

STATE OF THE ART

# The Predatory Rhetorics of Urban Development

## *Neoliberalism and the Illusory Promise of Black Middle-Class Communities*

Kevin L. Clay<sup>1</sup> and Jasmine D. Hill<sup>2\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Theory, Policy, and Administration, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public Policy & Sociology, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, Los Angeles, CA, USA

\*Corresponding author. Email: [jhill@luskin.ucla.edu](mailto:jhill@luskin.ucla.edu)

### Abstract

In this article, we reflect on the pernicious nature of rhetoric aimed at soliciting Black community support for predatory urban development schemes. Highlighting recent examples of Urban One Casino + Resort's development campaign in Richmond, Virginia, and the messaging leveraged by political leaders on behalf of SoFi stadium and the Intuit Dome in Inglewood, California, we find that discursive moves made by public and private stakeholders reflect what we call the "predatory rhetorics of urban development." We argue that these rhetorics intend to enlist divested Black communities as supporters of development projects that concentrate wealth and power in the hands of economic and political elites. They do so by playing on Black desires for social and economic inclusion into American middle-class community life. Four common threads of predatory rhetoric appear across both contexts. They are 1) seizing the real needs and concerns of stigmatized places, 2) relying on representational politics to mitigate issues of trust, 3) the neoliberal framing of American internal colonization as a problem that requires extractive private development solutions and, finally, 4) dissimulating intra-community class interests to consolidate "Black needs." We reflect on the outcomes supported by these rhetorics across both development projects and raise several points of further consideration as we hope for more organized responses to such rhetorics in the future.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism; Gentrification; Urban Development; Rhetoric; Anti-Blackness; Racial Capitalism; Richmond; VA; Inglewood; CA

### Introduction

In media conglomerate Urban One's 2021 bid to build the One Casino + Resort on the historically Black southside of Richmond, Virginia, the company launched a formidable multimedia advertising campaign. Included in this campaign was a series of ads, which aired across the five radio stations in Richmond that Urban One owns, that directly targeted Black voters (Inside Radio 2021). One ad, set to music, repeated the refrain, "Vote Yes for One Casino and Resort!" Then, leaning into adult contemporary calypso rhythms, the ad continued, "It's a voting opportun-i-ty...to bring jobs to the commun-i-ty," and "Funding for roads and schools... It can be a beneficial tool!" Sponsored by Urban One's PAC

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

(Virginia Public Access Project 2021), another ad specifically named Black Richmond. The Black woman narrating encouraged listeners to vote “yes” for Urban One Casino + Resort, arguing that “...for far too long *we’ve* been told that education and politics are the pathways to [Black] freedom,” [emphasis added]. The ad suggests, instead, that Black power comes from Black folks taking their economic futures into their own hands.

Comparing messaging campaigns for the development of Urban One Casino + Resort in Richmond, Virginia, and the SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, we examine the discursive moves of corporate development to understand how urban Black communities become enlisted to support neoliberal development. By comparing these two different cases, we find that in majority-Black cities, political elites attempt to curry favor with Black voters for development projects by trafficking in bad faith, predatory rhetoric, or what we term the predatory rhetorics of urban development. Despite differences between these two cities and their respective development projects, these predatory rhetorics take up four key discursive moves in both instances. First, we find political and economic elites seizing and exploiting the real material needs of Black communities, framing their development projects as the solutions to longstanding problems founded by systems of racial capitalism and institutional neglect. Then, both sites see a reliance on Black community leaders and representational politics, be they celebrities or trusted elected officials, to act as messengers and build trust in service of capital interests. Next, we see predatory rhetorics invoke the language of Black liberation, civil rights, Black faith tradition, and other notions of Black uplift and solidarity to advance their economically, ecologically, culturally, and spatially extractive projects (Agha and Rascher, 2021; Taylor 2020). Finally, we argue the stoking of intra-class conflicts among Black communities, which prey on desires for social and economic inclusion in American middle-class community life (Taylor 2019).

The literature on the impact of urban development often focuses on quantitative analyses to adjudicate the occurrence of displacement of Black residents (see Brown-Saracino 2017). Instead, taking up the theoretical concept of Black aspatiality, we take displacement and dispossession as inherent consequences of the ways in which anti-Blackness (Lewis 1999) and neoliberal racial capitalism operate through colonial projects of urban development in both Richmond and Inglewood (Addie and Fraser, 2019; Bledsoe and Wright, 2019). Our interests and contribution lie in untangling how these projects take root in Black communities, particularly when destructive projects of this nature typically require large-scale public approval. To explore these dynamics, we examine one understudied dimension here: the important role of discourse in coercing compliance and manufacturing consent in vulnerable communities. Taken together, our work here aims to both illuminate and explicate how anti-Black rhetorical predation functions in service of extractive development schemes as a mechanism of neoliberal racial capitalism.

## Background

### ***Anti-Black Racial Capitalism and Neoliberal Urban Development: “Remaking” The Post-Industrial Chocolate City***

How do we understand urban development and “investment” in Chocolate Cities (Hunter and Robinson, 2018) in the context of a well-documented tradition of political and economic neglect? We adopt Manning Marable’s (1983) thesis to frame our study, arguing that underdevelopment in Black America is a project of American capitalist development that relies on the concentration and exploitation of Black surplus labor to isolate wealth and power in the hands of a Western ruling class. Against this backdrop, our framework conceptualizes neoliberal urban development as a spatial project of racial capitalism principally grounded in the logic of what Adam Bledsoe and Willie Jamaal Wright

(2019) call Black aspatiality. Drawing on Black ontological frameworks of anti-Blackness and Black nonbeing (Ferreire de Silva 2015; Wynter 1976), Bledsoe and Wright argue that colonialism—chattel slavery in particular—marked African bodies and the spaces that they occupied as “unhallowed” (Bledsoe and Wright, 2019, p. 12).

This is not to suggest that Black peoples were or are understood as not physically present...[d]espite physical presence, Black populations nonetheless remain rendered “ungeographic” in dominant understandings of space. Hence the geographic locations in which Black populations reside are treated as open to the various agendas espoused by dominant spatial actors (Bledsoe and Wright, 2019, p. 12).

Similarly, Henry Louis Taylor (2020) reminds us that Black populations in the central city often function as “placeholders” of capitalist development as the city-building process relies on their presence to facilitate growth in the urban market system. In our cases of Inglewood, CA and Richmond, VA, developers not only rely on Black labor but also require Black voter permission and support to execute their plans. Seeing Black cities only as sites of disinvestment misses how underdevelopment preempts Black exploitation and coercion when the opportunity for development eventually arises (Bledsoe and Wright, 2019; Desmond and Wilmers, 2019; Taylor 2019; Taylor 2020). Taylor (2020) concludes, “Blacks are allowed to occupy these placeholder sites until developers can put them to more profitable uses, at which time Blacks are displaced and forced to move to another placeholder site” (p. 19). In this way, theories of Black aspatiality capture both urban development’s bleak indifference toward and clear dependence on Black populations in the central city.

Put together, the “promise” of neoliberal urban development seen through the prism of Black aspatiality holds an irreconcilable paradox: Black and minority inclusion in the city’s economic growth that they are either being left behind in or priced out of. The language of Black aspatiality clarifies how anti-Blackness and racial capitalism cohere around the site of urban development in the Inglewood and Richmond development projects that ground this study. In both cases, capital interests offer development as a salve for decades of underdevelopment. In the face of gentrification and the expansion of the low-wage, peonage sector, elites expect working-class Black residents to be politically sanguine about the prospects of corporate liberalism.

In the following sections, we consider how predatory rhetorics of the corporate ruling class function when local electorates and other actors are a potential roadblock to this unfettered growth and expansion of the global market in deindustrialized America. We argue that rhetoric is an important site of inquiry in cases like Richmond and Inglewood, which require municipal leaders and corporate developers to deploy strategic campaigns to assuage urban residents of any potential misgivings about new capital projects. We reveal that development projects rooted in logics of Black aspatiality must be rhetorically framed as “common sense” procedures necessary to realize progress in the post-industrial city.

### ***Rhetorical Predation and Black Economic Politics***

Lloyd F. Bitzer (1968) reminds us that rhetoric cannot be separated from its context; rhetoric always emerges in response to a specific political or cultural situation. For instance, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan introduced “Black capitalism” into public discourse to legitimize the rise of neoliberalism in American politics (Baradaran 2019; Marable 1983). Mehrsa Baradaran (2019) explains how Nixon adopted the rhetorical strategy of condemning overtly racist policy while simultaneously rolling back civil rights reforms under the same logics—that they posed an “unfair racial advantage.” Instead, Black capitalism was put

forth and framed as “a hand up, not a hand out.” Through the rhetoric of Black capitalism, Baradaran notes that Nixon was able to “accomplish a great deal with very little,” as meager investments into the Black business sector became one of his administration’s principal focuses. These rhetorics not only legitimized retrenchment from Civil Rights Era gains, but they ratified neoliberal governmentality as an appropriate response to the problems of urban decay and concentrated poverty. These were not problems of economic justice. Instead, these issues could be solved through entrepreneurship. Black capitalism narrowed calls for self-determination over community institutions like schools, government, and public safety to a singular call for more Black entrepreneurship. Baradaran (2019) writes that with Black capitalism, Nixon “neutralized Black militants, gained business support, lost none of his political base, and spent virtually nothing” (p. 166).

Today, the ramifications of those neoliberal rhetorical agendas are still widely felt in America’s response to Black communities and shape even the epistemological possibilities within Black political discourse. Baradaran (2019) and Marable (1983) note how the bell toll of Black capitalism registered for the upwardly mobile segment of the Black electorate, revealing clear class distinctions. Marable (1983) notes both the rise in Black conservatism during this era of political retrenchment and how this bloc saw Black capitalism as a salve for economic alienation and underdevelopment. In addition to the Black middle class, Marable’s analysis also implicates the “Black Brahmins” (or Black political “misleadership”) in the rising popularity of Black capitalism as they worked to move Black politics further away from the proletarian concerns of the previous decade. Adolf Reed (1988) similarly theorized a relationship between the coincidental rise of the Black municipal political class in the 1970s with the knee-capping and subsequent downfall of Black radicalism that was driving the freedom movement. Particularly in the central City, Black leaders’ promises of development and subsequent middle-class inclusion were presented as a trade-off to the Black electorate for abandoning re-distributional convictions—a political reality reflecting, in part, the constraints these municipal leaders faced due to limited resources and pressures by White leaders at higher levels of government (Reed 1988). This historical lineage reminds us of the significance of rhetoric as an effective analytical agent in American political life and the enduring legacies of neoliberal discourse, particularly in co-opting the terms of Black struggle and widening class divisions among Black interests.

Our research seeks to understand the rhetorical lineages of neoliberal racial capitalism, with particular attention to urban development. Jovan Scott Lewis’ (2022) research traces these lineages in present-day North Tulsa, Oklahoma, where the legacy of the Greenwood District (popularly known as America’s Black Wall Street) and the 1921 Tulsa Massacre operate, in Black Tulsa, as discursive and ideological symbols in service of economic and social reclamation. For Black Tulsa and its political leadership, Greenwood represents a *horizon* of utopic restoration against the realities of structural poverty and underdevelopment. However, while discursive deployments of “Greenwood” and “Black Wall Street” conjure collective historical memories of Black communal pride and self-determination, Lewis finds that these invocations typically espouse neoliberal reforms and charitable responses from local organizations that the author argues facilitate dependence. Misdirecting responsibility away from the state for its continued divestment in and displacement of Black Tulsa since the massacre, such reforms ultimately do not offer robust economic and social reparations or a pathway to Black communal self-determination.

In a similar vein, N. D. B. Connolly’s (2014) historiography explores how the fraught intra-racial politics between Miami’s Black poor and middle-class elite helped to modernize segregation in the rapidly developing city at the twilight of Jim Crow in the late 1960s. He finds members of Miami’s Black middle class functioned as intermediaries, brokering with White elites for what were often toothless (or predatory) forms of economic inclusion and other public sector reforms “on behalf” of Black poor and working-class city residents.

Connolly writes, "...real estate, from the perspective of non-White property owners, proved critical to the cause of racial justice because ownership of real estate served, in itself, as a symbol of racial equality and a means for community uplift" (2016, p. 7). Connolly notes that such framings played on the desires of poor renters in the city who dreamed of one day too experiencing capitalism on the other side of its most violent exploitations. Connolly's account speaks not only to the significant role of the Black middle class in facilitating dispossession but also hints at the critical role particular messages play in these processes as well, in his case, the framing of real estate development as a civil rights goal.

However, other literature, such as Michael Dawson's (1995) research on "linked fate" depicts shared interests and support between the working class and elites. Studying Black political behavior, Dawson finds that instead of conforming to center-left politics as do other racial and ethnic groups, middle-class Black Americans curiously reflect voting behaviors seemingly in solidarity with working-class Black people. To make sense of this inter-class solidarity, Dawson argues that ongoing discrimination faced by middle-class Blacks, along with an awareness of a more significant, shared history of racial alienation and disadvantage, shapes the political perspectives of African Americans, regardless of class. Dawson argues that Black voters, regardless of their economic position, see their fates as linked to the social and economic outcomes of Black America as a whole and, as a result, overwhelmingly support social policies that benefit low-income Black communities. Towards building the literature on Black class struggle, we consider to what extent does linked fate play out in processes of urban development, which might be particularly harmful to working-class Black neighborhoods? Like Marable, our analysis is cognizant of an intra-racial class schism within America's Black population which functions to maintain capitalism as a world system. Our work argues that Black elites leverage rhetorical notions of linked fate to assimilate Black interests into their desires for a particular, exclusionary vision of Black middle-class communities—all while claiming an elusive shared Black politic.

## Methods

In highlighting the prevalence of rhetorical predation, we ask: what arguments are leveled in defense of corporate development, and how might these be crafted for Black audiences? To understand the discursive practices of urban development, we rely on critical discourse analysis of materials surrounding the development of the Urban One Casino + Resort in Richmond, Virginia, and SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. Critical discourse analysis is a method commonly used to study rhetoric that analyzes the relationships between power, inequality, ideology, and social identities in linguistic form (Wodak and Meyer 2015). This trans-disciplinary method relies on the ethnographic analysis of documents, images, and talk-interaction data to describe texts' organization and theoretical accounts (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough 2013). Our primary data consist of a corpus of over one hundred radio, TV, and print advertisements, relevant news articles, opinion pieces, press releases, public comments in governmental hearings, official documents, and social media posts surrounding these projects' announcement, promotion, and subsequent community responses. All sources were collected using online searches of publicly available materials, beginning in the year each project was initially announced (2018 and 2013, respectively). With interests in how urban development gets packaged to Black communities, we paid particular attention to communications from capital interests, including owners, development firms, financiers, and their various public relations arms. Additionally, we were interested in how Black communities received, contested, or supported these interests, calling us to trace responses of Black

**Table 1.** Key Predatory Rhetorical Strategies of Urban Development

Predatory Rhetorics of Urban Development	Richmond, VA	Inglewood, CA
Seizing of the real needs and concerns of stigmatized places	Advocates promised the Casino would benefit schools, provide parks, help nonprofits and boost economy	Developers promised to help with languishing economy, unemployment, environmental racism
Relying on representational politics to mitigate issues of trust	Black celebrity endorsements promote Casino as good for community	Elected and entrusted Black mayor who promised his pro-business approach would save city via development
Framing internal colonization as a problem that requires private development	Framed development and Black business ownership as a form of Black liberation; the loss of development as a causality for affordable housing and jobs	Framed stadium as means to return to “global prominence” and shake territorial stigma
Dissimulating intra-community class interests to consolidate “Black needs”	The emphasis on Black casino/resort ownership is depicted as a benefit to the entire Black community	Black homeowners lead support efforts for stadiums to raise property values; ignore offering of precarious employment/threat of push out to Black working class

political figures, community organizations, project detractors, and community members. We coded each text manually for broad themes within and across cases to find the four rhetorical themes between the two cases (Table 1). Overall, our corpus represented pro-development stakeholders, such as developers or advocacy groups; anti-development groups or individual perspectives; and (seemingly) neutral sources, like local Black newspapers, reporting on developments and representing both sides of the debate. In doing so we sought to get a wide scope of perspectives, and because the data emerges from publicly available sources, we have confidence that we captured the dimensions of local discourse from these critical actors.

## Results

### ***Fame and Games: The Case of Urban One Casino + Resort***

Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney embodied “corporate development as Black uplift” politics. Before the Casino proposal, the Richmond City Council considered a Stoney-backed proposal to redevelop the historically Black Navy Hill neighborhood. Navy Hill, once a twentieth-century community of mixed-income Black folks, was destroyed by 1960s urban renewal highway projects (O’Keefe 2019). As with many such projects in the 1950s and 1960s, working-class Black residents were disproportionately displaced, uprooting their homes and lives to grant suburban residents easier access to the city (Troutt 2014). In 2018, the Navy Hill redevelopment team pitched building high-rise condominiums, a Hyatt hotel, and a sporting arena—all of which Mayor Stoney projected would bring over \$1 billion in revenue to the city, in addition to providing affordable housing for low-income residents (Graff 2020; Robinson 2018). Mayor Stoney also pitched the project as a “win” for Black small-business owners in Richmond, as the arena would need vendors. In 2019, the mayor’s press secretary reported a goal of “\$300 million in minority business participation,” (O’Keefe 2019). However, Black community residents raised questions about the proposal’s investment in Black entrepreneurs and job

seekers and suspicions about the project's financing structure (Cheats Movement 2019; O'Keefe 2019). Despite Mayor Stoney's enthusiasm, the project proposal would ultimately die in a council vote in February 2020. Stoney expressed his regret with the vote, explicitly relying on an argument that the primary consequence of the proposal's failure was the social impact it would have had. "It saddens me that Richmonders won't benefit from the housing, jobs, and economic empowerment this project would bring," (Andrews 2020).

While some Black Richmonders echoed Stoney's frustration and saw this as a loss for minority-owned-business owners and job-seekers, other Black residents noted the hypocrisy of a gentrification project named after a Black neighborhood, destroyed to privilege White Richmond metro residents. In an op-ed written in Richmond Free Press (Ray 2019), Richmond's Black-run Newspaper, a seasoned affordable-housing activist, Preddy Ray Sr., wrote:

Why should Black folks be excited about the Navy Hill development project? More than 50 years ago, the Navy Hill community was destroyed. It was done by the same city that now lifts that neighborhood's name in praise. Economic opportunities, the social development and all of the fabric of the community were torn to the ground. Yet we are now asked to celebrate. Celebrate what? The destruction of our history? The taking of our land? Becoming yet another example of setback for Black people economically? What will new housing, a new Coliseum and new businesses do to atone for the destruction of this once proud community? Why should we be on this bandwagon, and why should we allow them to pimp the name of Navy Hill? To do this continuously sends the message that in order to save a Black community, you must destroy it either physically or spiritually—either the bulldozer or gentrification. Excuse me, but I take no joy in either.

Since Urban One's casino proposal made it onto the agenda of the Richmond city council in late May 2021 for voter approval on the November 2, 2021 ballot, it faced a similar crisis of legitimacy (Schiffres 2021). After the failure of Navy Hill in the city council, legislation from the Virginia Assembly required any casino gaming establishment in Richmond to seek community approval via referendum. As in all political contests for resources, space, and opportunities, opposing sides formulated arguments with hope that they might marshal the political will of the majority to advance their agendas. The challenge faced by Urban One's backers was that they would need to inevitably confront the actual realities of the public in Richmond. In places like Richmond where decades-long fights for fair and affordable housing and quality neighborhood schools have been waged, how do you convince Black residents to set aside those concerns and embrace a casino?

### ***Black Neoliberalism and the Promises of Enterprise***

To capture the votes of Black residents, Urban One's Black leadership team touted the One Casino + Resort as a historic achievement: the country's first Black-owned Casino (a claim that seems to be overblown given that others have identified African American entrepreneur, Don Barden, as the nation's first Black owner of a major casino operation) (McKinney 2017). The leader of the local NAACP and other heritage civil rights organizations heralded Urban One Casino's promise of Black entrepreneurship and the creation of 1500 new jobs as a pathway to social and economic justice for Black Richmond (Suarez and Robinson, 2021). Urban One brought on Al Sharpton, the prominent civil rights actor and founder of the National Action Network, to represent local civil rights groups and

pontificate on the value of the casino. Standing alongside Urban One's CEO, Alfred Liggins, at a news conference, Sharpton remarked:

"I think that [Urban One] has a historic opportunity in a community that has been ignored to develop something that could be an economic engine to help bring revenue and jobs to the city. This could be a national template of how *we* can build and own things" (Suarez 2021, emphasis added).

Urban One's and Sharpton's deployment of lines about the transformational impact of Black ownership presume that Black residents would look upon the success of one Black-led corporation like Urban One with feelings of vicarious success. As Black corporate leaders, Liggins' and his mother, the company's founder Cathy Hughes' "build[ing] and own[ing] things" (Suarez 2021) is represented as a symbolic, economic, and sociopolitical victory for Richmond's Black residents. In a context like Richmond, where Black business ownership seems highly valued, it might be reasonable to assume that these arguments would gain traction. However, what is the economic theory of change Urban One advances?

Underneath Liggins', Hughes', and Sharpton's strategic brand of representational politics is a bad faith theory of Black trickle-down economics (Lewis 1999). Their rhetoric wraps Reagan-era conservative economic theory in the warm veneer of Black cultural pride. The spread of this messaging through Sharpton, and the local NAACP in particular, filters the intentions of the Civil Rights Movement through the logics of free-market capitalism. Their appeals recast the call for radical self-determination and economic justice of the Black freedom movement into one of "self-help" that snugly aligns with the goals of neoliberal governmentality and privatization. In this way, Urban One and its surrogates tell Black Richmond that voting in the interest of representational corporate ownership means "taking your economic interests into your own hands," as the radio ad referenced at the beginning of the text suggests. The radical spirit of Black self-determination gets converted into the American myth of "bootstrapping" meritocracy (Clay 2019).

The radio ad campaign consistently and explicitly framed the vote as a "choice," with dire consequences should one choose incorrectly. Voting for the casino meant "choosing" to improve the lives of Black residents as the casino would provide jobs to minority residents, improve Black schools, and fix neglected public infrastructure in Black neighborhoods. Thus, voting against (or abstaining from voting) must be understood as a "choice" in opposition to these changes. In this rhetorical frame, Black freedom is rendered through the lens of middle-class life. This freedom could be achieved by choosing to abide in this "rare opportunity" for Black-owned corporate development to fund Richmond's Southside. The only problem is that Urban One could not guarantee where and how any city funds would be spent.

During a forty-five-minute radio interview, Urban One's leadership team, Hughes and Liggins, responded to community questions about the Casino project (KISS FM 99.3/105.7, 2021). When asked whether casino revenue would go to Richmond public schools, CEO Liggins explained that 10% of revenue generated by the casino would go directly to Richmond City—a projected \$50 million annually. He added that while Urban One *could* advocate for the money to go toward public schools, it was ultimately at the mayor's and city council's discretion. Liggins concluded his response by offering a brief yet a not-so-subtle critique of Richmond Public Schools. He explained that his son attended a school in northern Virginia, Fairfax County, where the schools outperform most schools in the nation and that despite receiving the same amount of state aid through lottery revenues as Fairfax (a spurious claim), Richmond Public Schools chronically underperform. Liggins



speculated that Fairfax was doing a better job educating their students than Richmond for reasons other than funding, suggesting that more money was not the answer to southside residents' concerns about school improvement, despite what recent public opinion polls indicated. This erroneous viewpoint on funding for schools is especially concerning coming from someone of Liggins' influence; he notably delivered substantial campaign contributions to Mayor Stoney, city council members, NAACP leaders, and VA legislators, including the House Appropriations chairman (Suarez 2021). In effect, while Liggins was claiming not to have any influence over the spending decisions of city officials, he was actively making six-figure campaign contributions to these very officials.

### ***Representational Politics and Urban One's Framing of Richmond's Needs***

Richmond is a city that prides itself on Black small-business ownership and where Black storefronts are on the rise (BLK RVA 2022; Central Virginia African American Chamber of Commerce 2021). In addition to figures like Al Sharpton, Urban One enlisted celebrities like Jamie Foxx and Missy Elliot to convince Black Richmond that voting for the casino was in the city's best economic interest. But why would their campaign need famous Black celebrities to support a local casino project? After all, many would find it odd to see Jim Carey or Robert Downey, Jr. being asked to campaign on behalf of a development project in an affluent White American suburb. Drawing on Black entertainers is a strategy that seemingly assumes the Black working class finds Black celebrities who do not live in their community or experience their economic burdens to be reliable sources on local affairs. However, Black elites like Elliot and Foxx lack expertise in economic development in Richmond. Instead, their qualifications presumably emerge from their assumed expertise on what it takes to be a financially successful Black individual. Although they may not know much about Richmond, its history, and its policy legacy concerning its Black residents and their neighborhoods, they must know what it takes to accrue individual wealth. As Black and rich people, Urban One relies on celebrities like Foxx and Elliot, as well as images of Urban One's Black founder, Cathy Hughes, and her son, the company's CEO Alfred Liggins, to inspire trust in their economic advice.

### ***Urban Development's Strategic Use of Black Cultural Symbols***

Perhaps the most surprising radio advertisement was a frequently-aired commercial on Urban One's Praise 104.7 FM, Richmond's Black gospel station. Narrated by a Black woman whose voice carried an earnest conviction, the commercial opened with a prayer:

...Dear Lord, we pray for love and peace in our lives and communities. We pray for our collective economic growth, and we pray for the financial advancement of Richmond. Dear Lord, we come to you today seeking passage of the referendum that will create 1500 new jobs, an infusion of new revenue for our nonprofits and schools, a safe park for our picnics and gatherings, a venue to showcase our talents, a financial boost to the economy of our city, and an opportunity to spotlight the collective power of the residents of this city. Dear God, we ask that you propel us to vote. And we ask that we be given the opportunity to determine our own financial destiny by voting "yes," for the One Casino referendum. This is our prayer....

Here Urban One's paid promotional marketing for the One Casino + Resort is framed as a religious conviction to advance social progress. The framing also attempted to assure voters that God was on the side of the casino. Quizzically, this ad supported a casino referendum

—gambling being an enterprise that is explicitly denounced in Christian faith. Perhaps noting this contradiction, the word “casino” appears only once at the end of the ad, but not before the “prayer” offers a comprehensive list of projected social goods stemming from the project. Drawing on the Black faith tradition of using prayer as an essential spiritual foundation for mobilizing and encouraging Black folks in political struggle, the narrator claims that a “Yes” vote for the referendum will empower [Black] Richmond to “determine [its] own financial destiny.”

In all of these examples, voting for the Urban One Casino + Resort was cast by Black elites as a social responsibility to the larger Black community. Not only was it a social responsibility, Urban One presented a “yes,” vote as the will of God. The rhetorics of the Urban One campaign positioned Black elites in corporate, entertainment, and civil rights fields as knowledgeable economic authorities. At the same time, developers framed the city’s future as solely dependent on working-class Black residents making the “good choice” by agreeing to what these monied Black authorities said was in Black Richmond’s best economic interest. Sharpton’s claim that Liggins’ and Hughes’ model could teach Black communities how to “build and own things” (Suarez 2021) presumes an unknowing Black community in need of the Black elite’s guidance. This rhetoric suggested that not supporting Liggins and Hughes would be racial betrayal, with Urban One Casino + Resort being the nation’s first Black-owned casino.

Despite these efforts to sway Black Richmond voters, voters rejected the casino in the referendum on November 2, 2021. When the casino vote failed, the press and stakeholders on all sides thrust blame and credit in several directions. A small political action committee—“Vote No on RVA Casino”—launched a series of social media video ads in which local community leaders, including activists, artists, and clergy, spoke out against the casino and its deleterious impact on vulnerable communities. The conservative group, “The Family Foundation,” credited itself with “standing alone” against the casino. Several publications credited a local grassroots nonprofit organization, Richmond for All, with the victory against the casino. In the press, Richmond for All representatives accepted credit for organizing a grassroots campaign that appealed to voters across the city. Despite these claims, however, polling data revealed that Black southside voters overwhelmingly voted in favor of the casino, while residents in majority-White precincts voted against it (Andrews 2021).

Targeting Richmond’s southside as the site of a casino crystallizes our understanding of Black aspatiality. Beyond just gentrification projects that displace, Black aspatiality renders the Black working class *ungeographic*—malleable to the whims of monied interests. Casino stakeholders’ rhetorical work plays on the hopes of the Black working class’s desire to revitalize their communities yet never discloses the economic interests of casino developers and civic backers. Urban One’s success with southside residents suggests that their campaign messaging to Black voters resonated. As the precinct data came in, city council members to whom Liggins donated and paid local NAACP leaders subtly and more explicitly decried White NIMBYism as responsible for the vote’s failure. Indeed, racial tensions around the casino proposal had arisen the summer before the vote when local civic organizations in primarily White neighborhoods launched anti-casino campaigns that tapped into racially coded language (Suarez 2021). In the wake of the vote, local NAACP leaders and city council members went on record saying that southside [Black] residents “felt cheated” and that the racial bifurcation of the vote was evidence of “the old Richmond,” alluding to the city’s legacy as the capital of the Confederacy (Suarez and Robinson, 2021). The irony of these statements matches the irony of the referendum outcome. Casino backers framed the voting results as another example of White folks impeding Black self-determination. While perhaps true, these statements strategically misdirected attention away from

the functionally extractive social and economic relationship that casinos establish in working-class Black neighborhoods (Mele 2011). Harnessing a collective Black historical memory of chattel slavery and Jim Crow violence, such statements pervert the trauma of the Black American past as a tool of rhetorical identification (Burke 1969).

### ***Who Loses in the City of Champions? Stadium Politics in Inglewood, CA***

In a city of just over 100,000 Black and Latinx residents almost 3000 miles from Richmond, developers unleashed one of the largest entertainment parks in the United States. Today, Inglewood, California, is home to two new, state-of-the-art sports arenas: the 70,000-seat SoFi Stadium and the 18,000-seat Intuit Dome. SoFi Stadium opened in 2021 as home to the NFL's Los Angeles Chargers and Rams, named the "most expensive stadium in NFL history" at \$5.5 billion (Fenno and Farmer, 2020). Supported by a record-breaking campaign of resident signatures to approve the project (Logan 2015), the stadium sits as the centerpiece of Rams owner Stan Kroenke's 298-acre Hollywood Park development, zoned for new office space, apartments, a hotel, and a lake park.

Then, just blocks away, construction on the NBA Clippers' Intuit Dome nears completion. However, there was already a basketball arena in town. While fully operational, the Clippers did not want to play at the Forum, opting to build a new arena instead. As a result, three arenas, SoFi Stadium, the Intuit Dome, and the Forum, operate side by side, driving thousands of visitors to Inglewood every week. How did a predominantly working-class suburban city of Black and Brown residents become home to three sports arenas within just ten square miles? What were residents promised, and were those promises realized?

Logistically, developers desperately needed resident support to build these stadiums. Large development projects in California are subject to lengthy and costly environmental reviews to protect the public from the ecological impacts of construction. Business interests in California often complain that these review processes derail or significantly change the size and scope of their development projects. However, capitalists have found a loophole to avoid these reviews: under a separate California election code, any voter-sponsored petition with signatures from fifteen percent of registered voters requires a special election or immediate adoption by the local governing body—both without environmental review (Logan 2015). So, Rams owners needed Inglewood residents to write and sign a petition to build a stadium in their community. In the end, through persuasive campaigning, the stadium won twice the necessary resident signatures (Bergman 2015). The predominately Black city council voted to approve the stadium shortly after. In the following sections, we describe the rhetorical moves developers and their allies made to win Black voter support.

### ***Capital's Framing of Inglewood's Needs***

In an interview, developer Steven Balmer shared that his arena would "reinvigorate [Inglewood's] local economy and support local businesses by creating jobs, enabling job readiness, and educating entrepreneurs to help them better run their businesses and transform their finances" (Newcomb 2021). Much like Urban One's commitments to city funding, these remarks reflect typical rhetorics of corporate billionaires, with the requisite "give back" messaging attached to any project set to earn them significant returns. However, Balmer's discourse is also engulfed in racialized assumptions about Inglewood's

needs. Balmer and other elites decide that “job readiness” and “entrepreneurs” rather than guaranteed living wages or affordable housing, for example, is what Inglewood needs most. Balmer asserts that local entrepreneurs need to “transform their finances” rather than acknowledging decades of White flight and racist fear-mongering around visiting Inglewood businesses, rendering searches like “Is Inglewood safe?” as one of the most common Google inquiries about the region.

Other scholars have noted that Balmer’s call for “job readiness” programs plays into racist assumptions about Black cultural deficiencies (Moss and Tilly, 2001; Zamudio and Lichter, 2008), assuming that Black workers need “training” on how to assimilate best. Instead of recognizing the role of forces like massive job loss in urban centers or anti-Blackness in the labor force as the source of Black suffering, the rhetorics of urban development nod to job readiness or claims of abundant school funding in Richmond, playing into neoliberal logics that Black workers’ deficiencies bear the responsibility for racial inequality. In this framework, stadium projects like the Urban One Casino, SoFi Stadium, and Intuit Dome get sold to Black communities almost as a charitable act, with the air of “you need our stadium to help solve your dysfunction.”

### ***Redistributive Cooperation (and Co-Optation) of the Black Middle Class***

While playing on notions of Black pathology, predatory rhetorics of urban development promise to solve the economic woes faced by deindustrialized Black regions. Like other urban cities that experienced massive White flight, Inglewood has suffered the consequences of residential segregation. A few years ago, the city neared bankruptcy, and federal actors needed to intervene in taking over its school district. While Inglewood boasts a sizable Black middle class, its residents also disproportionately face poverty, unemployment, and homelessness. Noting these outcomes, elite developers and their supporters leveraged these challenges as problems stadiums could solve. Initial pro-stadium rhetorics stemmed largely from prominent, middle-class Black Inglewood residents who called themselves “Citizens for Revitalizing the City of Champions,” or the “Inglewood Champions” for short. In a 2015 fact sheet mailed to thousands of residents, the “Inglewood Champions” group emphasized the city’s sports legacy as a means for economic growth.

Beginning with the 1932 Olympics, when the Marathon Race ran through Inglewood, and when three Olympic winners were all alumni from Inglewood High School, Inglewood has had a storied history as the City of Champions... Join Inglewood’s return to the premiere sports and entertainment destination in Southern California (Revitalization Project 2015).

The ongoing presence of the Inglewood Forum as a major concert venue already draws questions around the logic that entertainment venues usher in community-wide prosperity; if sports and entertainment buildings lead to prosperity, why hadn’t the Forum already solved Inglewood’s problems? Many residents already knew employment at the Forum offered part-time poverty wages and precarious hours. Still, developers used talking points around the need for more sports activity and working poverty jobs, promising Inglewood’s revitalization. Thus, when the Inglewood Champions group celebrated a past where Inglewood prospered because of its sports greatness, they envision a future where a fantasized past might be reclaimed.

Like in Richmond, Virginia, interested parties recognized some of the city's deepest concerns and used these vulnerabilities to sell the stadiums as a worthy investment. Their mailer continued:

This new development will create thousands of construction and permanent jobs in Inglewood, and the best part is that hiring preference for stadium jobs will be given to local residents... And we all know this city could use more job opportunities.

The project is expected to generate hundreds of millions of dollars—you read that correctly—in new economic activity in Inglewood each year. Local businesses will prosper from all that new commerce, fueling even more revitalization. The city will benefit, too, by receiving tens of millions of dollars in new revenues each year... Revenues from the project will also fund new after-school activities, such as mentoring and anti-gang programs. This is really a win-win for Inglewood. And that's why you should join me and hundreds of others, including faith leaders, business owners, educators, civic organizations and clubs, and regular folks supporting the Revitalization Project (Revitalization Project 2015).

Here, each stadium promise corresponds with a community need. Stadium supporters offer new revenue for a city on the brink of bankruptcy. To deal with high unemployment rates, developers promise jobs and “new economic activity.” Even the description of the Clippers' Intuit Dome as “carbon-free” whispers in registers that Inglewood residents can hear; Inglewood's physical proximity to the Los Angeles airport makes its residents vulnerable to high rates of pollution and asthma (Mackey 2021). In this way, even the green, pro-climate messaging acts as a dog whistle in the rhetorical project of urban development as a cure for a Black community's experience with environmental racism.

Outlined in their pro-stadium materials, the Inglewood Champions present that Black futures in Inglewood rely on, among other things, small businesses, city services, and investments in education. Indeed, many of these kinds of investments likely would benefit city residents. What this campaign of mostly Black “faith leaders, business owners, educators, and regular folks” misses is the extent to which corporate interests will dictate these expenditures. For example, in the aftermath of the stadium build, news reports revealed that the Rams donated valuable sports equipment to Los Angeles Unified School District, presumably as part of the promise to support youth (Sondheimer 2016). The problem is that Inglewood has its own school district, so this public relations move directed funds to an entirely different and lesser impacted community. These embarrassing missteps mean Inglewood residents are recipients of all the traffic, pollution, and displacement from the stadiums and not much of its glory. Still, to make their way in, the predatory urban development rhetorics seize Black residents' concerns and offer their market-based interventions as the salve.

A closer examination of the Inglewood Champions statements and website reveals this Black middle-class pro-stadium group was “sponsored and funded” by LA Rams owner Stan Kroenke, who owns and developed SoFi Stadium. Thus, while Inglewood Champion statements may reflect a long list of local Black middle-class community leaders as supporters on their website, the role of outside developers in organizing and co-opting Black community support cannot be understated. Indeed, corporate elites were clear that campaign imagery led by smiling Black faces, locally trusted leaders, and “homegrown” representation held power to sway Black communities toward their objectives. That stadium-sponsored advocacy documents leverage representational politics demonstrates a familiarity with Black community politics, using rhetorical coercion and vague gestures of diversity and inclusions as symbols of progress.

### ***Black Representational Politics and Solving the Blemish of Place***

Inglewood's mayor James Butts was one of the most effective pro-stadium spokespersons. Upon his election in 2011, Butts committed to bringing new commercial activity into the city, quickly becoming one of the development's most vocal advocates (if not orchestrators). A Black former police chief, Butts took the mantle of getting Inglewood's fiscal house in order and fixing its reputational problems. In an interview preceding his first election, Butts shared his vision, saying:

When I left Inglewood in 1991, we were a destination city. Well managed, well-run... Over the last two decades, it's not that way anymore...even our own residents avoid [the city] when it comes to seeking entertainment, to making purchases ... It is now time to have someone with experience and background around helping make cities work. I have a Bachelor's in business and a Master's in Business, an MBA, and I feel now is the time for a mayor that has the experience and the education related to the problems that Inglewood has (JamesButts4Mayor JamesButts4Mayor 2010).

In his description of Inglewood, then mayor-hopeful Butts advances a kind of territorial stigma (see Wacquant 2008). By characterizing the city as a place others “avoid,” he embraces a rhetorical degradation of the city. A gentle reading of Butts' remarks would suggest that perhaps he and other Black civic leaders participated in territorial stigmatization to challenge beliefs about what a historically Black city deserves. Regardless of its motivations, Loïc Wacquant and colleagues theorize that this vocal, negative characterization of the “blemish of place” is a central process in the growth of the carceral state and the reproduction of neoliberal regimes (Wacquant et al., 2014). By sanctioning places as violent, morally destitute, or economically insolvent, policies to incarcerate, redevelop, and gentrify that place become natural and inevitable. Indeed, according to Butts' election discourse, Inglewood's problems were business-related challenges that a business-oriented approach could solve. His leadership approach would concern city problems—its imbalanced budget, low bond rating, and poor contract management. Notably missing from his description were the *people's* problems: racialized poverty, an underfunded school system, and overexposure to pollution (De La Cruz-Viesca et al., 2018; Mackey 2021). Instead of prioritizing community uplift, Butts' concerns were mainly around the city's image; he clearly outlined a desire to see hotels, entertainment, and shopping that would make Inglewood a “destination city.” To be sure, when pressed on the living conditions for Inglewood families, Butts reassured voters that attending to the city's business would trickle down to mean prosperity for them, too. Here and in Richmond, we see Black leaders answer questions around liberation, arriving at conclusions similar to those of White billionaire developers. Clearly articulated here is rhetoric that private projects can “reinvigorate” a community of economically disenfranchised people of color through the neoliberal prescription that market-based band-aids can solve systemic problems.

Capturing fifty-five percent of the vote in 2011 and more than eighty percent in subsequent elections, Butts' vision seemed to resonate with many Black voters. One reason for his popularity may lie in his capacity to capture Black middle-class concerns. For example, discursive moves in his campaign and throughout his now decade-long mayorship emphasize the city's racialized reputation as a big problem for homeowners. White buyers' fear or skepticism of Inglewood for years meant Black homeowners could buy cheap in the city but saw little growth in housing values. As such, Inglewood's Black middle class sat at the wedge of Black aspatiality—benefitting with a rare opportunity for upward mobility, but still unable to access the spoils of generational wealth promised to them due to the racialization of the city they call home.

Just beneath the surface of narratives from urban developers and discourse from the mayor himself lay the contradictions of the pride and peril of Inglewood's reputation as an undeniably Black place. With a landmark case to desegregate schools in 1970, Inglewood has long been home to a sizable Black population (Bonacich and Goodman, 1972). However, 1990s film depictions like "The Wood" and "Boyz in the Hood" likely crystallized a racialized image of Inglewood to the world, depicting the ravages of the crack epidemic as a symbol of West Coast gang violence, Black pathology, and crime.

For Black homeowners, who make up about thirty percent of Inglewood's total population, plans to reenvision Inglewood's future meant the chance for their fortunes to change. The Inglewood Champions group speaks directly to their desire to shift reputation in their literature:

Not too long ago, Inglewood was the sports capital of Southern California, playing host to the Lakers, the Kings, and Hollywood Park racetrack. That brought enormous benefits to our economy and *international prestige* to our city...Now, with the City of Champions Revitalization Project, Inglewood once again will be the premiere sports and entertainment destination point in Southern California. People throughout the region will come to Inglewood to see sports teams play in this new world-class stadium right here in Inglewood (Revitalization Project 2015).

While theories of linked fate suggest that most would agree with a political platform to expand economic opportunity for the Black working class (Dawson 1995), the means through which this advancement happens is up for debate. Notably, linked fate is a belief system which empirical studies show influences actions like voting behavior; however other work suggests these beliefs can be appropriated easily (Fields 2016; Hill 2022). Preying on these insecurities, stadium developers framed themselves and their stadiums as a means for this group to escape the isolation, stigma, and devaluation experienced as a result of being racialized as Black.

To advance rhetoric around the benefits of urban development, Mayor Butts developed a full-blown public relations campaign. In preparation for hosting Super Bowl LVI, the city paid for a glossy magazine advertising insert enclosed in each edition of the *Los Angeles Times*. The multi-page, sponsored ad on the "Inglewood Renaissance," features a full-page article on the mayor himself—presumably written by his team. The article "A Man and a Plan: Inglewood's Mayor Builds from His Past and Plans for the Future," clearly speaks to the desire to triumph over former reputational concerns (*Los Angeles Times* 2022). The article reads:

[Since assuming office in 2011], Butts has spearheaded an uncommon renaissance for the South Bay city once dubiously (and often unfairly) famous for its crime and a floundering economy. Embodying the dream of all those striving for equality, equity, and inclusion, he has built a flourishing majority-minority city equal to any in the world—set to host both Super Bowl LVI and 2028 Olympic events—yet wholly inclusive and protective of its Black and Brown residents.

Note here the nod to Inglewood's racialized reputation and the valorization of Mayor Butts as an embodiment of a dream for Black progress. The article also claims that the city staved off gentrification and champions racial equity. This insertion directly responds to the growing number of residents who may have once supported the stadium but now see it as a force of greed, gentrification, and displacement (Cancian 2020; Jennings 2019; Scott 2019). In doing so, the rhetorics of urban development are keen enough even to recognize that any

gesture towards gentrification or displacement is bad for the public image of a project. In a more intimate interview with the local Black newspaper *The Sentinel*, Mayor Butts, however, strays from the official messaging to showcase his actual viewpoint on gentrification:

Let's talk about the term 'gentrification.' Most people see that as a racially inspired term, and it is not. It's a socio-economic term and it was meant to capture the dynamic that occurs when people of middle- and upper-middle-class incomes move into areas that were previously considered depressed properties, rehabilitate those properties, and by doing so, and by their presence, they raise property values. And what happens is that *the socio-economic band of people* that formerly could rent there and buy there can no longer do that, ergo the term... "the area gentrifies." And so, gentrification is something that you want to have happen if you have depressed areas (*Los Angeles Sentinel* 2017, 10:06, emphasis added)."

This admission reveals the duplicitousness of public statements, which development actors now know must depict solidarity with the needs of the most vulnerable. While the promise to "wholly protect Black and Brown residents" stands as an official talking point, further exploration illuminates how removing a particular "socio-economic band" may indeed be desirable to them, centering the interests of the city's Black middle class. We argue that rhetorics of urban development understand the pressing concern of Black communities about threats of displacement and thus employ veiled promises of protection to sway Black voters when other motives lie beneath the surface.

Corporate interests in both Richmond and Inglewood learned to speak the language of liberation to exact the logics of Black aspatiality. While making the now necessary political donations and public concessions, development in Inglewood only exacerbates existing inequalities. Capital, embodied here by stadium owners Kroeke and Ballman, is interested in finding new subjects to exploit: extract cheap labor, absorb unsettled land, and take power to satisfy their interests. Indeed, given the high cost of Los Angeles County's housing markets, some of the more financially strapped and adventurous White families have already decided to move in. Meanwhile, residents already decry the traffic congestion and rent increases which threaten many of them out of their communities. At the end of the day, Mayor Butts, pro-stadium supporters, and developers may have bartered for a "better" Inglewood—one with rising housing values, a balanced city budget, and shiny new amenities. But whether any of Inglewood's greatest treasures—its Black and Brown people—will be able to stay there remains to be seen.

## Conclusion

For decades, Black thinkers have debated the question of Black liberation. Would collective emancipation come from enterprise, in the tradition of Booker T. Washington? Would it be gained from education, in the tradition of W. E. B. DuBois? Would it come from nationalist collectivism or post-capitalist institution-building? Or would it be something else? In urban cities across America, we find predatory rhetorics of urban development that intimately know the narratives within this debate. Capitalists, both White and Black, attempt to advance their material interests in Black cities around the country by strategically leveraging these community debates, blending the messaging to suit their aims, and obscuring the question of liberation to Black audiences.

Much of what Marable and theories of Black aspatiality identified appears in the current rhetorical projects undergirding corporate development in the urban metropolises that we



highlight in this article. The Black leaders in the Richmond and Inglewood cases offer corporate development as the pathway to economic and social change that uplifts Black communities. Local political leaders and developers position these projects as a refuge from the long *durée* of economic decline experienced by the urban Black working class in the post-industrial City. They render an image of a future city endowed with the same kind of investments in the public and commercial sectors that one would take for granted in White suburbia. In this way, developers, with the support of their political allies in local government, masquerade as saviors of the Black working class. At the same time, their words take attention away from the elusiveness of middle-class community life, just as private interests exploit Black renters and homeowners (Taylor 2019). What the ‘corporate-development as savior’ narrative strategically avoids naming is that White middle-class lives and communities in the United States have always been heavily subsidized by the plundering of the urban Black working class (e.g., Rothstein 2017; Troutt 2014). While major redistribution policies that built the affluent White suburbs of the country are rarely considered, “Black progress” in cities like Richmond and Inglewood is said to be achieved through capitulation to the sway of the market.

This article aims to make several contributions, first in naming and demonstrating a theoretical framework within which rhetoric becomes a means to facilitate the logics of Black aspatiality. We also hope to contribute to the literature on Black class struggle in a few ways. First, for scholars of political economy, our work offers vital sets of examples of how race gets deployed as a tool to exact the aims of capitalism. Next, studies of Black identity and class polarity often rest on notions of linked fate to predict one set of pro-Black, altruistic behaviors from the Black middle class, taking Dawson’s (1995) original, insightful application of the heuristic to voting behavior to a much wider set of outcomes. Contrary to this depiction, we illuminate how the Black middle class and political elites often play a critical role in shaping and disseminating predatory rhetorics of urban development. Rather than representing a sense of linked fate, in both cases, Black elites, motivated by their desires for illusory middle-class communities, work in concert with projects which will disadvantage and exclude the Black working class. Viewed from a racial capitalism framework, these findings thus demand future work be attuned to the ways real class struggle within Black communities disrupts naive notions of Blackness as an identity with one homogenous set of interests. To this end, future studies should further explore different kinds of actors in developing rhetorical predation, including the often Black-led public relations and communications firms who partner with development interests to deploy coercive messages in “culturally competent” and ultimately persuasive ways.

These cases and the need to confront neoliberalism raise essential questions. Considering what is at stake, we ask, who *effectively* organizes the Black working class around collective and radical community development interests? Particularly, how are community-based organizations and grassroots formations investing in political education in light of predatory development schemes? As developers parachute in and spend millions of dollars to inundate Black communities with coordinated messages to sell communities on achieving dreams of American middle-class community life via corporate reform, what might a playbook look like for developing a radical analysis of community development? We are encouraged by and look to those Black-led grassroots organizations in cities across the country—Moms 4 Housing in Oakland, CA; Defend Atlanta Forest & Stop Cop City in South Atlanta, GA; Liberty Community Land Trust in Los Angeles, CA; Save UC Townhomes in Philadelphia, PA; Richmond Tenants Union, and Race Capitol in Richmond, VA—each of which offers us a vision of how the schemes of rhetorical and visceral predation might be resisted and what free, Black places might look like.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, the Association of Black Sociologists, and the Critical Race Studies in Education Association for feedback and audience on versions of this manuscript. We would also like to thank Martina Manicasteri for her insights on rhetoric.

### References

- Addie, Jean-Paul D., and James C. Fraser (2019). After Gentrification: Social Mix, Settler Colonialism, and Cruel Optimism in the Transformation of Neighbourhood Space. *Antipode*, 51(5): 1369–1394.
- Agha, Nola, and Daniel Rascher (2021). Economic Development Effects of Major and Minor League Teams and Stadiums. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 22(3): 274–294.
- Andrews, Kate (2020). Richmond's \$1.5B Navy Hill Project Is Dead. *Virginia Business*, November 3. <https://www.virginiabusiness.com/article/richmonds-1-5b-navy-hill-project-is-dead/> (accessed November 17, 2022).
- Andrews, Kate (2021). Richmond Casino Rejected by Voters. *Virginia Business*, November 2. <https://www.virginiabusiness.com/article/too-close-to-call-but-richmond-casino-appears-unlikely/> (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Baradaran, Mehrsa (2019). *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Bergman, Ben (2015). Potential NFL Stadium Could Be on Inglewood Ballot by Summer. *89.3 KPCC*, January 26. <https://archive.kpcc.org/blogs/economy/2015/01/26/17852/nfl-stadium-moves-closer-to-going-on-inglewood-bal/> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. (1968). The Rhetorical Situation. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*: 1–14.
- Bledsoe, Adam, and Willie Jamaal Wright (2019). The Anti-Blackness of Global Capital. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37(1): 8–26.
- BLK RVA (2022). Welcome to Richmond. <https://www.visitblk RVA.com> (accessed January 11, 2021).
- Blommaert, Jan, and Chris Bulcaen (2000). Critical Discourse Analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29(1): 447–466.
- Bonacich, Edna, and Robert F. Goodman (1972). *Deadlock in School Desegregation: A Case Study of Inglewood, California*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Brown-Saracino, Japonica (2017). Explicating Divided Approaches to Gentrification and Growing Income Inequality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43(1): 515–539.
- Burke, Kenneth (1969). *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cancian, Dan (2020). Inglewood Residents Lash out at Rams New Stadium: “This Is Gentrification.” July 30. <https://www.newsweek.com/inglewood-residents-lash-out-rams-new-stadium-1521602> (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Central Virginia African American Chamber of Commerce (2021). About. <https://www.cvaacc.org/about> (accessed January 11, 2021).
- Cheats Movement (2019). Black Richmond Needs More Ownership from the Navy Hill Project...Let Me Explain. *The Cheats Movement*, December 24. <https://thecheatsmovement.com/black-richmond-needs-more-ownership-from-the-navy-hill-project-let-me-explain/> (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Clay, Kevin L. (2019). ‘Despite the Odds’: Unpacking the Politics of Black Resilience Neoliberalism. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(1): 75–110.
- Connolly, N. D. B. (2014). *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Dawson, Michael C. (1995). *7 Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Desmond, Matthew, and Nathan Wilmers (2019). Do the Poor Pay More for Housing?: Exploitation, Profit, and Risk in Rental Markets. *American Journal of Sociology*, 124(4): 1090–1124.
- De La Cruz-Viesca, Melany, Paul M. Ong, Andre Comandon, William A. Darity, and Darrick Hamilton (2018). Fifty Years After the Kerner Commission Report: Place, Housing, and Racial Wealth Inequality in Los Angeles. *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4(6): 160–184.
- Fairclough, Norman (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. New York: Routledge.
- Fenno, Nathan, and Sam Farmer (2020). How Stan Kroenke and NFL Turned SoFi Stadium Into \$5-Billion Reality. *Los Angeles Times*, September 4. <https://www.latimes.com/sports/story/2020-09-04/stan-kroenke-nfl-owners-coronavirus-workers-sofi-stadium-rams-chargers> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Ferreira da Silva, Denise (2015). Before Man: Sylvia Wynter’s Rewriting of the Modern Episteme. In Katherine McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, pp. 90–105. New York: Duke University Press.
- Fields, Corey D. (2016). *Black Elephants in the Room: The Unexpected Politics of African American Republicans*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Graff, Henry (2020). Stoney Doubles Down on Navy Hill Project during State of the City Address. *NBC12 Richmond*, January 28. <https://www.nbc12.com/2020/01/29/stoney-doubles-down-navy-hill-project-during-state-city-address/> (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Hill, Jasmine D. (2022). Kin Support of the Black Middle Class: Negotiating Need, Norms, and Class Background. *Social Problems*, 69(1): 3–21.
- Hunter, Marcus Anthony, and Zandria Robinson (2018). *Chocolate Cities: The Black Map of American Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Inside Radio (2021). There's Opposition to Urban One Casino Project, But Radio Could Sell Idea to Richmond Voters. *Insideradio.com*, August 25. [https://www.insideradio.com/free/there-s-opposition-to-urban-one-casino-project-but-radio-could-sell-idea-to-richmond/article\\_f17f8230-0575-11ec-b554-cbc9ff7b2b99.html](https://www.insideradio.com/free/there-s-opposition-to-urban-one-casino-project-but-radio-could-sell-idea-to-richmond/article_f17f8230-0575-11ec-b554-cbc9ff7b2b99.html) (accessed November 17, 2022).
- JamesButts4Mayor (2010) Inglewood Election Campaign 2010 - City of Inglewood Election Information 2011 - Municipal Elections, *YouTube*, December 31. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiOPun7TrOU> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Jennings, Angel (2019). One of California's Last Black Enclaves Threatened by Inglewood's Stadium Deal. *Los Angeles Times*, April 10. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-inglewood-gentrification-rent-crenshaw-rams-stadium-20190410-hlmlstory.html> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- KISS FM (2021) Why ONE Casino + Resort? A Real conversation with Cathy Hughes and Alfred Liggins. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=205411811722576> (accessed March 1, 2023).
- Lewis, Gordon (1999). *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.
- Lewis, Jovan Scott (2022). *Violent Utopia: Dispossession and Black Restoration in Tulsa*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Logan, Tim (2015). Inglewood Stadium Plan Garners 20,000 Signatures. *Los Angeles Times*, January 26. <https://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-inglewood-stadium-plan-garners-20k-signatures-20150126-story.html> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Los Angeles Sentinel* (2017). EXCLUSIVE: Inglewood Mayor James Butts Goes One-on-One. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6pwmsEEF0w> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Los Angeles Times* (2022). A Man and a Plan: Inglewood's Mayor Builds from His Past and Plans for the Future. September 16. <https://www.latimes.com/inglewoodrenaissance/story/2022-02-03/a-man-and-a-plan> (accessed November 17, 2022).
- Mackey, Ashley, and Grace Manthey (2021). Neighborhoods of Color East of LAX Have Some of the Highest Health Risks, Data Shows. *ABC7 Los Angeles*, October 29. <https://abc7.com/lax-air-pollution-respiratory-illness-inequities-los-angeles/11174361/> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Marable, Manning (1983). *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society*. First edition. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- McKinney, Jeffrey (2017). 45 Great Moments in Black Business – No. 27: Don Barden's \$149 Million Acquisition of Three Vegas Casinos. *Black Enterprise*, October 31. <https://www.blackenterprise.com/45-great-moments-in-black-business-no-27-don-barden-makes-history-with-149-million-acquisition-of-las-vegas-casinos/> (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Mele, Christopher (2011). Casinos, Prisons, Incinerators, and Other Fragments of Neoliberal Urban Development. *Social Science History*, 35(3): 423–452.
- Moss, Philip, and Chris Tilly (2001). *Stories Employers Tell: Race, Skill, and Hiring in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Newcomb, Tim (2021). L.A. Clippers Partner with Intuit and Plan High-Tech Intuit Dome. *Forbes*, September 17. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/timnewcomb/2021/09/17/la-clippers-partner-with-intuit-and-plan-high-tech-intuit-dome/> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- O'Keefe, Jimmy (2019). Navy Hill: From Thriving Black Community to Debated Redevelopment. *WHSV3*, December 12. <https://www.wshv.com/content/news/Navy-Hill-From-thriving-black-community-to-debated-redevelopment-566150231.html> (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Preddy, Ray, Sr. (2019). Letter to the Editor: Navy Hill Project Nothing to Celebrate. *Richmond Free Press*, December 27. <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2019/dec/27/navy-hill-project-nothing-celebrate/> (accessed February 23, 2023).
- Reed, Adolph (1988). The Black Urban Regime: Structural Origins and Constraints. *Comparative Urban and Community Research*, 1(1): 138.
- Revitalization Project, The (2015). Revitalize The City of Champions: A Once in a Lifetime Opportunity for Inglewood. <https://championsinitiative.com> (accessed December 31, 2015).
- Robinson, Mark (2018). Richmond City Council Mulling Own Analysis of Arena Redevelopment Proposal. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, January 18. <https://richmond.com/news/local/richmond-city-council-mulling-own-analysis-of>

- arena-redevelopment-proposal/article\_e66c5e80-4fff-5d8e-aba5-53c34457668c.html (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Rothstein, Richard (2017). *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: Liveright Publishing.
- Schiffres, Meg (2021). Backers Promise Casino Would Revitalize Southside, but Experts and Advocates are Skeptical. *VPM News*, October 28. <https://vpm.org/news/articles/26642/backers-promise-casino-would-revitalize-southside-but-experts-and-advocates-are> (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Scott, Anna (2019). Inglewood Community Fights Gentrification Driven by Tech Boom. *All Things Considered*, September 5. <https://one.npr.org/i/758043726:758043727> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Sondheimer, Eric (2016). Rams Agree to Donate Equipment to L.A. Unified. *Los Angeles Times*, October 27. <https://www.latimes.com/sports/highschool/la-sp-rams-lausd-donation-20161027-snap-story.html> (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Suarez, Chris (2021). More than \$2 Million Has Been Poured into Richmond's Casino Debate. On Tuesday, the Voters Decide. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, October 19. [https://richmond.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/more-than-2-million-has-been-poured-into-richmonds-casino-debate-on-tuesday-the-voters/article\\_a72a604e-0b13-5375-8fe6-ba93490d4660.html](https://richmond.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/more-than-2-million-has-been-poured-into-richmonds-casino-debate-on-tuesday-the-voters/article_a72a604e-0b13-5375-8fe6-ba93490d4660.html) (accessed November 18, 2022).
- Suarez, Chris, and Mark Robinson (2021). 'I Was Expecting It to Pass': Urban One Casino Fails Despite Being Heavily Favored by Voters in South Richmond. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, November 3. [https://richmond.com/news/local/i-was-expecting-it-to-pass-urban-one-casino-fails-despite-being-heavily-favored-by/article\\_4302929b-d3eb-5f20-b6a7-d2a23e97f304.html](https://richmond.com/news/local/i-was-expecting-it-to-pass-urban-one-casino-fails-despite-being-heavily-favored-by/article_4302929b-d3eb-5f20-b6a7-d2a23e97f304.html) (accessed November 21, 2022).
- Taylor, Henry Louis, Jr. (2020). Disrupting Market-Based Predatory Development: Race, Class, and the Underdevelopment of Black Neighborhoods in the U.S. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and the City*, 1(1–2): 16–21.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta (2019). *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press.
- Troutt, David Dante (2014). *The Price of Paradise: The Costs of Inequality and a Vision for a More Equitable America*. New York: NYU Press.
- Virginia Public Access Project (2021). <https://www.vpap.org/committees/391079/vote-yes-richmond-wins/> (accessed November 17, 2022).
- Wacquant, Loïc (2008). Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality. In Jarmo Houtsonen and Ari Antikainen (Eds.), *Symbolic Power in Cultural Contexts*, pp. 43–52. Leiden, NL: Brill.
- Wacquant, Loïc, Tom Slater, and Virgilio Borges Pereira (2014). Territorial Stigmatization in Action. *Environment and Planning A*, 46(6): 1270–1280.
- Wodak, Ruth, and Michael Meyer (2015). *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Wynter, Sylvia (1976). Ethno or Socio Poetics. *Alcheringa*, 2(2): 78–94.
- Zamudio, Margaret M., and Michael I. Lichter (2008). Bad Attitudes and Good Soldiers: Soft Skills as a Code for Tractability in the Hiring of Immigrant Latina/os over Native Blacks in the Hotel Industry. *Social Problems*, 55(4): 573–589.

**Kevin L. Clay** is Assistant Professor of Black Studies in Education at Rutgers the State University of New Jersey. His research involves the study of political education, youth organizing, and youth activism, particularly as these areas confront the neoliberal capitalist political economy. He is currently drafting his first ethnographic monograph, under contract with the University of Minnesota Press. Clay's work has been published in popular press including *The Black Youth Project* and *The Root*, and several scholarly journals, including, *Theory and Research in Social Education*, and the *American Educational Research Journal*.

**Jasmine D. Hill** is Assistant Professor of Public Policy & Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles. She studies the material and cultural underpinnings of racial inequality, the experiences and challenges faced by sub-baccalaureate Black workers, and the consequences of social mobility on Black identity. Hill's work has appeared in academic venues including *Social Problems*, *Teaching Sociology*, *The Journal of Critical Race Inquiry*, and in 2007 she co-edited *Inequality in the 21st Century* with David Grusky for Westview Press.

---

**Cite this article:** Clay, Kevin L., and Jasmine D. Hill (2023). The Predatory Rhetorics of Urban Development: Neoliberalism and the Illusory Promise of Black Middle-Class Communities. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 20: 371–390. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X23000048>