The creation of community in the third place

Owen Leroy Daniel

Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd

Recommended Citation
Daniel, Owen Leroy, "The creation of community in the third place" (2000). Retrospective Theses and Dissertations. 21157.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/21157

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
The creation of community in the third place

by

Owen Leroy Daniel

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

Major: Architecture
Major Professor: Karen Bermann

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2000

Copyright ©Owen Leroy Daniel, 2000. All rights reserved.
This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Owen Leroy Daniel

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Proposal</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. INFLUENCES &amp; ELEMENTS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnival</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Indian American Day Carnival Parade</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration: West Indian Migration</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Care and Styling</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton Street</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. SITE INFORMATION</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Existing Building</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Neighborhood</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton Street Today</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4. THE DESIGN OF THE THIRD PLACE</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Front Façade</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhabitable Space</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rear Façade</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmatic Space</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A. MAPS AND OTHER IMAGES</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B. EXISTING CONDITIONS</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C. THE DESIGN OF THE THIRD PLACE</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis is about the creation of a community center in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. The design of the proposed community center draws from issues that bear social significance to the lives of the residents, who are predominantly African-American and Afro-West Indian. The inspiration from those respective issues are intended to assist and support in designing a space that identifies and explores aspects —real and imagined—of the respective peoples for the end result of community wholeness. The overall realization is that there is a voluntary or involuntary cultural and political partnership that occurs and should occur among people. Therefore, understanding some of the underpinnings of the various cultures helps in the creation of community. In recognition of their shared and yet different histories, the project is offered in the hopes that it will support to, among many things, assimilation into a reasonably responsible and tolerant city life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For much I am grateful, and to many I am thankful. In the wise words of Proverb 15:22, “Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established.” I would like to give many thanks to those whose counsel has been poured into my life. For we are the sum total of what we have learned from all who have taught us, both great and small.

I am deeply grateful to my major professor, Karen Bermann, for her wisdom, commitment, guidance, and selfless contribution to my continuing development in the field of architecture. I am fortunate to benefit from her knowledge and insight. Thank you, Karen.

I also extend my deepest thanks to my thesis committee members: Professor Mickael “Mikesch” Muecke, and to the husband-wife-professor-tandem of Mark and Elisabeth Hamin. To Professor Muecke for his knowledge and instruction throughout my graduate studies. To Professor Mark Hamin for endless giving and guidance in shaping and reshaping my thesis.

My sincere appreciation to the many professors and colleagues that have had a hand in shaping my journey, and explorations, my life.

My greatest appreciation goes to my family, and church family for their support, love, and encouragement, all of which has helped maintain my focus on completing my graduate studies.

In closing, I give all thanks to my Heavenly Father and Savior without whom nothing is possible.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Problem

"Leroy, your mama's calling you," is a phrase I often recall, visualizing the grin on the face that so customarily uttered it. This phrase always takes me back to my early years, growing up on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia, in a neighborhood where everyone literally knew your name, or at least your family's. Belonging in a place where you are known or, even more so, belonging in a place where everyone is neighborly or familiar, is a commonly desired way of life. I have since migrated to New York, and taken up United States citizenship. Still, while I hold on to that memory and others of my childhood, I have found myself living among strangers, with little hope of changing that reality. It is no wonder that many people speak of the "good old days," by which they refer to a time when one knew one's neighbors, and shared a concern for the well-being of the community and its members. The images of such neighborhoods are presented in Ray Suarez's The Old Neighborhood, in which he offers "a tour of the places people lived in, loved, and left."1 Suarez writes:

People talk about the closeness, the intimacy of the old urban neighborhood. People talk about the friendships found and lost, the adventures of city life, waiting for the old man to come home from work. We knew each other then. We saw our faces plainly, in the mirror and in each other's eyes.2

This clearly documents the nostalgia of those that experience that sense of loss.

Although that nostalgic sentiment may be genuine, I do not intend for it to nullify the fact, that often imbedded in this nostalgia is explicit or tacit racial resentment. Racial

resentment—displeasure with anything other or different from oneself—that contributes to
the toxic potion of suspicion and exclusion responsible for the loss of community.

At present, it is both a cultural perception and often a real condition that we live in
neighborhoods where we often fear, or simply ignore, our neighbors. We spend more time in
isolation than ever before. People are increasingly resorting to every manner of electronic
gadgetry as they substitute public encounters for the solitude of their individual homes. I
would like to reiterate the questions put forth by Ray Oldenburg when he asks:

[H]ow substantial have the recent gains against segregation in the United States really
been? What does integration count for when little remains of public and collective
life? What does the right to associate mean in a land where people retreat to the
privacy of their homes and where residential segregation remains solid?²

The realm of the public or communal is continually declining; this is evident through the
constant deterioration of public facilities and institutions. For example our public school
system have become the dumping ground for countless negative views. The more people
increasingly turn their backs on community, the worse things in the public realm become.
Likewise, as the fear associated with public places/things increase, so too do the degree of
isolation from the public domain. The fear and the isolation is as great as it is already within
our inner cities, such as Brooklyn, because of the many horror stories that have been
repeatedly told.

At a glance, the situation of our inner cities, such as Brooklyn, seems to indicate a
deep-seated fear reinforced by the perceived criminal behavior of the sort of people who

inhabit the inner cities. However, to believe that claim, without placing it within a wider social dynamic, would be to accept the myth used to ostracize the inner city and its inhabitants. "Nor is it illuminating to tag minority groups, or the poor, or the outcast with responsibility for city danger." As Jane Jacobs argues, "there are immense variations in the degree of civilization, [i.e. cultural refinement and consideration for others] and safety found" amongst groups of people.

One likely reason for many inner city residents' apparent uncaring attitude may be the loss of strong community ties and affiliations. There seems to be no institution, entity, person, or space to which people can look in order to counteract their existing situations. Likewise, if such an entity or space exists, it is a faint presence that goes unnoticed. When a people or a community loses its sense of identity, fear and discouragement tend to hold sway.

I am in agreement with Jacobs' argument that:

[w]e shall have something solid to chew on if we think of city neighborhoods as mundane organs of self-government. Our failures with the city neighborhoods are, ultimately, failures in localized self-government. And our successes are successes at localized self-government.  

Jacobs uses the term "self-government" in the broadest sense, to indicate both formal and informal self-management of society. Essentially, neighborhoods have the capacity to examine and execute actions that will affect them both internally and externally simultaneously, so that the neighbors may not only benefit individually, but may also in turn

---

5 Ibid. p. 31.
6 Articles, such as, "Fear, Crime, Community Organization, and Limitations on Daily Routines," Urban Quarterly, Vol. 20, No.3, March 1985 show that quality of life is affected directly by community involvement.
affect the overall cityscape. One such example is street surveillance where neighbors keep a vigilant eye on the street. Consequently, unusual activities or events draw greater attention and subsequent intervention from the neighborhood members or the police. Such community involvement helps to shape both the immediate community, and the wider city that enfolds it.

The loss of community is directly related to the loss of spaces—architectural spaces—that traditionally helped to develop and to nurture community ideals. Indeed, a closer examination of the community will reveal that the loss of community accompanied the destruction and elimination of spaces that fostered community. I am not suggesting that community spaces alone will rectify all that ails urban areas such as Brooklyn. However, it has been shown that when residents participate in maintaining the welfare of their communities, there is an improved quality of life within that community. That ability to improve the quality of life through residential involvement is evident in a special report by John Marks entitled, “The Big Apple comes roaring back—and other cities wonder how it was done,” in the *U.S. News & World Report.* Marks focuses on the rebirth of a community in the South Bronx, as well as that of several other once devastated communities in New York City.

Communities need some base(s)—by which I mean primarily community centers—upon which to site and foster community development. As part of the research for this thesis, I returned to the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Although I was impressed with its

---

9 Bedford-Stuyvesant: a neighborhood in north central Brooklyn (1990 pop. 135,000), bound to the north by Flushing Avenue, to the east by Broadway and Saratoga Avenue, to the south by Atlantic Avenue and to the west by Classon Avenue. Its name is derived from those of two middle-class communities in the nineteenth-century Brooklyn—Bedford (to the west) and Stuyvesant Heights (to the east).
development and sense of community, there was no place designated as a community center. This is not to imply that Bedford-Stuyvesant does not have community-oriented establishments. For such agencies do exist, as I will discuss later. However, I would like to make the point that community-centered establishments are different from a community center, even though they might provide similar services. Consequently, there is at present no designated place where neighbors can congregate for community functions and purposes. If there is any such space, then its location is not well known, which defeats its intended purpose.

Some of Bedford-Stuyvesant’s communal appropriations include barbershops, laundromats, parks, and churches. People can be seen gathering in those places on a daily basis. Other places that seem to serve the purpose are street corners; but then again, there is a negative connotation surrounding the act of gathering on street corners. Nevertheless, the previously mentioned appropriated places are not adequate, since only a few of the neighborhood’s many residents frequent those places. For example, a barbershop is exclusively for men, which makes it inadequate for serving as a community center. There is admittedly something unique about such appropriated spaces that attract gatherings, which bespeaks their appeal. However, overall, those individual places can never by themselves substitute for a designated community center. The lack of community centers, as well as the appropriation of the previously mentioned places, attests to the need for such a gathering place in the neighborhood.

It is an odd truth that most anything that is in one’s childhood is accepted as the natural order of things. A chuckhole in the street is there because it is supposed to be
there, and to think of it as a[n] accident, as a piece of carelessness by your elders, is out of the question.\textsuperscript{10}

For a stranger moving to a new place, in my case Brooklyn, New York, it is almost a given to accept things as they appear. For many, it is easier to keep to themselves than to risk venturing out into the unknown. I recall conversations with friends, prior to leaving my childhood home of St. Lucia for Brooklyn, in which they advised me to replace my soft demeanor with a cold, impersonal one in order to “fit in.” In retrospect, it is ironic that in my case, the phrase “Leroy, your mama’s calling you” lived up to its implied message in the urban setting of Brooklyn, New York. The phrase implies a homebody, i.e. an individual who seldom ventures or is allowed to venture, far from home. I am not suggesting that being a homebody is wrong, or even that it is less desirable than being out in the community. Instead, I am claiming that we have lost a part of ourselves by living in isolation from each other. It is even more heartrending that we have accepted the current condition as the natural order of things. It is that loss of belonging that most disappoints me, because I believe that participation in the public things and cares are essential to life.

The Proposal

The proposed community center is a space where neighbors could go to encounter, to experience each other in an inclusive and mutually shared environment. The community center consists neither of one person nor of a body of identical people. Rather it should consist of a body of different kinds of people, since community requires different kinds of capacity, interest and character among its members. As is suggested by John Schaar,

“through the interplay of the diversities, men are able to serve as compliments of one another and to attain a higher and better life by the mutual exchange of different services.” This space, a “third place,” to borrow Ray Oldenburg’s phrase, is one that provides for richer human association. To refer to the community center as the “third place” is appropriate, in that it is neither the home, the first place, or the workplace, the second place. My proposed third place, i.e. the community center, acts as a staging area where the members of the neighborhood can get to know each other. While it is true that the community center might not result in visitors becoming neighborly, and that some residents may choose not to use it, it is also true that the community center would be the means by which they would mobilize and come to realize that anyone is absent. Basically, it is through personal interaction that one gets to realize another neighbor’s absence. Oldenburg suggest that the third places “serve as ‘Ports of Entry’ for visitors and as places where newcomers may be introduced to many of their predecessors; and as communities nonetheless depend upon the successful integration of strangers . . . there is a general consensus that greater citizen involvement is the desideratum.”

I would like to explore in my thesis the conversion of an abandoned building, which once served the community as a public hall, into a community center for the residents—primarily Blacks, African-Americans and Afro-West Indians—of the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn (Table 1, Figures A1, A2, A3).

---

12 “Third place,” refers to places that are both outside the realm of the home (the first place), and the work place (the second place).
Table 1. Population change by Race and Hispanic Origin by Selected Ages; Housing Unit changes. Brooklyn Community District 3, 1980 – 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>Number Change</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133,377</td>
<td>138,696</td>
<td>5,319</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>1,217</td>
<td>-498</td>
<td>-29.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>112,994</td>
<td>113,544</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Origin</td>
<td>17,781</td>
<td>22,589</td>
<td>4,808</td>
<td>27.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, Pac. Isl. Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>101.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amer. Ind., Esk, Aleut Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>120.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>-109</td>
<td>-30.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under 18 years     | 47,282  | 42,426  | -4,356       | -10.27         |
18 years and older | 86,095  | 96,270  | 10,175       | 11.28          |
Total Housing Units | 55,266  | 54,344  | -922         | -1.67          |

*Report prepared by Brooklyn Community District No. 3.

My design scheme maintains most of the existing envelope of the building that now sits of the site, assuming that the existing building is gutted on the interior. The center is intended to serve as a catalyst for developing the neighborhood's sense of community.

At the core of my proposal is a community center for the residents of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Collectively the residents—African-Americans and West Indians—have a shared Blackness, by which I make reference to their variable skin colors and their intertwined histories of slavery, discrimination, and stigmatization, both of which stem from their African ancestry. Historically, the United States has practiced a racial categorization that has overwhelmingly shaped the life choices of Black Americans. Therefore, "all persons of any
known or discernible African ancestry, regardless of somatic characteristics, are considered Black and have been subjected to all of the social and legal disadvantages that this implies.”  

However, in spite of this shared cultural Blackness/ historical oppression, there are cultural histories that differentiate the two groups. As a result, for the design of the proposed community center, I will draw from several areas that have given greater social significance to the lives of both groups of the residents. The inspiration derived from those respective areas will assist and support me in designing a space that identifies and explores aspects —real and imagined—of the respective groups for the end result of community wholeness. In recognition of their shared, but also distinctive histories, the project scheme will derive its influence from important social aspects of African-American and Afro-West Indian culture, in the hope that, among other things, it will help to transition residents into a reasonably responsible civic life. Overall, acquiring a better understanding of the cultures helps to establish the basis upon which the fostering of community can occur.

The design of the community center is in some ways intended to give life to the histories and stories of the Black peoples of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Although the stories stem from different circumstances, they share a commonality as a result of their shared Blackness, which relegates residents, whether West Indian or African-American, singularly or collectively, to an inferior status in U.S. society. The design of the community center, then, will pay homage to the African-American and Afro-Caribbean peoples that inhabit Bedford-Stuyvesant. Although the community center is oriented primarily to the Black population that inhabits Bedford-Stuyvesant, it is not intended to be strictly a Black community center, in

---

that it welcomes only Blacks. Instead, the Blackness of the population and the neighborhood's various histories, stories, events, memories, and experiences are intended to influence the design of a community center that is to be located in their neighborhood. Collectively, then, these social areas of inspiration will help in constructing a history of the local residents that will in turn help give shape to the design of this community center.

Inspiration for my design will come from five areas: West Indian Carnival, immigration, the church, hair care and styling, and Fulton Street. As for a common thread linking these areas of inspiration, they all stem from a social perspective, in that they bear social significance regarding the ways, individually or collectively, that African-Americans and West Indians identify and perceive themselves. Within each category or source of inspiration are further cultural implications, such as theatricality and ambiguity/duality that I will explore in closer detail below. The influence of the above-mentioned categories informs the building design on different levels. While some contain the potential of literal incorporation into the building, others will operate on a conceptual or symbolic level. Nevertheless, these areas of inspiration will be interwoven into the design scheme of the community center to tell community stories—or histories, if you will—spatially, textually, and visually. The building, while intended essentially to foster community, also gives life to the history, i.e. the stories incorporated into the design, both to represent the Black population of Bedford-Stuyvesant, and to serve as physical documentation.

The implementation of the respective histories into the design give rise to the social importance of preserving and passing on that history to subsequent generations. Two issues worthy of recognition here are storytelling traditions and sociability. Sociability refers to the community center as a hub oriented to the lives of the residents in relation to the community
collectively. The Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, Updated Revised Deluxe Edition, defines 'social,' the root word of 'sociability,' as:

1. pertaining to, devoted to, or characterized by friendly companionship or relations: a social club. 2. seeking or enjoying the companionship of other; friendly; or sociable; gregarious. . . . 4. Living or disposed to live in companionship with others or in a community, rather than in isolation: People are social beings. . . . 8. noting or pertaining to activities designed to remedy or alleviate certain unfavorable conditions of life in a community, esp. among the poor.

I am suggesting that each resident has a responsibility to the overall well-being of the community and its members, and the community center is intended to promote and to provide a space where the idea of community can function and receive reinforcement.

The issue of storytelling, while significant because oral tradition has been instrumental to Blacks in ensuring the passing on of their histories, also signifies an ideal of sociability, by which I mean community. For instance, I remember the many occasions where my siblings and I would gather around our mother to listen to the stories she had learned from her mother. Although I have chosen a family gathering as an example, the gathering was never restricted to immediate family, because other adults and children joined in as well. Moreover, the gathering occurred in the yard, and consequently, represented more than simply a family congregating to hear or to tell a story. Wyer wisely notes that “stories are the fundamental constituents of human memory, knowledge, and social communication.”15

Ultimately, contained within stories is the idea and importance of community—partaking and sharing with one’s neighbors—which stems from the sociability of storytelling. Likewise, the

design scheme of the community center and the sources of inspiration shaping it aim to create a space that would bring various people from the community together.
CHAPTER 2. INFLUENCES AND ELEMENTS

Carnival

European and West Indian Carnivals

Traditionally, Carnival, a pre-Lenten festival, traced its roots to pre-modern Europe. In recent times, Carnival in the West Indies has been thoroughly Africanized, through a direct influence of the song, dance, and story of African slaves of the Caribbean. Nevertheless, Carnival generally maintains a laissez-faire attitude that permeates the event. This is not to imply that there is no official restriction or containment of Carnival, because there are both temporal and locational restraints that limit Carnival to two days a year, and to a specific location. Therefore, I refer to the liberties afforded during Carnival in order to highlight the fact that celebrations are permitted to be taken further than normally would be sanction by the authorities. Basically, Carnival participants are allowed to act—laissez-faire: let act—in ways that would ordinarily be unacceptable.

In her novel, The Chosen Place, The Timeless People, Paule Marshall describes the temporary lapse of all inhibitions in connection to Carnival, the consequence of which is often revealed nine months later. Philip Kasinitz has it right when he describes Carnival as originating in “pre-Lenten festivals of the flesh that suspend normal social relations and rules of decorum [which] are a feature of many Christian cultures.”

The reason given for the suspension of inhibitions is a temporary freedom from everyday life and the abstentions of Lent. I would combine the two, since Lent signifies a return to the everyday in countries celebrating a pre-Lenten Carnival. As a result, Lent—the Christian event commencing with Ash Wednesday—bears a greater cultural significance on the festivities since it marks the end of Carnival and the return to normal life, i.e. return to a life of decorum and basic Christian decency. Carnival, then, is supposedly a cultural safety valve or a release from the normal for the citizenry. It is a two-day hiatus from customary rules and regulations.

In tandem with the idea of a release valve is that of pacifying an otherwise restless populace. "Thus it can be argued that Carnival distracted the poor, drawing off energies that otherwise might have gone into a more substantial challenge to the social hierarchy."17

Another justification for the moral lapse of Carnival is the concept of "playing mas'." (Figures A4, A5, A6, A7, A8). "Playing mas'" at its core is theatrical, because it is a magical transformation that gives way to fantasies and other realities while in costume. Basically, it allows for an individual to adorn a costume, i.e. a mask, and be transported to fantasies and behaviors once bottled up. It is while in costume or in mask—"playing mas'"—that Carnival participants are licensed to misbehave or behave badly, or as it is phrased in Caribbean vernacular: "to get on bad." Essential to this fact is the idea of play—theatrics—in the sense that play also indicates the adopting of a role or persona, as well as the engagement free activity, or more ideally, fooling around. It is important to understand Carnival, as the temporary adopting of an alternate persona, in that the Carnival participant would ordinarily

behave better, which is to mean behave properly. Therefore, like any other theatrical production it is temporal and is simply make believe.

Nevertheless, the seriousness of this play or theatrics that occur during Carnival should not be dismissed that completely as light-hearted fun and games. There is just as much a serious or real realm to the activities that occur during Carnival. One should realize that the play becomes reality while it is occurring. As a result, there is a blurring as to what is real and what is play. The seriousness of this play is ideally expressed when Kasinitz quotes the Commissioner of the Departmental Executive Directory of the Gironde at Bordeaux who noted that, "[i]t is under the mask that one gives oneself over to the last degree of impudence in those unrestricted games that bring ruin and desolation to families."\[18\] It is here that we can see the ambivalence of Carnival.

For most of my life, those ideas have been the foundation for many horror stories, which of course are founded within the reality of Carnival, but that have deterred me from participating, or even viewing the Carnival festivities. As a matter of fact, I still have not had any direct association with Carnival. However, I recognize in the Carnival setting the potential for nullifying the barriers that separate people. I am less interested in the perversion of carnival, than I am in the inversion—one of inclusiveness—that occurs during Carnival. The sentiment of Carnival is “All o' we is one,” as is stated by the character of Lyle Hutson in Paule Marshall’ś, The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (Marshall, 200).

Thus another result of “playing mas’” is the cancellation of barriers between categories whatever they are or might happen to be, because Carnival draws participants

from various sectors of society. In the U.S., the thousands of people that line and parade along Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn on Labor Day, are testimony to this fact. Ideally, “the reversal of the social order and suspension of the moral rules of societal life has tremendous poignancy, even when done in jest. Carnival, the leveler, provides the space in which these fixed rules of social relations can be challenged.”

Essentially, “playing mas’” is a practice that provides a person or a group of people with the right to be “other” via play. Of course, the “other” is enacted from under the mask that allows for adopting a persona and simultaneously fooling around. In addition, play, as it relates to the theatricality of Carnival, also indicates a literal performance play. For example, the street becomes a stage for the Carnival procession, or live performance, or play, if you will. The procession flows through the street with its extravagant costumes and masks on display, which helps to create that alternate reality.

**West Indian American Day Carnival Parade**

The roots of Brooklyn’s West Indian American Day Carnival Parade go back to Trinidad, a Caribbean Island that initially began its Carnival tradition in the 1700s, which in turn was modeled after those of pre-modern Europe. Trinidad is also the native land of Jessie Wardell, the initial organizer of what would become known as the West Indian American Day Carnival Parade. However, Carnival in Brooklyn has been Americanized and takes on a more complex significance that has enriched the inversion perspective.

---

First, there is the Labor Day schedule change that differentiates the West Indian American Day Carnival Parade from the tenuous connection to Catholicism of the pre-Lenten Carnival celebrated in the Caribbean, thus facilitating the participation of West Indians of all religions. In recent years, the West Indian American Day Carnival Parade has become available to peoples of various cultures and languages, as was demonstrated by the international theme for the thirtieth anniversary of the West Indian American Day Carnival Parade. The thirtieth anniversary celebration featured music representing Latino, Jamaican, French Creole, East Indian and Caribbean communities. In addition, it was host to groups from Brazil, Haiti and other countries.²¹ Over the centuries, the phrase, “all o’ we is one,” has held true for the atmosphere promoted by Carnival organizers. The addition of “American” to the celebration’s title bears witness to the change that West Indian Carnival has undergone in its American transplanting.

Another significance to Carnival in Brooklyn is that it serves as an identifier to West Indians. Carnival has become a forum where people confronted by the feeling of dislocation can ground themselves in something thought of as distinctively West Indian, insofar as it was transported from the West Indies, and them gives a sense of shared identity:

In Brooklyn . . . Carnival is a time when people play with the idea of identity: it is a movement when who one “is” can be questioned, redefined. So it is strangely fitting that this event has become the most visible public symbol of New York’s west Indian community . . . Like the West Indian community, Carnival is now too huge to be ignored, and thus it served to make visible a group of people who have long felt invisible.²²

Thus, Carnival substantiates their selfhood, or at least helps to define it within the sphere of the Carnival.

As an influence to the design of the community center, Carnival impacts the concept of the design through the all-inclusive notion that "all o' we is one." The community center serves as a setting where that which hinders community is done away with. This does not mean that people’s differences are dismissed. Instead, it is indicative of a transformation of people’s minds. The building serves as the mask, if you will, under/ in which all o’ we become one. However, unlike, the temporality, i.e. momentary “passing” of Carnival, the sense of community fostered is intended flourish.

I used the phrase “the passing” in the above sentence as a means of revisiting the idea of Carnival as a procession and to indicate further how Carnival affects the design of the proposed community center. One implication of “procession,” “passing,” or “passage” is the thought of the building as a means of “passage” to community. However, a more literal application of those terms deals with the floor plans of the community center, in light of the fact that I am defining procession as free flowing, i.e. continuous, flow without restrictions. Therefore, the floor plans are done with limited enclosure in order to permit spatial flow both visually and physically (Figures C2, C3, C4, C5).

**Immigration: West Indian Passage**

West Indian migration to the United States is longstanding, despite its many peaks and valleys. This population shift has been especially noticeable since the late 1800s (Table 2), although I will primarily focus on the migrations of the twentieth century. The 1900s saw a notable increase of West Indian migration to the U.S. Three distinct waves
Table 2. Caribbean Immigration to the United States, 1820 – 1988a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Immigrants</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1821 - 1830</td>
<td>3,834</td>
<td>1911 - 1920</td>
<td>123,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831 - 1840</td>
<td>12,301</td>
<td>1921 - 1930</td>
<td>74,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841 - 1850</td>
<td>13,528</td>
<td>1931 - 1940</td>
<td>15,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851 - 1860</td>
<td>10,660</td>
<td>1941 - 1950</td>
<td>49,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861 - 1870</td>
<td>9,046</td>
<td>1951 - 1960</td>
<td>123,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881 - 1890</td>
<td>29,042</td>
<td>1971 - 1980</td>
<td>741,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891 - 1900</td>
<td>33,066</td>
<td>1981 - 1988</td>
<td>671,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901 - 1910</td>
<td>107,548</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Immigration and Naturalization Services. (Palmer, p.41).*

of West Indian migration to the United States occurred in the twentieth century. A large group came in the first decades of the twentieth century. A much smaller and somewhat more middle-class group came between the waning of the Depression and the changes in U.S. immigration policies during the mid 1960s. The largest wave began in 1966 and continues to the present (Kasinitz, 23 - 24). The impetus for the current wave is due largely to the change in U.S. and British immigration laws. Prior to the change in U.S. immigration laws in 1965, West Indians, then under British colonialism, had limited access. In fact, the Caribbean colonies of Britain were permitted to send only 100 emigrants per year to the United States.

Ransford W. Palmer articulates that point when he writes that:

The triggering mechanism for this surge of emigrants was the passage of new legislation in Great Britain and the United States. During the 1940s and 1950s, Great Britain had been principal non-Caribbean country of destination for migrants from the West Indies. In the United States, during these years, the McCarran-Walter Act had all but prohibited the immigration of residents of colonies to it. But on both sides Atlantic, new legislation reversed the roles of the two countries. The 1962 British Commonwealth Act effectively barred new arrivals from the English-speaking. But the 1965 amendments to the McCarran-Walter Act drastically enlarged the opportunity for Caribbean people to come to the United States. Whereas previously the colonies of the region had been permitted to send only 100 migrants per year to the United States, under the new legislation, all locations in the Western Hemisphere,
no matter their constitutional status, could share in the quota of 120,000 migrants (Kraly 1987, 39).

It is evident that the colonies' change to independent status from Britain, combined with the restriction of immigration to Britain and the softening of U.S. immigration laws, resulted in the growing wave of migration from the West Indies to the United States.

This most recent migrant group, which is arguably perhaps most responsible for the thriving West Indian culture in Brooklyn, will be the one generally referred to. This is not meant to downplay the achievements of the two previous waves. Instead, the focus on the latter is intended to bear on the design scheme of the community center proposed. This emphasis simply reinforces my belief that the center will function as a mediator, to help West Indians make the transition into the community, and create a greater sense of belonging for them. The community center provides a direct means of transition into the greater community, as well as acknowledging that portion of the community’s population.

Immigration is important to the proposed community center for two reasons. First, there is the fact of the growing immigrant population. While it is true that the number of people migrating from Caribbean has slowed down in the last decade, there is a very noticeable presence of West Indian culture in Brooklyn.

Second, the community center is directed at impacting the immigrant mentality. I refer primarily to the condition of doubleness—the immigrant is torn between two distinct things, without necessary belonging to either—within which immigrants exist. It serves to assist in transitioning newcomers into community life. While West Indians have been reluctant to give up ties to their homeland, the latest migratory wave revealed a greater

likelihood to accepting United States citizenship (Table 3). As Table 3 indicates, naturalization rates for Black immigrants are higher than for Hispanics and, once adjusted for length of time in the country, higher than that for Whites as well. This does not necessarily mean that West Indians have completely given up their West Indian heritage. In fact, the struggle for one's identity is further complicated. However, the decision to become U.S. citizens is made easier due to a desire to sponsor others, as well as for political benefits, such as the ability to vote.

Table 3. Naturalization rates for immigrants by race, 1980a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% naturalized citizens</th>
<th>Standardized for date of arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Races</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In addition, "with the single exception of Trinidad, the new nations of the Anglophone Caribbean permit full citizenship rights to their subjects abroad whether or not they have become U.S. citizens."24 Despite the duality that this implies, as to maintaining and enjoying dual citizenship, contemporary West Indians desire to become more involved in their communities for they resided in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood.

Furthermore, the process of becoming a naturalized citizen emphasizes the permanence of their stay. The naturalization process is indicative of a refashioning of one's identity. While the community center is not intended to inform one's identity, it would serve

to transition or, "process" if you will, people, regardless of their origina or ethnicity, into the
community.

Church

Recently, I watched a portion of a television interview on CSpan with Alan Keyes, a
Republican candidate in the upcoming 2000 presidential election. He suggested that the
failure of most programs directed at African-Americans/Blacks is due to a lack of
acknowledgement of the role played by family and by the church into the success of such
programs. To a greater extent than might be realized, the "Church"—i.e. Christian principles
and the faith inherent to them—has been pivotal to black thought and life in America. For
example, church communities stood at the core of the Abolitionist and Civil Rights
Movements, as is evident through such leaders as Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. The
church and the fundamental principles it promotes have been instrumental in assisting Blacks
to deal with and sometimes confront the racist and discriminatory realities with which they
have been forced to live. The "Church," fundamentally through the salvation provided
through the teaching of Jesus Christ, thus provides salvation and hope for a people that have
routinely been denied the rights and liberties that the United States promotes as its ideals.
Overall, the church, by which I primarily refer to the teachings and the principles taught in
the Gospels, promotes a life that is righteous and just, whereupon all people are created
equal, or more accurately stated, "all o' we is one."

Associated with the church is the concept of "Sunday best." I assume that this idea
stems from the desire and practice of reverencing God through one's self-presentation.
Nevertheless, it is very important to both the African-American and the Afro West Indian
cultures that on Sundays one go before the Lord, i.e. attend Sunday service, in one's best
clothing. "Sunday best" should not be mistaken for a display of expense or glamour. Instead, it is meant to symbolize the state of mind in which one went before God. It is very understandable, in light of the reverence and awe owed to God. In retrospect, the idea of "Sunday best" was more than about wearing freshly cleaned and ironed clothes, or the beautifully feathered hats that graced the heads of women or, the suits that only made their way out of the closet on church days. "Sunday best" is more about the feeling that went along with the dressing up. Consequently, if one dressed well, then one felt well. To some extend it was a theatrical production, with clothing serving as a mask for transitioning one's mind into oneness with God.

The significance of the church is also inherent in the building in which my community center will be designed (Figure B3). The direct correlation between my site and the church stems from the fact that the building was intended to serve as a church during the 1960s. Although the renovations remained unfinished, the traces of that intent are evident in the building's front façade. The influence of the church makes its way into my design scheme both formally and spiritually. The tripartite building parti reflects the concept of a triune Godhead: God the father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit. This tripartite division is readily conveyed in the existing building, through the scheme of a central nave flanked by side aisles, and as is reflected by the front façade with its flanking towers. The design incorporates the idea of threes both on a micro and macro level. Thus, the literal division of three permeates through the building both vertically and horizontally in that it is revealed in both the plans and elevations.
Hair Care and Styling

More than anything else in this world, Minnie Mae wanted pretty curly hair crowned by a stiff pink butterfly bow. . . . Oh, if only she could run a comb through her hair as nonchalantly as Sally Lou and have it leave little rows where the teeth had been! Or to have it fall down into her eyes when she stooped over, or to run in the wind and have it blow before her eyes. But no, she must have these inky stiff naps that made her cry every time mother washed them.  

Hair presents a unique way of looking into black culture. Hair and its treatment are a major factor in Blacks’ perception of themselves. Thus the task of looking into Black hair speaks to sociability on two levels: group socializing and group identity. Firstly, the treatment of hair, whether it is simply being trimmed, combed, or processed—referring to the alteration of hair consistency and texture through the use of artificial chemicals—affords the opportunity to socialize with family, friends, and neighbors. This aspect of the sociability surrounding hair is evident in the gatherings in beauty salons and barbershops. As portrayed in film, the barbershop is more than simply a place to get one’s hair cut. In fact, there seems to be a complex community involved. For instance, it is the place to meet other people, catch up on the latest news, and learn about people. The caring for Black hair always seems to be accompanied by commentator and spectators. For example, the barbershop scenes in Coming to America, or that of the television series, “Martin,” or even Spike Lee’s “Joe’s Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We cut heads.” One critic remarked that Lee’s “film dramatically recreates the world of the corner barbershop, the local meeting place where people talk, put nickels and dimes on their lucky numbers—and sometimes even get a haircut” (Vincent Canby, New York Times).

The second issue of sociability rests on the concept of identity, dealing with how Blacks identify themselves socially. As is indicated in the quote at the beginning of this section, it is believed that good hair makes an individual more acceptable, and consequently more likely to have a successful life. “Good hair” refers to long hair that requires little or no artificial treatment. Typically, it is the type of hair derived from a mixed heritage involving peoples of African descent and either Native Americans or more typically Whites. The concept of “good hair” supposedly carries an air of superiority, which, like other racist assumptions, upholds all things European; it asserts that White attributes are better than Black attributes. In this case “good hair” is closer in nature to Europeans’ hair. Also associated with the idea of “Good hair” is the concept of “passing.” “Passing” in relation to hair indicates a Black person who can be, or is often assumed to be White. Consequently, “good hair,” in some ways, provides a means of playing or masking as “other.” Therefore, “good hair” is a means to assimilation.

In opposition to “good hair” is “bad hair,” which is commonly referred to as nappy hair. Therefore, “bad hair” is basically hair that is purely African or unassimilated. My focus for the requirement of this project will be on “bad hair,” which is natural in the sense that the hair has not been altered by addition of chemical agents, i.e. processed.

The idea of “going natural” emerged during the 1960s and the Pan-Africanism movement, which questioned Black identity and the preconceptions of beauty. By coming to terms with the nature of Black hair, reclaiming African pride or Black pride was made possible. Thus, it placed a heightened emphasis on one’s hair as a statement of black identity and selfhood that affected how one perceived oneself socially.
The significance of hair care and styling makes its way into my design in two ways. First, there is its literal incorporation through the barbershop. As part of the building program, the barbershop is an economic enterprise, because it is a business that provides the service of hair trimming for a fee. However, the barbershop is also important for its social aspect, as was discussed above. The implication of hair is also platted into the community center both ornamentally and structurally. The structure and ornamentation of the building draws from the various possibilities of styling hair, such as braiding, platting, or corn-rowing (Figures A10, A11, A12). Consequently, the structural pieces mimics the pattern of braiding for example, in which strands of steel are woven/wrapped around each other. Similar application of this style will be in the railing of staircases, metal door handles, and other such ornamental moments.

Fulton Street

Fulton Street has, for centuries, served as a major thoroughfare of Brooklyn. There is evidence to suggest that Fulton Street or its predecessor was a major artery through Brooklyn even prior to the first Dutch arrival in 1609. Essentially, Fulton Street derives from a Native American path that followed a similar route across the northern portion of Brooklyn, linking Jamaica Bay to the East River.

The original towns tended to be situated on existing Indian paths: Breuckelen was settled along a path leading from Marechkawieck, which became known as the “road from ferry,” and later formally named Fulton Street.  

An even greater significance to Fulton Street is its role in the racial struggle that unfolded in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Bedford-Stuyvesant, like most other places in the United States, blossomed with a White middle-class in the nineteenth century that would eventually give sway to a Black populace. The specific conditions and consequences of the struggle in Bedford-Stuyvesant were fought out within the confines of Fulton Street, insofar as Fulton Street served as the racial divide between Bedford-Stuyvesant’s residents. “While no pervasive system of residential segregation prevailed in Brooklyn, the physical proximity of Blacks was not always welcome.”

The 1900s ushered in two events, the Great Migration and the construction of the Fulton Street Elevated railway, that conspired to change the demography of Fulton Street and of Bedford-Stuyvesant in its entirety. The Great Migration witnessed thousands of Blacks departing from the south, and to a lesser degree from the Caribbean, to Brooklyn and other northern cities of the United States. As a result of the Great Migration, Brooklyn’s Black population quadrupled from 18,637 residents in 1900 to 68,921 in 1930. This then comprised 30% of Brooklyn’s total population. The stimulus for the migration of Blacks came from World War I, which created a new market for American manufacturers and with it the need for an increased labor force: “Northern employers looked to the vast, generally untapped, internal human resource, the Southern Negro.” Attracted by employment possibilities and encouraged by labor recruiters, Blacks migrated northward to fill the jobs that, until then, were restricted to immigrants from European countries. This influx of Blacks into Bedford-

---

28 Ibid. p.53.
29 In 1930 over 60% of Brooklyn Blacks had been born in the southeastern United States. (Connolly, 54).
Stuyvesant was concentrated along Fulton Street and Atlantic Avenue, as indicated in the Black Population map (Figures A1, A2). Atlantic Avenue and Fulton Street were both less-than-desirable locations, because of the noisy presence of the Long Island Railroad on Atlantic Avenue and the El on Fulton Street. Blacks rarely penetrated beyond those main thoroughfares and their adjoining streets. Although by the 1930s some Blacks had moved northward beyond Fulton Street, as is also revealed in Figure A2, the number of Blacks in that area were “dwarfed into near insignificance by the area’s overall whiteness.”

The white residents of Bedford-Stuyvesant perceived the Black influx as a threat to their neighborhood and reacted with fear, anger, hostility, and discrimination. The continuous Black influx during the Great Migration supposedly threatened the existing character of the entire area, so local Whites implemented a highly organized and constant opposition to stem the Black tide. This period gave rise to such White organizations as the Gates Avenue Association, whose agenda centered on keeping Blacks out of the neighborhood. Connolly writes that:

A rare insight into their activities is provided by the Gates Avenue Association, founded in 1922. During the 1920s this organization expended more time and talk on the “Negro question” than on any other topic.31

This organization’s essential aim was directed at preventing the movement of Blacks into White neighborhoods. One of its members urged the enactment of restrictive zoning, wherein residents would be restricted to residential areas according to their race. However, in the absence of such legal sanction, property owners were urged to utilize only “reliable” realtors

31 Ibid. p.59.
and to refrain from selling to strangers. Thus, Blacks were prevented from purchasing property, in an attempt to ensure the “quality” of the residents and the stability of property values.

As a means of discouraging the Black influx in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the Gates Avenue Association devised a scheme intended to simultaneously improve Fulton Street, and eliminate the Black population. As was mentioned earlier, Fulton Street was one of the less desirable locations in Brooklyn as a result of the presence of the noisy El, nicknamed the “Fulton Street Spider.” Whites had little desire to reside along Fulton Street because of the El, new Black population tended to settle in that area. The Gates Avenue Association observed that the El resulted in decreased property values along Fulton Street, thus making the area accessible to economically deprived Blacks. The Fulton Street Elevated Railroad provided convenient and cheap transportation between the highly residential Bedford-Stuyvesant and the downtown business district. The accessibility made possible by the El, combined with the established Black presence, acted as a magnet that drew Blacks into residing along Fulton Street. Consequently, with Fulton Street and its El providing a major impetus to Black settlement, the area was destined for “improvements” intended to protect White interests.

Agitation for the removal of the El dated back as early as 1910. However, the plan for improving Fulton Street became more feasible with the construction of a parallel subway line. The razing of the El was based primarily on the assumption that it would result in increased property values, which would in turn lead to the reclamation of depreciated

---

property, driving out Blacks or at least halting their expansion beyond Fulton Street. The subway line would also allow for rapid transportation between Bedford-Stuyvesant and the downtown areas of Brooklyn and Manhattan. Nevertheless, the construction of the new subway line and the demolition of the El supposedly would yield higher property values. Connolly claims that “white residents expected that:

In place of old brownstones, outmoded apartment houses, and dilapidated business buildings, ‘there will be built modern residences, small unit multi-family houses and attractive looking shopping centers.’ Such extensive changes would allow ‘this great section’ to ‘gain come into its own’ and ‘rebound back to old-time real estate values.’

The Gates Avenue Association envisioned an area free from the Black blight it feared. Anticipating the impending reclamation of depreciated property, The Gates Avenue Association eagerly pressed for the construction of the subway and the razing of the El. The construction of the Fulton Street subway began in 1927, and was temporarily halted by the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, construction of the subway was soon renewed with increased vigor after the granting of a federal loan in 1934. The subway that had seemed so long in coming was finally opened on April 8, 1936, amid a frenzy of spoken and written hopes from White residents. For example, the Brooklyn Real Estate Board editorialized glowingly:

April the 8th will mark a red-letter day in the history of Brooklyn, for on that date another important extension to the city's municipal subway will be placed in operation. For many years we have been hearing and reading about the new transit line under Fulton Street, and now we are about to see this dream become a reality. What the opening will mean to the section to be served by the new line . . . can easily be imagined. Rapid transit brings with it the erection of new buildings and the rehabilitation of existing structures. Fulton Street should prove no exception to this

rule, and during the next few years many improvements will be made in the territories within walking distance of the Fulton Street subway.34

Their hopes rested on the fact that "subways had been instrumental in opening outlying areas to intensive development and population."35 However, what they failed to realize was that the areas that the subways were most effective in altering were undeveloped areas, in terms of both construction and people. Bedford-Stuyvesant, on the other hand, stood fully developed with little open land for speculation and building.

The role of improved transportation facilities cannot be overestimated with regards to demographic growth. The completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 provided convenient transportation to New York City and spurred a population increase for all of Brooklyn. More particularly for the Bedford and Stuyvesant neighborhoods, the construction in the late 1880s of an elevated railway along Fulton Street made the area ripe for rapid and general development by bringing it within a reasonable commuting time of downtown Brooklyn and New York City.

As with Carnival, Fulton Street, too, impacts the design of the proposed community center through the concept of "procession" or "passing" or "passage." The most obvious expression of the previous concept deals with the street actually functioning as a means of passage to the community. In fact, the demographic of Bedford-Stuyvesant changed as a result of Fulton Street functioning as passage to the area. However, a more practical application of those terms occurs within the floor plans of the community center. The concept of "procession" further reinforces the spatial flow/openness of my design.

CHAPTER 3. SITE INFORMATION

The Existing Building

The physical manifestation of my thesis project is located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant (often referred to as Bed-Stuy) section of Brooklyn, at 1584 Fulton Street, between Troy and Albany Avenues. The building sits across from where Marcus Garvey Boulevard intersects Fulton Street (Figure B1). Diagonally across the street from my proposed building site is a housing development, Rizley Dent Towers. In addition, on either side of the proposed community center, are apartment buildings with stores or shops on the ground floor. For the most part, this area is predominantly residential (Figures B3, B4, B5, B6).

Over the many years of the building’s existence, most of the relevant public records have been lost. Nevertheless, the building that sits at 1584 Fulton Street is assumed to have been in existence since the 1880s, since the Miniature Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn\textsuperscript{36} indicates a building of similar size, 100 feet long by 40 feet wide, at the exact location (Figure B2). The original date of construction is not known for certain, because all public records have been lost or perhaps stolen. Nevertheless, area maps indicate that, from at least 1912 through 1920, the building was called Sumner Hall; it served as a public hall for the residents of the area. Original street names further validate this claim, since Marcus Garvey Blvd., which acquired its current name in honor of the late Pan-Africanist who lead a repatriation movement back to Africa, was previously known as Sumner Avenue, a name

which in fact still appears on official documents (Figure B1). Sumner Hall would have marked the end or beginning—relatively speaking—of Sumner Avenue.

I believe that the building sat vacant from the 1920s to the 1960s, since little else is known or recorded about the building during that period of time. Nevertheless, in the 1960s, there was an attempt to convert the building into a church. Unfortunately, the conversion was never completed.

In spite of the inability to complete the conversion, the front façade of the existing building has retained indications of its church redesign (Figure B3). The façade bears traces of an attempt at Romanesque Revival. Indicative of this style are the monochromatic brick façade highlighted by the semi-circular arch for window openings, as well as the square towers flanking the façade, as shown in the exemplary Romanesque Revival façades of the First Presbyterian churches in Cleveland Ohio, and Galveston, Texas respectively (Figure B7). The fact the building was never fully converted to a church might explain the minimalism of its parts. Evidence of the failure to complete the church is most visible in the front of the building (Figure B8, B9).

A close examination of the existing exterior façade of the building suggests that the building most likely has a typical basilica layout, with side aisles (the width of which are indicated by the two towers, on either end of the front façade) and a central nave (Figure B10, B11). The central nave reaches up to the trusses of the gable roof that shelters the building. The side aisles rise to ten feet in height, to be topped by a gallery that runs along the interior front façade and side walls to the pulpit area as is shown in the first floor plan and section c-c (Figure B10, B14). The front wall consists of a three foot wide door opening up to each side aisle, and a pair of double doors six feet wide. The pairs of double doors usher
people into the central nave. Directly above the pair of double doors is a window that is almost as wide as the central nave—a 7-foot-high by 14-foot-wide rectangle topped with a semi-circle with a 7-foot-long radius—and about a third as tall, which might have been intended to serve as the location for an organ (Figure B12).

While the front portion of the building was used as a public hall, and later intended to serve as the space for a church, the rear twenty-foot-deep portion of the building contains three distinct floor levels (Figure B15) that consist of a series of rooms. I believe that the rear portion of the building was designed to house the offices and storage rooms that served the more public front portion. The building is enveloped by brick walls, which are twelve to eighteen inches thick all around, and extend the entire height of the building.

The Neighborhood

The building’s Fulton Street location makes it accessible by public transportation. The building stands on the routes of the number 25 bus (The B-25), which runs either way along Fulton Street; the number 15 bus (The B-15), which runs along Marcus Garvey Boulevard and Albany; and the A and C trains, which run beneath Fulton Street. All these routes have stops in close proximity to the proposed building. For example, the B-25 has bus stops on both sides of Fulton Street on the same block as the building, and the B-15 has a stop at the junction of Fulton street and Marcus Garvey Boulevard (Figure B1). Ideally the community center would be within walking distance, which would make for greater interaction between the residents and the neighborhood.
Fulton Street Today

"Fulton Street today is the aroma of our kitchen long ago when the bread was finally in the oven. And it's the sound of reggae and calypso and ska and the newest rage, soca, erupting from a hundred speakers outside the record stores. It's Rastas with their hennaed dreadlocks and the impassioned political debates of the rum shops back home brought out onto the street corners. It's Jamaican meat patties brought out and eaten on the run and fast food pulori, a Trinidadian East Indian pancake doused in pepper sauce that is guaranteed to clear your sinuses the moment that you bite into it. Fulton Street is Haitian Creole heard amid any number of highly inventive, musically accented versions of English. And its faces, an endless procession of faces that are black for the most part—for these are mother Africa's children—but with noticeable admixtures of India, Europe and China, a reflection of the history of the region from which they have come in this most recent phase of the Diaspora” (Paule Marshall, “The Rising Islanders of Bed-Stuy”)

Fulton Street is an atmosphere that needs to be experienced to be fully appreciated.

As a microcosm of the urban environment, in itself, it is dense with potential, as a result of the richness of its program—the services, the activities, and the events that occur there. In addition, the architecture blends and adapts the old and the new, as well as the existing and the changing. David G. Woodcock explains that:

The street is an urban living room bounded by buildings that have grown, changed, and modified over time. Old and new remodeled, and “face-lifted,” they represent a “family” of buildings and are as interdependent as a human family.37

Thus, Fulton Street is not simply a street cutting through Bedford-Stuyvesant. Instead, I think of it as a passage, a passage that allows flow—continuous movement. While a passage, or a street, implies cutting through, it does not simply divide. It also brings together/joins/links, and embodies a state that is constantly becoming, as its users bring to it changing uses that most adequately suit their desires. As Paule Marshall's “The Rising Islanders of Bed-Stuy” conveys, Fulton Street is a happening place.
As the primary artery through Bedford-Stuyvesant, Fulton Street provides either an address or the link to most of the community-based agencies to be found in the neighborhood.

The first of these are the two high schools, Paul Robeson H.S., and Boys and Girls H.S., which are both ten minute walks from the community center; Boys and Girls H.S. on Fulton Street, and Paul Robeson H.S. on Albany Avenue.

One community-based agency is the *Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation* that works with residents to improve the quality of life and economy of the neighborhood. The Restoration Center, as it is often called, houses various community boards and elected officials, in addition to theatrical spaces and a day care center. At certain times of the day children, under the watchful eyes of adult instructors, can be seen playing in the amphitheater space within the compounds of the Restoration Center (Figure B16).

Adjacent to the Restoration Center is the *Covenant House: Brooklyn Community Program*, which serves as a resource center to adolescents and their families. It has a three-pronged approach, which is education (tutoring, and GED preparation courses); economics (job training and employment placement); and health (medical exams, counseling and preventive services). What impressed, yet disappointed me, about the Covenant House was the tiniest of the building in which those services were provided. Andrea, the young lady at the desk, reiterated the need for such places in the neighborhood. She expressed great regret

---


38 Bedford Stuyvesant Corporation. The first nonprofit community development corporation in the United States, formed in 1967. It was founded through the bipartisan efforts of Senators Robert F. Kennedy and Jacob K. Javits. (The Encyclopedia of New York City. P. 95).
in having to turn young people away, in spite of having opened up a second branch a short distance away.

In addition, there were flyers promoting a separate, but similar youth oriented program, Vannguard Youth Council, a few blocks away. Vannguard Youth Council and Covenant House together cater to youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two.

Adults twenty-five years and older are served by the Adult Learning Center on Nostrand Avenue, a block off of Fulton Street. It is located in the building that was formerly Girls High, which educated many of the middle and upper class white young women whose families once lived in the neighborhood. The Adult Learning Center, like the youth-based programs, provides for the educational and intellectual development of members of the community. While it is true that Fulton Street contains all those community-based agencies, they cannot replace a legitimate community center.
CHAPTER 4. THE DESIGN OF THE THIRD PLACE

The design of the community center stems from the five categories of inspiration discussed earlier. The community center provides services to the community that address a three-tiered agenda: social, economic and educational. This agenda shapes the program of the building: a large assembly hall; a café with an attached sitting area; a kitchen; a dining space; a barbershop; a reading space; four classrooms; and arts and craft studios.

The building contains three floors and a basement. The basement continues to serve as storage and mechanical space, while the upper floors will provide space for the proposed program. I will discuss the program in terms of three areas: the front façade, the rear façade, and the programmatic space. The treatment of the programmatic space will reflect the intention to not be confined to autonomous rooms; certain spaces will cater to multiple activities. This approach stems from the earlier description of Fulton Street as a passage of continuous flow, that divides, that brings together, joins, links, and that is in a constant state of becoming. Likewise, in a community, as in a street, there are many appropriations, i.e. different uses or events occurring in the same environment, well as different people playing many roles. This scheme requires that the events and activities be categorized as verbs. For example, eating, drinking, watching, reading, chatting, playing and so on. Most of these activities are not relegated to any one specific area, but can happen simultaneously in different location in the building. Consequently, my description suggests how I envision them working separately and together.
The Front Façade

The front façade, the face of the building, which looks out onto Fulton Street and to the rest of Bedford-Stuyvesant, is in direct contact with the community (Figure C1). The face of the building is "playing mas'" in that it fronts for a place intended to foster community, in spite of the differences that exist between the residents. If the idea of "playing mas'" in Carnival confers the idea that the mask consumes (the wearer becomes the mask or becomes the physical manifestation of the alternate reality that the mask makes possible) and alters its wearers’ state of being, then the façade of the building is both consumed and consuming, since there is a dual alteration that occurs through interaction with the building. This implies that the users of the building, as well as the building, experience alteration.

The building’s alteration is best understood through the guise of Carnival. The front façade, as a mask, of the building makes reference to itself as a theatrical space (Figures C15, C16). That theatrical space is articulated in two ways: façade as storyteller, and façade as inhabitable space. The façade as storyteller arises from the palette it makes available for inscribing the stories and histories of the people that call Bedford-Stuyvesant home. Therefore, inscribed cornices of the building, from left to right, are relief moldings depicting the slavery past, Carnival scenes, and other stories reflecting the past, the present, and the future hopes of the residents of the area.

Another story suggested by the façade, as was previously indicated, is that of the presence of a church. Although the façade maintains its church façade resonance, a change to the existing façade includes a fifteen feet wide opening in the brick wall (Figures C6, C8). This glassed-in opening extends forty feet from street level up through the third floor, the advantage of which is day-lighting, as well as creating a visual dialogue, in terms of looking
out onto the neighborhood and vice versa. The opening of the front façade is important to the overall scheme of fostering community, in that it permits a transparent separation between the community center and the neighborhood. The intention here is to tap into the vibrant street life of Fulton Street. Therefore, the opening of the façade brings the outside and inside into greater communication with each other. The building’s interior is encountered visually prior to even entering the building, which reinforces the idea of spatial flow, as well as creates a visual “passage” from the street to the building’s interior.

Another change in the front façade occurs on the ground floor. The ground floor is glassed-in as well, which allows for the displaying of the commercial portions, the barbershop and café, which are at the front, along either side of the building. The central location of the façade contains a pair of doors that open up to ground floor lobby (Figure C2). The opening up of the ground floor too reinforces the visual penetration of the building, as well as blurring the separation between inside and outside.

The implication of hair styling makes it way into the front façade as well. The molding along the window mimics a hair braiding pattern (Figure C6). The mullions of the glazed opening as well as the double doors continue the braiding analogy.

Inhabitation of the Façade

As the floor plan of the building reveals, at the front of the building is a recessed space, a result of the side towers projecting out further than the central portion of the façade (Figures C2, C3, C4, C5). The inhabitation of the façade occurs in that space. Running across the façade are open-air fire escape “stages” that link the two separate towers together. I have referred to them as fire escape stages, since they functions as more than a means of egress in
the case of a fire. They become a key part of the building’s facade to be used by the building’s inhabitants or players (Figures C15, C16). Basically, the space is reclaimed for occupation. Consequently, visitors can venture beyond the building’s envelope and onto the fire escapes; there, they symbolically consumed by the façade. Thus they are able to inhabit the façade, the theatrical space/stage, and become part of the story told on the façade. They become a living counterpart/complement to the relief sculpture/molding of the façade. In addition, these stages on the outside of the building makes it possible to interact with other members of the community who are using the street below, another way of engaging the vibrant street life. Visitors gain access to the fire escapes through the doors from the side of each tower. Each exit occurs at the respective floor levels of the building. Thus, there are two fire escape stages (Figures C15, C16).

A mask-related design choice also occurs in the treatment of the recessed space. This design decision arises out of the understanding of a mask as covering. Consequently, a thin wall plane extends into the recess space from either tower. These planes function as shading devices for the front façade.

**Rear Façade**

The rear façade of the building faces due south and opens up to a backyard, twenty feet long by forty feet wide, which is fenced in by the adjacent lots (Figure C2). In addition, the fence demarcates the actual lot size. As indicated by the ground floor plan, the backyard functions as an amphitheater. The seating is positioned to the west while the rest of the backyard functions as a stage, if you will, for play. The vision for this space was one of fun: a place that appeals to the children who would want to play such games as Double Dutch and
others better suited for outdoors, while the seating would allow for adult supervision and interaction. This arrangement makes for the opportunity of contact between children and adults, a potentially enriching experience for both. Similar to the impromptu storytelling sessions that occur in the yard, while in St. Lucia, the openness and setup of this backyard beckons to a similar occurrence.

To increase its appeal to children, I have also provided a variety of surfaces. Therefore, while the backyard provides a hard surface to play on, its south and east edges are lined with a sand box and plant box respectively. In addition, the change in seating levels provides for variation in surface heights. The variation in surfaces appeals to varied experience both spatially, and tactiley (Figure C2). I have reduced the length of the building by twenty feet to allow for a backyard.

The rear façade is a newly which with the exception of the kitchen area, has been glazed, i.e. glassed-in. Like to the opening on the front façade, openings on the back façade brings the outside and inside into greater communication with each other (Figure C7). As a means of fostering community the wall opens up visually onto the surrounding community, by means of a transparent/ glass separation between the community center and the backyard and the surrounding neighborhood.

Functionally, the opening of the façade provides for supervision of those in the back yard. As with the front the back façade too has its fire escape stages from which visual and verbal contact can occur between those on the ground and those above. Again, this reinforces a spatial flow/openness, in that the differences between inside and outside are blurred insofar as they are brought into a greater interaction.
The blurring is taken a step further through the addition of a mask to the back façade (Figures C7, C17, C18). As is revealed by the images of the back façade in Figures C7, C17 and C18, there is a glass façade, and five feet away from it is a partial brick façade. It is partial in the sense that it does not occupy the entire height of the building. It is the brick wall that functions to mask the glazed wall. Here, as is the case with the front, I interpret “mask” as a covering. However, the understanding of the mask is extended to include the issue of theatricality, i.e. play.

For example, as a covering the mask functions as a screen or shading device. However, the theatricality of the mask allows for alternate readings. Therefore, on the top level the mask switches roles, and becomes the actual façade, in that one of the classrooms on the third floor extends to the façade (Figure C5, C7). In this case the mask adopts another persona. It is that change in persona that helps blur the distinction between inside and outside. As a shading device the mask is positioned on the outside and is distinctively separated from the glazed wall (Figure C17, C18). On the top floor it becomes part of the classroom, and thus ceases to function as a shading device/covering.

The blurring between the inside and the outside is also made evident through the treatment of the fire escape stairs. The fire escape stairs begin on the outside of the mask, but then wrap around to the inside of the mask, and move back out again. The wrapping of the stairs around the mask again plays on the relationship of inside-outside.

The glazing of the back façade is also designed to take advantage of passive solar effect. The fact that the rear of the building faces due south makes a passive solar scheme highly possible and profitable. The glazed rear façade takes advantage of daylighting all year round, and aids heating in the winter. Structurally, the side walls extend five feet past the
glazed façade, and at each floor level, there is a five-foot horizontal overhang in addition to the mask that shades the glass from excessive sunlight and heat (Figure C5).

The existing building extends to the lot line; my proposal recommends that it be shortened by twenty feet. Shortening the building provides room for the backyard and the amphitheater dedicated to children’s play. In addition, it allows for sufficient clearance from neighboring buildings to utilize passive solar heating and daylighting, by means of the glazed rear façade.

**Programmatic Space**

Prior to entering the building on Fulton Street, one has already visually entered the building via the glazed front façade (Figure C16). On physical penetration of the front façade, visual communication continues; one has the option of choosing from various possibilities (Figure C2). One possibility is a vertical ascent that reveals a two-foot-wide gap where the floor above meets the front façade. That gap is intended to indicate the alteration of the interior space. The decision to stop the floor short of the wall suggests to the viewer that it might not be original. This might lead into a discussion of the building’s history. It then serves to spur communication between the building’s users.

From the lobby, ascent to the above floors is possible through either the staircase or the elevator (Figure C2). However, from the lobby one can also access the barbershop, immediately to the right, and the café, immediately to the left. The glass wall of the barbershop extends back to the elevator. The glass face of the café notches back to reveal the staircase (Figure C2, C13). The stair tread is eighteen inches high; thus it functions simply as a stair but also as a low bench. This design decision blurs the function of the step, but more
importantly it hints at the multiplicity of functions that occur within any given part of the community center (Figure C13).

Another function provided within the setback is that of reception and greeting. Its location near the entrance and the cafe makes it an ideal spot for a greeter to position him/herself. From this position a vigilant yet welcoming eye/gaze can be positioned.

As is indicated in the first floor plan the main lobby flows in the central space which brings together, links, joins the front and back areas. It functions primarily as a gathering space that allows such activities as eating, sitting, reading, observing, conversing, hanging out, and so on. The character of this space is analogous to that of Fulton Street; multiple activities and events occur simultaneously without a designated spot. It is a stage for living in all of its variety and richness. The design satisfies the programmatic need for a café seating area, a periodical/reading room, casual chat, circulation to the dining space, the kitchen, and the backyard.

The concept of spatial openness/flow is also carried into the kitchen and dining room space. As is indicated by the first floor plan there is not a permanent separation between the dining room and the kitchen (Figure C2). Instead, there is simply a counter that services both the kitchen and dining room. The openness of the space allows for communication between people regardless of where they are within the space. While this area is a dining room/kitchen it serves as a game room as well, since the seating is conducive to card games or dominoes.

These design decisions for the spatial flow and openness of the scheme are done from the understanding that developing a sense of community is dependent on contact and communication between members of the community. This should not give the impression
that the floor plan is completely open and free of containment. But they are arranged to provide for maximum visual and/or verbal communication. For example, running along the reading space is a wall that demarcates the reading space. However, the wall is only 18 inches tall to allow for sitting. Its height establishes it as a stoop for sitting in addition to allowing for visual openness. Therefore, while it helps to confine the reading space, it does not isolate the reading space.

The openness or spatial flow of the design does not only occur horizontally but vertically as well. The central space of the first floor is provided with natural light from above through openings in the second floor which also permit the flow of sight and sound (Figure C3). On the second floor and on the mezzanine above is the assembly hall, also a lobby that provides a gathering space outside the assembly hall. From the Lobby one can access the front fire escape stage. In fact, access to the outside can be gained both visually and literally. Opens on all four sides of the mezzanine provide for visual spatial flow (Figure C4).

The vertical flow of light and space from the first floor is carried all the way up to the third floor, although there is a change in the location of the openings on the third floor (Figure C5). Horizontal spatial flow is also evident on the third floor. While there is a greater degree of separation between the classrooms and the rest of the third floor, access to the classrooms is possible through the double doors. Also within the classroom all the walls do not extend to the ceiling (Figure C14).

As with the second floor, access to the front fire escape stage is possible from the third floor (Figure C5).
The approach to the design takes into consideration the possibility that the openness of the plan will allow for re-appropriations of the space. While the plan caters to the programs of barbershop, cafe, etc. it allows for the possibility of bringing other uses to the community center. Therefore, as with Fulton Street or Carnival, the all-inclusiveness that is made possible through the openness of the building, allows for a space within which the residents can bring other possibilities for the purpose of fostering community, i.e. shared living experiences and interests.
CONCLUSION

An architect’s primary concern is the public good. This thesis is about the “public” and means of sustaining the “public.” In this case sustenance of the public is equated to maintaining healthy social relationships between neighbors. I have attempted to provide for the social well-being of a community through the design of a community center. The design calls for the community center to serve as a catalyst for creating and establishing a sense of community in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. As a means of addressing the public good, I sought to approach the design problem from a cultural basis, since I believe that a mutual understanding of the two cultures of the neighborhood, African-American and Afro-West Indian, would provide a basis for fostering community.
APPENDIX A.

MAPS AND OTHER IMAGES

Figure A1 Concentration of Black Population in Brooklyn, 1970
Figure A2 Concentration of Black Population in Brooklyn, 1930
Figure A3 Concentration of West Indian/foreign-born Blacks living in Brooklyn, 1980
Figure A4 An example of Carnival Mask

Figure A5 An example of Carnival Costume
Figure A6 An example of Carnival Costume/mask

Figure A7 Carnival Participants playing ‘mas’
Figure A8 Carnival Costumes Designs

Figure A9 A scene of St. Lucia’s Carnival Queen celebrating Brooklyn Carnival, 1990
Figure B10 An example of stylized braiding of Black Hair
Figure B11 Another example of stylized braiding of Black Hair
Figure B12 An example of Black Hair treatment
Figure B1 Site map with proposed building site indicated
Figure B2 Map from the Miniature Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn, 1912
Project site: 1584 Fulton Street

Figure B3 A view of streetscape
Figure B4 A view looking down Marcus Garvey Blvd., from proposed building site
Figure B5 A view of Rizley Dent Towers from the proposed site
Figure B6 Residential building at corner of Fulton Street and Albany Avenue.

Figure B7 Example of Romanesque church facades.
Figure B8 Photograph documenting the incomplete construction of the building’s façade

Figure B9 Photograph of the existing entrance to the building
Figure B10 Suggested First Floor Plan of existing building

Figure B11 Suggested Gallery Plan of existing building
Figure B12 Section A-A through existing building
Figure B14 Section C-C through existing building
Figure B15 Back Elevation of existing building at 1584 Fulton Street
Figure B16 Amphitheater at the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Center.
APPENDIX C.

THE DESIGN OF THE THIRD PLACE

Figure C1 Community Center amidst surrounding buildings
Figure C3 Second Floor Plan
Figure C4 Mezzanine
Figure C6 Front Elevation of proposed community center
Figure C7 Back Elevation of proposed community center
Figure C8 Section A-A through proposed community center
Figure C9 Section B-B through proposed community center
Figure C10  Section C-C through proposed community center
Figure C11 Section D-D through proposed community center
Figure C12 Structural Plan of Proposed design
Figure C13 An interior view from the barbershop looking towards the dining room
Figure C14 An interior view from the classroom area looking towards the 3rd fl. lobby
Figure C15 A view of the community center from front yard of Rizley Dent Towers
Figure C16 A view of the front façade of the proposed community center from the NW
Figure C17 A view of the back façade of the proposed community center from SE
Figure C18 A view of the back façade of the proposed community center
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited


Oldenburg, Ray. The Great Good Place: Cafes, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts and how they get you through the day. New York: Marlowe & Company, 1997


**Work Consulted**


Weld, Ralph F. *Brooklyn is America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1950