

Project Title: Retaining a Right to Place: Research to Support Black Homeownership & Artistry in Seattle's Central District

Research Team:

Lynne C. Manzo, PhD, Principal Investigator, Professor - College of Built Environments, UW

- As principal investigator, Lynne will oversee various components of the research, including survey development, data collection & analysis, as well as report writing in collaboration with Wa Na Wari

Inye Wokoma, Executive Director, Co-founder, Wa Nar Wari - Community-based organization in Seattle's Central District

- As the lead organizer for their CACE 21 project,¹ Inye will facilitate collection of data through the organization's ties with the Black community in the Central District.

Kristin McCowan, PhD Candidate, School of Social Work, UW

- As a researcher with Wa Na War, Kristin will lead the survey development with input from Inye Wokoma & Lynne Manzo

Part time Research Assistant - graduate student at the UW to help analyze survey data

Overview:

As we write this proposal, COVID-19 pandemic has besieged our communities. The ensuing lockdowns have caused us to think anew about the dynamics of emplacement and displacement, about our socio-spatial and economic precarity. Research now indicates that lower income people and people of color are more negatively impacted by this pandemic and the economic instability that it has wrought (CDC, April 2020). This makes it more critical than ever for people of color to retain a foothold in the communities where they live.²

More specifically, Seattle's Central District, which has been a vital African-American community for over 70 years, has seen a dramatic decline in the Black population due to gentrification and market pressures. In 1970, Blacks comprised 73.4% of the population. That number has shrunk consistently in the decades that follow to only 18% in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau). A critical aspect of this loss is related to homeownership. The homeownership rate among Blacks in the city dropped by half between 2000 and 2013, with just one in five Black households owning a home.³ "What has happened here for Black homeowners does not parallel a wider trend. Nationally, 42% of Black households own their home, the same as in the 1970s."⁴ This raises fundamental issues of equity, justice and the right to place among Blacks and Black homeowners in Seattle.

¹ Wa Na Wari's ongoing project "Central Area Cultural Ecosystem for the 21st Century"

² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [released new, preliminary nationwide data](#) on Friday, that revealed 30% of Covid-19 patients are African American, even though African Americans make up around [13% of the population](#) of the United States.

³ Beason, T. (May 28, 2016). Central District's shrinking black community wonders what's next. Seattle Times. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/central-districts-shrinking-black-community-wonders-whats-next/>

⁴ Balk, G. (June 12, 2017). The rise and dramatic fall of King County's black homeowners. Seattle Times. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/the-rise-and-dramatic-fall-of-king-countys-black-homeowners/>

Wa Na Wari is a non-profit community based organization that supports Black homeownership and artistic creativity in the Central District. As a “Communities of Opportunity” (COO) partner, they are leading anti-displacement organizing work with Black homeowners in the Central District. The goal is to change land use policy and permitting processes to allow for a wider range of community use of properties zoned single family residential and enable members of the Black community to stay in place and retain economic viability in the city.

Research Questions:

1. What are the most pressing challenges, needs, and concerns of Black homeowners and artists in continuing to live, work, create and build community in the Central District and how would they prioritize addressing them?
2. How have these challenges to living, working and creating in the Central District shaped their experience of communal life?
3. What adaptive models of ownership and cultural place-making are Black homeowners & artists interested in exploring to address these challenges, needs and concerns?

Relevance to Poverty in our Region

Community-based work on anti-displacement strategies and cultural placemaking are vital aspects of anti-poverty endeavors in the region. In recent years, wealthy home buyers entered Seattle’s Central District and developers began purchasing older bungalows, replacing them with expensive new homes. On the heels of this, property taxes in Seattle have increased more than 56% since 2013, with the median household now paying \$5,708 a year. For low-income residents and elderly residents living on fixed incomes in the Central District, the added costs were often too big a barrier to overcome and they were forced to move.⁵ The work of Wa Na Wari and this research project is aimed to find creative ways to establish economic stability and remain in their neighborhood.

Relevance to the Work of the Community Partner

This proposal was initiated by Wa Na Wari and stems from their ongoing work in support of Black homeowners and cultural workers as described in the research plan below. We do not anticipate that the WCPC mini-grant would fund the entirety of this project. Rather, it would support the contributions of researchers at the UW – Dr. Manzo and a graduate research assistant - to provide input in the 3 phases as described below. This larger research plan is provided to describe the ongoing project being spearheaded by the community partner, Wa Na Wari.

⁵ Cohen, J. (January 25, 2019). “Where are the Black people?” Central District residents get creative to fight displacement. Crosscut, Accessed online: <https://crosscut.com/2019/01/where-are-black-people-central-district-residents-get-creative-fight-displacement>