

# BLACK PRO- DUCTION AND THE SPACE OF THE UNIVER- SITY

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## Call for Papers

To Be Presented at Columbia University  
in the City of New York East Gallery Buell Hall  
30 March 2019 Hosted by the Black Student  
Alliance at Columbia University Graduate  
School of Architecture Planning and Preserva-  
tion BSA+GSAPP Keynote Toni L. Griffin

## Black Production and the Space of the University

**Keynote: Toni L. Griffin, Professor in Practice of Urban Planning, Harvard GSD**

**Saturday, 30 March 2019**

Columbia University in the City of New York, East Gallery, Buell Hall

Organized by BSA+GSAPP

They say that freedom is a constant struggle. They say that freedom is a constant struggle. They say that freedom is a constant struggle, O Lord, we've struggled so long we must be free.

—Angela Davis reciting part of a “Freedom Song” while delivering the Birkbeck Annual Law Lecture: ‘Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Closures and Continuities’ (London, 25 October 2013).

The space of the University has long been a charged and contingent domain. As both material realities and sites for the production and dissemination of various forms of knowledge, the University has been the subject of ongoing and recent debates around topics ranging from terms of access and the rights of students to the multiple forms of violence enacted on campuses across the country. In the midst of these debates, students are implored to, nonetheless, perform and produce. Black students who dare to pursue “higher education,” accepting an invitation from an institution to do so, are critically aware of their fraught and shifting status and of the high stakes of their work, particularly in relation to black identities and communities.

Black students of architecture, design, planning, preservation, real estate development and related fields move in incalculably differentiated ways from within the university as they speculate on and propose ideas for the production of space. Whether realized or acknowledged, practices related to the articulation, planning, development, and preservation of the built environment always constitute a “critical practice.” Despite this, the critical nature of this work is often minimized, obscured, or ignored. Instead, these practices are routinely regarded as purely functional, aesthetic, or commercial, as though these characterizations are *outside* of theory, ideology or politics. However, the work of imagining interventions and modifications to the built environment, especially as an academic exercise, inherently incorporates, responds to and reflects social, cultural, political, and racial ideologies. As students work, debates within and beyond the space of the University persist and continue to emerge around the seeming irrelevance and stunted agency of the architect, rebuke of the developer as exploitative, as well as in the field of preservation around which objects deserve to be preserved and how, and who or what entities get to make those decisions. More and more we see conversations in the field interrogating how planning practices can be made more just, equitable and ethical. What all of these debates and conversations are ultimately responding to (but rarely articulate explicitly), is the prevailing “whiteness” of those agents and institutions involved in this discourse and modes of practice—where “whiteness” is understood not as a natural or biological category, but as a well-crafted and powerful fiction which must always sustain and renew itself, often through violent and exclusionary means. By extension, such debates, as veiled forms of professional and practical reckoning, have tended to avoid, ignore and “invisibilize” the work of black practitioners, always and already engaging these problematics.

Pursuing disciplines that have, as scholar Craig Wilkins puts it, “both a systemic and specific resistance” to blackness, black students exercise particular forms of freedom and resistance within the university. This one-day symposium aims to provide a space for historical, methodological, and theoretical discussions that examine the relationship between black production and the space of the University. Rather than focus on this work as solely marginal or subversive, we ask: what happens when we think, act and produce beyond an assumed “from below” posture? What does it look like to engage a broader set of positions, such as the within, alongside, in-between and on top of, while interrogating what it means to be free and produce freely in these spaces? Rather than focus exclusively on the fleeting and transitory nature of fugitivity, a key conceptual framework for black studies today, we seek to examine a broader scope of resistant and liberatory practices. As scholars and producers of the built environment specifically, we ask, what are the outlines of staying, of enduring, of dwelling in? What might it mean to dwell in contradiction, beyond binaries, and between disciplines, as human bodies working to make sense of our own labor within the space of the University—free, perhaps, but at what cost?

We solicit abstracts from students in professional schools of architecture, planning, preservation, real estate development and all those fields whose work engages the built domain and production of space. Papers may address any temporal or regional scope, including investigation of contemporary spatial practices. We also invite reflective, as well as speculative work, which may include satire, creative essays, or uncommon forms like review of a studio or project brief. Papers might address, but are not limited to, topics such as:

- Freedom, Liberation, Liberatory Space
- Radical Practice/Revolutionary Practice

- Invitation/Consent/Permission
- Production of Space
- Fugitivity: Possibilities & Limits
- The Undercommons
- Freedom Schools
- Discipline, Disciplinarity
- Criminality, Sneaking, Stealing
- Legitimacy/Authority
- Training, Professionalism
- The University/The Academy
- Institutionalality
- Blackness in the University
- Double Consciousness
- Gentrification & Displacement
- Imposter Syndrome
- Visibility/Invisibility
- Contradiction, Multiplicity
- Affirmative Action
- Safe Spaces
- Is the University a “white” space?
- The Ivy League
- HBCUs
- Work, Practice, Creation, Production
- Movement/s, Motion, Mobility
- The University & the legacy of slavery
- Humanities and the Human in architectural practice and education
- Critical Theory/Critical Practice

**Submission Guidelines:** 250-300-word Abstract as a **.pdf**, including full name, affiliation, address, and email

**Timeline and Selection Process:** All documents are to be submitted to [blackproduction@arch.columbia.edu](mailto:blackproduction@arch.columbia.edu) with “Last name: Black Production” in the subject line by **4 March 2019**. Authors of accepted papers will be notified via email and asked to submit a full preliminary draft (2,500-4,000 words) by **25 March 2019**.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions prior to the submission deadline.

**Travel and Financial Support:** Limited funds are available to offset the costs of travel and accommodation, to be distributed on a case-by-case basis.

**For more information please see:** [arch.columbia.edu/events/blackproduction](http://arch.columbia.edu/events/blackproduction)