

April 2014



THE  
BLACK/LAND  
PROJECT

RACE FOOD JUSTICE:  
BLACK/LAND DESIRE MAPPING WORKSHOP  
*CLEVELAND, OHIO APRIL 2014*

By Allison Guess and Mistinguette Smith  
The Black/Land Project

## **What is The Black/Land Project?**

Black/Land gathers and analyzes stories about the relationship between black people, land and place. The purpose of the project is to identify and amplify the current critical dialogues surrounding the relationship between black people (including African-Americans, Caribbean-Americans and African immigrants) and land. The relationship to land may be a fifth generation family farm in the Alabama Black Belt or a neighborhood in Detroit. A public park, a church filled with local history, or an immigrant community's journey from one place to another are all stories about black relationship to land and place.

The Black/Land Project has gathered interviews with community members in many cities, including Cleveland, OH. We share these stories, and the story of their historical contexts, in order to highlight the powerful traditions of resourcefulness, resilience and regeneration they contain.

## **What is the Desire Mapping Workshop?**

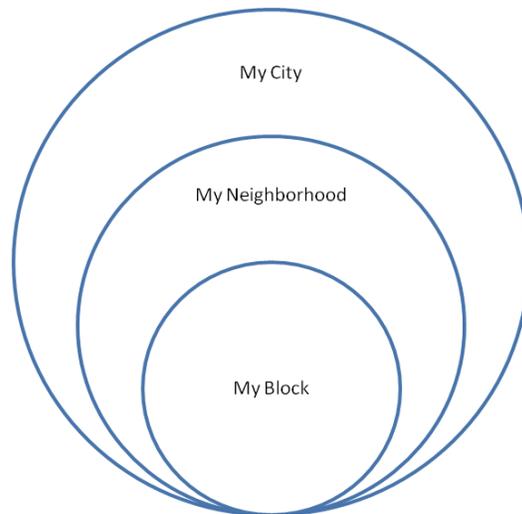
Black people have both historical relationships to land, and also relationships based on aspiration and desire. The idea that black people have only histories of enslavement, disruption and displacement from land ignores that black people have also shaped the landscape of cities like Cleveland as builders, landowners, home and business owners and city planners with aspirations, longings and desires.

The Black/Land Project has designed a workshop to help black communities have conversations about how land in our communities is being used now, and how we desired it to be used. In small groups, we guide participants through a description of how they would like land to be used in the future.

An abbreviated version of this workshop was offered to fifty participants Race Food Justice Conference in Cleveland, OH April 4-5, <sup>2014</sup>. The following pages summarize the results of that workshop, and the new ideas that emerged in response to the workshop.

## Desire Mapping: The View from Cleveland

Desire Mapping seeks to capture very specific experience of land, both current and desired. Participants are asked to focus on questions in three dimensions: their immediate block, then their surrounding neighborhood, and finally their city.



This is what black Clevelanders had to say.

### *How is land now used in my community?*

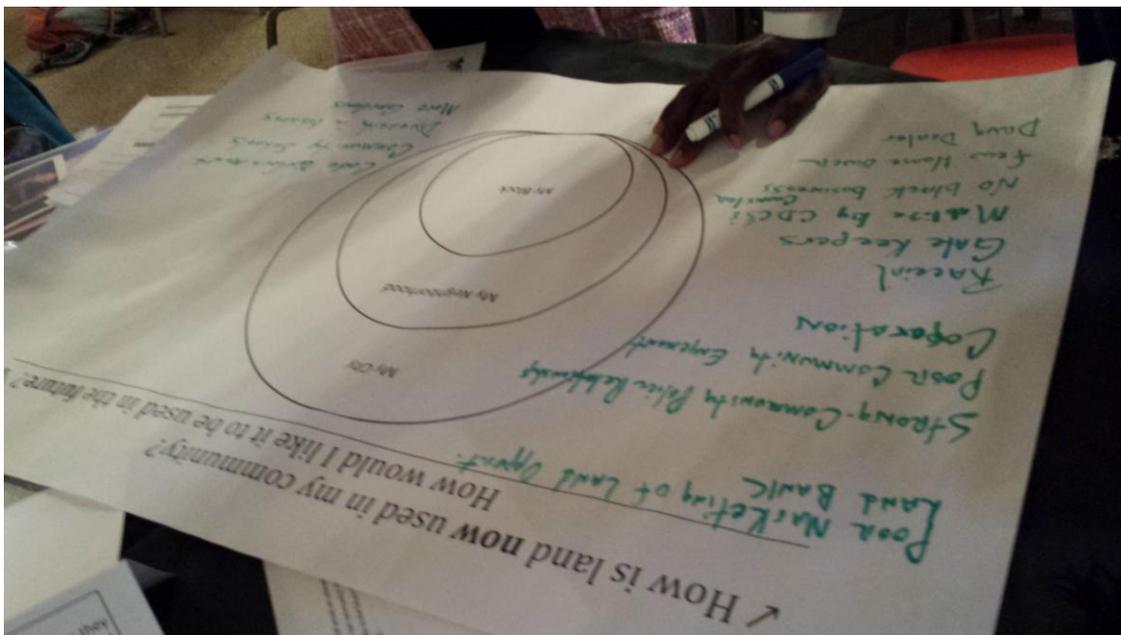
- CDC Famicos
- Repurpose land: gardens (parks and green spaces)
- Maintain home ownership (support home security)
- Uptown condos
- Re-gentrification
- Poor marketing of land bank
- Strong community-police relationship
- Poor community engagement
- Racial Gatekeepers mobilized by CDC and consular
- No Black business
- Few homeowners
- Drug dealers
- **Euclid:** Housing/Business
- **Mt. Pleasant:**
  - Dilapidated Houses
  - Renter section 8
  - Old homeowners
  - vacant lots (land loss)
- **University Heights:**
  - Homes, apt buildings and commercial buildings
  - small business
  - parks and recreation
  - homeowners, rentals
  - Churches
  - Schools
  - small agriculture

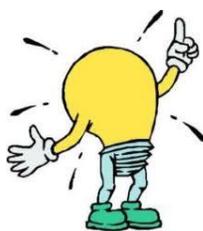
- **Buckeye:**
  - lawns and yards groomed mostly
  - remodeling of dilapidated housing/structures and increased home buying market.
  - Vacant lots and houses
  - Trash dumping
  - Absentee landlords in rentals
  - Historic buildings
  - Medical institutions
  - Churches
  - Good public transportation
- New library
- Recreation of Luke Easter Park (Woodhill)
- New buildings on 115<sup>th</sup> street, new business on 116<sup>th</sup>
- **Lee-Harvard:**
  - Blocks of lost/abandon houses
- **Hough:**
  - community gardens
  - less home owners
  - contaminated lands
  - built over wetlands
  - active street clubs

### *How would I like land to be used in the future?*

- Policies to support/maintain (*our*) homeownership (individual/single-family property ownership as opposed to corporate)
- More grocery stores/retail
- Engaging youth in agriculture and business (small business)
- Youth environmental community projects
- Intergenerational projects
- Bring back horticulture studies in local schools
- Assistance for the Black family
- **Mt. Pleasant:**
  - Feng Shui Garden
  - urban farms
  - tranquil parks and “healthy home ownership.”
  - Business revitalization by local business owners
- **University Heights:**
  - “Upkeep” of housing, schools, businesses, churches etc.
  - Small agriculture
  - Policies that prevent poverty
  - Allow residents to purchase property
  - Less isolation/less sterile
  - Many more streetlights
- 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation hungry kids
- more diverse jobs
- new leadership (mayor)
- clean communities and parks/recreation
- funding for Black business
- Code enforcement
- Community schools
- Diversify businesses
- Gardens
- Entertainment and education

- Put the neighbor back in the neighborhood
- Restore pride, purpose and reinvest.
- Ownership
  
- **Glenville:**
  - Access to fresh foods and other resources
  - Revive Moreland Theater
  - Revive East Side Market
  - Redevelop Buckeye commercial district
  - Tear down vacant homes
  - Organize clean-up efforts
  - Walking paths
  - Clean energy buses
  
- **Buckeye:**
  - More community gardens in vacant lots or every street/flowers
  - Better public transportation on Woodhill
  - More safe spaces for children
  - Whole Foods store
  - Safe streets/environment
  - Small businesses
  - Solar energy
  - For current resident development (commercial, small business and parks)





## New Ideas

Twenty one of the Desire Mapping workshop participants responded to our evaluation question: “What is one New Idea that occurred to you during this presentation that you had never thought of before?”

These responses document what was most striking to workshop participants, and point toward content and processes that can be repeated in the future.

Many participants noted the pieces of information that were new to them, and described how the workshop discussion format generated new ideas based on that information:

- *Life expectancy: 24 years difference between Hough and South Euclid*
- *How land history affects perceptions of land today, and are very distinct city to city (how different Cleveland may be from Pittsburgh, etc.)*
- *The connection of land and relationship was a different way of looking at living and changing concepts around how we see, and use our land, and what we desire for our lives. Awesome.*
- *Black relationship to land*
- *Lots of new ideas! The concept of poverty as political. Most interesting, slide of Cleveland’s history. Most disturbing, no discussion of lack of African American cultural garden (in Wade Park)*
- *How to view land versus a home! Land & food. Land & history.*
- *Lots of new ideas! The concept of poverty as political. Most interesting, slide of Cleveland’s history. Most disturbing, no discussion of lack of African American cultural garden (in Wade Park)*
- *The fact about black landowners hiring European immigrants to work their land as laborers!*
- *Giving the people of Cleveland, Buckeye in particular, a history lesson so that we understand the value of our land; and if possible move to restoration that is recognized by the National Historical Society.*
- *Have a better understanding of black peoples’ role and history within the city of Cleveland. A lot of the facts you shared I was unaware of, and in order for me to lead change, I must know our history, and be able to educate other to inspire and motivate them. The question posed about black peoples’ relationship to land is something I hadn’t considered and I will now explore. Have to know our history and be able to educate, and tell our story.*
- *This workshop allowed me to see my community black neighborhood and city and the segregation that Cleveland and other cities are experiencing from a different perspective. BLP – great job!*

- *I didn't know the history of black land /business ownership in Cleveland, and the history behind how our local neighborhoods became structured in the way they are today.*
- *Graphic about the meaning of equity; where we live, work, learn, play and worship determine our opportunities of health, place to connect to our ancestors. Spiritual connection/environmental action. What does \_\_\_\_\_ look like now to you? What do you see in the future, my city, my neighborhood, my block (Desire map)*

Other participants expressed appreciation of the workshop's format. Breaking out into eight working tables, participants were asked to "share the air" so that everyone could write on the Desire Map, but no one person could speak twice until everyone had spoken once. Because the focus was on how black people desired to see land used in their neighborhoods, non-blacks were invited to participate by listening attentively without interruption, and to express appreciation for the opportunity to hear a conversation to which they usually don't have access by not asking questions.

Participants gave the following feedback on the workshop process:

- *Appreciate the emphasis on the consensus / decisions being made by the community; and having non-black people listen not talk.*
- *Meeting and greeting, networking with one another, and getting ideas surrounding our community.*
- *A videotaping of each speaker would be great.*

The Black/Land Project Desire Mapping workshop is designed to generate new ideas and the sharing of aspirations. Here are some of those ideas that were reflected in our evaluation sheets:

- *Bringing back horticulture to the school system*
- *Opening up a small healthy eating store (kind of a smaller version of Whole Foods) in my area. I would like to see how I could become part of growing food for my community.*
- *Bring industry into the community, service, manufacturing and agriculture*
- *How to help others know the value of land and how to use the land for many things. Other than a living space, how to make Cleveland a cleaner place to live health wise, and pride wise. "Take a stand where you live"*
- *I can support the Glennville Community to participate in the Black/Land project... to remember their connection to and re-vision their connection going forward. Thanks for what you do!*
- *I've been active in the community and community development since the 1960s, and grew up in Cleveland in the 1940s and 50s. So...there wasn't much new. However, I have a concern about developing green space and community gardens (which I have been doing since 2011) and then being faced with future development and eminent domain. I want to own the land but that isn't protection either.*

## Conclusion

This report represents a brief harvest from one Black/Land Desire Mapping conversation in Cleveland. It is clear that city residents have complex visions of their desired relationships to land and place. The frameworks for building a desirable landscape and livable city includes more than “blight removal’ and “economic development.” They also require attention to building the quality of relationship among the people who live together on land, and regeneration of the agricultural quality of land. The deep integration of economic development, land regeneration and relationship restoration are hallmarks of traditional black relationships of care for the environment.

This workshop was presented in partnership with Place Matters, whose urban planning efforts focus on reducing health disparities that are predictable based on the ways racial segregation restricts black communities in place.

Place Matter believes conversations as engaged and illuminating as this one can be seeded in other gatherings, and cultivated, cared for and sustained by a network of people doing work on environmental justice, food security and planning for health equity in communities across the city.

Cleveland is a city where Place Matters. It is also a place ready to be regenerated by sustained discourse, shared commitment, and the power of black relationships to land.