

BLACK SPACES

RECLAIM & REMAIN

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TEACHER GUIDE

Explore the braided histories of displacement, resistance, and resilience within Black American communities in Oakland and the East Bay in *Black Spaces: Reclaim & Remain*. This teacher guide will help you prepare for your students' visit. Teachers are also welcome to visit OMCA for a free planning visit.

EXHIBITION CONTENT

Black Spaces: Reclaim & Remain explores the importance of place in the fight for freedom by Black Americans in the Bay Area. Within the context of the history of the Great Migrations, it highlights how local people have worked together to share their histories and honors the unique culture, creativity, and community that have come from this region.

Black communities have faced many challenges, like unfair treatment, racism, and being pushed out of their homes and neighborhoods. This has happened through things like unfair housing rules, urban development projects, mass incarceration, and gentrification. Despite these challenges, Black Americans have fought back by creating their own spaces, building strong communities, and making their voices heard.

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

This exhibition is divided into two parts. The first part of the exhibition tells the history of Black American communities in two cities, Russell City and West Oakland, through three themes: Homeplace, Social Fabric, and Dispossession & Repair. The second part invites three unique perspectives from an artist, an architect, and an archive to share how they are addressing this history in their own cultural practices.

HOMEPLACE

This section explores the connection between individuals and the places they call home. Objects and moments will reference the importance of a homeplace in cultivating a sense of self and belonging. Visitors will understand the hope and opportunity that drove Black Americans from the Jim Crow South to places like California.

SOCIAL FABRIC

Community consists of individuals coming together to build personal and economic networks, forming the social fabric of a place. Social institutions like churches, Black-owned businesses, and entertainment venues contributed to the social fabric of Black communities within Russell City and West Oakland.

WEST OAKLAND | West Oakland was a hub for Black culture and commerce. Firsthand accounts from West Oakland residents pulled from archival interviews give insights into the life and culture of West Oakland.

RUSSELL CITY | In the 1950s, Black and Latino residents lived in Russell City, in the unincorporated area outside of Hayward. Russell City was one of the few places they could buy homes. Though limited infrastructure was provided, residents built strong networks that sustained their community.

DISPOSSESSION & REPAIR

Public and private entities have used their power to shape and redefine the Bay Area landscape. These forces significantly impacted Russell City and West Oakland. In 1964, Russell City was destroyed. In West Oakland, while some people successfully resisted, many lost their homes. This section explores the forces that reshaped these places and the lasting impacts today.

3 PERSPECTIVES: ARTIST, ARCHITECT, ARCHIVE

Three collaborators present unique installations that share their perspectives and reflections on Black history in Oakland. They offer words, ideas, and tools—honoring the past and lived experiences of Black communities. Each of the collaborators developed the text in these sections.

ADRIAN BURRELL | A third-generation Oakland artist, Adrian Burrell's art often draws from his own family history to explore themes related to Black life, history, resistance, and liberation in America.

JUNE GRANT | Architect and founder of blink!LAB in Oakland, Grant's work explores how design reflects social values and envisions community-centered futures.

ARCHIVE OF URBAN FUTURES | The Oakland-based Archive of Urban Futures (AUF) is a collaboration between a nonprofit housing advocacy organization, Moms 4 Housing, and a group of UC Berkeley-affiliated researchers led by Dr. Brandi T. Summers. AUF focuses on questions of history, value, the right to place, memory, and erasure in Oakland.

Exhibition highlights include:

- Community-rooted stories from West Oakland and Russell City
- Thought-provoking installations by an artist, an architect, and an archive, offering reflections on Black history in Oakland

- Historical ephemera and memorabilia from the African American Museum and Library of Oakland (AAMLO), Hayward Area Historical Society, Oakland History Center, and Marin City Historical Society
- Data highlighting the migration of the Black population to California
- Timeline of select moments highlighting Black Oaklanders (1850–2019) by Archive of Urban Futures members Maya Sapienza and Juleon Robinson

KEY EXHIBIT MESSAGES

- Connection to place is an essential part of one's experience that stitches together community, kinship, history, and sense of self. Various social and economic forces have denied people, predominantly Black Americans, this connection to home and place.
- The perspectives of the artist, the architect, and the archive offer models for repair and hope for a just future.
- People can take actions—big or small—to (re)imagine their future and create spaces of belonging.

UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

The student conversation guide:

- Helps teachers, chaperones, and students better manage their self-guided visit to *Black Spaces: Reclaim & Remain*.
- Promotes student-driven inquiry. Students are prompted to consider particular topics/themes, but are given the opportunity to choose what to focus on within the exhibition.
- Encourages student conversation and reflection about these topics to help students consider and extend their experience in the exhibition.

FACILITATION SUGGESTIONS

- Bring enough printed copies of the student guide, writing surfaces, and pencils for each student. The student guide is designed for 8.5 x 11 paper. A limited number of printed student guides will be available at OMCA's School Group Entrance. No pens are allowed in the galleries.
- Allow students to work in pairs or small groups. If any student(s) seems to be struggling with the prompts, check in with them and encourage them to work with a peer to solve any challenges.
- Create a safe space for dialogue. We encourage students to work with a partner, however, participation in dialogue should be voluntary. Encourage students to participate however they're comfortable.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources may help you better prepare to facilitate your students' experience or provide student learning opportunities before or after your visit:

- [Oakland Museum Black Spaces](#) exhibition site, which includes images, highlights, books, and resources from the exhibition
- [Timeline of Black Oakland](#) by Juleon Robinson and Maya Sapienza from Archive of Urban Futures
- [Roots, Race and Place: A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area](#) report published by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at UC Berkeley
- [Oakland Public Library: Gentrification and Displacement](#) resource guide on the gentrification and displacement of Black and brown communities
- [Highways to Destruction: Oakland & Boyle Heights](#) lesson plan from Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Coalition
- [Russell City Reparative Justice Project](#) website
- [blink!Lab](#), June Grant's Oakland-based design, architecture, and urban design practice
- [Archive of Urban Futures](#) website
- [Adrian Burrell](#) artist website
- [Moms 4 Housing and UC Berkeley Researchers Create An Archive For Activism](#) article from KQED Arts & Culture

KEY TERMS

As you explore this exhibition, you will see ways in which people came together to build communities and establish the social fabric and identity of places like West Oakland and Russell City. **The list of terms below addresses the methods with which various entities disrupted the spaces cultivated by Black Americans.**

URBAN RENEWAL was a federal program established after the Housing Act of 1949. This act provided federal loans to local governments to clear “blighted” or “slum” areas and the redevelopment of those areas.

In the 1950s and 1960s, **REDEVELOPMENT** projects under the Urban Renewal Program resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of residents with the use of eminent domain. The majority of these projects negatively impacted Black residents and people of color.

EMINENT DOMAIN refers to the power of the government to take private property for public use if they provide just compensation to property owners. Local redevelopment agencies used eminent domain to forcefully seize properties from neighborhoods they deemed “blighted.”

BLIGHT was a term used by redevelopment agencies to describe neighborhoods that were deemed in poor condition. Often occupied by Black residents and residents of color, these areas suffered from lack of investment and neglect by local and federal governments.

RACIALLY RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS were passages in the deeds of homes that barred people of color from purchasing the property.

ZONING is the separation of the land into different sections, or zones: residential, commercial, and industrial.

GENTRIFICATION is the unlivable conditions suffered by residents of a previously low-income neighborhood due to the influx of wealthier individuals that drive up the cost of rent and properties.

In the late 1930s, financial institutions created **REDLINING** maps that outlined which borrowers were restricted or limited from receiving credit based on the racial or socioeconomic status of their neighborhood.

Philosopher Achille Mbembe describes **NECROPOLITICS** as the practice of government bodies defining who is disposable and who is not.