Parks as Mirrors of Community
Design Discourse and Community Hopes for Parks in East St. Louis

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ABSTRACT While imprinted by past social values and design ideals, parks evolve according to changing expectations and socio-economic and racial change in the surrounding community. Design discourse and community processes both call on park design to reflect community history, expand recreational and social resources, and serve as a catalyst for community revitalization. However, community concerns to develop implementable designs in light of alternative funding strategies, volunteerism, and phased development remains largely unaddressed by the design community. Focusing primarily on urban African-American contexts in East St. Louis, Illinois, this paper outlines three non-exclusive perspectives that shape discourse on race in park planning and design: recreational use and preferences according to ethnicity and race; community development, through both grassroots activism and professional participation; and form-seeking design approaches inspired by community history and everyday practices of marginalized groups. These three perspectives of contemporary discourse are then counterbalanced with an applied perspective based on current park revitalization efforts that are being undertaken by community groups in East St. Louis, Illinois.

KEYWORDS Parks, African American, community development, participatory planning and design

East St. Louis' parks, similar to many in urban low-income communities, represent a desirable resource with unmet potential to serve community needs. As legacies from more affluent times, the city's parks reflect bygone attitudes about civic responsibility and social activity. Their initial design and programming has evolved as new facilities and services are added and removed according to national trends and the local economic and political climate. Grand fountains, sunken gardens, and tree-lined parkways now share space with later additions of playgrounds, swimming pools, sports fields, and community centers. With deindustrialization, depopulation, and municipal budget crises, the parks have suffered from reduced staffing, service closures, and deferred maintenance, leaving them vulnerable to underutilization, vandalism, and crime. The impact of neglected parks is exacerbated by a larger context of vacant land that is susceptible to illegal dumping.

Meanwhile, the communities around the parks have also changed. Once an industrial city with a diverse population and segregationist policies to separate white and black neighborhoods, the city has become predominantly African American with high levels of unemployment and poverty. Although appropriated to serve the residents even as the community has been marginalized, East St. Louis' parks represent important social institutions that residents would like to see restored into useful and safe places. Even in their disrepair, parks embody the potential of the community and are integral to hopes for community health and revitalization. Whereas in the past it might have been the municipal leaders’ role to maintain parks, the responsibility now falls on residents who bear the impact of their neglect directly. Several resident groups have identified park improvements as important community endeavors, creating opportunities to re-envision parks to reflect the existing community needs and identity.

This paper uses the case of parks in East St. Louis to investigate how past and present constructions of race are reflected in park planning and design. The paper outlines three non-exclusive approaches that directly or indirectly address race in park discourse: recreational planning and research on preferences; community development through grassroots activism and professional participatory processes; and form-seeking that is inspired by the history and current practices of marginalized groups. An historical overview reveals the complicated relationship of city development, park ideology, and resident needs. The paper closes with a description of three ongoing community projects: Jones Park, Lincoln Park, and the future Pullman Porter Park. These projects offer an applied perspective that confirm and contradict the implications of academic and professional discourse on race in park planning and design.

RECREATIONAL PLANNING AND EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY PREFERENCES ACCORDING TO RACE

Historical studies of American parks and open space acknowledge that park design has been guided by normative agendas aimed at improving the emotional, moral, and physical health of the public (Boyer 1978, Cranz 1982, Cranz and Boland 2004). Early rationales for
citywide park systems tended to justify different kinds of parks for different aesthetic and recreational functions, with the intention that parks should serve the needs of specific groups while also serving the general public. Recreation was valued as a "democratic" public activity that brought together all groups and classes, but experts also addressed particular concerns about the mixing of groups, particularly new immigrants and African Americans with white audiences. Playgrounds were a specific concern due to white prejudice against integration and concerns about ethnic and racial cliquishness (Curtis 1917). Landscape architect Henry Hubbard (1914) expressed the hope that playgrounds provided an opportunity to overcome prejudices, yet acknowledged inevitable segregation by race and class, and the impossibility of racial integration in Southern cities. In general, most park literature tended to praise the capacity of recreation to encourage social interaction yet remained silent on issues of equity and access by people of color, which can be interpreted as supporting the status quo. Because neighborhood parks and playgrounds provided most urban recreation needs, residential segregation may have been another way to bypass this issue. Generally, it can be assumed that African American recreation was provided through general public facilities; scheduling that separated groups according to race, age, or other criteria; separate facilities in African American communities; or not provided because of discriminatory policies.

A review of the various editions of Introduction to Community Recreation, a textbook written for the National Recreation Association by George Butler, provides a glimpse into discussion of African Americans in recreation planning. In its first edition (1940), Butler applauded community recreation as "one of the most powerful agencies for absorbing the various nationality and racial groups into American life" (387). He acknowledged equity issues, stating, "Colored people, like other racial groups, are entitled to share in the recreation programs provided by the municipality" either through facilities in black neighborhoods or facilities used by both white and black people (388). In the first edition, Butler separately addressed the needs of immigrant groups and African Americans, while later editions consolidated the two discussions as one topic. In the 1949 edition, noting that prejudice, ignorance, and timidity often discouraged immigrants and racial groups from using parks, he suggested diversifying park staff to encourage participation (1949, 400). He noted the need for dual provision of recreational facilities in areas that maintained "separate but equal" systems for education and municipal services (Figure 1).

In the fourth edition of Introduction to Community Recreation, published in 1967, Butler referred to Supreme Court decisions affecting integration and described common responses by cities, including integration, removal of public recreation to avoid integration, and adding new facilities in black neighborhoods. He also noted the increase in membership-club swimming pools and other facilities as a strategy used by some municipalities to avoid integration. Butler encouraged rational planning that addressed specific needs of user groups according to nationality, race, occupation, education, economic status, and standard of living. Along with other generalizations about activities that would interest various ethnic groups, he recommended "rhythmic activities" for African Americans, stating, "Special aptitudes of national and racial groups are particularly valuable in initiating recreation programs for them, although an attempt should be made to broaden the interests of these groups and to draw them increasingly into community-wide activities" (Butler 1967, 272–3).

In 1962, the first national study of American recreation was conducted to identify changing recreation patterns based on urbanization, new lifestyles, and class-based differences (ORRRC 1962). One finding was that minority groups (African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans) used recreational opportunities less than the white population, even when other socio-economic factors were held constant. The report concluded that, given projections of an increasing non-white population, appropriately planned outdoor recreation activities might provide opportunities for social interaction. It also identified the potential to
provide new recreational activities on lands made available through urban renewal and highway construction, but failed to note that these areas often resulted from the demolition of low-income and African American neighborhoods. The report conveyed a bias towards assimilation to urban middle-class (this can be interpreted as white) standards, as well as caution regarding full integration, particularly interracial physical contact. Swimming pools, in particular, were "the single-most charged symbol of contact between people" and an inappropriate place to force interaction (Mead 1962, 21-22).

In the 1970s, a series of empirical research projects sought to clarify how social class, income, and race affected recreational preferences and use. Grounded in a faith that scientific study could provide predictors of participation, the implication was that research could direct planning and policy to increase use and avoid social conflicts. Some studies sought information about differences between black and white recreation preferences while others studied variation based on income, occupation, and location (Cheek, Field, and Burdge 1976, Craig 1972, Kronus 1971, Stamps and Stamps 1985). When taken as a whole, the findings distinguished few generalizable results due to small sample sizes, regional differences, unclear definitions of race and ethnicity, and conflation of variables (Edwards 1981, Hutchison 1988). Inability to predict participation or preference had led to ongoing debates about whether leisure differences by race and ethnicity are a consequence of sub-cultural diversity, marginality resulting in differential allocation of recreational resources, or discrimination (Feagin 1991, Stodolska 2005).

Rather than seek ethnic or race-based preference, recent research has explored socio-cultural patterns of park use. For example, an analysis of Chicago's Warren Park found the park heavily used by individuals reflecting the local community composition of white (including Eastern European Jewish immigrants), African American, Asian (Indian and Pakistani), and Hispanic groups, but with little mixing between them (Gobster 1998). While acknowledging external factors that might influence this pattern, the author also noted that the park's design, with high-use facilities along the perimeter to maximize visual and physical access, its range of programs, and good site management, were factors in the park's popularity and use patterns. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris (1995) used observation in several Los Angeles parks to compare the activities of Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, and African-American park users, and found that racial and ethnic groups did not mix so much as co-exist. She concluded that different

Figure 1. Two descriptive pictures from another standard text by George Butler, Recreation Areas: Their Design and Equipment, in a section on sandboxes: one in Washington D.C. with African American children and another in New York with white children, quietly reaffirming the default separation of white and black children's play. (1947, 32).
ethnic and racial groups might use the same park, but they adapt territories and activities according to other park users to avoid potential conflict. While useful for understanding appropriation in multicultural contexts, observation-based studies such as these do not address possible unmet desires for alternative social and recreational facilities.

Parks and Community Development—Grassroots and Professional

Parks figured prominently in early strategies of city planning and today still play a significant role as public resources and amenities that shape communities. Parks facilitate aesthetic order, provide social and recreational activities that facilitate civic and social objectives, and, in some cases, reinforce barriers that separate groups and neighborhoods (Gobster 1998, Solecki and Welch 1995). It is generally assumed that cities should have parks just as they should have schools, fire departments, and other public facilities. Yet access to parks is not universal, with low-income communities of color experiencing an overall shortage of park space and services (Harnik 2004, Sherer 2003). And even though parks are credited with multiple personal, social, economic, and environmental benefits, their upkeep is often neglected in light of municipal fiscal limitations and priorities (Carr et al. 1992, Garvin 2000). Reduced staffing, accumulated neglect, and crime have raised public fears about parks as dangerous places (Mozingo 1995). Meanwhile, community development strategies suggest that revitalized parks help reduce crime, increase property values, and encourage community investment (Bonham, Spilka, and Rastorfer 2002; Crompton 2001).

While many cities have invested in park improvements as a catalyst for revitalization, often the initiative to improve degraded parks comes from residents who want better resources for their neighborhoods. The community open space movement is grounded in local initiatives to improve the neighborhood resources (Francis, Cashdan, and Paxson 1984, Fox, Koeppel, and Kellam 1985). This kind of grassroots activism aligns with longstanding strategies of self-help in African-American communities that have historically been denied access to mainstream resources, such as federal programs, banking institutions, and educational resources (Butler 1991, Carson 1993). While local activism and self-help are generally considered positive activities that empower communities, it is also important to realize that the burden of improvement is often put on the people with the least power who are expected to address problems of disinvestment that are the result of longstanding discrimination or unequal access to resources (Halpern 1995). Although officials may laud the sight of residents cleaning up a park, this does not necessarily lead to tangible aid. In lieu of public support, local groups often rely on foundations and grants, in-kind material donations, and volunteer labor.

Local groups frequently receive technical support from landscape architects, planners, and designers working in the advocacy planning tradition (Hester 1975, 1999). Professional designers engage in such projects through pro-bono work, university service-learning courses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies. Professional engagement not only responds to unmet needs, but also to a desire to use design as a catalyst for community organizing and development. This involvement often requires that designers take on new roles—as advocates, community organizers, technical assistants, and visionaries (Francis 1999). While acknowledging contributions of professionals and residents to the process, most advocates do not explicitly acknowledge cultural differences based on race that may affect how professionals and community members communicate (Lawson 2005).

The involvement of residents who have immediate knowledge of local conditions and desires often leads to place-specific programming and design (Fischer 2000, Hester 1983). When working with little or no funds, these efforts often make use of recycled or experimental materials and volunteer labor. This kind of self-help, opportunistic approach yields quick results that community participants can enjoy while also providing knowledge and experience to apply to future community projects. However, criticism of the resulting "low
income neighborhood design” has prompted some advocates to argue that such parks should have access to budgets on par with suburban contexts (Garvin 2000). While grassroots efforts may initiate a project, there is also an environmental justice argument that buoy long-term efforts to seek construction and maintenance support from public sources through the political process. This requires a careful balance of immediate action to address local concerns and long-term advocacy and lobbying for public investment, from both public and private sources.

Race and Representation in Design Form

In communities that have experienced economic decline, rather than accepting a “narrative of loss” that contrasts the current poor conditions to a bygone golden era, there are new design approaches that seek inspiration through interpreting the evolution of a community and acknowledging how new groups modify the landscape to fit cultural practices and daily patterns (Crawford 1999, 23). Redesigning public spaces provides opportunities to visually represent changing community demographics. Designers tend to find inspiration through observation, dialogue with community residents, and vernacular landscape traditions. This perspective includes two non-exclusive fields: design based in community memory through preservation and interpretation, and design that is inspired by everyday patterns of marginalized groups.

Community memory. The initial design of many urban parks typically expressed the visual and social ideals of elite founders and professionals. More recently, increasing acknowledgement of other participants—laborers, immigrants, slaves, women, etc.—has created opportunities to reveal alternative community histories. Form can be generated by reinterpreting spaces to reveal otherwise undocumented stories from community history and current life. Yet revealing the social history of a marginalized group may be complicated by the lack of distinct physical landmarks since many culturally significant sites have been demolished or altered by re-use. The challenge is to reveal significance in the everyday working landscape, which Dolores Hayden describes as “the power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens’ memories, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory” (1995, 9). Through preservation, iconography, and interpretive markers, the resulting symbolic landscapes reveal cultural traditions and ways of life. This approach builds on the scholarship of cultural landscape history and stories collected from archives and living people, transforming what is learned into an artful, multi-faceted expression.

There are several considerations in representations of community memory. As described by Cornel West, self-conscious representations are “value-laden, socially loaded, and ideologically charged” (1993, 19). Representing the past is a political act that often requires normalizing everyone's experiences into a homogenous history. It raises questions about how to counteract racist stereotypes: does one focus on positive images, or represent both the good and bad that exist in any group? Furthermore, there is an ethical dilemma: is the display of bitter experiences, such as race riots or prejudicial acts, unnecessarily painful, or part of the healing process (Wilson 2001)? While revealing multiple histories, a design that seeks to express community history also runs the risk, as Kobena Mercer suggests, of trying to tell a complex story in too brief an outburst (Mercer 1994, Wilson 2001). Relegating “interpretation” to one site (a park) may not compensate for a larger context of invisibility, or worse, ongoing discrimination and injustice. The challenges are to embed meaning while not becoming too didactic or abstract; avoid “one-liners” as well as the “codification of memory”; and prevent the loss of meaning over time as communities grow and change (Upton 2001).

Inspiration from everyday life. Designers have also found inspiration for new design forms through interpretations of everyday activities by marginalized groups. This approach seeks to reveal how otherwise
generic, standardized spaces are adapted to serve unplanned activities or practices that are often the result of changes in ethnicity, race, and income within the population (Crawford 1999). The goal is to raise awareness of how marginalized groups appropriate the landscape to support traditional practices and everyday life, such as urban food production, street vending, or social gathering on the street. This perspective frees the designer to find inspiration through observation of how people use space and in turn shape it, and has inspired design approaches such as 'everyday urbanism' and Walter Hood's improvisational design (Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski 1999, Hood 1997). Identification of use patterns seeks to be nonjudgmental, with activities like loitering, street vending, and skateboarding celebrated as vital public forums, even if larger society may consider them inappropriate. However, residents of a community may not agree with an outside designer's interpretation, seeking instead to replace unsatisfying current conditions with designs that emulate conventional park features. Local residents intent on improving public perception of their neighborhood may want to discourage the very activities that a designer finds inspirational. Thus, dialogue is necessary to assure a good fit and appropriate representation for the host community.

As these three non-exclusive perspectives—recreation planning and preferences, community development, and representation in design—suggest, there are multiple ways in which race has been addressed in park planning and design, both directly and indirectly. An historical perspective on park planning reveals a strong impulse to use parks for integration and acculturation, but also an acceptance of the status quo and unequal access and use. Post-civil-rights efforts to understand lower participation rates and preferences according to race and ethnicity generally failed to produce generalizable results, but did raise awareness of the complex causes of difference, including cultural traditions, marginality, and discrimination. The community development perspective suggests new opportunities to revitalize parks to better serve local concerns and desires, which blends well with designers' ideas about new design processes that engage community memory and everyday practices. However, grassroots park revitalization efforts may be stopgap measures that do not or cannot directly address unequal access to municipal support or the structural issues that perpetuate limited resources in communities made up primarily of lower income people of color. Although designers may find inspiration in appropriated spaces that accommodate both legal and illegal activities, local residents in that same community may have other agendas related to safety, legitimacy, and public perception that establish different design and planning priorities. Each of these three approaches reaffirms the importance of working with local communities in order to understand local patterns, needs, and visions. What may remain unaddressed, however, is the gap between visionary, empowering design concepts and the means by which to realize them in light of unequal access to resources.

East St. Louis

Case studies of three East St. Louis park projects illustrate how these approaches inform or contradict current efforts by residents to revitalize parks in low-income communities of color. Established in 1861, East St. Louis, Illinois, was developed primarily for its trade and industrial potential. With the advantages of rail lines connecting east and west and the Mississippi River supporting transit north and south, enterprising industrialists ignored marsh conditions to build factories, warehouses, roads, rail lines, businesses, and homes for workers. The industrial conglomeration of factories producing a range of materials, stockyards, and bordering company towns, brought eager workers who settled the city so quickly that the population doubled every decade between 1870 and 1910 (Baldwin 1989, Theising 2003). Residents then included American-born and immigrants from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Croatia, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Yugoslavia. Industry also recruited African Americans from the South to fill low-skilled labor positions. By 1917, 16 percent of the popu-
lation was African American. To encourage industrial expansion, city taxes were kept low, resulting in minimal investment in public services and civic amenities. City government was tainted by patronage, corruption, and violence for personal and political gain.

Although state laws had prohibited segregation in public schools since 1874, and in public places since 1885, African Americans in East St. Louis were expected to conform to a system of racial segregation that created separate neighborhoods, schools, and workplace lunchrooms and restrooms. The South End, separated from the rest of the city by industry and railroads, was the hub for African-American residential, religious, social, and educational activities. Much of the neighborhood was platted with narrow lots that were appropriate for wood-frame "shotgun" houses, but it also included larger brick homes for professional and middle-class residents.

Even with the segregation, racial tensions created an unsettled atmosphere. In 1917, East St. Louis made international headlines when one of the worst race riots to date—aptly described by contemporary social reformers as a massacre—erupted. The official death count included 39 African Americans and 9 whites dead, and 750 injured, although other sources reported over 400 African Americans were killed (Rudwick 1964). In the aftermath, it was estimated that as many as 7000 African Americans left the city (Nunes 1998). For those that stayed, cautious insurance agencies cancelled fire insurance policies, landlords removed black tenants, and real estate developers exerted pressure to increase segregation. However, even with these discriminatory policies, by 1938 the African-American population was back to pre-riot levels.

Similar to other industrial cities, East St. Louis was vulnerable to the ebb and flow of industry, as well as the eventual trend toward urban deindustrialization. It was during the industrial decline that the population gained a majority of African Americans. As depopulation left derelict buildings, vacant land, and an insufficient tax base, remaining residents struggled with reduced public services and deteriorating infrastructure. Urban renewal, the Model Cities program, and other planning efforts that intended to attract new investment failed and left behind vast areas of cleared land (Judd and Mendelson 1973). By the 1980s, the city was forced to terminate services, including trash pick-up for five years. The loss of industry also left behind brownfields and contamination that threatened public health. Faced with an $88 million debt and amid race-conscious public confrontations between the black mayor and white governor, the State of Illinois took over the city's financial management in 1990. As of 2000, the city's population was 98 percent African American, with just over 35 percent of the population below poverty level and a household median income of $24,567 compared to the national median of $50,046 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

Faced with an ineffective city government tainted by years of corruption, some residents have taken the initiative to improve their own neighborhoods independent of city resources. Neighborhood organizations have formed to stop illegal dumping, demolish abandoned buildings, and improve community capacity through social networks (Reardon 1998). Building on these successes, organizations have initiated housing development, job training, and economic development. It is in this context that neighborhood groups have identified parks as important sites for community revitalization.

**Parks and Open Space in East St. Louis**

As a city focused on industrial development and profit, East St. Louis in the late 19th century invested only minimally in public services. However it did develop some parks in accordance with national trends. The Park District was created in 1895, and by the early 20th century included the 130-acre Jones Park and several smaller neighborhood parks, including a formal sunken garden in the prestigious Washington Place neighborhood. When Harland Bartholomew (1920) developed the city's first master plan in 1920, his inventory identified six inadequately sized neighborhood parks, an over-developed Jones Park, three playgrounds, one athletic field, and three recently acquired sites for new
Bartholomew proposed an expanded park system in line with then-contemporary planning. His plan included new boulevards, three new neighborhood parks, new community centers, and fourteen playgrounds, including one in the South End for "colored" use. While Bartholomew was optimistic that the plan would make East St. Louis a great city, few of Bartholomew's proposals were implemented (Edwards and Lawson 2005).

Forty years later, another city plan described the dearth of park facilities (Caneub and Fleissig 1960). The plan responded to the decline of industry and depopulation with policies that conveyed that period's modernist faith in rational planning and governmental programs. Again, comparing East St. Louis to national standards, the 1960 report concluded that there was a deficit of 308 acres in parkland. Like its 1920 predecessor, this plan proposed new parks and playgrounds for each residential district, to be built on old industrial sites or lands cleared for urban renewal. It also proposed a riverfront park to complement the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (the Arch) on the St. Louis side of the Mississippi River. Again, few of the recommendations were implemented.

By the mid-1970s, the city was in crisis and newspaper reports forecast the closure of parks and pools due to inadequate funds for maintenance and staffing. Undeveloped parkland was sold, half of the 50 park employees were laid off, and the parks department had to seek funds from the Model Cities program to open swimming pools during the hot summers. (Metro East Journal 1972). The deterioration has continued, and today the park staff of five employees can barely provide trash pick up let alone security and basic recreational services. Bathrooms are locked, pools are open only sporadically, and children play on outdated and unsafe metal equipment. Overuse and poor maintenance have resulted in grassless, bare areas, and damaged and dying vegetation is not replaced.

Lacking municipal support, citizen groups and non-profit organizations have stepped in to provide some services. For instance, gold medal Olympian Jackie Joyner Kersee, raised in East St. Louis, established the Jackie Joyner Kersee Foundation in 1989 to support a 37-acre recreational facility with football, softball, and baseball fields as well as an indoor facility with a gymnasium, fitness center, classrooms, computer lab, kitchen, meeting rooms, and offices. Because it is one of the only supervised recreational centers in the city, it draws children from all neighborhoods who arrive by bus, car, and on foot. The Katherine Dunham Center, Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House, churches, and other organizations also provide a range of educational, social, and cultural programs. Meanwhile, citizens have taken it upon themselves to mow vacant lots, plant gardens, and clean up playgrounds and parks.

Three community-driven efforts to improve parks in the city—Jones Park Fountain, Lincoln Park, and Pullman Porter Park—provide insights into community visions and priorities in park revitalization. Working with landscape architecture faculty, students, and staff from the University of Illinois to develop design and implementation plans, these community organizations are expressing their immediate concerns, articulating their desires for the future, and strategizing how to build projects with minimal municipal support. Each of these efforts responds to residents' concerns and preferences regarding recreation, community development, and designs that reflect community history and everyday life, but with unique place- and people-based perspectives that are largely weighted by practicalities regarding security, implementation, and maintenance.

Jones Park Fountain. Initially designed as a pastoral park, Jones Park has, over time, accumulated facilities, including athletic fields and courts, a pool (now made into a water park), and the city's parks department district office. Occupying the middle of the park is a lagoon with a Romanesque-inspired brick pavilion at one end and a formal fountain with Art Deco details at the other. The last time the fountain functioned was at least thirty
years ago, when the park was still segregated (figures 2 and 3).

The recently formed Emma Wilson King Foundation has identified the fountain's restoration as its first community project. In honor of their mother, who raised twelve children in East St. Louis, this family foundation chose the fountain because its restoration provides an opportunity to convey civic pride regardless of any association with segregation. While the Foundation intends to address a range of pressing community needs, it considers the fountain an important symbolic asset that serves less tangible, emotional needs. As expressed by one family member at the first meeting with the designers, "We want our community to have the same opportunities as other communities. We want an elegant place to show visitors, a place to take wedding pictures." The Foundation also wants a success, a "shining example" of what can be done to revitalize the city. The parks department has arranged to lease the site and is eager to relinquish maintenance responsibilities to the Foundation once improvements are made.

In spring 2005, all the family members who could attend—some local as well as others from Chicago, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles—met with designers at the site to discuss their vision for the fountain’s redesign. The main concern was to restore the working fountain to its original form, and to add plantings reflecting their mother’s love of gardening as well as a brick plaza that could be used for a buy-a-brick fundraising campaign. While seeking to create an elegant space, family members also wanted to keep the site simple, low maintenance, and safe. Given sixteen alternatives that ranged from classically inspired formal plazas to abstract designs inspired by current award-winning designs, Foundation members selected four solutions that were then presented at a public meeting. These included two that framed the fountain with formal plazas, one that proposed a colorful and rich planting design, and one that broke up the fountain’s symmetry with skewed angles reinforced by new paths and plantings. Drawing enthusiasm from an audience of over 150 residents, including the mayor, the final plan that was selected develops the site as a plaza with rounded paved areas surrounding the historic fountain and minimal tree planting to frame the space (Figures 4 and 5).

The Foundation’s efforts to restore the fountain
have sparked renewed interest in Jones Park as recreation facility and civic space. The Foundation has initiated a substantial funding drive and has contracted with a construction management company to oversee fountain restoration and site development. Meanwhile, the hiring of a new, enthusiastic parks director has sparked complementary efforts to improve Jones Park as a whole. In addition to replacing old play equipment and restoring recreational fields, she is working on plans to encourage family reunions at the park as a fee-generating activity that would bring more people to the park and provide income for additional improvements.

Lincoln Park. The 14.2-acre Lincoln Park was developed in the 1920s on a four-block site in the South End to accommodate segregation. It is a recreational facility that includes three baseball fields, four tennis courts, a track, basketball court, playground, swimming pool, and picnic area. An allée of trees bisects the park and
leads to a central war memorial. In the 1960s, a geodesic dome was built on the southwest corner to house the Mary Brown Community Center. Named after a local community leader, the community center accommodated a branch of the East St. Louis Library, a health clinic, meeting facilities, and recreational programs. In 1987, due to flood damage and insufficient city funds, the center closed. Currently, the park is in disrepair, with a burnt-out picnic shelter, broken benches, tennis courts without nets, and no bathroom facilities. Nonetheless, it is heavily used in summer when young people from the region cruise around the park causing traffic back-ups that frustrate many of the older neighbors (Figures 6 and 7).

In 1995, a group of residents formed the South End New Development Organization (SENDO) to organize neighborhood clean-ups, demolish unsafe structures, and engage in other community improvement activities. Building on these efforts, they successfully lobbied and acquired funds to restore the Mary Brown Center. Because the city does not have funds for staffing and programming, SENDO is partnering with other community groups and non-profit organizations to run the center. The organization also would like to revitalize Lincoln Park as a recreational resource and a place to commemorate local history. In their recently completed neighborhood plan, SENDO identified Lincoln Park as the “heart of the community” and a focus for community revitalization efforts (Lawson 2005).

In discussions about the park’s future, the main concerns are safety and appropriate use. SENDO is made up mostly of older women who remember when the South End was a safe, family-oriented neighborhood. Few members currently use the park and they would be reluctant to take their grandchildren there because of drug activities and the disruptive, unsupervised youth who use the park. Older residents would like a sidewalk and other amenities along the park’s edges so that they can walk in the park while still feeling safe and in public view. The group is also not sure how to discourage the loitering and drinking that occurs in the park. In 2005, when SENDO lobbied the city to remove a small shed that served as the regular hangout for a group of men, the unintended result was that the men moved across the street into the park. SENDO members now have mixed feelings about the parks department’s proposal to replace the old picnic shelter because of concerns that the new pavilion will become the men’s new hangout. They are exploring ways to minimize this threat, both through the location of the pavilion and securing better police surveillance.

Residents are also very interested in using the park to commemorate the South End’s history. Many older residents have fond memories of the park as a place for local school functions, church revival meetings, the neighborhood baseball league, and other activities. However, important community memories, such as the migration from the South, the 1917 race riot, the close-knit community, and celebrities from the South End, have left few physical traces behind that might be interpreted in the park’s redesign. Although SENDO encourages design proposals that include commemoration of these people and events and receives them well, prospects for their realization seem far off because they find funding and implementation of these plans hard to conceive. Instead they focus primarily on opening the Mary Brown Center, controlling undesirable uses, organizing park clean-ups, and working with the park department to get a new pavilion and play equipment (Figure 8).

Pullman Porter Park. For many years, residents in the 41st Street Corridor have met once a month to discuss local concerns and strategies for change. Their efforts have included successful lobbying to have some streets repaved and sidewalks installed. In order to discourage illegal dumping, neighborhood residents have installed planters and planted trees strategically to block truck access to a railroad right-of-way that abuts the neighborhood. They are now seeking to lease this 3.5-acre site from the railroad company to create a park to be named after the Pullman porters who used to work the
Figure 6. Lincoln Park. (Photograph from files at the East St. Louis Parks District Office, n.d.)

Figure 7. Lincoln Park. An allée of trees is all that remains of what some residents recall as "lovers' lane." (Photograph by author, 2005)
Figure 8. Conceptual plan for Lincoln Park that includes a memorial to the 1917 race riot and a community history walk. Designed by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign MLA student Jeong Yoon Park, 2003.

train line. This park would fulfill an unmet need for park space in this part of the city, which was cited in both the 1920 and 1960 plans as underserved.

Initially the group was split about how much to develop the park, with some arguing that a fully developed park could encourage " riff-raff" and teenagers to come into the neighborhood (which currently includes many elderly residents) while others cited the need for legitimate recreational resources in order to discourage youth delinquency. Working with designers, local participants are developing a plan that claims the space and addresses their priority concerns, but avoids over development. Because residents will build and maintain this park without city support, the group needs a design that they can implement without excessive burden. Initial "wish lists" for the park, which included projects such as community garden plots and flower beds, became points of heated discussion in community meetings, as some participants were concerned that the burden of upkeep would fall on them.

After several community meetings with the designers, the residents identified priority projects, including developing a walking path, clearing and replanting around a small pond, developing a lighting plan for increased security, and installing a small pavilion and picnic area for social events. In the future, the resident group would like to add murals and other features that celebrate community history. Hoping to capitalize on opportunities presented by grants, in-kind donations, and volunteer labor, they are flexible as to what gets built, how it is built, and when the full project will be completed (Figure 9).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION
Efforts underway to improve parks in East St. Louis reveal concerns and challenges faced by many communities when the responsibility for change falls on resident groups who have the will but not necessarily the means for implementation. Similar to many other places, the city has a history that reveals the legacy of disinvestment, discrimination, and racism in the public landscape, as well as the conflation of racial and economic crises that perpetuate critical needs. This is a common story for previously industrial cities that have experienced rapid demographic change and a concentration of poverty and environmental injustices that the city cannot adequately address within its political and financial resources (Thomas and Ritzdorf 1997, Keating and Krumholz 1999). Communities can gain, however, from the economic, social, and health benefits associated with parks and recreation. Currently, resident groups are re-visioning their futures based on immediate concerns about safety and health, memories of bet-
ter times, and hopes for a better future for their children. Some of their plans are based on local patterns and everyday activities, but also on a desire for facilities on par with other communities as well as practicalities regarding implementation and maintenance.

While designers may find inspiration through non-judgmental interpretations of activities and adaptations to parks, many residents want to remove illegal or negatively-perceived activities and restore parks to children and the elderly. Stories about the industrial past, community life, and famous individuals can be revealed through design, and design proposals based on these narratives may inspire unconventional visions. But given an incremental, phased approach that places the burden of funding and implementation on the shoulders of residents and local activists, such narratives are often given a low priority in light of more pressing safety and use concerns.

Literature on the construction of race in the landscape often focuses on the negative because, of course, the landscape reveals disparities resulting from layers of discrimination and injustice. The next step is to reframe the issue, acknowledging the impact of discrimination on current community efforts while also suggesting actions for positive change. This suggests that designers, planners, and researchers need to address the transition from idea to action more effectively. It becomes critical to ground theoretical perspectives in local conditions, community priorities, and nontraditional forms of implementation. As a repository of past environmental and social conditions, community public spaces evolve—and continue to evolve—in response to changes from both within and beyond the community. While the physical landscape represents past and present everyday life, proposals for change offer new visions for the future. In this context, planning and design open discussions around past events and memories, current practices, and future goals. Whether or not parks are a
catalyst for change depends on both the vision of possibilities and the ability to realize improvements that serve community needs.

NOTES
1. While this paper focuses primarily on justifications and research related to parks through the late 19th and 20th centuries, the author also acknowledges the importance of alternative, unofficial public spaces created by disempowered, disenfranchised groups (Crawford 1999, Laguerre 1999, Mitchell 2003).
2. David Roediger (2005) notes that early 20th century discussion about immigrant groups rarely used the term "ethnic," in part because the term "new immigrant" provided a category that simultaneously described recent arrival and racial difference.
3. While a comprehensive survey of all literature on parks is impossible, the author searched many key texts, including Burnap (1916), Butler (1940, 1947, 1967), Olmsted and Nolen (1906), Nolen (1916), Weir (1928), and various pamphlets produced by the American Parks and Outdoor Art Association, as well as secondary sources (Boyer 1978, Cranz 1982, Cranz and Boland 2004, Schuyler 1986). This is an area for ongoing research.
4. The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) study showed that non-urban recreational activities, such as fishing, hunting, camping, and backpacking were becoming less important activities and served a smaller part of the population. It also showed increasing importance of urban recreational activities, such as picnics, driving for pleasure, swimming, sightseeing, walking for pleasure, playing outdoor sports and games, fishing, attending outdoor sports events, and boating. The study found parallel patterns between white and non-white populations, with increasing similarity in urban areas. Activities that were most closely shared between white and non-white groups included walking, attending outdoor sports events, hunting, bicycling, playing outdoor sports, and fishing. Even when other socioeconomic factors were held constant, being non-white produced a lower outdoor recreation score for males than any other factor. The situation was not so extreme for the non-white female, although her outdoor activity score was well below that of the white female (ORRRC 1962).
5. In his critique of recreation research addressing race, ethnicity, and social class, Ray Hutchison (1988) defined ethnicity as membership in a subculture group on the basis of country of origin, language, religion, or cultural traditions different from dominant society. Race was defined as a social construct based on physical difference that generally does not change with acculturation. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) describe race as a socio-historical concept, with categories and meaning expressed by social relations and historical context in which they are embedded, and varying over time and between different societies.
6. Because parks figure prominently in urban planning, it is important to consider the relationship of urban planning to African-American urban history (Thomas and Ritzdorf 1997, Yiftachel 1988). Racially-restrictive covenants, redlining, urban renewal, and concentration of public housing perpetuated segregation and concentrated poverty, resulting in structural conditions that further isolated urban African Americans from access to employment, education, and opportunities (Conley 1999, Massey and Denton 1993).
7. While the discipline of landscape architecture has rarely addressed this issue, it has been addressed in the related fields of architecture and planning (Forsyth 1995, Groat and Ahrentzen 1996).
8. On the eastern bluffs formed by the Mississippi River, archaeological finds indicate that the city of Cahokia, the largest pre-Columbian settlement north of Mexico, was inhabited from approximately 700 CE to 1400. French settlers established St. Louis in the 1760s. Illinoistown was first incorporated in 1859, but subsequent mergers with other platted communities led to the name change and incorporation of East St. Louis in 1861 (Federal Writers' Project 1936).
9. Classifying East St. Louis as an industrial suburb, Andrew Theising (2003) argues that the industrial hegemony curtailed the development of the liberal American social contract whereby government is typically held accountable for basic social, economic, and environmental concerns of citizens.
10. Although the city did not provide any community centers, related services were provided by the YMCA, the Colored YMCA, the YWCA, the Colored YWCA, the Catholic Community House and Center, and the Neighborhood House. Community centers provided an indoor place for civic functions, lecture courses, indoor recreation, an employment center, a branch library, and a public health center.
11. This number is based on a National Recreation Association recommendation of a minimum of 6.2 acres per 1000 persons. East St. Louis had 2.7 acres per 1000 persons.
12. The idea to respond to the Arch with a park on the East St. Louis side has been a recurring vision for the riverfront.
Currently, the regional Metro East Park and Recreation District is going forward with plans for an observation deck and park. Railroad corridors, highways, and industry block this area from the city's residential neighborhoods.

13. These featured park revitalization projects reflect partnerships between East St. Louis resident organizations and the University of Illinois East St. Louis Action Research Project (www.eslarp.uiuc.edu).


REFERENCES


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