

Davis Project for Peace:  
 Memorializing and Reimagining Resistance  
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*My childhood in Bushwick was saturated by the morning bacon-egg-and-cheese smell that escaped through the bodega doors, 10-hour long summer block parties that featured the Caribbean and México's irresistible rhythms and cuisine, and dusk-time scenes of children playing street basketball with crates-turned-hoops tied to lampposts. That Bushwick feels ephemeral in 2020, bracketed in limited spaces throughout the neighborhood.*

### Project Brief

*Memorializing and Reimagining Resistance* believes that the most impactful anti-gentrification approaches must be led by conscientious community members who experience the ramifications of urban displacement. Using cultural preservation and socially engaged art, this project draws on emancipatory peace-building theory<sup>1</sup> to resist harmful urban renewal in Bushwick, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. *Memorializing and Reimagining Resistance* acknowledges that Bushwick-raised youth hold the power to challenge gentrification and propose successful sustainable solutions. Nonetheless, this work requires a critical awareness of their neighborhood's past. The proposed project will support this conscientization by immersing youth in the neighborhood's history and inviting them to visualize Bushwick as an ideal sanctuary community. To achieve these objectives, a youth-built community archive (titled *Digitized Community Archive*) and a youth-led socially engaged photography workshop (titled *Modeling Sanctuary through Photography*) will be launched. At the end of both workshops, students will have the necessary conscientious knowledge to brainstorm a preliminary anti-gentrification resistance strategy that employs their individual talents and skills.

The project will partner with Educated Little Monsters (ELM)<sup>2</sup>, a Bushwick-based organization that provides performing and visual arts programming to youth of color; Arts in Bushwick (AIB)<sup>3</sup>, a community-led anti-gentrification organization that supports local artists and runs the Bushwick Open Studios (BOS) Summer Festival<sup>4</sup>; and Sen Floyd,<sup>5</sup> a renowned Brooklyn-born-and-raised documentarian and photographer who runs Sen Floyd Productions, LLC. He has previously worked with Apple Music, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Tribeca Film Institute. All Davis Project programming will occur over eight summer sessions in 2020. Ivette Yazmin Colón (ELM founder), Floyd, and I met multiple times during the fall and winter. We collectively developed a project plan that reflects our lived and technical experiences, my academic coursework, and Bushwick's distinctive artistic features.

All community archival content will be digitized and accessible via Arts in Bushwick's official website. Photographs from the socially engaged art workshop will be curated and on display at the 2020 BOS Summer Festival, an event that showcases hundreds of local artists.

### Background

Bushwick is a predominantly Black and Latinx residential neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Long-time Bushwick residents have resiliently fought decades of government disinvestment, neglect, and now accelerated gentrification. Middle-class New Yorkers and transplants who have been priced out of Manhattan are now relocating to Bushwick.<sup>6</sup> Developers and landlords have responded by exploiting affordable housing and profiting from the private real estate boom. This trend has perpetuated intergenerational displacement and thus left native Bushwick residents at risk of losing their homes.

*Memorializing and Reimagining Resistance* will apply an emancipatory peacebuilding paradigm to challenge the systemic displacement and racialized redlining of communities of color. The aforementioned peacebuilding model posits that peace is catalyzed by local actors and informed by a community's specific needs, knowledge, and desires.<sup>7</sup> Cultural construction and preservation in the forms of photography and archives will channel self-definition and self-determination principles. As gentrification in Bushwick displaces working-class families of color, creating a palpable archival record that sediments their experiences into public memory is an act of resistance. The *Digitized Community Archive* workshop will memorialize a history that has been neglected and is now under threat of erasure. Acclaimed cultural theorist Stuart Hall wrote, "[Archiving is] an interruption in a settled field, which is to enter critically onto existing configurations to reopen the closed structures into which they have ossified."<sup>8</sup> The community archival movement, which informs this workshop, echoes Hall's statement: it posits that grassroots collections accentuate and weave together marginal histories to retell a narrative that exists outside the hegemonic discourse.<sup>9</sup> The proposed project will also apply socially engaged art practices through the workshop *Modeling Sanctuary through Photography*. It will be facilitated by the Photographer in residence, Sen Floyd. Socially engaged art features dialogical relationships between the artist and community and works towards achieving social change.<sup>10</sup> These values complement Bushwick's decades-long thriving art scene.<sup>11</sup> The photography workshop embraces the established cultural infrastructure to empower Bushwick youth to manifest control over a neighborhood that is rapidly changing, often without accounting for their needs or desires. ELM youth will have an artistic platform to reclaim the streets by documenting their vision of a safe and unified community.

## Project Activities

*Memorializing and Reimagining Resistance* will entail two workshops, *Digitized Community Archive* and *Modeling Sanctuary through Photography*. It will involve ten ELM youth who will be selected through an application process led by Floyd and me. Floyd and I will create an application that assesses the candidates' commitment, experience, and interest in the topic. We will also conduct virtual interviews during the Spring. ELM is divided into the Little Monsters group (ages 11-13) and the Big Monsters group (ages 14-18). Five Little Monsters and five Big Monsters will be paired together to create a peer-mentor cohort. Curatorial activist practices<sup>12</sup> will inform the aesthetics of the photography exhibit at the 2020 BOS Festival. The display will reach the Festival's diverse audience which comprises of long-time Bushwick residents and newer community members. ELM youth will receive networking preparation in anticipation of the Festival. This will give them the confidence to connect with well-established Bushwick artists and initiate potential partnerships over the weekend. The project will end with a "Reflection-and-Action" session. ELM youth will reflect on the consciousness-raising activities they partook in and brainstorm the next steps they will take to resist gentrification. Their action plan may be derived as a team or individually, but it must be personalized to align with the students' passions and skills.

### I.) *Digitized Community Archive*

The *Digitized Community Archive* will document and preserve Bushwick's history in an online community-based repository. I will facilitate and lead this project. Each pair will follow the Community Archival Collection Curriculum. I have been working with Lorin Jackson (Research and Instruction Resident Librarian at Swarthmore's McCabe Library) to develop the curriculum based on her experience as a youth educator. We have been meeting since November to brainstorm and outline a preliminary curriculum draft. Through the Archival Curriculum, ELM pairs will learn standard archival, interview, and preservation conventions; catalog five to ten photographs; conduct 30-minute oral interviews; catalog five to ten community artifacts; and reformat and digitize all archival content on social media and the Arts in Bushwick website.

*Digitized Community Archive* is a sustainable project. The Archival Curriculum will be recycled by ELM educators in order to continue expanding the collection. The curriculum will also take the form of a zine to make it digestible and appealing to various age groups and ensure that youth are informed on how to preserve the collection. More importantly, the curriculum will allow future generations to embark on their own conscientization journey. ELM will also be able to share the curriculum with other partner community centers, such as El Puente Bushwick Leadership Center, which will widen the scope of the collection's audience. The digitized element of the project will make the archive freely accessible to anyone with internet access, thereby optimizing the visibility of Bushwick's history. Lastly, the youth's control over these platforms will allow them to expand the collection throughout their time in ELM.

### II.) *Modeling Sanctuary through Photography*

Through this workshop, ELM youth will use photography to self-define the community they want to live in and manifest that vision. They will collectively determine the features of an ideal sanctuary community. Each pair will then photograph five spaces or objects in Bushwick that embody their definition of sanctuary and write a gallery caption that explains their creative reasoning. The pairs will work closely with Sen Floyd, who is currently working with them on producing a documentary. Floyd will familiarize them with candid photography conventions and photography editing software. Using a critical curatorial approach that seeks to disrupt dominant discourse, Floyd and I will curate a photography exhibit at the 2020 BOS Festival using the workshop's photographs.

The workshop will be sustainable because the photographs will be memorialized once they are added to the living archive. ELM will also have the needed technological equipment to launch similar projects in the future. Additionally, the exhibit will increase the visibility of local youth attitudes towards gentrification. It will also create opportunities for them to initiate partnerships with older local artists, thus fostering a multigenerational sense of community through the arts.

## Outcome

Peace is attainable when a collective has control over its present and future. However, this relies on an understanding of the past. *Memorializing and Reimagining Resistance* urges Bushwick's Black and Brown youth—a group that is designated to lead the future, but paradoxically prevented from scaffolding its own reality—to monumentalize Bushwick's history as they experience it. In spite of the displacement that residents of color face, Bushwick's youth will model cultural preservation and art practices that challenge harmful hegemonic systems. Building a preliminary community archival collection will invite them to actively partake in constructing their neighborhood's living history. They will also determine the future they want to live in by digitally capturing the moments and spaces that align with their definition of sanctuary. More importantly, conscientious Bushwick youth will decide for themselves how to best disrupt oppressive social infrastructures based on their own passions and skills.