



Fourth and Yuma Street. Geographical Segregation in my College Town
KC Blackgrove and Sherry Haar (mentor)

Black, history, segregation, Exodusters

Design Mentor Statement

The mentor relationship was instructor and student in a pattern-making course with a culminating project to investigate and design garments that reflect an aspect of the program's 150-year history. To meet this purpose, an overview of the historical contexts was provided through presentations and guest speakers. Student's selected a concept and developed a project proposal that included the purpose, concept, historical and current contexts, design ideation, and proposed designs. Following critique, students built more depth to their proposed project, and designs were edited down to three conceptual and three ready-to-wear looks of which one from each market was constructed. Outcomes were integrated into the proposal file that became a digital project booklet for their website. The *Fourth and Yuma Street* project was selected due to the student's in-depth research of black history in the community and the thoughtful process of communicating township segregation through textiles. This is one of the conceptual and limited production looks.

Purpose and Background

The goal of this project was to investigate a historical topic related to our college community. I researched black history with a focus on geographic segregation. While the town and college were open to all and did graduate a black man in 1899 and a black woman in 1901, who was also employed as a professor of Domestic Science, there were many barriers in place within the community and college (African, 2020). After the abolition of slavery, tensions were high in the south leading freed men and women to seek new locations. When the option to migrate to Lagos, Nigeria, proved expensive and deadly, many were drawn to the agricultural states (Painter, 1992). These groups were called Exodusters or Exodites. In 1879, many Exodusters settled on the edge of my college town in what was called 'The Bottoms'; that is, land south of the railroad tracks in low ground near the river (Walton, 2008). Here, the land was less expensive due to low ground flooding and train noise (African, 2020). By the 1900s, the black community expanded north, but with a clear demarcation at Colorado Street with Yuma Street home to several black community establishments (African, 2020). It wasn't until the 1960s that black families lived beyond this defacto border; however, today there remains both the perception and reality of black community beginning at Fourth and Yuma (African, 2020).

Not only did the town have geographical boundaries, but the college had segregated housing. The first college dormitory in 1926 was open to white women students with others living in boarding houses, rooms in private homes, apartments, or fraternities or sororities. While the

college had the first black fraternity west of the Mississippi in 1917, it wasn't until the 1930s that there was designated housing in a group home for black women students (African, 2020).

Primary and secondary education in the town was initially integrated, then changed to segregated classrooms (Walton, 2008). Then black parents asked for a school for black students, taught by black educators, creating the Douglass School which ran up to 1962 and the Brown versus Board Education ruling (Walton, 2008).

While the community was open to black migrants, racism, segregation, racial aggressions, and racial tensions were abundant in the township history (African, 2020; Walton, 2008). Fast forward to the past decade with racially charged tweets, racist notes at the Multicultural Student Center, and accounts of black face, the community and college still have racism to overcome (Svrluga, 2016; William, 2020; Williams, 2021).

Process Statement

To communicate black history through design, I focused on the geographical segregation of the town with themes of separation and exposure. The pants were draped from a textile that was created as an aerial view abstraction of the black and white neighborhoods. The research identified a rich history with many famous black people who lived in 'The Bottoms' (African, 2020). This vibrant history is represented by the multiple colors of fabric blocks that were stitched both above and below the base fabric surface. Separation by the zipper tape represents the railroad tracks with the black communities in 'The Bottoms' and the white above the tracks. The black denim fabric references the toil that the Exodusters went through to reach this location. The open cutouts and minimal draped top in a gold wool crepe with a metal crocheted closure represent the exposure and vulnerability that black people faced socially and economically. My aim as a black student was to deconstruct exposure and separation into something beautiful.

Impact Statement

This project commemorated black history in my college town through the recognition of an emerging community's struggles and successes. The design with a heavy representation of black neighborhoods reiterates the importance of this location to black history. In the current racial climate, this history is a poignant reminder of the distance yet to overcome in race equality.

References

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