Racial Justice and the Urban Humanities
Lead Unit | Taubman College of Architecture & Urban Planning
in partnership with the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and the Digital Studies Institute

Proposal Leads

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Rationale

The Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning as proposal lead, with the enthusiastic support from the Department of AfroAmerican and African Studies (DAAS) and the Digital Studies Institute (DSI), is proposing an anti-racism cluster hire in the urban humanities (especially the "digital urban humanities") that will extend our ongoing efforts to create collaborative models of research, teaching, learning and urban design in and around the Detroit Metropolitan region. At the heart of our cluster hire concept is creating a continuing interdisciplinary framework for the deep interconnection between design, the humanities, and a commitment to Detroit. This interconnection is fundamentally anti-racist in that the struggle for an egalitarian metropolis in Detroit and cities like it requires constant insight, research and action to combat racism as it is literally built into the structure of a "divided metropolis." The cluster hire therefore involves a close partnership between the urban design imagination as represented in Taubman and the defining anti-racist commitment and urban scholarship represented by DAAS and DSI.

The cluster hire proposal is rooted in many ways in the evolution of the Detroit School of Urban Studies, which posits that Detroit and other Detroit-like cities are marked by shrinkage, as opposed to growth, and have deep histories of racism and residential segregation that inform contemporary tensions and patterns of hyper-segregation between the urban core and the surrounding suburban rings. They are also beset by deindustrialization and neoliberal austerity measures, including bankruptcy and emergency managers, while being simultaneously endowed by a host of indigenous resources that foster resistance, resilience and hope.

While racism and the lived realities of nonwhite people in the city have long been central to the Detroit School project, it has been less successful at evolving an explicitly anti-racist perspective and pedagogy, on the one hand, and a sustained relationship with community- based organizations and residents, on the other. We view this anti-racist cluster hire as the logical next step, first, because of the analytical power of the urban humanities as a paradigm for teaching and learning, coupled with a recognition that racism and hypersegregation are part of the way the city is designed; and second, because these hires will be institutionally well situated to bring together the work and insights of multiple adjacent and overlapping initiatives, including the Mellon-funded Egalitarian Metropolis project, the Detroit River Story Lab, and the Carceral State Project.

The Urban Humanities is the driving force of this proposal. It is an emergent field that lives at the intersection of urban planning, urban design and the humanities, especially critical digital studies and the "digital humanities." It aspires to be an action-oriented and place-based humanistic practice for interpreting, reimagining and intervening in the city in egalitarian and anti-racist ways. As one group of practitioners has articulated it, this focus on urban spaces is key precisely because the city is "the social, physical, and political terrain of our collective lives, where we live in geographic proximity to people unlike ourselves, negotiating varied understanding that comprise our coexistence." Such a vision is historically informed even as it unfolds in real-time across the contemporary cityscape. It is both local and global, attuned to transnational flows of people, goods, and capital, and always attentive to modes of diversity, contestation, tension, and cooperation that cities engender.

The Detroit School -- and any attempt to fully understand Detroit and Detroit-like cities -- needs the urban humanities and its emphasis on spatial justice, which seeks to undo the racism instantiated through historical and contemporary structures of power and exclusion. Such an emphasis lends itself to anti-racism as an intellectual framework and as a set of practices that encompass debates about the built environment, the need for a robust narrative infrastructure to support inclusive storytelling and polyvocal description, and a predisposition for activist forms of community-engagement and the co-creation of knowledge.

Indeed, at the heart of our conceptualization of the urban humanities as an anti-racist paradigm that seeks to reverse the effects of decades of racial segregation and marginalization is the rigorous inclusion – and centering – of voices and bodies of urban community members, particularly the Black and nonwhite bodies and voices that have been criminalized and incarcerated, silenced, discarded and undervalued -- even as they have been and remain a vital source of resilience, resistance and justice. We cannot build new, just and inclusive futures without them.

In many ways we have already begun to build a Detroit-focused urban humanities collaboration here at Michigan. The Egalitarian Metropolis grant from the Mellon Foundation has supported a variety of research teams incorporating both Taubman College and LSA faculty members, cross-school postdoctoral fellows, and the evolution of a co-taught course in Taubman College and LSA's Residential College. The grant also provides funding for the Semester in Detroit program's

"Detroiters Speak" series; the Carceral State Project's emphasis on Detroit as a carceral space; as well as the Detroit River Story Lab, which engages in a range of critical narrative (and policy) issues from the historical association of the River and freedom via the Underground Railroad, to downriver histories of Indian removal, and more contemporary struggles with hyper-industrialization, environmental concerns and lived realities of riverfront communities extending from Detroit to Monroe. Equally important is the "Racializing Space in Detroit" research project and proposed exhibition in conjunction with the Detroit Historical Society.

Equally importantly, the Digital Studies Institute is now a nationally established center for doing anti-racism work in the growing interdisciplinary field of critical digital studies. The unit is a home of the ambitious Mellon funded DISCO Project, a national network of researchers, artists, technologists, and practitioners to combat social and racial inequities. In Detroit there is the Taubman ArcPrep program, and the energy and excitement generated by "The Detroit Square" project, which won the 2019 DIA Plaza/Midtown Cultural Connections competition.
As the U-M continues to make plans to reinhabit the Rackham Building we believe that an urban humanities/urban design perspective on anti-racism and spatial justice is essential, particularly given our less than stellar track record with the city.

Central to this perspective and to our anti-racist proposal is "the digital urban humanities." It was through the challenge of researching and mapping the changing racial balances within American cities that digitization first became an integral part of the urban humanities. Recently, more sophisticated mapping applications have supported what is called "thick mapping," i.e., the use of hyperlinks to link particular places on a digital map with a wealth of digitized sources that explain and deepen their significance.

Perhaps more importantly, the recent digitization of extensive urban archival materials has challenged the digital urban humanities to go beyond mapping to utilize the potential of "big data" to uncover seemingly-lost perspectives of Black and other marginalized groups. For example, the Carceral Studies Project has used digitized police records for groundbreaking research to uncover the once-hidden experience of the Black community under a racist Detroit police force. The digital urban humanities more generally now has the opportunity to utilize sources either too obscure or too voluminous for conventional research to reveal previously obscured narratives of marginalized populations. Moreover, the digital revolution in video including such resources as ArcGIS StoryMaps has re-energized narrative techniques to organize this wealth of urban research in ways that are especially effective in presenting anti- racist perspectives.

Not only the Carceral State Project but the Racializing Space in Detroit project and the Detroit River Story Lab referred to above have all made extensive and creative use of the power of digital-based research to address directly such issues as redlining, police brutality, and community building along the Detroit River. We believe that we are only at the beginning of this significant research and pedagogical collaboration between digital studies and the urban humanities. In proposing a 50/50 shared appointment between Taubman and the Digital

Studies Institute (see below) we are building on an already-extensive partnership between the two units including DSI's longstanding commitment to anti-racism as shown in faculty research, curriculum and in the DISCO Network. Pedagogically the collaboration will include Taubman's new undergraduate major in Urban Technology, where it would strengthen that program's focus on the use of "big data" as a tool of inclusivity for citizens marginalized by race.

Other institutions have launched similar efforts and initiatives as they have struggled to make sense of their relationships to, interconnections with and responsibility for racialized urban problems, while searching for creative collaboration with communities and positive ways to intervene. Examples include the CityLab at UCLA, the Urban Humanities Design Initiative at the University of Pennsylvania, and The Divided City urban humanities initiative at Washington University that has sought to address racial segregation and violence in the St. Louis area in the wake of the police killing of Michael Brown and the protests in Ferguson. The University of Michigan's often fraught and complex relationship with Detroit offers similar possibilities, especially as the city is poised to "come back" to a future that must be dramatically different from its past.

We thus see the three proposed hires -- one based in the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies; one based in the Taubman College's programs in urban design and planning; and a 50/50 collaboration between Taubman and the Digital Studies Institute, all described in more detail below -- as a way to expand the gains achieved by the Egalitarian Metropolis project; to set up the University of Michigan to excel in anti-racist research and teaching; and to enhance the University's deep commitment to Detroit and its inclusive recovery.

Sustainability and Impact

This cluster hire in the urban humanities builds on successful anti-racism strategies that humanities units within LSA, DAAS, DSI and the Taubman College have practiced, especially in their initiatives in Detroit. It is also rooted in what we have learned, cumulatively and collaboratively, about research and teaching about Detroit and Detroit-like cities. One major strategy for sustainability is the established track record that we have amassed over the past decade in developing the Detroit School for Urban Studies, the Semester in Detroit program, the DAAS in Action initiative, DSI's DISCO network and the Egalitarian Metropolis Project. These efforts have brought together faculty, graduate students, undergraduates and community-based researchers and activists for mutually beneficial discussions, internships and projects.

This internal strategy is augmented by an external, national one. Spurred by an ambitious initiative by the Mellon Foundation with major grants to Berkeley, UCLA, Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Michigan, we are also part of a national conversation about how the urban humanities can help to create partnerships among urban centers and R1 institution, drawing both from the capacity of the design professions to envision non-racist futures, especially by using advanced techniques of mapping and representation, and from the characteristic strengths of the humanities in crafting complex narratives that undergird identity and a sense of place. What gives the urban humanities its

special relevance to anti-racism is not only its interdisciplinary character but above all the insistence that theory and practice in the humanities incorporate directly the voices and concerns of urban communities.

Hence, both locally and nationally, we are building from strengths, and the Mellon-funded Taubman/LSA "Project on the Egalitarian Metropolis" has been crucial for complementing and supporting already-existing initiatives. Beyond the Detroit School and Semester in Detroit (and the program's "Detroiters Speak" series done in conjunction with Wayne State), the Mellon grant is currently providing funding for the Carceral State Project and the Detroit River Story Lab, both based in LSA. To these the Project the Egalitarian Metropolis has added ArcPrep (a program for Detroit public high school students interested in design); "Racializing Space," a research partnership with the Detroit Historical Museum for an exhibition that would document Detroit's racial transformation; and the interdisciplinary undergraduate course, "The Egalitarian Metropolis." Equally importantly, DSI through a separate Mellon Foundation grant has been an integral part of the national DISCO network (Digital Inquiry Speculation Collaboration Optimism) dedicated to a more equitable and inclusive digital future. In addition to anti-racism focused digital studies, through the Digital Accessible Futures Lab (PI M. Remi Yergeau; LSA English Language and Literature) DSI has achieved a leading position in issues of disability justice, techno-ableism, and anti-racist praxis.

The cluster hire will thus extend existing strengths in design practice and anti-racism scholarship/praxis, and bring these two areas closer through joint appointments and a shared research agenda that pivots around the digital humanities. The proposed positions (see "Search Process" above) are designed to encourage and enhance this cross-school collaboration. We see the structure of these appointments as creating a continuing interdisciplinary framework for the deep interconnection between design, the humanities, digital studies and a commitment to Detroit that, as we note in the Rationale, is at the heart of our cluster hire concept. Across both schools and within the proposed cluster the impact will come from our collective capacity to engage more deeply with the vision of an inclusive, and anti-racist recovery in Detroit, which will create a model for other Detroit-like cities. It will also continue to structure collaborative research projects with community-based partners, continue to enrich the curriculum and for Taubman, DAAS and DSI to bring more focus to the University's offerings in urban studies.

Sustainability & Impact at Taubman

One might sum up the long and varied history of the Taubman College's involvement in Detroit with the observation that Taubman has learned that, for the design imagination to truly combat racism, it must be based on detailed knowledge of Black communities and their struggles in the city, as well as on designers' ability to incorporate community voices in all stages of the design process. In addition Taubman has taken a leadership role nationally in advocating for a more inclusive design profession, including the Equity in Architectural Education Consortium; new Racial and Spatial Justice Fellowships; and participation in a multi-institutional Dean's Equity and Inclusion initiative. Taubman's many Detroit design initiatives range from the design of

affordable housing to the inclusive re-design of the "Museum District" on Woodward Avenue to combatting the "digital divide, and the hires will have a special role and responsibility to better connect these initiatives to the relevant Detroit communities.

In terms of Impact: Taubman College's 5 year DEI plan action items include the decolonization of our curriculum, mentoring our existing faculty with regard to antiracist teaching practices, and making more equitable the policies and practices for new faculty hires. In this way, our proposed hires would bolster an already robust antiracist teaching and learning infrastructure at Taubman College. Curricular offerings particularly relevant to our proposed hires include multi-instructor studios in such areas as Affordable Housing, Sustainable Design, and the newly formed U-M Public Design Corps, a practice-based clinical program offering U-M students the opportunity to engage in socially-driven design with non-profit community organizations in Detroit. The new hire could also choose to team-teach in the interdisciplinary "Egalitarian Metropolis" course and perhaps other Taubman/LSA partnerships.

Sustainability & Impact at DAAS

DAAS is of course not new to anti-racist research, pedagogy and outreach, all of which are part of the unit's rich history of resistance and institutional change. Yet the timing of this hiring opportunity is nonetheless ideal. Building on its historic interdisciplinary strength and anti-racist commitments, the department has just revamped its undergraduate curriculum and identified curricular needs for a stronger focus on community-engaged learning, anti- racism, environmental and social justice issues that respond to students' expressed interests. Key to the new major and minor are a number of "Curricular Themes'' which are intended both to serve as a guide for DAAS Majors and Minors and to provide students with models of how a course of study within DAAS can provide them with essential skills and knowledge for pursuing career opportunities. The "Environmental Studies" and "Law, Politics, and Social Justice" tracks were identified as top priorities because of their anti-racism framework and engaged learning capacity that greatly appeal to DAAS students. Black Urban Studies sits at
the intersecting field of these two tracks, and as such would have a major impact on the growth of the department's undergraduate curricula and enrollments.

At the same time DAAS is currently conducting a search for a Lecturer III position with expertise in community-based learning and Black Gender/Feminist Studies that aims to pursue the work of the Gender Consciousness Project (GCP): a grassroots program housed in DAAS that focuses on gender-based social justice and capacity building, as it teaches young girls to develop agency and build resistance to gender oppression in local high schools. The position will complement the existing strengths of DAAS jointly appointed faculty members working at the intersections of race, urbanism, and Detroit, including: Stephen Ward (DAAS/Residential College): director of the Semester-in-Detroit program and advisor of Urban Studies minor in the Residential College; Damani Partridge (DAAS/Anthropology): teaching capstone AAS 498 "DAAS in Action" course "Filming the Future of Detroit;" Heather Thompson (DAAS/ History/Residential College): Author of Whose Detroit: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City (2001, 2017), co-PI of the Carceral State Project, and teaching DAAS courses on Policing Blackness and the Carceral

system; and Martin Murray (Taubman/DAAS)'s project, "Contested Urbanism of Abandonment," started paving the way for the kind of DAAS-DSI- Taubman collaboration envisioned, often with faculty and students of color at the center. As part of the "Mapping the Egalitarian Metropolis: Spaces of Hope" initiative, this Detroit-based project brings landscape architecture into conversation with the urban humanities. A position in Black Urban Studies informed by an anti-racist pedagogy would further strengthen DAAS commitment to community-based learning, while putting its special focus on Black Urbanism in dialogue with this Taubman-LSA cluster.

Sustainability & Impact at LSA
The College of Literature, Science and the Arts has an under-articulated capacity in teaching, learning and research in fields related to urban studies and a less than optimally organized approach to work in and on Detroit. Through this cluster hire the College hopes to promote more collaborative, connection and synergy. By significantly augmenting our capacity in the urban humanities we see this cluster hire as a way of strengthening this area of our curriculum and further structuring our anti-racist commitments in the city. We currently have a small minor in the Residential College, whose Arts and Ideas in the Humanities program is a possible appointment location for the proposed senior hire based in LSA. The minor helps to support the Semester in Detroit program and many students who do SiD also complete the minor. Since its inaugural semester in Winter 2009 SiD has hosted over three hundred students and established partnerships with over 60 organizations based in Detroit, including a growing partnership with the General Baker Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to building leadership capacity and anti-racist activism among Detroiters. Expanding the visibility of the minor in relation to other programs and initiatives would be impactful for our students, and for a variety of programs—especially the Carceral State Project, based in History and DAAS and the Detroit River Story Lab, based in English.

All of these programs, projects and initiatives represent a "humanities in action" and engaged liberal arts approach to teaching, learning and research often rooted in intergenerational labs more common to the sciences and professional schools. Building them within the humanities represents a significant departure from what has long been the norm and places the College at the forefront of efforts to rethink the humanities for the 21st century. This is part of the commitment motivating our support for the Humanities Collaboratory, which has been promoting these sorts of faculty-led projects. It is also a hallmark of the recently founded Center for Social Solutions, led by Professor Earl Lewis, who is the PI on "Crafting Democratic Futures: Situating Colleges and Universities in Community-based Reparations Solutions," funded by the Mellon Foundation's Just Futures Initiative. We also anticipate that the cluster hire will help to augment the parts of the LSA Race & Ethnicity Requirement that are rooted in place-based coursework and community-engagement, which we articulated as a goal in our DEI plan. Providing additional resources to DAAS in ways that honor its historic role in anti-racist activism and engagement on our campus and beyond is also of significant value for LSA and the U-M in general. It's frankly hard to imagine a serious anti-racist hiring initiative without the presence of this unit.

Finally we expect that all three members of the cluster hire will work together across LSA and Taubman to advance the long term curricular implications of the urban humanities. This exploration has already begun with the interdisciplinary course "The Egalitarian Metropolis," team-taught for the first time in Winter 2021 by Professors Dillard and Fishman and now by Professor Fishman and Visiting Professor Vincent Carducci and intended as a model of engaging undergraduates with the urban humanities and with Detroit. But the urban humanities implies a more fundamental change in curriculum than a single course, and our expectation is that the members of the cluster hire will become leaders in bringing not only DAAS, DSI and Taubman closer together, but in showing how anti-racism and the urban humanities can become the ethical core of programs of study that bring together the "silos" that conventional academic practice has kept apart.

Sustainability & Impact at the Digital Studies Institute

DSI has sought since its founding to be an integral part of anti-racist initiatives both on this campus and nationally. Although our roster of affiliated faculty already includes many of the most outstanding humanities scholars and urbanists at the University of Michigan, a shared new appointment with Taubman with a specific focus on anti-racism and "the digital urban humanities" will strengthen both our research and our praxis in this vital area. The new hire will be directly engaged with colleagues at Taubman on researching and combatting structural racism as it is literally built into the very design of Detroit and Detroit-like cities. They will also connect directly with "big data" urban research conducted at Taubman and LSA with the specific aim of utilizing advanced digital methodologies to uncover the hidden voices and concerns of marginalized groups who are underrepresented even in the conventional historical record. Finally the new hire will also engage with colleagues in the humanities who are striving to open up narrative conventions to multiple voices and perspectives. As stated above, we expect that these interdisciplinary concerns will also promote a transformed pedagogy that rises to the challenges of teaching the digital urban humanities. This position will also strengthen the existing connection between Taubman and the DSI, and between LSA units, in providing a critical mass across Michigan to support anti-racist faculty and student collaborations, hiring and retention.