DOES A PLANNED CITY MEAN A SEGREGATED CITY? COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN BELO HORIZONTE AND CHICAGO

CIDADE PLANEJADA SIGNIFICA CIDADE SEGREGADA? ESTUDO COMPARATIVO ENTRE BELO HORIZONTE E CHICAGO

¿UNA CIUDAD PLANIFICADA SIGNIFICA UNA CIUDAD SEGREGADA? UN ESTUDIO COMPARATIVO ENTRE BELO HORIZONTE Y CHICAGO

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Abstract:
This article offers a comparative analysis of Belo Horizonte (Brazil) and Chicago (USA), two cities planned at the turn of the twentieth century. Engaging in dialogue between Katherine McKittrick's work on the *Black sense of place* and Beatriz Nascimento's conceptualization of the *quilombo* as a social and spatial structure of Black resistance, the study examines how modernist urban planning practices fostered projects of racial segregation in contexts that are distinct yet structurally connected through hegemonic modes of space production. The analysis unfolds through three interconnected topics: first, an examination of the ideals of progress embedded in the planning of these cities; second, an exploration of how such projects reinforced dynamics of dispossession and subordination of Black populations; and third, a discussion of forms of Black resistance through *aquilombamento* processes, which enable understandings of a Black sense of place beyond the frame of violence. We conclude that a critical reading of the parallel processes of black spatial production in the Americas points to the possibility of existence beyond urban expropriation, racial violence and continual threats to freedom.

Keywords: Belo Horizonte, Chicago, black sense of place, quilombos, urban planning

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Resumo:
O artigo propõe uma análise comparativa entre Belo Horizonte (Brasil) e Chicago (EUA), ambas planejadas no final do século XIX. A partir do diálogo entre os estudos de Katherine McKittrick acerca de um sentido negro de lugar (black sense of place), e de Beatriz Nascimento, que trata do conceito de quilombo como estrutura social e espacial de resistência negra, investiga-se como práticas de planejamento urbano modernistas contribuíram para a materialização de projetos de segregação racial em contextos distintos, mas estruturalmente conectados por práticas hegemônicas. A pesquisa se desdobra a partir de três tópicos: o primeiro, que examina os ideais de progresso associados às cidades planejadas; o segundo, que evidencia como esses projetos reforçaram dinâmicas de expropriação e segregação de populações negras; e o terceiro, que discute formas de resistência negra por meio de processos de aquilombamento, que permitem a compreensão de um sentido negro de lugar, para além da violência. Concluímos que uma leitura crítica de histórias paralelas da produção espacial negra nas Américas aponta para a possibilidade de existências para além da expropriação urbana, violência racial e ameaças contínuas à liberdade.

Palavras-chave: Belo Horizonte, Chicago, sentido negro de lugar, quilombos, planejamento urbano

Résumé / Resumen:
El artículo propone un análisis comparativo entre Belo Horizonte (Brasil) y Chicago (Estados Unidos), ambas ciudades planificadas a finales del siglo XIX. A partir del diálogo entre los estudios de Katherine McKittrick sobre un sentido negro del lugar (*black sense of place*) y el concepto de quilombo desarrollado por Beatriz Nascimento como una estructura social y espacial de resistencia negra, se investiga cómo las prácticas de planificación urbana modernista contribuyeron a la materialización de proyectos de segregación racial en contextos distintos, pero estructuralmente conectados por prácticas hegemónicas. La investigación se desarrolla en torno a tres ejes: el primero examina los ideales de progreso asociados a las ciudades planificadas; el segundo evidencia cómo estos proyectos reforzaron dinámicas de expropiación y segregación de las poblaciones negras; y el tercero discute formas de resistencia negra a través de procesos de *aquilombamiento*, que permiten comprender un sentido negro del lugar más allá de la violencia. Se concluye que una lectura crítica de historias paralelas de la

producción espacial negra en las Américas señala la posibilidad de existencias más allá de la expropiación urbana, la violencia racial y las amenazas continuas a la libertad.

Palabras-clave: Belo Horizonte, Chicago, sentido negro del lugar, quilombos, planificación urbana

Introduction

According to Galés and Robinson (2024), the resurgence of comparative urban studies took place at the beginning of this millennium, when globalization processes intensified and, as a result, interdependence between disparate geographies grew. This enabled advancements in the field of comparative urban studies that analyze commonalities in spatiotemporal processes, breaking the bounds of conventional comparison that focuses on spatial conditions and outcomes. This article contributes to this new wave in comparative urban research as it stems from our observations of similar processes of segregated space production as an urban planning tool in two turn-of-the-century planned cities—Chicago (USA) and Belo Horizonte (Brazil).

It is necessary to recognize the distinctions between social, economic, political, and geographic realities between the two cities. Chicago is situated in the Global North and Belo Horizonte is in the Global South. In addition, the initial planning of the cities differed - Chicago emerged as an industrial metropolis while Belo Horizonte was founded to be an administrative capital. Furthermore, the population differences should be noted, Chicago having a population of 1.7 million people and Belo Horizonte with little more than 10 thousand. The Black populations in both cities also differed, with Brazil receiving 5.5 million enslaved people while the United States received around 450,000. This data reflects the distinct dynamics within which Chicago and Belo Horizonte were and are inserted.

Nonetheless, via a historiographic analysis, it is also possible to compare processes that both cities share, in order to offer new perspectives for the comprehension of similar historical and contemporary sociospatial relations.

This identification was facilitated by the recognition of the historic and contemporary potential of the black population in both cities. Chicago received thousands of black people throughout the 19th century as part of the Great Migration (the exodus of thousands of black people from the south of the country in search of better living conditions in the north), today representing 30% of the population of the city, making it the second largest black population in the US, following New York (US Census, 2024). Belo Horizonte follows national patterns in Brazil, with 56% of the population self-identifying as black (IBGE, 2022). This proportion is directly tied to slavery, as Minas Gerais (the state within which Belo Horizonte is located) was one of the states that received the largest number of enslaved people in the country.

Beyond the data presented, this article recognizes the role of urban planning models that came from, notably, Chicago from the turn-of-the-century until the 1940s, which cater to hegemonic interests and, consequently, segregate the black population. These plans had a strong global influence, including in Belo Horizonte.

In parallel, we identify that since the 20th century, there have been studies which identify urban planning as a tool of segregation, including at the Chicago School, as well as models developed by Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Homey Hoyt (Machado, 2019). However, these studies indicate the potential of planning tools to segregate, but they do not point to the racial bias present in these management instruments. When they do, they highlight the

existence of the Black population in a predominantly violent position.

Departing from this presumption, the objective of this work is to discuss the convergences between the emergence of the two planned city at the end of the 19th century as a form of implementing racialized socio-spatial segregation, but also, highlighting the role of black resistance, beyond the violent relations that the black population was exposed to, thus disobeying traditional narratives.

Therefore, the article proposes a dialogue between the theory of two black researchers, the Canadian geographer Katherine McKittrick and the Brazilian historian Beatriz Nascimento. Based on their studies about black sense of place (McKittrick, 2011) and the concept of quilombo as a social and spatial structure of black resistance (Nascimento, 2021), we seek to blacken the processes within, despite, and beyond urban planning. The identification of moments of convergence of spatial production throughout history, even while recognizing their differences in opposite hemispheres, serves as the departure point for this analysis.

Methodological procedures

This article mobilizes emerging trends in comparative urban studies to offer alternative perspectives about black life in urban space (Simone, 2024; Jones and Rogers, 2024; Maloutas, 2024). We present three topics in chronological order to understand these urban conditions: first, the hegemonic urban planning practices that were used at the turn-of-the-century to build cities that were symbols of modern progress; second, the ways that these urban planning practices aided in the process of capitalist domination via codification of racial segregation; and, third, contemporary instances

of black spatial production that resist the violences enacted by these modernist planning practices.

The distinguishing contribution of this article is to place prominent theories from two black women scholars - Katherine McKittrick and Beatriz Nascimento - in dialogue in order to build a new lens with which to articulate realities of black life that point towards possibilities of existence, beyond suffering, violence and death. This articulation follows Beatriz Nascimento's goal to build historical continuity (Ratts, 2011), which shows how organized black resistance during slavery connects to contemporary forms of resistance. More abstract than terms borrowed from anthropology such as “survival” or “cultural resistance”, the author argues that historical continuity more appropriately describes the black experience of union throughout centuries of domination and oppression. This directly reflects McKittrick’s guiding question to her article that defines black sense of place: “In what ways are the historical precedents of anti-black violence in the Americas spatial and linked to our present geographic organization?” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 948). This practice of tracing patterns through history guides our paper.

The article focuses on the years following the Industrial Revolution and abolition across the Americas, a period during which urban planning became a mechanism to materialize ideals of progress, effectively translating core principles of capitalism into physical space (Silva, 2020). The two American cities studied - Belo Horizonte and Chicago — are prime examples of this period as they underwent planning processes that represented the modernist architectural vanguard of the time, materialized both in their orthogonal urban layouts and in the projects of world-renowned

architects such as Oscar Niemeyer in Belo Horizonte and Mies van der Rohe in Chicago.

While this could serve as the starting point for the comparison; our aim is instead to disorient this conventional telling of the spatial development of these cities, this first topic, instead revisiting the historical context that informed early urban planning decisions. The intention is to move beyond this dominant first topic and investigate the second and third topics, opening up a discussion about how modernist planning, based in capitalist relations, especially private property, established the racialization of space and how the impacts of these policies have affected and continue to affect socio-spatial dynamics in both cities, specifically black sense of place (McKittrick, 2011) and aquilombamento (the process of making and sustaining a quilombo) (Nascimento, 2021).

The three topics first engaged when modernist planning was implemented in Belo Horizonte and Chicago—the former in 1897 and the latter in 1893. We begin with the context in which both cities emerged, shortly following the abolition of slavery. In the United States, abolition was officially enacted in 1865, and twenty three years later Brazil followed suit, extinguishing, at least officially, the relations of captivity to which the black population was subjected. In parallel to this historical period, the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the Illuminist ideals, which began in the second half of the 18th century in Europe, influenced urban decisions in the Americas (Nascimento, 2021). Belo Horizonte and Chicago both emerged from these republican ideals, materializing the possibilities that modernist vanguards offered for the future of cities. These same ideals were forged through the construction of a modern mindset (McKittrick, 2013; Bledsoe, 2015; Silva, 2022), in which social

existence is validated through a white, European-centered understanding of humanity. Therefore, the modern planned city can be understood as the spatial materialization of this human referential. Given this social standard, we raise an initial provocation: what was the role of the black population in these socio-spatial relationships?

To validate the analytical lens, we leverage Santos (2012), who argues that it is possible to suppose that the foundation of the urban changes during the post-abolition modern era was centuries of racial violence legitimized by the slaveholding relations that had until then governed colonial social, political, and economic dynamics. This duality guides the study - on one hand, the design of two planned cities to be symbols of a new era, and, on the other, the indispensability of racialized relations in the formation of hegemonic and subjugated spatialities.

Based on this presented dialectic, this paper aims to discuss the relationship between the production of racialized socio-spatial segregation and the construction of planned cities, in order to analyze how global relationships of expropriation and subjugation—established between white and black people—underpinned the emergence of these new spatialities. First, we describe the theoretical foundation of the article - building a dialogue between McKittrick's theory of black sense of place and Beatriz Nascimento's theory of aquilombamento. Then, we set out to the discussion of the three narratives, beginning with a description of the urban planning practices that underscored the development of Chicago and Belo Horizonte (first topic), then discuss the ways in which these practices resulted in racial segregation in both cities (second topic), and finally, present two instances of spatial resistance that build the case

for a critical black geography rooted in the two theories discussed (third topic). These studies are part of research of the authors and can show evidence of empirical form of the arguments presented. We conclude with suggestions for future research, specifically those that relate the impacts of these processes to contemporary socio-spatial dynamics.

The article contributes to the academic literature by comparing a rarely-studied connection between the process of spatialized racial dispossession and resistance in two turn-of-the-century planned cities. The article examines the construction of Belo Horizonte and Chicago to reveal how power relations can be understood from two seemingly distinct perspectives that ultimately converge toward the same socio-political and economic reality: the annihilation of a black sense of place for benefit of hegemonic interests. Therefore, this analysis aligns with the approach of Galés and Robinson (2024), as it moves away from classical urban comparison and aims to emphasize the impact of global relations on urban dynamics. Revisiting city planning at the end of the 19th century may be a way of rethinking how the concept of globalization can be expanded to establish a permeable weave between colonial and contemporary relationships.

We draw insights regarding the following question: how does a comparative study of sites of resistance, or an expanded understanding of aquilombamento, in the legacy of two turn of the century planned cities in the Americas, contribute to the transnational dialogue about black sense of place? The understanding of processes of aquilombamento as a way to produce spacialities in the face of state-sanctioned expropriation, exclusion and segregation in Chicago and Belo Horizonte can provide

productive insights on the emergence of a geography of blackness rooted in life rather than suffering (McKittrick, 2011).

Black sense of place and quilombo

Black sense of place is a concept that has been mobilized by many scholars to discuss the interrelated nature of blackness and geography (Evans, 2025; Bledsoe e Cirqueira, 2023). Katherine McKittrick (2011) defines this concept as "the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter" (p. 949). She continues, "that which 'structures' a black sense of place are the knotted diasporic tenets of coloniality, dehumanization, and resistance" (p. 949). Her text on black sense of place is motivated by her preoccupation that analyses of racial violence are focused on a paradoxical preoccupation with the suffering/violated black body and the denial of a black sense of place.

McKittrick's (2011) response to this preoccupation is that black sense of place can't be defined only by violence; to the contrary, it is the interconnection between race, place, and violence that point to other categories that compose this sense. The author points to the necessity to revisit historic processes where "our racial pasts can uncover a collective history of encounter—a difficult interrelatedness—that promises an ethical analytics of race based not on suffering, but on human life" (p. 948). The difficulty in this inter-relation lies precisely in the actions of hegemonic forces, preventing black self-determination and relegating this existence to a position of subordination. But this existence also cannot be summarized, to the contrary, the resistance to hegemonic processes

is what qualified blackness. Mckittrick (2013) advances this analytical possibility, affirming that:

> This black urban presence—black life—uncovers a mode of being human that, while often cast out from official history, is not victimized and dispossessed and wholly alien to the land; rather, it redefines the terms of who and what we are vis-à-vis a cosmogony that, while painful, does not seek to inhabit a location closer to that of "the fittest" but instead honors our mutually constitutive and relational versions of humanness. (p. 12)

The possibility to see black existence in the production of urban spatialities, beyond violations, brings us to the analysis of collective analytical experiences that can point to the complexity of a black sense of place and, consequently, its presence as a fissure of hegemonic processes. Maroons in Jamaica and Colombian Palenques are examples of these movements that have existed since the 16th century in the Caribbean and in Latin America, respectively (Nascimento, 2021). Similar to these, Brazilian quilombos are secular instances of organized social form that problematizes hegemonic spatial production. Analyzing the manifestations of black sense of place from an aquilombamento lens can be a pathway to complicate the concept and see sociospatial fissures in Belo Horizonte and Chicago, as collective black experience is woven together from the same point of origin as resistance - both ancestral and African.

Beatriz Nascimento (Nascimento, 2021) conceives the quilombo as an alternative social system that permits black existence to act in a collective form, beyond the hegemonic processes that create, in our case, urban processes. According to the author, since the 19th century the concept of quilombo in Brazil was an

ideological booster that performs the "fundamental role of embodying the historic conscience of black people" (p. 112).[1] This black consciousness, just like the influence of African heritage, establishes a group cohesion and acts as a mechanism of racial and cultural affirmation (Nascimento, 2011). Additionally, the term quilombo comes from the Angolan Bantu word, quimbundo, which means "union". The author argues that the ongoing processes that make quilombos create a sense of unity that emerges in resistance to the erasures promoted by the historic and ongoing violences erasures perpetrated against black people. It offers a possibility to glimpse the historical continuity between past, present and future generations of black Brazilians. Thus, from this historic union prompted by quilombos, it's possible to see emancipatory black processes in spatial production.

If capitalism encourages individuality, then quilombismo, a term coined by Abias do Nascimento (Nascimento, A. 2019), proposes collectivism as a path towards black emancipation. The quilombo, in this sense, acts to promote freedom in the face of an interconnected system of domination (hooks, 2022) that encloses a black sense of place. This freedom can be understood as a possibility of sociospatial reorganization.

This idea of organization is key to Beatriz Nascimento's conception of aquilombamento - the quilombo is a type of social organization, which has a long history of cultural, economic, and agricultural practices. The core of the author's theoretical thrust is that conventionally, quilombo are defined purely as a space of war, of escape, and of flight. However, she goes to prove that a

[1] This and all other non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the authors.

comprehensive vision of the quilombo is one that highlights periods of peace, a structure that illuminates paths towards alternative, emancipatory forms of social organization that reject white, capitalist, colonial society. She argues that white fear is not a fear of armed conflict, but of quilombo peace where social and economic relations were maintained within and outside the territories, where people can practice freedom. In other words, her approach highlights these spaces as alternative constructions of community-based spaces, whose historic and political character point towards a spatial continuity, which, according to her, can be considered a threat to hegemonies (Ratts, 2007). Thus, the quilombo must be both understood in its roots as a place that responds to the violence of slavery as well as one that embodies alternatives for societal organization.

Additionally, the author amplifies the concept of quilombo for the black body itself - an existential territory that acts as fissures or escape routes from a stiff process, whether colonial or modern (Nascimento, 2021). This amplification holds both of those definitions at once and at the same time is connected to the core of McKittrick's theory.

From this theoretical construction, we identify socio-spatial fissures in the planned city, via processes of aquilombamento, or the formation of community-based spaces, which in the past were quilombos and in modern day have been amplified to other spaces of black socialization, being used in the metaphorical sense for spaces of black continuity, grouping, collectivity and freedom. Thus, we depart from the assumption that as Belo Horizonte and Chicago design urban space that hinders black social action, the resistance of these relations also exists in planning.

In the subsequent sections, we describe the three topics proposed at the beginning of the article - first returning to the urban planning history that created the historic and contemporary conditions black communities face in order to then present two case studies of aquilombamento processes as affirmations of black sense of place.

First topic: the planned city as symbol of modern ideals

The year that marks the beginning of the connection between Chicago and Belo Horizonte for this purpose of this article is 1893, the year that the elites of the Brazilian state, Minas Gerais, began drawing up plans to build a new capital city. They aimed to depart from their colonial past, embodied by the capital at the time, Ouro Preto, a Portuguese outpost built along a mining route high in the hills. The city was a dead-end—both literally and figuratively—its colonial urban morphology (Vieira, 2016, p. 16) shaping a landscape marked by a slaveholding past. All roads that led to Ouro Preto ended in a small collection of cobblestone streets, tight blocks, and colonial politics. Turning to the future, local Brazilian elites wanted to propel their state into the twentieth century as a "commercial emporium, industrial center, and an intellectual sanctuary" (Congresso, p. 88). After years of political debate, they selected a valley in the center of the state, the home of the Curral del Rey community, as the future site of their new capital. With funds secured and the Construction Commission of the New Capital or CCNC (Comissão Construtora da Nova Capital) set up as the decision-making body, the proponents started looking for a precedent to model their growth.

At the end of the 19th century and 5,000 miles north, Chicago was one of the fastest growing metropolises in the world. Chicago's

key location on the bank of Lake Michigan, one of the world's largest supplies of freshwater and frontier of American westward expansion, proved it an ideal doorway to the future. Chicago was the second largest city in the US, thanks to a surge of migrants who were powering its factories, slaughterhouses, meatpacking warehouses, iron mills and cement factories. The Chicago Board of Trade introduced various instruments to incentivize this growth, especially a new urban grid that arose from recovery efforts after the widespread 1871 fire, laying the groundwork for a robust real estate economy (Cronon, 1991). These factors made Chicago the heart of the largest railroad hub between the east and west coasts of North America, connecting disparate rural regions as well as attracting millions of immigrants from Europe and Asia, as well as freed black people fleeing racial violence, Jim Crow Laws oppression, and lack of opportunity in the American South. Rapidly, the city became a symbol of progress, innovation, and the heart of turn-of-the-century capitalism.

Chicago's rapidly growing global fame was emboldened by its launch of the Columbian World's Exposition in 1893. Chicago unabashedly took advantage of this opportunity to host a lavish display of the newest technologies and architectural styles from across the world. Housed in by a strict neoclassical architectural arrangement designed by budding urban planner Daniel Burnham, the fair exported Chicago's image of prosperity, resilience, and progress to the world. Historian William Cronon wrote, "[Chicagoans] would suggest that their own city was itself the fulfillment of a destiny that Columbus had long ago set in motion," (991, p. 341) and, "the Columbian Exposition stood as a remarkably self-assured reminder that the nineteenth century was, after all, the

greatest era of civilized progress the world had ever seen (ibid, p. 342). The world took note, especially Brazilian elites.

Thus, in designing Belo Horizonte, the new capital of Minas Gerais, the CCNC conformed with conventional plans, adopting urban design standards from Paris (designed by Baron George Haussmann in 1860) and Washington DC (designed by Charles L'Enfant in 1790) as signs of progress, control, and wealth. This style of urban planning was marketing by right angled streets, superimposed with large, diagonal processional avenues that approach strategic sites, including government buildings and monuments (Adelman, 1974, p. 53). Chicago was the contemporary manifestation of the ideals embodied by these older cities, their more relevant younger sibling. Chicago transplanted the right angled gridiron onto the American Midwestern geographic context and layered in new systems of industrial capital, a massive rail network, and political structures to ensure the maintenance of power in the hands of the industrial elite. Chicago represented the adoption of turn-of-the-century design ideals in a geographic and political context that the local Brazilian elites could more easily relate to than the Parisian and Washington predecessors. As Saba writes, "Chicago, more so than any other American city, dazzled the Brazilian observers" (2021, p. 211). Harnessing this moment of modernist opportunity, the local elites dreamed their city to be ranked with the greats and, inspired by Chicago, embarked to design the city as such.

Second topic: the planned city as a segregated city

The parallels between Chicago and Belo Horizonte in the second topic demonstrate how the turn-of-the-century Brazilian and

American city-building projects created segregated cities. In both Belo Horizonte and Chicago at this time, new political conditions began to arise amidst massive social change emerging from the abolition of slavery that occurred a short time prior. Brazil, the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery, freed 700,000 Afro-Brazilians in 1888, two decades after the end of the American Civil War in 1865 and one decade after the end of American Reconstruction in 1877. This historical moment in both the United States and Brazil saw massive potential to restructure economic and social systems with the dissolution of slavery.

The abolition of slavery in Brazil was intentionally crafted by a network of cosmopolitan antislavery reformers to transition Brazil to free labor in order to boost capitalist development in both the US and Brazil. Roberto Saba investigates this period in his book *American Mirror* (2021), where he poignantly notes that, "neither of these two societies was caught off guard. On the contrary, as slavery unraveled in the western hemisphere, Americans and Brazilians came together to stimulate and direct this transformation" (p. 2). He continues, "For these reformers, antislavery wasn't a romantic quest to free an oppressed race; it was rather a modernizing project that would build strong nation-states and prosperous capitalist economies" (2021, p. 3). In both countries, the tools of private property and free labor were used to codify racial segregation in the name of capitalism progress.

Thus, it's clear why, in Brazil the republic proclamation in 1889 was marked by the abolition of slavery, which, similar to the US, didn't change much for Afro-Brazilians. Minas Gerais, (literally "General Mines") colonized by the Portuguese after a 1690s gold rush, was built primarily by enslaved Africans, thus the economic

and physical landscapes were deeply intertwined with slavery. At the time of creating new, post-slavery narratives for Minas Gerais, boosters pushed policies that would encourage economic progress through mining and agriculture. However, as Pereira writes,

> [...] the proposed 'mining modernization' by the local liberals did not break completely with the colonial tradition – therefore, it did not break with the political and ideological values that sustained the dynamics of a slave-based society (2019, p. 22).

Belo Horizonte's modern plan was intended to "supplant the colonial past - not necessarily the slave-holding past - but the State in order to build a republican future" (McDonald, 2019, p. 2). In other words, the planned city would symbolize the new republic, imbued with political, economic, and social ideals driven by a white elite rooted in a slaveholding society.

If enslavement had established a black sense of place tied to expropriation, subordination, and violence, the same elite—whose legacy was built on slavery—would not relinquish its privileges and radically transform social relations. To the contrary, the planned city materialized a new yet simultaneously old pact (Bento, 2022), *the white pact*, that situated black existence as "the ontological anchor for the project of the modern world" (Bledsoe, 2015, p. 328).

How did this new pact materialize in Chicago and Belo Horizonte to perpetuate racial dispossession? To guide this historical analysis we return to Beatriz Nascimento's framework of historical continuity and McKittrick's objective to connect black geographic histories. These theories prompt the possibility to draw connections between how the processes of planning and implementing two cities carry raciality as an intrinsic condition of their spatial formation. City planning in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the

Americas was shaped by the broader social, economic, and political conditions of the time. Understanding the connection between the urban planning trends implemented in Chicago and Belo Horizonte reveals how the emergence of private property in these cities—designed to be models of modern capitalist innovation—reinforced racial segregation during the significant shift from colonial societies to industrialized, market-driven economies. This responds to McKittrick's (2011) call to study the "difficult encounters of racial encounter" (p. 949). The historical ties between Chicago and Belo Horizonte are deeply rooted in similar processes of modernist urban planning that reinforced racial segregation and produced distinct black senses of place.

The images below depict the urban planning blueprints of Chicago and Belo Horizonte. Analyzing them allows us to ask: where would black people be located in these cartographies—on or off the grid? This analysis does not claim that the Black population is always outside the urban fabric, but rather that planning is implicated in hegemonic processes that foster segregation. Urban design establishes who is included and who is excluded from the dynamics of new cities. In other words, it acts as a new tool of spatial colonization, delineating those who are "with" or inside—the ones who enjoy the ontological condition of freedom (McKittrick, 2011, p. 950)—and those who are "without" or outside, consequently becoming objectified bodies. That said, the maps below exemplify how the urban grid, implemented during these urban planning processes, was used as a mechanism for controlling space with the aim of segregating the Black population. "Outside" does not necessarily mean outside the planned area, but rather excluded from the free use and appropriation of space. As described in more detail

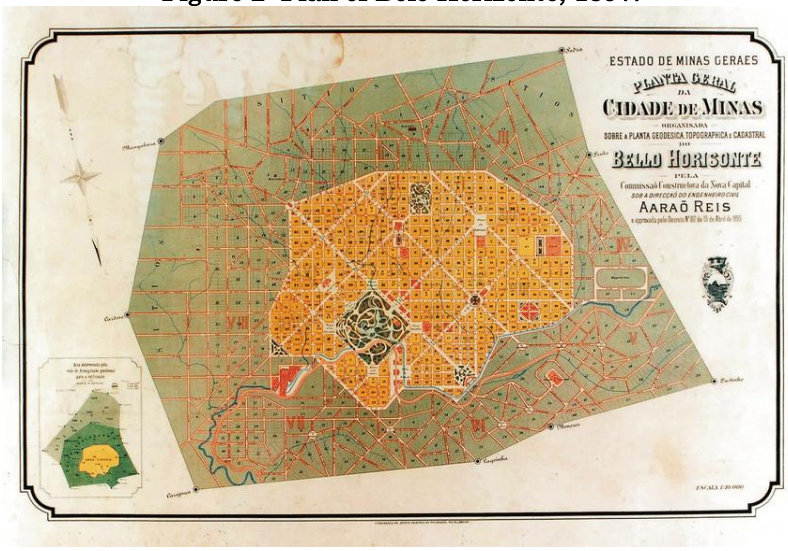
below, in Chicago the Black population was relegated to a zone within the urban grid, while in Belo Horizonte the Black population was expelled to regions "outside" the planned center. The point is that while the physical location in relation to formal planning varies between the two cases, these planning practices comes from the same roots and have the same results: the brutal segregation and exclusion of the Black population.

Figure 1: Plan of Chicago, 1909.



Source: Chicago Architecture Center

Figure 2: Plan of Belo Horizonte, 1897.



Source: Public Archive of the City of Belo Horizonte

To describe these practices of segregation in the modern planned city, we use McKittrick's term *urbicide* to describe these tools. McKittrick defines urbicide as "the deliberate death of the city and wilful place annihilation" (2011, p. 951). This lens makes possible the analysis of "sites of environmental, social, and infrastructural deterioration and geographic surveillance that demarcate many black geographies and their inhabitants" (p. 951). Based on this conception, it is possible to see the planned city as an impossibility of Black existence via the delimitation of racialized spaces. Therefore, the urbicide can be understood as an urban planning strategy to violently act against black sense of place.

The first of these we call the erasure of black existence (McKittrick, 2011). In the case of Belo Horizonte, approximately 70% of the population that lived in the previous community, Curral Del Rey, was black (Pereira, 2019, Silva, 2020). In order to construct the new Mineira capital, there were expulsions and removals of black communities whose processes have been unveiled in various

historiographic research projects (Pereira, 2019; Silva, 2020; Musa, 2022; Dias, 2023), which point to the the violence perpetrated by the State in order to remove black existence during the construction of the city.

In Chicago, a parallel process of urbicide was being implemented in the form of urban renewal, a state-sponsored series of slum clearance programs that spanned the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century and, arguably, to modern day. These projects were meant to "safeguard the value of business centers and property tax bases while providing more modern structures" (Chicago Public Library, 2022). However, often these projects resulted in mass displacement of black people, as infrastructure and housing projects razed existing neighborhoods, according to the Digital Scholarship Lab's data from 1950 to 1966 (Digital Scholarship Lab, 2021). One University of Chicago chancellor was quoted saying that the urban renewal projects would be a way of "cutting down the number of negroes" (Hirsch, p. 153). Nationwide, while black people in 1960 comprised just 13% of the total population, they made up 55% of the population of those displaced. Author James Baldwin summarized this practice, coining the phrase, "*urban renewal is negro removal*".

These are the possibilities of applying the idea of urbicide practices (McKittrick, 2011) which act "through the razing of specific black communities, homes, buildings, and sacred sites" (p. 952). Even though being distinct places, these urban processes "go hand in hand with imperialism, violence, and economic, racial, and ethnic terror, while also hinging on specificities: scale, region, economy, place, and how each destructive force is delivered, all matter" (p. 952).

A second strategy of codifying racial segregation can be understood as processes of spatial delimitation. The emergence of the

planned city at the end of the 19th century and its development during the beginning of the 20th century systematically established the position of black bodies, inserted in segregated spaces as much as in the "official" or "planned" or "formal" city as labor, maintaining relations of subordination tracing back to slavery. These relations can be identified based on the planning tools implemented in that time period. Bustamante (2023) analyses these actions in Belo Horizonte, applying a racial lens to earlier urban studies in order to reveal how raciality can explain political decision-making. One example is the emergence of the Concórdia neighborhood.

In 1902, municipal decrees were issued (Lima, 2009) to encourage the densification of central areas of the city by workers who would serve the demands of the elite at the time. This region, called the 8th suburban zone, was occupied by a proletarian population, from which labor was extracted in a process of labor expropriation. It is possible to guess who the people were who occupy this urban area. Then, in 1928, new municipal decrees were issued (Lima, 2009) authorizing the eviction of the population that had settled there for some years, relocating them to pericentral areas, in this case, to the Villa Operária Concórdia (Concordia worker's village), located approximately one kilometer from the urban grid. These actions were driven by economic pressure from real estate speculation, which demanded central areas in the rapidly developing city. A new way of managing black bodies was being implemented. Whereas previously their labor had been extracted, now their bodies and homes were deemed undesirable and removed from the urban landscape. These actions align with hygienist policies that underpinned decision-making in various parts of the country (Farias Filho; Alvim, 2022). The urban policies described here demonstrate

how the violation of a black sense of place is tied to a "political economy of bodies" (Mbembe, 2021, p.16), in which black existence is directed to serve hegemonic demands.

In Chicago, a similar dynamic is visible in *redlining*. In response to the decline in homeownership due to the Great Depression in the late 1920s, the National Housing Act of 1934 created the Federal Housing Initiative (FHA). The FHA implemented a series of programs to boost homeownership, specifically single-family homes. The FHA's affiliate agency, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) created a series of maps to codify real estate appraisal values based on racial categories, with white Europeans being more desirable and less risky and "Negroes and Mexicans" as the least desirable and highest risk. These maps were used by banks to determine where to give FHA homeownership loans, a process called "*redlining*". They were one of many tools that reinforced racial segregation at a time when racial segregation was still sanctioned by law. *Redlining* was officially made illegal as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, however multiple studies show that redlining continued past this date and residential discrimination based on race persists in Chicago (Lutton, Fan & Loury, 2020).

The practice of *redlining* is exemplified by the neighborhood of North Lawndale on Chicago's west side. This neighborhood was predominantly Jewish with 65,000 Jews in 1946 (Cutler, 1996). However, with the practice of *redlining* that incentivized '*white flight*' or the out-migration of white residents to the suburbs incentivized by home loans from the HOLC, by 1960, 91% of the residents in North Lawndale were black.

Comparing these two processes illuminates the violated black body, subjected to state-sponsored dispossession. However, following

Beatriz Nascimento and McKittrick, the intention of this article is not to stall at this conclusion, rather to advance the discussion of aquilombamento and black sense of place as liberatory Black claims to space that illuminate collective histories of alternative social systems that promote life rather beyond suffering. This is the third topic.

Third topic: aquilombando the modern planned city

The final chapter of this article compares processes of aquilombamento (quilombo formation), or as previously presented, the formation of spaces of continuity, with a sense of grouping, continuity, and Black freedom, in Belo Horizonte and Chicago in order to advance the articulation of alternative perspectives of black life in urban space.

First, the Concórdia neighborhood, which was founded in Belo Horizonte in the second decade of the 20th century and was presented earlier, is currently considered a "Little Africa" or a "Quilombaço". The dynamics related to its founding help explain how resistance to hegemonies can operate as another way of shaping black sense of place, as they emerge as an aquilombamento process, thereby pointing to other forms of black existence in the city. Bustamante (2023) applies a racial lens in urban studies in order to reveal how raciality can explain political decision-making. Similarly, blackness rooted in African ancestry influences individual and collective decisions (Portilho, 2021) and enables a black sense of place to be understood beyond hegemonic processes.

Returning to the case of Belo Horizonte, the population removed from the 8th suburban zone, located in the center of the city, was resettled in Concórdia Workers' Village, now known as the

Concórdia neighborhood. The term "Little Africa" was coined by local residents and patrons (Bustamante, 2023) and is reflected in the significant number of African-based spiritual and cultural practice spaces, including Umbanda and Candomblé terreiros (worship centers), as well as celebrations in neighborhood streets and plazas (Bustamante, 2023). The author maps these places and exemplifies this African presence by analyzing three expressions of existence: the African-rooted practices held in Gabriel Passos Square, the prominent role played during Carnival by the Afro Bloc Magia Negra, and the leadership of Queen Conga Isabel Casemira with the local community during the Reinado Treze de Maio of the Guarda de Congo e Moçambique. These ancestral existences in the neighborhood demonstrate that, despite the processes of biopolitical expropriation and segregation acting upon black lives, the black population reterritorialized through its African heritage, asserting a black sense of place that transcends the hegemonic impositions present in the urban policies.

In Chicago, we read the aquilombamento process as a collective movement to resist hegemony and assert black sense of place in order to articulate alternative narratives of black space, specifically looking at the North Lawndale neighborhood on Chicago's west side. In 1966, following heightened racial tensions due to discrimination in employment, education, and access to basic services, Dr. Martin Luther King Junior decided to make North Lawndale the base for the northern civil rights movement (Ralph, 1993), with a specific focus on housing discrimination. This symbolic move built the momentum for the black Panther Party's choice to headquarter the Chicago chapter in North Lawndale in 1968. Rooted in a hyper-local and class-based critique of American political

economy, the black Panthers formed a unique relationship across racial lines, building a coalition of Latino, White, and black Chicagoans, called the "Rainbow Coalition". These progressive, socialist groups provided many services to combat the city's discriminatory housing practices, creating the foundation for radical ideas and civil disobedience in Chicago (Serrato, 2019).

However, due to their revolutionary politics, the Black Panther Party was heavily persecuted by both the federal government and local Chicago police, ultimately resulting in the murder a prominent leader of the group, Fred Hampton in North Lawndale. Hampton's murder was one of many that targeted Black Panther leaders across the nation. It was later proven that one of the causes of the murder was the fear that Hampton "wanted a revolution to replace the capitalist economy with a socialist economy as [...] America could never live up to its ideals as a democracy under a capitalist economy (Williams, p. 81). The deep structural change advocated by the Black Panther Party, guided by ideals of racial and class solidarity to put humanity before capital, proved a massive threat to the hegemonic status quo.

In July 2025, the city installed a plaque - the first of twelve documenting the planned Black Panther Party Heritage Trail - at the site of the former Black Panther headquarters. At the opening, the local alderman said,

> Let us not whitewash this history. The FBI waged war against them not because they were violent, but because they were effective and building power among the powerless. […] Let this marker remind every passerby: These were not just dreamers; they were doers (Thrush, 2025).

This comment directly dialogues with Beatriz Nascimento's reflection, presented earlier, about quilombos as spaces of peace and freedom, a narrative which counters the common understanding of quilombos as simply a response to racial oppression. Thus, in the application of this Brazilian term, we can see how black space making that emerged from the Black Panther Movement is a form of aquilombamento as it offered other structures for existence that emphasize group cohesion and racial and cultural affirmation, as discussed by author (Nascimento, 2021).

Articulating this instance of aquilombamento in Chicago also extends Beatriz Nascimento 's concept of continuidade histórica to one that is not only historical but also geographical. The author finds a similar *spatial continuity* in her empirical analysis of quilombos in Minas Gerais, writing:

> One of the hypotheses of our project explicitly states that the areas where "quilombos" were located in the past imply a spatial continuity with the present, preserving or attracting black populations in the 20th century. (p. 151).

The parallels between black sense of place as resistance to racial violence and simultaneous existence of black life, joy, and spatial production and aquilombamento as manifestations of that structure are found in two distinct geographies across the Americas. The abstraction of these terms allows us to see how they are continuous across the continents, inherently woven together in their shared origin.

The dialogue between the two cases presents a concept of quilombo that goes beyond political consciousness, embracing an ancestral African existence. How can we create this exchange of counter-modern existences? On one hand, in Chicago, we see the

emergence of political activism. On the other, in Belo Horizonte, we identify how diasporic knowledge materializes in African-rooted cultural expressions. In this sense, we recognize a complementarity between the U.S. and Brazilian processes. Bringing these histories together strengthens our connection as siblings in the diaspora and opens possibilities for exchange, solidarity, and resistance against hegemonic forces—despite the social, political, and economic differences in which we are embedded.

Figure 3: Presentation of the Afro Magia Negra Bloco during Carnaval in the Concordia neighborhood.



Source: Personal archive.

Figure 24: Ex-leaders of the Black Panthers inaugurate a plaque at the headquarters, now demolished, of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panthers.



Source: Block Club Chicago (Thrush, 2025).

Final considerations

To conclude, we return to the three topics proposed at the beginning of the article - the first being the conventional telling of Chicago and Belo Horizonte as symbols of modern progress; the second being the racial segregation and anti-blackness foundational to the political and spatial production of these capitalist cities emerging from post-abolition restructuring; and third, the instances of black resistance to these structures in the forms of cultural and political manifestations in Belo Horizonte and Chicago. The lens we use to weave together these three topics is a dialogue between McKittrick's black sense of place and Beatriz Nascimento's studies about Brazilian quilombos in order to demonstrate the vast historical and geographical connections across the African diaspora. We show that a critical reading of parallel histories of black spatial production

in the Americas illuminates a pathway with which to reread the contemporary city in order to identify pathways out and beyond current conditions of urban dispossession, racial and class violence, and ongoing threats to freedom.

This lens can be extended to do a greater mapping of processes of aquilombamento in places within the African diaspora, within & outside of Brazil. While we present a discussion about afrodiasporic spaces such as Maroons and Palenques which exist elsewhere in the Americas, this article's contribution is to argue that these understanding of spatial alternatives rooted in blackness emerge in distinct ways when born in the context of modernist planned cities. The objective is not to exhaust the possibilities of identifying alternative social systems in both cities, but to provide a lens with which to unveil a broader research agenda.

Deeper analyses of the intersectional nature of these mappings is also necessary as quilombos and sites of black political activism still hold racial, gender, and class dynamics (Nascimento, 2011). Furthermore, future studies could focus on investigating spaces that currently house contemporary activities connected to moments of quilombo formation throughout history.

This article contributes to the academic literature about black sense of place by comparing a rarely-studied connection between the process of spatialized racial dispossession and resistance in two turn-of-the-century planned cities, Chicago and Belo Horizonte. This proposal asks, what does a comparative study of racial identity rooted in place in the legacy of two turn of the century planned cities in the Americas contribute to the transcontinental conversation about black sense of place? We propose that by comparing the process of how black sense of place emerges as a process of aquilombamento

in the wake of state-sanctioned spatial dispossession, exclusion, and segregation in the two cities, productive insights can emerge about the geography of blackness rooted in life rather than suffering.

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