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An Analysis of Abbott Elementary through the Lens of Black Placemaking

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the portrayal of Black placemaking in the television series *Abbott Elementary*, a mockumentary style comedy about a group of teachers working in a predominantly Black elementary school in Philadelphia. Utilizing the concept of Black placemaking, this paper examines how the show depicts the physical, social, and cultural identities of the characters and how they leverage the complexity of these tenets of identity in their praxis to foster and empower their community, even when disenfranchised. Through a critical analysis of the "Pilot" episode, this thesis explores the ways in which *Abbott Elementary* challenges stereotypes and dominant narratives about Black people and communities, and how it contributes to the representation of Black stories, essentially making place for Black people in popular culture and as viewers. This work reveals that *Abbott Elementary* provides a nuanced portrayal of Black educators and students within a public-school setting, while also highlighting the importance of community building. This thesis aims to expand Black placemaking as a framework that can analyze media.

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Introduction

This thesis draws on theories of Black placemaking to analyze an episode of ABC's popular mockumentary television show *Abbott Elementary* (Walian, 2021-present). Within Abbott, both the teachers and students face many adversities that threaten the longevity of their community. However, they still rally in support of one another, constructing space for themselves and each other to reach vitality, thus Black placemaking. Current theory work in Black placemaking exists within the realm of architecture and city planning, so this thesis begins the work of extending that theory to mainstream media analysis. Before working on the theory extension I first discuss how the institution of slavery was built not only for racial domination, but as an attempt to strip away the sovereignty of the Black enslaved identity. However, Black enslaved people still created spaces to recuperate themselves. I provide a few details on the transatlantic slave trade to explain how language, identity, and kinship amongst Black enslaved people evolved even when forced away from their native practices. Black enslaved people made an effort to communicate, form individuality/personhood, and build community, even within a system of racial domination. There were aspects of Black enslaved culture that contrasted greatly from the slave owner's culture. Next, I discuss theories of homeplace then Black placemaking to expand on how Black people make community, a place for themselves, in different ways when there are internal and external forces that threaten livelihood and vitality. Then I provide a few details on Black representations in Hollywood to demonstrate just a few of the stereotypes contemporary popular culture media is working against when representing Black stories. Then I provide background on placemaking, and its original roots as a theory based on urban planning and how the physical, social, and cultural identities of those within urban communities not only

constructs place for these identities, but maintains a place for them to nurture their spirits and liveliness.

I then explain how Black placemaking has been used in an educational context, to explore how Black students in predominantly white institutions create groups, events, and space for themselves as an act of resistance. This aversion to the dominant white culture is not only Black placemaking, but a form of praxis. Next, I offer background on Abbott Elementary, offering a brief synopsis of the show to build background and context before the analysis of the "Pilot" episode. I define the elements that I am going to be analyzing and how every character leverages their physical, social, and/or cultural identity to not only construct a place for themselves, but the people within their community of Abbott.

Background

The transatlantic slave trade between the 15th and 19th centuries was a multi-country, multi-continent institution based on racial domination and power. By design, the slave trade denied its victims of their native cultural identity by stripping enslaved Africans of their homes, families, and nearly all things familiar. Due to the slave trade spanning over approximately 400 years, I cannot cover all of the aftermath in my paper, however, it is important to discuss the extensive loss of sovereignty over body and identity and loss of varying cultural traditions and dynamics. Being torn from their cultural milieus, enslaved Africans were expected to abandon their heritage and to adopt at least part of their enslavers' culture. There was a conscious effort within the institution of slavery by the slave owners to remove the identity of slaves by prohibiting any displays of cultural expression.

Nevertheless, many sources reveal that there were aspects of slave culture that contrasted from their master's culture (Morgan, 1998, p. 17). While forced to mesh cultures when enslaved people from different areas of Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere were sold to the same slaver, enslaved people found ways to culturally survive. To recover themselves and facets of their identity, enslaved Africans created spaces or a homeplace, defined as "the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination" (hooks, 1990, p. 384). These practices have been interpreted as not only forms of resistance to oppression, but as survival tactics of a native culture in a new society. Cultivating mechanisms and asylum to adapt to life, despite great odds, allows for pedagogies and other values to be passed down. This instates a safe space and community for participants to thrive and succeed.

Background on Transatlantic Slave Trade

The transatlantic slave trade spanned approximately 400 years and transported around 12 million enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. These men, women, and children were forced onto ships and tight quarters and stripped of all things that were a semblance of their original homeland. Enslaved Africans not only lost their homes, families, and friends, they also lost their identity and were stripped of their personhood as they were taken to a foreign country (Beckelheimer, 2021, p. 52). Although the slave trade exhibited a multifaceted and complex nature that underwent various changes over time and location, there were far-reaching and enduring impacts. The transatlantic slave trade generated wealth for many individuals, companies, and countries, all while doing irreversible damage to the Black population. I will be

focusing on the loss of language, identity, kinship, and essentially homeplace through the slave trade.

Language, and the formation of dialects, has been a primary way for people to communicate what they think, believe, and understand. The dissipation of African languages and dialects can be attributed to the slave trade. It was a deliberate policy enforced by slavers, as they often split up Africans from their original ethnic groups and mixed them with those who spoke other languages so that they couldn't communicate with one another on ships. Enslaved people were also prohibited from using their native languages and passing them on, as it could lead to revolt and uprising, much to the fear of slave owners (Mufwene, 2015, p. 6-8). Enslaved Africans were often forced to adopt their slaver's language, as it was necessary for their survival. However, the retention of some African languages was transmitted through oral expressions and cultural products. There was also no way for slavers to police African languages being spoken in the slave cabins (Mufwene, 2015, p. 12-14). Through singing, call and response, and hollering, enslaved Africans coordinated their labor, and communicated with one another across adjacent fields.

Even amid pressure to shed their African character and adapt to an exclusively Anglo one, some African linguistic practices still managed to survive throughout plantations. However, these linguistic practices evolved into something new. Retention of Western African language that had been "creolized", was a resistance to adhering to the standards of English that was enforced upon enslaved Africans (Lauture, 2020, p.168). Since enslaved Africans did not share the same culture or speak the same language, slaves appropriated colonial vocabulary, while maintaining their original African languages and linguistic practices. As a result, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) was formed as a way for slaves to communicate with one

another, despite differences in cultural backgrounds. For enslaved Africans, the languages they were forced to adopt, but also what they retained and cultivated to their own degree, was an effect of and resistance to imperialism.

The overexploitation and oppression of enslaved Africans in the Americas led to them losing their sovereignty. “Literacy, spirituality, creativity, and any other sort of agency were withheld from African Americans and beaten out of those who tried to attain them” (Plumpton, 2016, p. 13). Their humanity, citizenship, and identity were negated under the institution of slavery, which shed them of their cultural rites and diasporic individualities (Thiaw & Mack, 2020, p. 146). As previously mentioned, many Africans were forcibly displaced from their homes and separated from their original ethnic groups, leading to the inter-mixing of many ethnicities (Randrianja, 2002, p. 210). With the consolidation of slavery within America evolving and expanding, not only was it used to generate wealth and unify the government at the physical and psychological demise of the enslaved, but it was a “tool for establishing the boundaries by which citizenship would be defined” (Plumpton, p. 46). The racial category “Black” was created as an encompassing term to maintain a “color-line”, between enslaved Africans and white slavers (Omi & Winant, 2004, p.7) as the Black slave served as a framework for white Americans to build an identity against. Thus, solidifying a racial and social hierarchy that deemed white as “good” and Black as “bad”. However, this also allowed the enslaved to construct a sense of self against the colonial narrative. Even though different ethnicities made up the African diaspora, being of African descent was enough for the enslaved to form a bond of solidarity that has evolved into a sense of identity.

The forced exile of enslaved Africans from their home countries led to the separation and loss of family, and the severing of cultural and kinship ties led to their “natal alienation” in the

New World. The forced migration and uproot of enslaved Africans resulted in the displacement of their established social structures of their natal society and made them strangers to the slaver's society, as they were "denied all claims on, and obligations to, his parents and living blood relations but, by extension, all such claims and obligations on his more remote ancestors and on his descendants" (Patterson, 1967, p. 5). During slavery, it was a difficult and daunting task for the enslaved to create and sustain new kinship bonds, despite their attempt to emulate the norms of their masters. Enslaved Africans could cultivate informal family relationships and connections; however, it was essentially arbitrary since they could have been separated at any moment (Balon, 2015, p.141). However, this didn't discourage relatives and non-relatives on slave-holding plantations from forming bonds while taking on a nurturing role and supporting children separated from their parents. Although the experience of enslavement destroyed traditional kinship and kin patterns, enslaved Africans still established fictive kin relations, and bestowed symbolic kin status on nonkin (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996, p. 191). As a resilience to the institution that deprived and took them away from relatives and connection, enslaved Africans built their own familial systems to reinstate severed bonds and to preserve the idea of family. The initial loss yet continued formation of kinship shows that even when faced against hardships and external dangers that threatened livelihood and familial structures, enslaved Africans found ways to make sacred relations and create community in which they could foster everlasting unions and heal severed familial wounds as an act of resistance.

Homeplace and Black Placemaking

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Black people have built and are still building homeplaces as a resistance to white supremacist logics (hooks, 1990; Oliha-Donaldson, 2018) thus

cultivating kindred ties sustained through traditions and shared experiences. Within these homeplaces, hooks notes that Black women construct a space that allows the Black community "opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits" (hooks, 1990, p. 384). For centuries, Black people have been the racialized other and the stigmatization of our race has been a scapegoat for our exploitation, control, and exclusion, as well as a way for our white counterparts to secure their own positive identity through the condemnation of ours. Familial and community preservation has not only been a sight for healing from these aftermaths, but a form of resistance to the systemic oppression that we continue to face.

Amid racial oppression and domination, when even the subconscious is being colonized by white supremacist practices, homeplaces are critical for political, ideological liberation and for the Black community to remedy part of the cultural erasure brought on by repressive institutions. The term homeplace also recognizes the need for spaces built by and for minoritized people. Much of the current research (see Roberts, 2017; Williams, 1985) developing the idea of homeplace stems from the ways communities develop within cities, connecting to the use and reuse of space within Black communities. Homeplace is not only an area and a domain, but a "set of social and political characteristics of neighborhoods, towns, settlements, and landscapes in which cultural sovereignty and self-determination is possible" (Roberts, 2017). Ultimately, homeplace fosters a sense of belonging as it allows for people to solidify their identity and background, as well as build community.

Hunter et al. (2016), defines Black placemaking as "the ways that urban black Americans create sites of endurance, belonging and resistance through social interaction" (p. 31). Hunter et al. shed light on Black sociability in both digital and physical atmospheres by examining numerous spaces such as Black public housing reunions, Black lesbian and gay

nightlife, Black Little League baseball, and Black digital commons within Chicago. Within these spaces, Black people not only create a sense of kinship and belonging, but art and media that are a reflection of our experiences.

The notion of Black people creating homeplaces extends outside of one's familial ties, and into sectors such as community and groups. Black people and other communities make place for themselves despite external and internal adversities that threaten livelihood and these spaces in everyday life. A prime example of this is seen within the formation of Ballroom, a LGBTQ subculture, and how it has been a notable space for Black and Latino creatives. In 1960s New York, many Black and Latine drag queens began to organize their own pageants as an opposing force to racism in other pageant circuits. Drag is defined as an artform in which individuals dress up as a different gender and perform, often adopting the conventional mannerisms of that gender (Buckner, n.d.). Originally, Balls were a space for white men to don on drag and have fashion shows in the late 1800s. Black queens were often not allowed to participate, and if they did, they were expected to paint their faces a lighter complexion and faced race-based prejudice from their white counterparts (Cunningham, 1995). Ballroom comprises an "entire language of concepts, categories, dances, and slang" (Phillips et. al, 2011 p. 517) that are unique to the subculture, as well as social structures and values.

Many participants in Ball culture could not openly express their sexual orientation and gender identity within the confines of their biological families, and were often subjected to abuse, some were even unhoused by their household. This common experience led to the cultivation of groups called "houses" within Ball culture, family structures led by a "mother" (gay men or transgendered women) or "fathers" (transgendered men) (Bailey, 2011, p. 367). Houses serve as a homeplace for displaced Black and Brown LGBTQ youth and adults within

larger LBGTQ culture, offering them kinship and a place to foster creativity, performance, and education. Active creation of homeplace is happening in different subcultures, like in Ballroom, and much of the homeplace work is inaccessible and underground to those not in the LGBTQ scene. Ballroom culture is not only a form of resistance to traditional gender and sexuality norms, but it is an opposition to the original racist ideologies and racial oppression that made up the original drag culture and scene. While the Ballroom culture described here is very niche, it demonstrates the long history of Black placemaking as resistance to racist ideologies, especially in America.

Pop culture is another sector in which Black talents continue to make space for their stories, experiences, and themselves. For instance, actress, producer, and writer Issa Rae, has broken boundaries with her HBO comedy drama *Insecure* (Rae, Becky, Penny, & Rotenberg, 2016-2021) The show follows and depicts the life of modern-day Black women dealing with real-life issues and insecurities as they navigate professional life, relationships and friendship. Rae has made history as the first Black woman to create and star in a premium cable series. However, she started with a YouTube web series *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* (Rae, 2011-2013) in which many viewers left comments and responses to Rae, saying that she accurately depicts their experiences as more introverted Black women too. Oftentimes, television and film media depicts a one-dimensional or monolithic representation of Black people. Rae's portrayal of a Black woman who was more reserved, socially awkward, and not sure of herself, contrasted greatly from the usual depictions of Black women we see on screen who are headstrong, sassy, and confident. Not everyone of the same race thinks, feels, acts, or navigates life the same, so it is important to have Black characters with intricate personalities to display unique traits outside of the normalized typecast. More representation outside of the monolithic

depictions allows for the audience to see themselves in the characters and their stories and for these narratives to resonate more. In an interview with *TIME,* Rae stated that she wanted to "create characters that people can relate to. For so long, entertainment executives have said the reason they don't cast people of color is that they're not relatable onscreen." Through her web series and television show, Rae created a platform for the narratives of Black women, and even men, to be showcased, heard, and elevated. This allows a group whose experiences are often overlooked in storytelling to have an outlet to share their narratives and allow for others who relate to be represented. There are numerous examples across genres of entertainment culture, I described two here to demonstrate some of the placemaking work of Black Americans. The remainder of this thesis will specifically look to a mockumentary television show as further evidence of this placemaking work.

Background on Black Placemaking

Placemaking is an architectural approach to urban designing that was developed in the 1960s. This multi-facet concept's goal is to create a connection between a community member, and the spaces in which they live, work, and play (Project for Public Spaces, 2007). While research to-date is fairly limited, placemaking was founded by Jane Jacob and William H. Whyte, when both offered ideas about designing cities curated to meet the needs of the residents that occupy them, rather than automobile and transport connectivity (PPS, 2007). With community-based participation at its core, placemaking specifically "pays attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution" (PPS, 2007). Placemaking is a dynamic take on the creation, utilization, and the maintenance of public spaces to improve urban vitality (PPS, 2007).

Highlighting how Black people make places amidst and in spite of oppression and systemic dangers, Hunter et al. first used the framework of Black placemaking to study Black life in Chicago. Drawing on poems and other theoretical literatures across a range of disciplines (authored by Black creators), Hunter et al states that Black placemaking is a way to "counter the scholarship that contributes to the unrelenting negative portrayals of Black neighborhoods, without losing sight of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency" (p. 3). Hunter et al. argues that previous social science research typecasts Black people living in urban areas and paints them one dimensionally as the victims of transgressions that threaten daily livelihood, and never "captures the life that happens within them, and thus the matter of Black people's humanity" (p. 2). Hunter et al.'s work shows that Black placemaking is not only a resistance to the injustices that Black individuals encounter, but it is a way to build sites of endurance and belonging. Additionally, Hunter et al. demonstrate the value of creative works, authored by Black creators, shared with wider audiences as sites for this resistance, sites for placemaking. This thesis draws on Hunter et al.'s work as foundational to demonstrating, through close reading, that placemaking can be discussed as the viewer-reader of creative works.

Black placemaking has also been used as a sociological framework to study Black student life at historically white institutions (HWIs). Antar A. Tichavakunda (2020), explored how Black students create space for themselves in predominantly white institutions and universities. Tichavakunda's analytical work offers expansion to Black placemaking, as he argues that it "might be applied to any setting where Black people are present and congregate to create communities, places, and events for themselves" (p. 3). In extending Black placemaking to student life, Tichavakunda demonstrates a critical role education and educational institutions play in offering sites of resistance and Black placemaking.

Engaging in resistance that modifies reality and builds spaces that goes against white supremacism and colonial practices is seen throughout the theory of Black placemaking, but it is also a form of praxis pedagogy. Paulo Freire (1972) described praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 52). Praxis relies heavily on linking theory and practice, where praxis is an alternate to the banking method of teaching. In the early 1990s, Ladson-Billings (2021) provided a framework for understanding the practices and pedagogies of educators, specifically Black educators, and how they work consistently to create spaces that uphold the dignity of students and their peers and also enact revolutionary praxis of resistance. Teachers drawing from culturally-relevant pedagogies are strong advocates and their work of leveraging culturally relevant practices allowed students to "see their ethnic identity in a positive light" and for them to "organically build relationships" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 165). This praxis allows for Black students' physical, social, and cultural needs to be met, all while acknowledging how their identities play a role in educational institutions making a place where they are valued. Since the focus of this thesis is analyzing how a television show about an elementary school fosters Black placemaking, briefly outlining pedagogical theories will help demonstrate how *Abbott's (*Walian, 2021-present) representation of teaching, education, and schooling offer spaces of resistance and positive representations of ethnic identity.

Racial Representation in Hollywood

To placemake in a network sitcom means building a place for more stories, specifically in this context Black stories, to be heard, discussed, and celebrated. It also allows opportunity for people to engage with different and more complex narratives surrounding Black people and Black culture. For years, Black expression has been suppressed in television media and

oftentimes unrepresented or misrepresented. The first Black radio sitcom, *Amos 'n' Andy*, (Gosden & Correll, 1928-1960) originated in Chicago during the 1920s, in which two white men portrayed the characters, and imitated what they thought to be poor Black men (Chen, n.d.). Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll were doing the Chicago comedy act originally in blackface, as it was common tradition in American theater for over 100 years for white actors to wear darker face makeup. *Amos 'n' Andy* (Gosden & Correll, 1928-1960) attracted more than 40 million listeners and later became the highest-rated comedy in radio history over the next 22 years. When the show was adapted for television in 1951, two Black actors Alvin Childress and Spencer Williams, took over for Gosden and Carrell as the respective roles of Amos and Andy. It served as the first TV series to have an all-Black cast and would be the only one of its kind for the next 20 years. However, American Advocacy groups and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) criticized both forms of the show for promoting racial stereotypes, leading to its cancellation in in 1953.

Black caricatures being depicted on screen has been a common phenomenon since the earliest years of film and television. Many of the earlier Black characters were depictions of two extremes, one being the Black criminal stereotype and other negative tropes associated with Blackness and the other being the respectable, but often too accommodating Black character who would assimilate. In 1964, actor Sidney Poitier made history as the first Black actor to win an Oscar for Best Actor for his performance in *Lilies in the Field* (Nelson, 1963). Even though Poitier broke barriers with this win and throughout his entire career, he spoke openly about the racial prejudice that he encountered, stating, "Black people were so new in Hollywood. There was almost no frame of reference for us except as stereotypical, one-dimensional characters." (Bordow, 2022) For Brunson to placemake in a network sitcom such as *Abbott Elementary*, it

allows for more representation of contemporary Black characters with complex storylines and personalities, without having to typecast them into negative cliches.

With the insurgence of new cable networks and digital streaming platforms, there has been a plethora of opportunities for new stories to be told and chances for audiences to engage with different topics outside of their cultural realm. Not only does television entertain and inform us, but it is a key piece of media that shapes our perspective of the world and has been "a primary source of America's racial education," scholar Stephanie Troutman Robbins (2022) states. Television has told a broader story of race through the depictions of demonized and dehumanized portrayals of Black people, as well as the stories of progress, that have occurred as a "result of resistance from artists and activists, those demanding representation and opportunity" (Leonard & Robbins, 2021, p. 478). For Black creatives to placemake in television is for them to actively push against the once trite and disparaging representations of Black people that perpetuate racism and normalized inequality and injustice.

In the early years of television, representation of Black characters was scarce, with only 6% of characters on screen being Black from 1955 to 1986, a stark difference from the 89% of the TV population that was white (Lichter, 1987, p. 13-16). Although times have changed, and recent studies from Arizona State University show that representation of Black actors in leading roles of cable-scripted television shows has boosted to 12.9%, only 6% of writers, directors and producers of U.S. - produced films are Black (Bordow, 2022). Few Black people are given creative, off-screen roles as jobs in the industry tend to go to insider's acquaintances and members of their extended networks. Effectively pitching and receiving backing for Black projects is also difficult, as it is often hard for executives to stretch beyond themselves and see themselves in other people or relate to different narratives. When television is still defined by

whiteness, Brunson and other Black creatives creating a place for themselves in these spaces is a resistance to a hierarchical standard of whiteness.

Abbott Elementary: Background

The mockumentary style television series *Abbott Elementary (*Walian, 2021-present) is a good illustration of the hardships and triumphs of Black educators, through the eyes of teachers and students alike. The show tells the story of a group of dedicated educators that work in an underserved Philadelphia public school. Jeanine Teagues is a new second grade teacher working alongside history teacher Jacob Hill, kindergarten teacher Barbara Howard, second grade teacher Melissa Schemmenti, school principal Ava Coleman, and recent hire Gregory Eddie.

Quinta Brunson, creator of the show and actress playing Jeanine, has a personal connection to Philadelphia education and schooling that shines through the series. Brunson's identity as a Black woman from Philadelphia and growing up within the public school system is evident in her passion for the show and even though it is a homage to her personal experiences, the series has garnered support from many watchers, especially those who are Black. Brunson's work is a form of placemaking, as it highlights the shared experiences of many Black students and Black teaching professionals. Although Brunson got her start in YouTube, similarly to Rae, and digital content creation with the media outlet BuzzFeed, their placemaking differs in the sense of accessibility. The show *Insecure* aired on HBO, a premium network channel, whereas *Abbott Elementary* airs on a public access channel, ABC. This contrast in accessibility isn't wrong, as it meets the needs for who it was created for.

"Pilot" Analysis

For the sake of retaining a moderate length to my thesis, I will only be analyzing one episode from the series, the "Pilot" (Brunson & Einhorn, 2021). The remainder of this thesis uses three tenets of placemaking physical, cultural, and social identities to explore how a television show set within an urban school positively represents Black placemaking, and how that invites viewers, specifically Black viewers, to share and connect. As shown above, much of the prior research focused on physical and city planning centering the needs of Black community members. This analysis shifts that focus by looking at how a television show represents a Black public school as a site for placemaking, and how that allows viewers to co-construct placemaking alongside the show. This analysis centers elements of the show that center Black placemaking specifically, to showcase the value of positive representation for Black viewers.

For the analysis of this thesis, it will be important to define physical, cultural, and social identities. In terms of physical identity, Black people often had and still must negotiate a sense of self as separate individuals under oppressive structures. Black people actively build physical identity and sense of self in a wider, predominantly white, culture by establishing diverse and varying personalities and traits that go against the negatively enforced stereotypical and monolithic expectations of our race (Davidson, 2016, p.10). Within this thesis, physical identity will be defined as a character's sense of self that they establish within the context of their teaching praxis and intrapersonal roles as teachers and students at Abbott. The storylines the characters portray demonstrate the physical identity negotiation that builds experiences, experiences used as the show progresses to further the character growth, plotlines, and ultimately the placemaking possible through representation within the show. The representation of these physical identities, practices and experiences of these characters allows there to be a formation of

self and community not only amid racial oppression, but as a resistance to it for them and Black viewers.

Culture within itself can be described as the shared attributes and characteristics of a group of people. Cultural identity is based on socially constructed categories (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, generation, ability, religion/spirituality, nationality) that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behaviors or ways of acting (Jones, 2013). However, it is recognized that not every individual lives up to those suppositions, as cultural experiences are not monolithic amongst shared tenets. Building a cultural identity and sharing identification with a particular group creates a sense of belonging and unity. It's essential to one's sense of self and how individuals relate to others. Forming cultural identity also helps construct and solidify personhood and agency against the systemic dominations that limit and oppress because of such. For this thesis, cultural identity will be defined as the shared norms and beliefs of characters within their cultural groups and how this identity is merged into their praxis. On the surface, cultural representation, because it is shared, can appear monolithic. However, as will be shown throughout the analysis, representation of shared cultural values, specific to Black community, specific to urban public education, specific to Philadelphia public education, simultaneously invites all viewers to understand the genre, while creating space for the storyline and characters to use the shared understanding to create community and sense of belonging amongst Black viewers. The demonstrated cultural identity of these characters are crucial to their development and Black placemaking because it creates space for the audience to connect with the show, as well as feel a sense of fellowship through shared experiences.

Social identities are the components of self that are derived from involvement in social groups with which we are interpersonally committed (Jones, 2013). Similar to cultural identity,

social identity includes expectations for behaviors or ways of acting. Throughout the analysis, social identity will be defined as the shared interpersonal experiences amongst the character's social groups and how they socialize with and around one another while leveraging their praxis. Comparably to cultural categories these social tenets are grouped by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, generation, ability, religion/spirituality, and nationality. The representation of individual social identities, and individual social identities within the group of characters at Abbott creates space for the audience to connect to how Blackness is valued. More than the other categories, analyzing Abbott and identifying the negotiation at play in character development and character story arch (as social identity) reinforces the rich placemaking possibilities for viewers when a show centers Blackness as valuable and valued within a fictionalized world.

These facets of identity each play a role in Abbott Elementary and Black Placemaking as the theory helps unpack character development considering how characters are written through forming, establishing, and reinforcing a sense of self amongst Black characters and Black viewers. When these identities are paired with a character's individual praxis, the results offer a space for them and others to reach vitality. This institution and reclamation of Black identity as a whole is a resistance to racial oppression and white supremacist ideologies. It also helps construct and reinforce a sense of belonging, community, individuality, and asserting worth and value under a system of racial persecution amongst Black characters and viewers.

The "Pilot" (Brunson & Einhorn, 2021) episode kicks off with the introduction of the main faculty and teaching staff introducing the roles of the main characters. As previously mentioned, the mockumentary style means characters speak directly to the camera at times. Unique to Abbott Elementary is the use of this mockumentary style to engage cultural and social

identity exploration through character dialogue, development and portrayal to represent space for placemaking, Black placemaking specifically.

Janine Teagues, a young Black female with an eclectic style and optimistic attitude, shares that she has been teaching at Willard R. Abbott Elementary, a predominantly Black school, for a year. Although Janine herself has grown up within the Philadelphia public school system, she admits to the audience that she finds frustration in how the city can't allocate money to schools within the district, but can use the money to make multi-million-dollar renovations to the Eagles stadium. This circumstance represents social and cultural identity for American Black viewers, as it is a common experience for political higher-ups in urban areas to allocate funds for projects that will generate more wealth for the city, but not for initiatives that will improve the livelihood for the residents that make up the city. Schools such as charters, will utilize public funding but they make education exclusive, and not open to all who occupy the public. This is a shared commonality within urban areas that the show doesn't explain in great detail, but expects the viewers to know.

Despite the lack of funding, Janine states that "We just make do. I mean, the staff here is incredible." She expresses admiration of some of the older teachers and how she looks up to them and that as newer teachers she and Jacob (and a couple others) are still getting the hang of things at Abbott. This moment is a characterization of Janine's social identity as a Black professional. It offers explanation to how she perceives, explains, presents, and conducts herself and her teaching praxis. She recognizes the significant role that older teachers maintain within the community of Abbott, which is why she seeks out their advice and support for the betterment of the students. She and Jacob continuing as teachers despite all of Abbott's disparities and quirks shows that they value the community of Abbott, specifically the students who make up the

community and want to maintain a space for them to reach vitality in their lives and education, even when faced with adversity. The representation of this identity shows that Janine remains hopeful, even in the face of unpromising situations. This is Black placemaking as it depicts how Janine cares for the learning of her students and how she has the drive to continue to make space for herself as a young Black professional, but also for her community of Black students within Abbott.

An example of Janine improvising within her circumstances as a teacher within a school that doesn't receive all the necessary resources, is when she is going over the United States Presidents, but the History book hasn't been updated since President George W. Bush. Janine tells her class that she has taped images of the three Presidents since the Bush administration inside of the books. Janine's motivation and ability to adapt is not only an essential character trait, but it is a form of praxis as she recognizes that and enacts a strategy to overcome. Creating a space for this identity to develop is essential to Black placemaking as it constructs a sense of belonging, or kinship for her students and amongst the audience.

Janine then states, "I know that this school is rough, but I became a teacher to make sure students come out alive." Within the scene, it is seen that one of her students, Jamal, has urinated on the classroom rug because his reasoning was that "I had to go, and the toilets don't work." The next scene shows Janine throwing out the rug, which is a problem as she describes the rug to be a soothing comfortability for her students. Later in the teacher's lounge, Janine tells her colleagues that she needs a new rug and they share that they are in need of one for their rooms too. Although this scene focuses on the need for a material object, it shows that each teacher recognizes the usefulness and practicality of resources that aid their students and individual praxis as teachers within the classroom. This displays that they all care for the physical well-

being of their students and value them as important community members, which is extremely crucial as the majority of them are Black children. The significance of this moment not only serves as empowerment for their students, but is a way for the teachers to build community with and for them. The show creates storylines to specifically depict the teachers creating sights of resistance within Abbott even when dealing with forces that make community building difficult and this is Black placemaking.

The audience is then introduced to kindergarten teacher Barbara Howard, an older Black female who describes herself as a "woman of God." This character archetype of religious Black female elders is commonly present within the Black community as the faith of elderly Black women resonates with their placement as spiritual links between slavery and Black pride (Black, 1999, p. 359-360) and therefore, vital to Barbara's cultural identity. This is essential to Barbara's character as it reveals how she interprets the circumstances that she goes through not only in her personal life, but as a teacher in an underserved school and how she can maintain composure and self-worth while dealing with this hardship. Barbara's regard for her religion and faith can be considered a form of praxis as she teaches her students how they can become and remain self-assured and still recognize their potential when faced with troubling conditions as well. Barbara's social identity is multifaceted, and making space for this identity development is representative of Black placemaking because it portrays the complexity of the Black experience and identity, specifically the dynamism of older Black womanhood. This consideration of her religion is also an important sector of her social identity as it explains how she interacts with others and navigates space as an older Black female teacher.

When Janine can't get her classroom to settle down, she tries to do the countdown method with her class to mitigate the situation, but to no avail. However, Barbara tells the kids to

"Sit down" in a firm and serious, yet still respectful tone and the kids listen to her authority. Janine admits that she aspires to reach that level of teaching as Barbara is an older and more experienced teacher. This is representative of physical identity for both Barbara and Janine, as it shows the first contrast in their praxis. Janine is in the position as a mentee to Barbara, and holds her in high esteem as a teacher who can leverage her authority while still respecting the needs and accommodations for students. Mentorship serves a key role in fostering community, as it creates a place for assistance and support. Barbara, as the more seasoned teacher in this scenario, is offering her expertise as a way to aid Janine in her classroom. This empowers the teaching community of Abbott and offers a sense of belonging to Janine as a younger teacher. This is Black placemaking because it allows space for Janine to not only grow and develop as an educator, but to learn more under the guidance of Barbara to eventually strengthen her praxis.

History teacher Jacob Hill, a young white male, reveals that he came to Abbott the same year as Janine and other new teachers, however he and Janine are the only ones who have "survived" the school system. Melissa Schemmenti, a middle-aged white woman from South Philly with a cynical yet warm attitude and second grade teacher, is also introduced as she expresses her disapproval of the documentary crew. Although these characters are white, their involvement is important to the show as it serves as a template for the Black characters to construct and reinforce their identities against whiteness, decentering it. The shifting of whiteness is essential to the show and Black placemaking as it cements Black identity, even amidst racial oppression.

Teacher Tina Schwartz, a young white female teacher who is a bit erratic and seems shaken, approaches the principal asking for an aide to help her manage her classroom as she feels "outnumbered" and believes that the kids "are crazy." Tina goes on to say that "One of them told

me to mind my six this morning. I don't know what that means, and I need help." Not only does Tina not resonate with her students, but she can't understand them culturally as she is put off and confused by their vernacular. "Watch your six" means to watch your back, and the use of AAVE in this situation fosters not just placemaking but Black placemaking. This example resonates with a large number of viewers, children in elementary classrooms take advantage of vulnerable teachers. *Kindergarten Cop* (Reitman, 1990) was based on a similar student-teacher dynamic, *The Magic School Bus* (Commisso, 1994-1997) takes this dynamic further with students needing to save a spacey teacher. As portrayed in *Abbott Elementary*, the exploitation of the teacher's vulnerability through the use of AAVE opens space for Black placemaking. It represents a situation where Black cultural language created power and community to positively serve community building needs.

Tina approaches the principal for support with her students, with support for her inability to manage her classroom. The principal Ava Coleman, another Black female character with a more comedic personality and nonchalant approach to her job, explains to Tina that the school can't afford to hire an aide but reassures her that her students are "just kids". This interaction, although minute, shows that Ava is trying to rationalize the kid's behavior and maybe even get Tina to remember that these kids are human. Unlike *Kindergarten Cop* (Reitman, 1990), Tina is never the focus of this interaction, the Black students are the center. Tina leaves Abbott Elementary by the end of the pilot episode because she cannot understand or find a way to work with the students in her classroom, she cannot find a way to connect with them. This interaction establishes the social identity of Ava, centers Black students as valued members of a Black community, and is a form of Black placemaking because it speaks to a disheartening, yet common experience of Black children, specifically Black students. In schools, when interacting

with non-Black teachers and staff, Black children are often required to do the cultural work toward whiteness. At Abbott Elementary, white teachers are required to do the cultural work toward connecting with Black students. The bias against Black students and dehumanization they face as a result, is a frequent experience starting as early as preschool. Studies show that implicit bias against Black students within education systems starts at a young age, as they are four times as likely to be suspended or disciplined as white students, and nearly twice as likely to be expelled (Young, 2016, p.1).

Within the next scene, chaos ensues out into the hallway as a student tells Janine that Tina just kicked Rajon, a student. Tina is subsequently fired and Ava states that she was "out of line" and "clearly didn't know how to handle her class" but claims that everything is resolved now. Janine and the other teachers disagree and eventually persuade Ava into making an emergency budget request to the district. Ava tells Janine to write an email detailing all that it is that they will need. The other teachers are enthused, but Barbara isn't as positive. Substitute teacher Gregory Eddie, a young Black male, is then introduced. His personality is more reserved and a bit serious, but also non-confrontational as he doesn't acknowledge when Ava makes a pass at him. Barbara introduces herself, but Melissa doesn't even bother to remember his name as she believes he won't last long.

Back in Janine's classroom, a female student, Bria, throws up. Janine then escorts her to the bathroom to clean her up and she runs into Gregory, as he is also helping a student clean himself up because he had an accident. Gregory then states that the toilet is broken and the water shot into the air and onto him and Janine shares that it's called "reversy toilet" and it's been like that for a while. Janine then decides to make a trade-off with Gregory, taking the male student back to her room to get pants and leaving Gregory to clean Bria's shirt. These efforts both

showcase Janine and Gregory's physical and social identities. Gregory, although a relatively new teacher in this scenario, immediately shows empathy and care for the student and tries to find a resolution to the issue. His physical identity as a teacher isn't fully realized yet, but he does recognize the importance of caring for the children within the community. Janine, the more experienced teacher in this scenario offers support and provides a resolution for Gregory. Their social identities as young Black educators in this scenario offers a place for mentorship to be formed. Even though Janine is relatively new herself, she still helps and guides Gregory through this situation and offers him advice. This is Black placemaking as it shows that the bond of the teacher community within Abbott is not only strengthened through their shared care for their students, but through the offering of support for one another in times of need. This bond is indicative of kinship, as they share no familial relation, but are still able to form meaningful relationships with each other and their students thus creating a place of belonging for both of these identities.

The next day, Janine asks Barbara to look over the email she has drafted for Ava about the request for new rugs. Barbara tells Janine to not get her hopes up, and that Ava is just one person in a long line of people who have done nothing for the school. Janine tells Barbara to have some faith but Barbara retorts, and tells her to "Just do your job." Janine goes on to say that "I think the job means trying to make things better", which greatly contrasts from Barbara's pedagogy as she states, "I think the job is working with what you got so you don't get let down." This exchange reveals that there is a great juxtaposition between Janine and Barbara's social identities and thus their individual praxis. Janine believes that with a positive demeanor and advocating for what's right and making changes to the system will lead to better results, while Barbara is more of a realist and believes in making the most of what has been given to not

disappoint herself and possibly her students. The revelation of these differing attitudes represents two differing, yet important social identities in the realm of teaching and specifically being a Black professional. Historically, Black professionals have had to "make do" with the resources, or lack thereof, given in many fields. In this example from the pilot, the story develops with two professional Black women portraying different social identities while accomplishing the same task, teaching children. Creating a scene for Barbara's more traditional approach to "make do" alongside Janine's approach of "make better" invites multiple representations and interpretations. Importantly, it represents the space a show can create for taking back the coexistence of multiple social roles within a community. It represents the space a show can create for placemaking where individuals should exist as individuals. Barbara continues to serve in the role of mentor to Janine, despite their differences in this situation. While Janine advocates for more and better access to the necessary materials needed to promote vitality for Black people and Black communities. They both believe that they can produce high results and impact from their actions for the students at Abbott which is an important aspect of their praxis. With this example, Abbot Elementary again demonstrates the value of centering the care and education of Black children as of necessary importance. The formation of community and kinship through this valuing reinstates that everlasting unions can be created amidst hardship and overcoming these disadvantages can be accomplished through a sense of togetherness. This fellowship, affection, and mutual aid is an act of defiance to oppressive systems that are in place. These systems are the school district and the higher-ups within the district, who make it harder for students and teachers alike to thrive within the public school system without adequate resources. However, public education itself functions as a place of resistance as Black Americans have always used education as a means to fight against racial domination and discrimination. Whenever there is

domination, there is also a possibility of resistance (Ryan, 1984, p. 471). The conveying of these actions is a form of Black placemaking as it allows for the Black characters to construct a place for themselves even when faced with obstacles that halt dynamism and community growth. The character's actions also allows Black viewers to connect and resonate with the representations that they see within the show.

Ava makes an announcement over the PA system, calling all the teachers to gather about some improvements made to the school. However, it is then shown that Ava has spent the emergency budget on a school sign of herself instead of the needed resources and rugs, much to the dismay of Janine and the other teachers. Janine's next course of action is to send an email to the superintendent. This action is essential to her physical identity as this showcase of advocacy and well-being for one's self and community is a common experience of the Black professional, and the Black identity as a whole. In a system where Black people often have to negotiate identity, Janine actively fighting against the structures that create strain and wound the school community is a powerful stance and opposition, as well as a depiction of her establishing herself as someone who is just. This resistance is representative of her praxis, as a teacher who has a "make better" approach and attitude to disenfranchisement and recognizes the value in advocating for oneself and their collective when wronged. This is a form of Black placemaking because this perseverance through adversity strengthens community and solidifies place for Black identities even in circumstances where their spirit is being endangered. The creation of this narrative within the show allows for Black viewers to placemake alongside it as well.

Barbara and Melissa inform Janine that the superintendent "never sees our emails" and he has them bounced back to the person in charge of where they came from, which in this case is Ava. Once Ava receives the email, she calls for an immediate trust workshop for the teachers

during their lunch break to strengthen their bond as a work family. In the next scene, Ava and all of the teachers are gathered in the library. It quickly becomes obvious that the trust workshop was just a ploy for Ava to publicly criticize Janine for her actions. When none of the teachers take part in berating Janine, Ava calls in Sheena, one of Janine's students to say what she wishes was different about Ms. Teagues. Janine mediates the situation by admitting she was the one who disrespected Ava and sent the email to the superintendent. She apologizes to Ava and the other teachers, but especially Sheena, for making them miss lunch. She emphasizes the intent of her actions by saying "I did it because I care about the kids at this school, and that shouldn't be a bad thing." This exchange is an example of Black placemaking as it centers and values the care and education of Black youth. However, the show never exploits Black children to make this point. This is an example of community building as it indicates that Black youth within the show are important members of the Abbott community by acknowledging their personhood and caring for that development isn't wrong. Before she leaves the room, she even offers her cafeteria pizza to Sheena. This entire segment is representative of Janine's physical and social identity once more. Although her praxis of "make better" created interpersonal conflict with Ava, she still stands by it and her actions. Janine is purposefully taking a stance against the system and higher-ups that dominate the school and make it harder for the community to reach vitality. She's asserting her social identity as not a one-dimensional character. This growth and depth of Janine is very powerful, as we can see the multifaceted elements of her and her personality. This is Black placemaking because it shows the humanity of Janine as a complex Black character, and her evolution as a leader within her community. Offering her lunch to Sheena shows that even when faced with antagonism, she still puts the needs of her students, her community, first. This is

Black placemaking because it shows that even when internal forces such as Ava threaten the vitality of the community, Janine still shows care for the students within Abbott.

Barbara stands up in defense of Janine, saying that “She’s right. Actually wanting to help the children at this school shouldn’t be a bad thing.” Barbara leaves and the other teachers follow her out, as an act of solidarity, to go check on Janine. The unity in this departure is a representation of physical and social identity for all of the teachers, especially for Barbara. It's a demonstration of physical identity as it is a sign of support for a community member but also an act of amalgamating a sense of individual self and initiation of their individualized praxis. The teacher’s are deliberately taking a stance against the systemic inequities in place and are rallying together for the liveliness of their school community. This depiction of advocacy strengthens a sense of identity and is particularly a form of resistance for Barbara. Even with her attitude of “make do” she can still adapt her praxis and empathize with the efforts of others when it’s time to serve her community. It would be easy to typecast Barbara as only the “woman of God", but this action shows that her personality and personhood is fairly elaborate. This is a form of Black placemaking as it reveals the depth and intricacy of Barbara’s social identity and how she will leverage this identity to fight for the welfare of her students and against the inequities in place. Barbara leading this walk out demonstrates her activism for her student and teaching community within Abbott, a repeated theme throughout the episode and show. This support between cross-generational teachers portrays the benefits of an older praxis, in assistance to a newer praxis. This makes space for more teaching ideologies to be fostered and thrive within a deteriorating system. It also makes place for Black viewers to connect and construct their sense of self in the context of a television show, as it recognizes and makes space for the complexity and diversity

of our traits and personalities as individuals, and how these unique personhoods come together to build and reinforce a sense of fellowship and community.

This also constructs social identity for teachers as it shows how all of them interact with and view Janine. Although they might not all inherently agree or align with Janine's praxis and actions, the shared experiences they have as educators who want to better their school community allows them to understand and empathize with Janine and her intentions. They value the education of their Black students and therefore will come to their defense in hopes to mitigate and change their current circumstances to enhance the vitality of the Black community within Abbott. This is an example of Black placemaking as it shows that all of these teacher's take into consideration the importance of maintaining community even when dealing with afflictions. They do this for the education and sake of the Black children who make up the Abbott community, as they respect and want to accommodate their needs so that they can recognize and reach their full potential.

In the next scene, Janine is outside of her classroom, looking through the window. When the other teachers gather around her, she shows them Amir, a student who is napping on the classroom floor, as he usually takes a nap on the classroom rug during lunch. Barbara remembers him being in her class, and briefly explains that his mother has a lot of kids, his father is not around and the parents fight when the father is in the picture, which hinders his sleep. Janine says she told Amir to sleep at his desk, but he said he liked sleeping on the rug because it was softer than his bed at home. Janine then says, "I don't care if you think I'm good at this or not anymore, I care about whether or not I can make a change." This exchange reinstates Janine's social identity as it shows how she wants to create a space that centers learning and care for her students. The formation of this space is a sight of resistance against the internal and external

threats to livelihood that the students within the Abbott community face. Although at first glance this scene can be interpreted as sad and make the viewer take pity on Amir and his situation and paint him as a victim of transgressions, it captures the development of community and the care for those who make up the community. This situation humanizes the characters, making them multi-dimensional. This is Black placemaking as it deconstructs simplistic views and representations of Black characters and is an opposition to the transgressions that happen within Black communities. It depicts the humanity of Black characters, while offering a place for them to nurture themselves against the adversities that try to strip that humanity away.

Barbara reassures her, stating that "Teachers at a school like Abbott, we have to be able to do it all. We are admin. We are social workers. We are therapists. We are second parents. Hell, sometimes we're even first." The other teachers are in agreement and highlight the fact that they do what they do because they care. Barbara "You want to know my secret? Do everything you can for your kids. We'll help." This moment is essential to the social and physical identities of all the teachers involved, but specifically Janine and Barbara. Janine states she wants to implement change to the system through her physical actions. Although she holds Barbara's opinion of her in high regard, she defends her praxis and advocacy of her students. She cares for not only their educational but physical experience at school as well. Wanting to alleviate the stressors and threats to vitality of these children is Black placemaking because these actions solidify community, by uplifting Black children as essential community members and being aware of their needs. Community building is also happening amongst the teachers within this scene, as they all rally together in support of Janine. This is Black placemaking as it depicts the empowering of community through the shared praxis of caring for the welfare of their students and wanting to construct a space for their students where their needs are met.

Within this moment, Barbara recognizes all the different roles that they play as more than just teachers in the everyday lives of their students, and how the acclimation of these roles allows the students to reach their full potential. The on-taking of these positions, specifically the roles of "second parents" and even "first parents" shows the formation of kinship and establishing familial bonds through hardship. This sense of familiarity, even when it's fictive and non-relational, helps nourish the spirits of the students and helps them reach their full potential, even when faced with lack of resources within school. This is Black peacemaking because it shows that community is built and healed from within and that these kinships are formed between the characters, all while being faced with adversity. These relationships and the community that stem from them are an act of resistance. This interaction between Janine and Barbara also cements their respective praxis of "make better" and "make do", while merging these practices and ideologies together. Not only does this represent a mutual understanding of each other's teaching philosophies, but it shows their support for one another as teachers and people within a disenfranchised setting, such as Abbott. This support allows them to come together and strengthen the community of Abbott. This is also a form of Black placemaking because it shows that even when they are at an emotional low due to hardship, they can still come together as a collective and make the best of their circumstances.

Barbara then suggests putting their money together to buy Janine a rug. Janine refuses their money, but comes up with a solution by utilizing Melissa's connections. Melissa then makes a call to a friend that she has who is currently working on the Eagle's stadium construction. Towards the end of the school day, Melissa's friend drops off Eagle's rugs to all the teachers. Janine is speaking personally to the cameraman and directly to the audience as the episode wraps up. She says that although the day hasn't been easy, it's been good and she finally

understands what Barbara has been saying, and she can appreciate and incorporate Barbara's praxis, while still leveraging her own. She says, "You have to find a way. Get things done yourself. Even if the way you do them is outside of the system." As all of the teachers are walking down the hallway with rugs in hand, Gregory expresses admiration and respect for Janine and her mission to make the circumstances of the school better. She says it's "Just a day in the life of being a teacher here. You get used to it." Although Gregory's decision to become a full-time teacher after subbing at Abbott hasn't been officially made yet, he is considering staying after seeing the resolution to all of the events of the day and his conversation with Janine. This exchange is essential to the social identities of Janine and Gregory. Even though they are both relatively new teachers, this conversation shows that there is mentorship between the two. Even as Janine serves as a mentee to Barbara, she can still offer her praxis and lend expertise to mentor a newcomer such as Gregory. Mentorship is essential to community as it not only provides meaningful connections, but it makes a sense of belonging for these characters as it creates and solidifies a place for them. This is powerful for Black placemaking, as it strengthens the community and shows how the teaching community of Abbott can come together in support of one another and prevail even after a day of hardships.

Janine, surrounded by her students, lays the rug down on her classroom floor and the room erupts in cheer. She tells the audience, "I provided for my students today. That's huge. It's all any of us want to do." As the episode concludes, Janine is on the rug with her students having story time. Barbara comes in silently, and puts an odor and stain remover spray on Janine's desk. Janine speaks to the audience once again saying, "I was called, I answered, and now I know that even with no help from the higher-ups and no money from the city, I can get this job done." When the school day is over, Janine is in the bathroom, watching a YouTube tutorial on how to

unclog a toilet as she makes an attempt to fix “reversy-toilet.” Although she struggles with it, it's the effort that counts. This final moment of the episode is another depiction of Janine’s physical identity and how she merges it with her praxis of “make better.” She continues to try to fix the disparities within the school and attempts to heal the community from within. This is Black placemaking because it shows that she not only cares for the educational experience of her students, but their physical experience in school as well. She cherishes her students and their needs, and still wants to provide them with functioning resources as she recognizes them as important community members.

Conclusion and Next Steps

While this thesis only analyzed one episode of *Abbott Elementary*, all episodes in the now two seasons build and showcase story arcs that demonstrate Black placemaking. All of the characters, specifically the Black characters utilize their physical, social, and/or cultural identity within their individual praxis to make space for themselves as teacher and their students. The merging of their praxis with the tenets of identity allows them to construct and maintain a place for themselves and their students within a school district that doesn’t provide adequate resources for them to reach their full vitality. The formation and maintenance of this place is an act of resistance to the oppression and adversities that they face. Although these internal and external factors threaten their ability to reach vitality, the characters still communicate, find/create identity, and build/strengthen their community. This is the point of Black placemaking, as it shows that the Black characters, and essentially Black people within urban areas aren’t just the victims of transgressions, but they are multifaceted and complex leaders within their shared communities. Not only does this further Black representation in media as more than one-

dimensional, it portrays the humanity of Black characters, more importantly Black people, thus allowing Black viewers to make place for themselves on and off screen.

Using Black placemaking as a frame for analysis would be strengthened through applying to multiple episodes. Because this is an undergraduate thesis, I've focused on just one episode to show the multiple representations within a 21-minute episode. Including further episodes would serve to continue to show the placemaking work possible through a popular television program.

Working with a concept such as placemaking that originally has roots in architecture and geographical location and has very little to do with media, can benefit culture and especially American culture. This thesis offers just one example of extending the architecture and city planning theories to story and characters within a popular mainstream television show. This study potentially offers an entry point for how placemaking can be expanded to being used as a lens to view media, and the potential growth and community building for audiences/viewers. The importance of place is that it serves as a common denominator for all people, regardless of physical, social, and cultural identity. However, this inclusion of place doesn't undo or mitigate injustices, prejudices, or other systemic oppressions and viewing place as a common denominator runs the risk of erasing the differences in ways that people experience, construct, and maintain place (PPS, 2017). Placemaking is important as it offers everyone a space to fully optimize/realize and cement their identity, especially when that identity can sometimes render you as "out of place" or the other.

For future work, the theory of placemaking can be utilized to observe how all minoritized groups create space for themselves and their vitality, even when faced with internal and external hardships that threaten them.

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