

## *Rewriting Buffalo*, Stephanie Wong-You

Post-curatorial response to *A Millimeter of Space* by Justina Dziama



Dziama, Telescope House, 47 Krupp Street (3A), 2021, liquid latex rubber reinforced with calcium carbonate powder

*A Millimeter of Space* is a history of Buffalo, written between the lines of what artist and architectural designer Justina Dziama references as palimpsests. The exhibition tells the story of the people of Buffalo, those that came and went, in the casting gently peeled from the Lovejoy Telescope House at 47 Krupp St (3A), an object that literally reveals layers of paint applied by families that resided there. In the ten latex castings hanging in the Buffalo Arts Studio gallery, I read the diverging story of those that came, and those that stayed behind.

I read the story of the redlining of East Side African Americans in those layers, when the development of highways and subsidized mortgages facilitated predominantly white Americans to seek homeownership in the suburbs, leaving the city. While at the same time, racial covenants were embedded into the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, segregating African Americans to specific areas of the city, and curtailing African American purchasing power as risky

investments, and the depressing of African American owned home values. The impact of these policies still exists, as does the consequences of still inhabited neighborhoods given up as blight.

Dziama tells the story of when manufacturing jobs left for the American South [Houdaille Industries 2A, 2B, 2C] for lower labor costs and anti-union environments. Between the lines, I read that at its peak, around 35% of Americans were in unions in the 1950s. Eventually, other manufacturers also departed for the Global South for ever cheaper labor; leaving behind the spectre of a once robust organized labor class, and the ongoing struggle for dignity, living wages, and labor protections across the world.

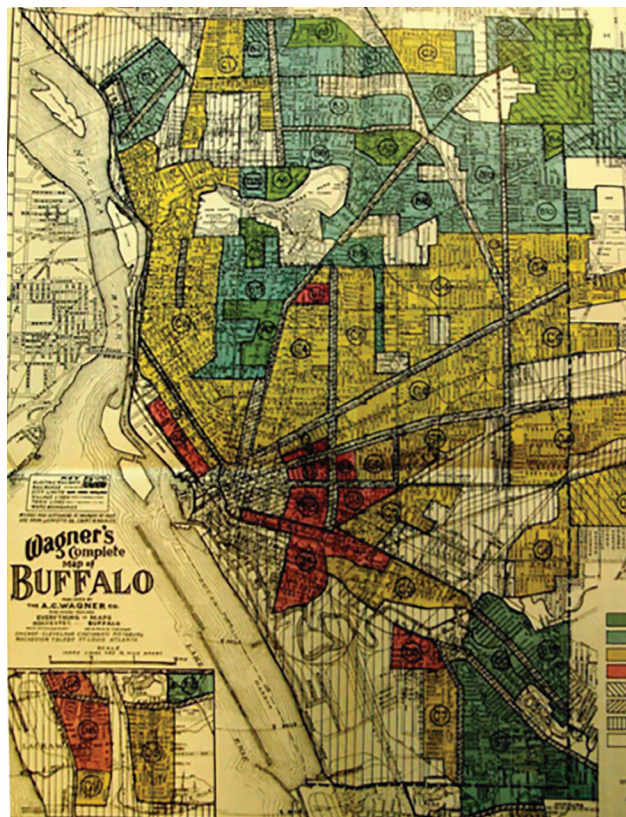
As Buffalo is in its transformational moment of resurgence, grappling with development and generational disinvestment, the center of this community redevelopment should be the people who have been here through Buffalo's downturns and held on.



To whom is housing, employment, public space, preservation, renewal created for? As the city welcomes large scale development projects, and older generation residents see rising housing and living costs, what does revitalization look like for the historically marginalized, those erased from large scale development conversations? What is being done, at the forefront of community development considerations to disrupt and change the pathway of inequitable practices?

These, I believe, are the lingering questions that emerge from Dziama's conversation.

I see community development practitioners answering these questions and writing Buffalo's future. From Grassroots Gardens, a network of community spaces where the public can find refuge and reconnect with nature to the FB Community Land Trust, which has met community unease and concern for the future affordability of housing in the face of development, with homes for native Fruit Belt residents. From, Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI), which supports pathways to community wealth building and works to close the wealth gap for refugees, native BIPOC, and the working class through accessible loans and financial education.



1937 Residential Security Map, Buffalo, N.Y., City Survey File

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Justina Dziama's community research process

To coalitions like the Buffalo Niagara Community Reinvestment Coalition, a group of 13 local organizations working to eliminate inequality and discriminatory practices within financial institutions of Western New York, and advocates for community benefits and equitable economic frameworks, including Community Development Financial Institutions and Public Banking to co-create more just and prosperous communities.

People centered and community directed development, which acknowledges our full history, is what we must work for to reconcile our relationships and patterned inequality, to co-create a more resilient, inclusive, and fully realized Buffalo.

**About the Author**

Stephanie Wong-You is an Economic Development Program Associate at Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI) and has worked with community based organizations for ten years spanning disability rights, small business, and neighborhood building through community organizing, financial education, literacy initiatives, and language access.

