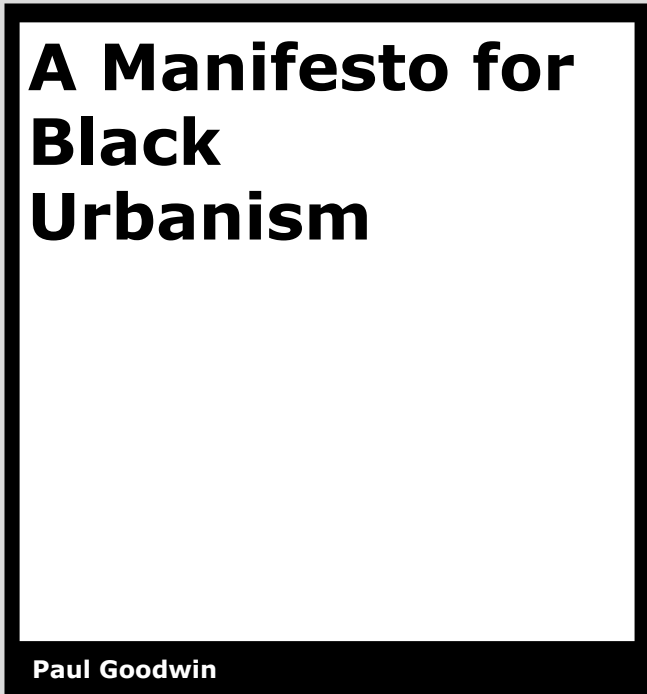


were united in the belief that areas like Peckham, stigmatised in the media as *no hope ghettos*, have incredible potential for self transformation, development and innovation.

Black urbanism, in the way I have framed it, has a vital role to play in this. Not as an end in itself. The goal is not to build *black* cities for black people. Rather, it is to explore and develop the incredible *creative energy* that exists in so-called black areas: a potential that can contribute to the sustainable development of the *whole* city. The formula is simple. To paraphrase the thoughts of an enlightened friend of mine, the scientist and businessman Samuel Ogunsalu, we must contemplate, innovate and liberate:

- **Contemplate: we must challenge and re-think our negative perceptions of stigmatised areas.**
- **Innovate: we must unleash the creative potential of inhabitants.**
- **Liberate: we must allow communities the democratic freedoms to create their own destinies.**



A Manifesto for Black Urbanism.

By Paul Goodwin.

October 18, 2007.

Lecture at the Royal Society of Arts, London,

1. From Toxteth to Brick Lane, from Brixton to Peckham, black people and immigrants have created their own urban worlds; their own urbanisms.

There is no single experience of city life. Until now these emergent urbanisms - subaltern, underground, excluded - have been largely understood through the ideologically loaded prism of *the ghetto*. This concept has limited our understanding of not only how these spaces are produced but also what they represent and signify; in other words, their complexity and diversity. This shift of understanding is not just academic or conceptual. It has major implications for the way we deal with black, migrant or ghetto spaces in terms of policy and intervention in the real world.

5. Innovation, creativity, art and cultural expression are defining features of black and African diasporic practices as many great scholars such as WEB Dubois, Angela Davis, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have proved in their writing.

The city, the urban milieu, is the *locus* and *inspiration* for much of the creative practices of black communities in Britain. Any notion of black urbanism as a *creative form of intervention* must recognise, support and help create fluid structures for black creativity to flourish. There is a growing understanding in some enlightened regeneration circles that art and creativity, produced by local communities from the bottom up (not top down) are central, not marginal, to creating vibrant sustainable communities. This came home to me at a recent exhibition and public debate about regeneration and black communities that I organised recently, in Peckham, South London ("Peckham Rising" exhibition, Sassoon Gallery, September 4-9, 2007). The audience, both black and white in composition - middle class denizens of the posh Belleuden side of Peckham as well as residents from some of the tough surrounding estates and people from other areas in London -

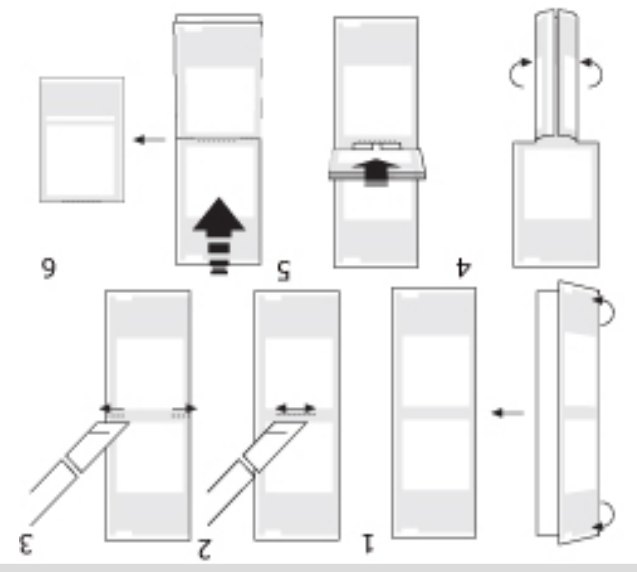
3. The relationship between blackness and urbanity or urbanism is made up of many paradoxes and contradictions.

Black urban cultures (style, fashions, music, arts) are in many places a driving force, in the so-called renaissance of culture in metropolitan areas: New York, London, Paris, Tokyo etc. Notions of urban cool, and hipness once prevalent in the Jazz Age, are today being re-defined around the global traffic in black culture: fuelled by the phenomenal rise in hip hop and its related industries. Yet at the very same time, black communities in these same cities around the globe are living in conditions of squalor, extreme poverty and socio-economic marginalisation. This *paradox of black urbanism* reflects the deeper schizophrenic and dialectical nature of the incorporation of blackness into contemporary urbanism.

Effectively, urban blackness has been historically produced between two main signs. On the one hand, blackness is seen as a redeeming factor, a potential source of spiritual renewal of a decrepit and decaying white civilisation. At certain moments in Western cultural history - as in the time of the Harlem Renaissance in New York in

Dubois, Michel Foucault, Rosalyn Deutsche, Paul Gilroy and Henri Lefebvre. Case studies based on ongoing field research in London and Paris will be included. The project will initiate scholarly debate, stimulate community dialogues and produce original research reports and publications.

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2. Studies of discrimination and urban disadvantage do not cover the totality of the black urban experience.

Black people are not just victims. Histories of community building; struggles over housing, jobs, and space; art and creative practices, the construction and regeneration of urban landscapes, and their relationship to black and migrant communities, all need to be recognised addressed by urbanists and planners today. In other words, black and immigrant communities have contributed much to the current vibrancy of British cities. These communities need to be central to any inner city urban regeneration efforts, such as the 2012 Olympics and the transformation of the Thames Gateway.

Re-Visioning Black Urbanism is a research initiative being developed at the Centre for Urban and Community Research by Paul Goodwin. It explores new modes of inhabiting, imagining and making cities from progressive black and culturally diverse perspectives. The project critically examines the impact, contribution and engagement of black and minority ethnic communities with contemporary urbanism: the physical, economic, social, political and cultural environments in metropolitan areas.

Research

The research component of the project will:

1. Re-think the way black communities have been conceptualised in Western urban thought
2. Research case studies of black urbanism as 'dissident' socio-spatial interventions in cities involving specific forms of spatial knowledges, discourses and strategies
3. Explore alternative visions of urban life by black artists, architects and thinkers

The research will encompass critiques of urban epistemology and urban rationalities by engaging with the work of writers as diverse as WEB

the 1940s and the global rise of hip hop since the 1980s etc - the black presence and influence in culture is seen as a vital source of energy and newness, a driving force of cultural modernism. On the other hand, blackness is often interpreted as a sign of deprivation and decay in cities. Notions of crime and criminality, disease, contagion, plagues, degeneration and miscegenation have been associated at various points in history with the black presence in cities. This is the *fear of a black planet* articulated by the seminal rap group Public Enemy: blackness perceived as a sign of urban disorder and chaos, a harbinger of death and destruction. Black urbanism, in this sense, can be seen as a schizoid sign that haunts and inhabits urbanism and the myth of the *white city*. It is the *ghost in the machine* that is capable of inducing the urban machine into moments of paranoid breakdown (riots, moral panics over crime) while also reconfiguring the machine into new modes of innovation, creativity and expression (music, arts, architecture). To understand the complex nature of black urbanism means, in my opinion, understanding and working through the *productive* nature of this contradiction.

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4. My project is to create a discourse and practice of black urbanism that goes beyond the limited, singular understanding of the black urban experience represented in ideas about ghettos.

My goal is to understand black urbanism in a more *active* and *open* sense, to understand it as a *process of engagement and building of urban spaces* - real and imagined - that integrally involves black communities in cities and neighbourhoods all across the UK. The implication of this is a more *active* and *positive* definition of black urbanism; one in which black communities are positioned at the very heart of the process of designing and creating the neighbourhoods and spaces of the metropolitan areas they have done so much to help revive over the past half century. In other words, black urban communities, must be seen as *active creators, innovators* and *authors* of the city building process not just as passive victims of urban decay or a culture of poverty.