Report of Five Senses Scavenger Hunt

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In 2015, in response to the protests, such as Mailman Can’t Breathe, 12am Columbia, and riots around the country, discussions were held to address student concerns about the School’s handling of these issues. Students and faculty worked to brainstorm activities that could respond to students’ request to address racism on campus, as well as for more opportunities to engage with issues of racism and violence in current events.

Dr Mindy Thompson Fullilove suggested that learning about racism as driver of health in the Medical Center neighborhood could give concrete grounding to the issues being discussed. A walk through the neighborhood was proposed. Dr Linda Fried, the Dean of the Mailman School of Public Health, endorsed this activity. The underlying goal of this activity was to help students see and understand urban fracture, a concept that underpins Dr. Mindy Fullilove’s book Urban Alchemy. Cities experiencing fracture and segregation will also experience negative ripple effects, such as social unrest, poor health, and economic problems, not only in the areas that are deprived of resources, but also in those areas that receive resources.

The following report outlines the development and implementation of a “Five Senses Scavenger Hunt,” using the collaborative planning model developed by architect Lawrence Halprin and his wife, dancer Anna Halprin. Called “R.S.V.P. cycles,” this model connects: the needed resources (Resources), the activity plan (Score), the embedded values used to choose outcomes (Valuation), and the actual implementation of the activity (Performance).

Students in Dr. Mindy Fullilove’s seminar, Emerging
Issues in Urban Health, helped to plan the walk, participated in it, held discussions with walk participants about how it went, and prepared this report.

Resources

A Faculty and Administration Organizing Committee was created, composed of: Robert Fullilove, Mindy Fullilove, Gina Lovasi, Roger Vaughan, Marlin Delva, and Justine Herrera. That committee laid out the plan for the event, set the date and assigned duties.

The Office of Student Affairs developed marketing and activity materials. That office sent invitations to participants, reserved the room for the presentation and debriefing, and organized a lunch and a snack. OSA organized butcher paper and chalk for the walking groups. A number of people from the Mailman Communications Office attended and documented the event.

Planning and evaluation support were provided by students in the seminar, Emerging Topics in Urban/Community Health, co-taught by Drs Robert Fullilove and Mindy Fullilove. The class read Dr. Mindy Fullilove’s book, *Urban Alchemy: Restoring Joy in America’s Sorted-Out Cities*, to understand the forces that drive investment and disinvestment in urban communities. The week before the Five Senses Scavenger Hunt, the class spent 1.5 hours making and preparing resources for the walk. Ten locations in Highbridge Park were identified as places of disinvestment, followed by reinvestment. From this, maps and 10 routes with written directions were created for 10 groups of participants. Each group had a Scavenger Hunt Sheet with activities for the groups to partake in, such as taking a picture with the restored landmark the group was assigned to find and document. This sheet also had prompts to draw attention to the fractured parts of Washington Heights, and groups were instructed to share thoughts about places of disinvestment and investment in the debrief session. A powerpoint presentation was prepared for the participants and the movie clip, “The Domino Effect” was selected for showing at the introduction of the walk. Other resources included: participants’ cell phones to take photographs during the walk and a “dreamcatcher” (composed of string, pins and cardboard) for the debriefing session.
Valuation

As mentioned previously, the goal of this activity was to address urban fracture, and to highlight progress that has been made in reinvesting in neighborhoods. The values that underpin the activities outlined in the “Score” (below) are as follows:

- developing awareness of city fracture,
- examining of patterns of city development (i.e. what is being developed and for whom),
- keeping a critical eye on signs of gentrification,
- developing an awareness of the neighborhood around Columbia’s medical campus that isn’t frequently traversed by students, and
- creating a spirit of social awareness.

Score

The Score component of the RSVP cycle provides an outline for the ideal implementation of the Five Senses Scavenger Hunt activity. The day of the event, participants should gather at the designated location to receive instructions and resources for the scavenger hunt. Once participants have gathered, the facilitator will provide contextual and historical information about the patterns of investment and disinvestment in Washington Heights and the fractures these patterns caused and perpetuated. In order to further explore the urban fractures evident in Washington Heights, as well as areas of reinvestment, the facilitator will show the film “The Domino Effect”. This film draws on several examples of disinvestment and reinvestment in parks in Northern Manhattan. Throughout the introduction the facilitator will emphasize the importance of recognizing these fractures that exist in the neighborhood in which participants attend school and where they spend a significant amount of their time. Following the introduction, participants will be assigned one of ten sites of reinvestment and prompted to form groups and assign the delineated roles. After gathering the necessary materials and resources for the scavenger hunt the groups will depart. Within the designated amount of time each group will complete the scavenger hunt tasks (see instructions). When the groups have completed each of the scavenger hunt activities they will debrief with the other groups and facilitator. During the debriefing, the groups will perform their ‘Sounds of the City’ and reflect on and discuss things they noticed or felt during the scavenger hunt.
Mailman School of Public Health Community Explorers’ Five Senses Walk

Materials
- butcher paper
- crayons with the paper peeled off
- sidewalk chalk
- route map

Time
1 hour, 15 minutes

Step 1: Select Roles
- **Navigators** find the way
- **Documentors** take photos and post #yus #ourfuturecity
- **Letter Writers** hit the streets with sidewalk chalk
- **Wall Rubbing-ers** find a surface to collect a wall rubbing
- **Dream Collectors** meet someone on your walk and find out their dream for the future city
- **Sound Collectors** Listen for the sound of the city and find one for your group to perform
- **Time Keeper** Make sure the group keeps time and watch out for the 2:15 challenge
- **History Student** Study the bridge medallions

To complete the scavenger hunt, your team must do the following:

**Rubbing**
Find a wall with an interesting texture, a plaque on a statue or numbers carved in stone on the side of a building. Make a rubbing using the butcher paper and crayon. Feel free to make more than one.

**Love Letter**
Using the sidewalk chalk select a person, place, tree, business, anything you see on your walk that you like and write it a love letter on the side walk. Be descriptive. Why do you love it?

**Sound Collection**
Listen the sounds of the neighborhood. Select one that you want to share. As a group learn how to perform this sound.

**Dream Collection**
Meet someone on your walk. Ask them their dream for Future City so it can be included on our dream catcher.

**History Student**
What is the story on the bridge?

**Postcard Artist**
Send postcards from the Bronx.
Locator Find the spot in the photo you have and organize a group then-and-now photo.

**2:15 Challenge**
At 2:15 everyone in the group will turn towards the sun and listen to the city for 60 seconds.
**Performance**

On October 21, 2015, a group of students and faculty joined for a five senses tour through Highbridge Park led by Dr. Mindy Fullilove. First, we gathered for lunch and an introduction to the recent evolution of Highbridge Park. Each group of 10 students were assigned a photo that represented the disinvestment experienced in different areas of the park and a route for how to get there.

With the list of scavenger hunt tasks, the groups went for a walk through Highbridge Park to the Bronx. Students took photos, wrote letters to New York, created chalk etchings, and listened to the city.

Following the walk, the participants reconvened to discuss their experiences on the scavenger hunt. Each group performed the sound they created. After the sound performances, we began a larger discussion. We asked participants to share with us anything that surprised them along the walk. We found that many participants were surprised to learn the history behind the Clean Water Act, which was written...
on the medallions along the trail. Many people discussed how their perceptions about the neighborhood had changed following the scavenger hunt. We also discussed the experiences of residents by sharing the dreams that they had for the neighborhood, such as well-paying jobs and better schools for kids.

**Feedback Session**

After the Walking Tour, the seminar invited participants to a feedback session on November 23rd. Attendees offered valuable insight and suggestions on how to improve and expand the experience in anticipation of Fall 2016 orientation activities. Participants appreciated the opportunity to hear more about the history of Washington Heights from Dr. Robert Fullilove and it was suggested that each group include a member with historical knowledge of the neighborhood. Including this historical perspective helped participants to understand the social processes that have shaped the Washington Heights community as well as the existing coherence of the neighborhood. Additionally, participants felt that there could be more interaction with community members beyond asking the one question for the dreamcatcher exercise. Addressing the racial diversity of Washington Heights was also very important to participants, who expressed interest in incorporating the implications of race and class in urban fracture and disinvestment. One student expressed: “There is a gap in terms of communicating with the Washington Heights people. How can we create racial harmony? We need to understand the history before we can have racial harmony. If we walked through Highbridge without a facilitator, we would not understand the context of these people.”

Many proposals came up in the feedback session. One proposal for the RSVP activity is to create routes that will take participants through more of the Washington Heights neighborhood rather than using only the most direct routes from CUMC to Highbridge Park. In creating longer routes
participants will interact with more of Washington Heights giving them an opportunity to observe examples of disinvestment and investment in addition to Highbridge Park. Another proposal made during the debrief session at the conclusion of the walk was to expand the exercise to include the sense of taste. By encouraging, but not requiring, participants to visit a local restaurant or street-based food vendor for a snack the activity can demonstrate support for local business while acquainting participants with the cuisine of the cultures residing in Washington Heights. It was also suggested that doctoral student be included in the activity during orientation whereas most orientation activities focus on first year Master’s students. Finally, use of a hashtag to collect images taken by participants during the activity will allow for the experience to be shared via social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat and Tumblr.

Figure 4: Prof Robert Fullilove and group on the High Bridge with a photo of the locked door that closed it off for decades.
**Assessment**

In order to assess this activity, we reviewed the values we started with:

- developing awareness of city fracture,
- examination of patterns of city development (i.e. what is being developed and for whom),
- keeping a critical eye on signs of gentrification,
- developing an awareness of the neighborhood around Columbia’s medical campus that isn’t frequently traversed by students, and
- creating a spirit of social awareness.

The feedback showed an interest in having this knowledge widely available during the activity. In general, participants on the walk were able to identify patterns of city development as reflected in the renovation of Highbridge Park. Participants were also very aware of the signs of gentrification and could readily identify them. Many participants remarked on the difference between the Columbia campus and surrounding neighborhood and had noticed the disconnection between the two. By and large, participants approached the activity with a spirit of social awareness and were able to ground this awareness in the structure of Washington Heights through this activity. The group that included Dr. Bob Q: How did you find walk?
A: Fantastic because the experience fomented wonder, learning, and community in one activity. Because it was tactile and outdoors. Basking in the sunshine on the High Bridge, that embodiment of the public health virtues of clean water and physical activity, I felt joy—because this beautiful pedestrian nexus is reopened—mixed with foreboding and helplessness about the “green-lining” gentrification it portends. I yearned for a medallion that spoke to the 40 years of neglect. And looking out to the Bronx side, I saw a new luxury building with a windmill on its roof and reflected on how “green” of parks and environmental consciousness can serve as a status symbol and instrument of power, privilege, and exclusion. To feel—both as a sensation and emotion—is a powerful way to learn!

--Timothy Paul
Fullilove developed a deeper understanding of city fracture because of his historical knowledge of the neighborhood.

**Future Action Items**

As students at Mailman who have participated in SSGA, we propose a reorientation of the Self Social and Global Awareness (SSGA) program to start with the Global and end with the Self, or the individual, in order to highlight how global problems affect all of us, and how individuals are positioned within this context. As we propose to expose city fracture through the Scavenger Hunt activities, we should also explore the ways that social fracture, on a global scale, affects the behaviors of individuals within these societies. This would be a good introduction to orientation and the MPH program at Mailman.

There were a number of other concrete suggestions that came up during the feedback session. These suggestions included engaging with the Community Advisory Board and other community organizations, and partnering with the student group Greater Community Reach in order to facilitate these relationships. Prior to incorporating these suggestions, we note that it is useful to revisit the Valuaction component of the RSVP Cycle to assess whether or not community engagement is the primary goal of the Five Senses Scavenger Hunt.

Based on the Feedback Session held with participants to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and suggested changes, the Emerging Issues in Urbanism seminar team developed the following action steps for various actors at Mailman School of Public Health. The first action item proposed for the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) is to restructure the Self, Social, Global Awareness (SSGA) workshop to Global, Social, Self Awareness (GSSA). This change pushes students to examine health and social issues through a global lens, and how they are positioned within that context. OSA would have the responsibility of shifting the culture of how new students interact with the community they are entering. Thus, OSA’s next action item is to recreate the CUMC Safety Video that orients new students to the Washington Heights neighborhood. The new video should provide safety tips that prime students for living in a city, but not create a culture of fear around black or poor folks (e.g. instructing students not to cross Audubon or stay away from The Armory). Finally, OSA will help to prepare students for the walk, by disseminating “pre-walk” resources that would provide students with historical and social
context of Washington Heights. Students would be required to review the resources and materials, such as excerpts from Urban Alchemy, before the day of The Walk. The walk should be developed in the Spring, including a facilitator training prior to the walk so that we could achieve the valuation of understanding city fracture. In order to fully accomplish these goals, facilitator training should emphasize themes such as race, the role of students in Washington Heights, and neighborhood restoration without marginalizing populations. This training should be facilitated by the Community Advisory Board to ensure scholars are accountable to the community they collaborate.

The following action items will be facilitated by the Drs. Fullilove. This includes compiling the readings and resources that students must engage with before orientation and the walk. On the day of the walk, when students assemble, give students more opportunities to talk and get to know each other. This will emphasize the message of social cohesion that is critical to the strength of communities. Facilitators and the Drs. Fullilove will make these points to emphasize in the walk:

1) How race is a driving factor in investment/disinvestment in communities?
2) Are there other opportunities for students to engage in Washington Heights?
3) What is the role students play in the community?
4) Can we have neighborhood restoration without displacement?