

The Hidden Architecture

What the Machine Cannot Classify

Sierra Parsons · Wa Na Wari · South Park, Seattle

I. THE THESIS ARRIVES FIRST

Gladys West shaped the Earth. She preferred paper maps.

She spent 42 years at the Naval Proving Ground in Dahlgren, Virginia — one of four Black employees in the building. She developed the satellite geodesy models that became the mathematical foundation of GPS. Every time any of us has ever found our way somewhere, her math got us there. Her contributions were classified. Her white colleagues received the praise, the travel assignments, the credit. Her own children didn't know the importance of her work until she filled out a biographical form for her college sorority.

That is not an oversight. That is architecture.

The same architecture that erased Katherine Johnson's name from her own orbital calculations. That let Willa Brown train hundreds of men who became Tuskegee Airmen while the Army debated whether Black people could fly. That hired Timnit Gebru to audit algorithmic bias and fired her the moment she named it too clearly. The pattern is not accidental and it is not historic. It is the operating logic of every system Black women have been recruited into and extracted from — aviation, mathematics, artificial intelligence, war.

Clocking the machine is not the same as running it.

This is the argument we made in *Fly As Fuck*, a mini zine published out of South Park, Seattle in 2026. Black women's documented capacity to identify and expose AI bias has positioned them as necessary agents within imperialist war infrastructure — recruited into the system whose logic they were among the first to name as violent. This is not inclusion. This is conscription in a different uniform. Anti-Blackness is not a bug. It is the architecture. The machine does not malfunction when it harms Black people. It performs exactly as designed. So the question this dispatch is carrying is not: how do we fix the machine? The question is: what are we building while the machine is busy looking elsewhere?

II. THE TURN SOUTH

South Park is one of the most ethnically diverse and economically pressured neighborhoods in Seattle — a community on Duwamish land that has been deliberately disinvested, redlined, flooded, and freeway-bisected for generations. It is also the neighborhood where something called Sowing in Place is quietly building a counter-architecture.

Sowing in Place is not a nonprofit. It is not a program. It is a neighborhood experiment, funded by neighbors, grown by community members, harvested together. Four projects sown side by side: Freedom Schools rooted in the 1964 SNCC model, an Oral History archive preserving the living memory of Black aviation, construction, and maritime workers, weekly Hot Meals circulating \$3,000 every week through local Black- and brown-owned restaurants, and Restorative

Circles facilitated by a trained circle keeper for neighbors, young people, and organizers who need space to repair.

What strikes me about this work — what I keep returning to — is the logic underneath it. Sowing in Place does not interface with the extractive system. It does not apply for the grants that come with strings. It does not produce deliverables for funders who want to feel good about a neighborhood they've never visited. It sidesteps the architecture entirely. It asks: what do we already have? What is already here, in this soil, in these hands, in these elders and young people and restaurant owners and circle keepers? And then it sows from there.

We have more resources than we have the capacity to recognize. We are all proximate to love, and a will to be together, at no cost but connection.

This is not naivety. This is precision. The machine extracts because it can. Sowing builds something it cannot reach.

III. GLADYS AND THE FREEDOM SCHOOL

Here is what Gladys West built: a mathematical model of the Earth so accurate that it remains the geodetic foundation of the Global Positioning System today. A model that tells you, within meters, where you are on the surface of this planet. The precision is extraordinary. The invisibility of its author — for decades — is equally precise.

The knowledge she produced was classified. Useful to the Navy, to the state, to the infrastructure of modern navigation. But not attributed. Not hers, in any public record, for most of her working life. The labor of knowing was extracted and the credit was withheld. That is the architecture in action.

Freedom Schools operate on an opposite logic.

Rooted in the 1964 Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Freedom Schools of Mississippi — where young Black Mississippians were taught not just literacy but their own history, their own power, and their right to act — the Freedom School in South Park is a deliberate inversion of what Gladys West was subjected to. The knowledge produced here is not classified. It is given, freely, to the young people who need it most. It is curriculum created by community educators who live in the neighborhood, for children who grow up in it. It names names. It does not erase. The Freedom School does not produce a deliverable the state can use. It does not generate a dataset that can be extracted, classified, or weaponized. It produces people — people who know where they come from, what has been done to them, and what they have the right and the capacity to do next. That is not a product. That is not extractable.

The machine needs to classify in order to control. What resists classification resists control.

Gladys West's work was classified because it was too valuable to share — too powerful to credit her with. The Freedom School in South Park produces a different kind of power: one that circulates within the community that made it, that cannot be lifted out and repackaged without losing the thing that makes it work.

Community knowledge, passed person to person, elder to child, circle to circle, is not legible to the extractive system. It does not have an API. It cannot be scraped.

IV. RESTORATIVE ORGANIZING AS METHODOLOGY

I want to name the praxis directly, because I think the academic framing of insurgent digitality is reaching for something that community organizers in South Park already know how to do.

When Professors Pittman, Oloukoï, Ince, and Owens ask — what lessons do Black experiences of insurgent digitality have to teach others? — I want to offer the restorative circle as an answer.

A circle is a technology. It has a structure, a set of protocols, a facilitator, a speaking piece that moves around the room and guarantees that every voice has a turn. It produces outcomes: accountability named, relationships repaired, harm addressed without the punitive architecture of the state. It is documented, archived, passed on. Tyra Edwards, the circle keeper in South Park, is not just facilitating healing — she is preserving the history of restorative practice emerging among Collective Justice organizers across the entire region. She is building an archive that names what has been learned, by whom, from whom, in what conditions.

That archive is insurgent. It is digital only insofar as the people who carry it choose to make it so. It lives first in bodies, in relationships, in the muscle memory of showing up to a circle week after week and practicing what it means to be accountable to each other. The algorithm cannot surveil that. The drone cannot map it. The dataset cannot contain it.

This is what the Combahee River Collective understood in 1977 when they wrote that the liberation of the most marginalized would require building new structures — not reforming the ones that were built to exclude them. What *Sowing in Place* is doing in South Park in 2026 is not new. It is a continuation of a lineage that runs from Combahee through SNCC through the restorative peacemaking traditions that Huayruro carries forward today. The methodology is not a response to techno-fascism. It is older than the machine. It will outlast it.

We do not seek inclusion into a burning house. We are building something new — for all of us, by all of us.

For the scholars in this cluster: this is your insurgent digitality. It is happening in a neighborhood twenty minutes from your campus. It is not waiting to be studied. It is waiting to be resourced.

For the organizers reading this from inside the work: what you already know how to do is the answer the academy is still formulating the question for. Your methodology is valid. Your archive matters. Your circle is a technology. Name it as such.

V. DISPATCH

Gladys West died earlier this year. She was 96. She spent the last years of her life as a celebrity of sorts — inducted into the Air Force Hall of Fame in 2018, celebrated at events, written about in publications that had ignored her for decades. She received it all graciously. She had spent 42 years building something that worked whether or not anyone knew her name. That was the discipline. That was the gift.

I think about that a lot in South Park.

The hot meals go out every week whether or not a funder is watching. The elder sits down for an oral history interview whether or not the university has discovered it yet. The young people show up to Freedom School whether or not their work will

ever appear in an academic journal. The circle opens whether or not there is a grant report due. The work is not waiting for legitimacy. It is legitimate. It has always been legitimate.

What I am sending from South Park to the scholars at UW is this: the counter-architecture to techno-fascism is not a future project. It is not a theoretical framework waiting to be built. It is already here, already running, already producing people and relationships and oral histories and meals and circles that the machine cannot classify, cannot extract, cannot weaponize.

What I am asking the research cluster to carry back is simpler: proximity. Come to the neighborhood. Sit in the circle. Hear the elders. Eat the food that was cooked by a Black-owned restaurant with community dollars. Let that be data. Let that be methodology. Let that be enough.

Gladys West shaped the Earth with math no one could see for decades. The people sowing in South Park are shaping something too — a neighborhood, a lineage, a proof of concept for what it looks like when Black communities build from abundance rather than scarcity, from relationship rather than transaction, from love rather than fear.

The seeds are already in the ground.

This is the dispatch.

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About the Author

Sierra Parsons is a community organizer and co-steward of Wa Na Wari and the Seattle Black Spatial Histories Institute, based in Seattle, Washington. She is a contributor to Sowing in Place, a neighborhood experiment in South Park, Seattle, rooted in food sovereignty, restorative practice, oral history, and intergenerational leadership. This piece was written in response to an invitation from the Black Digital Studies in the Age of Techno-Fascism crossdisciplinary research cluster at the Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington.

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