

Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* articulate the complex social dynamics of the Black interior in the form of public gatherings in the salons of Harlem's brownstones, dance halls, and religious spaces. Each one of these interior spaces is interminably flexible in its use: they have provided everything from a primary residence for well to do families to boarding houses for the newly emancipated middle-class subject, or a staging ground for the local non-profit. In this sense, the typical Harlem brownstone was not guided by the social norms of its Victorian aesthetic—a false assumption that Frank Lloyd Wright believed necessitated the invention of the Prairie Style—but by the spatial practices of its primary occupants. As Lillian Williams notes in her text *Strangers in the Land of Paradise*, it has provided liberation since the nineteenth century for Black residents seeking a level of independence in the social programming of local boarding and settlement houses in nearby walkups. This social practice extended the reach of the Black family to encompass literal and metaphorical “relatives” as the Great Migration brought new kinship relations to the industrial North. In such cases, family was made and remade in the private kitchens, dining rooms and front porches of what are now the Rust Belt cities of the United States.

Despite the tyrannical focus on architectural form undertaken by polemicists of the international style in the United States, it is possible to find some of the most ‘modern’ spatial practices occurring in some of the most decidedly ‘pre-modern’ of buildings. Placemaking does not require a novel architectural frame to take shape, although plenty of progressive architects have learned to design a building that amplifies the strategic function of its social space. According to the philosophy of modern architect Robert Traynham Coles, an MIT trained Buffalo native, the social trajectory of modernity has contributed to an inversion of suburbanization wherein “private spaces should become smaller in urban society as public spaces, facilitating interaction, become larger.” Coles applied this principle to the design of multiple building typologies, perhaps most eloquently in his own house-studio on Buffalo's East Side. In the sense that his architecture helps to shape the public good, he demonstrates the ways