



# James G. Stockard, Jr. MCP '68, LF '78 Fund

2022 – 2023



Harvard University  
Graduate School of Design

# Abdul-Razak M. Zachariah MUP '23



## Why I Chose the GSD

The GSD was an exciting choice for me because it presents several design disciplines in one space and grants me the opportunity to learn planning in an interdisciplinary manner both through GSD and broader Harvard courses.

The practice-oriented structure of studios stood out to me as an opportunity to apply theory of progressive planning approaches in conversation with peers from other parts of the world and other neighborhood contexts. And tying that planning knowledge to topics I would learn at places like the Kennedy School and Graduate School of Education would help me test the validity of these ideas with other community practitioners.

At a practice level, I came with a strong interest in becoming a neighborhood planner centered on scaling up models of service delivery, community design, participatory planning, and solidarity economy systems. I'm dedicated to co-designing with youth and families in communities of color, particularly neighborhoods and cities with large and historic Black populations.

As I've taken studio courses and attended reviews within urban planning and across the other GSD design fields, I've recognized that my interests have expanded to include a stronger focus on reparative planning practices rooted in residents' cultural, economic and physical relationships to land.

## Where I Call Home

West Haven, Connecticut

## Education

Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and  
Certificate in Education Studies,  
Yale University

Master of Education in  
Prevention Science and Practice,  
Harvard Graduate School of  
Education

## Work Experience

- MIT Hack the Archive
- Association for  
Neighborhood and Housing  
Development
- Harvard Ed Portal
- Center for Youth and  
Community Leadership in  
Education
- Leadership, Education and  
Athletics in Partnership, Inc.



I hope to further explore how cities can pursue the decommodification of housing while simultaneously thinking of alternatives to individual and community wealth generation. This stems from my hope that low-income communities of color can experience a closing of the racial wealth gap while also not relying on housing in the market as their primary means of economic stability. Some tools I am learning about towards this end are community land trusts and land value capture.

I also hope to think creatively across the fields of education, cultural heritage, arts and planning to develop a practice that supports residents' pursuit of culturally relevant and healing neighborhood identities and development.

I plan to learn more about methods to democratize knowledge of planning practice through community-level planning workshops. And I want to understand how the incorporation of the arts and public engagement community histories can serve as mediums for designing neighborhoods that represent what people want to rectify, remove or rejoice about from their local past.

## **Highlights of My Time at the GSD**

- With my MUP classmates Lamei Zhang, Christian Schmidt, and with support from the GSD's Racial Equity and Anti-Racism Fund, I was able to coordinate Community Site Visits to local community-based organizations that support communities of color within the fields of urban planning, affordable housing development, social services and organizing. We would bring groups of ten Urban Planning and Design (UPD) students on these trips to meet organizational leaders, learn about their work, and visit sites relevant to their programming or development work. The overall goal was to supplement the learning that UPD students have by way of direct community conversations, specifically with communities of color who are often not centered in the country's history of urban planning practice.



- For my second semester urban planning studio, my classmate Gauri Nagpal and I were able to devise and present on our proposal of a community-based organization and new city department in the Acre neighborhood of Lowell, Massachusetts that supports the economic opportunities of Lowell residents. Our focus was on the use of vacant and underused parcels of land in Lowell to provide a program around flexible, informal uses of land for economic and social activities that can build financial stability for immigrant residents and induce future development of those sites for good social purpose.
- As part of my Housing and Urbanization in the United States, my MArch classmate Gabriel Soomar and I were able to create a podcast as our final assignment to share reflections from residents of the Roxbury neighborhood on their thoughts about the connections between affordable housing and open, green spaces. We were able to get interviews with people who could speak about various housing types and histories and the neighborhood, then provide commentary from our perspectives as a community worker/urban planner and as an architect/public realm designer.



## **Dear Jim and Donors of the Stockard Fund,**

Thank you so much for creating this fund for graduate students like me who are interested in pursuing work in affordable housing and community development! I'm grateful that I'm a recipient of the fellowship, especially after being able to work with you last year as an RA and after taking your course this past semester with Jenn.

You've been an incredible and supportive resource for me when it comes to thinking about career futures that include my interests in youth work and cultural planning. And your overall insights on how to think about planning with all the nuances of working with community members and in service of one's community have helped me understand more my own goals in becoming a planner. It's important for students to have committed professors like you who are always excited about what students are excited to think through and share.

As I continue to learn more about my own interests in these fields, I'm looking forward to being in touch with you and getting your advice along the way. And I'm always happy to see what tie you'll have on each time I see you. Thank you again, Jim, and I'll talk to you very soon!

With warmth,

**Abdul-Razak M. Zachariah**

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