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# What is Africatown?

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## What is Africatown?



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The last few months have been interesting to say the least. I have been hearing about Africatown for years but never really understood what it was all about. Despite knowing one of the founders, Wyking Garrett, for years, way back to our Garfield High School days (Any dogs in the house?), I was not sure what Africatown really was or did. Depending on who you talk to Africatown is a state of mind, for others a neighborhood, property developer, business incubator, youth empowerment and for some others a movement (thats a lot!).

What I found out is that Africatown Seattle is actually an umbrella for several organizations and entities all with different mandates and objectives, but ultimately all with a common goal of empowerment of Seattles Black Community. Inside Africatown there is the Africatown Community Land Trust, Africatown Central District Preservation and Development Association, Africatown Center for Education and Innovation, and lastly Black Dot Underground.

It looks like there is a lot going on so let's go through these one by one.



**Africatown Community Land Trust**

Although only two years old, Africatown Community Land Trust (ACLT) has been making major and sustainable progress and lots of noise in the community. You might not have heard of ACLT, but for sure you have seen their handy work in the form of the Liberty Bank Building development on 24th & Union. Thats right, ACLT is a driving partner on the Liberty Bank Building project along with Capitol Hill Housing, Byrd Barr Place, and the Black Community Impact Alliance. The Liberty Bank Building project is very much aligned with ACLTs core mandate, to secure land on behalf of the community and actually the community will own the Liberty Bank Building in 15 years. According to the team at ACLT, the Liberty Bank Building is just the first of several projects. Next up for them, the Midtown Plaza, where in 2021 the new Africatown Village will open, offering affordable housing options for the community.

So basically, ACLTs sole focus is acquiring land on behalf of the community. Ok, now I understand that part...whats next?

### **Africatown Central District Preservation and Development Association.**

So once ACLT acquired the land, that is when the Africatown Central District Preservation and Development Association (whew thats a mouthful!) or APDA gets involved; and their job is to develop the land in a way that best benefits the community. ACLT gets the land and APDA develops it. APDA also works actively to preserve historic landmarks in the community to shield them against the wrecking ball of gentrification.

So basically APDA develops/cultivates programming for properties that the ACLT acquires. APDA is focused on placemaking, identigy, design, planning, business development (Black Dot) basically helping to cultivate what happens in and around the property such as recruiting and assisting tenants, producing events and activations. APDA also works to preserve historic buildings and structures in the neighborhood.

Great, I got it! Okay enough with the land and housing for now. Lets shift gears to education and innovation.



### **Africatown Center for Education and Innovation**

Ironically enough, the Africatown Center for Education and Innovation (ACEI) is housed in a former Seattle Public Schools resource center on the corner of Martin Luther King and Alaska Street. The stated mission of ACEI (lots of acronyms at Africatown) is to cultivate and promote innovative education enhancement and community development solutions focusing on people of African descent. ACEI came into existence in 2013 when a group of concerned and dedicated parents, students,

educators, administrators, community leaders, and politicians all came together to immediately address the educational crisis amongst African American students in Seattle Public Schools. The end result was ACEI, which is committed to creating a community that fosters hope, resilience, and academic achievement. ACEI has three core pillars, academic enrichment, engagement, and personal/professional development.

Africatown Center for Education and Innovation is all about promoting solutions for lifelong learning in our community by empowering our youth in regards to education and engagement and works with adults to develop professional skills. Ok, I definitely understand that!

To build a strong community you need strong commerce and that is where Black Dot comes into play.



### **Black Dot Underground**

If you ask the team from Black Dot what their organization is all about, they will tell you it is where culture, business, and tech collide (Boom!). Black Dot Underground, is literally underground, as they are located in the basement of the Business Impact Northwest building on 16th and Jackson Street. Black Dot has a few thousand square feet that is divided up into coworking space, conference rooms, and even a kitchenette and dining area with super fast wifi throughout. Many small businesses and start ups just need a place to do business, take meetings, and email; Black Dot is the perfect location for these coworking solutions. However, Black Dot does much more. They provide knowledge and support to help launch and grow dreams into sustainable ventures. What does that translate to? Well, the team at Black Dot works hand in hand with entrepreneurs to help them develop business skills and also align them with business capital in the form of grants and loans. In this, Black Dot is very unique from other coworking spaces where its just a place to work. Black Dots Mastermind Mondays, where entrepreneurs meet in the spirit of Think & Grow Rich to support, collaborate, and hold each other accountable, is a great example of that. The team at Black Dot can very well send you down the road to launching your new business with a bag in hand.

Black Dot Underground is all about creating space for people to work and as well helping those in need enhance their business through classes, seminars, and alignment with grants and loans. Hmmm, helping our businesses...understood!

So this covers the different organizations within Africatown, but wait, theres more!



Africatown is also a concept as well as a geographic location. How can it be both? Well, let's take a look at other ethnic hubs of commerce and culture. We have all heard of Chinatown (these days it has a more politically correct name, The International District or ID), with Seattle's massive Asian population. For sure, all Asian people or even just people of Chinese descent, do not live in Chinatown; and the city's sizable Vietnamese population does not all live in Little Saigon, however, those geographic locations are very much considered the heart of the culture. Community members who live far from Chinatown and Little Saigon in neighboring cities, still take the trek to the International District for authentic shopping and cultural experiences.

Apply that same rationale to the Central District. Black people have been calling the CD home for over 130 years. We all know about the pioneering legends in arts and music that the CD birthed. Today, despite being heavily gentrified, many Black people still consider the Central District to be the cultural epicenter of Blackness in the Pacific Northwest. And now, despite living in far-flung satellite cities like Kent and Federal Way, Black people still make the pilgrimage back to the Central District to get a haircut at Earls, pick up some food from Ezells or Catfish Corner Taste of the Caribbean or Catfish Corner, or take their kids to Barnett, Pratt, or Sam Smith Parks, or an afternoon at the Northwest African American Museum, or even to catch the Umoja Fest parade.



So in that sense, Africatown is a concept of the cultural heart of Black culture in Seattle and a geographic location, the Central District.

We have covered a lot of ground here, I think it is best if we review:

**Africatown Community Land Trust** - Acquires land on behalf of the community.

**Africatown Preservation and Development Association** - Develops what happens in and around the space land trust acquires and also works to preserve historic structures.

**Africatown Center for Education and Innovation** - Works diligently to bring the best out of our students as well as offering personal/professional development for adults.

**Black Dot Underground** - Where business, culture, and tech intersect and form a cohesive environment for coworking as well as providing business development services, classes, seminars, and assistance with grants and loans.

**Africatown** - Also known as the Central District or CD, the historical epicenter for Black people in Seattle and despite gentrification still the place where Black people make the pilgrimage to for an authentic cultural experience.

So I hope this short article has helped you get a better understanding of what Africatown is all about and more importantly, in understanding, you will do like I did and get involved.