

Philadelphia Freedoms
Cultural Landscapes
and Civic Ideals

**SOUTHEAST BY SOUTHEAST:
MAPPING NEIGHBORHOOD KNOWLEDGE**

FEATURING ESSAYS BY

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**ARTISTS AND
WRITERS EXCHANGE**

SPRING 2016

ARTISTS AND WRITERS EXCHANGE SOUTHEAST BY SOUTHEAST: MAPPING NEIGHBORHOOD KNOWLEDGE

SUPPORTED BY THE CENTER FOR
PEACE AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
AT HAVERFORD COLLEGE



In Spring 2016, Haverford College students enrolled in **Philadelphia Freedoms: Cultural Landscapes and Civic Ideals**, a critical writing seminar, conducted a series of dialogues with members of Southeast by Southeast, a neighborhood project of the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. Our goal was to produce a collaborative project about the history and future of Philadelphia through a close study of Southeast by Southeast.

According to their mission, Southeast by Southeast is located in "a formerly defunct property that has been transformed into a community arts and resource center for new refugees from Bhutan, Burma, and Nepal living in South Philadelphia." Southeast by Southeast is a five-year-old partnership between Mural Arts, the City of Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, Lutheran Children and Family Service, and members of the community. Initially intended as a six-month intervention, Mural Arts extended the project in response to community members' calls for longer lasting engagement. Now, five years later, Southeast by Southeast continues to grow as an incubator for community arts projects, resource sharing, and neighborhood relations.

As a class, under the guidance of Southeast by Southeast lead artist Shira Walinsky, students applied critical writing approaches pursued in their semester coursework toward a public presentation that also aimed to serve Southeast by Southeast with a window into their body of work.

In small groups, students responded to an oral history project produced by Southeast by Southeast youth participants, as well as archival materials loaned from their storefront space. Walinsky visited with students at Haverford, met with a representative from the Haverford College Admission Office to discuss college access and equity strategies for students from refugee communities, and welcomed Haverford students to the storefront for a site visit with youth from the project. In their groups, Haverford students examined sites of creative knowledge production in and around the neighborhood surrounding the storefront to contribute entries toward a collective class publication. Their writing addresses the ethical, historical, environmental, and creative issues raised through Southeast by Southeast's oral histories, murals, and neighborhood engagements.

—Paul Farber
Professor, Philadelphia Freedoms

QUESTIONS

TO CONSIDER

As a project, how does Southeast by Southeast fit into the neighborhood's history, present, and future?

How do its members participate in the production of knowledge around the site?

What is the relationship between art making and social services, especially given Mural Arts' municipal and community partnerships?

Who runs the city?

Who are the sources of knowledge and/or authority around this site?

How does Southeast by Southeast collect and explore its neighborhood's history? Mural Arts? Philadelphia?

How does Southeast by Southeast fit into a the larger map of the city?

How does Southeast by Southeast produce, exchange, and evolve, especially to relation to the neighborhood and the city?



ARTISTS AND
WRITERS EXCHANGE
STUDENTS

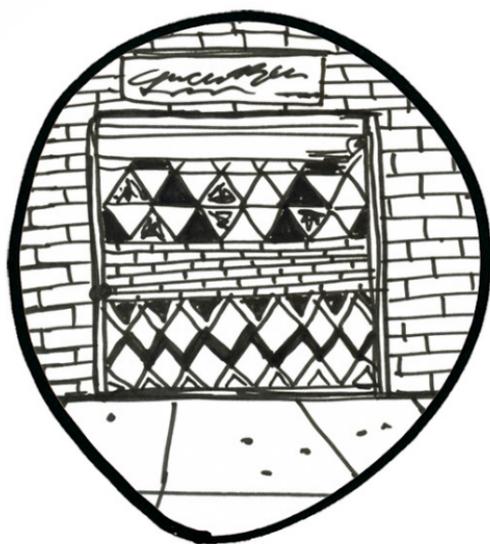
Special Guest
ra Walinsky
Arts/Southeast

theast

SHIRA WALINSKY
AND SOUTHEAST BY
SOUTHEAST YOUTH
PARTICIPANTS



How do we create more opportunities for us to get a good
school and make a better life for us in Chicago?



SOUTHEAST BY SOUTHEAST STOREFRONT

2106 S. 8th Street

Sophie Hess '19 and Austin Huber '19

Southeast by Southeast is a community arts project run by the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. The project was created with the goal to create a “community arts and resource center for new refugees from Bhutan, Burma, and Nepal living in South Philadelphia.” Though Southeast by Southeast operates and creates art throughout Southeast Philadelphia, the project’s cultural mecca is currently located at its storefront on South 8th Street. This storefront is a dynamic space that changes constantly to meet the many demands of Southeast by Southeast’s diverse participant base.

Even when Southeast by Southeast’s storefront is closed, you can still get a feel for the community by viewing its front grate. Painted in a geometric pattern with striking colors, Southeast by Southeast has also painted several grates throughout its Southeast Philly neighborhood. On open days, the welcoming and vibrant atmosphere of Southeast by Southeast continues once you step into the storefront. When you walk inside, you will likely first see the space’s weekly calendar to your right. The walls are also adorned with community-created art, photographs, and personal accounts of participants’ experiences. Overall, the objective is to give participants a space where they feel at home. The personal accounts create kinship, the traditional artwork adds a sense of comfort, and the weekly calendar provides order in participants’ often intense and ever-changing lives. The Southeast by Southeast storefront feels less like a non-profit’s project headquarters or commercial space, and more like a home space where participants are encouraged to build community and make new roots in the United States.

The storefront serves as a home to workshops, art exhibits, events, English classes, grandparents' groups, women's groups, and classes in participants' home languages of Karen and Chin, all of which are scheduled throughout the week. Moving into a new space last year, in 2015, after leaving an original location on South 7th Street just blocks away, Southeast by Southeast focuses on the collaboration of participants and artists with opportunities to schedule workshops or events. Artist Shira Walinsky, one of the co-founders of the project and its lead artist, works with refugees and immigrants throughout Philadelphia to create murals and spaces that foster a sense of home and comfort. The participants not only learn from and attend workshops led by Walinsky, but lead their own workshops and educate others about their own cultures and experiences.

The storefront also provides the participants in the Southeast by Southeast program a space to include their families and build community. Many of the participants are children, so programs that help integrate them into their new culture, learn English, and transition into Philadelphia schools are all extremely important. When asked what they would most like to add to Southeast by Southeast's program, some of the project's youth answered that they would appreciate a storefront with more space. Though the current storefront does serve as a host for a variety of activities and classes, limited funding has constrained the storefront to one big room with several long tables. This means that on any given day the storefront could be filled with multiple activities, including students in an English class, women weaving or sewing

traditional pieces of art, or youth preparing for an upcoming artistic showcase. The needs of new residents from Bhutan, Burma, and Nepal are greater than that which the storefront can provide.

Though the storefront is small in its footprint, its cultural significance throughout South Philly is not. Many immigrants and refugees rely on Southeast by Southeast to help them acclimate to their new and changing lives, and the workshops and classes made accessible to these participants means very much to them and their families. Life in South Philly is extremely different from the lives participants left behind in their home countries, so the work that Southeast by Southeast does is of the utmost importance to create new homes and community spaces where the participants feel like they belong.



CONSTELLATION OF MURALS

Around S. 7th and Emily Streets

Joseph Boyle '19, Shu Min He '19, and Elisa Sheen 19

Murals characterize a universal language that effectively bind communities and initiate conversations about social and political issues. Through in-depth interactions between artists and community residents, Southeast by Southeast has overseen the blossoming of murals throughout Philadelphia, and especially in South Philadelphia, since its inception in 2011. The organization behind this project—the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, a municipally-grounded, public-private entity—has sought to engage local communities through public art. Such murals tend to be commissioned as singular projects, so the constellation of similarly themed murals envisioned by artists Shira Walinsky and Miriam Singer for this project was relatively unprecedented.

The murals of Southeast by Southeast, such as the depiction of a tiger surrounded by a background of textile designs and colored rectangular patterns on South 7th Street, across from the organization's original storefront, have had a tremendous impact on public spaces by conveying a continuing narrative of refugee history and culture in the city. They have captured the attention of more and more people because the nature of Mural Arts compels passersby to examine their details and artistic intent. According to Will Pace, a former Mural Arts project manager, Southeast by Southeast's mission is to use art as a "catalyst to give refugee populations an opportunity to tell their story." Southeast by Southeast recognizes the rich history of incoming refugees and helps to highlight and to record this history with a constellation of murals painted with the input from the refugees themselves. As people create their own interpretations of murals, they push for

deeper meaning through questioning and discussions, and these conversations often result in communities valuing the voices and experiences of individuals.

Through Southeast by Southeast's mural production process, South Philadelphia's refugee and immigrant residents have contributed their own ideas to create murals that represent their own values and backgrounds. For example, lead artist Shira Walinsky incorporated concepts of mountains and textile designs suggested by residents into the mural at the intersection of 8th and Emily Streets. Her mural portrays people traveling to a city with large mountains and colored stripes in the background, representing textile designs. Southeast by Southeast student Mnar notes that he and other students chose the words that appear on Walinsky's Language Lab mural, an amalgamation of words such as "tiger," "dragon," and "lotus" illustrated and inscribed in languages including Karen, Chin, and Vietnamese. (During the design process, community members who are experts in each language changed and edited the words.) In these ways, members of the community are contributing to the construction of knowledge, of cultural heritage preservation in the neighborhood, and of a communal culture. As Robin, another student, notes, the program allows community members to "do everything – we draw, write, and learn from each other here." In contrast to a single mural, whose meaning may change depending on its context, the benefits of the string of Southeast by Southeast murals are readily apparent: the value of these murals resides across their exploration of ideas and the complementary building of tight-knit communities.



GROWING HOME GARDENS

Between S. 7th/8th Streets and Emily Streets

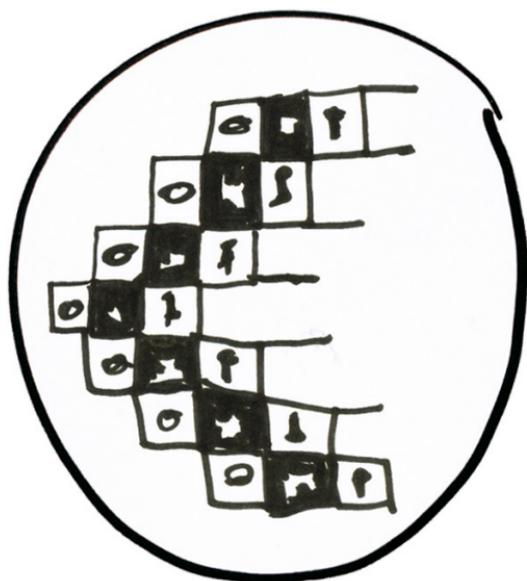
Sophie Hess '19 and Austin Huber '19

In 2011, Emily Street, between South 7th and 8th Streets, was characterized by a cluster of vacant and overgrown lots. Over the last five years, those properties were transformed into community gardens through the combined efforts of the Nationalities Service Center's lead gardener Adam Forbes and the neighborhood's prominent Southeast Asian refugee community. Today, the gardens serve as reliable sources of fresh produce and, more importantly, provide the refugee community with a vital social and psychological outlet through which they may reconcile the complex process of relocating thousands of miles away from their native cultures and countries.

The transition to urban life in Southeast Philadelphia from countries as diverse as Bhutan, Burma, and Nepal is often quite drastic. Families and individuals exchange their rural, mountainous, agrarian lifestyles for the paved and frenetic metropolis. Small villages are left behind for urban rowhomes lining dense, narrow streets. Walking to gather daily necessities is exchanged for SEPTA bus rides or subway trips to markets that do not offer the most basic components of native cuisines. Life is fundamentally redefined and refugees often struggle to locate or reproduce for themselves much sought after vestiges of their homelands. In Southeast Philadelphia, however, the community gardens reaffirms that they are indeed integral members and stakeholders of an ever-diversifying neighborhood.

Growing out from between scattered rowhomes, these humble yet verdant gardens function as a meeting place for the refugee

community and other neighborhood residents a meeting place in which knowledge, cultures, and traditions may be practiced, shared, and preserved. For many, gardening is a therapeutic practice that translates cultural heritage within the context of new Philadelphian realities, in some ways transporting immigrants back to their respective homelands. The harvesting of the popular crop Chim Bong recalls the common Burmese practice of collecting crops directly from home gardens and facilitates the cooking of traditional dishes. Rather than traveling to a bodega, walking to and harvesting from the community garden is easier and free of cost. Community members feel confident that they can not only access foods difficult to find in Southeast Philadelphia, but also foster an environment in which to freely express their cultural practices. Whether refugee community members identify as full-fledged Philadelphians or with the combined influences of their native and adopted cultures, delving one's hands into the raised planting beds offers the opportunity to reach through the soil and once again feel the pulse of life in their new homeland.



LANGUAGE LAB MURAL

S. 7th and Moore Streets

Christopher Goings '19, Sabrina Kwak '19, and Miranda Johnson '19

Philadelphia's Language Lab mural was released to the public on September 12, 2015 as a collaboration between the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts program and community members in Southeast Philadelphia. The project, funded, in part, by the City of Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, documents and commemorates the assemblage of languages found within the city of Philadelphia. The mural, which lies at the intersection of South 7th and Moore Streets, is near the East Passyunk Crossing section of Southeast Philadelphia and located in a neighborhood comprised of many political refugees from Southeast Asia along with other residents. As many households in this community are multilingual, their community identity and growth within the city of Philadelphia has been largely aided by the Mural Arts Program and other community art and education initiatives in recognition of this language diversity.

Through the Language Lab mural, lead artist Shira Walinsky aimed to incorporate a multitude of language traditions found in the city through colorful image/word tiles. Southeast Asian languages such as Burmese, Bhutanese, Khmer, and Nepalese are found in the mural in addition to other world languages such as Spanish, English, and Mandarin. The tiles in the mural combine images of life in Philadelphia with languages from across the world. For example, the SEPTA 47 bus tile combined with Burmese text adeptly synthesizes a mix of cultures, playfully symbolizing the different experiences represented in Southeast Philadelphia. Haverford College student and filmmaker Sarah Moses '16 captured the creation process and final implementation of the

Language Lab mural in her senior thesis documentary film. In remembering the history of language in Southeast Philadelphia, and placing newer additions to Philadelphia's linguistic landscape alongside older languages, Walinsky's mural highlights the value of new cultural contributions and positions speakers of these languages as valid and exciting contributors of knowledge.

The mural seems designed with accessibility very much in mind. Mural Arts designs public art specific to a location, and works with communities to place them. This mural, which is next to the 47 bus stop, is seen daily by commuters, thus easily integrating knowledge sharing and cultural celebration into the daily life of the neighborhood. Visually, the mural is vibrant, with a simple color blocked design and repeating images hint at the wealth of information it contains. These features help make the Language Lab mural equally relevant to both children and adults, as well as to native and non-native English speakers.



HORACE FURNESS HIGH SCHOOL

1900 S. 3rd Street

Will Herzog '19 and David Zegeye '19

Horace Furness High School is a public high school serving the Lower Moyamensing community. As a neighborhood public school, the facility is open-enrollment and serves those not enrolled in magnet or charter schools. While Furness serves a much broader geographical area and population, 48% of Furness students are Asian, and 47% of Furness students are English language learners. Furness sophomore and Southeast by Southeast participant Marmetra, a native of Burma, was initially not excited to attend Furness and was worried that the school would not provide access to a quality education. However, Marmetra discovered it to be welcoming because "there are people who speak my language, so I don't feel alone." Furness seniors and Southeast by Southeast contributors Timothy and Mnar have a similar understanding. They like Furness because it is diverse and has many different cultures represented. Their classmates' native languages are Burmese, Nepali, and Khmer, among other Southeast Asian languages. Critical to fostering this culture of diversity is Principal Daniel Peou. Peou came to Furness in 2012, but his connection to Furness is deep-rooted. Furness was the first school Peou attended when he first arrived in America as a Cambodian refugee. A non-native language speaker, he had never attended a school for formal education before coming to Furness. Peou prizes this diversity, stating on the nonprofit buildOn's website, "this is where I met other refugee students from many different countries who also had little or no formal education. We began learning English together and started building friendships across cultures at the same time...the most important lesson learned was that I was able to dream." Timothy finds comfort in

having a principal with a similar path, stating “I think he’s really cool and he’s Asian. Being born and raised [with our background] is very different.” Mnar likes Peou as well, stating that he knows almost every student’s name. Marmetra likes Peou’s annual assembly, where every Southeast Asian country’s food is represented, and students can “dance, sing, or do any other representation of our culture.” Although Furness incubates a vibrant community, the school is not without its challenges. Built in 1914, the facility is plagued with serious maintenance issues due to insufficient funding. Marmetra states, “If there’s a really rainy day, we have to [change classrooms].” Approximately 30% of students demonstrate proficiency on the Algebra I Keystone Exam by 11th grade, almost 10% below the average across the school district as a whole. Additionally, a large population of students hail from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

MOORE ST



15429 S

DUDLEY ST



EMILY ST

15426 S



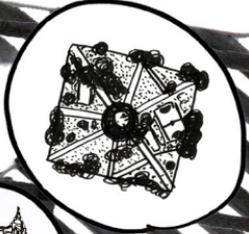
CANTRELL ST

WINTON ST

15844 S

15744 S

W MOYAMENSING AVE



W RITNER ST

W PORTER ST



SOUTH EAST PHILADELPHIA

MORRIS ST

S 5th ST



MIFFLIN ST

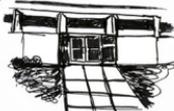
E MOYAMENING AV



MERCY ST

McKEAN ST

SNYDER AVE



S 3rd ST

JACKSON ST

TREE ST

DALY ST

WOLF ST

S 4th ST





EDWARD W. BOK TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL (CLOSED)

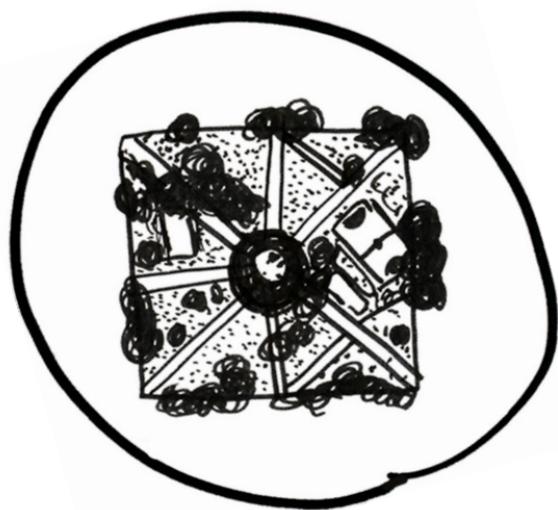
1901 S. 9th Street

Will Herzog '19 and David Zegeye '19

In 2013, Edward W. Bok Technical High School in South Philadelphia was shuttered due to a lack of funding. Although the school was closed, Bok remains a centerpiece of the neighborhood's landscape, architecture, and history. Bok was a vital community asset. Closing the building was a disservice to residents who relied on the school as an educational resource. We met with Marmetra, a member of the Southeast by Southeast community as well as a sophomore from Furness High School, to talk about how the closure of Bok High School has affected the neighborhood. Our conversation revealed that the closure of Bok meant that former classmates were primarily diverted into two proximate schools, Furness and South Philadelphia High Schools. He says Furness is now packed and that students have to travel to farther neighborhoods that they may be unfamiliar with to receive the same education they previously had.

It is irresponsible for the School District of Philadelphia to not leave the fate of Bok in the hands of the community leaders, but to sell the school to a developer, who may or may not have had experience working in the neighborhood. Some of the new owner's plans for the former high school include reimagining the building as a makers' space or a preschool as possible uses for the neighborhood. However, leaving the community out of the repurposing of their central educational anchor only encourages the building to become a structure isolated from the surrounding neighborhood. A fear spoken by residents is the possibility Bok High School will become repurposed into a structure that aims to attract wealthier inhabitants from outside the neighborhood, which would lead to an increase of property taxes and a decrease in the voices of people who are

susceptible to these changes. It is feared that the repurposing of Bok High School will lead to gentrification and displacement of both longtime residents and of recent immigrants. Using census data to quantify changes in home prices, the amount of owned or rented homes that have increased in price since the school's closure are a small fraction of the neighborhood's housing stock. Median income has stayed the same as well. At the moment, it seems that the neighborhood of Lower Moyamensing has not experienced a spike in home prices or an increase in the price of goods. However, if plans for the high school's redevelopment do not engage the community and acknowledge its dynamics, then the redevelopment will not act as a catalyst but will become a displacing force for current residents.



MIFFLIN SQUARE PARK

Between S. 5th/6th Streets and Wolf/Ritner Streets

Yilin Li '19, Tai Nguyen '19, and Moeka Noda '19

"The park is my most favorite place in Philadelphia."

Today, similar to many other public parks in Philadelphia, Mifflin Square Park exists as one of the most popular spots for local youth in its neighborhood. As a relatively small space (under 2.5 acres), the park often serves its local community as a place for social gatherings. Mifflin Square Park is shared by an ethnically complex community, comprised of whites, African Americans, and Southeast Asian immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma. Since the 1990s, the park has transformed from a place of racial tension and gang violence to a safer playground for children who live in the neighborhood.

Until several years ago, many parents did not allow their children to go to Mifflin Square Park due to safety concerns. In a 1996 Philadelphia Inquirer article, reporter Kathy Boccella describes the park as a public space neglected by the city, and as a place where gang fights between different Asian ethnic groups occurred every day. Regarding themselves as "those who were there first," the white neighbors labeled children of Asian immigrants as "those who are taking over." The park was not only the location for violence, it was also the central point of contention between those groups.

This, however, changed as the neighborhood found more ways to come together. Many different programs were born thanks to organizational efforts from the community, one of which is the Friends of Mifflin Square Park. Founded in 2010 by a few community members and local organizations, the volunteer group holds monthly clean-up events, movie nights, and fitness activities.

Today, you will find children playing on swings, neighbors from diverse backgrounds walking dogs and talking to each other in the park. To respond to the community's needs, the city has now stationed police officers during the day.

"The park is open for everyone. It's free!" – a youth member of Southeast by Southeast answered when we asked on a recent site visit if the park is a place for everyone in the neighborhood. "Yes, it is our place." While being kept away in the past because of safety concerns, children are now allowed by their parents to come to the park to chat and play basketball. As some of its primary users, youth at Southeast by Southeast know best. The way they talked about the park shows that it is no longer solely a symbol of racial tension, but rather a space of sharing. In the 1990s, ownership of the park may have, in part, belonged to gangs. Today, it seems to be the property of the Mifflin Square community, with safety and cleanliness as priorities of many renovation projects. Southeast by Southeast has a special connection to Mifflin Square Park, where they filmed an oral history of the park and documented their new lives in Philadelphia. The park and its surrounding areas are still dealing with the effects of violence and tensions that arose from the gang and drug turf wars, even as neighbors achieve progress to make it a safer space.

With many recent successes, Mifflin Square Park is certainly still a work in progress. As the closest, largest public space to Southeast by Southeast, the park greatly complements many projects that happen in the organization's storefront. As a spacious and welcoming community place, Mifflin Square Park will be the possible location for multiple upcoming community art projects and neighborhood engagements.



PREAH BUDDHA RANGSEY TEMPLE

2400 S. 6th Street

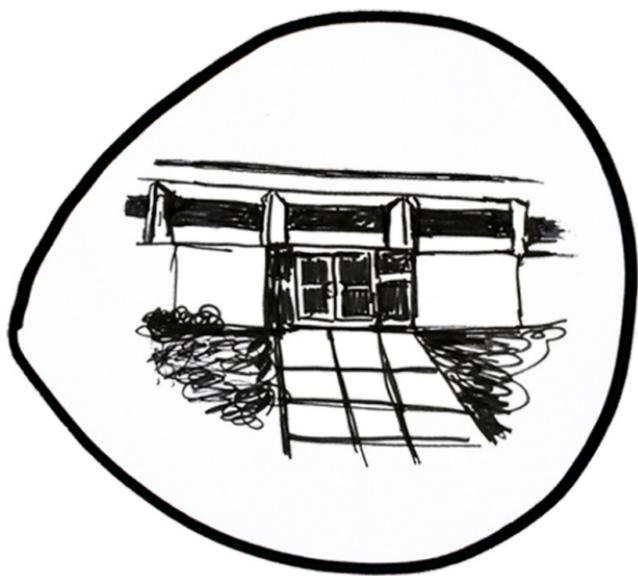
Yilin Li '19, Tai Nguyen '19, and Moeka Noda '19

Footsteps away from Mifflin Square, Preah Buddha Rangsey Temple was previously a Catholic church that was renovated in 2003 to become a local temple for Cambodian immigrants in South Philadelphia. The Khmer Buddhist Humanitarian Association (KBHA) purchased the church when it was on the verge of collapse. Open to a public of all religions and cultures, the temple mainly serves Cambodian immigrants who took refuge to Philadelphia to escape the Khmer Rouge. The temple has about 4000 members, and extends its membership to the Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, and Thai communities. Its chief monk, Muni Ratana, is one of the founders of KBHA.

Inside, the building has three floors: the first floor is often used for dining and celebration, the second floor for praying and meditation, and the third floor is devoted to the monks. As most of the interior was kept intact, the biggest changes seemed to happen at the fence and the front door. Detailed red and yellow carvings combined with the two lion statues at the door aim to remind the Cambodian community of their temples from home.

Cambodian immigrants turn to the temple to practice their faith and build a homely community. When Muni Ratana talks about his temple, he describes it as both a physical shelter for the monks, and a spiritual shelter for the local Cambodians. When the Khmer refugees fled the country three decades ago, Pol Pot's decimation of temples and traditions left them with little to rebuild on their own. "Some Cambodian refugees lose everything: family, goals, religion. The temple is a place for them to live happily. It gives them hope again," said Ratana.

The constructive influence that the temple has extends beyond religion. The arrival of the monks helps transition the neighborhood and makes it a much safer place for the local residents. Many restaurants and markets, such as “New Phnom Penh,” add flavor and vigor to the neighborhood while also creating more economic opportunities. According to Yun Or, a current monk at the temple, “before, as soon as the sun went down they were shooting and attacking and killing in the park across the street. The bad stuff has reduced to less than 10% since we moved here.” Although created for a specific purpose, Preah Rangsey Temple ends up being a parallel to (as well as a spiritual home and anchor for) members of Southeast by Southeast in the generative impact it has created in the Mifflin Square neighborhood.



WHITMAN LIBRARY

200 Snyder Avenue

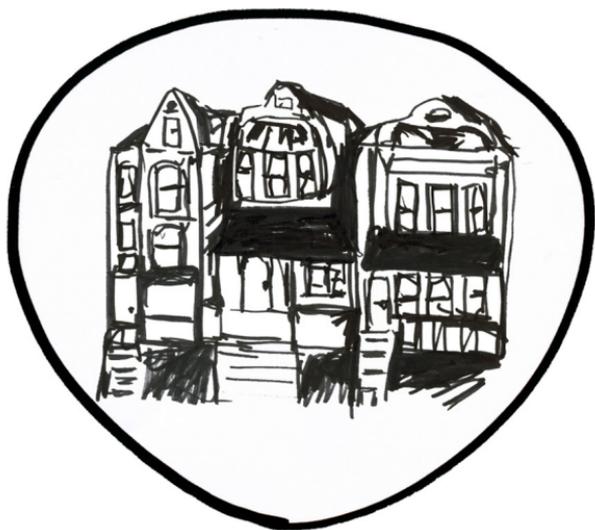
Christopher Goings '19, Sabrina Kwak '19, and Miranda Johnson '19

The Whitman Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia opened in 1977 and was later renovated in 2000 under the “Changing Lives” campaign which brought Internet access to several branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The library facilitates both academic and cultural education according to the needs of its community by hosting a variety of events and classes for the community including job fairs, yoga classes for kids and adults, nutrition classes, and home buying seminars. The library also overlaps with some services provided by Southeast by Southeast with adult education classes focusing on GED preparation and English language skills. In fact, Southeast by Southeast sometimes takes their own ESL class there to teach basic computer skills.

With its long hours and proximity to Furness High School, the library’s accessibility makes it an indispensable resource for students. While the library provides resources and programming for all age groups, it is an especially important space for kids and teens. According to Khin, a student participant in Southeast by Southeast, students are the primary beneficiaries of the Whitman library. The Library offers a LEAP After School Program which welcomes students to come in after school for homework help. Programs such as these become increasingly vital to the success of Philadelphia’s students, as schools facing budget cuts struggle to provide the necessary resources for students to do their best in school. The library is not the only resource available to students, but it is an important supplement. For many, the library provides educational resources that either aren’t available outside of regular school hours and seasons or are being eliminated

from local schools due to budget cuts, providing much needed continuity and support. Khin commented that in her experience, checking out books was the most utilized library function, especially during the summer when students have to do summer reading without the resources provided by schools.

In recognizing Whitman Library's significance, it is important to reflect on its role as a civic institution in the space and community which it serves. As an institution, it is involved in supporting the community's formal education and attitudes toward higher education. The library serves as both a gathering place and hub for exercise, tutoring, and study which reinforces a particular neighborhood identity, as well as functions as a civic institution which connects what might otherwise be an isolated community to the city as whole.



NEIGHBORS/NEIGHBORHOODS

Southeast Philadelphia

Joseph Boyle '19, Shu Min He '19, and Elisa Sheen '19

South Philadelphia has evolved into a melting pot of people with different backgrounds, and this evolution has brought with it both communal challenges and accomplishments. The youth of the Southeast by Southeast project have worked to collect both the history and current status of their neighbors through an oral history project. According to one interviewee, Bruce, a long-time resident of South Philadelphia and neighborhood activist, "If you look at the communities where your school is, there is one race of people there, mostly Irish. Then you have the African-American community, then you have the Italian community...Back then it was a time when we had to fight to go to school: there were race riots." The neighborhood's dynamics have developed further through an influx of immigrants and refugees from Bhutan, Burma, and Nepal. An addition of many new community members from different backgrounds often produces challenges with acculturation and language acquisition. This sentiment is echoed by Than Than, a student of the Southeast by Southeast project, who states that "when I first came, I didn't really speak English. There was a community house over there, a teacher's house...but we were scared to cross the park." Community members have strived to bridge the acculturation gap by actively engaging with others in the area. For example, Zing, a translator, Chin community leader, and Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association Coalition (SEAMAAC) employee, mentions that she has worked to "help our Burmese families integrate into the neighborhood. There is so much they have to learn, but we have become strong and learned how to live a good life in America."

Southeast by Southeast, by functioning as a source for social services, a platform for community bonding, as well as a participant in creative civic engagement, has helped to strengthen the neighborhood's sense of community. It has achieved this by looking at issues of adjustment through the lens of art, ethnography, social work, and education, and balancing its role of serving the immigrants of its neighborhood and its identity as a participant-actor in the neighborhood. The youth group's photographic and textual documentation of Southeast Philadelphia not only catalogues the area's residents but also captures the rich history and web of interactions that occur within the community. Video, images, and testimonial accounts of community members captured by the project narrate the tensions that have existed between the "older" and "younger" residents of the neighborhoods, as well as their own evolutions and healing actions over time. According to Bruce, "The struggle continues. We struggle everyday to make it better for this community...not only for the African-American community. It's a multicultural community, so we do it for everyone." In this way, the organization and neighborhood work in conjunction with each other, creating a symbiosis of change through community bonding and offering contributions toward residential unity.

ABOUT PHILADELPHIA
FREEDOMS: CULTURAL
LANDSCAPES AND
CIVIC IDEALS

Philadelphia, founded by William Penn in 1682, was originally envisioned as a concept city for freedom, tolerance, and justice. Since then, the city has exemplified revolutionary thought, cultural ideals, and nation building. However, the dualities of freedom and repression, social ideals and harsh realities, have also shaped the city throughout its history to the present day. Currently, Philadelphia's identity as a 21st century cultural destination has been marked by recent regrowth and economic revival, alongside long standing crises in education, urban violence, and economic injustice. How do Philadelphians balance the deep imprint of venerated core ideals with such ongoing challenges? What is the relationship between Philadelphia's founding ethos and its layered built environment? How can the city embody the ethical dilemmas and conceptual possibilities for broader debates about contemporary civic ideals? Who runs the city?

Philadelphia Freedoms spans the history of the city, in order to trace how the city's founding principles have manifested in the lived experiences of its residents over many generations. Each week, students read works – including historical accounts, cultural critiques, and artistic representations – in order to produce weekly writing assignments, several essays, a final project about one street or intersection in the city, and a group project with a local arts organization in order to reveal and read the city's complex layers.

ABOUT THE CITY
OF PHILADELPHIA
MURAL ARTS
PROGRAM'S
SOUTHEAST BY SOUTHEAST

When you walk into the storefront, vibrant images and elaborate scripts created by immigrants and their children tell stories of movement, struggle, and triumph. There's the large notepad on the easel with words written in English leftover from an ESL class, and lanterns that loom gracefully from the cut-out wall in the back. Framed photos of the community members dressed in brightly colored saris, clutching shawls and engaging in everyday activities, hang from the winter white walls.

This is the storefront of the Southeast by Southeast project, a formerly defunct property that has been transformed into a community arts and resource center for new refugees from Bhutan, Burma, and Nepal living in South Philadelphia. Numerous events are held there almost every day, like cultural food nights, sari giveaways, and art therapy and art classes. Translators and community members have taken ownership of the center.

Southeast by Southeast began in 2011 with a series of community events and workshops. Developed in partnership with the City of Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, and Lutheran Children and Family Service, the goal of this project is to build a safe and supportive community space for immigrant and refugee families to learn about one another, gain access to important social services, and lend their voices to public art projects planned for the neighborhood.

ABOUT THE
CENTER FOR PEACE
AND GLOBAL
CITIZENSHIP AT
HAVERFORD COLLEGE

The Center for Peace and Global Citizenship advances Haverford's long-standing commitment to peace and social justice through research, education and action. The Center integrates innovative scholarship and responsible civic engagement around contemporary issues of global significance. With its commitment to knowledge as the foundation for effective action, the Center embodies Haverford's scholarly and ethical mission as a premier liberal arts college.

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FOR SSSLA

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DOCUMENTATION

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SOUTHEAST
BY SOUTHEAST

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