CREATIVE STATE

CELLPHONE DIARIES
SPARK DIALOGUE

As residents and Raleigh city planners shape a neighborhood’s future, they’re using “cellphone diaries” to document its past and present.

Professors and research assistants in NC State’s College of Design helped residents create short videos to tell stories about the people, places and events that have shaped their lives.

Landscape Architecture magazine is featuring the project in which the videos — shot and edited by residents, with the assistance of faculty and students — are linked to an online map showing where they were filmed.

Landscape architecture professor Kofi Boone spearheaded the project, in collaboration with the South Park East Raleigh Neighborhood Association. Faculty with expertise in research, sociolinguistics and graphic design also participated in the project.

Downtown Raleigh’s reinvestment boom is bringing changes to the area, sparking anxiety among current residents. In South Park and East Raleigh, where working-class African-American families have lived for more than a century, residents are concerned that the growth could displace them and wipe out their community’s history.

Videos created at Chavis Park, which include references to park elements that no longer exist and events that no longer take place, directly informed the John Chavis Memorial Park master plan. Locations highlighted in the park and throughout the neighborhood were also included in the South Park East Raleigh Heritage Walk, a community revitalization initiative.

The community project has been featured at Raleigh’s Block2 Gallery as well as The State of Things with Frank Stasio on radio station WUNC.

SPIRITS REJOICE:
BIVINS ON JAZZ
AND RELIGION

Poet Ted Joans once wrote, “Jazz is my religion.” If he had said jazz is religion, he wouldn’t have been far off the mark. The two subjects are intertwined at the root.

Jazz is indigenous to the United States, shaped by a confluence of cultures and musical traditions, including faith-based traditions. As a religious studies scholar — and jazz musician — Jason Bivins explores the relationship in a new book that addresses how religion has shaped jazz and the way people think about it.

In his academic life, Bivins specializes in the nexus of religion and U.S. politics. As a musician, he has recorded improvisational albums with bands such as the Unstable Ensemble, the Micro-East Collective and the Impermanence Trio.

In his book, Spirits Rejoice! Jazz and American Religion published by Oxford University Press, Bivins explores a variety of issues, from how jazz musicians have drawn on specific religious traditions to inform their music to musicians who view performance as a ritual.

“The more I researched, the more I found confirmation that jazz has been a part of larger American developments in — and improvisations on — key religious concerns and practices like historical narrations, communitarian experiments, ritual, meditation and cosmology,” Bivins explains.

“That so many different themes were accreting convinced me that it was simply not possible to understand the history of jazz without accounting for this abundant religiosity.”

- ABOVE: NC State College of Design faculty and students have worked with residents to document a Raleigh neighborhood.

- TOP: Jason Bivins is a religious studies scholar and a jazz musician. - BOTTOM: He explores the links between jazz and religion in a new book.