

***Inequity and inequality are ongoing themes in urban scholarship. Drawing from the material discussed this term, discuss how urban form and inequality are related – how inequalities unrelated to space and spatial form (economic, social, racial, gender, etc.) are manifested in urban form, and how urban form perpetuates and reinforces those inequalities. Obviously, this is a complicated relationship, but please focus in on the “pivot points” – market or institutional dynamics that are especially important in shaping variation across space or change over time, and/or offer some potential for intervention***

If gentrification has made anything clear about America’s cities, it is how deeply our urban form is tied to this country’s history of racism and sexism. The sudden reversal of fortune for spaces that were redlined for decades as wealthier Americans displace longtime residents has created a visual spectrum of social injustice along race lines, which is impossible to ignore. Meanwhile the surge of women entering the urban workforce has revealed just how oppressive the patriarchy-built suburban form was designed to be.

The visibility of America’s inequality should not be surprising. As most of America’s cityscape barely dates past more than a century, our young cities have the somewhat unique ability to reflect the inequities and inequalities of our society as they are, not as part of a broader mélange of histories and cultural identities. While it is tempting to break down spatial injustices as they affect people of color and women in general, since solutions to these injustices do not always intersect, it is equally important to study how the American urban form was intended to benefit the members at the top of the hierarchy. From this perspective, it will be easier to see how to best develop intersectionality between solutions, and to make them inclusive of younger pursuits of social justice, such as justice for the disabled and queer communities.

Many mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (and far too many contemporary) economists and politicians having argued the notion that an American’s ability to “vote with their feet” meant that they could always find the locality best suited to their needs, but for more than half of the last century it was nearly impossible for people of color to do so. Ideas of “home rule” embedded in American ideology gave localities the ability to segregate and deny people of color rights to services (equal or otherwise). Much of this was accomplished through local real estate “covenants,” which were supported by state courts until the Supreme Court overruled them in *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948. Meanwhile, “through mortgage insurance and other policies, the federal government directly encouraged segregation by race and class until roughly the middle of the twentieth century” (Briggs, pp.19) [1]. Even though the African American diasporas from the South between 1910 and 1950 created new enclaves governed by black officials and supported by black businesses in places like Harlem and Southside Chicago, the economic isolation of these communities meant that they were hit especially hard by The Great Depression and the following recessions. However, the exponential levels suffering in black neighborhoods had some benefits for the white supremacist system, as “the imposition of racial segregation insulates poor whites from the higher rates of black poverty and keeps white poverty concentration at a markedly lower level” (Massey and

Denton, pp.125) [2]. By creating and concentrating “black poverty” through segregation, white America was able to limit the effects of urban spatial decay to specific areas, known as “ghettos.” As the development of new technologies and urban forms (car-centered suburbia) outmoded the layout of older industrial cities in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, these ghettos became the perfect staging grounds for expansive city highways that served white commuters. By this point, the economically devastated black neighborhoods (such as the South Bronx) no longer had the political power to resist. This relationship has continued through the modern era of gentrification, as the areas formerly considered “blighted” have become profitable investments for wealthier white Americans, who have transformed black churches into condos, black hardware stores into cafes, and black banks into restaurants (all found in gentrified areas of Brooklyn, NY).

This use of economics and urban spatial form to oppress the non-white population can also be observed in the goals of the patriarchy throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While first laying off black workers first during economic downturns (Massey and Denton, pp. 124) allowed white America to temporarily stall the negative effects of de-industrialization on the workforce, women have long been used as a “reserve army of labour to be recruited or laid off as circumstance changed” (McDowell, pp.67) [3]. This was especially the case during World War 2, when the absence of men required “Rosie the Riveters” to step in to the labor market. At the end of the war, however, these women were quickly forced out of the official labor market and back into the unpaid labor of childcare and home maintenance. This was accomplished through several means, including the universal practice of paying women significantly less than their male counterparts, but dismantling the socialized domestic services needed during wartime played a crucial role in removing women from the workforce. These services included communal dining (in the form restaurants and cafeterias) and day/nightcare centers. While there were some experiments in replicating the socialization of domestic work in housing design during and after the world wars (see the Garden Cities of Welwyn and Letchworth), the suburban boom that followed World War 2 created an urban form that demanded women remain at home and gave them as little mobility outside the domestic environment as possible. While the distance between the suburban home and work centers made it difficult enough to provide childcare and hold a job, the absence of off-peak public transit connecting residential suburbia to the outside world essentially trapped women at home. This is because the suburbs “were designed around the assumptions that, for whites, women were the sole unpaid caretakers in the private sphere and men were the only wage earners in the public sphere” (Spain, 586) [4]. But constant, unpaid domestic labor was not a lifestyle many middle and upper class women were comfortable with, so the market attempted to invent its way out of this conflict with washing machines, dish washers, and other household appliances. Wealthier households might pay for domestic help, so that “the middle-class ideal of the leisured wife, for example, depended on the labour of her working class sisters” (McDowell, 62). As an urban form, suburbia paid off the patriarchy by simultaneously separating women from job centers where they might “steal” men’s jobs, and from communal amenities that could relieve some of the housekeeping burden. Ironically, neo-liberalist policies took this inequity to such extremes that working and middle class women were required to re-enter the workforce in order to afford the domestic and childcare standards that American culture demands.

When planners or politicians observe the inequities and inequalities of the American urban form, it is essential that they do not only focus on who lost out on these designs, but also who benefited from them, and why. By doing this they might avoid solving a problem for one of these identities while adding burdens to another. Gentrification is a good example of this. While this movement may be allowing many white middle class women to escape the suburbs, it is simultaneously displacing people of color (including many women of color) to that same patriarchal space. Furthermore, by bearing in mind the many ways in which the white heterosexual male has benefited from his city design, future planners will have an easier time creating spaces inclusive to black and/or LGBTQ men, without excluding women or even straight white men.

[1] Briggs, Xavier De Souza (2003). *More Pluribus, less Unum? The changing geography of Race and Opportunity*. Race and Housing Choice in Metropolitan America. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005.

[2] Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton (1993). *American Apartheid: Segregation and the making of the Underclass*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts.

[3] McDowell, L, (1983). *Towards an understanding of the gender division of urban space*. Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, England.

[4] Spain, Daphne (2014). *Gender and Urban Space*. Annual Review of Sociology: 40:581-98. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043446