

## **Understanding Ferguson: Black Neighborhoods as the Epicenter of Neoliberal Racism**

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This paper uses an urban studies and black liberation studies framework to interpret the meaning of the black response to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. We argue that the black response to Michael Brown's death illustrates that precarious and distressed black neighborhoods have become the epicenter of neoliberal racism and should now be the focal point of black liberation. Following Robert J. Sampson and Patrick Sharkey, we argue that political decisions, public policies and neoliberal economics have led to severe disinvestment in black neighborhoods, persistent socioeconomic segregation, declining economic opportunities and a growing link between the black community and the criminal justice system and increasing confrontations between young blacks and the police. Today, functioning within a neighborhood context, the operation of the health care system, the education system and the criminal justice system are wreaking havoc in black communities, while the neoliberal economy is trapping them in the nation's occupational and economic basement. Here, the social determinants of socioeconomic development erect barriers that creates a setting in which many blacks die prematurely, have low academic attainment, are incarcerated and have a low quality of life. These events represent the emergence of precarious and distressed neighborhoods as the epicenter of neoliberal racism. We will demonstrate how various geographic visualization and GIS analyses ranging from a relatively simple mapping to a more complex advanced spatio-temporal analyses provide ways of seeing and interpreting complex, multi-scalar issues that are resided in black neighborhoods. At the same time, we show that adequate critical analyses of complicated issues such as urban injustice and inequality due to the impact of neoliberal racism require reflexive conversation with socio-spatial concepts that extend beyond what can be analyzed and visualized in GIS.

## **Reporting on a Riot: Media Accounts as Social History in Ferguson, Missouri**

Presenter: Daniel Monti, Saint Louis University ([monti@bu.edu](mailto:monti@bu.edu))

Local media accounts of rioting in Ferguson, Missouri did a relatively good job of reporting who had done what to whom in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of a 18-year-old black male by a white police officer. They stuck with the story after violence waned, exploring both the shorter-term and longer-term responses by local residents, businesses, institutions, and political leaders. They were not as politically-charged or symbolically-laden as national media reports ("Looks like Baghdad"). Nor were they as naive as some international accounts ("Haves versus the Have-not's" and indicative of conditions across the country that were bound to erupt at some point). The most important contributions that local media made, however, came through stories where an attempt was made to put this event into a larger historical context or inadvertently reported on behavior (the large number of out-of-state people arrested, young people offering to clean up, peaceful demonstrations during the day that went largely uncovered while violence at night was widely reported) that social historians could use to tell us how or in what ways this event fit into the evolution of civil unrest in American towns and cities.

## **Racial Segregation and Economic Decline in the Older U.S. Suburbs**

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Existing work on economic and racial residential segregation has focused primarily upon inter-urban comparisons between central cities and metropolitan areas, and accorded less attention to the differences between cities and their suburbs. When suburban segregation levels are measured, they appear to be lower than the corresponding urban indices. We argue that this observation cloaks a stark and persistent gap between groups of suburbs that forms a backdrop for recent events in Ferguson. Analyzing 2007-2011 ACS data, we offer a novel comparison of segregation levels in cities, older suburbs, and newer suburbs. We find that Black-White and Hispanic-(non-Hispanic) White segregation indices in older suburbs commonly approaches or even exceeds principal cities and far exceeds the newer (and often homogenously white) suburbs. The basic Black-White dissimilarity index among St. Louis' post-war suburbs is .652, rivaling that of St. Louis City (.658) and far exceeding St. Louis' newer, developing suburbs (.538). This pattern is repeated across the nation in most metropolitan areas with populations greater than 1 million. We also compare these findings to data from 2000 to identify metropolitan areas with older suburban areas where segregation levels are rising, stable, and falling. These contours of segregation racialize the suburban economic decline that has been long recognized in the planning, policy, social science, and law literatures. Post-war suburbs, in particular, have contended with deteriorating infrastructure, tax base depletion, governmental fragmentation, and rising poverty for several decades – all aggravated by the foreclosure crisis and subsequent recession. Many of these post-war suburbs are home to large and growing minority populations, and thus, high rates of racial and ethnic segregation may make it difficult to respond to the economic decline of the older suburbs.

### **Rethinking Detroit's Decline: Regionalism, Race and the Agglomeration of Capital Beyond the City**

Presenter: Harley Etienne, University of Michigan Ann Arbor ([hfe@umich.edu](mailto:hfe@umich.edu))

This paper questions Detroit's current attempts at revitalization by examining the relationship between Detroit and its surrounding suburbs. The social sciences and humanities have long documented the deindustrialization but has failed to document the relative social and economic isolation of the city within its own region. What is often most overlooked about the metropolitan Detroit region is the considerable wealth that can be found within it and the stark isolation most Detroit residents experience from that capital. This paper seeks to challenge the accepted frame of analysis on Detroit by understanding it through two new dimensions: the agglomeration of wealth in the city's persistently prosperous suburbs over time; and, the socio-political and economic isolation of Detroit and its residents through a near apartheid-style policies. Both constitute a failure of regionalism unlike most cases to be found in the North American continent—including the American South. To demonstrate this, data showing the migration and clustering of high-income households racially homogenous sections of the metropolitan Detroit area between 1970 – 2012 will be discussed. Additionally, preliminary historical analysis of the movement of social institutions such as church parishes, synagogues, private/parochial schools, and civic organizations will reveal that the movement of capital was but one feature of a complicated process of decline that is an often overlooked feature of Detroit's decline. In the

tradition of Thomas Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, this paper will also attempt to understand both phenomena—the agglomeration of wealth, and isolation of Detroit's residents—from a critical race perspective.