Race, Planning, and the American City

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In 1997, June Manning Thomas, then a professor of urban planning at Michigan State University, produced a report titled *Race, Racism, and Race Relations: Linkage with Urban and Regional Planning Literature*. The report, commissioned by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, responded to a request by the White House for information on racial segregation in the United States.

Thomas's report covered areas such as equity and discrimination, housing and neighborhoods, redlining and mortgage lending, community development, transportation, and the environment. Drawing on work by historians, planners, sociologists, and policy analysts, Thomas laid out the state of the art in scholarship on race and planning. However, what stands out now is the relatively small scope of the literature at the time, and how much it has expanded over the last 20 years.

The field of planning history is a case in point. From a handful of titles in the 1997 report, it has grown to encompass hundreds of works across a wide range of themes. Today, there is a large and ever-expanding literature on the role of race in the history of city planning. And, while we have only scratched the surface, scholars have revealed many of the ways that race—as much as class, gender, sexuality, and other lived and embodied experiences—has shaped the practice of planning since its origins. These practices have not always been explicit or straightforward. Racism hides behind many masks, and insinuates itself into the city-building process through a wide variety of policies, laws, customs, habits, and beliefs.

The following paragraphs present a small but vital selection of scholarship on race and city planning from a historical

Race has been at the center of urban planning history for decades. Joseph Heathcott outlines essential insights and debates in this field.

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perspective. It is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. Indeed, the nature of such an overview makes it inevitable that some works will go unmentioned. For instance, this essay does not even begin to recount the immense literature on the Civil Rights movement, nor does it touch on the rich and deep scholarship on African-American history per se, though both fields inform the work examined here. Rather, the goal of this piece is to provide a point of departure for thinking about the long-term impact of race and resistance in American city planning.

If the field has expanded dramatically since 1997, it is because of the pioneering work of scholars like Thomas herself. Her book *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* remains one of the most important studies, still required reading for anyone beginning their studies in this field. Her edited collection with Marsha Ritzdorf, *Urban Planning and the African-American Community: In the Shadows*, jump-started a new wave of scholarship in the field. That same year, Raymond A. Mohl and Kenneth W. Goings published their highly influential volume on *The New African American Urban History*. Both volumes drew on previous work by Otis and Beverly Duncan (*The Negro Population of Chicago: A Study of Residential Succession*), Gilbert Osofsky (*Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*), and Kenneth L. Kusmer (*A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870–1930*).

The 1980s and 1990s saw a steady accumulation of works on the interrelationship of race and planning, emphasizing different themes and approaches. Kenneth T. Jackson's landmark study *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, focused on the national policies of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), Home Owners' Loan Corporation, and the real estate industry in the defense of white communities. Joe William Trotter's *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat*, presented a new point of departure for the study of African-American migrants to the northern city, placing them into a broader history of Black working-class community building. Thomas J. Sugrue took a similar tack in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, bringing together the national, regional, and local threads of the story like no other previous book.

Many scholars of the history of race and planning have focused on segregation in housing, examining the values, processes, laws, and customs that underscore spatial apartheid. In their highly influential book, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*,

Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton anchored the topic in rich longitudinal data. Joe T. Darden's *Afro-Americans in Pittsburgh: The Residential Segregation of a People* established an early touchstone for the historical treatment of the topic, while Arnold R. Hirsch's *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940–1960* and John F. Bauman's *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920–1974* carried the story forward into the expansion of federal housing programs. In *"The Most Segregated City in America": City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920–1980*, Charles E. Connerly delineates the direct and indirect ways in which planners advanced white political imperatives. In his detailed study of planning in Chicago, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis: Housing Policy in Postwar Chicago*, Preston H. Smith II shifts the story in important ways to the emergence of black civic ideology and the priorities of African-American communities. Meanwhile, Carl H. Nightingale's sweeping *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities* reminds us that segregation and discrimination are by no means exceptionally American stories.

Expanding from neighborhood and community studies, historians have focused increasingly on the interrelation of race, real estate, and development. W. Edward Orser's pioneering book on *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story* provides one of the most detailed studies of everyday white real estate tactics on the ground. Kevin Fox Gotham's *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900–2010* draws the focus out to the broader process of capital, investment, and city building. In his study, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida*, Nathan Connolly looks at real estate practices beyond housing to include the ways in which white homeowner interests protected schools, businesses, and recreational facilities in an effort to keep neighborhoods segregated. Several major recent works deepen these stories in crucial ways: LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880–1950*; Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: How the Struggle Over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America*; and Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. At the same time, each of these books greatly expands what we know about Black working-class and middle-class efforts to create new residential opportunities, reshape the urban property market, and establish fair housing laws. Meanwhile, Lance Freeman's

book *There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up* presents a fresh, multi-stranded story of race, planning, and urban change in one of America's great neighborhoods.

While many scholars have rightly focused on segregation in cities, others have built out our understanding of race and suburbanization. David Schuyler's *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940–1980* established a key point of departure for such studies. Books by Lisa McGirr (*Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*) and Kevin M. Kruse (*White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*) locate the emergence of neoliberal politics and policies in the racial ordering of the metropolitan landscape. Dianne Harris's study *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* shifts the focus from policy to architecture, investigating the ways in which the design, marketing, and consumption of suburban housing reconstructed racial lines after World War II. Meanwhile, in *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, Andrew Wiese illuminates the little understood but nevertheless major phenomenon of Black families fleeing cities for greener pastures. Walter D. Greason's provocative book *Suburban Erasure: How the Suburbs Ended the Civil Rights Movement in New Jersey* goes further than previous studies to examine the limits of the integrationist dream as it dilutes into the mass consumer culture of suburbia.

Housing emerged as one of the dominant arenas for the study of race and resistance. However, many scholars have built on the work of Trotter and Sugrue to focus their attention on the role of labor, work, industrialization, and community. Trotter co-edited an influential volume with Earl Lewis and Tera W. Hunter, *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present*, which emphasized the importance of a labor perspective, as did Henry Louis Taylor, Jr. and Walter Hill's volume, *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis: African Americans in the Industrial City, 1900–1950*. In her book *Hope and Danger in the New South City: Working-Class Women and Urban Development in Atlanta, 1890–1940*, Georgina Hickey reframes the story through the often missing lens of gender, tracing the "fear" of Black women within white male political institutions and women's organizations, and examined the ways in which Black women built networks of resistance. Kevin Mumford examines race, gender, and sexuality in his major study, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New*

York in the Early Twentieth Century. While not explicitly about city planning, Mumford's book locates racial and sexual practices within an ambit of concern by politicians, public health officials, social workers, police, and other agents of municipal control.

Movements for Civil Rights and social justice often placed participants in contention with the various strands of governance, political power, and the local state. In so doing, rights and justice work reshaped civil and religious institutions in ways that articulated a "struggle for the city," in the words of urban historian Frederick Cooper. Haywood Farrar's *The Baltimore Afro-American: 1892–1950* took a broad look at efforts in Baltimore's Black communities to build strong civil institutions that would eventually challenge white supremacy. Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.'s important edited volume, *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820–1970*, put race and labor at the center of the story of Cincinnati's growth, with essays by Taylor, Robert B. Fairbanks, Andrea Tuttle Kornbluh, and others. Taking a more explicit look at the creation of urban community networks, Leslie Brown's *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* details the hard work of Black women to shape a felicitous counter-public sphere. Likewise, Victoria W. Wolcott's *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* argues that the narrative of "respectability" provided an avenue for Black women to take leading roles in building responsive civil and religious institutions.

As crucial as the Civil Rights movement is to the history of race and planning, scholars have pushed deeper into Black politics and resistance in order to tell a broader story. In his definitive work on the topic, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, Robin D. G. Kelley challenged standard narratives of the Civil Rights movement that obscured working-class Black agency, and expanded our notions of what constitutes the city-building and city-making process. Lisa Levenstein's *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* recovers an important story, common well beyond Philadelphia, of government planning around poverty and poor people's resistance to the constraints and injustices of public policy. Meanwhile, a growing body of literature, exemplified by Peniel Joseph's *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, has begun to recast the Black Panther Party and other radical political organizations as community builders. Donna Jean Murch provides a comprehensive account in *Living for the*

City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California. And the collection edited by Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party*, reminds us that such community-building efforts were diverse and multifaceted, inflected by local and regional cultures.

While some scholars examined politics from the ground up, others took a broad look at national and regional politics. Some of these works focus on the intersection of these broad trends in particular cities, while others examine how national and regional politics play out across a variety of urban landscapes and contexts. Earl Lewis's *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* provides one of the most detailed studies of how African-Americans in one city simultaneously confronted local, state, and federal institutions in order to advance their demands for a more just city. In his similarly intricate account, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, Robert O. Self shifts the story to examine the expansion of reactionary politics and the mobilization of white homeowner and real estate interests to translate local concerns into state and national revolts. On the other hand, David R. Goldfield's *Region, Race and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* stands as one of the definitive works on the role of race in shaping regional politics, policy, and urban planning. Similarly, David R. Diaz traces these regional forces in shaping Mexican-Americans' urban experience in *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning and American Cities*. And David M. P. Freund's *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* investigates the ways in which federal and state policies framed local planning practices in several Michigan communities.

In many respects, criminal justice has become a kind of urban planning by other means—a systematic, institutional path for excluding people of color from the urban landscape. Building on major early work by Carter Woodson and Angela Davis, scholars have begun to examine prisons, courts, and police as institutions to control Black bodies in urban space. In his study *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, Khalil Gibran Muhammad argues that the militarization of police and criminalization of Black men and women constitute a central feature in the development of the American city. Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* brings the story forward, revealing the ways in which white racial panic, cloaked in terms of race

neutrality, responds to rising Black political power and mobility through the expansion of the carceral state. At the same time, the rise of mass incarceration goes well beyond local urban fears or national political culture; there are crucial global dimensions to the story as well. Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* deftly connects the streets of Los Angeles to the state legislature in Sacramento to the political economy of California in a rapidly changing world. And Loïc Wacquant takes a broad international view in his book *Deadly Symbiosis: Race and the Rise of the Penal State*, examining the interconnected development of the prison-industrial complex in the United States, Europe, and Latin America.

Much of the scholarship on race and planning has revolved around the assertion of an "urban crisis." So much so that Robert A. Beauregard finds crisis narratives obscuring more than they reveal, subsuming the complex, uneven, variegated, and multifaceted histories of cities in America (*Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*). Many scholars have considered these notions of crisis, resilience, and renewal in their work. Sugrue's *Origins* challenges the standard notion that the 1967 uprising in Detroit was the catalyst for the city's decline, arguing that these conditions emerged over a much longer period of the twentieth century. Gerald Horne's *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* agrees with Sugrue's temporal argument, but argues that in the case of Los Angeles, Black communities were bereft of key social institutions such as the unions, large churches, and ward political machines that dominated eastern cities. Likewise, Richard Campanella's *Delta Urbanism: New Orleans* suggests that efforts to understand Hurricane Katrina as a short-term failure neglect the long-term interrelationship of race, infrastructure planning, and city building in the segregated metropolis. Meanwhile, in *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City*, Howard Gillette, Jr., demonstrates that the concentrated poverty, disinvestment, and racial segregation of Camden are not merely the outcomes of local conditions, but rather the results of large-scale structural changes in the global economy and the response of government to those changes.

Moving beyond the urban crisis, scholars have looked at a wide range of approaches, methods, and outcomes of organizing in communities of color. Rhonda Y. Williams's major contribution, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality*, tells a remarkable story of self-determination and organization by

the poorest of the poor in American cities. Lawrence Vale's *Reclaiming Public Housing: A Half Century of Struggle in Three Public Neighborhoods* takes a close look at race, class, and resistance in housing projects in several areas of Boston. Building on this work, Amy L. Howard's *More Than Shelter: Activism and Community in San Francisco Public Housing* examines the multicultural communities that reside in, and struggle for the future of, the public home. Similarly, Eric Avila's *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* traces the responses of diverse communities of color to federal projects, in this case large-scale urban expressways. Amanda I. Seligman's *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* investigates race, class, and community organizing in America's most segregated city as residents respond to patterns of urban disinvestment. And in his imaginative study, *Black Citymakers: How The Philadelphia Negro Changed Urban America*, Marcus Anthony Hunter revisits the famed 7th Ward made famous by W.E.B. DuBois. He challenges the common assumptions that Black residents were simply "victims" of urban renewal, instead finding them to be active shapers of strategies for economic and social mobility that eventually led them out of the neighborhood to new opportunities. Similarly, Mike Davis's lively *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. Big City* demonstrates the many ways in which Latin American immigrants have shaped urban spaces to suit their needs, despite the often brutal and discriminatory treatment they encounter.

This bibliographic essay only scratches the surface of what has become a rich and still-expanding literature. As we imagine ways to move the #BlackLivesMatter campaign into the realm of policy, and to challenge the legacies of racism, discrimination, and concentrated poverty in cities, it is crucial that we take stock of what we know about the long history of racism in city planning. It is equally important that we study the multiform efforts of diverse peoples over time to build resilient communities, demand justice, and define alternatives. By shaping a collective memory of the "struggle for the city," we create a trove of wisdom and experience on which to draw.