
MAIN POINTS

- Describe how urbanization, housing shortages, the migration of whites to suburbs, and urban unrest led to the rise of racialized neighborhoods.
 - Explain why most Americans continue to live in racially segregated neighborhoods.
 - Discuss how the lack of housing assistance combined with flat incomes at the bottom of the economic distribution and rising housing costs have disproportionately affected families in poor, minority neighborhoods.
 - Examine how poverty levels, unemployment rates, and demographic changes have transformed the suburbs since the 1990s.
 - Learn more about the ways environmental racism disadvantages nonwhite rural communities, particularly those on American Indian reservations.
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One of the most pernicious images of America is that the country is white. To attribute to whites a certain ownership over this country, even if it isn't done on purpose, is to amputate from our collective memory the fact that nonwhites always have belonged to it—to its industry and progress, its culture and spirit, its suffering and celebration. Nowhere is this more important than in the careful analysis of how race works within the residential field.

This chapter takes up that analysis with a historical overview of the racial struggles over housing that took place during the twentieth century, explaining the changing demographic contours of cities, the origins of black ghettos, and white flight from the inner city. It then moves into the present day by discussing the causes and consequences of racial segregation before analyzing how race works in four major residential areas: ghettoes, cities, suburbs, and rural areas. A home, we know, is more than bricks and mortar. It is the cultural and spiritual center of the family, a dwelling steeped in significance and meaning. Where you live is intimately connected to thoughts of who you are as well as your life chances. And in America, the geography and dynamics of the residential field are in large part driven by, and drive, race.

RACIAL STRUGGLES OVER RESIDENCE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

Many of us might guess that America was more racially segregated at the conclusion of the Civil War than today. But the opposite is true. Throughout the nineteenth century, whites and nonwhites lived relatively close together, interacting with one another on a daily basis. In northern cities, whites and blacks lived side by side; in southern cities, black servants and sharecroppers lived close to their white employers, either on their land or in alleys connected to main streets. By and large, there were no “black areas of town” before the 1900s. To be sure, many nonwhites excluded from participating fully in the labor market tended to live in the poorest areas of town, but so, too, did poor whites and new immigrant groups from

eastern Europe. The segregation levels in major cities during the nineteenth century, however, were less than half of what they are today. In 1890, the average black person living in Milwaukee resided in a neighborhood that was 1 percent black; today, the average black person living in Milwaukee resides in a neighborhood that is 66 percent black. The same pattern holds for cities across the country.¹ At the beginning of the twentieth century, most blacks residing in northern cities lived in neighborhoods that were majority white; by the end of the century, most lived in neighborhoods that were majority black.² What happened?

The Racialization of Neighborhoods

The racial and economic landscape of American cities underwent dramatic changes as the twentieth century unfurled. The rise of industrialism, which facilitated the rise of cities, attracted thousands of people—immigrants, blacks, Mexicans, whites, Asians—to roiling metropolises. As they poured into cities, some ethnic groups tended to cluster together in neighborhoods, many living in crowded, dilapidated slums. Irish, German, Polish, Swedish, Persian, Italian, and Hungarian families lived in cordoned-off areas with such names as the Irish Kilgubbin, Polish Hamtramck, and Hungarian Delray. Chinatowns emerged in some cities, as did black belts, where African American families lived together. As groups grew in numbers and moved into different neighborhoods, ethnic conflicts sparked between Greeks and Persians, blacks and Sicilians, and Chinese and Germans, to name just a few. As Harvey Zorbaugh described it, writing in 1929, “While the Irish and Swedish had gotten on well as neighbors, neither could or would live peacefully with the Sicilian. There was considerable friction, especially among the children of the two races. The play parks were the scenes of many a ‘battle’ when the Irish boys would attempt to run out the Italian, and alley garbage cans were stripped of their covers which served as shields in these encounters.”³

As the twentieth century marched forward, prosperous European immigrant families were able to move out of the slums and assimilate into the white American mainstream. Meanwhile, those who wore the badge of otherness—the “racial uniform,” in the words of American sociologist Robert Park—were forbidden by law and custom to live anywhere else.⁴ As European Americans of the “new immigration” were further enveloped by whiteness, ethnic distinctions between Italians, Irish, Hungarians, and so forth became less salient. So, too, did ethnic distinctions among neighborhoods, such that by the 1920s many neighborhoods based on close-knit ethnic affiliations gave way to urban divisions based on race and class. Little Italy, Hungarian Town, and the Norwegian village melted into white sections of town, a transition that made the racial contrast between nonwhite and white neighborhoods even more stark.⁵

Migration and Urbanization

As cities grew, they became racially more diverse. Employment opportunities in manufacturing and in agriculture inspired many Mexican families to move north. The U.S. government endorsed Mexican migration, and factory employers actively recruited Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, who by and large could be hired at cheaper rates than whites.

However, as the economy began to take a turn for the worse, a turn that resulted in the Great Depression of the 1930s, whites started blaming Mexicans for widespread unemployment and economic scarcity. White anger targeting Mexicans soon materialized into government policy. In what became known as Mexican Repatriation Programs, thousands of Mexican families were rounded up and sent via train back to Mexico. All too often, those who conducted the roundups did not differentiate between Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals. More than half the people shipped back to Mexico were U.S. citizens. Repatriation proved an especially painful experience for Mexican families, who lost their jobs, property, and livelihood. Families were separated, and many were forced to live in poverty-stricken borderlands. By the end of the 1930s, roughly 2 million people—over one-third the overall population of people of Mexican heritage—forcibly were removed from American soil.⁶ Recognizing the suffering induced by repatriation programs, the state of California, which alone deported roughly 400,000 American citizens and legal residents of Mexican ancestry, offered an official apology—in 2005. “The state of California,” the act read,

“apologizes . . . for the fundamental violations of . . . basic civil liberties and constitutional rights during the period of illegal deportation and coerced emigration.”⁷

If Mexican Repatriation Programs were intended to evict Mexicans en masse from America, policies targeting Native Americans were designed to have the opposite effect: to advance programs of assimilation and tribal dissolution. During the Great Depression, poverty crushed many families living on reservations, and it continued to do so during the World War II years. To combat this suffering, policymakers advanced programs to relocate thousands of Native Americans to urban centers, hoping they could prosper from the economic uplift that took hold after the war. They also hoped that indigenous peoples, once removed from their respective reservations, would shed their “Indian-ness” and be fully incorporated into “mainstream American society.” From 1950 to 1970, thousands of indigenous people moved to Detroit, Seattle, Chicago, and other metropolises. Los Angeles served host to the largest American Indian population, with 60,000 indigenous residents. By 1990, more than 60 percent of American Indians were residing in cities.⁸

American Indian urbanization proceeded in lockstep with processes of tribal termination. In 1953, Congress enacted legislation that divested the federal government of trust responsibilities to Indian country. State governments were given legal jurisdiction over Indian reservations, and between 1953 and 1973, 109 tribes were terminated in the eyes of the federal government. Protection was lifted from over 1 million acres of land formerly entrusted to tribes, and thousands of Native Americans were stripped of their (legally recognized) tribal affiliations, including those people who belonged to Wisconsin’s Menominee Tribe and Oregon’s



Thirteen thousand Mexicans were sent back to their native country by the Los Angeles County Charities Department on August 21, 1931. By the end of the 1930s almost 2 million people were relocated to Mexico.



Jacob Lawrence's *The Migration Series*, Panel No. 1 depicts the great migration north by southern African Americans during World War I.

Klamath Tribe. Tribal termination policies were slowed during the Kennedy years and abandoned by the Nixon administration in the wake of the American Indian movement, yet the effects of twenty years of wiping out political sovereignty and tribal ownership of economic resources still are felt today.⁹

The beginning of the twentieth century also witnessed a massive movement of blacks from the rural South to the urban North. As southern slavery gave way to sharecropping, Jim Crow segregation, and racial terrorism, many blacks sought to flee to better conditions. A decline in the price of cotton resulted in job shortages in southern agriculture. At the same time, World War I sharply reduced European immigration, cutting off northern industry's main source of cheap labor and creating

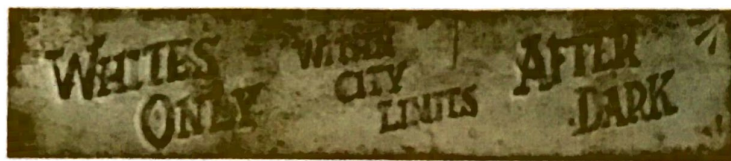
massive job vacancies in growing Midwest metropolises. These two economic shifts encouraged many blacks to head north to Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Detroit, and other cities in search of better work and a safer life for their children. In his poem "The South," Langston Hughes effectively captured the sentiment of many African Americans during this period. Referring to "The lazy, laughing south with blood on its mouth," he wrote, "And I, who am black, would love her, but she spits in my face; and I, who am black, would give her many rare gifts, but she turns her back upon me. So now I seek the North—the cold-faced North. For she, they say, is a kinder mistress. And in her house my children may escape the spell of the South."¹⁰ Between 1910 and 1930, over 1.5 million African Americans traveled north; another 3 million followed between 1940 and 1960—a movement known as the Great Migration.¹¹

But these sojourners encountered a new face of racism, one enforced not so much by the mob violence of the Ku Klux Klan as by the antiseptic arm of the law. Some towns, primarily in northern and western states, forbade African Americans and other nonwhite groups from living there. Townspeople hung signs that warned nonwhites to be out of town by sundown: "Nigger, don't let the sun set on YOU in Hawthorne" read a sign posted in Hawthorne, California, in the 1930s. These towns came to be known as "sundown towns" and to function as all-white communities. By one estimate, between 1890 and 1960, "probably a majority of all incorporated places kept out African Americans." Chinese Americans, Native Americans, and Jewish Americans also were subjected to sunset restrictions.¹²

In large cities, blacks were cordoned off to restricted districts, rundown slums that quickly became overcrowded. Isolated from the surrounding city, these slums began to see more crime and disease, as well as poverty, since many blacks who secured jobs worked in menial and dangerous positions. Blacks were kept a safe distance from the surrounding white population, whose antislavery sentiments during the Civil War in no way translated into prointegrationism after the fall of

the Confederacy.¹³ As the folk saying went, “The South doesn’t care how close a Negro gets just so he doesn’t get too high; the North doesn’t care how high he gets just so he doesn’t get too close.”¹⁴

Tensions between blacks and whites heated up, sometimes exploding into racial uprisings or riots that were a recurrent feature of the first half of the twentieth century. One of the worst uprisings took place in Chicago during the summer of 1919. One hot July day, a seventeen-year-old black teenager swam to the “white side” of a bathing beach and was pelted with rocks by white swimmers. In the altercation that ensued between blacks and whites, the teenager—his name was Eugene Williams—drowned. This sparked a weeklong uprising that left 38 people dead (23 blacks and 15 whites), 500 injured, and 1,000 homeless. The Chicago riot was just one of many that took place during the summer of 1919, a summer that later would aptly be called the Red Summer. Uprisings continued throughout the inter-war years, involving whites, blacks, and Hispanics. One of the bloodiest uprisings of the century took place in Detroit during June 1943. Fights between white and black youth escalated into three days’ fighting, shooting, and looting. When things died down, thirty-four people lay dead, most of them black.¹⁵



A sundown town sign, forbidding nonwhites after dark.

The Origins of the Ghetto

Major U.S. cities experienced housing shortages lasting from the Great Depression to the mid-1940s. While these shortages were painful for many whites, conditions were worse for nonwhite populations forced to live in teeming slums. Simply put, most houses were built strictly for white inhabitants. In 1947, 92 percent of Detroit’s housing units were for whites only.¹⁶ Federal law not only permitted racial segregation; it *encouraged* it, since lawmakers feared that integrated neighborhoods would result in unrest that would drive down property values. The Federal Housing Administration denied loans to many nonwhites, regardless of their financial or veteran standing, and real estate brokers refused to show nonwhites homes outside “designated areas.”¹⁷ According to one analyst, “the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration financed more than \$120 billion worth of new housing between 1934 and 1962, but less than 2 percent of this real estate was available to nonwhite families—and most of that small amount was located in segregated areas.”¹⁸ By 1940, thanks to the discriminatory efforts of the federal government and the housing market, racial residential segregation was widespread.

Some white home sellers made matters worse by including in the deeds to their property *covenants*, which sought to uphold the “desirable residential characteristics” of a neighborhood. Covenants could restrict the purchase of land or property to certain religious or racial groups. “This property shall not be occupied by any person except those of the Caucasian race,” a typical covenant might read. Although covenants were rendered legally unbinding in 1948, they still could be included in property deeds and remained effective. Even if the courts no longer enforced covenants, banks refused to subsidize contractors looking to build homes for nonwhites on land deemed “for whites only,” and realtors who violated racial covenants risked being boycotted by whites.¹⁹ Nonwhites not only were denied a place to live beyond

said Tracts to a corporation or association formed by residents or owners of property in Innis Arden No. 2, or to a corporation or association formed by residents or owners of Innis Arden, for community purposes, in the activities of which corporation or association residents of Innis Arden No. 2 shall have the right to participate, subject to reasonable restrictions and requirements imposed by such corporation or association.

14. RACIAL RESTRICTIONS. No property in said addition shall at any time be sold, conveyed, rented or leased in whole or in part to any person or persons not of the White or Caucasian race. No person other than one of the White or Caucasian race shall be permitted to occupy any property in said addition or portion thereof or building thereon except a domestic servant actually employed by a person of the White or Caucasian race where the latter is an occupant of such property.

15. ANIMALS. No hogs, cattle, horses, sheep, goats, or or similar livestock shall be permitted or maintained on said property at any time. Chicken hens, pigeons, rabbits and other similar small livestock, not exceeding a total of twenty-five in number, shall be permitted but must be kept on the premises of the owner. Not more than one dog and cat may be kept for each building site. No pen, yard, run, hutch, coop or other structure or area for the housing and keeping of the above described poultry or animals shall be built or maintained closer

In the 1940s racial restrictions were written into contracts, forbidding non-White people from owning a particular property.

majority nonwhite areas but also were systematically denied the ability to purchase homes within those areas. Lenders refused to offer mortgages and home loans in nonwhite neighborhoods through a discriminatory practice known as “redlining.” The word derives its name from lenders’ practice of taking a city map and drawing in red ink a border around nonwhite neighborhoods, marking them as too risky for loans or subsidies.²⁰

There was good money to be made in the exclusion of nonwhites from the private housing market. To save money, slumlords ignored housing repairs and building occupancy codes, a combination that proved deadly during times when faulty electric wiring could set ablaze a house swelling with people. Landlords also divided their properties into multiple apartments, charging their nonwhite occupants inflated rents. In 1960, the median black rent payment was \$76 per month, whereas the median white rent payment was \$64 per month, even though whites were living in much better conditions.²¹

“The process of housing segregation set into motion a chain reaction that reinforced patterns of racial inequality,” observes historian Thomas Sugrue, speaking of blacks in postwar Detroit. “Blacks were poorer than whites, and they had to pay more for housing, thus deepening their relative impoverishment. In addition, they were confined to the city’s oldest housing stock, in most need of ongoing maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation. But they could not get loans to improve their properties. As a result, their houses deteriorated. City officials, looking at the poor housing stock in black neighborhoods, condemned many areas as blighted, and destroyed much extant housing to build highways, hospitals, housing projects, and a civic center complex, further limiting the housing options for blacks. Moreover, the decaying neighborhoods offered seemingly convincing evidence to white homeowners that blacks would ruin any white neighborhood that they moved into. Finally, neighborhood deterioration seemed definitive proof to bankers that blacks indeed were a poor credit risk, and justified disinvestment in predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods.”²²

Housing opportunities for nonwhites were strained even further by urban development projects undertaken after World War II. Cities’ infrastructure was ill suited to accommodate their steady growth. Highways had to be installed; hospitals to be erected; sewage processing plants to be built. City planners in Detroit, Milwaukee, New York, and other major cities destroyed entire nonwhite communities, complete with mass eviction orders. In fact, some saw highway development as “a handy device for razing slums.”²³

Some residents who owned property in areas designated for highway construction were forced to leave before selling their property—for who would want to buy a house that would be bulldozed in a week’s time? And dozens of African American and Puerto Rican neighborhoods were razed, not to make way for a new expressway

but in the name of "urban renewal." As historian Robert Caro has noted, urban renewal was unique, not only in scope—an enormous venture with costs soaring into the billions—but also in philosophy, because it was the first time in the country's history that the "government was given the right to seize an individual's property not for its own use but for reassignment to another individual for *his* use and profit."²⁴ Proponents of urban renewal programs were motivated by a desire to breathe new life into the ailing inner city and to better the living conditions of slum dwellers, but they also were attracted to large profits to be made by the erection of luxury apartments, art museums, and toll roads.²⁵

The mid-twentieth century was the age of the wrecking ball, which crashed through windows and walls that once housed families struggling against the big city and smashed neighborhoods that had stood for generations. Urban renewal programs obliterated entire blocks of areas city planners called "slums"—most of them occupied by nonwhites—and millions of people lost their homes. In New York City alone, between 1946 and 1953, Robert Moses, the powerful and infamous city planner, evicted "not thousands of people or ten thousands but hundreds of thousands from their homes and tore the homes down."²⁶ Overwhelmingly, Moses, and dozens of city planners like him—planners who, in fact, flocked to Moses's table to learn how to toss people out of their homes to make way for this stadium or that expressway—replaced the housing he destroyed not with apartments for the poor, but with high-rises for the rich. Residents of areas marked for destruction—the cities' most economically vulnerable and racially marginal—were expected to find another place to live, sometimes with and sometimes without the government's help. In a tight housing market in which only a handful of neighborhoods were open to nonwhites, slum dwellers did the only thing they could: they packed themselves into other racial slums, worsening the already poor living conditions there.²⁷

White Fight and White Flight

Disadvantage bred disadvantage to create the American ghetto. But as the Civil Rights Movement gained steam, racial segregation lost its legal foothold. In the late 1960s, civil rights activists in cities across America marched for "open housing." They sought to bring an end to legalized housing discrimination. But resistance was strong. A supermajority in both houses had helped President Johnson pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but legislators backed by real estate lobbies had refused to get behind his open housing law. What moved the hand of



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Congress was the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, and the urban uprisings that followed his assassination. "Shocked that the nation's leading advocate of nonviolence had been brutally slain," historian Patrick Jones writes, "and reeling from the massive wave of urban violence that followed, Congress quickly moved to pass the 1968 Civil Rights Act, which featured a strong open housing measure."²⁸

The Civil Rights Act was the last landmark piece of legislation that resulted from the Civil Rights Movement. Title VIII of the act, known as the Fair Housing Act, provided federal enforcement to prohibit housing discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or national origin. Later amendments also prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender, disability status, or family composition.

Legalized segregation dismantled, nonwhites who could move out of the ghetto did so. Nonwhite communities previously segregated by race soon became segregated by race *and* class, as economic fault lines within black, Asian, and Hispanic communities were made more prominent. In many respects, the liberation of middle-class nonwhites from segregated areas resulted in the decay of tightly knit, economically diverse nonwhite communities. Those left behind were such communities' poorest of the poor.

Many whites at the time thought that nonwhites would bring drugs, sexual immorality, and crime into their neighborhoods and would cause property values to plummet. Some described the migration of nonwhites into *their* neighborhoods with the language of war. They spoke, that is, of being "invaded," "taken over," or "threatened," as well as of the need to "defend" and "protect" their homes, families, and livelihoods.²⁹ Testifying in front of a Senate committee in 1963, a local politician captured the sentiment of many white families: "When integration strikes a previously all-white neighborhood . . . there will be an immediate rise in crime and violence[,] . . . of vice, of prostitution, of gambling and dope. . . . [Racially mixed neighborhoods] will succumb to blight and decay, and the residents will suffer the loss of their homes and savings."³⁰

Broadly speaking, whites reacted to the racial integration of their neighborhoods in two ways: by picking up and moving or by slugging it out with newcomers—that is, by fleeing or fighting. Fearing racial integration, many whites who had the means to do so sold their houses in the city and fled to the suburbs, a migratory process known as "white flight." White flight had begun in the 1950s, spurred on by suburbanization. Whites who could afford it followed factory jobs as the latter relocated from the city center to the suburbs and surrounding small towns. But white outward migration peaked in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement—migration spurred on not by job loss, but by racial fear.

This fear was exploited by real estate agents who spotted a chance to cash in on neighborhood integration. "Blockbusting" agents, as they became known, learned to stir up whites' fear of integration. They might pay a black woman to walk her baby through a white neighborhood, giving off the image that she lived there. Or they might sell a house to an Asian family and publicize it widely. Once word spread that the neighborhood was being "taken over," agents would post fliers and call homeowners, encouraging them to sell their homes before things got worse. One blockbuster paid a pair of black children to travel door to door in a white neighborhood delivering fliers that read, "Now is the best time to sell your house—you know that."³¹ As a result, many panicking whites sold their homes to real estate agents at

below-market rates. The agents, in turn, would sell that house to nonwhite families hungry for decent housing at above-market rates, thereby collecting a large profit. If nonwhite families could not secure a home loan, blockbusting agents often would step in, offering loans at inflated interest rates.

As blacks and Asians moved in, whites moved out and were welcomed in small towns and suburban communities. In fact, the federal government endorsed white migration to the suburbs through loan programs administered by the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration. As discussed in Chapter 4, these programs provided, for the first time in American history, the opportunity for many working white families to own a home. In some areas it became cheaper to buy a house in the suburbs than to rent one in the central city.³³ When we consider this fact, as well as rampant white fear of nonwhites' "taking over" cities, we should not be surprised to learn that neighborhoods changed rapidly in their racial composition, from completely white to completely black in only a few years. Whites poured out of Atlanta so quickly that the city, once nicknamed "The City Too Busy to Hate," earned a new title: "The City Too Busy Moving to Hate."³³ As whites fled, they took their accumulated wealth with them, depleting the cities' tax base. Soon, city centers, spaces that just a few decades before had housed massive factories and bustled with the vibrancy of urban life, were hollowed out and abandoned by thousands of white homeowners, as well as better-off nonwhite families. In 1940 only one-third of all metropolitan residents lived in the suburbs; by 1970 the majority of them did.³⁴

But not all white people left their neighborhoods during this time. Working-class white homeowners and European immigrants, who had poured their life savings into their homes and whose grasp on homeownership was more tenuous than that of their middle-class counterparts, could not afford to flee the city. Instead, on facing racial immigration, they chose to ward off nonwhite families through intimidation tactics, protests, and violence—a strategy that can be labeled "white fight." Neighborhood homeowners' associations were employed as political vehicles through which white homeowners could "defend their property" from encroaching nonwhite populations. Signs were posted throughout neighborhoods reading "Whites Only" or "All White." In 1945—the year American soldiers liberated Jewish concentration camps throughout Germany and Poland—white homeowners in one Midwestern city hung signs that read, "Negroes moving here will be burned. Signed, Neighbors."³⁵

When a nonwhite family moved into a previously all-white neighborhood, white residents often reacted with protests and organized violence. When that did not work, protests often escalated into vandalism, and vandalism escalated into terrorism. Whites threw rocks through windows, poured gasoline on front lawns, dumped rotting garbage on porches, and pulled down



A sign from white Americans "defending" their neighborhood.

fences. In some cases, they lit newly purchased houses on fire or planted a burning cross—the terrifying emblem of the KKK—on the front lawn. Sometimes, the houses of new nonwhite residents, as well as the offices of their real estate officer, were firebombed. Young people regularly participated in these acts. In most cases, they were responsible for spreading the word about events and for adding a special dose of verve and spit to the rallies.³⁶

Not all whites reacted with such vehemence. Some sold their homes to nonwhites, despite their neighbors' pleas. Compared to other whites, those belonging to Jewish communities were far less likely actively to resist nonwhite "intrusion."³⁷ White antiracists fought for racial integration and against the white backlash. They worked for the multiracial NAACP to dissolve the legal standing of segregation and formed new organizations, like the Detroit Interracial Committee, that urged whites to "join the fight against religious and racial hate."³⁸ Some white religious leaders, like Milwaukee's James Groppi, a Catholic priest who organized several protests against residential segregation in one of the nation's most segregated cities, stood up against white resistance.³⁹

In many other cases, however, whites fought tooth and nail, risking prison time to preserve the color line.⁴⁰ Although some nonwhite families stood firm in the face of harassment, in many cases whites' efforts drove nonwhites back to run down and segregated neighborhoods.

Like most people during the Civil Rights Movement, the majority of nonwhites simply wanted to live a "normal life."

Urban Unrest

By the 1960s, American cities had undergone rapid transitions—economic, racial, and political. Not only were native-born nonwhite populations growing and expanding out of concentrated areas, but the abolition of national-origin quotas (as discussed in Chapter 4) resulted in immigrants from Asia and Latin America streaming into the country by the thousands. American Indians continued to relocate to the cities, and so did Mexican Americans, settling primarily in border towns and urban areas of the Southwest. But despite these changes, racial segregation remained stubbornly entrenched. The expansion of nonwhite neighborhoods did not translate necessarily into integrated neighborhoods. As one group moved in, the other group moved out—if not to the suburbs, then to another area of the city. And many nonwhite city dwellers—victims of years of economic exploitation, housing discrimination, and the compounding effects of racial domination—remained trapped in their respective ghettos, areas that had deteriorated only because of the flight of jobs and the middle class to the city's outskirts. Sociologists writing in 1962 observed that many blacks living in northern cities "live[d] in essentially the same places that their predecessors lived during the 1930s—the only difference [was] that[,] due to increasing numbers, they occup[ied] more space centered around their traditional quarters."⁴¹

The violent enforcement of racial segregation and degradation continued to relegate nonwhites to neighborhoods stripped of city services, bereft of jobs, ignored by politicians, and simmering with a sentiment of discontent. In the mid-1960s, many of these neighborhoods exploded. The majority of these racial uprisings took

place in poor black neighborhoods and, unlike the uprisings that took place earlier in the century, were started by black residents. Harlem, which according to one of its residents at the time "needed something to smash," hosted a racial uprising in 1964; a year later, the weeklong Watts uprising of Los Angeles resulted in the deaths of thirty-four people (twenty-five of whom were black) and over 1,000 injuries; and Detroit served host to a vicious uprising in 1967, one that left forty-three dead (most of them shot by police) and over 2,500 buildings looted and burned.⁴² And as we mentioned earlier in this chapter, after King was assassinated in 1968, uprisings erupted all across the nation. Throughout the mid- to late 1960s, in one major city after another, black neighborhoods went up in flames. Many Americans were certain that in these uprisings a second civil war was brewing.

These uprisings were not merely criminal or destructive acts; they were expressions of rage and suffering caused by a racist system. Many started as protests against police action within the black community. The insurgents targeted for destruction white-owned businesses in black neighborhoods, stores that refused to hire blacks, and institutions that mistreated blacks.⁴³ The majority of whites surveyed in 1968 felt the uprisings mainly were caused by "looters and undesirables." Nearly half of all blacks surveyed believed the uprisings were a reaction to "discrimination and unfair treatment."⁴⁴

While many blacks disagreed with the uprisings, arguing that racial progress would best be achieved by more conventional means, others felt more radical



On the second night of Harlem's racial uprising, two African American girls flee police officers in Brooklyn.

action was needed. A growing sense of black militancy was taking hold in urban black communities, or what came to be known as the Black Power Movement (which we discuss in more detail in Chapter 9). Many insurgents, the majority of whom were young black men, were fed up with white supremacy. "People keep calling it a riot," recalls Tommy Jacquette, who at twenty-one years of age participated in the Watts revolt. "But we call it a revolt because it had a legitimate purpose. It was a response to police brutality and social exploitation of a community and of a people, and we would no more call this a riot than Jewish people would call the extermination of the Jewish people 'relocation.' . . . People said that we burned down our community. No, we didn't. We had a revolt in our community against those people who were in here trying to exploit and oppress us. We did not own this community. We did not own the businesses in this community. We did not own the majority of the housing in this community. Some people want to know if I think it was really worth it. I think any time people stand up for their rights, it's worth it."⁴⁵

The racial uprisings not only brought the plight of the urban black poor to the forefront of American discourse; they also directly resulted in policies aimed at improving conditions in the ghetto. Government programs such as welfare payments, low-income housing subsidies, and job programs were initiated, as were summer programs for young people, often referred to as "riot insurance."⁴⁶ The uprisings brought about another consequence as well: the ratcheting up of police repression in the black community, a topic we take up in Chapter 6.

In their song "Loaded Gun," American Steel, the Oakland-based punk band, scream: "I didn't see Watts burn, but I felt the embers." So it is for us today. Our cities and suburbs—as well as our small towns—have been forged in the fires of Watts, Harlem, Detroit, and other cities that hosted racial uprisings, as they have by white flight and flight, immigration patterns, housing discrimination, and urban renewal.⁴⁷ In the history of American housing, we see, too, the origins of present-day racial segregation and disadvantage. Because of the intimate connection between homeownership and wealth accumulation, the unequal distribution of wealth discussed in Chapter 4 is explained in large part by the housing struggles reviewed here. Because many assets, especially those rooted in real estate, are passed down from one generation to the next—property usually is inherited—the wealth and financial security many whites enjoy today are a direct consequence of government restrictions and business practices that systematically excluded nonwhites from stable homeownership during the second half of the twentieth century.

Throughout the twentieth century, many whites blamed nonwhites for their problems, allowing the real culprits—job loss brought on by deindustrialization, the housing shortage that came after World War II—to escape scrutiny. Casting a backward glance at the history of housing in twentieth-century America reveals not a smooth transition or a "natural" progression, but a bloody struggle over the right to live where one wishes—the very ownership of America. And at the plinth of this struggle lies the color line, pitting the principles of American democracy against the practices of racial intolerance.⁴⁸

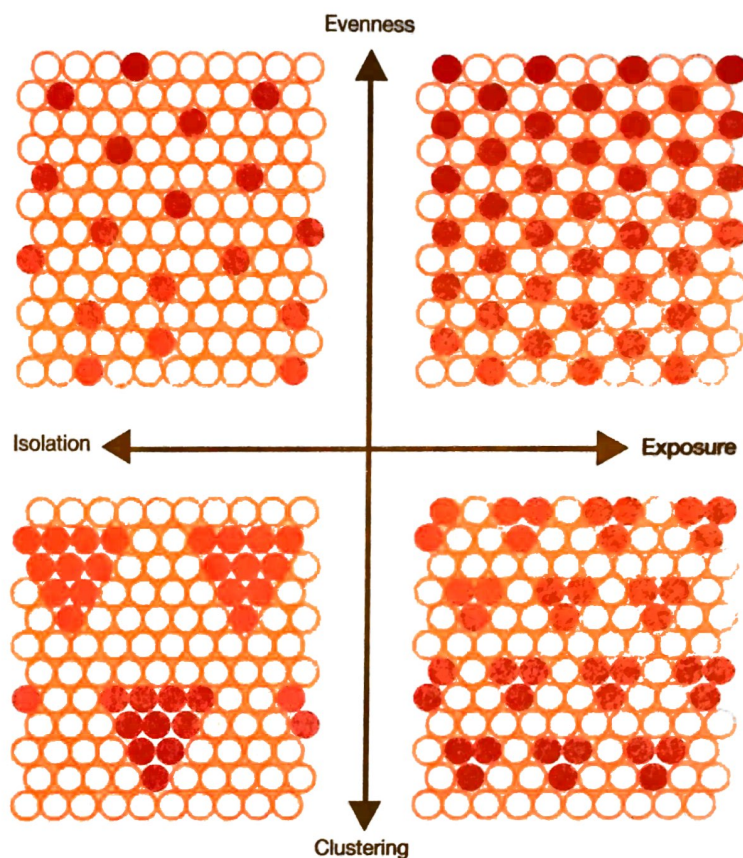
RACIAL SEGREGATION

How racially segregated are America's neighborhoods today? To answer this question, we need a good measure of segregation. Racial segregation can be measured by the degree to which certain racial groups are distributed throughout the city. For instance, if a city had a 20 percent Asian population, then in a city with no racial segregation, each neighborhood would be 20 percent Asian. The degree of segregation, therefore, can be gauged by the percentage of a certain racial group that would have to move into other neighborhoods to obtain zero segregation. If in our city of 20 percent Asians a neighborhood is 40 percent Asian, then to achieve perfect integration, 20 percent of those people would have to move into a neighborhood where the Asian population is below 20 percent.⁴⁹ Imagine that a city is a grid of boxes, each box representing a neighborhood. Now imagine that you are given a bag of multicolored marbles: white marbles represent your white population, black marbles your black population, and so forth. To model perfect integration, you would need to gather all your white marbles and drop them, one by one, into each box until they run out, repeating this step with your other marbles. If you did that, your segregation level would be zero. If, however, you decided to dump all your black marbles into a few connected boxes and all your white marbles into different boxes, you could model a very high level of segregation. Which model does America resemble?

Segregation has declined in some metropolitan areas (mostly in multicultural cities of the West and Southwest) and smaller towns since the 1970s. Between 1990 and 2010, the share of metropolitan census tracts that are racially integrated increased from 20 percent to 30 percent.⁵⁰ Even more encouraging is the finding that 75 percent of neighborhoods that were integrated in the 1980s remained so a decade later. Whites and nonwhites committed to the principle of integration have helped to build up stable, multiracial neighborhoods.⁵¹

And yet, most Americans continue to live in racially segregated neighborhoods. In many areas, the majority of the entire black population would have to move into different neighborhoods to achieve perfect integration. Northern cities, such as Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Gary, are the most segregated in America, where our segregation measure reaches 80 percent to 90 percent.⁵² If blacks are segregated to such a severe degree in cities, then so, too, are whites. Many times when people speak of segregation, they speak of neighborhoods with a high concentration of blacks or Hispanics, failing to realize that those neighborhoods exist only because there also are

FIGURE 5.1 DIMENSIONS OF SPATIAL SEGREGATION



Theoretical patterns of segregation or integration.

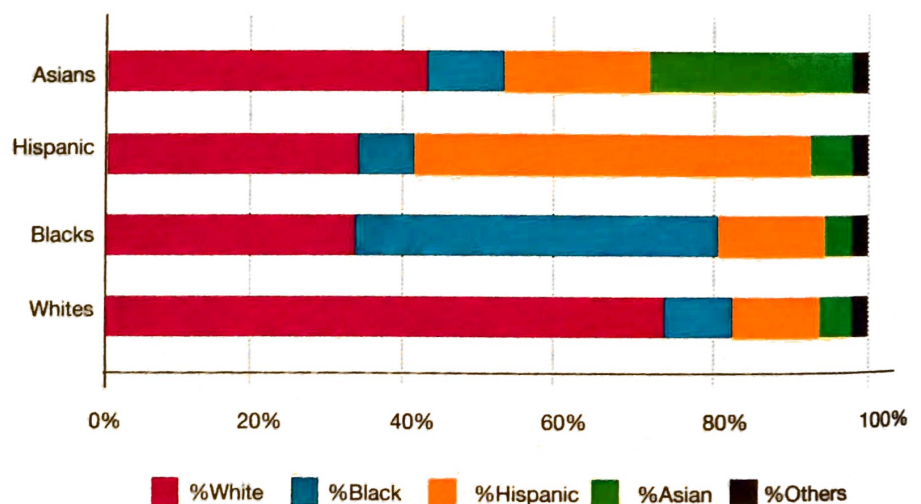
neighborhoods with a high concentration of whites. An all-white section of the city is no more “natural” than an all-black one; each exists because of the other.

In fact, whites are more likely to live in segregated neighborhoods. In U.S. cities, “the typical white lives in a neighborhood that is 75% white, 8% black, 11% Hispanic, and 5% Asian. . . . The typical black lives in a neighborhood that is 45% black, 35% white, 15% Hispanic, and 4% Asian. The typical Hispanic lives in a neighborhood that is 46% Hispanic, 35% white, 11% black and 7% Asian. The typical Asian lives in a neighborhood that is 22% Asian, 49% white, 9% black, and 19% Hispanic.”⁵³

Different Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups experience different levels of segregation. Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Indian Americans are more segregated and live in poorer neighborhoods than do Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans.⁵⁴ And the degree to which Hispanics are segregated depends in large part on the color of their skin. Focusing on Caribbean Hispanics, such as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, and Panamanians—groups that share many cultural characteristics (such as religion and Spanish proficiency) but vary greatly with respect to skin tone (from very light to very dark)—researchers have found that dark-skinned Hispanics are much more segregated than light-skinned Hispanics. In ten metropolitan areas, 52 percent of light-skinned Hispanics would have to move to achieve perfect integration. That percentage jumps to 72 percent for brown-skinned Hispanics and soars to 80 percent for black Hispanics.⁵⁵ And many black Hispanics, especially those of Puerto Rican descent, live in poorer neighborhoods than light-skinned Hispanics.⁵⁶

The fact that Asians and Hispanics are less segregated than African Americans reflects not so much the former two groups’ extreme integration into white neighborhoods, but the extreme segregation of African Americans. In twenty-nine cities, which contain no less than 40 percent of the entire black population, blacks are isolated to

FIGURE 5.2 DIVERSITY EXPERIENCES IN EACH GROUP’S TYPICAL NEIGHBORHOOD, 2010



Although Americans of all different races end up living in racially segregated neighborhoods, white people are significantly more likely to do so.

Source: American Communities Projects, Brown University

such an acute degree that most of them live only within "black areas of town."⁵⁷ The segregation of black Americans living in these cities is so severe that Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, authors of *American Apartheid*, refer to it as "hypersegregation," a term describing the observation that "black Americans in these metropolitan areas live within large, continuous settlements of densely inhabited neighborhoods that are packed tightly around the urban core. . . . No other group in the contemporary United States comes close to this level of isolation within urban society."⁵⁸

The Role of Economic Factors

What causes racial segregation? Perhaps what on the surface looks like racial segregation is segregation based on economic factors, that is, because on average whites are more wealthy than nonwhites. Perhaps racial segregation is caused not by mechanisms of racial domination, but by class-based inequalities. If this is true, then racial segregation would disappear the higher one climbed up the economic ladder. This idea, however, is not borne out by evidence. In northern cities, blacks remain highly segregated from whites, regardless of income. Blacks making more than \$50,000 a year are just as segregated as those making minimum wage. Middle-class Latinos are slightly less segregated than poor Latinos: in Los Angeles, for instance, where Hispanics constitute 45 percent of the population, 64 percent of the poor Latino population would have to relocate to achieve perfect integration, while 50 percent of the middle-class Latino population would have to do so. Economic inequalities matter, but they alone cannot explain racial segregation—especially the hypersegregation of African Americans, the most affluent of whom are more segregated than the poorest Hispanics in the country's largest Latino barrio. Economic explanations also cannot account for the fact that racial segregation persists in affluent suburbs.⁵⁹

The Role of Personal Choice

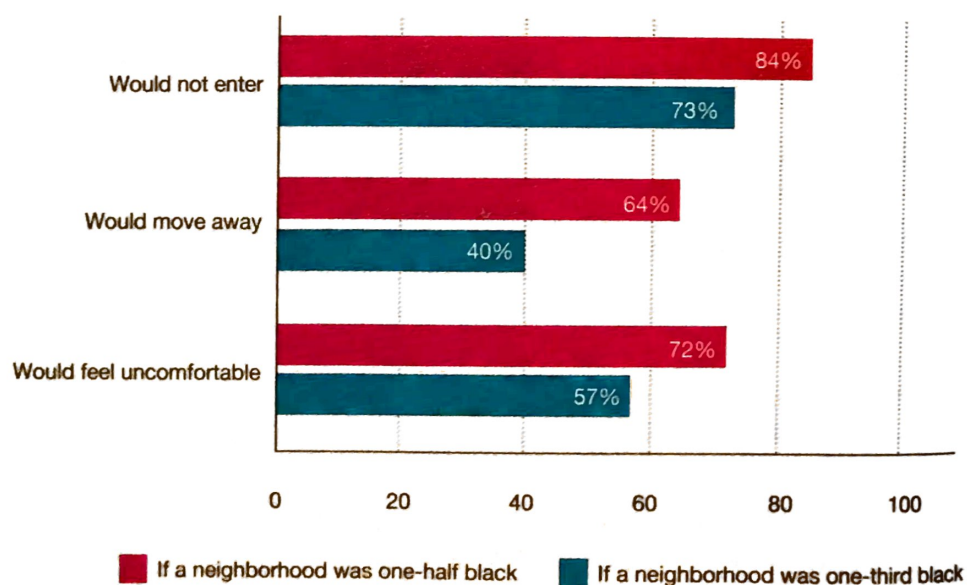
What about personal choice? In a survey, two-thirds of Milwaukee residents claimed that the reason their city was so segregated was because "people of different races choose to live in communities with people of their own race."⁶⁰ To what extent were they right? Are black people segregated simply because of their desire to live in black neighborhoods? By and large, the answer is no. Most African Americans strongly endorse the ideal of integration. Consider the findings of the Detroit Area Survey. In this study, conducted in the 1990s, white and black people were shown maps of hypothetical neighborhoods that varied in terms of racial composition: dwellings that housed black families were colored black; those that housed white families were colored white. Those who participated in the study were asked how they felt about the different neighborhoods and in which neighborhoods they would choose to live. The majority of blacks said their ideal neighborhood was 50 percent black and 50 percent white; when asked about their preference, many emphasized the importance of racial cooperation and collaboration. Blacks also showed a strong aversion to segregated neighborhoods: 30 percent would not move into an all-black neighborhood and, fearing they would be unwelcome (or, worse, would be met with hostility), 60 percent were unwilling to move to an all-white neighborhood.⁶¹

While blacks are strong proponents of integration, whites are advocates of segregation. A quarter of whites who participated in the Detroit Area Survey

reported that a single black neighbor would make them uncomfortable. Regarding a neighborhood that was one-third black, 73 percent of whites would refuse to travel there, 57 percent would feel uncomfortable, and a full 40 percent would move away if they lived there. When shown a neighborhood that was 50 percent black and 50 percent white, 84 percent of whites would not enter that area, while 64 percent would move away, and 72 percent would feel uncomfortable. In other words, the neighborhood that most blacks would want to move to—one with an even balance of black and white folks—is the one that whites would want to move away from. These whites, echoing the sentiments of whites across the twentieth century, feel that having even a handful of black neighbors would drive down property values and increase neighborhood crime.⁶² Since this famous study, numerous others have reaffirmed the finding that modern racial segregation does not solely reflect personal preferences.⁶³

Racial segregation is caused in part by personal choice: it is the choices not of Puerto Ricans to live with other Puerto Ricans or blacks with other blacks, but of whites to live with other whites that matters the most. Just as they did in the twentieth century, some whites will go to great lengths to avoid racial integration at the neighborhood level, from lashing out in violence at their nonwhite neighbors—roughly half of all Chicago’s hate crimes today occur in white neighborhoods undergoing a process of integration—to paying outlandish mortgages and suffering lengthy commutes to live in predominantly white suburbs.⁶⁴ This is why observers have claimed that ending America’s racial segregation will require “a moral commitment that white America has historically lacked.”⁶⁵ It will require a moral commitment to render hollow and worthy of reproach the joke that circulates in segregated white neighborhoods: “What is a word that starts with ‘n’ and ends with ‘r’ that you should never call a black person? . . . ‘Neighbor.’”⁶⁶

FIGURE 5.3 WHITE PARTICIPANTS IN THE DETROIT AREA STUDY



Percentage of whites responding to questions about integrated neighborhoods. Whites are unlikely to want to move into a neighborhood with an even balance of black and white residents.

The Role of Housing Discrimination

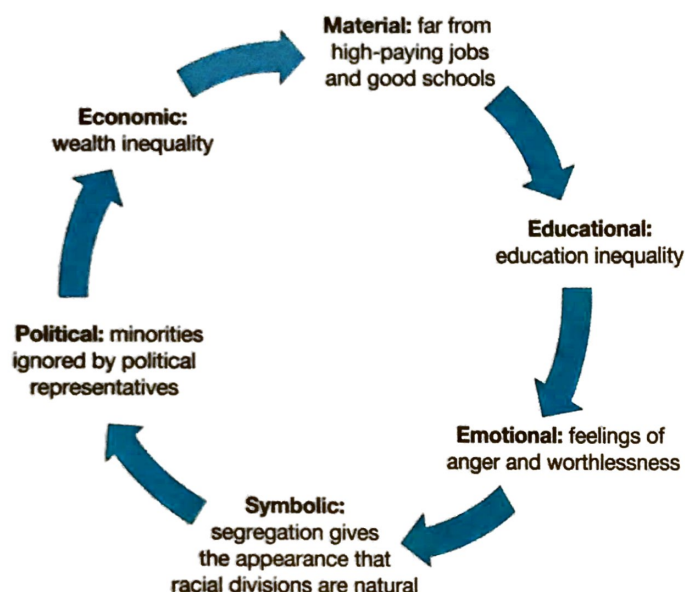
Social scientists also have explained racial segregation by analyzing the mechanisms of housing discrimination.⁶⁷ Through the employment of audit studies, where paired actors, equal in every way aside from race, approach a realtor as prospective home buyers or renters, researchers have gathered evidence documenting compounding and multisided discrimination against nonwhites. According to a massive audit study conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Hispanics and blacks looking for housing faced high levels of discrimination (which occurred in 50 percent of their interactions with realtors and landlords), as did Asians (who faced discrimination in 20 percent of cases) and Native Americans (who faced discrimination in 30 percent of cases).⁶⁸ Although housing discrimination has been outlawed since the Fair Housing Act of 1968, it is clear from such studies that it continues, albeit in more covert and underhanded ways.

Several audit studies have documented the practice of realtors falsely informing prospective nonwhite clients that the houses or apartments they noticed in an advertisement have just been rented or sold. One study documented the practice of a Chicago-based developer who worked only with whites; blacks were *always* told no properties were available, whereas whites were shown properties the majority of the time.⁶⁹ According to another study, prospective black home buyers were informed of 65 homes for every 100 shown to whites.⁷⁰ Yet another study found that between 60 percent and 90 percent of houses and apartments displayed to whites are never shown to blacks.⁷¹ In addition, a good number of realtors often show nonwhites only those homes located in nonwhite or integrated areas, leading them away from majority-white neighborhoods—a practice known as “steering.”⁷² One analyst found that Hispanic and black home seekers encounter steering between 30 percent and 40 percent of the time, while white home seekers are often discouraged from buying in integrated neighborhoods.⁷³ Real estate offices advertise homes in majority-nonwhite or integrated neighborhoods at far lower rates than they do homes located in middle-class white neighborhoods, a pattern that persists even after taking into account the economic profile of the neighborhoods.⁷⁴

Social scientists also have documented gender discrimination in housing, a dynamic that makes things especially difficult for women of color. Not only are women sometimes denied loans or charged higher rents on the basis of their sex, but they also are disproportionately victimized by sexual harassment. Landlords and building managers may agree to fix a repair or waive a late fee in exchange for sexual favors or may threaten a tenant with eviction unless she “is nice to him.”⁷⁵ What is more, on learning that a woman is in an abusive relationship, landlords have been known to reject her rental application or evict her.⁷⁶

For their part, banks and loan companies, as we learned in Chapter 4, reinforce racial segregation. Regularly, nonwhites, even those with impressive financial portfolios, are denied mortgage loans and receive poor credit ratings. One study found that even “after controlling for all objective indicators for applicant risk, lenders still rejected minorities 56 percent more often than otherwise identical whites.”⁷⁷ According to political scientist Karen Orren, since the 1960s, life insurance companies virtually have abandoned the city, choosing instead to offer mortgage loans almost exclusively to suburban properties.⁷⁸ And many banks, continuing a more clandestine kind of redlining, refuse to finance homes in nonwhite and integrated neighborhoods.

FIGURE 5.4 THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEGREGATION



Interestingly, banks seem most hesitant to invest in areas undergoing racial change—distributing loans at high volumes in majority-white areas, moderate volumes in majority-black areas, and low volumes in racially mixed areas—a practice directly at odds with the principle of racial integration.⁷⁹

The Consequences of Segregation

The consequences of segregation are multisided and complex. First, racial segregation takes an economic toll. Because banks often deny qualified nonwhites home loans, nonwhite home seekers must secure mortgages with inflated interest rates and high monthly payments. And because realtors steer nonwhites away from affluent white neighborhoods, many nonwhites end up purchasing homes that are not worth as much as comparable homes in white neighborhoods. In fact, studies have shown that black homeowners actually are penalized for purchasing a home: the average black

homeowner resides in a neighborhood that is more segregated and less prosperous than that of the average black renter.⁸⁰ And in his study of housing discrimination, John Yinger estimates that each time a black or Hispanic person looks for housing, she or he, met with all the mechanisms of discrimination discussed earlier, pays an average “discrimination tax” of \$3,000.⁸¹

Added to the economic disadvantages attached to housing in segregated neighborhoods are the disadvantages associated with one’s proximity to well-paying jobs. Opportunities for work are abundant in some areas—namely, booming suburbs that have flourished since the white flight of the 1960s—and virtually nonexistent in others. Nonwhites clustered together in isolated city centers live in gutted-out areas cut off from the economic mainstream.⁸² In many overlapping ways, therefore, racial segregation directly reproduces racialized poverty.

Racial segregation also affects people’s living conditions. Forced to live in neighborhoods bereft of normal institutions (like grocery stores and banks), housed in old, dilapidated structures in a state of disrepair, and miles away from the nearest hospital or medical clinic, residents in poor, nonwhite neighborhoods experience a quality of life resembling nothing like the American ideals of comfort and security. To a lesser degree, this is true even of some middle-class black families, who live in neighborhoods with higher crime rates and lower property values than those of their white counterparts who earn the same amount of money.⁸³

Racial segregation also has political consequences. If nonwhites are clustered only in certain areas of the city, they can be more or less ignored by political representatives who focus their energies on other areas. Although segregation can help nonwhites elect nonwhite representatives, as we learned in Chapter 3, by the same token it can marginalize nonwhites in the political arena. The segregation of nonwhites therefore erodes hope of coalition building and interracial collaboration in the political field, on both local and national levels.⁸⁴

Students' performance in school does not go unaffected by racial segregation. Children and young people living in run-down segregated neighborhoods must attend poor schools with teaching shortages and few resources. Roughly half of all property tax revenue is used for public elementary and secondary education.⁸⁵ Because property tax is dictated by property values, affluent neighborhoods with soaring property values will enjoy a plump tax base from which schools can draw, while poor neighborhoods with abysmal property values will have a paltry tax base. This means that schools that service students in nonwhite low-income areas will be forced to operate with a much smaller budget than will schools housed in affluent white neighborhoods; they will have less money for field trips, textbooks, computers, and competitive teachers' salaries. It is small wonder, then, that black and Latino students living in highly segregated ghettos perform worse in school than black and Latino students from poor families living in more affluent neighborhoods. For many students living in racially isolated neighborhoods, doing well in school takes a back seat to staying safe, avoiding street crime and gangs, navigating the drug scene, and making ends meet.⁸⁶

Besides such material consequences, racial segregation also brings about symbolic consequences. By dividing cities along racial dimensions, racial segregation gives off the appearance that racial divisions are real, natural, and unchanging. The geographic segregation in cities encourages a kind of mental segregation, one that reinforces and reifies the racial order. As one historian has put it, "in the very act of defining the boundaries of the 'ghetto,' whites also continually defined and reinforced the boundaries of race."⁸⁷

And, last, we cannot forget the deep emotional costs of racial segregation. "The people of Harlem know they are living there because white people do not think they are good enough to live anywhere else," wrote James Baldwin in 1960. "No amount of 'improvement' can sweeten this fact. . . . A ghetto can be improved in one way only: out of existence."⁸⁸ "Housing is no abstract social and political problem, but an extension of man's personality," remarked American sociologist Kenneth Clark in 1965. "If the Negro has to identify with a rat-infested tenement, his sense of personal inadequacy and inferiority, already aggravated by job discrimination and other forms of humiliations, is reinforced by the physical reality around him. . . . A house is a concrete symbol of what the person is worth."⁸⁹

Economic, material, political, educational, symbolic, and emotional—the consequences of racial segregation are mighty and many. But if racial segregation disadvantages some, it advantages others. If inner-city blacks are cut off from well-paying jobs, whites living in the suburbs are well connected to corporate America; if Mexicans living in crowded barrios are ignored by their political representatives, whites throughout the suburbs, with their healthy tax base, can more easily catch hold of the politician's ear; if Native Americans relegated to isolated and impoverished reservations are burdened by a sense of inferiority, whites living the good life might come to possess, perhaps without their knowledge, a sense of entitlement. It is incorrect to assume that every white gain translates into nonwhite loss—or vice versa. However, it is equally inadequate to speak of the disadvantages faced by people of color living in segregated neighborhoods without at the same time calling to mind the advantages enjoyed by whites living in equally segregated communities.

THE CITY

Unaffordable America

Public housing—government-owned units provided at low rates to poor residents—always has played a large part in reinforcing racial segregation in cities. Public housing arose after World War II as a response to the country's housing shortage. At first, many white and black families stayed in public housing units for short periods of time. However, as urban renewal projects were visited upon ghetto areas and thousands of poor blacks, evicted from their homes, were channeled into already swelling slum areas, public housing “was now meant to collect the ghetto residents left homeless by the urban renewal bulldozers.”⁹⁰ To make room for these displaced newcomers, cities erected towering public housing units—Chicago's Robert Taylor homes once housed as many as 20,000 tenants—always in the isolated ghetto and, more often than not, “bleak, sterile, and cheap—expressive of patronizing condescension in every line.”⁹¹ Unlike many European states, which provide public housing in the form of financial housing subsidies to poor families, American public housing tends to consist of these inner-city projects.

Yet we should bear in mind that most low-income Americans do not benefit from public housing. In fact, the vast majority of low-income families live unsatisfied in the private market. Since the Nixon administration that began in 1969, policymakers have withdrawn funding from housing programs for the needy on the grounds that the private housing market is the best provider of shelter. Towering public housing that once defined ghetto neighborhoods—Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes, St. Louis's Pruitt-Igoe Homes, Atlanta's McDaniel-Glenn Homes—has been destroyed. Public housing inventory has fallen by roughly 20 percent since 1991.⁹² In an average year in the 1980s, 161,000 additional households (as compared to the previous year) received subsidies in the form of public housing, vouchers, or some other kind of assistance. Since 1995, in an average year only 3,000 did.⁹³

Only one in four households that qualify for housing assistance receives it. The lack of housing assistance combined with flat incomes at the bottom of the economic distribution and rising housing costs since 2000 have resulted in more and more renting families devoting large chunks of their income to housing costs. Because they have been disproportionately excluded both from good jobs and from the mortgage market, most African American and Latino families rent their housing—and accordingly have been disproportionately affected by the rise of rent burden.⁹⁴ As research by Matthew Desmond (an author of this book) shows, the percentage of black and Latino renters dedicating less than a third of their income to housing costs has declined over the last twenty years, but the percentage dedicating over half their income has risen. Today, roughly one in four black and Latino renting families spends at least half their income on housing.⁹⁵

As a result, eviction has become commonplace in poor, minority neighborhoods. Desmond's research shows that in the city of Milwaukee, landlords evicted roughly 16,000 adults and children from 6,000 units in an average year. That's sixteen evictions a day. To place these figures in perspective, consider that the number of families evicted in Milwaukee in an average year is equivalent to the number of families forced out of public housing in Chicago, a city with approximately five times the

population, over the course of a *decade*. Almost half of Milwaukee's evictions take place in predominantly black inner-city neighborhoods. With roughly one in fourteen renter-occupied households evicted annually, eviction is frankly commonplace in Milwaukee's black ghetto.⁹⁶

The consequences of eviction are many and severe. Eviction decreases one's chances of securing decent and affordable housing because landlords often turn away applicants with a recent eviction record. And it can prevent families from benefiting from affordable housing programs, as the housing authority often regards an eviction as a strike against an applicant. Eviction often brings about prolonged periods of homelessness and increases poor families' material hardship. Recent research has linked eviction to job loss, depression, residential instability, and relocating to poorer, more violent neighborhoods. Women in poor minority neighborhoods disproportionately experience eviction and its consequences. In poor black neighborhoods, women are more than twice as likely to be evicted as men. If incarceration has become typical in the lives of men from impoverished black neighborhoods, eviction has become typical in the lives of women from these neighborhoods.⁹⁷



An eviction team removes the belongings of a tenant who was forced from her apartment. She had been unable to work the year prior because of a medical condition.

Advanced Marginality: The Ghetto

It is fitting to end our section on race in the city by returning to the ghetto, that institution, formed by fear and racism, in which the metropolis's "urban outcasts" live. In Chapter 4, we defined the ghetto as a racial institution marked by social isolation and economic vulnerability first formed when blacks migrated north during the early twentieth century. To this we might add Massey and Denton's observation that "a ghetto is a set of neighborhoods that are exclusively inhabited by members of one group, within which virtually all members of that group live."⁹⁸ By this definition, African Americans are the only group in the history of the United States that have experienced ghettoization. Even early European immigrants, who clustered together in Germantowns and Little Italys, did not experience ghettoization to the degree that blacks experience it today. There are poor white neighborhoods, Hispanic barrios, and Chinatowns aplenty. But a ghetto is not defined exclusively by its poverty, nor, as we have already seen, are all kinds of poverty the same.

The defining characteristic of a ghetto is not economic destitution, but advanced marginality. Advanced marginality refers to the severe spatial and social segregation of the ghetto's residents, marked by their amputation from America's economic prosperity, national security, collective imagination and memory, and state services.⁹⁹ The ghetto first originated in medieval Europe as an area of the city where Jews were cordoned off from the rest of the population. In fact, the word "ghetto" comes from an Italian word meaning "the part of a city to which Jews are restricted."¹⁰⁰ And it is this restriction, this social isolation, that is the essence of the ghetto.

The ghetto we find today, primarily in northern cities, does not resemble the ghetto of the mid-twentieth century. The ghetto of midcentury might be called the “the communal ghetto.” Owing to legalized segregation, virtually all African Americans—no matter their title, profession, or economic standing—lived there. The ghetto was economically diverse, had its own economy, and functioned as a safe space for blacks who were unwelcomed in other areas of town. After legalized segregation fell, middle- and upper-class blacks fled the ghetto, leaving behind only low-income families. The “hyperghetto” of today is a territory segregated by race and class—and is a site of extreme concentration of poverty, crime, and other social maladies. Other neighborhoods may be racially segregated or economically deprived. But the hyperghetto is marked by extreme levels of both African American segregation and acutely concentrated disadvantage.¹⁰¹

Ethnic Enclaves

Immigration has been and remains an urban phenomenon. Of the thousands of immigrants who come to the United States each year, most settle in large “receiving” or “gateway cities,” such as Miami, Los Angeles, New York, Dallas, Chicago, Houston, and San Francisco. Through international communication channels, immigrants in the sending countries learn where pockets of immigrants from their country have settled. Although not as segregated as African Americans—or, for that matter, European immigrants of the nineteenth century—today’s immigrants are a fairly segregated lot, many clustering together in ethnic enclaves.¹⁰²

Are ethnic enclaves transitional neighborhoods in which new immigrants live until they gain enough footing in American society to move out, or are they more established communities, where multiple generations of immigrants live even though they do not have to? The answer, social scientists have learned, is “both.”

According to the spatial assimilation thesis, advanced by American sociologist Douglas Massey, new immigrants self-segregate in enclaves and rely on the enclave economy for their start.¹⁰³ After some time in the enclave, immigrants, having acquired savings and improved their English skills, look for a new place to live, one that can offer a higher standard of living. In this view, ethnic enclaves are a stopping point for immigrants—some of whom face high rates of housing discrimination—on their way to economic and cultural assimilation.¹⁰⁴

According to another view, the ethnic community thesis, ethnic enclaves are sought out by immigrants who could afford to live elsewhere. Some immigrants prefer living in areas where a good number of their neighbors eat the same food, celebrate the same holidays, and speak their native language.¹⁰⁵ Although most ethnic neighborhoods are underprivileged, some are quite well off. The Vietnamese and Japanese enclaves of inner-city Los Angeles, for example, are at least as affluent as the other



Ethnic enclaves, such as Manhattan's Koreatown (pictured), create communities which can either help or hinder immigrant populations.

neighborhoods where Vietnamese and Japanese families live. The same is true of New York City's Afro-Caribbean, Filipino, and Indian American enclaves.¹⁰⁶

Within ethnic enclaves—indeed, within neighborhoods of all varieties—we find those who could live elsewhere but who, attracted to their enclave's cultural life, choose not to; those who wish to live elsewhere but are trapped within it; and those who use the enclave as a launching pad from which to ascend.¹⁰⁷

Interracial Conflict: Blacks and Koreans

Immigrants always have added to the pulse and vibrancy of American urban life. Take today's Korean immigrants, the immigrant group with the highest rate of self-employment in the United States. Many cities owe their dry cleaners and nail salons, fish markets and fresh-flower stands, and neighborhood grocery stores to Korean entrepreneurs. For over a hundred years, immigrant groups have established businesses in the inner city. Throughout the twentieth century, Jewish shopkeepers were a regular fixture in the center of town. But as their children inherited not just the opportunities their parents had worked so hard to provide but also the opportunities involved in being welcomed deeper into the ranks of whiteness, they took leave of their shops, opening up in turn new opportunities for streams of other ethnic immigrants. Koreans have filled the business niche left by Jewish shopkeepers, and many have opened up shop in the black ghetto, because they can afford to live there and because they do not have to compete with large corporations, which are much more interested in the deeper pockets of suburban residents.¹⁰⁸

Many black ghetto residents, however, view Korean shopkeepers with a fair degree of animus and resentment. Many poor blacks feel that Korean entrepreneurs have taken their jobs, while others feel generally mistreated and disrespected by shopkeepers. We are met with this tension when comedian Dave Chappelle jokes, "Now I would never say I hate all Korean people. I haven't met all Korean people. That hate talk's for savages. But even though I don't generalize, I do do percentages and averages. So far I hate one out of five Koreans I've met."¹⁰⁹ Conflicts between black patrons and Korean store owners often are colored by racist language, with each party exchanging epithets.

Black-Korean conflict boiled over in the early 1990s. In 1991, a Korean merchant shot and killed a black teenager in South Central Los Angeles. A year later, Los Angeles went up in flames as insurgents of all racial identities took to the streets after four white police officers, who had been caught on videotape beating a twenty-five-year-old motorist named Rodney King, were acquitted. As the smoke settled from the country's first multiethnic uprising, fifty-two people had been killed and millions of dollars' worth of property had been destroyed. Korean store owners were hit the hardest, suffering almost half of the total property damage—roughly \$400 million.¹¹⁰



A Korean-American store owner stands vigil on the roof of his grocery store in the Koreatown area of Los Angeles during the three days of violence following the acquittal of the four Los Angeles police officers accused of beating Rodney King.



Nearly 8 million people in the United States live in gated communities.

Urban conflict and tension between minority groups can be found in today's cities just as it could have been found there a century ago between Italians and Germans, Catholics and Protestants. The distrust that different racial and ethnic groups living in poor urban neighborhoods harbor toward one another is matched only by the interests and struggles shared by these groups.

THE SUBURBS

America's sprawling suburbs originated as a racial creation, and they remain one today. Suburban development was fueled by white fear: fear of racial integration, of plummeting property values, and—most of all—of violent crime. In their distance from city centers, their cul-de-sacs and dead-end roads, their stringent zoning laws, and their lack of public transportation, the suburbs purposefully are constructed to promote isolation

from city dwellers and their “vices.” Nowhere is this better exemplified than in gated communities, which have flourished since the 1970s. As their name suggests, gated communities, where nearly 8 million Americans reside, are residential areas fortified by high walls and security forces. To enter, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists must pass through a large gate, sometimes enabled by round-the-clock guards and surveillance cameras. No longer only a luxury of the elite, middle-class gated communities are now springing up all over suburbia.¹¹¹

Americans often view urban life as made up of “chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs,” as funk master George Clinton once put it, and associate multiracial cities with poverty and crime and white suburbs with affluence and safety. After eating at Sylvia's, a famous soul food restaurant located in the heart of Harlem, Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly announced that he “couldn't get over the fact” that Sylvia's was like any other restaurant. “It was like going into an Italian restaurant in an all-white suburb in the sense of people were sitting there, and they were ordering and having fun,” O'Reilly said. “And there wasn't any kind of craziness at all.”¹¹² Embedded within this comment is the implication that black city areas are distinctly different, especially in terms of order and civility, from all-white suburbs.

The suburbs, however, are neither all affluent nor all white. In fact, since the 1990s, poverty has been on the rise in many suburbs. Between 2000 and 2010, suburban poverty levels rose an astonishing 53 percent.¹¹³ Indeed, many cities have attempted to entice upper-class individuals to newly renovated central-city areas by pushing out poor families, who in turn have relocated to the inner rings of the suburbs. The result has been the beginnings of “suburban ghettos,” areas with extremely high poverty and unemployment rates, detached from social services and employment opportunities.¹¹⁴

In 2010, 78 percent of whites, 62 percent of Asians, 59 percent of Hispanics, and 51 percent of blacks lived in the suburbs.¹¹⁵ Most nonwhites migrating to the

suburbs moved into areas already populated by nonwhites and areas undergoing racial change. Suburban areas with small nonwhite populations experienced higher levels of integration, while segregation is more trenchant in areas with large nonwhite populations. Typically, black Americans with ample bank accounts do not move from segregated urban areas to integrated suburbs, but from one black neighborhood to another. To pluck one statistic from many: 60 percent of black households earning over \$75,000 live in majority-black neighborhoods. The same pattern is true, though to a lesser extent, of Hispanic and Asian Americans.¹¹⁶

Because many middle-class black neighborhoods abut poor black neighborhoods, middle-class residents often shop at the same stores, play in the same parks, and walk down the same streets as poor blacks living a few blocks away. Some middle-class blacks attempt to erect clear boundaries between themselves and their downtrodden neighbors (and hence have been labeled "buppies," a combination of black and yuppie). Others, however, have forged alliances with poor members of the black community, together participating in church fund-raisers or community education projects. Accordingly, many of the social problems that fester in the ghetto have crept into middle-class black neighborhoods, which are less affluent and have higher crime rates than middle-class white neighborhoods (or even many poor white neighborhoods). On the whole, middle-class blacks are just as segregated from whites—and, in turn, from good schools, well-funded social service agencies, and grocery stores with fair prices and fresh produce—as are poor blacks.¹¹⁷

At the same time, middle-class black families often oscillate between black and white communities, navigating racial boundaries at different times and for different reasons. Career-driven blacks may work in a majority-white corporate world but worship in a majority-black church. Black children from well-off families may attend a majority-white prep school during the weekday and play on a majority-black inner-city Little League team on the weekends.¹¹⁸ However, other middle-class black families, especially those sprinkled across majority-white suburbs, may remain culturally and spatially isolated from other black families. Black adolescents brought up in such areas often describe themselves as "raised white," such that they do not identify with African American history, culture, or communities. Indeed, biracial adolescents raised in white suburbs often identify as white until they get to college, where they undergo a reracialization orchestrated by their peers, professors, and guidance counselors. As one biracial woman attending the University of California–Berkeley explained, "Before I came to Cal I was white. I was all white culturally. . . . Here I am perceived as black. I'm treated as black so I don't have a problem with being black. . . . But it's a difficult situation. It's really hard."¹¹⁹ Comments like these attest to the fluidity of racial categories, as well as to the importance of place in molding those categories.

Growing numbers of immigrant families live and work in the suburbs. In fact, almost half of new immigrants who arrived in the 1990s settled in suburban areas. In Los Angeles, which, along with New York, is home to the largest and most diverse collection of immigrant communities in the nation, there are more Mexican, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese citizens and immigrants living in the suburbs than in the inner city. Large Cuban communities thrive in the suburbs of New Jersey, and Salvadoran enclaves are nestled beyond the city limits

throughout southern California. Although not as affluent as many white suburbs, suburban ethnic communities provide a higher standard of living than do inner-city ethnic enclaves and other urban neighborhoods.¹²⁰

One of the largest and most diverse Asian American communities is found in the suburban cities that made up the San Gabriel Valley, east of Los Angeles. First settled by Asian workers in the mid-nineteenth century, the San Gabriel Valley is home to the eight cities in the United States with the highest proportions of Chinese Americans as well as to thousands of Japanese, Filipino, South Asian, and Japanese Americans. Public libraries and schools in the area have embraced Asian cultures as well as the principles of multilingualism and multiculturalism, with some high schools incorporating Mandarin language courses into their curriculum. As one observer has commented, many Asian American youth living in San Gabriel Valley “do not know they are ‘supposed to’ major in engineering and not in sports,” and a significant number of the area’s young people, Asian and non-Asian alike, are “multilingual, multiracial, and multicultural . . . [and] comfortable in diversity.”¹²¹

RURAL AMERICA

Most of this chapter has focused on urban life, and for good reason: most Americans live in metropolitan areas.¹²² However, racial dynamics also affect the lives of millions of people living in rural areas, the residents of American Indian reservations, farmlands, and small towns. In fact, many rural areas are just as racially segregated as their urban counterparts; what is more, many rural nonwhites live “in close proximity to the historical remnants of institutions explicitly created to conquer, oppress, and maintain their subordinate position in society.”¹²³ For this reason, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to unpacking the racial dynamics of residence in rural America.

Colonias and Bordertowns

Since the early 1900s, American agriculture has relied on the busy hands and sturdy backs of migrant laborers, who were willing to work for below-market wages. In fact, between 1942 and 1964, the U.S. government recruited Mexican nationals for agricultural work through the Bracero program, which granted them temporary residence in the United States. Over 4.5 million Mexicans worked in the United States through this program, willing to bend and sweat and pick in the fields for substandard wages. They often lived in crowded and hot dwellings, with bunk beds stacked on top of one another. Called “legalized slavery,” the Bracero program was outlawed the same year the Civil Rights Act was ratified; however, the working and housing conditions for today’s migrant workers—the overwhelming majority of them Mexican immigrants working in the rural West—have not improved much.¹²⁴

Between 1990 and 2000, the proportion of Mexican immigrants working in agricultural fields nearly doubled.¹²⁵ Small settlements, called *colonias*, have sprung up around the fields where migrant workers toil. Many *colonias* are made up of low-cost housing or, in some cases, lines of dilapidated shacks built of pieces of discarded sheet metal, old tires, and scrap wood. Their residents are isolated—culturally, linguistically, economically, and politically—from the neighboring white

communities, including the farmhouses of their employers; many suffer from a lack of social services and basic medicine. Although *colonias* house significant numbers of Mexican immigrants, many are made up of native-born Mexican Americans. In South Texas, for instance, roughly two-thirds of *colonia* residents are American citizens.¹²⁶

The desolate towns nesting against the 2,000-mile border separating the United States from Mexico are some of the poorest areas in the country. Star County, Texas, has one of the highest poverty rates in the nation.¹²⁷ Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants who populate the borderland face limited economic opportunities and accept positions in America's growing low-wage market. Many Mexican American families have moved north, to the upper Midwest and other parts of the country, in search of more opportunity.¹²⁸

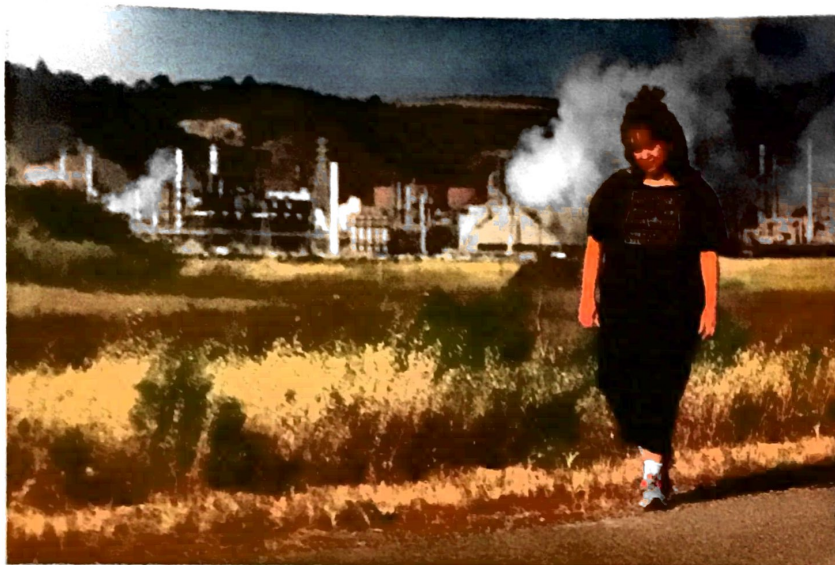


A woman watches her two children play in front of their home in a *colonia* just northwest of McAllen, Texas.

Life on the Reservation—and Environmental Racism

A large proportion of America's indigenous population lives on reservations.¹²⁹ These are anything but one-dimensional settings. They vary along economic, cultural, religious, linguistic, and political lines. There also is immense variation within Indian nations, caused (among other things) by differentiations built into tribal structure: separate clans, traditions, and villages. On examining the history of the Cherokee Nation, one sociologist noted that because the tribe's language changed from village to village, as did its customs, rituals, and everyday practices, it is more accurate to speak of "many different Cherokee populations," as opposed to a single, monochrome tribe.¹³⁰

Those who never have set foot on an American Indian reservation might carry in their minds a great many misconceptions of reservation life. Indeed, many non-Indian Americans seem to view Indians as somehow locked in time, living on reservations the same way their ancestors lived centuries ago. Reacting to the frequency of these stereotypes, a joke circulating on an Indian listserv in 2002 read, "Things Native Americans Can Say to a White Person upon First Meeting One: (1) Where's your powdered wig? (2) Do you live in a covered wagon? (3) What's the meaning behind the square dance? (4) What's your feeling about riverboat casinos? Do they really help or are they just a short-term fix? (5) I learned all about your people's ways in the Boy Scouts."¹³¹ Just as it would be absurd to ask a white person these questions, it would be equally absurd to ask a resident of an Indian reservation, "Where's your headdress?" or "Do you live in a tepee?" More accurately, like most other Americans, many Native Americans live with one foot in the present and the other in the past. Many members of the Navajo Nation, for instance, live in modern homes decorated with traditional hand-woven rugs, pottery, and sand paintings; in their back yards, next to the trampoline and propane grill, sits a hogan, a small, dome-shaped wood and mud structure, which serves as a ceremonial site.



Many firms have offered millions of dollars for the right to pollute Indian reservations.

Among the many problems facing American Indian reservations in the twenty-first century, environmental racism ranks among the most pressing. Environmental racism can be defined as any environmental policy, practice, or directive that disproportionately disadvantages (intentionally or unintentionally) nonwhite communities.¹³² Native American lands have been targeted for radioactive dumpsites, incinerators, and erosive mining operations. According to one source, over 300 reservations are threatened by environmental hazards, from chemical waste to dangerous air emissions, clear-cutting, and strip-mining. Faced with stringent environmental regulations, waste disposal firms have looked to Native American reservations, which are not subject to state laws regarding dumping. Hoping to buy off corrupt tribal leaders or to exploit the economic vulnerability of reservation inhabitants, these firms have offered thousands, even millions, of dollars for the right to pollute Indian country.¹³³

Consider the case of the Skull Valley Band of Goshutes, located on reservation land in northern Utah. Only a couple dozen tribal members live on the impoverished reservation, and it is not hard to see why. "To the southwest lies the Dugway Proving Ground, where the U.S. government develops chemical and biological weapons. To the east is one of the world's largest nerve-gas incinerators. To the north is a giant magnesium plant, a major polluter. To the northwest sit a hazardous-waste incinerator and a toxic-waste landfill. The tribe's only profitable business is a municipal garbage dump serving Salt Lake City."¹³⁴ In 2006, tribal members were approached with a proposition by Private Fuel Storage, a consortium representing nuclear utilities. In exchange for \$100 million in fees to be dished out over a span of forty years, the Skull Valley reservation would agree to store nearly all the country's radioactive waste, roughly 44,000 tons. The payoffs were obvious, as were the risks—nothing short of the permanent poisoning of their lands—and tribal members disagreed on the plan and finally rejected it.¹³⁵ To debate whether or not residents of the Skull Valley reservation should have taken the deal is an important exercise. Equally important, however, is a sociological exercise that forces us to question why these Native Americans must choose between rural poverty and radioactive waste. What past and present economic, social, cultural, and political forces combine to produce this devil's bargain?

American Indians living on reservations are exposed to some of the worst air and water pollution in the country. As a result, they are at high risk of contracting cancer and lung diseases, of dying at a young age, and of giving birth to babies with defects. Compared to the national average, Native Americans living on reservations are 2.8 times more likely to die of diabetes, for example.¹³⁶ When we learn that doctors can identify industry pollutants in the milk of nursing mothers living on the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation in upstate New York, we begin to understand one reason why many Indian babies are born prematurely and weigh less than the

national average—and why the infant mortality rate on reservations is 1.2 times the national average.¹³⁷

Native Americans have formed coalitions to resist environmental racism. In 1999, residents of the Eastern Navajo reservation appealed to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to put an end to ongoing uranium mining. California's Mohave Nation and Nevada's Western Shoshone battled against proposals to build radioactive waste dumps on tribal land. And interracial coalitions aimed at combating such problems have emerged since American Indians are not the only group that suffers from environmental racism. After taking economic attributes into account, Latino and black urban neighborhoods are far more likely to experience environmental hazards than their white counterparts. The majority of large hazardous waste landfills are located in nonwhite neighborhoods; in 2000, as many as three out of five African Americans lived in areas with toxic waste dumps, and more than 46 percent of all public housing units were located within a mile's radius of factories emitting toxic gases.¹³⁸

Poor rural black communities, especially those located in the Deep South, also have been sacrificed to house the nation's waste. In a document prepared for the United Nations, sociologist Robert Bullard wrote, "The Lower Mississippi River Industrial Corridor has over 125 companies that manufacture a range of products including fertilizers, gasoline, paints and plastics. Environmentalists and local residents have dubbed this corridor 'Cancer Alley,' and tax breaks given to polluting industries have created few jobs at a high cost. This is particularly true in Louisiana. . . . In the 1990s, Louisiana wiped off the books \$3.1 billion in property taxes to polluting companies. The state's top five polluters have received \$111 million over the past decade."¹³⁹ Over thirty petrochemical and industrial plants are located within a two-mile radius of Mossville, Louisiana, a rural black community. According to a study carried out by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, dioxin levels in Mossville residents are extremely high. A deadly substance, dioxin can cause cancer, hormone disruption, and severe birth defects.¹⁴⁰

We now know who suffers from environmental racism. But who benefits from it? Companies that profit directly from creating pollution (such as chemical or plastic manufacturers) or by disposing of it (such as those involved in the waste processing industry)—as well as corrupt politicians more interested in funding their campaigns than in the livelihoods of their most vulnerable constituents—undeniably are beneficiaries of environmental racism. But there is another beneficiary as well. If you live as the average American does, you use up roughly twenty tons of raw materials each year, consuming ten times more than the average Chinese citizen and thirty times more than the average person living in India.¹⁴¹ Where does all our garbage go? Is the place you now live powered by coal or nuclear energy plants? If so, who is forced to breathe the coal emissions that power your television set? Where does the radioactive waste from your nuclear energy plant get buried? If you are privileged enough to live in a neighborhood that does not house garbage incinerators or sewage plants, an area that does not abut nuclear waste dumps or factories spouting toxic gases into the air, but you continue to gobble up resources, then, when asked, "Who benefits from environmental racism?" we must answer, "I do."

The Changing Face of Rural White America

Poor rural white communities face many of the same problems that affect poor nonwhite communities. Small villages throughout Kentucky and Virginia have been victimized by environmental devastation, including illegal dumping and strip mining that has caused flash flooding. Poor whites living in rural America often are isolated from mainstream economic opportunities, overlooked by their government leaders, and constrained to live in inadequate housing. Like poor blacks living in the projects, poor rural whites living in trailer parks also are marked with a stigma, a “blemish of place,” which threatens to erode their sense of self-worth and dignity.¹⁴² Trailer parks, it is commonly held, are where “rednecks,” “hicks,” and “white trash” live; they are breeding grounds for deviant behavior, poor hygiene, and lazy talking. And poor rural whites—especially those of the Deep South—often are stereotyped as bitterly intolerant, harboring violently racist attitudes associated only with zealots of the KKK. This is an old belief, one that existed before the Civil War, and it divides rich from poor, civil from uncivil, North from South. As W. J. Cash wrote in 1960, there exists among ordinary people, from North and South, “a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself remarkable homogeneity.”¹⁴³

The world of poor rural whites has been turned into a kind of backward and bigoted world, one that outsiders enjoy pointing to with a smirk or a condescending shake of the head. In debasing poor rural whites, other Americans—affluent and city-dwelling whites and nonwhites alike—can conveniently avoid inspecting their own racist attitudes and dispositions. “I’m not a racist,” they say. “If you want to see racism, talk to a redneck.” In truth, interpersonal racism is not concentrated in backwoods white towns but is found throughout

America, in all communities, white and nonwhite alike. And as long as we peg the poor rural white as the American bigot, we can avoid the painful exercise of asking how racial domination thrives in our own communities and families, and even in our own thinking.¹⁴⁴

Today, many rural middle-class white communities no longer are able to avoid confronting their own racial modes of thinking and acting, primarily because immigration patterns are transforming the racial landscape of previously majority-white towns. Some small towns that only ten years ago hosted small pockets of nonwhites now are adjusting to growing nonwhite populations as well as to cultural change. Grocery stores are beginning to stock Chinese food; Wal-Mart is beginning to follow English announcements with ones in Spanish; Middle Eastern restaurants are appearing on Main Street. The reactions from white residents have been diverse and, at times, disquieting.



Poor rural whites are often thought of as racist “rednecks,” but this stereotype ignores the deep poverty suffered by many individuals in rural communities.

Lewiston, Maine, an inland town of 36,000 located in the whitest state in the Union, recently has experienced an influx of Somali immigrants. Between 2001 and 2002, roughly 1,200 Somalis moved to Lewiston; that number doubled over the next five years, until Lewiston had the highest per capita Somali concentration in the United States. The Somalis, many of whom were refugees, were attracted to Lewiston's low cost of living, its tradition of racial and religious tolerance (most Somalis are practicing Muslims), its good schools, and its social services. But some of Lewiston's white residents resented the immigrants, assuming they were disproportionately draining the town's resources. This sentiment was made official in a letter, penned by the city's mayor, asking the elders of the Somali community to discourage their friends and family members from moving to the town. "The Somali community must exercise some discipline and reduce the stress on our limited finances and our generosity," the mayor wrote. "Our city is maxed-out financially, physically, and emotionally." The Somali residents of "Little Mogadishu" felt unfairly blamed for the town's financial hardships, responding to the mayor's letter with reminders of their own contributions to Lewiston.

The mayor's letter, however, began a string of events—including a rally held by a white supremacist group and a man rolling a severed pig's head down the center aisle of a local mosque during an evening prayer service—that stoked the coals of racial hostility, dividing Somali residents from their white neighbors.¹⁴⁵ But even in this charged atmosphere, non-Somali antiracists, nonwhite and white alike, took stands against interracial hostility and intolerance. While the hate group rally drew only 30 people, roughly 5,000 turned out for the counterprotest held on the same day, a "diversity rally" that condemned racial hatred.¹⁴⁶

Like Lewiston, the 37,000-person town of Carpentersville, Illinois, has experienced drastic changes in its racial demography. In 1990, Hispanics made up 17 percent of the town's population; today, they constitute more than half. Although most of the town's Hispanic families are American citizens, some of Carpentersville's white residents have reacted to their rising Hispanic population by voicing opposition to illegal immigration. In a recent election, candidates calling themselves "The All American Team" won seats to Carpentersville's board of trustees by vowing to penalize landlords who rented to undocumented workers, as well as businesses that employed them. Before the election, a flier printed by a supporter of the All American Team was circulated throughout the town. It read,

Are you tired of waiting to pay for your groceries while Illegal Aliens pay with food stamps and then go outside and get in a \$40,000 car? . . . Are you tired of reading that another Illegal Alien was arrested for drug dealing? Are you tired of having to push 1 for English? . . . Are you tired of not being able to use Carpenter Park on the weekend, because it is overrun by Illegal Aliens? Are you tired of seeing the Mexican Flag flown above our Flag? If you are as tired as me then let's get out and Vote for the: All American Team."¹⁴⁷

In 2007, the newly elected All American Team passed an ordinance making English the official language of Carpentersville. This ordinance forbids the printing of various city notices, including warning signs and local regulations, in both Spanish and English, and would discourage city employees, including police officers, from

speaking Spanish. As a result of these moves, the racial climate in Carpentersville has grown more toothy and intolerant. Many of the town's Hispanic residents feel unwelcome and under attack. For them, white residents are not taking on illegal immigration but are mounting an assault on Hispanic culture and language. Many whites, however, feel that the town's Hispanic population is not assimilating fast enough. "They want the American dream, but they don't want to assimilate," declared one member of the All American Team. "Immigrants are what made this country great, but the immigrants of yesterday and the immigrants of today are totally different people. They don't have the love of this country in their hearts."¹⁴⁸

Carpentersville is not the only place that has passed or proposed English-only resolutions, and thirty-two states list English as their official language. Other state and local governments have passed laws designed, in one observer's words, to "make life miserable for illegal immigrants in the hope that they will have no choice but to return to their countries of origin."¹⁴⁹ (This strategy has become known as "self-deportation.") Indeed, many of these laws are having their desired effect. Undocumented immigrants, many of whom have worked in the town for years, are leaving Carpentersville, because they fear deportation more than ever before. Even Mexican American citizens are leaving, because they feel unwanted. In this way, English-only ordinances and other laws targeting the Hispanic population can be interpreted as a new tactic of white fight.

TOWARD AN INTEGRATED AMERICA

Focusing on the workings of racial domination in the residential field, this chapter has underscored the continuing persistence of racial segregation, as well as problems and privileges unequally distributed to different communities on the basis of their racial makeup. These social ills are old and established but, as we have learned, have not been with us forever. Nor must they remain this way. But we still have a long way to go before we arrive at an America that is truly integrated. Listen to James Baldwin once more: "It is a terrible and inexorable law that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own: in the face of one's victim, one sees oneself. Walk through the streets of Harlem and see what we, this nation, have become."¹⁵⁰

THE BIG PICTURE

Chapter 5: Housing

MAIN POINTS

Describe how urbanization, housing shortages, the migration of whites to suburbs, and urban unrest led to the rise of racialized neighborhoods.

Explain why most Americans continue to live in racially segregated neighborhoods.

Discuss how the lack of housing assistance combined with flat incomes at the bottom of the economic distribution and rising housing costs have disproportionately affected families in poor, minority neighborhoods.

Examine how poverty levels, unemployment rates, and demographic changes have transformed the suburbs since the 1990s.

Learn more about the ways environmental racism disadvantages nonwhite rural communities, particularly those on American Indian reservations.

KEY TERMS

- racialization of neighborhoods, page 170
- white flight, page 176

- causes and consequences of segregation, page 183

- advanced marginality, page 189

- environmental racism, page 196

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

"All society is implicated in the creation of the ghetto." Reflecting on your upbringing, how might this statement apply to you? That is, how might you be contributing to the racial segregation and the reproduction of the ghetto?

Using the "Fact Finder" feature on the United States Census Bureau's website, determine the racial composition of the zip code in which you grew up. Compare the makeup of your zip code to that of the entire U.S. population. Using your sociological imagination and what you have learned in this chapter, explain the disparities you notice.

Where have you always wanted to live? What, in other words, is your ideal living arrangement? Would you like to live in the city or in the country; in a house or a condominium; in what kind of a neighborhood? Reflect on these questions with an eye toward racial dynamics. How might racial domination in the residential field condition your ideas? Have you thought about the racial composition of your dream neighborhood? How—and why (or why not)?

How might you be contributing to the problem of environmental racism? What are some things you could do to combat this problem?