

Spotlight on Race, Justice, and the City

For this issue of IJURR's "Spotlight on" web series, we asked scholars working in a variety of settings to critically reflect on the contemporary inscription of race on urban space, in light of the growing prominence of local and transnational racial justice social movements. The six resultant essays presented here come together to form a clarion call that mirrors those movements in their varied forms. This call demands that urban scholars recognize with urgency the ways that black lives have been excluded from and rendered invisible in urban space. It also calls attention to diverse forms of resistance that are emerging to address this exclusion. These essays highlight some of the many groups working in cities across the globe to make themselves visible and to assert their humanity in the face of dehumanizing processes. As Melissa Valle argues in the opening essay, race is too often elided with economic stratification and thus erased or minimized in urban studies. The essays presented here represent a counterforce to that trend, showcasing the powerful work of scholars across disciplines interested in race, justice, and the city.

While exclusion is undoubtedly the central theme across these essays, scholars working in different places demonstrate the historical specificity of how racialized hierarchies have become inscribed and are re-inscribed on urban space. Phillip Horn reveals the pernicious tenacity of an ethno-racial order born out of Bolivia's experience of colonialism that designates urban spaces as white and rural spaces as indigenous – even in the face of progressive constitutional reforms. Likewise, despite a hopeful end to the apartheid system in South Africa decades ago, Trevor Ngwane argues that it is precisely this legacy of racial hierarchy in concert with rapid finance-driven urban development that set the stage for anti-immigrant violence in Johannesburg. Keisha Khan Perry brings us to Salvador, Bahia, Brazil to expose gendered police violence that erupted during the same summer that Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri. These parallel experiences lead Perry to proclaim that "disregard for black humanity is not only routine, but normative across the diaspora in the Americas." She challenges us to recognize that despite how different each of these struggles may appear, there is a transnational interconnectedness to the urban processes which devalue black lives. AbdouMaliq Simone reinforces this point when he invites us to think about the black city as a collectivity that is increasingly targeted for erasure as a threat to the social order.

While these essays emphasize the urgency of scholarship around race, justice, and the city they also present two interlocking challenges for those working in the field of urban studies. The first is to sharpen and deepen our understandings of justice in relationship to race and urbanization. While Horn, for example, speaks of the challenges of achieving ethnoracial justice post-legislative reforms, Perry entreats us to imagine a concept of the socially just city that takes race and justice into account. Either way,

these essays make clear that efforts to achieve justice aren't 'just' about race, but interlocking and intersecting systems of stratification. If we cannot talk about a just city without discussing race, then it seems scholars interested in justice would do well to heed Valle's warning that when we ignore issues of race in the city we become complicit in the reinscription of these racial hierarchies. But can turning our gaze towards race have a similar effect? Kate Derickson argues that indeed, if we are not deeply reflexive about our epistemological practices, we risk perpetuating the injustice. This second challenge, also echoed in the struggles for justice described in several of the essays, is to enter into dialogue with the voices of those not fully legitimized, and even delegitimized, by the academy. As Derickson suggests in her description of the "Tuvel" affair that has dominated conversations in philosophy this year, there are plenty of writers outside the academic gates vociferously proclaiming the need to center black humanity in our conversations on justice. Together these essays provide some guidelines about how scholars in urban studies can join them.

We have also included open-access to several articles previously published in IJURR which speak to the themes of racial exclusion and struggles for justice on the urban terrain. These articles demonstrate discourses around race and marginality that have animated debates in urban studies over nearly thirty years. Among these is Loic Wacquant's exposition on the study of the American Ghetto which sparked significant debate around epistemologies of race, place, and power. They also give a sense of breadth of how scholars have conceptualized contestation, from riots to musical expression.

Liza Weinstein

IJURR Interventions Editor

Meghan Doran

Assistant Interventions Editor

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