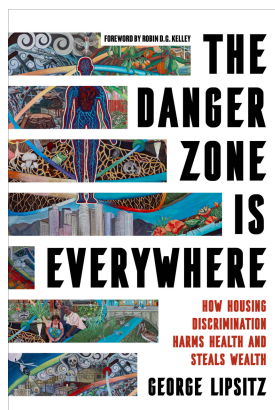


Book Reviews

George Lipsitz 2024: *The Danger Zone Is Everywhere: How Housing Discrimination Harms Health and Steals Wealth*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.



In the wake of the uprisings of 2020, George Lipsitz writes in his new book *The Danger Zone Is Everywhere*, an American Medical Association issued a statement affirming that racism affected the health of marginalized communities, that systemic and structural changes were necessary in the profession and that race was a social construct. Yet, as he continues, ‘turning proclamations into policies and aspirations into action has proved exceedingly difficult’ (p. 70). The sordid history of biological racism in science and medicine left the profession ‘not ready to understand racism’s role in public health’ (*ibid.*).

Coming amid a new wave of virulent white revanchism that is precipitating a drastically different moment in the professional fields, *The Danger Zone is Everywhere* is primarily aimed at practitioners: doctors, lawyers, planners, brokers, realtors and public health workers who must ‘be ready’, following Kwame Ture, to make that systemic change.

Lipsitz traces the continued imbrication of health, wealth and housing (alongside incarceration, gender violence and industrial pollution among other issues), developing the concept of ‘The Danger Zone’ to describe how racial segregation in housing leaves ‘racially aggrieved groups’ living in places that systematically expose them to extraction, exploitation and premature death. Bringing together housing, environmental justice and medicine, and mobilizing a host of empirical data, Lipsitz makes a powerful case that preventing and remediating racist harms starts in the home and the community, where most exposure to harm occurs.

Lipsitz mobilizes short vignettes, which illustrate ongoing racist practices and the failures of organizations, professional associations and the legal system to produce real justice. Describing the persistence and innovation in discriminatory practices in zoning, lending, appraisal, tax assessment, insurance, risk assessment, social service provision, addiction treatment, debt collection, and policing and incarceration, he shows how practices and procedures developed in the professional fields he is addressing have led to their ‘culpability in creating and sustaining structural and systemic racism’ (p. 155). Furthermore, he shows that these have been codified as color-blind best practices in their fields by professional associations and regulatory agencies.

The failure of these communities of practice and the racist histories of the professional associations that represent them thus traced, Lipsitz advances a multipart framework for how professionals should respond to the failures of their fields. Drawing on pediatrics, Lipsitz argues that housing professionals would be well served by adopting an approach rooted in the 'precautionary principle' (pp. 43–7), seeking to anticipate potential racist harms and prevent them from happening, rather than the corrective model that now prevails. Most importantly, however, Lipsitz points to the leadership of the people 'living in the red' (at the intersection of racially subordinated housing and medical markets) who chose to 'lead rather than leave' (p. 48) such places. He argues being in 'dialogue and accompaniment with the oppositional and propositional actions' (p. 16) of these groups is of paramount importance.

Lipsitz is a fantastic pedagogic writer and this book is a teaching text of extraordinary value. Centrally, this book leverages the intellectual tools and core insights of critical race theory to reveal how practitioners' efforts to combat racism in housing and medical practice have been increasingly inadequate. The book builds on Lipsitz's previous work, particularly in *How Racism Takes Place*, with which it shares a great deal in concept and content, with updated examples of the white and black spatial imaginaries, racial aggrivement and propositional politics operant in racist policy and antiracist resistance today. Lipsitz provides incredibly clear and useful introductions to concepts like racial formation (pp. 72–5), malign colorblindness (pp. 77–8), and intersectionality (pp. 81–8). Especially powerful is his attack on the persistence of biological determination in the medical profession and the development of an exculpatory and insufficient colorblindness in response. This kind of analytical framework has historically not been central to professional education in these fields and the increasing adoption of coursework requirements intended to better equip professionals to deal with racial issues in their fields

Lipsitz upholds the protagonism of what he terms 'aggrieved racial groups' in urban politics, crucial in writing for an audience accustomed to treating such people as passive subjects of social problems and objects of interventions designed by professionals. Yet Lipsitz does not proceed from the simplistic framework which holds racialized persons to have an inherent and epistemic understanding that mechanically re-poses and transforms social questions which (speaking from experience) usually prevail among professional students and practitioners who react to the former misappropriation. Instead, Lipsitz emphasizes 'aggrievement as an achievement' of groups subject to unjust, collective, racialized conditions of subordination, which involve the collective identification and contestation of 'structures and systems that oppress them and that impel them to generate new approaches' (p. 15). Critically it is 'the fights against housing discrimination and medical racism', in definite historical struggles like the civil rights movement, that are the 'harbingers of new social relations, structures and systems' (p. 16). In the context of professions whose associational networks serve as key modalities through which elite capture is actualized, Lipsitz's relentless focus on the 'oppositional and propositional' struggles is important. He emphasizes that these projects require the 'creation of mobilized counterpublics, of masses in motion capable of envisioning and enacting new ways of being in the world' (p. 162), in contrast to those called into being by governance.

I am perhaps not as optimistic about the potential of professionals to enact radical and movement-oriented politics. This is not to chide Lipsitz, a personal hero and giant of my field who does in fact know much better than me, but the process of professionalization as a planner, for example, with its well-developed apparatuses of coercive isomorphism produces an extraordinarily constrained intellectual field for planners and an environment in which radical critiques can only be absorbed, co-opted and denuded of their radical potential. To what extent the professionals can accompany these ‘masses in motion’ from inside the professions, I am not sure.

If anything, that makes the effort of writing books like this, which can jam the patterns of professionalization and lead to those epistemological breaks that cause professionals and students to renege, recant and undertake class suicide, all the more important.

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