DURABLE CHANGE

Race, Inequality, and the City

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PATRICK SHARKEY, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012, 264 pages, ISBN 978–0–2269–2424–3. Paper, $30.00.

MARCUS ANTHONY HUNTER, *Black Citymakers: How* The Philadelphia Negro *Changed Urban America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 304 pages, ISBN 978–0–1999–4813–0. Hardcover, $35.00.

> *The combined trends of increased inequality and decreasing mobility pose a fundamental threat to the American Dream, our way of life, and what we stand for around the globe.*
> —President Barack Obama

> *If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death. It is evil crystallized in unjust social structures, which cannot be the basis of hope for a better future. We are far from the so-called "end of history", since the conditions for a sustainable and peaceful development have not yet been adequately articulated and realized.*
> —Pope Francis

After the revanchist Tea Party-led Republican Party quickly stymied any (possibly misguided) progressive hopes for a transformative Obama presidency in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, it seemed that any political will to discuss inequality would have to wait for the end of the dying howl of the soon-to-be minority conservative White American male. That howl appeared destined to last a

disappointingly long time in 2010. In the early days of 2014, however, it seems that the howl may be fading, as both political and religious leaders criticize the same economic and racial inequalities that Patrick Sharkey and Marcus Anthony Hunter explore in their excellent monographs. In light of the seemingly growing political will to combat economic inequality, a closer look at Sharkey's *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality*, and Hunter's *Black City Makers: How the Philadelphia Negro Changed Urban America*, reveals the ways in which the quotes above—spoken by two of the most powerful men in the world, one political, the other religious—resonate today, while also highlighting the need for such warnings and exhortations to be even more pronounced.

While affluence has returned to the center city in some areas, so has income segregation. Similarly, while the diversification of America has led to greater interracial contact, visualizations of racial segregation and newer metrics highlight the endurance of racial segregation, even in those cities experiencing a revitalization of their urban cores (Logan and Stults, 2011; Rankin 2009; Rugh and Massey, 2013). Chicago and Philadelphia are prime examples of the disparate impact of these trends on their neighborhoods. Thanks to tax incentives that promote development, Philadelphia's center city has become an enclave of professionals, development, and services; while Chicago is heralded, according to Robert Sampson's (2012) recent book as "The Great American City." At the same time, however, Philadelphia's poverty rate in 2013 was 28.4% (34% for African Americans, 40% of whom were in deep poverty), and Chicago had more than 2000 reported shootings in 2013.

Each of these cities has become substantially more diverse—neither has a racial group that represents over 50% of its population—while remaining among the most racially segregated cities in the country. In response to budget crises, both cities are closing dozens of public schools whose students are primarily Black (over 80%) and low income (over 93%). That the city, as an organizing principle and not just a political entity, is servicing its wealthier, White constituents better than its low-income, non-White constituents is nothing new. Sociologists Patrick Sharkey and Marcus Anthony Hunter each provide new insights into these processes, enhancing our theoretical and empirical understandings of the racial geography of the city. Paired together, they reveal even more important insights, while at the same time highlighting how much further social science has to go.

It is almost heretical to study urban sociology without paying homage to the pioneering and groundbreaking contributions of William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978) and *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), and Douglas S. Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid* (1993). These now-classic tomes elucidated the macro-level processes responsible for racial and class disparities in neighborhoods. That is, the legislative changes in the 1960s to fight housing discrimination either had unexpected consequences or were far too weak, resulting in the growth of urban, concentrated poverty. Although more recent decades witnessed a real and meaningful decline in the breadth of concentrated poverty (unfortunately, those declines seem to have reversed in the new, post-Great Recession economy [Kneebone et al., 2011]), that process was undeniably slow. Each of these scholars' contributions emphasized different macro-level forces (Wilson emphasized the labor market and downplayed residential segregation; Massey and Denton argued, alternatively, that residential segregation was key), and their combined insights led to a resurgence of scholarly interest in racial and economic inequality after a decades-long period of benign neglect. The broad and lasting influence of *The Truly Disadvantaged* and *American Apartheid* is seen in scholarship on Black middle-class neighborhoods (Pattillo 2007), the impact of concentrated poverty on localized cultures and attitudes (Young 2004), and how

concentrated poverty: (1) stigmatizes job applicants (Kirschenman and Neckerman, 1991; Pager 2007); (2) affects educational opportunities (Ainsworth 2002; Wodtke et al., 2011); and (3) compromises individual health (Inagami et al., 2007). These two books were also key references for designing and implementing *the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality* (Bobo et al., 1998), a four-city study of cross-cutting theories of racial and economic inequality conducted in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles during the mid-1990s.

An important shift in the 1990s and 2000s was the move to incorporate the neighborhood as a critical, meso-level analytic piece of the urban racial inequality puzzle because clearly, neighborhoods mattered, but how and why was unclear. Driven largely by the results from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) and Rob Sampson's work (excellently summed in his recent book, *Great American City*), the neighborhood became a significant driver of research on urban inequality, and the meso-level analysis implicit in earlier studies of urban trends and segregation is now an explicit focus of attention. Vaguely cultural concepts like "collective efficacy" (Sampson 2012, p. 27) toe the line between the never-ending debate over cultural versus structural causes of racial inequality. It is difficult, however, to determine whether collective efficacy is a cause or an effect—why would an individual in a socially-isolated, economically-impoverished, ghetto neighborhood exhibit any sense of trust or confidence in the larger society? That is, relative levels of collective efficacy may be the common sense reaction of individuals to their place in the urban neighborhood food chain, one that is based on decades of local history for which we lack survey research. Nonetheless, sociological thought jumped forward with the new focus on and ability to study differences *across* neighborhoods in a city. Due in large part to Sampson's clarion call for sociology to interrogate neighborhood effects, Patrick Sharkey's *Stuck in Place* and Marcus Anthony Hunter's *Black Citymakers* are particularly timely additions to the sociological understand of the racial and class geographies of the city for two related but distinct reasons. We begin with Sharkey's work in part because it fits the primary arc of urban racial inequality research most directly. Hunter's piece is most valuable as an outsider critique of that strain, even as it is generally in agreement with the bulk of the findings from that strain of research.

Stuck in Place grows directly from Rob Sampson's insights about the role of the neighborhood in persisting urban inequality. Sampson's work with the PHDCN largely explores recent effects—the survey was only introduced in the 1990s, after the process of ghettoization in Chicago was largely complete. Sharkey extends Sampson's neighborhood-based research by (re)introducing a temporal component, and this is what makes *Stuck in Place* particularly insightful and, unfortunately, pessimistic (even as he is optimistic about the possibility of change). Generally, time is incorporated into models and theories of change because the temporal component is implicit: there cannot be change without there being a "before" change and an "after." Change also implies a moment of schism from one (un)stable reality to a new one. Those schisms are the primary ways in which we make sense of the world around us—from atomic physics to economic disruptions, society largely learns from change, not from persistence. Indeed, the importance of change is evident in the Chicago School's ecological model, which highlighted such processes as invasion/succession and the change from rural to urban populations. Hence the recent growth in studies of gentrification as a process of change: gentrification unbalances the standard spatial and economic processes of a city, and exposes different assumptions about how cities and their populations operate and think of themselves (Brown-Saracino 2009; Freeman 2006; Pattillo 2007).

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Sharkey explores the amount of change in economic and racial inequality in cities across generations using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. The book is split into three parts, the first of which highlights the persistence of economic inequality by neighborhood and the lack of intergenerational mobility for African American families in high poverty neighborhoods. Sharkey also shows that the lack of mobility is not based on individual characteristics and family resources, but instead is linked to the neighborhood quality shared across generations, neighborhoods that have not seen improvement in the post-industrial economy. Second, Sharkey asserts that previous neighborhood effects research has been too timid. By including parent's childhood neighborhood, he identifies a very strong neighborhood effect on children's outcomes. This demonstrates that having parents who grew up in a poor neighborhood, net of individual characteristics and the quality of one's current neighborhood, affects one's future education and economic status. Sharkey concludes by considering how these highly transmissible and long-lasting effects of neighborhood disadvantage lead to a pessimistic view of the progress toward racial equality, while also offering suggestions on how to reconsider anti-poverty policies.

The key insight from *Stuck in Place*, however, is not that cities or neighborhoods do or do not change, but rather that a specific type of neighborhood in the city—concentrated poverty neighborhoods—do not change in their impact, even if they shift in location (though, that geographic shift may not be very pronounced). These neighborhoods not only remain stagnantly underresourced and isolated, but the residents remain stagnant as well. Sharkey labels this phenomenon "the inherited ghetto" (p. 10), emphasizing the durability and intergenerational quality of this inequality. Thus, while many neighborhoods in cities change over time, the most impoverished do not. Moreover, like a massive Hotel California, the residents of these doomed neighborhoods rarely leave. In Sharkey's words:

> "... [t]he American ghetto appears to be inherited. In the same way that genetic background and financial wealth are passed down from parent to children, the neighborhood environments in which Black and White Americans live have been passed down across generations, a process that has continued even in the post civil rights era . . . . I do not mean that children grow up and remain in the same physical space, but rather that children grow up and remain in the same type of environment. The level of poverty and the racial composition of families' neighborhood environments remain incredible similar across generations of family members" (pp. 9–10).

The term "inherited ghetto" is powerful in its implication of the critical role that family plays in an individual's experience of concentrated poverty. Even though Sharkey attempts to be clear that the ghetto is inherited from outside of the family, he fails to clearly delineate from whom individuals inherit their neighborhood. What is clear from Sharkey's analysis is that residence in concentrated poverty neighborhoods is not a choice that families make; rather it is a circumstance that is foisted upon families and is nearly impossible to improve upon. By way of example, Sharkey notes that simply living in a neighborhood that becomes less segregated is associated with an average increase in income between $5000 and $8000 a year for individuals. This improvement in quality of life is not inherited from one's family, it is created by others in the neighborhood—hence, it is the improvement in the neighborhood that matters. To his credit, by way of his careful, well-executed analysis and interpretation, Sharkey is careful to avoid construing the ghetto as an environment created and perpetuated by its inhabitants (as the quote above demonstrates). Still, the term "inherited ghetto"

warrants more detailed consideration and explication to understand the process of the intergenerational transmission of the ghetto more precisely. Such an analysis might also show that there, in fact, have been dramatic changes in the neighborhood contexts of Black families *before* civil rights (think Great Migration) but not after; a strong indictment of civil rights legislation and policy over the past half-century.

While this is not likely shocking news to many social scientists—it is something that we have "known" intuitively—few of us have been able to demonstrate so clearly the shocking durability of the ghetto, not to mention its devastating *intergenerational* impact. Indeed, much of our current interest, as mentioned previously, is about *neighborhood change*: cities becoming less racially segregated, while also becoming more economically segregated. Sharkey—like Wilson, Massey and Denton and, more recently Sampson—on the other hand, highlights that, although the urban experience is changing dramatically, *it is the stability of concentrated poverty for many neighborhoods and families that requires more of our attention and understanding*. Ultimately, what Sharkey demonstrates in *Stuck in Place* is an urgent need for a fundamentally different policy approach that remains in place long enough to impact the durable issues Sharkey identifies in his work. Consequently, Sharkey points out, much of the current debate among policy wonks and social scientists alike—mobility versus place-based investment—fails to see the forest for the trees. There is no good reason for us to accept segregation, nor is there good reason to believe that economic inequality will magically become aspatial. As such, the best response is the creation of a holistic urban policy agenda that not only promotes mobility, but also recognizes the potential of these durable ghettos, many of which are located on potentially prime real estate in urban areas undergoing a resurgence that continues to avoid the real issues of entrenched poverty.

Marcus Anthony Hunter's *Black Citymakers* speaks to many of the issues Sharkey addresses quantitatively, using a method that Hunter refers to as "historical ethnography" (p. 221). While one might quibble with the clarity of that concept—as it is written by a sociologist, does it demand that the author coin a sociological term for the method?—the work itself is an important rejoinder to much of sociological thought about cities, policy, and agency. Furthermore, and consistent with his piece in this journal last year (Hunter 2013), *Black Citymakers* also promotes continued reclamation of Du Bois's classic sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro* ([1899] 1996), as an origin point for the establishment and development of urban sociology, and as a basis for a theoretical critique of dominant sociological theories on cities and their inhabitants.

Where Sharkey asserts the importance of a temporal component in sociological studies of the ghetto, Hunter pushes for the inclusion of Black people. Specifically, Hunter argues that those sociologists studying urban communities have struggled to adequately address the actions and agency of Black people. Hunter persuasively argues that point by detailing the dramatic impact of Black residents in the making of modern Philadelphia, writing a sociologically rich history of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward with a laser-like focus on the actions of Black residents. Using four extended case studies rooted in the same geographic area of Philadelphia, Hunter shows that Philadelphia's cultural, economic, geographic, and political realities of the twentieth and twentieth-first century were strongly shaped, for better and for worse, by Black agency.

While a scholar of Philadelphia's history could criticize Hunter for having slightly inconsistent geographical definitions of the Seventh Ward or for paying short shrift to some seminal events and individuals (can one write a book on a part of Black Philadelphia without mention of MOVE or by saying so little on figures like Cecil B. Moore, even if they were outside of the Seventh Ward?), as a *sociological* examination of Black agency over time, Hunter pays homage to Du Bois's *Philadelphia Negro* in the best

possible way: placing Black agency at the center of an examination of a Black neighborhood. Hunter argues:

"... the sociopolitical history of the Black Seventh Ward demonstrates that urban Black residents were not mere victims of the structural changes impacting American cities like Philadelphia throughout the twentieth century; nor were they mere passive bystanders watching the city change from the windows of their row homes. Rather, as I will show throughout the book, Black Philadelphians were agents of urban change, or citymakers, albeit sometimes purposeful and inadvertent, but facilitating and frustrating patterns of urban change nonetheless" (p. 8).

Given Hunter's stated goals, such trivial critiques of Hunter's shifting urban geography and narrow focus on one Philadelphia neighborhood become both more and less significant. His larger point about the active role that Black Philadelphians play in the development of the city is a powerful rejoinder to practically the entire genre of urban sociology, which has treated Black residents and their neighborhoods either as isolated from urban structures and organizations or as pawns in a larger structure of which they are often not even cognizant. Traditionally, the opposite side of that coin is to imbue Black neighborhoods and actors with too much power, and to negate the role of structure and emphasize in its stead a victim ideology or other cultural deficiencies as the primary explanation for social and economic inequality. Hunter's theoretical framework asserts Black agency is real; however, as with any form of agency, it is influential and influenced, limitless and at the same time inherently constrained by others. Throughout, Hunter provides powerful evidence of Black agency and its key role in shaping both Philadelphia's geography and its self-concept. Despite his stated emphasis on the Seventh Ward, Hunter's search for Black agency, however, very quickly propels him beyond the Seventh Ward into South Philadelphia, even as much of Philadelphia's Black population moved both west and north. As a result, Hunter's search for Black agency may have resulted in a slight overstatement of his case. Although Black Philadelphians occasionally fought—and won—local battles, they lost the war because the national economy and political will shifted and changed over time. One community can only do so much, but Hunter aptly demonstrates that sociology has some distance to go in order to understand whether and how Black communities—individually or collectively—interact with and understand their cities.

Today, as Hunter notes, Philadelphia's Seventh Ward is overwhelmingly White and affluent; a transition so extreme and so recently completed (only in the past five to ten years) that it is likely a key contributor to the recent "flash mob" moral panic in Philadelphia (indeed, similar processes likely operated in other cities that experienced the same moral panic over flash mobs and perceived threats of Black violence). When considered alongside *Stuck in Place*, Hunter's is a countervailing story. According to Hunter's analysis, the Seventh Ward became a notorious slum through a combination of interference of outside forces, malignant neglect from the city, and tragedies like the fall of Philadelphia's independent Black banks in the 1920s (Much like Lani Guinier's (2002) miner canary, these banks collapsed years before the Great Depression, but with quite little fanfare outside of the economic devastation of Black Philadelphia). While it is true that Black agency contributed to problems like that bank collapse, it is also true that Black agency in the 1960s and early 1970s helped stop construction of the Crosstown Expressway, a radical and short-sighted transportation plan that had the potential to isolate and deprive South Philadelphia much like the Cross-Bronx Expressway did to the South Bronx (Caro 1974). Similarly, while it is true that today's vibrant gentrification efforts in South Philly may not substantially improve conditions

for the long-term Black residents of Point Breeze, it nonetheless demonstrates that the transformative potential of investing in a durable ghetto is real, if not realized.

It may appear then that the authors of *Stuck in Place* and *Black Citymakers* are at odds with one another. Where Sharkey asserts that the ghetto has become nearly inescapable, and that confinement within concentrated poverty neighborhoods is intergenerationally transmitted, Hunter makes a strong case for the agency of Blacks living within ghetto neighborhoods and their contribution to the startling shift of the ghetto in Philadelphia. In fact, as readers, we wish there were more on how racial segregation in Philadelphia changed and why. For example, did formerly Black ghettos in other cities experience similar wholesale moves? If not, what made Philadelphia unique? Yet, when one realizes that the most disheartening aspect of Hunter's historical ethnography is that despite the consistent and dedicated agency of Black Philadelphians, the city remains hypersegregated by race, and has the highest rate of deep poverty among large American cities, these questions fade in importance (Lubrano 2013). It is a city known as much for its poor-performing, underfunded schools and high rates of gun violence as it is for early American history and cheesesteaks. This, according to Sharkey, is to be understood through the lens of the durability and intergenerational transmission of residence in concentrated poverty neighborhoods—neighborhoods that may move geographically but do not disappear. For example, the Odunde festival that Hunter highlights in chapter five may be a long-standing tradition for Black Philadelphians in the then predominantly Black and low-income western section of the Seventh Ward, but that same neighborhood—still home to Odunde—is now majority White and affluent. And, although South Street is not an Expressway, it is also no longer a center of Black commerce.

What is most powerful about both, however, is their assertions of the need for careful research across generations to map the processes that create and maintain concentrated poverty neighborhoods—the ghetto—as one of America's most tragic and enduring features. To speak ahistorically about the ghetto and its residents, as Sharkey illuminates, is to miss the cumulative and dramatic impact of segregation and isolation on residents. To speak historically without consideration of the very real human agency exhibited by all of the actors in the city, as Hunter argues, is to ignore Du Bois's powerful assertion that one of the greatest flaws in sociology has been the treatment of Black people as objects and not subjects of analysis (Du Bois 1898). Thus, together, these two books—engaging, well-written, and thoroughly researched by two exciting young scholars—force us to challenge extant sociological understandings of urban inequality, particularly as they relate to race in cities. Stepping out from the shadows of Wilson, Massey and Denton, and Sampson, Sharkey and Hunter each inspires the reclaiming of a Du Boisian perspective (Bobo 2000) for understanding urban inequality.

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