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Ever a Divided City?

Segregation, Fragmentation, and »the Problem of the Color-Line« in Twentieth Century Urban History

»For decades, urban history in the United States has followed a disheartening narrative line of suburban affluence and center-city despair – a story with a strong and bitter subtext of racial segregation.« Mr. Bloomberg said to loud murmurs of approval from his audience. »But in today's economy, that division makes losers of cities and suburbs alike.«¹

In a speech at the beginning of his second term, the mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, thus wrestled with an issue – perhaps *the* issue – that had plagued his predecessors in that city, and practically every other American community of any size, over the course of the twentieth century: the corresponding fissures of race, class, and geography in urban America. In short, it has become impossible to discuss any of one those issues without becoming entangled in all three. It is true that the segregation of urban space along the lines of class and employment has been examined by scholars of the earliest manufacturing city as well as the high industrial metropolis.² And other studies have looked at the way the U. S. city sorted its inhabitants, or at least their spheres of activity, in terms of age, gender, and even sexuality.³ But above all, scholars of the urban experience have consistently focused their attention on the concept of race, and particularly upon the history of African Americans in the city.⁴ Given the task of a brief overview of recent English language historiography on segregation, this essay will take a cue from W. E. B. Du Bois and confine itself to the question of the color-line in the twentieth century U. S. city. As recently as 2004, researchers remain interested in »how several generations of immigrants from Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia came to see and experience the city, especially by the second half of the twentieth century, as a place dominated by blacks.«⁵ They have noted the dominance of this theme, almost in isolation:

»Open any newspaper, listen to most news reports, catch the words of many politicians bemoaning the decline of the central city, and for years the images used to accompany the message pictured a

1 *Sewell Chan*, Proposed Cut for HUD is Criticized by Bloomberg, in: *New York Times*, 1 March 2006.

2 *Paul E. Johnson*, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium. Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837*, New York 2004; *Ira Katznelson*, *City Trenches. Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States*, Chicago 1982.

3 *Bryant Simon*, *New York Avenue. The Life and Death of Gay Spaces in Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1920–1990*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 28 (2002), p. 300–327; *Marc Stein*, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves. Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945–1972*, Chicago 2000; *George Chauncey*, *Gay New York. Gender, Urban Culture and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*, New York 1994; *Philip J. Ethington*, *Recasting Urban Political History. Gender, the Public, the Household, and Political Participation in Boston and San Francisco During the Progressive Era*, in: *Social Science History* 16 (1992), S. 301–333; *Kathy Lee Peiss*, *Cheap Amusements. Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, Philadelphia 1986.

4 *Kenneth W. Goings/Raymond A. Mohl*, *The New African American Urban History, Thousand Oaks/California 1996*. *June Manning Thomas/Marsha Ritzdorf*, *Urban Planning and the African American Community. In the Shadows, Thousand Oaks/California 1997*.

5 Editors' introduction to *Joe William Trotter/Earl Lewis/Tera W. Hunter* (eds.), *The African American Urban Experience. Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present*, New York 2004, p. 1.

black face. Since the 1960s, against the backdrop of race riots and general despair, the words black, inner city, ghetto and problems became connected and at times interchangeable. Oftentimes the stories produced appear as if blacks inhabit the inner cities alone. In this world there are no Asians, Latinos and Latinas, Native Americans, or whites. In this world the central cities are divided from power structures, businesses, labor unions, politics and adjacent suburbs. In this world race and racism exist within a tightly bound space divorced from the larger society. Why is this?⁶

Yet tightly bound racial segregation was not a characteristic of American cities forever and at all times. In the wake of the 1954 Supreme Court decision that outlawed racial segregation, historian C. Vann Woodward developed an influential thesis, published first in 1955 (and as recently as 2002) as *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, arguing that formal, systematic racial segregation did not emerge, even in the deep South, before the turn of the twentieth century.⁷ Scholars have debated the timing of segregation ever since, but all have agreed about the urban setting for its development.⁸ The path to racial segregation, however, was not immediately clear to American urbanites. Despite confinement of most blacks to poorer districts, in the view of historian Kenneth Kusmer, »it seems doubtful that anything even remotely resembling a real black ghetto existed in American cities, north or south, prior to the 1890s« (with the partial exceptions of New York and Chicago).⁹ Instead African Americans were integrated amidst Irish immigrants and other working class populations, if not in the immediate vicinity of affluent homes they served. Similarly, a scholarly re-examination of the turn of the century urban landscape encountered by W. E. B. DuBois when he researched *The Philadelphia Negro*, his foundational 1899 study of race in the city, observed that »all blacks lived in close proximity to whites«, »none of the wards was majority black«, and »as a result, poor blacks and whites came into contact to a degree unimaginable in the late twentieth-century city.«¹⁰

Even as larger numbers of African Americans began to migrate into cities – particularly during and after World War I – the sense of a firm black / white color line was complicated by the presence of immigrants recently arrived from Southern or Eastern Europe, groups whose own sense of identity within the American polity was in flux. By creating ethnically isolated enclaves, immigrants often tried to insulate themselves from violent racial clashes (such as Chicago's 1919 riots) and thus constituted what Arnold Hirsch has called a »transient third tier« beyond black or white. Mixing imported prejudices with American racist attitudes by the end of the 1920s, however, these groups solidified around an identity of »white ethnics« that would provide a durable racial consciousness in US urban and political life. Thus, initially separating themselves on the basis of national origin, Italians and other immigrants learned to be »white« and justify segregation on that basis.¹¹

6 Ibid.

7 C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Oxford etc. 2002.

8 Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890*, New York 1978. John Whitson Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy. The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South*, Cambridge etc. 1982.

9 Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape. Black Cleveland, 1870–1930*, Urbana 1976, p. 12.

10 Michael B. Katz/Thomas J. Sugrue, W. E. B. DuBois, Race, and the City. *The Philadelphia Negro and Its Legacy*, Philadelphia 1998, p. 8.

11 Arnold R. Hirsch, E Pluribus Duo? Thoughts on »Whiteness« and Chicago's »New« Immigration as a Transient Third Tier, in: *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23, (2004), p. 7–44. Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival. Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945*, New York 2003. Susan Cotts Watkins, *After Ellis Island. Newcomers and Natives in the 1910 Census*, New York 1994. Robert Orsi, *The Religious Boundaries of an Inbetween People, Street Feste and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned Other in Italian Harlem, 1920–1990*, in: *American Quarterly* 44 (1992), p. 313–347.

During the 1960s and 1970s, historians examined the impact of racism on the formation of segregated black ghettos in northern cities, emphasizing the poverty and other social ills concentrated within them.¹² In contrast to that »first ghetto« school, newer studies have emphasized the resourcefulness, strength and dynamism within these segregated black communities in the early twentieth century city.¹³ As African Americans began moving northward, whites in cities like St. Louis scrambled to exclude them from civic institutions and establish a segregated, »Jim Crow City«. In response, however, the newcomers created a parallel set of institutions that nourished the black community's own leaders and civic life (as well as providing an organizational base to challenge segregation later).¹⁴

The »great migration« of African Americans to urban areas was not only a feature of northern cities; if anything Southern city dwellers were more explicit and legalistic about the process of segregating the burgeoning white and black populations. In Birmingham from the 1920s onward, planners utilized zoning in to insure that the South's most industrialized city was also its most segregated, devising elaborate legal responses to court challenges (as when racial zoning was declared unconstitutional). Such obstinacy in fact prevented the application of pent up black housing demand to the city's housing market, at least until the new, post-World War II city planning tools of urban renewal broke the status quo by displacing black neighborhoods into white areas. By that time, however, diminishing numbers of whites would remain in the city anyway.¹⁵ Similar stories can be told about the distinctively modern, bureaucratic process of racial segregation across the urban South – in Atlanta, Louisville, Nashville, Charlotte, or even Orlando – over the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶

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- 12 *Kenneth L. Kusmer*, *A Ghetto Takes Shape. Black Cleveland, 1870–1930*, Urbana 1976. *Allan H. Spear*, *Black Chicago. The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890–1920*, Chicago 1967. *Gilbert Osofsky*, *Harlem. The Making of a Ghetto. Negro New York, 1890–1930*, New York 1966.
- 13 *V.P. Franklin*, *The Education of Black Philadelphia. The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900–1950*, Philadelphia 1979. *James Borchert*, *Alley Life in Washington. Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850–1970*, Urbana 1980; *Joe William Trotter*, *Black Milwaukee. The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915–45*, Urbana 1985; *Allen B. Ballard*, *One More Day's Journey. The Making of Black Philadelphia*, Philadelphia 1987; *Peter Gottlieb*, *Making Their Own Way. Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916–30*, Urbana 1987; *James R. Grossman*, *Land of Hope. Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*, Chicago 1989; *Earl Lewis*, *In Their Own Interests. Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*, Berkeley 1991; *Richard Walter Thomas*, *Life for Us Is What We Make It. Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915–1945*, Bloomington 1992; *Irma Watkins-Owens*, *Blood Relations. Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900–1930*, Bloomington 1996; *Lillian Serece Williams*, *Strangers in the Land of Paradise. The Creation of an African American Community, Buffalo, New York, 1900–1940*, Bloomington 1999.
- 14 *Joseph Heathcott*, *Black Archipelago. Politics and Civic Life in the Jim Crow City*, in: *Journal of Social History* 38 (2005), p. 705. *Robin D. G. Kelley*, *The Black Poor and the Politics of Opposition in a New South City, 1929–1970*, in: *Michael B. Katz* (ed.), *The »Underclass« Debate. Views from History*, Princeton/New Jersey 1993.
- 15 *Charles E. Connerly*, »The Most Segregated City in America«. *City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920–1980*, Charlottesville 2005.
- 16 *Louis M. Kyriakoudes*, *The Social Origins of the Urban South. Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890–1930*, Chapel Hill 2003; *Kristin Larsen*, *Harmonious Inequality? Zoning, Public Housing, and Orlando's Separate City, 1920–1945*, in: *Journal of Planning History* 1 (2002), p. 154–180. *Thomas W. Hanchett*, *Sorting out the New South City. Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875–1975*, Chapel Hill 1998; *David Delaney*, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836–1948*, Austin 1998. *Ronald H. Bayor*, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, Chapel Hill 1996.

Northern segregation was enforced formally and informally in the first half of the twentieth century, including the frequent application of white-on-black violence.¹⁷ African Americans who challenged the boundaries of de facto housing segregation in northern cities were liable to be met with deadly force, as demonstrated in Kevin Boyle's National Book Award-winning account of the 1925 mob that came to expel a new black homeowner from his previously all-white Detroit neighborhood.¹⁸ The work of Thomas Sugrue exposes how the white working class opposed (at times violently) the arrival of African Americans in Detroit's neighborhoods and workplaces from World War II onward, thereby undermining the possibility of integration as well as progressive interracial political coalitions.¹⁹ Surveying »Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods« across the entire twentieth century, Stephen Grant Meyer finds violent white hostility endemic in both northern and southern cities, and notes that such clashes reached their apex in the 1950s.²⁰

The mid twentieth century also manifested increased public intervention into conditions in American cities, particularly on the part of the federal government by means of the congressional housing acts of 1937, 1949, and 1954 (among other legislation and appropriations). Recent studies continue to emphasize the dismal record of urban renewal programs from the 1940s through the 1970s, ineffective at best but all too often counterproductive with regard to the conditions of African Americans in U. S. cities.²¹ In some cases, this was because officials and policymakers were more interested in promoting economic development than redressing urban inequalities.²²

There is also evidence, however, for more deliberate malice toward blacks in these policies. The most influential work of the last generation on the study of racial segregation in post-World War II cities has been Arnold Hirsch's 1983 study *Making the Second Ghetto*, recently reissued in a new edition and also the subject of a 2003 special issue of the *Journal of Urban History* (vol. 29). Hirsch showed how white Chicagoans used slum clearance, public housing and other urban renewal programs to eradicate the black ghettos created in the first half of the twentieth century, only to replace them with even more racially and economically segregated public housing projects. Federal, state, and local government urban initiatives thus served to concentrate, stigmatize, and insulate African Americans even further from the American mainstream.²³ In Hirsch's wake, historians have

17 Sean Lang, Segregation and Violence in the USA 1900–50, in: *Modern History Review* 16 (2005), p. 23.

18 Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice. A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*, New York 2004.

19 Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis. Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Princeton/New Jersey 1996.

20 Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door. Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods*, Lanham/Maryland 2000.

21 Wendell E. Pritchett, Race and Community in Postwar Brooklyn. The Brownsville Neighborhood Council and the Politics of Urban Renewal, in: *Journal of Urban History* 27 (2001), p. 445–470. June Manning Thomas, Redevelopment and Race. Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit, Baltimore 1997; Howard Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty. Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.*, Baltimore 1995; June Manning Thomas, Redevelopment and Race. Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit, Baltimore 1997.

22 Joseph Heathcott/Maire Agnes Murphy, Corridors of Flight, Zones of Renewal. Industry, Planning, and Policy in the Making of Metropolitan St. Louis, 1940–1980, in: *Journal of Urban History* 31 (2005), p. 151–189.

23 Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto. Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960*, Chicago/Illinois 1998 (originally published in 1983); idem, »Containment« on the Home Front. Race and Federal Housing Policy from the New Deal to the Cold War, in: *Journal of Urban History* 26 (2000), p. 158–189.

detailed the way a »second ghetto« was replicated in cities across the country – the only major debate being whether this outcome was the intentional goal of discriminatory policies or the unforeseen result of financial pressures and demographic shifts.²⁴

Similarly, historians find the hand of government is visible in another great migration, the suburbanization of the U. S. population. A 1994 survey by the *Journal of Urban History* of the most influential urban historians singled out Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier*, a 1985 book which has itself as a standard text on suburbanization in the decades since publication. Jackson emphasized U. S. public policies (especially mortgage programs and transportation priorities), which promoted white suburban development while neglecting urban, minority constituencies.²⁵ He also drew attention to the practice of »redlining,« whereby banks denied loans to residents in areas deemed high-risk – often defined on the basis of race – from the Depression onward. Jackson argued that the federal government directed the private banking sector to practice such discriminatory financing by means of maps produced by New Deal agencies. More recent studies of lending patterns, however, indicate that banks did not rely on such government maps to make lending decisions, while public programs did in fact offer loans to minorities.²⁶

Nevertheless, exclusivity of various kinds – social, economic, as well as racial, ethnic and even religious – was built into the American suburb from its inception, primarily through deed restrictions. These »restrictive covenants,« well-established by the end of the nineteenth century, either explicitly forbade the sale of property to undesirable groups or else they mandated certain standards with the intention of preventing any change in neighborhood character.²⁷

But the picture of a lily-white, affluent suburban preserve is incomplete, according to new research. Even if such exclusionary arrangements were in effect for many, perhaps the majority, of prominent suburban developments, a number of historians have recently pointed out other, more inclusive settlements on the urban periphery. In distinction to organized speculative subdivisions or even workmen's housing in company towns, however, these were not coordinated undertakings. Yet already by the beginning of the twentieth century, working class immigrants were acquiring small parcels of land on the outskirts of cities from Toronto to Los Angeles and constructing do-it-yourself houses.²⁸ Of all the »white ethnics«, Jews were among the earliest to leave urban neighborhoods during the first blush of the automobile suburbs in the 1920s. Historians have pointed to the relative portability of Jewish congregations, in contrast to rigidly delineated parish boundaries, as an explanation for »why the Jews left Boston and the Catholics stayed.«²⁹

And throughout the twentieth century African Americans also strived and occasionally even successfully managed to carve out suburban homesteads.³⁰ But like the ethnic en-

24 *John F. Bauman*, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal. Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920–1974*, Philadelphia 1987; *John F. Bauman/Roger Biles/Kristin M. Szylvian* (eds.), *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes. In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America*, University Park/Pennsylvania 2000.

25 *Kenneth T. Jackson*, *Crabgrass Frontier. The Suburbanization of the United States*, New York 1985.

26 *Amy E. Hillier*, *Who Received Loans? Home Owners' Loan Corporation Lending and Discrimination in Philadelphia in the 1930s*, in: *Journal of Planning History* 2 (2003), p. 3–24.

27 *Robert M. Fogelson*, *Bourgeois Nightmares. Suburbia, 1870–1930*, New Haven 2005.

28 *Richard Harris*, *Unplanned Suburbs. Toronto's American Tragedy, 1900 to 1950*, Baltimore 1996.

29 *Gerald H. Gamm*, *Urban Exodus. Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed*, Cambridge 1999; *John T. McGreevy*, *Parish Boundaries. The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North*, Chicago 1996.

30 *Andrew Wiese*, *Places of Their Own. African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago 2004.

claves of the inner city, working class suburbs would also become racial battlegrounds in the period after World War II, as white homeowners continued to defend their stake in the American Dream in racially segregated terms.³¹ That said, some recent studies have suggested that whites' flight from the cities and their concomitant backlash against liberal urban coalitions may have been less a result of racism than disillusionment from the diminishing returns of economic and social policies.³² Such is the story in one recent account of post-World War II Baltimore, but it also fits with Chicago's West Side, where black migrants inherited a neighborhood already in decline from neglect during white administration, with whites already on the way out.³³

The 1960s represent a key turning point for ideas about racial relations in the city, given the collapse of support for urban renewal programs as well as successive summers of rioting by African Americans in many cities. Urban historians, however, have generally tended to focus either on the antecedents or legacies of this period, rather than focusing directly on the so-called »urban crisis«. The black rioting and liberal political crises of the 1960s seem less aberrational, for example, when placed within the context of white mob violence throughout the twentieth century. African American activism created pressure for a legal and political sea change, notably including the outlawing of segregation in 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But the collapse of the Jim Crow system also produced renewed confrontations and population shifts; the fiftieth anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* brought forth a wave of scholarship addressing the white backlash and other unintended consequences of the civil rights movement.³⁴ A study of Detroit suggests, for example, that despite longstanding racial animosities, whites did not actually flee that city until African Americans achieved political power (electing the first black mayor) in the 1970s.³⁵

Upon the desegregation of southern cities like Atlanta by the 1960s, many whites not only withdrew from shared spaces like golf courses, buses, and parks but then also sought to withhold political and financial support from such public amenities. Such »tax revolts« represented a kind of »white flight« that was not simply geographic but also represented ideological shifts toward privatized, racially-exclusive social realms.³⁶ Even communities that lacked the explicit jure programs of segregation found in southern cities underwent a similar political and spatial shift, as in the case of the racial polarizations between Oakland and the suburbs of San Francisco's East Bay. The protection of white suburban »property rights« vis-à-vis the black inner city came to stand in for the direct racial con-

31 *Becky M. Nicolaides*, *My Blue Heaven. Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965*. Chicago 2002.

32 *Kenneth D. Durr*, *Behind the Backlash. White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940–1980*, Chapel Hill 2003.

33 *Amanda I. Seligman*, *Block by Block. Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side*, Chicago 2005.

34 *Michael J. Klarman*, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights. The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality*, Oxford etc. 2004. *Derrick A. Bell*, *Silent Covenants. Brown V. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, Oxford etc. 2004; *Charles J. Ogletree*, *All Deliberate Speed. Reflections on the First Half Century of Brown V. Board of Education*, New York 2004; *Peter H. Irons*, *Jim Crow's Children. The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision*, New York 2002; *James T. Patterson*, *Brown V. Board of Education. A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*, Oxford etc. 2001.

35 *Heather Ann Thompson*, *Rethinking the Politics of White Flight in the Postwar City. Detroit, 1945–1980*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 25 (1999), p. 163–198.

36 *Kevin M. Kruse*, *The Politics of Race and Public Space. Desegregation, Privatization, and the Tax Revolt in Atlanta*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 31 (2005), p. 610–633.

frontations of the earlier periods when whites and blacks cohabitated within the same urban political economy.³⁷

Once de jure segregation within the city had given way to de facto segregation between increasingly black cities and predominantly white suburbs, civil rights advocates attempted to remedy these spatial inequalities through busing schemes aimed at integrating the suburban and central city schools. The 1971 Supreme Court case that upheld such forced busing (*Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*) originated in Charlotte, North Carolina, as that city prided itself for embracing school desegregation and enjoyed significant economic benefits from its relative racial harmony.³⁸

However, suburban whites did resist court-ordered busing in Charlotte from the early 1970s onward, but they eschewed racial justifications through a language of »color-blind populism« that proclaimed local control, property rights, and »middle-class innocence« in segregation.³⁹ It was actually in the North, notoriously in the traditional Irish working class neighborhood of South Boston, that forced school desegregation engendered violent white opposition in the 1970s. Meanwhile, Boston's more middle class suburban whites favored the political and legalistic tactics seen in Atlanta or Charlotte over such mob opposition.⁴⁰

Such forced school desegregation initiatives were abandoned in almost every city by the 1980s. Discrimination and segregation in the areas of employment and housing would also prove persistent throughout the final decades of the century. Updating the 1968 survey of urban conditions by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (also known as the *Kerner Report*), a 1998 study noted that, in the thirty years since urban riots prompted a national self-examination, conditions for poor, minority city dwellers had in fact deteriorated, becoming ever more insurmountable and isolated.⁴¹ The scholarly debate about the lingering conditions of urban inequality was revived in the 1980s by sociologist William Julius Wilson, who suggested that the movement of industries out of northern cities was leading to the development of a permanent urban underclass, perpetuated through social pathology.⁴² In response, some sociologists pointed to the persistence of segregation over the 1970s to explain the disproportionate effect of deindustrialization on black poverty rates; others contrasted African Americans with successful new immigrants to the post-industrial city, noting that blacks were largely excluded from factory jobs in the industrial era anyway.⁴³

Historians led by Michael Katz joined the discussion by the early 1990s, in an attempt to intervene in the public policy discussion by attacking the very concept of a post-industrial urban underclass for providing little more than the conventional stigmatization of individuals in poverty. Instead, they argued for turning attention to »processes at work

37 *Robert O. Self*, *American Babylon. Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, New Jersey 2003.

38 *Stephen Samuel Smith*, *Boom for Whom? Education, Desegregation, and Development in Charlotte*, Albany/New York 2004.

39 *Matthew D. Lassiter*, *The Suburban Origins of »Color-Blind« Conservatism. Middle-Class Consciousness in the Charlotte Busing Crisis*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 30 (2004), p. 549–582.

40 *Ronald P. Formisano*, *Boston against Busing. Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, Chapel Hill 2004.

41 *Fred R. Harris/Lynn A. Curtis* (eds.), *Locked in the Poorhouse. Cities, Race, and Poverty in the United States*, Lanham 1998.

42 *William J. Wilson*, *The Truly Disadvantaged. The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, Chicago 1987.

43 *Douglas S. Massey/Nancy A. Denton*, *American Apartheid. Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, Cambridge/Massachusetts 1993. *Roger David Waldinger*, *Still the Promised City? African-Americans and New Immigrants in Postindustrial New York*, Cambridge/Massachusetts 1996.

over a very long span of time and to the ideas and politics that generated and sustained them.«⁴⁴ These would have to include not simply family or individual pathologies but »structural transformations of the economy; the working out of racism in time and space; the consequences of institutional development; the reshaping of urban space; and the activities of the state.«⁴⁵ Scholars would continue to interrogate the effects of deindustrialization.⁴⁶ But there was no disputing the fact that by the 1970s and 1980s, vast urban areas of the United States – from Detroit to North Miami, Watts to Camden – were witnessing more concentrated, racially segregated urban poverty than ever before.

Given such conditions in the deindustrialized »rustbelt« just as »sunbelt« cities across the American South and West experienced unprecedented growth, it should hardly come as a surprise when the editors of the 2004 volume, *The African American Urban Experience*, announce that Great Migration reversed itself: »During the last third of the twentieth century, the return migration of blacks [from North to South] rose to nearly 50,000 each year.« But even more salient has been the rate of black suburbanization, »especially in northern and western cities«: »Indeed, by the turn of the twenty-first century the magnitude of black migration to the suburbs had surpassed the Great Migration to American cities.«⁴⁷ Meanwhile, by the 1980s, a generation after the phenomenon of »white flight,« affluent young white professionals (often raised in suburban enclaves) began to resettle in the very urban areas previously abandoned to poor minorities. While these movements were not generally expressed in terms of the turf wars of earlier decades, they almost inevitably initiated rising real estate prices that in turn put pressure on such economically marginal groups.⁴⁸

In the fall of 2004, new analysis of 150 years of U. S. census data revealed that late twentieth century Americans were more geographically mobile than any time since the mid nineteenth century.⁴⁹ One year later historian Robert Fishman argued that American cities were experiencing a broad new pattern of intra-national migration, encompassing new immigrants, businesses, African Americans, and the white middle class, which will eventually »reurbanize precisely those inner-city districts that were previously depopulated.« In Fishman's view, the urban crisis has passed, as trends including suburban dispersal, concentration of poverty, and even rising crime rates began reversing their late twentieth century trajectories in the 1990s. Most importantly – for our purposes here – »as white middle-class in-migration becomes more widely distributed«, Fishman sees indication of »at least the softening« of dynamics from »the period of gentrification, when the boundary between the privileged and the rest was razor sharp.«⁵⁰ Combined with other indicators that are beginning to suggest rising levels of employment, home ownership and mortgage availability for African American urbanites, there may be room for optimism. For if urban history has painfully recorded the sad implications of W. E. B. Du Bois' all-to-apt 1903 prediction that »the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line«, then the softening of these boundaries of race and class would certainly bode well for America's communities in the twenty-first.⁵¹

44 Michael B. Katz, Reframing the Debate, in: Katz, (ed.), The »Underclass« Debate, p. 442.

45 Ibid.

46 Jefferson R. Cowie/Joseph Heathcott, Beyond the Ruins. The Meanings of Deindustrialization, Ithaca 2003.

47 Editors' introduction to Trotter, et al. (eds.), The African American Urban Experience, p. 2.

48 Neil Smith, The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City, London etc. 1996.

49 Patricia Kelly Hall/Steven Ruggles, Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity. New Evidence on the Internal Migration of Americans, 1850–2000, in: Journal of American History 91 (2004), p. 829–846.

50 Robert Fishman, The Fifth Migration, in: Journal of the American Planning Association 71 (2005), p. 357–366.

51 W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, New York 2005, p. 43.