Introduction

Race, Place, and Power

It is an aspect of their sense of superiority that
the white people of America believe they have
so little to learn.
—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

What happened to the hopes of the civil rights movement? What has become of Dr. King's dream? How can it be that decades after the adoption of comprehensive civil rights laws, racial identity remains the key variable in shaping opportunities and life chances for individuals and groups in the United States? Why does race still matter so much? The most popular answers to these questions lead us in exactly the wrong directions. Since the 1970s, politicians, pundits, and publicists have argued that Black people have shown themselves to be simply unfit for freedom. They argue that in a time when civil rights laws clearly ban discrimination, the persistence of racial inequality demonstrates that Blacks have been unable to take advantage of the opportunities afforded them. Equal opportunity exists, they contend, so unequal outcomes have to be attributed to what they perceive to be the deficient values, beliefs, and behaviors of Black people themselves. At times those who adhere to these positions concede that past generations of Blacks had legitimate grievances about slavery, segregation, vigilante violence, and disenfranchisement, but they argue that the problems that Black people confront today are of their own making. What was once done to them by white racists, this line of argument contends, Blacks are now doing to themselves. Inequality between races today, they claim, exists because Blacks allegedly commit more crimes, have lower rates of marriage, and higher rates of children born out of wedlock. They contend that Black students perform poorly on standardized tests because they and their parents do not value education, and that they are disproportionately poor because

their parents either refuse to work or because they foolishly purchase expensive and flashy consumer goods while refusing to save money. Some of these critics even blame these conditions on civil rights laws themselves, arguing that efforts to desegregate schools, to promote fair hiring, and to end housing discrimination have led Blacks to expect special preferences and privileges simply because they are Black. At the same time, these critics complain that society practices reverse racism by punishing hardworking whites and giving unearned rewards to unqualified Blacks.

In my book *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, I showed how focusing on Black disadvantages deflects attention away from the unearned advantages that whites possess. It is not so much that Blacks are disadvantaged, but rather that they are taken advantage of by discrimination in employment, education, and housing, by the ways in which the health care system, the criminal justice system, and the banking system skew opportunities and life chances along racial lines. Moral panics about alleged Black misbehavior, I argued, are designed to obscure the special privileges that whites receive from collective, cumulative, and continuing forms of discrimination.[1]

A large and unrefuted body of research reveals how the economic standing of millions of white families today stems directly from the unfair gains and unjust enrichments made possible by past and present forms of racial discrimination. A wide range of public and private actions protect the assets and advantages that whites have inherited from their ancestors, wealth originally accumulated during eras when direct and overt discrimination in government policies, home sales, mortgage lending, education, and employment systematically channeled assets to whites. For example, at least forty-six million white adults today can trace the origins of their family wealth to the Homestead Act of 1862. This bill gave away valuable acres of land for free to white families, but expressly precluded participation by Blacks.[2] Seventy years later, the 1934 Federal Housing Act distributed federally insured home mortgages to whites in overtly and directly discriminatory fashion, building additional equity in the estates of some thirty-five million white families between 1934 and 1978 while systematically excluding Black families from those opportunities.[3] Moreover, because money is passed down across generations through inheritance, the patterns of the past still shape opportunities in the present. Whites not only inherit the riches that flow across generations because of these policies, but new provisions in the tax code consistently add new forms of favored treatment to inherited wealth while increasing taxes on earned income.

Segregated housing leads to segregated schools that give white people privileged treatment, better facilities and better trained teachers. School and neighborhood networks give them access to insider information which enables them to receive preferential treatment when seeking the 80 to 90

percent of jobs in U.S. society that are never openly advertised to the general public. Over time, these uncompetitive processes shape wealth accumulation. They produce cumulative disadvantages for African Americans, but provide "locked in" advantages for whites. As Daria Roithmayr explains in her innovative work on whiteness as an efficiently functioning racial cartel, whites used restrictive covenants, racial zoning, redlining, steering, blockbusting, and mob violence between 1866 and 1948 to monopolize advantages for themselves and their descendants. They acted collectively as a group to gain favored access to homeownership, employment, education, and political power. The Federal Housing Administration and other government agencies translated aspirations for racial power into public policy, channeling home loans to whites while denying them to Blacks. Although many of the practices that secured these gains initially were outlawed by the civil rights laws of the 1960s, the gains whites received for them were already locked in place. Even more important, nearly every significant decision made since then about urban planning, education, employment, transportation, taxes, housing, and health care has served to protect the preferences, privileges, and property that whites first acquired from an expressly and overtly discriminatory market.[4]

Blacks and whites with similar incomes, work histories, and family alignments have very different relationships to wealth. Blacks currently possess merely seven to ten cents for every dollar of net worth that whites possess.[5] Largely because of racialized space, whiteness in this society is not so much a color as a condition. It is a structured advantage that channels unfair gains and unjust enrichments to whites while imposing unearned and unjust obstacles in the way of Blacks. Of course, not all whites benefit equally from the possessive investment in whiteness, but even the poorest of the poor among whites do not face the degree of concentration in impoverished neighborhoods and schools or the levels of exposure to environmental hazards that routinely confront middle-income Blacks.

The wealth that present-day whites acquire from expressly discriminatory and racist land use practices makes a huge difference in their lives. Middle-class whites have between 3 and 5 times as much wealth as equally achieving blacks. Disproportionately large inheritances provide them with transformative assets that enable whites to make down payments on homes, start businesses, and pay for college educations. Inherited wealth is the main reason why whites and Blacks earning exactly the same incomes have widely divergent wealth portfolios.[6] Sociologist Thomas Shapiro shows that between 1990 and 2020, some seven to nine trillion dollars will be inherited by the "baby boom" generation. Almost all of that money is rooted in profits made by whites from overtly discriminatory housing markets before 1968. Adult white wage earners routinely inherit money *from* parents, while adult non-

white wage earners routinely send out money *to* their parents to compensate for the low wages and lack of assets they possess because of racial discrimination. Shapiro's research reveals that white inheritance is seven times larger than Black inheritance. One out of three "baby boom" generation whites in 1989 could count on bequests, but only one in twenty Blacks could have similar expectations. In addition, even among those who do inherit wealth, whites are four times as likely as Blacks to receive a sizably significant inheritance. On the average, whites inherit $102,167 more than Blacks. White families are 2.4 times as likely as Blacks to have parents who can provide help with down payments or closing costs. Largely because of assets inherited from the past, Blacks get $2.10 in net worth for every dollar earned, whites get $3.23. Cuts in inheritance and capital gains taxes disproportionately benefit whites and make property income more valuable compared to wage income. The homes that whites do acquire in largely white neighborhoods cost them less than comparable homes purchased by Blacks, but they appreciate in value much more than homes in Black neighborhoods. Only 26 percent of white children grow up in asset-poor households, but 52 percent of blacks and 54 percent of Latinos grow up in these economically fragile households. According to Shapiro, inheritance is more important in determining life chances than college degrees, number of children in the family, marital status, full-time employment, or household composition.[7]

Because these inequalities started with discrimination in the past, one might expect that they would become less important over time, that improvements in race relations would gradually narrow the racial wealth gap. Yet precisely the opposite is the case. Assets that appreciate in value and are transferred across generations *increase* in value over time, especially when their privileged beneficiaries skew public policy to make the fruits and rewards of past discrimination even more valuable in the present. A 2010 study conducted by Shapiro and his colleagues at the Institute on Assets and Social Policy at Brandeis University revealed that the wealth gap between Blacks and whites quadrupled between 1984 and 2007. More than a quarter of African American families have no assets at all. Even *high-income* Blacks average assets of only $18,000 compared to the $74,000 in assets held by *middle-income* whites. These differences are not due to market forces, personal attributes, or family composition, but rather are the consequence of both direct discrimination and the indirect effects of the racial dimensions of state policies designed to provide incentives and subsidies for asset-building activities like homeownership. Seemingly race-neutral changes in public policies have also played an important role in widening the racial wealth gap. Cuts in inheritance and capital gains taxes over the past three decades have augmented the value of past discrimination, increasing the fortunes of the white

beneficiaries of past and present housing discrimination. At the same time, deductions allowable for local property taxes produce massive federal subsidies for school taxes in largely white suburbs.[8] Shapiro and his colleagues conclude that present-day job achievements do not predict family wealth holdings adequately, reiterating that people with similar incomes and work histories have vastly different levels of wealth because of past and present racial discrimination.[9]

Privatization of public institutions, cuts in government services, and capital flight to low-wage countries decreases opportunities for upward mobility for most Americans. Under these circumstances, inherited wealth becomes even more important for those positioned to receive it. A 2002 study found that parental income had become a more reliable predictor of children's eventual earnings than it had been in the 1980s.[10] The damaging effects of this racial wealth gap are exacerbated by the massive refusal in our society to desegregate schools or enforce civil rights laws banning discrimination in employment and education. Having civil rights laws on the books is not an effective way of protecting Black rights when white lawlessness is routinely condoned and encouraged by the major institutions in our society. The words that Dr. King wrote about this dynamic in 1967 still hold true today,

> Throughout our history, laws affirming Negro rights have consistently been circumvented by ingenious evasions which render them void in practice. Laws that affect the whole population—draft laws, income-tax laws, traffic laws—manage to work even though they may be unpopular; but laws passed for the Negro's benefit are so widely unenforced that it is a mockery to call them laws. There is a tragic gulf between civil rights laws passed and civil rights laws implemented. There is a double standard in the enforcement of law and a double standard in the respect for particular laws.

How Racism Takes Place challenges the people blaming Blacks for the persistence of unequal racial outcomes in U.S. society today to come to grips with the fatal couplings of place and race in our society. When I say that racism "takes place" I mean it figuratively, in the way that historians do, to describe things that happen in history. But I also use the term as cultural geographers do, to describe how social relations take on their full force and meaning when they are enacted physically in actual places. By examining residential and school segregation, mortgage and insurance redlining, taxation and transportation policies, or the location of environmental amenities and toxic hazards, we learn that race is produced by space, that it takes places for racism to take place.

Relations between races are relations between places, as the work of geographer Laura Pulido demonstrates.[11] White identity in the United States is place bound. It exists and persists because segregated neighborhoods and segregated schools are nodes in a network of practices that skew opportunities and life chances along racial lines. Because of practices that racialize space and spatialize race, whiteness is learned and legitimated, perceived as natural, necessary, and inevitable. Racialized space gives whites privileged access to opportunities for social inclusion and upward mobility. At the same time, it imposes unfair and unjust forms of exploitation and exclusion on aggrieved communities of color. Racialized space shapes nearly every aspect of urban life. The racial imagination that relegates people of different races to different spaces produces grossly unequal access to education, employment, transportation, and shelter. It exposes communities of color disproportionately to environmental hazards and social nuisances while offering whites privileged access to economic opportunities, social amenities, and valuable personal networks. The lived experience of race takes place in actual spaces, while the lived experience of place draws its determinate logic from overt and covert understandings of race. Yet as I attempt to demonstrate in this book, the actual long-term interests of whites are often damaged by spatial relations that purportedly benefit them, while Black negotiations with the constraints and confinements of racialized space often produce ways of envisioning and enacting more decent, dignified, humane, and egalitarian social relations for everyone.

People of different races do not inhabit different places by choice. Housing and lending discrimination, the design of school district boundaries, zoning regulations, policing strategies, the location of highways and transit systems, and a host of tax subsidies do disastrous work by making places synonymous with races. The racial meaning of place makes American whiteness one of the most systematically subsidized identities in the world. It enables whites to own homes that appreciate in value and generate assets passed down to subsequent generations. At the same time, Blacks confront an artificially constricted housing market that often forces them to remain renters unable to take advantage of the subsidies that homeowners receive from the tax code. When they do manage to own homes, Blacks are forced to do so on terms that compel them to pay more for dwellings that are worth less and appreciate in value more slowly than comparable homes inhabited by whites. Housing and school segregation function to channel white children into well equipped classrooms with experienced teachers while crowding Black children into ill-equipped buildings where they are taught by inexperienced teachers and surrounded by impoverished classmates many of whom suffer from lead poisoning, malnutrition, and a variety of undiagnosed and

untreated disabilities. The estimated four million violations of federal fair-housing law that take place every year offer whites privileged access to parks, playgrounds, fresh food, and other amenities while relegating Blacks to areas that suffer disproportionate exposure to polluted air, water, food, and land.

Living in segregated inner-city neighborhoods imposes the equivalent of a racial tax on people of color. One important way in which this "tax" is imposed is on the health and well being of Black bodies. The racial wealth gap is also a racial health gap. Michael Marmot, chairman of the World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health, offers a vivid illustration of the health consequences of racialized space. "If you catch the metro train in downtown Washington, D.C. to suburbs in Maryland," Marmot observes, "life expectancy is 55 years at the beginning of the journey. At the end of the journey, it is 77 years. This means that there is a 20-year life expectancy gap in the nation's capital, between the poor and predominately African American people who live downtown, and the richer and predominantly non–African American people who live in the suburbs."[12]

Researchers have long established how racial discrimination in housing impacts health as well as wealth. Relegating people of different races to different places artificially skews exposure to toxic hazards. The neighborhoods of people of color become prime sites for the location of garbage and toxic-waste dumps, incinerators, lead-based paint on playground equipment and interior walls, metal-plating shops, and concentrated pollutants from free-ways and factories. Segregation-related educational inequality, racialized policing strategies, mismatches between the location of jobs and the residences of communities of color, siting of supermarkets and fast-food outlets, and the constant emergence of new forms of racially targeted exploitation like predatory lending, insurance redlining, foreclosure abandonment, and under-bounding (discussed in Chapter 10) combine to undermine the health of ghetto and *barrio* residents.

Research indicates that discrimination itself is a health hazard, that the panoply of racially tinged everyday experiences that people of color confront can injure their cardiovascular, endocrine, immunologic, and metabolic systems, contributing to increased chances for hypertension, obesity, diabetes, depression, asthma, and infections.[13] Nancy Krieger notes that anticipating and/or receiving racial discrimination "provokes fear and anger: the physiology of fear . . . mobilizes lipids and glucose to increase energy supplies and sensory vigilance and also produces transient elevations in blood pressure; chronic triggering of these physiologic pathways leads to sustained hypertension."[14] A U.S. Department of Agriculture study found that the inner-city poor pay on average 4 percent more for food than suburban dwellers pay.[15] In addition, many inner city areas are "food deserts," filled with fast-food out-

lets, convenience markets, and liquor stores but void of stores selling fresh fruits and vegetables. One study conducted in New Orleans found that neighborhoods that were predominately Black housed an average of 2.4 fast-food restaurants per square mile, while the number in predominately white neighborhoods was only 1.5 fast-food establishments per square mile.[16]

The cumulative vulnerabilities crafted by centuries of anti-Black racism leave African Americans facing multiple and overlapping economic obstacles. Direct discrimination by insurance agents and mortgage loan officers compounds the already difficult economic situation facing working-class and poor people of color as can be seen from the ways in which segregation into different neighborhoods channels people of different races to different sectors of the banking industry. Banks locate branches disproportionately in suburban neighborhoods, forcing inner-city residents to turn to nonbanking institutions for banking services. Thus they are compelled to pay exorbitant fees for simple needs like cashing checks.[17] Residents of white neighborhoods can expect to do business with mainstream financial service providers. Their neighborhood banks offer them savings and checking accounts, certificates of deposit, prime rate mortgages, individual retirement accounts, and automobile and home improvement loans. People who live in Black neighborhoods, in contrast, find only low-end service providers. They transact business with payday lenders, pawn shops, check-cashing establishments, rent-to-own shops, and subprime mortgage lenders who charge them exorbitant fees and rates of interest because they do not have access to the top end of the banking industry. A North Carolina study found that Black neighborhoods house three times as many payday lenders as white neighborhoods.[18] The number of check-cashing businesses in the nation jumped from 2,151 in 1986 to 5,500 in 1997 and 22,000 in 2003.[19] Fees charged on payday loans can amount to an annual rate of as much as 400 to 1,000 percent.[20]

Among workers with incomes under $83,000 per year, the percentage of families without bank accounts rose from 9.5 percent to 13.5 percent between 1977 and 1989. But among families with an average annual income below $11,970—nearly one-fifth of the population—the percentage of families without bank accounts went from 30 percent to 41 percent.[21] Increases in deposit fees, branch bank closings, increased levels of personal debt, and the stagnation of real wages hurt all middle- and low-income workers during this time period, but members of aggrieved racial groups suffered the most. In nearly every aspect of life, from the frequency and duration of layoffs to the locations of branch bank closings, race proved to be a more decisive variable than class.[22] Yet the same banks that discriminate against minority applicants for standard home loans profit tremendously from the subprime loans that became the basis of the national economic meltdown in 2008 (see Chap-

ter 4). All too often, race rather than class or creditworthiness determines who gets subprime loans. The Center for Responsible Lending calculated that in 2002 high-income African Americans were three times more likely to be subjected to subprime terms than low-income whites.[23] A study by the Reinvestment Fund of mortgage lending in ten cities discovered that the amount of subprime lending in an area rose in proportion to the number of elderly and Black residents, even after accounting for credit risks and the condition of housing stock.[24] More than half of the Blacks refinancing loans in Philadelphia and its suburbs received subprime loans, but only 11 percent of whites needed to turn to the subprime sector for refinancing purposes.[25] Another Philadelphia study found only 2 percent of white borrowers in that city used subprime lenders for home purchases, compared to 20 percent of Blacks. In middle-income neighborhoods in Chicago, subprime refinance loans constituted 48 percent of lending in predominately Black neighborhoods but only 8 percent in comparable white areas.[26] Researchers for the Department of Housing and Urban Development found that African American neighborhoods nationwide were five times more likely to see subprime purchases than white neighborhoods.[27]

The home loan industry often attributes Black reliance on subprime lenders to inadequate consumer sophistication rather than admitting to the pervasive nature of discrimination that drives minority consumers to subprime lenders. The current crisis is a direct result, however, of laws that freed the banking industry from regulation, from the 1980 law passed by Congress that removed interest-rate caps on first-lien mortgages to the Banking Reform Act of 1999 and its attendant securitization of the mortgage industry that enabled individuals to make enormous profits by making unsecured loans in a largely unregulated market. Credit-starved Blacks trapped in artificially constrained housing markets proved to be ideal targets for unscrupulous and unregulated lenders.

Spatial isolation from employment opportunities and municipal facilities also raises transportation costs, while expenses for health care increase because of augmented exposure to environmental hazards and decreased access to primary care physicians and preventive medical services.[28] The predominately Black and Latino neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles have one primary care physician for every 12,993 residents, but there is one primary care physician for every 214 residents in the largely white area of Bel Air. Suburban and largely white Bethesda, Maryland, boasts one pediatrician for every 400 children, but the Black neighborhoods in southeast Washington, D.C., have one pediatrician for every 3,700 children.[29]

Redlining by insurance companies plays an important if often invisible role in imposing impediments to asset accumulation. Insurance rates are

higher in inner-city areas than in suburbs, even when loss ratios are higher in the suburbs. In his excellent study of urban decline in twentieth-century St. Louis, Colin Gordon demonstrates that residents of Black neighborhoods had difficulty finding insurance companies willing to sell them policies. They paid more for the policies that they did purchase than residents of comparable white neighborhoods in the suburbs, often losing their coverage as soon as they made a claim.[30] A study of insurance redlining in Chicago by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and one on insurance redlining in Milwaukee by researchers from the University of Wisconsin's branch campus in that city revealed that the number of insurance policies written per owner-occupied dwelling in any given area depended more on race than on any other variable including neighborhood poverty rate, age or condition of buildings, homeowner income, population turnover, frequency of fires, or levels of crime.[31] A federal audit of twenty-four cities found that 53 percent of Black insurance seekers experienced some form of discrimination. These acts ranged from insurance agents not returning phone calls about insuring property in minority neighborhoods to agents withholding information about insurance options from Black customers, from charging Blacks more money for less coverage to charging white customers less money for more coverage. In Chicago, Black insurance seekers faced discrimination 83 percent of the time. Blacks in Memphis experienced the fewest instances of discrimination in this study, but they still faced discrimination 32 percent of the time. White applicants, in contrast, found that their race increased their options and their coverage while providing them with lower rates.[32]

A study by the Commissioner of Insurance for the state of Missouri found that residents of low-income Black neighborhoods in St. Louis paid $6.15 for every thousand dollars of coverage, while residents of poor white neighborhoods paid only $4.70 for every thousand dollars of coverage. In addition, the loss ratio was higher in the white areas. The Shelter Group insured many homeowners in the St. Louis area, but in the city of St. Louis and the suburban zip codes with the largest minority populations that firm had virtually no customers. In the predominantly white suburban zip code 63026, Shelter had one agent and 501 policies in force. In zip code 63132, however, where 40 percent of the residents were Black, the company had no agents and only sixty-two policies. Yet zip code 63132 had a median income of $34,695, higher than that in the mostly white 63026 where earnings averaged $31,336.[33] An investigation conducted by the Missouri Insurance Department in 1991 discovered a map of the city of St. Louis in an office of the Farm Bureau Town and Country Insurance Company with a circle drawn around the inner city with the words "ineligible property" written inside the circle.[34] One mid-1990s study discovered that the loss ratio for insurance companies in the predomi-

nately Black neighborhoods of central Atlanta was 79 percent while annual premiums were $705. In the mostly white areas of north Fulton and northwest DeKalb counties, however, loss ratios were 92 percent while premiums averaged only $349.[35] The competitive economic position of whites benefits tremendously from these unfair gains and unjust enrichments.

Along with discrimination in insurance coverage and home rentals and sales, discriminatory practices by mortgage lenders play a central role in skewing housing opportunities and life chances in U.S. cities along racial lines. Along with Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos, African Americans pay higher rates for home mortgage loans than whites, even after controlling for borrower credit history, debt levels, and income.[36] Lenders subject Black applicants to more credit checks than white applicants. They require more documentation from them even before meeting to discuss the terms of a loan. Whites face less restrictive qualification standards, receive more advice than Blacks about creative financing options, and routinely secure loans with lower escrow and reserve account contributions.[37] Minority applicants also face more obstacles to securing loans for improving existing dwellings. These loans have even greater value for minorities than they do for whites, because systematic discrimination leaves minority homeowners facing an artificially constricted housing market that makes it harder for them to move to new dwellings. An Atlanta study showed that nearly 33 percent of Black applicants and 30 percent of Latino applicants were rejected for home improvement loans—compared to 15.4 percent of whites.[38]

The patterns of the past continue to impede progress in the present in many ways. A 2008 study by sociologist Jesus Hernandez revealed that the physical locations of foreclosures of homes owned by Blacks and Latinos in Sacramento between 1998 and 2008 could be predicted precisely by finding the areas in Sacramento in 1939 that were redlined for whites but that were not secured by restrictive covenants. Even though the individuals who shaped and profited from the patterns of 1939 were long gone, their actions determined that the home foreclosure crisis of the turn of the twenty-first century would have disproportionate impact on minority borrowers.[39] Moreover, housing discrimination holds a direct and reciprocal relationship to employment discrimination. Disinvestment in an area's housing frequently causes an exodus of shopping centers, food stores, restaurants, full-service banks, and other institutions capable of providing employment, career training, and economic growth.[40] When minority workers are confined to neighborhoods far from the places of highest job growth, they suffer a competitive disadvantage with other job seekers.[41] Job discrimination can produce subsequent new forms of housing discrimination. One reason why banks and mortgage lenders discriminate so systematically is because their work forces are segregated

as a result of their discriminatory policies as employers. A recent study of five metropolitan areas showed that an increase in Black administrators and officers in banks led to higher approval rates for Black loan applicants.[42] Similarly, bringing more minorities into the industry workforce would be one of the most effective ways of addressing the many different manifestations of insurance redlining.[43]

Of course, racialized space is not simply a matter of Black and white. In many of my previous publications I have described and analyzed the construction of physical places and discursive spaces by Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.[44] I have written about Chicano poster art and low riders, Asian American music and musicians, and Native American poetry, about interethnic antiracist organizing by the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, the Labor Community Strategy Center, and the Midwest Treaty Network. I have long maintained that race in the United States and around the world is a complex and polylateral phenomenon, that different aggrieved communities have widely varying relations with each other as well as with whites, that the histories they share entail both coalitions and conflicts. The first racial zoning ordinance in the nation was intended to clear Chinese residents of San Francisco out of desirable neighborhoods downtown and confine them to slum neighborhoods adjacent to polluting factories and noxious waste dumps.[45] The restrictive covenants used everywhere to deny housing opportunities to Blacks also blocked Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans from neighborhood choices and homeownership opportunities. Highway construction and attendant urban renewal programs destroyed some sixteen hundred Black communities in the twentieth century, but they devastated many Latino and Asian American neighborhoods as well.[46] During the first eight years of federally funded urban renewal, more than 75 percent of those displaced were Black or Latino.[47] The harsh realities of racialized space confront Native Americans in border towns and urban ghettos, while all communities of color suffer from disproportionate proximity to environmental hazards.[48] I focus on the Black/white binary in *How Racism Takes Place* not because I believe it exhausts the racial geography of our society, but because a focus on Black spaces reveals particular dynamics that have been central to the general construction of racialized space for everyone. The particular history of anti-Black racism focuses our attention on urgent choices that need to be made now. I view the evidence and arguments that I present here about the Black spatial imaginary as contributive to rather than competitive with the substantial, substantive, and superb work done by scholars of all races about racialized space and Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.[49] Because racial projects are flexible, fluid, and relational, the contours of anti-Black spaces are relevant to

all communities of color. They are crucibles where other kinds of cruelty are learned and legitimated. When discrimination succeeds, it does not stop with one group but rather becomes generalized as a social principle and practice. Yet resistance to racialized spaces by Blacks can also have important generalizable implications for other aggrieved groups.

How Racism Takes Place argues for the importance of acknowledging the degree to which our society is structured by a white spatial imaginary and for confronting the serious moral, political, and social challenges mounted against it by a black spatial imaginary. The white spatial imaginary portrays the properly gendered prosperous suburban home as the privileged moral geography of the nation. Widespread, costly, and often counterproductive practices of surveillance, regulation, and incarceration become justified as forms of frontier defense against demonized people of color. Works of popular film and fiction often revolve around phobic representations of Black people unfit for freedom. These cultural commitments have political consequences. They emerge from public policies that place the acquisitive consumer at the center of the social world, that promote hostile privatism and defensive localism as suburban structures of feeling. They encourage homeowners to band together to capture amenities and advantages for themselves while outsourcing responsibilities and burdens to less powerful communities.

The first section of *How Race Takes Place* identifies the white spatial imaginary as a problem. It delineates the ways in which seemingly race-neutral urban sites contain deeply embedded racial assumptions and imperatives. As Martin Luther King argued decades ago, "To find the origins of the Negro problem we must turn to the white man's problem."[50] In Chapter 1, I explore the white spatial imaginary to explain how and why the racially propelled logic of hostile privatism and defensive localism has come to dominate decisions about both private investment and public policy. In Chapter 2, I explain how the necessity of turning segregation into congregation has produced a distinct Black spatial imaginary that counters hostile privatism and defensive localism with democratic and inclusive ideals. The white spatial imaginary often relies on misdirection, on creating spectacles that attract attention—yet detract our gaze from the links that connect urban place and race. In Chapters 3 and 4, I examine how municipal subsidies for a football stadium in St. Louis and the emergence of the television series *The Wire* promoted subject positions that encouraged spectators *not* to see things that were right in front of their eyes: urban poverty and educational inequality in St. Louis and predatory lending and community-based resistance in Baltimore. Stadium building in St. Louis and sensationalized depictions of ghetto life in Baltimore reveal that urban *sites* and urban *sights* work together to produce and sustain racial meanings. They enact a public

pedagogy about who belongs where that has disastrous consequences for our shared social life.

Understanding the causes and consequences of the white spatial imaginary holds the key to understanding what happened to the dreams of the civil rights movement. Of course, the democratic and egalitarian insurgencies of the 1960s won some significant victories. It matters that the Supreme Court decided that segregated schools violated the constitutional rights of Black children in the 1954 *Brown* case. Opportunities have been opened up for millions of people of all races, genders, sexual identities, and degrees of ability and disability because the 1964 Civil Rights Act banned discrimination in employment. Our democracy is stronger because the 1965 Voting Rights Act prohibited practices designed to deny the franchise to members of aggrieved groups. In the face of the structural weaknesses written into the 1968 Fair Housing Act, activist citizen groups forced to function as private attorneys general have established a body of case law and administrative rulings that now make it possible for previously excluded individuals and groups to accumulate assets that appreciate in value and can be passed down to future generations. The election of Barack Obama in 2008 as the first African American president was a product of many forces, but prominent among them were the changes in the national racial order created by decades of legislation, litigation, education, and agitation.[51]

Yet these victories have been partial, incomplete, and even ephemeral. Racial justice remains elusive. Passing laws that proclaim equality does not produce practices that instantiate that equality in everyday life. In a characteristically brilliant discussion, critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw explains how this inversion of priorities has come about. She shows that a determined and deliberate repudiation of the aims and ideals of the civil rights movement has become the dominant force in U.S. culture and politics. Fueled initially by massive white resistance to school desegregation in the North and South, the era of repudiation took shape through an extended series of Supreme Court decisions, legislative initiatives, and actions by the executive branch of government. Supported by leaders of both political parties and cooperative judges, these actions dismantled or undermined many of the key policies created during the civil rights era, such as school desegregation and affirmative action. At the same time, municipalities, states, and the federal government routinely refuse to enforce fair-employment and fair-housing laws. In order to protect and preserve the traditional privileges of whiteness, leaders across the political spectrum have increasingly embraced the cynical strategy of "color blindness." They argue that recognizing race for the purposes of redressing racial injustices violates law and morality as much as the explicitly race-based discrimination that made it necessary to pass civil

rights laws in the first place. In all areas of U.S. life, we now confront the presumption that color-bound injustices require color-blind remedies, that race-based problems should be solved by race-blind remedies.[52] As a result, more than four decades after the civil rights activism of the 1960s, and nearly one hundred and fifty years after the abolition of slavery, race remains the most important single variable determining opportunities and life chances in the United States.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the racialization of space. Seemingly race-neutral urban sites contain hidden racial assumptions and imperatives. The design, construction, administration, financing, and policing of shopping malls, sports arenas, schools, highways, and transportation corridors follow the racial logics of hostile privatism and defensive localism. They loot public resources for private gain, channeling massive subsidies and tax breaks toward wealthy corporations and investors while diminishing city services and imposing new burdens on renters and owners of inexpensive property. These spaces make racial segregation seem desirable, natural, necessary, and inevitable. Even more important, these sites serve to produce and sustain racial meanings; they enact a public pedagogy about who belongs where and about what makes certain spaces desirable.

Perhaps the most destructive effect of the white spatial imaginary is its role as a crucible for the arguments I referenced at the beginning of this introduction, the idea that Black people have shown themselves unfit for freedom by failing to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by civil rights laws. Today's segregated schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces produce white people who know very little about Blacks and even less about themselves. They certainly know next to nothing about the actual history of the civil rights movement or the beliefs of Dr. King. Today, people who profit tremendously from the privileges that accrue to them because of their color piously cite Dr. King's dream that one day his children would be judged by the content of their character rather than by the color of their skin. They cite this phrase in everyday conversation, public policy debates, and even Supreme Court decisions as justification for opposition to affirmative action, school desegregation, fair housing, fair hiring, and fair lending. They tell us that the way to get beyond race is to stop mentioning that racism exists. They do not know that Dr. King argued that "giving a man his due may often mean giving him special treatment," that he wrote that "a society that has done something special *against* the Negro for hundreds of years must do something special *for* him, in order to equip him to compete on a just and equal basis."[53] They do not know that by 1967 Dr. King talked less about his dream and more about how important it was for white America to wake up.[54] The people who congratulate their country and themselves on the passage of civil rights laws in

the 1960s have created a rhetorical Martin Luther King to serve their interests who bears little resemblance to the actual historical Martin Luther King. They imagine that white benevolence in the 1960s enabled Dr. King and his followers to attain their goals. They do not know that in his last book, published the year before he was murdered, Dr. King charged that "White America was ready to demand that the Negro should be spared the lash of brutality and coarse degradation but had never truly been committed to helping him out of poverty, exploitation or all forms of discrimination."[55] Focusing directly on the content of their character, Dr. King found white Americans wanting. "They are uneasy with injustice," he observed, "but unwilling yet to pay a significant price to eradicate it."[56] Dr. King did not view the passage of civil rights laws as the fulfillment of his dream. Instead, he saw in them a colossal failure of will, of nerve, of integrity. He charged that "after writing piecemeal and incomplete legislation and proclaiming its historic importance in magnificent prose, the American government left the Negro to make the unworkable work."[57] King saw the laws passed by Congress as fatally flawed, designed deliberately to be inadequate and destined never to be fully enforced. Rather than resolving racial inequalities responsibly, these laws enabled whites to pretend that the problem had been solved. They catered to white vanity but did little to protect Black humanity. As King complained in 1967,

> Every civil rights law is still substantially more dishonored than honored. School desegregation is 90 percent unimplemented across the land; the free exercise of the franchise is the exception rather than the rule in the South; open occupancy laws theoretically apply to population centers embracing tens of millions, but grim ghettos contradict the fine language of the legislation. Despite the mandates of law, equal employment still remains a distant dream.[58]

The conditions we face today are eerily similar to the realities Dr. King described more than four decades ago. Civil rights laws remain largely unenforced. Affirmative obligations to promote fair housing are consistently evaded by cities, counties, and states.

School segregation is reverting to the levels of the 1970s. Voting rights are routinely compromised by gerrymandering, by requirements for photo identification at polling places, by purging people who move frequently from voting rolls, and by disenfranchising ex-offenders. Moreover, judges assiduously protect white privilege by treating civil rights remedies as more egregious violations of individual rights than the forms of direct discrimination that made them necessary in the first place. Yet Dr. King was not only a critic of the white spatial imaginary; he was also a champion of the Black spatial

imaginary. He believed that it contained important tools for building a more decent, humane, and just society, not just for Black people but for everyone. In the course of sustained struggle, Dr. King came to understand that white supremacy was not an aberrant practice in an otherwise just society, but rather one node in a larger network of misplaced priorities. Like his ancestors who emerged from slavery to forge Abolition Democracy in the nineteenth century, Dr. King believed that it was not enough merely to remove negative racist obstacles in the way of Blacks, but instead that it was necessary to create new democratic practices and institutions. Calling for "a radical restructuring of the architecture of American society," King specifically rejected the idea that the purpose of the civil rights movement was to make Blacks exactly like whites.[59] Instead, the goal was to transform both Blacks and whites (and everyone else) into new kinds of humans, into people capable of creating new racial and spatial relations. "Let us, therefore, not think of our movement," he urged, "as one that seeks to integrate the Negro into the existing values of American society." Instead, King asked his followers to "be those creative dissenters who will call our beloved nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness."[60]

King perceived part of the race problem and its solution as spatial. "The suburbs are white nooses around the Black necks of the cities," he wrote. "Housing deteriorates in central cities; urban renewal has been Negro removal and has benefited big merchants and real estate interests; and suburbs expand with little regard for what happens to the rest of America."[61] King complained that "the federal government subsidizes the nonpoor twice as much as the poor when we include various forms of subsidies such as middle-income public housing, tax deductions for mortgage interest and real estate taxes."[62] He called for the creation and enforcement of fair-housing laws, desegregation of neighborhoods, an end to homelessness, and a guarantee that all housing would meet minimum standards of adequacy.[63]

Yet King believed that the nation's racial and spatial problems had already started to produce racial and spatial solutions. He saw ideas and actions emanating from Black spaces as tremendously valuable to the nation at large. In Montgomery in 1955 and 1956, Black people boycotted the buses and walked to work on the sidewalks. They conducted lengthy public mass meetings that turned churches into sites for deliberative talk, face-to-face decision making, and collective mobilization. Masses in motion on the streets of Birmingham, students staging sit-ins a lunch counters throughout the South, freedom riders transforming buses and bus stations into new democratic spaces, marchers protesting racist violence on rural highways in Mississippi or pushing for voting rights on the road from Selma to Montgomery expressed new spatial and racial imaginaries. King recognized the importance of the fact that these

actions took place in actual places, that they enacted in real time the social relations that dreamers could only envision. "By taking to the streets, and there giving practical lessons in democracy and its defaults," King asserted, "Negroes have decisively influenced white thought."[64] More than any individual reform, the great achievement of the civil rights movement was the creation of Blacks as an aggrieved and insurgent people dedicated to the democratic transformation of the nation and the world. Up to the day he died, King kept insisting on the need for direct action. For him, action mattered precisely because it did not depend solely on moral suasion, but instead strengthened ethical appeals by supporting them with what Dr. King called "constructive coercive power."[65] Consistent with his oft-repeated injunction that in order to comfort the afflicted it was often necessary to afflict the comfortable, King also believed that collective action in public contained powerful potential for expanding democracy. Mass participation required critiques and demands capable of involving the broadest possible range of participants, countered tendencies toward autocracy and bureaucracy by generating the development of new leaders among the rank and file, and kept leaders accountable to their constituents. King believed in participatory democracy as both a means and an end. As he explained, "No great victories are won in a war for the transformation of a whole people without total participation. Less than this will not create a new society; it will only evoke more sophisticated token amelioration."[66]

I have dealt with the ideas of Dr. King at length in this introduction because his good name is often invoked to support and justify policies he certainly would have opposed. The statements that he made on these subjects are a matter of public record. If we do not know his ideas, it is because time and time again we have been lied to about them. But there is more at stake here than the personal reputation of one national icon, even one as brilliant and visionary as Dr. King. The ideas that King championed were not his alone. They emerged from and spoke for a Black spatial imaginary created in dispersed and diffuse sites by a broad range of activists, artists, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens.

The second part of *How Racism Takes Place* looks at some of the sources of the spatial, racial, and social imaginary that King deployed so deftly. In the wake of the civil rights movement, music by Horace Tapscott, visual art by Betye Saar and John Biggers, and writing by Paule Marshall and Lorraine Hansberry explored the creative and generative dynamics of the Black spatial imaginary. These artists and Dr. King himself came out of a tradition. They owed much to the people largely unknown to history described by Charles Mills as thinkers and creators who "under the most difficult circumstances, often self-educated, denied access to formal training and the resources of the

academy, the object of scorn and contempt from hegemonic white theory, nevertheless managed to forge the concepts necessary to trace the contours of the system oppressing them, defying the massive weight of a white scholarship that either morally justified this oppression or denied its existence."[67] The archives created by these artists, activists, and intellectuals continue to inform the Black spatial imaginary in the present as I argue in my discussions in this book of the activities of the World Stage Performance Gallery in Los Angeles, Project Row Houses in Houston, Students at the Center in New Orleans, and fair-housing councils all across the nation. I focus on practices and products of expressive culture to examine how Blacks have consistently drawn a distinct spatial imaginary to oppose the land use philosophy that privileges profits over people and instead to create new "use values" in places that have little "exchange value." Many of these works of expressive culture contested the oppressions of race by imagining strategic realignments of place, by presenting strategies for altering the scale, scope, and stakes of space—for burrowing in, building up, and branching out. They proceed from a philosophy that sees art as a vital part of the life of a community, that finds value in devalued spaces, and that offers alternatives to possessive individualism and competitive consumer citizenship. These strategies and sensibilities permeate the Black spatial imaginary today in many different ways. They guide diverse efforts to turn segregation into congregation, to transform divisiveness into solidarity, to change dehumanization into rehumanization. In Chapter 10, I explore how participating in contemporary challenges to the hostile privatism and defensive localism of the white spatial imaginary can help us understand and advance the democratic and egalitarian ethos of the Black spatial imaginary.

I turn to works of expressive culture that emerged from the Black spatial imaginary in the mid-twentieth century not out of nostalgia for a lost golden age, but rather because these works constitute a living archive of oppositional consciousness and thought, because their prophetic power predicted the problems we confront today, and because their ideas and aspirations continue to guide struggles for democratic and egalitarian social change in the present. Just as *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*—the book that Dr. King published the year before he died—contains crucial insight about the importance of continuing to struggle today for affirmative action, school desegregation, fair hiring, fair housing, and environmental justice, the music, art, and literature of the mid-twentieth century provides us with continuing insights about the White spatial imaginary and how to contest it.

Although reflecting the individual aesthetic choices and personal preoccupations of their creators, the artistic practices and products I discuss in this book also offer evidence about the central role played by place in the cogni-

tive mapping and structural economy of race from the mid-twentieth century through the present. The innovative, imaginative, and even eccentric character of many of these works of art stems from an unusual ambition to blend aesthetic and political goals into a unified totality. Like other artists, intellectuals, and activists from aggrieved communities, they engage in what literary critic Raymond Williams called "a long march to alternative institutions which have to be raised from the resources of surviving and potential in-place communities."[68] Black artists show how racialized space produces *both* solidarities of sameness and dynamics of difference. No one spatial strategy suffices to solve the diverse and plural problems that white supremacy poses for Black communities. Yet changing the scale, scope, and stakes of space—burrowing in, building up, and branching out—can serve different purposes at different times, functioning as parts of a reticulated web that accomplishes more collectively than any one tactic might achieve individually. Although these strategies were ostensibly designed to reorder space, it would be more accurate to say that they work within time and space to advance new understandings of ancestry, inheritance, association, affiliation, and action.

When history takes place, it does so in actual places. Among aggrieved groups, history also takes places away, leaving some people, as David Roediger reminds us, displaced, disinherited, dispossessed, and just plain dissed. In the United States, racial subordination has manifested its full force and fury through physical segregation and spatial subordination. African American expressive culture has functioned as both a symptom and a critique of the nexus that links race and space. Its compelling qualities testify to the shameful duration, depth, and dimension of the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. Yet works of expressive culture from this tradition also offer evidence about what Raymond Williams identifies as the "intransigent attachments to human diversity and recreation" that survive as long as people "keep living and looking beyond the routines which attempt to control and reduce them."[69] Now more than ever, we need to understand the full force and pernicious power of the white spatial imaginary. Yet we also need to learn lessons that the Black spatial imaginary can teach.

I believe that understanding the causes and consequences of racialized space can advance the cause of racial justice. It can help address and redress the injuries that Black people experience from living in a society where not just white property but even white vanity is valued more highly than Black humanity. But the problems produced by racialized space should not be simply the particular and parochial concerns of Blacks. Although the system through which race takes place delivers short-term advantages and benefits to whites, racialized space ultimately hurts everyone. It creates expensive and dangerous concentrations of poverty, pollution, disease, and crime.

It misallocates resources by squandering the talents and abilities of deserving Blacks while moving less talented whites into positions they do not deserve. It encourages environmentally unsound patterns of development and transportation, disperses populations inefficiently. It helps produce much of the antisocial behavior that it purports to prevent. It deprives cities, counties, and states of tax revenues by depressing property values artificially. It promotes a suburban culture of contempt and fear that fuels opposition to sensible economies of scale, that encourages each subunit of government to try to win gains against every other subunit. Perhaps most important, it undermines democracy by isolating Black people and the spatial and social imaginaries they have developed over time from potential white allies who would derive great benefit from them—if they could only overcome their allegiances to racial privilege.

Malcolm X used to say that racism was like a Cadillac because they make a new model every year. The names change, he charged, but the game's the same. The achievements of the civil rights revolution of the 1960s changed many of the names. It is no longer permissible to maintain overtly segregated school systems and public accommodations. Racial discrimination in employment and housing now clearly violates the law. Yet changing the names did not change the game. Race still exists because racism persists. Ending the fatal links that connect place and race would do much for social justice. In the conclusion of *How Racism Takes Place*, I outline measures that need to be taken to end the skewing of opportunities and life chances in our society along racial lines. We need to change the game, not just the names by which it is called. To understand how to accomplish this task, we need to turn in Chapter 1 to an examination of the white spatial imaginary and to ask the questions that Dr. King posed at a key point in *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* He asked, "Why does white America delude itself, and how does it rationalize the evil it retains?"[70] These are questions well worth answering. The rest of this book will attempt to answer them.

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