

# Neighbourhood effects and beyond: Explaining the paradoxes of inequality in the changing American metropolis

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## Abstract

American cities today are simultaneously the same and different from Wilson's classic portrayal in *The Truly Disadvantaged* ([1987] 2012), first published over 30 years ago. Concentrated poverty and racial segregation endure, as do racial gaps in multiple aspects of wellbeing. But mass incarceration, the dramatic drop in violent crime, immigration, rising income segregation, the suburbanisation of poverty, and other macrosocial trends have transformed the urban scene. The paradoxical result is that cities today are both better and worse off. In this paper, I put forth a unifying framework on persistence and change in urban inequality, highlighting a theory of neighbourhood effects and the higher-order structure of the contemporary metropolis. I apply this analytic framework to examine: (1) neighbourhood inequality as an important driver and mediator of urban transformation; (2) racial disparities across the life course in compounded deprivation, poisoned development, and intergenerational mobility; and (3) how everyday spatial mobility beyond the local neighbourhood is producing new forms of social isolation and higher-order segregation. I conclude with a challenge to dominant policy perspectives on urban racial inequality.

## Keywords

cities, crime, inequality, life course, neighbourhood effects, race, urban mobility

## 摘要

今天的美国城市与威尔逊在30多年前首次出版的《真正的穷人》（[1987] 2012）中的经典写照既不同，又有相同之处。集中的贫困和种族隔离持续存在，人民福祉的多个方面存在种族差距。但是大规模监禁、暴力犯罪的急剧下降、移民、收入隔离的增加、贫困的郊区化以及其他宏观社会趋势已经改变了城市的现状。矛盾的结果是，今天的城市既变得更好，又变得更坏。在本文中，我提出了一个关于城市不平等的持续性和变化的统一框架，强调了社区效应理论和当代大都市的高阶结构。我运用这个分析框架来研究：（1）街区不平等作为城市转型的重要驱动力和中介；（2）整个生命过程中的种族差异（体现为复合剥夺、被毒害的发展和代际流动性）；以及（3）超越本地社区的日常空间流动如何产生新形式的社会隔离和高阶隔离。最后，我对城市种族不平等的主导政策观点提出了挑战。

## 关键词

城市、犯罪、不平等、生命历程、社区效应、种族、城市流动性

## The new urban question

The contemporary urban scene is depicted by clashing narratives. On the one hand, the mood is grim among those whom we might call the prophets of urban doom. Evoking the urban crisis that was described in William Julius Wilson's ([1987] 2012) classic *The Truly Disadvantaged*, new alarms have been set off. Richard Florida declares it simply *The New Urban Crisis* (2017). Culprits include rising inequality, the austerity of neoliberalism, nativism, segregation, mass incarceration, and globalisation. Although urbanists in this camp disagree on the biggest threat, there is consensus that a negative transformation is rupturing the American city and engulfing urban areas far beyond the USA. Segregation and spatial isolation of the poor are increasing in Europe (Musterd et al., 2017; Tammaru et al., 2015); the migration crisis spans the globe; and as Thomas Piketty (2014) famously demonstrated, income inequality has risen sharply around the world. The sustainability of the urban environment has also emerged as a defining challenge of our time as urbanisation continues its seemingly inexorable global increase (Seto et al., 2017).

On the other hand, we have the prophets of urban rebirth. Steven Pinker has declared a 'new Enlightenment' (2018), highlighting the diverse and dramatic improvements in health, wealth, peace, the environment, safety, terrorism, and our overall quality of life. Focusing more directly on the urban, the demographers Samuel Preston and Irma Elo describe the 'Anatomy of a municipal triumph: New York City's upsurge in life expectancy' (2014). More generally, Ed Glaeser pitches *The Triumph of the City* (2011), in which city dwellers everywhere are happier, healthier, greener, and smarter than

ever. From Glaeser's perspective, income inequality in cities is misread; the poor flock to them precisely because of greater opportunities. Patrick Sharkey advocates a more guarded optimism in *Uneasy Peace* (2018), but a positive story emerges nonetheless. Violence has plummeted dramatically since the 1990s, and Sharkey shows that some of the biggest beneficiaries have been low-income and minority residents of American cities. Mortality rates have decreased most dramatically for black men, for example, with most of the cause traced to declines in violence. Sharkey also argues that while gentrification is widely criticised, it has brought unrecognised benefits to the poor in many cities.

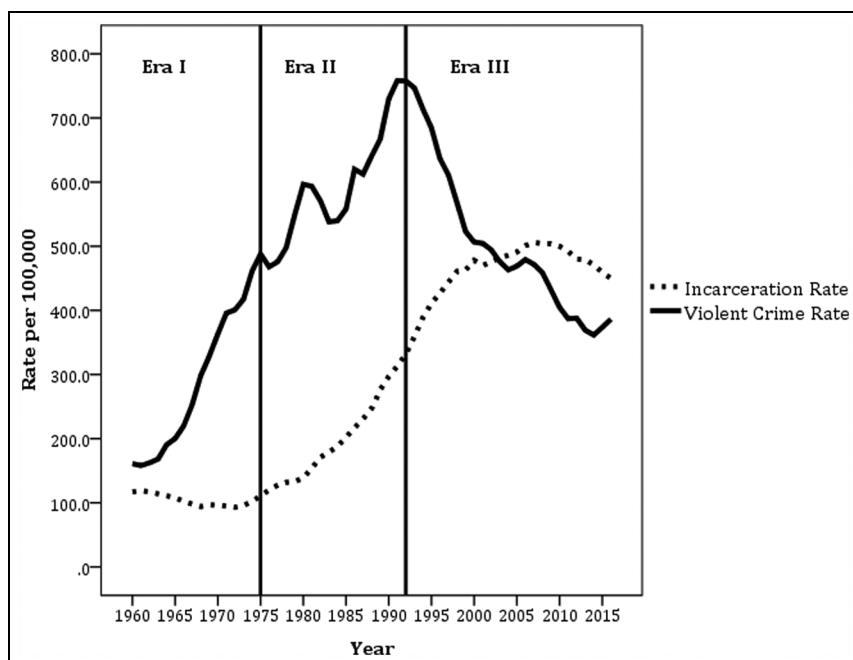
There is truth in both of these positions, and therein lies the real paradox of urban inequality. If we set aside author hyperbole on both sides, along with the tendency to conflate moral evaluation with analysis (e.g. the assumption that 'bad' things such as inequality inevitably cause bad outcomes), it is undeniable that cities are simultaneously better and worse off today than they were at the height of the urban crisis in the 1970s and 1980s that Wilson ([1987] 2012) wrote about. The most dramatic example of this is what I have labelled the three eras of crime and criminalisation in the last half century. Figure 1 shows that violence and incarceration rates began at similar levels in Era I, but the dramatic upswing in violence in the 1960s and early 1970s, with no discernible policy response involving the prison system, was a defining turning point in cities. If anything, incarceration declined slightly, with lower levels in 1975 than 1960. It is notable that The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, which painted a pessimistic picture of violence, criminal justice

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**Figure 1.** Three Eras of crime and criminalisation in the USA in the last half-century.

Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics; Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics; Uniform Crime Reporting System (1960–2016). Incarceration Rate: sentenced prisoners under state or federal correctional jurisdiction per 100,000 residents. Violent Crime Rate: murder/nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault per 100,000 residents.

inequities, and the future of cities, released its widely read report near the beginning of this era, in 1968 – well before rates of interpersonal violence hit their peak, and while incarceration was historically stable and relatively low.<sup>1</sup>

In Era 2, violence continued its steep rise, but incarceration rose dramatically as well, almost in tandem. By the time *The Truly Disadvantaged* was published in the late 1980s, both social dislocations were in full swing and wreaking damage, especially in poor, minority neighbourhoods in America's inner cities. Violence was recognised at the time as a crisis in the black community and demands for relief were prominent, but the response of the state was one-sided in its ratcheting up of aggressive crime control (i.e. 'law and order'), with incarceration the most

prominent tactic (Forman, 2017; Fortner, 2015).

Suddenly, starting in the 1990s, violence dropped dramatically, paving the way for the resurgence of cities, and as Sharkey (2018: 66–71) demonstrates, important gains in the life expectancy of African Americans. In Era 3, we thus observe the disconfirmation of key predictions of the report issued by the Kerner Commission in 1968, which warned about escalating urban violence and the continuing decline of cities. We can also see disconfirmation of the idea that major improvements in life chances are necessarily tied to improvements in economic or political institutional arrangements. Indeed, income inequality increased over the same period, while 'neoliberalism' escalated and the Great Recession took its toll.

No one predicted the future well at the time, however; in this, the Kerner Commission was in good company, as most forecasts were in contrast with actual events. Immigration boomed from around the world, transforming the American urban landscape, and cities became the engine of innovation and growth while violence plummeted (MacDonald and Sampson, 2012; Vitiello and Sugrue, 2017). Despite public perceptions, the current homicide rate in the USA is now at 1950s levels, marking an extraordinary turnaround from previous eras. New York City, a poster child for urban apocalypse in the 1970s and early 1980s, is now perhaps the safest large city in the world, and certainly one of its most thriving.<sup>2</sup> Nationally, the poor today have the same risk of victimisation by violence as the rich did in the early 1990s (Sharkey, 2018: 112), a statistic that encapsulates the crime revolution that we have witnessed. Note, too, that beginning about 2010, incarceration began a decline from its historic peak (see Figure 1), a trend that continues to the present day. Criminal justice reform may finally be on the horizon.

An optimistic assessment of Era 3 is tempered, however, by the fact that America still leads the modern world in incarceration and imprisons many more residents than it did at the height of the violence epidemic. Although incarceration is declining and once again converging with the violent crime rate, the consequences of the sheer magnitude of this criminalisation will be felt for decades. Police killings have also risen, with a disproportionate toll inflicted on African Americans; distrust in criminal justice institutions has increased; and the fear of crime and terrorism remains high (Bannister and Flint, 2017). More generally, racial disparities in economic mobility are stubbornly persistent; income segregation has deepened the neighbourhood divide in cities across the

country; and politically, polarisation is at a modern high.

### *Argument and plan of the paper*

These paradoxes motivate a question: are we confronting a new urban opportunity or a new urban crisis? Cities have always been characterised by a Dickensian best of times/worst of times paradox, but many of the recent transformations are historically unique. Our job as analysts is to confront these important countervailing trends and offer plausible theoretical accounts to questions of both stability and change. I propose to tackle this urban challenge, albeit in a purposively restricted way. It is impossible, nay foolhardy, to try to take on structural trends in all urban phenomena, at multiple geographic scales, and in cities across the world in a serious way within the confines of one article.

To gain traction, I zoom in on stability and change in the contemporary American metropolis from the theoretical perspective of neighbourhood effects, with a focus on racial inequality at several levels of urban organisation. I pay special attention to the role of crime and criminalisation, both in terms of explaining urban inequality and in evaluating contemporary policy responses. A focus on violence and criminal justice is fitting because 2018 is the 50th anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report; 2018 is also the 50th anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, Jr, who fought brilliantly against the racial inequalities that characterised urban America and that were a focal point of the civil unrest. Although certainly not as eloquent as Dr King's speeches, the Kerner Commission's long and detailed report got many things right and was a prescient document – a historical statement of urgency and power that captured the times.

My core argument is that neighbourhood structures are a persistent feature of urban systems that exert causal effects on a wide variety of everyday life, that neighbourhoods mediate and are mediated by both macro structures (e.g. political, economic, legal) and micro processes (e.g. perception and choice), and that without effective policy intervention, neighbourhoods will perpetuate structural inequality. Intersecting all this is what Myrdal (1944) called the American Dilemma: racism.

I begin my argument by briefly laying out a general theoretical account that draws on *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Sampson, 2012). Although I touch on key empirical patterns that bear on the current paper's arguments, my main emphasis is on research since the publication of that book. I organise this body of research around three themes: (1) neighbourhood inequality as an important driver and mediator of urban transformation; (2) racial disparities across the life course in terms of compounded deprivation, 'poisoned development', and intergenerational mobility; and (3) how everyday spatial mobility beyond the local neighbourhood produces a largely unrecognised form of social isolation and higher-order segregation by race and class. The research in each of these areas is connected theoretically and, taken together, supports the larger thesis of the paper. Although my analysis and empirical materials are based mainly on the largest US cities, I believe there are general implications for comparative research.

In the conclusion, I return to *The Kerner Report* and urban social policy. In the original report, the President's Commission identified two primary pathways of intervention to counteract the status quo of racial inequality as it stood 50 years ago after riots and civil unrest had divided the country. In their words, the options were:

- Ghetto Enrichment
- Encourage Integration.

The Commission insistently argued that both strategies were needed – that directing policy choices to support just one was not enough to overcome the multiple inertial forces reinforcing racial inequality. They therefore advocated for a combination of enrichment (what today we would call 'place-based' policy) with integration-based policies (which today we would call a 'person-based' approach), such as the popular housing-voucher policy to move poor minority residents into higher-income and white neighbourhoods. The policy framing of the original report has surprising relevance today, and I thus come full circle back to the Kerner Commission's urban question: person, place, or both? I derive policy implications from my theoretical argument, and conclude with a challenge to the dominant perspectives on urban racial inequality from the perspective of the place- versus person-based debate.

## The social order of the city

Based on research around the world, the archeologist Michael Smith argues that the 'spatial division of cities in districts or neighborhoods is one of the few universals of urban life from the earliest cities to the present' (Smith, 2010: 1). In this view, neighbourhood is a fundamental organising dimension of urban life, with neighbourhood differences persisting across historical eras despite the transformation of specific boundaries, political regimes, and the physical layout of cities (Sampson, 2012: 362). The consistency of spatial differentiation from ancient cities to the present is a powerful signal that points to the general and enduring process of neighbourhood effects, hence its theoretical centrality for the study

of urban stratification and multiple aspects of wellbeing. I took this approach in *Great American City*, arguing that: 'While the 21st century city has been declared spatially liberated, it remains place-based in much of its character' (Sampson, 2012: 31). I thus rejected intellectual moves toward placelessness and argued that neighbourhoods are not merely the settings in which individuals make independent personal decisions, and that neighbourhoods are not only determined by external forces.<sup>3</sup>

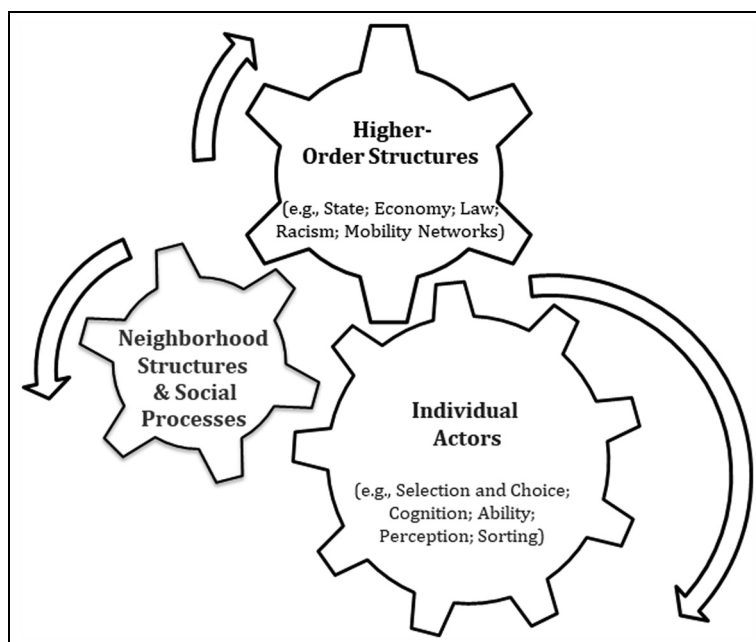
None of this is to say that macro structures, such as globalisation, capitalist accumulation, or politics, are unimportant, any more than are individuals. Nor is it to say that the 'Chicago School' of urban sociology, or Chicago, the site of my research in the book, is automatically representative of urban processes everywhere.<sup>4</sup> Comparative research is essential. I simply argue that neighbourhood contexts are important determinants of the quantity and quality of human behaviour in their own right, and that they play an important role in mediating both macro and micro processes. I also argue that Chicago is similarly important in its own right, and that its lessons, at least by hypothesis, extend well beyond its borders (see also Ren, 2018). Making good on this argument, the research I discuss in this paper includes Chicago along with other cities around the USA, including a national sample of neighbourhoods, generating falsifiable implications that can be assessed internationally.<sup>5</sup>

I conceptualise neighbourhood effects generally, expanding traditional definitions to examine multiple units of analysis, outcomes, and timescales. In this view, neighbourhood effects command a broad scope, ranging from individual cognition to the higher-order social structure of the city. Neighbourhood stratification across time and multiple levels of social ecology includes poverty, affluence, employment, family structure, violence, and criminalisation,

among other forms of inequality. The theoretical concepts I have examined to explain processes underlying neighbourhood effects, and to which I will return, include collective efficacy, organisational density, the looking-glass neighbourhood, and networks of neighbourhood mobility and information flows that generate city-wide interlocking structures.<sup>6</sup> Racial segregation is a major part of the neighbourhood effects story in the USA. The spatial isolation of African Americans produces exposure to concentrated, cumulative, and compounded disadvantage, constituting a powerful form of racial disparity.

Summarised at a broad level, then, three interconnected themes characterise the enduring neighbourhood effect and the social order of the city: (1) *Neighborhood concentration* (the spatial foundation of inequality) that is manifested (2) *Across diverse phenomena* (compounded adversity) and that is characterised by (3) *Persistence despite change* (enduring inequality). Before proceeding further, I wish to briefly acknowledge criticisms of neighbourhood effects research that bear on each of these themes.

The first and probably most vocal concern in the literature is that neighbourhood effects merely reflect individual differences, which I think of as the 'bottom-up' critique. Here, selection bias is the threat and causality is questioned. I have addressed this concern in detail elsewhere, as have many others (see the discussion in Sampson, 2012: chapter 12).<sup>7</sup> The concern is valid, but selection or 'sorting' is itself a form of neighbourhood effect, and numerous studies addressing selection bias have identified credible evidence of the causal effects of concentrated disadvantage on a number of individual outcomes, especially with respect to longer-term or developmental neighbourhood influences.<sup>8</sup> There is also experimental evidence of long-term neighbourhood effects on adult income attainment, health, and other important outcomes.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2.** Integrating 'top down' and 'bottom-up': An analytical conception of neighbourhood effects.

A second concern I alluded to earlier is what I call the 'top-down' critique, namely that neighbourhood effects are determined by larger-scale political, institutional, and economic forces. One might add structural racism and the role of law in fostering racial segregation (Massey and Denton, 1993; Rothstein, 2017). Tom Slater (2013), for example, has marshalled a critique of the neighbourhood effects research programme drawing on the research of Marxist scholars such as David Harvey (1973) and Neil Smith (1996). I actually agree with much of what Slater says about the flaws of policies derived from neighbourhood research, to which I return at the end of the paper. But like the crime decline, the argument that neighbourhood effects are purely a function of class or the capitalist economy does not survive the evidence, in my view.

Accordingly, the goal of an appropriate analytical strategy should be to integrate the micro, meso (neighbourhood), and macro levels. In the spirit of Elster's (1989) 'cogs and wheels', but without rational choice underpinnings or deterministic assumptions, a general analytic schema of the approach derived from *Great American City* that guides my thinking is shown in Figure 2. As depicted, higher-order structures, neighbourhoods, and the micro foundations of action are causally interactive (see also Sampson, 2012: 63, 377–388). This paper is aimed at elaborating the middle range of neighbourhood structures and processes that mediate and are mediated by individual and societal forces, with a focus on social change in the American metropolis and the various forms of racial inequality that penetrate each level.

## Neighbourhood contours of urban change

I turn now to a more explicit focus on stability and change in basic patterns of neighbourhood inequality in American society over recent decades. The persistence of neighbourhood inequality might be considered surprising in light of the massive social transformations that have reshaped cities over the last 50 years. After all, we no longer live in the 1967 world described by the Kerner Commission – many things have dramatically changed, often for the good. Yet it must be said that in fundamental respects one of *The Kerner Report's* conclusions could be issued today: 'Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans' (The National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders, 1968: 2). We might alter the language ex post, but racially concentrated disadvantage defines much of urban, and now also suburban, America 50 years hence.

Poor child health, for example, is strongly concentrated spatially and is connected to both poverty and exposure to neighbourhood violence (Sampson, 2012: 14). The connection of child wellbeing to neighbourhood violence has been documented by a wide body of other research, much of it pointing to the causal effect of violence on child development (Sharkey and Sampson, 2015). The fact that both violence and poor child health are concentrated disproportionately in poor African American neighbourhoods reinforces the link between racial inequality and the wellbeing of children growing up. Moreover, the epicentre of mass incarceration over the past several decades was in poor African American communities, and in Chicago, there has been relative stability for decades in this spatial imprint despite changing levels of incarceration (Sampson, 2012: 114).

Income inequality by race is similarly sticky by neighbourhood. The legacies of inequality in Chicago stretch back at least half a century. If we consider the intense pockets of racial segregation in the 1960s, the era of *The Kerner Report*, and especially the poor black neighbourhoods on the south and west sides that Martin Luther King Jr was advocating for in his marches, it is there that we find poverty increased the most in subsequent decades (Sampson, 2012: 116), and where the macro social changes induced by the Great Recession of 2007–2008 hit the hardest in the form of home foreclosures.

## Neighbourhood income mobility and gentrification

In my more recent work, I have probed two aspects of neighbourhood change in greater detail – income mobility and gentrification – moving well beyond Chicago. In a 2016 paper, I examined transition matrices for the income mobility of all neighbourhoods in the USA (over 50,000) and for neighbourhoods in both Chicago and Los Angeles, often thought to be radically different in urban form. I showed that from 2000 to 2010, over 75% of low-income neighbourhoods at the beginning of the decade remained so at the end. For the rich, there was virtually no change in the probability that affluent neighbourhoods retained their status (an approximately 80% retention rate). Hence there is little upward or downward neighbourhood mobility through time, despite widespread reports of gentrification in recent decades (Sampson, 2016: 267; Sharkey, 2013). Moreover, if anything, neighbourhood inequality is greater in Los Angeles than in Chicago, especially at the top of the income distribution (Sampson et al., 2017). For example, while 82% of Chicago neighbourhoods in the top income quintile remained in place between 2000 and 2010, in Los Angeles the persistence rate



reached 87% among neighbourhoods in the highest income quintile. Neighbourhood inequality in Los Angeles thus appears more rigid in comparison with Chicago and with the USA as a whole, a pattern that is also seen when comparing pre- and post-Great Recession values of the concentration of income extremes among neighbourhoods (Sampson, 2016: 272).

The relative lack of income mobility at the neighbourhood level across the USA challenges the narrative of rampant gentrification (see also Sharkey, 2018). That said, some neighbourhoods obviously do turn over and there is variability in the pace of gentrification. It might not be a nationwide phenomenon, but cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles are indeed in the midst of change, especially in recent years. Still, there is evidence that gentrification is systematically structured by neighbourhood racial inequality.

In a study published in 2014, Jackie Hwang and I developed a conceptual framework on racial inequality and gentrification, introducing a method of systematic social observation using Google Street View to detect visible cues of neighbourhood change (Hwang and Sampson, 2014). We argued that a durable racial hierarchy governs residential selection and, in turn, gentrifying neighbourhoods. Integrating a number of different data sources with the Google measures, including direct measures of state capital investment (e.g. the dollar amount of government investment by type of project in each neighbourhood), we showed that the pace of gentrification in Chicago was negatively associated with the concentration of blacks and Hispanics in neighbourhoods that either showed signs of gentrification or were adjacent and still disinvested in earlier years. Racial composition had a threshold effect, however, attenuating gentrification only when the share of blacks in a neighbourhood was

greater than 40%; apparently, there is a limit to stated preference for diversity among gentrifiers.

Consistent with the theory of neighbourhood stigma laid out in *Great American City*, we also found that collective *perceptions* of disorder, which are higher in poor minority neighbourhoods, deter gentrification, while *observed* disorder does not. These results do not mean that concrete cues are a figment of the imagination. Neighbourhoods with high concentrations of minority and poor residents have long been plagued by structurally induced problems of crime and physical disinvestment. But perceptions and imputed meanings of disorder take on a new life and cohere into a cumulative texture when reinforced by social interactions, practices, and collective reputations. In particular, inter-subjectively shared perceptions – rather than simply visible (or ‘objective’) cues – form a meaningful social property of the environment that influences neighbourhood-level outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, perceptions of disorder by *outsiders* who do not live in the neighbourhood – such as organisational leaders, schoolteachers, and the police – correlated highly with perceptions of the residents themselves, suggesting a convergence of reputation by insiders and outsiders (Sampson, 2012: 137). This is the essence of what I hypothesise as the ‘neighbourhood looking-glass’, and more broadly, what we might think of as cognitive or perceptual inequality, whereby social interpretations and reactions to signs of disorder in stigmatised areas are a distinct factor in neighbourhood sorting and labelling by outsiders, in this case shaping gentrification proclivities. Neighbourhood processes are thus shaping the evolution of gentrification, helping to explain the reproduction of neighbourhood racial inequality amid urban transformation. I now turn to how neighbourhood processes help explain another macro-level trend, in this case the unexpected drop in crime.

### *Explaining the great crime decline*

My colleagues and I have previously theorised collective efficacy as a process whereby informal social controls and shared expectations for taking action by residents and organisations play a role in crime control (Sampson et al., 1997). Seemingly banal acts such as the collective supervision of children and adult mentorship add up to make a difference. I have also shown that the density of nonprofit organisations in a neighbourhood is directly related to its level of collective efficacy and civic engagement (2012: 161, chapter 8). As Sharkey and colleagues (2017) argue, however, the theoretical and empirical literature on the great American crime decline has neglected the tradition of research in criminology and urban sociology that considers how violence is regulated through informal sources of social control arising from residents and organisations internal to communities. The dominant tendency is to assume that crime-related changes stem from criminal justice policies such as ‘broken windows’ policing (Zimring, 2013) or incarceration (Levitt, 2004). No doubt they do, in part, but the collective efficacy of the community in fighting back against crime is a hypothesised cause of future changes in crime that has been overlooked. In this case, the meso level of the neighbourhood is again theoretically implicated in macro-level change.

Sharkey et al. (2017) test this idea by focusing on the role that local nonprofit organisations played in the national decline of violence from the 1990s to the 2010s. Using longitudinal data and an instrumental variable strategy to account for the endogeneity of nonprofit formation, they find a negative causal effect on violent crime of nonprofits whose focus is on reducing violence and building stronger communities. Drawing on a panel of 264 cities spanning more than 20 years, Sharkey et al. specifically estimate that every ten additional

organisations focusing on crime and community life in a city with 100,000 residents leads to a 9% reduction in the murder rate, a 6% reduction in the violent crime rate, and a 4% reduction in the property crime rate. That is an impressive accounting that challenges the conventional crime drop wisdom.

The larger message is that the national decline in violence is in part a result of neighbourhood collective efficacy and the organising of both residents and nonprofits, which in turn has had important effects on the quality of life in the American city. Considering that violence itself generates urban inequality through multiple channels, the effect of organisational and citizen efficacy on the crime decline has improved the lives of millions of children and is one of the major success stories of the past several decades. As Sharkey (2018) has also argued, African Americans may have benefited the most from the decline in violence, yielding significant improvements in life expectancy. This finding poses further questions: did the racial gap in violence change as well? Did the causes of violence change?

### *Race and violence after the crime decline*

Counterbalanced against the undeniable gains afforded by crime reduction is a persistent relative gap in neighbourhood rates of violence by racial composition. In 1995, William Julius Wilson and I published ‘Toward a theory of race, crime, and urban inequality’ (Sampson and Wilson, 1995), where we argued that racial disparities in violent crime rates were attributable in large part to the persistent structural disadvantages disproportionately concentrated in African American communities. We also argued that concentrated disadvantage predicted crime similarly across racial groups. In a recent paper for the *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, we

reassessed and updated our theory in light of the evidence that has accumulated since 1995 (Sampson et al., 2018). Based on an extensive review of research, the sources of violent crime continue to be, as we put it in 1995 (p. 41), ‘remarkably invariant across race and rooted instead in the structural differences among communities, cities, and states in economic and family organization’. More specifically, despite the large-scale declines in violence for all race/ethnic groups along with other transformations of the American city, concentrated disadvantage remains a strong predictor of violent crime and accounts for a substantial portion of racial disparities (see also Krivo and Peterson, 2000; Light and Ulmer, 2016). Although separate analyses by race are hampered by the lack of overlap in the neighbourhood conditions to which blacks and whites are exposed, the predictive power of concentrated disadvantage on violence is similar where comparable, predicting violence within each racial group.

In short, there is no systematic or strong evidence that the great American crime decline has resulted in a fundamental change in the neighbourhood-level factors explaining crime rates for blacks compared with whites – or, for that matter, Latinos. Yet while all groups are now exposed to considerably less violence than in the 1990s, racial disparities in neighbourhood violence, even if somewhat narrowed (Sharkey, 2018), remain large and persistent. As Sampson et al. (2018) argue, race is not a direct cause of violence, but is rather a marker for the cluster of social and material disadvantages that both follow from and constitute racial status in America. Theoretical concepts such as cynicism toward the police and the institution of law (what I have termed ‘legal cynicism’), social isolation, collectively perceived disorder, and the attenuation of collective efficacy have been hypothesised as intervening neighbourhood mechanisms that explain

the effects of racial disadvantage and the legacies of racism, but this research agenda remains in its early phases.<sup>11</sup> The criminal justice system (e.g. policing strategies, mass incarceration) is another understudied institutional mechanism that potentially explains the racial gap in crime and thus deserves further inquiry.

## Racial disparities over the life course

I have focused to this point on stability and change at the macrosocial and neighbourhood levels of analysis. I now extend my argument by examining longitudinal studies of individuals over time that capture the dynamics of life chances as they relate to neighbourhood context, further probing the nature of racial disparities. The life course perspective offers a distinct advantage by foregrounding how inequalities evolve both within and across generations. I specifically consider three forms of racialised disadvantage over time – *compounded deprivation*, *poisoned development* from exposure to toxic environments, and *lack of intergenerational upward mobility*. By taking a simultaneous life course and contextual perspective, I show how the persistence of racial disparities over the lives of individuals is strongly tied to neighbourhood inequality.

### Compounded deprivation

Based on a long-term follow-up on four of the original cohorts from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), Kristin Perkins and I examined racial disparities in acute, compounded, and persistent deprivation over time (Perkins and Sampson, 2015). This study is based on a longitudinal analysis of a representative sample of the three largest race/ethnic groups in Chicago and American society at large – whites, African

Americans, and Latino Americans – that began in 1995. A birth cohort and three older cohorts (9, 12, and 15) were followed over an 18-year period.<sup>12</sup> Our goal was to explore simultaneous exposure to individual and neighbourhood poverty during the transition to young adulthood of the 9- to 15-year-olds, who by the last follow-up were in their mid-20s to early 30s.

We found that blacks were anywhere from 10 to 16 times more likely than whites or Latinos to experience compounded poverty (defined as having an individual income in the bottom fifth *and* living in a neighbourhood with greater than 30% poverty) during adolescence and the transition to young adulthood. Notably, this large disparity persisted despite controlling for the individual differences in cognitive capacity (based on standard ‘IQ’ tests) and noncognitive skills (e.g. self-control) emphasised by economists and psychologists in human capital attainment (Heckman et al., 2014), along with controlling for baseline differences in poverty and family structure.

Before the Great Recession, the probability of experiencing compounded poverty for blacks had been converging toward that of whites and Hispanics, but by the end of the follow-up period, the probability of compounded poverty for blacks was over 16 times higher than whites and more discrepant than at baseline during adolescence. More specifically, over 16% of blacks were both poor and living in concentrated poverty neighbourhoods. Compounded poverty over time for both whites and Hispanics, meanwhile, hovered just above zero and under 1% no matter the historical era. We also found a substantial racial gap in cumulative exposure to social-organisational deprivation (for example, low collective efficacy) at each point in the life course, again after adjusting for individual and family-level differences.

These results provide evidence of the deep connection between race and compounded disadvantage during the transition to adulthood, especially in the aftermath of the Great Recession.<sup>13</sup> Importantly, large and persistent racial disparities in both material and social-organisational forms of compounded deprivation cannot be explained by individual or family characteristics. The inequality is contextual in nature.

### *Poisoned development: When the biological is social*

Another disparity commonly overlooked by urban scholars of neighbourhood effects is the physical environment, especially in the form of exposure to literal toxins. Alix Winter and I have assessed the racial ecology of lead exposure as a form of environmental inequity, one with both historical and contemporary significance, that has negative, long-term effects on child development (Sampson and Winter, 2016). Drawing on comprehensive data from over 1 million blood tests administered to Chicago children from 1995 to 2013 and matched to over 2300 geographic block groups, we found that black and Hispanic neighbourhoods exhibited extraordinarily high rates of lead toxicity compared with white neighbourhoods, in some cases with prevalence rates topping 90% of the child population. The racial ecology of what we called ‘toxic inequality’ is partially attributable to socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and education, and to housing-related factors, such as unit age, vacancy, and dilapidation. However, controlling for these factors, neighbourhood lead poisoning remains closely linked to racial and ethnic segregation. Our theoretical framework and results thus pointed to lead toxicity as an environmental pathway through which racial segregation has contributed to the legacy of black disadvantage

in the USA. More specifically, we posited that lead toxicity is a pathway through which racial inequality literally gets into the body and transmits social disadvantage over the life course.

In papers published in the *American Journal of Public Health* and *Criminology* in 2017 and 2018, we took a further step by capitalising on the follow-up of more than 200 infants from the birth cohort of PHDCN matched to their blood lead levels from around age 3. Using multiple strategies, we found a link between early childhood lead exposure and both adolescent health (including obesity, anxiety/depression, and impulsivity) and delinquency. The results underscore lead exposure as a trigger for poisoned development in the early life course (Sampson and Winter, 2018; Winter and Sampson, 2017).

In the *Annual Review of Sociology*, Chris Muller, Alix Winter, and I summarise the contemporary evidence and present a conceptual model of environmental inequality over the life course to guide an agenda for future research (Muller et al., 2018). Lead exposure is an important subject for urban studies because it is socially stratified at both local and global scales and has important consequences for future stratification via pathways of child, adolescent, and adult development, which in turn depend on children's social environments. Put differently, environmental toxicity is both structurally caused and has structural consequences mediated by life course development (see Muller et al., 2018: figure 1), consistent with the argument of this paper.

In addition to racial segregation, poverty, and social organisation, a fundamental cause of lead exposure and other environmental toxins is a weak regulatory environment that favours the interests and profits of business over the health of the public. We conclude with a call for deeper exchange among urban

scholars, environmental scientists, and public health officials, and for more collaboration between scholars and local communities in the pursuit of independent science for the common good. There is some urgency in this call, given that high levels of lead exist in thousands of cities in the USA (Pell and Schneyer, 2016) and in developed and developing countries around the world (Tong et al., 2000).

### *Intergenerational mobility*

Racial disparities in compounded deprivation and lead poisoning are primarily a story of life course stratification within generations. But upward economic mobility over multiple generations provides perhaps the most direct test of how far America in 2018 has progressed from the America in which Martin Luther King, Jr, fought for equality and the Kerner Commission advocated for structural changes. After all, one of the basic American creeds is equality of opportunity, and in turn the promise of equality of outcomes. Despite vast changes in the last 50 years, including improvements in race relations, education, housing laws, affirmative action and the other transformations I have documented, intergenerational racial inequality in mobility remains stubbornly low.

In a pathbreaking study of intergenerational mobility using de-identified tax return data covering 20 million children and their parents from the mid-1990s to the present, Raj Chetty and colleagues show how geography and race shape contemporary opportunity in the USA (Chetty et al., 2014a, 2018). The differences across race are stark: black children born to parents in the bottom household income quintile have a 2.5% chance of rising to the top quintile of household income, compared with 10.6% for whites. Growing up in a high-income family

provides no insulation from these disparities. American Indian and black children also have much higher rates of downward mobility than other groups.

From my perspective, what is most notable about this study is the neighbourhood effect on long-term outcomes and the sharp racial differential in exposure to good neighbourhood environments. The Chetty data make clear that neither individual characteristics such as ability, nor family characteristics such as income, nor neighbourhood characteristics such as concentrated poverty fully close the racial gap. In fact, in 99% of neighbourhoods in America, the researchers find a black–white gap in intergenerational mobility. At the same time, they find strong evidence that neighbourhoods matter. First, there is variability across counties and neighbourhoods, with percentage of poverty, single-parent families, and racial bias predicting lower mobility. Second, neighbourhoods have causal effects on long-term outcomes:

Black men who move to better areas – such as those with low poverty rates, low racial bias, and higher father presence – earlier in their childhood have higher incomes and lower rates of incarceration as adults. These findings show that environmental conditions during childhood have *causal* effects on racial disparities, demonstrating that the black–white income gap is not immutable. The challenge is that very few black children currently grow up in environments that foster upward mobility. Fewer than 5 percent of black children currently grow up in areas with a poverty rate below 10 percent and more than half of black fathers present. In contrast, 63 percent of white children grow up in areas with analogous conditions. (Chetty et al., 2018)

Once again, therefore, the enduring neighbourhood effect is seen, this time based on 20 million children across the entire USA, and by examining economic mobility across

generations. Similar to our Chicago data (Perkins and Sampson, 2015), moreover, individual differences in ability and noncognitive skills cannot explain this finding, and neither can family characteristics. Blacks are differentially exposed to what I would interpret as materially deprived and toxic neighbourhood environments, with long-term consequences for wellbeing.<sup>14</sup> This ‘steady state’ of racial disparities is eye-opening in light of 50 years of extensive gains in civil rights and declines in racial segregation.

### Urban mobility and higher-order inequality

As a final consideration, I turn in this section of the paper to a line of inquiry that probes the continuing influence of spatial inequality, but this time moving beyond the local neighbourhood, and like Chetty et al., well beyond Chicago. A larger or ‘higher-order’ perspective is motivated by the fact that the neighbourhood is not an isolated entity: nonspatial or cross-neighbourhood networks are distinct from internal neighbourhood processes. Although there are other important structural characteristics that take on a supra-neighbourhood role (Figure 2), cross-cutting neighbourhood ties define a conceptually independent feature of urban social structure relevant to understanding inequality.

In *Great American City*, I advanced this theoretical view by examining how individual-level actions created interlocking structures in the city of Chicago through inter-neighbourhood residential mobility and ties among organisational leaders. The idea was that moving between neighbourhoods creates a tie, as does one leader consulting with another leader in a different community to address a problem, even one local in nature. A city can then be further defined by the extent to which its

neighbourhoods are structurally tied together. In this sense, the individual, neighbourhood, and city/macro levels are united analytically through neighbourhood networks (Sampson, 2012: 312–313, 323; figure 2). A growing literature is examining this kind of ‘neighbourhood network’ logic (e.g. Browning et al., 2017; Graif et al., 2017; Papachristos and Bastomski, 2018).

Beyond the direct role of spatial distance, I found that in Chicago, the greater the social similarity between two communities, the higher the likelihood that they were connected through residential exchange networks. This relational pattern at the neighbourhood level was induced by sociodemographic characteristics, especially dyadic similarity in racial composition and median income. Similar processes governed organisational ties across communities. Structural homophily of this kind creates a chainlike movement of people and information that reinforces neighbourhood inequality. Although not by conscious design, the city can thus be said to possess an enduring higher-order structure of stratification and accompanying processes of social organisation that are quite persistent despite individual fluidity and neighbourhood compositional change.

### *A new form of social isolation?*

In a research project with Mario Small, I have taken this neighbourhood logic a step further to address the classic thesis of social isolation in urban studies. Living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is widely assumed to undermine life chances because residents are isolated from middle-class or ‘mainstream’ neighbourhoods with greater resources and opportunities (Wilson, [1987] 2012). Yet people may avoid such isolation by spending much of their everyday lives outside their home neighbourhoods (Small, 2004). Common experience and research from travel diaries verify that over the

course of a typical day or week, people leave their neighbourhoods of residence and travel throughout the city, creating different opportunities for contact (Browning and Soller, 2014; Browning et al., 2017). But how much contact is there, and with what types of neighbourhoods? Are residents of poor black neighbourhoods isolated from mainstream neighbourhoods or places of economic and social resources beyond where they live?

Research testing social isolation from this ‘extra local’ or neighbourhood networks perspective is sparse. In a study based on travel accounts from a sample of about 3000 Los Angeles residents, Krivo and colleagues (2013) found that social isolation is experienced by residents of both highly disadvantaged and highly advantaged neighbourhoods because the two groups spend time in largely nonoverlapping parts of the city. They also found that racial segregation exacerbates social isolation. A few other studies have examined mobility across neighbourhoods using commuting data (Graif et al., 2017; Kawabata and Shen, 2007) and geographical differences among social groups using geolocation records from cell phones and social media platforms (Bora et al., 2014; Onnela et al., 2011; Shelton et al., 2015). Although travel diaries and so-called ‘big data’ capture the dynamism of mobility patterns, these studies have been limited in scope and by type of mobility, inhibiting race and class comparisons of isolation across a large number of neighbourhoods or cities.

My colleagues and I advanced this line of inquiry by analysing large-scale social media data to estimate urban travel patterns for large populations, examining the everyday movement of residents throughout the metropolis (Wang et al., 2018). Our goal was to provide a new conceptualisation and test of neighbourhood isolation that improves on static measures from census data on

home neighbourhoods and small-sample studies based on time diaries. To do so, we leveraged fine-grained dynamic data on the everyday movement of residents by applying machine learning techniques to over 650 million geocoded Twitter messages. We estimated the home locations and travel to neighbourhoods throughout a city's entire commuting zone of almost 400,000 residents of America's 50 largest cities over 18 months.<sup>15</sup> This strategy expands the argument in *Great American City* by directly estimating inter-neighbourhood contact based on everyday travel patterns rather than the much rarer act of changing one's home neighbourhood. Although we focused on exposure to non-poor and white neighbourhoods among residents of poor minority neighbourhoods (Sharkey, 2013; Wilson, 2009), our broader goal was to capture exposure patterns across all race and class categories that contribute to societal integration (Blau, 1994; Blau and Schwartz, 1984).

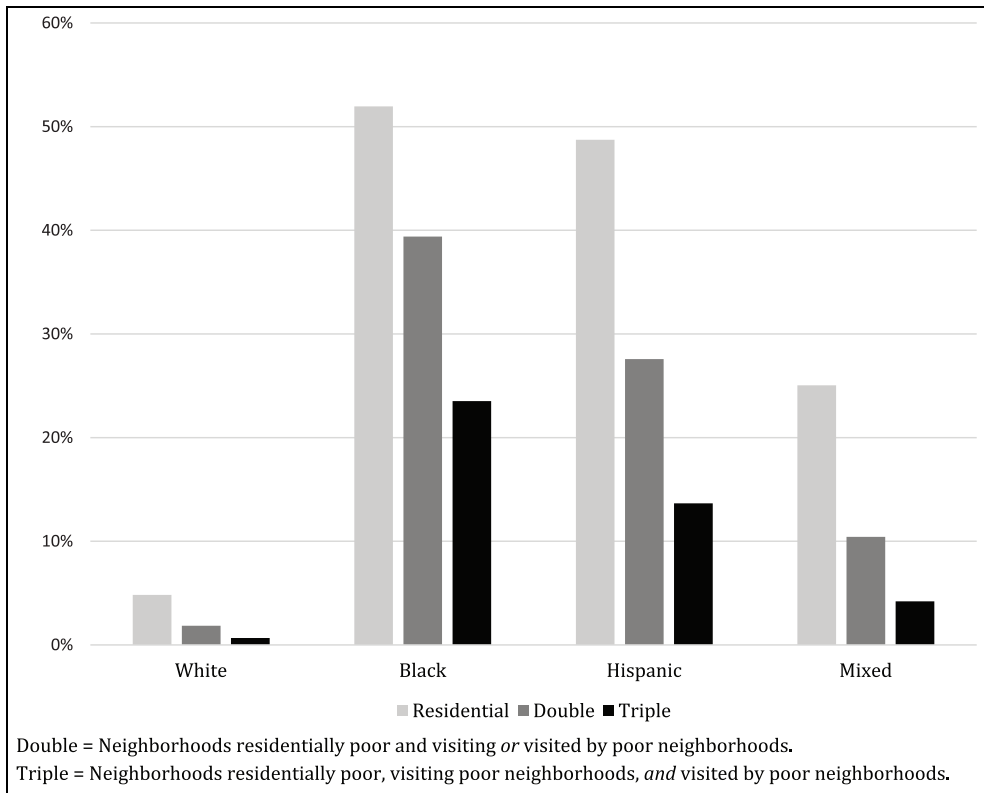
We found surprisingly high consistency across neighbourhoods of different race and income characteristics in the average travel distances (in metres) and the numbers of unique neighbourhoods visited in the metropolitan region. This similarity seems to contradict the logic of Wilson's social isolation thesis ([1987] 2012) while supporting general theories on the regularity of urban dwellers' mobility patterns based on a small set of basic urban principles that operate locally, as argued by Bettencourt (2013) and González et al. (2008). At the same time, however, we uncovered notable differences in the race and class composition of neighbourhoods visited. More specifically, we found that residents of primarily black and Hispanic neighbourhoods – *whether poor or not* – are far less exposed to either non-poor or white middle-class neighbourhoods than residents of primarily white neighbourhoods. For example, the predicted probability that residents of poor black and poor

Hispanic neighbourhoods visit non-poor white neighbourhoods are 0.32 and 0.29, respectively, below the expected baseline of equality defined by the share of available neighbourhoods to visit in the commuting zones of the 50 cities. By contrast, it is only 0.05 below the baseline for residents from poor white neighbourhoods. The fact that poor white neighbourhoods are still isolated from non-poor white neighbourhoods is consistent with growing income inequality and the increasing political polarisation in America between poor or working-class whites and educated whites.

The gaps are even greater between *non-poor* neighbourhoods. The predicted probabilities of residents from non-poor black and non-poor Hispanic neighbourhoods visiting non-poor white neighbourhoods are 0.29 and 0.24 below the baseline. Yet the predicted probability for non-poor white neighbourhoods is 0.14 above chance expectations, which yields differences of 0.43 and 0.38, respectively (Wang et al., 2018: 5, figure 4). Overall, therefore, we find that *race trumps class* in mobility patterns of exposure to non-poor white neighbourhoods that command resources, despite the fact that there are minimal to no differences in distances travelled and the numbers of neighbourhoods visited by race.

Building on this methodology, our research team has also examined compounded neighbourhood deprivation by taking into account urban mobility flows by race and class status (Levy et al., 2018). To do so, we estimate the extent to which visits outside one's home neighbourhood are to disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the metropolitan region, as well as the average frequency of visits to one's home neighbourhood by residents from other disadvantaged neighbourhoods. We use these metrics to introduce a concept we call *double disadvantage*. That is, a neighbourhood is considered doubly disadvantaged if it is





**Figure 3.** Share of residential (single), double, and triple concentrated poverty (30% + poor) based on everyday mobility in America's 50 largest cities, by neighbourhood racial composition ( $N = 37,719$  neighbourhoods).

poor and either visits mostly poor neighbourhoods or disproportionately receives visits from poor neighbourhoods. If a neighbourhood is disadvantaged on all three fronts, it is *triply disadvantaged*. In Levy et al. (2018), we examine a multi-item scale of advantage and disadvantage, focusing on the added value of triple disadvantage in explaining rates of neighbourhood well-being. For present purposes, I focus on differences in exposure by race, calculating the traditional measure of 30% or more residents living in poverty, along with exposure to double and triple poverty, for the 50 largest American cities.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 3 demonstrates the strong pattern of inequality by race in exposure to concentrated poverty, but this time going beyond internal neighbourhood characteristics. On the former, we already know that black neighbourhoods are at higher risk for being in poverty than white neighbourhoods – in the present case, at the block-group level and across the 50 largest American cities – almost 11 times greater. What does this differential by race look like when we account for the higher-order segregation suggested by Sampson (2012), Lichter et al. (2015), Krivo et al. (2013), Wang et al. (2018), and others? When it comes to double disadvantage, the

rate of exposure of black poor neighbourhoods to other poor neighbourhoods is over 21 times higher than the rate for white poor neighbourhoods. For triple disadvantage, where neighbourhoods are poor, visit other poor neighbourhoods, *and* are visited by poor neighbourhoods, the black–white relative risk ratio rises to just over 35. In absolute magnitude, nearly a quarter (24%) of black neighbourhoods are characterised by triple disadvantage compared with less than 1% of white neighbourhoods. Hence, black neighbourhoods are substantially more exposed to compounded poverty than white neighbourhoods when we account for urban mobility flows. Hispanic neighbourhoods fare a little better than black neighbourhoods, followed by mixed neighbourhoods, but the patterns are similar. Large racial differences in social isolation and the exposure to double or triple neighbourhood poverty are notable given recent declines in racial segregation and the increasing diversity of American cities (Firebaugh and Farrell, 2016).

More generally, as Wang et al. argue (2018), a previously unrecognised form of social isolation is occurring, whereby residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods travel well beyond their home residence and yet their levels of relative isolation by race and class persist within the wider metropolis. These findings, based on a population that by definition is technologically connected and likely more mobile than the general population, imply that racial segregation is operating at a higher-order level than typically appreciated or systematically measured by urban scholars. Racial segregation thus manifests itself not only where people live, but also where they travel throughout a city and to whom they are exposed by visits from others (Levy et al., 2018). Put differently, although the USA is becoming increasingly diverse, interactions across race and class groups that ultimately contribute to societal

integration (Blau and Schwartz, 1984) are apparently not taking place. Because segregation reaches well beyond one's home, it is important to consider mobility interactions across neighbourhoods, of other dimensions, such as education. In current work, we are advancing this approach further to develop structural measures of integration based on neighbourhood connectivity at the city level (Phillips et al., 2018).

## Implications

I have built a methodical case from a wide range of studies that documents the continuing significance of neighbourhood inequality in contemporary American society. Paradoxically, this significance persists across multiple domains of life despite transformative changes over the last 50 years. I have argued that neighbourhood effects are an important driver and mediator of these transformations. I have also documented the neighbourhood context of durable racial disparities across the life course in compounded deprivation, poisoned development, and intergenerational mobility. 'Toxic inequality' with intergenerational consequences is especially pronounced and persistent in poor communities of colour. Furthermore, it is not just the local neighbourhood that matters. I have described how higher-order inequality is durable too, so much so that when we consider the social integration of American cities based on everyday mobility, we find that racial and economic segregation 'travel' far and wide across the metropolis, with race trumping class in determining exposure to neighbourhoods of opportunity.

Although a comparative study is beyond the scope of this paper, I believe the theoretical structure I have put forth and the implications of empirical results are ripe for international assessment, with appropriate tailoring to local contexts. After all, evidence of neighbourhood segregation by ethnicity

or skin colour, the concentration of social ills, discrimination against foreigners because of perceived disorder, and rising income inequality across neighbourhoods characterise many cities in Europe and around the globe.<sup>17</sup> The methods my colleagues and I have developed, especially 'ecometrics' for data big and small, also provide a toolkit for comparative neighbourhood and higher-order structural analysis.<sup>18</sup> Extending these theoretical ideas and methods, I propose that a fruitful line of inquiry will pursue how neighbourhoods mediate higher-order economic, political, and global forces, while simultaneously influencing spatial sorting among individuals.

In the meantime, I wish to conclude with a discussion of policy implications, especially regarding persistent racial inequality, a theme that has run throughout the paper and that demands confrontation. Returning to the Kerner Commission Report of 50 years ago, the urban question that remains paramount is: Where do we go from here to address racial inequality in America? As noted at the outset, the Commission identified two primary pathways of intervention to counteract the status quo of inaction: 'Ghetto Enrichment' (place-based) and 'Encourage Integration' (person-based). The 'Third Way' recommended by the Commission was to utilise both pathways to reduce racial inequalities. Although the last 50 years have witnessed considerable successes, due in no small part to legal interventions and government responses spurred by the Civil Rights movement, resistance to change has been stiff. A significant literature has emerged on how legal provisions and fair housing policies have been circumvented, for example, leading to a continued pattern of racial segregation (Hirsch, 1983; Massey and Denton, 1993; Rothstein, 2017; Trounstein, 2018).

Not much has shifted in terms of the logic of government strategies in the decades since

the Commission's report, but the volume of efforts has produced considerable change in public housing in the USA. The contemporary person-based approach to reducing spatial inequality focuses on individual residential mobility – attempting to move individuals out of poor communities and into middle-class or high-opportunity areas. One prominent strategy has been to offer housing vouchers to incentivise residents to move away from areas of concentrated poverty, as occurred in the famous Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment (Briggs et al., 2010). Another variant is to force moves by dismantling publicly subsidised housing projects in concentrated poverty communities and dispersing residents, as occurred in the infamous Robert Taylor Homes or Cabrini Green projects in Chicago (Austen, 2018). Either way, the idea was, and is, to move the poor. A front-page headline in the *New York Times* reporting results on the long-term MTO follow-up and another study on moving across neighbourhoods declared the takeaway: 'Change of address offers a pathway out of poverty' (Leonhardt et al., 2015). A voucher programme in Dallas was more explicit: 'To sharpen the prod, the government has also cut subsidies for those who do not go' (Applebaum, 2015). I have called these 'move out' approaches.<sup>19</sup>

The place-based approach is to intervene at the scale of poor neighbourhoods or communities themselves. Instead of moving poor people away from their homes, the goal is to renew the existing but disinvested and often troubled neighbourhoods in which they live with an infusion of resources and opportunities ('Ghetto Enrichment'). In theory, people can stay in place in their communities, but still 'move up'. The Kerner Commission's vision was obviously never fully realised, but present day examples of this approach include the Harlem Children's Zone and the Promise Neighborhoods initiative of the

former Obama administration (for a discussion and review, see Sharkey, 2013: 137–146; Cisneros and Engdahl, 2009). A related strategy is to establish mixed-income developments in concentrated poverty areas (Chaskin and Joseph, 2015).

A mixed national-level strategy, a variant on the Kerner Commission's 'Third Way' or combined approach, would be a programme that would invest in poor residents who have lived in poor or historically disinvested areas (Sampson, 2016). In this hybrid person – place approach, cash assistance or tax relief could be combined with jobs training or public works job creation. The theory is rooted in the notion that poor individuals who have lived for an extended period in poor neighbourhoods have accumulated a legacy of compounded disadvantage that distinguishes them from poor individuals who have otherwise been surrounded by the resources of better-off neighbourhoods or who have only experienced concentrated poverty briefly. African Americans, more than whites or Latinos, have historically experienced greater exposure to compounded deprivation, and the data show that this trend continues to the present day. By this logic, the beneficiaries would therefore be primarily African Americans, and the policy could be considered a form of reparations for structural racism and institutional disinvestment (Coates, 2014), in this case based at the neighbourhood level. As Sharkey (2013) has argued, we need *durable* investments in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods to match the persistent and long-standing nature of institutional disinvestment that such neighbourhoods have endured over many decades.

My goal here is not to evaluate the empirical evidence on the relative effectiveness of person- versus place-based strategies. Much ink has been spilled on this elsewhere, and it is fair to say that both person- and place-based interventions have come up

short. Voucher programmes such as MTO have shown some positive effects, for example, but the evidence is still uncertain overall; meanwhile, although neighbourhood income-mixing is a favoured policy tool and is the subject of growing scholarly discussion, research is sparse and has produced conflicting results. It is also not clear that scaling up voucher programmes to the national level is feasible – can we afford to move tens of millions of residents? Even if we could, concentrated poverty could well be shifted to other locations if mobility programmes crossed a certain threshold of programme participation (see also Nagin and Sampson, 2018; Sampson, 2012: chapter 11). Neighbourhood-level interventions are no panacea either; there are few rigorously tested success stories, and the costs are high. Many interventions are also single-site or time-constrained, with outcomes only measured locally and in the short term.

Rather than choose between place- and person-based approaches, *The Kerner Report's* 'Third Way' still seems to be the *right* way – we need both types of interventions to effect durable change. Yet even if a combination of interventions existed that satisfied the demands of causal efficacy and that the nation could afford or would actively pursue if cost were not an issue, it is necessary first to have a normative conversation about what kind of communities we aim to build. What do residents want? What is the ethical community? In a society built on institutional racism, do current housing programmes rely on racial stereotypes in the pursuit of integration? In perhaps the biggest paradox of all, we might ask: does American integrationist policy reinforce African American stigma? I believe these are important questions to confront, especially in the USA, where racial animus and claims of white supremacy have erupted in a very public way in recent years. I therefore conclude on a more normative and theoretical

note on the implications of contemporary policies.

### *Does American integrationist policy stigmatise blacks?*

Whether individual vouchers or community-level interventions, it can be argued that many government policies stigmatise African Americans by reinforcing racial stereotypes of poor black neighbourhoods as inherently inferior. Consider that housing voucher programmes typically require predominantly poor African Americans to move to better-off, typically 'whiter' neighbourhoods. On the one hand, this makes common sense given the data on differential neighbourhood conditions by race: What could be wrong with promoting integration and access to better resources given the historical reality? On the other hand, such housing policies send an implicit message about the quality and perhaps even moral character of predominantly black environments. Indeed, the message we often hear is that black neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty are something to avoid or escape, not to rescue or infuse with reinvestment. The MTO philosophy reinforces this by incentivising individual moves away from home neighbourhoods that are black and poor. Other place-based interventions compel movement in different ways, often with an explicit focus on 'destruction'. For instance, Chicago took to blowing up high-rise housing projects in the 1990s, many of which are now out of sight and presumably out of mind for many in the city.

However well-intentioned these policies, the inherent logic prompts a number of questions that require further consideration. For one, public housing is not inevitably bad – it worked rather well in cities such as New York for decades – and not everyone wants to move to the suburbs or to predominantly white neighbourhoods, as some policies

incentivise. For another, when the poor are asked about problems in their communities or whether they want to move, their answers turn on issues such as getting away from violence, drugs, gangs, and poor-performing schools (Sampson, 2016; Wilson and Mast, 2014). This finding suggests that what poor residents want – whether black or white – is what everyone wants, and that living among the truly disadvantaged is seen as a problem by residents only insofar as it means the denial of valued resources, such as safety and quality education (Sampson, 2018). The dilemma we have seen all along is that those valued resources tend to be disproportionately concentrated in white neighbourhoods, and that society has been unwilling to redress that imbalance on a systemic scale.

The result is that the burden is put on a select group of poor minorities, typically those who have won vouchers through lotteries or those living in concentrated high-rise housing projects, to move to areas with better access to resources but which may have implicitly discriminatory structures and lack social integration. For example, MTO recipients have reported that black males have been harassed in destination neighbourhoods by the police or looked on suspiciously by neighbours, especially in the suburbs (Briggs et al., 2010: 107). Although housing vouchers are an undeniable benefit, and freedom of choice to move is a principle worth fighting for, there are also other costs to moving – such as the rupturing of social networks and social support in the neighbourhood one leaves behind (Coleman, 1988). Recovering these ties may be one reason that many voucher movers in the MTO programme eventually moved back to their origin neighbourhoods (Sampson, 2012: 278).

Additionally, when poor neighbourhoods are broken up by the state in place-based interventions, who reclaims them? It appears that in some neighbourhoods, the

newcomers are white and well-to-do, leading to a repurposing of former ghettos in ways that are subversive of the goals of integration. This is arguably a unique form of government-supported gentrification, one on display in neighbourhoods such as Cabrini Green in Chicago that I studied, where the housing project sat close to the prime real estate of the Gold Coast. Although the picture is not yet complete and a mixed-income neighbourhood was the goal, upscale redevelopment, condos, and gentrification are well underway (Austen, 2018). But gentrification is not the only, or even the most likely, outcome. Many sites of public housing demolition in Chicago sit empty or lack reinvestment. The site of the Robert Taylor Homes on Chicago's South Side, once a complex that stretched for blocks and housed 30,000 residents, is now largely a vacant field, far from the bustle of Chicago's Loop and the gentrification lapping at Cabrini Green (Sampson, 2012: 10). It is apparently easiest simply to abandon neighbourhoods and let vulnerable individuals fare on their own, leaving the market to determine the fate of the former ghetto. Ghetto enrichment this is not.

Extending the conversation of Harvey (2008), we can thus ask: does one have a right to one's neighbourhood, even if it is poor and predominantly minority? Here I firmly agree with Slater (2013) and others who have critiqued the hegemony of voucher-type programmes made famous by the Moving to Opportunity experiments. In an earlier critique myself, I referred to the programme as 'Moving to Inequality' (Sampson, 2008). It is worth noting that whites are rarely required to make sacrifices, let alone move, to achieve racial integration. And when they are, opposition is common.<sup>20</sup> It is also interesting to recall that *When Affirmative Action was White*, as Ira Katznelson (2005) put it, federal support in

the USA was essentially a 'no strings' direct transfer to poor whites.

I would further argue that to demand racial integration mainly through the residential actions of black Americans is morally suspect in a society where white supremacy remains virulent and is apparently sanctioned at the very top (Bobo, 2017).<sup>21</sup> *The Kerner Report* confronted the implications of this dilemma directly. In the face of 'implacable white resistance', they noted: 'It is not surprising that some Black-Power advocates are denouncing integration and claiming that, given the hypocrisy and racism that pervade white society, life in a black society is, in fact morally superior' (2016: 403–404). The Commission also asked whether African Americans could achieve equality of opportunity with whites without losing black identity and communities of colour, specifically by creating black communities that 'are just as good – or better – than elsewhere'. The Commission ultimately rejected separatist leanings but was unflinching in its probing. Once again, we seem to have moved the needle very little from 50 years ago, but a few scholars today are asking the tough questions posed in *The Kerner Report*.

No modern-day Black Panther, and, like the Kerner Commission, no fan of 'separate but equal', Mary Pattillo (2018) has nevertheless provocatively argued in 'The problem of integration' that the racialised coding of voucher programmes sends a message that it is blackness itself that needs to be broken up. In pointing out the integration conundrum, she writes:

Promoting integration as the means to improve the lives of Blacks stigmatizes Black people and Black spaces and valorizes Whiteness as both the symbol of opportunity and the measuring stick for equality. In turn, such stigmatization of Blacks and Black spaces is precisely what foils efforts toward integration. After all, why would anyone else

want to live around or interact with a group that is discouraged from being around itself?

Drawing on black scholars as diverse as WEB DuBois, Glenn Loury, and Derrick Bell, she further argues that the solution to racial inequality in concentrated disadvantage

cannot be realized through the co-location of Black and White bodies alone, but must include the real stuff of equality – wages that support a family, income maintenance in the absence of work, schools that compensate for inequalities in family resources, policing that does not always have its finger on the trigger, and parks and music and health care centers and clean air and good food whose distribution is not driven by the stigma of Blackness, of non-Whiteness or of poverty ... until and in pursuit of the day that such stigma is no longer. (Pattillo, 2018)

Can that day be achieved? Certainly, forced segregation should be vigorously counteracted through law and governmental actions, but it is far less clear that housing vouchers or other current place-based policies are optimal for achieving a just and morally desired society, one without racial stigma. In Pattillo's ideal world, segregation is not inherently bad because the link between race, stigma, neighbourhood of residence, and access to resources would be severed, leaving people free to live wherever they choose, sometimes integrated and sometimes not, yet with parity in resources. The hard part is, as she puts it well, the 'real stuff of equality'. Thus far, this hard part has been avoided, and the steady state of racial inequality endures.

Lest I end on a counsel of despair, a dose of optimism in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr, is a tonic for moving forward. After all, he believed in the ultimate power of collective action and what I would call collective efficacy. Many of the gains achieved over the past 50 years were

attributable to the effectiveness of citizen action to confront the injustices that King and many others fighting with him were inspired to resist – not only white supremacy, but also a host of inequalities. Were he alive today, Dr King might point to ongoing successes in areas such as criminal justice reform, Black Lives Matter, reductions in violence (where community organisation has been essential), and community-based activism to halt efforts to roll back environmental regulations (Muller et al., 2018).

To be sure, racism and economic inequality will not disappear anytime soon, and the large-scale governmental infusion of resources is presumably not imminent either. But Dr King would still likely conclude that inequality by design can be *re-designed*. We can infer the same from the Kerner Commission's passionate report and call for action. At the least, inequality can be modulated and disparities by ascribed characteristics of all stripes reduced. Communities of colour should be at the frontier of not only resource infusion but also the power to decide their own fate in a society where choice has long been denied. Would it not be the ultimate irony if equality of outcomes were realised because of the collective efficacy of citizens despite active resistance from the state?

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## Notes

1. The Kerner Commission, as it was commonly known, was chaired by Otto Kerner, Governor of Illinois, and was appointed by President Lyndon Johnson in response to the widespread riots that rocked US cities in 1967. The Kerner Commission's *The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* was published by Bantam Books in 1968, becoming an instant best-seller with over 2 million copies sold. The previous year, President Johnson's other commission, on 'Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice', had released *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society* (1967). Crime was clearly a major concern at the time both among citizens and at the highest levels of government. *The Kerner Report* was recently republished by Princeton University Press along with an introduction by the historian Julian Zelizer (The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 2016).
2. The urban freefall of New York City is well represented in popular culture as well as in the academic literature. My favourite is *Taxi Driver*, directed by Martin Scorsese and featuring Robert De Niro's haunting portrayal of Travis Bickle, an urban avenger of sorts. The original version of *Death Wish*, about vigilantism, and *Serpico*, a fact-based portrayal of police corruption and the landscape of urban crime and disorder in the 1970s, are just a few of the other films capturing the mood of the city at the time. Watching these films today drives home viscerally the magnitude of social change in ways that are not easily captured in the written word. In teaching, my undergraduate students find such depictions of city life circa the 1970s and 1980s almost unbelievable.
3. I conceptualise neighbourhood as a geographical subsection of a larger city or region that has distinctive characteristics (Sampson, 2012: 53–57). Researchers have operationalised neighbourhood characteristics with a wide variety of ecological units, including city blocks, census block groups or tracts, city planning or health districts, political wards, tertiary communities based on street blocks, and locally defined community areas. Census tracts tend to predominate in the USA. Across a wide range of units and characteristics, there is considerable social inequality between neighbourhoods (for a discussion, see Sampson, 2012: 31–34).
4. Critiques of the Chicago School are legion and by now verge on a caricature. For more on the Chicago School versus Los Angeles School versus other schools of thought and the evolution of the idea of neighbourhood effects, see Sampson (2012: chapter 4).
5. For a revealing discussion of the problems and prospects of comparative urbanism and a critique of the binary distinction between theories of the Global North and South, see Storper and Scott (2016). Of particular interest is their observation of the 'provincialisation of knowledge' in postcolonial urban theory. Although taking up these debates is beyond the scope or objectives of this paper, like Storper and Scott, I would not limit the jurisdiction of any theory by fiat.
6. See Sampson (2012: chapter 15) for a theoretical synthesis of these concepts. See also Sampson et al. (1997) on collective efficacy, defined as the union of social cohesion and shared expectations for informal social control.
7. For a review of research on neighbourhood effects, especially on the heterogeneity of effects, see also Sharkey and Faber (2014). An earlier review is provided by Sampson et al. (2002).
8. Using state of the art methods, for example, Wodtke et al. (2011), Wodtke (2013), Wodtke and Parbst (2017), and Sharkey and Elwert (2011) find that living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood has negative effects on high school graduation and cognitive ability, with longer durations of exposure to concentrated disadvantage associated with more negative outcomes. Sampson et al. (2008) also find that growing up in severe disadvantage attenuates the learning of verbal skills, approximately equivalent to losing a year in school, and Sharkey (2010) finds that exposure to neighbourhood violence depresses test scores. Using national-level US data on income mobility, Chetty and colleagues



- (Chetty et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2018) report that the odds of intergenerational income mobility vary sharply by geography (county, commuting zones, and census tract), with strong evidence of causal effects. Moreover, using extensive data from the Netherlands, van Ham and colleagues (2018) explicitly model neighbourhood choice, or selection, and yet continue to find a significant effect of neighbourhood income on individual income. The selection bias critique has thus been thoroughly engaged by researchers studying neighbourhood effects using observational data.
9. A recent study of the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment found that moves to a lower-poverty neighbourhood during childhood are associated with higher adult earnings, and that the magnitude of this effect declines with age, eventually flattening out to no effect among those who were adolescents at the time of moving (Chetty et al., 2016). This pattern suggests that the duration and timing of exposure to concentrated poverty is causally important for later adult outcomes, especially upward economic mobility. Moreover, when researchers compared the MTO voucher study with observational studies obtained from the same city, they found convergent negative effects of concentrated poverty on cognitive skills that were larger for those children who moved out of the most severely disadvantaged environments (Burdick-Will et al., 2011). Children's test scores were found to improve the most when residential changes led to major reductions in exposure to violent crime.
  10. I also showed that flows of residential movement between neighbourhoods were greater the higher the similarity in collectively perceived disorder. By this account, selection is contingent on the coordinated perceptions that in turn play a role in shaping the long-term trajectories and identities of places that make up the social organisation of the city. As the influence of the 'broken windows' thesis expands globally, shared perceptions of disorder will increasingly matter in a variety of contexts for reasons that extend far beyond the presence of physical cues in the environment (Sampson, 2012: chapters 6, 13, pp. 365–367).
  11. See Kirk and Papachristos (2011) and Kirk and Matsuda (2011) for studies of legal cynicism, violence, and the police.
  12. We interviewed over 1000 respondents in 2012 and 2013 that we located from the last wave of the study in 2002, following individuals no matter where they moved in the USA.
  13. Among older adults, see Bruce Western's (2018) in-depth examination of the connection of race with multiple correlated adversities in the transition from prison back to the community.
  14. Using the Chetty et al. data, Sharkey and Torratts-Espinosa (2017) find that violent crime is a causal mechanism explaining lower intergenerational mobility, and by implication, racial disparities.
  15. For details on methodology and findings, see Wang et al. (2018) and supporting information at [www.pnas.org/lookup/suppl/doi:10.1073/pnas.1802537115/-/DCSupplemental](http://www.pnas.org/lookup/suppl/doi:10.1073/pnas.1802537115/-/DCSupplemental).
  16. These measures adjust for neighbourhood size and the propensity of some individuals to tweet more than others (e.g. journalists). For technical details, see Levy et al. (2018).
  17. Racial inequality in the USA takes on unique historical dimensions, for example, but the relationship between skin colour and stratification is general. The hypothesis of the looking-glass neighbourhood is similarly exportable and might inform examination of the processes by which the stigma associated with the poor or foreign-born migrants produces neighbourhood segregation.
  18. Raudenbush and Sampson (1999) developed a systematic metric for measuring ecology (hence 'eco-metrics') for survey and observational methods. For a detailed explication of econometrics and its application to large-scale administrative data sources, see O'Brien et al. (2015).
  19. See also Sampson (2012: 420–425, 2016, 2018), which this section draws on to interrogate person ('move out') and place-based ('move up') approaches.
  20. The demands that are made on the well-to-do are especially prone to resistance. For

example, the movement of the poor to wealthier white communities through vouchers or mixed-income developments is often blocked through zoning or land use regulations (Trounstein, 2018).

21. When white supremacists marched with Confederate flags and torches in the summer of 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting the Nazi slogan 'Blood and Soil' ('Blut und Boden'), with one marcher murdering a counter-protestor, the President of the USA stated publicly that the white supremacists included 'some very fine people'.

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