**Contemporary Urban Theory and the Ghetto**

The term Ghetto continues to be used as a descriptor of (physical space) and analytical concept (to explain observed outcomes) in contemporary urban research. Social scientist have further obfuscated issue by invoking the term as a catchall to explain poverty, segregation, and social organization in both African-American and “minority” communities across the globe. Consistent with Chicago school orientation, Wilson studies poverty in cities and argues that class has become more dominant in shaping life chances of blacks. But with Wilson we find a more deliberate use of the term ghetto. He maintains that in post – civil rights era, central challenge facing the ghetto is lack of economic opportunity, not spatial marginality or race discrimination per se. Wilson’s ghetto, like Wirth’s, is in part a cultural phenomenon, defined by social characteristics of individuals who live there (XV). Loic Wacquant has taken issue with Wilson’s argument, maintaining that: “to say that they are ghettos because they are poor is to reverse social and historical causation: it is because they were and are ghettos that joblessness and misery are unusually acute and persistent in them. Wacquant looking at Chicago’s “Black Belt” and France’s “Red Belt”, treats these areas as ideal types in order to highlight process of institutionalized spatial confinement and control during a period of industrial decline, state retrenchment, and media hysteria about minority youth. One key difference between the French and the American ghetto, was the American withdrawal of key resources, which contributed to the ghetto’s deterioration and necessitated the rise of the penal system to manage the urban underclass. He places the institution of the prison in historical sequence following slavery and the ghetto, and argues that these “peculiar institutions” define the black experience in America. In fact, as the penal management system replaces the social welfare system as a mechanism of social control in an environment of industrial decline and deregulated wage labor markets, the traditional ghetto becomes more like a prison and the prison becomes more like a ghetto, eventually making the latter obsolete. The ghetto becomes a central place for “sociopolitical struggles” and political mobilization against white domination of the city(XVI). Wacquant’s critique wrench discussions on ghetto away from urban poverty discourse and connected term back to its original meaning – formal segregation of stigmatized groups supported by institutional structures. When we turn our attention to the Latinos in America, scholars have tended to use the term barrio in a way that closely parallels ghetto, while areas believed to be the result of *voluntary segregation*, like China towns, are generally called “ethnic enclaves”.

**Loic Wacquant: Janus-Faced Institution of Ethno-Racial Closure**

In medieval Europe Jews were commonly allotted quarters wherein they reside it, administer their own fares, and followed their customs. Such orders were granted or sold as a privilege to attract them into the towns and principalities which they fulfill key roles as money – lenders, tax collectors, and long-distance tradesman (6). In 1516 the Senate of Venice ordered all Jews rounded up into the ghetto Nuovo an abandoned foundry on an isolated island enclosed by two high walls whose outer windows and doors were sealed while watchmen stood guard on its two bridges and patrolled the adjacent canals by boat. Jews were henceforth allowed to come out to pursue their occupations by day, but had to wear a distinctive garb that made them readily recognizable and return inside the gates before Sunset on pain of severe punishment. These measures were designed as an alternative to expulsion to enable the city – state to reap economic benefits brought by presence of Jews (including rent, special taxes, and forced levies) while protecting its Christian residents from contaminating contact with bodies perceived as unclean and dangerously sensual, as carriers of syphilis and vectors of heresy, in addition to bearing taint of money making through usury, which the Catholic Church equated with prostitution (Sennet 1994, 224). Social life in the Jewish ghetto is turned inward and verged on “over organization”, reinforcing both integration within and isolation from without.

One can detect the four constituent elements of the ghetto: stigma, constraint, spatial confinement, and institutional parallelism. The ghetto as a social organizational device that employs space to reconcile two antinomic( ie. contradiction between principles) functions: 1) maximize material profits extracted out of a category deemed defiled and defiling 2) minimize intimate contact with its members so as to avert threat of symbolic corrosion and contagion they are thought to carry. If the target population did not serve an essential economic function, it could be kept out of the city or expelled from it – as Jews had been periodically in medieval history. If that same group were not irremediably tainted, it would simply be exploited and allowed to mingle in the city in accordance with its position in division of labor. It is the conflictive combination of economic value and symbolic danger that made handling Jews problematic and spurred the invention of the ghetto (7).

These four building blocks governed the genesis, structure, and functioning of African-American ghetto in the Fordist metropolis after World War I. Blacks were recruited into northern cities of the United States at the outbreak of World War I because their unskilled labor was indispensable to industries that formed backbone of a factory economy fed by booming military production starved of hands by interruption of European migration (Marks 1989). Yet there was no question of them mixing and consorting with whites, who regarded them as inherently vile, and congenitally inferior, and shorn of ethnic honor owing to the stain of slavery. As blacks moved in from the south in the millions, white hostility increased in patterns of discrimination and segregation that had hitherto been informal and inconsistent hardened in housing, schooling, and public accommodations and were extended to the economy and polity(8). African-Americans were forcibly funneled into reserve districts that quickly turned homogenously black as they expanded and consolidated. They had no choice but to seek refuge inside the boundary perimeter of the Black Belt and to endeavor to develop a network of separate institutions to procure basic needs of the castaway community. Thus arose a duplicate city anchored by black churches and newspapers, black block clubs and lodges, black schools and businesses, and black political and civic associations, nested at the core of the white metropolis yet sealed from it by an impassible fence built of custom, legal suasion, economic discrimination (by realtors, banks, and the state), and violence, as manifested in beatings, fire bombings, and riots that checked those who dared stray across the color line (8).

This forced institutional parallelism predicated on enveloping and inflexible spatial seclusion, not extreme poverty, housing blight, cultural difference, or mere residential separation – is what has distinguished African Americans from every other group in US history(8).

As the lineal descendents of the eta and hinin, two categories locked out of the fourfold the state border of feudal Japan (composed of warriors, peasants, artisans, and merchants) the Burakumin were untouchables in the eyes of the Buddhist and Shinto religions. They suffered centuries of virulent prejudice, discrimination, segregation, and violence that kept them cloistered in social and physical space. By the 19th century they were legally confined from sundown to sunup in out-of-the-way hamlets that were omitted from official maps, they were obliged to wear a yellow collar and walk barefoot, they were expected to drop on their hands and knees when addressing commoners, and they could be killed virtually without sanction. Crucially, the Burakumin were barred from entering shrines and temples, and they were restricted to weddings solely among themselves, based on the belief that the filth of their ancestors was indelible and communicated by blood (9).

Spread over three continents and five centuries, the Jewish, African American, and Burakumin experience demonstrate that the ghetto is not, pace Wirth, “a natural area arising via environmental adaptation governed by a biotic logic akin to competitive cooperation that underlies the plant community.” The mistake of the early Chicago school consisted in falsely “converting history into natural history” and passing ghettoization off as a “manifestation of human nature” virtually coterminous with “history of migration when it is a highly peculiar form of the organization warped by asymmetric relations of power between ethnoracial groupings (based on descent): a special form of collective violence concretized in urban space. That ghettoization is not an “uncontrolled and undesigned” process, as Robert E. Park asserted in his preface to The Ghetto, became especially visible after World War II in the United States when the black American ghetto was reconstructed from the top down, and it shelf life extended by another quarter century, through state policies of public housing, urban renewal, and suburban economic development intended to bolster the rigid spatial and social separation of blacks from whites (10).

**All ghettos are segregated, but not all segregated areas are ghettos.**

The selected boroughs of western Paris, the exclusive upper-class suburbs of Boston, or Berlin, and the “gated communities” that have mushroomed in global cities such as Milan and Miami, are monotonous?? in terms of wealth, income, occupation, and, ethnicity, but they are not for all that ghettos. Segregation in them is entirely voluntary and elective, and for that reason it is neither all-inclusive nor perpetual. Fortified enclaves of luxury package “security, seclusion, social homogeneity, amenities, and services” to enable worthwhile families to escape what they perceive as “a chaos, dirt, and danger of the city” these islands are privileged to serve to enhance, not curtail, the life chances and protect lifestyles of their residence, and they radiate a positive aura of distinction, not a sense of infamy and dread (15). **This indicates that residential segregation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for ghettoization.** For a ghetto to emerge, spatial confinement must first be *imposed and all-encompassing*. Then it must be overlaid with a distinct and duplicative set of institutions enabling population cloistered to reproduce itself within its assigned perimeter. If Blacks are the only ethnic category to be “hyper segregated” in American society, it is because they are the only community in that country for which involuntary segregation, assignment to a reserve territory, and organizational parallelism have combined to entrap them in a separate and inferior social cosmos of their own, which in turn bolstered their residential isolation, as wells and force their extreme marital isolation, virtually unique in the world among major ethnic groups (16).

**Ghettos and ethnic neighborhoods sport divergent structures and serve opposite functions.**

The foreign “colonies” of interwar Chicago that Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and Lewis Wirth – and after them the liberal tradition of assimilationist sociology and historiography mistook for so many **white “ghettos” were scattered and mobile constellations born of cultural affinity and occupational concentration, more so than prejudice and discrimination, segregation in them was partial and porous, a product of immigrant solidarity and ethnic attraction instead of being rigidly imposed by sustained out-group hostility.** Consequently, residential separation was neither uniformly nor rigidly visited upon these groups: in 1930, when the all-black Bronzeville harbored 92% of the city’s African-American population, Chicago Little Ireland was “an ethnic hodgepodge” of 25 nationalities composed of only one third Irish persons and containing a paltry 3% of cities denizens of Irish ancestry. **The distinctive institutions of European and American enclaves were turned outward: they operated to facilitate adjustment to the novel environment of the US metropolis.** They neither replicated the organizations of the country of origin nor perpetuated social isolation and cultural distinctiveness. And so they typically waned within two generations as their users gain access to their American counterparts and climbed up the class order and the corresponding ladder of places. All of which is in sharp contrast with the immutable racial exclusivity and enduring institutional alterity of the Black Belt (21). This **Chicago illustration dramatizes the fact that immigrant neighborhood and the ghetto served diametrically opposed functions: the one is a springboard for assimilation by cultural learning and spatial mobility, and the other is a material and symbolic isolation ward geared toward dissimilation. The former is best triggered by a *bridge*, the latter by a *wall*** (22). Ghettoization can be attenuated to the point where, through gradual erosion of, and disjunction between, it’s spatial, social, and mental boundaries, the ghetto devolves into an elective ethnic concentration operating as a springboard for structural integration and/or cultural assimilation into the broader social formations (22). This describes the trajectory of the Chinatown United States from the early and late 20th century and the status of a Cuban immigrant enclave of Miami, which fostered integration through biculturalism after the Mariele exodus of 1980.

**De- spacialization and Dilution of the Ghetto: Current Trends in the United States, Peter Marcuse**

A new taxonomy of the generic ghetto might run somewhat as follows:

i. A dispersed or de-spatializing ghetto, located in distance from central business district, often in the suburbs, less racially concentrated, more middle-class, but with residents still discriminated against economically and socially in a variety of forms, and sometimes limited in extent by state actions

ii. a hard ghetto, spatially concentrated by relatively rigid economic behaviors in other parts of the metropolitan area and singled out for special treatment by governmental actions; lower income; widely perceived as socially dangerous and in need of strict control; stigmatized; the classic stereotype of the ghetto.

iii. a weak or gentrifying diluted ghetto, still significantly racially concentrated in spaces of the older hard ghetto; more diverse and more middle and upper middle class; disproportionately found in globalizing cities; prime sites of gentrification.

iv. an abandoned ghetto, the space of some former hard ghettos, abandoned by both market and the state; often the location of older public housing; often with high vacancies, substandard physical housing, and inadequate services and public facilities; disproportionately found in de-globalizing cities. (give to Dominick)

The evolving pattern suggest virtual disappearance of the hard ghetto, though not disappearance of weak ghetto, which is maintained by continuing segregationist racism and a reaction of solidarity built on the enclave aspect of space identity. The disappearance of the hard ghetto did not by any means suggest disappearance of racial discrimination, domination, and expectation. It only means that racism’s effect– continuing inequality within and outside our cities – is now achieved with less emphasis on spatial boundaries (35). The ghetto’s role in achieving exclusion by spatial means is diminishing and the sophisticated use of other means of control is increasingly taking its place. Space continues to play a key role and playing out relations of power, but in so far as hard ghetto is concerned, its role is changing. This is what is meant by *de-spatializing*. *Dilution* means the role of space in today’s weak ghetto is changing, and the weakening of spatial social control function, which is less concerned with exclusion but continues to play a role in maintaining social inequality.

A ghetto should be defined as a boundary area of spatial concentration of an oppressed group, defined by an ascribed identity, in which the confinement is used for the purpose of social control over and economic subordination of the resident population (39). A ghetto is (1) a space created by (2) relations of power, and (3) used for oppression and control.