

# RESEARCH HANDBOOK ON **Urban Sociology**

Edited by  
**Miguel A. Martínez**



---

## 10. Questioning the foundations: the embedded racism in urban sociology theorization

*Miguel Montalva Barba*

---

Handbooks like this one are essential because they direct the discipline for about 20 years, and if they repeat the same patterns, then the discipline reinforces the mainstream (Slater 2021). Slater defines the ‘mainstream’ as ‘an atheoretical, unquestioning embrace of the structural and institutional conditions (and concepts and categories) favored by city rules and the profiteering interests surrounding them’ (2021: 8). Following Slater’s definition, this chapter addresses how racism is embedded in urban theorization as scholars replicate the mainstream with atheoretical and unquestioning frames that have stagnated a complaisant urban sociology. By embedded racism, I mean how racism and White supremacy are hidden and included as a primarily unspoken norm or marker of normalcy in urban theorizing (Montalva Barba 2023: 2024).

Abrutyn and Lizardo’s *Handbook of Classical Sociological Theory* (2021) includes a chapter by Clark and Wu that addresses urban theorization. Clark and Wu (2021) summarize more than a century of theorizing on the urban question. They develop four major theoretical themes to ground their analysis: human ecology (1890s), neo-Marxist political economy (1960s), world-system and global theory (1980s), and the cultural turn (1990s) (2021: 424). These major theoretical perspectives defined those eras, considering that some detail and specificities are lost when reducing wide breadths of knowledge and research. Nevertheless, synthesizing such a large amount of research into very tangible themes is commendable; those themes are used here to structure this argument.

The way racism and White supremacy embed themselves in urban theorizing most often occurs through colorblindness or colorblind urbanism (Montalva Barba 2023, Petersen 2022, Valle 2017, 2021). Ignoring that, White folks are also racialized and replicate those patterns, ideas and ideologies that are part of the dominant culture. By using these themes, I reveal how racism is embedded in urban theorizing, often appearing as colorblind, invisible, or unstated but always present and often hidden in the uncritical reproduction of research that follows the mainstream. Colorblind racism is so embedded in urban theorizing that even in Abrutyn and Lizardo’s *Handbook*, which includes a chapter on Du Bois’s erasure from sociology, no connection was included to engage his work. Like other forms of colorblindness, colorblind urbanism takes a presumed race-neutral approach that does not see color or only sees race when it relates to non-Whites in the city (Valle 2017). Race-neutrality always benefits White supremacy.

Urban theorizing rarely takes the role of racism, or more specifically the role of White supremacy, as a structural agent, especially regarding the socialization of White people (Montalva Barba 2021, 2023). When taking a structural (economy, state, institutions/family, government, education) approach to racism à la Critical Race Theory (CRT), scholars need to approach research knowing that racism and White supremacy are embedded in everything that Eurocentric notions touch – from the organization of the city to our interactions on the street.

Unless research questions are directly about White folks, their Whiteness is not discussed, ignored, assumed irrelevant, or reduced to class matters (Lipsitz 1998). Whiteness is a ‘social, political, economic, and psychological standpoint of structural advantage that shapes the everyday’ and essentially intersects skin color to power structures and access (Frankenberg 1997, Mills 2003, Montalva Barba 2021: 4). Thus, when scholars take on colorblindness, intentionally or not, their analysis perpetuates existing structural and ideological patterns that ignore the role of White supremacy in the mundane.

From the start, urban sociology set forth as a discipline aiming to understand ‘urban problems’ in the city – which mostly translated into understanding the large waves of (im)migrants, those considered non-White,<sup>1</sup> ‘vice areas,’ and any other population outside of those considered part of acceptable Whiteness (Baldwin 2004, Montalva Barba 2023, Yu 2001, Steinberg 2007). This was unique to US urban sociology and later disseminated to the rest of the world as international scholars came to US institutions for their graduate training. I use Clark and Wu’s (2021) major theoretical perspectives to show how racism is embedded in the form of colorblind urbanism (Valle 2017), or ‘race-neutral’ or ‘post-racial’ urbanism, as race, racism, and White supremacy and how the power differentials or dynamics that (re)create it are hardly ever named. In the initial urban research, Whiteness is the standard from which the Other is measured and assessed (Baldwin 2004, Yu 2001). Moreover, ‘race-neutral’ research ignores a genuine engagement with discussions on racialized power relations and who benefits from exploiting those racialized minorities on the margins of society. The objective here is to redirect the academic gaze of urban sociologists to rethink our approach and research questions. In the following sections, I frame the conversation within the foundations of sociology and their relations to urban sociology. Next, I summarize each theoretical theme and show how racism is embedded in the four major waves. Finally, I offer a theoretical framework to guide future research and some suggestions to address this pervasive problem and conclude with suggestions to move forward.

## FOUR MAJOR THEORETICAL THEMES AND HOW RACISM IS EMBEDDED

### **The Foundations and Progress Narratives**

Sociology developed out of modernity following the Enlightenment. From sociology’s inception, regardless of scale, the urban was at the heart of the discipline because founding theorists had as their central concern how the urban/rural dynamic was affecting the social. As urban sociology has evolved, progress narratives have primarily informed the discipline’s development. Progress narratives, or master narratives, are forms of national ideology used to rationalize social structures and inequality. Progress narratives are rooted in global (in)differences as they justify state actors’ social, political, economic, and place-based ideologies. They are also at the root of the classics, Marx, Du Bois, Weber, and Durkheim. Connell argues that progress narratives are at the center of the work of the classics mainly because they congregated around the ‘difference between the civilization of the metropole, and an Other whose main feature was primitiveness’ (1997: 1516–1517). While Connell’s statement might seem to address anthropology’s turbulent past, she addresses the work of early sociologists that focused on urban

prosperity versus urban poverty. All foundational theorists include notions of progress in their theories used for empire-building (Connell 1997, Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1974).

As this chapter shows, the embedded racism in theories can be noticed by what is left unsaid but implied, ignoring Whiteness and White people as a racialized group or only speaking about race as something only non-White people have. For example, the human ecology approach (HEA) was too narrowly focused on the urban problems, mainly those racial and ethnic Others. This perspective informed the neo-Marxist political economy (MPE) theme, which missed the importance of racial ideology and its interrelatedness with structures. The next theme, world/global systems (WGS), reduced everything to macroeconomics and global forces, leaving local specificities and contexts behind. The cultural turn (CT) now combines several previous themes but still ignores foundational frames that created the fixation with 'diverse' cultures.

Except for Du Bois, the founders did not make their object of study the city directly, but it was indirectly part of their theorization (Saunders 2003 [1989]). Most often, it was noticed in their use of progress narratives or ideas about the social transformation that was taking place based on their social context (Saunders 2003 [1989]). For example, in Marx's work, progress narratives deal with the destructive consequences of capitalism and its effects on individuals as a multilayered and devastating alienation imposed by capitalist exploitation and class antagonism (Tucker 1978: 476). Like Marx, Tönnies was concerned with the transformation from the pre-modern to modern, outlined by the transition between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (2002). *Gemeinschaft*, or community, for Tönnies is defined by close and personal social relations characterized by a shared sense of place. Contrastingly, *Gesellschaft* is characterized by impersonal, calculative, and self-driven social relationships. In *Gesellschaft*, social cohesion is maintained by developing contracts, laws, and formalized relations. Like Tönnies, Durkheim was also concerned with the continuum of transformation from 'mechanical' to 'organic' solidarity (1984). However, Durkheim rejected Tönnies' characterization of modernity as he understood that social cohesion in the modern period is maintained by an abstract collective consciousness developed through the interdependence of individuals and their belief in individuality overall. For Durkheim, such abstractness in the modern epoch facilitated more freedom for the individual than they exercised in mechanical solidarity, resulting in modern social ills; e.g., deviance, anomie, and unhappiness (Kasinitz 1995). Weber understood that individuals, through participation in the capitalist system, or the rationalization of life, would become calculative (1967). Weber's master metaphor, the iron cage, showed that individuals would become so immersed in capitalism that they cannot escape it as they become enmeshed within such a system of interdependency.

The work of the classics was part of a larger empire-building narrative (Connell 1997; Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1974), making the time and place of the development of sociology take a new definition:

One of the major tasks of sociological research... was to gather up information yielded by the colonizing powers' encounter with the colonized world. *Sociology was formed within the culture of imperialism and embodies a cultural response to the colonized world.* This fact is crucial in understanding the content and method of sociology as well as the discipline's cultural significance. (Connell 1997: 1518–1519, emphasis added)

From the Chicago school's foundations onward, urban sociologists' theoretical themes broadly extended Eurocentric progress narratives in theories and research (Connell 1997). Like anthropology, sociology uses similar methods and logic to gather information about

those ‘social problems/people’ in the US. The only difference is that sociology at large has not had to come to terms with this history like other disciplines. Progress narratives, although hardly stated, are at the center of urban theorizing. Scholars tend to focus on projecting onto cities their versions of what they believe cities, spaces, and places should strive to be, mainly imposing an ideology. Ideology always carries coercive powers, and those powers are always loaded with ideas, images, and ways of being. This becomes problematic as that ideology is often hidden or disguised behind objectivity/neutrality claims. For example, the ideology behind Park’s research on race relations and Burgess’s concentric circle model set into motion a system of theories and methods that relied heavily on an empire-building framework rooted in progress/origin narratives to explain the city (Baldwin 2004, Connell 1997, Go 2013, 2016, Jung 2009, Magubane 2014, Morris 2015, Schwendinger & Schwending 1974,). Not only does the name ‘race relations’ occlude power dynamics but, connecting with the concentric circle model, it gives a generational recipe for becoming assimilated into Whiteness (Baldwin 2004, Connell 1997, Steinberg 2007,) and thus reproducing White supremacy. The HEA, the first urban sociological theoretical theme, was rooted in explaining the cycle of order–disorder–order, and it exemplified the conveyor belt of civilization influenced by Thomas and Small (Baldwin 2004, Connell 1997). This order–disorder–order frame was primarily influenced by religious and bio-deterministic thought.

## HUMAN ECOLOGY APPROACH (1890s–1950s)

The Chicago school popularized the HEA. They emerged as the first sociological department focusing on the growing inequality in urban city centers at the turn of the 20th century (Abbott 1999, Anderson 1996, Hunter 2013, Kurtz 1984, Morris 2015, Sassen 2010, Yu 2001). As major US cities saw rapid urbanization, stark inequality, diverse waves of (im)migrants, and overpopulation, the city became the laboratory to explore these issues.

The Chicago school matured from Albion Small’s desire to help influence the development of the ‘kingdom of God on earth’ (Greek 1992: 106). Coming from a theological background, Small merged the gospel with Darwinism to focus on social disorganization in the city based on the cultural traits of those groups/individuals present in Chicago (Montalva Barba 2023). Small’s social disorganization (1916), along with Thomas’s ethnic paradox, was merged with Burgess’s concentric circles (1967) to create the HEA.

The HEA also incorporated Park’s race relations cycle (1950) and Burgess’s concentric zone theory (1967) to map the geographic order of the city, which became assimilation immigration theory.<sup>2</sup> Park and Burgess developed research that mirrored the natural sciences to solidify sociology with scientific legitimacy, focusing on what disrupts ‘natural’ homeostasis – invasive species or viruses. Thus, the studies produced focused on the spatially tied characteristics of the people occupying those spaces under study. For example, it was not just about Black people but about the Black people in the Black Belt, so their bodies became representative of those places and spaces. The focus extended to any group living within the city center that was outside the White middle- and upper-class standards. As such, the studies solidified homogeneous thinking about the bodies of those considered the Other. The HEA continues to be influential, even as it has been seen as deeply flawed (Lal 1987, Lyman 1968, Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1974). The Green Bible, *The City* (Park et al. 1967 [1925]),

known for its original green color, is still considered a foundational text in urban sociology courses.

### **Embedded Racism in the Human Ecology Frame**

Much has been written about this period and the Chicago school, but what is constantly left out of the conversation, with some exceptions, is that this timeframe was rooted in White supremacist thinking. By White supremacist thinking, I am referring to the spectrum of Whiteness that foregrounds the aesthetics, manners, comportment, and ways of being that support the nearly universal idea that Whiteness and White people are superior to those considered non-White/Other. In short, this theoretical theme completely missed, ignored, and occluded power differentials at the individual, local, state, national, and global levels. As the research of the Chicago school focused on what disrupts 'natural' homeostasis, those that were not part of Whiteness were seen as deficient or at some stagnated stage of civilization (Baldwin 2004). The structures that uphold racism and power dynamics that continually create spaces and places to exploit those on the margins were never included in the analysis. For example, these researchers focused on the Black Belts, ghettos, and areas of vice but ignored that Black folks were not allowed to live in other areas due to legal or de facto segregation (Drake & Cayton 2015 [1945], Du Bois 1968, 1920, Frazier 1997).

Further, many of those under study, like the Chinese, also had limited housing options due to racist thinking, behaviors, and policies. Studies created from this perspective instituted a pathologizing of the bodies of the Other, leaving the White majority as the standard. Urban scholars still need to contend with this legacy. When Black bodies are 'seen' as out of place if they are not in Black neighborhoods, when people perpetually think of Latine/Asian people as (im)migrants, inner city crime, Black on Black crime, the focus on neighborhood effects, and broken window theories, these are the pernicious effects of assigning a place to the bodies of the Others that have created great indifference. The embedded racism in HEA implicitly and explicitly used Whiteness as the standard. In the effort to study those 'little worlds,' a perpetual Othering was taking place wherein the construction of 'proper' Whiteness was being solidified and further cemented (Montalva Barba 2023).

From this period, the Chicago school also created another lasting problematic regarding scholars of color and their incorporation into sociology. The Chicago school only began to enroll students of color if they represented a sector of the population that was off limits to those White scholars (see Montalva Barba 2023, Yu 2001). Chinese and Black scholars, for example, were mainly accepted into the Chicago school if they were willing to study and represent their race and the communities they came from (Baldwin 2004, Yu 2001). Scholars of color had to be willing to learn what Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) call White logic and White methods. White logic, Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva state, 'refers to a context in which White supremacy has defined the techniques and processes of reasoning about social facts... assumes a historical posture that grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite Whites and condemns the views of non-Whites to perpetual subjectivity' (2008: 17). White methods are the tools 'to manufacture empirical data and analysis to support the racial stratification in society' (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva 2008: 18). The non-White scholars selected were trained in White logic and White methods to study the communities they represented and to translate them to White academics. Yu argues that sociologists from that time produced knowledge not from exotic locals but from the bipolarity present in the city by training insiders to translate

the knowledge ‘of their little worlds’ to outsiders; i.e., White professional men (Yu 2001). ‘Chicago sociologists,’ argues Yu, ‘actively recruited insiders to translate their native knowledge into [White] sociological knowledge’ (Yu 2001: 139). Like the anthropologists working abroad acquiring knowledge of foreign lands, sociologists at home worked to gain knowledge of the hobos, gangs, Catholics, Blacks, Asians, (im)migrants, and any other category that might have been unfamiliar to referential Whiteness, translating the knowledge gained from native informants into institutionalized White knowledge.

### **Marxist Political Economy (1960s–)**

Reacting to the social, cultural, revolutionary, and decolonial movements across the globe, especially in the Global South, of the 1950s and 1960s, neo-Marxists began to reject the limited scope that urban theorizing had taken (Clark & Wu 2021, Gottdiener et al. 2018, Harding & Blokland 2014). For example, the HEA was too narrow in focus, centered on the neighborhood level, and too specific to problems that disconnected the analysis from more significant dynamics: capitalism and global forces (Castells 2007, Molotch 1976, Smith 1996).

The alternative presented was to think of the urban via MPE terms. The political economy approach to urban theorizing stayed connected to Marxist thinking by analyzing the city as a product of class antagonism created to benefit the interests of those that control the means of production. Henri Lefebvre’s contribution was vital as it utilized Marxist concepts to study and analyze the city (Gottdiener et al. 2018, Lefebvre 2014). In short, Lefebvre made the case that city development was a creation of the capitalist system. By focusing on the city’s role within a Marxist frame, Lefebvre added part of what was present in Marx and Engels but not fully developed. Harvey (1975, 1985, 2006) embraced what Lefebvre had started and developed an urban development analysis that defines the city as a spatial node that concentrates and circulates capital where class conflict is enacted (Gottdiener et al. 2018).

The other leading idea of the time was thinking of the city as a ‘growth-machine’ (Logan & Molotch 2007, Molotch 1976, 1990). In this theoretical frame, growth and development are necessary for the survival and persistence of cities, creating the conditions for the city, state, and capitalists (Harding & Blokland 2014). Therefore, competition between cities for resources and services is vital to move forward. Private and state actors have a role in attracting corporations and government funding to make each city more competitive than the next. Although most of the work that developed primarily centered on reducing everything to capitalism and competition, some scholars extended their analysis to other oppressive structures like race, age, and gender, but the central focus was always on capitalism and class conflict. The MPE follows the linear progress narrative thinking, as scholars emphasize urban development. It made urban theorization concentrate on capital accumulation as the city’s driver of change, and this is where the racism is embedded.

### **Embedded Racism in Political Economy**

Like traditional Marxist theorizing, MPE dismisses the importance of space-specific history and cultural dimensions, focusing more on capital conditions rather than the roles that place, space, and actual people play in and through the lived environment. Reducing the analysis to economic terms and arrangements ignores how socio-spatial patterns impact, reflect, and (re)create those economic structures. This dismissal is where the embedded racism hides. In

places like the US, Europe, Latin America, and Africa, a global White supremacy is enmeshed in cultural and ideological systems (hooks 1999). Reducing our understanding of cities and urban life to the processes of capital accumulation through class struggles, consumption patterns, or market terms hides the role of gendered, racial, sexual, and ableist structures maintaining oppressive systems.

As has been argued in Harris's 'Whiteness as Property' (1993), within the US and other states that base their property law around liberal principles that extend from the Enlightenment period, private property is synonymous with Whiteness. The racial identity of Whiteness developed to protect the interests of White propertied men supported by US law (Haney López 1996, Harris 1993). The MPE theme where capital investments, rentiers, land value, land use, and exchange value are key factors (Harvey 1973, Logan & Molotch 2007), not paying attention to the role of White supremacy and Whiteness in the capitalist system, further mystifies the role of racism and the structuring of urban economies.<sup>3</sup>

This theoretical theme is characterized by its Eurocentrism and uneven application of theories (Harding & Blokland 2014). As MPE focuses on property and capitalism, the analysis embeds a White supremacist notion of private property and property law (Bhambra 2020, Bhandar 2018, Harris 1993, Nichols 2020, Saito 2020), using a Eurocentric notion of the work that does not acclimate well to other parts of the world. This leaves White supremacy unacknowledged as a structural agent.

### **World-systems and Global Theory (1980s–)**

WGS theory grew out of the developments of MPE. From a particular perspective, political economy began exploring the connection between global forces and capitalist accumulation (Gottdiener et al. 2018). WGS theory aimed to bring together distinct phenomena that had been separated, due to discipline boundaries limiting their engagement (Friedmann & Wolff 1982, Hall 2001, Wallerstein 2004). As meta-theories or all-encompassing theories, they understood the city as a product of global forces based on nation-state conditions (Clark & Wu 2021). WGS theory analyzes urban processes based on the unequal distribution of wealth globally: while some countries benefit, others are exploited and are affected by the unjust and unequal distribution of resources. Therefore, the Global North, the 'core,' extracts most of the world's goods and resources, while the countries of the Global South, the 'semi-periphery and periphery,' are underdeveloped based on the unjust historical patterns of global exploitation, imperialism, and (neo)colonialism. WGS theory expanded and invigorated the limitations of MPE by extending the analysis outside each locality, focusing on global connection and interdependence (Clark & Wu 2021, Sassen 2001, 2004a), but much was left unquestioned. For example, Sassen's global city (2001, 2004a, 2004b) highlights the importance of financial capital and the bureaucratic arrangements needed to make a global economy possible where globalization is produced.

### **Embedded Racism in World-systems and Global Theory**

In foregrounding the interconnectivity and interdependence of the world's economy, considerably less weight is placed on other elements, or they are missed entirely. Thus, WGS theory has a limited explanatory capacity as it has difficulty addressing the state's role (Ren 2018, Sassen 2001) and the individual's agency (Slater 2021, Wallerstein 2011, 2004). WGS theory



focuses on the experience, history, factors, and logics of the Global North as the drivers of all ‘progress’ and, indirectly, history, reducing all form of inequality to capitalist production (Clark & Wu 2021, Ren 2018). The Global South, the ‘less developed’ periphery localities, is positioned as a reactionary place and space in relation to processes occurring in the Global North.

Further, centering the analysis on global capitalism ignores human agency and the inseparability of White supremacy and capitalism. When the analysis centers on the experience of the Global North, those on the periphery become only dependent actors in relation to those in the Global North. Aligning the human experience with the Global North and treating the rest of the world as passing or supporting characters maintains systemic inequality (Bhandar 2018, Nandy 1983). Overall, this theoretical theme continues the legacy of urban sociology as a theory of Western progress, where those at the center are the typical players or the focus is on a few places (Clark & Wu 2021). Ignoring global White supremacy’s role in driving capitalism concretizes colorblind urbanism, and as shown above, the notions of capital, property, and economic accumulation are based on propertied Whiteness.

### **Urban Cultural Turn Approach (1990s–)**

The CT is the most recent and, in some ways, brings us back to the Chicago school (Musil 2004). Storper argues that the CT produces ‘theory and research based on the notion that the key to understanding contemporary society and transforming it lies in the ways that culture orients our behavior and shapes what we are able to know about the world’ (Storper 2001: 161). Postmodernism partly informs this perspective; like culture, language is both a structuring and structural agent, not just a byproduct of political economy. As such, much of what this research has shown is a documentation of the difference found in cities, places, and spaces (Musil 2004). At the middle of the CT is consumption. Stated differently, Musil argues that urban cultural sociology has changed ‘...into a kind of institutional and economical analysis of cities’ (2004: 289). The city, its localities, and bodies are available goods for consumption. Cities become amenities available to the highest bidder for consumption as the cultures seem to be the driver of growth and progress (Florida 2002, Hutton 2019, Lloyd 2010, Musil 2004, Ward & Hubbard 2019, Zukin 2011). With deindustrialization and the disappearance of factory and production centers, the CT claims that street art, art, the food industry, tourism, and other cultural components have become significant forces in urban centers (Hutton 2019). Zukin’s *The Cultures of Cities* (1996) shows how ethnicity, aesthetics, and marketing – ‘culture’ – shape and reshape urban spaces and places. As there are many of these aspects of urban cultures, the public and private sectors use them to revitalize such spaces and amenities. Thus, the spaces, places, and cultures embedded in those localities become amenities available to investors, which reduces everything to its consumptive value (Zukin 1998). Private and public investors and revitalizers use the cultures of places and spaces to attract urban newcomers, causing social and economic inequality – the displacement and emplacement around gentrification.

### **Embedded Racism in the Urban Cultural Turn Approach**

The CT embeds racism as it lacks conversations about power differentials, treats culture as a stand-in for race and ethnicity, avoids questioning Whiteness and White supremacy, and rep-

licates early Chicago school ideas (Musil 2004) with the help of new technology. In this form, culture stands for race, ethnicity, and other intersecting identities infused into place and space. Unfortunately, much of the research done within this theoretical approach misses that places and spaces with a cultural, economic value, like Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latine, Queer, or marginalized spaces, were created and kept because of power differentials. Thus, research that is merely descriptive, devoid of theory (Venkatesh 2008, Wacquant 2002), essentially works to translate those ‘little worlds’ into White logic and White methods (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva 2008).

In a larger sense, the CT becomes what bell hooks called ‘eating of the other’ (hooks 1999), where the bodies, spaces, and culture of the Other(s) are there to be enjoyed and played with to spice up the bland White pallet. As consumption is crucial and global White supremacy has a fascination with the ‘primitive,’ this creates an obsession with the Other as a form of White entertainment and a ritualistic form of self-transformation and revitalization (hooks 2000). Looking at a progressive White community, I have shown that a sense of community and diversity are in direct opposition, as the label ‘diverse’ hides inequality (Montalva Barba 2021). I also argue that progressive White residents replicate settler colonial narratives, like frontier myths, to rationalize inequality in their neighborhood (Montalva Barba 2021; 2024). Here, settler colonialism narratives are understood as frames or stock stories that rationalize ‘the ongoing process where colonizers settle in someone else’s land, creating social, political, legal, and economic institutions solely for their benefit’ (Montalva Barba 2021: 3, Saito 2020).

In the end, this examination of the distinct periods of urban theorizing and how they embed racism shows that urban sociology has moved in conjunction with sociology at large in prioritizing progress narratives. Race and racism in each theme protect, embed, and occlude from sight White privilege and White supremacy. The HEA was too narrowly focused on the urban problem, mainly racial Others (Montalva Barba 2023). This perspective determined how MPE missed the importance of ideology and its interrelatedness with structures, followed by WGS, which reduced everything to macro-economics and global forces, leaving behind the local specificities, and leading to the CT, which brings together several of the previous themes but ignores foundational frames that have created these ‘diverse’ cultures. There have been calls from different prominent scholars to critically understand the role that race, racism, White supremacy, settler colonialism, and empire have on the social and the urban (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 2015, Fenelon 2016, Glenn 2015, Go 2016, Itzigsohn & Brown 2020 Rios 2015, Slater 2021, Veracini 2010).

## ADDRESSING EMBEDDED RACISM IN URBAN THEORIZING

To address the embedded racism in urban theorizing, I offer several ways of thinking about race, racism, White supremacy, and settler colonialism. First, to recalibrate urban sociology’s gaze, critical race and global critical race and racism (GCRR) theorizing suggest some cultural changes to the discipline (Christian 2019). A GCRR perspective brings together world-systems and global theorizing, political economy, and urban cultural studies, in conjunction with a race critical perspective. A GCRR perspective reconnects and builds on Du Boisian sociology, which is profoundly urban and centered on a global interconnectivity that urban sociologists must embrace (Itzigsohn & Brown 2020).

### **Critical Race and Global Critical Race and Racism**

The concept of race only tells us that racism persists as its creation is rooted in domination and exploitation, justifying all forms of inequality. Most of the time, when speaking about race, people are genuinely talking about racism, White supremacy, and inequality. Racism and White supremacy are active structures that work with other structures to justify global inequality (Banerjee-Dube 2014, Du Bois 1920, Fields & Fields 2014, Grosfoguel 2011, Mills 2003, Mullings 2005, Pierre 2012). Whiteness, like all dominant categories, hides in urban research (Montalva Barba 2023) as scholars often ignore the role that it serves as an (in)visible category present in the city (Clarke & Garner 2010). Whiteness as a social, historical, and political category is inseparable from conceptions of the city, social problems, and the characterization of the Other (powell 1997). Gotanda states that the US Constitution was written in a colorblind manner that enables White racial domination (1995: 257). Gotanda presents four ways the US Constitution uses race for domination: status-race, formal-race, historical-race, and cultural-race (Gotanda 1995). Status-race is the traditional way of understanding race as a social category, while formal-race is the normative interpretation of race that lacks imposed meanings and characteristics (Gotanda 1995). Historical-race, however, includes those proposed meanings and characteristics assigned to race – historical and contemporary racial subordination (Gotanda 1995). Cultural-race uses codes to signify specific characteristics; e.g., Blackness as the equivalent of African American lifestyle, culture, consciousness, and diaspora (Gotanda 1995). While this is rooted in a US context, the implication of thinking about race, as Gotanda articulates, can help urban scholars see past limitations and provide scholars with a frame to move forward. The HEA mainly used a cultural-race frame, which is invested in infusing racial categories into space, places, and bodies, while the CT tends to use both the cultural- and status-race approaches. Approaches based on capital accumulation and class antagonism, such as WGS theory, rely on a status- or a formal-race approach that actively de-emphasizes the complexity of racism and White supremacy as a structuring mechanism.

By taking Gotanda's race theorizing seriously, urban scholars can begin to see alternative ways to focus on a more historical understanding of race and racism. A historical-race perspective will influence scholars to consider how racism and racial categories have changed in different locations. Gotanda states that formal definitions of race do not consider the historical and social implications and largely leave race as a neutral identity qualifier (Gotanda 1995) or something that only non-White folks have. CRT proposes that racism is a global project that takes shape differently in specific localities but is ultimately rooted in global White supremacy (Bonilla-Silva 2001, Christian 2019; Christian et al. 2019, Jung 2020).

Christian proposes a 'GCCR framework that assumes the following: the racial structure is global and worldwide, national histories shape contemporary racial practices and mechanisms, materiality is the foundation, racism is defined structurally and ideologically, and global White supremacy is produced and rearticulated in new deeply rooted and malleable forms' (2019: 172). As Christian argues, this framework is undergirded by the idea that race and racism are malleable and have changed over time, and as such, 'we can identify how racism transforms depending on historical, political, and geographic boundaries marked by critical juncture events and path-dependent processes spotlighting both the *relational* and *interconnective* character between countries but still rooted in the foundation of global white supremacy' (2019: 172). A GCCR framework is built by the world system of global White supremacy and racializes zones and localities based on historical (empire, colonial modes) and global (racial

neoliberalism, the War on Terror) processes (Christian 2019). Such processes engage with racist structures (state, economy, and institutions) and ideologies (discourses and representation) that create and maintain a national racial system, order, and inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2006, Christian 2019).

Due to globalization, empire, colonization, and settler colonialism, global White supremacy operates worldwide (Mills 2003). As Nandy states, ‘The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds’ (1983: 9). Some scholars will hesitate to embrace the premise that a racial structure is operating globally; I challenge such scholars to take an inventory of how Whiteness and White supremacy might operate in relation to their research, theoretical standpoints, and statuses in academia. As legal scholar Mary Matsuda (1990) points out, one should ask the other question when addressing intersectional coalition building. By this provocation, Matsuda challenges often taken-for-granted positionalities or standpoints to arrive at a more inclusive alliance that addresses how a global White supremacist structure operates. Matsuda states,

The way that I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call ‘ask the other question.’ When I see something that looks racist, I ask, ‘where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’ When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask ‘Where is the class interest in this?’ (1990: 1189)

While Matsuda is speaking about intersectional coalition building, the same questions can be valid for research agendas, positionalities, and statuses in academia. Global racial politics have been and will continue to be important because of globalization and global interconnectivity, which have been at the forefront since even before formal colonization.

## CONCLUSIONS

The role that embedded racism plays in urban sociology must be reconsidered, and our theorizing and research must account for urban sociology’s foundation. Challenging embedded racism in urban theorizing must consider whom we cite and what we teach. The insights offered by GCRR and CRT should provide scholars with starting points to exploring what Shaw calls ‘White Cities’ (2007) and ‘White institutional spaces’ (Moore 2008). Historical-race perspectives that consider a robust and contemporary understanding of racism and race are needed. Research agendas that work to make the settler colonial visible in the city (Montalva Barba 2021, 2023) are needed along with work that questions White upper and middle-class parents (Hagerman 2018), how Whiteness operates in localities (Ramos-Zayas 2020), and how White supremacy takes place in spaces and places (Lipsitz 1998, 2011, 2019) and rethinks old terms like ‘inner city’ (Ansfield 2018, Wacquant 2002).

Urban sociologists need to come to terms with the legacies of the discipline to undo what has been and continues to be done. Slater calls for critical urban scholars to guard ‘against the subordination of scholarly to policy agendas and challenge the rise of policy-driven research at the expense of research-driven agendas’ (2021: 185). From the onset of urban sociology, funding from governmental agencies and non-profits has driven the urban question (Baldwin 2004, Montalva Barba 2023, Yu 2001). The early Chicago school’s partnership with the city and the Rockefeller Foundation drove HEA research agendas, and this has only accelerated as the field has evolved. Leading to the question ‘what has changed?’ urban scholars must stand

with their insights and forms of seeing the urban and not be limited by funding agencies or institutions. Who has the power when grants and state agencies lead this field forward?

## NOTES

1. I use ‘non-White’ to reference that in the US, whiteness has been constructed by the courts and has shifted over time; at different points, non-Whites included Italians, Polish, and Jewish people (see Haney López 1996).
2. Park’s immigration and migrant assimilation theory was based on the work produced to understand the city. As populations become assimilated, they would ‘naturally’ move away from the city center and lose their differences. Park showcased the way White populations would become assimilated, not those marked with non-White racial difference (see Lipsitz 2011, Lyman 1968, Steinberg 2007).
3. See Robinson (1993, 2019) for his contributions to racial capitalism.

## REFERENCES

- Abbott, A. (1999) *Department and discipline: Chicago sociology at one hundred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Abrutyn, S., & Lizardo, O. (2021) *Handbook of classical sociological theory*. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Anderson, E. (1996) Introduction to *The Philadelphia Negro*. In *The Philadelphia Negro: A social study by W. E. B. Du Bois*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ansfield, B. (2018) Unsettling ‘inner city’: Liberal protestantism and the postwar origins of a keyword in urban studies. *Antipode* 50(5): 1166–1185.
- Baldwin, D. L. (2004) Black belts and ivory towers: The place of race in US social thought, 1892–1948. In Pfohl, S. et al. (eds.) *Culture, power, and history: Studies in critical sociology*. Leiden: Brill Publishers, 325–378.
- Banerjee-Dube, I. (2014) Caste, race and difference: The limits of knowledge and resistance. *Current Sociology* 62(4): 512–530.
- Bhambra, G. K. (2020) Colonial global economy: Towards a theoretical reorientation of political economy. *Review of International Political Economy* 28(2): 307–322.
- Bhandar, B. (2018) *Colonial lives of property: Law, land, and racial regimes of ownership*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2001) *White supremacy and racism in the post-civil rights era*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006 [2003]). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Durham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015) More than prejudice: Restatement, reflections, and new directions in critical race theory. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1(1): 73–87.
- Burgess, E. W. (1967 [1925]) The growth of the city: An introduction to a research project. In Park, R. et al. (eds.) *The city: Suggestions for investigation of human behavior in urban environments*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 47–62.
- Castells, M. (2007 [1968/1976]) Is there an urban sociology? In Pickvance, C. (ed.) *Urban sociology: Critical essays*. Abingdon: Routledge, 33–59.
- Christian, M. (2019) A global critical race and racism framework: Racial entanglements and deep and malleable whiteness. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5(2): 169–185.
- Christian, M., Seamster, L. & Ray, V. (2019) New directions in critical race theory and sociology: Racism, white supremacy, and resistance. *American Behavioral Scientist* 63(13): 1731–1740.
- Clark, T. N., & Wu, C. (2021) Urban theorizing. In Abrutyn, S. & Lizardo, O. (eds.) *Handbook of classical sociological theory*. Cham: Springer Nature.

- Clarke, S. & Garner, S. (2010) *White identities: A critical sociological approach*. Boston: Pluto Press.
- Connell, R. W. (1997) Why is classical theory classical? *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6): 1511–1557.
- Drake, S. C. & Cayton, H. R. (2015 [1945]) *Black metropolis: A study of negro life in a northern city*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1920) *Darkwater: Voices from within the veil*. Mineola: Dover Publications.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1968) *Dusk of dawn: An essay towards and autobiography of a race concept*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Durkheim, E. (1984) *The division of labor in society* (2nd ed.). Basingstoke: Macmillian.
- Fenelon, J. V. (2016) Critique of Glenn on settler colonialism and Bonilla-Silva on critical race analysis from indigenous perspectives. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 2(2): 237–242.
- Fields, K. E., & Fields, B. J. (2014) *Racecraft: The soul of inequality in American life*. London: Verso Books.
- Florida, R. (2002) *The rise of the creative class* (Vol. 9). New York: Basic books.
- Frankenberg, R. (1997) Introduction: Local whiteness, localizing whiteness. In Frankenberg, R. (ed.) *Displacing whiteness: Essays in social and cultural criticism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1–33.
- Frazier, E. (1997 [1957]) *Black bourgeoisie*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Friedmann, J., & Wolff, G. (1982) World city formation: An agenda for research and action. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 6(3): 309–344.
- Glenn, E. N. (2015) Settler colonialism as structure: A framework for comparative studies of US race and gender formation. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1(1): 54–74.
- Go, J. (2013) For a postcolonial sociology. *Theory and Society* 42(1): 25–55.
- Go, J. (2016) *Postcolonial thought and social theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gotanda, N. (1995) A critique of ‘our constitution is color-blind’. In Crenshaw, K. et al. (eds.) *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York: The New Press, 257–275.
- Gottdiener, M., Hutchison, R., & Ryan, M. (2018) *The new urban sociology*. New York: Routledge.
- Greek, C. E. (1992) *The religious roots of American sociology*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2011) Decolonizing post-colonial studies and paradigms of political-economy: Transmodernity, decolonial thinking, and global coloniality. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1(1).
- Hagerman, M. A. (2018) *White kids*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hall, P. (2001) Global city-regions in the twenty-first century. In Scott, A. (ed.) *Global city-regions: Trends, theory, policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 59–77.
- Haney López, I. (1996) *White by law: The legal construction of race*. New York: New York University Press.
- Harding, A., & Blokland, T. (2014) *Urban theory*. London: Sage.
- Harris, C. I. (1993) Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review* 106(8): 1707–1791.
- Harvey, D. (1973) *Social justice and the city*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Harvey, D. (1975) Class structure in a capitalist society and the theory of residential differentiation. In Peel, R. et al. (eds.) *Process in physical and human geography: Bristol essays*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Harvey, D. (1985) The geopolitics of capitalism. In Gregory, D., & Urry, J. (eds.) *Social relations and spatial structures*. London: Palgrave, 128–163.
- Harvey, D. (2006) *Spaces of global capitalism*. New York: Verso.
- hooks, b. (1999) *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (2000) *Feminism is for everyone*. Boston: South End Press.
- Hunter, M. A. (2013) *Black citymakers: How The Philadelphia Negro changed urban America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hutton, T. (2019) The cultural economy in cities. In Schwanen, T. & Van Kempen, R. (eds.) *Handbook of urban geography*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Itzigsohn, J. & Brown, K. L. (2020) *The sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jung, M. K. (2009) The racial unconscious of assimilation theory. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 6(2): 375–395.
- Jung, M. K. (2020) *Beneath the surface of white supremacy*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

- Kasinitz, P. (1995) *Metropolis: Center and symbol of our times* (Vol. 3). New York: New York University Press.
- Kurtz, L. R. (1984) *Evaluating Chicago sociology: A guide to the literature, with an annotated bibliography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lal, B. (1987) Black and blue in Chicago: Robert E. Park's perspective on race relations in urban America, 1914–44. *The British Journal of Sociology* 38(4): 546–566.
- Lefebvre, H. (2014 [1991]) The production of space. In Gieseking, J. et al. (eds.) *The people, place, and space reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Lipsitz, G. (1998) *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lipsitz, G. (2011) *How racism takes place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lipsitz, G. (2019) The sounds of silence: How race neutrality preserves white supremacy. In Crenshaw, K. (ed.) *Seeing race again: Countering colorblindness across the disciplines*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 23–51.
- Lloyd, R. (2010) *Neo-bohemia: Art and commerce in the postindustrial city*. Routledge: New York.
- Logan, J., & Molotch, H. (2007 [1987]) *Urban fortunes: The political economy of place*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lyman, S. M. (1968) The race relations cycle of Robert E. Park. *The Pacific Sociological Review* 11(1): 16–22.
- Magubane, Z. (2014) Science, reform, and the 'science of reform': Booker T. Washington, Robert Park, and the making of a 'science of society'. *Current Sociology* 62(4): 568–583.
- Matsuda, M. J. (1990) Beside my sister, facing the enemy: Legal theory out of coalition. *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1183.
- Mills, C. W. (2003) *The racial contract*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Molotch, H. (1976) The city as a growth machine: Toward a political economy of place. *American Journal of Sociology* 82(2): 309–332.
- Molotch, H. (1990). Urban deals in comparative perspective. In Logan, J.R. & Swanstrom, T. (eds.) *Beyond the city limits: Urban policy and economic restructuring in comparative perspective*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 175–198.
- Molotch, H., & Logan, J. (1990) The space for urban action: Urban fortunes; a rejoinder. *Political Geography Quarterly* 9(1): 85–92.
- Montalva Barba, M. (2021) (Re)enacting settler colonialism via white resident utterances. *Critical Sociologist*, 47(7–8): 1267–1281.
- Montalva Barba, M. (2023) To move forward, we must look back: White supremacy at the base of urban studies. *Urban Studies* 60(5): 791–810.
- Montalva Barba, M. (2024) *White supremacy and racism in progressive America: Race, place, and space*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Moore, W. L. (2008) *Reproducing racism: White space, elite law schools, and racial inequality*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Morris, A. (2015) *Scholar denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the birth of modern sociology*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Mullings, L. (2005) Interrogating racism: Toward an antiracist anthropology. *Annual Review Anthropology*, 34, 667–693.
- Musil, J. (2004) Fifty years of urban sociology. In Genove, N. (ed.) *Advances in Sociological Knowledge*. Cham: Springer Science, 269–298.
- Nandy, A. (1983) *The intimate enemy: Loss and recovery of self under colonisation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Nichols, R. (2020) *Theft is property! Dispossession and critical theory*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Park, R. E. (1950 [1918]) The collected papers of Robert Ezra Park. In Everett, C. H. et al. (eds.) *Vol. 1: Race and Culture*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Park, R. E., Burgess, E., & McKenzie, R. D. (1967 [1925]) *The city: Suggestions for investigation of human behavior in urban environments*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Petersen, C. (2022) Capitalizing on heritage: St. Augustine, Florida, and the landscape of American racial ideology. *City & Community* 21(3): 193–213.
- Pierre, J. (2012) *The predicament of blackness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- powell, j. (1997) The 'racing' of American society: Race functioning as a verb before signifying as a noun. *Law and Inequality* 15(99): 99–125.
- Ramos-Zayas, A. Y. (2020) *Parenting empires: Class, whiteness, and the moral economy of privilege in Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ren, X. (2018) From Chicago to China and India: Studying the city in the twenty-first century. *Annual Review of Sociology* 44: 497–513.
- Rios, V. M. (2015) Decolonizing the white space in urban ethnography. *City & Community* 14(3): 258–261.
- Robinson, C. J. (1993) *Black Marxism: The making of a Black radical tradition*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Robinson, C. J. (2019) *An anthropology of Marxism*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books.
- Saito, N. T. (2020) *Settler colonialism, race, and the law*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sassen, S. (2001 [1991]) *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sassen, S. (2004a) New frontiers facing urban sociology at the millennium. *British Journal of Sociology* 51(1): 143–159.
- Sassen, S. (2004b) The global city: Introducing a concept. *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11: 27.
- Sassen, S. (2010) The city: Its return as a lens for social theory. *City, Culture, and Society* 1: 3–10.
- Saunders, P. (2003 [1989]) *Social theory and the urban question*. Los Angeles: Routledge.
- Schwendinger, H., & Schwendinger, J.R. (1974) *The sociologists of the chair: A radical analysis of the formative years of North American sociology (1883–1922)*. New York: Basic Books.
- Shaw, W. S. (2007) *Cities of whiteness*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Slater, T. (2021) *Shaking up the city*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Small, A. W. (1916) Fifty years of sociology in the United States (1865–1915). *American Journal of Sociology* 21(6): 721–864.
- Smith, N. (1996) *The new urban frontier: Gentrification and the revanchist city*. London: Routledge.
- Steinberg, S. (2007) *Race relations: A critique*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Storper, M. (2001) The poverty of radical theory today: From the false promises of Marxism to the mirage of the cultural turn. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25(1): 155–179.
- Tönnies, F. (2002 [1887]) *Community and society*. Mineola: Dover Publications Inc.
- Tucker, R. (1978) *The Marx-Engels reader*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Valle, M. M. (2017) Revealing the ruse: Shifting the narrative of colorblind urbanism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. Available at: <https://www.ijurr.org/spotlight-on/race-justice-and-the-city/revealing-the-ruse-shifting-the-narrative-of-colorblind-urbanism/>.
- Valle, M. M. (2021) Globalizing the sociology of gentrification. *City & Community* 20(1): 59–70.
- Venkatesh, S. A. (2008) *Gang leader for a day: A rogue sociologist takes to the streets*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Veracini, L. (2010) *Settler colonialism: A theoretical overview*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wacquant, L. (1995 [1989]) The ghetto, the state and the new capitalist economy. In Kasinitz, P. (ed.) *Metropolis: Center and symbol of our times*. New York: NYU Press, 413–449.
- Wacquant, L. (2002) Scrutinizing the street: Poverty, morality, and the pitfalls of urban ethnography. *American Journal of Sociology* 107(6): 1468–1532.
- Wallerstein, I. (2004) *World-systems analysis*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wallerstein, I. (2011 [1974]) *The modern world-system I: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century* (Vol. 1). Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Ward, J., & Hubbard, P. (2019) Urban regeneration through culture. In Schwenen, T. and Kempen, R. (eds.) *Handbook of urban geography*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Weber, M. (1967 [1930]) *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Weber, M. (1978 [1921]) The city (non-legitimate domination). In Roth, G., and Wittich, C. (eds.) *Economy and society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yu, H. (2001) *Thinking orientals: Migration, contact, and exoticism in modern America*. New York: Oxford University Press.



- Zuberi, T. & Bonilla-Silva, E. (2008) *White logic, white methods: Racism and methodology*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Zukin, S. (1996) *The cultures of cities*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zukin, S. (1998) Urban lifestyles: Diversity and standardization in spaces of consumption. *Urban Studies* 35(5–6): 825–839.
- Zukin, S. (2011) Is there an urban sociology? Questions on a field and a vision. *Sociologica* 3: 1–17.