Introduction

An immense body of work already exists with respect to the relationship between race and the modern landscape which demonstrates the depths of the racial dimension of America’s urban development. Statistics show that in the decades since the Civil Rights Movement, segregation and particularly the hyper-segregation of whites has grown. Distance between racial groups is evident in practically every area of social life, from housing, employment, and education to health, political access and representation, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Over a century of de jure white supremacy in the United States has effectively resulted, in keeping with the 1968 prediction of the Kerner Commission, in “two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal.” Racialized residential discrimination and the struggles both to enact and dismantle it have had an extremely influential effect on America’s degeneration into its standard form of a racially-dual society.

Individual understandings of concepts such as race and racism are practically as varied as the people who live by them. For the purposes of this paper, race and racial categories are defined as “a [fabricated] body of prejudgments that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior” (American Anthropological Association, 713). This identification of race as something which was initially created by man is not to deny the salience of race and racism in the lives of individuals throughout history. Rather, it is to remind that “human beings have the capacity to learn any
cultural behavior,” and, by extension, that we are similarly capable of unlearning damaging behavior (American Anthropological Association, 713). The specific concept of racialization refers to “the way in which racial categories sort people, society distributes resources along racial lines, and state policy shapes and is shaped by the racial contours of society” (Gotham 13). This racially-based unequal distribution of resources historically established land acquisition and infrastructure precedents that have more often than not proved resistant to change with devastating long-term effects.

In terms of urban planning, there are two different levels wherein the racialization of space takes place: first, the material or physical, which is racialized through the effects of both explicit and implicit racist policies and private action, and second, the extra-verbal, or cognitive dimension, wherein ideological indoctrination frames how individuals perceive their material surroundings, thereby dictating how said individuals are inclined to act. In the United States, the connection between race, land (property) and individual identity was established early, and has mutated along with the ideology of white supremacy into the ‘colorblind’ form it takes today. To demonstrate the origins and form of America’s dual-level racialization of space, this paper presents analyses of racialized identity formation, ideological mechanisms of indoctrination and institutionalization, and a consideration of the ways in which these are interwoven with the real estate industry and urban development as a whole. As previous scholars have pointed out, the ultimate purpose of naming and describing racist practices is not to pass judgment nor induce guilt but rather to empower current and future generations to both recognize and work against racism in all its forms.

**Ideology and the American Racial Identity**

General definitions of ideology describe a set of beliefs, an outlook or a worldview that provide individuals with established frameworks for understanding relationships (to others and to one’s environment) and making decisions about how to act (Higgs 36). In the history of human society, ideologies have, more often than not,
been used by the elite to harness the labor, power, and support of other (lower) classes, if not for explicit material gain then at the very least to ensure their continued dominance. This method of using ideology to divide and conquer has been used in the United States, wherein the ideology of white supremacy justified the legal sanction of slavery for nearly 100 years and has been providing rationalizations for the continuing oppression and exploitation of minorities in the years since.

Contrary to the current popular understanding (which is demonstrably ideologically based) that racists are no more or less than individual extremists who operate on the outskirts of acceptable society, when a given society’s normative function is the unequal distribution of power and resources along racial lines, any action which is not explicitly and adequately anti-racist will inadvertently follow society’s established racialized trajectory (Barndt 148). In the United States, the ideology of white supremacy has continually provided a variety of benefits to the white population, the most basic of which is solidarity, i.e., the fulfillment of the human psychological/spiritual need to associate with a broader group identity (Higgs 42). These benefits, though often tangible, are essentially no more than a bribe, gifted to the white population automatically and specifically designed to both disguise the globalized system of resource redistribution and dissipate organized resistance (Alexander 34-35).

The clearest example of this racial bribe in US history is in its initial establishment, described by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow* as follows:

Deliberately and strategically, the [elite] planter class extended special privileges to poor whites in an effort to drive a wedge between them and black slaves. White settlers were allowed greater access to Native American lands, white servants were allowed to police slaves through slave patrols and militias, and barriers were created so that free labor would not be placed in competition with slave labor. These measures effectively eliminated the risk of future alliances between black slaves and poor whites.
Poor whites suddenly had a direct, personal stake in the existence of a race-based system of slavery. Their own plight had not improved by much, but at least they were not slaves. Once the planter elite split the labor force, poor whites responded to the logic of their situation and sought ways to expand their racially privileged position. (25)

Similar forms of this bribe have been repeatedly enacted since. Therefore, white privilege and racial discrimination today have been institutionalized and work for the most part autonomously, which allows whites to distance themselves from the racial dimension of their daily actions (Bonilla-Silva 53). Racial bribes today rely not on whites’ violent maintenance of racial boundaries; that work is completed by the autonomous functions of the state. Instead, whites merely have to commit to turning a blind eye to the ways in which their privileged treatment is reliant on the continued exploitation of others.

Although race is not the only axis of social division at work in modern society, it is, especially in the United States, overdeterminant, functioning essentially as a meta-language which “impregnates the simplest meanings we take for granted... [and] tends to subsume other sets of social relations” (Higginbotham 255). Where an individual’s understanding of their identity is connected both to racial superiority and private property as symbolic of wealth, it follows that disruptions to perceived racial and residential norms would have an incendiary effect on political engagement as a means to defend/secure one’s perceived holdings. Historically, the ideology of white supremacy has relied on this metaphor of theft or threat of loss to induce impoverished, working, and middle class whites to decry organizations and institutions that might have benefitted them, like independent labor unions, public housing, and government welfare, on the basis of their racialized implications.

**Language of Ideology, Meta-Language of Race**

Language is an integral part of identity development. In his article on the development of Israeli/Palestinian group identities, Phillip Hammock describes the development of individual identity as “ideology cognized through the individual engagement with
discourse, made manifest in a personal narrative constructed and reconstructed across the life course, and scripted in and through social interaction and social practice” (222). This process begins even before birth, as philosopher Louis Althusser points out; babies are born, at the very least, with the expectation that they will bear their father’s name, i.e., attach to a pre-existing identity formation (119). In recent years, studies of early child language development found that “by the time the children were 3 years old, trends in amount of talk, vocabulary growth, and style of interaction were well-established...when we listened to the children, we seemed to hear their parents speaking” (Hart & Risley 7). When, as in the United States, children develop both under conditions of racial hyper-segregation and with exposure to the mentality of past generations through familial interaction, the “power of a word to mean,” specifically the power of internalized racial language in early identity development can have devastating effects (Higginbotham 256, Bonilla-Silva 32, 60).

In recent years, psychologists have experimented with tracking brain activity on an MRI machine while showing subjects images of people’s faces of various races in order to test the extra-verbal boundaries of the sociological theories that individuals differentiate associations based on racial identifiers. The image of an unfamiliar black face triggered neural responses in the amygdala of white men, the area of the brain specifically associated with fear and vigilance. In a different study, images of the homeless, black or white, both incited activity in the insula, an area associated with disgust, and “failed to stimulate areas of the brain that usually activate whenever people think about other people, or themselves” (Fiske). These experiments substantiate what students of ideology and racism have maintained for years, that the “social construction of race [is] predicated upon the recognition of difference and signifying the simultaneous distinguishing and positioning of groups vis-à-vis one another” (Higginbotham 253). It is important to recall that this recognition of difference is taught through an individual’s socialization in racial isolation; it is a learned behavior, not a biological predisposition.
Althusser refers to this process as “the ideological recognition function,” which he compares to an individual being hailed in the street; though the metaphor implies a linear progression of time, in fact the hailing and the individual recognition of his or her identity as the hailed occurs simultaneously, the implication being that any individual capable of being so hailed ideologically is “always-already” primed for activation (118-119). In effect, any time an individual of a given group is confronted with a decision, whether they realize their decision-making process has been ideologically corrupted or not, they will act accordingly, unless they make the active and often inconvenient or “illogical” choice of acting against their ideological intuition. This process, and more specifically the system of classificatory logic that induces whites to “misrecognize” fellow humans as an alien or “Other,” is the underlying ideological mechanism whites use to justify and rationalize the existence of the racially-stratified system at work in the United States today (Wynter 45).

It is specifically this misrecognition function, upheld in reality by ideological and state apparati, that has resulted in the modern meta-language of race that lends differential meanings to words depending on their racial association. Consider, for example, the following passage from Barndt’s *Dismantling Racism*:

> What are simply school problems in any other place become ‘problems of minority education.’ Whatever the issue – housing, school, jobs, street lights, sewers, sex, welfare, family life – in the ‘minority community,’ they become racial problems… Categories such as ‘cultural deprivation,’ ‘welfare syndrome’ or ‘family deterioration’ are part of the everyday language to describe people of color in the United States.

> A totally different vocabulary is used, of course, to describe the white community – a vocabulary that gives more pleasant names to our illnesses. For example, we live in ‘communities’ and ‘neighborhoods;’ they live in ‘ghettos,’ ‘inner cities,’ and ‘slums.’ We have ‘youth disturbances,’ they have ‘race riots.’ The use of such sociological languages
to describe our separate existences helps to make the cultural curtain even more impenetrable. (108-109)

Higginbotham specifically demonstrates how this dual system of classification based on race is visible when we consider how the experiences of individuals in other categories of social division are split along racial lines. During the Reconstruction Era, for example, black women were routinely criticized for “female loaferism,” i.e., their

---

**Figure 1:** Racial microaggressions are forms of ideological invalidation. (Sue et al. 278)
withdrawal from the workforce “to play the lady while their husbands supported them” (260). During the same period, upper-class white women were increasingly encouraged to isolate in the home, in keeping with the broader trend of growing domestic isolation, where both the home itself as symbolic of wealth and the “racially pure” white women within were perceived as in need of protection from the threat of racialized urban contamination.

The Industry of Real Estate

The association between land and wealth did not originate in America, yet due to both the vastness of the American territory and the racialized perception of land in America as vacant and therefore open for the taking, access to the associated social benefits of land ownership was more readily available for the average American citizen than their Old World counterparts (Jackson 53-54). The emphasis that developed in America, however, was not simply on the ownership of land but on the conspicuous ownership of land; that is, ownership of land that has been disconnected from serving an economic purpose, such as a farm or mill, and is instead an ornamental, symbolic representation of accumulated business capital. Men, especially upper-class men, were expected to make at least enough money through business in the city to afford to keep their family in an ornamental, semi-rural homestead on the outskirts of the metropolis, so as to keep them “safe” from the perceived negative influence of urban life. The following 1905 real-estate advertisement explicitly exemplifies this mindset: “Get your children into the country. The cities murder children. The hot pavements, the dust, the noise, are fatal in many cases, and harmful always. The history of successful men is nearly always the history of country boys” (Jackson 138). This is but one of many examples of similar expressions, made through advertisements and general statements of influential individuals, which portray the city as inherently unsafe and incapable of betterment.

This call to abandon cities was in large part constructed by real estate developers in their mission to inflate the cost of their products. Although many of the detrimental effects of both urbanization and industrialization were visible even as they occurred, these
negative consequences manifested with few adequate means of coping in place for the general public. This can hardly be called accidental, as a main part of the reason business leaders at this time were so easily able to commandeer local governments into developing public services according to their interests was due to the ideological assumption that disease, vice, and poverty were innate to the “lesser” races, and that the only logical solution was to segregate and contain the negative aspects of urban life (Goldberg 197-198; Jackson 120, 124). Beginning in the late 20th century, this general trend for public services and municipal development to focus on transit and sprawling residential development over inner-city welfare at the expense of the general taxpayer has been described as the ‘shortcut’ whites took to establish a secure, stable residential environment (Jackson 131, 293; Schirmer 97).

Racialized language was an essential component of the real estate industry’s early sales technique. The rhetoric of advertisements played on white anxiety both through explicit claims of white exclusivity and the use of implicit, coded language which alluded to shared cultural assumptions about race and urban issues (Goldberg 202). Over time, as open racial discrimination became more and more taboo, advertisements and racial rhetoric in general reverted to exclusive reliance on “non-racial” justifications for racial segregation. In effect, this insistence that racial segregation is the result of individual choices made in a free market combined with the ideological misrecognition of minorities as outside the boundaries of the “legitimate” American public has allowed the government to excuse itself from taking responsibility for these populations’ continually disadvantaged state (Wynter 44-46). While the FHA essentially subsidized white flight from inner cities, and suburbs today continue to benefit from the small percent of their population which requires government/public assistance, officials continually argue against fair/public housing proposals under the pretense that they are explicitly coercive welfare state maneuvers. These same developers have continually taken advantage of the coercively-based relationship between suburbs and the city (Jackson 285, Gotham 129-133).
Figure 2. Racially restrictive covenants were not rendered illicit until 1972, though they were challengeable in court by 1954. (Goldberg 195, Gotham 41)

Racial Restrictive Covenants and Subdivisions in Metropolitan Kansas City, 1900–1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County (MO)</th>
<th>Johnson County (KS)</th>
<th>Jackson County</th>
<th>Clay (MO)</th>
<th>Platte County (MO)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Restrictive Covenants</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Subdivisions</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Subdivisions with Restrictive Covenants</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Acreage of Subdivisions</td>
<td>3105</td>
<td>3322</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Acreage of Subdivisions with Restrictive Covenants</td>
<td>3023</td>
<td>2160</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Acreage of Subdivisions with Restrictive Covenants</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year First Restrictive Covenant Recorded</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Last Restrictive Covenant Recorded</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Plat Books and Guarantor Books at the Recorder of Deeds Offices for Johnson County, Jackson County, Clay County, and Platte County; Slingsby 1980, p. 112; X1239A “Explicit Racially Restricted Covenants Against Blacks, 1900–1965. Jackson, Clay, and Platte Counties”, X22 (oversized). “Restrictive Covenant Location Map, Kansas City Metropolitan Area, 1947.” Both exhibits prepared by Gary Tobin. Racially restrictive covenants including date recorded, name of subdivision, and land developer are located in Box 343. KC 250, Arthur A. Benson, II. Legal Papers. WHMC-KC and in Box 47, folder 1. KC 206, Hare and Hare. WHMC-KC.
Although these suburban environments may appear stable, this stability has been achieved only by further sacrificing the stability of the national community as a whole. The cost of not initially developing adequate methods to remedy the ills of urban life, along with the astronomical commitment early generations made to pay for the development and maintenance of residential sprawl, have had devastating long-term results (Jackson 297-298, 304; Ben-Joseph 80). Today, cities can barely afford to keep their streets in their current state of continual disrepair, much less introduce new initiatives for alternative, potentially more efficient municipal practices. More often than not, when construction projects are even partially municipally funded, they are geared more towards selling the city as an attractive destination rather than addressing residential needs (Sohmer & Lang, 426-427). The standard justification for this is that tourists and consumers will be drawn to the city, resulting in an increase of foot traffic and revenue. In reality, the majority of this revenue goes to both businesses and workers that are not local and do not live in the city. In fact, if inner-city residents were not forced to bear the cost of both such projects and their cities’ failing infrastructures, they would likely have at least some extra disposable income to begin supporting their own local businesses. In turn, this would cause an increase in cities’ tax revenue and would eventually result in the collection of enough funds to begin the consideration of larger projects. This particular method of municipal development is not as flashy as building new stadiums and shopping centers, but it is the necessary first step toward the construction of the kind of stable infrastructure that is needed to support successful residential life.

Conclusions

Althusser and others have maintained that “ideology has a material existence” (112). In the United States, the urban landscape is a clear reflection of the material existence of white supremacy born through the ideological actions of individuals and the government as a whole. Today, however, the racialized nature of the urban landscape has been cloaked by the rhetorical insistence that these outcomes are not racial. In his work on the settlement and rise of Chicago, William Cronon describes a similar
rhetorical move. After early municipal leaders modified key parts of the natural landscape of the Chicago area so that it might better serve their interests, “boosters”, or advertisers of the city, continued to describe these constructed attributes as a “natural” part of Chicago’s municipal advantage. Cronon and others have referred to this alteration of the landscapes and its subsequent inflation with the natural order as “second nature” (56). Racial residential segregation in the United States today is, in many ways, a form of second nature. Although this phenomenon was openly constructed, American children today grow up indoctrinated with the belief that segregation is natural and that integration has not yet occurred because “the races just don’t get along” (Bonilla-Silva 84-87). In fact, integration has not occurred because, by the time the government was forced to dismantle it on the public stage, white supremacy had already shifted to a new battleground. Today, suburbs regularly refuse annexation by their nearby metropolis; as Jackson states, “the well-to-do could avoid local costs of urban old age simply by stepping over the border and leaving the poor to support the poor” (285). This continuing dissociation between today’s urban and suburban governments is yet another extension of America’s historically based racially-dual society.

Suburbs, however, are not the only highly visible form of white supremacy on the modern landscape. Nearly a century after white retreat and the association between minorities and urban crime began to be institutionalized, scholars have shown that “mass incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time” at the continual expense of investing in public services specifically designed to address the extreme conditions of poverty which foster crime (Davis). This situation is disguised; unemployment figures for African-American men, for example, jump from 11 to 17 percent once incarceration is figured into the equation, even as countless corporations take advantage of inmate labor, which offers no health benefits or workers compensation and includes no potential for strikes or union organizing (Davis).
Comparisons that have been made between the prison and military industrial complexes can also be extended to the real estate industry. Described as “a set of bureaucratic, political, and economic interests encouraging increased spending...regardless of actual need,” the industrial complexes operate with immense overlap between public and private interests and, more often than not, with “an eye to the bottom line” (Schlosser 54). The same is true of the real estate industry (Gotham 7-10). Although the term ‘complex’ applies in one respect to the system of invested parties, “in the realm of psychology a complex is an overreaction to some perceived threat” (Schlosser 55). Whereas the “permanent emergencies” of the Cold War and the War on Drugs prompted the government to sanction the shift of military and incarceration efforts into big-business maneuvers, the perceptions of communism and crime as threats and the subsequent descent into defensive action, which is highly profitable for those in charge, can in fact be traced back to the previously discussed ideological metaphors of theft.

The immense reaction to racialized understandings of what an individual perceives he or she is entitled only makes sense once we appreciate the extra-cognitive function of the ideology of white supremacy which, as stated, defines the legitimate community of the American public as only those who ascribe to the middle-upper class white male norm. By extension, the poor both in America itself and in the global third world are placed outside the realm of responsibility, along with any others who cannot or refuse to ascribe to the aforementioned ideal. Therefore, any claim to equality that cannot be incorporated into the constructed realm of what is ‘normal’ becomes viewed as an illegitimate, impossible, and potentially dangerous threat.
Works Cited


