

Introduction: Race, Space, and Scale in the Twenty-First Century

Wendy Cheng & Rashad Shabazz

The writer and social critic Richard Wright made issues of race, space, and scale central in his famous novel *Native Son* (1940). *Native Son* tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a young Black man living on Chicago's South Side during the 1930s. Wright shows how racial segregation and the tiny, incommensurate housing Black Chicagoans were forced to live in (kitchenettes) signified the racial inequality Black migrants from the South were compelled to confront at multiple levels, including the body, home, and neighborhood. For Wright, racism was a spatial practice made palpable by immediacy, proximity, and containment. Wright called the kitchenette—formed from apartments cut into smaller residences and housing entire families—“our prison, our death sentence without trial, the new form of mob violence that assaults not only the lone individual, but all of us, in its ceaseless attacks.”¹

Three-quarters of a century later, the racial inequality Wright described in Chicago continues.² It's lived on an everyday basis across multiple spatial typologies (e.g., ghetto, suburb, barrio, reservation, prison, occupied territory). Settler-colonialist occupation, “stop-and-frisk” tactics, harsh anti-immigrant policies such as Arizona's Senate Bill 1070, and outright killing—whether perpetrated by bombs, police, or vigilantes—illustrate the interlocking scales in which these processes take place. In each of the above cases, forms of restraint, surveillance, containment, and expulsion function at multiple levels. In the case of stop-and-frisk, for example, New

¹ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Basic Books, 1941), 106.

² For a relatively recent, popularly accessible analysis of the continuing consequences of the vast inequalities created by residential segregation, see Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” (*The Atlantic*, June 2014; <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>).

York City police systematically accosted mostly young Black and Latino males at the level of the body. SB 1070 functioned similarly in Arizona, with brown people surveilled and policed throughout the state. In the occupation of Palestine, a form of “frontier architecture” brackets the people who live on a strip of land between Israel to the west, which delimits their mobility through checkpoints and walls, the Mediterranean Sea to the east, Egypt to the south, and Lebanon to the north. In all these examples, processes of immobilization exacerbate vulnerability to state-sanctioned violence³ and function on different scales simultaneously—body, city, state, and territory—and are justified by racist common sense.⁴

In each of these cases, race—deployed as an enduring marker of hierarchical social difference—is integral. In the era of “postracialism” and “color blindness,” racism is proclaimed to be over, and race is refused any relevance to individual experience as well as to large-scale processes. However, racism, understood as “the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death,”⁵ is readily apparent across spaces and scales. For instance, in the United States, the twenty-first century was inaugurated on September 11, 2001, with the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City in planes piloted by foreign nationals. This event unleashed a new era of US war making on a global scale, as well as domestic surveillance and newly reinvigorated and differentially racialized fears of the “other” within. Economic implosion in the late 2000s justified another racial purge directed against immigrants, overrepresented in the popular imaginary by poor brown bodies from Mexico and experienced on an everyday basis by brown people of all backgrounds. As a consequence of these geopolitical and global economic shifts, immigration policing and detention now intersect with and feed the largest prison-industrial complex in the world, whose technologies of punishment and control have reached a new level of cruelty with the increasingly widespread use of long-term solitary confinement in security housing units.

Historically, the United States’ territorialization of race has its roots more broadly in the European conquest, settlement, transatlantic slavery, and economic exploitation of the Americas.⁶ In the US settler state, the ongoing genocide and dispossession of indigenous people have been justified by frontier ideologies of empty, unoccupied land and by the construction of Native peoples as uncivilized outsiders relegated to a distant past. The idea of Manifest Destiny anointed Anglo-Americans as the only rightful occupants of the nation. Concomitantly, Black people, whose experiences in the United States were rooted in plantation slavery, came to be seen as the domestic other, inferior but part of the nation nonetheless—and, importantly, necessary

³ This formulation paraphrases Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s definition of racism, quoted and discussed in the following paragraph.

⁴ We refer to a Gramscian conception of common sense here, in which common sense is believed to refer to age-old wisdom but is actually specific to a particular historical moment and serves to justify the existing social order. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971); and Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1986): 5–27.

⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 28.

⁶ On territorialization more broadly, see David Delaney, *Territory: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005). On the territorialization of race, see Juan De Lara, “Remapping Inland Southern California: Global Commodity Distribution, Land Speculation, and Politics in the Inland Empire” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009).

as devalued labor. Therefore, while one logic justified large-scale expulsion and expropriation, the other necessitated control at the level of the street and the body.⁷

The practice of racism through spatial differentiation did not end after conquest and emancipation. In the aftermath of emancipation in the South and the end of Reconstruction, white supremacy roared back. Jim Crow racism, as it became known, was a form of racism that worked across scales: region, city, and body. Jim Crow racism sought to segregate Blacks and whites in the American South. Through lines of demarcation that were inscribed onto the geography of the South, Jim Crow created two worlds: Black and white, separate and unequal. By dividing southern society along racial lines, white southerners reaped the benefits of property accumulation, better schools, better jobs, and better housing—a process that occurred nationwide but was defended most visibly and viciously in the South. Indeed, Jim Crow at the level of community segregation created vast inequalities that spawned the Civil Rights movement. The most visible forms of Jim Crow racism worked at the level of the body. Through the ubiquity of signs that separated Blacks and whites in public (at pools, on buses, and in schools, for example), Jim Crow cemented the fears and anxieties that whites had onto the landscape of the South. Simultaneously, in the country as a whole, during and long after Jim Crow, redlining and housing discrimination segregated cities and suburbs and, perhaps most insidiously, naturalized the deepening spatial, racial, and class divisions that ensued.

Stop-and-frisk, contemporary anti-immigrant, and other policies and practices enable the terrorization of Black and Brown people seen to be “out of place” and therefore a threat to the status quo. They are the cousins of Jim Crow and are made possible by the continuing pervasiveness of racial segregation. Using fear and safety as justification, and operating in always already-racialized landscapes, these tactics serve to create markedly distinct and unequal everyday experiences and outcomes for racially differentiated populations. In the past few years, increased public attention to numerous extrajudicial arrests, beatings, and killings of unarmed Black men, women, transgender people, and children by police and vigilantes has given rise to a new mass political movement, #BlackLivesMatter.⁸ In Arizona, SB 1070 caused a mass exodus from the state, dividing families and decimating neighborhoods. Arizona’s increased desirability as a destination for undocumented Mexican immigrants in itself was a result of California’s ramped-up border policing of the 1990s, part of what Joseph Nevins has described as a system of global apartheid.⁹ Federal programs such as Operation Streamline, in which undocumented immigrants are tried in court en masse and leave with criminal convictions, produce growing, freshly criminalized, entire populations, who feed the expanding carceral system in the United States and throughout the Americas.¹⁰

⁷ See Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Nicholas De Genova, “Introduction: Latino and Asian Racial Formations at the Frontiers of U.S. Nationalism,” in *Racial Transformations: Latinos and Asians Remaking the United States*, ed. Nicholas De Genova and Ana Y. Ramos Zayas (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–22; and Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing,” in *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006), 70–76.

⁸ <http://blacklivesmatter.com>

⁹ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on “Illegals” and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁰ Joshua Partlow, “Under Operation Streamline: Fast-Track Proceedings for Illegal Immigrants,” *Washington Post*, February 10, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/under-operation-streamline-fast-track-proceedings-for-illegal-immigrants/2014/02/10/87529d24-919d-11e3-97d3-f7da321f6f33_story.html.

In the past half century, significant demographic shifts have also facilitated more broadly differentiated opportunities for immigrants and people of color (i.e., at both the high and the low ends of the economy). Cold War geopolitics, global economic restructuring, and the aftereffects of colonial exploitation and neocolonial wars created dynamic routes of mobility and exchange, alongside enduring trauma for entire communities. These processes have resulted in the transformation of a broad range of metropolitan and rural landscapes by what historian and ethnic studies scholar Scott Kurashige has called “the new polyethnic majority.”¹¹

Interdisciplinary scholarship in the humanities and social sciences—particularly in ethnic studies, American studies, and gender studies—has begun to reckon with these and a host of other complexities of racial formation in the twenty-first century.¹² Still, few explicit considerations of the mutually formative relationships between race and space exist.¹³ This issue of *Occasion* is one attempt to mark and bridge the gaps between the literatures on race, space, and scale. What do these three markers of difference and location tell us about the world we live in? The late Stuart Hall famously argued that class is lived through race. The same can be said of race and space: race is lived through space. Further, space is lived through scale. By that, we mean that space and scale are the registers through which race is lived, expressed, articulated, and produced. Apartheid, policing, anti-immigration policies, and occupation constitute some of the material, spatial realities through which race is lived. Indeed, the “spatialization of race” is a primary mechanism that perpetuates racial inequality.¹⁴ Space and scale are central frames of analysis that scholars and everyday people use to talk about not only racial inequality but nearly all types of social inequality, whether it is experienced through segregation, policing and containment, uneven development, or occupation. This issue of *Occasion*, therefore, focuses on race, space, and scale because articulating the relationships between these is integral to how longstanding processes of inequality work.

Following the critical interventions of Marxists and geographers—and particularly Marxist geographers—over the past several decades, we understand both space and scale as socially and historically produced rather than static entities. That is, space is not an empty vessel within which social processes are located but is actively produced by, and shapes, social processes. Similarly, scale, in a spatial sense (e.g., body, region, nation, world), is not “ontologically given” or fixed but, rather, constituted by “platforms” of linked activities and meanings that are made to cohere by social, political, and economic processes.¹⁵ Typically, then, scales are the dominant spatial units

¹¹ Scott Kurashige, “The Many Facets of Brown: Integration in a Multiracial Society,” *Journal of American History* 91 (2004): 56–68.

¹² See Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, eds., *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); and Daniel HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido, eds., *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

¹³ For some notable exceptions, see Marlon Bailey and Rashad Shabazz, “Gender and Sexual Geographies of Blackness,” *Gender, Place, and Culture* 21, nos. 3–4 (2014): 449–52; and Michael McIntyre and Heidi J. Nast, “Bio(necro)polis: Marx, Surplus Populations, and the Spatial Dialectics of Reproduction and ‘Race,’” *Antipode* 43, no. 5 (2011): 1465–88.

¹⁴ For a brief, introductory overview of this topic, see George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape,” *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (2007): 10–23.

¹⁵ As Neil Smith puts it: “Different societies not only produce space . . . but they also produce scale. The production of scale may be the most elemental differentiation of geographical space and it is every bit a social process. There is nothing ontologically given about the traditional division between home and locality, urban and

by which societies and social processes are organized and understood. As such, they are both objects and terrains of struggle. Struggles over scale can result in the reconfiguration of political claims, identities, and relationships of power.

For instance, in his landmark work *Development Arrested*, Clyde Woods described a “blues epistemology” that emerged from enslaved people under the heel of the Mississippi delta’s plantation regime and that subsequently resonated around the world as a global articulation of Black experience in imperialist, capitalist modernity.¹⁶ Similarly, in *Golden Gulag*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s influential account of the political economy of prison expansion in California, Gilmore describes how anti-prison activists started asking questions from a “local” level but came to expand their geographic scale of analysis statewide, in order to understand the linkages between the inner-city areas from which most prisoners came and the rural towns in which prisons were sited. Being attentive to geographic scale as well as to various intellectual scales of analysis is essential to understanding social problems, since it helps us understand how the specificities of local conditions are rooted in more expansive circuits of power that operate across scale.¹⁷ In turn, this is instructive for crafting a politics of social change, “both in terms of the development of alternative political spaces and the deployment of socio-spatial strategies of resistance.”¹⁸

In this issue of *Occasion*, authors engage with space and scale to map the intricate details of race and racism’s lived realities. Not only is racism lived through space, but space is also a major “resource in the production of white privilege.”¹⁹ In the beginning of this essay, we quoted Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s definition of racism as it is usually quoted in the scholarly literature. However, in a more elaborated iteration, Gilmore’s definition actually reads, “Racism is the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in *distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies*.”²⁰ In other words, geography is integral to understanding the practices of racism and white supremacy. Be it through the Trail of Tears that Native Americans faced or apartheid in South Africa, or more contemporary examples like immigration policies and police tactics, the control of space is inextricably linked to the practice of racism. Concomitantly, delving into geographies of power also shines a light onto terrains of struggle, resistance, and alternative ways of knowing and being in the world.

Our hope as coeditors is to strengthen the links between the study of racism and geography. In order to do so, we bring together the work of nine scholars who are grappling with this

regional, national and global scales. The differentiation of geographical scales established and is established through the geographical structure of social interactions.” Neil Smith, “Geography, Difference and the Politics of Scale,” in *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences*, ed. Joe Doherty, Elspeth Graham, and Mo Malek (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 73. Elsewhere, Smith defines scale as “platforms for specific kinds of social activity . . . in a wider sea of relational space.” Neil Smith, “Scale,” in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, ed. R. J. Johnston, Derek Gregory, Geraldine Pratt, and Michael Watts, 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 725.

¹⁶ Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in the Mississippi Delta* (London: Verso, 1998).

¹⁷ We thank Juan De Lara for this particular insight. See Juan D. De Lara, *Inland Shift: Race, Space, and Power in Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

¹⁸ Helga Leitner and Byron Miller, “Scale and the Limitations of Ontological Debate: A Commentary on Marston, Jones and Woodward,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 121, doi:10.1111/j.1475-5661.2007.00236.x.121.

¹⁹ Laura Pulido, “Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 1 (2000): 30.

²⁰ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Race and Globalization,” in *Geographies of Global Change: Remapping the World*, ed. R. J. Johnston, Peter J. Taylor, and Michael J. Watts, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 261 (emphasis added).

relationship in diverse locales and at multiple scales and who are producing some of the most exciting interdisciplinary work being done at the intersections of ethnic studies, geography, indigenous studies, American studies, and urban studies. We hope these articles will provide readers of this journal with challenging, multidisciplinary perspectives to think about race, space, and scale in new ways.

Collectively, the articles presented here ask: How does the relationship between race and space work at various (nonexclusive) scales, from the body to the global? What is the role of the state in continuing to produce and mediate the relationship between race and space? How does geopolitics function in the everyday, and how might we foreground political economy in metropolitan, regional, and global analyses to examine both intended and unintended consequences? What is the role of middle-classness and relatively privileged segments of racialized minorities in shaping US cities and suburbs today, and how might these transform dominant understandings of metropolitan space? And finally, how do long histories of colonization and dispossession function in shaping individual lives, landscapes, and public memory today?

Jenna M. Loyd grapples with the global reach of carceral power in her essay, “Carceral Citizenship in an Age of Global Apartheid.” Loyd’s essay not only shows the global reach of the prison-industrial complex but does so by illustrating the multiple scales upon which carceral power operates, articulated through border policing and militarization, which have resulted in migration, regulation, and detention. Importantly, Loyd links the rise of the carceral state with racist and imperialist histories at a global scale. The author traces the origins of current border policing and criminalization practices back to policies meant to keep out Haitian refugees, policies that were themselves rooted in global histories of anti-Blackness. She shows how US border practices cannot be separated from global contexts, histories, and relationships and how, through the carceral state, these combine in devastating ways with national and regional racial ideologies. “Repackaging Plantation Relations: Green Revolution Technologies, Agriculture, and the Remaking of the Américas,” by Orlando R. Serrano Jr., takes up the economic hemispheric links between the US South and the “Américas” that were made possible through technologies from the “Green Revolution.” Drawing on the work of the late Clyde Woods and focusing on coffee production, Serrano carefully identifies how the “plantation relations” Woods described in his work have been deployed throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Thomas Michael Swensen’s essay, “Race Technologies and Familial History in Twentieth-Century Native Alaska,” contends that US statehood brought with it processes of racialization that negatively impacted the indigenous Alaskan population at the intimate scales of families and individual bodies. Through a careful close reading and analysis of a piece by Siberian Yupik poet Susie Silook, Swensen achieves persuasive insights about the formation of racial, gender, and national identities through intimate interactions in the context of nation building and colonial violence, as well as about practices of defiance and resilience that cannot be suppressed. In “Target: Biomedicine and Racialized Geo-body-politics,” Shiloh Krupar and Nadine Ehlers also look at the effect of biologized violence on individual bodies, in an essay that examines the targeting of Black people in order to market “race-specific” drugs; and “hot-spotting,” a practice of medical spatial profiling. These neoliberal practices, argue Krupar and Ehlers, enlist Black bodies and racialized spaces in what they term a “geo-body-politics.”

Two essays address relationships between race and space at the metropolitan scale. Johana Londoño’s piece, “Critical Latino Urban Studies in a Metropolitan Perspective: The Case of

Latino-Majority Union City, New Jersey,” argues for an intervention that needs to be made in literature and discourse regarding “Latino urbanism” as well as in urban studies in general. Londoño advocates taking a “metropolitan perspective,” particularly by looking closely at the political, economic, and even geopolitical processes that produce Latino-majority spaces at the fringes of metropolitan areas. Once-Cuban-dominant Union City, New Jersey, serves as the fascinating case study that informs this larger argument. “Reading Whiskey Gulch: The Meanings of Space and Urban Redevelopment in East Palo Alto, California,” by Michael B. Kahan, focuses on the metropolitan Bay Area in California to provide a vivid and well-researched historical and contemporary account of an understudied locale (East Palo Alto) to consider the long reach of twentieth-century urban-renewal policies and the end of the redevelopment era in a multiracial, once predominantly Black city. Kahan’s work also makes visible the uneven development between cities and suburbs.

Finally, Kwame Holmes and Darius Bost focus our attention on race, gender, sexuality, and scale in the nation’s capital. Holmes’s essay, “Celebrating Black Displacement? Heritage Development in the ‘Life Cycle’ of a Chocolate City,” examines the racial and sexual geographies of exclusion and resistance in Washington, DC. With cultural readings of the U Street Heritage Trail, Holmes illuminates the historical geographies of dislocation that are enabling white, middle-class settlement and Black displacement in the U Street neighborhood. Darius Bost’s piece, “At the Club: Locating Early Black Gay AIDS Activism in Washington, DC,” explores the early impact of HIV/AIDS among Black gay people in Washington, DC. Through a case study of a Black gay nightclub, Bost inquires how this community, who were on the margins of HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, received information about the epidemic. Bost’s essay also investigates how white gay culture impacted the Black gay community’s response to HIV/AIDS.

In an influential 2002 essay on racism and geography, Ruth Wilson Gilmore argued that “a geographic imperative lies at the heart of all struggles for social justice.”²¹ We echo Gilmore’s claim and contend not only that geography is at the center of social justice struggles but also that critical spatial thinking is necessary to understand and make visible contestations over space, place, and mobility. The essays presented here advance our understandings of the intersections between race, space, and scale and illustrate the importance of spatial thinking for antiracist activism and critical race scholarship across multiple disciplines. A

²¹ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference,” *Professional Geographer* 54 (2002): 16.