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GEOG 341

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Segregation, Racial Justice, and Differentiated Solidarity

The United States has a long and documented history of racial injustices tied to segregation. Ever since the 1896 Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, questions of "separate but equal" and inherent (in)equality have pervaded every sector of our society from education to the workplace, and housing is no exception. Throughout this history, non-white households, especially Black households, have been treated unequally in the housing sector. Practices like redlining and racial covenants have produced significantly disparate economic outcomes, restricting the freedom of movement for Black families and confining them to infrastructure-deprived neighborhoods in urban areas while enabling mass suburbanization, sprawl, and the "flight" of white families. These practices have also created unequal opportunities for Black and white communities, such as making wealth building much more accessible for white families than for Black families. Residential racial segregation also contributes further to segregation in other facets of our society, such as education or employment, and racial segregation intersects with issues of class segregation as well (Young, 2002).

But what about residential segregation in which separate accommodations and economic opportunities are equal—in which the caliber of infrastructure, quality of education, and ability to build wealth is the exact same in a Black neighborhood as in a white neighborhood? Even if this were the case, segregation still produces damaging social costs—most notably, segregation can fuel prejudices (Ellen, 2008). These

prejudices contribute to damaging constructions of racial identities. Even if we level the playing field so to speak, we cannot erase historical narratives. Segregation involves a process of "othering" that can serve to justify and give meaning to historical narratives. For instance, because white people have exerted dominance over Black people historically, our society has constructed "blackness" as being associated with subordination (Omi and Winant, 2015). Through time, as Black people have been systematically boxed into these unsafe, run-down neighborhoods, their association with these fear-inducing neighborhoods exacerbates and "justifies" discrimination against them (Young, 2002). Thus, it is important for people of different groups to spend time with and around each other, and to learn from one another, to defeat these associational illusions.

On the surface, there appear to be no positive aspects to the reality of residential segregation. As a result, academics, policymakers and others alike have sought to reduce, or even eliminate residential segregation. Because of the ills of residential segregation, as with other types of segregation, many critical perspectives tend to assume that integration and desegregation are infallible and an end toward which society ought to strive at all costs. However, political philosopher Iris Marion Young argues we should strive for a different ideal which she calls *differentiated solidarity* (2002). Young's ideal of differentiated solidarity essentially acknowledges the negative aspects of segregation while affirming the freedom of choice for minority groups, a freedom that ideas of integration generally ignore. Whereas she agrees with the prevailing position that segregation inhibits freedom of movement and creates unequal opportunities, Young does not necessarily agree that integration should be viewed as the end all be all, and points

out that certain minority groups might have valid reasons to want to cluster together (2002). It might be in the best interest of a city's Black population to remain segregated to preserve their sense of community and keep their political power consolidated, and it is their right to do so. Differentiated solidarity argues that spatial group differentiation should be voluntary, not forced (Young, 2002).

It is important to clarify that Young is not arguing *for* segregation; she still acknowledges its dangerous social costs. She believes various groups should mix and interact with each other and that this interaction is important for democracy (Young, 2002). For this reason, she believes there should be no clear boundaries between demographically disparate neighborhoods (Young, 2002). Making a case for democracy, Young also argues for regional or metropolitan-level governments, citing the unwillingness and inability of residents of certain municipalities to strive for justice for residents of other municipalities despite coexisting as part of the same larger community (2002). For instance, a wealthy, white resident of Orono, Minnesota lives within the same broad economic region as a lower-income Black resident of North Minneapolis, and both of them are likely impacted by the same current events, share the same infrastructure, and share the identity of being from the Twin Cities. However, because these two individuals are separated by municipal boundaries, there is little capacity or obligation for either of them to be present at the same decision-making tables, and thus little incentive for either of them to have a stake in just outcomes for each other. Consolidating under a metropolitan-level government obligates the wealthy white residents of Orono to help remedy the injustices the underprivileged Black community experiences in Minneapolis. This larger governmental structure would place both of these people at the same

decision-making tables and foster a greater sense of understanding and community between them.

We have seen the ways in which cities have tried to achieve racial justice through integration, but to what extent could cities feasibly implement ideals of differentiated solidarity? Should we implement these ideals? Let us suppose we are advising a mayor of a hypersegregated city on racial justice policy. To bring about racial justice, what aspects of differentiated solidarity can our mayor implement, and which should she implement? Right away, we confront the issue of regional-level government—the mayor of one city could not implement one by herself. It is not within the power of one mayor to dissolve municipal boundaries or change governmental structures outside of her jurisdiction. The most commonly cited regional governments in the United States—the Portland Metro and the Twin Cities' Metropolitan Council—were established by statewide ballot measure and created by the state legislature, respectively (Abbott & Abbott, 1991; "History of the Metropolitan Council", n.d.). Thus, our mayor could not rely on establishing a metropolitan area-level government to foster racial justice.

Another question that arises when considering the implementation of differentiated solidarity is promoting diffusion in cases where the boundaries between racially distinct neighborhoods are rigid. Young (2002) argues against clear boundaries of separation between different neighborhoods, but in many American cities, prominent streets serve as dividing lines between two demographically disparate neighborhoods. For example, East 8 Mile Road in Detroit and Troost Avenue in Kansas City both separate predominantly Black neighborhoods from mostly white neighborhoods, and Detroit and Kansas City are both hypersegregated cities as of 2010 (Hotchkiss, 2015). Under a policy

of differentiated solidarity, how could the mayor turn these boundaries into areas of diffusion? Young seems to argue that implementation of an overarching metropolitan government structure would enable this process, but we have seen how it would be difficult for a mayor to implement such a structure. Additionally, to what extent is this true? Regional governments like the Metropolitan Council have been unable to resolve issues of housing segregation, induce diffusion, or bring about racial justice. The stress and anxiety surrounding the current trial of Derek Chauvin is an important reminder of this. We could point to larger-scale examples of differentiated solidarity, such as the European Union, but it is arguable as to whether or not country borders in the EU have become areas of diffusion, and in the case of the EU, this has little to do with race.

Thus, we cannot completely rely on differentiated solidarity to resolve our hypersegregated city's racial justice issues. Many of the ideals behind differentiated solidarity are predicated on the establishment of overarching government structures. However, there are some aspects of differentiated solidarity that we can look to implement—for example, affirmation of freedom of association for affinity groups that emphasizes it is not the burden of underprivileged folks to "fix" segregation. Our mayor may seek to implement any racial justice policy that adheres to these tenets. One recent example of a policy that does this is the Local Reparations Restorative Housing Program in Evanston, a north side suburb of Chicago. This program uses money generated from legal cannabis sales to fund up to $25,000 per household in down payments, home improvement, or mortgage assistance for Black families in the city (Treisman, 2021; "Evanston Local Reparations", n.d.). This reparations program adheres to the ideals of differentiated solidarity in that it affirms Black Evanston residents' freedom to cluster or

to move elsewhere—residents may use reparations to help relocate to a new home or to improve their current home. In this sense, resources are (re)distributed, not people; Black households are not burdened to "integrate" the city because they have the freedom to stay put.

If we cannot completely implement differentiated solidarity, perhaps there are other policies that could fill in the gaps or supplement our efforts. Gregory Squires has proposed stronger enforcement of the Fair Housing Act, arguing that there are currently not sufficient resources to properly enforce the Act, creating high opportunity costs. This lack of resources undercuts coalitions and disproportionately punishes Black communities, who suffer the most from housing inequality. With more resources, we can do more research, educate, and provide more for groups working on enforcement efforts (Squires, 2008). Although additional resources and fairer enforcement of housing law is welcome and necessary, this proposal is not "actionable"—it does nothing to confront segregation head-on. Dedicating more resources to research and uncover instances of segregation does not give decision-making power to the communities that segregation disproportionately negatively impacts. While more resources would be beneficial in the long run, this proposal would change little in terms of racial justice in the short run.

Keels, et al. (2005) make a case for housing vouchers and residential mobility programs, citing the success of Chicago's Gautreaux program. However, this also places the burden of desegregation on non-white communities. These types of programs are designed such that white people give up little, if anything at all, but Black and other minority groups must relinquish all of the benefits that accompany affinity clustering. Among these are a sense of community, as Young (2002) mentions, and consolidation of

political power. Additionally, Gautreaux was implemented at a relatively minute scale—only about 7,000 households in Chicago—and similar programs could potentially detract from other housing programs. If implemented at a larger scale, there would be large, empty, desolate areas in former inner-city neighborhoods. It would simply be impractical to relocate a much larger number of people. More programs like Gautreaux would be welcome at their current scale for households who do not feel too burdened leaving their current communities. Thus, other policy proposals like more resources and mobility programs would be beneficial for reducing the ills of segregation, but they are incomplete and should only exist in complementary roles to larger, more impactful policies.

Ultimately, our mayor should rely on differentiated solidarity to the extent that she is reasonably able to adhere to its tenets. Mayors cannot realistically achieve all of the means of differentiated solidarity—many of the ideals of differentiated solidarity are predicated on regional governance, which mayors lack the ability to implement. But mayors should still champion policies that affirm Black residents' freedom to associate with each other if they so desire without burdening them if they do not. Reparations in Evanston is a great example of this—it promotes this freedom; redistributes resources, not necessarily people; and is reasonably replicable in larger, hypersegregated cities, all without zeroing in on integration. This program cuts through the social costs of segregation in two ways—if Black residents choose to invest in their current homes using these reparations, they help fight the construction of "blackness" as generally being associated with dilapidated neighborhoods. If they are comfortable with using reparations to go towards buying a new home, they might contribute further to diffusion. Either way,

they build more equity, and one would be hard pressed to find flaws in this approach. Approaches like housing reparations in Evanston showcase the attainable tenets of Iris Marion Young's differentiated solidarity, and segregated cities should strive to implement policies like these whenever and wherever possible.

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