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Race, Neighborhoods, and Community Power

On December 14, 1995, Cynthia Wiggins, a seventeen-year-old African American girl, was on her way to her job at the Walden Galleria, a large shopping mall in the town of Cheektowaga, a suburb to the east of Buffalo, one of the most segregated cities in the United States.¹ She was riding the number six bus, which arrives at the Galleria via Sycamore Street, through the heart of Buffalo's east side, a neighborhood which most of the population not only never directly sees, but deliberately avoids. When the mall was constructed, its owner, Pyramid Companies, adopted a policy which prohibited all buses coming from Buffalo from pulling up adjacent to the mall's entrances to drop off and pick up passengers. Rather, buses to and from the city were forced to stop and let passengers off on Walden Avenue, making riders cross several lanes of almost constantly heavy traffic. On her way across Walden on December 14, Cynthia Wiggins was struck by a dump truck. She died a few weeks later from the accident. Only under the threat of a boycott issued by local civil rights groups and a teachers' organization did the mall agree to change its policy and allow all buses to pull up adjacent to the entrances to load and unload passengers.

In many respects, this tragic incident, which created not only extensive local debate but was also covered by the national media, symbolized the predicament of many residents of segregated, lower income urban neighborhoods today. Despite the common assumption, one that is frequently heard during discussions of social welfare or urban policy, that low-wage jobs are available basically everywhere, the fact is that many urban residents have to travel significant distances to have access even to low paying, service sector jobs. The lack of opportunity currently present in many lower income urban areas is certainly one of the major causes of their high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. But these problems have not been produced by autonomous economic

change. Because of the persistent discrimination faced by African Americans, there have been no free markets at work in housing, education, or employment in the Buffalo area over the past several decades. It should not be expected, therefore, that free markets can or will begin to address the many problems associated with ghetto formation. Remedying concentrated urban poverty is certainly a very complicated task, but policy should be informed from a perspective which recognizes that racial discrimination is the root of the problem.

Background

The Problem of Concentrated Urban Poverty

This book is about the relationships among race, neighborhoods, and local political decision-making in Buffalo, New York, from the 1930s through the 1990s. The basic argument is that both race and location have played central roles in the politics of Buffalo. More specifically, numerous local policy decisions over the last several decades have been driven by the forces of race and location, and have reflected and indeed reinforced the distribution of power within the community. The city's residential patterns, particularly the segregation of neighborhoods, have been an important element of the local policy-making process, as well as a result of a variety of local policies. The development of ghetto neighborhoods, and their attendant problems, has been closely connected to the local decision-making process.

The problem of concentrated urban poverty, or what many have labeled the urban "underclass," has been the subject of heated debate in recent years.² Approximately eleven million individuals lived in the nation's lowest income urban neighborhoods in 1990, the large majority of whom were members of minority groups.³ Roughly one in five African Americans, or six million persons, lived in ghetto neighborhoods in 1990. William Julius Wilson has summarized what has happened to poverty in cities over the past few decades:

In sum, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a sharp growth in the number of census tracts classified as ghetto poverty areas, an increased concentration of the poor in these ar-

eas, and sharply divergent patterns of poverty concentration between racial minorities and whites. One of the legacies of historic and class subjugation in America is a unique and growing concentration of minority residents in the most impoverished areas of the nation's metropolises.⁴

Far from going unrecognized, the numerous effects of the concentration of poverty have received substantial scholarly and popular attention. After reviewing much of the literature on the subject, Myron Orfield has succinctly affirmed that:

Individuals who live in concentrated poverty are far more likely to become pregnant as teenagers, to drop out of high school, and to remain jobless than their counterparts in socioeconomically mixed neighborhoods. . . . These factors interact with anger, frustration, isolation, boredom, and hopelessness, and create a synergism of disproportionate levels of crime, violence, and other anti-social behavior.⁵

Even in the lowest income areas, it must be noted, there are many employed people, and most residents are law abiding.⁶ Although members of the urban underclass tend to live in ghetto neighborhoods, one can by no means claim that all ghetto residents are members of the underclass.⁷ Subsequent chapters will establish that in Buffalo, poverty, unemployment, and crime are concentrated in predominantly African American east side residential locations, and that the segregation of the entire city has been a problem for many decades. Thus the presence of nonpoor residents in the most troubled neighborhoods does not minimize the many challenges faced by these neighborhoods in general and by the individuals who live in them. It is for these reasons that this book is about ghetto formation—the geographic concentration of poverty—and not about the development of the underclass.

The phenomenon of concentrated urban poverty also has measurable effects on all urban and metropolitan residents and, in turn, shapes the national political debate. Quite simply, cities have become stereotyped as havens for a culture of poverty, an image which has made it politically possible to reduce or eliminate social programs, affirmative action, and urban policies, while simultaneously reinforcing the expectation that free markets are the best method of dealing with urban problems. In this type of political environment, the supposed failure of these types of programs goes

increasingly unquestioned. And when programs which aid urban areas are scaled back, residents who live beyond the city limits also pay a price because an entire metropolitan region suffers when its central city deteriorates.

David Rusk has made this point by illustrating that the smaller the income gap between a city and its suburbs, the greater the increase in jobs for the entire region.⁸ The implications of the existence of the ghetto today, then, are so substantial that it is imperative to carefully examine the processes which produced the lowest income neighborhoods, and thoughtfully reflect upon policy prescriptions to address contemporary urban problems.

Different Explanations of the Phenomenon

Several different analyses involving a variety of causal factors have been advanced to explain the emergence of concentrated urban poverty. Yet the variable of local politics has generally not been examined by scholars. The emphasis of more conservative scholars, such as Charles Murray, is the behavior and motivation of low-income persons, linking chronic unemployment, out-of-wedlock births, and so forth, with increased federal social welfare programs.⁹ Although politically quite popular, such explanations are replete with unquestioned assumptions, and fail to address the fundamental issue of the context within which socially destructive behavior frequently occurs. Alternative approaches, the most well known of which has been articulated by Wilson, have tended to focus on structural factors associated with economic and demographic trends which have contributed to the lack of opportunity and mobility for minority individuals living in inner cities.¹⁰ The large movement of southern blacks to northern cities during the middle twentieth century, combined with the mass migration of whites to the suburbs and the loss of industry, led to conditions in which urban ghettos began to form. Wilson also argues that despite the many gains of the civil rights movement, one result of black advancement has been that middle and working-class African Americans have been more easily able to move out of historically black neighborhoods, thus leaving behind disproportionately large numbers of low-income blacks to inhabit developing ghettos.

In *American Apartheid*, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton take a different approach by arguing that residential segregation has been the most significant factor in the creation and perpetuation of geographically concentrated urban poverty. The fact that

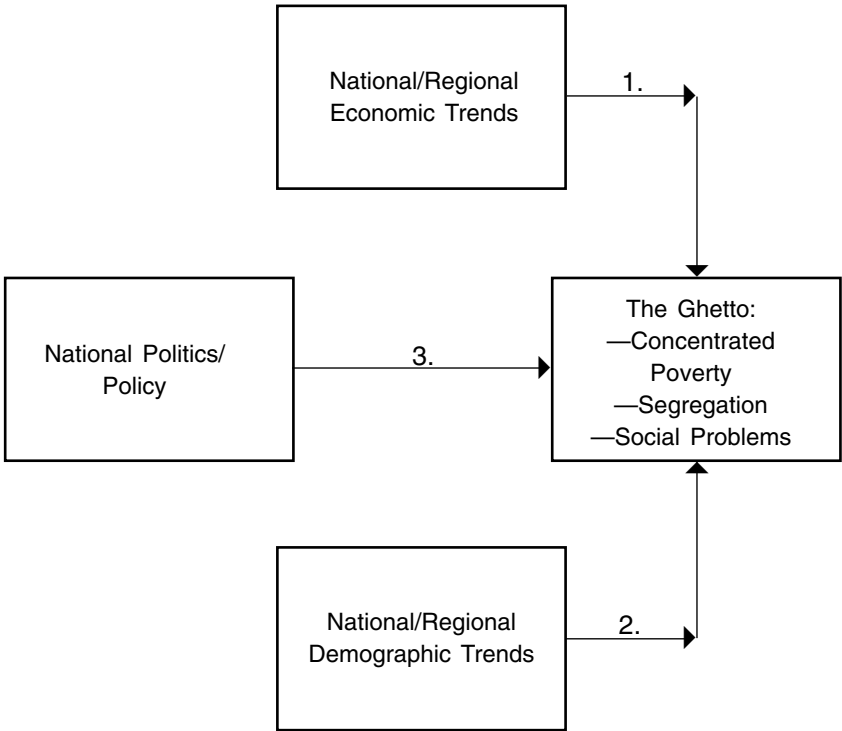
the lowest income neighborhoods are made up largely of minorities points to the large role that racial segregation has played in their creation. In other words, Massey and Denton properly point out that the problem of the ghetto is ultimately a racial problem. The authors also mention that local political institutions have played a role in segregating neighborhoods, particularly in the area of public housing policy. A more comprehensive understanding of the origins of concentrated poverty, though, will require the exploration of the role that local political decision-making has played in the process of neighborhood change, as well as its relationship to residential segregation.¹¹

Neighborhoods are pieces of land. And as Paul Peterson has affirmed, "Urban politics is above all the politics of land use, and it is easy to see why. Land is the factor of production over which cities exercise the greatest control."¹² I suggest that the reason scholars of concentrated urban poverty have not considered the significance of local politics is because of their lack of attention to land use powers in explaining the formation of ghetto neighborhoods as places.¹³ Once one concedes that very poor neighborhoods are, in fact, quite different today from what they were many years ago, one necessarily has to consider the dimension of local politics and community power. Scholars have generally begun their analyses by defining the underclass as persons living in urban areas with high rates of poverty: ghetto residents. After establishing this definition—which points to specific locations—they then attempt to explain the phenomenon almost solely in national or regional terms. In other words, many analyses have failed to take advantage of their own concepts.

The concept of place is the very reason why anyone started studying the evolution of the contemporary ghetto in the first place. Beginning in the 1960s, the nation's ghetto neighborhoods increasingly became places which were very distinct and distant from the rest of the city and suburbs. Rioting in dozens of urban ghettos in 1967 and 1968 made it painfully apparent that the emerging ghetto was becoming different not only from the rest of society, but, perhaps more significantly, from the rest of the city, which was only a short distance away. Given this growing isolation of the nation's lowest income neighborhoods, scholars began to ask: How did this happen?; and What should or could be done about the situation?

Existing analyses of the emergence of the ghetto, then, tend to rely on national and regional economic and demographic trends, and national public policies as the main explanatory factors. National and regional economic and demographic trends are more useful in

Figure 1
 Synthesis of Existing Models of Ghetto Formation



1. Deindustrialization
2. Great Migration; Residential Segregation; Suburbanization
3. Civil Rights Movement; Social Welfare Policy

directly explaining national and regional changes in phenomena such as poverty and unemployment rates than in accounting for the transformation that has occurred in the nation's ghetto neighborhoods. What follows is a brief discussion of the logical difficulties of trying to explain the development of concentrated urban poverty solely in national or regional terms.

The trend that is most frequently associated with the development of concentrated urban poverty, and the one that is most forcefully argued by Wilson, is deindustrialization: the shift away from manufacturing and toward service-producing that has occurred

in urban areas throughout the United States, though most conspicuously in the northeast and midwest. There is no disputing the fact that deindustrialization occurred, and that it is still occurring. Yet to argue that it has been the primary cause of the creation of concentrated poverty is to beg the question. Ghetto neighborhoods are geographic areas of extreme poverty that consist almost exclusively of minority residents.

To conclude that deindustrialization has been the primary creator of the new urban poverty, one would have to show that the industrial manufacturing jobs that have left U.S. cities historically employed large percentages of local minority populations. While the heavy industries of the northeast and midwest employed some African Americans, they mainly employed large numbers of white laborers. Heavy industry was a consistent source of employment for European immigrants. The distinguishing features of today's ghettos can therefore scarcely be attributed solely to the decline in manufacturing jobs. The racial composition of the ghetto, indeed, suggests that racial discrimination, independent of economic restructuring, has been an important factor in the process of neighborhood change.¹⁴

The loss of a city's manufacturing base, moreover, might be expected to lead to some sort of aggregate decline in wealth, which would be evident across neighborhood boundaries. While cities that have suffered the most from deindustrialization indisputably have lost population, northeastern and midwestern cities which have lost industry still possess many working, middle and even upper-income neighborhoods within their boundaries. Yet poverty is highly concentrated in predominantly African American neighborhoods, thus urban decline has been geographically specific. Further, there are numerous cities in the south and west which never had a strong base of industrial manufacturing, but today possess very low-income, largely minority neighborhoods. Here then is another indication of the empirical difficulties of attempting to link the emergence of concentrated urban poverty primarily with the loss of industry. Deindustrialization seems to be a better explanation of changes in urban and regional poverty generally than of the creation of the contemporary ghetto.

The Great Migration of southern blacks to northern cities, post-World War II suburbanization, and deindustrialization, all became important factors in shaping the evolution of urban politics. But there is no necessary connection between these macropopulation and economic changes and the development of ghetto neighborhoods, nor indeed do these trends suffice to account for ghetto development without the decisive influence of local politics.

Demographic accounts of the underclass, such as Massey and Denton's, are much more helpful than strictly economic arguments because they are based on the assumption that the problem of concentrated urban poverty has a significant residential dimension. But discussing where people live leads to a partial understanding of concentrated poverty. Today's ghettos house large numbers of low-income individuals, but they are also remarkable for what they lack, especially economic activity. Private businesses have, over time, either left these neighborhoods or chosen not to locate in them, creating the relatively low level of economic opportunity present in the more distressed urban neighborhoods today.

Consideration of the impact of local policy decisions on the development of the ghetto, including the impact of local policies on residential and economic patterns within a city, can supplement existing explanations which focus on residential segregation. This approach to the issue of concentrated urban poverty is possible once the study of community power is formulated explicitly in terms of the variables of race and location.

Community Power and the Ghetto

In arguing that the local decision-making process has substantially contributed to the existence of concentrated urban poverty, I maintain that race itself has been the primary source of conflict related to policies affecting residential neighborhood development. Scholars of community power, however, have not adequately addressed the degree to which race has influenced local politics and development.¹⁵ Dahl's classic study of New Haven focuses on ethnic politics, and implicitly adopts the position that African Americans are analogous to other ethnic groups.¹⁶ Hunter discusses race in his analysis of Atlanta, which became the basis for elite theories of community power, but ultimately sees the influence of economic elites as being the critical factor for assessing local power, a position which emphasizes class over race.¹⁷ Bachrach and Baratz tell the story of Baltimore's blacks struggling throughout the 1960s to get city council districts reapportioned.¹⁸ The authors' application of the concept of nondecision-making, however, focuses exclusively on the political process. Since they do not connect the process with policies that shape land use and ghetto formation, they implicitly minimize the concrete impact of local decisions involving race.

Peterson's economistic approach to community power, which has been the subject of substantial debate and criticism, fails to sufficiently address urban political conflict generally, let alone the substantial power of racism in decision-making and the impact of policies on African Americans.¹⁹ And although spending much of his book discussing the factor of race in the politics of Atlanta, Stone gives primary attention to the relationship between the business community and local officials, thus deflecting attention away from questions related to how racial attitudes have impacted local decision-making.²⁰ A recent historical study of Atlanta supports the notion that racist policies, have, in fact, been central to that city's physical and institutional development.²¹ In addition, Richard Keiser's examination of Atlanta politics gives substantial explanatory power to the racist attitudes of white elites by maintaining that biracial coalitions have formed not as a result of different cultural values, but rather because of the fact that white elites were forced to work with blacks because of the makeup of the city's population:

This chapter rejects claims that Atlanta's business leaders were innately more ambitious or less racist than elsewhere. I also do not believe that Atlanta's political and economic leaders conceded power when they were not forced to do so. They reflected southern racial attitudes and the typical business desire to advance their financial interests, but their environment created a set of inducements and constraints that forced them to do more than pay lip service to ending segregation and empowering Blacks.²²

These accounts place racial conflict at the center of inquiry, and thus present Atlanta politics in a different light than that of Stone.

This is not to say that urban scholars have intentionally minimized the explanatory power of race, but rather that they have, especially in the last several years, focused their primary attention on the degree of influence that business wields in the local political arena. Race has generally been addressed in terms of issues related to electoral coalition-building and mayoral leadership, but not as an independent force, the significance of which is evident throughout the policy-making process.²³ A substantive goal of this book is to build on existing literature in urban politics by illustrating the extent to which race has permeated local political debate, and ultimately shaped policies which have affected residential neighborhood development.

By illustrating the magnitude of the influence of race, the significance of the variable of location in local politics becomes apparent. Special attention will be paid to the residential patterns in Buffalo over the last several decades, and the role that these patterns have played in local decision-making. The creation and persistence of residential segregation has linked racial interests with the interests of particular places. Thus the characteristics of specific locations should be viewed not only as a product of decision-making, but also as an essential element of the political process, a method of utilizing power. In other words, the process of keeping African Americans confined residentially has been about more than simply winning political debates about housing and schools. It has also been about limiting access to particular neighborhoods through the political process, and, in turn, minimizing African Americans' contact with the structure of opportunity. Persistent segregation has also reinforced existing racial attitudes. As African Americans were kept out of a number of neighborhoods, the low level of interracial contact that resulted only hardened the racial attitudes of whites, thus intensifying existing stereotypes.

Residential concentration makes it easier for any group to elect representatives in a system based on districts or wards. But the negative effects of ghetto formation have far outweighed any positive effects. For instance, intense patterns of segregation, which result in very high concentrations of African Americans in a handful of neighborhoods, actually reduce the potential for blacks to elect a number of legislators commensurate with the African American percentage of the city's total population. The politics of race and the politics of place have been, and continue to be, fundamentally connected. When one emphasizes either race or place in evaluating community power, and draws out all of the implications of focusing entirely on that variable, one is necessarily led to the other variable since the two are so closely linked.

By emphasizing the importance of the factors of race and location in the study of community power, I adopt one fundamental assumption of pluralist scholarship: that political decisions, either policies adopted or, in many cases, not adopted, by elected and appointed officials have mattered, and continue to matter, and that looking at the institutions of government and the political decision-making process and its effects are important undertakings. Consequently, the primary focus of this book is on policies, not elections, which either implicitly or explicitly tend to be the main emphasis of much of the literature on race and local politics. Elections are

discussed, but only in relation to the policy-making process and as indicators of public opinion, not as independent subjects of inquiry.

This is not meant to affirm any theory of local state autonomy. Rather, I maintain that with regard to issues that have most affected neighborhood life in Buffalo, including policies involving public and private housing, redevelopment, and education, the local state has frequently expressed the will of the majority. Hence emphasizing the influence of private sector elites when analyzing residential neighborhood development is somewhat misplaced.²⁴

In adopting some pluralist assumptions about methodology, however, my analysis differs from traditional pluralist thought in terms of interpreting historical events and intergroup relations. Almost all of the decisions in this book were made by elected and appointed officials, and most occurred within the context of substantial public debate. The record clearly illustrates that since the 1930s, race has been the driving force behind a number of important policy decisions in Buffalo, with white majorities consistently winning out over black minorities. Unlike other ethnic groups, which have prospered once they have achieved sufficient formal representation, African Americans have faced unremitting discrimination even after achieving adequate political representation.²⁵

Political structures have played a critical role in ghetto formation. An undue emphasis on the autonomous preferences of individuals can lead to the conclusion that poor neighborhoods have developed as a result of microlevel decision-making, while other arguments describe ghettoization primarily as a result of macrolevel processes involving the restructuring of the larger economy. Both positions are empirically dubious. The racism of individuals, while clearly at the root of societal racism, is more powerful and ultimately more influential when expressed through political structures. While the control of private economic resources by whites in Buffalo and western New York has been and remains a critical component of the dilemma faced by the black community, this book seeks to demonstrate that white influence over local government has played a pivotal role in creating the ghetto conditions that exist in much of the east side today.

Assessment of the influence of economic elites in the politics of cities like Buffalo requires an analytical distinction be made between issues relating to downtown (the central business district), and those issues relating mainly to residential neighborhoods. One such distinction is posited by regime theory, but it is based on the assumption that in order to maintain a regime, mayors must keep

neighborhood politics confined to patronage and material incentives, thus away from policy-related questions, while simultaneously making downtown politics about policy, specifically development. One study of the Chicago regime of Mayor Richard J. Daley makes this point clear:

By structuring the electoral arena around the distribution of material rewards and incentives, Daley kept electoral and neighborhood politics on an individual and issueless basis. . . . [T]he policy orientation and capital investment strategies, in dividing downtown and the neighborhoods, mirrored the political dichotomy between policy (economic development) and electoral (neighborhood) politics.²⁶

Yet the assumption that growth-oriented mayors reduce electoral politics only to material incentives fails to consider the many policy-related reasons for which city voters either support or oppose a particular mayor. For example, voters in Buffalo's white working-class neighborhoods supported Mayor James Griffin for traditional reasons related to preferential service delivery and patronage, but also because of his positions on school desegregation, open housing, public housing, neighborhood development, and even cultural issues seemingly unrelated to local government such as abortion and homosexuality. Neighborhood support for a mayor who favors downtown interests, then, does not stem only from material incentives; it is also rooted in public policy positions related to a variety of phenomena, all of which affect residential neighborhood life, even if indirectly. White working-class support for a mayor who is tightly connected to the downtown business elite may appear superficially to be a classic tradeoff based only on material incentives, but when examined closely, it contains a solid basis in policy preferences.

Local government is influential in shaping both downtown and residential neighborhoods, yet in very different ways. This distinction between policies related to downtown versus those related to neighborhoods persists because in numerous smaller and medium-sized cities, of which Buffalo is an excellent example, downtown has never been much of a residential location. In addition, the majority of private elites who are influential in downtown issues live in the suburbs, and thus do not take an active interest in many issues affecting any of the city's neighborhoods. Their indifference solidifies the distinction between downtown and neighborhood poli-

tics. Two different policy realms, then, operate simultaneously—one which primarily involves neighborhoods and their elected and appointed officials, and the other which involves the inner workings of urban regimes consisting of private sector elites and government.

Further, while some urban policies, such as urban renewal, have been driven by elite interests during the early stages of policy-making,²⁷ once on the agenda, local residents and neighborhoods and their government officials had direct influence on exactly how renewal would be carried out, or, in many cases, not carried out. Elites did not simply dictate the particulars of the large redevelopment project in Buffalo's lower east side which was begun in the 1950s. Powerful downtown interests may have been instrumental in formulating the original plan for the project, but its numerous implementation problems—which were clearly not in the interests of private elites—resulted from an extended partisan debate among elected officials which occurred at the expense of the African American community.

In sum, a focus on the role of elites in local policy-making confines the scope of inquiry to questions related to large, downtown development projects, while simultaneously minimizing the many ways that neighborhoods and local government officials have influenced residential locations. So while I examine the decision-making process and its effects, I do so in a manner which focuses substantial attention on the concept of location, emphasizes the important distinction between downtown and residential neighborhoods, as well as variation among residential neighborhoods themselves, and attempts to begin to come to terms with the relationship between public policy and residential neighborhood change and development.

Politics and Place: The Geographic Dimension of Community Power

Harold Lasswell's conceptualization of politics—who gets what, when, how—originally formulated in 1936, has traditionally been accepted by social scientists.²⁸ The study of power, and specifically the study of community power, therefore, has tended to focus on these four dimensions: who, what, when, and how.

Determining *who* has influence within a local political arena is the ultimate purpose of all community power studies. Scholars

have differed in their approaches, however. Some scholars, usually sociologists, have focused directly on an analysis of individuals in power or those who are thought to be influential. Others have looked at the details of the local political decision-making process—the *what* and *how* of Lasswell's politics—and attempted to draw conclusions about local politics from this perspective. This approach has generally been employed by political scientists.

Finally, although to a lesser extent, some community power studies have addressed the dimension of time—the *when* part of Lasswell's politics. Historical approaches to the study of community power are generally used to illustrate that who is influential in local politics changes over time. For example, Dahl presents a lengthy historical analysis of New Haven's politics in an effort to make the pluralist argument that in the contemporary period, patterns of influence in the local political arena are much more decentralized than in previous periods.²⁹ And Stone's account of Atlanta from the 1940s through the 1980s also explicitly places the subject of local politics within a larger, historical context.³⁰

When considering Lasswell's definition of politics as well as the community power literature, however, one is struck by the absence of any geographic concepts which could be utilized in evaluating both local political influence and the impact of local policy-making. This literature seems to implicitly assume that the spatial organization of cities—both where people live and where infrastructure is located—is simply the inevitable product of automatic, free market processes,³¹ or the result solely of elite influence. Yet a geographic dimension of local politics and government is present throughout the entire public policy-making process. It manifests itself as soon as the relationship between residential segregation and local government is examined.

Focusing on Race and Place in Studying Community Power

Neighborhoods are places with interests. And if a city is segregated by race, as so many American cities are, then the interests of neighborhoods largely, in some cases almost completely, overlap with the interests of certain racial groups. In other words, if a substantial majority of a city's black residents live in the same neighborhoods, and constitute the majority within those neighborhoods, then the interests of the African American community and the interests of those neighborhoods are very similar.

We can gain a better understanding of why neighborhoods have certain, tangible characteristics by focusing directly on the concept of place within the traditional formula of Lasswell's politics. An explicit assumption I make, therefore, is that location, or place, is as important as any of these other dimensions because places shape access to valued resources in society and thus are necessarily related to who has power in the community. The spatial organization of a city is not only a product of the local political process, however. Rather, it is a fundamental part of the process itself. Lasswell's four dimensions interact with the dimension of place to produce political outcomes. Where residents live and where things are located in any city illustrates how local politics has operated in the past, and shapes how it will take place in the future.

Further, when one considers the division of every level of government in the nation into geographic electoral districts, and the ongoing attention municipalities give to attracting and directing growth projects, it is clear that local politics possesses a significant geographic dimension. Considering these factors, then, we can update Lasswell's formulation of politics: politics is who gets what, when, how, and *where*. Addressing the many components of the relationship between local politics and neighborhoods is possible once a geographic dimension is added to the study of community power and the variable of race is made a primary component in the analysis.

Representation and Democracy

Giving significant attention to race entails close attention to the larger concept of representation. Representation is one of, if not the most important, elements of democracy. Voters elect representatives at every level of government on the assumption that once in office, elected officials will represent the interests of their constituents. And appointed officials, from members of the Supreme Court or president's cabinet all the way down to municipal board members, are also representatives of the people. Appointed officials are given their positions by elected officials, and thus are indirectly influenced by the electorate. Ideas about representation are only useful, however, if one can examine actual representatives with reference to a certain framework. The concept of descriptive representation begins to provide such a framework.

Descriptive Representation

The subject of representation can be examined in a variety of ways. Insofar as race is concerned, the descriptive approach is the most relevant.³² Those who have argued in favor of descriptive representation maintain that the “legislature be so selected that its composition corresponds accurately to that of the whole nation; only then is it a representative body.”³³ Further, the descriptive approach “depends on the representative’s characteristics, on what he *is* or *is like*, on being something rather than doing something” (italics in original).³⁴ In short, representatives must be similar to the people they represent.

Descriptive representation is applicable not only to elected officials but also to appointed officials. Being aware of this, chief executives often go to great lengths to make sure that those they appoint to positions of power are demographically representative of the electorate.³⁵

The necessity of at least a minimum level of descriptive representation has been legitimated by several different actions of the federal government. Both Congress and the Supreme Court have promulgated policies aimed at making legislatures, and, indirectly, appointed bodies, more representative of the population.³⁶ Although the Court has recently limited the use of racial districting aimed at giving specific groups essentially guaranteed representation, the importance of the principle remains intact.³⁷ Rather than being an abstract idea, descriptive representation has evolved into an accepted, though often debated, element of democratic government.

Underlying an examination of government officials in terms of descriptive representation is the assumption that it matters who is in positions of power. This is especially true when one considers the legacy of discrimination faced by both minorities and women over the course of American history. It can be concluded, therefore, that a representative’s racial identity plays a key role in shaping his or her policy preferences and choices.

Consideration of the persistence of residential segregation as well as the basic land use functions of local government makes it clear that having a representative group of both elected and appointed officials at the local level is critically important. Because of segregation according to race and even sometimes according to ethnic group, inadequate descriptive representation in a municipality means that when a particular racial or ethnic group has been denied power, the location where that group is residentially concentrated

has also necessarily been denied power. The presence of residential segregation, therefore, underscores the need for descriptive representation. Conversely, if the nation's cities had always been relatively integrated, examining the demographic characteristics of representatives, though significant, would not be as critical a question of inquiry.

But policy-making itself is not the only reason that having a representative group of government officials is important. The presence of any African Americans or other previously excluded racial or ethnic groups or women on a decision-making body changes its internal dynamics as well as its relationship with the larger polity. Representation of a previously excluded group gives that group a point of connection with government, which facilitates the flow of information between the represented and their representatives. And the mere presence of even one member of any previously excluded group on a legislative body or board can make each member behave differently.

For example, one recent comparative study of the implementation of school desegregation decisions in Boston and Buffalo, two cities that are quite similar in racial and ethnic terms, found that the presence of blacks on the Buffalo Common Council and School Board during desegregation made it much more difficult for the white members of those bodies who opposed desegregation to make racially inflammatory public remarks, and ultimately made desegregation proceed more peacefully.³⁸ In Buffalo, many council and board members, including some who were vehemently opposed to the idea of court-ordered desegregation, had become friends with their African American colleagues. Even those who were not on a friendly basis with black council and board members still had to work with them on a regular basis, and thus had a strong disincentive to attempt to ignite public hostility toward the issue of desegregation.

The scenario in Boston was exactly the opposite. When the desegregation decision was first handed down in 1974, representation on the Boston Common Council was entirely at large, and as a consequence, no blacks held council seats. There were also no African Americans on the city's school committee (the equivalent of a school board). The absence of African American individuals in positions of power in Boston city government produced an environment in which the immediate costs to officials for publicly denouncing desegregation were negligible. The public displays against desegregation which followed, including several

instances of protest and mob violence, received national media attention. In Buffalo, while there was public criticism of court-ordered desegregation, there were limits to that criticism, and the environment that developed was different from the environment in Boston. While black representatives in Buffalo had been unable to prevent the numerous actions which segregated the city's schools in the first place, black representation within city government still performed a critical role when the desegregation order was eventually issued. In their extensive study of California cities, Browning, Marshall, and Tabb found similar changes in the atmosphere of city councils once minorities were elected to them:

We were told repeatedly that minority councilmembers were important in linking minorities to city hall, in providing role models, and in sensitizing white colleagues to minority concerns. . . . Even where minorities were not strongly incorporated, councilmembers talked about a new atmosphere and new pressure on the council once minorities were members. One official said, "When minorities talk to the city council now, councilmembers nod their heads rather than yawn."³⁹

Thus a representative group of government officials is an important part of democratic government for reasons other than just policy-making.

Community Power and the Study of Representatives

Descriptive representation has been a concern of scholars of community power, particularly in the early studies.⁴⁰ However, the assumption underlying much of this literature is that once a group previously excluded from positions of power was granted power—as a result of redrawn electoral lines or board appointments—then a more equitable system of governance had been created. In some respects, this assumption was correct, as a hypothetical example can easily demonstrate. Let us suppose a city with a black population of 50 percent, but whose common council district lines have been drawn in such a way that only 20 percent of the city's legislators are black. After a struggle over reapportionment, the district lines are redrawn in such a way that half of the newly elected council members are African American. The racial composition of

the new council, then, accurately reflects the racial composition of the entire city. With a legislative branch which is 50 percent black, African Americans will be much more likely to be given board appointments and high ranking administrative jobs, and policy choices will tend to be more favorable toward the African American community.⁴¹

In this hypothetical example, which is exactly the scenario that was played out in many cities, after reapportionment, the black community definitely had more political power than it had previously, and in some ways a more democratic system had been created. The mere achievement of descriptive representation is only the beginning of the story, however, since many issues decided in the local political arena divide primarily along racial lines. So while an analysis of race and representation at the local level must examine the racial composition of relevant decision-making bodies, it must go even further. The analysis must look at whether the policies under investigation during the period when African Americans constituted a minority of the city's population—even after achieving sufficient descriptive representation—divided mainly along racial lines. In sum, to gain a more complete understanding of the intimate relationship between race and local government, one must consider several questions. What were the tangible effects of the complete exclusion of African Americans from the local political process? What was the relationship between the variable of residential segregation and public policy? Even after blacks had achieved political power, were the largest issues still divided along racial lines, with African Americans left in a minority position and lacking effective political power? If so, what were the effects of unrelenting racial divisions on policy? These questions, in large part, underlie this book, and point to the need for a thorough examination of how race has impacted local politics and policy choices, and, in turn, shaped the creation of a city's neighborhoods.

The Concept of Neighborhood Change

A central concept of this book, neighborhood change, merits some preliminary discussion. The concept of neighborhood change has two primary dimensions, one spatial and the other temporal. The spatial dimension is relatively straightforward. A neighborhood is a geographic location, a place in which residents generally have

certain common bonds. The temporal dimension refers to history. Neighborhoods do not change overnight, nor as a result of one or a few minor events. To study the issue of neighborhood change within a particular city, then, one must look at local politics throughout the time period during which the neighborhood(s) in question transformed. More specifically, one must study the political issues and decisions which can help explain why particular locations have undergone dramatic change, and, conversely, why others have not.

In order to appropriately consider the relationship between a local political structure and a particular neighborhood's historical transformation, emphasis must be placed not only on the people who influenced decisions, but also on the tangible consequences of local policies which, over time, can be linked to the physical transformation of the neighborhood. For example, it is not sufficient simply to determine who influenced and eventually won the political battle over the site of a new school or urban renewal project. Rather, the analysis must go further and look at where the school or renewal project was eventually located, where it was not located, and how the location decision could be linked to subsequent changes occurring in and around a particular neighborhood. Simply put, neighborhood change is an incremental process that involves the transformation of the physical characteristics of a neighborhood as well as its residential population.⁴²

The Concept of Social Isolation: Politics, Economics, and Space

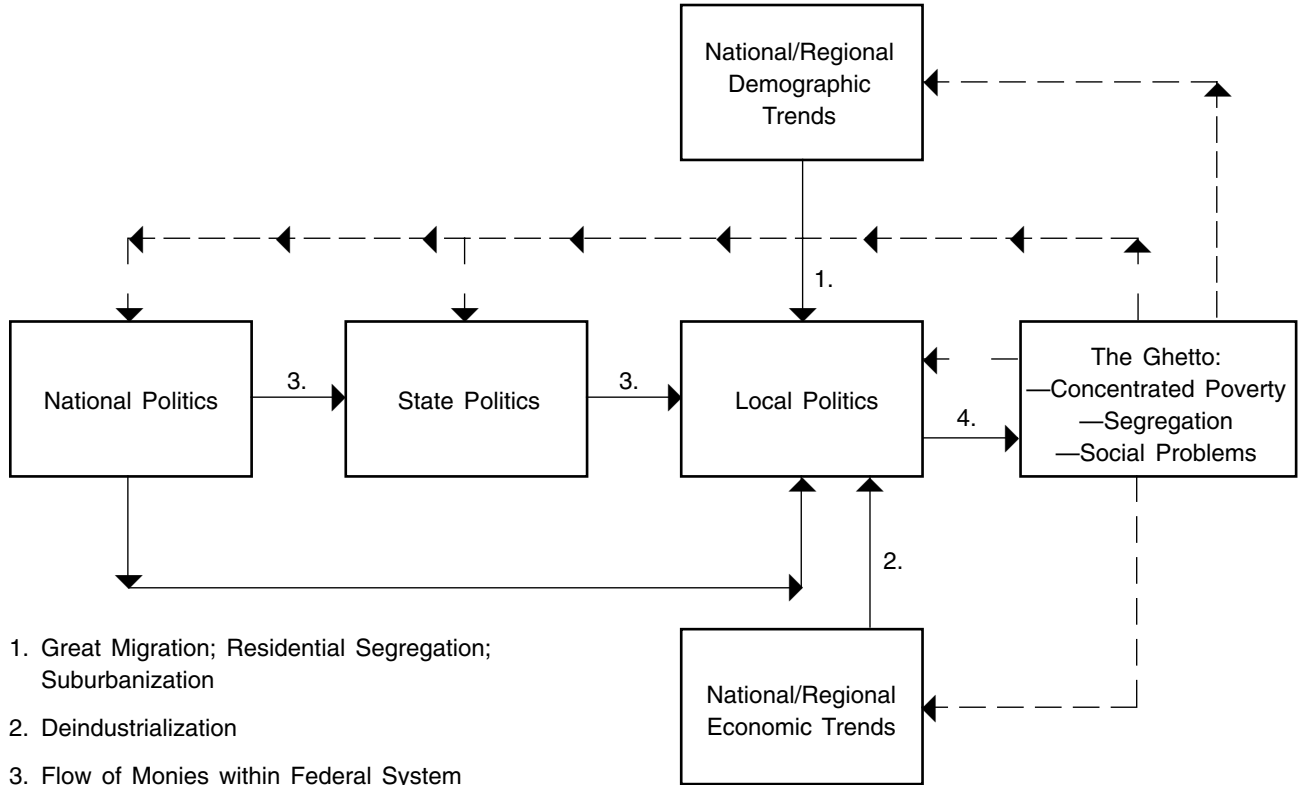
Numerous scholars have pointed out that the distinguishing characteristic of many of the residents of very poor neighborhoods, and the neighborhoods themselves, is social isolation. Since behavior is not the main phenomenon under examination here, social isolation will be understood as the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent the existing opportunity structure. Segregation, unemployment, and poverty are, after all, strong evidence of a lack of connection to information and social networks which represent opportunity. And not having direct access to opportunity makes the cycle of poverty tragically self-fulfilling. Regarding the connection between poverty concentration and unemployment, Katherine M. O' Regan found

that high levels of poverty only increase the likelihood of unemployment among minority youth, controlling for individual level variables, because ghetto poverty is characterized by a lack of social networks.⁴³ Geographically concentrated poverty necessarily limits opportunity, and the result can only reinforce the original effects of poverty. The definition of social isolation employed here, then, emphasizes the fact that neighborhoods of extreme poverty are discernible places that lack adequate relationships to opportunity. Isolation from opportunity structures is separate from, indeed may be a major cause of, behaviors that others attribute to a culture of poverty.

In order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between local politics and the process of neighborhood change, the concept of social isolation can be broken down into three basic components: political isolation, spatial isolation, and economic isolation. A neighborhood can be effectively politically isolated in terms of both actual and perceived influence within the local political structure: a neighborhood and its residents either have no representation at all or else constitute a minority on many important issues. The effects of political isolation often translate into concrete changes in the neighborhood, frequently manifesting themselves in spatial and economic isolation. The spatial isolation of a neighborhood occurs when it is residentially segregated. Although it may be geographically proximate to the rest of the city, residents who live there suffer from discrimination which does not allow them to move easily, if indeed they can move at all, into other neighborhoods or the suburbs. Further, individuals living outside the neighborhood not only choose to not move into it, but also can avoid ever entering the neighborhood when carrying out their daily activities, which reinforces its spatial isolation. Finally, if a neighborhood has a consistent decrease in or outright lack of economic activity over an extended period of time, then the neighborhood and its residents will become economically isolated.

Political isolation, spatial isolation, and economic isolation are obviously not independent of one another; all three interact to bring about the social isolation of a neighborhood and its residential population. Once isolated from local politics, other areas of the city, and the larger economy, a neighborhood will become even further isolated from the existing opportunity structure. Local politics plays both direct and indirect roles in creating social isolation, and therefore contributes substantially to the creation of ghettos.

Figure 2 Ghetto Formation Incorporating Local Politics



1. Great Migration; Residential Segregation; Suburbanization
2. Deindustrialization
3. Flow of Monies within Federal System
4. Local Political Decisions

The Model: Local Politics and the Ghetto

The model I employ assumes that municipalities decide how to use the land within their boundaries, and therefore directly shape the physical characteristics of their neighborhoods. The model posits that national and regional economic and demographic trends, as well as national and state public policies, are ultimately filtered through local political structures. These larger phenomena, therefore, can at best be linked indirectly to the creation of very low income urban areas. Residential segregation is a regional demographic trend in that it is apparent in numerous metropolitan areas, but it is also a product of and contributor to local decision-making.

The model suggests (illustrated in Figure 2 through the use of dotted lines) that ghetto formation has many important effects on politics, economics, and living patterns. The political effects of the evolution of ghetto neighborhoods on politics have been profound, and can be witnessed at every level of government. The mere existence of the ghetto has caused local government to change its expectations regarding potential development projects, to alter patterns of law enforcement, and to struggle every day with the many problems associated with governing a segregated city. State and federal governments, seeing the ghetto as the result of excessive past governmental spending, proceed to reduce policies and programs benefiting urban areas. The economic and demographic effects of ghetto formation are also noteworthy: as urban areas become the home for more low-income persons concentrated in seemingly ever-expanding ghettos, businesses and residents are more likely to leave cities and move to suburban or even rural locations.

The type of analysis suggested by the model can illuminate how the many day-to-day activities of local government, when evaluated across time, contribute to what is generally accepted by both liberals and conservatives alike as an inevitable phenomenon—the contemporary ghetto neighborhood.

The Case: The City of Buffalo

Located in western New York State on the eastern edge of the Niagara River and Lake Erie is the city of Buffalo. In many ways, Buffalo illustrates several of the trends associated with the new urban poverty, the most apparent of which is deindustrialization.

The literature on Buffalo tends to emphasize economic changes which have taken place in the city and throughout the region. Earlier this century, Buffalo was the nation's eleventh largest industrial center, the third largest producer of steel, and the largest inland port. Deindustrialization changed all of this, however. Beginning in the late 1950s, the city's reign as a national industrial power began to fade. Accompanying deindustrialization has been substantial population loss. Buffalo's population peaked in 1950 at 580,000. By 1990, primarily as a result of suburbanization, the city's population had decreased significantly to 328,000. At the same time, black migration from the south gave the city a very different racial composition, as African Americans became roughly one-third of the population. Today estimates place African Americans at between 35 percent and 40 percent of the city population.

Like any city, Buffalo has several neighborhoods with unique characteristics. Generations of residents of Polish, Irish, and Italian descent, for example, have tended to live in certain specific neighborhoods. And also like any city, Buffalo has ghetto neighborhoods. The lowest income areas are located in the lower and middle east side. Much of this part of Buffalo contains a substantially high rate of poverty and is made up almost exclusively of black residents. The economic downturn of the east side has been gradual, with rates of poverty and segregation increasing over the span of several decades.

Because of the persistence of residential segregation, the interests of the city's black community have largely coincided with the interests of this section of Buffalo. Up until the 1940s, the city had a relatively small black population, and the lower east side, although being the home to nearly all of the city's blacks, was reasonably racially diverse. Blacks continued to migrate to the city during the 1940s and 1950s, and moved north from the lower east side into the middle section of the east side. As the black population increased, whites continued to leave, and by the 1960s and 1970s, the lower/middle east side was not only the home for almost all of the city's blacks, but also a predominately African American area. In the early years of the period under examination, therefore, from roughly the middle 1930s through the 1950s, the interests of the black community largely overlapped with the interests of the lower and middle east side. From approximately 1960 through the 1980s, the interests of the African American community and those of the lower and middle east side were nearly synonymous. The fate of this section of the city, and of the vast majority of the city's

African American residents, therefore, have been tremendously dependent upon both black representation in the local political process and the outcomes of that process. If the black community was excluded from key political decision-making, or if it was a losing minority on important decisions, then a sizeable section of the east side would clearly feel the effects.

The main policy areas being investigated are public housing, redevelopment, and education, from the middle 1930s, when the city first began construction of public housing, through the middle 1990s, when the nearly twenty-year-old desegregation order for the city's public schools was lifted and the rehabilitation of a deteriorated, long-abandoned public housing development was finally begun. Other relevant policy actions will also be investigated, including the movement for fair housing, which began in the 1960s, and the impact of major development on residential neighborhoods. My intention is to analyze political decisions that can be linked to the development of ghetto conditions on the east side over the last several decades. This will be done by determining who was involved in the decisions, what policies resulted from them, and how these policies affected the lower and eventually the middle part of the east side. The goal of the data being collected is to measure the social isolation of poor neighborhoods in terms of political, spatial, and economic isolation. Political isolation is the main focus of the analysis, and consequently most of the findings involve politics and public policies. Economic and spatial isolation are viewed largely as the consequences of political isolation. The black community's lack of political influence over key decisions affecting African American residential neighborhoods (political isolation) led to both tangible physical changes in and the increasing segregation of the lower/middle east side (spatial isolation), and eventually to decreasing economic activity and opportunity there (economic isolation). These forces have come together, reinforced one another, and produced a place which is, in many respects, socially isolated.⁴⁴

The research method being used is a variation of the traditional pluralist method, which studies political decision-making by examining who participated and prevailed in the political process. This book seeks to determine not only who has and who has not participated in the policy areas under study, but also intends to analyze the effects of the political process. My approach makes race the primary concern and adds a geographic dimension to the study of community power. Looking at both the political process as well as its effects is critical because the two phenomena are closely

related. They can assist in explaining how and why some neighborhoods change, sometimes dramatically, over time, while others remain virtually unchanged.

In this book, I focus on government itself, the decisions it makes, and its relationship to the public. I look at actual decisions, many of which were policies not adopted, rather than attempt to find which issues were completely excluded from the decision-making arena altogether. I suggest that it is possible to examine the relationship between local government policies and race because this relationship has frequently been quite overt, characterized by publicly debated issues which, in many cases, one does not have to look very hard to find. My argument attempts to analytically integrate the decades-old debate about community power with the recent debate about the development of concentrated urban poverty for a more comprehensive understanding of urban politics and development.

The policies under examination consist of three main types: 1. policies (either written or unwritten) which were adopted and implemented by local officials; 2. policies which were adopted, but never implemented according to original plans; and 3. policies which were not adopted but which, had they been adopted, could very well have had beneficial effects on much of the east side. Before looking at these policies, however, it is first necessary to look more closely at the city chosen for this study, Buffalo, New York.