

"Urban Outcasts: Stigma and Division in the Black American Ghetto and the French Urban Periphery"

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Loïc J. D. Wacquant

Editors' Introduction

Loïc Wacquant promotes a comparative perspective on the phenomenon of the urban underclass, through his comparative fieldwork among Northern Africans in the Parisian "Red Belt" city La Courneuve and its infamous public housing concentration called the Quatre mille, and African Americans in the classic "Black Belt" district known as the Southside of Chicago. Through compelling ethnography, he finds similarities in how the American inner city and the French urban periphery are stigmatized as territories of deprivation, dereliction, and danger. He detects commonality in the way both his informant groups experience demonization as undesirable and degraded social outsiders. He finds important differences, however, in the ensemble of historical and social processes that have marginalized these two groups as reservoirs of low-skilled labor in a de-industrializing economy. Race, space, and place are experienced in a similar fashion, but constituted differently in the two locations.

Wacquant draws a sharp contrast between French minorities and American minorities in the sense of political inclusion and cultural identity. His French North African informants carry an outlook of collectivism and social class-consciousness from the factory shop floor, neighborhood politics, and participation in street marches. He found, by contrast, that African Americans of the Southside of Chicago feel more marginalized by the individualistic ethos of U.S. society. They have a different experience of racial minority status; the French minorities are more adept at a kind of cultural code switching, while African Americans experience racial difference as a more permanent status of exclusion. This debunks the claim that European poverty is being "Americanized."

Loïc Wacquant was born and raised in Southern France, and educated in Montpellier and Paris. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Chicago in 1994 after earlier graduate studies in industrial economics and fieldwork on the island of New Caledonia in the South Pacific. His research interests include urban poverty, criminal justice, race relations, and social theory. Wacquant has conducted fieldwork on the South Side of Chicago, and in the jails of big cities in the United States, France and Brazil. He has acted as consultant on issues of urban poverty, violence, ethnicity, and crime to central and local governments, unions, and the courts in France, Argentina, Brazil, Norway, Sweden, and to the OECD.

For the past several years, he has been Professor of Sociology and Research Associate at the Earl Warren Legal Institute, University of California at Berkeley, where he was also affiliated with the Program in Medical Anthropology and the Center for Urban Ethnography, and Researcher at the Centre de Sociologie Européenne du Collège de France. He is now on the faculty of the Graduate Faculty at the New School University in New York. He has been a member of the Society of Fellows at Harvard University and a MacArthur Foundation Fellow. His books include *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (with Pierre Bourdieu; 1992, translated into 18 languages); *Prisons of Poverty* (1999, translated into 15 languages); *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (2000, translated into nine languages); *Parias Urbanos* (2001); *Punir les Pauvres* (2004); *Deadly Symbiosis: Race and the Rise of Neoliberal Penalty* (2004); *The Mystery of Ministry: Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics* (forthcoming in 2005).

Wacquant recently completed an anthology of the works of Marcel Mauss on *Belief, Exchange, and Social Transformation* (forthcoming with the University of Chicago Press), a special thematic issue of *Ethnography* on "Dissecting the Prison" (vol. 3, no 4, December 2002), and the English translation of his first book on prizefighting, *Body and Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). He is currently working on the sequel, *The Passion of the Pugilist*, an analysis of the dialectic of desire and domination in which he puts forth an argument for "carnal sociology." He is also preparing an anti-reader on the works of Pierre Bourdieu (with whom he worked closely for over a decade) entitled *Practice, Power, Knowledge: The Essential Bourdieu*; and writing up an ethnography of life strategies and "institutional stretching" on Chicago's South Side, *In the Zone: Making Do in the Dark Ghetto at Century's End*. His next project is a comparative historical sociology of forms and mechanisms of racial domination provisionally entitled *Peculiar Institutions*. He is co-founder and co-editor of the international and interdisciplinary journal *Ethnography*, director of the new book series "Practice and Symbolic Power" published by Verso (with W. W. Norton in the U.S.A.), and a regular contributor to *Le Monde diplomatique*.

Two interconnected trends have reshaped the visage of western European cities over the past decade or so. The first is the pronounced rise of multifarious urban inequalities and the crystallization of novel forms of socio-economic marginality, some of which appear to have a distinctly "ethnic" component and to feed (off) processes of spatial segregation and public unrest. The second is the surge and spread of ethno-racial or xenophobic ideologies and tensions consequent upon the simultaneous increase in persistent unemployment and the settlement of immigrant populations formerly thought of as guest workers.

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The coincidence of new forms of urban exclusion with ethno-racial strife and segregation has given *prima facie* plausibility to the notion that European poverty is being "Americanized." Hence many European analysts (though by no means all) have turned to the United States for analytic assistance in an effort to puzzle out the current degradation of urban conditions and relations in their respective countries: thus the transatlantic diffusion

of concepts, models, and sometimes ready-made theories from recent (and not-so-recent) American social science. This is visible in the worried and confused public discussion in France – and in other countries such as Belgium, Germany and Italy – about the presumed formation of immigrant "ghettos" in degraded working-class neighborhoods harboring large low-income housing tracts known as *cités*. It can be detected also in the spread of the notion of "underclass" in Britain and in its smuggling into the Netherlands to address the strain put on citizenship by the emerging concatenation of joblessness, ethnic discrimination and neighborhood decline. Such conceptual borrowings, however, stand on shaky analytical grounds inasmuch as they presume exactly that which needs to be established: namely, that the American conceptual idiom of "race relations" has purchase on the urban realities of Europe – leaving aside the question of whether conventional American categories (or newer concepts such as the largely mythical notion of "underclass") pack any analytical power on their own turf to start with.

The best way to answer, or at least productively reframe, this question is through a systematic, empirically grounded, cross-national comparison of contemporary forms of urban inequality and ethno-racial/class exclusion which (1) does not presuppose that the analytical apparatus forged on one continent should be imposed wholesale on the other, and is sensitive to the fact that all "national" conceptual tools have embedded within them specific social, political and moral assumptions reflective of the particular history of society and state in each country; (2) attends consistently to the meanings and lived experiences of social immobility and marginality; and (3) strives to embed individual strategies and collective trajectories firmly into the local social structure as well as within the broader national framework of market and state.

This chapter is part of a broader attempt to contribute to such a comparative sociology through an analysis of the social and mental structures of urban exclusion in the American "Black Belt" and the French "Red Belt." "Black Belt" is used here to denote the remnants of the historic "dark ghetto" of the large metropolis of the North-East and Mid-West of the United States, that is the dilapidated racial enclaves of the metropolitan core which have dominated recent public and academic discussions of race and poverty in North America. The expression "Red Belt" refers not simply to the townships of the outer ring of Paris that form(ed) the historic stronghold of the French Communist party, but more generally to the traditional mode of organization of "workers' cities" in France, anchored by industrial male employment, a strong workerist culture and solidaristic class consciousness, and civic incorporation of the population through a dense web of union-based and municipal organizations creating a close integration of work, home and public life. It is in such peripheral working-class neighborhoods that urban inequalities and unrest have coalesced, making the question of the *banlieue* perhaps the most pressing public issue in the France of the 1980s.

The analysis that follows uses data from a variety of primary and secondary sources and combines observations drawn from censuses, surveys and field studies of the American ghetto and the French *banlieue*. On the French side, I

concentrate on the Red Belt city of La Courneuve and its infamous public housing concentration called the Quatre mille (after the nearly 4,000 units it originally contained). La Courneuve is an older, Communist governed, north-eastern suburb of Paris with a population of 36,000 situated midway between the national capital and the Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport, in the midst of a densely urbanized, declining industrial landscape. On the American side, I focus on the South Side ghetto of Chicago where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in 1988-91. The South Side is a sprawling, all-black zone containing some 130,000 inhabitants, the majority of whom are unemployed and live under the official federal "poverty line." I have presented elsewhere a detailed sociography of both sites which highlighted a number of parallel morphological traits and trends. In summary, both locales were found to have a declining population with a skewed age and class structure characterized by a predominance of youths, manual workers and deskilled service personnel, and to harbor large concentrations of "minorities" (North African immigrants on the one side, blacks on the other) which exhibit unusually high levels of unemployment caused by deindustrialization and labor market changes. This comparison also turned up structural and ecological differences suggesting that the declining French working-class, *banlieue* and the black American ghetto constitute two different socio-spatial formations, produced by different institutional logics of segregation and aggregation and resulting in pronouncedly higher levels of blight, poverty and hardship in the ghetto. To simplify greatly: exclusion operates on the basis of color reinforced by class and state in the Black Belt, but mainly on the basis of class and mitigated by the state in the Red Belt, with the result that the former is a racially and culturally homogeneous universe characterized by low organizational density and state penetration, whereas the latter is fundamentally heterogeneous in terms of both class and ethno-national recruitment, with a strong presence of public institutions.

The purpose of this article is to flesh out some of the invariants and variations in the socio-organizational and cognitive structures of urban exclusion by contrasting two dimensions of daily life salient in both the French *banlieue* and the black American ghetto, though, as we shall see, with

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significantly discrepant inflections, degrees of urgency and socio-political dynamics. The paper addresses the powerful territorial stigma that attaches to residence in an area publicly recognized as a "dumping ground" for poor people, downwardly mobile working-class households and marginal groups and individuals. Poverty is too often (wrongly) equated with material dispossession or insufficient income. But, in addition to being deprived of adequate conditions and means of living, to be poor in a rich society entails having the status of a social anomaly and being deprived of control over one's collective representation and identity: the analysis of public taint in the American ghetto and the French urban periphery serves to stress the symbolic dispossession that turns their inhabitants into veritable social outcasts.

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TERRITORIAL STIGMATIZATION - ITS EXPERIENCE AND EFFECTS

Any comparative sociology of the "new" urban poverty in advanced societies must begin with the powerful stigma attached to residence in the bounded and segregated spaces, the "neighborhoods of exile" to which the populations marginalized or condemned to redundancy by the postfordist reorganization of the economy and state are increasingly being relegated - not only because it is arguably the single-most protrusive feature of the lived experience of those assigned to, or entrapped in, such areas but also because this stigma helps explain certain similarities in their strategies of coping or escape and thereby many of the surface cross-national commonalities that have given apparent validity to the idea of a transatlantic convergence between the "poverty regimes" of Europe and the United States.

"It's like there's a plague here"

Because they constitute the lowest tier of that nation's public housing complex, have undergone continual material and demographic decline since their erection in the early 1960s and received a strong inflow of foreign families from the

mid-1970s onwards, the *cités* of the French urban periphery suffer from a negative public image that instantly associates them with rampant delinquency, immigration and insecurity, so much so that they are almost universally called "little Chicagos," both by their residents and by outsiders. To dwell in a Red Belt low-income estate means to be confined to a branded space, to a blemished setting experienced as a "trap." Thus the media and its inhabitants themselves routinely refer to the Quatre mille as a "dumpster," "the garbage can of Paris," or even a "reservation," a far cry from the official bureaucratic designation of "sensitive neighborhood" used by the public officials in charge of the state's urban renewal program. In recent years, the press of stigmatization has augmented sharply with the explosion of discourses on the alleged formation of so-called *cités-ghettos* widely (mis)represented as growing pockets of "Arab" poverty and disorder symptomatic of the incipient "ethnicization" of France's urban space.

It should be noted however that the Quatre mille does not exist as such in the perceptions of its residents. The indigenous taxonomies the latter use to organize their daily round distinguish numerous subunits within the large estate which in effect has only an administrative and symbolic existence - though it has real consequences. What appears from the outside to be a monolithic ensemble is seen by its members as a finely differentiated congery of "micro-locales": those from the northern cluster of the project, in particular, want nothing to do with their counterparts of the southern section, whom they consider to be "hoodlums" (*racaille* or *caillera* in the local youth slang), and vice versa. "For the residents of the Quatre mille, to change building sometimes means to change lives." Yet it remains that dwellers in *cités* have a vivid awareness of being "exiled" to a degraded space that collectively disqualifies them. Rachid, a former resident of the Quatre mille, gives virulent expression to this sense of indignity when asked about the eventuality of moving back into the project: "For us to return there, it would be to be insulted once again. The Quatre mille are an insult... For many people, the Quatre mille are experienced as a shame." When the interviewer inquires about the possibility of salvaging the housing project through renovation, his answer is no less blunt:

To renovate is to take part in shame. If you agree to play this game, then in a way you're endorsing shame. We've come to a point of no return where you got no solution but to raze the whole thing. Besides the people here agree there's only one solution: "Gotta blow it up." Go and ask them. . . . When you don't feel good inside, when you don't feel good outside, you got no jobs, you got nothing going for you, then you break things, that's the way it is. The shit they're doing trying to fix the garbage disposal and the hallway entrance, the painting, that's no use: it's gonna get ripped right away. It's dumb. It's the whole thing that's the problem. . . . You gotta raze the whole thing.

For Sali, another North African youth from the Quatre mille, the project is "a monstrous universe" seen as an instrument of social confinement by its inhabitants: "It's a jail. They [second-generation residents] are in jail, they got tricked real good, so when they get together, they have karate fights against the mail boxes and bust everything up. It's all quite easy to understand." The verbal violence of these youths, as well as the vandalism they invoke, must be understood as a response to the socio-economic and symbolic violence they feel subjected to by being thus relegated to a defamed place. Not surprisingly, there is great distrust and bitterness among them about the ability of political institutions and the willingness of local leaders to rectify the problem.

It is hardly possible for residents of the *cité* to overlook the scorn of which they are the object since the social taint of living in a low-income housing project that has become closely associated with poverty, crime and moral degradation affects all realms of existence – whether it is searching for employment, pursuing romantic involvements, dealing with agencies of social control such as the police or welfare services or simply talking with acquaintances. Residents of the Quatre mille are quick to impute the ills of their life to the fact of being "stuck" in a "rotten" housing project that they come to perceive through a series of homological oppositions (*cité*/city, us/them, inside/outside, low/high, savage/civilized) that reproduce and endorse the derogatory judgment of outsiders. When asked where they reside, many of "those who work in Paris say vaguely that

they live in the northern suburbs" rather than reveal their address in La Courneuve. Some will walk to the nearby police station when they call taxicabs to avoid the humiliation of being picked up at the doorstep of their building. Parents forewarn their daughters against going out with "guys from the Quatre mille."

Residential discrimination hampers the search for jobs and contributes to entrench local unemployment since inhabitants of the Quatre mille encounter additional distrust and reticence among employers as soon as they mention their place of residence. A janitor in the *cité* relates a typical incident in which he helped new tenants contact firms by telephone only to be told that there no longer was any position open whenever he revealed where he was calling from: "It's like there's a plague here," he says in disgust. Territorial stigmatization affects interactions not only with employers but also with the police, the courts and street-level welfare bureaucracies, all of which are especially likely to modify their conduct and procedures based on residence in a degraded *cité*. "All youths recount the change of attitude of policemen when they notice their address during identity checks," for to be from a *cité* carries with it a reflex suspicion of deviance if not of outright guilt. A high school student tells of being stopped by subway controllers in the Paris Métro: "We took out our identity cards. When they saw that we were from the Quatre mille, I swear to you! They went . . . they turned pale."

"People really look down on you"

In America, the dark ghetto stands similarly as the national symbol of urban "pathology," and its accelerating deterioration since the racial uprisings of the mid-1960s is widely regarded as incontrovertible proof of the moral dissolution, cultural depravity and behavioral deficiencies of its inhabitants. The journalistic reports and academic (pseudo) theories that have proliferated to account for the putative emergence of a so-called "underclass" in its midst have accelerated the *demonization of the black urban (sub)proletariat* by symbolically severing it from the "deserving" working class and by obfuscating – and thereby retroactively legitimating – the state policies of

urban abandonment and punitive containment responsible for its downward slide.

Today, living in the historic Black Belt of Chicago carries an automatic presumption of social unworthiness and moral inferiority which translates into an acute consciousness of the symbolic degradation associated with being confined to a loathed and despised universe. A student from a vocational high school on the city's South Side voices this sense of being cut off from and cast out of the larger society thus:

People really look down on you because of where you come from and who you are. People don't want to have anything to do with you . . . You can tell when you go places, people are looking at you like you are crazy or something.

The defamation of the ghetto is inscribed first in the brute facts of its physical dilapidation and of the separateness and massive inferiority of its resident institutions, be they public schools, social agencies, municipal services, neighborhood associations or financial and commercial outlets. It is constantly reaffirmed by the diffident and contemptuous attitudes of outsiders: banks, insurance companies, taxis, delivery trucks and other commercial services avoid the Black Belt or venture into it only gingerly; kin and kith are reluctant to visit. "Friends from other places don't want really to come here. And you yourself, you wouldn't want to invite intelligent people here: there's markings and there's writing on the wall, nasty, whatever," says an unemployed mother of three who lives in a West Side project. Children and women living in public housing in the inner city find it difficult to develop personal ties with outsiders once the latter learn of their place of residence.

Desmond Avery, who lived in both the Cabrini Green project in Chicago and in the Quatre mille, remarks that residential discrimination is at least as prevalent in the Windy City as in the Parisian periphery. Ghetto dwellers are well aware that living in a stigmatized section of town penalizes them on the labor market: "Your address, its impression for jobs." Residing on the South Side, and even more so in a public housing project whose name has become virtually eponymous with "violence and depravity," is yet another hurdle in the arduous quest for employment. A jobless woman who lives in

the ill-reputed Cabrini Green housing development remarks:

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It's supposed to be discrimination, but they get away with it, you know. Yes, it's important where you live. Employers notice, they notice addresses, when that application's goin' through personnel, they are lookin' at that address: (worried tone) "Oh, you're from *here!*?"

Over and beyond the scornful gaze of outsiders and the reality of exclusion from participation in society's regular institutions, the thoroughly depressed state of the local economy and ecology exerts a pervasive effect of demoralization upon ghetto residents. Indeed, the words "depressing" and "uninspiring" come up time and again in the description that the latter give of their surroundings. Moreover, two-thirds of the inhabitants of the South Side and West Side of Chicago expect that their neighborhood will either stay in the same state of blight or deteriorate further in the near future; the only route for improvement is to move out, to which nearly all aspire. But the possibility of accumulating resources in preparation for upward mobility is further eroded by the predatory nature of relations between residents and by the pressure towards social uniformity which weighs on those who try to rise above the poverty level common to most inhabitants of the area: "They won't let you get ahead. Stealin' from you and robbin' you and all that kinda thing," laments a 27-year-old machine operator from the far South Side. Given the inordinate incidence of violent crime, living in a ghetto neighborhood also entails significant physical risk and, as a corollary, high levels of psychic stress which tend to "drag you down" and "wear you out." No wonder that life in the Black Belt is suffused with a sense of gloom and fatality, a social *fatum* which obstructs the future from view and seems to doom one to a life of continued failure and rejection.

FROM SOCIAL STIGMATIZATION TO SOCIAL "DISORGANIZATION"

Paradoxically, the experiential burden of territorial stigmatization weighs more heavily on the residents of the French *banlieue* than it does on their counterparts of the American ghetto, in spite of

the fact that the latter constitutes a considerably more desolate and oppressive environment. Three factors help account for this apparent disjuncture between objective conditions and the subjective (in)tolerance of those who evolve in them. First, the very idea of relegation into a separate space of *institutionalized social inferiority and immobility* stands in blatant violation of the French ideology of unitarist citizenship and participation in the national community, an ideology fully embraced and forcefully invoked by youths from the Red Belt, especially second-generation immigrants of North African origins in their street protest and marches of the past decade. By contrast, the color line of which the black ghetto is the most visible institutional expression is so ingrained in the make-up of the American urban landscape that it has become part of the order of things: racial division is a thoroughly taken-for granted constituent of the organization of the metropolitan economy, society and polity. Second, residents of the American ghetto are more prone to embracing a highly individualistic ideology of achievement than are their counterparts of the French *cités*. Many, if not most, adhere to the social darwinistic view that social position ultimately reflects one's moral worth and personal strivings, so that no one in the long run can be consistently held back by his or her place of residence. A third and most crucial difference between Red Belt and Black Belt is found in the nature of the stigma they carry: this stigma is only residential in the former, but jointly and inseparably spatial-cum-racial in the latter. The French *banlieue* is but a territorial entity which furthermore contains a mixed, multi-ethnic population; it suffices for inhabitants of the Quatre mille or any other *cité* to hide their address in order to "pass" in the broader society. No readily perceptible physical or cultural marker brands them as members of the Red Belt, and use of simple techniques of "impression management" enable them to shed the stigma, if only temporarily. Thus adolescents from poor Parisian *banlieues* regularly go to "hang out" in the up-market districts of the capital to escape their neighborhood and gain a sense of excitement. By traversing spaces that both symbolize and contain the life of higher classes, they can live for a few hours a fantasy of social inclusion and participate, albeit by proxy, in the wider society. This "consciousness switch" renders more intolerable the idea of per-

manent exclusion and the outcast status associated with consignment to a degraded *cité*.

Residents of the American Black Belt are not granted the luxury of this dual "awareness context." For the ghetto is not simply a spatial entity, or a mere aggregation of poor families stuck at the bottom of the class structure: it is a uniquely *racial formation* that spawns a society-wide web of material and symbolic associations between color, place and a host of negatively valued social properties. The fact that color is a marker of identity and a principle of vision and division that is immediately available for interpretation and use in public space and interaction makes it nearly impossible for inner-city dwellers to shed the stigma attached to ghetto residence. For instance, they cannot casually cross over into adjacent white neighborhoods, for there the sight of a young black man evokes an image of someone dangerous, destructive, or "deviant" so that they will promptly be trailed and stopped, nay systematically harassed, by police. Ghetto blacks in America suffer from *conjugated stigmatization*: they cumulate the negative symbolic capital attached to color and consignment to a specific, reserved and inferior territory itself devalued for being both the repository of the lowest class elements of society and a racial reservation. In a race-divided society such as the United States, where all spheres of life are thoroughly color-coded and given low chances of escaping the ghetto, the best one can do is make a virtue of necessity and learn to live with a stigma that is both illegitimate and unacceptable to French working-class youths of the Red Belt *cités*.

Yet the main effect of territorial stigmatization is similar in both countries: it is to stimulate practices of internal social differentiation and distancing that work to decrease interpersonal trust and undercut local social solidarity. To regain a measure of dignity and reaffirm the legitimacy of their own status in the eyes of society, residents of both *cité* and ghetto typically overstress their moral worth as individuals (or as family members) and join in the dominant discourse of denunciation of those who undeservingly "profit" from social assistance programs, *faux pauvres* and "welfare cheats." It is as if they could gain value only by devaluing their neighborhood and their neighbors. They also engage in a variety of strategies of social distinction and withdrawal which converge

to undermine neighborhood cohesion. These take three main forms: mutual avoidance, reconstitution and elaboration of "infra-differences" or micro-hierarchies, and the diversion of public opprobrium onto scapegoats such as notorious "problem families" and foreigners or drug dealers and single mothers. In the French *cité*, residents commonly insist that they are there only "by accident" and carp over the waste of public resources allocated to those who, "contrary to them," do not genuinely need assistance. Similarly, in Chicago's ghetto, residents disclaim belonging to the neighborhood as a network of mutual acquaintance and exchange and strive to set themselves aside from what they know to be a place and population of ill repute. This 41-year-old nurse from the West Side neighborhood of North Lawndale, one of the most destitute in the city, speaks for many of her peers in both Black Belt and Red Belt when she says: "Hell, I don't know what people [around here] do, I guess I'm pretty much on my own. I don't associate with people in the neighborhood; I mean I speak to them, but as far as knowing what they're about, I don't know."

To sum up, residents of the French *cité* and of the American ghetto each form an *impossible community*, perpetually divided against themselves, which cannot but refuse to acknowledge the collective nature of their predicament and who are therefore inclined to deploy strategies of distancing and "exit" that tend to validate negative outside perceptions and feed a deadly self-fulfilling prophecy through which public taint and collective disgrace eventually produce that which they claim merely to record: namely, social atomism, community "disorganization" and cultural anomie.

[...]

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to uncover some of the similarities and differences between

the "new urban poverty" in France and in America as it is locally structured and experienced by those whom the term (or its equivalent) has come to designate in these two countries. Rather than compare national aggregate statistics on income, standards of living or consumption patterns, which often measure little more than properties of the survey bureaucracies and procedures which generate them and take no account of the specific welfare-state and socio-spatial environments in which individuals and groups actually evolve in each society, I have proceeded by way of a contextualized examination of a master aspect of life in a stigmatized neighborhood of concentrated poverty: territorial indignity and its debilitating consequences upon the fabric and form of the local social structure.

Drawing out the organizational and cognitive texture of everyday living in the Parisian Red Belt and in Chicago's Black Belt, how the residents of these blighted areas negotiate and experience social immobility and ostracization in "the ghetto" – as social myth in one case and enduring historic reality in the other – highlights the distinctively racial dimension of inner city poverty in the United States. It also points to the uncertainty in the process of collective identity formation in the Red Belt caused by the demise of traditional agencies of class formation. Whether France and America converge or continue to differ in the future with regard to the social and spatial patterning of inequality in the city, there can be little doubt that racial separation, where it prevails, radicalizes the objective and subjective reality of urban exclusion; and that state support (or tolerance) of segregation and recognition of ethno-racial divisions only serve to intensify the cumulation of urban dispossession and to exacerbate the destructive consequences of socio-economic marginality, not only for those upon whom it is imposed and for their neighborhoods, but for the broader society as well.