

Reading Tips and Study Questions

CLASS THREE

Required reading

1. Briggs, pp.1-5 (through "...segregated housing patterns.") in Chapter 1, plus Chapter 2 ("More *Pluribus*, Less *Unum*? The Changing Geography of Race and Opportunity") in **The Geography of Opportunity: Race and Housing Choice in Metropolitan America**, edited by X. Briggs (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2005).
2. Skim main findings: Chapters 3 and 4 in **The Geography of Opportunity**.
3. Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube, "Cul-de-sac poverty," *The New York Times* (May 20, 2013).
4. (Audio) "[Advocates struggle to reach growing ranks of suburban poor](#)" (national Public Radio, May 20, 2013).
5. Douglas Massey and others, **New Faces in New Places**, chapters 1-2 (pages 1-50).

Recommended reading

6. Ingrid Ellen, "Continuing Isolation: Segregation in America today," in **Segregation: The Rising Costs for America**, pp.261-278.

Session overview

Building on our discussion about just-city principles and policies, we now turn to several sessions focused on the historical and current drivers of inequality. While we will focus primarily on economic inequality, we consider social and political context—including unequal political power—as well.

This session will focus, in particular, on the changing make-up and spatial distribution of demographic groups, while subsequent sessions look at the broader economy, key trends in American politics, and conceptions and functions of "community." In this session, a variety of demographic fundamentals—birth rates, ageing, migration, etc.—come into play, helping to define the context for housing and community economic development efforts. But so do investment, contracting, hiring, outreach, and other decisions, by governments, businesses, nonprofit institutions, and millions of individual households that together shape the quality of places. These demographic trends and patterns in decision-making in turn help define something that has gained considerably currency among planners, policymakers, researchers over the past decade—the idea that a "geography of opportunity" shapes well-being, life chances, and more and is thus a conceptual tool for creating places that are more just.

We can and should debate whether the geography of opportunity is in fact a useful construct, but if it is, planners need to be able to examine it rigorously in any given place (use the construct as a diagnostic tool) and also understand why *reshaping* that geography is important but challenging. That last thought begs a question we will ask again and again throughout the semester: Where is the leverage?

Meaning: On what fronts do we have the best odds of effecting specific kinds of change in the state of the world—over the short, medium or longer run—and why?

Note: the reading load (volume) is particularly intensive for this session, so you will need to read critically and selectively. Focus on main ideas, and skip over or skim the areas of overlap that inevitably appear (repeat) across the readings. Needless to say, you will not be asked to recall the details; our main goal is to familiarize you with a broad array of trends and their major implications.

Discussion questions

1. Segregation is a persistent feature of America's urban regions and, in a different way, its rural ones too. By many measures, America's urban regions are far more segregated internally than are urban regions elsewhere in the world. Segregation is a defining feature of the geography of opportunity. There are, for most purposes, four major segregation debates. They are related but distinct in terms of what they aim to reveal, namely: the WHAT of segregation (what the patterns are, descriptively), the WHY (what explains those patterns), the SO WHAT (implications of segregation, for example social, political, and economic impacts), and the NOW WHAT (policy options, their pros and cons, and the political, technical, financial and other challenges of advancing any of the options). **Briggs's** "More *pluribus*, less *unum*" is mainly about the WHAT and SO WHAT. Published in 2005, the chapter reflects trends through Census 2000 and not—yet—the latest decennial census. What major patterns, according to his argument, define the geography of opportunity? Which patterns appear to be changing in significant ways? On the WHY of persistent segregation, skim chapters 2 and 3 in the same volume to understand the role of housing preferences on one hand and discrimination on the other.
2. One key argument in *The Geography of Opportunity* is that the concept is not intrinsically or necessarily about a central city (or "inner city") versus the suburbs divide. Rather, advantage and disadvantage concentrate in space, "containing" disadvantage. And the shape of the "container" has changed dramatically in many metro regions. One sign of that is the dramatic suburbanization of poverty in recent decades. As demographers **Kneebone and Berube** note, "The landscape of poverty in America has changed, but the way we think about poverty hasn't." What are the most significant shifts, according to the authors, and what are some implications of these shifts? Listen to the brief radio segment and [watch the brief video](#) based on their book too.

3. In *New Faces in New Places*, focus on chapter 1 and skim chapter 2. What key forces, according to **Hirschman and Massey** (chapter 1) have shaped decisions, by immigrants, to migrate and also choices about where, i.e. to which metro regions? (Note that movement between regions, defined by metro housing markets, is commonly labeled *migration*, whether that movement happens within or across national borders, whereas movement within those metro markets is labeled *residential mobility*.) Pay particular attention to the evidence on how migration links to economic restructuring, since we will look more closely at shifts in the broader economy in our next sessions.
4. In chapter 2, **Massey and Capoferro** look more closely at “the new geography” of immigrant settlement. Focus on understanding the major patterns they highlight—including the emergence of newer “gateway” regions—and the top explanations for those patterns.

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