



Black Lives and Spatial Matters: Policing Blackness and Practicing Freedom in Suburban St. Louis

Jodi Rios (2020). Cornell University Press. 294 pages. \$27.95 (paperback)

M. Scott Ball

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and aging (Howe). Deborah Howe's chapter on planning for an aging society will spark the interests of planners across the country as we face the "silver wave" of the baby boomer generation and how this demographic process is transforming housing markets, housing design, and challenging local planning practice, and yet—as Howe points out—there is not enough sense of urgency when dealing with matters of aging, disability, and planning for more equitable places.

For planners who work in the equity space every day, this book will inspire and motivate to deepen their understanding of how far equity planning has come and to know they're not alone in this work. The authors in this edited volume have played a significant role in sustaining equity planning in terms of local and national initiatives. Lisa Bates and her colleagues have sustained the research on equity planning with significant publications while also building momentum in Portland. Manuel Pastor's output on equity has had a national impact through PolicyLink, PERE, and the development of equity profiles for cities and metro regions with a broad impact on Los Angeles as a home base for equity research political organizing.

If there is any limitation of the book, it is the focus on the United States in isolation from the conversations and lessons about equity and racial justice in cities and social movements around the world. Even within the United States we have much more to learn from the margins and marginalized regions often ignored by planning academia, from Puerto Rico and the colonías on the border, to the many indigenous nations within our nation. Too often, the publications by planning scholars tend to focus on the United States or on international case studies. Less often do we see the intermixing of both experiences through the intellectual cross-pollination of ideas and shared political strategies across national boundaries. On this point, I will suggest that the emerging generation of equity planners is leading the way.

ORCID

Jacob Wagner  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7761-5837>

JACOB WAGNER is an associate professor of urban planning and design at the University of Missouri–Kansas City and director of the Urban Studies Program. He is a member of the editorial board of the *International Journal of Urban Design*.

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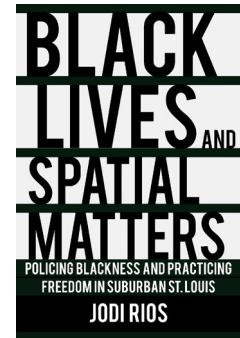
Reviewed by M. Scott Ball, *Commons Planning*

In the 4 years that she wrote *Black Lives and Spatial Matters*, Jodi Rios could not have anticipated the course the Black Lives Matters movement would take in the summer of 2020 when protestors marched in communities around the world. Into the summer of unrest, the release of *Black Lives and Spatial Matters* was a welcome event.

Taking as subjects "policing blackness and practicing freedom in suburban St. Louis" (p. C1), Rios demonstrates possibilities for broadening our understanding of space and means of planning it in a way that is particularly helpful at this moment in time.

Rios is a transdisciplinary scholar who draws from law and policy, geography and urban planning, and academic discourses in cultural anthropology and Black queer studies. She bridges these disciplines and fields in a new and potentially unsettling way to a practitioner of any individual field. The book probes the historical and current associations made by journalists and public officials of Black people with risk and details how this linguistic framing has shaped regional and municipal policies in North St. Louis County (MO). She finds that a "Blackness-as-risk" (p. 23) frame of understanding has created hostile and predatory policies, particularly policing policies, that ultimately contributed to Michael Brown's death when he was shot by a police officer in Ferguson (MO) on August 9, 2014.

In part I, "Blackness-As-Risk," Rios concentrates on the theme of epistemic violence, a subject that has been more richly discussed and developed in academic study than integrated into planning practice. Epistemic violence occurs when cultural and racial stereotypes are deployed to truncate empathy, catalyze oppression, and enable exploitation. Rios describes the relative efficiency and ease with which epistemic violence has disenfranchised communities like North St. Louis County. Terms like "urban populations," though benign at face value, have for decades been seeded to evoke a Blackness that is dangerous and uncivilized. Once imbued with these innuendoes, the unpacking of the terms and



their flattened characterizations require significant effort. It is work that philosopher Michel Foucault described as the “archeology of knowledge” with all of the laborious digging, dusting off, and cataloging of details that the phrase implies (Foucault, 1969). In her review of North St. Louis County’s sociopolitical context in Part I, Rios demonstrates the potential for epistemic mapping to prepare audiences to confront, interrupt, and help remediate systemic injustice. In many ways, form follows perception in urban investment and disinvestment trends, and epistemic mapping is a tool for regularly repositioning and tuning a place within public perception and policy.

In part II, “Blackness as Freedom,” Rios documents the role played in the Ferguson protest movement by women who identify as queer and transgender. Rios portrays these women’s willingness to live fully, visibly, and unapologetically outside of societal norms as “extreme practices of freedom” (p. 166). Rios provides a wealth of testimony from Mamma Cat, Diamond, Unsung Haiku, Reverend Sekou, Sixela Yoccm, Mr. Moff, Jamell, and other protestors speaking to the leadership roles queer women of color took in the protest movement. Rios is fully aware that she is an outsider in this context, not a member of the Black, queer, North St. Louis County community she studies. In chapter 6 of part II, Rios plunges into a risky and hopeful protest against the norms that guide her research: scholarly critical distance conventions. Her commentary is often interspersed seamlessly with the excerpts from her subject interviews. Rios’s words seem less intent on antiseptically framing, packaging, and explaining the interviews and more intent on being unapologetically present as who she is: a highly educated White, female, passionate trans scholar. Rios ebulliently draws her interviewees’ testimony into a series of academic reference points that have clearly shaped her understanding and drew her research focus to Ferguson in the first place. Rather than the controlling, violent frameworks discussed in part I, what emerges in part II is an empathetic epistemic cacophony where subjects and scholar both risk liberty.

For those planners ready for and perhaps in need of the challenge, Rios demonstrates the potential for a critical shift in how citizen engagement can be conducted in planning. The institutional legacy of the 1960s citizen’s participation movement is broad advocacy: Planning processes have been brought out from back rooms and into community spaces where more voices can contribute. However, as the book shows, advocacy is a reciprocal relationship between voice and audience, and broad inclusion requires discerned listening. An audience of planners who are skilled in the careful archaeology needed to understand epistemic contexts and assist in repositioning place knowledge can provide

the reciprocity necessary for citizen participation and community engagement to have a meaningful impact.

Black Lives and Spatial Matters performs with grace and exacting rigor the skills of audience that planners and civic leaders must develop more fully if we are to participate directly in urgent social challenges of our day. Unrest has brought to the fore that more developed audience skills are needed if planners are to draw a connection between practice and “the urgencies of now” that are marching up streets worldwide. *Black Lives and Spatial Matters* thus lands on our doorsteps at an opportune moment. It offers a troubling review of epistemic violence and a hopeful performance of freedom and audience skills and introduces us to the Black Lives Matters leaders of North St. Louis County.

REFERENCE

Foucault, M. (1969). *L’archéologie du savoir*. Éditions Gallimard.

M. SCOTT BALL is a principal of Commons Planning, a nonprofit urban design and civic development organization in Atlanta (GA). Scott has been actively engaged in the promotion of the independent living and health of aging citizens and has authored numerous publications on the subject, including *Livable Communities for Aging Populations: Urban Design for Longevity* (John Wiley & Sons).

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Affordable Housing

The Voucher Promise: “Section 8” and the Fate of an American Neighborhood

Eva Rosen

(2020). Princeton University Press. 352 pages.
\$27.95 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Dan Immergluck, Georgia State University

In *The Voucher Promise*, Eva Rosen has given us a well-written ethnography of the experience of families and landlords participating in the largest demand-side housing subsidy program in the United States, the federal Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, formerly referred to as “Section 8.” Rosen is a

