**“Finding the City in Sociology: Broadening and Deepening the Geographic Scope of the Urban
and Inequality Literatures”**

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Abstract

Cities have long been the object of fascination within sociology. Key portions of sociological literatures on inequality and globalization, for instance, have focused on urban spaces as essential sites for the production and reproduction of social life, and urban sociology itself is one of the oldest fields in the discipline. For all of this prominence, however, locating the city itself in these literatures can be difficult. Much of our understanding of urban life and urban social problems is derived from a relatively small number of American cities. Moreover, cities are often relegated to a supporting role as a research site rather than an institution worthy of interrogation. This article reviews the path that has brought a specific set of cities to the fore of American sociological analyses. In response, broadening literatures to cities in the literal and figurative American South and producing deeper literatures of specific cities can give sociology the opportunity to produce more representative and contextually rich analyses of inequalities, urban social life, and urban form. The literature on St. Louis, Missouri, is presented as an example of what such a broader and deeper literature could encompass.

Keywords

urban sociology, urban social problems, cities, St. Louis, Chicago School, W.E.B. Du Bois, paradigmatic cities

Urban life and its discontents are omnipresent in many corners of sociology, particularly within the fields of inequality, urban sociology, and race. Despite the widespread presence of cities in sociological research, however, urban sociology itself has faced crises of identity (Castells, 1968, 2002; Walton, 1993; Wu, 2016; Zukin, 1980) and sometimes visceral theoretical debates (A. Abbott, 2002; Dear, 2002b; Molotch, 2002; Sampson, 2002) as it has morphed largely into the study of inequalities and social problems in urban spaces (Castells, 2002; Gans, 2009; Wu, 2016; Zukin, 2011). Institutional pressures have helped shape this shift, both by deemphasizing urban life in graduate curriculums and discouraging faculty from pursuing ‘local’ research (Zukin, 2011).

At the same time, the study of urban social problems routinely emphasizes a small number of paradigmatic cities, including Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles.¹ These cities, particularly Chicago, have become routine references while other cities both in the United States (Lloyd, 2012) and the global south (Ren, 2018; Robinson, 2011) have been relegated to the status of case studies. This trend has generated both general critique (Dear, 2002b; Dear & Flusty, 1998) and serious questions about the representativeness of these places (Small, 2015; Small, Manduca, & Johnston, 2018). The findings of these critiques, notably that neighborhoods in well-studied cities are increasingly atypical in their experiences of poverty and inequality (Small et al., 2018), are a key motivation for this present paper.

¹ Earlier critiques (see for example Lloyd, 2012; Hunter & Robinson, 2016; Ren, 2018; Small et al., 2018) follow the same general pattern for listing what here will be referred to as paradigmatic cities – those urban areas in the United States that scholars feel have received outsized attention. The most commonly cited cities in this regard are New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Hunter and Robinson (2016) call these the “triumvirate of urban sociology.” Boston and Philadelphia are also often included as part of a more general focus on the industrialized Northeast.

The tensions in subject matter within urban sociology, and the rise of paradigmatic cities within the American urban literature, are not accidental. Rather, I argue that they are the products of a particular trajectory within urban sociology's evolution over the twentieth century. This status quo has meant a focus on particular topics and cities while a broad swath of American cities from the American South have received relatively little attention (see Lloyd 2012). In the second section, I describe these challenges, what has been lost by leaving them out, and opportunities for developing an urban sociology that is both *broad* in geographic scope and *deep* in its contextual pursuits. As an example of what such a broader literature could encompass, the third and final section offers a brief overview of the sociological and social science literature about St. Louis, Missouri. Largely ignored by mainstream sociology (Sandoval, 2013), St. Louis illustrates the tensions within our current disciplinary arrangements and the possibilities for expansion.

The goal of this article is not to provide yet another vision piece in the tradition of Casells (2002), Wu (2016), or Zukin (2011). Nor is it to establish yet another "school" in the tradition of the "Los Angeles School" (see Dear, 2002a for an overview). Rather, just as scholars in the global south (Ren, 2018; Robinson, 2011) have forcefully advocated for greater attention to life in Nairobi, Sao Paulo, and Mumbai, sociology would also benefit from far more substantial engagement with a *broad* array of cities, particularly in the American South, as well as *deep* engagement with the sociohistorical context of individual cities. This call echoes earlier arguments (Lloyd, 2012) that Southern cities remain largely ignored in mainstream sociology. By overlooking Southern cities, a particular set of dynamics are understudied in urban sociology and the study of urban social problems.

The Trajectories of the City in Sociology

The dominant narrative of urban sociology typically begins by emphasizing the ways in which the themes described by Marx, Tönnies, Weber, Simmel, and the other "classical" sociologists collided in Chicago in the early 20th century, where a group of scholars coalesced to form the nucleus of American sociology at the University of Chicago. Each of the major theoretical schools that helped shape urban sociology over the twentieth century found themselves in dialogue with the Chicago School to varying degrees, and each contributed in particular ways to development of particular American cities as paradigmatic or prototypical.

The Chicago School

Historians of the discipline have marked the Chicago School's development as a seminal moment in the formation of American sociology. Bulmer, for example, argues that "the Chicago School was the first great flowering of sociology in the United States" (1986, p. 8). Chicago's location at the epicenter of American Sociology was due in large part to founding department chair Albion Small's leadership with both the American Sociological Society (he served as the fourth president) and *American Journal of Sociology*. These positions helped to structurally root Chicago as the intellectual center of gravity for American sociology, and for some the history of Chicago was the history of the discipline itself during these early years (Bloom, 2002; Bulmer, 1986).

Small and his colleagues embraced an active approach to understanding social problems, including by founding a settlement house and maintaining connections with social work (Bloom, 2002; Kurtz, 1984). These connections fueled a myriad of seminal works (see Kurtz, 1984, pp. 60–68), including *The Ghetto* (Wirth, 1998), *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Zorbaugh, 1983),

and of course Park and Burgess's *The City* (1967). An important theme that flows through the human ecology theory developed at Chicago, and the empirical work that Park and Burgess pushed themselves and their students towards, was that Chicago was a laboratory from which empirical sociologists could collect data and generalize. This emphasis laid the foundation for Chicago's paradigmatic place in the discipline, but the city's rise came at the expense of disciplinary attention on other scholars.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Atlanta

The narrative about Chicago's early prominent role is at best incomplete and at worst, misleading, because it fails to account in any meaningful way for W.E.B. Du Bois. Chicago's founding chair, Albion Small, was a contemporary, but whereas Small was active in building institutions like the AJS and the American Sociological Society, Du Bois was producing a critical body of research on issues of inequality, race, and urban life (Morris, 2017). These include the *Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 2007) and *The Philadelphia Negro* (Du Bois, 2014) as well as stunning examples of what we would now consider "data visualizations" (Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, 2018).

An emphasis on Du Bois is also essential because it draws attention to how American sociology itself embodied racial tensions from its earliest years. Whereas Small arrived at an institution benefiting (not without some controversy) from the largess of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., Du Bois lacked the institutional resources at Atlanta University that would catapult the University of Chicago into the center of American sociology and was never welcomed as an "insider" within the discipline (Morris, 2017). Morris described what could have been known as "the Atlanta School" (Morris, 2017), and recent years have seen increased attention to and

acknowledgement of his legacy (e.g. Hunter & Robinson, 2016; Lloyd, 2012; Loughran, 2015; Morris, 2017 and publications like the *Du Bois Review*). The lack of early acknowledgement, however, is one reason that Atlanta “remains comparatively understudied” (Lloyd, 2012) and outside of the realm of paradigmatic cities.

Urban Culturalists

Instead, the influences of the Sociology Department at the University of Chicago and the simultaneous erasure of Du Bois from the discipline's historical memory meant that for much of American sociology, Chicago was "the city" rather than just "a city." Classics of urban sociology throughout the post-war period were written either in Chicago or by graduates of the University of Chicago (e.g., Cayton, 1962; Gans, 1982; Whyte, 1973). Some of these works and others, driven by the Chicago School's reformation around symbolic interactionism (see Gusfield, 1995), helped to form the initial wave of what Borer (2006) identifies as three waves of the “urban culturalist” perspective.

The unique perspective of urban culturalists, both in their earliest iterations and more recent waves, relied on a distinct focus between urban form and the symbolic work done by individuals to develop and reify understanding about urban life (Borer, 2006). Beyond classics from Gans (1982) and Goffman (1990, 2008), Borer (2006) identified a host of more recent works across six specific domains. Some researchers have focused on individual neighborhoods (e.g. Small, 2009) while others have looked at the cultural landscape of entire cities (e.g. D. Monti, 1999), and have taken differing stances on the degree to which a city's culture is fractured and conflict-ridden. It is important to note that the urban culturalist project is ongoing and has

found itself in dialogue not just with the Chicago School but also the urban intellectual traditions that have developed since the first culturalists wave.

Critically, a focus on paradigmatic cities was not grounded in the forefront for urban culturalists as a whole. However, Borer (2006) makes particular reference to work in Boston (e.g. Small, 2009), New York (e.g. Duneier, 2001), and Chicago (e.g. Grazian, 2005). This is an essential point, because while the urban culturalist project was alive and well in many cities, many of the seminal works in this tradition retain a particular focus on these paradigmatic cities.

Urban Political Economy

Written alongside the transition between the first and second culturalist waves (Borer, 2006), Castells' first publication (1968) questioned the very nature of urban sociology, kicking off a series of pieces by himself and others that sought to challenge the subject matter of the field. Castells (1977, 1978), Harvey (2010), and Lefebvre (1992), though their specific arguments were at times conflicting, all emerged during this period out of a broader Neo-Marxist tradition. Whether called "Marxist urban theory" or "urban political economy" (Kemeny, 1982), the various ideas exposed by urban theorists represented a significant departure from the earlier, Chicago-influenced generation.

The essence of this can be found in both empirical work (Logan & Molotch, 2007) and reviews (Walton, 1993; Zukin, 1980). Urban form, the urban political economists argued, followed the dominant economic modes of production and therefore reflected the market conditions and priorities. Like the urban culturalists, urban political economists were not rooted in specific cities per se. Though there are certainly references to Chicago as prototypical

(Walton, 1993) and an emphasis on other paradigmatic cities like New York (Zukin, 1989), there are also influential works like Gottdiener, Collins, and Dickens' (2000) analysis of Las Vegas. Later work focused on the ways in which centers of capital in the United States, like New York, were connected to other "global" cities (Sassen, 2002, 2013). Others, including Castells (2011), were focused on documenting how the information technology revolution was reshaping societies and economies and metropolitan constellations of cities were emerging, each a node of broader regional and global networks.

Wilson, Anderson, and the Growth of Urban Ethnography

At the same time as this neo-Marxist tradition in urban sociology gained traction, prominent African American sociologists, like Elijah Anderson and William Julius Wilson, began long, influential careers. Though neither fit into the "urban political economy" paradigm, they were contemporaries not just temporally, but substantively with a shared focus on issues related to economic inequality, poverty, and stratification (Walton, 1993). Anderson and Wilson, like so many before them, were also products of Chicago. Their collective works were instrumental at defining a generation of scholarship on and in American cities. Anderson in particular, with *A Place on the Corner* (2003), helped solidify a strong tradition of ethnography in the study of urban social problems that too had its origins in the University of Chicago's methodological developments (see Apter et al., 2009). His early work also used Chicago's South Side as a research site, continuing the development of our disciplinary understanding as one rooted firmly in America's Midwest. In this methodological vein, ethnography continued to be used extensively to study both paradigmatic cities (Deener, 2012; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; A. Goffman, 2015; Newman, 2009; Small, 2009; Venkatesh, 2009) and others like San Francisco (Gowan,

2010). These works focused on many of the same issues that urban political economy emphasized, such as poverty and stratification, but from different theoretical standpoints.

The L.A. School

The themes and ideas that emerged from Chicago and other paradigmatic cities in this period, however, did not resonate equally with scholars elsewhere in the United States. A constellation of urbanists began to emerge in the 1980s in Southern California, offering what they saw as challenges presented by Los Angeles and its environs (Davis, 2006; Dear, 2002a, 2002b; Dear & Flusty, 1998). Coupled with a transition towards post-modern thought more generally, Dear (2002a; Dear & Flusty, 1998) articulated several trends based on the region. These "urbanisms" (Dear & Flusty, 1998) included a recognition that urban growth in Los Angeles in the late 20th century appeared different than growth in Chicago a century before. Political trends were also different in these cities, private, fortified, and surveilled communities abounded, and the city's development felt more "theme park" like than authentic (Dear & Flusty, 1998).

Dear and his L.A. School adherents were in part propelled by a lack of sociological research in Los Angeles (Dear & Flusty, 1998) along with simultaneous new clusters of work in the humanities and social sciences (Davis, 2006). The L.A. School researchers also found themselves buoyed by a sense that Los Angeles's trajectory was increasingly America's. Despite the intellectual differences between the L.A. School and the Chicago School, there was therefore a similar sense each was a prototypical or paradigmatic city (Dear, 2002a).

This was not, however, a roundly welcomed disruption. A dedicated issue in *City & Community* featured powerful critiques by Abbot (2002), Molotch (2002), Sampson (2002), and

Sassen (2002) in addition to several empirical articles about Los Angeles itself. Their arguments shared a number of substantive points - Los Angeles was perhaps not as different from other paradigmatic cities as Dear and his contemporaries claimed, that the Chicago School had long been subject to theoretical and empirical critique, and that the L.A. adherent's "pontification about postmodernism" (Sampson, 2002) was misplaced.

Neighborhood Effects

While the work of Sassen, Castells, Dear, and others pushed scholars to think regionally and globally about how urban life and inequalities are shaped, a mostly distinct literature focused locally developed in parallel. The contemporary neighborhood effects literature (e.g. Jargowsky, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Massey, 1996; Massey & Denton, 1993) reinvigorated earlier Chicago School and urban culturalist emphases on neighborhoods with increasingly sophisticated computational and spatial methods. Though not without critique (e.g. Oakes, 2004), the neighborhood effects literature saw continually expansive growth, focusing on poverty (Wilson, 2012) as well as a range of inequalities like health disparities (e.g. Duncan & Kawachi, 2018), racial residential segregation (e.g. Jargowsky, 1997; Massey & Denton, 1993; Pattillo, 2013), and intergenerational income inequality (e.g. Sharkey, 2013).

Sampson's *Great American City* (2012) was perhaps the pinnacle of this literature, a massive empirical undertaking situated, as so many works were before, in Chicago. On its own the book was an incredibly significant volume representing a two-decade culmination of research. Sampson's work represented a maturation and greater sophistication in the discipline's understanding of urban inequality and how neighborhoods shape so many of the outcomes

sociologists have studied for generations. The book's title, however, also represented the culmination of Chicago's rise as a paradigmatic city.

Challenges and Opportunities for a Broader Literature

For those who are interested in propelling forward the study of inequality, urban social problems, and the urban form, there are both challenges and opportunities for these fields as they continue to mature with work like Sampson's (2012). These challenges can help address the key criticisms made of urban sociology, including the overemphasis on paradigmatic cities and an unclear substantive focus.

Cities, Cities Everywhere, but Which to Study?

In his critically important 2018 article with Manduca and Johnston, Small focuses his attention on "typically studied cities," including "Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Milwaukee" (2018:565) as well as Boston and New York. This geographic focus was critical, Small and his colleagues argued, because these cities were not "typical" in terms of their inequality and poverty. Thus the dominant form of urban life after the 1970s, the vision of gutted neighborhoods with soaring crime, poverty, and unemployment rates, should be seen as increasingly *atypical* for American cities (Small et al., 2018).² Small's analysis presents a fundamental challenge to the current literatures on inequality and urban social problems. By

² There is an interesting tension in this article between the critique about representation and the goal of many ethnographers. Small and colleagues are clear about this, noting that the issue is not whether individual ethnographies are generalizable. Rather, they assert, it is understanding how common or uncommon the conditions discussed in each ethnography are as a key piece for drawing conclusions from the work (Small et al., 2018).

rooting itself in a select set of cities that, in the tradition of the Chicago School, were assumed to be stand-ins for the urban experience more generally (Lloyd, 2012; Ren, 2018; Small et al., 2018), sociology may have failed to understand the heterogeneity of experiences in both inequality and urban form that existed in the United States.

This attention to particular paradigmatic cities is a product of a number of intersecting paths. What Morris (2017) calls the "Atlanta School" never flourished in the way that the "Chicago School" would several decades later. The lack of attention paid to Atlanta is instructive, not just for understanding why Du Bois remains mostly absent from the historical narrative of American sociology, but for thinking about what cities we choose to focus on as sites of inquiry. Morris's work shows the impact that racism played in the earliest days of the discipline. Once attention was turned toward Chicago, each phase of urban sociology's theoretical development covered in the previous section reinforced, to varying degrees, the centrality of a few cities. While Du Bois has gained increasing recognition within the discipline, the consequences of more than a century at the margins have also been slow to remedy.

In particular, even as cities like Atlanta grow in terms of the scientific research produced about them, there is institutional inertia that reinforces the idea of paradigmatic cities - significant institutions that have either historically or contemporarily found themselves at the center of American sociology. Just as Chicago's prominence was spurred by the University of Chicago, the Los Angeles School's rise was enabled not just by the emergence of differences in the Southern Californian urban experience but also because the city plays host to two other elite institutions - the University of California-Los Angeles and the University of Southern California. Other commonly listed paradigmatic cities (e.g. Lloyd, 2012; Ren, 2018; Small et al., 2018) also are home to prestigious universities that house some of the nation's top sociology programs.

Zukin (2011) has argued that the incentive structure within elite institutions can prevent the production of local research by faculty, but these cities also make convenient research sites for graduate students at these institutions. Continued study of these cities reifies their status as paradigmatic sites.

The Global South and the American South

For several decades now, a strident critique has been made by post-colonial scholars about the overwhelming focus of the urban literature on cities in North America and Europe (Robinson, 2011). In the opening of *Worlding Cities*, Roy and Ong (2011) make an impassioned call for developing an urban literature that accounts for the variability of urban experiences across the Global South. All too often, they and their colleagues have argued, our understanding of urban social problems and urban development reflects the trajectories of a few highly developed cities. The same can be said of scholarship on American cities. A focus on paradigmatic cities has meant that, just as we have ignored the Global South, we have also missed important variability in urban experiences within the United States. The institutionalized racism at the core of our turn away from an “Atlanta School” towards Chicago and other paradigmatic cities therefore matters not just for Du Bois’ legacy, but for both the cities we have focused on and the topics we study.

Richard Lloyd (2012) is among those calling to make an intellectual return to the American South. In his essential *Annual Review of Sociology* article (2012), Lloyd echoes earlier sentiments that Southern cities are not always seen as “real” cities and are rather a “sociological black box” (2012:484). The northward gaze of the discipline, reified throughout the twentieth century, has meant that we lack substantial literatures rooted in most Southern cities. Lloyd’s

(2012) article profiles both Atlanta and New Orleans, two Southern cities that have seen increased research activity in the twenty-first century. While Lloyd's (2012) work draws attention to this research, he also argues that many Southern cities remain largely ignored or understudied by the discipline. Moreover, they are conspicuously absent in discussions that center on paradigmatic cities. Just as Robinson (2011) and others have argued we need greater emphasis on Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore) and Budapest, we also need greater attention placed on Birmingham and Biloxi.

A lack of attention to Southern cities has also meant that particular topics have been undertheorized by the discipline, both regarding cities themselves (Lloyd, 2012) and urban African American life (Hunter & Robinson, 2016). While each of the paradigmatic cities have experienced *de facto* segregation and episodes of racial violence, a focus primarily on Northern cities has meant that the consequences of slavery, *de jure* segregation, and Jim Crow laws for urbanization have not been foregrounded in urban sociology. For example, the connections between industrialization in New England and the chattel slavery economy in Southern states are often overlooked. Likewise, the Great Migration's critical demographic shift is highlighted largely from the standpoint of how it shaped the North and West rather than the effects it had on the development of Southern cities. Not only has the slow embrace of Du Bois prevented a flourishing "Atlanta School," but the sociohistorical connections articulated by Wacquant (2002) and others (Hunter & Robinson, 2016) have not been fully explored in Southern cities.

A Site or Institution?

When researchers do step out into American cities, Southern or otherwise, they encounter a fundamental tension within both urban sociology and the study of urban social

problems: is the city merely a research site or an institution worthy of deeper inquiry? Wu (2016) explores this tension, which is at the heart of questions over the subject matter of urban sociology. He advocates forcefully for urban sociology to embrace the city itself - what he calls "a sociology of the city" (Wu, 2016:103) that treats "the city as an autonomous social unit" (Wu, 2016:103). As he and others (Castells, 2002; Gans, 2009; Zukin, 2011) have noted, urban sociology has lost a distinct focus on the city per se and instead has merged in many ways with the broader literature on inequality, with the city used as a research site.

Consider a recent high-profile publication, Goffman's *On the Run* (2015), which is rooted in urban space but leaves largely undeveloped critical links to the city that plays host to the research. The neighborhood itself is masked, meaning that whatever rich history and critical institutional links exist in that real-life "6th Street" are minimized in the service of protecting her informants. In reaction to this default choice that Goffman and many other qualitative sociologists make, Jerolmack and Murphy (2017) have offered a substantial critique. In particular, they make an impassioned critique of the "requisite features" of ethnography, the masking of subjects, institutions, and places that feature in ethnographies. One tradeoff, they argue, is that masking place can "exaggerate the universality of the case" intentionally or otherwise. This is a critique that falls along the lines of Small and colleagues concerns about how the bulk of ethnographies, taken together, are interpreted by readers (Small et al., 2018) regardless of ethnographers' positions on the limits of generalizability.

This is but one example of a literature that is at once urban but without critical context, and is indicative of a critical tension for scholars of inequality who use a variety of methods. Many of the works cited in this paper, either by omission or deliberately to shield the actual location where the researcher conducted their fieldwork, treat the city as a research site itself

and not an essential institution in its own right. Treating cities as an essential institution entails not just focusing on the social problems at hand but the social and historical features of individual cities that have given rise to these problems. As with other critiques about urban sociology's subject matter (Castells, 2002; Gans, 2009; Wu, 2016; Zukin, 2011), this critique is an acknowledgement of the lack of clear subject matter, and a call to draw clear empirical and theoretical connections between the city itself and the problems that arise within it.

Broader and Deeper: The Example of St. Louis, Missouri

There are two simultaneous needs for urban sociology and the study of inequality within cities in response to these challenges and opportunities. The first need is to embrace a *broader* set of cities that are routinely used as research sites. *Broadening* these fields' reach into "Southern" cities, loosely defined, can help shed light on the ways in which chattel slavery and race are at the core of the early development of American cities, and help connect this historical past with the structural inequalities of the present more directly. In doing so, we can address the second need, which is to encourage *deeper* development of literatures about specific places that emphasize their particular sociohistorical trajectories. Inviting greater historical context can help account for both the typical and atypical features of a given place, and ground cities not just as research sites but as institutions in their own right. While sociologists have not focused extensively on St. Louis (Sandoval, 2013), there are clusters of research published on race, economic decline, crime, and immigration.³ Highlighting these traditions and their limits illustrates the ways in which such a literature could develop.

³ A full list of social science research related research on St. Louis is located in a companion Open Science Framework repository at <https://osf.io/rf5ak/>.

Historical Legacies

St Louis is a principal city in a former slave state whose loyalties were split during the Civil War. The city sits on the northern edge of the broader political and social “American South.”⁴ Like W.E.B. Du Bois’ legacy, St. Louis’s 20th century history is one of intentional racial exclusion and institutional failure. The rise and fall of the large Pruitt-Igoe housing project (Bristol, 1991; Montgomery, 1985) is an early example of the failures of American public housing policy. Similarly, the shooting deaths by police of young African American men like Michael Brown and the use of ticketing to pad municipal budgets are prominent examples of failures in American policing (Ordower, Onesimo Sandoval, & Warren, 2017). Since 1950, the city has lost over sixty percent of its population (Gordon, 2013, 2014; Sandoval, 2013) and seen violent crime rates climb by the late 2010s to some of the highest levels of any large city in the United States. Discrimination and institutional failure are both critical areas for sociological research. Understanding the intersections of these issues with the particular historic trajectories of individual Southern cities is an essential element of developing *deeper* literatures.

Race

The East St. Louis race riot in 1917 is an early example of the racial tensions that permeate the region’s history and a major focal point for the literature on race in St. Louis

⁴ While ostensibly a “Union” state during the Civil War because it did not officially secede, Missouri occupies a critical space in America’s history of race. The “Missouri Compromise” was an integral part of slavery’s expansion (Forbes, 2009), the Dred Scott case originated in Missouri (Graber, 2006), and the state was home frequent fighting during the Civil War itself. In the antebellum period, slavery was an active part of Missouri’s economy (Forbes, 2009), and Jim Crow was an equally active presence during the early 20th century (Heathcott, 2005). While not geographically part of the “Deep South,” then, Missouri shares many of the hallmarks of the dynamics that structured economic and race relations both before and after the Civil War. Clarence Lang, who has written about social movement activism in St. Louis, has described St. Louis as “northernmost Southern city and the westernmost Eastern city” (Smiley, 2019).

(Lumpkins, 2008; McLaughlin, 2005). Researchers have examined East St. Louis' rise and fall (M. Abbott, 2011) and the contemporary poverty and blight that are endemic in the city (Hamer, 2011) that is now more than ninety-five percent African American. St. Louis proper, on the west side of the Mississippi, was also an early laboratory for Jim Crow era techniques in segregation, like exclusionary zoning, racially restrictive covenants, and redlining (Gordon, 2014; Rothstein, 2017). Racial discrimination therefore figured prominently in early 20th century demographic patterns in St. Louis (Logan, Graziul, & Frey, 2018) and the city played host to critical court cases, like *Shelley v. Kraemer*, that brought about these strategies' legal demise (Darden, 1995).

An important subtopic for researchers has been the state of education, particularly for African Americans, in St. Louis. Though private schools desegregated in the 1940s and public schools officially desegregated a decade later (see Brantley, 1955; D. J. Monti, 1985), the city's schools have remained stubbornly segregated. Courts have found that the city's policies have directly contributed to continuing segregation (Judd, 1997). Moreover, poverty and inequality mean a large proportion of families experience the to need switch schools each year (Metzger, Fowler, & Swanstrom, 2018). These challenges for African Americans in particular have led to a robust mobilization of social movements in St. Louis opposed to both segregation and inequity (Heathcott, 2005; Jolly, 2013; Lang, 2010). These patterns, and the historical legacies they are inextricably linked to, highlight the role of legal institutions in both maintaining and, eventually, helping to dismantle some aspects of what Du Bois (2007) and others have called “the color line.”

St. Louis's population peaked in 1950 with just over 850,000 residents (Gordon, 2014), but signs of decline were already beginning to be recognized (Thomas, 1949). Researchers have identified the subsequent population decline as a critical feature of the city's trajectory along with a host of policy failures to deal with not just population loss but associated issues like deindustrialization (Checkoway & Patton, 1985; Gordon, 2013, 2014; Heathcott & Murphy, 2005) and the city's vacancy rates (Prener, Braswell, & Monti, 2018). Despite widespread decline, however, St. Louis has experienced rebounding population and development in some neighborhoods (Daniel J. Monti & Burghoff, 2012; Goodman & Monti, 1999; Swanstrom, Webber, & Metzger, 2015). The benefits of redevelopment have not been evenly distributed (Mallach, 2018; Tighe & Ganning, 2015), in part because of the ways in which development has been subsidized with tax abatements (Goshorn, 1999; Metzger & Webber, 2018; Reinert, 2001). These subsidies are, in turn, part of broader concerns that redevelopment and strategies for stabilizing neighborhoods, like community gardening (Braswell, 2018) or programs to mitigate vacancy (Ganning & Tighe, 2015), are not only uneven but also potentially spurring gentrification. Debates about gentrification are widespread in American cities, as are concerns about vacancy and so-called 'shrinking cities,' all patterns that would benefit from continued scholarship in cities that have been the most affected by these phenomena as opposed to paradigmatic cities.

Crime and Immigration

The study of crime and immigration in St. Louis are two other notable areas of focus for social scientists. Though media reporting of crime rates in St. Louis has been both pseudo-scientific and sensationalistic (Sandoval, 2013), recent years have seen homicide rates in the city

that have eclipsed both Baltimore and Detroit, two other cities with national reputations for violent crime. The concentration of violence in the city and region has been assessed by researchers using increasingly sophisticated spatial statistical methods (Messner et al., 1999; Smith & Sandoval, 2019a, 2019b). Like crime, immigration is also an increasingly fruitful area of sociological research (Sandoval, 2013), particularly around both growing Latino communities and a substantial resettlement of Bosnians in the city and later the county following civil war in the former Yugoslavia (Cheah, Karamehic-Muratovic, & Matsuo, 2013; Cheah, Karamehic-Muratovic, Matsuo, & Poljarevic, 2011; Hume, 2015). St. Louis's crime and immigration trajectories, which both currently differ from many American cities, are examples of what sociology as a discipline can miss when paradigmatic cities are continually looked to by researchers.

Unrealized Potential

This body of research is interdisciplinary, drawing not just works of sociology and demography but also closely allied disciplines of urban history, cultural studies, African American studies, and criminology. It is also highly fragmented. Beyond Gordon's 2008 book, publications focused on St. Louis do not routinely cite much of the literature on the city itself, nor do they establish critical links to the larger project of urban sociology. Gordon's work, though important, has also become a stand-in for deeper contextualization. Some papers provide a little context for the city's rich but troubled history of race relations, some merely cite Gordon, while a few provided more detailed efforts to place their research in the wider lens of the city's past and present. Though the literature on St. Louis is small, it is growing, and forging deeper connections is a key step towards unifying the social science study of St. Louis.

Encouraging *deeper* engagement with cities embraced with a *broad* geographic focus therefore requires encouraging a holistic view of these cities as literatures that provide critical social and historical context. The synthesis of work presented here is an initial step towards developing this holistic view in St. Louis that includes these links to historical and social context.

Conclusion

There is a particular path within the literatures on urban sociology and urban social problems that has led to the rise of a particular set of paradigmatic cities that are seen as archetypes for our understanding of urban form and inequalities. Focus on particular cities is a thread that can be traced throughout a number of successive twentieth century theoretical traditions, and is tied both to the priorities of some of those traditions themselves as well as institutional racism and inertia within sociology. These paradigmatic cities are not the only places research has occurred (Lloyd, 2012), but they are routinely acknowledged (Hunter & Robinson, 2016; Ren, 2018; Small et al., 2018) as being the focal points for American sociology.

One approach to incorporating a geographically wider set of cities is to embrace comparative work (e.g. Ren 2018). While intellectually powerful, it becomes even more challenging for researchers to include deep, rich historical and social context when two or more cities are compared. This should not be seen as a detraction from comparative work itself, but rather an additional motivation for pursuing both comparative and single-sited studies on a broader geographic scale. While others (e.g. Ren, 2018) have made the call for additional comparative work explicitly, it is not the only path forward for researchers who want to embrace a geographically *broad* and contextually *deeper* urban literature.

St. Louis provides just such an opportunity for both *broadening* our study of cities outside of the discipline's mainstream to cities that experienced slavery, Jim Crow, and *de jure* segregation. Acknowledging and contextualizing this as an essential part of these cities' development is a key piece *deepening* our urban research by pursuing more detailed academic literatures of specific places. The goal should not be to create a "St. Louis School" in the tradition of place-based legacy projects, but rather to encourage peer literatures for St. Louis, Birmingham, Jackson, Little Rock, and other cities in a broadly defined America's South. The same can be said of the Global South, where both *broadening* and *deepening* can also serve as a model for continually expanding the range of cities studied. While research exists on many of these cities, viewing it as a literature in and of itself is an essential facet of this project. By focusing more intensely on single cities outside of those seen by sociologists as paradigmatic, and providing deeper context to these cities, we have the opportunity to respond to the multiple challenges laid before urban sociology and the study of inequity in cities (Jerolmack & Murphy, 2017; Small et al., 2018).

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