

Introducing
Just Sustainabilities
Policy, Planning and Practice



**Julian
Agyeman**

Just Sustainabilities
Policy, Planning and Practice

Just Sustainabilities in Policy, Planning and Practice.

Professor Julian Agyeman

uep Urban + Environmental Policy + Planning

Tufts
UNIVERSITY

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Urban thought leaders | Inspiring Conversations



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Land recognition

I am presenting on the traditional territory of the Wôpanâak (Wampanoag) and Massa-adchu-es-et (Massachusetts) people. I pay my respects to their Elders, their past, present and future, and commit to a principle of respect and care as part of this meeting.



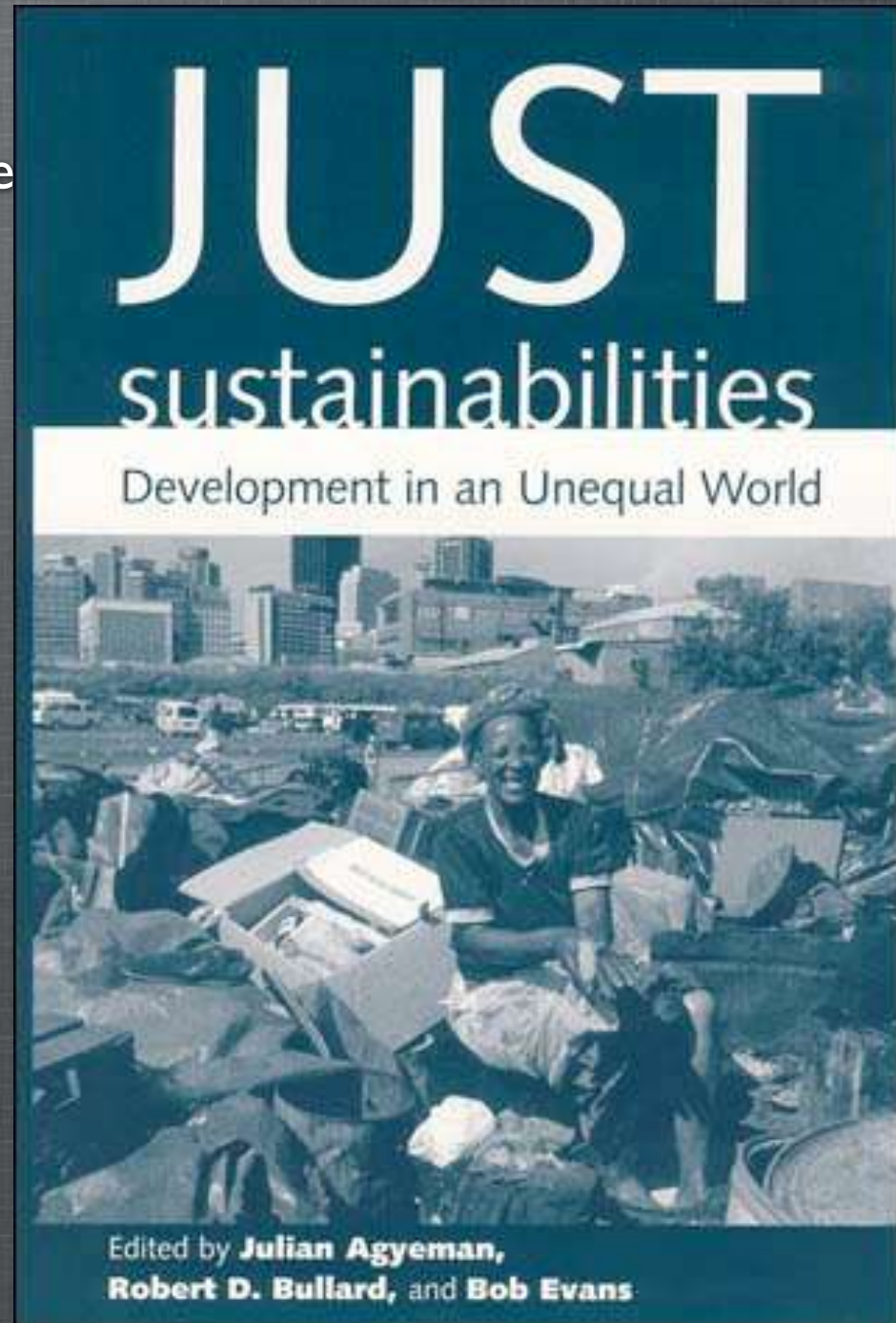
Just Sustainabilities: The history

It is now 23 years since the publication of my first book. In that book we broke new ground by embarking on a sustainability and sustainable development-based discourse, but one that focused explicitly on *equity* and *justice* – on the links between *environmental quality* and *human equality*.

We argued that:

“Sustainability cannot be simply a ‘green’, or ‘environmental’ concern, important though ‘environmental’ aspects of sustainability are. A truly sustainable society is one where wider questions of social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems.”

Agyeman et al. 2002, 78



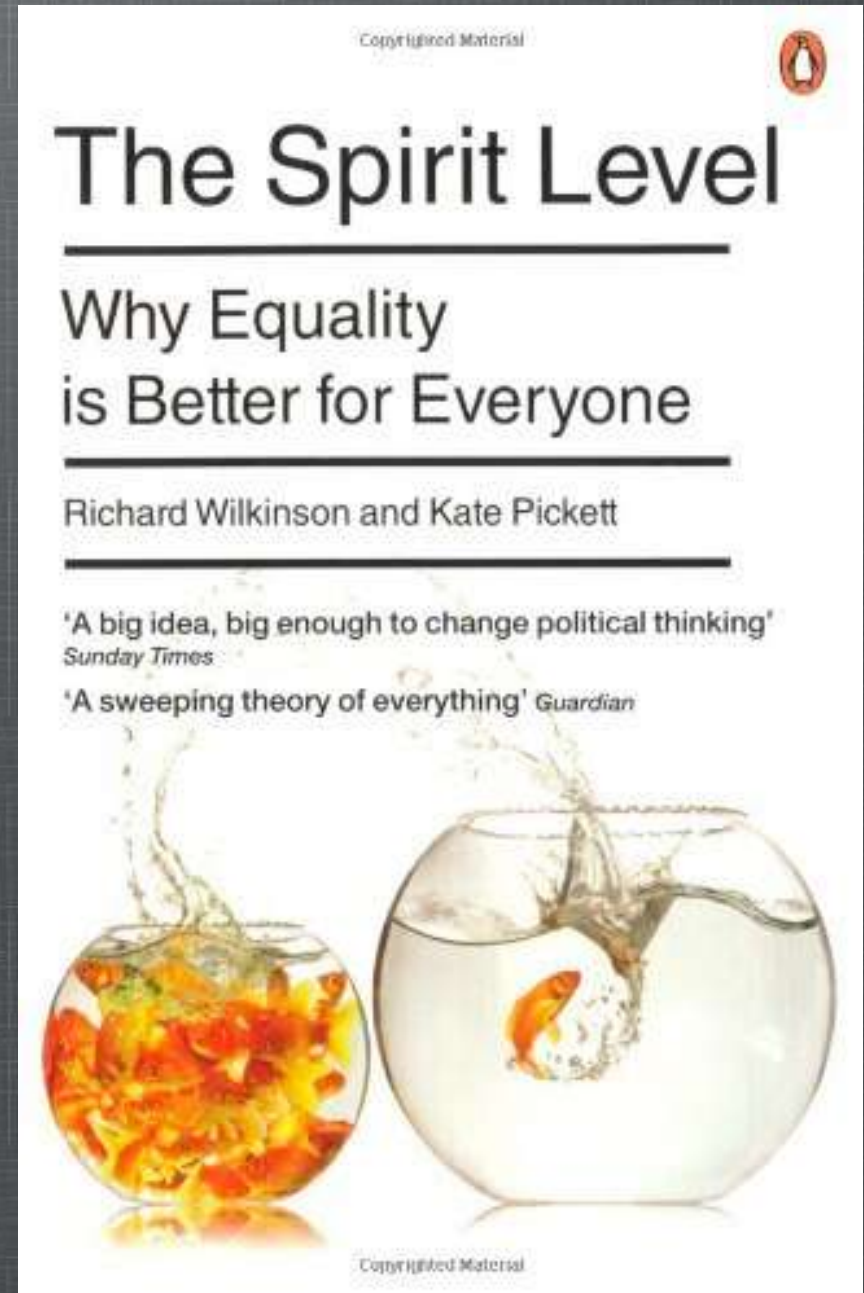
New evidence today: human equality and environmental quality are related

The most compelling evidence to date.....

“Inequality...heightens competitive consumption”

(Wilkinson and Pickett 2009)

If we REALLY want to understand sustainability our focus should be on both *human equality* and *environmental quality* TOGETHER.



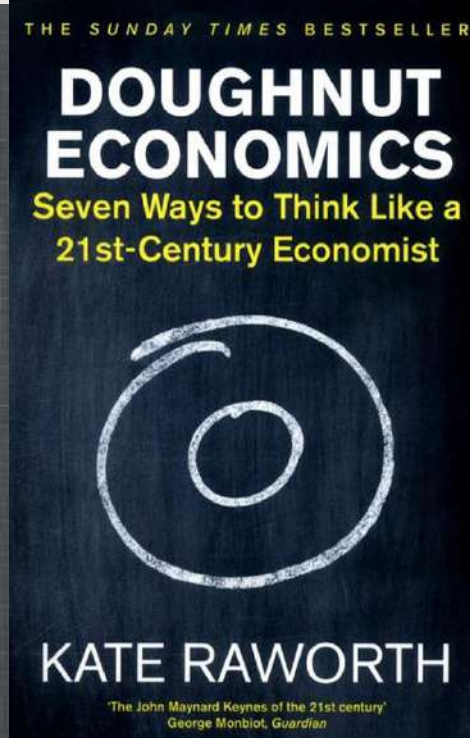
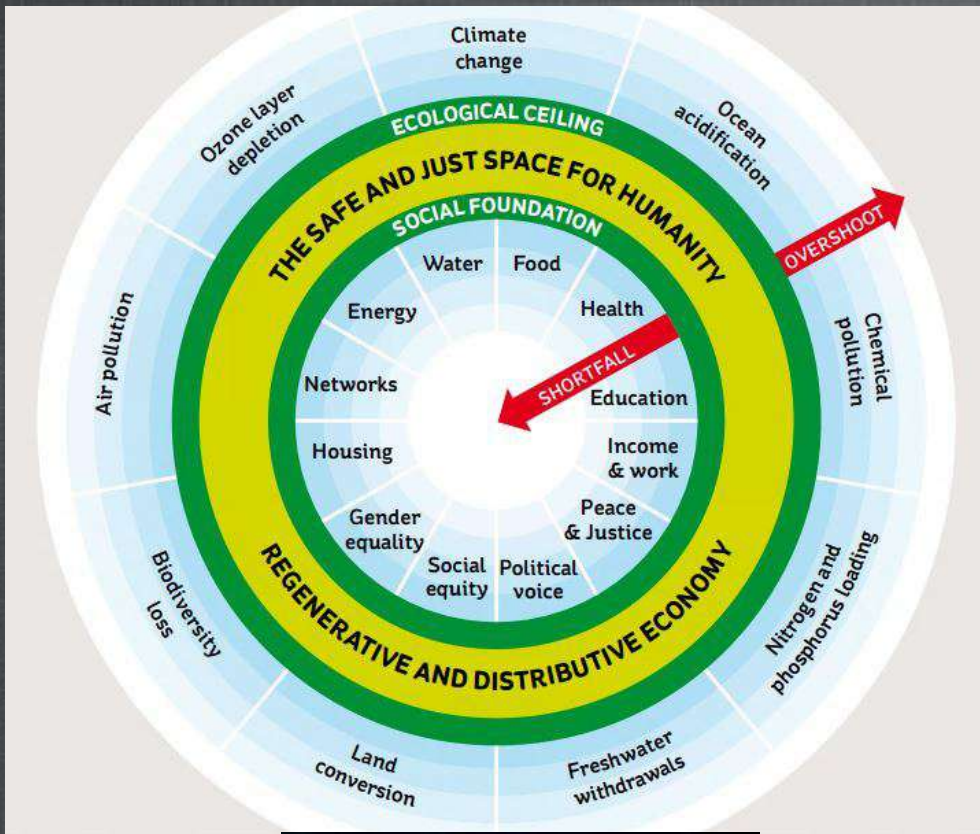
Defining Just Sustainabilities

“The need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems.”

There are four ‘conditions’:

- 1) improving our quality of life and wellbeing;*
- 2) meeting the needs of both present and future generations (intra-generational and intergenerational equity);*
- 3) justice and equity in terms of recognition, process, procedure, and outcome;*
- 4) living within ecosystem limits (‘one planet living’)*

Just Sustainabilities both underlies and predates 'Doughnut Economics' and the UN SDGs!



Four overarching thoughts on urban planning:

I “managing our co-existence in shared space” (Healey, 1997).

“[This] speaks with equal clarity about environmental, transport, housing and other conflicts, reminding us that, whether we like it or not, we do share space on the planet with others who in many ways are not like us, and we need to find ways of co-existing in these spaces, from the next-door neighbor to the street, neighborhood, city and region”
(Sandercock 2000).

2 Moving from Racial Planning, to Reparative Planning (Williams 2020).

“Racial planning, as the public production of racialized space, has been at the heart of the American planning tradition. Reparative planning is a normative call for the field to embrace reparations via a Reparative planning.”

Four overarching thoughts on urban planning:

3 What is the relationship between belonging and becoming?

Are we urban planners as good at fostering belonging (recognition, reconciliation, difference, diversity, inclusion) as we are at developing imaginaries, prescriptions for what our cities can become (smart, sharing, resilient, sustainable etc)?

4 Just sustainabilities, 'humane-scaled' as opposed to solely 'human scaled' planning, helps us think through BOTH, together.

I want to see planning for human dignity, planning that inculcates empathy, planning that facilitates our co-existence in shared space.

Just Sustainabilities in policy, planning and practice.

Two examples:

Spatial justice:

How do we allocate rights in urban spaces and places?

Minneapolis Paradox:

How does one of the most green, liberal cities in the US end up
as the epicenter of our current introspection over structural
racism?

Spatial Justice



“Just as social justice requires that life chances are not distributed along class lines, spatial justice requires that they are not distributed geographically” (David Lammy, British Member of Parliament 2004)





05:32

Back Bay to Nubian Square: 2 miles and a 23-year life expectancy gap

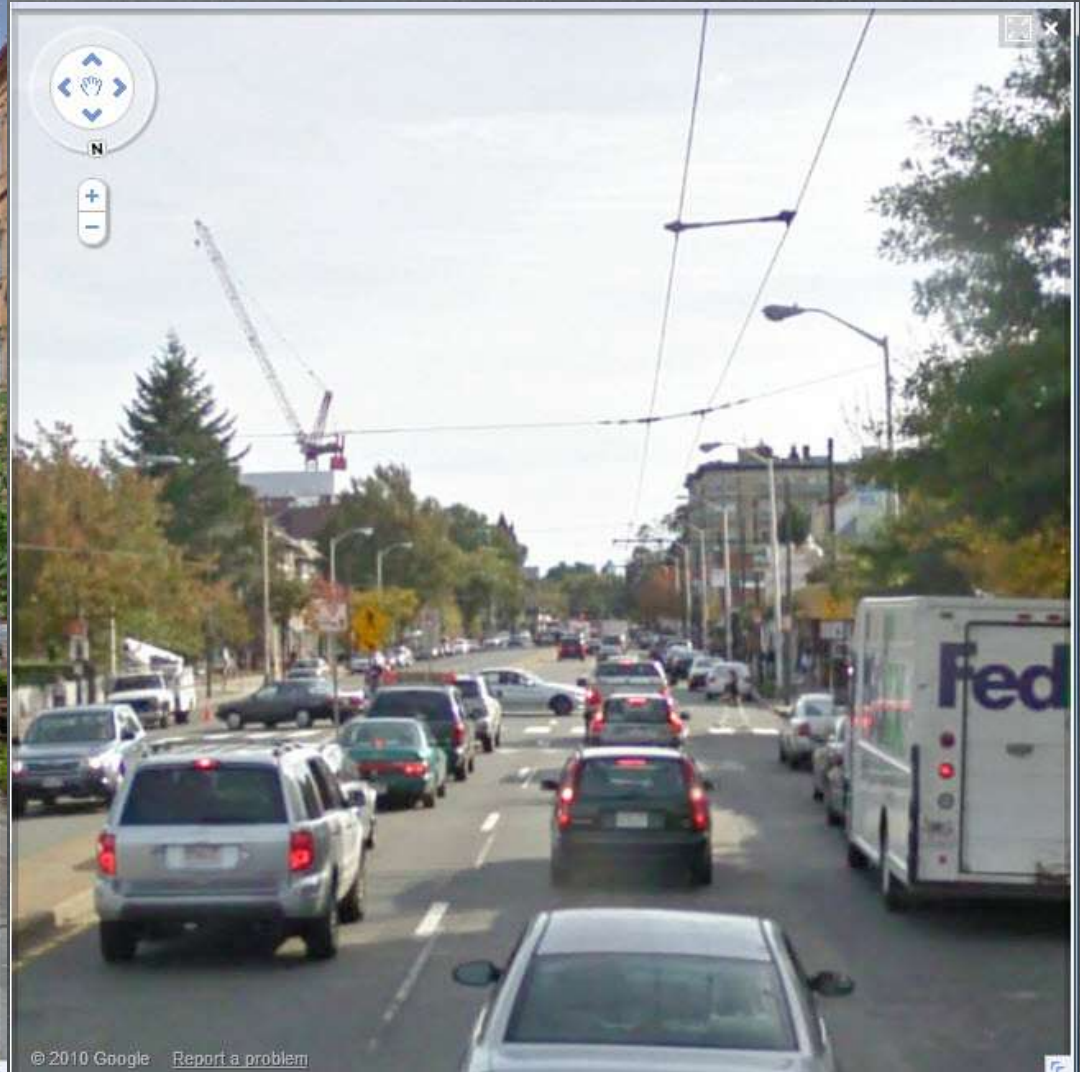
Updated May 24, 2023 By [Martha Bebinger](#)



Spatial justice: Rethinking urban streets

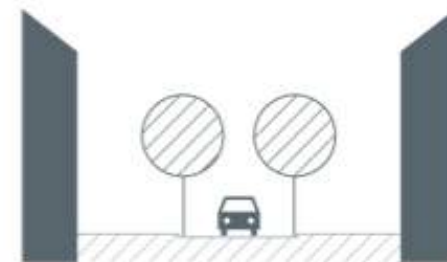
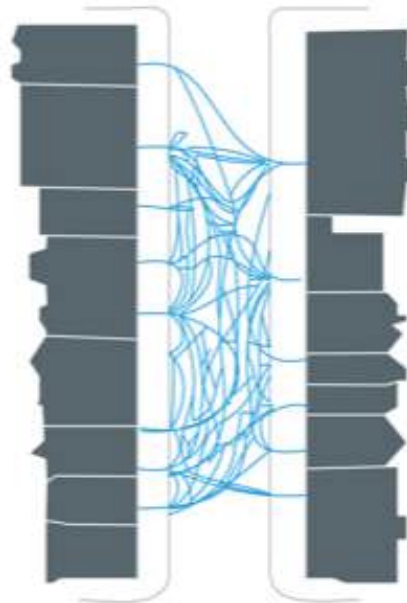
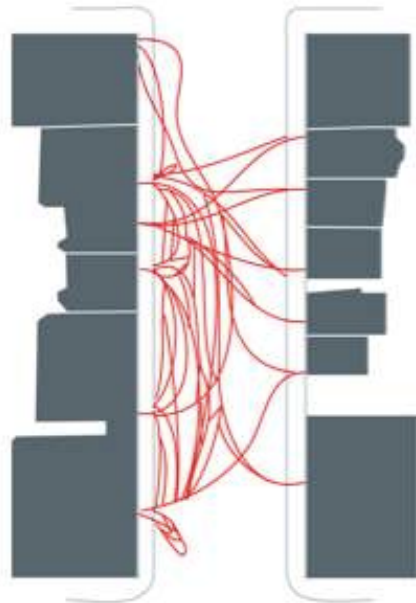
Södra Vägen, Gothenburg, Sweden

Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge, MA



The street is our most commonly used public space. It has been democratized on Södra Vägen but not on Massachusetts Avenue. What does this say to adults, children who use these streets daily and become acculturated to spatial justice on Södra Vägen or spatial injustice on Massachusetts Avenue?

Street Traffic and Social Interaction



Heavy traffic

16,000 vehicles / day
1,900 vehicles / peak hour

0.9 friends per person
3.1 acquaintances per person

Medium traffic

8,000 vehicles / day
550 vehicles / peak hour

1.3 friends per person
4.1 acquaintances per person

Light traffic

200 vehicles / day
200 vehicles / peak hour

3.0 friends per person
6.3 acquaintances per person



Good news from NYC



Spatial (in)justice: hostile and defensive architecture

“those seemingly decorative “anti-homeless” spikes installed on the exterior ledges of buildings, benches with metal armrests set close together to prevent anyone from lying down, even classical music piped through outdoor speakers to deter teenagers from congregating in front of convenience stores” Arieff 2017



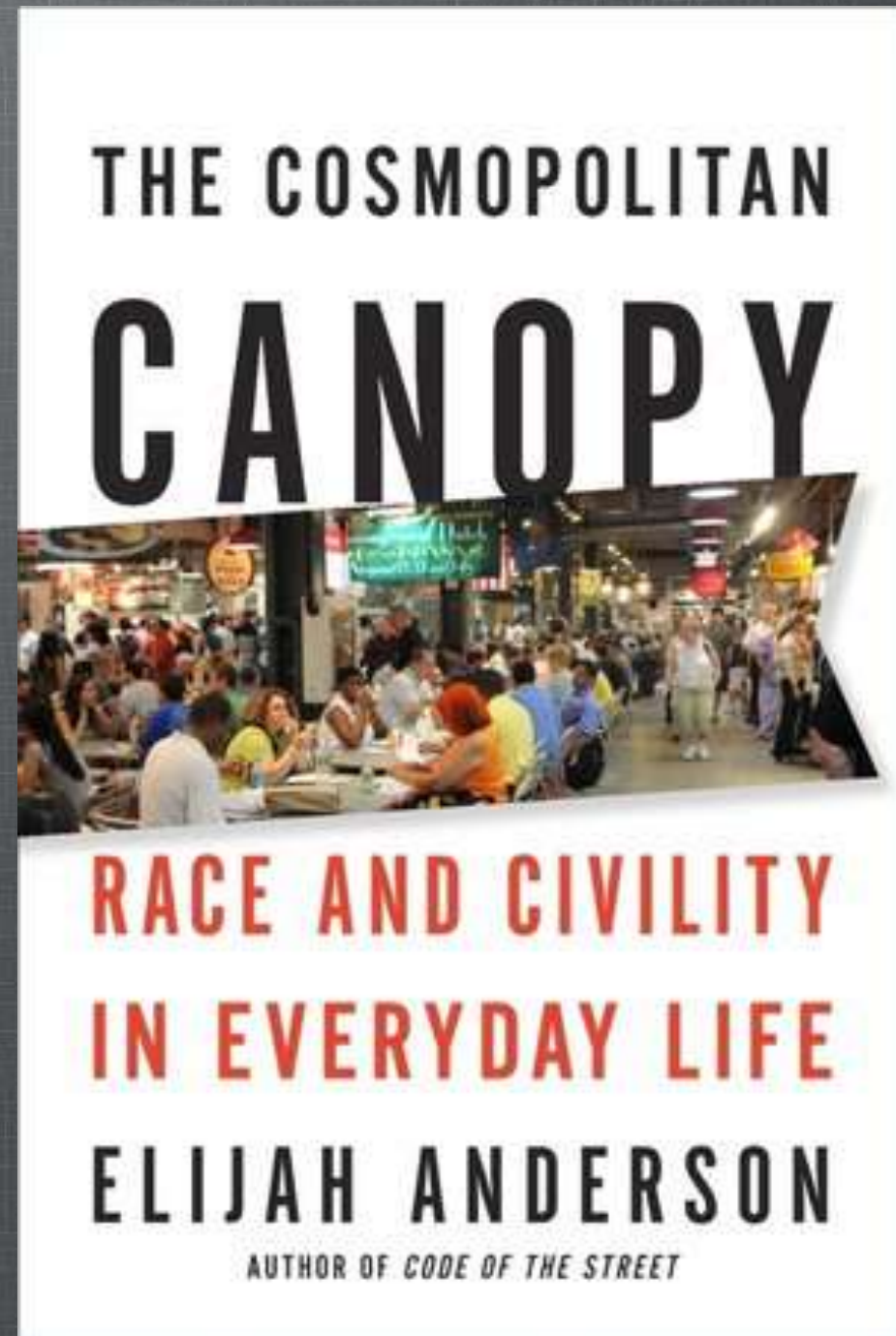
An aerial photograph showing a multi-lane highway interchange with several overpasses. The highway runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right. To the right of the highway, there is a dense residential neighborhood with many small, multi-story houses and apartment buildings. Some buildings appear older and somewhat dilapidated. There are also parking lots with many cars. To the left of the highway, there are more trees and some commercial buildings. The overall scene depicts a typical urban environment where a major highway cuts through a neighborhood.

**Removing urban highways can
improve neighborhoods blighted
by decades of racist policies**

Spatial justice: The Cosmopolitan Canopy

“numerous heterogeneous and densely populated bounded public spaces within cities.... offer a respite from this wariness, settings where a diversity of people can feel comfortable enough to relax their guard and go about their business more casually. A prime such location is Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market. In this relatively busy, quasi-public setting, under a virtual *cosmopolitan canopy*, people are encouraged to treat others with a certain level of civility or at least simply to behave themselves.”

Anderson 2004



A photograph of a park scene, likely Central Park in New York City, showing a group of people, including children and adults, gathered around a circular stone structure. Several strollers are visible, and the background is filled with trees and a park lamp. The text "THE COSMOPOLITAN CANOPY" is overlaid in large white letters, and "RACE AND CIVILITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE" is overlaid in smaller red letters below it.

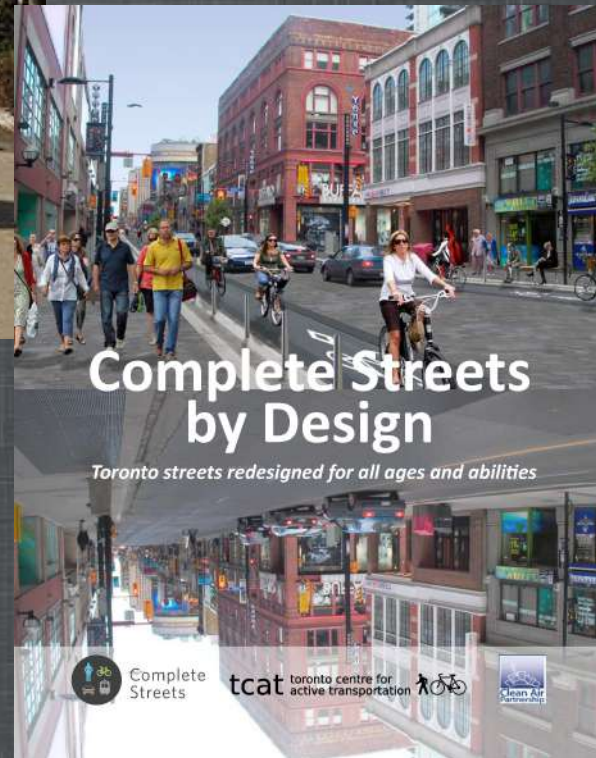
THE COSMOPOLITAN CANOPY

RACE AND CIVILITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Is there a role for planning/planners and urban designers in creating Cosmopolitan Canopies?

Solution to spatial injustice? 'Complete Streets'?

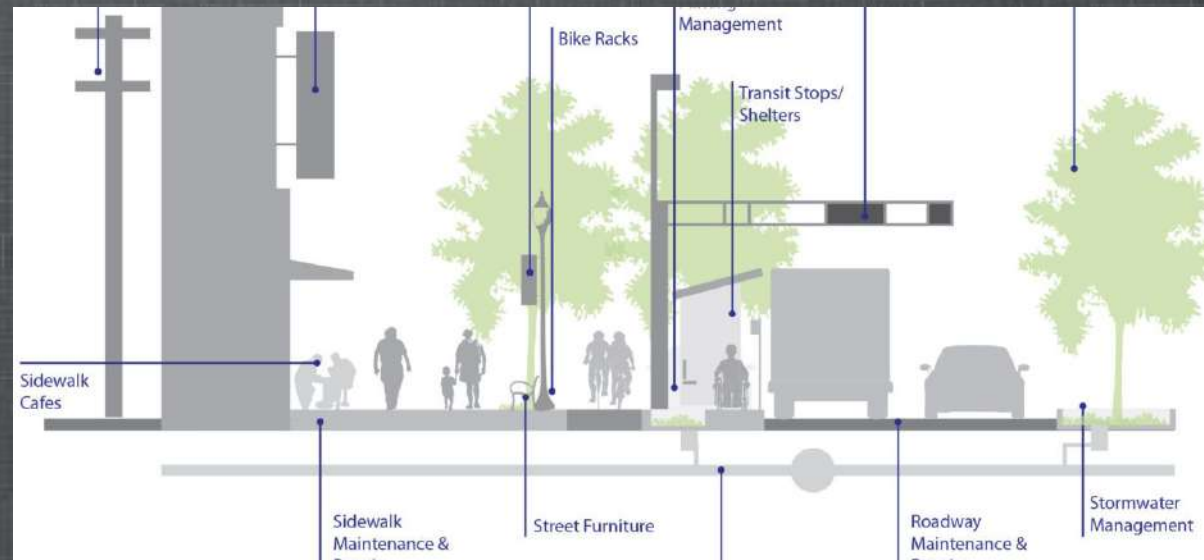
Can the current 'Complete Streets' discourse, design manuals, policies and other regulatory structures reverse the inequalities that car-centric planning exacerbated or created anew, or will it result in enhanced livability only for the most privileged residents of cities?



What is a 'Complete Street'?

Street as social construct and physical space

Massey (1995) sees places (*and streets are places*) as having no fixed meaning; rather, they are “*constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time.*” Yet much of the current physically-focused Complete Streets rhetoric *disconnects streets from their significant social, structural, symbolic, discursive, and historical realities.*



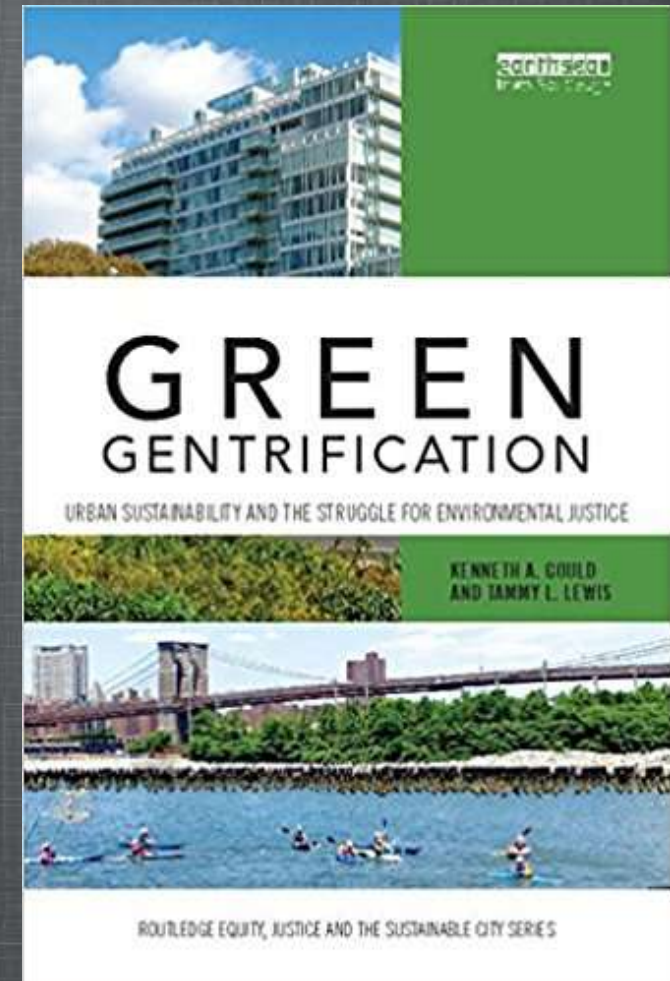
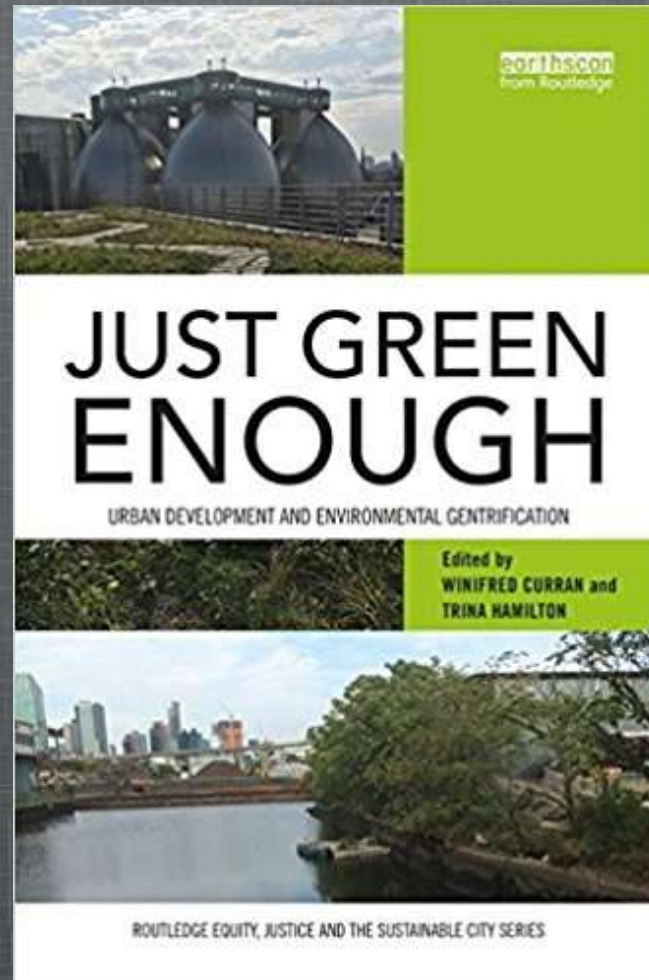
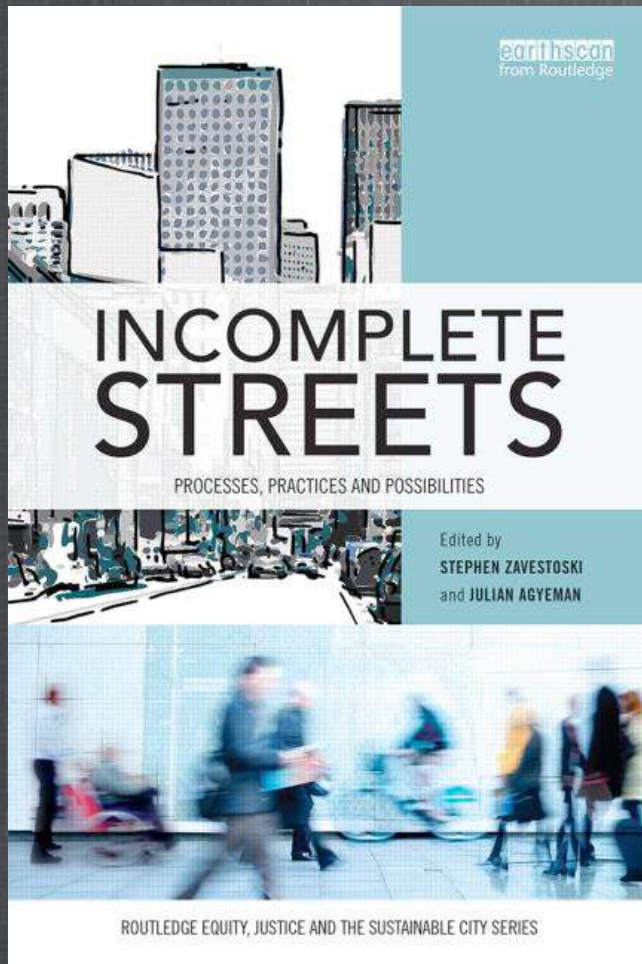
Complete Streets: The strange case of LA.

From tacos or bacon-wrapped hotdogs. ...these mobile meals create hotspots of social interactions in a city that too often lacks public life.”



“Can streets in a heavily immigrant metropolis, however multi-modal the distribution of lane space, be said to be “complete” if they fail to include the livelihoods and economic survival of vendors; the smells, sights and tastes of homelands; and places for people to pause, shop and eat?”

Complete Streets, 'greenlining' and Gentrification?



There are important missing narratives in the Complete Streets movement, discourse and practice. In the absence of these narratives such policies, plans and efforts are *systematically reproducing many of the urban spatial and social inequalities and injustices* that have characterized our cities for the last century or more.

Live Where You Love



Great Nearby Places



Improve Your Commute



Fits Your Lifestyle



Advisory Board

The Walk Score [advisory board](#) includes urban planning, environmental and technical experts from institutions such as The Sightline Institute and The Brookings Institution.

Walk Score is now a part of [Redfin](#) and was originally incubated at [Front Seat](#).

Spatial justice: Rethinking urban parks

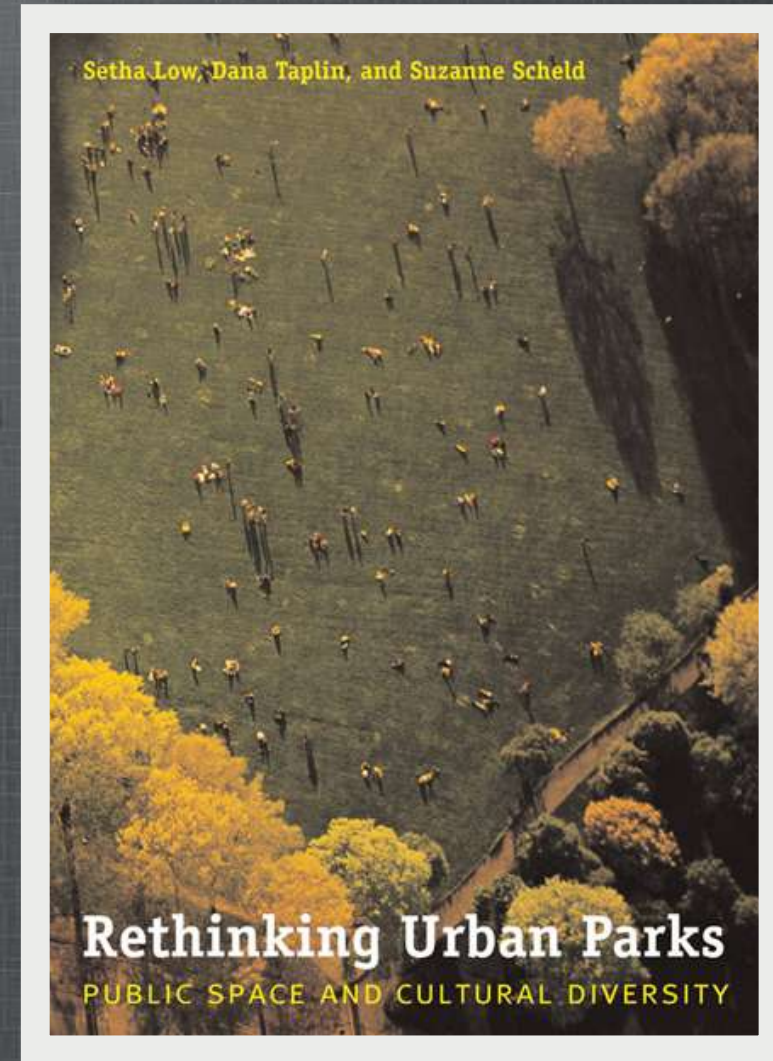
“In this new century, we are facing a different kind of threat to public space-not one of disuse, but of patterns of design and management that exclude some people and reduce social and cultural diversity”.

(Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005)

“contact theory posits that...interracial interactions that occur in leisure settings have the potential to be more genuine and sincere compared with the more obligatory interactions that take place in formal settings”

(Shinew, Glover and Parry 2004)

In the 1980s, environmentalists in Bristol, UK, persuaded the local Parks Department to create wildflower meadows. These are environmentally sound, but are they socially just?



Spatial justice: Immigrant Engagement in Public Open Space

“The lack of engagement of more recent immigrants in “friends of the park” organizations and other environmental groups of today has led to concerns that while Olmsted’s vision continues to resonate with a great many Bostonians it may not resonate with the majority of those who will decide Boston’s future.” (Lanfer and Taylor 2004)



Engagement, belonging: Landscape links?

“Families gravitate toward Herter Park because, for many, the landscape reminds them of home. Extended family gatherings on riverbanks are popular in Central America, and the trees along the shore remind many immigrants of the all-day Sunday picnics they enjoyed in El Salvador or Guatemala” (Lanfer and Taylor 2004)

“I think one of the reasons that that place...is so popular with us, Latinos, is because of the willows. Willows in Guatemala are very common. They grow beside rivers. People like Herter Park because it looks like home.”

– Guatemalan-American, Allston, Boston.



Engagement, belonging: 'Designing in' Encounter? Superkilen Park, Nørrebro, Copenhagen



Engagement, belonging: We need 'deep ethnographies'

#refugeeswelcome in parks: a resource book

- ideas for refugee integration and wellbeing
- how parks and urban public space can be more welcoming to refugees and asylum seekers



Journal
Local Environment >
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1417

Views

0

CrossRef citations

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Articles

Ethnographic understandings of ethnically diverse neighbourhoods to inform urban design practice

Clare Rishbeth Farnaz Ganji & Goran Vodicka

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Department of Landscape

Home > Landscape > Staff > Staff Profiles > Clare Rishbeth > Transnational Urban Outdoors research group

TRANSNATIONAL URBAN OUTDOORS RESEARCH GROUP

TUO is the Transnational Urban Outdoors research group based in the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield. We are a group of academic researchers who have trained and practiced in landscape architecture and urban design, and also currently teach on professionally accredited courses.





Urban planning as a tool of white supremacy – the other lesson from Minneapolis

July 27, 2020 8:15am EDT

Minneapolis: Green utopia?

Minneapolis Named Best City Park System in U.S. on Trust for Public Land's Annual ParkScore Index

Posted on 20 May, 2020



MINNEAPOLIS ONE OF THE BEST CITIES IN THE US FOR EXERCISE

The Miracle of Minneapolis

No other place mixes affordability, opportunity, and wealth so well. What's its secret?

DEREK THOMPSON MARCH 2015 ISSUE

US Cities with the Most Bike Commuters per capita



MATT CHASE

Minneapolis: Racist hell?

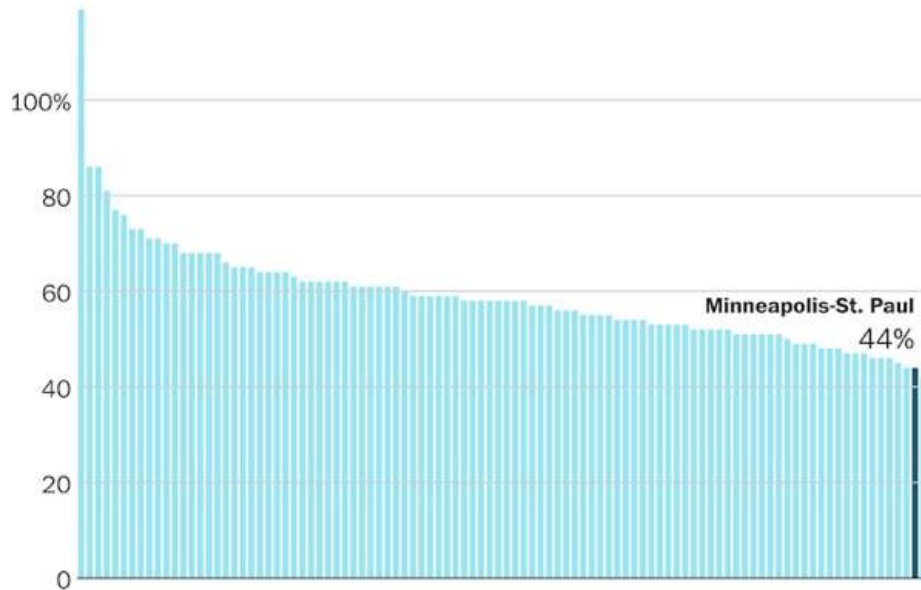
Racial inequality in Minneapolis is among the worst in the nation

The economic gulf between black and white families is higher in the Minnesota city than nearly anywhere else in America, data show



The black-white income gap

Median black household income as a percent of median white household income, 100 largest metro areas

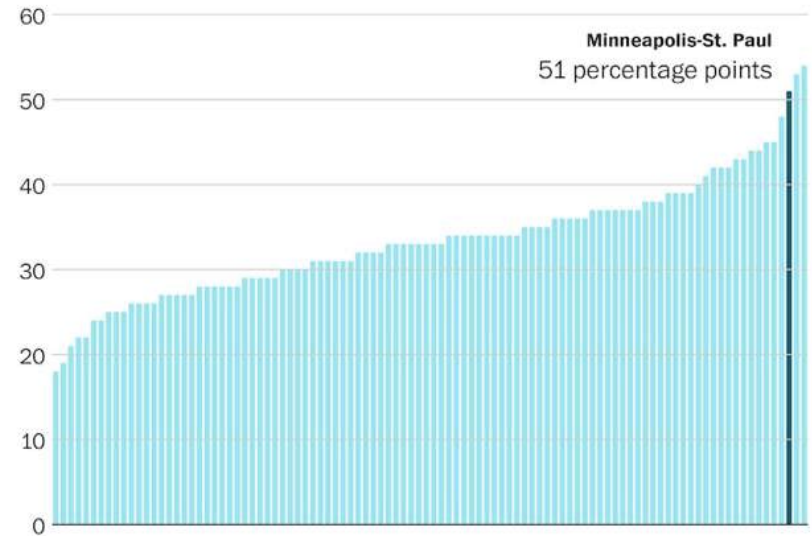


Source: American Community Survey

THE WASHINGTON POST

The black-white homeownership gap

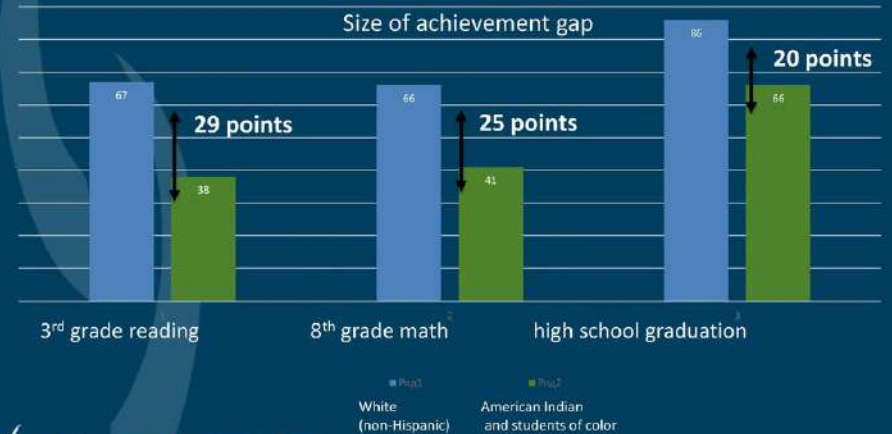
Percentage point gap between black and white homeownership rates, 100 largest metro areas



Source: American Community Survey

THE WASHINGTON POST

Minnesota's Opportunity Gap: K-12 racial achievement gap, 2014



SAINT PAUL COLLEGE
A Community & Technical College

Source: Minnesota Compass and Minnesota Department of Education

Minneapolis: Why?

“All that civic rhetoric about Minneapolis being a model metropolis at the cutting edge of great urban planning obscures some *darker truths* about the city,”

Kirsten Delegard, Minneapolis historian and Mapping Prejudice project co-founder.

Racialized covenants (early 1900s -1960s)

+

Exclusionary/single family zoning (70% of residential land)

+

Redlining

=

RACIAL SEGREGATION, THEN, AND NOW.

Minneapolis: What now?

“There’s a direct linkage between those practices in the late 19th, early 20th century and today’s modern zoning plans. Part of the impetus for changing how we view land use is to try to undo some of those impacts.”

Heather Worthington, Director of Long-Range Planning.

Put another way.....

“Urban planning is the spatial toolkit for articulating, implementing, and maintaining white supremacy, and we can do something about it.”

Julian Agyeman

Minneapolis 2040

In 2018, Minneapolis was the first large US city to vote to end single-family zoning, allowing duplexes and triplexes on single-family lots. This, among a package of reforms such as “inclusionary zoning” — requiring new apartment projects to include 10% of units for moderate-income households, is part of the Minneapolis 2040 Plan

minneapolis | **2040**

1. Eliminate disparities: In 2040, Minneapolis will see all communities fully thrive regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, country of origin, religion, or zip code having eliminated deep-rooted disparities in wealth, opportunity, housing, safety, and health.



minneapolis | **2040**

3. Affordable and accessible housing: In 2040, all Minneapolis residents will be able to afford and access quality housing throughout the city.





Eliminate Disparities Policies:

39 policies relate to Goal 1: Eliminate Disparities.

Please refer to the pages listed below to read the content of each policy.

Policy 49: "Educational and Economic Access" on page 184

Policy 50: "Access to Technology" on page 185

Policy 51: "Healthy Pre-K Development" on page 186

Policy 52: "Human Capital and a Trained Workforce" on page 188

Policy 55: "Business Innovation and Expansion" on page 192

Policy 56: "Supporting Small Businesses" on page 193

Policy 2: "Access to Employment" on page 108

Policy 3: "Production and Processing" on page 110

Policy 58: "Business Districts and Corridors" on page 196

Policy 30: "Emphasize the Value of Minneapolis' Art and Culture" on page 158

Policy 31: "Artists and Creative Workers" on page 159

Policy 1: "Access to Housing" on page 105

Policy 33: "Affordable Housing Production and Preservation" on page 162

Policy 37: "Mixed Income Housing" on page 168

Policy 38: "Affordable Housing near Transit and Job Centers" on page 169

Policy 39: "Fair Housing" on page 170

Policy 40: "Homelessness" on page 171

Policy 41: "Tenant Protections" on page 173

Policy 42: "Expand Homeownership" on page 174

Policy 43: "Housing Displacement" on page 176

Policy 44: "Comprehensive Investments" on page 178

Policy 23: "Coordinated Development Strategy" on page 149

Policy 45: "Leverage Housing Programs to Benefit Community" on page 179

Policy 46: "Healthy Housing" on page 180

Policy 15: "Transportation and Equity" on page 137

Policy 16: "Environmental Impacts of Transportation" on page 138

Policy 61: "Environmental Justice and Green Zones" on page 199

Policy 66: "Air Quality" on page 207

Policy 62: "Contaminated Sites" on page 201

Policy 81: "Social Connectedness" on page 230

Policy 85: "Access to Health, Social and Emergency Service" on page 235

Policy 63: "Food Access" on page 202

Policy 86: "Healthy Food in Institutions" on page 236

Policy 78: "Park Design and Programming" on page 226

Policy 34: "Cultural Districts" on page 164

Policy 48: "Freeway Remediation" on page 182

Policy 87: "Northside" on page 237

Policy 98: "Innovation Districts" on page 252

Policy 100: "Place-based Neighborhood Engagement" on page 255

Leadership and vision: Calling it out

“Food justice means racial justice, demanding a clear-eyed understanding of how white supremacy has shaped our food systems nationally, and right here in Boston, where Black, Latinx, Indigenous and AAPI communities have not enjoyed equal access to nutritious and culturally relevant foods, good food jobs, economically vibrant neighborhoods, and the opportunity to thrive.”

Michelle Wu's Food Justice Agenda for a Resilient Boston

RELATED KEY ISSUES

[Public Health →](#)

[Small Business →](#)

[Economic Justice and Workers' Rights →](#)

[Closing the Racial Wealth Gap →](#)

[DOWNLOAD THE FULL PLAN](#)



Just Sustainabilities: summary

“managing our co-existence in *shared space*” (Healey, 1997);

fostering *belonging* (recognition, difference, diversity, inclusion) and thinking about what cities can *become* (smart, sharing, sustainable);

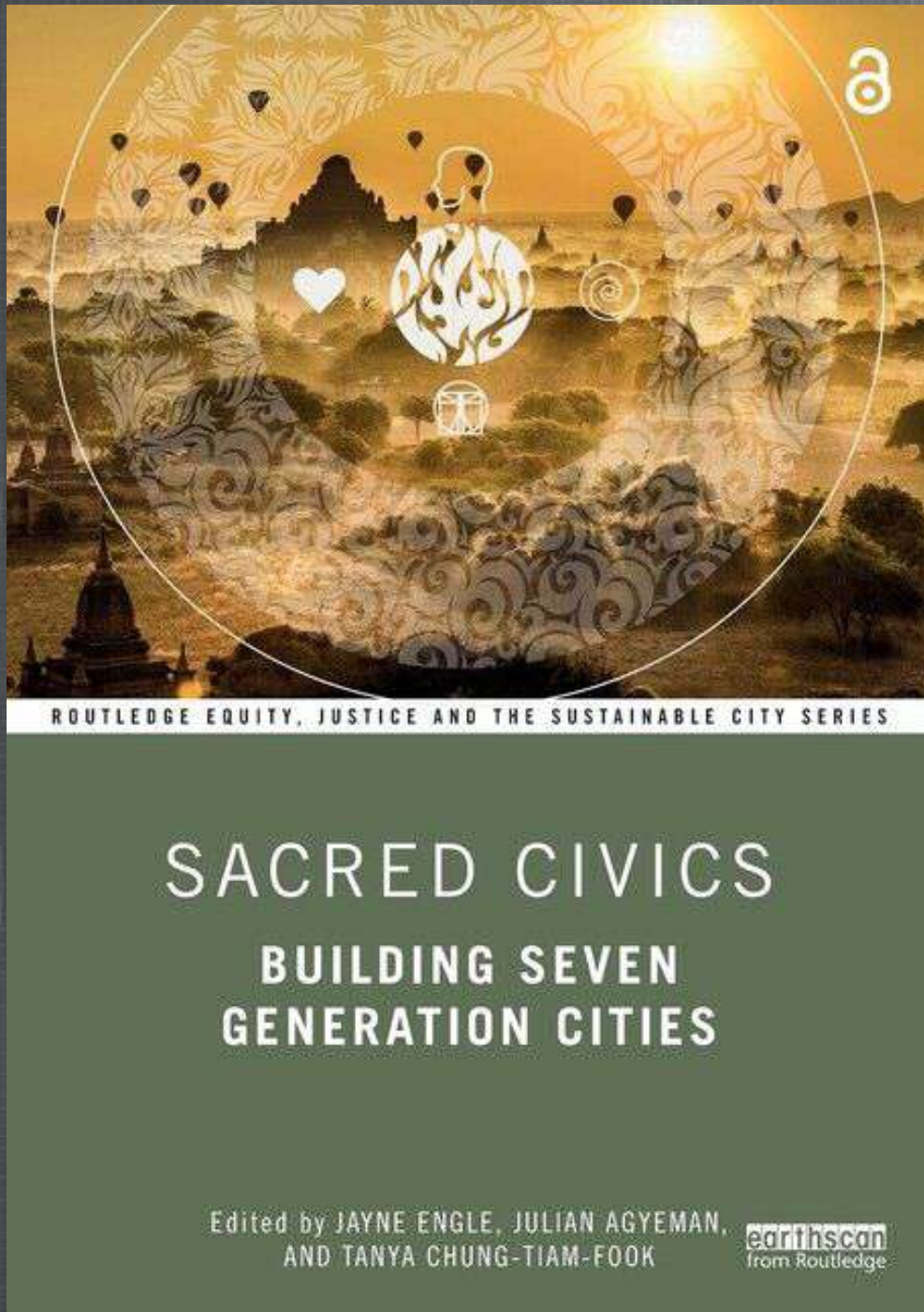
fostering engagement, belonging, using ‘*deep ethnographies*’;

engaging *intercultural, culturally competent* planning and policymaking

practicing '*humane-scaled*', and '*human-scaled*' urban planning and design;

Above all, social justice never simply ‘happens’ in planning processes and outcomes. It must be intentional, explicit and front and center in our work.

Closing thought....



“Our greatest challenges are not scientific or technological; they are deeper than that—they are *spiritual* and *cultural*.”