

# Resisting Amnesia: Renewing and Expanding the Study of Suburban Inequality



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*Suburban inequality is the focus of this double issue of RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences. This introduction addresses the limited related scholarship, describes how inequality unfolds differently in suburban communities than in urban and rural communities, and draws attention to urgent issues related to stratification between and within suburban communities. We argue that inattention to the study of suburban space, methodological and disciplinary silos, and the changing nature of the suburbs have left large holes in our understanding of how inequality operates. This critical review covers areas such as measurement, forgotten suburban scholarship, demographic change, suburban poverty, social supports, race, immigration, education, politics, policing, and future directions for suburban studies. In our call for resisting amnesia, we also draw attention to forgotten suburban histories and studies of a diverse range of suburban communities.*

**Keywords:** suburbs, suburban inequality, race, ethnicity, immigration

Scholars and policymakers have explored the challenges that city residents and governments face, and the role cities have played in shaping contemporary American society. This grand attention to the city has meant that the study of

suburbs has been neglected, despite a near majority of Americans (49 percent) living in suburbs today.<sup>1</sup> In fact, since 2000, population growth in the suburbs has outpaced population growth in the urban core (Parker et al. 2018). In

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1. Unless otherwise noted, statistics presented in this article are based on population estimates using a census-convenient definition of suburbs and drawn from the 1990, 2000, and 2010 Censuses and the 2006–2010 and 2015–2019 American Community Surveys (U.S. Census Bureau 2020a, 2020b). We use 1990 geographies for consistency across years.

this introductory article, we shed light on what scholars of inequality have missed by overlooking suburbs, highlight work in the burgeoning field of suburban inequality, and suggest new directions for research on suburban inequality. The articles in this double issue of *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* demonstrate that more attention to suburban inequality will provide scholars with a better understanding of the nature, causes, and consequences of an increasingly unequal United States.

The suburbs are most commonly defined in contemporary social science as “the physical space beyond a city’s boundaries, yet still within the metropolitan area” (Lacy 2016, 370). This definition, sometimes called the census-convenient definition (Airgood-Obrycki, Hanlon, and Rieger 2020), facilitates broad analyses comparing urban, suburban, and rural communities and provides a shared definition to scholars interested in the field. *Suburb* more colloquially invokes images of cookie-cutter single-family homes, manicured lawns, and residents who commute to the nearest city. This image, though, captures a declining portion of suburban life and has limited the attention scholars have paid to the places where nearly half of all Americans live today (Anacker 2015a; Allard 2017). Whereas research at the close of the twentieth century often portrayed suburbs as sites of the American Dream, more recent examinations suggest that they are better viewed as places to examine how inequality unfolds and shifts across space (Anacker 2015a; Allard 2017). Problems related to race, ethnicity, immigration, class, gender, and sexuality are all influenced by suburban terrain, but too little social scientific scholarship has addressed these topics outside cities.

The suburban population has changed dramatically in the past two decades. The share of Black Americans living in suburbs rose from 25

percent in 1990 to 40 percent in 2019. More than one-third of poor families live in suburbs today, a 30 percent increase over the past thirty years. Nearly half of Latinx Americans and a majority of Asian Americans and immigrant Americans live in suburbs. Finally, the percentage of suburban residents who are White declined from 82 percent in 1990 to 64 percent in 2019. These changes have drawn greater attention toward suburbs (for example, see Anacker 2015a; Allard 2017). Still, much more demands exploration, especially related to processes of inequality (Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 2007).

The issue of food insecurity, for example, is highly influenced by suburban place and space. A sharp rise in poverty in the suburbs has coincided with an uptick in food insecurity in suburban communities (Remley et al. 2021). In suburban communities, however, service providers addressing food insecurity are fewer and farther apart, offering a less robust safety net (Murphy and Allard 2015). In addition, access to such sites often requires access to a car, which is financially burdensome; relying on walking long distances, which can be unsafe in suburbs with inadequate sidewalks; or using public transit, which is frequently more time consuming in the suburbs. These circumstances combine to make food insecurity a pressing problem in the suburban landscape. The same holds for other issues of contemporary concern. Some of the sparks of the Black Lives Matter movements, for example, came from the suburbs (Lung-Amam and Schafran 2019).

*Suburban studies* as a field is largely invisible in the academic landscape.<sup>2</sup> In leading social science general interest journals, papers are much more likely to focus on urban areas than suburban ones.<sup>3</sup> For example, in the past two decades the top two sociology journals published seventeen articles with the word *urban* in the title but just one with the word *suburban*

2. Suburban studies have remained most active in the policy realm with multiple publications by the Brookings Institution as well as some by the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University.

3. To assess this, we searched the archives of top journals in several of the major social science disciplines: sociology (*American Sociological Review* and *American Journal of Sociology*), economics (*Quarterly Journal of Economics*), political science (*American Political Science Review*), and anthropology (*American Anthropologist*) for work published since 2000. Given the limitations of journal search functions, we looked at the titles of works, finding many more articles highlighting a focus on urban contexts than on suburban contexts.

(notably, a recent piece by Kiara Wyndham-Douds, one of the contributors to this double issue). In addition, from 2000 to 2018, 80 percent of articles in the flagship education research journal *American Educational Research Journal* were explicitly about urban schools; just 12 percent were about suburban schools (Diamond and Posey-Maddox 2020). None of the main professional associations in the social sciences have sections, communities, or member discussion fora related to suburbs or suburbia.<sup>4</sup> These gaps in scholarly attention and professional associations in turn have led to a lack of training of graduate students in the field of suburban studies.

This double issue begins to address the dearth of scholarship on suburban inequality, to draw attention to urgent issues related to disadvantage and stratification and how they unfold differently within and between suburban communities. Much theorizing of urban inequality concentrates on the role of poverty. The suburban context pushes us to consider not only experiences of disadvantage but also experiences of privilege. In addition, because ethnic, racial, and economic diversity (Douds 2021; Rastogi 2021) and segregation (Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino 2015) are high in the suburbs, the suburbs offer multiple opportunities to consider the relational dynamics of inequality.

Suburbs vary in their ties to central cities. Some suburbs have a symbiotic relationship involving urban growth, suburban development, and migratory patterns, many workers living around the extended metropolitan area but commuting to the center for work, social life, and familial connections (Rusk 1993; Florida 2017). Other suburbs, such as *satellite cities* and *boomburbs*—cities that are rapidly growing and that previously were seen as suburbs to larger metros—have become centers of their own commerce and labor, making them much more internally oriented, if not self-sufficient (Lang and LeFurgy 2007; Garreau 1992). Indeed, such places are connected not only to central cities

but also to other suburbs within the larger region. As Daniel Lichter and his colleagues demonstrate in this double issue, the *suburban fringe*—the boundary between suburban and rural areas—has also grown and helps reshape not only boundaries but also demography. This means, as reflected in these articles, some questions about suburban inequality necessitate consideration of the larger geographic context.

In addition, important differences also exist between suburbs of the same urban center. Similar to kaleidoscopes that rearrange around a center, suburban inequalities too may cluster or be arranged differently around a shared metropolitan core. Take for example, the suburbs of New York City. The history of suburbanization in Westchester County, New York, has created a pattern of settlement in which five municipalities of the county's twenty-four are home to roughly 80 percent of the county's Black population, and the majority of municipalities have populations that are less than 10 percent Black.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Essex County in New Jersey has a much more equal distribution of Blacks across its twenty-two municipalities, nearly half having 10 percent or more Black residents. These varying patterns of segregation between suburbs within metro areas may affect what we observe in social domains such as education, criminal justice, and neighborhood integration. They change over time as well; in this double issue, Kasey Zapatka and Van Tran analyze changes in neighborhood integration by immigration and race over the past two decades in the suburbs of New York City.

Size also matters; even within the same metro area, suburbs can vary from a few thousand residents to nearly a quarter million. For example, in the New York City metropolitan area, Yonkers is nearly two hundred thousand people and Alpine, New Jersey nearly 1,500. Analyses that are sensitive to local, regional, and national histories and geographies will help mark new ground in documenting in-

4. This includes American Economic Association, American Association of Geographers, American Planning Association, American Political Science Association, and American Sociological Association.

5. Authors' calculation using American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2016–2020 (U.S. Census Bureau 2020c).

equality and hopefully mark paths toward equity.

Although we call attention to suburban inequality as a particular form of inequality, we also remind scholars to avoid reductive thinking and recognize diversity across suburbs. The census-convenient definition, when used crudely, can treat suburbs as monolithic and fail to illuminate significant similarities between urban and suburban areas. Recent interventions in urban studies have challenged the notion of urban homogeneity, pointing out that no two urban poor neighborhoods are alike (Small, Manduca, and Johnston 2018). The same can be said of suburbs. In this double issue, we aim to avoid the pitfalls of previous scholarship on urban inequality, which has been critiqued for assuming homogeneity and developing theories of universal urban problems despite diversity in urban environments (Small, Manduca, and Johnston 2018). This does not mean that urban and suburban categorizations are without meaning. Instead, we must become more specific about their meanings and features in our scholarship and interventions.

Despite the vast and growing differences between suburban communities and issues related to suburban inequality, we nevertheless suggest suburban inequality is an important, understudied field. We hope this double issue will bring renewed attention to it. Our goal is to advance academic knowledge on U.S. suburbs with a focus on inequality within and between them and inequality between suburbs and other places connected to them (that is, both urban and rural areas). Taking cues from Alan Berger and Joel Kotkin (2017) who argue the study of suburbia cannot be bounded by a single discipline, we have brought together scholars from a wide variety of disciplines, including education, geography, history, political science, public policy, sociology, and urban planning. These scholars study diverse aspects of suburban inequality, facilitating a deeper understanding of how suburban inequality is both distinct from and similar to urban and rural inequality. Collectively, the authors utilize different data, measures, methods, and analytical approaches to help shed new light on different forms of suburban inequality in hous-

ing, education, organizations, and politics. These varied modes of inquiry across domains help us rethink the history of suburban space as well as better capture portraits of the suburban present. We hope these articles help define the state of our current knowledge on suburban inequality and inspire future research as well.

### WHAT IS A SUBURB?

We would be remiss not to address a common question—what is a suburb? Suburbs, like all other typologies of place, are difficult to define, even if most people have an intuitive conception of suburbs. Where and when do they begin and end? In the popular imagination, suburbs are easily identifiable: cookie-cutter houses and cul-de-sacs. In reality, however, the demographics, development patterns, social life, and politics of suburbs are dynamic and complex. When it comes to conceptualizing suburbs, no agreed-upon rules are in place, though some conventions are accepted.

We offer key dimensions along which to define the suburban. Drawing on the census-convenient definition, proximity to the urban core emerges as a key variable. In addition, we maintain that the suburbs also have a particular *political* relationship with their nearby cities, although this relationship may look different in different parts of the country. In the South, where county boundaries more often span city and suburb, the relationship may be less fragmented; in other parts, such as the Northeast, the boundary between city and suburb is often a municipal boundary, a result of historical processes of exclusion and resisting annexation into the urban core. Racial and socioeconomic demographics also play an integral role in how both scholars and the public understand suburbs. We can think of suburbs in terms of their relationship to Whiteness (suburbanization as a racial project) or in their relationship to class (desirability and exclusivity as markers of the suburban). In some cases, suburbs are defined by their affluence (see “exclusive enclaves” in Frankenberg 2012). In others (“stable mixed-income” or “inner-ring transitioning”), they are defined in terms of their deviation from the ideal of a middle-class residential community.

Finally, we might think of suburbs in terms of suburban ways of living, also known as *suburbanisms* (Walks 2013). Markus Moos and Pablo Mendez (2015) use quantitative data from Canada to develop a set of dimensions to capture suburbanisms, including built environment or commute-mode, domesticity patterns, and social status, to help clarify what life in suburbs is like. In the United States, Whitney Airgood-Obrycki, Bernadette Hanlon, and Shannon Rieger (2020) suggest that these suburbanisms can better define suburbs than simply relying on the census-convenient definition. The usefulness of the suburbanisms metric is underscored by the fact that it is not uncommon to hear parts of cities referred to as suburban. Shawn Bucholtz, Emily Molfino, and Jed Kolko (2020) use machine learning to take up the challenge of understanding the mismatch and agreement between what demographers may label as urban or suburban and resident perspectives on their own neighborhoods. Using neighborhood level data, they find that, in central cities, 51 percent of residents call their neighborhoods urban and 47 percent call them suburban. The very idea of a suburban urban neighborhood demonstrates that what is meant by suburb and suburban is complex and not always neatly delineated by municipal boundaries (Clergé 2023, this volume, issue 1).

Scholars across disciplines have developed other typologies of suburbs, highlighting facets of suburbia ranging from proximity to the city (see, for example, inner-ring and outer suburbs in Lee and Leigh 2007; Hanlon 2010) to age (mature versus developing suburbs) to demographics (Anacker 2015b; Anacker, Niedt, and Kwon 2017). Some find this profusion of typologies indicative of the impossibility of defining *suburb*, and perhaps even the necessity of doing away with the term (Archer 2005); others suggest that replacing *suburb* with more specific language may be a generative path forward (Forsyth 2019). Rather than viewing these competing frameworks as in conflict with one another, however, we see them as illustrative of the dynamic nature of American suburbs. They highlight the number of axes to which one must attend when thinking about the suburban landscape. We maintain that the concept of the

suburban remains important, insofar as suburban points toward particular constellations of physical and social dynamics of interest to social scientists—including historical trajectories, political economies, ways of being, sense of place, and demographics.

We do not hold that a singular definition is required for the term *suburb* to be useful. Rather than being prescriptive about a single answer to the question of what a suburb is, we instead affirm an ecumenical approach and call for specificity. We urge scholars studying the suburbs to make clear what characteristics, dynamics, and patterns they are pointing to with their use of the word *suburban*. Individually and collectively, the articles in these two issues recognize vast differences between suburbs, related to social and economic resources, patterns of settlement and immigration, access to the urban core, and more.

## RESISTING AMNESIA

Many inquiries about the suburbs and the forms of inequality that proliferate within and around them suffer from *sociological amnesia*. Three decades ago, Herbert Gans (1992) lamented sociological amnesia, which he described as social scientists' penchant for "discovering" an area of study over and over again. One of the cases he cited was suburban studies, because scholars were describing the field as new without properly acknowledging previous work on the topic and using that knowledge to help build new insights. Gans's insight feels as fresh today as it did in 1992. To avoid amnesia, social scientific studies of the suburbs must draw from earlier studies, while crossing disciplinary boundaries to better understand what is happening in suburbs today.

Early twentieth-century scholarship on suburbs carefully delineated their prevalence and variety in a way that is uncommon today. For example, approximately eighty years ago, Chauncy Harris noted that "The study and classification of individual suburbs is a fascinating business" (1943, 7). Using 1930–40 data to describe suburban types and trends, Harris conveyed the importance of identifying variation in the processes shaping suburban growth. He described how the extent of development of suburbs varied by region, and he recognized



that the overall population size and functional typology of the central city (manufacturing, diversified, political, transportation, wholesale and retail centers, resorts, and mining) mattered. Harris was one of the first scholars to examine the composition of suburban populations (focusing on occupation) and the functional ties between places via a measure of commuting (that is, the ratio of employment within a suburb to the population of the suburb). Harris's work made important contributions to our knowledge of suburbs, identified how they can be studied, celebrated their diversity, and understood the nature of changing social and economic ties across space.

As the twentieth century unfolded, other scholars of the suburbs attempted to dispel notions of homogeneity (for example, Douglass 1925), highlighting the ways that the expansion of uniform housing in the postwar period did not mean uniform social relations (Gans 1967). Gans remarked that in the suburb of Levittown he saw "old lifestyles . . . on new soil." Through surveys and interviews, he found that people were not governed by competition as many sociologists suspected, but instead were often bound by the desire to create community. At the same time, he was careful to highlight that those forms of community were predicated on exclusionary building and lending practices. These early and mid-twentieth-century studies were often in-depth case studies of postwar communities that relied on qualitative and some quantitative data.

Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* (1985) provided a history of the development of American suburbs while offering unifying characteristics, pointing to "population density, home-ownership, residential status, and journey-to-work" as traits defining quintessentially American suburbs (6). Although Jackson did not attempt to homogenize suburbs, rejecting stereotypes and taking pains to acknowledge the diversity between suburbs such as East St. Louis, Missouri, and Winnetka, Illinois, the text's reception in the field may have solidified suburbs as homogenized, curated places born out of discriminatory lending and homebuying.

Richard Rothstein (2017) reveals how zoning ordinances based on economic exclusion com-

bined with government policies rooted in racial exclusion to make suburban residence all but impossible for Black families (see, for example, his discussion of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation's racially discriminatory practices, as well as the Federal Housing Authority's efforts to prevent residential, and therefore school, integration). Of course, some Black people did indeed find ways into the suburbs, but as Harold Rose (1976) argues, even as Black people moved from cities to the suburban rings, their settlement patterns reflected a continuation of processes of segregation and ghettoization. Kathe Newman and Elvin Wyly (2004) and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2019), furthermore, point to how practices of predatory inclusion and subprime lending targeted Black people, locking them into center cities and less-affluent suburbs.

Despite these scholarly attempts at capturing the complexity of suburban life, the rapid expansion of suburbs helped solidify the image of the suburbs as homogenous, rigid, and antithetical to the city, which in contrast was viewed as diverse and cosmopolitan. This homogenized image of the suburbs coincided with less scholarly attention being paid to the suburbs throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

Andrew Wiese (2004) offers these words of caution: "Historians have done a better job excluding African Americans from the suburbs than even White suburbanites have." Wiese and several historians (see Kruse and Sgrue 2006) advocate for a new suburban history that acknowledges the presence of non-White suburbs and non-middle-class suburbs (Black, Latinx, Asian, and working class) that existed sometimes as a direct result of racially exclusive White suburbanization, and in other cases predated mass White suburbanization. The discipline of history's attempt to correct the misunderstanding of suburbs as monotonic and expand the record on their historical complexities has not yet been fully engaged by the social sciences. Through work in this double issue and other emerging scholarship, we hope to help contribute to the new suburban studies.

We argue that suburban amnesia has taken place through two dominant mechanisms: sub-

urban nostalgia and suburban erasure. *Suburban nostalgia* privileges a view of the suburbs as idyllic. In many popular narratives, the suburbs are spaces of respite from urban troubles and the domain of White middle-class nuclear families, where non-White, nonhetero, and nonmoneyed people were not seen. *Suburban erasure* occurs when the emphasis on racially and economically homogenous suburbs in popular media and in later twentieth-century social science actively erases the experiences of suburban residents of color, poor residents, and other marginalized communities.<sup>6</sup> Inattention to marginalized residents' experiences has allowed the White middle class to become the focus of suburban inquiry, which has emaciated scholarship on suburban life and inequality. These practices must be addressed to better refine our understanding of the suburbs, who is in them, and how inequality functions within and between them.

### Suburban Nostalgia

Although the suburbs have diversified, especially in the last two decades, we urge scholars to resist overprivileging an easy narrative that positions suburbs' current diversity and dynamics as a 180-degree turn from their past. Suburbs were never landscapes of idyllic uniformity; assuming as much risks stigmatizing contemporary suburbs as having moved away from an imagined ideal that never was (Harris and Lewis 1998). To some extent, such stereotypes are built into the very genesis of the word *suburb*: as Richard Harris (2018) notes, the word arose in the late 1800s in Britain, where newly industrial cities were increasingly less desirable places to live, and those who had the means left the cities for outlying areas. In the United States, cities experienced "territorial stigmatization" (Airgood-Obrycki and Price 2018) and *suburb* quickly came to connote not just class exclusivity, but racial exclusivity as well. The suburb became the imagined antithesis of the city and seen as a refuge from its ills and inequalities. In the mid-twentieth century, hallmarks of suburbia included "mass consumer-

ism: a car in every driveway, a fridge in every kitchen, and a TV in every living room" (Harris 2018, 32). The commute became the domain of male workers, the home the territory of suburban women. By the 1970s, this idealized vision led to feelings of suburban threat by residents, related to environmental toxins, crime, and morality. News media depictions heightened the moral panic felt among many suburban residents, who often responded by endorsing privatized protections bolstered by neoconservative culture and politics on the rise during the same period (Riisman 2020).

Despite this suburban nostalgia, gendered oppressions and racial tensions have always been part and parcel of suburbs (Harris 2018; Coon 2014). Additionally, Harris (2018) reminds us that even in the period when the suburbs were imagined to be at their best, few suburbs would have lived up to the now taken-for-granted ideal; for example, postwar suburbs, being recently developed, would have lacked the mature trees and greenery that we so often imagine as suburban. The racial demographics of the suburbs already began to transition in the 1960s, and a decade later, Black people were moving to suburbs at a higher rate each year than White people (Airgood-Obrycki and Price 2018; Logan and Schneider 1984; Schwartz 1980; Stahura 1983). As we eschew suburban nostalgia, we would do well to heed Harris's guidance to consider that the truth lies somewhere between the positive and negative stereotypes of the suburban past. Nostalgia, inaccurate on its own, can be a launching point to a more honest reckoning with the suburbs, past and present. Media depictions in the past quarter century, such as *The Truman Show*, *Pleasantville*, and *Desperate Housewives*, have indeed criticized the illusion of the idyllic suburb (Coon 2014).

### Suburban Erasure

Many histories of suburban expansion in the second half of the twentieth century carefully document the ways that government funding, state law, transportation technologies, and the

6. Walter Greason also uses the phrase "suburban erasure," in the title of his 2012 book, which chronicles how suburbanization quelled the civil rights struggle of Black residents in rural New Jersey. We use the term with a different meaning.

desire to escape the troubles of the city facilitated mass suburbanization as a largely racially exclusive project (Cohen 2003; Jackson 1985). Lending practices that bolstered White accumulation, coupled with interracial clashes, helped shape suburbs as racially and socioeconomically segregated, further cementing racial and economic divisions between the city and the suburbs across the United States (Freund 2007; Rothstein 2017; Sugrue 2009). However, that is not the full story of race and class and the suburbs in the 20th century.

Too often, a natural outgrowth of the nostalgia for an imagined suburban past is a failure to fully recognize the realities of the suburban present; our collective mental model of what *suburb* means and looks like has taken far too long to be updated. Even today, despite the fact that we know in the one hundred largest metro areas, the suburbs now house more Black, Latinx, poor, and immigrant residents than central cities (Frey 2018), headlines about “suburban voters” and “suburban women” continue to use *suburban* as a stand-in for White and middle class. And even when the presence in suburban space of racially and socioeconomically marginalized groups is acknowledged, the struggles they face are less often appreciated. Suburban schools are seen as “good” schools, understating the vast inequalities that persist within them (Lewis-McCoy 2014). Suburban neighborhoods are seen as safe neighborhoods, ignoring the fact that Black suburbanites still experience the threats of disproportionate policing (Boyles 2015).

The presence of economically disadvantaged residents is also minimized to the point of erasure. Although owning a single-family home is the suburban ideal, rates of homeownership vary significantly along race and class lines, and eviction is increasingly a suburban phenomenon (Rutan, Hepburn, and Desmond 2023, this volume, issue 1). Donors view suburbia as a place where poverty is not a problem and where social safety net service providers need not establish a presence (Allard 2008). The suburbs continue to be understood, in broad brushstrokes, as places of Whiteness and economic privilege, rendering less visible the experiences of disadvantage—both absolute and relative—and inequality that are an in-

trinsic facet of suburban life for many residents past and present.

In the following sections, we offer an overview of demographic changes that have reshaped the suburbs and their implications for institutions and processes of broad interest to social scientists.

## POVERTY AND SOCIAL SAFETY NETS IN THE SUBURBS

Research on U.S. poverty has tended to privilege either the inner city or the nation. As a result, certain geographical scales and different types of places—regional, county, and other subnational places as well as rural and suburban areas—have been neglected or treated as a residual or as an add-on (Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 2007). In 1990, approximately 8.7 million people in the suburbs lived below the poverty line; today that figure, by our calculations, is 15.4 million. In fact, since 2010 in the hundred largest metropolitan areas more poor people live in suburbs than in central cities (Allard 2008; Kneebone and Berube 2013).

The suburban erasure of poverty has important consequences for understanding and addressing economic precarity. Challenges that urban poor residents face, such as gentrification and displacement, were previously thought to be created by the urban landscape but are now increasingly experienced by the suburban poor as well (Markley 2018; Hochstenbach and Musterd 2021).

Poverty in the suburban landscape is often invisible, in part because it tends to be clustered at local scales. The multifamily units and apartment buildings that do exist in suburbs tend to be lower in number and clustered in particular locations, invisible to residents in most other neighborhoods with single-family homes as the dominant housing stock (Girouard 2023, this volume, issue 1). Looking at the hundred largest metro areas, Alan Berube (2019) finds that between 2010 and 2014, 41 percent of poor suburban residents lived in a neighborhood where neighborhood poverty exceeded 20 percent. Public acknowledgment of increasing poverty by local politicians and media may be seen as negative by homeowners concerned about property values (Fischel 2001). These factors can lead to a suppression of



awareness of poverty and misrecognition of needs, problems with which Alexandra Murphy (2010) finds suburban social-support organizations struggle. Still, suburban poverty tends to be less concentrated than urban poverty.

Suburbanization in the postwar period led to communities whose features and amenities were more decentralized and often car dependent. This leads to unique issues for the suburban poor, such as lack of transportation and access to social services. Crucially, that decentralization is not just spatial, but also governmental; in a country where the safety net is often administered at the level of state or local government or via nonprofits, variation from place to place in the amount and quality of supports available to low-income suburbanites is considerable. Suburban residents struggling with poverty have less access to social service organizations and health care than those in urban areas both because of lack of organizations and because of lack of knowledge of pathways for remediation (Allard and Pelletier 2023, this volume, issue 2; Murphy and Allard 2015; Schnake-Mahl and Sommers 2017).

Support providers also find challenges in offering social services in suburban spaces. As Scott Allard (2017) finds, the decentralization of economically disadvantaged suburban residents—in contrast to the concentrated poverty more often found in central cities—presents several problems for provision of resources and support. First, pockets of the suburban poor can be so small that they are not readily visible at the county level (but see “overshadowed suburbs,” Murphy 2010). In addition, support providers may struggle to secure funding for suburban locations, as many donors still hold an outdated idea of the suburbs as a place where poverty is not a problem. Finally, providers encounter exclusionary Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) attitudes when seeking space to operate because some suburbanites resist the presence of support organizations that they fear will attract more poor people to their communities (Allard 2008). Suburban support providers often stretch their services over a larger area, spanning multiple municipal and county boundaries (Allard and Roth 2010). These issues are compounded and complicated by ongoing racial inequali-

ties; for example, Murphy and Danielle Wallace (2010) find that poor suburban neighborhoods, even more so than urban, tend to lack organizations supporting upward mobility, and that this paucity is particularly acute in neighborhoods where poor Black and Latinx children live.

More research on the comingling of wealth and poverty will be critical for future scholarship. Wealth is positively associated with homeownership, educational attainment, and a host of other indicators (Killewald, Pfeffer, and Schachner 2017). However, racial and ethnic inequality in wealth shows stark differences in accumulation (Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Maroto 2016) and in the ability to leverage wealth via homeownership (Conley 1999; Killewald and Bryan 2016). Few of these studies have interrogated the dynamics of suburban poverty and wealth in relationship to each other and the myriad ways these relational inequalities are complicated by race, gender, age, family structure, and other forms of difference.

The particular constellations of wealth and poverty in the suburban landscape also call for more research on suburban health infrastructure. Health infrastructure, like all infrastructure, should meet the needs of the public it serves today and will serve in the future. Population shifts—including moves to suburban counties—can create an infrastructural mismatch, with implications for population health (Schnake-Mahl and Sommers 2017). Health and infrastructure investment needs to keep pace with demographic shifts, recognize emergent issues, and formulate policies to address both new forms of inequality and any deepening inequities.

### **RACE, ETHNICITY, AND IMMIGRATION IN THE SUBURBS**

Postwar suburbanization occurred along racial lines, allowing White families access to better residential options while limiting access for Black families via measures ranging from restrictive covenants to segregated lending to interracial antagonisms (Freund 2007; Rothstein 2017). These processes allowed Whites with economic means to solidify racial rewards, hoard opportunities, and solidify racial identities (Geismer 2015; Kruse 2007; Lassiter 2013).

This history, paired with popular images of suburban space, demarcated the suburbs as White spaces in the American imagination (Coon 2014).

An emphasis on suburban spaces as historically and predominantly White remains a central feature of most studies of suburbs. However, in driving home the point of racial exclusivity, these discussions have led to suburban erasure of the racial and ethnic diversity that has long been present in suburbia (Kruse and Sugrue 2006). In addition, diversity has increased even more since the turn of the twenty-first century (Frey 2018). Recent studies are addressing this suburban erasure, noting the importance of place as it intersects with race in multiple arenas, including education (Lewis and Diamond 2015; Lewis-McCoy 2014; Posey-Maddox 2017a, 2017b; Warikoo 2022), real estate (Besbris and Faber 2017), public health (Johnson et al. 2019; Ray 2017), political economy (Geismer 2015), politics (Frasure-Yokley 2015; Smith and Greer 2018) and criminal justice (Boyles 2015).

Suburbs are in fact at the leading edge of American diversification and integration (Rastogi 2021); today, more than one-third of residents in American suburbs are people of color. Diverse suburbs are increasing in number: William Frey (2018) describes suburbs with significant numbers of multiple race groups as “melting pot” suburbs. The growth of such suburbs is driven by increasing numbers of Asian Americans and Latinx living in suburban communities. Both Asian Americans and Latinx experience significantly less housing discrimination than Black Americans do, providing greater access to suburban communities (Logan, Alba, and Leung 1996; Pew Research Center 2012). Still, when Whites move from one suburb to another, they tend to move from more to less racially diverse suburbs (Fowler, Lee, and Matthews 2016; Kye 2018; Parisi, Lichter, and Taquino 2019). These patterns of White migration help explain the diversification of some suburbs and the continued segregation of others.

As segregation levels have decreased between cities and their surrounding suburbs, segregation between suburbs has increased (Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino 2015). These forms of

microsegregation are further complicated by the geography of land and settlement patterns. Early sociologists from the Chicago School assumed that all metros operated as concentric zones radiating out from the city (Burgess 1925), but the shapes and development patterns of some metropolitan areas challenge those theories (Rutan, Hepburn, and Desmond 2023, this volume, issue 1). The incorporation status of municipalities also shapes who lives where (Wyndham-Douds 2023, this volume, issue 2). Additionally, the distribution of ethnic groups varies significantly by region, which means that some metropolitan areas have large shares of particular ethnic groups and others have smaller shares (Douds, Lewis-McCoy, and Johnson 2021).

Recent scholars of Black suburban experiences have studied a range of suburbs, from working-class communities in small cities (Haynes 2001) to sprawling communities of affluence (Lacy 2007; Gordon 2019). Black suburban communities also feature regional variation. For example, recent patterns of reverse migration are helping reshape the landscape of the southern United States. Additionally, the wide range of Black suburban communities is further complicated and enriched by the presence of Black immigrants and their children, who have established themselves as a part of the cultural fabric in historically White and historically African American suburban communities (Clergé 2019).

Immigrants are also reshaping the suburban landscape, often revitalizing suburbs that have experienced population loss (Johnson 2017). They and their descendants have made homes in suburbs for decades, despite the racialized nature of postwar suburbanization (Singer 2008; Walker 2019). Since 2000, a majority of immigrants live in suburbs, most frequently suburbs of major cities (Hardwick 2008; Wilson and Singer 2011). In fact, suburbs are increasingly the place of arrival for immigrants rather than a destination after achieving socioeconomic mobility. Overall, the geographic landscape in suburbs where immigrants tend to live has also changed, leading Audrey Singer to coin the term “suburban metropolises—decidedly not cities, but for the most part large, loosely bounded, lower den-

sity, sprawling, auto-dependent metropolitan areas” (Singer 2008). Still, the major studies of immigrant assimilation have focused on cities (for example, see Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2004; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller 2005; Rumbaut 2008), leaving a lacuna in our understanding of immigrant incorporation. The increasing diversity of suburbs in terms of immigration, race, and class mean that these theories need updating.

Early theories of immigrant assimilation suggested movement to middle- and upper-middle-class suburbs as the ultimate measure of assimilation, based on the intergenerational mobility and movement of eastern and southern European migrants of the early twentieth century (Park and Burgess 1925). These theories of spatial (Massey 1985) or segmented (Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller 2005; Portes and Zhou 1993) assimilation relied on suburban nostalgia: they took for granted an image of suburbs as well-off, predominantly White and middle class, and the ultimate sign of achieving the American dream. But suburban living no longer seems to require minority assimilation into a White identity; ethnographies of immigrants in suburban communities show that strong ethnic ties frequently persist alongside socioeconomic mobility (Agius Vallejo 2012; Clergé 2014; Imoagene 2012; Li 2009; Logan, Zhang, and Alba 2002; Warikoo 2022; Ocampo 2016). In addition, although immigrant communities have too often been erased from the suburban narrative, *ethnoburbs*, or ethnic enclaves outside central cities (Alba et al. 1999; Li 2009), have existed for decades. Sanjoy Chakravorty, Devesh Kapur, and Nirvikar Singh (2017) further describe suburbs with high numbers of immigrants who arrived to the United States through H1-B visas as “ethno-techno-suburbs,” where parents often move for proximity to suburban technology firms as well as for highly reputed schools. Still, immigrants living in suburbs are less likely than their nonimmigrant suburban neighbors to live in single-family homes with a nuclear family. In fact, one in five immigrants in suburban communities lives in a multifamily home (Hardwick 2008). Suburban immigrant integration is not conflict free, ei-

ther. Recent research in upper middle-class, previously predominantly White suburbs with growing numbers of Asian Americans has revealed new forms of ethnic conflict related to feelings of group threat among Whites as they watch Asian American neighbors attain academic and socioeconomic success (Jiménez 2017; Lung-Amam 2017; Warikoo 2022).

Along the lines of race, ethnicity, and immigration, the suburbs are more diverse than ever. As scholarship leaves behind the misconception that suburban means White and middle class, so too should it acknowledge that suburban households are departing from the mythologized nuclear family headed by a heterosexual couple. In addition to race and ethnicity, future work on the diversity of suburban residents should devote additional attention to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) populations, their rights and equalities, as well as group residential patterns. Indeed, paralleling other literatures on place, LGBTQ+ scholarship is moving beyond the urban core (for example, see Howard 2019). The urban gayborhood has received almost all of the attention (Ghaziani 2014) but its form and function may now have reached a plateau (Bitterman and Hess 2021). Reflecting other social and cultural shifts in society, literature is emerging on places, including suburbs, that are home to increasing LGBTQ+ communities (Podmore and Bain 2021). Exploring these intersections of identity and place may be a fruitful area for future research.

### SCHOOLING IN THE SUBURBS

Schools are, in many ways, central to the suburban landscape. The growth of many suburbs goes hand in hand with Whites fleeing urban centers to avoid school desegregation. Thus many suburban schools grew as a direct result of Black exclusion and class segregation. Despite residential segregation between school districts, the U.S. Supreme Court disallowed mandated school desegregation across district boundaries in the 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* decision, hardening the school segregation created by these patterns of settlement (Orfield and Eaton 1997; Geismer 2015; Hagerman 2018).<sup>7</sup> In

7. *Milliken, Governor of Michigan, et al. v. Bradley, et al.* 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

some southern districts, suburbs have seceded from the district altogether to create a better-resourced suburban district, exacerbating inequality (Siegel-Hawley, Diem, and Frankenberg 2018). Still, although Jonathan Kozol's narrative about "savage inequalities" (1991) between urban and suburban schools continues to hold some truth, it is only part of the story of spatial inequality in schools. As we emphasize throughout this review, not all suburbs are alike; the same is true for suburban schools. Many of the challenges that appear in urban schools also appear in suburban schools.

Like the suburbs they are embedded in, many suburban schools themselves are rapidly diversifying, a growing trend rendered invisible by suburban erasure. Today, a majority of students in suburban public schools are children of color, and just 6 percent of students attending suburban schools in large metros do so in schools that are predominantly (more than 90 percent) White (Chen et al. 2021). In addition, suburban schools serve increasing numbers of low-income children and English-language learners. Many suburban schools struggle to meet the needs of their less-advantaged students even though most White, middle-class native English speakers do quite well in those schools (Dondero and Muller 2012; Frankenberg and Orfield 2012; Shiller 2016).

School segregation within suburban areas is increasing, in part due to increasing numbers of low-income families of color living in suburban areas and White families moving out of them (Reardon and Yun 2001). In issue 2 of this volume, Erica Frankenberg and her colleagues and Willow Lung-Amam show how suburban school districts' redrawing of attendance zones, shaped by the influence of longstanding, predominantly White families and some middle-class Asian American families, leads to increasing segregation within districts alongside growing diversity. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Commu-*

*nity Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (2007) prevents districts from addressing this segregation by using race as a factor in school placement.<sup>8</sup> In addition, during the 1980s, many court-ordered school desegregation plans ended, districts arguing that they no longer needed to be forced to integrate schools; this has led to further resegregation in southern schools.<sup>9</sup> In addition to racial inequalities, socioeconomic inequality has increased in schools in recent decades (Reardon and Owens 2014; Owens, Reardon, and Jencks 2016), driven in part by increasing class segregation within and between suburban and urban school districts (Owens and Rich 2023, this volume, issue 2). Shruti Bathia and her colleagues (2023, this volume, issue 2) show how these patterns have shifted for Latinx students in particular over the past two decades.

Families of color face unique challenges within suburban schools, even well-resourced ones (Lewis-McCoy 2014, Lewis and Diamond 2015; Posey-Maddox 2017a). School officials are often more responsive to White parents than to parents of color, especially when it comes to addressing issues of racial inequality (Lewis-McCoy 2014). This affinity between school staff and White parents stems in part from shared cultural repertoires between upper middle-class White parents and White school teachers and administrators (Warikoo 2022; Park 2020), benefiting not only the children of White parents who engage with the school, but other White children, as well, as school staff anticipate particular responses from all White parents and act accordingly (Lewis-McCoy 2014; Lewis and Diamond 2015). Black and Asian parents alike report experiencing microaggressions from school staff and White parents in suburban contexts (Warikoo 2022; Park 2020; Posey-Maddox 2017a). School staff frequently take a colorblind approach, ignoring issues of race (Pollock, 2004; Tyler 2016; Welton, Diem, and Holme 2015). In other schools, especially in liberal districts after the Black Lives Matter

8. *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 et al.*, 551 U.S. 701 (2007).

9. District size and school governance vary widely in the United States. For example, although both Florida and Pennsylvania are home to sixty-seven counties, Florida has seventy-three school districts but Pennsylvania five hundred. Whereas Philadelphia County is one district, a neighboring suburban county, Montgomery County, has twenty-three districts.



movement got under way, educators are more ready to address race, even though class remains salient but largely silenced, in part because suburban living implies being “not poor” (Foley 2021).

Black and Latinx students attending suburban schools often experience different treatment than their White and Asian American peers do, especially related to academic track placement and school discipline (Lewis and Diamond 2015; Tyson 2011; Tyler, 2016). Black girls face unique challenges, including greater scrutiny from and strained relationships with teachers (Eggleston and Miranda 2009). Asian Americans, in contrast, are often stereotyped as model minorities in suburban schools, given their high levels of academic achievement on average (Lee and Zhou 2015). Paradoxically, that positive stereotype can lead Whites to move out of suburbs with a growing presence of Asian Americans, given White perceptions in some locales that the racial order has flipped, leaving some Whites to perceive a decline in Whites’ racial status (Jiménez and Horowitz 2013; Kye 2018; Warikoo 2022).

Many foundational ethnographic studies of immigrant and African American youth in schools took place in suburban communities (see, for example, Matute-Bianchi 1986; Carter 2005; Wun 2016), yet the spatial aspects of those schools and communities were not central parts of the analyses or subsequent discussions of the work. Similarly, more recent studies of suburban inequality raise questions about what make urban and suburban education distinct and whether the binaries should be challenged or clarified (Milner 2012, Posey-Maddox 2016). Following the lead of urban sociologists of education such as Carla Shedd (2015) and Eve Ewing (2018), scholars of suburban education should bring a “place-sensitive” lens to their work, investigating how the suburban landscape is not mere backdrop, but an active agent in the dynamics at play. This might look like considering how public transit (or lack of it) affects children’s experiences or parental engagement or, as Angela Simms does (2023, this volume, issue 2), examining how the governance and political structures of suburban communities shape school boards and district policies.

## POLICING IN THE SUBURBS

Suburbs are rarely the first terrain that people think of when it comes to police and crime. Decades of social scientific research and media narratives have cemented the idea that crime and police is part and parcel of inner cities. The association has led to an assumption that suburban spaces have little to no crime. For example, in the summer of 2020, amid the calls to defund the police, when Congressperson Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was questioned on what police abolition looked like she remarked, “It looks like a suburb.” Ocasio-Cortez and others invoke images of the suburbs at the expense of the realities that many residents of suburbs face. The imagined or misremembered suburbs are largely affluent and White, and they feature very little police intervention; this suburban erasure renders invisible a growing number of suburbs and residents within them.

M. P. Baumgartner (1989) argued that suburbs were often governed by a moral order that valued avoiding confrontation, which resulted in high levels of social control. Scott Jacques and Richard Wright (2015) borrow from the “moral order of the suburb” theory to explore drug dealing in an ethnographic study in an affluent, predominantly White suburb. Despite drug use being comparable between cities and suburbs, drug dealing is often studied only in central cities, a form of suburban erasure that prevents a spatial understanding (Degenhardt et al. 2007). Jacques and Wright argue that drug dealing in suburban spaces looks and feels different because it is characterized by less violence than it is in cities, it is subject to less surveillance by police, and regulation of the market via social norms is greater. This analysis, however, likely reflects the experiences of White suburban residents more than the experiences of suburban residents of color. Andrea Boyles (2015), in her study of suburban Saint Louis, finds that Black residents were often subjects to police tactics and harassment similar to those used in central cities. Whereas Whiter sections of the suburb had less contact and more favorable experiences with police, Black residents in Blacker neighborhoods experienced strained relationships (see also Gordon 2019).



The 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin by the vigilante George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida, and the 2014 killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, by the police officer Darren Wilson set in motion the emergence of what would become the global Black Lives Matter movement. Both Sanford and Ferguson are suburbs, which for many would be an unlikely location to seed an antipolice violence movement (Lung-Amam and Schafran 2019). But the suburbs may be an important frontier for issues of police and inequity: Samuel Sinyangwe finds that between 2013 and 2019 the number of people killed by police nationally remained steady, but the number of killings in big cities declined and the number in suburban and rural areas increased (2020).<sup>10</sup>

Beyond police violence, suburban police often disproportionately ticket Black residents, an important source of revenue (for examples around the country, see Ordower, Sandoval, and Warren 2017; LaScala-Gruenewald, Adamides, and Toback 2020; Harris, Pattillo, and Sykes 2022). Josh Pacewicz and John Robinson (2021) find that these heavy fines and fees schemes are more likely to be found in majority Black suburbs. Brenden Beck (2023, this volume, issue 2) examines the nexus between suburban demography, fines and fees, and police killings and finds links between them. Taken together, these studies suggest that experiences with police in suburbia are deeply raced and classed.

Incarceration and its impact on suburban communities also demands greater scholarly attention. Mass incarceration is an increasing issue in the suburbs. In studies of Massachusetts, Jessica Simes (2018, 2021) finds that the highest imprisonment rates are now in small cities and the poorer suburbs of Boston and that the focus on our largest urban centers has diverted both scholarly and policy attention away from communities affected most by mass incarceration. The geographic distribution of the formerly incarcerated is also changing, bringing the challenges of reintegration to new types of places, including suburbs (Kirk 2019).

## POLITICS IN THE SUBURBS

Suburban erasure is perhaps best exemplified in the field of suburban politics. Suburban politics is increasingly understood as a distinct area of study (Gainsborough 2001). For several presidential election cycles, suburban voters have been heavily covered in the news and their votes coveted by politicians because they are often assumed to be the voters on which candidates' fates turn. Reporters implicitly equate suburban voters with White middle-class voters, writing articles that frequently feature the voices of White female voters as the voices of suburbia (Kurtzleben 2018; Lerer 2020). In turn, in the 2020 presidential campaign Donald Trump suggested that Democrats desired to "abolish the suburbs" (Associated Press 2020) and "suburban lifestyle" (Karni, Haberman, and Ember 2020), appealing to suburban nostalgia among White middle-class voters.

Political scientists have discussed suburban politics through the lenses of residential choice, civic capacity and participation, and, more recently, access to political power. Charles Tiebout's (1956) public choice theory, commonly known as "voting with your feet," suggests that when potential residents look at places to live they choose their location based on the municipality that has the amenities they desire and a tax structure they find attractive. Mark Schneider (1989) furthers this perspective by arguing that competition between suburbs is not only for homebuyers but also for businesses, which undergo a similar searching process when deciding where to locate their facilities. Suburban residents' preferences for low tax burdens can make local government officials less willing to support a robust social safety net: William Fischel (2001) demonstrates that homeowners—more prevalent in suburbs than in cities—often vote for low local government spending, their goal being to maximize their property values. Although instructive in explaining much of suburban politics, these analyses focus on the experiences of propertied, White suburban residents, missing an increasing share of suburban politics.

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10. Sinyangwe defines urban, suburban, and rural using a measurement of density. Although it is not perfect, this method is increasingly used in journalist accounts and popular statistics (see Kolko 2015).

(2023, this volume, issue 2) use unique precinct-level data to examine voting patterns in suburbs and how they changed between 2016 and 2020. Through a careful analysis of multiple suburbs across the nation, they find that Whiter suburbs remained the least likely to have an increased Democratic voter share even though the suburbs overall voted more Democratic. They conclude that it was population change rather than changes in White suburban voters' party preferences that drove electoral result changes.

Theories of public choice also fail to account for how and when local governments do build social supports. For example, Lorrie Frasure-Yokley (2015), in a case study of an ethnically diverse suburb outside Washington, D.C., finds that local governments adopted programs and policies that extended social safety nets and assisted undocumented and other vulnerable communities. These new theories of politics in the suburbs are challenging the idea that suburbs are in and of themselves inflexible and incapable of adjusting to new and diverse residents, particularly Latinx residents. In addition, scholarship on Black suburbs and Black suburbanites (see, for example, Lake 1981, Johnson 2002) has raised key questions about suburban demography, the homebuying process for Black families, and the evolution of political representation and power. Still, Black suburbanites continue to experience limited political power, even while middle-class Black families receive more benefits and voice than lower-income Black families do (Haynes 2001; Lacy 2007).

The diversification of suburbs should lead us to rethink the politics of suburbia when it comes to resource allocation and incorporation (Lung-Amam 2017; Jiménez 2017). As immigrants become more of a presence in suburban spaces, immigration also increasingly shapes suburban political processes and suburbs become an increasingly important facet of the broader political economy (Jones-Correa 2006, 2019).

Whereas some studies (see Frasure-Yokley 2015) are finding collaboration between old residents and newcomers in ethnically diverse suburbs, that is not the case universally. Simms, in this volume, issue 2, returns to Prince George's

County, Maryland—the hallmark of Black suburbia—to capture the dynamics of the ethnically diversifying county and the process of budgeting. In a case study of public hearings on school budgets, she finds that predominantly Latinx newcomers find themselves in competition with long-standing Black communities; larger issues of regional and structural inequity remain underdiscussed as solutions to funding limitations, as well.

As the suburbs and suburban voters increasingly become flashpoints for political battles during major election cycles, the need is urgent for more research on the everyday political economies of suburban spaces. One need look no further than the recent politicization and polarization of suburban school boards, which have been the target of critiques and even attacks as a result of a right-wing campaign purporting to oppose Critical Race Theory. These challenges to curriculum, leadership, and even funding are a way to push back against the embrace of equity and reckoning with racial and ethnic diversity. Given the centrality of suburban schools to suburban communities—indeed, the schools are often a significant reason why families move to the suburbs or choose to reside in a particular suburb—these battles over school boards should be understood not just as educational issues, but also as political ones.

Under the suburban politics umbrella, the environment is another important area for further research. The contemporary environmental movement is undoubtedly tied to suburbia, though scholars debate how this is so. Adam Rome (2001) looks at the environmental impact of suburbanization, which he argues propelled the need to protect the environment, whereas Christopher Sellers (2012) identifies suburbs as the very sites where environmental activism first ignited. In addition, Robin Leichenko and William Solecki (2013) lament the lack of attention to how residents in suburbs will be affected by climate change. They identify how key vulnerabilities and impacts associated with climate change (for example, flooding) vary widely across different types of suburban settlement zones (high, medium, and low-density suburbs) as do the factors that influence suburban adaptive capacity and resilience. Their

discussions also identify the interconnections between suburban places (upstream origins and downstream impacts). In a recent paper, Hannah Teicher, Carly Phillips, and Devin Todd (2021) extend the suburban and climate change discussion to discussions of governance that acknowledge the interconnections between urban cores and suburbs. They argue that suburbs should be a locus of climate action.

## CONCLUSION

We would be remiss not to mention that this double issue was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has laid bare the depths and reach of societal inequalities. Accordingly, in a very short time span, volumes of papers have been written on systemic racism, social justice and injustice, and the structural inequalities of place in relation to COVID-19 prevalence, hospitalizations, death, and vaccine dissemination and uptake. We are also learning about place-based disparities related to the impact of COVID-19 on essential workers, children, the elderly, and other high-risk populations (Lewis-McCoy and D'Andrea Martinez 2020). Given the continuing demographic shifts out from the urban core, it is inevitable that suburbs will be part of an ongoing national conversation on all of these topics, and many more.

These two issues on suburban inequality were born from a desire to bring to together a range of scholars to collaboratively mark out what we know about the topic. Because suburbs have so often been overlooked by scholarship and overshadowed by urban inquiry, we were aware that a significant goal of this double issue would be to “sell the suburbs” as a site of study. Through this review of the extant literature and the contributions of this double issue, we are confident that we can resist amnesia and carve new space for a field of suburban inequality.

By way of conclusion, we offer three suggestions. First, we implore scholars to resist suburban nostalgia and to focus instead on the ways in which systems of inequality penetrate and are perpetuated within suburban communities. Relatedly, we call for an end to suburban erasure; scholars should recognize the diversity

of suburban communities and the diverse histories of suburban communities as well. Last, scholars should resist social scientific amnesia, and excavate suburban inquiries that can shed light on the suburban present. Recognizing that much of suburban studies is siloed into disciplinary and methodological tracts (just as many other fields are), we call for suburban scholars to reach across disciplinary boundaries for more illuminating studies of suburban inequality. We hope this double issue of the *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* facilitates the next steps in this burgeoning field of study.

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