

SLS RESOURCE LIST: STRUCTURAL RACISM & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

October 2020

Authors/organizations based in Atlanta or Georgia are distinguished by red font

SLS's TOP FIVE

Federal Policy and Discrimination

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: a Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Liveright Publishing, 2018.

Recommended by: Chris Burke (Community Relations, GT) and Alex Karner (formerly GT, now School of Architecture, UT Austin)

Rothstein compellingly argues in this work of popular non-fiction that America's cities came to be racially divided from *de jure* segregation, and the actions and policies of successive administrations at the federal level, rather than the *de facto* segregation that results from income inequality or white flight. Rothstein draws on examples both familiar -- such as the famed all-white suburb Levittown in Long Island -- and less so, such as Stuyvesant Town in Manhattan, which seemingly race neutral rent control laws have kept almost all white for generations. Drawing the reader back to the 1890s, Rothstein offers the kind of detailed historical context essential to understanding how so many American cities came to be starkly segregated, and why they remain so.

Infrastructure and Race in Atlanta

Osborne Jelks, Na'Taki. [*Sewage in Our Backyard: The Politics of Race, Class and Water in Atlanta, Georgia*](#), Projections 8, 2008.

Recommended by: Chris Burke and Na'Taki Osborne Jelks (Environmental and Health Sciences, Spelman)

Jelks discusses the equity implications of policymakers failing to incorporate the voice and perspective of local residents. She offers two enlightening cases, demonstrating how African American communities in southwest Atlanta successfully challenged the City of Atlanta on wastewater treatment improvement proposals which had not engaged or been developed in collaboration with community members. At the heart of Jelks's analysis are three questions that she demonstrates have relevance for all municipalities: "Did the potentially impacted community have adequate access to information about the proposed policies?; Was the potentially impacted community engaged from the outset of the planning process?; and Was there an equitable distribution of benefits vs. risks and burdens for the proposed policy?"

Environmental Justice

Mohai, Paul. [*Data-Driven Research for Environmental Justice: How Universities Can Help Move Vulnerable Communities from Surviving to Thriving. SMARTech Home*](#), 27 Sept. 2016, smartech.gatech.edu/handle/1853/55913.

Recommended by: SLS

This video of a Serve Learn Sustain (SLS) event featuring environmental justice scholar Paul Mohai highlights how universities can help move communities from "surviving to thriving" through the use of data. Mohai explains the ways that vulnerable communities have been disproportionately affected by pollution, and how data software, such as GIS, can help address systems of inequity and cases of environmental injustice.

Transportation and Race

Partnership for Southern Equity, "[Opportunity Deferred: Race, Transportation, and the Future of Metropolitan Atlanta.](#)" 2017.

Recommended by: SLS

Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) offers, in this document, a detailed primer on the complex dynamics of sustainable transportation development in Atlanta. Despite public and private interest in connecting communities in Atlanta -- through the Atlanta BeltLine, MARTA expansions, and enhanced biking infrastructure -- much of the city is still underserved by public transportation, and opportunities to access amenities and services are unevenly distributed. "Opportunity Deferred" describes the roots of inequitable development and outlines specific policy recommendations to address the threats of displacement and increasing income and housing inequity.

SLS's Educational Tools

Hirsch, Jennifer. [Environmental Justice 101](#): SLS Tool.

Recommended by: SLS

This tool offers students an introduction to the concept of environmental justice and foregrounds two definitions for students to consider. The purpose of this tool is to help students begin to understand how the EJ movement works to address environmental injustice (especially in the U.S. South, where the movement was born). Materials in the tool offer students examples that illustrate the entwined impacts of race and class, and the roles that scientists and engineers in particular can play in redressing systemic injustice and supporting community mobilization.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS BY CATEGORY

Federal Policy and Discrimination

Desmond, Matthew. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Broadway Books, 2017.

Recommended by: Alex Karner

Evicted is a work of non-fiction following the lives of eight families struggling to pay rent and mortgages during the 2007-2008 recession. This book provides a framework for the argument that housing is a human right and vividly depicts how poverty, an affordable housing crisis, and socioeconomic inequality are ravaging the U.S.

Dreier, Peter et al. [Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the 21-st Century, 3rd Edition](#). UP of Kansas, 2014.

Recommended by: Dan Amsterdam (HSOC, GT)

Dreier et al. draw on updated census data (as of 2010), polls, and trends in the United States to address issues of unemployment, poverty, crime, pollution, and transportation congestion and offer ways to equitably address these challenges. The authors put American cities in global context and unfold the impact of increasing economic segregation in the U.S., arguing that coalition building around progressive policies is essential to addressing a multi-front "urban crisis."

Infrastructure and Race in Atlanta

Dorsey, Allison. *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875 – 1906*. UGA Press, 2004.

Recommended by: Chris Burke

Allison Dorsey's *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875 – 1906* details the connections and networks that Black Atlantans created after Reconstruction. Dorsey examines the work of black citizens to increase representation in local politics, schooling, church and fraternal organizations. She details the barriers erected not only through “white laws and customs” but through internal community divisions which arose from status and class.

Elmore, Bartow. “[Hydrology and Residential Segregation in the Postwar South: An Environmental History of Atlanta, 1865-1895.](#)” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 94, no. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 30-61.

Recommended by: Na'Taki Osborne Jelks

Bartow Elmore discusses post-Civil-War developments of racially motivated segregation in water management infrastructure. Elmore describes the determination by white planners and officials to strictly maintain racial segregation and white citizens' privilege through infrastructure decisions that intentionally deprived black neighborhoods of equal services such as water treatment.

Keating, Larry. *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion.* Temple University Press, 2001.

Recommended by: Chris Burke

Larry Keating offers a critical analysis of Atlanta in the second half of the 20th century in *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion*. Chapters focused on housing, transportation, and employment are complemented by deep examination of particular sites of conflict and promise, such as the 1996 Olympic games. Keating situates more recent history in the rich context of the development of Atlanta's identity, since the Civil Rights Era, as both an engine of economic opportunity and a stratified city, where race and racism have always shaped policy and planning decisions.

Kruse, Kevin M. *White flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism.* Princeton University Press, 2013.

Recommended by: Alex Karner

In *White flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, Kevin Kruse details the causes and consequences of the movement of white people to the suburbs, known as “white flight.” Kruse argues that rather than merely a literal movement of people, “white flight” represented a dramatic shift in political ideologies for “The City Too Busy Moving to Hate.” Kruse's analysis hinges on the language of “rights” -- and their deployment in protest and activism -- to describe the way that white Atlantans sought to maintain white supremacy and the cultural and material privileges it conferred.

Environmental Justice

Checker, Melissa. [Polluted Promises: Environmental Racism and the Search for Justice in a Southern Town.](#) NYU Press, 2005.

Recommended by: SLS

Checker, an environmental justice scholar and anthropologist, focuses this evocative case study on the neighborhood of Hyde Park in Augusta, Georgia. She documents the long campaign undertaken by African American residents there to hold the industries polluting Hyde Park accountable. She describes how local activists sustained their efforts to make their community healthy and safe again, despite the presence of nine major polluters and an array of officials and decision-makers unmoved by dangers to the health of African American residents.

Ottinger, Gwen. [Information Infrastructures for Environmental Justice](#) (video lecture, 2017).

This video of Gwen Ottinger's visit to Georgia Tech highlights the problems associated with providing communities information and raw data without appropriate mechanisms to leverage that data for positive

change. In order to address environmental injustice, data shared with communities must be accompanied by collaborative support and resources to create meaningful outcomes. Ottinger emphasizes the need for a reimagining of how small communities engage with “big data.”

Pellow, D. (2016). Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies: Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 13(2), 1-16. doi:10.1017/S1742058X1600014X

Recommended by: SLS

Pellow discusses the connection between race and Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ) studies. By adopting a multi-disciplinary approach including the Black Lives Matter movement, political ecology, ecofeminist theory, and others, Pellow is able to hypothesize what CEJ could look like in this dynamic intellectual and social climate.

Taylor, Dorceta E. *The Environment and the People in American Cities: 1600s-1900s*. Duke University Press, 2009.

Recommended by: SLS

In *The Environment and the People in American Cities*, Dorceta E. Taylor uses race relations, social movements and organization theories to frame her discussion of urban environmentalism. She homes in on poverty and epidemics in cities and efforts to reform cities and redress their “chaos” through interventions such as greenspace and parks as modes of restoring social order. Widening the lens from parks, the implications of discriminatory zoning and land use planning and the impact of industry and polluters are part of Taylor’s analysis, and she offers insight into how communities and workers responded to their compromised health and living standards. The long historical view, nuanced by careful attention to race and class, provided by this work affords the reader insight into the evolution of environmentalism with cities at the center.

Transportation and Race

Bullard, Robert Doyle, Glenn Steve Johnson, and Angel O. Torres, eds. *Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism & New Routes to Equity*. South End Press, 2004.

Recommended by: Christina Fuller (School of Public Health, GSU)

Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism & New Routes to Equity discusses the little known impacts of the 1964 Civil Rights Act on transportation. The authors discuss discrimination and racism ingrained in public transportation, nearly a half century after the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. Citing the insidious contributions of transportation planners, the authors argue that unequal access as it manifests in transportation systems will, if unchecked, exacerbate racial and economic inequality.

[“Systemic Racism Can’t Be Fixed Without Tackling it Within Cycling: 14 Stories from Black People Who Love Bikes.”](#) Bicycling.com, June 9, 2020.

Recommended by Nisha Botchwey and Meaghan McSorley

These fourteen stories from Black bicyclists document their experiences of racial profiling, hopes for transportation equity, and recommendations for what must be done to address racial division in cycling and in the U.S. broadly. Taken as a whole, the essays serve as a call to action for the adoption of effective ant-racist practices.

SLS Educational Tools Related to Racism and the Built Environment

Fisch, Jessica. [Introduction to Green Infrastructure and Equity](#). SLS Teaching Toolkit.

Recommended by: SLS

This framework developed by Serve-Learn-Sustain (SLS) provides a comprehensive introduction and analysis of green infrastructure and the equity implications of green infrastructure projects in contemporary contexts. The introductory framework, “What is Green Infrastructure,” is accompanied by case studies to support faculty seeking to deepen students’ engagement with the Key Concepts of the framework. For example, a case study of the 11th Street Bridge Park in Washington, D.C., is provided to offer perspective on the complexity and importance of community engagement for equitable green infrastructure projects.

Jacobs, Bethany and Dave Ederer. [Introduction to Equitable and Sustainable Development](#). SLS Teaching Toolkit.

Recommended by: SLS

This tool focuses on the Atlanta BeltLine as a means to introduce students to Key Concepts in Equitable and Sustainable Development, particularly as they pertain to large infrastructure projects. Through a combination of readings, lectures, and in-class group activities, students explore the successes and shortcomings of the BeltLine. Equally important, the tool supports students in understanding what infrastructure is, why understanding the context and impact of major infrastructure projects is important for achieving equity, and how students themselves can have an impact in cultivating equitable and sustainable development in Atlanta, and elsewhere.

Additional Resources on Structural Racism

Etienne, Harley F. *Pushing Back the Gates: Neighborhood Perspectives on University-Driven Revitalization in West Philadelphia*. Temple University Press, 2012.

Recommended by: Chris Burke

Harley F. Etienne introduces readers to the historical and contemporary impact of the University of Pennsylvania in West Philadelphia, through examining three possible roles for universities: as drivers of economic development, as urban real estate developers themselves, and as partners or service providers seeking to meet “needs” in the surrounding community. Etienne highlights community-based perspectives, foregrounding the voices of residents and tracking the ways that University-stimulated “revilization” brings mixed results for communities seeking to hold the university accountable.

Jones, Camara. [Allegories on Race and Racism](#), TedX at Emory: 10 July 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNhcY6fTyBM.

Recommended by: SLS

Dr. Camera Jones provides four allegories on race and racism in this TedX Emory event: “Japanese Lanterns: Colored Perceptions” which examines how racial constructions that are contextual “color” who we are and what we see; “Dual Reality: A Restaurant Saga” which offers the two sides of an “open/closed” sign as a metaphor for exclusion and inclusion in a racist society; “A Gardener’s Tale” (elaborated in an article of the same title, below); and “Life on a Conveyer Belt: Moving to Action” which Jones adapts from scholar Beverly Tatum’s work, in which anti-racism is contingent on walking in the opposite direction of the belt (racism in our society), questioning the belt’s operations, and working actively to dismantle it.

[“Toward the Science and Practice of Anti-Racism: Launching a National Campaign Against Racism.”](#) *Ethnicity & Disease*, vol. 28, 2018, pp. 231-234.

Recommended by: SLS

Dr. Camera Jones discusses her National Campaign Against Racism in this article as part of her American Public Health Association (APHA) presidency. Linking racism to race-correlated

health disparities, Jones sets a clear agenda: “1) naming racism; 2) asking “how is racism operating here?” and 3) organizing and strategizing to act.”

["Levels of racism: a theoretic framework and a gardener's tale."](#) *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 90, no. 8, 2000, pp. 1212-1215.

Recommended by: SLS

Through a gardening analogy, Dr. Camera Jones distinguishes the three levels of racism in this article: institutionalized; personally mediated; and internalized. She compares the government to a “gardener” who, in favoring one plant over another, creates the conditions (“good soil”) for that plant to flourish, and then posits the inherent inferiority of the neglected plant, which faltered in every successive season because it never had healthy soil in which to grow.

Oliver, Melvin L., Thomas M. Shapiro, and Thomas Shapiro. *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*. Taylor & Francis, 2006.

Recommended by: SLS

Oliver and Shapiro take a stance not common in evaluating racial inequality in America in *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*. Rather than analyzing income alone, Oliver and Shapiro focus their analysis on private wealth -- total assets and debts -- to uncover a deeply ingrained and persistent pattern of inequality in The United States.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, [“Could Where You Live Influence How Long You Live?”](#) January, 2020.

Recommended by: SLS

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Life Expectancy calculator is an interactive way to distinguish how your physical location, home, or workplace could affect your lifespan. The Foundation cites a range of factors that predetermine the overall health of your home city and its relation to your life expectancy.

Schell, Christopher J., et al. "[The Ecological and Evolutionary Consequences of Systemic Racism in Urban Environments](#)." *Science*, 2020, pp. 1-18.

Recommended by: SLS

Schell et al. provide description and analysis of how racism in urban centers relates to biophysical properties and patterns of ecological life. Drawing on their extensive, collaborative research, Schell et al. make the argument that residential segregation and other forms of institutionalized racism that drive gentrification change urban ecology. As Schell et al. assert, “systematic inequities have profound impacts on global biological change and biodiversity loss.”

Wezerek, Gus. [“Racism’s Hidden Toll: In America How Long You Live Depends on the Color of Your Skin”](#) *New York Times*, August 11, 2020.

Recommended by: SLS

NYT Opinion columnist Gus Wezerek shares his insight on how the color of your skin affects your lifespan. This interactive piece -- enlivened by Wezerek’s data visualizations -- illustrates the impact of institutionalized racism on the health and lifespan of black Americans, specifically their disproportionate vulnerability to COVID-19.

Additional Resources on Race and COVID-19 – Recommended by SLS

Burch, Audra D.S. [“Why the Virus is a Civil Rights Issue: ‘The Pain will not be Shared Equally’”](#) *New York Times*, April 19, 2020.

In this *NYT* piece, Audra Burch argues that the COVID-19 pandemic is a civil rights issue, the effects of which will not be shared equally amongst all. Burch cites several examples, ranging from the release of detainees from prisons not adequately prepared for the virus to protests for the cancelation of rent and mortgages for those hardest hit by the physical and economic ravages of the pandemic.

Cabrera, Yvette. [Coronavirus is Not Just a Health Crisis - It's an Environmental Justice Crisis](#). *Mother Jones*, April 25, 2020.

Features the work of [Fatemeh Shafiei](#) (Political Science, Spelman)

Yvette Cabrera discusses how racial inequality and environmental racism in America have shaped the impact of COVID-19; residents of places like “Cancer Alley” in Louisiana have been battling environmental injustice for decades, having become sick from toxic air, water, and soil. Those same communities, writes Cabrera, have seen pollutants drive up rates of cancer and respiratory illness, both examples of pre-existing conditions that make COVID-19 far more dangerous.

Iyengar, Nikishka and John Haines, [“Preparing for the Post COVID-19 Land Grab.”](#) *Next City*, June 3, 2020

Iyengar and Haines describe the “double lever” of real estate, which can both build wealth in historically marginalized communities as well as lead to “wealth erosion” when residents or businesses are pushed out by private capital and development. The authors describe the role that foundations can play in supporting the former mechanism -- wealth building -- highlighting examples like the Community Investment Trust in Portland, Oregon, where mostly low-income residents of color have bought shares in a property that will pay out increasing dividends. The CIT and initiatives like it both build wealth in the local community and protect local land, businesses, and homes from predatory development.

Raymond, Elora, Dan Immergluck, Lauren Sudeall, Frank S. Alexander, Michael Rich, Dan Pasciuti, John Travis Marshall, Prentiss Dantzler, and Allen Hyde. [“Toward an Emergency Housing Response to COVID-19 in Georgia”](#) *Medium*, March 20, 2020.

This *Medium* article brings together voices from many disciplines for a conversation on housing and COVID-19. The authors, all of whom are Atlanta-based, discuss the need for affordable housing for those most at risk of displacement. Citing specific instances and trends in COVID-exacerbated housing insecurity, they offer concrete recommendations for mitigating the effects of the pandemic on too-often-marginalized families and citizens.

Local and National Organizations Working at the Intersection of Race and the Built Environment

*Organizations marked with an * are SLS partners*

[Partnership for Southern Equity \(ATL\)*](#)- PSE stands to address inequities within systems and communities so that access to resources and prosperity can be created and enjoyed by all within the community. PSE focuses on Equitable Development, Health Equity, Energy Equity, and Economic Inclusion.

[TransFormation Alliance \(ATL\)*](#)- “The TransFormation Alliance is a collaboration of community advocates, policy experts, transit providers and government agencies that believes equitable transit-oriented development can promote community building practices to link communities near transit stations with the opportunities they need to thrive.”

[Harambee House \(Savannah\)*](#)- Harambee House, based in Savannah, Georgia, “is a community- based organization that works collectively with organizations, families, and youth in our neighborhoods. The organization has a proven record of accomplishment of being a catalyst and incubator for promoting civic engagement, environmental justice, and social change at a local, regional, national, and international level.”

[PolicyLink \(CA\)](#)- PolicyLink is a research and action-oriented organization focusing on advancing economic and social equity. PolicyLink supports the goals and vision of communities of color that are economically vulnerable.

[West Atlanta Watershed Alliance \(ATL\)*](#) - WAWA’s mission is to improve the quality of life within the West Atlanta Watershed by protecting, preserving and restoring the community’s natural resources. WAWA represents African American neighborhoods in Northwest and Southwest Atlanta that are most inundated with environmental stressors, but are least represented at environmental decision-making tables. WAWA was founded and is led by Black leaders from the communities where WAWA works.

[WE ACT for Environmental Justice \(NY\)](#) - “WE ACT’s mission is to build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and/or low income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices.” WE ACT focuses on clean air, environmental justice education, and sustainable and equitable land use, among many other issues. NAACP* – including the initiative, [Centering Equity in the Sustainable Building Sector](#)- The NAACP Centering Equity in the Sustainable Building Sector focuses on producing equitable access for all through the advancement of sustainable building policies. Their goal is to facilitate the intentional inclusion of those most vulnerable in “the design, construction, and occupancy of sustainable, regenerative, healthy buildings.”