

The Rights to the Suburb

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On November 24, 2014, people around the world witnessed the dramatic unfolding of social unrest in Ferguson, Missouri. In the aftermath of a grand jury's decision not to indict Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown on August 9, 2014, citizens of Ferguson took to the streets to protest that decision, to demonstrate their frustration at a system of law enforcement that disproportionately incarcerates, punishes, and kills black people, and their anger at decades of discrimination and oppression.¹ What did viewers watching from outside of Ferguson see that night when they looked at the images of protest and rioting? They did not see familiar images of urban rioting from the 1960s; this protest erupted in an inner-ring suburb.

Representations of the suburb during the riot—widely available through television, social media, and the Internet—posed visual challenges: poorly illuminated night scenes were rendered hazier when seen through a cloud of tear gas or the smoke from a burning car; photographers and television camera operators moved rapidly through the streets creating photos and live-action images of protesters running, struggling to breathe as clouds of tear gas overwhelmed them, or walking with their hands in the air; police appeared in formation, dressed in riot gear. The discernable glimpses of Ferguson revealed streets lined with low-rise buildings, the kind of buildings commonly found in less affluent suburbs nationwide; strip malls with convenience stores, fast-food outlets, a beauty supply store, small restaurants, and retail shops preceded by parking lots. If they looked carefully, viewers could observe streets designed to carry both two and four lanes of automobile traffic, lined with uninviting sidewalks largely devoid of pedestrian amenities

Recognizing the distinctive dynamics of suburban space and culture through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's writing helps us understand fights for justice in Ferguson and other suburbs.

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such as canopy trees, benches, or aestheticizing vegetation; they could see a landscape designed for quick and efficient automobile movement; *they could see a community that was not primarily designed for the pedestrian or for public gathering, but that was suddenly filled with people taking over the streets.*

How were the streets of Ferguson claimed that night? How is it possible to take back a suburb more generally? How, in particular, should we understand the intersection of form, space, and unrest in Ferguson?² And what urban theories might we turn to in order to know the suburb as a site of protest? Given these shifting and multiple definitions of suburbia, and the complexities of a place like Ferguson and the events that unfolded there, we need a specific theoretical analytic that obtains for the U.S. suburb, especially as it relates to uprisings/unrest and the spaces of those communities that are outside the home itself. As we struggle to make sense of the nonsensical murder of Michael Brown, how are we to understand the impact of space in the violence that unfolded in that first-ring suburb located on the edge of St. Louis and the riots of November 24th? How might we understand the space of the suburban gated community in Sanford, Florida, where Trayvon Martin was shot and killed? The incidents in Ferguson are historically and socially complex, situated within the deep history of segregation, structural racism, and state-sanctioned violence that have plagued St. Louis and other US cities for decades.³ But the majority of Americans now reside in suburbia, and we must think about how space impacts opportunities for struggles for justice.

My own interest in this topic developed from my previous study of Levittown, Pennsylvania, where a well-known riot occurred in 1957 after the first black family, Daisy and William Myers and their children, moved into a house in that development. Hundreds gathered outside their suburban ranch house for weeks protesting the arrival of the first black family into what was then an all-white community (and still remains predominantly white).⁴ But numerous, less well-known disturbances on both a large and small scale also occurred there, such as the Gasoline Riots of the 1970s, staged at an intersection in the central business district known as “Five Points,” and smaller disturbances such as those mounted by housewives protesting food prices at the local grocery store.⁵ These moments of strife in Levittown and in similar suburbs across the nation require consideration of the ways political protest is enacted in postwar communities located on urban peripheries where the traditional spaces of unrest—the urban plaza, the broad

public streets of downtowns—do not exist, and where there is a general absence of public gathering spaces (or the right to gather in seemingly public spaces).⁶ These few examples also demonstrate that although many instances of suburban unrest have been driven by the tensions that arise from segregation and spatialized structural racism, as is the case in Ferguson, some, like the 1970s Gasoline Riots, have also developed from the activities of middle- and working-class whites who saw suburban spaces as completely natural—perhaps even as inevitable—sites for their various forms of activism.

My question is not whether social and civil unrest happens in the suburbs; suburban disturbances are neither rare nor geographically isolated.⁷ Rather, in this essay, I aim to contribute to the search for a theoretical framework that will help scholars of suburbia, and those who study social unrest, base their work in a meaningful analytic for understanding riots and large-scale disturbances that take place in settings not necessarily understood to be traditionally “urban,” thereby validating their meaning and giving credence to their value in the fight for justice.

On Cities and Suburbs

The term “suburb” is broad and encompassing. It includes multiple kinds of locales situated on the peripheries of urban space. If it once implied the postwar bedroom communities occupied largely by working- and middle-class whites (think Levittown), the term can now conjure a range of spaces located on urban peripheries including, for example, transnational suburbs that are now home to immigrants from South Asia, Southeast Asia, South America, and many points around the globe.⁸ Twenty-first-century suburbia in the United States, as we now understand it, is a complex and dynamic set of residential and mixed-use spaces that defy easy categorization. I use the term here to refer largely to residential zones with small- to medium-sized commercial districts that are located on urban peripheries with relatively low population densities.

The term also encompasses places like Ferguson, Missouri, that have relatively small populations and that may or may not be incorporated into the city limits of a larger metropolitan region. Such spaces cannot be presumed to be occupied primarily by whites, nor can they be presumed affluent or even necessarily middle-class. Ferguson is an inner-ring suburb situated just over ten miles from downtown St. Louis and approximately five miles from the

St. Louis International Airport. Today, just over 21,000 people reside in Ferguson; 22 percent of them have income levels that fall below the federal poverty line. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 67.4 percent of Ferguson's population is African-American.⁹ Only three of the 53 officers on the Ferguson police force are Black. Although Ferguson initially expanded between 1940 and 1970 as whites fled the inner city, its population declined again after 1970 when whites moved to more distant suburbs, and Ferguson's black population increased to two-thirds of the total by 2010. Across the United States, inner-ring suburbs like Ferguson have become economically distressed as more affluent and largely white residents sought either inner-city lifestyles in upscale, gentrified downtown areas or suburban estates situated at a greater distance from the incorporated areas of the city.¹⁰ However, the discourse of white flight and demographic shifts must not obscure a harsh and by now well-known reality: Ferguson, like many other similar communities nationwide, is a place forged by the racist housing policies of the federal government, and by racist housing practices reinforced by federal, state, and local lending agencies, mortgage insurers, real estate boards and agents, and a US building industry that has turned its back on problems of fair housing for more than a century.¹¹ The majority of Ferguson residents may own their own homes, but the average value of their homes falls well below the national average.¹²

Just as Ferguson reflects the changing nature of today's suburbs, the unrest and protests that have emerged there force us to rethink suburban unrest and the roles that space plays in the rights to public space.¹³ Often, North American suburbanization and the "suburban ideal of open space" are cited as key factors in the erosion of such public spaces, since the creation of open but privatized spaces has served to separate people rather than to create opportunities for social contact.¹⁴ But for many urban theorists, revolution depends on the idea of a gathering space, and a space that can be activated politically by the public; suburban spaces are thus seen to be politically neutered. For instance, in *Rebel Cities*, David Harvey's distillation of contemporary urban rights theories, Harvey suggests that suburban space cannot hold the potential for social revolution because it does not accommodate the spaces or conditions for what he calls "political action and revolt." "Perhaps," he wrote, "after all, [Henri] Lefebvre was right, more than forty years ago, to insist that the revolution in our times has to be urban—or nothing... The urban obviously functions ... as an important site of political action and revolt. The actual site

characteristics are important, and the physical and social re-engineering and territorial organization of these sites is a weapon in political struggles.”¹⁵

Harvey’s denial of the suburb aside, I believe that Henri Lefebvre’s theories of urban space, urban revolution (which he used to refer to a multiplicity of meanings that extended beyond revolutions in urban space to include the long transformation to an urbanized society), and the rights to the city *do* open new ways to think about suburbs. Of course, the North American suburb and the French *banlieue* are not equivalent. *Banlieues* were meant to house industries and people excluded from the city from at least the time of Georges-Eugène Haussmann; in the post-Colonial period, Parisian suburbs came to house workers from former colonies, and they have come to be marked as culturally, economically, and religiously distinct from urban spaces. In the United States, in contrast, only recently have suburbs come to be seen as racially and culturally diverse spaces.¹⁶

Despite the fact that they are both historically and geographically specific, Lefebvre’s writings, especially *The Right to the City* (1968), are a natural starting place for anyone seeking to understand the relationship between space, activism, and social justice in the United States.¹⁷ What, precisely, did Lefebvre try to convey (if anything) about suburban space and the rights to claim what I will call “public space”—at least apparently or ostensibly public space—rather than strictly urban space? Do Lefebvre’s theories of the production of space and the right to the city translate to historical considerations of suburban space in the United States? As North American suburbs come to be seen not only as zones of prosperity, but also as zones of disinvestment, it is worth turning to Lefebvre’s writings for an analysis of the potential for change in such spaces.

Lefebvre and the Suburb

Lefebvre produced the majority of his writings on the right to the city from the mid-to-late 1960s through the early 1970s. But his work, like that of many other theorists, is not necessarily temporally bound to the moment of its production. The medieval village and the city of the future informed his analysis, as did the rapidly shifting urban fabric he observed around him in France and abroad. A particularly strong influence were the *grands ensembles* (mass housing estates) and the *villes nouvelles* (new towns) that began to define suburban development outside of Paris during the postwar “thirty glorious years” of economic growth after the

Second World War. Lefebvre was ideologically opposed to the state-led urbanism and “suburbanism” in Postwar France.¹⁸

Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city was undoubtedly impacted by suburban development. In 1963 in the Sarcelles housing project, which came to be a symbol of poorly designed and maintained public housing projects in France, much as Pruitt-Igoe did in the United States, tenants protested against the developer, “targeting the lack of urban facilities, insufficient public transportation, their long hours of commute,” and the overall monotony of their daily social experience.¹⁹ From this, Lefebvre concluded “the appropriation of space cannot be thought of as limited to an individual home or private apartment but must address the urban scale.”²⁰ In the following years, Lefebvre taught at Nanterre—the “suburban” university town northwest of Paris where many of the May 1968 uprisings began—from 1965 to 1973. In Nanterre, he was made keenly aware of the differences between those privileged enough to live in the center of Paris “and those deprived of the rights to that city,” as Łukasz Stanek has noted. The dialectical relationship between Paris and Nanterre, between city and suburb, inclusion and exclusion, as Stanek further argues, made Nanterre *the* place for uprising.²¹ Lefebvre published three of his most important books, *The Right to the City* (1968), *Urban Revolution* (1970), and *Space and Politics* (1972) while he was teaching in Nanterre. He may not have labeled the suburb a space with revolutionary potential, but French suburbs were fruitful sites for his work as an urban theorist, as was true for many on the left in France at this time.²²

But if the suburb/*banlieue*/new town and its U.S. counterpart were on his mind, Lefebvre never wrote *The Right to the Suburb*, and his vocabulary is generally constructed with reference to the city, which was clearly his own intellectual (if not always his geographical) center. It is worth noting that there is no entry for “suburbia” or “suburb” in the index for the 1991 Nicholson-Smith translation of *The Production of Space*. We find “agro-pastoral space,” “bastides,” “centre/periphery,” “city/town,” “company towns,” “latifundia,” “agro-pastoral space,” “periphery,” “second nature,” “streets,” and “town.” Lefebvre references “cities and their territorial dependencies,” but he never uses the term “suburb” in that publication.²³ Notably, the term appears in Lefebvre’s 1970 essay, “Reflections on the Politics of Space,” as an elegy for lost nature. “One grieves,” he wrote, “for simple and wholesome pleasures: one remembers the era before suburbanization when the Île-de-France still offered an admirable landscape to appreciative sightseers.”²⁴ For

Lefebvre, suburban space is declensionist space then, fallen away from both the ideals of the urban and the natural. It could also be an archetypical heterotopia, a place that, according to Neil Smith, Lefebvre imagined as a site for “renegade commercial exchange, politically and geographically independent from the early political city,” but still without potential for renegade social uprising or political activism.²⁵

What did Lefebvre mean then, when he used the terms “urban” and “city”? Peter Marcuse has come to regard the word “urban” in Lefebvre’s writings as “shorthand for the societal as congealed in cities today, and to denote the point at which the rubber of the personal hits the ground of the societal, the intersection of everyday life with the socially created systemic world about it. In Lefebvre’s hands, it is a normative concept, incorporating the positively desirable organization of space and time.”²⁶ According to Marcuse,

Lefebvre is quite clear on this: It is not the right to the existing city that is demanded, but the right to a future city, indeed not necessarily a city in the conventional sense at all, but a place in an urban society in which the hierarchical distinction between the city and the country has disappeared... The urban is only a synecdoche and a metaphor... Lefebvre himself wrote (1967: 45, 158), “[The right to the city] can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life ... thus from this point on I will no longer refer to the city but to the urban.”²⁷

Marcuse’s important interpretation indicates that Lefebvre used the term “city” as a metonym for anything having to do with daily life lived in non-rural spaces. But according to Christian Schmid, Lefebvre’s concern focused on the rights to a “specific urban quality ... [with] access to the resources of the city for all segments of the population, and the possibility of experimenting with and realizing alternative ways of life.”²⁸ This interpretation then, centers on Lefebvre’s interest in the idea of an abstract promise of the social benefits of urban public life, one that he would have seen systematically denied, to those living in state-led developments outside of urban space.

Lefebvre in Ferguson

Viewed through the lens of Ferguson, what we should see in the discourse of suburban rights is a struggle for the right to the centrality of material resources, to the centrality of economic, political, and social life. It is a struggle against marginalization and oppression that is both physically manifested in the spaces of Ferguson and materially/socially manifested in the lives of its citizens.²⁹ The terms “city,” “suburb,” and “countryside” then may be seen less as important definitional or spatial distinctions. Instead, what matters, and what we can draw from Lefebvre’s work, is the consideration of urbanization as a social process, the “urban” as space presumed to include freedoms and privileges that are in demand and necessary for social and economic justice. In Lefebvre’s writings, the city is better understood as “a historical category that is disappearing as urbanization progresses ... it is a level or order of social reality,” and a “concrete utopia” full of promise.³⁰ As Schmid points out, Lefebvre himself moved away from “rights to the city” discourse later in his career and toward “the right to space.”³¹

As a zone excluded from centrality, Ferguson is a space of increased susceptibility to the enactment of neo-liberalism, with its attendant intensification of surveillance/policing, and of economic predation. Its socioeconomic marginality is rendered legible by the visibly less prosperous spaces that result from uneven development and growth politics.³² It is a place, like many others in the United States and around the world, where the social contract has collapsed in favor of the accumulation of extreme wealth, power, and privilege in the hands of a relative few residing elsewhere. Ferguson is, to use another of David Harvey’s formulations, a site formed through accumulation by dispossession.³³ This framework is helpful for considering again the struggle for what Harvey would refer to as “the commons,” and that for this essay we might profitably consider as public space.

Yet, one of the prevalent gaps that exist in the Marxist frameworks that undergird much urban geographical theory, and that may help explain the challenges of applying Lefebvre’s writings to the events that unfolded in Ferguson is this: The writings of Marxist geographers have tended to privilege a rather abstract discourse that renders opaque or invisible the harsh realities embedded in the daily lived experience of individuals suffering within a system of racial oppression. The language of Marxist scholarship does little to address the discrimination, hostility, and violence faced by people of color in the United States no matter where they reside. There are exceptions, but in the literature that focuses on the right to the city, race is frequently one among

a range of abstract factors, such as (in a list formulated, for example, by Peter Marcuse) “the right to hold guns, anti-tax measures, homophobia ... anti-immigration sentiment, religious fundamentalism, family values...,” etc.³⁴ This gap in Marxist theory is now somewhat commonly noted, especially by scholars of ethnic studies and critical race studies.

To understand Ferguson and similar locations then, we might profitably consider the questions and perspectives of scholars of Black Marxism. As Frank Wilderson III has written, “...the Black subject reveals Marxism’s inability to think White supremacy as the base and, in so doing, calls into question Marxism’s claim to elaborate a comprehensive, or in the words of Antonio Gramsci, ‘decisive antagonism.’ Wilderson calls this Marxism’s ‘conceptual anxiety’—the fact that, as he sees it, Gramscian Marxism ‘sows the seeds of freedom for Whites only.’”³⁵ Black Marxism shows us that traditional Marxist formulations cannot see that “State violence against the Black body ... is not contingent, it is structural and, above all, gratuitous.”³⁶ Michael Brown’s death was part of this system of structural, gratuitous state violence against the Black body. The riots in Ferguson were thus an expression of rage, of grief, of frustration, and of a struggle for the right to centrality, a struggle for the right to justice. In order to make sense of Lefebvre in this context then, we have to regard the right to the city as the right to sow the seeds of freedom for people of color, wherever they live. Asserting this may seem to render the spatial as so broad as to become insignificant. To the contrary, I want to place emphasis on “*wherever they live*” to indicate not a sense of placelessness, but a prompt to further explore the possible scope and breadth of Lefebvrian theory.

Lefebvre did not consider suburbs with anywhere near the antipathy for or disinterest in those spaces that is demonstrated by some other critics and theorists. Instead, might we not acknowledge the impact of a powerful bias among cultural geographers and theorists to privilege the urban in their studies and particularly in their creation of theoretical frameworks for analyzing space? If Lefebvre’s publications frustrate a desire to formulate a theory that would help us understand suburban space and revolution, it may have less to do with the reality of the past, and more to do with modes of writing and historicizing that have rendered obscure the greatly varied dynamics of suburban space and culture. And now, especially now, as black people take to the streets across the United States and around the world, in major city centers, in small towns, and in various suburban spaces, we need to understand the dynamics of the

fight for justice as it happens across time and space. We need to understand it now, so that we can imagine a different future—a future and a now in which Black Lives Matter.

Dianne Harris, "The Rights to the Suburb," *Aggregate* 3 (March 2015), <https://doi.org/10.53965/MXOC4069>.

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1 This essay was originally written for a roundtable session on "Social Change and Urban Space" organized by Marta Gutman and Greg Hise for the 2013 conference of the Society of American City and Regional Planning Historians in Toronto. My thanks to Marta, Greg, and to the other participants in that session—Mary Ryan and Joseph Heathcott—for their contributions in that session. I also wish to thank my colleagues at the University of Illinois, Professors Gilberto Rosas and David Wilson, who generously read drafts of this essay and provided helpful feedback. My thanks also to Madeleine Hamlin who read drafts of this essay and provided helpful a critique and I owe particular gratitude to Meredith TenHoor for her thoughtful editorial work on this essay. [↑](#)

2 Though I do not explore the topic here, I want to acknowledge the ways in which various forms of new media are changing our perception of what constitutes an activist space. Whether watching the Arab Spring unfold in Tahrir Square, or street rioting in Istanbul, or a riot in Ferguson, our sense of public space has now shifted and expanded because of the use of social media as a tool for communication during uprisings. See, for example, Stephanie Alice Baker, "From the criminal crowd to the mediated crowd: The impact of social media on the 2011 English riots," *Safer Communities* 11, no. 1 (2012): 40–49. [↑](#)

3 See Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936–75* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State and Law and Order*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013). [↑](#)

4 On the Myers riot and Levittown, see the essays in Dianne Harris, ed., *Second Suburb: Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010). In particular see the essay in that volume by Thomas J. Sugrue, "Jim Crow's Last Stand: The Struggle to Integrate Levittown," 175–199. [↑](#)

5 On the Gasoline Riots, see Chad M. Kimmel, "No Gas My Ass!: Marking the End of the Postwar Period in Levittown," in *Second Suburb: Levittown, Pennsylvania*, ed. Diane Harris, 340–353. [↑](#)

6 On the privatization of seemingly public spaces, see Kristine Miller, *Designs on the Public: The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). [↑](#)

7 I am just embarking on an in-depth study of suburban riots. For this project, I plan to collect and analyze data that indicates the frequency, geographic distribution, and causes of suburban unrest using the Social, Political, and Economic Event Database (SPEED) that has been developed by my colleagues at the Cline Center for Democracy at the University of Illinois, and its "Societal Stability Protocol" (SSP). This tool permits macro-scale analysis of a very large data set derived from digitized major newspapers. As the Cline Center website notes, "SPEED is a technology-intensive effort to extract event data from a global archive of news reports covering the Post WWII era. It is designed to provide insights into key behavioral

patterns and relationships that are valid across countries and over time. Within SPEED, event data is generated by human analysts using a suite of sophisticated tools to implement carefully structured and pretested protocols. These protocols are category-specific electronic documents that are tailored to the information needs of a particular category of events (civil unrest, property rights, electoral processes, etc.). SPEED data will produce insights that complement those generated by other components of the SID project (constitutional data, archival data, survey-based data, etc.) because event data generates 'bottom-up' observations from news reports. In generating these event data, SPEED leverages tens of billions of dollars that have been invested in compiling news reports from throughout the world." "Civil Unrest Monitoring - Datasets," Cline Center for Democracy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, accessed August 10, 2014, <http://www.clinecenter.illinois.edu/data/speed/>. ↑

8 Recent years have seen a rapidly growing number of studies that focus on transnational suburbs, but for a good overview, see Audrey Singer, Susan W. Hardwick, and Caroline Brettell, eds., *Twenty-First Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2008). I also want to acknowledge an important article that shares a portion of its title with this essay, but focuses particularly on the question of immigrants' rights in suburbia: Genevieve Carpio, Clara Irazabal, and Laura Pulido, "Right to the Suburb? Rethinking Lefebvre and Immigrant Activism," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2011): 185–208. Their study focuses primarily on immigration debates as they play out in two suburban areas of California (Costa Mesa and Maywood), examining policy debates and relatively peaceful public demonstrations rather than riots. ↑

9 "Ferguson, Missouri," United States Census Bureau, accessed January 12, 2015, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/29/2923986.html>. ↑

10 For an overview of the history of inner-ring suburbs in the United States, see Bernadette Hanlon, *Once the American Dream: Inner-Ring Suburbs of the Metropolitan United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012). ↑

11 Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Racist Housing Policies that Built Ferguson," *The Atlantic*, October 17, 2014, accessed January 12, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/10/the-racist-housing-policies-that-built-ferguson/381595/>. See also Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). The literature on housing segregation and unfair housing is vast, but see in particular George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). ↑

12 According to zillow.com, "The median list price per square foot in Ferguson is \$42, which is lower than the St. Louis Metro average of \$104. The median price of homes currently listed in Ferguson is \$47,140 while the median price of homes that sold is \$54,757." The foreclosure rate in Ferguson is three times that of the national average. "Ferguson Home Prices & Values," *Zillow*, accessed January 18, 2015, <http://www.zillow.com/ferguson-mo/home-values/>. ↑

13 This history of suburban riots, disturbances, and uprisings in the United States is not yet well studied. However, a few important publications have begun to demonstrate the scope of this subject. See, for example, Thomas J. Sugrue and Andrew P. Goodman, "Planfield Burning: Black Rebellion in the Suburban North," *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 4 (May 2007): 568–601. Alison Isenberg also noted the importance of smaller town and suburban riots that took place in locations such as New Bedford, Massachusetts; Lawrence, Kansas; Homer, Louisiana; Hagerstown, Maryland; Peoria, Illinois; and in many more such locales, just as she also notes that little

historical scholarship has yet focused on these subjects. See Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 231, 394; n.60. For an older but important analysis, see Donald I. Warren, "Suburban Isolation and Race Tension: The Detroit Case," *Social Problems* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1970): 324–339. Sugrue and Goodman state that "Forty-five percent of the 163 riots of 1967 occurred in cities with populations under 100,000; 28 percent took place in cities with populations under 50,000." They based this on data from the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 323–324. [↑](#)

14 Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2003), 143, 144. On this topic, Mitchell cites the work of Cindi Katz, "Whose Nature, Whose Culture? Private Productions of Space and the 'Preservation of Nature,'" in *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millennium*, ed. Bruce Braun and Noel Castree (New York: Routledge, 1998), 46–63. [↑](#)

15 David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2012), 25, 118. [↑](#)

16 According to Samir Meghelli, the term *banlieue* as it is used today is often a shorthand term that refers to the poor, working-class, disproportionately immigrant, outer-cities (and all the stereotypes that are implicated therein, e.g., much-feared, crime-ridden, racialized towns/neighborhoods) ... [wherein] a physical space is conflated with an imagined one ... wealthy suburbs may be referred to as *banlieue aisée* or *banlieue riche* whereas ... *banlieue difficile* or *banlieue défavorisée* are used to describe their opposite. New towns, or *villes nouvelles*, may also be referred to as *banlieues* in the term's most pejorative sense because of the class and racial/ethnic makeup of the towns. The *grands ensembles* (found in the *banlieues*) are often referred to as *les cités*, a pejorative term with its own set of stereotypes equivalent to that of the *banlieue*. My thanks to Professor Samir Meghelli, Department of African-American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for this information, conveyed via personal email, June 30, 2014. My thanks to Brian Hunt, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of French at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for his assistance with this parsing of terms. On the longer history of the *banlieue*, see Annie Fourcaut, *Un siècle de banlieue parisienne (1859–1964): Guide de recherche* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1988); and Fourcaut, *La banlieue en morceaux: La crise des lotissements défectueux en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Grâne, France: Creaphis, 2000). My thanks to Meredith TenHoor for drawing my attention to these works. [↑](#)

17 On Lefebvre's multiple meanings of "urban revolution," see Neil Smith, "Foreword," to Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1970] 2003). Despite the differences that existed then, as now, between France and the United States, the two countries shared some cultural shifts during the postwar era: the rise of consumer culture and the growth of expendable, surplus incomes; an increase in leisure time; the rise of easily attained credit that stimulated consumer spending; an increase in affordable housing for the middle classes, and an attendant rise in the level of interest among members of the growing middle classes in the attainment of private, single-family houses. See Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 50. My focus in this essay is the search for a theoretical framework that might be applied to North American suburbs. It is important to note, as Swati Chattopadhyay has done, that Anglo-American suburbs do not share enough in common with suburbs in other locations around the globe to be able to share an analytic model. South Asian suburbs, she points out, require their own analytic, "one that attends to the fluidity of socio-spatial relationships." See Swati Chattopadhyay, "Introduction: The Historical Legacy of Suburbs in South Asia," *Urban History* 39, no. 1 (February 2012): 53. [↑](#)

- 18 Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*, 106. [↑](#)
- 19 Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*, 111, 117. [↑](#)
- 20 Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*, 117. [↑](#)
- 21 Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*, 190. [↑](#)
- 22 Again, I thank Meredith TenHoor for helping me see Lefebvre within a broader context of intellectuals working in France at the time. [↑](#)
- 23 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 38. [↑](#)
- 24 Henri Lefebvre, "Reflections on the Politics of Space," originally published in *Espaces et société* 1 (1970): 3–12. Here, I relied on the reproduction in translation of that essay that appears in Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, eds., *Henri Lefebvre: State, Space, World*, trans. Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 183. The term "suburb" appears in several additional essays by Lefebvre that are published in this volume, though whether these instances represent a literal or a more free translation remains yet unknown to me. [↑](#)
- 25 Smith, "Foreword," xii. [↑](#)
- 26 Peter Marcuse, "Whose Right(s) to What City?" in *Cities for People, Not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*, ed. Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse, and Margit Mayer (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 25. [↑](#)
- 27 Marcuse, "Whose Right(s) to What City?," 35. Here Marcuse is citing Henri Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, in *Writings on Cities*, trans. and ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (London: Blackwell, 1996), 63–184. [↑](#)
- 28 Christian Schmid, "Henri Lefebvre, The Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream," trans. Christopher Findlay, in *Cities for People, Not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*, ed. Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 43. [↑](#)
- 29 Schmid, "Henri Lefebvre, The Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream," 44. [↑](#)
- 30 Schmid, "Henri Lefebvre, The Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream," 46, 49; Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*. [↑](#)
- 31 Schmid, "Henri Lefebvre, The Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream," 49; Henri Lefebvre, *De l'État, vol. 4: Les contradictions de l'État moderne* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions: 1978), 317. [↑](#)
- 32 Margit Mayer, "The 'Right to the City' in Urban Social Movements," in *Cities for People, Not for Profit*, ed. Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 69. The still-classic work on uneven development is Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (New York: Blackwell, 1984). [↑](#)
- 33 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). [↑](#)
- 34 For Marcuse's list, see Peter Marcuse, "Whose Right(s) to What City?," 33. An example of an exception is Nicholas Blomley, "Mobility, Empowerment, and the Rights to Revolution," *Political Geography* 13 (1994): 407–422. This issue was also taken up by Stephen Nathan Haymes, *Race, Culture, and the City: A Pedagogy for Black Urban Struggle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). [↑](#)
- 35 Frank Wilderson III, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave In Civil Society?" *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (2003): 226. [↑](#)
- 36 Wilderson, "Gramsci's Black Marx," 229. Wilderson also writes, "The absence of Black subjectivity from the crux of Marxist discourse is symptomatic of the discourse's inability to cope with the possibility that the generative subject of capitalism, the Black body of the 15th and 16th centuries, and the generative subject that resolves late-

capital's over-accumulation crisis, the Black (incarcerated) body of the 20th and 21st centuries, do not reify the basic categories which structure Marxist conflict," 230. ↑