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Migration, Community, and Stereotype: Shaping Racial Space in the Twentieth-Century Urban West

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The American city should be a collection of communities where every member has a right to belong. It should be a place where every man feels safe on his streets and in the house of his friends. It should be a place where each individual’s dignity and self-respect is strengthened by the respect and affection of his neighbors. It should be a place where each of us can find the satisfaction and warmth which comes from being a member of the community of man. This is what man sought at the dawn of civilization. It is what we seek today.

—Lyndon B. Johnson

President Lyndon Johnson addressed Congress regarding the nation’s cities in March 1965: while he spoke in the rhetoric of his times by using universal “man” to represent males and females, Johnson’s language was unequivocal and thoroughly inclusive when he stated that “every member has a right to belong.” Based upon his legislative record, Johnson’s vision of a collection of communities likely included a multicultural collection of community members. In 1965 many U.S. cities resembled tattered quilts of separate patches of color that were breaking apart at fragile seams. Five months after Johnson outlined his hopeful urban vision the Watts section of Los Angeles rioted. Race riots ripped through America’s fraying cities in five consecutive summers from 1965 to 1969, and Johnson’s vision seemed increasingly unattainable.

African Americans who migrated to western cities in the twentieth century encountered a polyglot mix of Euro Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans. Diverse western populations dictated that western racial contests over space and power would evolve differently from those in the North or the South. This paper examines the discourse on white, Latino and African American racial landscapes in western cities through themes of migration, community formation, and white stereotypes and community responses to those stereotypes in seven key monographs and two articles published between 1993 and 2005.

Migration

This essay examines the effects of migration on western urban racial landscapes as illuminated by the work of Arthur R. Gómez, Albert S. Broussard, Quintard Taylor, and Douglas Flamming. Arthur R. Gómez’s 1994 book, Quest for the Golden Circle: The Four Corners and the Metropolitan West 1945–1970, informs discussion on migration and offers the first model for regional community formation. Broussard’s 1993 study, Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954, is the first case study of blacks in the twentieth-century urban West and provides a model for racial studies of western urban places. Taylor’s 1994 book,
Albert S. Broussard, Quintard Taylor, and Douglas Flamming examine massive World War II African American in-migration that transformed the West and changed the racial landscapes of San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles, respectively. In 1993 Broussard investigated national and transnational factors—the Great Depression, the New Deal, World War II, and the postwar era—that changed San Francisco’s black community. Examination of pre-World War II patterns of migration, employment, housing, family and social life, politics, protest activities, and status reveals that struggles of black San Franciscans paralleled those of black Bostonians, and that African Americans in both cities lagged far behind their white urban counterparts in all categories. Broussard writes that before World War II western black communities developed differently from those in other regions: before 1940 western cities (except Los Angeles) had only small African American populations; western urban centers lacked black ghettos; moreover, San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles had sizeable Asian communities that deflected white racism. The author demonstrates that David Katzman’s racial caste model belies San Francisco’s liberal and progressive image and reveals a “polite racism” that limited social, political, and economic opportunities for African Americans.

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Ironically, the sparsely populated Four Corners subregion was perhaps the best contemporary western example of President Johnson’s 1965 urban vision of diversity in the West. Gómez examines regional community development in the Four Corners, a confluence of four states marked by four towns that anchored the subregion and vied for pre-eminence: Moab, Utah; Flagstaff, Arizona; Durango, Colorado, and Farmington, New Mexico. Gómez addresses Native American longevity through a chain of residence from the Anasazi in 200 B.C. to Navajo tribes that later populated Anasazi areas. Navajos shared the southern half of the Four Corners with Hopis and Apaches and the northern half with Utes and Pueblos. Euro American Mormons, Texans, Californians, and Midwesterners who settled the Four Corners in the late nineteenth century encountered a landscape peopled with Navajo and Hopi tribes and Hispanics of Mexican and Spanish descent. In the mid-1960s, the four states embarked on two cooperative efforts that forged a lasting regional “ethos”—a federal lobbying coalition that pushed for the Navajo Trail highway across the Navajo Nation and a regional planning effort to capitalize on tourism.

Gómez cites Earl Pomeroy when he argues that western hinterland communities emulated their metropolitan neighbors through economic dependence on eastern industry, struggle to gain social and economic acceptance, and eagerness to exploit resources. Gómez argues that, just as World War II transformed the West from colony of the industrial east into pacesetting region, so did federal subsidies and the resources of the Four Corners fuel western growth and transform the Four Corners into an intraregional colony of its larger neighbors. Gómez cites Bernard DeVoto to argue that extractive demands “plundered” the west. From the 1960s Four Corners cities forged municipal and private partnerships that aggressively courted tourists to Four Corners ski resorts and national parks in order to diversify sagging extractive economies. However, in his 2000 Preface, Gómez cites Hal Rothman to argue that tourism is often a “devil’s bargain” through which cities compromise their cultural integrity to attract tourist dollars.

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Broussard cites Nash when he argues that World War II was a “watershed” that
transformed western race relations. The war pulled African Americans to the San Francisco Bay Area in record numbers in search of jobs, education, and freedom from violence; San Francisco’s black population increased more than six hundred percent between 1940 and 1945. The author cites studies that profile African American wartime migrants to San Francisco. Such migrants mostly came from the South, primarily from Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Louisiana, and Arkansas; they moved to the Bay Area in search of racial and economic equity. Wartime African American migrants differed from San Francisco’s established black population: they had little to lose economically; they had neither friends nor family in the city; they migrated as family units; they were young, ambitious, and almost as well-educated as long-established black San Franciscans; they likely traveled to San Francisco by train or bus, rather than by automobile; their families were larger, and they shared their homes with extended family.

One year after Broussard’s study appeared, historian Quintard Taylor’s investigation of one hundred years of spatial and institutional development in Seattle’s Central District was published. Taylor and Broussard acknowledge each other in their works, and both authors argue that the presence of Asian peoples shaped and complicated the African American narrative in their respective cities. Taylor explores the paradox of Seattle, which, like Broussard’s San Francisco, offered neither overt prejudice nor economic opportunity and mixed condescension with contempt. Taylor argues that the presence of Asian Americans, Seattle’s largest population of color before World War II and since 1970, modified racial identities and expectations of Seattle’s blacks. From 1890 to the 1940s white Seattleites focused their racial fears on Asians and Native Americans rather than on the small African American population. Seattle Asians and blacks demonstrated “competition and cooperation among various peoples of color” as they jointly pressed for racial equality but competed for jobs and housing. Taylor reconceptualizes northern ghetto formation models by arguing that his study of Seattle agrees with previous studies of Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Denver in demonstrating that no single city can define the black urban experience.

The author rethinks a black community “ethos” molded, but not defined, by denial and exclusion, and he argues that black Seattleites “sought to retain and transform their rural values and sense of shared culture” through their organizations and institutions. Like Broussard, Taylor affirms the transformative effect of World War II; Seattle’s massive in-migration from rural places in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana precipitated development of ghetto-like conditions, changed the city’s race relations, and increased urban pathologies that revealed the “disintegration of the pre-World War II system of parental and community supervision.” Taylor argues that Seattle’s Central District demonstrates that economic inclusion of all persons demands that a racially liberal platform also incorporate an economic plank.

A decade later, Douglas Flamming’s study of Los Angeles race relations in the fifty years before World War II was published. The author focused on Los Angeles because the sprawling, multiracial city then prefigured the landscapes of twenty-first century cities. In contrast to Taylor’s findings in Seattle, Flamming asserts that most pre-World War I black Angelenos were middle-class migrants from the urban (not rural) South—specifically, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Atlanta, Georgia, as well as Texas cities of San Antonio, Austin, Galveston, Beaumont, and Dallas—a migration, he argues, that “highlights the selective nature” of the black migration West and the importance of “chain-migration links between Los Angeles and several key southern cities.” Early-twentieth-century western blacks believed the South represented tyranny, the West represented freedom, and “the West was in danger of becoming another South.”
histories of black Angelenos reflected southern oppression and generated the civil rights activism that guided their daily actions.

Flamming revises a traditional declensionist tale of a black Los Angeles “golden age” with a complex account that echoes Broussard and Taylor, in which Los Angeles black migrants found ambiguous conditions in a city that was freer than southern and most northern cities, but was, nonetheless, tightly constrained by the city’s dominant white population. Educated black Angelenos of the middle class were often underemployed in menial, insecure jobs; they represented a “blue-collar bourgeoisie, earning working-class wages but holding middle-class aspirations.”

Like Broussard and Taylor, Flamming engages other racial and ethnic groups in his study. He observes that white domination over non-white Angelenos—World War II internment of Japanese Americans, Great Depression repatriation of ethnic Mexicans, and wartime “zoot suit” riots against Mexicans—never prompted the diverse groups of Los Angeles to band together in mutual support except briefly during World War II; indeed, he argues that black Angelenos viewed freedom solely in black and white terms. Flamming writes that black Angelenos built an unrelenting activism through the early decades of the twentieth century, and in concert with northern and western blacks, they inserted it into the New Deal and ended Jim Crow in the West. For the middle-class black Angelenos of whom Flamming writes, civil rights activism was a daily way of life.

Community Formation

The present survey explores themes of community formation in western urban settings principally through the works of Andrew Wiese, Robert O. Self, David G. Gutiérrez, and Ramón A. Gutiérrez. Wiese’s Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (2004) is the first synthesis study of black suburbanization. Self’s historiographical essay, “City Lights: Urban History in the West,” explores how historians have conceptualized the effects of metropolitanism on the western racial landscape. David G. Gutiérrez was the first scholar to move beyond advocacy to tease out contradictory ethnic Mexican views on identity and immigration in his 1995 study, Walls and Mirrors. Ramón A. Gutiérrez’s 2004 essay chronicles U.S. historiographic traditions of writing about Latin American peoples and how those depictions shaped the identities that Latino people assign themselves, particularly regarding the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic.”

Andrew Wiese’s examination of place, space, race, class, and gender in working-, middle-, and upper-class African American suburbs challenges the myth that suburbs are synonymous with white middle- or upper-class communities. Wiese cites groundbreaking studies by Kenneth T. Jackson and Robert Fishman that criticize the racialism that segregated America’s cities and suburbs, but the author argues that “historians have done a better job excluding African Americans from suburbs than even white suburbanites.” Wiese posits a new model of suburbanization that includes all expansion beyond the city limits in order to accommodate millions of black suburbanites and African American working-class families that have long lived on the suburban fringe. Wiese examines the types of homes African American suburbanites desired, the neighborhoods they sought, and what they would have preferred if they had had the freedom to choose. The suburban places they created illustrate their commitment to Johnson’s 1965 ideal of “a place where every man feels safe on his streets and in the house of his friends.”

Wiese discovers that black suburbs developed in spaces previously claimed by earlier generations of African American community-builders, and the geography of the suburban spaces reveals a continuous pattern of black suburbanization from the late nineteenth century. Black suburbs that developed after 1960 vary in socioeconomic and physical details, but they uniformly grew out of previous black settlements, and, in turn, they served as the ground floor for future
black development. The suburban boundaries illuminate racial struggles over time to create a living space. Through much of the twentieth century the intertwined connection between race and class dictated that African Americans could live in only circumscribed areas; the community’s racially defined places, therefore, fostered political and social capital.

Like Wiese, Flamming examines the intertwined themes of race and space. Flamming depicts the poorer and more ethnically diverse Los Angeles Eastside (east of the Main Street divide) in relation to the wealthier and whiter Westside. Central Avenue was situated firmly in the city’s Eastside directly south of downtown. Blacks, Asians, ethnic Mexicans, and ethnic whites shared Eastside space circumscribed by Westside housing restrictions. Flamming describes early twentieth-century Eastside residents as a racially mixed group of “scrappers and strivers,” of whom the blacks “were probably the most affluent.” World War II immigration created desperately crowded conditions, but Flamming describes the area as “neither ghetto nor slum,” and argues that to imagine it as such “misrepresents the essence of the place.” Like Wiese, Flamming looks beyond the physical description of a place to examine its social capital. He writes that Central Avenue derived its vibrancy from its multi-ethnic character, but that black Los Angeles claimed the space of The Avenue through its residences, newspapers, churches, jazz clubs, and businesses.

Robert O. Self examines how metropolitanism shaped western racial landscapes in his essay on western urban historiography. Beginning with its 1925 University of Chicago roots that emphasized concentric economic zones from dense urban centers to the hinterlands, Self identified four major interpretive trends in western urban history: spatial economy of western cities, the urban public, the urban white republic and its legacies, and the metropolitan west. Historians examine spatial economies to seek connections between cities and their hinterlands, cities and extended networks of power, and cities and religion. Historians of the urban public ask who and what belongs to the public and under what terms. Because race defined the urban public before and after World War II, historians of the white republic and its legacies examine western cities born after the late-nineteenth century. Scholars of the metropolitan West move beyond conventional dualisms of center and periphery, ethnic conflict and assimilation, and industrialization and deindustrialization to question, for example, the urban crisis or the feedback loop that compounded urban disadvantage. Self argues that economy, space, and power are the core of urban history, and urban historians must explode false boundaries between varieties of history and investigate all sides of a question.

Self’s own exploration of the effect of post-World War II metropolitanism on black Oakland, not surprisingly, is a good example of the kind of urban history he calls for in his historiographical overview. Self examined tropes of urban decline and white flight to unmask and define Oakland’s postwar racial struggles over race, space, and economy. He cites Kenneth Jackson to highlight federal subsidies of white suburbs and the consumer culture that privatized the public sphere even as Johnson’s Great Society tried to combat racism and poverty. Self reaches deeper to explore political scales (including household, neighborhood, municipal, county, state, regional, and national) that control urban spaces. The author argues that homeowners in Oakland’s East Bay suburbs expected low property taxes and racial segregation and accepted “the conflation of whiteness and property ownership with upward social mobility.” Property, then, became capital for homeowners and municipal governments, as Self demonstrates by his examination of Oakland and the southern Alameda County cities of San Leandro, Milpitas, and Fremont. Oakland’s escalating capital flight, deindustrialization, and black social isolation
contrasted with the simultaneous corporate investment and population growth in the three suburban cities.

Like Self, Josh Sides explores how metropolitanism affected and shaped African American communities. Sides examines the post-World War II African American struggle for space and property in Los Angeles, thus beginning his coverage at the point Flamming would end his 2005 study. Sides explains that the spatial complexity of Los Angeles made its neighborhood desegregation story different from that of most postwar American cities and “was the impetus for a burgeoning civil rights movement that forced black demands into the public consciousness of white Los Angeles.” As the Central Avenue area became more densely populated, working-class and middle-class blacks moved out to the West Jefferson and West Adams districts or to newly integrating working-class suburbs. When working-class and middle-class residents left, Central Avenue became poorer and more socially isolated. The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) built several public housing projects throughout the city before World War II, but after the war proposed HACLA projects in Compton and Santa Monica faced fierce white resistance; thus, the HACLA built public housing in places where African Americans already lived, notably siting four large projects in Watts, creating a “ghetto within the ghetto,” and fomenting conditions that precipitated the 1965 Watts riot.

Scholars who examine community cohesiveness and identity heed Johnson’s call to ensure that “each individual's dignity and self-respect is strengthened.” Such scholars include David G. Gutiérrez, Ramón A. Gutiérrez, Taylor, and Wiese, all of whom focus on ethnic and racial identity, and Matthew C. Whitaker who focuses on political identity and the interplay of racial identities. David Gutiérrez examined differences and commonalities that divided and bound Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants through themes of class, ethnicity, and politics in order to illuminate questions of immigration, identity, and community development. He argued that constant influx of recent Mexican immigrants precipitated heated debates in Mexican American communities between long-term U.S. residents and recent arrivals and forced community members to daily refine their identities in relation to the incomers. He writes that such debates among Mexican American and Mexican immigrant activists complicated adoption of a unified political and cultural identity. However, Gutiérrez argues that such activists formulated and articulated the concerns of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants and mobilized and empowered them to shape their own destinies in the U.S. David Gutiérrez’s delicate probing of ideological debates prefigured a later call by Ramón Gutiérrez to write such histories.

David Gutiérrez also explores the evolution of Mexican American society and political culture in Mexico’s northern provinces following conquest by the U.S. in 1848, but he suggests that even before annexation Mexican Americans exhibited strong political, social, and cultural differences from Mexicans. The author argues that such political and social divisions continued through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continue to influence debate between citizens and aliens. Against a backdrop of increasing hostility toward Mexicans, Mexican Americans of the 1920s and 1930s adopted two perspectives on immigration and the social, economic, and political future of Mexican Americans; these discourses shaped later debates over immigration and ideological and civil rights. He analyzes how World War II and later the Bracero Program shaped civil rights rhetoric and national debates on immigration and complicated divides between and among Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants over their respective senses of ethnicity. The author explores the two threads of thought into the Cold War as the Bracero
Program stimulated legal and illegal immigration from Mexico and influenced positions adopted by Mexican American rights activists from the 1940s into the 1960s. Gutiérrez concludes that a “strident assertion of Chicano ethnicity” among Mexican American youth represented the evolution of Mexican American perception of the debate over Mexican immigration to the U.S.  

In his essay, “Hispanics and Latinos,” Ramón Gutiérrez reveals a tension in U.S. historiography between Hispanophilia, which emphasizes European and Christian traditions and white origins, and Hispanophobia, which focuses on Indian and African ancestry and illegitimacy and cultism. Gutiérrez argues that the two views held by the dominant white culture dictated ways in which long-time residents and recent immigrants identified themselves in private and in public. He further contends that many “aggressively resisted Hispanic as an English-language identity imposed by government from above,” and they preferred to call themselves Latinos.  

Latinos are demographically diverse: geographically from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central, and South America, racially in gradients from white to black, and financially from poor to wealthy. However, the majority of U.S. Latinos are the working poor; they depend on bonding networks to secure their jobs; they lack education and English skills, and they are racialized as nonwhite. Gutiérrez acknowledges scholarly attention to Latino cultural hybridity, and a diasporic past and calls for historians to rethink their perceptions about the “unity of nation-states, the coherence of national languages, the constancy of communities, and the complexity of personal subjectivities.”  

Taylor presented a similar argument to David Gutiérrez in his study of the Seattle black community. Taylor wrote that from before the 1890s contradictions in liberalism and paternalism and biases in race, class, and length of residence have ideologically and spatially divided Seattle’s black Central District community; the same concerns defined the contours of an ideological break in the community in the 1960s. Taylor thus argues the “fallacy of ascribing the worldview of the leadership cadre to the entire community,” and he urges historians to extend their examinations beyond organizational and institutional leaders.  

Wiese, on the other hand, in analyzing African American suburbs eschews emphasis on divisions within the black community and instead chronicles the rise in black middle-class suburbanization and concurrent production of cultural identity. He argues that post-World War II urban restructuring forced suburban blacks into frequent and intimate face-to-face encounters with racism that heightened, rather than diminished, their racial identity. Despite distance, many suburban African Americans maintained their social and cultural ties by commuting to black events and black spaces; other black suburbanites reinforced their connections by searching for houses in communities that were “both middle-class and African American.”  

Like David Gutiérrez and Quintard Taylor, Matthew C. Whitaker argues against assuming a monolithic African American political identity. In his examination of the black struggle for civil and economic rights in twentieth-century Phoenix, Whitaker points to black liberals such as Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton and conservative black spokesmen such as Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, Clarence Thomas, and Alan Keyes to demonstrate the ideological complexity and fracturing of black politics. Middle-class and wealthy blacks left urban neighborhoods for suburbs and took their tax dollars and their political power with them; behind them they left the poor who could not leave. Whitaker argues that class conflict exacerbates problems of the poor, and that black communities often lack cohesion due to “[c]lass divisions, geographical separation, and lingering racial discrimination.”  

Whitaker also points to identity conflicts between African Americans and Mexican
Americans through the social construction of race that placed African Americans at the bottom of a racial hierarchy below Mexican Americans, who had European backgrounds. Whitaker argues that black Americans “did not have escape clauses when it came to the ‘race problem,’” while “Mexican Americans enjoyed a kind of racialized ‘escape hatch.”’ Whitaker makes his case that the interplay between the groups makes the West different. As he writes, “[t]he Chicano population in Phoenix challenged the city’s African Americans in ways that blacks in the East and South did not have to contemplate.” Whitaker’s exploration of the cultural interactions between black, white, and Latino populations in Phoenix presents a more complex and realistic view of western urban life than do studies that view race or ethnicity in a black and white or brown and white duality.

White Stereotypes and Community Responses


Avila questions what it means to American culture that Ebbets Field, Coney Island, and streetcars disappeared at about the same time and how these urban disappearances changed Los Angeles spatially and reflected the city’s post-World War II racial order. Avila argues “that relations between diverse racial and ethnic groups are mutually constitutive,” and his synthetic study of race and ethnicity uses the spatial reorganization of Los Angeles as a case study in white identity formation. White America solidified its social and cultural hegemony over persons of color when Hollywood depicted urban decline and chaos in film noir (literally translated as black film), when Walter O’Malley abandoned Brooklyn’s Ebbets Field and built Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, when Walt Disney’s vision of sanitized order became white America’s archetypal amusement park, and when Los Angelenos traded heterogeneous public streetcars for private automobiles on freeways.

Using metaphors of “chocolate city” and “vanilla suburbs,” Avila chronicles the white cultural retreat from public to private spheres and the concurrent white spatial retreat from cities to suburbs; both retreats signaled white avoidance of the civil rights movement that demanded inclusion of blacks in American public spaces. Avila argues that when their distance did not shield them from “racial uprisings, moral implosions, mass murders, and political assassinations,” whites turned toward political conservatism and Ronald Reagan to help them end New Deal liberalism and attain their dreams of the good life. Increased immigration from Asia and Latin America exacerbated economic extremes, blurred racial lines, and prompted further white flight from Los Angeles. However, Avila argues that the “re-Mexicanization” of Los Angeles represents “an ethnic transformation of the urban landscape on a scale unparalleled in history,” that popular culture reflects that demographic shift, and that Los Angeles may again be a cultural trend-setter.

Like Avila, Deverell argues that white responses to Mexican ethnicity shaped the racial landscape of Los Angeles; he posits that by exposing its mythical, faulty history Los Angeles might build a different future. Deverell explores how ethnic stereotypes guided municipal response to the 1924 Los Angeles bubonic plague outbreak in which nearly forty people died as
health officials quarantined five urban districts where Mexicans lived. White authorities battled the disease by instituting strict quarantine, massive rodent extermination, and wholesale demolition of the affected areas—areas that coincided with Mexican districts. Deverell explores whether authorities declared structures “public nuisances” so they could demolish Mexican properties, avoid compensating Mexican owners, and remake the ethnic landscape of the city. White newspapers avoided publicizing the “slight epidemic” that could tarnish the city’s public image, while the Spanish language newspaper scolded “the hermetic silence in which authorities have locked themselves.” The city’s actions reshaped the Los Angeles racial landscape, and Deverell argues that municipal response to the plague reflected white stereotypes that linked ethnicity to disease.

The historiography demonstrates that racial prejudices and stereotypes resulted in a racial hierarchy and structural segregation of nonwhite groups in the urban West; whites reflected these prejudices in popular cultural settings. Broussard and Flamming demonstrate that whites showed greater hostility towards Asians than towards blacks before World War II, but their greater postwar numbers ensured that African Americans received the brunt of white racism and discrimination. Broussard, Taylor, and Flamming reveal the varied southern backgrounds of World War II black migrants to western cities. David Gutiérrez, Ramón Gutiérrez, Quintard Taylor, and Matthew C. Whitaker argue the complexity of ethnic and racial identities. Avila and Deverell illustrate how the urban racial landscape reflects white stereotypes and community responses to those stereotypes.

The historiography reveals that multiple racial and ethnic groups complicate western urban narratives of migration, community formation, and the way communities respond to stereotypes, because members of various groups may or may not place racial or ethnic identity above their own social, economic, or political aspirations. The historiography on this topic also points to future studies that may complicate the racial discourse by adding layers of knowledge that may inform future racial relations. Taylor calls for more “bottom up” studies that go beyond organizational and institutional racial leaders. Ramón A. Gutiérrez urges historians to reconceptualize communities of common language or place of origin and instead to tease out differences. Robert O. Self calls for historians to synthesize western urban questions and not to slice historical query into narrow categories. Andrew Wiese calls for a new model of suburban study that includes all expansion beyond city limits. Eric Avila exhorts historians to study urban racial and ethnic groups as a collective whole. William Deverell urges historians to identify, correct, and expose false histories.

The West has always been the place where different peoples converge; the richness of that diversity makes the West unique and shapes the lives of those who inhabit the region. I suggest more synthetic histories such as those by Avila and Wiese that highlight cultural themes that connect and divide racial and ethnic groups over time. Likewise, I advocate for more studies on the model of David Gutiérrez and Ramón Gutiérrez that articulate the ideological and cultural debates that divide and connect individuals within groups. I also propose more local, in-depth studies of how multiple groups shared and contested the space of the city. Whitaker provides a model for a study of white, black, and Latino interaction; however, most western places are home to multiple groups, and studies should offer voice to all peoples that populate a place. If we expand our knowledge by weaving together complex threads of migration, community formation, and stereotypes and community responses with multiple textures of race and ethnicity, we will create intricate tapestries that will more accurately reflect the histories of the multicultural and
multiracial western urban communities that populate the West. By following multiple threads of inquiry and knitting the stories together we may illuminate a pattern of knowledge that can enlighten the “collections of communities” that formed Johnson’s urban vision and create American cities where, indeed, “every member has a right to belong.”

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14 Ibid., 49.
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