

Learning from the American Ghetto

A Comparative Analysis of African American Inner Cities

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Introduction

The American urban “ghetto” has been widely studied by social scientists for decades and has been characterized as a place of concentrated poverty, high unemployment, welfare dependence, isolation from the remainder of urban society, and a place of pathological social conditions.¹ Native American reservations have received comparatively less attention from social scientists, but are sometimes compared to the urban ghetto. The comparison between the ghetto and Native American reservations is apparent even in popular discourse, such as when the Navajo Nation is depicted in African American rapper Akon’s “Ghetto” music video. The song and video narrate a class-based, interracial solidarity between those who feel helpless and struggle to live within the social constructs of the ghetto. How accurate is the comparison between Native American reservations and African American inner cities? To investigate the similarities and differences between Native American reservations and African American ghettos, this paper first compares their conditions, characteristics, structures, and historical context. Additionally, this paper examines tribal economic development strategies in order to determine whether social conditions stem from a lack of economic development and opportunity, or instead are the result of structural isolation and detachment from mainstream society and economic life.

Starting Point: Loic Wacquant’s Distinction Between Ghetto and Reservation

Wacquant (1997) addresses the American conception of the black poor and the ethno-racial dominations that have formed and distorted the understanding of the ongoing (re)articulation of color, class, and place in the American metropolis. He describes three deep-seated, pernicious premises that have dominated debate on racial division and urban poverty in the United States and which form the American conception of the ghetto. First is the tendency to simply designate the ghetto as an urban area of widespread and intense poverty.

Second is the idea that the ghetto is a disorganized social formation that can be analyzed in terms of its lacks and deficiencies. Third is the tendency to exoticize the ghetto and its residents, highlighting only the extreme and unusual aspects of ghetto life. These premises are fallacies and Wacquant (1997) argues, “The fact that ghettos have historically been places of endemic and often-acute material misery does not mean that a ghetto has to be poor, nor that it has to be uniformly deprived” (p. 343).

Wacquant stresses the role of racial isolation, not poverty, in defining a ghetto, and claims that not all low-income areas are ghettos. He refers to Native American reservations as an example of such a low-income area. While this seems to reflect a clear opinion that reservations are not ghettos, in a footnote he states: “whether Native American reservations qualify as a subtype of ghetto or are best understood as a distinct mechanism of ethno-racial subordination would require an extensive discussion that is not possible here” (p. 344). This paper aims to address Wacquant’s question and to explain the historic and contemporary structures of African American inner cities and Native American reservations, which have led to their conflation.

Definitions: Social Exclusion, The Ghetto, and Native American Reservations

Madanipour (2007) writes that social exclusion should be understood in its political, economic, and cultural dimensions. From a political standpoint, the denial of participation in decision-making and lack of political representation can alienate individuals and social groups. Culturally, exclusion from common channels, cultural communication, and integration can similarly alienate and marginalize minorities whose language, race, religion, and lifestyle are different from those of the larger society. Economically, exclusion from employment leads to a lack of opportunity for production and consumption, and undermines the ability of individuals and households to actively participate in social processes. The combination of these forms of disenfranchisement can create an acute form of social exclusion, which keeps the excluded at the margins of society and can often be seen through

¹ Although the term “ghetto” carries pejorative implications, I use the term as it is commonly used in social science literature.

clear spatial manifestations in deprived inner cities and peripheral areas (Madanipour 2007, 161). The concept of social exclusion as understood in this framework is important because it is one of the underlying factors in the formation of ghettos.

Massey and Denton (1993) define the ghetto only in terms of a neighborhood's racial make-up, and not by class or income. They described the ghetto as a set of neighborhoods that are exclusively inhabited by members of one group, where virtually all members of the group live involuntarily, yielding an extreme level of social isolation (Massey and Denton 1993, 10, 19). For African Americans, the high degree of residential segregation imposed on them ensures their social and economic isolation from the rest of American society (Massey and Denton 1993, 160). Wacquant would agree with Massey and Denton in that a ghetto is not a function of income, but would add that ghettos have become poor as a result of social and historical factors. "It is because they were and are ghettos that joblessness and misery are usually acute and persistent in them – not the other way around" (Wacquant 1997, 343). Today, the ghetto is a part of modern American society; it was created by whites to isolate and control the growing urban black population, and it is now maintained by a set of institutions, attitudes, and practices that are deeply embedded in the structure of American life (Massey and

Denton 1993, 217). I will focus on the concept of ghettos in the African American-specific case here, though I do acknowledge that there are many other ethnically diverse ghettos not only in the United States, but in international contexts as well.

Similarly, reservations have been used as a mechanism to isolate and control the Native American population. Native American reservations are areas of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States as permanent tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe (U.S. Department of the Interior n.d.). There are currently 56.2 million acres of land held in trust by the United States, divided into approximately 326 reservations. The largest reservation is the 16 million-acre Navajo Nation Reservation encompassing parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah; the smallest is a 1.32 acre parcel in California (U.S. Department of the Interior n.d.). Currently, there are 565 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Not all tribes have reservations, but some have multiple.

Reservations share many of the same social

characteristics as urban black ghettos: they are homogeneous and segregated from other racial groups, isolated, and excluded. They differ in that they are commonly rural, lie within designated government boundaries, and are self-governed by tribes. In order to create a productive comparison that allows aspects of each to emerge more clearly, this paper will interrogate their historical contexts before moving on to compare the current structures and policies that perpetuate spatial segregation in urban and rural America.

African American Inner Cities and Native American Reservations: A Comparison of Historical Context

A comprehensive understanding of the United States and its metropolitan regions must account for race or ethnicity, and with the exception of Native Americans, all other U.S. citizens trace their ancestry to other countries, cultures, languages, and "racial" groups (Goldsmith and Blakely 2010, 25). Consistent with this history, the publicly promoted conception of the United States typically entails an ideology of newness, inclusion, and diversity, popularized as a 'melting pot' in the late nineteenth to mid-

twentieth centuries.

While the popularity of the melting pot metaphor has seen decline over the past 40 years, with the rise of multiculturalism, the underlying belief in an American

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exceptionalism based on the assimilation of immigrants to form a uniform "American" culture remains pervasive. Historical narratives describe an America in which all citizens can rise from rags to riches if they just work hard enough. This belief is exemplified by Horatio Alger-type stories, written during the rise of urban America, of poor immigrant boys from American inner cities who were able to gain social and economic success via hard work. The ugly underbelly of these hopeful narratives is that those Americans who do not escape poverty, whether from the urban ghetto or the rural reservation, are individually blamed for not succeeding against the powerful structural forces that have been developed to maintain the economic power of the elite.

In other words, the notion of American exceptionalism has been promoted as meritocracy, where opportunities were equal for all and economic mobility was based on one's ability and achievement, and even a recent immigrant or someone from the urban ghetto has the opportunity succeed. This belief has been used as a powerful justification for the ongoing structures that maintain race and class hegemony via spatial practice and

economic policies. In the twentieth and twenty-first century United States, these understandings of opportunity, labor, race, and class have been used to explain – and at times justify – the structural oppression of African Americans in the inner city and Native Americans on reservations. The poverty and lack of economic mobility of both groups, maintained by economic policy and spatial separation, have been wrongfully explained in popular culture as a result of race rather than a result of the structural issues they stem from.

Racial exclusion and residential segregation have long been common elements in U.S. metropolitan areas. American urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was fueled by massive European immigration, and urban spaces became notorious for their clear ethnic geographical boundaries. This gave rise to portions of the urban landscape that even today are known as ‘Little Italy,’ and ‘Chinatown,’ which have distinctive qualities representative of the identities of its inhabitants (Abrahamson 2006). African American urbanization also grew during this time period, mostly after the conclusion of the Civil War, which allowed newly-freed slaves to migrate to both southern and northern cities (The Great Migration), away from the rural plantations where they had been a captive labor force.

In U.S. cities, racially homogeneous neighborhoods have become common; for African Americans, however, these are socially and economically enforced conditions, while the ethnic enclaves which Abrahamson discusses often exist by choice. “In fact, African Americans are kept to restricted ghettos simply because white people, via numerous mechanisms of prejudice and privilege, do not allow blacks to live or live comfortably in white neighborhoods” (Goldsmith 2002, 132). These mechanisms have ranged from individual practices of racism and prejudice to structural policies, such as redlining conducted by lending institutions. Practices such as these greatly limit African Americans’ opportunity to live or afford to live in more integrated neighborhoods.

At the culmination of World War II these factors began to shape the areas where African Americans were and were not allowed to live and/or purchase property. Additionally, capital investments in housing, highways, shopping centers, and schools fueled the suburbanization of white middle-class households, creating a huge space of racialized poverty in the inner city. The construction of public housing (or lack of it) created separate, publicly subsidized, racialized spaces for whites and blacks (Zukin 1998, 515). For the majority of African Americans, living in highly segregated conditions is a fact of life; no other group in U.S. history has been so persistently segregated via economic and social structures except for Native Americans, who were segregated formally, by law, on reservations (Goldsmith 2002, 132).

Sturtevant (1976) describes how most portions of the American population decided to leave their native country, implying some dissatisfaction and thus readiness to adjust to a new environment, while others are here because they were violently forced into slavery and had no choice but to adjust and assimilate. However, for Native Americans this is not the case: they are members of societies that remained on their native lands, where they were invaded and overwhelmed by foreigners (Sturtevant 1976, 22). Popular culture in the United States typically depicts Native populations as conquered, giving rise to a conception of Native Americans as having lost their sovereignty. However, the reality is that few tribes in the U.S. were conquered militarily, and most entered into treaties with the United States Government (Kalt and Singer 2004, 8). These treaties were not always fair or respected, but it is this basic information that produces a vast difference between the historical experience of Native Americans compared to other racial groups that experience racism and exclusion.

Treaties between the United States and tribes were based on a nation-to-nation legal relationship in which the treaties preserved each tribe’s sovereignty and made other promises in exchange for the vast majority of land in the United States. These treaties promised to respect tribes’ rights and recognized their governance over reserved land (Kalt and Singer 2004, 8). No other minority group in the United States can claim the same sovereign legal and political status as federally recognized Native American tribes (Snipp 1986, 145). However, even with the recognition of tribal sovereignty, federal policy toward Native Americans has been assimilationist. Carter (2000) describes the nature of federal policy:

At the apex of United States trans-continental expansion, with most Indian lands overrun, the federal policy of assimilation actively sought to cleanse Indians of tribal traditions, including customary governing and justice systems. The success of this policy is demonstrated by the fact that many tribal governments had ceased to function in any effective way by the end of the nineteenth century. (p. 8)

Despite these assimilation efforts – such as forcible removal from ancestral homes, generations of children placed in boarding schools, and the undermining of traditional culture, Native American tribes endured and many still retain their distinct cultures (Phillips 1996, 240).

Government policy toward Native Americans has been one of prejudicial spatial practice, with acts such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed by President Andrew Jackson. In 1851, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Appropriations Act, setting in motion an official federal policy that allowed for the creation of reservations and the placement of Native Americans on

them. Immigration and urban population growth within non-Native America led to government policy aimed at weakening tribal power by opening Indian Territory. The Dawes Act (Indian Allotment Act) of 1887 is commonly agreed upon as being one of the most devastating pieces of legislation for Native American reservations. The Dawes Act allotted portions of land to eligible Native Americans, imposing private property values and deeming the remaining portions of reservation land as surplus, open for non-Native settlers to purchase. "By 1934, when the Federal government ended allotment (through the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act), allotment had cost Native Americans almost 90 million acres, two-thirds of the land they owned fifty years earlier" (Bobroff 2001, 1561). Yet, as a result of the Indian Reorganization Act that ended allotment, tribes re-established congressional support of tribal sovereignty and tribal self-government.

Tribal sovereignty refers to the inherent, reserved, and aboriginal right to self-govern without limitations by federal or state governments. While the Indian Reorganization Act strengthened tribal government powers, it both enabled and required tribes to adopt constitutions and bylaws for their governments. Tribal governments have nearly the same powers as the federal and state governments to regulate their internal affairs, with only a few exceptions; these powers include, but are not limited to, the power to form a government, control their enrollment, regulate their property, maintain law and order, and regulate commerce. While the Reorganization Act has generally served many tribes well, it by no means fully satisfies the ideal of self-determined tribal government. Instead, it is criticized for imposing the foreign notion of written constitution into tribal tradition (Carter 2000, 8-9). Additionally, many tribes have not had the financial means to effectively exercise their sovereignty of government, although the right to self-government and self-determination forms the nucleus of Federal Indian Policy to this day. The lack of funding and ongoing authority of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has prevented major progress towards self-sufficiency; and while the Indian Reorganization Act marked the beginning of a period of tribal self-control, it came in exchange for minimal economic support from the federal government (Gerdes et al. 1998, 20).

Funding has not only been an issue at the federal level, but also from financial institutions. An underlying issue on reservations is the inability to access loans and borrow against the value of land. The unique structure of reservations related to tribal land status, sovereignty, and the requirements to gain title from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has meant an absence of private housing development and private financial lending institutions on reservations (Manchester 2001, 317). Historically, banks would not lend to prospective borrowers on reservations

because the land is held in trust by the federal government, making it impossible to repossess if the borrowers were to default (McKee 2004). According to a U.S. General Accounting Office report, during the 5-year period from 1992-1996, lenders made only 91 conventional home purchase loans to Native Americans on trust lands (Manchester 2001, 317). The resulting housing stock has been largely federally funded, or consists of mobile homes that can be repossessed. In the 1990's, 80 percent of new housing units built on reservations were constructed under various Housing and Urban Development programs (Pickering 2004, 113). Lending practices have had significant impact on reservations, resulting in housing shortages to weak business development. This has also prohibited reservations from being able to urbanize as other areas across the United States have. While other areas have been able to utilize the financial system to facilitate improvements and development, reservations have not.

This overview of the historical differences between the development of the African American ghettos and Native American reservations exposes the need to understand the structural context of Native American reservations, and, in particular, to investigate whether the spatial segregation of reservations also produces economic segregation and oppression. The following section describes the current demographics of Indian Country, and examines tribal economic development strategies to determine if they have had any influence in reversing continued social and economic segregation.

Reservations: Social and Economic Conditions

The most obvious comparison between Native American reservations and urban ghettos lies not only in their spatial segregation, but also in the confluence of poverty and exclusion from mainstream society. Logan and Molotch (2007) describe the cause of these patterns:

These patterns of discrimination and deprivation are obviously not the result of recent trends like suburbanization or high-tech displacement. These patterns represent a historically consistent, sequentially reinforcing practice of repression. The only people lower than blacks in their contemporary economic standing are the Native Americans (Sowell 1981), also not "immigrants" but subjected as despised "savages," to the harshest repression (indeed, genocide). Today they live in residential areas that, whether as remote reservations or urban slums, have high levels of dependence on outside bureaucracies and a weak "business tradition." This situation, like that of blacks, implies something about the difference between immigration and subjugation, not arrival times. (p. 131)

Therefore, the continued poor economic standing of both Native Americans and African Americans can be

understood as a result of their historic and continued repression, rather than by recent spatial or industry trends or, for African Americans, by arrival time to this country.

The unique historic status of Native American tribes in law and public policy has characterized them as “captive nations,” referring to tribal communities as “domestic dependent nations” (as cited in Snipp 1986, 146). The continued poverty coupled with spatial segregation suggests that despite the divergent historical experiences of Native American reservations and urban ghettos, their contemporary economic and political contexts are more similar than they are different. For Native Americans, like African Americans in the inner city, their continued economic and political oppression is also intimately connected to federal and state policy. Matthew Snipp (1986) describes the consequences of federal policy on Native Americans:

The status of captive nation paved the way for internal colonization by making formerly self-sustaining Indian tribes dependent upon federal authorities. As a matter of stated policy, for good and bad reasons, American Indians were made “wards” of the State with federal authorities, primarily the BIA, assuming extensive oversight responsibilities for the management of remaining Indian lands. Since becoming federal wards, Indians have continued to rely heavily on activities such as hunting, fishing and subsistence agriculture for their subsistence. (p. 154)

Federal policy towards Native Americans dramatically transformed the way of life of formally self-sustaining tribes, and created a strong reliance and attachment to reservations.

The Native American attachment to reservation life has been viewed as a strong impediment to assimilation and absorption into the general population (Kelly 1957, 71). In spite of this, federal assistance programs were developed to encourage Native Americans to relocate to urban, industrial cities (Kelly 1957). The Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Urban Indian Relocation Program, begun in 1952, moved Native Americans from reservations to cities across the country including Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration n.d.). The program relocated at least 30,000 Native Americans in the 1950’s and almost three times that during the 1960’s and 1970’s (Burt 1986, 85). An impetus for the relocation program was the tens of thousands of Native Americans who moved to cities during WWII for jobs in the booming

war industries.

However, the relocation program had motives beyond the economic well being of Native Americans. The BIA tried to discourage Native Americans from returning to their homes, and at times refused to even give out names and addresses of other Native Americans in the vicinity. It believed that association would encourage

cultural contacts and identification rather than assimilation (as cited in Burt 1986, 91). Many of those who were relocated could not adjust to urban life or became homesick for their families and

communities, and ultimately returned home. City life was vastly different from what most Native Americans were accustomed to, and cultural dislocation became one of the most significant issues with relocation programs.

Despite federal programs aimed at improving economic conditions on reservations, historically, tribal communities have been economically devastated and isolated as a result of their relations with the United States. This has been compounded with the historic lack of access to loans for homes and businesses. Additionally, housing shortages have emerged due to that lack of financial capital and with a significant share of the housing stock dependent on federal housing programs. These shortages have had the potential of forcing middle income Native Americans off reservations for housing, when they exceed the income limit to qualify for federal housing programs. Housing shortages have only further impacted the social and economic conditions on reservations; they have the potential to force middle incomes to seek housing elsewhere. This prohibits those individuals from contributing to their communities and further isolates lower income groups.

Demographically, Native Americans have fallen drastically below the national average in nearly every indicator of socioeconomic status. Cornell et al. (1998) provides research on the economic conditions of Native Americans prior to the emergence of gaming:

The available evidence on pre-gaming economic conditions in Indian Country provides a long list of alarming comparisons between tribal economic and social conditions and U. S. national averages: Indian per capita income is about 40% of the national average, the Indian poverty rate is almost four times the national average, the incidence of Indian homes lacking complete plumbing is over 14 times the national average, alcoholism death rates are more than five times the national average for Indian adults and more than 17 times the national average for Indian youths, and so on. (p. iii)

“While other areas have been able to utilize the financial system to facilitate improvements and development, reservations have not.”

These figures make clear the equity divide between Native Americans and the rest of the U.S. population, and explain pressures for economic development in Indian Country.

Economic development has become the top priority for nearly all tribes, and over the past two decades, gaming has emerged as the primary tool. The popularity of gaming derives from it being one of the few economic development strategies that utilize a tribe's distinct sovereignty. For tribes that are often located in depressed rural areas with few other options, it offers the opportunity to draw in outside revenue. However, the spatial isolation of reservations makes it impractical for all tribes to successfully challenge structural economic inequality via gaming enterprises. "For some tribes, gaming has provided the only successful means to obtain the funds to be able to exercise their inherent powers of self-government" (Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan n.d.). Tribes are able to utilize gaming revenue like a local or state government would use taxes: to provide for the general welfare of their citizens. Tribes without strong economic bases struggle and are unable to fund the same kind of governmental services and programs that tribes with successful gaming operations have. As of 2009, 237 of the 565 federally recognized tribes in 28 states were involved in gaming to create jobs, fund essential government services and rebuild their communities (National Indian Gaming Association).

Data as of 2000 revealed that per capita income of reservations with gaming only marginally benefited over those without, and while per capita incomes on gaming reservations increased at a greater rate of change over a 10 year period than both non-gaming reservations and the total U.S. population, the equity gap remains large. The available data on Native Americans make apparent that their social and economic characteristics fall dramatically below the total U.S. population for all races. Taylor and Kalt (2005) provide an exhaustive comparison of change in social and economic indicators between 1990 and 2000 of gaming and non-gaming Native American areas, for exemplary purposes, I will focus on the per capita income:

- Native American areas (including statistical areas) had a per capita income of \$7,472 in non-gaming areas and \$9,771 in gaming areas.
- Native American areas outside of Oklahoma Tribal Statistical Areas had a per capita income of \$7,365 in non-gaming areas and \$8,466 in gaming areas.²
- Native American reservations other than the Navajo Nation reservation had a per capita income of \$8,816

² Oklahoma Tribal Statistical Areas (OTSA) were omitted because they include nearly the entire state of Oklahoma (and some urban areas). OTSA's reflect the conditions in the broader state economy to a degree not typically experienced on reservations. By excluding OTSA's it focuses attention on reservation conditions per se (Taylor & Kalt 2005, 10).

on non-gaming reservations and only \$8,466 on gaming reservations.³

- The total U.S. population of all races had a per capita income of \$21,587.
- Black or African Americans had a per capita income of \$14,437 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

These statistics focus solely on real per capita income, but the trend remains throughout the social and economic indicators Taylor and Kalt present. The data not only makes apparent the equity divide between Native Americans on reservations and the rest of the U.S. population, but also demonstrate that the benefits of gaming have been minimal, especially once the Navajo Nation reservation has been omitted. While there is no doubt that select tribes have attained economic prosperity as a result of gaming, those tribes that have succeeded tend to benefit from their geographic location and their proximity to urban areas or a larger population base. Against popular conception, data has yet to show that gaming has made significant improvements overall in bridging the equality gap between Native Americans on reservations and the total U.S. population. Future per capita income data for gaming reservations is expected to continue increasing, however, gaming is not a feasible option for all tribes and many Native Americans have not and will not participate in this prosperity. In addition to Taylor and Kalt's study, I have provided African American per capita income during this same period to allow for comparison. This statistic reveals the equity divide between African Americans and the total U.S. population, and while urban ghettos have not been discretely separated as reservations have, these statistics affirm Logan & Molotch's description of Native Americans' contemporary economic standing in relation to African Americans.

Gaming is only one facet of economic life on Native American reservations, and while it offers hope for improving and funding government operations and providing for the general welfare of tribal citizens, I mention it only to illustrate that there is underlying spatial and economic barriers. These barriers correlate the economic conditions of Native Americans on reservations with African Americans living in inner city ghettos. To explain the economic standing of Native Americans, it must be acknowledged that "the fact that tribal lands are primarily located in remote rural regions suggests that the relatively lower per capita incomes in tribal areas may be

³ The Navajo Nation reservation was omitted because it did not have gaming in the 1990's, and it is twelve times the size of the next largest reservation and has nearly three times the combined population of all other reservations that did not have gaming by decade's end; as a result, comparisons between gaming reservations and all non-gaming reservations tend to be dominated by the conditions of the Navajo Nation (Taylor & Kalt 2005, x).

largely a function of factors, such as the lack of access to markets, an inadequate infrastructure, and a lower cost of living” (Leichenko 2003, 365). However, reservations’ rural locations fail to fully explain the lack of economic opportunity for Native Americans on reservations. In fact, when one looks at the economic promise and failures of economic development on reservations via gaming, it becomes clear that – like the Federal Housing Administration’s inner city redlining practices and public housing segregation during the mid-twentieth century – federal policies and structures have perpetuated economic discrimination and oppression for Native American reservations as well.

Conclusion

A comparison between Native American and African American relation to place can be made by evaluating government programs that have affected each. First is the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Urban Indian Relocation Program that forcibly relocated large numbers of Native Americans to industrial cities. As a result, large populations of Native Americans still reside in these urban areas, however, many of those who were relocated ended up returning to reservations after some time. Their return, in part, had to do with the low population of Native people in cities, which did not create and support the types of relationships and networking that Native Americans were accustomed to on reservations.

The second is the Section 8 Housing Voucher Program provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that attempted to desegregate the urban ghetto. The program combated criticisms that the federal government had confined minority groups to the ghetto and failed to develop housing programs outside of the urban core (Luttrell 1970). The housing voucher program, initiated in 1974, provided rent subsidies that could be used anywhere in the service area—city or suburb—and in non-segregated neighborhoods. However, according to Leif and Goering (1987) and Hays (1985), Section 8 beneficiaries have contributed little towards integrated housing and desegregation because most holders tend to relocate near their original homes (as cited in Chandler 1992, 526). The choice for Section 8 recipients to reside near their original homes may draw some parallels with what motivated Indian Relocation Program relocatees to return to their reservations. The communities, linkages, and networks established by those in the inner city may give people a reason to stay there, despite the fact that housing vouchers would allow them to leave segregated neighborhoods. These attachments to place are similar to those expressed by researchers as a hindrance to Native American assimilation and reasons for which relocatees were drawn back to reservations despite having the opportunity to live in industrial cities.

Aside from personal connection to place, both African Americans and Native Americans have been bound to place as a result of a set of discriminatory institutions, attitudes, and practices. For African Americans, redlining of neighborhoods is just one of many practices that have historically bound where they could or could not live; this is reminiscent of boundaries created under federal policy for Native Americans. While on one hand reservations were meant to protect Native Americans, on the other they were meant to isolate Native Americans from the wider population. Given Massey and Denton’s definition of the ghetto as a set of neighborhoods that are exclusively inhabited by members of one group and where virtually all members of the group live involuntarily, the historical context of reservations’ formation and the continued reliance upon them suggests that reservations do fall under this characterization. For some tribes, the land that they retain is their ancestral homeland, but others were forced onto marginal and unproductive lands. The exclusion prevalent in both the urban ghetto and on reservations creates an acute form of social segregation that has kept these racial groups at the margins of society in deprived inner cities and peripheral areas.

Social exclusion and economic isolation lay the foundation for the formation of ghettos. Ghettos should not be viewed simply as places of poverty; rather, their social and economic conditions should be understood as a result of historical causation and racial segregation. It is because they are ghettos that these conditions persist. The same can be said for reservations, where Native Americans suffer socially and economically as a result of their imposed structure. Neither Native Americans nor African Americans are or have been traditional immigrants to this country, and their treatment stems from a historical attitude of subordination. Federal policies and structures have perpetuated discrimination and oppression for African Americans in inner cities and Native Americans on reservations. Their current social and economic characteristics appear and can be described as a similar, and their formations have been based on the same institutions, attitudes, and acts of ethno-racial domination, but Native American tribal sovereignty and reservation land held in federal trust creates circumstances unique to Native Americans.

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