NYU Furman Center

Advancing research and debate on housing, neighborhoods, and urban policy

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The Dream Revisited: Explaining Ferguson Through Race and Place

NYU Furman Center's series, The Dream Revisited, *marks one year as a forum for "slow debate" among leading scholars and practitioners on economic and racial segregation; Latest discussion explores how racial and economic segregation set the stage for the events in Ferguson, Missouri*

New York, NY—One year ago the NYU Furman Center launched *The Dream Revisited*, a "slow debate" among leading scholars and practitioners on economic and racial segregation. Its latest discussion, published today, explores how metropolitan development patterns shaped by race and class set the stage for the events in Ferguson, Missouri.

In its first year, *The Dream Revisited* series published 11 discussions exploring economic and racial segregation issues, including over 40 essays by leading scholars and practitioners. Topics ranged from gentrification to housing policy reform and the role of implicit racial bias in driving segregation patterns. Contributors included practitioners, advocates, and academics in such diverse fields as law, economics, sociology, political science and urban planning.

"The events in past year have dramatically highlighted the need for frank, policy-relevant discussions about race, class and segregated living patterns," said **Ingrid Gould Ellen**, faculty director of the NYU Furman Center and co-editor of *The Dream Revisited*.

The most recent discussion on *The Dream Revisited*—titled, Explaining Ferguson Through Race and Place—explores how metropolitan development patterns shaped by race and class set the stage for the events in Ferguson, Missouri.

"The simple dichotomy of poor black cities and affluent white suburbs no longer captures the reality of segregation in metropolitan areas in the United States," said Ellen. "Metropolitan areas are now home to an increasingly multi-ethnic population as well as a significant minority middle class. Despite the diversification of our population, however, residential segregation based on race and on income continues to characterize both our schools and our living environments."

The opening essay suggests that the events in Ferguson are not simply a result of severed race relations and person-to-person discrimination. Co-authors **John Mollenkopf**, professor at CUNY Graduate Center and director of its Center for Urban Research, and **Todd Swanstrom**, professor at the University of

Missouri-St. Louis, write, “The underpinnings of racial injustices today are metropolitan development patterns rooted in a tangled complex of private practices and public policies.”

Christopher M. Tinson, assistant professor of African American Studies at Hampshire College, argues that Mollenkopf and Swanstrom are wrong to see race as only a contributing factor to the tensions in Ferguson, instead of the driving force behind the protests.

Tinson writes, “Anti-Black policymaking has been the rule in American society, not an accidental or ‘old-fashioned’ feature, but one that is continually reshaped and which guarantees certain material outcomes from a devaluation of difference.”

The second response explores what the election of President Obama meant for race relations and disparities within racial groups. **Jennifer Hochschild**, professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard University, writes, “The protests in Ferguson, New York, and elsewhere have evinced a great deal of racial solidarity and not much evidence of a multi-racial poor and working class coalition.”

Hochschild suggests that solutions to “The Ferguson Problem” may come from “robust cities interacting with depressed suburbs” rather than from the federal government.

The final contributor, **Jeff Smith**, assistant professor at the New School for Public Engagement and former Missouri state senator from St. Louis, proposes five policy responses to foster more equitable development in the region. He writes, “None of these proposed solutions is a panacea. But taken together, they have a real chance to begin to heal a region whose wounds are centuries in the making.”

The Dream Revisited will continue in the coming year, with a new discussion published each month. Learn about new discussions on *The Dream Revisited* by joining the NYU Furman Center’s mailing list.

“As we extend this series, we hope that the diversity of perspectives offered by the contributors to *The Dream Revisited* continue to provide both broad normative analyses as well as concrete policy suggestions,” said Ellen.

The Dream Revisited is a project of the NYU Furman Center, presented as part of its Integration Research Initiative, and is funded by the Open Society Foundations.

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Link: http://furmancenter.org/research/iri/home

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About the NYU Furman Center

The NYU Furman Center advances research and debate on housing, neighborhoods, and urban policy. Established in 1995, it is a joint center of the New York University School of Law and the Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. Learn more at http://www.furmancenter.org.