

(Infra)Structural Racism

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ABSTRACT

Sociologists have longed been concerned with the mechanisms that generate, sustain, and exacerbate racial residential segregation. Yet sociologists have not adequately theorized the role of the built environment, including road network connectivity and physical barriers, as a mechanism of segregation. In this paper, I argue that racism, discriminatory practices, institutional bias, and systematic exclusion can take lasting physical form in the built environment, and such practices have enduring power in part because they take physical form – rather than requiring shared understandings among actors or the legal enforcement of covenants, racism and inequality can become embedded in the urban infrastructure. Their consequences can persist for generations, resulting in longstanding inequalities and enduring patterns of racial residential segregation. This paper presents what I call (infra)structural racism as an additional mechanism of segregation and offers a new way to understand the patterns, processes, and consequences of segregation in historical and contemporary contexts.

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