The Enduring Struggle for Social Justice and the City

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Myriad questions related to social justice have shaped urban geographic scholarship, among which two things remain clear: geographers maintain fidelity to the idea that the discipline should keep working to understand unjust processes within urban life and simultaneously seek solutions to make cities more just. Beyond this, few geographers today would come to the same set of defining characteristics of what a just city would look like, or agree on the right questions to ask toward its realization. What the concept of social justice lacks in terms of facilitating intellectual and political consensus, it makes up for in centering heterodox efforts at generating relevant theory and practice that can change the social circumstances of people living in cities, regardless of how these terms are defined.

It is out of these enduring commitments, demands, and possibilities that the theme of this special issue emerged: Social Justice and the City. This special collection offers insights into the state of the discipline on questions of social justice and urban life. Although using social justice and the city as our starting point might signal inspiration from Harvey's (1973) book of the same name, the task of examining the emergence of this concept has revealed the deep influence of grassroots urban uprisings of the late 1960s and earlier and contemporary meditations on our urban worlds (Jacobs 1961, 1969; Lefebvre [1974] 1991; Massey and Catalan 1978) as well as its enduring significance built on by many others for years to come. Laws (1994) described how geographers came to locate social justice struggles in the city through research that examined the ways in which material conditions contributed to poverty and racial and gender inequity, as well as how emergent social movements organized to reshape urban spaces across diverse engagements including the U.S. civil rights movement, antiwar protests, feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) activism, the American Indian Movement, and (dis)ability access. The twenty-six essays that make up this special issue collectively offer a theoretically robust and empirically astute picture of how far this idea has evolved since the radical turn in geography in 1968 and 1969 and more specifically within a flagship journal of the discipline. There was broad support across the journal's editorial board for this theme as well as broad interest, evidenced by the fact that the initial call for abstracts yielded 131 considered submissions. When inviting full paper submissions, special emphasis was given to capturing the breadth of how scholars and teams of scholars push the ways we can envision and talk about social justice and the city. Thirty-six full papers were invited and of those we include twenty-six articles here. Only seven of the essays in the collection either explicitly engage or reference Harvey's (1973) Social Justice and the City, another indication that the idea has roots and a trajectory that moves much beyond this more often cited origin.

What follows in this article is an effort to trace the genealogy of urban social justice within the Annals to understand its origins since the journal's first publication in 1911 and gesture at where it might be going. To frame the articles that follow, we work through the archives of the Annals starting with the first published issue, mapping changes in the definition of social justice in three cuts. In the first section, we consider the political discussions of justice and injustice up to the radical turn in the discipline that prefigured what would become social justice as a dominant theme of investigation in geography. We then show, in selected ways, the rapid theoretical development of social justice in its variegated forms after the turn up to this special issue. Over time, we note how the empirical emphasis of articles widens to consider a broad range of geographies, identities, and political aims with a greater preponderance of specifically urban studies. Third, we discuss the ways in which articles published in the Annals have treated “the city” and urban geographical processes more broadly. Following this deeper context, we offer some summary of the twenty-six special issue articles. The shift across the journal's disciplinary history is quite extraordinary, with much of the early research drawing from racist, sexist, colonial, and environmentally determinist thought and transitioning into much more socially engaged and progressive, sometimes radical, scholarship.

Although the collective insights across this special issue suggest that there has been substantially more
engagement with politically relevant and timely geographic questions of social justice over the span of the journal’s history, we feel it necessary to point out the slow and painful pace of change with regard to significant inequalities in the discipline that shape our geographic knowledge production, our mutual intellectual thriving, and publishing within geography. A very recent and profound testament to this reality is Kelsky’s (2017) compilation of gender-based discrimination and violence in the academy more broadly. On this subject, a tweet from Dr. Carrie Mott (who has an article in this special issue) on 10 December 2017 said, “I would love to see men in Geography take seriously a survey and responses that are being gathered by @ProfessorIsIn. For every response on there (includes some in Geog) there are MANY more. @theAAG.” Kelsky’s crowdsourced survey had, the last time we looked, 2,213 cases of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual assault listed across all academic disciplines and ranks. Unlike other important surveys (see Hanson and Richards 2017; Webley Adler 2017), Kelsky’s survey includes geographers sharing a range of oppressive and violent incidents they have experienced.

In the face of slow but steady progress in the content of geographic scholarship, why is it that the practice of doing that scholarship is still fraught and more difficult for many women-identified, non-white, LGBTQ, and gender-nonconforming people who continue to endure unequal workplace conditions? How is it that our collective record of sustained attention to socially unjust geographies can continue to be accompanied by such deep betrayals of justice in our professional and personal relations? Of course, part of the answer to this is that those geographies of injustice we examine also exist within the patriarchal conditions of our intimate social worlds. Beyond these ongoing and dehumanizing incidents of gender-based violence, a fidelity to social justice requires us to contend with the additional (intersectional) reality that racist, classist, heteronormative, transphobic, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and anti-Semitic dynamics (among others) continue to exist within the embodied practices of our discipline despite our ostensible aims to address them in our work. As we venture into the archives of geography within the Annals, marking our progression, it seems important to maintain urgency for social justice oriented work, but this cannot be meaningfully pursued without the work of dismantling the uneven social relations that shape our professional relationships, our research, and our publishing. How can we bring a renewed commitment beyond the published pages to guarantee that our departmental hallways, conference halls, and other spaces where geographers interact are more socially just also? When will we come to realize that without ethical, everyday social relations embedded within our practice of publishing about social justice, our work will always lack in emancipatory potential?

Prefiguring Social Justice

Normative approaches to social justice were absent in the early issues of the Annals. There were theoretical precursors, however, that prefigured what ultimately became some of the most important political ideas in those early issues. As a way of providing a foundation for this special issue, we marked the radical turn as a threshold to cultivate a sense of how discussions of equity, truth, ethics, and principles were framed beforehand, prior to when social justice emerged as a central preoccupation. Preceding these prefigurative discussions of justice, in the earliest decades of the Annals, we see many examples of environmental determinist analyses that exemplify the ways in which geography contributed to the development of racist and colonial typologies (see Woods [1998]; Byrd [2011]; Tuck and Yang [2012], for counternarratives and context).

Whitbeck (1912) offered the earliest insight into the terrain of the political for the Annals in its second volume, stating that “when the white man came to Wisconsin, thirty million acres of timber lay untouched before him. In those forests stood more than one hundred billion feet of white pine and as much more of other merchantable timber. At the close of the Civil War, enough white pine stood in Wisconsin to liquidate the national debt which that war had piled up” (59). Where Indigenous people are excluded from Whitbeck’s discussion of the opportunities for economic gain envisioned in the extraction of timber, Gregory (1915) evoked a colonizing sentiment that infantilizes Indigenous peoples when he said, “To the Hopis the coming of the white man was welcome. Under the protection of a stronger race, the farms of their ancestors, practically abandoned for 250 years, were reoccupied” (117).

That same year, Brigham (1915) questioned how and whether geographers should consider race, asking, “Our references to the race problem might seem superfluous, for if this field belongs essentially to the anthropologists, what right has the geographer there” (14). Brigham (1915, 18) revealed, however, the
environmental determinist roots of his orientation by commending the development of Ratzel’s “Darwinism” in the field of geography. Other key examples of determinism include Semple (1919) on the influence of tree species and specific forest resources to people and their ship-building enterprises and on irrigation and reclamation in the Mediterranean (Semple 1929). Just as influential as Semple’s work in the early twentieth century is Huntington (1924), whose determinist scholarship helped shape the discipline and was supported by scholars such as Bowman (1932) and Whittlesey (1945), among others. As the determinist trend within geography waned, scholars nevertheless continued to rescue Ratzel’s ideas, for example, when Sauer (1971), in his essay “The Formative Years of Ratzel in the United States,” reflected on “the grave and unresolved crisis of destructive exploitation and urban malaise” (254), pointing to Ratzel’s prophetic insights into the development of the U.S. landscape.

As early as the late 1940s, an intervention by Platt (1948) suggested the beginning of a pushback against determinism within the discipline: “If we avoid a deterministic approach and give our best efforts to the pursuit and use of knowledge, we can rightly hope to bend our common course in the direction of our desire, and to cause a trend of events (cause in a true philosophic and not in a pseudo-scientific sense) toward greater human welfare” (132). In descriptive essays that predate this more obvious shift, however, geographers observing Indigenous social worlds also subtly worked against the dominant determinism of their time. For instance, Haas (1926, 172, 175) refused to measure the “advancement” of Indigenous people against Western norms, yet speaks highly of the “progress,” “skill,” community-organized public projects, and governance structures among the “Cliff-Dwelling” peoples of the Southwestern United States. In the first mention we found of (in)justice in the Annals, Haas (1926) observed, “Had our colonial history been written by the red man, or even by unbiased minds, the story would read quite differently” (171). Across the years that followed, Trewartha (1938) discussed the history of Indigenous conflict in North American French settled regions and Martin (1930) and Meyer (1956) reflected on the negotiation in the courts and with the federal government over Indigenous land claims.

Early scholarship on race and racism in geography is now easily critiqued, thanks to the sophistication with which Black Geographies have matured (see McKittrick and Woods 2007); nevertheless, there are some notable essays from those early years. Several articles comment on racialized conflict and integration between Indigenous and black peoples with the introduction of the slave trade: Hans (1925) described how in the West Indies and Brazil “the Indian could not and would not adapt himself to slave conditions” (91), Parsons (1955, 52) noted how Miskito peoples were conscripted to put down slave rebellions, and Price (1953, 155) discussed mixed-race settlements. Although still steeped in a determinist logic, Parkins (1931) aimed to critique the institutional roots of slavery in the United States and mentioned the importance of the urban for fostering social movements, when he suggested that “the very poor, landed or landless, were inaudible then as now. There were no large urban groups to contest the control of the planter classes” (8). Waibel (1943, 119) discussed the transformative impacts of abolishing the slave trade and how planters sought to spread the “American principle” of the plantation economy into West Africa. Meanwhile, much later on, Nostrand (1970) offered the first discussion of “Hispanic” as an ethno-racial category in the Annals.

Even during the apex of the determinist trend, more progressive currents of thought began to consider questions of rights, governance, and organizational structures able to improve human lives. Colby (1924), for instance, discussed cooperative marketing in the formation of a raisin trust that suggests collective organization for social benefit, and Visher (1925) evaluated what standards guaranteed a respectable livelihood in terms of homestead allotments—perhaps an early exploration of equality in housing and habitability. Although environmental justice and urban political ecology are relatively newer domains within the Annals, earlier studies also nod to these ideas. McMurry (1930) recorded the enclosure of natural areas, “bought up by wealthy sportsmen and developed into private game preserves for the exclusive use of the owners. Individuals and clubs have leased considerable acreage for hunting purposes, and numerous farmers derive appreciable income from this source” (12). Whitaker (1941) discussed inequity of natural resource depletion and the need for governing authorities to intervene. Twenty years later, McNee (1961) published a precursor to work done on petro-economics that considered the multidirectional forces at work in regions dominated by international petroleum companies. This was followed quickly by the first extensive discussion of Marxist geography by Matley (1966) that interestingly
worked to emphasize the ongoing importance of environmentalism in Soviet geography and their interpretations of Marx.

Especially relevant to this special issue are discussions of housing rights. Hance (1951) published one of the first papers to explicitly discuss this, describing crofting settlements in the Outer Hebrides that “make a perplexing problem for the public health officials. With little means to pay taxes except when employed, owning no land to be taxed, they create congestion and often possess the poorest of the houses in the community” (87). Sometime following this, both Ward (1968) and Holzner (1970) touched on different housing problems related to urban “blight,” its psychosocial repercussions, and the right to adequate housing. Perhaps presaging a broader right to the city discussion, these publications were reflective of debates in other regions around land reform and rights to land (see Chardon 1963).

It was not until 1959 that Naylon (1959, 361) made the first explicit mention of “social injustice” in the Annals in his discussion of land fragmentation in Spain. Highlighting the need for geographers to pay more careful attention to land as a domain of inequality, Naylon explained that the Spanish example “is of interest in showing that under-employment, low productivity, and social discontent are not related only to large estates and their associated monocultures, although the glaring social injustices of the latifundios [large estates] have in the past received the most attention from reformers and academic observers.” Bushman and Stanley (1971), in another early and explicit reference, similarly reflected on the political possibilities present in a social justice coalition as they discussed political trends in the U.S. Southeast. They noted, “The Democratic Party in the region undoubtedly will continue its shift toward a more liberal position on racial matters and issues of social justice” (666).

Toward the latter half of the 1960s, the Annals begin to evidence increasingly sophisticated analyses of the local geographies of political struggles to address poverty, colonial dispossession, and racial inequity. Whereas Meinig (1972) located the movements of “American Indians, New Mexican Hispanos, Mexican Americans, and Black Americans, [who were] never accorded full social integration” (182) in rural settings, other scholars considered how these struggles specifically articulate within the city. Lowry (1971) unequivocally stated, “Negroes and whites unquestionably did not enjoy equally the benefits of economic advances in and around urban places” (586). Finally, perhaps one of the most provocative related essays we found in the archives was Murray’s (1967) “The Geography of Death in the United States and the United Kingdom,” in which he detailed the correlation between mortality rates and socioeconomic conditions: “Areas of large minority group populations, such as Indian reservations, Spanish-American districts, and most particularly, the high-proportion Negro areas of the South, portray rates higher than the average” (310). He continued that the health effects of poverty and racial inequity extend into urban areas: “Some of the highly urbanized counties in the Northeast also reveal above average rates, partly because of their attraction for minority and deprived groups whose longevity is jeopardized” (310).

Social Justice after the Radical Turn

In her retrospective of the Annals, Kobayashi (2010) suggested, “As the 1970s rolled around, contributions to the Annals began to reflect a larger concern for geography’s role in society, responding to larger societal concerns about the ongoing Vietnam War, the advent of activism over environmental degradation, the second-wave feminist movement, and the burgeoning human rights movement” (1099). Although development of social justice research (broadly defined) quickly proliferated after the radical turn in geography, there are some key essays we believe offer an especially interesting context for this special issue. In his presidential address delivered at the sixty-eighth annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG), published as “From Colonialism to National Development: Geographical Perspective on Patterns and Policies,” Ginsburg (1973) highlighted the growing attention to issues of social justice: “The increasing concern with relevance in academia is shared by most geographers, who recognize themselves to be citizens and human beings as well as scientists and scholars” (1). He went on to write, “The equity principle involves much more than regional equity. It also involves the distribution of benefits among all the people, not merely some of them. . . . Everyone recognizes the enormous disparities in income and welfare even within given metropolitan areas and the social injustices associated with that maldistribution” (16).

The 1970s and early 1980s in the Annals saw more heterodoxy than is commonly attributed to this period.
of geographic scholarship. In his piece, “The Geography of Human Survival,” Bunge (1973) suggested, “The penance of the new wave of exploration is to undo the exploitation of the early geographers. The world is not some vast treasure trove of unlimited wealth, human and mineral, to be carted off to the homeland as booty” (290). We also see a continued thread of Marxist geography, with Peet (1975) writing just a few years later, “There is little point, therefore, in devoting political energies to the advocacy of policies which deal only with the symptoms of inequality without altering its basic generating forces. Hence the call for social and economic revolution, the overthrow of capitalism, and the substitution of a method of production and an associated way of life designed around the principles of equality and social justice” (564).

Although there might have seemed to exist a broad consensus that geography’s relevance increasingly hinged on its attention to such broader social questions, there were many fault lines already evident within and across these politics. Some, like King (1976), Ley (1980), and Helburn (1982), added differently nuanced and theoretically positioned ways of considering questions of social justice. Toward the end of the decade as these debates unfolded, Bunge (1979) wrote of these differences, “I am short tempered with academic geographers, even Marxist ones. The campus geographers tend to separate theory from practice. They read too much and look and, often, struggle not at all. They cite, not sight. In the heady atmosphere of all theory and no practice all sorts of objections are raised to our work, but the one that is most fearful is an ideological Marxist reductionism” (171).

Long-standing questions about land and Indigenous struggles over land took on much more emancipatory trajectories in the 2000s as evidenced by Wolford’s (2004) “This Land Is Ours Now,” Harris’s (2004) “How Did Colonialism Dispossess?,” and Radcliffe (2007), who argued, “Articulated as alternatives to neoliberalism, indigenous geographies of hope are grounded in critiques of racism, colonial legacies, and particular forms of economic political power” (393). More recently we can see Blomley (2014) furthering these discussions when he argued, “Property is an instrument of sociospatial justice, whether in relation to colonialism or other social and political settings. As a set of relations, powerfully constitutive of space, property can serve both as an instrument of dispossession and as a ground for resistance” (1303).

If determinist, racially insensitive, and outrightly unjust research was published in the earliest decades of the Annals, after a relative silence during the mid- and late 1980s, the 1990s and onward have seen a flourishing of research working to extend an explicitly antiracist, social justice orientation in publishing. Dominant within this thread have been questions about housing discrimination (Holloway 1998) and segregation (Ellis et al. 2012). To this end, geographers have continued to better connect processes of racialization to other spatial practices as evidenced by Hoelscher’s (2003) suggestions that “the culture of segregation that mobilized such memories, and the forgetting that inevitably accompanied them, relied on performance—ritualized choreographies of race and place, and gender and class, in which participants knew their roles and acted them out for each other and for visitors” (677). Other key publications extended the political horizons on which geographers continued to take questions of race and racialization seriously, including their relation to immigration (Leitner 2012), public space (Tyner 2006), antihunger politics and social reproduction (Heynen 2009), racial violence (Inwood 2012), white supremacy (Inwood and Bonds 2016), prison politics (Bonds 2013), neoliberal regulation (Derickson 2014), and mobility (Alderman and Inwood 2016; Parks 2016). Much of this work has helped expand on the driving insights from Kobayashi and Peake (2000), who argued that “strategies of resistance are also diverse. They are expressed through distinctive racialized identities, and take many forms that may range from everyday cultural practices to political movements, and may cover the ideological spectrum” (398; see Kobayashi 2014 for a more in-depth overview).

Although feminist scholarship should now be considered a key pillar of Annals publications around questions of social justice, it was slow to develop. One of the most notable contributions to opening up feminist scholarship in the 1990s was Jones and Kodra’s (1990) “The Feminization of Poverty in the U.S.” in which they argued, “First, raising the national minimum wage above the poverty level will end the injustice of working full-time yet remaining poor. Second, a re-evaluation of the worth of women’s work, through pay equity legislation, would be a major step towards eliminating gender-based wage differentials” (180). Meanwhile, Katz’s (1991) “Sow What You Know” was a landmark paper extending discussions of social reproduction in the field. England’s (1993) “Suburban Pink Collar Ghetto” and Wright’s (2004) “From Protests to Politics: Sex Work, Women’s Worth, and Ciudad Juárez Modernity” worked crucially to widen the spectrum of feminist scholarship the Annals published.
Other key feminist geographic interventions include Hovorka’s (2005) “The (Re) Production of Gendered Positionality in Botswana’s Commercial Urban Agriculture Sector” and Brickell’s (2014) “The Whole World Is Watching: Intimate Geopolitics of Forced Eviction and Women’s Activism in Cambodia.” The growth of feminist scholarship was extended into more specific research on sexuality and LGBTQ studies.

We have seen a slow, although steady, increase in publications situating social justice within LGBTQ geographies including Waitt’s (2006) “Boundaries of Desire: Becoming Sexual through the Spaces of Sydney’s 2002 Gay Games” and Schroeder’s (2014) “(Un)holy Toledo: Intersectionality, Interdependence, and Neighborhood (Trans)formation in Toledo, Ohio.” Collins, Grineski, and Morales (2017) most recently helped to show the increased cross-cutting developments within LGBTQ geographies in their “Sexual Orientation, Gender, and Environmental Injustice” by emphasizing that “it is important to recognize that same-sex partnering in households is a highly visible expression of minority sexual orientation (in contrast to being LGBT single or in the closet) and is thus an important residential indicator of the status of the LGBT community in social justice terms” (89).

Though there has been important evolution in geographic work published on race, gender, and sexuality, there has also been continued evolution of innovative intersectional and internationalist approaches to staging more inclusive and comprehensive efforts at social justice oriented questions. Gilbert’s (1998) “Race, Space, and Power: The Survival Strategies of Working Poor Women” highlights “the significance of place and context in shaping the relationship between space and multiple relations of power, in this case, racism and gender. Therefore it becomes important to ask how mobility and immobility are related to historically and geographically situated constellations of power relations” (616). Mullings’s (1999) “Sides of the Same Coin?” was another important publication in this context. This effort at thinking across subject positions was also explored in internationalist contexts by Hodder (2016) and Featherstone (2013), who argued, “The various forms of internationalism associated with labor, Pan-Africanism, anti-colonialism and feminism . . . were not homogenizing universalisms but built on the mutual constitution of gender, class, race and national subordination to create agendas for struggle and visions of social equality and justice” (1408). Indeed, much of this work has gone into making legible the invisible connections that so powerfully make places, as Elwood et al. (2015) explained: “When relational place-making involves engaged struggle with difference and inequality, actors might begin to recognize, articulate, and question race and class norms or poverty politics that were previously invisible and taken for granted” (136).

During this period, environmental questions about justice and, by extension, political ecology, began to take social justice questions in innovative and new directions for geographers. Lawrence’s (1993) “The Greening of the Squares of London” is one of the earliest discussions in the Annals that is explicitly interested in “nature and (in) the city.” Likewise, the Annals was host to one of the earliest environmental justice papers, in which Bowen and Salling (1995) argued, “Environmental justice is the policy rubric within which issues such as environmental equity, environmental discrimination, and environmental racism are embedded” (641). Only a few years following came one of the most important papers published to extend questions of social and environmental justice, especially related to race, in Pulido’s (2000) “Rethinking Environmental Racism.” She explained, “The issue of racism itself raises both scholarly and political concerns. I believe that as geographers, we need to diversify and deepen our approach to the study of racial inequality. Our traditional emphasis on mapping and counting needs to be complemented by research that seeks to understand what race means to people and how racism shapes lives and places” (33). Other work by Boone et al. (2009) and Holifield (2012) only further helped to solidify the journal’s content on research focusing on environmental justice.

The last special issue in the Annals (edited by Braun in 2015) contained a number of essays that extended social justice oriented questions through sociocultural empirical contexts. In that issue, Mansfield et al. (2015) noted, “In a world of massive and ubiquitous socioeconomic change, it is time to rally not around the tired environmentalisms of ‘protecting nature’ but around protecting and fostering the social natures that lead to the most just outcomes for humans and nonhumans alike” (292). Likewise, Derickson and MacKinnon (2015) and Wainwright and Mann (2015) extended important political arguments related to climate change, as did Rice, Burke, and Heynen (2015), who argued for new, more egalitarian forms of knowledge production around these important questions: “In the case of climate, organic intellectuals could
articulate the knowledge of ordinary people and sub-patterns in place-based, culturally attuned ways that spark more inclusive and just climate actions, thus replacing traditional intelligentsia with a more egalitarian politics of knowledge” (255). In that same special collection, Collard, Dempsey, and Sundberg (2015) articulated how central decolonial approaches are to this overall project of social justice: “Orienting toward abundant futures requires walking with multiple forms of resistance to colonial and capitalist logics and practices of extraction and assimilation. Decolonization is our guide in this process” (329).

“The City”

Given the breadth and sophistication of urban studies today, it is interesting to assess the ways in which “the city” and urban social processes evolved slowly within the early pages of the *Annals*. At first, much like the wider breadth of urban literature at the time, the city is staged merely as the site in which economic processes agglomerate. Whitbeck (1912), who offered the first political discussion in the *Annals*, also published the first explicit reference to a city, describing the industrial urban geography of the city of Sheboygan (Wisconsin), where over half of its wage earners were employed in furniture factories, “chiefly chair factories” (62). Just over a decade later in an essay examining similar themes of industrialization in Kentucky, Davis (1925) published the first explicit reference to “urban development.” Yet, it was not until 1951 that Branch (1951) offered the first discussion of “planning” or “city planning” when he wrote, “Every actual situation in community planning combines physical and socio-economic considerations in inseparable combination” (281).

Gregory (1915) wrote an article about the settlement of Tuba, which is today an incorporated city with a population of only about 9,000 but was in 1915 a heavily used route across northern Arizona. This article matter-of-factly details the history of dispossession of local residents related to the establishment of the town. Two years later, Jefferson (1917) wrote, “A great country population cannot exist to-day among civilized men without bringing cities into existence. Neither Norway nor Ecuador, on the other hand, can have a great city because they have no great country population” (6). In this sense, Jefferson’s work reveals early thinking that structures a city–country binary within early colonial and determinist logics.

In the early years of the Great Depression, an urban geographic nuance emerged to understand the development of U.S. cities, much of which throughout the 1930s was predictably influenced by Chicago school emphasis on zones, functions, and an organism understanding of urban form. For instance, Colby (1933) wrote, “The modern city is a dynamic organism constantly in process of evolution. This evolution involves both a modification of long established functions and the addition of new functions. Such functional developments call for new functional forms, for modification of forms previously established, and for extensions of, and realignments of, the urban pattern” (1). Just a few years later, Kellogg (1937) described a relational logic between cities and urban economic system: “In the city invention replaces philosophy, the cathedral replaces the church, the delicatessen the garden, the night club the home; in short the city is sterile, biologically and spiritually. Later these cities, built by the wealth and sons of the soil become dominant and make economic and social arrangements to their own liking” (147).

In the longest urban geographic essay in the *Annals* to this point, Taylor (1942) employed an explicitly environmental determinist analysis in his sixty-seven-page “Environment, Village and City” to survey how the local environment shapes some twenty case studies of urban developments. In a section subtitled “Possibilism Applied to Race, Nation and City,” Taylor wrote, “As most of my readers know, I have always been a rather definite environmentalist. In concluding this address, I wish to consider whether determinism or possibilism is of more importance in connection with the three types of human groups which I have studied with some thoroughness” (65). Here we capture the sort of questions that geographers were considering related to urban social process and spatial form that link directly over time as a problematic contribution to environmentally determinist understandings of the built form and urban marginality, in conversation with ideologies of the ghetto and culture of poverty to emerge later from the urban literature, broadly defined.

Murphey (1954) offered an early instance of the language of revolutionary change and the urban (in Western Europe and China), which is, interestingly, also the *Annals’* first reference to Marx, when he suggested, “The industrial revolution has emphasized the economic advantages of concentration and centrality. But
is it true to say that change, revolutionary change, has found an advantage in urbanization; in concentration and numbers?” (349). Murphey foreshadowed questions taken up later in urban political ecology when he suggested, “The whole economical history of society is summed up in the movement of this ... separation between town and country” (350). Out of this language of revolutionary change, and similarly foreshadowing fundamental changes to urban growth and structure in the United States, came Nelson’s (1962) “Megalopolis and New York Metropolitan Region.” The following year, Burton (1963) published the first article explicitly discussing “urban sprawl.” Although scale was mobilized in different ways in reference to “the city,” Ulack (1978) published the first mention of “neighbourhood change” as well as “urban squatters.” Ultimately, attention to the dynamics of scalar, urban change led to framing problems and their solutions in far more nuanced ways that considered linkages across processes and practices at multiple scalar levels as evidenced when Dingemans (1979) published the *Annals’* first analysis of “redlining” and “urban design.”

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the *Annals* published vibrant urban theoretical papers that significantly advanced ongoing discussions, such as Soja (1980), who, responding to Harvey (1973), argued for the importance of space and extended Lefebvre’s work on everyday urban life and the concept of uneven development in generative ways. Harvey (1990) also continued to push urban theory toward more comprehensive formulations. Dear and Flusty’s (1998) “Postmodern Urbanism” offered the first reference to this theme in the *Annals* by way of comparative analysis of the Chicago and L.A. School approaches of urban geography.

At the same time, we saw urban geography expand from “the city” to other spatial configurations as evidenced by Walker and Heiman’s (1981) claim that a “major response of Great Society liberals to the black and poor people’s movements of the 1960s was to attack suburban exclusion as the cause of lack of access to jobs and housing” (74). They went on to note, “The social and land use control reform movements thus coincided in a program to ‘open up the suburbs’ which helps open up emergent work of suburban geographies focused of social justice questions” (74). As the concept of suburbia was developing for urban geographers so too was “global cities” research. Although there were a number of descriptive urban papers about cities in the Global South throughout these decades, it was not until Mitchell and Wheeler’s (1994) first reference to the idea of “global cities” that we see it as a concept and object of analysis explicitly connected to work on globalization.

One of the most important themes within this special issue to follow relates to processes of displacement and gentrification, making a deeper context of this theme in the *Annals* important. Price and Young (1959) offered some of the earliest discussion of housing markets presaging cycles of urban change, gentrification, and industrial decline: “Whether the land should have been built up to avoid such a problem is a question this generation does not ask, and the next one, not faced with our choices, really will not be able to answer. ... With continued growth the old core will demand attention, if for no other reason than the great space it occupies” (112).

Another landmark publication is that of Schaffer and Smith (1986), discussing “The Gentrification of Harlem,” in which they captured the state of discussion twenty-seven years after Price and Young by stating, “Debate over gentrification has emerged around three main questions: the significance of the process (or its extent), the effects of gentrification, and its causes. ... It will quickly become obvious that these three issues are closely interrelated” (348). That same year Pratt (1986) published “Housing Tenure and Social Cleavages in Urban Canada,” showing a strong spatial correlation between home ownership and access to capital gains across all classes of homeowners. The next year the *Annals* published Smith’s (1987) landmark “Gentrification and the Rent Gap,” in which he expanded on his earlier idea, stating, “If the early literature tended narrowly to emphasize either consumption-side or production-side explanations (such as the rent gap), it should now be evident that the relationship between consumption and production is crucial to explaining gentrification. The restructuring of the city, of which gentrification is only a part, involves a social and economic, spatial and political transformation” (464). To this, Ley (1987) replied, “The discussion of the rent gap thesis occupied only a small portion of my paper,” going on to suggest that Smith “is anxious to defend it, particularly as his theoretical framework has not fared well in recent reviews” (465).

Dubois’s (1903) prophetic declaration that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line” (41) was clear in the pages of the *Annals* related to “the city.” In Bogue (1954) we see race used descriptively to examine urban structure and evolution: “Literally thousands of nonwhites (mostly
Negroes) left the soil to settle in urban centers. The result was almost a doubling of the nonwhite population of cities within the decade” (130). Hart’s (1960) “The Changing Distribution of the American Negro” details the urbanization of black populations, and Lewis (1965) discussed the impact of African American migration on electoral geographies of Flint, connecting political geographies to the expansion of African American neighborhoods.

Importantly, given the urban uprisings that in part ushered in geography’s broader radical turn, 1970 is the first year we see an article using the language of “racial segregation” in the city. In a hugely important essay, Rose (1970) outlined early understandings of these dynamics: “The Negro ghetto represents an expanding residential spatial configuration in all of the major metropolitan areas in the United States. The process of ghetto development is essentially related to the refusal of Whites to share residential space with Blacks on a permanent basis, and to the search behavior employed by Blacks in seeking housing accommodations” (1). Related to this theme, the early 1970s saw a significant increase in attention to racial urban geography, including Brunn and Hoffman (1970), Hartshorn (1971), and Bennett (1973).

At this same time, Bunge published on his (and his collaborators’) Fitzgerald project, extending the discussion of race in the city but adding an explicit and important engagement with youth geographies: “Urban exploration, the use of geography in the protection of children, survival geography, because of the overwhelming need, cannot wait for a gradual acceptance. Those of us who are convinced must plunge ahead even if it upsets our fellow tradesmen” (Bunge 1974, 485). Bunge cross-cut this discussion by talking explicitly about race: “There is only ‘racism,’ and only a racist would not know it. To use a racist term like ‘white racism’ implies that there is a ‘black racism,’ which there is not. If you bridle at this logic you are a racist, so follow the following logic, over and over, if necessary, until you have purged yourself of your racism. It is true that blacks often hate whites, but this is not racism, this is a reaction to racism” (485). Thus, Bunge’s expounding on the importance of language and categories here suggests that for him, urban geographic research should always be linked to both anti-racist praxis and writing.

The mid-1970s and 1980s saw a smattering of important work connecting racialized processes to the structure of the city. Another landmark essay in this regard was Anderson’s (1987) “The Idea of Chinatown,” which opened up discussion about the social construction of race and ethnorracial urban districts for geographers when she argued, “Racial categories are cultural ascriptions whose construction and transmission cannot be taken for granted” (580). The next year Marston (1988) published “Neighborhood and Politics: Irish Ethnicity in Nineteenth Century Lowell, Massachusetts,” further expanding discussions of race and ethnicity, followed soon after by Aiken’s (1990) “A New Type of Black Ghetto in the Plantation South.” Specifically, Aiken thought through the localized dynamics of race across scalar processes, and noted that “[a]t the regional scale, unequal changes in white and black municipal populations produced an increase in segregation among the municipalities of the Yazoo Delta. At the local scale, a pattern of residential desegregation has emerged in particular municipalities” (223).

The connection between (urban) space, property, and vulnerable bodies was a thread that began to develop in earnest in the 1990s. Rowe and Wolch’s (1990) “Social Networks in Time and Space: Homeless Women in Skid Row, Los Angeles” is one of the earliest ethnographic projects in the city with street-based vulnerable populations. Related to this, Mitchell (1995) helped raise the visibility of the politics of public space by suggesting, “So long as we live in a society which so efficiently produces homelessness, spaces like these will be—indeed must be—always at the center of social struggle. For it is by struggling over and within space that the natures over ‘the public’ and of democracy are defined” (128). Others such as Blomley (2003) opened up discussions on urban property relations and the spatial power therein, for example, by arguing that “[p]hysical violence, whether realized or implied, is important to the legitimation, foundation, and operation of a Western property regime” (121). This marks a key turn within urban geography specifically, toward understanding the underlying colonial dynamics of urban land, no doubt indebted to ongoing Indigenous struggles Blomley witnessed within the city.

Although Mitchelson and Wheeler (1994) opened the language of “global cities” in the Annals, there is a string of detailed papers published early in the journal about the development of cities and regions outside of North America, including Hall (1934) on Japan and Hoseltz (1959) on cities in India. The tone and tenor of these early articles offer important context for appreciating the evolution of work in cities across the world, especially postcolonial cities. McFarlane and Graham’s (2014) “Informal Urban Sanitation:
Everyday Life, Poverty, and Comparison” and Doshi and Ranganathan’s (2017) “Contesting the Unethical City: Land Dispossession and Corruption Narratives in Urban India” are exemplars for thinking through this growth.

Unearthing the evolution of the city in the Annals yielded substantial anti-colonial and anti-racist interventions, as did going through the back issues with an eye toward excavating what came before social justice. The different cuts we took through the archives offer up a range of different kinds of colonial, gendered, racialized, and environmental determinist sentiments that help contextualize how far the discipline has evolved. This context is especially important for highlighting the innovative and politically astute research within this special issue.

**This Special Issue**

The more contemporary archives of the Annals show the continued interest of geographers in big questions about justice (Mitchell 2004), ethics (Kearns 1998), democracy (Barnett and Bridge 2013), and political relevance of geographic scholarship (Staeheli and Mitchell 2005). Many of the themes that have long been central to papers published in the Annals are represented in this special issue, albeit often in ways critical of the approach of many of the earliest publications. There are several essays included that take on the social theoretical connections between democracy and theories of justice. For instance, Barnett engages notions of social justice within human geography and urban studies by tracing the recurrent disavowal of “liberalism” in debates on social justice and the city, the just city, and spatial justice. Through a feminist approach, Wright explores the way in which the forced disappearances of Mexican students in 2014 open up new approaches to link democratic theories of justice with the creation of counterpublics that become necessary amidst the absence of those activists who cannot stand for their rights. Examples embodying these counterpublics, such as mass graves and prisons, paint a picture of a necessary restoration to versions of democracy attempting to operate amidst disappearances. Lake uses a relational approach to social justice to investigate the larger democratic ramifications for social movement collective action against housing displacement.

The centrality of gentrification and displacement starting in the 1980s within the Annals continues in this special issue. Lees, Annunziata, and Rivas-Alonso insist that notions of survivability are key to understanding the ongoing ravages of planetary gentrification and that organizing against it should be composed of both overt opposition and everyday (often invisible) resistance. Shin’s paper seeks to show how grassroots people come to realize notions of rights in their struggles against urban redevelopment and displacement amidst efforts around urban speculative accumulation in Seoul. Muñoz’s research into housing justice in Buenos Aires shows that when precarious housing is understood at the scale of the home, as opposed to broader urban spatial scales, it can offer new ways of seeing how the right to the city is endeavored, challenged, and denied. Maharawal and McElroy discuss the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project active within the San Francisco Bay Area to demonstrate how countermapping, inspired by feminist and decolonial science studies, can be mobilized through robust data visualization and oral historical analysis for posing challenges to the proliferation of gentrification and eviction. Through sophisticated storytelling methodologies, they embody social justice work in innovative and compelling ways.

In considering contradictions of social justice and the city, several articles in the special issue investigate questions of law, policy, and policing. Swanson investigates how zero tolerance policing as exported from New York to Ecuador led to transnational displacements of street vendors from Ecuador back to New York, demonstrating the perverse role of policy mobilities exacerbating gentrification and socioscalar disruptions at the global scale. Hamilton and Foote use police torture of hundreds of black men in Chicago to help us understand how far theorizing race and violence have evolved since the beginnings of the radical turn in geography and particularly since the publication of Social Justice and the City. They show the urgent necessity of vigilance in their theorizing amidst ongoing violence done to black men in cities across the United States as well as the rise of Black Lives Matter. Brownlow investigates the underpolicing of rape in U.S. cities to show how race continues to bias where rape is likely to be undercounted and hidden.

In the rich, if recent, tradition of feminist scholarship in the Annals, several articles in this special issue extend different forms of feminist theorization to questions of social justice. Mott’s article centered on organizing around Arizona’s racial profiling legislation SB 1070 offers thought-provoking social movement insights into how anarcha-feminist solidarity work rooted in horizontal praxis can negotiate across race,
class, gender, language, and documentation status. Dowler and Ranjbar use the lens of a feminist ethics of care to look at how efforts at “just praxis” and “positive security” can be mobilized to overcome vulnerability to political and environmental violence in both Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Orumiyeh, Iran. Arpagian and Aitkin open up possibilities of social justice in the city in their discussion of Roma dispossession in Bucharest that foregrounds the emotive politics of care as foundational to politics against dispossession and exclusion.

Two of the articles help build the growing focus on LGBTQ struggles in the city. Roberts and Catungal investigate a public–private partnership between an LGBTQ-focused center, a private philanthropist, and the City of Toronto to show the ways social justice ideals continue to be limited and thwarted through the proliferation of urban processes of neoliberalization. Goh investigates how “unjust geographies” that cross-cut race, class, and gender are central to LGBTQ activism in New York and how queer community organizers and activists are fighting for social and spatial change.

Questions of citizenship are also taken up in the special issue. Ye and Yeoh investigate how narratives of multiracialism help explain how the diversification of peoples in the global city is also paralleled by the diversification of precarity. Richardson’s investigation of Occupy Hong Kong offers insight into postcolonial ideas of social justice through a focus on citizenship and whiteness for better understanding the contested politics of universal suffrage in a centrally important global city.

The emphasis on property and vulnerability present in the Annals is also extended by several articles in this special issue. Safransky builds from scholars of critical race studies, critical Indigenous studies, and decolonial theory to investigate underresearched questions related to the cultural and racial politics of land and property dispossession in Detroit. She asserts land justice to be a historical diagnostic for thinking about similar questions in other North American cities. Barracough investigates the urban valences of settler colonialism by showing how ideologies of the cowboy and the frontier continue to limit the abilities of Indigenous and other marginalized people to realize social justice in the U.S. West.

Although also related to questions of property and land, several essays in the collection attend to environmental justice, urban political ecology, and disaster response. Grove et al. investigate the deep historical connections between environmental inequality and segregation in Baltimore. Using the Baltimore Ecosystem Study (BES) as a foundation, the article shows the indelible patterns left by decades of urban social processes on socioracial patterns of the city that help understand the long-term notions of environmental justice. De Lara mobilizes urban political ecology and theories of racial capitalism to show how sustainability discourse is conceptualized as a way of challenging green capitalism in Southern California. Valdivia expands discussions of environmental justice and urban political ecology, putting these approaches into tighter conversation around the politics of social justice and urban political ecology, emphasizing and important research undertaken to represent and contribute to these struggles, and the work that remains to be done to enact just practices across our various engagements within and beyond the academy. It is troubling to us to review the colonial, racist, and masculinist history of geography that endured in at least

**Conclusion**

This special issue reflects on the trajectory of urban social justice oriented work within geography, the compelling and important research undertaken to represent and contribute to these struggles, and the work that remains to be done to enact just practices across our various engagements within and beyond the academy. It is troubling to us to review the colonial, racist, and masculinist history of geography that endured in at least
the metaphorical language used to summarize its early progress. After fifty years of publication for the *Annals*, Whitaker (1954) suggested, “The first fifty years of this Association have seen the pioneering tasks completed, the land taken up, the clearing done, the seed planted. Our task is to produce more abundant harvests as the years go by” (244). We agree with Blaut’s (1979) view on the long history of geographic scholarship in his “The Dissenting Tradition” when he said, “Geography is not socially and politically neutral. It never has been such, and it never can be such” (158). In a similar way, Lave (2015) argued that within this moment of waning scientific influence, “lending our authority, however reduced, to the production of knowledge for progressive, justice-focused ends,” geographers might collectively “achieve more of our political and intellectual goals by embracing the progressive aspects of our reduced authority than by fighting its erosion” (245). The range of problems and approaches those political questions provoke continue to become evermore nuanced and robust. This is evidenced both in the wide interest in the framing of this special issue as well as the thought-provoking and important scholarship published herein. To this end, we share Barkan and Pulido’s (2017) sentiment that “all of this suggests a great role for geographic knowledge in the pursuit of justice” (38), and we think that this special issue conveys that this sentiment well. At the same time, a more emancipatory focus on social justice as it relates to how we produce geographic knowledge necessitates renewed and vigilant attention to the embodied practices, cross-positional interactions, and often outright oppressive conditions some of us continue to enact at the expense and harm of others.

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