
Project Proposal

The Material World of Modern Segregation: St. Louis in the Long Era of Ferguson

Introduction: For all of the confidence with which we, as scholars and citizens, invoke the “segregated city” to explain the world we live in – segregation being at once the object and the conclusion of so much of our analysis – we still have much to learn about the material realities of racialized urban experience. These realities often defy the simple spatial binary implied by “segregation” as well as arid liberal pieties about “post-racial society.” The material world of modern segregation involves mixing, movement, and change within sedimented structures, and has a complex genealogy. The Ferguson moment in which we continue to live has exposed these realities, highlighting the bankruptcy of the worn theories and constructs we use to explain them. Our project explores segregated life in our region by engaging racialized locales – those over-determined, but often under-studied sites of segregation – that define and even symbolize urban life. It asks what we can learn about modern segregation through “archaeological” examination of these sites – one that engages the textures, movements and meanings of everyday experience, the political-social histories and racial memories, of our city. What can the Ferguson QuikTrip, Ball Park Village/Busch Stadium, a Starbucks in the heart of white suburbia, the Ikea located in what once was Mill Creek Valley, Christ the King Church in Florissant, or the overgrown forest where the Pruitt-Igoe towers once stood, teach us about racialized experience in America? Do insights emerging from analysis of these sites revise theories of structural racism, or complicate governing logics of sequential experience, cause-and-effect relationships, and linear movements through time and space? **We conjecture that, in order to understand racialized experiences embodied in such sites, we must call upon different consciousnesses, seek new conceptions of the “segregated city” and its relevant boundaries and pathways.**

Stated Purpose and Goals: We are requesting funding to support the development of a course, and an archive and a symposium related to that course. Our purpose is to identify and engage material sites of segregation in St. Louis, seeking to understand the realities of segregated life through a close reading of visual, spatial, and historical clues and contexts. Collaborators will develop readings that draw upon **material associated with these sites** (images, historical documents, maps, sound recordings, oral histories, etc.) that will become part a **living archive** intended to support future collaborative study. In SP17 we will stage the course and the symposium, both of which will feature these readings. This work will yield important **new insights into the political-historical geography of St. Louis**, as well as **new modes of understanding of the material realities of segregation.**

Intellectual Underpinnings and Relevance to Sustainable Urbanism: Our project began in FL14 with an [AMCS Modern Segregation program initiative](#), which earned a Dean’s Collaborative Seed Grant to bring five leading theorists of race to campus to interrogate key problems of segregation ([racial classification](#), [race, place and violence](#), [the pleasures of](#)

[homogeneity](#), and [segregation and the city](#)). Their lectures, held in the immediate aftermath of the shooting death of Michael Brown, became massively attended public events in which participants explored the dissonance between received ideas about race/post-race and the brutalizing experiences of structural racism being exposed everyday. What emerged was a shared sense of the urgent need to focus more relentlessly on the material realities Ferguson exposed. With valuable inputs from our distinguished guests and others, including Walter Johnson (Harvard), Leigh Raiford (Berkeley) and Eric Sandweiss (Indiana), we began to develop a framework for engagement with material sites of segregation. We are pursuing something both less and more, and in all events, radically different, from the standard spatially-informed histories of urban segregation (Gordon, 2008; Heathcott; 2005; Jackson, 1985), which, like sociological studies that focus on development patterns and effects exclusionary policies and practices (Hirsch 2000, Massey, et al, 2013, Rothstein 2014), do not fully illuminate the *material* dimensions of segregated life. The racialized city is formed by accretion, concentration and conjuncture of structural-experiential particulars, in the manner of a palimpsest; that is how we will approach it.

The Proposed Methodology: The process for developing the integrated course, archive and symposium will involve small groups of scholars and practitioners (activists, artists, public historians, etc.) working together, each bringing to bear on their site relevant approaches and interpretative strategies. We will stage this work as a series of collaborative engagements that move from the particulars of site analysis to critical analysis of the racial logics of the segregated city. Our method is empirical: **we believe that it is only through an iterative processes of observation and analysis – one informed by consideration of deep historical and political contexts, local understandings and representations of these sites – that we can decipher the “hidden in plain sight” realities of the segregated city.**

The Content and Form of the Proposed Work: The requested funds will the following interrelated activities: preliminary planning for collaborative research on these material sites; the development of a repository of archival resources to be designed in collaboration with WUSTL Libraries; the development of an AMCS course; and the staging of a symposium in SP17. The symposium will serve as an occasion for rich cross-disciplinary conversation (collaborators will provide formal / informal response to one another’s readings of their sites, drafts of which will be pre-circulated, and re-engage sites) and for the identification of – and critical engagement with – new racial logics that emerge from site analysis, which in turn will inform decisions about the structure of the course and an online exhibit on the library website. The course, “Engaging the City: St. Louis Outside/In,” will be team-taught, and open to undergraduates and MA students from the AMCS University College Program, who will be invited to explore the material world of segregation across the region, and participate in the symposium. AMCS Harvey Graduate Fellows will serve as TAs. AMCS plans to offer this course at least twice (the first offering in SP17), and will provide \$5000 in additional funds for its development.

Milestones:

FL15-SU16: Confirmation of participants/sites informed by ongoing research; SU16: In consultation with Library, finalize plan and list of target materials for archive; SP17: stage course and related symposium.

Challenges and Limitations: The staged-but-not-fully-scripted quality of collaborative research requires an openness to experience in the context of strategic hypothesis-testing. Scholars and students need to make themselves available to this process, and to insights that come from exploration across multiple sites and historical moments. These insights are not announced *a priori*, but announce themselves, often through thick processes like those we have imagined. We expect the skill and discipline of close reading of material sites, which is developed through iterative practice and collaborative discussion, will require patience and nurturing by the course leaders and symposium participants. We also anticipate logistical/conceptual challenges in producing a visuals-rich publication and the accompanying digital archive, although both are crucial to the project. This methodology will undoubtedly push some of our participants beyond their training, and that is to be expected and encouraged.

Deliverables: An AMCS course to be taught in SP17 and subsequent terms, with robust archive of material related to segregation in St. Louis (photos, maps, film, other media); pod-cast interviews of collaborators conducted by students (to be featured on amcs.wustl as well as voices.wustl); symposium, SP17. Future plans include book publication of symposium essays, which will not be supported by the requested funds.