

RACE AND SPACE

Contesting Boundaries and
Inequities

Edited by Lisa Leitz

RESEARCH IN SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS
AND CHANGE

VOLUME 46

RACE AND SPACE

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RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS
AND CHANGE VOLUME 46

RACE AND SPACE: CONTESTING BOUNDARIES AND INEQUITIES

EDITED BY

LISA LEITZ

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INTRODUCTION

Lisa Leitz¹

More than a century, political and sociological scholarship has examined the role of race in social conflict and social movements. However, the size and scope of the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests have, rightly, pushed this topic back into the forefront of academic work. The BLM protests began in the United States after witness and security camera footage of the police murder of George Floyd spread quickly via the internet, resulting in what has been called the largest protests on race in this country's history (Buchanan et al., 2020). As in earlier waves of racial justice activism in the United States during 2013–2014 and 2016, #BlackLivesMatter began trending on social media, and politicians, celebrities, and traditional media engaged with police brutality and killings of racial minorities (Duvall & Heckemayer, 2018; Ince et al., 2017; Jones, 2020; Phelps et al., 2021). This resurgence of BLM activism called attention not only to institutional racism in the criminal justice system but also encouraged people to examine widespread economic, cultural, and other race-based forms of oppression.

In spite of lockdowns due to the global coronavirus pandemic, marches and rallies occurred in numerous countries. Research conducted by *The Guardian* found that these protests were the “largest anti-racism rallies since slavery era” (2020, subtitle) and were widespread across the United Kingdom (see also Mohdin et al., 2020). Media and entertainment elites helped to spread calls for justice for Floyd around the globe; people marched and rallied, often targeting US embassies, on every inhabited continent in June 2020. Activists in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Dominican Republic, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe connected grievances specific to their countries to the US BLM movement. The 2020 global diffusion of BLM resonated with local organizations and encouraged larger visibility of activism on local inequities, creating a hybrid-BLM movement opposing violent police brutality toward various racial, religious, and other minority communities (Shahin et al., 2021).

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The global interest in racial justice draws attention to many important avenues for scholars to reevaluate dominant theories, data-collection, and practices of war, peacebuilding, and movements to further examine the continuing significance of race. [Johanna Solomon's \(2021\)](#) careful construction of the previous *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change* volume, *Four Dead in Ohio*, did this in memorialization of the 40th anniversary of the Kent State University where students were killed in protests against the Vietnam War. By seeking out submissions from and encouraging the work of scholars from Asia and South America, Solomon produced a volume that demonstrates how state repression and student activism is neither a Western nor white issue. Solomon's introduction highlights the racism in media coverage and American memory, in which the white students of Kent State are continuously memorialized while Black students killed in similar manners at other university protests have been forgotten. Chapters demonstrate that in spite of decades of youth prominence in street protests, movement online communication often fails to take youths seriously as (potential) activists ([Elliott & Earl, 2021](#)). Further, race and class play a powerful role in society's fears of youths, especially their activism ([Corrie, 2021](#)).

Two years after BLM protests swept the globe, national police reform remains stalled in the US Congress, and some of the local justice system reforms were reversed. However, panel data find significant increases in American understanding of racial discrimination and support for government intervention to address racial inequality, which thus influenced voting patterns ([Mutz, 2022](#)). This Volume, too, is an outcome of the 2020 protests, and the scholarship within can spark greater discussion of race as an axis of oppression within the fields of Peace and Conflict and Social Movement Studies. Chapters examine the operation of race and ethnicity in social movements as well as related ideas of nationality and citizenship. For this double-blind peer-reviewed volume, I invited submissions focused on race and ethnicity, in addition to offering space for general submissions. The chapters not focused on race in this volume examine notions of space as not only a geographical location but also a maker of identity and shaper of experience.

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CORRECTIVES

BLM should be situated among the long history of Black organizing in the United States, which predates the Civil War, though this organization's emphasis on intersectionality and media innovation distinguishes it from previous iterations of racial justice activism ([Nummi et al., 2019](#)). Critiques of the 2020 BLM movement often centered on activists who broke laws or violated pandemic health policy, with US conservatives often negatively comparing this movement with a neutered and mythologized version of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) of the 1960s. This comparison derives from a dominant memorialization of the CRM that ignores elements of the Black liberation's oppositional political and cultural positions, unpopularity, and intentional use of disruptive and even violent radical tactics ([Theoharis, 2018](#)). While social movement scholars have

written much about the violence Civil Rights activists faced and the civil disobedience in which the mainstream organizations engaged (e.g., [McAdam, 1982, 1988](#); [Morris, 1984, 1999](#)), much of the most well-known scholarship is anchored in the past and/or in the US South, thus allowing many to ignore the ongoing movements for racial justice and continued existence of racism across the country and internationally. Further, social movement scholars have rarely examined the organizations, tactics, and framing of “Black Power” (for exceptions see [Rojas, 2007](#); [Taylor, 2021](#)), thus ignoring separatist and more radical political organizing against racial injustice. To address scholarly inadequacies, some have called for the explicit development of social movement theory using a critical race (e.g., [Richter, 2018](#); [Smith, 2021](#)) or an intersectional (e.g., [Gallo-Cruz, 2021](#); [Robnett, 1997](#); [Roth, 2021](#); [Woehrle, 2014](#)) lens that corrects some of the assumptions. Answering this call, chapters one and two of this volume build toward a deeper understanding of race within US Black political organizing.

In the first chapter of this volume, Eddins demonstrates the importance of situating movements within an emic perspective, and therefore uses concepts from Black Studies, specifically racial capitalism and the Black Radical Tradition, to assess scholarship on the CRM. She then continues to use these to develop a macro-level analysis of the reparatory justice movement, which seeks compensation for the economic harms of slavery and discrimination. “Racial Capitalism and Black Social Movements” illuminates the importance of understanding that race and class are mutually constitutive forces in Black activism.

In “Inequities in Movement Making: A Socio Structural Organizational Analysis of ‘Right to the City,’” Liu combines critical race theory, intersectionality, and organizational theories to explain power dynamics within organizational structures and relationships. This chapter contributes to the ongoing debate over movement professionalization ([Cable, 1984](#); [Heideman, 2017](#); [Mosely, 2012](#); [Staggenborg, 1988](#)). Liu examines the organizational dynamics within the community and housing justice movement. By examining both a local chapter and a national coalition, Liu establishes how hierarchies are replicated within an organization ostensibly committed to undermining those hierarchies. This chapter demonstrates how ideology dedicated to dismantling structural problems affecting mostly marginalized groups clashes with funding needs in a way that replicates inequities. Positioning whites with greater economic power in leadership and decision-making roles disconnects the work from those most affected.

Racialized Issues

Addressing the need for breadth and depth of social movement analysis of racial justice movements, a few authors have examined the continuance of Black organizing in the United States beyond the moments of heightened protest, which attracted the greatest media and scholarly attention ([Jenkins et al., 2003](#); [Maher et al., 2019](#); [Santoro & Fitzpatrick, 2015](#)). Although issues have changed over the years, there has been tremendous stability in organizations and issues from the

1990s through the 2014 and 2020 waves of the BLM Movement (Oliver et al., forthcoming, 2022). The next two chapters focus on elements of the criminal justice system, the key area within which activists demanded change during BLM protests.

Police violence was the central issue of BLM around the globe (Shahin et al., 2021). The third chapter of this volume contributes to the innovative use of place-based variables to understand how this issue is affected by racial and class dynamics. “The More Things Change, The More They Stay the Same: A spatial analysis of historical and contemporary incidents of police violence” examines patterns in the individuals killed as well as community-level variables that illuminate where police killings occur. The data reveal expected individual-level patterns in those killed by police. Most are male, under 22, and armed, though a large percentage were unarmed, and Blacks are overrepresented. Using US Census level-data to situate fatal police encounters in St. Louis City at two points in time (1970–1980 and 2000–2010), Jackson’s data corroborate other single-time research that neighborhood concentrations of Blacks and socioeconomic disadvantage correlate with where these deaths take place. By utilizing historical and contemporary data, Jackson is able to demonstrate the persistence of these patterns over time. The consistent police violence in these communities must be understood as critical context for BLM and criminal justice organizing.

Although less focused on issues of race, the fourth chapter addresses another key issue in addressing racial inequities in the criminal justice system: prisons. Racial and ethnic minorities are overrepresented in US prisons (Blumstein, 2015; Cooper et al., 2021; Garland et al., 2008; Spivakovsky, 2016), but there has been limited social movement analysis of those fighting this disparity (Kilgore, 2015). “Organizing a Weak Anti-Prison Movement? Representation and Political Pacification at a Nonprofit Prison Reentry Organization” demonstrates one way that former prisoners are discouraged from engaging in social change activities related to this issue. Mijs offers insight into the difficulty of organizing based on shared experiences in prison spaces. The author finds that nonprofits in this sector depoliticize their clients by impressing on them the importance of individual rehabilitation. Their programs focus on dismissing their “past life” and therefore prematurely cutting off their chance of forming strategic organizational ties with other victims of the criminal-justice system. This research highlights how prison rehabilitation nonprofits draw attention away from the structural problems underlying the American prison boom and its burdens. These organizations instead stress the clients’ individuality thereby reproducing a “culture of political avoidance.” Similar to issues of professionalism addressed by an earlier chapter, Mijs raises important questions about funders’ differences from constituents and non-profit’s ability to address causes of inequity.

Race, ethnicity, and citizenship interact to shape immigration policy and the experience of being accepted as a full-member of one’s society (see Haines, 2007; Scott et al., 2021; Sorrell et al., 2019; Telles, 2018; Witherspoon et al., 2021). In 2006, US Latinx populations organized some of the largest United States protests by ethno-racial minorities to call attention to continuing racial and ethnic inequities in how this country determines legal citizenship (see Mora et al., 2018;

Zepeda-Millán, 2017). The last chapter in this section, “Sustained Mobilization for Immigrant Rights: A Comparative Case Study of the San Joaquin Valley,” examines rural protests against US legislative attempts to make being undocumented a criminal, rather than civil, offense. Urban spaces often provide safety in population numbers for minority protest, and most research on the immigration protests and other ethno-racial justice organizing has focused on major metropolitan centers. Mora’s examination of rural spaces in which there are high populations of economically disadvantaged Latinx people provides important nuance to political opportunity and resource mobilization. Weaving newspaper and interview data, Mora is able to demonstrate how grievances, or policy threats, vary by locality via immigration authorities’ different rates of enforcement across central California. Mora determines that locations with pre-existing organizations and a history of community organizing are more likely to have sustained and successful movements.

These chapters highlight how the characteristics of our community shape whether we experience police or immigrant violence, and this firsthand experience (or lack thereof) is likely to shape one’s choices in whether to engage in BLM, immigrant rights, or other ethno-racial justice activism. The walls of prison shape more than the experiences contained within them; they shape one’s sense of self and political possibility afterward. This emphasis on location-specific human experience is continued into the final section of the book.

Space as Identity

Both race, as descriptor of physical differences between humans, and space, as a geographic location, profoundly shape consequences in human experience, and both are only given meaning through human interactions. Improvements in computer-assisted data analysis have given rise to an increased use of geographic signifiers as variables in social science (Logan, 2012; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). Incorporating insights from geography, scholars’ careful study of differences of physical spaces can give rise to more complete explanations for social issues and differences in social movements.

A common understanding of war suggests that wars are fought over resources, which are fundamental features of the spaces of life. Though scholars continue to find numerous additional explanations for armed conflict, unequal distribution and scarcity of resources significantly affect the likelihood for civil (or internal) conflicts (Collier & Hoeffler, 2005; Gleditsch, 2018; Koubi et al., 2014; Ross, 2006). Climate change and climate-specific variables affect resource needs and their existence. By examining differences in the physical environment across nations, Shiva, Molana, and Kwiatkowski contribute to critical understandings of the relationship between physical space and war. “Climatic Conditions and Internal Armed Conflicts: An Empirical Study” utilizes a dataset constructed from spatial and conflict variables from 139 countries between 1961 and 2011. Controlling for other variables, Shiva, Molana, and Kwiatkowski demonstrate that temperature and precipitation significantly predict the onset of intrastate armed conflict. The authors’ econometric analysis suggests that controlling climate change, protecting

and promoting stability, and regulating population growth will reduce the onset of internal armed conflicts as a means of promoting peace.

By focusing on a single country, the final chapter of this volume, “It’s All About Timing: Temporal Dynamics in the Protest Repression Nexus in Pinochet’s Chile, 1982–1989,” contributes useful information about the relationship between protest and repression. Using detailed social movement data from the archives of the “vicariate of Solidarity,” Sanchez-Barna tests how movements were affected when met with repressive state force. Sanchez-Barna finds that the effect of repression varied depending on the level of existing mobilization. During an expansive phase, as the movement was growing, repression strengthened the movement; whereas when it was in a contractionary phase, the opposite was true.

Throughout the book authors draw attention to the important ways in which one’s physical surroundings, their space, determine the social issues they face and the ways they mobilize to address them. For both social movement analysis and examination of conflicts, it is critical to understand the intersections of space and race. Lipsitz writes, “The lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension (2007, p. 12).” Power and class positioning often flow from both race and space. How we utilize our physical surroundings and how it is controlled differentially affect racial and ethnic groups. Similarly, cultures and racial groups may have varying relations to land. Although each chapter offers separate insights into their respective literature in social movements and conflict studies, taken together they make a case for understanding race and space as determinants of identity as well as one’s likelihood to face violence or engage in activism.

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