Race, transformative planning, and the just city

Lily K Song

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What is This?
Abstract
Among the thorniest dilemmas stemming transformative planning practice in the context of American cities is the problem of race. While “just city” and neo-pragmatist perspectives have recently theorized progressive policy and planning efforts to create viable alternatives to the dominant neoliberal urban and local economic development model, they have paid less attention to the relationship between race, urban political economy, and transformative planning. This article seeks to bridge this gap by elaborating a conception of race that incorporates W.E.B. DuBois’ notion of “double consciousness” with neo-pragmatist planning perspectives to illuminate potential synergies between the situated perspectives of socially marginalized groups and differentially situated, resourced, and abled allies in illuminating systemic problems and directing deeper modes of urban policy and planning recourse. Drawing from two empirical cases, it examines how progressive urban coalitions might use race as a diagnostic and dialogic tool in undertaking provisional and contextual inquiry and praxis in the urban economic sphere toward realization of the “just city.”

Keywords
community development, just city, race, shared value creation, transformative planning

Introduction
The problem of race remains among the thorniest dilemmas stemming transformative planning practice in the context of American cities. By measures of prejudicial attitudes and intentional, overtly discriminatory behavior on the part of White individuals or persistence of formal segregation and discrimination in schools, housing, and other aspects of modern life, racism might appear to be in decline in the United States...
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(Goldman, 2012; Schuman et al., 1997). However, a structural–institutional interpretation of racism reveals a unique and fundamental position of cumulative Black disadvantage, complete with enormous employment differentials, earnings and wealth inequalities, and hyper-segregation, resulting from the combined effects of globalization, political and economic restructuring, exclusionary practices by the real estate and banking sectors, failing inner city schools, mass incarceration, and other contextual factors (Bobo et al., 1997; Mullings, 2005). An urban-spatial perspective further illuminates the historic effects of federally subsidized urban renewal, highway construction, and suburbanization of housing, commerce, and industry, complete with systematic redlining, demolition, and re-districting of racially diverse inner city neighborhoods (Sugrue, 2005), as well as more recent manifestations of racialized geography in the form of concentrated subprime lending and foreclosures in majority African American and Latino neighborhoods in the urban core and inner ring suburbs (Rugh and Massey, 2010). On the cultural–ideological front, “Jim Crow racism” has given way to a “laissez faire” form of racism, characterized by “persistent negative stereotyping of African Americans, a tendency to blame Blacks themselves for the Black-White gap in socio-economic standing, and resistance to meaningful policy efforts to ameliorate America’s racist social conditions and institutions” (Bobo et al., 1997).

In recent years, planning theory has seen an exciting resurgence of scholarship in the area of transformative planning (Albrechts, 2010, 2013; Fainstein, 2011; Friedmann, 2000, 2011; Sandercock, 2003; Steele, 2011). The conception of the “Just City” and neo-pragmatist perspectives in planning have provided especially fertile grounds to envision and analyze progressive policy and planning efforts to create viable alternatives to the dominant neoliberal urban and local economic development model. However, the relationship between race, urban political economy, and transformative planning has received less scholarly attention. Existing studies tend to emphasize politics of difference as well as procedural challenges and gains associated with achieving racial diversity in planning contexts. By some accounts, race gives rise to particularistic identities and divisive politics that are potentially antithetical to universalistic material or distributive interests. Such depictions neglect the material dimensions of racial oppression and stratification as well as those of Black freedom and civil rights struggles, not to mention the latter’s historic contributions to progressive interests and politics. Consequently, planning theory tends to overlook the importance of addressing race in building broad-based movements to challenge capitalist hegemony and promote alternative modes of economic production and exchange (DuBois, [1935] 1999; Kelley, 1996; Robinson, 2000; Thompson, 2005, 2008, 2011). Alternatively, this article explores a pragmatist conception of race that incorporates W.E.B. DuBois’ notion of “double consciousness” to explore how progressive urban coalitions might use race as a diagnostic and dialogic tool in undertaking provisional and contextual inquiry and praxis in the urban economic sphere toward realization of the “just city.” Following a review of the literature, I describe my conceptual framework before applying it to two empirical cases—the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative in Cleveland and the Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program, and conclude by discussing planning implications.
Review of the literature

Just cities

Susan Fainstein’s (2011) “The Just City” stands at the forefront of recent urban scholarship challenging the prioritization of market efficiency as a normative criterion by which to guide urban policy and planning efforts in favor of a greater emphasis on justice. The volume develops an urban theory of justice, centering on core principles of equity, democracy, and diversity, for evaluating urban institutions and policies in wealthy capitalist, formally democratic, Western cities. In part, Fainstein situates her work in contradistinction to what she deems an overemphasis on procedure among participatory, communicative, and collaborative approaches to planning, which risks diverting needed attention from the character of urban areas (Davidoff et al., 2003; Forester, 1993; Healey, 1996). Her emphasis on a substantive concept of urban justice premises that procedural democracy stands separate from urban equity, which requires a prescriptive program that restructures relations of urban production and exchange. Fainstein also distinguishes her work from traditional urban political economy perspectives in moving beyond critique to formulate specific criteria of desirable urban institutions and policies (Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, [1974] 1991). Such framing resonates with peaking skepticism toward the prevailing neoliberal model of economic growth amidst the prolonged economic recession following in the wake of the US housing and financial crisis. For all the gains in citizen engagement and participation in formal policy and planning channels over the past five decades, problems of intensifying income and wealth inequality, widespread social insecurity, and spatially uneven development have highlighted the need for radical intervention. The imposed dualism between process and outcome and characterization of planning’s counterproductive emphasis on the former at the cost of the latter is not without question or debate (revisited shortly). However, Fainstein’s bold attempt to distill transcendent normative criteria and universalistic discourse around a substantive concept of urban justice appears to have helped fill a theoretical void and, in so doing, generated wide traction within planning discourse (see Marcuse et al., 2009, for edited volume on concept of a “just city”; Thomas, 2008; Umemoto, 2013).

Pragmatist planning perspectives

In contrast to Fainstein’s “just city” approach, scholars exploring questions of progressive change and social justice from the perspective of American Pragmatism have resisted the conceptual neatness afforded by process-outcome binaries or transcendent normative criteria to instead emphasize provisional and contextual inquiry and praxis (Albrechts, 2013; Forester, 2012, 1993; Healey, 2009, 1997; Hoch, 2007; Innes, 1995; Schön, 1983). American Pragmatism, as a philosophical and epistemological tradition, rejects abstract categorizations and absolute truths to instead emphasize the situational contingency of human creativity and adjustment (Dewey, [1910] 1997, [1927] 2012). From the Pragmatist perspective, matters of participation, communication, and collaboration transcend categorization as procedural components or indicators of equitable outcome given the continuity of human activity, which transforms what might be goals of
action at one time into inputs for future aims. What matters more is their extent of relevance and proficiency as instruments for dealing with current social problems.

Among more recent formulations that share Fainstein’s “realist utopianism” or penchant for “nonreformist reforms,” John Forester (2012) expounds on the promises of critical pragmatism as a transformative planning practice that moves from deconstructive skepticism toward reconstructive imagination and joint learning, invention, and problem solving. In informing a co-constructed, generative, and negotiated planning practice, critical pragmatism attends to both processes and outcomes, utilizes multiple, contingent, and evolving forms of knowledge; probes and reframes public possibilities; and undertakes creative, expansive, and broadly beneficial negotiations. Likewise, Louis Albrechts’ (2013) reframing of strategic spatial planning from a coproduction perspective rejects an “ontology of being,” which privileges end states, in favor of an ontology of “becoming,” emphasizing actions, movement, conflicts, relationships, process, and emergence. In calling for active civil society involvement in the contextual, contentious, creative, and continuous process of agenda setting, problem formulation, and the shaping and implementation of policy, plans, and projects, it not only seeks to counter power and material interests and narrow thinking in the present realm of urban governance but also broadens the scope of possible futures by building strong, resilient, mutually supportive communities capable of meeting their own needs on an ongoing basis.

Transformative planning and the problem of race

In theorizing the relationship between race and the “just city,” Fainstein largely subsumes race under the category of “diversity,” which simultaneously complements and stands in tension with the other core principles of her urban theory of justice—equity and democracy. Together with social categories such as ethnicity, gender, and religion, race forms a component of poststructuralist thought on recognition, diversity, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and politics of difference. Race, as conferring to racial minorities, is a political formula [that] gives rise to demands for language autonomy and acknowledgment of particular customs such as holiday celebrations or styles of communication. In its call for recognition of difference, it is emancipatory in pressing for the end of discrimination and acknowledgment of the positive aspects of maligned cultures. (Fainstein, 2011: 42)

However, in forming the basis for “nonmaterial forms of oppression” and solidarity, race remains distinct from and partly undermines “economic forms of redress” (Fainstein, 2011: 42). In the words of Fainstein (2009),

*Justice requires dampening of sentiments based on group identity, greater commitment to common ends, and identification of institutions and policies that offer broadly appealing benefits … The inherently divisive character of identity politics cuts against the building of [broad-based, progressive] institutions and therefore is largely self-defeating. For redistribution to proceed, recognition is a prerequisite, but that recognition needs to involve shared commitments not rivalry. (p. 34)*
Thus, stripped of its economic content, race appears a secondary issue that may have cultural and political significance but is essentially a divisive mechanism that stymies the redistributive agendas or economic programs of class-based movements (Thompson, 2011). Such a depiction neglects the economic nature of racial oppression and stratification, whether related to slavery and Jim Crow; unequal access to social welfare programs, public education, worker protections, housing, and business loans; the systematic destruction of vibrant Black neighborhoods and commercial districts through urban renewal; or discriminatory policies by employers and unions (Marable, 2000). It further overlooks material dimensions of Black freedom and civil rights struggles, as well as their wider implications for progressive interests and politics (DuBois, [1935] 1999). Simply put, Fainstein appears ambivalent about race in seeing it as engendering exclusion, oppression, particularism, and divisive politics, which lie in tension with equity and democracy goals, all the while attributing to social diversity, a normative criteria of the “just city.”

In “The minority-race planner in the quest for a just city,” June Manning Thomas (2008) further probes the issue of racial diversity against the theoretical background of the “just city” to alternatively characterize race as assuming a constructive function in transformative planning. The article is based on a study in which Thomas presented a sample of African American planners with in-depth questions to explore how interconnections between their racial status and planning practice might further the goal of the “just city.” Respondents highlighted tendencies and capacities to defend the interests of minority or disadvantaged communities within respective agencies of employment and facilitate communication between underrepresented populations and said planning agencies. Among the major themes emerging from the study is that of minority-race planners offering: (1) unique perspectives concerning the special needs of minority and low-income communities, and (2) high levels of motivation to enter the planning profession, both as a result of perceiving or experiencing severe inequalities in their own communities. Without drawing essentialist implications or overestimating the capacity of individual planners to realize urban justice within mainstream planning contexts, the article accentuates a positive, epistemic and praxical dimension of race whereby minority-race planners gain valuable orientations and skills through exposure to marginalized or disadvantaged structural–institutional circumstances. Where Fainstein appears to value racial diversity as a substantive aim or desired end in and of itself, Thomas situates the unique contributions of minority-race planners on the procedural side of the process-outcome binary and as enhancing the position of minority or low-income communities in particular. Like Fainstein, Thomas frames the interconnections of race and the planning profession in terms of politics of difference; however, she additionally draws attention to the economic content of racial oppression in conveying a commitment on the part of minority-race planners to serving minority communities and economically disadvantaged groups in response to the poverty and disinvestment affecting their own minority-race neighborhoods.

Keeping in mind Thomas’ “positive” conception of race and using it as a reference point for revisiting Louis Albrecht’s coproduction perspective on strategic spatial planning opens up new possibilities at the nexus of race as a diagnostic and dialogic tool and shared value creation. Thomas points to unique insights and skills on the part of minority-race planners
stemming from direct experience of structural–institutional inequality in their own communities. In a similar vein, Louis Albrechts’ coproduction perspective recasts citizens from recipients of public services, lobbyists, and protestors to hidden resources or local assets in strategic planning processes by virtue of their local experience, knowledge, and investedness. While making no explicit mention of race, he advocates including the views of those who have been systematically excluded to “understand the full complexity of places and [broaden] the scope of the possible answers” in undertaking strategic spatial planning as a coproduction between civil society, government, and private sector partners (Albrechts, 2013: 56). Where Thomas’ unit of analysis is the individual minority-race planner, Albrechts focuses on the broader strategic planning context, different groups of actors within it, their unique perspectives and capacities, and potential synergies among different groups. While Thomas sees minority-race planners as largely adding procedural value, Albrechts disregards the conceptual separation between process and outcomes. He brings to light the more immediate gains of coproduction, in the form of countered power and material interests and improved public services, policies, plans, and projects, as well as enduring effects such as communities that are better organized and resourced, civically active, politically influential, and substantively engaged as to meet their own needs on a sustained basis.

**Toward a conception of race as a diagnostic and dialogic tool for transformative planning**

The coproduction perspective on strategic spatial planning accords with the tradition of American pragmatism in rejecting process-outcome binaries and transcendent normative criteria in favor of provisional and contextual inquiry and praxis, perfectionist commitments to human self-realization in the greatest and fullest sense, and attention to power and politics in emancipatory struggles. Where it also replicates the tendency of classical American pragmatism to deprioritize issues of race, we look to the scholarship of W.E.B. DuBois, which displays pragmatist themes of historical and contextual inquiry, centrality of action, considerations of power, and commitments to perfectionalism but also centralizes the problem of race in contemplating pressing social problems (Posnock, 1998; Taylor, 2004; West, 1989). In particular, we draw from DuBois’ ([1903] 2012) famous account of race as embodied by the notion of “double consciousness,” elaborated in the opening chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*:

> The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 3)

On one hand, double consciousness appears a sort of affliction that causes low self-esteem, disappointment in others, and a “mocking distrust of everything white”; yet
DuBois ([1903] 2012) also associates the burden of “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” with a “second sight” into greater facets of the social world (p. 2). Invoking the metaphor of the veil, he differentiates between the view of African Americans and those of the White majority, the latter being less self reflective or contextual by virtue of their privileged position and practical impertinence of taking the powerless into account. Hence, in contrast to Fainstein’s particularistic rendering, race and racism is a deeply “social” condition that not only afflicts racially subordinated groups but also inhibits the capacity of Whites to fully comprehend their social world and develop their various potentialities within it.

Besides associating “epistemological privilege” with conditions of subaltern or marginal social positionality, DuBois sees opportunities for social and individual empowerment and transformative social practice arising from the specific predicament and role of African Americans in the ongoing development of the capitalist economy, political systems, and cultural apparatuses in the United States (Hale, 1994: 448; Taylor, 2004). As interpreted by Manning Marable (2000),

For DuBois, the centrality of racism was not just a burden for nonwhites, but had to be openly and unconditionally recognized by white progressives. It was only through the development of an antiracist politics that the real material needs of all oppressed people could be addressed. (p. 11)

In other words, the DuBoisian conception of race transcends politics of difference to connect Black marginality, spanning multiple continents and variants of capitalist economic and spatial production, with the subordination and potential empowerment of the White poor and working-class majority. In disproportionately absorbing the tensions and contradictions internal to global capitalism, “racial others” embody experiences and insights that can direct the policy visions and concerted actions of class conscious, multiracial alliances toward addressing the deepest problems hindering democratic society. DuBois’ own social praxis synthesized a pan-Africanism informed by principles of race and class emancipation with cultural pluralism, radical democracy, and cooperative economics (Marable, 1986). In addressing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1946, DuBois urged the organization to transcend its “negative program of resistance to discrimination and unite with the best elements of the nation in a positive constructive program for rebuilding civilization,” as he saw it as “obligated to fight for progressive economic agenda, eliminate poverty, curb monopoly and rule of wealth, spread education, and practice democracy” (Marable, 1986: 168).

Extending DuBoisian double consciousness into the realm of transformative planning theory and practice, how might race find operationalization as a diagnostic and dialogic tool for unraveling and regenerating the urban economy to create shared wealth and begin to redistribute resources and power in society? While the concept of double consciousness focuses on the particular circumstances and epistemic privileges of African Americans, we can use it as a foundation to further contemplate the complementarity and combination of various insights and capacities possessed by different groups by virtue of their social locations. As delineated by Iris Marion Young (2002) in Inclusion and Democracy,
the standpoint of those in less privileged positions can reveal otherwise unnoticed bias and partiality … (p. 117)

Notwithstanding, [people in less advantaged social positions] too are liable to bias and self-regard in overstating the nature of situations, misunderstanding their causes, or laying blame in the wrong place. [Therefore,] some partiality and misunderstandings can best be exposed by discussion with differentially situated others. (p. 117)

The premise of inherent human narrowness and fallibility and regard for dialogic exchange with differentially situated others overlaps with the communicative planning tradition, which fosters inclusive participation, open discussion, and public decision making by force of argument and informed consensus rather than individual power or status (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1997; Innes, 1995; Ploger, 2001; Sandercock, 1998). However, Young (2002) transcends the discursive planning paradigm in additionally attending to the epistemic and “praxical” benefits of pooling different knowledge and skill sets toward effecting societal transformation. In her words,

Aiming to promote social justice through public action requires more than framing debate in terms that appeal to justice. It requires an objective understanding of the society, a comprehensive account of its relations and structured processes, its material locations and environmental conditions, a detailed knowledge of events and conditions in different places and positions, and the ability to predict the likely consequences of actions and policies. Only pooling the situated knowledge of all social positions can produce such social knowledge. (p. 117)

Thus, Young combines an appreciation for the situated perspectives of marginalized groups in illuminating unnoticed structural biases and partialities and generating appeals for social justice with a commonsense understanding of bounded human perspective and capacity as well as manifold requirements for efficacious public action and problem solving. Reading DuBois through Young elucidates synergies with neo-pragmatist planning perspectives that, in turn, open up opportunities for transformative planning theory and practice. Consonant with Forrester and Albrechts’ neo-pragmatism, DuBois’ appeal for broader coalition building and combination of resources with other progressive social forces rests on an understanding of power, inequality, and ideology as well as the challenges of navigating contentious, uncertain, and continually evolving political arenas and public decision-making channels. Where DuBois diverges and especially contributes to such perspectives is in emphasizing grassroots activism and radical social praxis in the economic sphere (among public decision-making venues) and centralizing race as a collective problematic and resource to be put in the service of broad-based movements for economic justice and democracy.

Revisiting Fainstein’s theory of urban justice, a core argument is that democracy, embodied by deliberative processes and public participation, stands separate from economic or material equality, the key difference being a matter of politics versus political economy. In other words, realizing the “just city,” beyond protest and contestation of dominant neoliberal urban policy and development paradigms, requires progressive urban coalitions to make policy demands and realize alternative approaches to economic and
workforce development, which, in turn, requires vision, strategy, and know-how. Fainstein demarcates democratic process from material equity to risk “throwing out the baby with the bathwater,” so to speak. This article explores an alternative approach that brings together DuBoisian double consciousness with neo-pragmatist planning perspectives to explore the utility of race as a diagnostic and dialogic tool for progressive urban coalitions undertaking iterative democratic praxis in the urban economic sphere toward realization of the “just city” in the US context. “Double consciousness” taps into the situated perspectives of racialized low income urban communities in illuminating systemic dysfunctions of the urban political economy and framing alternative local economic and workforce development agendas. In turn, neo-pragmatism highlights potential synergies arising among differentially situated, resourced, and abled groups as they engage in joint learning, invention, and problem solving. In building theory at the intersection of race, transformative planning, and the “just city,” such a theoretical and analytical approach avoids conceptual divides between particularism and universalism or process and outcome that carry little practical relevance. Rather, it remains attuned to the complex, transient, and historically and contextually contingent nature of urban problems, along with the locally specific, multimodal nature of efficacious policy and planning responses. It additionally embodies the perfectionist sensibility of American Pragmatism in emphasizing civil society capacity building in the urban economic sphere—or continual social practice—as the primary means to transform the urban political economy undergirding resource and power disparities and other dimensions of urban inequality (Taylor, 2004: 103).

Diagnostic and dialogic race in action

To further explore how diagnostic and dialogic race might play out and bear fruit in practice, this section presents summary findings from two empirical case studies—the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative in Cleveland and the Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program. In each case, progressive urban coalitions prioritized the experiences and insights of inner city communities of color in undertaking local economic and workforce development programs that boldly contrast from the dominant neoliberal model in prioritizing the needs of local communities, creating family sustaining jobs with career paths, building on shared vision and trusted relationships among multi-sector actors to generate shared value, and promoting the quality of the natural and built environment as well as long-run regional self-sufficiency. As with any other complex, “naturally occurring” social phenomena, the two cases originated from different starting points and are characterized by a confluence of numerous factors that complicate the task of disentangling confounding effects and drawing causal inferences. Therefore, rather than attempt traditional causal analysis that holds variables constant across cases and generalizes to a larger universe (Yin, 2009), I instead adopted a contextualized comparison of two critical and emblematic cases to build planning theory at the intersection of race, transformative planning, and the “just city” (Locke and Thelen, 1995). The contextualized comparison approach places differences rather than similarities at the center of analysis to bring into relief how actors in varying institutional and political contexts engage in divergent struggles with analytical parallels (Locke and Thelen, 1995).
The fact that the initiatives differ in appearance but are similar in substance renders them revelatory as a sample.

The research began with historical analysis of the disparate but also overlapping trajectories of intense neoliberal urban policy and local economic development practices and social marginalization in Cleveland and Los Angeles. These appeared to give rise to different “sticking points” for community-based green economic and workforce development initiatives whose thematic intersections became points for more focused analysis. To unravel the process by which community and civic organizations in the case studies used race as a diagnostic and dialogic tool in their respective community-based green economic and workforce development programs, I conducted field and archival research between November 2010 and May 2012—completing 89 unique semi-structured in-depth interviews with representatives of community and civic organizations, labor unions, university-based policy research centers, anchor institutions, and local government and other public agencies as well as consultants and other program participants and observing meetings, deliberative processes, work sites, and organizational settings. Secondary data sources include program proposals, reports, and organizational records; legislative and regulatory documents; planning documents; notes of correspondence; newspaper articles and editorials; and meeting minutes.

The case of the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative in Cleveland

In Cleveland, the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative originated from a series of coordinated efforts among anchor institutions in the University Circle area, the Cleveland Foundation, and local agencies to initiate area improvement projects toward the regeneration of surrounding neighborhoods. Located four miles east of downtown Cleveland, University Circle is home to Northeast Ohio’s premier education, medical, arts, and cultural institutions (i.e. Cleveland Museum of Art, Case Western Reserve University, University Hospitals, and Cleveland Clinic). On the other hand, the six neighborhoods surrounding University Circle—namely Glenville, Hough, Fairfax, Buckeye-Shaker, Little Italy, and the eastern part of East Cleveland—are disproportionately low income and African American. Once inhabited by diverse working-class communities of Irish, Czech, Slavic, Hungarian, Russian Jewish, and Italian origin as well as native-born Whites and African Americans, the neighborhoods experienced White flight from the 1930s and more general middle class flight from the 1960s (Miller and Wheeler, 2009; Perry, 1995). Following decades of deindustrialization, depopulation, and disinvestment, which incidentally coincided with growing African American electoral power (Nelson, 1995), the neighborhood suffered some of the highest foreclosure and unemployment rates in the country during the Great Recession. Having physically “turned their backs” on these neighborhoods since the 1960s civil unrest, many of the anchor institutions began to shift their orientation in the early 2000s, as customers, employees, students, and other stakeholders expressed discomfort with the surrounding poverty, dilapidation, and lack of amenities. Given its philanthropic interests, spatial focus on the communities of Cleveland, and reputation as an “honest broker” among both the public and private sector, the Cleveland Foundation stepped in to convene the “Greater University Circle Initiative” beginning in 2005 (Lee, 2011, Interview by author). After undertaking a series
of physical development projects (i.e. enhancing public accessibility and safety around three transit stations, developing mixed use transit oriented facilities), the Greater University Circle Initiative partners eventually arrived at the deeper challenge of eradicating neighborhood poverty and building community wealth.

In exploring alternative local economic and workforce development strategies, Foundation staff with extensive local knowledge and contacts played a critical role in “brokering” or “translating” the “epistemological privilege” of racialized, low income inner city communities arising from decades of socioeconomic and cultural marginalization in the target neighborhoods. For instance, India Pierce Lee, the Program Director for Neighborhoods, Housing, and Community Development, was not only a longstanding resident of one of the target neighborhoods with prolific personal networks (“People have this impression I live in Shaker Heights. No, I live in the Glenville neighborhood; that’s where I grew up!”), but also had decades of experience working in housing, community, and economic development projects around Cleveland. Hence, she was determined, “We weren’t going to create another program that gave lip service to the community … giving businesses loans to hire people, but then 15 years later, are the people still working? Are the companies still there?” Rather, what endured was a shortage of place-based enterprises and lasting and meaningful employment opportunities.

On the anchor institution side, “double consciousness” found incorporation by way of government regulatory mandates and trends of “socially responsible” institutional practices, which compelled University Hospitals to recruit an African American community representative for the board of directors. In turn, the new board member accentuated the shortcomings of the hospital’s existing procurement and purchasing approach, which routinely transferred billions of dollars, some of it to contractors and workers disproportionately based in outlying areas to the detriment of businesses and jobseekers in its immediate vicinity. University Hospitals Chief Administrative Officer Steve Standley (2012) described his revelation about the structural barriers faced by minority contractors and workers:

I will tell you in 2004, 2005, I had no idea. I had somewhat of an idea, but I had no idea how really hard it was ... You know, if you are a majority electrical company, they view your bonding capacity based on your company’s profit and loss statement, not based on your owner’s divorce or late credit card [payment]. When you get to small companies, whether they’re African American, Hispanic, female-owned, whatever, it’s everything about the person’s life that is being investigated to see whether they can post the bond.

Realizing the hospital’s direct role in perpetuating such inequalities reaffirmed for its management the urgency of tackling the polarized relationship between University Circle anchor institution and surrounding communities. An ensuing chain of multi-stakeholder meetings and negotiations involving the mayor’s office, local contractors, and regional building and construction trades culminated in a Project Labor Agreement with ambitious local/minority hiring targets on US$750m worth of construction. This event set a local precedent for racially inclusive, shared value–generating institutional procurement strategies, which formed a core component of Evergreen. Where the question remained what forms of business organization would best capture and distribute the economic gains
stemming from the anchor institutions’ targeted procurement expenditures, insights of Foundation staff such as India Pierce Lee into the lackluster record of privately owned companies in sustaining place attachments and investment in the target neighborhoods compelled “out of the box” thinking (Howard, 2011, Interview by author). The result was the formation of a network of community-based worker cooperatives owned and operated by residents in the six-target neighborhoods and operating under the aegis of Evergreen Cooperative Corporation (ECC), a holding company, along with a cooperative bank, R&D entity, and land trust.

While tapping into the double consciousness of racialized, low income inner city residents through the “grass tops,” the Cleveland Foundation adeptly incorporated different bases of knowledge and expertise to ensure Evergreen got beyond the visioning and design phase to become a viable initiative. In the anchor institutions, they found partners who were place based, focused on the public interest, long term in their operational and strategic planning outlook, and well resourced (i.e. with over US$3b in total annual purchasing and procurement expenditures). The Democracy Collaborative offered strengths in research, training, policy development, and community-focused practice around promoting stable communities and localities, equitable and inclusive growth, and environmental, social, and institutional sustainability. On the other hand, the Ohio Employee Ownership Center specialized in information and outreach activities to promote employee ownership under a variety of circumstances, ranging from succession planning to employee buyouts. The Cleveland Foundation also invited experienced business professionals to spearhead tasks including market assessment, business planning, and operations management. Cleveland’s Economic Development Department helped secure essential federal funds and enact necessary legislation at the local level to access private sector investment in the capitalization phase. In another instance of harnessed “second sight,” Towards Employment, a nonprofit specializing in job readiness for people facing barriers to employment, conducted focus groups and outreach sessions with Greater University Circle residents, which informed the syncing of health-care arrangements with social welfare policy stipulations and entitlements as part of organizational and program design. As business commenced at the first two enterprises—the Evergreen Cooperative Laundry and Ohio Cooperative Solar—from October 2009, daily challenges faced by worker-owners and probationary workers (i.e. limited math skills, no driver’s license, inflated housing costs, outstanding fines, child support, parole issues) informed efforts to build in effective worker support systems and personal development opportunities. Finally, as Evergreen implemented a program of cooperative self-governance and leadership training to transition to shared ownership and control by residents of the target neighborhoods, the leadership team also embarked upon a community engagement strategy. With the help of Community Works, a Community Development Corporation (CDC) from Lawrence, Massachusetts, they adopted a “network organizing” method, in part, to cultivate neighborhood residents’ political power and independence apart from the Cleveland Foundation and the University Circle anchors as to enhance the terms and dynamics of their reciprocal exchange and strengthen local capacities to advocate and launch community wealth building initiatives on an ongoing basis.

This is not to say that operationalizing double consciousness and combining the perspectives and capacities of differentially situated actors and groups was straightforward
or easy. Struggling to hire “qualified” managers from the Greater University Circle neighborhoods, the leadership team decided to bring in outside management and technical expertise in the start-up phase to play the role of “hired guns,” while worker-owners attained education, training, and experience to get to the point of self-sufficiency (Jones, 2011, Interview by author). The result was a precarious race and class dynamic, where the workforce was largely low income and of color, while the management was largely middle class, professional, and White. India Pierce Lee recalled an occasion on which she received a disconcerting phone call from one of the workers informing her that he was looking for another job (Lee, 2011, Interview by author). She elaborated,

There were some racially tinged comments; basically [a temporary manager of one of the Evergreen companies] was walking around saying, “I don’t have to worry because I can get a job, but you all are ex-felons and you won’t be able to get a job.” They’d go out for lunch and stand in front of the building, and he would come up and ask them, “What are you doing out there, dealing drugs?” And as they were giving him ideas about how to run things more efficiently, he didn’t want to listen to how they wanted to coordinate and run things, and basically it was “Do as I say.”

India Pierce Lee described her response, on behalf of the Cleveland Foundation and Evergreen leadership team, to the phone call:

I said, “Would you meet with us and talk?” He said, “No, we’re afraid we’re going to lose our jobs.” I said, “But you don’t get this. You can’t lose your job. This is where your voice counts!”

So a co-worker and I met with them on a Saturday morning at McDonalds. They sat down, and they weren’t irate or anything. They very eloquently described what was going on, what had transpired, how they were being treated.

Besides discussing the workplace conflict, Foundation staff and the group of workers deliberated on potential resolutions, in the process, establishing better rapport, mutual trust, and a deeper grasp of democratic governance as not only workplace practice but also a means for collective problem solving within Evergreen more generally. Following the plant manager’s dismissal, two of the most senior worker-owners stepped in to manage different aspects of the business while communicating openly about areas needing additional support. While the loss of a major customer exerted pressure to downsize the operation, the Evergreen leadership team actively avoided layoffs, instead exploring additional lines of business to ultimately expand the client base and realize financial recovery.

**The case of the Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program**

In Los Angeles, the Green Retrofit and Workforce Program began as a policy research and organizing campaign anchored by SCOPE/AGENDA, a community-based organization established in South Los Angeles in the aftermath of the 1992 urban uprising to address conditions of poverty, unemployment, and violence faced by the city’s inner city communities through grassroots mobilization and policy advocacy. Once home to Southern California’s thriving auto, rubber, furniture, electronics, chemical, and aviation
industries (Fogelson, 1993), South Los Angeles experienced deindustrialization from the early 1960s as the rest of Southern California gained from the aerospace–military–electronics boom and soaring containerized traffic with rapidly developing countries in Asia Pacific (Scott and Soja, 1998). Federally subsidized urban renewal, highway construction, and suburbanization facilitated White flight from the 1940, while the passage of fair employment and housing legislation at state and federal levels in the late 1950s and early 1960s spurred the mass departure of middle class households of color from inner city neighborhoods (Gottlieb et al., 2006). Despite growing minority political power, public investments bypassed inner city neighborhoods for more visible markers of economic growth such as downtown revitalization and port expansion (Davis, 2006). By 2009, the poverty rate in South Los Angeles totaled two times the county average, with area residents overrepresented in low wage, low skilled, less stable industries and occupations (Lee and Ito, 2009).

From the outset, SCOPE/AGENDA directly tapped into “double consciousness” in probing opportunities in the emerging green economy around community wealth creation. It surveyed 1000 constituents, the majority African American and Latino South Los Angeles residents with annual incomes below US$30,000, to ascertain a desire for green jobs paying living wages, providing employee benefits, and providing a safe and healthy working environment (Ito and Aaron, 2005). It simultaneously harnessed diverse knowledge systems and resource bases from various sectors of civil society, for instance, partnering with graduate student researchers in the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Department of Urban Planning to analyze workforce and economic development opportunities for low-income communities of color in Los Angeles’ green building sector. It also brought together 25 community, environmental, and labor organizations, and university-based partners under the banner of the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance. As recalled by Campaign Director Elsa Barbosa, “We did a lot of research type meetings and investigations around what the potential landscape could look like in terms of who would be interested in putting together an alliance of these non-traditional sectors that didn’t usually work together.”

Where members like the building trades and environmental organizations had previously stood on opposing sides with respect to issues of development and gains distribution, they established common cause and shared civic capacity around creating good jobs, a fairer economy, and energy independence. As the organizational anchor, SCOPE ensured the needs of the region’s inner city, low-income communities of color gained priority in policy research, coalition building, and program design (Lee and Ito, 2009). As described by Jennifer Ito, then Research Director at SCOPE,

*We went through an iterative process of doing the surveys, getting feedback through one-on-one meetings [with SCOPE members], holding leadership team meetings … We came up with multiple versions … and for each one, we got input and feedback, coupled that with research on what’s already out there, conducted power analysis and [considered] the political landscape, making sure it was feasible and it would be a valuable fight and all of that. We also got information by meeting with [Apollo Alliance partners]. In some cases, grassroots leaders [from SCOPE’s membership base] were in those meetings as well … then we took the input and the implications from those meetings back to inform a specific policy proposal or update our strategy.*
In time, the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance arrived at a policy campaign calling on the City of Los Angeles to “green” existing public buildings, adopt a project labor agreement to ensure high standards for contracted labor, upgrade the skills of incumbent workers, and hire low-income residents for new jobs created in green construction and operations/maintenance sectors. After multiple iterations of community outreach, lobbying campaigns, and negotiation with elected officials and city staff, the ordinance finally won unanimous approval from city council in April 2009. In conjunction, the Community Scholars Program, a joint project between the UCLA Department of Urban Planning, Labor Center, and Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, brought together graduate students from different departments together with representatives from local environmental and social justice organizations, service sector unions, and the building trades to create a roadmap for program implementation that would accord with the overarching vision of the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance.

To ensure the Green Retrofit and Workforce Ordinance actually saw implementation, SCOPE/AGENDA and its partners established the program in the Los Angeles City Mayor’s Office along with an accompanying Program Director seat and Advisory Committee consisting of different experts appointed by city council. Following, the initiative underwent sudden shift from partnership and coproduction among different civil society groups to the large exclusion of the private and public sector (outside elected officials and their staff) to mandated delivery and execution by the Los Angeles City General Services Department with consultation from the Program Director and Advisory Committee. In an unfortunate turn of events, the City announced a decision to lay off 240 workers, 107 of them from the General Services Department, thus redirecting the focus of the Green Retrofit and Workforce Program from job creation to job retention. Following, city staff from the Community Development Department led the process of selecting and hiring 40 workers slated for layoff as Green Retrofit trainees. In parallel, the newly hired Program Director, together with the Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program at UCLA and three workforce intermediary agencies, developed a worker training component for the Green Retrofit program, while the General Services Department appeared slow to provide feedback on job content and assemble the inventory of buildings to be retrofitted by trainees in an initial pilot phase. As the Program Director and members of the Advisory Committee actively engaged the General Services Department in the course of completing the 15-building pilot, rapport and team dynamics gradually improved. Next, the group worked together with external consultants to expand program features to finance citywide retrofits, including energy efficiency measurement and verification system, special revenue fund, and revolving loan fund. With help from the Construction Careers Academy at the UCLA Labor Center and in conversation with the Los Angeles/Orange County Building and Construction Trades Council and City Council, it also negotiated the establishment of a Civil Service Apprenticeship to formalize the transition for Green Retrofit trainees to careers in the building trades and Project Labor Agreement to ensure any jobs outsourced through the Green Retrofit program are covered by a collective bargaining agreement and provide low-income community members access to local hire opportunities. As for the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance, member organizations mobilized community presence at city council meetings and public events on an as-needed basis to support the work of the Program Director and Advisory Committee.
Discussion and conclusion

As observed with the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative and Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program, race can function as a useful diagnostic and dialogic tool for progressive urban coalitions undertaking provisional and contextual inquiry and praxis in the urban economic sphere. The results of the respective initiatives might initially appear modest when measured by the number of jobs created or amount of income and assets accumulated by participants, amidst a global economic recession no less. The more significant implications stem from the regeneration of worker cooperatives, anchor institutions, and labor unions to better serve racialized, low income urban communities, which have in turn equipped them to play a larger role in future courses of urban economic development and “just city” making. Historically, the American movement for employee ownership and shared capitalism has tended to be dominated by White, middle class concerns such as Employee Stock Ownership Plans and questions of economic efficiency and competitiveness with less attention paid to social inclusion, job creation, or place-making. Evergreen offers a model that connects firm level efforts toward shared capitalism with broad-based coalition building; racial reconciliation; community, local economic, and workforce development; and urban sustainability to both deepen and widen the potential impacts of employee ownership, particularly in disinvested urban areas. Moreover, it reframes the responsibility and role of anchor institutions, many of them beneficiaries of public funding, with respect to their surrounding communities. In Los Angeles, the pending Civil Service Apprenticeship, which emerged from the Green Retrofit and Workforce Program, represents an important milestone for community unionism and the American labor movement in forging a direct link between an entry-level position represented by Service Employees International Union, with a disproportionately minority, immigrant, and female membership, and a career in the building trades, with its disproportionately White, male, suburban membership. Where the unionization rate in the United States presently sits at a 70-year low, the impending mass retirement of White baby boomers in the building trades exerts considerable pressure to better respond to the growingly minority majority demographic in urban areas for purposes of relevancy and survival in the coming years. In trying to broaden access to building trades career pathways, the Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program also incorporated a new contingent of thought leaders such as SCOPE/AGENDA and community-based partner organizations with deeper ties to racialized, low income urban communities into the local labor policy and union innovation arena.

While urban equity thus appears intertwined with racial diversity and inclusion, broad-based coalition building, and the regeneration of democratic institutions, racial differences are not necessarily harmonious with material interests nor does the convergence of differentially situated actors and groups simply translate into collaborative partnership and coproduction. Ways in which actors recognize and manage racial differences, forge collaborative relationships among different groups, cultivate local leadership, and tackle emerging challenges matter greatly. Across cases, the respective urban coalitions directly probed and addressed material dimensions of racial oppression and stratification rather than minimize racial differences to reinforce class-based identities or solidarities, or problematize racial oppression or empowerment at the exclusion of material or
distributive concerns. As the respective anchoring organizations operationalized the “double consciousness” of racialized, low income urban communities in apprehending the structure of regional economic inequality and illuminating community-based, green economic and workforce development opportunities, they simultaneously assembled diverse coalitions comprising nontraditional allies. The Cleveland Foundation worked closely with institutional administrators, experienced business professionals, community development and employee ownership experts, and public agencies to design and initiate the program, while directly engaging residents of the targeted neighborhoods from the recruitment phase onward. Where the trade-off for program expediency by way of “top down” leadership engendered a delicate race and class dynamic, Evergreen leadership responded to the resulting workplace conflict with a communicative, action-oriented approach that transformed a potential setback into a learning and team-building opportunity. At the same time, it implemented measures to offer ongoing leadership training for worker-owners, institutionalize a culture of shared governance and ownership within the organization, and deepening community engagement in the target neighborhoods, thus shifting and developing its networked capacity as needed. Reciprocally, the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance began with the “grassroots” in conducting community surveys and pursuing public education on the topic of green economic and workforce development while forging collaborative partnership among community, environmental, and labor organizations, some of whom previously clashed on issues of urban development and gains distribution. Where the strengthened relations among three civil society sectors came at the exclusion of private and public sector partners, the impasse between policy campaign victory and program implementation by the Los Angeles City General Services Department amidst a local budget crisis demonstrated the limits of the coalition’s practical clout and capability. Still, together setting up program components brought the Green Retrofit and Workforce Program Director and Advisory Committee into constructive working relations with the public agency and private sector partners while Apollo Alliance member organizations contributed to the policy process by mobilizing their community base to exert political pressure from the “outside.” Hence, whether initiatives originate in a “top down” or “bottom up” fashion appears less important to their transformative potential than their incorporation of inclusive and transparent processes of collective problem solving along with mechanisms for continued learning, coalition building, and adaptive response.

Finally, from a neo-pragmatist planning perspective that emphasizes provisional and contextual inquiry and practice, among the most resounding impacts of Evergreen and the Los Angeles Green Retrofit program is expanded progressive civil society capacity in the urban economic sphere. Both initiatives relied on unconventional divisions of labor, whereby community and civic organizations led economic and workforce development projects. This might have partly resulted from their focus on emergent “green” sectors (i.e. local sourcing and procurement, energy efficiency) requiring extensive social organization and planning both on the demand and supply sides of the market. Nonetheless, both instances of democratic praxis in the urban economic sphere signified breaks from dominant assumptions and patterns of thought related to private sector primacy in the economic sphere and “bottom up essentialism” or “grassroots glorification” that limits community and civic groups from broadening grassroots organizing, coalition
building, and urban policy action to span economic programs. Where future efforts at coalition building and shared value creation will likely follow Evergreen and the Los Angeles Green Retrofit program, the former set a precedent for community foundations to launch a community wealth building initiative with business professionals, institutional administrators, community development and employee ownership experts, and public agencies all the while localizing future capacities to envision, advocate, and launch like efforts through its leadership development and community engagement strategies. In turn, the Los Angeles case symbolizes an iterative attempt at civic organizing, mobilization, discourse, and debate that sharpens the capacity of community and civic organizations to frame and carry out alternative economic programs and better equips them for future attempts at shared value creation with public and private sector partners. As urban problems remain ever complex, transient, and historically and contextually contingent, the “just city” appears less the stuff of idealized processes or outcomes than a learning continuum. Cities, as staging grounds for capitalist development and racial stratification but also places that bring together diverse groups of people within close vicinity and relations of interdependence—both willful and unwitting, offer a range of local assets for their inhabitants to understand and address specific dilemmas. The question is, how do urban coalitions create inclusive, transparent but also flexible spaces to overcome their respective conceptual limitations, weave together different issue areas, approaches, and resources, and enhance democratic society?

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Notes

1. Here, “race” not only connotes descriptive social categories referring to different cultural and behavioral ways of being or bases of intersubjective and epistemic differentiation, whether positive or negative. Besides historically situated and contextually contingent constellations of meanings that are “achieved from within” as well as “ascribed from without,” race additionally encompasses deeply embedded power and resource disparities originating from politico-institutional channels, economic structures and processes, and cultural–ideological sources. Accordingly, race as the lived experience and embodied knowledge of the racialized low income provides the means to analyze and problematize existing politico-institutional, economic, and cultural–ideological systems in contrast to a society’s professed democratic or ethical values. In so doing, race offers a tool not only for racially subordinated groups but class conscious, multiracial alliances more generally to direct grassroots mobilizations and policy efforts toward deeper modes of recourse and transformation.

2. As detailed in Black Reconstruction in America (1935) by the American historian and social scientist W.E.B. DuBois, events like the aftermath of the Civil War can be read as a
revolutionary period in the history of world capitalism in which the Black proletariat fought for their freedom as well as social rights for the broader American working class to encounter resistance from White reactionary forces (Gambino, 1983). In turn, the midcentury civil rights movement, despite its contemporary recognition for winning politico-institutional desegregation, largely by way of judicial–legalistic methods, was rooted in poor and working-class grassroots organizing efforts and rocked by intense internal debate on the relative importance of prioritizing demands for political versus material equality. While the movement appears to have evolved toward the former, its celebrated leader Martin Luther King Jr not only directly appealed to the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) to forge a unified movement for economic justice in the late 1950s but was eventually assassinated at a rally calling for improved employment and workplace conditions for sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee.

3. The abolitionist movement inspired the early movement for Women’s Suffrage, while the civil rights movement spun off a series of modern movements for equal rights and recognition, not only in a negative or nondiscriminatory sense but also in the sense of co-determining the terms of individual and social development, many of them based in urban areas (e.g. feminist and gay liberation movements of the late 1960s, environmental justice movement, present day immigrant youth movement, urban sustainability and green justice movement, the latter based in low income, majority minority, inner city communities).

4. As described by Cornel West (1989),

DuBois provides American Pragmatism with what it sorely lacks: an international perspective on the impetus and impediments to individuality and radical democracy, a perspective that highlights the plight of the wretched of the earth, namely, the majority of humanity who own no property or wealth, participate in no democratic arrangements, and whose individualities are crushed by hard labor and harsh living conditions … [For DuBois], creative powers reside among the wretched of the earth even in their subjugation, and the fragile structures of democracy in the world depend, in large part, on how these powers are ultimately exercised. (pp. 147–148)

References


Author biography

Lily K Song is an Urban Researcher and Planner whose work focuses on issues of urban justice, sustainability, and livability; race and class politics in American and postcolonial urban contexts; and shared value creation efforts among civil society, public sector, and private sector actors. She is currently a Provost Fellow with University College London’s Department of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Public Policy and a Research Affiliate with the Community Innovator’s Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.