



Race Brokers: Housing Markets and Segregation in 21st Century Urban America

Elizabeth Korver-Glenn (2021). Oxford University Press, 240 pages. \$27.95 (paperback)

Stephen Sherman

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manner" urbanisms, which have long been subject to feminist critique, including from Jane Jacobs. The implications for these new capital cities and their residents are most apparent when Pojani examines their livability. She demonstrates how these cities, despite being created anew in the modern era, still perpetuate gender-based, as well as "otherness"-based, biases in the planning of transit, infrastructure, services and amenities, public spaces, land use and zoning, land acquisitions, housing, and educational and economic opportunities, all within the hypermasculine context of neoliberal globalization. The resultant inequalities and exclusions are often extreme. Pojani concludes that an alternative "feminist capital" city would be one in which patriarchal and imperial ideals and frameworks are not given supremacy and that is not planned around traditional gender roles. What specific shape such a city would take is up to us to decide.

With a diverse set of case cities and an abundance of well-researched examples from them, this book makes a significant contribution and offers a fresh perspective to our understanding of cities, how we plan them, and with what consequences. The book, or select chapters, would be excellent additions to include in cities and urbanization courses, as well as feminist theory courses. Pojani's accessible writing style makes the book suitable for both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as policymakers and practitioners.

From an academic perspective, I am eager to learn more about the theoretical framework that Pojani uses to analyze each case. Although it is briefly described in the introductory chapter and themes clearly emerge throughout the chapters, providing more details explicitly, especially early in the book, would allow others to apply her framework succinctly and confidently to other cases. Related, one could take issue with the small sampling of cities—as Pojani notes, there are probably more than 200 new capital cities—and argue that the seven presented do not reflect the experiences in all capital cities. However, her analysis should encourage others to examine these other capital cities through similar analytical lenses. From a practitioner standpoint, this book raises questions about who we name our streets after, how we stylize our buildings and design our public spaces, where we source our materials, where we locate resources and how they are controlled, whose needs are given primacy, who benefits and who bears the cost of our planning actions, who has a voice at decision-making tables, etc.; in other words, who we plan our cities for. This book challenges us to re-evaluate the traditional and dominant planning paradigms and envision something different—something better.

Although Pojani seems hesitant to offer specific ideas on what a nonpatriarchal city could look like, she does give us plenty to consider. Retracing cities'

histories and documenting the implications of their planning approaches through critical lenses, whether they are new capitals or not, is an important part of reconciling the oppressions of the past and present and rethinking how we plan the cities of the future.

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Housing

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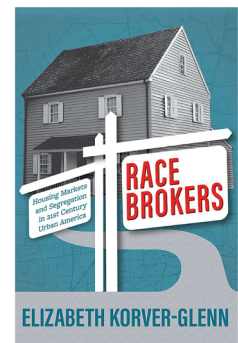
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Reviewed by Stephen Sherman, Kinder Institute for Urban Research

There are more ethnographic studies of drug dealers than of real estate professionals. It seems that academics more easily enter criminal social worlds than the worlds of real estate professionals. Elizabeth Korver-Glenn's *Race Brokers: Housing Markets and Segregation in 21st Century America* cracks the door open slightly. The book's findings rest on 1 year spent observing and interviewing real estate professionals in Houston (TX) with the goal of explaining the causes of residential segregation.

Mainstream U.S. housing research within planning and allied disciplines leans quantitative; the rare ethnographic research tends to focus on residents. For example, in the most recent issue of *Housing Policy Debate* (Vol. 31, Issue 3–5), only 1 research article out of 21 featured human subjects research with anyone from housing's business side, specifically small-scale landlords



(Balzarini & Boyd, 2021). Building knowledge on housing injustice—whether disaster vulnerability, or over-eviction, or segregation—may require turning a critical eye to the everyday work of real estate businesspeople. This book does that work and warrants attention for that alone. The author wields data from 102 interviews and 21 participant observations to support her argument that housing segregation is partially produced by real estate professionals, not only by the racist wealth gap and individual preferences.

In her book, Korver-Glenn, a sociology professor currently at University of New Mexico and soon to be at Washington University in St. Louis, uses data from her immersive fieldwork to identify these professionals' racist trust-building practices. Broadly, I appreciated how she moves beyond the sort of crassly racist steering that can occur between homebuyers and agents and captures the more subtle yet racist dynamics that occur at later steps of the homebuying process.

Following an introduction and an explanation of the Houston context, each chapter focuses on builders, agents, mortgage bankers, and appraisers, respectively, followed by recommendations and conclusions chapters. (Rental property purchases are not part of the book, even though more than 60% of Houston households are renter occupied.)

At each step of the process, housing professionals employ the "white racial frame" (Feagin, 2013) to "cultivate networks of value" (p. 88): Agents seek wealthier White clients and their wealthy referrals and funnel these buyers to specific mortgage lenders, who use specific appraisers who are more likely to overvalue homes in White neighborhoods. Every relationship in the process—homebuyer/agent, agent/banker, banker/appraiser—has specific trust-building practices.

These closed, White networks have the sum effect of "brokering race" and reproducing segregation. Parallel, smaller, and less remunerative real estate professional networks support homebuying for non-White Houstonians. These networks are staffed by "race breakers" who do not use racist frames in their everyday work.

The chapter on appraisers is probably the strongest and speaks to the need for more attention to that profession. (I could find no other human subjects research on mortgage appraisers.) By undervaluing homes in non-White neighborhoods, appraisers lessen the chance that mortgage bankers will loan to buyers there.

Besides her unique access to real estate professionals, I was drawn to this book because of its setting: Houston. There are very few planning or urban studies books about this country's fourth-largest city. This book, however, is not very "about" Houston, which is one of my two critiques. The local context chapter seemed a non sequitur by the end. Although the excellent methodological appendix shares more details about her work, I wish she elaborated more on how the local

environment, rhetorical strategies, and micro-interactions informed her thought process (see Packer, 2011).

My second critique targets the theoretical framing. Closed White networks may hoard capital, but was the "White racial frame" central to these networks' existence? I found myself not wholly convinced. Professionals may maintain these racist networks because they are a rational profit-maximization strategy: Real estate professionals may want to build wealthier White networks because they can generate higher commissions and profits. The racist frames may be ancillary, not explanatory, to these networks' existence. This possibility is not discussed, even though she mentions that "race breaking" can hurt the bottom line (e.g., she cites antiracist agents taking lower commissions). Perhaps a theoretical framework that centered racism, capital, and elite social networks, rather than rhetorical frame-making, may have extracted other insights from the data.

Noting these minor critiques, I highly recommend Korver-Glenn's book to housing scholars for both its important methodological intervention and her insights from the field. For housing practitioners and policy-makers, I recommend the penultimate recommendations chapter, which has implementable policies for regulation and oversight, such as recommendations for building a more just appraising profession. To wit, some of her findings (particularly about ways to reform appraising) informed some recommendations in the *My Home Is Here Harris County (TX) affordable housing strategy* that we produced at Kinder.

Elizabeth Korver-Glenn was also recently a fellow at the Kinder Institute at Rice University. Our tenures did not overlap, and we have never met.

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