

Three Thoughts on the Study of Space and Inequality

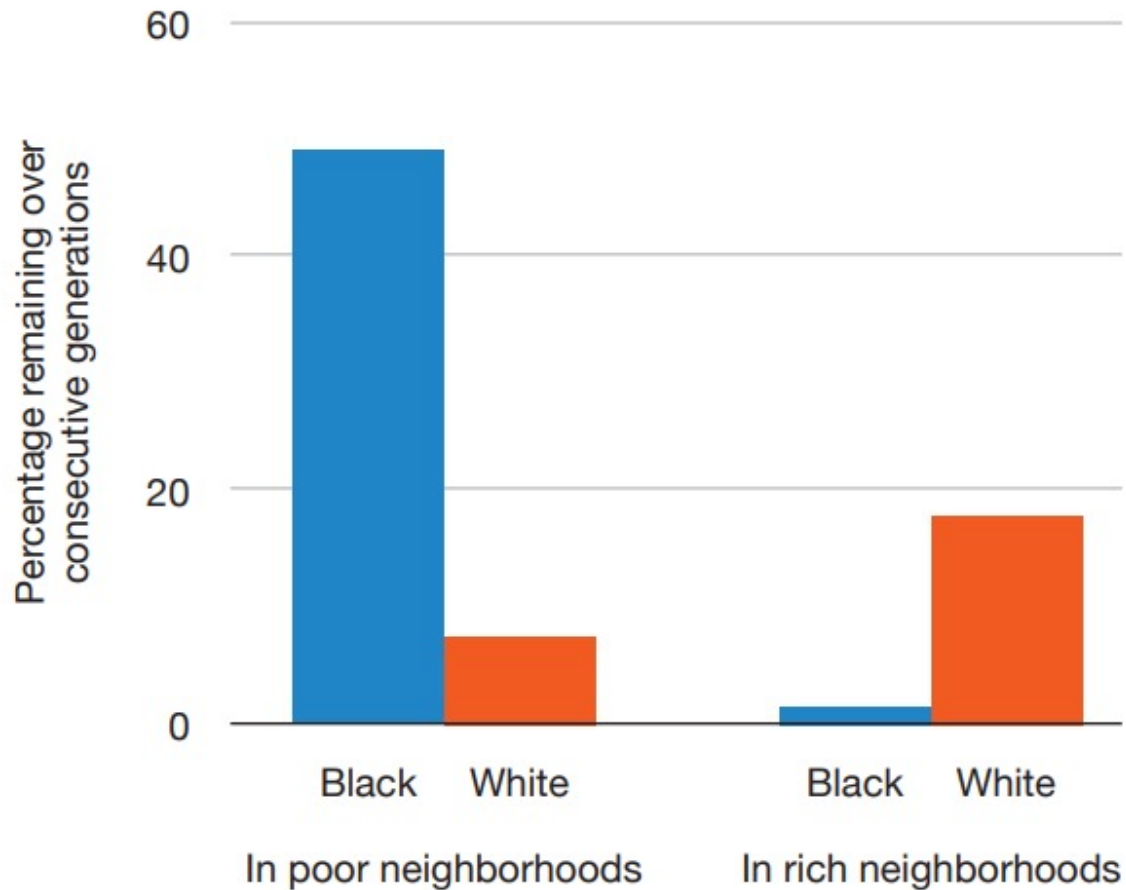
Patrick Sharkey

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Three Points

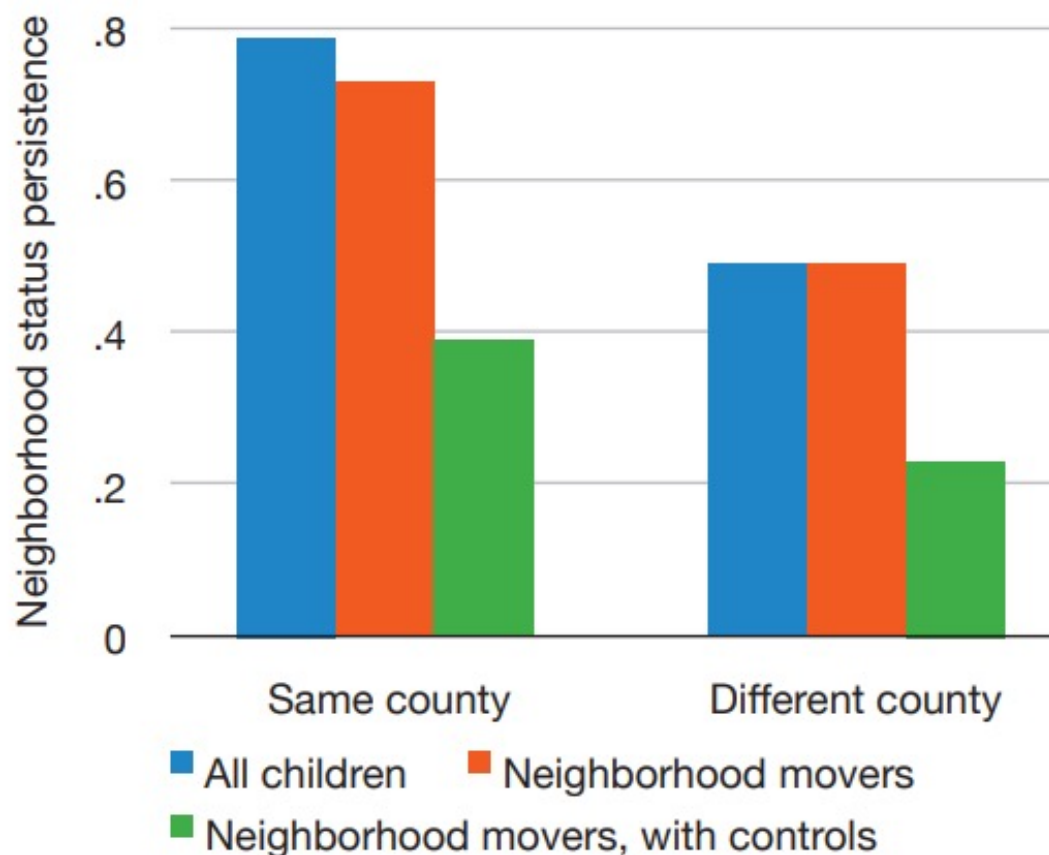
1. **Spatial advantage and disadvantage are long-term, multigenerational processes**

Figure 1. Almost half of Black Americans live in poor neighborhoods for consecutive generations.



Source: Sharkey, 2013.

Figure 2. Neighborhood economic status persists through adulthood, especially among those who remain in the same county.

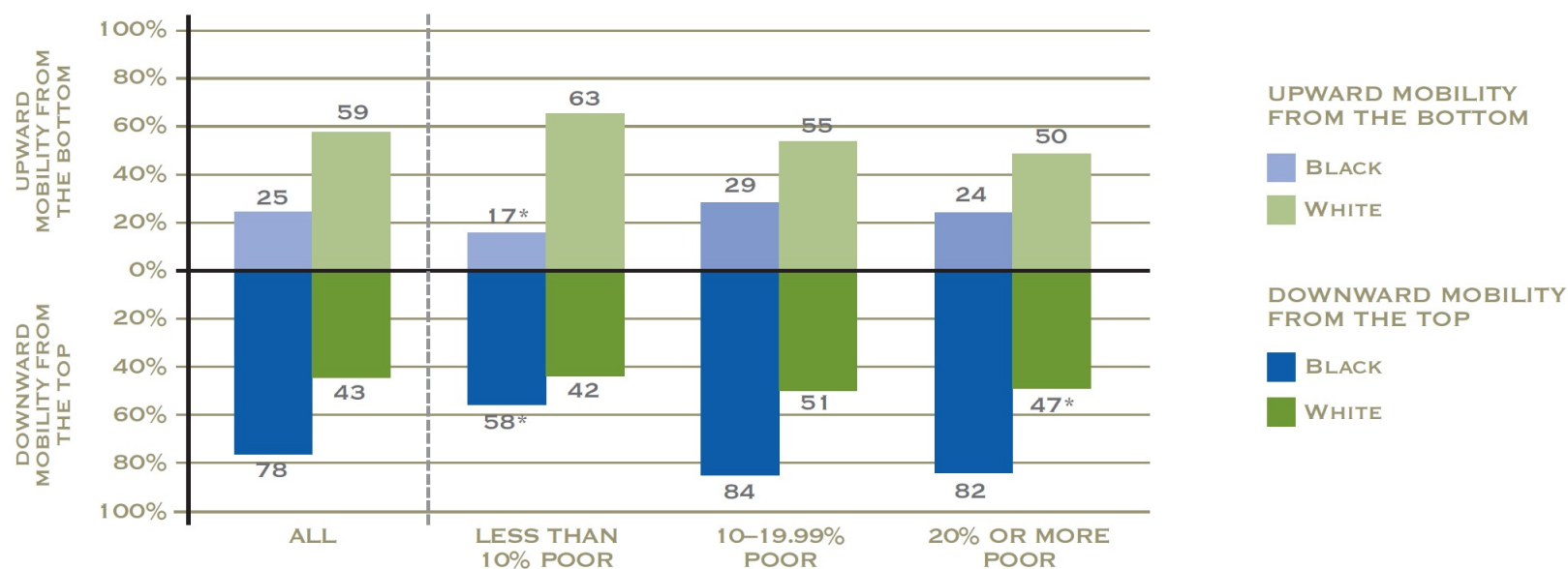


Note: The right-hand bars include individual-level demographic and economic controls.

Source: Sharkey, 2013.

FIGURE 3

Rates of Upward and Downward Mobility by Race and Childhood Neighborhood Poverty Level, Among Children Born 1955–1970



Notes: * = small number of cases. Upward mobility from the bottom is the percentage of people with parents in the bottom two quintiles who move up at least one quintile. Downward mobility from the top is the percentage of people with parents in the top three quintiles who move down at least one quintile. No differences between neighborhood types are statistically significant, except for the difference in downward mobility for whites in low- versus medium-poverty neighborhoods.

Three Points

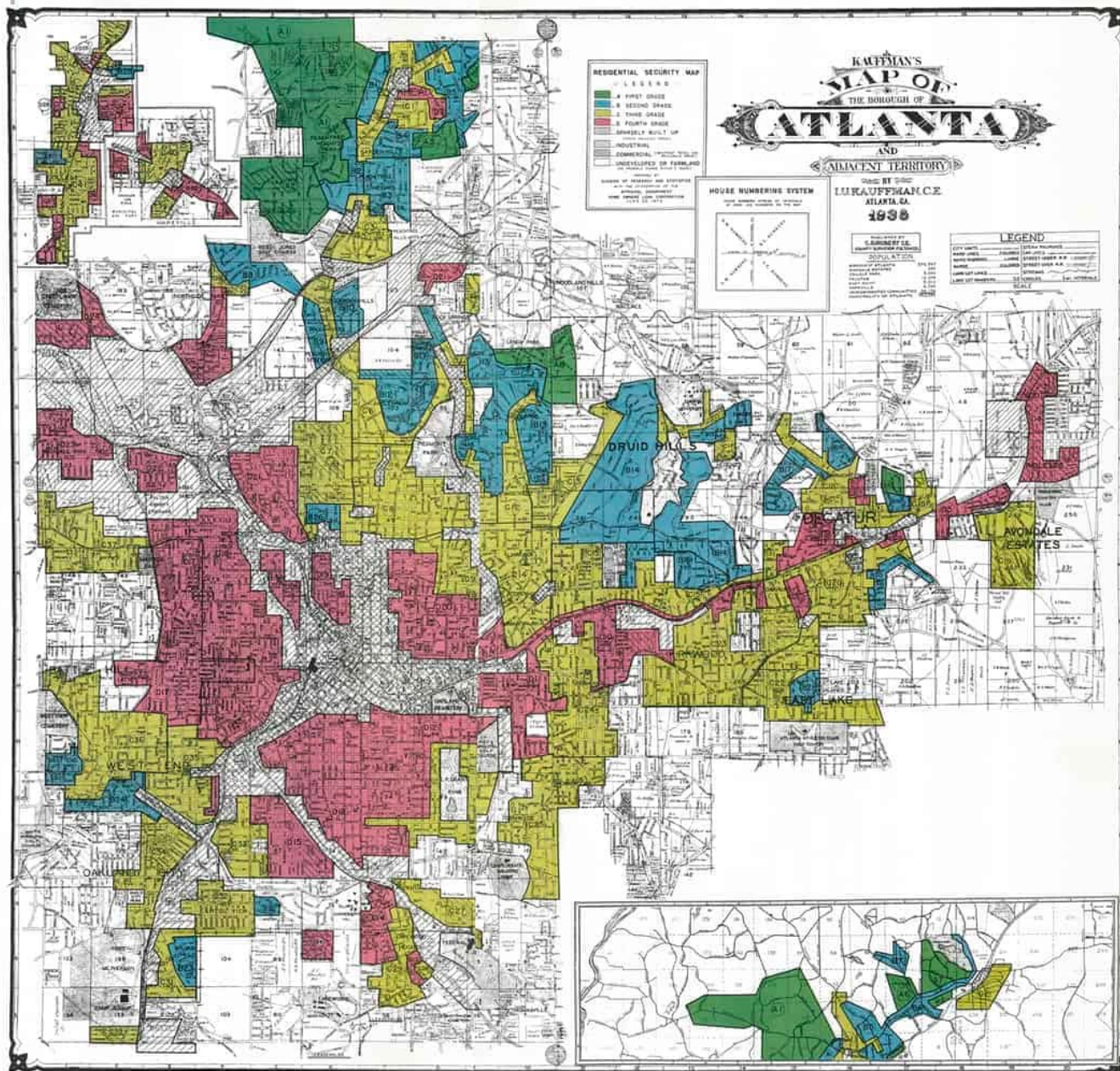
1. **Spatial advantage and disadvantage are long-term, multigenerational processes**

Implications:

- **Places, including institutions, exposures, opportunities, are central to the mobility process**
- **Histories of places and people are essential**
- **Linking areas/people/families across long periods of time and across regions, countries is a crucial part of understanding inequality today**
- **Examples: Derenoncourt (2022); Rothstein (2018)**

Three Points

2. Spatial inequality is generated by active interventions into space



Home Owners Loan Corporation map of residential security, 1938

**Atlanta's downtown,
before and after
highway construction**



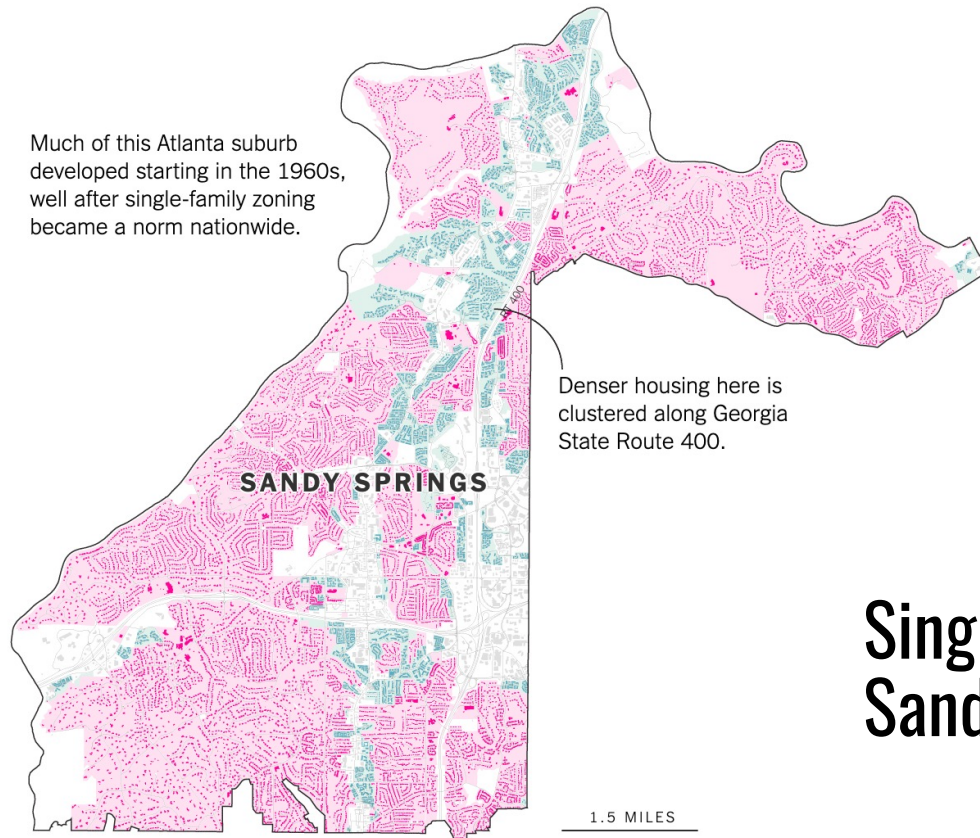
**Atlanta's downtown,
before and after
highway construction**



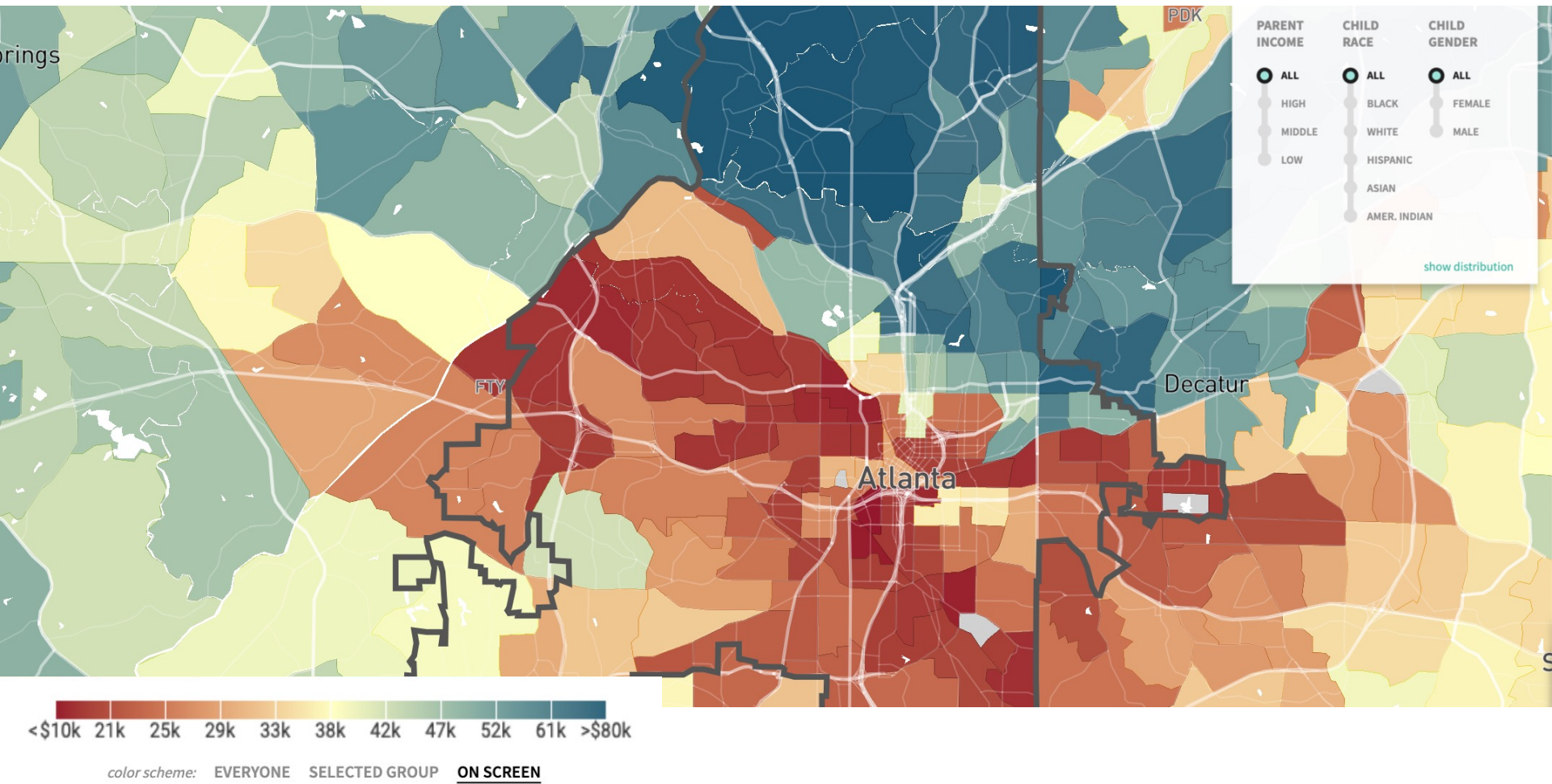
Sandy Springs, Ga.

85% of residential land is zoned for detached single-family homes

Much of this Atlanta suburb developed starting in the 1960s, well after single-family zoning became a norm nationwide.



Single-family zoning in Sandy Springs, GA



Spatial barricades: informal or formal boundaries that divide and regulate the use of space

- Red-lined (and yellow-lined) neighborhoods (HOLC maps)
- Formation of new cities and towns (Census of Governments; Boundary and Annexation Survey; Government Finance Database)
- New school districts, attendance areas or charter schools (Government Finance Database; Stanford Education Data Archive)
- Special water and sewer districts (Census of Governments; Government Finance Database)
- Housing developments with gated entry (American Housing Survey restricted data; Zillow home listings database)
- Exclusionary land use regulations (Corelogic national database of land parcels)
- Placement of highways (1947 interstate highway plan and current interstate highway maps)
- Fortified zones of commerce and consumerism (BIDs)
- Reliance on prisons/jails (Vera Institute county-level incarcerated population files)

Three Points

2. Spatial inequality is generated by active interventions into space

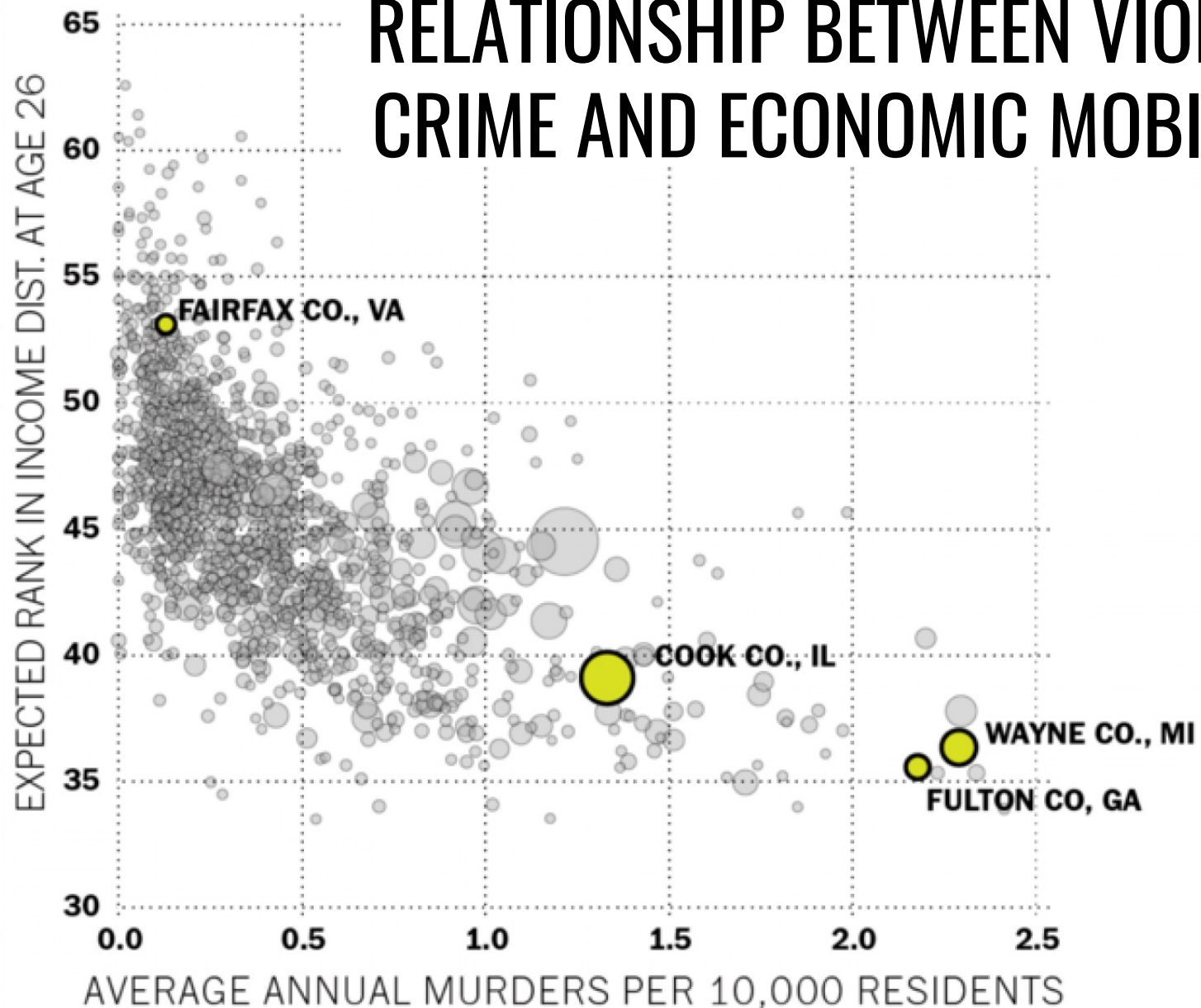
Implications:

- Urban inequality is relational: The decisions made by actors on one side of a set of boundaries affect the outcomes on the other side
- Neighborhoods are not islands; they are part of social systems
- More policy research must focus on the active interventions to divide space and to reinforce spatial stratification: HMID; land use regulations; occupational licensing requirements; local housing decisions
- Examples: Faber (2020); Trounstein (2018)

Three Points

3. Mobility happens through interactions, local social processes, turning points, shifts in mindset, identity formation, networks...

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENT CRIME AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY



Sharkey and Torrats-Espinosa, "The Effect of Violent Crime on Economic Mobility." *Journal of Urban Economics*.

Crime Type:
Murder

Value type:
Rate per 100k

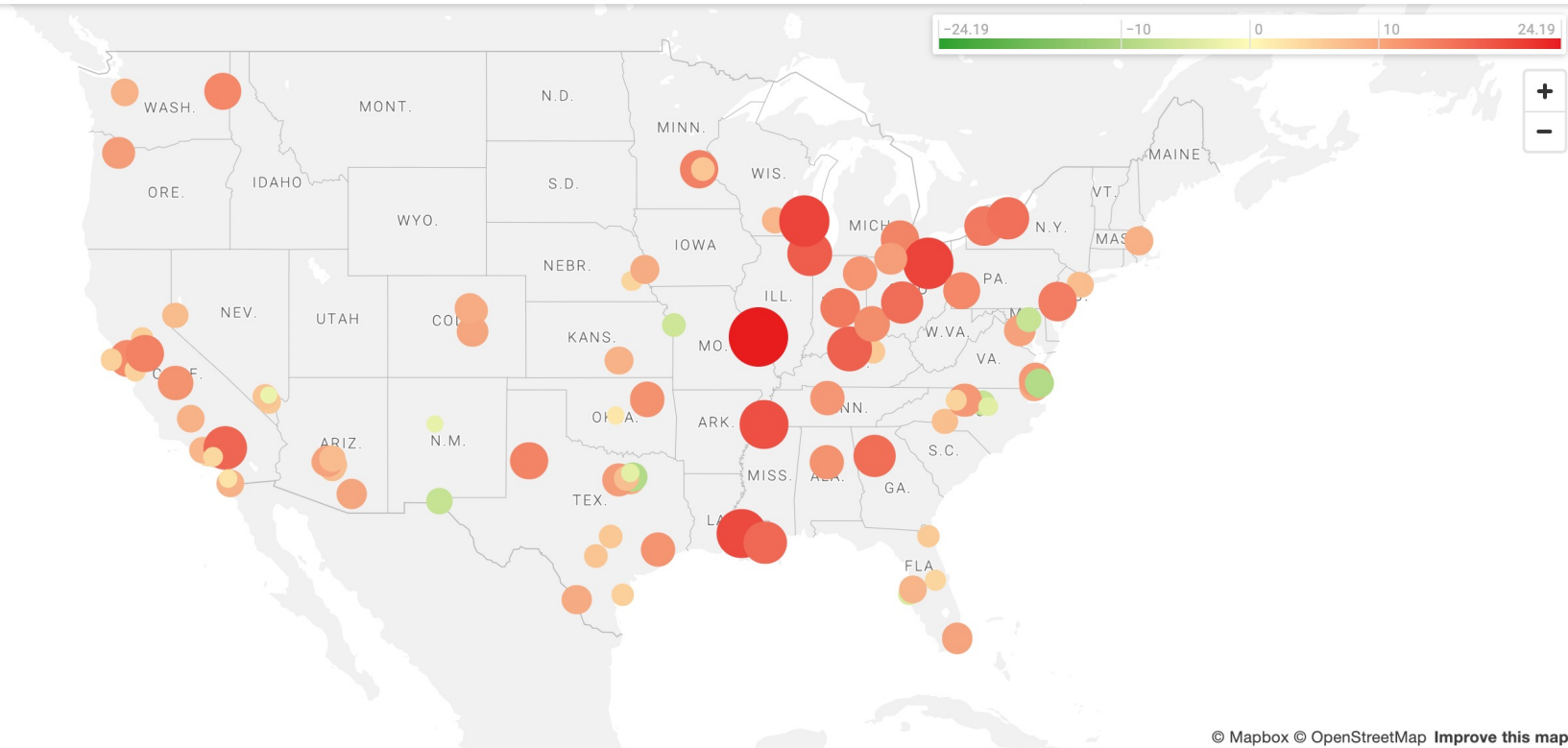
Time interval:
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Showing: **Murder rate per 100k in 99 US cities for 2020** compared to 2019 [Export](#)

Map View



Three Points

3. Mobility happens through interactions, local social processes, turning points, shifts in mindset, sense of identity...

Implications:

- Ethnography has to be at the center of the effort to understand social and economic mobility**
- Example: American Voices Project**