

Spatialized Intersectionality: Gendered and Racialized Residential Segregation and the Milwaukee Lead Crisis

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ABSTRACT

We introduce the term *spatialized intersectionality* to connote interlocking, geographically embedded forms of social identity marginalization. The past tense recognizes that prior and ongoing forms of complex white capitalist heteropatriarchal Western imperialism have left an imprint on all present-day geographies, and, as such, it urges us to interrogate the particular mechanisms by which this embedded inequity has come to be. To illuminate spatialized intersectionality and the insights into contemporary environmental, food, and reproductive (in)justices it can provide, we offer a case study of the interlocking emergence of gendered and racialized residential segregation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We argue that this form of spatialized intersectionality is essential to understanding how Black women became uniquely entrenched in the 53206, 53208, and 53210 zip codes that are also the most environmentally degraded and lacking of food and reproductive justice in Milwaukee County today. Through the lens of spatialized intersectionality, the reality that Black babies experienced especially severe outcomes during Milwaukee's current lead crisis can thus be understood in part as a tragic, yet predictable, intergenerational legacy of inequitable and intersecting geographic burdens. Taking this more seriously, we believe improved solutions can be addressed. In these and additional ways, we thus aim for spatialized intersectionality to unite and increase historically focused and forwardly applicable environmental scholarship.

Keywords: spatial inequality, environmental disparities, Black feminist theory, reproductive justice, food security, lead contamination

INTRODUCTION

HOW DID BLACK¹ BABIES in the 53206, 53208, and 53210 zip codes of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, become the bulk of lead poisoned people in the region? To help answer this, we introduce the term, *spatialized intersectionality*. This concept aims to capture interlocking, geographically embedded forms of social identity marginalization that are already in place, owing to past centuries of exclusionary hegemonic logics that have left a differential imprint on every corner of the world.

In Milwaukee, spatialized intersectionality includes historic forms of heteropatriarchal and White supremacist residential segregation that disadvantaged Black communities and women, disproportionately. To illuminate the concept and understand its links to contemporary childhood lead poisoning outcomes, it is the complex emergence and past interactions of these oppressions upon which we focus. From this, we argue that Black women² became uniquely entrenched in the 53206, 53208, and 53210 zip codes that are also,³ by hegemonic design, the

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²We use "Black" and "African American" interchangeably as is reflective of our data.

²We employ "women" throughout this article, as is reflective of our data and much associated theoretical and methodological discourse, which often measures, discusses, and/or defines dynamics of hegemonic oppression through the use of gendered terms while acknowledging gender fluidity and binary and nongender conforming peoples.

³Also, for example, Brenda Parker. *Masculinities and Markets: Raced and Gendered Urban Politics in Milwaukee*. (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2017).

most environmentally degraded and lacking of food and reproductive justice in Milwaukee County today. The reality that Black babies experienced especially severe outcomes during Milwaukee's lead crisis can thus be understood in part as a tragic, yet predictable, intergenerational legacy of inequitable and intersecting geographic burdens.

Toward a concept of spatialized intersectionality

Early 20th century social scientists uplifting a subaltern perspective were some of the first to amplify the spatialized nature of inequality among scholars. Reading Frantz Fanon as a geographer, for example, environmental scholars Lindsey Dillon and Julie Sze note how this foundational postcolonialist thinker, "describes the Manichaeon segregation of colonial space,"⁴ including from his experience as a Black and colonial "other" who feels, in his words, "squeezed tightly"⁵ due to the physical design of colonized sectors and his lived embodiment of them. Accelerating especially after the 1970s, postcolonial feminists also advanced spatial critiques of oppression from their lived and academic experiences, disrupting hegemonic notions of a monolithic "Third World Woman"⁶ through a focus on the multiscalar and interactive nature of racialized gender violence across coloniality, class, sexuality, Indigeneity, and nationality,⁷ among other imperial categories of difference and discrimination. It was at this time that Black feminists located in the United States similarly voiced their complex experiences of struggle and creative resilience in response to interlocking oppressions that shaped their environments and lives lived within them.⁸

Collectively, these intellectual lineages amplified a globalized ecosocial system of privilege and oppression,⁹ in which flows of resource extraction, exchange, and exploitation map onto distinct global, local, urban, and

rural geographies forged out of anthropocentric capitalist ideologies that are also inherently White supremacist and heteropatriarchal. By the 1990s, the shared threads of these perspectives helped encourage a focus on justice among environmental scholars, moving ecosystem considerations from an imperial vision of nature "out there" to consider more wholly our embodied relations in all local places where we live, work, and play, as well as the globally exploitative conditions that sustain these dynamics.¹⁰

Long a focus of seminal justice movements and critical perspectives of scholars among them, the interactions between people, power, and place have continued to find recognition in corners of academia. This includes to account for simultaneously racialized and classed spaces that also coconstruct dominant treatments of, for example, gender and sexuality,¹¹ youth,¹² and ability.¹³ At their best, such works engage the full complexity of what Black feminist geographer Katherine McKittrick refers to as *cartographies of struggle*, including illuminating the historical structures and cultures of domination through which coconstructing inequities have become spatially embedded, as well as the (re)shaped experiences, resistances, and resilience of oppressed peoples that prevail within hegemonic (re)formations of the environment.¹⁴

Admittedly, though, interlocking notions of spatialized inequality remain limited in dominant academic interpretations of these realities, a tendency many environmental practitioners then/too perpetuate. Even some of the most fruitful arenas of environmental and food justice that engage geographically embedded inequalities tend to

¹⁰Principles of Environmental Justice. People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. <<https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/ej-principles.pdf>>. (Last accessed on April 20, 2021).

¹¹For example, Miriam J. Abelson. "You Aren't from Around Here": Race, Masculinity and Rural Transgender Men." *Gender, Place and Culture* 23 (2016): 1535–1546; Peter Hopkins and Greg Noble. "Masculinities in Place: Situated Identities, Relations and Intersectionality." *Social and Cultural Geography* 10 (2009): 811–819; Sharlene Mollitt and Caroline Faria. "Messing with Gender in Feminist Political Ecology." *Geoforum* 45 (2013): 116–125; Elizabeth A. Mosley, Courtney K. Bouse, and Kelli Stidham Hall. "Water, Human Rights, and Reproductive Justice: Implications for Women in Detroit and Monrovia." *Environmental Justice* 8 (2015): 78–85.

¹²For example, Kate Cairns. "Youth, Dirt, and the Spatialization of Subjectivity: An Intersectional Approach to White Rural Imaginaries." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 38 (2013): 623–646; Clara Irazabal and Claudia Huerta. "Intersectionality and Planning at the Margins: LGBTQ Youth of Color in New York." *Gender, Place and Culture* 23 (2016): 714–732. Maria Rodó-de-Zárate. "Young Lesbians Negotiating Public Space: An Intersectional Approach Through Places." *Children's Geographies* 13 (2015): 413–434.

¹³For example, Alison Kafer. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2013); Nira Yuval-Davis. *The Politics and Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*. (London, Sage, 2011).

¹⁴Katherine McKittrick. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁴Lindsey Dillon and Julie Sze. "Police Power and Climate Matters: Environmental Justice and the Spatialities of In/Securities in U.S. Cities." *English Language Notes* 54 (2016): 13–23.

⁵Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York, Grove Press, 2004), 4.

⁶Chandra Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61–88.

⁷For example, Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis. "Contextualizing Feminism: Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions." *Feminist Review* 15 (1983): 62–75; Chandra Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color*. (Watertown, Persephone Press, 1983).

⁸For example, Angela Davis. "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves." *The Black Scholar* 3 (1971): 2–15; bell hooks. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. (Boston, South End Press, 1984); Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. (Trumansburg, Crossing Press, 1984). The Combahee River Collective Statement. United States, 2015. Web Archive. <<https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0028151/>>. (Last accessed on June 11, 2021).

⁹For example, Neil Smith. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2008); Immanuel Wallerstein. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004).

do so somewhat singularly, such as through frameworks focused uniquely on geographies of *whiteness*¹⁵ and *spatial racism*.¹⁶

It is critical to normalize White supremacy as a social problem food and environmental advocates must address, and much of the mainstream expression of this—what Black feminist and critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw might refer to as *single-axis work*¹⁷—has provided important impetus for societal change.¹⁸ Yet, at the same time, we should be cautious of singular foci, as this has historically tended to uplift only what Crenshaw refers to as, “the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group,”¹⁹ and thus, in theory and practice, “marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination.”²⁰ Concern with this is what led Crenshaw to coin the term *intersectionality* in 1989, a now vibrant but loosely defined theoretical and analytic framework to, “reflect the Black community’s needs [...through] an analysis of sexism and patriarchy,”²¹ with an understanding that, “the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism.”²²

Crenshaw’s attention to spatially situated and interlocking complexities is one that resonates with much of the postcolonial and Black feminist visions that pre- and postdate intersectionality as a term, and thus it has maintained relevance and, as of late, attracted increased and widespread appeal. In our interdisciplinary field of environmental justice, intersectionality offers a way to ameliorate potential drawbacks to single-axis tendencies that seem to gain easiest interpretation in hegemonic institutions.

A growing group of environmental scholars are thus calling for and offering enhanced insights into *geographies of intersectionality*²³ that advance a *deeply inter-*

sectional environmental justice.²⁴ Sociologists Stephanie Malin and Stacia Ryder capture a shared aim in this work: “to increase the relevance of our research in identifying core drivers of environmental injustice and then shaping solutions, in part by illuminating the intersections that can at times seem too complex to tease apart or contextualize.”²⁵ Most of us are aware of the messiness of ecosocial relations over time and place, and this vision of our field better articulating this knowing as a potentially transformative complement to social change is exciting.

It is in this spirit we introduce *spatialized intersectionality*, which strives to encapsulate the often unnamed yet shared condition our research and praxes in some way all address: that hegemonic ideologies, epistemologies, and actions have variously coconstructed contemporary spaces and each life lived in relation to them. Theoretically, the past tense connotation of spatialized intersectionality directs us to assume the presence of, and interrogate, (ongoing) historical impacts of White capitalist heteropatriarchal Western imperialism on our research sites, and, methodologically, it demands us to clarify the particular mechanisms by which this embedded inequity has come to be.

As African American Studies and environmental scholar-activist Kishi Animashaun Ducre affirms: “a line must always be drawn from the first encounter of colonial powers with indigenous people and the seizure of their land, labor, and culture with contemporary manifestations of capitalist exploitation.”²⁶ From here, solutions can be addressed. Spatialized intersectionality is thus a concept to unite and increase historically focused and forwardly applicable environmental scholarship toward better illuminating the actors, policies, and praxes that have embedded hegemonic inequality geographically, with persistent effects.

METHODS

To illuminate spatialized intersectionality, we offer a brief case study of the emergence of gendered and racialized residential segregation in Milwaukee, as well as insights into how this relates to present-day disparities in the city’s unfolding lead crisis. Mainstream media and several notable community leaders have termed Milwaukee’s “lead crisis” as such, especially since January 2018, when then mayor, Tom Barrett, disclosed that the city failed to notify 8000 predominantly Black families—disproportionately located in the northern city center zip codes 53206, 53208, and 53210—that their young children had tested positive for elevated lead levels in their blood.

¹⁵Elijah Anderson. “The White Space.” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1 (2015): 10–21.

¹⁶For example, George Lipsitz. “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape.” *Landscape Journal* 26 (2007): 1–7; Rashad Shabazz. *Spatializing Blackness*. (Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2015).

¹⁷Kimberlé Crenshaw. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139–167.

¹⁸Scholarly amplification of the negative health impacts of living in an unequal environment helped motivate Milwaukee to, in 2019, declare racism a public health crisis, and since then hundreds of other municipal, state, and national government agencies, as well as many major independent practitioner bodies, have also acknowledged this.

¹⁹Crenshaw. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” 1989, 140.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*, 166.

²²*Ibid.*, 140.

²³María Rodó-de-Zárate. “Developing Geographies of Intersectionality with Relief Maps: Reflections from Youth Research in Manresa, Catalonia.” *Gender, Place and Culture* 21 (2014): 925–944.

²⁴Stephanie A. Malin and Stacia S. Ryder. “Developing Deeply Intersectional Environmental Justice Scholarship.” *Environmental Sociology* 4 (2018): 1–7.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Kishi Animashaun Ducre. “The Black Feminist Spatial Imagination and an Intersectional Environmental Justice.” *Environmental Sociology* 4 (2018): 32.

Lead is a known toxin with heightened negative neurological effects on developing infants and young children. The primary sources of exposure in Milwaukee include leaching lead service lines aggregated around the northern city center's public drinking water supply, as well as unremediated lead-based paint primarily in residential housing located in an overlapping area. These dynamics present environmental and reproductive justice challenges as well as food justice ones, particularly because lead-contaminated drinking water produces heightened food insecurity for babies fed artificial formulas prepared with the compromised water supply.²⁷ What we were curious to better identify through our case study is: how did Black mothers and their children end up disproportionately located in the northern, most lead contaminated residential areas of Milwaukee?

Investigating intersectionality is as complex as geographically embedded, interlocking discrimination itself, and associated methods can thereby be unclear. Case studies seem effective toward empirically grounding the kind of relational understandings between contemporary outcomes and previously initiated inequities we attempt to clarify, particularly if lived experiences and reflexivity are considered throughout.²⁸ It is, therefore, important that we are clear about the genesis for this case study, which is several years old and has resulted in our data including years of observations, experiences, and strategic media, policy, and programmatic analyses.

Considerations into what we now term spatialized intersectionality began forming explicitly for Erica Morrell, the first author on this article, when she was a graduate student investigating in Detroit what geographer Rachel Slocum had noted as, "whiteness emerg[ing] spatially in efforts to increase food access, support farmers and provide organic food to consumers."²⁹ There, Erica began to grapple particularly with inequities around *first foods*, which include human milk, artificial formulas, and other primary forms of nourishment for young children.³⁰

On the ground in Detroit, grassroots activists were making clear that broader structural and cultural conditions rendered first foods central to understanding racialized and also urbanized and classed food systems.³¹ For example, City Council had passed Detroit's Food Security

Policy in 2007 to include a focus on "educat[ing] the community and families about the benefits of breastfeeding and the risks associated with infant formulas"³² after the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network helped draft it. Simultaneously, the nonprofit Black Mothers Breastfeeding Association was expanding to reduce racial inequities in Detroiters' first food access, with updates appearing monthly in the Detroit Food Policy Council newsletter.

Nonetheless, first foods are widely gendered in America,³³ and although Detroiters made clear that this kind of heteropatriarchal hegemonic differentiation and discrimination intersected with their racialized food experiences, Erica noted that this may have simultaneously contributed to many outsiders failing to address it.³⁴ This was apparent in 2015 when Medolac Laboratories, a for-profit company, stated it would partner with the Clinton Global Initiative and enter Detroit to "grow [Medolac's] breast milk donor base by 2,000 African American women,"³⁵ primarily to serve hospitals outside the city. Detroit reproductive activists lead a grassroots fight against this extractive move by which a corporation sought to exploit food systems disparities anchored in racist geographies, yet many outside food and environmental advocates were silent.³⁶

Erica observed a similar dynamic in Flint, just ninety kilometers north of Detroit, around the same time. Officials had switched the source of residents' tap water and contributed to this majority-Black city experiencing a lead-contaminated drinking water crisis. Noting the heightened danger for infants and informed by hegemonic gendered praxes that "locate the bodies of women as one lynchpin between environmental pollution and community wellness,"³⁷ decision makers largely targeted urban Black mothers with specialized messaging, directed resources, and disproportionate responsibility to mitigate lead poisoning in Flint.³⁸ Nonetheless, when outside researchers came with the expressed goal of

²⁷Mona Hanna-Attisha, Jenny LaChance, Richard Casey Sandler, and Allison Champney Schnepf. "Elevated Blood Lead Levels in Children Associated with the Flint Drinking Water Crisis: A Spatial Analysis of Risk and Public Health Response." *American Journal of Public Health* 106 (2016): 283–290.

²⁸Peter Hopkins. "Feminist Geographies and Intersectionality." *Gender, Place and Culture* 25 (2018): 585–590.

²⁹Rachel Slocum. "Whiteness, Space and Alternative Food Practice." *Geoforum* 38 (2007): 520–533.

³⁰Erica Morrell. "First Food Justice=Food Justice=Environmental Justice: A Call to Address Infant Feeding Disparities and the First Food System." *Environmental Justice* 10 (2018): 1–5.

³¹Amanda Freeman. *Skimmed: Breastfeeding, Race, and Injustice*. (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2019).

³²City Council. A City of Detroit Policy on Food Security. <https://detroitfoodpolicycouncil.net/sites/default/files/pdfs/Detroit_Food_Security_Policy.pdf>. (Last accessed on April 20, 2021).

³³Bernice Hausman. *Mother's Milk: Breastfeeding Controversies in American Culture*. (New York, Routledge, 2003).

³⁴Morrell. "First Food Justice=Food Justice=Environmental Justice: A Call to Address Infant Feeding Disparities and the First Food System." 2018.

³⁵Clinton Global Initiative. Co-op Campaign to Increase Breastfeeding in Urban Areas: Commitment by Medolac Laboratories. <<https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-global-initiative/commitments/co-op-campaign-increase-breastfeeding-urban-areas>>. (Last accessed on December 28, 2020).

³⁶Kiddada Green (lead author). "An Open Letter to Medolac Laboratories from Detroit Mothers." Black Mothers Breastfeeding Association. (Released January 12, 2015).

³⁷Barbara Gurr. "Complex Intersections: Reproductive Justice and Native American Women." *Sociology Compass* 5 (2011): 721–735.

³⁸Ron Fonger. Flint makes lead advisory official, suggests water filters and flushing. *MLive*. <https://www.mlive.com/news/flint/2015/09/flint_makes_lead_advisory_offi.html>. (Last accessed on December 28, 2020).

better understanding the crisis and augmenting responses to it, they tended to focus on the event's racialized dimensions, alone. In 2017, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission built on this momentum to investigate racism singularly in the context of the crisis, concluding that "spatial racism [...] played] an undeniable role."³⁹ In many ways a groundbreaking undertaking, it is notable that the commission did not address gendered intersections in their over 100-page report or ensuing recommendations to "ensure another Flint never happens again."⁴⁰

To help make sense of the complexity of first food politics she was observing city to city and between grassroots actors and academics, Erica interviewed Dalvery Blackwell, cofounding executive director of the nationally recognized African American Breastfeeding Network and the second author on this article. Dalvery shared a perspective built over her lifetime of lived and professional experiences navigating racialized and gendered discrimination specifically in the context of urban first food systems, including as a resident of Milwaukee, a Black mother, and, since 2011, in building out the African American Breastfeeding Network. Bluntly she explained to Erica: "what's normal is to see babies dying in our community. Institutionalized racism and sexism are working against communities of color."⁴¹

In the years following, the two of us grew close. Without explicitly naming spatialized intersectionality, we continued to dialogue about the kinds of geographically embedded and interlocking dynamics we now aim to capture through the term. Much of our insights toward the concept come from talking through personally lived experiences, including as similarly educated and employed American mothers who nonetheless raise our children in different urban and rural contexts that are also racialized opposingly, as we ourselves are, and from together examining related stories, peer-reviewed research, and local, state, and federal policy.

When the Milwaukee lead crisis broke in 2018, we were thus already regularly analyzing interlocking, embedded inequities, together. However, this event did mobilize us to engage more deeply. We began ongoing data collection on the sociopolitical dimensions of the lead crisis,⁴² and, in 2019, we launched survey and community conversation research into racialized and gendered family experiences with it.⁴³

The bulk of data we collected ahead of and between the public revealing of Milwaukee's lead crisis in January 2018 and the end of 2019 pointed to residential segregation as a chief driver of distinct burdens for Black women, passed intergenerationally to their children. However, when we looked to environmental scholarship, we struggled to find frameworks encompassing the entrenched intersections of race and gender that would have helped us make better sense of these geographies. Accordingly, in 2020, we turned to ourselves establishing this, through a historical evaluation of the complex prior phenomena that helped shaped differential residential relations in Milwaukee today. To do so, we drew from wide-ranging data, including our experiences, the input of participants in our abovementioned research, and, especially, documents collected⁴⁴ over years of our attention to the historical drivers of embedded inequity, which we categorized chronologically and put into strategic conversation with the aim of illuminating the complex social processes that have forged geographies of gendered and racialized discrimination in that city.⁴⁵ For clarity and brevity, we selected just a portion of these data in the case study hereunder.

CASE STUDY RESULTS

The area now predominantly known as Milwaukee was once a largely neutral territory. Indigenous peoples traversed the region for at least 13,000 years before French colonists settled it after a series of affronts to displace Native populations. To justify their brutality, colonists deployed hegemonic Eurocentric ideologies that racialized Indigenous peoples as non-White and inferior, along with diminishing the land they stewarded as a commodity uniquely destined for settler colonialists' own use.⁴⁶ Colonizers positioned African descendants similarly, and subsequently they moved Black peoples across place and space largely at colonists' own discretion. When the French relinquished the area to the British in 1760, the right to hold "Negros" was upheld as a condition of surrender. Roughly one African descendent slave was forcibly retained for every French colonist that remained.⁴⁷

³⁹Michigan Civil Rights Commission. "The Flint Water Crisis: Systemic Racism through the Lens of Flint." Public Report. (Released February 17, 2017).

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Dalvery Blackwell. Telephone interview with the first author, May 21, 2018 (digital audio file in possession of the author).

⁴²Erica Morrell began viewing related city council hearings and collecting official press releases, policies, and newspaper coverage of events related to the lead crisis as they unfolded. Meanwhile, Dalvery Blackwell joined the grassroots Coalition on Lead Elimination, which ultimately led her to work with Milwaukee Commissioner of Health, Jeanette Kowalik, on these issues.

⁴³Dalvery Blackwell and Erica Morrell. "Community Perspectives During a Lead Contaminated Drinking Water Crisis: Lessons for Lactation and Other Health Providers." *Journal of Human Lactation* 37 (2021): 331–342.

⁴⁴This includes Wisconsin Historical Society briefs, municipal policy archives, media coverage, Milwaukee's water filter distribution database (obtained by request), and secondary scholarship.

⁴⁵For example, Gregory D. Squires and Charis E. Kubrin. "Privileged Places: Race, Uneven Development, and the Geography of Opportunity in Urban America." *Urban Studies* 42 (2005): 47–68.

⁴⁶As is widely documented across Turtle Island/North America. For example, Dina Gilio-Whitaker. *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, From Colonization to Standing Rock*. (Boston, Beacon Press, 2019).

⁴⁷Wisconsin Historical Society. Black History in Wisconsin. <<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS502>> (Last accessed on January 7, 2021).

In 1818, Solomon Juneau formally settled Milwaukee, which developed quickly owing to an expanding manufacturing sector and incoming European immigrants. Anti-Black racism in public opinion and the law continued to define the region. In 1863, petitions to outlaw African American migration into Wisconsin were introduced into the state assembly several times, and mainstream public opinion and municipal statutes upheld racial segregation even as statewide measures failed. Milwaukee's Black population was thereby largely confined to the divested northern center later known as Bronzeville or the "inner core." White mobs formed to provide ad hoc enforcement of racialized geographies, at times publicly lynching Black Milwaukeean residents who defied them.⁴⁸

Gendered projects were also widespread during colonial settlement and expansion, contributing to sexist logics embedding in the region. Milwaukee's founders tended to deploy hegemonic notions that differentiated and diminished women, positioning them as less rational than men and consequently predestined for economically undervalued domestic life. Decision makers institutionalized such beliefs through discriminatory laws that barred most women from retaining earnings and purchasing property. The result was that men came to own the majority of Milwaukee's residences, while women maintained them. Such inequitable gender treatments informed and became further engrained as decision makers denied women a vote when ratifying Wisconsin's constitution in 1848.⁴⁹

Entrenched racism intersected with embedding gendered logics to coproduce complex residential inequities in Milwaukee. Regional law and praxes barred Black men from many lucrative sectors of employment, and for these reasons and broader histories of denied wealth, Black women came to work outside of their homes in greater proportions than their White gendered counterparts. Many Black women in fact worked in service to these racially privileged women and their families.⁵⁰ In these instances, Black women would leave their own segregated residences in the northern center to be accepted into Whiter geographies due to their intent to fulfill a societally subordinated function, which included infant feeding and other childcare. At the same time, that they as women had travelled away from their own domestic spaces to do so deviated from hegemonic gendered norms.

The particular social identity intersections of Black women thereby meant that as they moved through Milwaukee's geographies, gendered and racialized discrimination variously came to define much of their experiences. Black Milwaukeean women were often

treated as uncivilized, immoral, and socially dependent on others who lived in the degrading north central area because of their own deficiencies, while at the same time earning the affirming Mammy iconography⁵¹ for relieving White families' burdens in more privileged locales. These geographies were overtly on display in 1900 at Milwaukee's Pfister Hotel, when prominent African American journalist and northeastern women's club leader, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, was alerted by White women, and some prominent Black men,⁵² that she should only enter the space as a representative of the White clubs with which she was affiliated, but not the Black one.⁵³

Despite the U.S. Supreme Court deeming racial zoning unconstitutional in 1917, anti-Black residential discrimination accelerated in Milwaukee after this, in part through racially restrictive covenants, which banned incoming African Americans from housing rental and ownership in >90% of Milwaukee and the greater Milwaukee region.⁵⁴ Black people thereby tended to remain confined to the northern center of the city, which overcrowded as more migrated in to fill expanding wartime and postwar industrial jobs. Landlords responded to these new residential pressures by making cursory, often unsafe, modifications, turning single-family homes into multiunit complexes; meanwhile, racist redlining practices sanctioned at the federal level encouraged the denial of additional investments to the area.⁵⁵ Even though Milwaukee was becoming known nationally for its "sewer socialism"⁵⁶—the improvement of select areas through augmented sanitation, drinking water, and power systems—Black Milwaukeeans found themselves trapped in the intentionally disadvantaged north side.

From 1950 to the early 1970s, Milwaukee's African American population rose from 22,000 people to 105,000, with Black women and girls outnumbering men

⁵¹For example, Melissa V. Harris-Perry. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011).

⁵²The record is unclear here, but there is some evidence suggesting that, despite public efforts to condone the racist move, Washington remained silent. For example, Louis R. Harlan, Raymond W. Smock, and Barbara S. Kraft. *Booker T. Washington Papers Volume 5: 1899–1900*. (Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 1976).

⁵³For example, Mary Jane Smith. "The Fight to Protect Race and Regional Identity within the General Federation of Women's Clubs, 1895–1902." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 94 (2010): 479–513.

⁵⁴For example, Lois M. Quinn. "Racially restrictive covenants: The Making of All-White Suburbs in Milwaukee County." *ETI Publication*. 178. <https://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1177&context=eti_pubs> (Last accessed on January 17, 2021).

⁵⁵For example, Leah Foltman and Malia Jones. "How Redlining Continues to Shape Racial Segregation in Milwaukee." *WisCONTEXT*. <<https://www.wiscontext.org/print/how-redlining-continues-shape-racial-segregation-milwaukee>> (Last accessed on January 17, 2021).

⁵⁶Wisconsin Historical Society. *Women's History in Wisconsin*. <<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-043/>>. (Last accessed on January 8, 2021).

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Wisconsin Historical Society. *Women's History in Wisconsin*. <<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS561>>. (Last accessed on January 7, 2021).

⁵⁰Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis, eds. *The Black Worker From 1900–1919, Volume V*. (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1980).

migrating into the region 88:100 from 1955 to 1960 and 91:100 from 1965 to 1971.⁵⁷ Upon arrival, they confronted Milwaukee's racist housing dynamics rendered further complex by sexist practices. Women still experienced exacerbated barriers to obtaining credit and the legal status to purchase property.⁵⁸ Landlords were also known to evict tenants who became pregnant, and they widely discriminated against families with young children—practices that disproportionately prevented women of childbearing age from accessing stable housing.⁵⁹ For African American mothers, now forced into itinerant tenant living in degraded multiunit residential housing aggregated in the divested northern center, the combination of residential sexism and anti-Black housing discrimination contributed to coconstructing oppressions.

Going door to door as a volunteer with the League of Women's Voters during a portion of this time, Velvlea "Vel" Phillips met many of the Black women who had been denied better housing opportunities. Phillips recalled them subject to what she described in a media interview as, "true poverty [...] homes were run-down, with rickety porches [...] and my heart just turned over."⁶⁰ When elected to the Milwaukee Common Council, Phillips challenged spatially unjust dynamics through an effort to dismantle residential discrimination. Yet her colleagues rejected the proposed Phillips Housing Ordinance multiple times. Simultaneously, city officials targeted north central residences for midnight welfare raids disproportionately intended to scrutinize and humiliate Black women.⁶¹

When congress passed the Fair Housing Act in 1968, lawmakers did not consider families with children a protected class. Even as legal segregation ended in Wisconsin, predominantly White male Milwaukeean landlords were known to openly deny women and children access to housing, targeting Black women especially with "children-damage deposits" in addition to standard rental fees, and disproportionately evicting Black women of childbearing age.⁶² The legacies of this persist today: in high poverty White areas of Milwaukee, 1 in 150 women are evicted, in high poverty Black areas, 1 in 17 women are.⁶³

The war on drugs that unfolded post-1970 amplified complex spatial disparities entrenching in Milwaukee, including ad hoc forms of gendered and racialized segregation. Mainstream tropes of deviant Black men were uniquely coupled with the inner city to constitute a threatening space.⁶⁴ State actors leveraged this to justify increased surveillance and criminalization in north central Milwaukee, coupled with the targeted removal of Black men. Although African descendant males in their prime fatherhood years, ages 25–39 years, account for just 7% of Wisconsin's population, under this racist war they rose to comprise ~50% of people incarcerated. Left in Milwaukee's north side were Black women, who rose as sole heads of household.⁶⁵

Simultaneously, these conditions helped motivate *suburbanization*, which encouraged White people to flee the supposed dangers of the city in part through preferential lending, discursive manipulation, and biased policymaking.⁶⁶ Clinics, grocers, schools, childcare centers, and other community services often closed in their wake. This augmented the instability and stress imposed by society on Black women's spatial location, contributing to peaking Black infant mortality rates in Milwaukee in the 1960s and '70s.

Today, 80% of White households in Milwaukee County are located in the suburbs and 90% of Black households in the city. Black women have disproportionately remained in Milwaukee since the 1970s, often continuing to rent multiunit degraded residential housing in the north side, where they have for generations come to know and make a life in. Yet their experiences have continued to transform there, in part because of societal shifts (re)shaping geographies around them.

It was also post-1970 that multinational fast food chains proliferated in urban centers, for example, to meet demand for food and supplies left unfilled by retailers who had accompanied suburban relocatees or folded in after their flight. To support their families, Black women in Milwaukee increasingly took low-wage jobs in these establishments, which also tended disallowed family leave and lactation policies federally mandated in other sectors.⁶⁷ Avoiding the core structural problems that created such dynamics, both industry and state actors

⁵⁷Kidiocus King-Carroll. *Black Women, Migration, and the Delay of Fair Housing*. The Gender Policy Report. <<https://genderpolicyreport.umn.edu/black-women-migration-and-the-delay-of-fair-housing/>>. (Last accessed on January 8, 2021).

⁵⁸Disparities the federal Fair Housing and Equal Credit Opportunity Acts attempted to assuage.

⁵⁹Matthew Desmond. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. (Crown Books, 2016), 140–141.

⁶⁰As quoted in, Barbara Miner. "Valiant Lady Vel." *Milwaukee Magazine*. <<https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/valiant-lady-vel/>>. (Last accessed on January 8, 2021).

⁶¹Premilla Nadasen. "From Widow to 'Welfare Queen': Welfare and the Politics of Race." *Black Women, Gender + Families* 1 (2007): 52–77.

⁶²Desmond. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, 2016.

⁶³Matthew Desmond. "Poor Black Women are Evicted at Alarming Rates, Setting Off a Chain of Hardship." Policy Brief. (MacArthur Foundation, 2014).

⁶⁴For example, Shabazz. *Spatializing Blackness*, 2015.

⁶⁵Lois M. Quinn and John Pawasarat. "Statewide Imprisonment of Black Men in Wisconsin." *ETI Publications*. <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/217189188.pdf>>. (Last accessed on January 22, 2021).

⁶⁶Marc V. Levine. "Racialized Politics in Milwaukee and Wisconsin: An Analysis of Senate Factors Five And Six of the Voting Rights Act." Expert Report Submitted on Behalf of Plaintiffs in *Frank v. Walker*, Civil Action No. 2:11-cv-01128(LA). <https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/assets/2012.05.18_marc_levine_expert_report.pdf>. (Last accessed on January 8, 2021).

⁶⁷Tyler Lennon, Dalvery Blackwell, and Earnestine Willis. "Workplace Lactation Support in Milwaukee County 5 Years After the Affordable Care Act." *Journal of Human Lactation* 33 (2017): 214–219.

responded by amplifying artificial infant food promotion programs in urban centers rapidly also post-1970.⁶⁸

It was thus coinciding with the war on drugs and suburbanization that human milk feeding in Black families fell dramatically in Milwaukee and nationwide, which defies the reality of every other racialized group.⁶⁹ Even in the 2010s, Black infants in Milwaukee County nursed at rates 30 percentage points lower than White ones, thereby still today disproportionately reliant on artificial formulas and the public drinking water supply often used to reconstitute it.⁷⁰

DISCUSSION

In 2018 when Milwaukee's lead crisis broke, Black women were disproportionately the head of household, renting housing units in north central areas of Milwaukee known to have particularly high unmediated environmental hazards, with young children disparately reliant on artificial formula. Meanwhile, state actors had removed Black men especially from the space, denying them full opportunity to be present with/for their families. Simultaneously, outside of the city, White people, including both women and men, disproportionately enjoyed relative freedom to pursue their lives in the less contaminated and surveilled residential suburbs.

Our case study illuminates that these unique spatial dynamics did not occur by coincidence, rather, intersecting forms of racism and gender discrimination, entrenched residentially through centuries of biased dominant discourse, policy, and praxes, helped constrain African American women and children in a uniquely vulnerable position.⁷¹ We refer to this as a form of spatialized intersectionality, and we argue this is critical to accounting for why >10% of Black children ultimately tested positive for elevated lead levels in Milwaukee, whereas <3% of White children did.⁷²

CONCLUSION

We introduce spatialized intersectionality to account for instances wherein oppressive forces coconstruct differential and discriminatory geographies, and to advance scholarly attention to these phenomena. In Milwaukee, spatialized intersectionality helps us understand how zip codes became racialized and gendered, and thereby dif-

ferentially resourced, so that the disparate outcomes Black women and children experienced become more predictable: historic complex geographies of discrimination and disadvantage undergird them.

Spatialized intersectionality is meant to capture widespread though differential phenomena anywhere hegemonic logics have left their imprint. Deepening awareness of spatialized intersectionality can progress applied praxes and provide context to further amplify those engaged in hegemonic resistance.⁷³

On the ground in Milwaukee, for example, advocates have leveraged insights into intersecting forms of entrenched sexism and racism to help motivate lawmakers to pass an ordinance protecting renters from evictions related to lead mitigation disputes, as well as to earmark \$240,000 to provide safe home kits and specialized education to birthing parents in north central zip codes. The city is also planning to launch a citizen-led Lead-Safe Advisory Committee so that those who have uniquely lived the crisis can better shape solutions to it. Still, these are limited responses to the much larger hegemonic underpinnings of complex crises that will persist indefinitely unless called out deliberately. Toward this end, spatialized intersectionality is a challenge to all of us to better seek out and address interlocking forms of marginalization shaping arenas of (in)justice.

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Both authors have contributed to this article, reviewed this article, and take ownership over its contents.

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⁶⁸Freeman. *Skimmed: Breastfeeding, Race, and Injustice*, 2019.

⁶⁹Katherine M. Jones, Michale L. Power, John T. Queenan, and Jay Schulkin. "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Breastfeeding." *Breastfeeding Medicine* 10 (2015): 186–196.

⁷⁰Within eight weeks of birth. See, Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families. "LIHF Data Brief: Breastfeeding." Wisconsin Partnership Program. (August 2017).

⁷¹Emily E. Lynch and Helen C.S. Meier. "The Intersectional Effect of Poverty, Home Ownership, and Racial/Ethnic Composition on Mean Childhood Blood Lead Levels in Milwaukee County Neighborhoods." *PLoS ONE* 15 (2020): e0234995.

⁷²Wisconsin Department of Health Services. 2016 Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin. <<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01202-16.pdf>>. (Last accessed on January 22, 2021).

⁷³Katherine McKittrick. "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place." *Social and Cultural Geography* 12 (2011): 947–963.