A Transplanted Chicago

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Race, Place and the Press in Iowa City

Robert E. Gutsche, Jr.

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On the cover: Low-income apartments, home to many new black arrivals to Southeast Side, Iowa City, Iowa, are synonymous in local press coverage to urban ghettos of Chicago.

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To my wife

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Preface

It's three p.m. downtown, a confluence of businesses, bars, restaurants, and university buildings in Iowa City, Iowa. It's overrun by students and professors, panhandlers and homeless. The daily churning of people in one space adds a bit to the charm of a city that comes out of nowhere in rural America, plopped amid farmland, with its city limits that curve along blurred lines of city and country.

Buses gurgle and cough outside the Old Capitol Town Center, a shopping mall that until the late 1990s was a bustling mecca, a sign of a community trying to save notions of America's Main Street by keeping business, residents, and life in a central city space. When a new shopping mall opened in the neighboring city of Coralville in 1998, the downtown mall sat nearly empty. For close to a decade, storefronts were closed and gated. Though the second-floor movie theater was abandoned, escalators ran continuously, hauling next to no one to a lone health store left open upstairs.

The mall scene changed in the mid–2000s when the University of Iowa, around which much of the city is built, slowly moved offices into the Town Center's empty stores and massive hallways. By 2013, the university occupied some 70 percent of the mall with its classrooms, offices, bookstores and conference rooms. A few stores and restaurants have since gained traction. Upstairs, a local newspaper has opened up shop. On the main floor, with its thick clusters of tables and chairs, an otherwise dull space is filled with activity—college students study, flirt, arrive and leave in a flurry.

But it's outside the mall where the real action happens.

There, each weekday afternoon, smack dab on the border of private enterprise and higher education, public bus lines from across the city converge. Seemingly at once. Within a few minutes, intersections and curbs fill with

THE BUS STOP. Iowa City's downtown public bus hub signifies how traditionally white parts of the city are increasingly being shared with new black arrivals from elsewhere. Photograph by Alicia Kramme.

massive people movers. Chaos ensues. Riders of all types swerve and merge. College students head to their dorms. Those who hold prized positions in the city—working for the university and its hospital—stand, ear buds plugged in. Fast food and warehouse workers, homeless, and business owners, stand their ground as pedestrians pass through. In other parts of the country, this scene may not be special; it's Afternoon in America. In this downtown, though, and only for these few minutes each day, the space resembles someplace other than Iowa.

For the past 20 years, for many who live and work in Iowa City, the bus stop has signified symptoms of larger racial and cultural problems throughout the city. More specifically, through a portion of this scene, a particular population that stands out among the afternoon frenzy, represents decades of cultural change and challenges here: Gaggles of black high school students clustered at the curbside.

In Iowa, state law mandates that schools are not responsible for busing students if they live within three miles of their school, yet most of these students are picked up from City High School on the East Side and dumped at the bus stop downtown where they are told to wait—for as long as an hour—

to catch a bus home from school, just because their neighborhood falls inside the three-mile limit (Sullivan, 2012).

After waiting in the sun or snow, depending on the season, students finally board their buses home, all hailing the same street names—Broadway, Cross Park, Lakeside—streets in Southeastern Iowa City, the black neighborhoods, the "Southeast Side." If these children's families had cars, a ride from school to doorstep would take 10 minutes. Instead, a route from school to home, passing through the downtown, takes more than an hour.

Home to a mixture of white townies and new, black arrivals from Chicago, St. Louis, and other metro regions in the Upper Midwest, the Southeast Side is known—mythically—as a bastion of affordable housing, black families, and stories of devious behaviors (Gutsche, 2011). Still, it's cheap living in the Southeast Side. Apartments go for $600 to $800 a month. With Section 8 housing—a federal affordable housing program that assists qualified people to help make ends meet—out-of-pocket rent for these same places could be as low as $100. There, you can find a duplex to rent and even small houses to buy—an amazingly different housing market than many of these residents are used to.

Indeed, housing is a complicated business everywhere, whether they be projects in the cities, or in the suburbs, where cheap apartments are harder to find, massive McMansions so expensive that several families need to fill one house to make the rent. Kneebone and Berube (2013) write about how these polarized options—the broken ghetto or the burbs—are increasingly becoming the norm across the country. "Nationally, by the end of the 2000s one in three poor Americans lived in the suburbs, making them home to the largest and fastest-growing poor population in the country" (Chapter 2, Location 512). By 2010, for instance, "more than one in four suburban residents were poor or 'near-poor'" (Chapter 2, Location 515). In Chicago, for example, roughly two-thirds of residents live in the city's suburbs; 51 percent of them are considered poor. Iowa City, then, provides some promise in making a home.

There's no clear estimate of how many residents from urban pockets throughout the Midwest have sought Iowa as a new home, but some numbers give at least some indication: By 2007, 14 percent of the families using the voucher system as reduced rent assistance within Johnson County (in which Iowa City is located) were from Illinois and one-third of the 1,500 families on waiting lists for affordable housing in Iowa City were from the Chicago area (Bailey, Law, Mason and Phillips, 2011; Keene, Padilla and Geronimus, 2010; Spence, Lawson and Visser, 2010).

Still, there are no hard numbers that accurately measure this migration. Many families tend to move back to Chicago—or to somewhere else—within

the first few months to find better work, more affordable housing (even when these things are lacking "back home" [Hu, 2013]) or to live closer to family. Local governments and agencies, then, have a difficult task in tracking who is coming and going.

But for local Iowans, the real question is: "Why are 'they' coming here?"

That's a question that emerges when people want to complain about new arrivals, and it's asked as though the answers are beyond reason—and as though the question deserves a response, that people need to or must justify themselves for where they choose to live. But the answers, for the most part, are quite simple. Yet, they do little to squelch local voyeurism: People move to Iowa for safe streets, for education, and to find work.

Indeed, it's quite common for new arrivals to Iowa City to find a job the same day they moved. They are fairly good jobs, where working on a register at McDonald's, loading freight at a warehouse, or cleaning at the university provides consistent employment, with good pay that *starts* at minimum wage. Combined with a fairly low cost of living, these jobs can pay the bills and might leave some set aside for savings.

But there's another added cost to living in Iowa for many of these new residents: Dealing with the daily hate. While most of the racial hatred towards blacks in Iowa is subtle—and is explicated throughout this book—a few times a year, the distain for new arrivals makes itself known, often exposing itself through discourse in local news.

In 2010, the city's local newspaper—*The Iowa City Press-Citizen*—decided to publish an opinion piece about tensions surrounding an influx of residents to the city from Chicago and other "urban" places. It was this story that seemed to sum up the fears about this migration among long-time Iowans. The editors' headline to a story written by Maria Houser Conzemius, a resident who was part of the paper's select "Writer's Group," told the whole story of Iowa City's changing culture in bold, black letters: "Perpetrators of urban decay" (Conzemius, 2010). Throughout the article (which is discussed in more depth in Chapter 4), the author describes single mothers, their druggie boyfriends, and dangerous "inner-city refugees" as contributing to Iowa City crime and the deterioration of wholesome, Midwestern (read *white*) living.

The article's tone and language painted a very different picture of the Southeast Side than what those living there would say about it, and journalists legitimized these stereotypes of the Southeast Side as a ghetto through a concept this book refers to as *news place-making*, in which journalists—through rhetoric and sourcing—contribute to dominant characteristics of geography based upon long-standing narratives about race, place, and people. In this case, the news characterized the Southeast Side as a rural ghetto.

Journalists chose this particular article, for instance, because it served a

purpose that was more than just presenting a personal opinion. Using a pseudo-journalist who was sanctioned by the newspaper to articulate hateful language and stories about the Southeast Side, professional journalists released themselves from approaching these ideas themselves and presenting them as though they were ideas of the newspaper staff. If the newspaper had taken this same position under the guide of the *Press-Citizen* rather than under the veil of being an opinion—albeit a validated one because of the author's connection to the paper—the professional staff would have risked political and financial backlash from readers who may have been offended. Instead, the newspaper presented itself as being a forum for community discussion, allowing its Writer's Group member to say what the paper couldn't.

But the paper's journalists shouldn't get off so easily. They still have a responsibility for the discourse that appears in their pages. Here's why: First, editors chose to run the article in the first place as legitimate and verified information from a writer the paper had presented as a preeminent community member. Second, editors selected a headline (reporters and columnists rarely write their own) that furthered what some considered hate speech, categorizing and marginalizing a fairly vulnerable group of people. In effect, the headline served not just to present the story itself, but educated the public about what was considered "accurate" and acceptable news related to the community.

Furthermore, in addition to rhetoric that removed these residents from the larger community by referring to them as deviant ("perpetrators") and "other" ("refugees"), the article's cultural authority, having been approved and published by the newspaper, furthered divisive, destructive, and ambiguous discourse about real changes amid real people and real issues that Iowa City faced while trying to adapt to its growing community. This article mirrors dominant characteristics of how local news media has covered the Southeast Side. Just as the article casts its residents as assailants driven to attack the community and calls the Southeast Side "Little Chicago," other news articles presented the same stories of this rural ghetto, calling it a "No Go Zone," and "Fight Central," place-naming that identified public boundaries of its community.

The Southeast Side (and its pseudonyms), then, became someplace other than Iowa City, namely the places of Chicago believed to be ghettoized by residents who do drugs, who seek mischief, who have low motivation to work, and who have no aspirations for a "better life." In this way, Conzemius and the *Press-Citizen* hit the nail on the head about the dominant meanings assigned to the Southeast Side—and its black residents. In turn, local press achieved its goal of creating dialogue, not debate, about the Southeast Side and those who live there. Indeed, the article described above must have resonated with the community, because very few people seemed pissed off by the

publication and the story only encouraged more talk about what the Southeast Side was—or, what they *thought* it was.

Setting aside the idea that people just might not read their local newspaper, little to no public outrage about racist discourse surrounding the Southeast Side is quite troubling, but, sadly, not shocking. By the time of the above article's publication in 2010, the Southeast Side had become a mythical place, and the people from there—including black high school students who boarded downtown buses for Southeastern streets—had become an extension of the Southeast Side.

The presence of Southeast Side blacks in the downtown (and anywhere outside of their neighborhood) came to resemble the fears of most white Americans and signs of urban America that don't belong in downtown Anyplace, Iowa—an encroachment of *others* into *our* spaces. Rhetoric about Iowa City's Southeast Side, then, provided a foundation for public explanations of high schoolers' antics in the city's downtown bus hub. In fact, the students' loud and physical after-school play, their experiencing freedom after being cooped-up in classrooms, were ostensibly so disruptive between three p.m. and six p.m. on weekdays between August 2011 and the end of March 2012 that police responded to eight "juveniles-related calls" there (Sullivan, 2012). (Apparently, in Iowa City, eight calls to anything seems to signify a crisis, because just "responding to calls" wasn't enough action for the community.)

Starting in 2011, city leaders and businesses took further action. They instituted rules and deployed security guards to corral the kids. Over night, security guards arrived to pounce on students who broke posted rules that no one stand within 10 feet of the mall exit to the bus stop. City buses reissued their own warnings via posted rules for what it would take for riders to get kicked off the buses themselves, including having a loud voice, cursing, and physical play. Then, the big guns came in. Every day for weeks, it seemed, armed police officers stood, arms crossed, around these clusters of black youth, their squad cars parked haphazardly in the streets, lights flashing.

It became a common scene to see white folk weave through this crowd of kids and past straight-faced cops, arms sometimes on their hips, their guns protruding from their physiques. And, finally there was the press presence. Television stations and newspapers from in and around Iowa City swarmed to tell stories of out-of-control black kids infesting an otherwise pleasant city. As one television station reported in 2012:

> Large crowds of junior high and high school students who congregate there after school are making it one of the noisiest [downtown intersections].
>
> "We were just called down there last night for loud, rowdy kids," said Iowa City Police Sergeant Denise Brotherton.
>
> And it's not only noise but large crowds near the Old Capitol Mall.

> "It's hard to get in the doors sometimes because the doors will be blocked cause they'll be too many kids around," said Bill Johnson who boards the bus everyday on the busy street. "You have to squeeze your way through."
>
> Police say the crowds and the rowdiness have led to several fights in the area. So, they're keeping close watch [KGAN, 2012].

However, neither the police—nor the students at the bus stop—could define exactly what "fights" meant, and it soon became clear to me, at least, that the real concern wasn't the pending doom emanating from clusters of kids. Instead, people's concerns about the scene of black youth who just appeared to be standing around was used as a catalyst for explaining social conditions in the Southeast Side, the influx of blacks to the city, debate about the "true intents" of new people moving to Iowa City in the first place, and to keep asking how their arrival will change the city.

Couple these concerns with the fact that high school students were using publically funded buses to make their way from the Southeast Side into *our schools* and *our downtown*, and we have a better understanding of why the larger community, apparently, came to accept how their public officials (and the press) responded to new Southeast Siders—not with public resources and sympathy for kids trying to get home from school, but with police, surveillance, and forms of subtle racism that appeared in hushed conversations and daily press coverage (for example, see Hines, 2013).

The bus stop's pocket of black youth was the first thing I noticed when I first visited Iowa City in the 1990s and then again in 2009 when I moved to Iowa City to begin my doctoral studies. The scene just seemed out of place in a state in which whites make up more than 90 percent of the population. During my first few weeks in Iowa City in 2009 especially, the bus stop seemed to be the one place in the city where issues of race came to light. The curbside stop seemed to be a clear juxtaposition of how blacks and whites live in two different worlds in the same city, a glaring indication of segregation and inequality that ultimately was veiled in public rhetoric, news coverage, whiteness, and notions of post-race America.

I wasn't alone in these initial impressions. Regan, a doctoral student in English who moved to Iowa City from Oakland, California, in 2007, said that she, too, was struck by what the mall's bus stop resembled when she first arrived. "I would go there to catch the bus after class," she says, "which was usually after 3:30, and closer to 3:30 the worse the situation was."

Regan said that when the youth started speaking loudly and playing around, the response to their behavior got worse, too. "It felt like weekly, the bus drivers would get mad at the kids and call police," Regan says, "and more than three police cars would come and park. It was ridiculous. It just looked

ridiculous. It looked like the kind of police response I would see in a really dangerous and risky situation. But this dealt with high school students and buses."

Independently to us (Regan and I didn't meet until late 2011), the bus stop became a sign of a subtle and yet complicated scene that needed to be parsed out. There was a lot going on there, particularly in terms of the ways in which the city began to address the "issues at the bus stop" with police posturing, threats of small business moving out of the downtown unless the scene changed, and claims by vocal residents that the "kids downtown" were causing mini riots with their "behavior" of "speaking" and "playing around."

The more people I talked to—including the kids at the stop—saw the space as a site of control and oppression, an example of how "public space" had become controlled by those in power, those who determine who can spend time there, what people can do in that space, and who can implement systems to monitor and scold scores of black students through public enterprise—particularly city, police, and university officials.[1]

Even in 2013, Regan said the downtown setting continued to represent larger racial issues in the community that's rooted in the power dynamics and systems of a traditionally white community. The struggle, she says, is among those coming to terms with how to share their community with others—or to find ways to keep them out.

"The divide," Regan says, "is between people who are home here and people who aren't. People who are comfortable here expect people to do a lot of fucking work to make themselves feel more comfortable, fucking work that people who are comfortable here don't need to do. There is no sense of 'what I have to do to change.'"

I faced dealing with the mythical power of the Southeast Side head-on when my wife, Bridget, who was born and raised in Iowa City, told me that she wouldn't consider buying a home in the Southeast Side.

"I want to live someplace where I feel safe," Bridget told me. "Especially if I have to take the dog out at night."

We also wanted to live in an area where our property value would remain stable and grow and where we could easily walk to coffee shops. The Southeast Side has none of these traits.

On one hand, I bought that reasoning. She was right, of course, about my nightly groaning and avoidance of the dog's needs. She was also right that she needed to feel safe where she lived.

Bridget and I ended up buying a home near the North Side, but what continues to bother me about this scenario is how Bridget's perception of the Southeast Side wasn't rooted in any personal experiences that she'd had there. She had no reason to fear that neighborhood's people and places. There

were no spikes in violence there. No widespread reports of rape, burglary, assault.

Bridget—like most of the city—had only heard stories. Stories of what, I wasn't sure, but scary ones that kept people out of the Southeast Side. When I asked Bridget and others about why people were concerned about the Southeast Side, I only got the same answer over and over: "It's not safe."

It's troubling how easily I bought people's stories about the Southeast Side. I knew the Southeast Side was considered the city's black neighborhood. I knew police patrolled there constantly. I felt a sense that there seemed to be impending danger lurking in its streets. Had we moved into the Southeast Side, there's little to suggest we would have made a difference. Where I ended up living, I only cleaned some storm drains once during a flood, and I mowed our lawn, but I don't even remember the names of our neighbors, nor did I participate in local associations or shovel other people's sidewalks. So maybe I wouldn't really have had much of an impact living in the Southeast Side after all.

Still, it was at the moment when I bought those Southeast Side stories at face-value and when we decided to live somewhere else that we became part of the problem. By not living in the Southeast Side, we made a conscious choice to disinvest in the community and, in so doing, we started telling and validating rationales for why we avoided the Southeast Side.

Add ours to the list of stories about the Southeast Side.

Maybe this book can help tell an alternative tale.

After months of journalism students, local activists and artisans, public officials, and residents haranguing City Hall and the School Board to do something about the "unsightly scene" outside the bus stop in 2012, school and city leaders compromised in 2013 to provide buses for Southeast Side students, though only after a decade of ignoring what should have been a simple commute and of blaming the problem on the kids themselves. It's unclear how long this change will last, and certainly, as of this book's printing, nothing has been done to squelch the stigma assigned to these students' skin color, the Southeast Side, and the acceptance of these stigmas by the public—and the press.

In fact, a March 2013 *Press-Citizen* article about possible plans for a Casey's gas station to be built in the Southeast Side was headlined "Crime alarms Casey's lawyer" and subtitled "But is still 'interested' in southeast side" (Bannow, 2013). This article continued subtle chimes in local press that cast the Southeast Side as a foreboding ghetto, its subtleness a perfect example of racialized news discourses that are loaded with innuendo and lack evidence to support the veracity of their claims.

The story provides what the headline promises—a chronological account of interactions about the possible development between the gas station com-

pany, its legal counsel, city planners, police, and select Southeast Side residents. The most important interaction? Casey's lawyer, who was said to be "wary about crime" and who had "met multiple times at length with local law enforcement officials about crime in the area." Along with police and city officials, the lawyer had "carefully reviewed the neighborhood's crime statistics and said officers have asked Casey's not to build shrubbery that people potentially could hide in or that would obstruct officers' view of the site."

Besides several more paragraphs about the process of rezoning and construction, quotes from city planners and a near-to-Southeast Side resident (who also happens to chair the city's Zoning Commission), and concerns via a resident's letter to the Zoning Commission that the gas station would "increase crime, traffic and noise in the area," the article stops at innuendo in its description of the neighborhood and its "problems."

Most troubling was how the article resembled previous local reporting about the Southeast Side in that journalists failed to include crime statistics to support assertions that the Southeast Side was in any way dangerous. Indeed, there were no assessments of what types of crime may occur in the neighborhood, no mention of whether there had been an increase or decrease in recent crime (it had decreased), and no comparison of crime rates between the Southeast Side and the rest of Iowa City. Had journalists made such a comparison, they would have shown that downtown was more dangerous. In the end, very little evidence supported the lawyer's hysteria other than the same "stories of crime" that had kept me from living there.

The gas station report represents a common way in which local press has covered the Southeast Side—focusing on like-minded public and business officials to determine the dominant characterizations of the neighborhood. As in most Southeast Side coverage, no resident appeared in the story other than an official (a zoning commissioner who said she would buy pizza for her kids, if the gas station were built, because she lives nearby) and a complainant from the neighborhood resident who just didn't want the gas station and wrote as much to city officials. But what about other residents in the neighborhoods? Do any of them want a gas station? Does it matter? These reporting problems could have easily been fixed had the reporter talked to more people than the usual suspects, had editors required more voices in neighborhood news, and had readers demanded equal coverage of people in the Southeast Side.

More than anything else, however, press coverage of the Southeast Side—as this book will show and the gas station story exemplifies—characterized and racialized the Southeast Side and its people by keeping the story too simple: The bus stop is full of bad black kids. People from Chicago are ruining Iowa City. The Southeast Side is a bad place to build a business. In terms of

the gas station coverage that tends to show the neighborhood in a negative light, the news story lacked the potential positive contributions the business might have for the local economy. While not great jobs, the service industry would likely provide *some work* for those in and around the Southeast Side that they could get to easily, that would be close to home, and that is in close proximity to their children's schools.

If journalists wanted to be critical, watchdog reporters, they could have also evaluated the potential challenges to the neighborhood other than "crime," especially since this challenge wasn't supported by any evidence. Potential challenges from a gas station could include increased traffic and poor food options, for example. Gas stations and urban groceries, generally, don't offer quality food at reasonable prices; they do, however, provide fast and expensive junk food rather than healthy options, contributing to rising numbers of heart disease and diabetes among minorities.[2] That could have been a great story.

Lastly, the newspaper could have discussed the role police have in developing city environments (for example, see *Press-Citizen,* 2013; Schmidt, 2013). The news article already quotes police as wanting to limit foliage in which assailants could "hide." But instead of exploring the ability the police have in influencing what and how private and public developments look, the story uses the concerns from police to cast the space as a war zone and seems to limit any efforts of beautification that a business (albeit a gas station) can make in a neighborhood. (As an aside, it's hard to ignore the irony in how limiting the numbers of bushes and trees from new development in the Southeast Side only reinforces settings of a real-life concrete jungle—the very thing Iowa City residents seem to be against.)

This book is not about an Iowa City bus stop. Or a gas station. It's also not about evaluating the journalistic style of local press in and around Iowa City. But this project begins with these scenes and these players in part because they illustrate characterizations of the Southeast Side as being the city's "bad side of town." I begin this project with these scenes because I wish readers to remember them throughout the book. Indeed, these subtleties are at the focus of my arguments of how rhetoric in the press further notions of white supremacy and social control. By their very nature, subtleties are overlooked and explained away, but it's within these movements that dangerous ideologies thrive.

Second, these cases help set a foundation for this project, in which I wish to implicate the press and its power as major players in establishing and furthering racialized discourse and decision-making surrounding people and place. This project, therefore, attempts to undermine the discourse surrounding the Southeast Side and its people by addressing head-on, and with some

personal venom, the rhetorical and ideological attacks during a time of urban migration to a place that is supposed to be welcoming and supportive.

I have tried to be aware of the potential audiences for this book, first by grounding it in a conceptual framework with which to explicate and explain the otherwise veiled racial acts occurring in news media, public discourse, and policy. More specifically, I am interested in capturing a snapshot of historical change in the Midwest—specifically, how one community—Iowa City—is dealing with a slow, but sustained influx of black residents, which is why much of this project is based between 2008 and 2012. Just enough time has passed since then, perhaps, that one can look back in recent history for a deeper explanation of events. Let's hope so.

The front end of this project provides the conceptual work that then is applied to the news place-making of Iowa City's Southeast Side and, to some extent, other places in the country in the book's second half. In this respect, this book is meant for communications scholars and students. This project is also aimed at and for Iowa City's diverse communities. It is my hope that this book bridges both scholarly and popular audiences and can be used to discuss the role of power in place. More specifically, I wish to acknowledge the power of those in Iowa City who have shared their stories about being marginalized. In the end, these residents have experienced Iowa City in ways different than most, and those experiences deserve to be accepted.

To some people, this project may feel personal—particularly to those who have dedicated their lives to making Iowa a better place. For that I apologize. Many Iowans are likely aware of a piece written by a journalism professor at the University of Iowa and published on the *Atlantic*'s website in 2011. In that piece, the professor made perverse generalizations about the state. He called Iowa a "schizophrenic, economically-depressed, and some say, culturally-challenged state" in one part (Bloom, 2011), while another section of his article garnered the most local and national attention:

> Those who stay in rural Iowa are often the elderly waiting to die, those too timid (or lacking in education) to peer around the bend for better opportunities, an assortment of wastetoids and meth addicts with pale skin and rotted teeth...

Throughout the shit-storm that followed this article and an embarrassing NBC interview in which the author took on the wittier Willie Geist, it was hard for Iowans to recognize any of the article's truths: Iowa's rural parts do struggle with development; it is hard to attract—and keep—young people in the state's smaller communities; drugs, such as meth, continue to be a problem among rural communities that, under the radar, produce and sell, in part because it's cheap; and, there are rural stretches that work to maintain their own sense of identity as its people age and move and die.

Any benefit that could come from an analysis such as that which appeared on the *Atlantic*'s website was overshadowed by small and simply constructed descriptions. The article's attacks were too personal and they were made against those who may not have the power to overcome local economic challenges, who might already have been seen by outsiders as culturally inferior, who might be seen as living in a "fly-over state." In the end, it's simply not right to strike at those who are already down and out, and coming out from under that attack would make anyone weary of another project about Iowa.

The main difference between this project and the *Atlantic* piece is that this book addresses the stories of Iowans who are on the bottom, placed and kept there by inequality that reaches back generations, but that is instilled and maintained by the more powerful. To some extent, I am going after the same groups that the *Atlantic* author did, its white residents who are already down and out. My intent, however, is to place blame on the powerful—not those who can't defend themselves.

This is also not to be a book that bashes journalists (though I know many may feel it is) by ignoring the good that they can do and that they, sometimes, identify the problems of the world. In late 2013, local Iowa newspapers, including *The* (Cedar Rapids) *Gazette* published a series about racial inequalities in the state (Gruber-Miller, 2013; Gruber-Miller and Hennigan, 2013; Gruber-Miller and Hennigan, 2013a; Gruber-Miller and Pigee, 2013; Gruber-Miller and Sutter, 2013). The series focused on disparities by presenting data which included numbers that showed, among other things, that home ownership for whites was around 74 percent, 51 percent for Latinos, and 31 percent for blacks; that black families earn "less than half" of whites in the state; that blacks rank high among those who commit crime and low among those who graduate high school. The coverage, however, wasn't without its subtle racism. The introductory article, for instance, ended with a quote from a local community college official who acknowledged the difficulty inherent in being a new immigrant to Iowa but who couldn't help but say that new arrivals are simply better off by being here: "It may be difficult," the official said, "but it would have been worse if they would have stayed where they were from" (Gruber-Miller, 2013).

Another story presented racial bias in a more overt manner (Gruber-Miller and Pigee, 2013). That story focused on racial disparities among those who are jailed in Iowa—specifically that while blacks made up 3.2 percent of the state's population, black offenders in the system increased from 15.6 percent to 17.4 percent 2008 and 2012, while whites dropped from 76.6 percent to 74.5 percent. To personalize the story, journalists turned to the tale of a drug-user-turned-pastor who talked about pulling himself out of a blackened stupor that blacks seem to face and that lead to these folk simply making "bad

decisions" (Gruber-Miller and Pigee, 2013). None of the reporting provided a complex analysis of racial disparities that are rooted in pure hatred and fear of blacks that continues to permeate society. That story might be too unkind for Iowans to hear.

Iowa conjures up nostalgic imagery of one-room schoolhouses, farms, and Sunday family dinners—the glorified constructions that build notions of America's "Heartland" (Fry, 2003). Iowa is, after all, the place of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, an image that resounds throughout American culture as a symbol of, among other things, a Midwestern "Protestant work ethic." In fact, a two-story-tall version of this image stands in downtown Dubuque, Iowa, as a constant reminder of that painting—and of dominant culture and power-brokers.

Dredging up our nation's failed ancient and current history of racial integration to assign alternative meanings to what some define as "progress," as

TRADITION. Giant statues resembling Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, which was set in Iowa, lord over downtown Dubuque, Iowa. This "American Gothic" is a reminder of the state's traditional—and racialized—history; as late as the 1990s, Dubuque was the scene of Ku Klux Klan demonstrations, cross burnings, and racial violence in the city schools. Author's photograph.

this project does, must put both ourselves and our ancestors in an uncomfortable light. Consider it growing pains. Or constructive criticism. The great fact that Iowa was a Free State (it did not allow for slavery), for instance, must also include discussion that its people burned crosses in Dubuque as late as 1990s (Chaichian, 2006), that Waterloo has two high schools that were built with the intent of separate but equal and that still straddle the Cedar River, set in two heavily segregated neighborhoods. These past moments never go away; they become wrapped in collective memories and applied to new settings, with new characters, and new conflicts.

To some extent, I'll be asked—and maybe rightfully so—just who *I am* to write about such things. If it's not already clear, I'm a white guy. I'm not from Iowa. Nor do I live there anymore. So to this question, I don't have a great answer, but I'll tell you that I've approached this topic with the best of intentions.

As last notes to this Preface, the reader should know that many of the names in this book have been changed to protect the innocent, vulnerable, and angry. I complied with all requests to change names, and the reader will recognize a name change when I only mention a first name. Full names are used in particular cases when the individual has sought public attention, such as writing a newspaper editorial, or gave express permission for her or his name to be used. Finally, in the interest of full disclosure, the publisher of *The Daily Iowan,* Bill Casey, is my father-in-law. If anything, this relationship has afforded me a closer look at the news outlet's operations and provided me with contacts at the newspaper with whom I spoke regularly.

In the end, this is a book of stories told to me by people who have a hell of a lot more invested in Iowa City than I do at this point in my life; therefore, any royalties that come from its sale will be donated to the Community Foundation of Johnson County to further invest in the children (and other new arrivals) in Iowa City.

Introduction

Welcome to the Rural Ghetto: "Southeast Side" as "Little Chicago"

John Versypt wanted to hang a "No Smoking" sign. It was one of several improvements he hoped to make that October weekend in 2009 to help keep his tenants' homes clean and welcoming. Versypt, who owned several apartments in the Broadway Condominiums on Broadway Street in Iowa City, Iowa, had also planned during his visit to talk with apartment managers about what could be done about a rise in crime and vandalism there (Keppler, 2009).

In previous months, police had been called to these apartments more than 200 times for cases of domestic violence, drugs, weapons charges, and a string of other incidents. Versypt and others thought something needed to change. Even though he lived hours away, he tried not to be a neglectful landlord. Conversations with these managers and residents, Versypt said, would help him stay attuned with local vibes in a place where he considered himself another neighbor.

The meeting never happened.

Police found Versypt dead on the floor inside his apartment building on October 8. The 64-year-old father and sheet metal worker from Cordova, Illinois, about 30 minutes northeast of the Quad Cities, had been shot in the head, his body found next to the sign he planned to hang, a screwdriver, and the handgun that killed him. Versypt's murder left a stain on the community, but few in the city were surprised. People had expected this kind of thing to go down soon, especially in the Southeast Side, a place that seemed to become more like the ghetto each day. The October killing was the end of a summer

of violence in the neighborhood, where gangs were said to be in the midst of battle, people told stories of droves of drug-runners dealing in apartments, and mobs took to the streets with guns, baseball bats, and fists (Keppler, 2009). But murder wasn't as scary as the thought of who might have been the killer.

Months later, local police charged a 17-year-old black man who, in 2008, had moved to Iowa City from Holland, Michigan, with Versypt's murder. Police say the gun went off during an attempted robbery. Versypt is thought to have grabbed the gun when a single bullet shot through his hand and into his head.[1] At the time, police suspected several black youth of being involved in the crime, and it was these details of race—that the alleged shooters were black, Versypt, white—that jarred the city the most and catapulted it into a frenzy of fear. A white property "owner" being shot and killed by a black "subject" represented white Americans' worst fear—a black uprising.

Concerns about the city's changing culture and its future were targeted at blacks said to have moved to Iowa City from Chicago and other cities to prey on white Iowans. These people, popular discourse maintained, continued to move to the state to steal Iowans' social welfare and to destroy their public schools. For the next few years, local news stories about the Southeast Side focused on perceptions of its social decline and destruction.

Images of the Southeast Side in local media showed a rural ghetto (Gutsche, 2011): bushes overtaking tiny duplexes, weed-ridden lawns lining the block, plywood patches covering apartment windows, dumpsters overflowing with used furniture, trash and empty cardboard boxes. Also in these images—Southeast Side residents who are almost always black, wandering the streets or loitering at crime scenes.

To those outside of America's inner cities, such stories and scenes of Iowa City's Southeast Side may seem to have been pulled from somewhere else—Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis. Anywhere but Iowa. Crumbling and boarded-up brick apartment buildings resemble scenes of the low rises in HBO's *The Wire*, a drama based in the urban ghettos of Baltimore—after all, yellow police tape surrounding shell casings on the pavement are more Chicago and Compton than the middle of the Midwest.

And despite the Southeast Side's expansive parks, soccer fields, community gardens, school yards, and tree-lined streets, the neighborhood is constantly talked about and shown by local press as a bad neighborhood that's found itself in the middle of a migration of blacks from urban areas to smaller cities deeper into the Midwest.

In the text ahead, I introduce Iowa City as a rural ghetto through the lens of crime news in 2009 and 2010, coverage that often hinged on stories of crime, "failing" schools, and narratives of urban and black "culture" that's ghet-

toized America's Heartland—turning one mythical place that's based on traditional American living into another, one which represents the dangers of inner-city living. I begin with a background on this new Midwestern migration, placing it in a context of urban decline and change. I then discuss the issues of the Southeast Side specifically and conclude with an outline for the rest of the book.

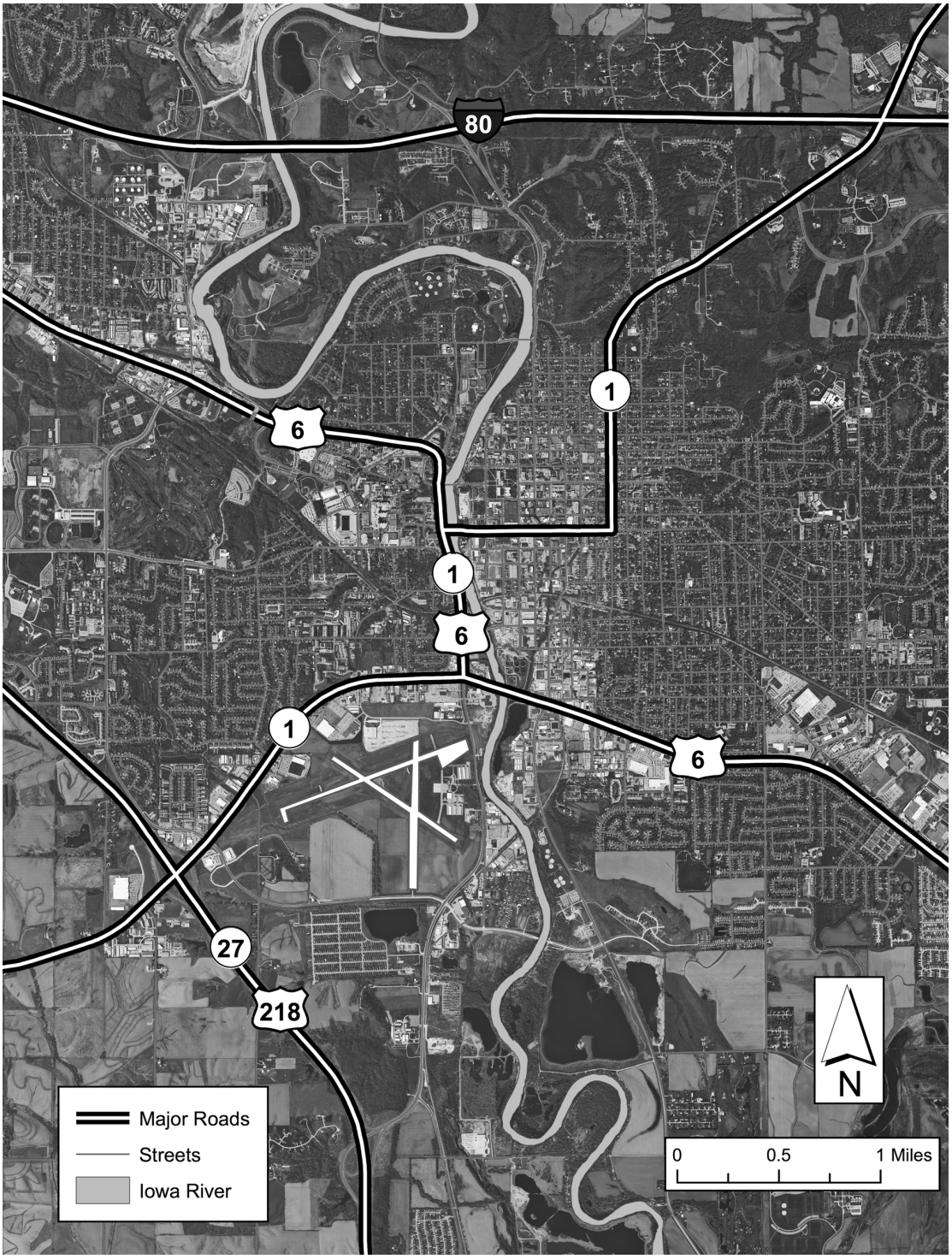
Migration to the Rural Ghetto

At nearly 70,000 people, Iowa City itself really isn't rural. Its local culture, though, is largely influenced by the rest of a predominantly rural state that's a couple hundred miles from major urban hubs, deep within God's Country. The city's location in the region keeps the people's connection to the fields, to long stretches of dirt roads, and to the hard work of a Midwestern way of life. It's common for people in Iowa City and its surrounding communities to have grown up on a farm or in a small town. If not, they likely know someone who has. These tight relationships and small towns are framed through a sense of nostalgia that paints a picture of Iowa City as a place of friendly, hardworking patriots who uphold traditional values in a world that's spinning out of control.

Iowa, then, and its slower pace of life, looks like a dream. It's the promise of this mythical new life that's contributing to a growing population of low-income city dwellers that continue to move from America's urban centers to the country's cornfields.

Increasingly, Iowa City is just one of several cities across the country's middle states that are gathering concentrations of poor minorities who continue to flee urban cores (Chaichian, 2006; Fry and Liaw, 2005; Goetz, 2003; 2013; Hunt, Hunt and Falk, 2012). Cities such as Iowa City, Iowa; Madison, Wisconsin; Bloomington, Indiana; and smaller, suburban neighborhoods around Chicago are gaining pockets of inner-city residents abandoned by governmental housing practices to house the poor in city slums (Kneebone and Berube, 2013).

The migration comes from urban neighborhoods in which many of these residents had lived inside publically funded housing projects and with the help other forms of public assistance, who then were forced out of their homes when these projects came down over the course of the last decade (Goetz, 2013). Leaving these areas, residents took with them their housing assistance in the form of federal vouchers that allow for people to shop within the private marketplace for housing that's based on their income (for review, see Fraser, Burns, Bazuin and Oakley, 2013).



MAP I.1. IOWA CITY, IOWA, 2012. Iowa City's dominant geographic features include the winding Iowa River that cuts through the center of the city and major highways and an interstate at the city's North and South. The city's downtown and the University of Iowa neighbor the Iowa River alongside Highway 1/6. Map by Tyler Johnson.

The voucher system, which merged with other forms of Section 8 housing assistance in the 1980s, was meant to disperse the high concentrations of poor and allow users to find homes that were closer to pockets of employment (Goetz, 2003). But this system has become yet another strategy of placing the burden of finding affordable and safe housing not on federal and local governments, but on the people themselves. Often, the apartments, rooms, and houses that accept Section 8 are in majority minority neighborhoods and developments that were constructed solely to house the poor.

A system that relies on such levels of social and cultural competencies of the voucher-holder requires one to navigate a complex structure of policies and neighborhood rules and norms. Indeed, the mobility of housing vouchers has created what Andrew Greenlee, an assistant professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, who studies the mobility of vouchers, calls *the third ghetto*. "A major rationale for the voucher is that it allows households to be mobile, meaning that it cannot only provide affordable housing but can also deconcentrate poverty," Greenlee told me. But mobility and the deconcentration of the poor, Greenlee says, "has become another means to not deal with some of the more structural root causes of the issues related to poverty."

With groups of poor moving across regions, away from each other and

Map. I.2. Interstate Mobility. The U.S. Interstate Highway System, along with mobile housing vouchers, increases the ability of urban populations to move throughout the Midwest. Map by Alicia Kramme.

cultures and social structures with which they are familiar, residents become individuals who are fully responsible for their conditions, not part of a larger population with shared experiences and the ability to voice their challenges, concerns, and the consequences of failed public policies. The effect of this dispersion, then, is a diluted sense of poverty, its causes, and notions of who's responsible. "Deconcentrating poverty does not necessarily solve it," Greenlee says, "but rather makes it more invisible than it was when it was in one place (and, in the case of public housing) in one type of very visible housing."

The "first ghetto" emerged after the great migrations of black folk from the South to industrialized urban centers in the North in the early 1900s and then to other parts of the country after World War II. Millions of blacks were led to find work and new lives away from their geographic connection to slavery. Influxes of new arrivals to these city centers—namely Detroit, New York, Chicago—allowed private business to construct massive housing projects that took advantage of desperate people needing safe homes, who wanted to make a better life for themselves, but didn't have enough to avoid being swindled (Beauregard, 2003; Katz, 2012).

Decades later, government officials identified a 30-year period of government policies starting in the 1930s that created "the second ghetto," one built around dense urban housing, constructed and funded through federal housing policies in America's big cities (Hirsch, 1998). High-rise projects included Chicago's infamous Robert Taylor Homes, and Cabrini-Green and Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis were home to dozens of buildings each. Stout towers peppered acres of low-rise apartment buildings at each location and became places where generations of families were born, lived, and died.

At one time, 30,000 people were said to have lived in the Robert Taylor Homes alone, though it had been built for a third of that number. Yet most population estimates for these projects still don't account for the countless squatters who lived there illegally and the homeless who sought refuge in these "vertical ghettos" (Goetz, 2013; Hirsch, 1998; Katz, 2012). For decades, the projects served as landscapes for murder, drug use, and the setting for mythical constructions of inner-city/ghetto/black culture. Even from the beginning, activists, residents, and governmental leaders called for an end to this kind of warehousing of the poor (English, 2011; Kotlowitz, 1992; Massey and Denton, 1993; Venkatesh, 2000; 2006).

The popular movement of urban renewal, the drive of private business to pounce on opportunities for low interest rate loans, and governments who were generous with their tax incentives for developers well before the economic bust of 2007 fed the mobility associated with the voucher system (Kneebone and Berube, 2013). Quickly, people without homes in the urban cores—or those who wished to move into newer developments with their safer schools,

open green spaces, and proximity to employment—were able to find better places to live.

But the problems with vouchers, which are complex and many, have led Greenlee to consider this movement, that of "the third ghetto," as a dispersed population dependent on the fluctuation of the "private market" that dictates rents, that creates social tensions between users and neighbors and landlords who question the character of those on welfare, and that still tend to result in users crowding the same neighborhoods for the added benefit of close and cheap childcare and other forms of informal support.

In these ways, the voucher system—despite its possibilities, such as its ability to provide users with "choices" about where to live—still represents society's interest in marginalizing poor blacks. "We need to move away from the assumption that we can solve the problems of poor people via mobility" and the racialized narratives of welfare and its users, Greenlee says. "Clearly there is a history around black and brown bodies to make it easier to justify these narratives, but to me this is as much a question about citizenship, about who has the right to access certain spaces and take advantage of whatever they perceive to be opportunity."

The opportunity of living in Iowa City—and really many of the places in the Midwest where voucher-holders have settled, often after years of moving and waiting to qualify for local assistance—comes with its own challenges. This migration has challenged communities that are new to welcoming people from outside and that tend to implement fairly straightforward social rules and norms regarding language, work, use of welfare, and educational achievements that these new people need to "abide by" in order to survive. Not following the "rules" will certainly lead to social pressures to move out of Iowa City, a place, some say, these folk don't belong to begin with. As Kneebone and Berube (2013) write:

> Place intersects with core policy issues central to the long-term health and stability of metropolitan areas and to the economic success of individuals and families—things like housing, transportation, economic and workforce development, and the provision of education, health, and other basic services [Chapter 7, Location 222].

More specifically to the people in these new places, scholarship has also identified histories of public, mediated racial narratives that have appeared in the press about social welfare, users, and their neighborhoods. Katz (1989), for instance, provides a rhetorical distinction between the *deserving* and *undeserving poor*. The deserving poor, Katz writes, are those who have, by no fault of their own, found themselves in poverty. These people, who may suffer from illness, layoffs, or general misfortune, tend to be cast as deserving sympathy

and public resources to help them to survive and to attempt to climb out of their situation.

The undeserving poor, on the other hand, are seen to have made choices that led them to poverty: maybe they live beyond their means, they spend their money unwisely, they are too lazy to work, struggle with addictions, or simply want to loaf on government "hand-outs." For these people—whose racial discrimination tends to be ignored or explained away—their mental illness viewed as non-existing, and/or their personal cycles of poverty seen to be of their own creation, not created and maintained by larger society—don't deserve public help or compassion. They are left to fix their own problems themselves.

Many of the new residents associated with the Southeast Side discussed in this book have been classified in news texts and in public discourses as being "undeserving" of public aid, of compassion, and of having their experiences legitimatized by placing them within a larger social and cultural context. Conversation about Iowa City's "declining" community has turned—as it often does—to notions of "personal responsibility," a fundamentally conservative approach to persuading the public to ignore the needs of subordinate groups.

Instead of holding landlords to task for discriminatory practices, holding police accountable for disproportionate targeting of minorities, and holding the general public accountable for supporting or remaining silent about policies that maintain the power and financial position of the elite, the "undeserving poor" are expected to magically persevere through hardships that would cause most of us to fail. Placing the blame and the sole responsibility of solving the problems of the poor *on the poor* in Iowa City has resulted in even more mobility as people search for more affordable and accessible communities.

While limitations have been placed on how many landlords can accept Section 8 assistance as a means to curb clustering of low-income households, little has been done to address social stigma related to living in the Southeast Side. Little has been done to address issues of adequate transportation, education, and work for these residents—many who have been forced to move into neighboring Coralville and North Liberty. The latter city is a 20-minute interstate drive North of Iowa City, and both cities hold even fewer options for affordable busing and social services than the Southeast Side.

In each of these new places, the struggles to adapt—or, as some may see it, assimilate—are different, set by local culture, but are maintained in similar ways—policing, educational, and other social policies that makes adapting nearly impossible. After all, black residents will remain black in majority white neighborhoods, and that difference alone makes them easy targets and perpetuate what Goetz (2013) describes as a pathological movement of the poor through public policies and local politics.

"For the most part," Goetz writes, "these families are moved from one high-poverty, segregated environment to other high-poverty and racially segregated neighborhoods" (p. 19). Benefits of moving out of projects, however, are "inconsistent," Goetz writes, which include "an increased sense of safety and reductions in visible signs of social disorder, but "there have been no overall benefits in terms of economic self-sufficiency, physical health, or in terms of education outcomes..." (pp. 19–20).

The irony of moving from one place to another just to experience many of the same challenges—and new ones—as those places one wished to escape also rears its head in terms of social structures and rules that ostracize, imprison, or accost. Beckett and Herbert (2009) refer to these types of social pressures as a process called *banishment*, a form of social control within public spaces that set the standards for what—and who—is accepted in society.

Banishment includes both overt and covert uses of force and control. Overt applications can include the use of armed, uniformed police who "are marshaled to enforce and often delineate" public spaces and "use their powers to monitor and arrest in an attempt to clear the streets of those considered unsightly or 'disorderly'" (p. 8), while covert methods include the implementation of "zero tolerance" policies that, on paper, enforce dominant perceptions of what's acceptable in public behaviors. Beckett and Herbert use the example of how New York City police in the 1990s applied pressure and "zero tolerance" against even the most minimal of crimes, as a show of force to oppress and institute order. At the time Beckett and Herbert write, "[t]hat meant that all street-level misdemeanors—including the infamous squeegeeing of car windshields by sidewalk entrepreneurs—would generate a strong police response" (p. 33).

Banishment also appears in media rhetoric. News about "new arrivals" to Iowa City from "the inner-city," for instance, reduces public investment in neighborhoods, normalizes the use of force and surveillance upon the already marginalized, and empowers the dominant storytellers and spatial definers to maintain physical distance between the dominant community and the "others."

Banishment that this particular project reveals within the press operates with purposes and vigor similar to banishment identified by Beckett and Herbert in several ways. First, such banishment via press discourse was meant to exclude the less desirable among us, those who challenge dominant explanations of everyday life, and who complicate the otherwise-simple stories of how people should experience the American Dream. Second, press-related banishment also punished those who operated outside of dominant ideology through ridicule and marginalization as a means to force these members of a community to submit to the dominant system and as a means to encourage the masses to

act according to the dominant norms. Third, this process of banishment through the press removed from individuals their right to participate in the community as full members who could both contribute to and benefit from social cohesion. Finally, banishment formed particular geographies within which the banished were restricted, creating a divide between dominant and subordinate communities.

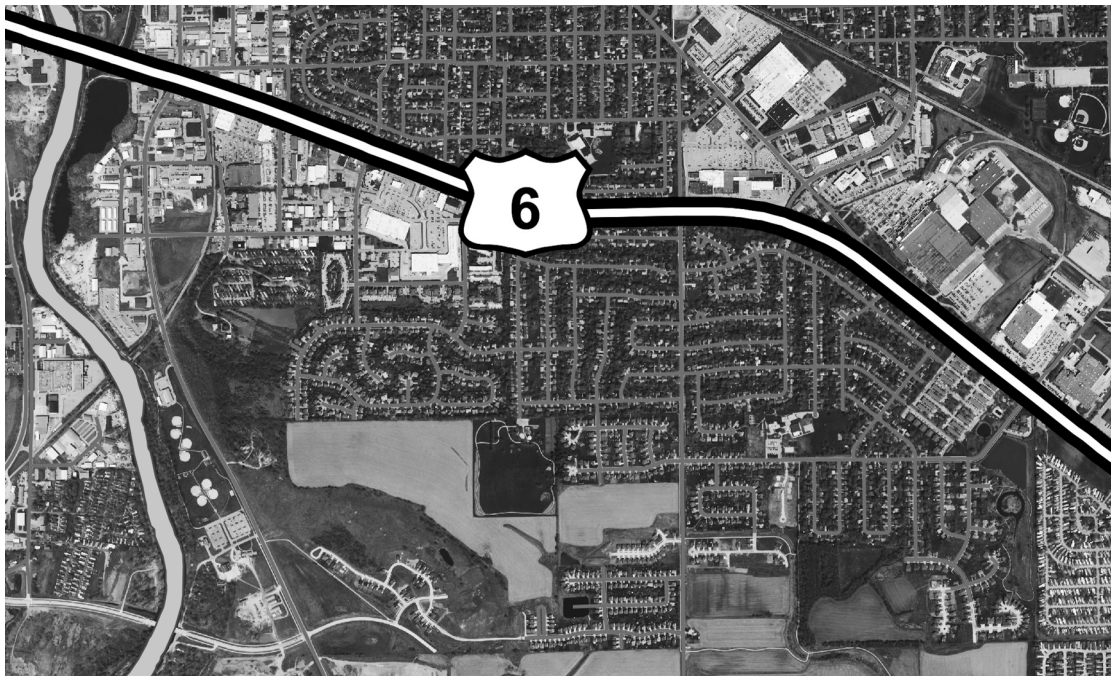
Through this lens, the stories of people's experiences in Iowa City discussed throughout this project reveal the ideological depth to the otherwise veiled racialized news coverage about the mythical and localized Southeast Side-as-ghetto. Constructions that determined what resources were made available to those in the Southeast Side, how rigorous such aid should be, and the explanations for social conditions there are rooted in a deep sense of who owns local neighborhoods and who has the right to challenge dominant characterizations of people and places.

The Rise of the "Southeast Side"

Iowa City's longtime residents and the established press have long said that those who move to Iowa City in search of assistance place additional strains on the community's social services, including transportation, health care, schools and police—and that these services are first and foremost for those who *are from Iowa*. In 2007, for instance, 14 percent of housing assistance—both vouchers and public housing units provided through the Iowa City Housing Authority—was used by families from Illinois; those from Illinois accounted for 30 percent of those on the waiting list.

By 2010, the number of Illinois residents on the waiting list grew to 50 percent (Keene, Padilla and Geronimus, 2010). Because of residency requirements that maintain voucher recipients must live in Iowa City in order to receive assistance, those from outside of the region continued to apply to receive aid after moving to the city and sat patiently on the waiting list.[2]

In addition to the public housing provided by the Iowa City Housing Authority, local non-profit groups such as the Housing Fellowship, the Johnson County Housing Trust Fund, Habitat for Humanity, and the Hawkeye Area Community Action Program all provided various forms of housing assistance for low-income and impoverished families. By providing aid, Iowa City appeared open and welcome to people—both locally and not—who wanted to call the city home. But a common misconception in Iowa City that's often told with distain—that black families from Chicago hog the community's affordable housing—shows how closed the community really is to people in need.



Map I.3. Iowa City's "Southeast Side," 2012. Map by Tyler Johnson.

Ironically, the reality has been that the majority of the city's housing choice vouchers are utilized by elderly, disabled white women, and that while some new arrivals had moved from somewhere else to Iowa City and utilize city and county social services and those of local non-profit groups, they account for only a small portion of those who seek assistance (Spence, Lawson and Visser, 2010). Furthermore, data gathered by Greenlee—the one who argues for the "third ghetto"—suggests more people take their vouchers from Chicago to elsewhere in Illinois than to Iowa City.

But who these new arrivals are—or who they are thought to be—and where they tend to settle in Iowa City has formed an ideological foundation for how to talk about poverty and race in the region. After all, families still have to rent houses and apartments they can afford, and many of those fall within the same neighborhoods south of Iowa City's Highway 6—a four-lane highway that serves both as a main artery into the city and as a physical boundary that divides many of the city's new black residents. In recent years, parts of Iowa City's Southeast Side have grown six times faster than other areas of the community since 2000. The Southeastern Broadway and Grant Wood neighborhoods, for instance, have expanded by as much as 25 percent, and the population of the Southeast Side increased by more than 19 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Bailey, Law, Mason and Phillips, 2011).

Seeing Iowa City's Southeast Side as an extension of Chicago's ghetto

THE ENCLAVE. Iowa City's Dolphin Lake Point Enclave in the Southeast Side resemble inner city projects of Chicago, Baltimore, and St. Louis. These and other low-income apartments are home to many new black arrivals to the city. Author's photograph.

has been a long time in the making. Since the 1960s, this southeastern space has been home to first-time home-buyers, the elderly who are on a fixed income, and the poor of all races. More recently, however, the neighborhood has attracted those with even less social capital and finances to fight being crammed into run-down apartments and rental homes, removed from the rest of the city.

Southeast Side apartment buildings are full, but the parking lots sit virtually empty. Few can afford a car—clunker or no—a common sign among both urban and suburban poor (Kneebone and Berube, 2013), and while college students pay thousands of dollars for rickety homes throughout the city—wearing their status as "poor college students" as a badge—poor and black new arrivals who live in disrepair in the Southeast Side are stigmatized and segregated.

By 2010, black families came to represent 2.9 percent of the state's population (and 3.2 percent by 2012), up from 1.4 percent in 1980 (Gruber-Miller and Pigee, 2013; State Data Center, 2012), an increase that becomes quite visible—especially at the local level. As of 2009, the number of racial minorities (predominantly black and Latino) in Iowa City's southeastern neighborhoods was double the city average. While nearly all focus is on the racial tension

caused by African Americans "from Chicago," Asian Americans have quickly come to represent the city's largest minority population, accounting for 5.8 percent of the city's residents in 2009, compared to African Americans, who represented 3.9 percent (Bailey, Law, Mason and Phillips, 2011).

Still, few news stories discuss the Asian American population—many who, by local guesses, work or study at the University of Iowa and tend to live downtown, in university housing, or in Western suburbs. Regardless, it's the Southeast Side that attracts the most attention, simply because of perceptions of who lives there.

Cut off from the rest of the city by Highway 6 and within walking distance of only big box retail and junk food stores, Southeast Side residents rely on public transportation to access the rest of the city. These are the same buses that for at least a decade have forced City High School students from the Southeast Side to travel for more than an hour, transferring downtown for a trip that takes less than 10 minutes by car, which this book's Preface discussed in great detail.

Today, Southeast Side students and residents continue to be bused on schedules that start too late for first-shift factory workers, that end their service early in the evening, that have limited access on Saturdays, that don't run on Sundays, and that require multiple transfers to get from one side of the city to the other.

Higher concentrations of affordable housing and students eligible for free and reduced lunch—a program to provide more affordable meals in schools for those who qualify—in the Southeast Side have not just contributed to the image of the neighborhood as a poor place, but as another world filled with a dense number of people who struggle to be integrated with the rest of the city.

By 2010, the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch had nearly doubled since the 2001–2002 school year. In the elementary schools on Iowa City's Southeast Side, more than half of the students are minorities and more than 60 percent of students have qualified for the program in recent years. (More on this topic is discussed in Chapter Eight). Yet, few of these details—such as who receives forms of welfare and the complex reasons why—have appeared in news coverage of the Southeast Side, replaced instead with dominant explanations based in blaming "black" and "ghetto" culture that all started on Mother's Day 2009.

The Mother's Day Riots

On the same day that many families were celebrating their moms, some 60 residents on Mother's Day 2009—including entire families—armed them-

selves with knives and baseball bats on the streets of the Southeast Side. Thirty more people clogged the streets during another melee just a couple of days later; this time young men were accused of wielding baseball bats and entering a home in the neighborhood to end a feud between two families. Those cited by police and press to be involved in the melee were 12- to 15-year-old black "men." These were called the "Mother's Day Riots" and the stories of violent crowds of black families rumbling in the Southeast Side launched a summer of racialized news coverage related to local violence.

In July of that year, a plain-clothed sheriff's deputy in Iowa City shot and killed John Deng, a 26-year-old Sudanese man who had been living in the city's homeless shelter. The deputy approached Deng and drew his service weapon after Deng allegedly stabbed a man with whom he was fighting. Deng—thought to be one of the "Lost Boys of Sudan," a group of 20,000 youth who fled civil war there before 2005 and were scattered across the globe (Corbett, 2001; Eggers, 2007; Hermiston, 2009)—spoke broken English. There was yelling and movement and in a moment of confusion, Deng, who was said to have tried to stab the man again, was shot once and killed (*Daily Iowan,* 2009).

After several news reports about the shooting, a vigil to remember Deng, and an investigation that cleared the deputy of wrongdoing, the story left the news pages, but remained in the city's collective memory. Deng's death at the hands of a police officer attracted the attention of local activists who claimed that skin color played a role in the shooting. The deputy was white, and Deng—for all intents and purposes—was black. But while the Deng story died out, stories about the "Mother's Day Riot" continued for weeks throughout the summer as police continued to arrest more residents suspected in the melee.

At the same time, public debate was brewing about pending changes to the local school system that would alter what schools elementary students would be attending to better disperse racial and socioeconomic inequalities in classrooms—a process called *redistricting*. Hidden in a conversation of redistricting was the concern of many white Iowa City parents that they soon could be sending their students to school with those from the Southeast Side—a debate that continued through 2013 (Hines, 2013a) and into 2014.

To calm fears about Southeast Side violence (and as a precursor to addressing concerns about the desegregation of Iowa City's elementary schools) the City Council in 2009 voted to start a nightly curfew to rein in Southeast Side youth. The curfew started in March 2010 and required 16- and 17-year-olds to be off of the streets by midnight. Younger youth had earlier deadlines.

However, while the curfew was intended to cover the entire city, it was clear to some of us that police were really targeting those in the Southeast

Containment. The city's only police substation that was built after the "Mother's Day Riots" on the Southeast Side is more about containing blacks in the neighborhood than keeping the peace. Photograph by Alicia Kramme.

Side. It turned out that we were right to worry; of the 40 contacts police officers made in Iowa City in the curfew's first months, a disproportionate number of the youth contacted by police regarding the curfew—more than 50 percent—were minorities (Hennigan, 2010).

Then in 2010, the police department opened its only substation—on the city's Southeast Side (Earnest, 2011). Police quickly moved into a strip mall at the corner of the infamous Broadway Street and Highway 6, bolted a large, illuminated sign announcing their presence on the top of the building, and parked a single squad car parallel to the mall's sidewalk to make the station's presence even more obvious.

Open weekdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., the substation hosted community meetings and a sole officer sat in his office behind what looks like bulletproof glass several yards from the front door. Computers lined the walls where residents could look for jobs, access the city's library databases, and surf the web—all under the officer's watchful eyes. But the police presence was more a signal of safety to the rest of the community than to the Southeast Side itself. That next summer, a community activist would tell me, the police chief told her the department's plan to "keep calm in the Southeast Side" would include citing residents for petty violations such as littering, loitering, and jaywalking.

"We're going to ticket the thugs back to Chicago," she says the chief told her, a believable story based on the status quo for dealing with Iowa City's dark-skinned population. By 2013, the detention rate for black youth in Johnson County (in which Iowa City is the county seat) hit about 19 percent, while rates for white youth sat at roughly 12 percent (Miller, 2013). School suspension rates are stacked against black youth, as well, with blacks in each of the three academic terms in the 2011–2012 school year equaling nearly 17 percent of all enrollments, but between 47 and 55 percent of suspensions, according to district records.

But concerns about the Southeast Side have extended beyond murder, violence, and gangs. Instead, it's been about "black culture" infiltrating a white community. It's about American and Western ideology (racist ideology) that puts people with white—or light—skin above people with dark—or black—skin. Such belief systems don't start or stop at the Iowa border. There has been a long history of black-white-Hispanic tensions in the U.S. (Telles, Sawyer and Rivera-Salgado, 2011) and unequal treatment based upon skin tone among American blacks (Robinson, 2010).

In the Midwest, the meanings of skin color go deeper than pure racism or intolerance. What fuels this conflict is a fear that traditional American values are being challenged and crushed. In response, many Midwestern cities have taken to local businesses and governments to report specifics about their growing "diversity" and to propose how to respond. It's partially these "official" reports that fuel the local news cycles and shape media narratives about their changing communities. Frequently, these narratives focus on shortcomings of the new arrivals as individuals, not on the abilities or interests of the communities themselves to change. In 2008, the Galesburg (Illinois) Area Chamber of Commerce, for instance, published "A Call to Action: Poverty in Knox County, Illinois" that said new arrivals from Chicago (read, black) had contributed to "[s]ignificant medical and legal problems," and are "unprepared to handle standard class work at their grade level," having come from "different cultural norms and expectations to the school environment" (Galesburg, 2008, pp. 4–5).

Little of the report focuses on the problems local medical and legal services had in understanding the particular needs and concerns of new arrivals, of businesses in providing fair and affordable prices for their products and housing stock, and of teachers and administrators in applying appropriate, progressive pedagogies in the classroom to engage with new students at their level. While it may be true that students from somewhere-other-than-Galesburg may struggle with understanding their new surroundings, the following is also true: urban schools continue to be sites of immense racial and educational and geographic segregation that affects learning (Kozol, 1991; 2005; Noguera, 2008; Payne, 2008; Rich, 2012). Furthermore, it's more likely

that mythical narratives of the urban ghetto and city living and black culture that are retold in rural communities make local education even more complicated than just the people who are moving there, as educators blame children for "inattentiveness," "disruption," and "poor home life."

These narratives allow the power elite to ignore the effects of local, cultural and structural influences that may make their environments unwelcoming or, at the very least, difficult for newcomers to rural schools and neighborhoods. It's just easier to claim that local strains are coming merely from population change and to assign blame for new "challenges" to an urban migration (Burgess, 1985; Gutsche, 2011; 2012; Parisi, 1998; Wilson, 2009). It is these narratives that I hope to undermine in this book.

In this Introduction, I have attempted to discuss the emptying of urban cores, such as the projects of Chicago, and set Iowa City in a larger landscape of changing communities across the country. Combined with a federal voucher system that allows people to transfer public housing assistance funds virtually anywhere, the federally-funded interstate system in the Upper Midwest has provided a new way to pay for transporting and housing the poor with public dollars (Kneebone and Berube, 2013). Given the changing communities and cultures that emerge with the introduction of newcomers (a phenomena shared across cultures and centuries), I argue that the contested nature of the Southeast Side of Iowa City becomes a case study for a closer look at how notions of the "ghetto" and fear of minorities were populated throughout news coverage to perpetuate racist ideologies.

The rest of this book takes on this dominant, mediatized construction of place through a study of how the press, their official sources, and Southeast Side residents experienced Iowa City and its Southeastern neighborhoods. Beyond describing a portion of the recent migration of urban blacks from the inner cities further into the rural Midwest—and the ghettoization of them and their new homes—I hope to contribute the notion of *news place-making*, "in which geography is selected as the ideological focus of journalistic forms of social construction" (Gutsche, in press). The following section details the discussion that appears in the chapters ahead.

Outline of Book

Chapter One presents an analysis of how news operates as a form and function of ideology. More specifically, I discuss the various levels of how journalists operate as individuals, as a collective, and as cultural storytellers to embed into news moral meanings of life. Because this project deals with how news shaped notions of the Southeast Side as both a geography and as a myth-

ical place, I introduce previous work on how journalists cover physical environments, from the "Heartland" to "The Inner City." Furthermore, by visiting research on journalism as a social and cultural institution, I implicate news media as an ideological tool that explored issues of Iowa City's Southeast Side through beliefs of dominant cultural and social power brokers. Through this lens, this chapter sets the scene for interrogating the construction of the Southeast Side via the news as a tool for interpreting events, people, and places for the audience, thereby rejecting the normative claim of an "objective" press.

In Chapter Two, I move further into explicating the concepts of space and place to solidify this project's focus on constructing the notion of news place-making as an ideological power function of the press. The work of major human and critical geographers that is presented here contributes to a theoretical discussion of how the Southeast Side was characterized in the news. This chapter also provides a practical understanding of how one may look at and experience geography. Rather than a mere concept, our environments are things to which we assign meaning that then hold power to transform not just our own experiences, but the types of people who are categorized along with that environment, the activities we allow to occur there, the degrees of access assigned to both insiders and outsiders, and the social resources we as a society make available to particular places.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach to the reading of news texts about the Southeast Side used in this study. In addition to articulating the process of qualitative textual analysis as applied to this study, I deepen the understanding of what goes into a cultural reading of texts. Here, I present a supplemental conceptual set—that of white supremacy and race in the press—through a cultural history of how the press have operated as social and cultural forces in the United States, particularly in terms of covering race relations during the Civil Rights movement and school desegregation. In this chapter, I use the term "black news" to represent the historical and mainstream treatment of news as related to America's blacks. I argue that black news—stories about crime, welfare, church, fashion, entertainment, education, and drugs—holds and assigns particular meanings to news coverage of a single "community." And while I don't subscribe to the idea of a single "black community," I do argue that news coverage of blacks in the U.S. forms the idea, unfortunately, that such a singular community exists (Robinson, 2010).

Lastly, because I argue that journalists operate as a collective *interpretive community* in covering Iowa City's Southeast Side, this institutional background of how media have operated in terms of setting the national agenda on racial issues is an important background that needs to be understood in order to surmise as to the explanations for how and why media covered the Southeast Side in particular ways. This discussion, once conceptualized with

analysis in future chapters, helps to identify Southeast Side news coverage as a rhetorical device that connects today's blacks in Iowa to those from Chicago's "ghettos" and then to (all of our) ancestors in Africa.

Chapter Four reveals how the term "Southeast Side" became a racialized social construction, an *ideograph* (McGee, 1980) rooted in rhetoric and a rich history of racial inequality that allowed journalists to characterize those neighborhoods and people as operating separately from the larger Iowa City community. In this discussion of control and space via news, this chapter reveals the ideological work that the dominant community of Iowa City performed to ostracize and generalize newcomers.

Chapter Five explores the dominant, mediatized news characterizations of the Southeast Side. It does so through a form of triangulation among interviews with journalists, their official sources, and Southeast Side residents that show how they characterize the Southeast Side and a textual analysis of news coverage. This chapter presents the methodological approaches—and initial findings—related to notions of news place-making in this case that furthers conceptual arguments about how place is made through the press.

Chapter Six highlights personal narratives of new arrivals to the Southeast Side and examines the challenges of limited mobility once they reach rural America. This chapter revolves around the irony in residents' stories of wanting out of Chicago, where they said that they largely felt isolated because of street violence, to become equally dismayed in Iowa, strapped to their homes by a lack of transportation and overt racial discrimination. Residents talk about increasing police surveillance, deteriorating housing, and problems with schools. In this chapter, the reader explores the mental maps produced by participants and is introduced to the particular place-making processes that are revealed in the comparisons among journalists and officials as dominant place-makers and residents as the "experts" of their neighborhood that are excluded from the news. In the end, this chapter suggests the degree to which journalists extended their authority to like-minded, socially connected, and culturally legitimate sources, creating a second level of the journalistic interpretive community.

Chapter Seven focuses on the ideological power of news place-making. Here, I apply news place-making as a concept through further explication of the findings from the main portion of this study—the mental mapping of the Southeast Side. Also, I conduct further analysis of news place-making around the Southeast Side by exploring news coverage of the city's southeastern neighborhoods and mobile home parks that were found in 2010 to be home to dilapidated and dangerous environments that garnered state-wide attention. In this analysis, I suggest how news place-making presented the causes of social conditions in the mobile home parks—which house mainly white residents—to be based on financial, governmental, and legal problems while the problems

of the Southeast Side were blamed on "black" or "ghetto" culture of that space. This analysis, then, articulates how journalism operates to explain social conditions by descriptions of environment and geography as much as by describing the people themselves.

Chapter Eight revolves around news coverage specific to Iowa City schools, since this debate was a popular (yet veiled) topic in news coverage about the Southeast Side in 2009 and 2010. Through a detailed discussion, this chapter argues that news coverage of schools that focused on official data and explanations for unequal distributions of socioeconomic status and race among the city's elementary schools served as an opportunity to discuss the "damage" caused to the community by an influx of inner-city blacks. Conceptually, I discuss in this chapter the notion of how schools have become "pipelines to prison" in that they construct highly policed and authoritarian environments that disproportionally target minorities. Efforts such as zero tolerance and truancy policies are increasingly becoming a function of the Alexander's (2010) New Jim Crow and appeared as acceptable, non-challenged means by which to address Iowa City's changing (read darkening) classrooms. This chapter concludes by discussing the degree to which news discussions about schools substitute (or supplement) more overt discussions about neighborhoods.

The book's Conclusion serves as a summary of the role the press played in characterizing Iowa City's Southeast Side the way it did, thereby solidifying the position of the press and journalists' official sources as part of a shared interpretive community. Here, I also address efforts in more recent years to create calm and inclusion in Iowa City, such as work in local theatre and film to focus on sharing the stories that compete with dominant, mediatized narratives of the Southeast Side. Such efforts connect to concepts of agency and resistance as an element of how change can be created, but also highlight the realities of cultural barriers to equality and representation in the rural ghetto. I also use the Conclusion to articulate this study's shortcomings as avenues for future research on diaspora, about place-making in the news, and to identify ideological functions of elite press.

Lastly, the book's Epilogue steps away from Iowa City and its Southeast Side to apply news place-making to a historically black city in the Midwest—Cairo, Illinois. Throughout this book, I will argue for engaged research into the process of news place-making among journalists rather than merely exploring the representations of place in news; however, in this final chapter, I present a case in which journalists are once again operating within a second level of interpretive community. My hope for this exercise is to show the power of place that's rooted in its cultural history, its current-day use as an ideological representation of dominant cultural meanings, and the power of news place-making to marginalize based upon these characteristics.