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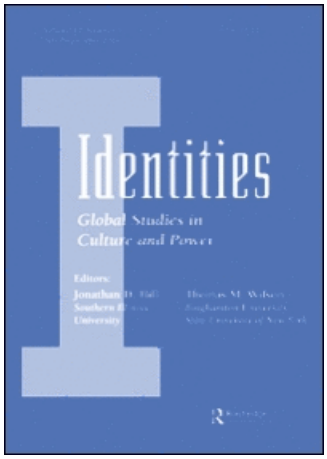

Identities
Global Studies in Culture and Power
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713663307

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME: DOMESTIC DOMAINS AND URBAN IMAGINARIES IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

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Online Publication Date: 01 April 2006
To cite this Article: Leonardo, Micaela di (2006) 'THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME: DOMESTIC DOMAINS AND URBAN IMAGINARIES IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT', Identities, 13:1, 33 - 52
To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/10702890500534338
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10702890500534338

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Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, 13:33–52, 2006
Copyright © Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
ISSN: 1070-289X print / 1547-3384 online
DOI: 10.1080/10702890500534338

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There's No Place Like Home: Domestic Domains and Urban Imaginaries in New Haven, Connecticut

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In this article, I attempt to adumbrate shifting race, class, and gender politics in the United States through a "world in a grain of sand" focus on one American city and through the fulcrum of what Marx labeled the "historical and moral element" that must always be considered in gauging class formation and capitalist development: the gendered construction, across class and race, of the workings of the "proper home." In so doing, I both document ethnographically the counter-empirical nature of much public–cultural representation of American race/class/gender lived realities and demonstrate the ways in which we can and should consider "the political" both in terms of our older understandings of politics and political organizations and in the newer sense of cultural politics—but without succumbing to the etiolated idealism of political economy-less postmodernism.

Key Words: urban United States, gender, race, political economy

Let me begin with some urban ethnographic snapshots.[1] First, from the summer of 2000, the tag-end of the Clinton years: I am in New Haven, Connecticut, in The Hill, one of the three named ghettoes of the town, about four blocks from my former home. My black male companion and I park outside the nondescript brick building with the single neon sign, Cavallaro's. I open the door onto a dark barroom. Black faces at the full bar turn toward me, then back to their conversations. Rhythm and blues pumps from the jukebox at the back of the room. My companion and I find spaces at the bar and order drinks. But the bartender is an elderly white woman, in a dress and matching pearl necklace and earrings, who seems to be having trouble understanding "Stolichnaya." On a hunch, I address her formally, "*Signora, è Italiana, lei*?"

Italian benedictions rain down on me as the signora, overjoyed to find a *paesana*, calls loudly for her husband and son to come meet me. The drinks are free, the great beauties of our mother country, my appearance, and my competence *nella lingua bella* extolled. The husband tells me at length about his recent trip back to the Abruzzi, checking

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every paragraph or so, "*Ha capito, signorina*?" Bar life goes on around us as the excitement fades. A hardbitten woman in a baseball cap, in response to TV news of an international Catholic gathering, shouts, "I want to go the fuck to Rome." The recent gospel convocation comes up, to much criticism of the arrangements: "This is Gospel Fest, you don't rope off shit. It's supposed to be free." Then the signora takes off her apron, totters around from behind the bar, bids me a flowery Italian adieu, and announces to the room, "Io vado adesso." Every barstool habitue turns around to call in chorus, "Goodnight, Mom." Baseball cap says minatorily to Giuseppe, the son, now behind the bar, "She's been on her feet all night!"

On a later evening, I wander in and suddenly realize there are only (almost all black) women customers and a female DJ. The place is hopping and it is clearly Lesbian Night. I engage the patrons in conversation and a young black firefighter throws her arms around Giuseppe, declaring "Joe and I went to school together, didn't we, Joe? I been comin' here 13 years!"

Then: moving back to 1989—deep in the Reagan–Bush Senior recession—and I am still living in, not just visiting, New Haven. I have developed a friendly relationship with the new black couple next door in my working-class neighborhood a couple of miles away from the Yale University campus and go over one evening to interview them. Patti Hendry had said upon meeting me, "I'm not knockin' my kind you know, but I never lived with a lot of black people around." I walk into an apartment much like mine next door in that it was a floor-through flat that has been created from a 1920s vintage multi-family house. But Patti's apartment, definitely unlike mine, is a miracle of white, cream, oatmeal, and glass surfaces—and she has a toddler son. She accepts my compliments as only her due and fusses over providing refreshments. Much happened during that interview, but here I want to note two key points. The first is that Patti repeatedly noticed tiny imperfections in her domestic environment—her little son leaving a handprint on the glass tabletop, a napkin falling to the impeccable white rug—and sharply directed her husband to remedy them. The second is that he and Patti, engaging with my life history questions, got caught up in a fierce disagreement with one another over whether or not poor black people were to blame for their poverty. Patti was furious about crime and drugs in the neighborhood and said, "And then you have to fault the parents," while her husband focused on the economy: "I'm just saying, there's some kids that don't know no way out . . . people doing what they have to do to survive . . . I'm saying there's no jobs out there right now."

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In the summer of 2000, having kept in touch, I catch up with Patti again. She has moved off my old block, due west, into a neighborhood that had been all-white in the 1980s. She is still renting, but now an entire house. This environment is even more impressive than her old apartment and, at the end of our interview, Patti gives me a tour of both floors of the house, pausing to explain how she sponge-painted the bathroom and stenciled a bedroom wall, showing off the vintage furniture and crystal and linen she has collected by haunting yard sales. While all this is going on, her two children wander in and are sharply told what they are allowed to eat in the kitchen and that they cannot go out to the front yard to play. Some little children playing outside come up to the screen door, trying to find out who I am. Patti teases them, but complains to me later that they are poorly trained. "You know, you don't talk to adults that way."

Through the years I have known her, Patti repeatedly lays out for me her sense of the city and its suburban surround, which areas are "nice" and which are "drug city," where she is willing to go and where not. She explicitly warns me against the block that Cavallaro's sits on and also tells me that she won't walk on the small business block a few streets away from her home, where I regularly attend a storefront black working-class aerobics center in an excess of ethnographic zeal.

In the same more recent period, I also visit with two white families living in Patti's new neighborhood. Both are professional-class heterosexual couples with children, both heavily involved in the renaissance of a local Orthodox Jewish congregation, both with progressive politics. And their home environments are similar as well. Just like Patti and her family in the 1980s, both families rent flats in 1920s multifamily houses. But unlike Patti, their apartments are dingy with old paint, crowded with mismatched, beat-up furniture, children's toys, and clothes flung all over, with no effort at decoration apparent. In each home, the children wander freely and engage the guest, taking over the conversation with their parents' happy approval. And in both homes, the women talk about New Haven in expansive terms. One boasted to me of her broad knowledge, despite her recent residence in the city, of different black and Latino neighborhoods as a result of exploring them in a search of the best thrift shops, in her beat-up station wagon with the kids in the back.

Finally, there is the New Haven native, a progressive black lawyer in her late 50s with a Black Panther past who befriended me in the aerobics class. For this woman, a wide-ranging familiarity with all areas of the city, specific long-term relationships with black neighborhood shopkeepers, and consumption of local minority journalism are all points of personal pride. She lives with her husband, a retired blue-collar

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worker, and with her elderly mother in a nice two-story Victorian furnished in high style, with Orientalist touches, in a neighborhood known since the 1980s as the residential center of the city's black middle class—just a few streets from my old block, in the opposite direction from Cavallaro's. Her sense of the city, as I have noted, is expansive and she tends to frame local crime issues in terms of improving communication and saving poor children's lives, rather than in terms of avoidance of certain areas or increased home or neighborhood security. One night she took me to the Black Elk's Lodge, located in the ghetto right next to her neighborhood, to listen to live jazz and afterward she drove around the area to show me, with great pride, newly constructed townhouses where falling-down public housing had been. "Where would we go?" she asked me rhetorically, talking about the city and its problems, and announced, "New Haven is home."

Representations of home, neighborhood, American history

Home is an extraordinarily resonant term in American life—a point now highlighted further by George Bush's post-9/11 appointment of a "Homeland Defense" office and czar. "Home" signals both the discrete domestic sphere and the wider world of community, polity. My own engagement with the gender, class, and race politics of home arose through the accident of setting up my own residence. In 1986, while teaching at Yale University, I rented an apartment in a working-class neighborhood in New Haven and thereby backed into doing fieldwork in that very poor, deindustrialized, and richly engaging city. The "home" theme of this piece is abstracted from the array of issues in my ongoing study as a whole, which is a historical ethnography of race, class, gender, and representation in the city from the optic of a shifting working-class neighborhood. In what follows, I attempt to limn shifting race, class, and gender politics in the United States through a "world in a grain of sand" focus on one American city and through the fulcrum of what Marx labeled the "historical and moral element" that must always be considered in gauging class formation and capitalist development: the gendered construction, across class and race, of the workings of the "proper home." In so doing, I both document ethnographically the counter-empirical nature of much public–cultural representation of American race/class/gender lived realities and demonstrate the ways in which we can and should consider "the political" both in terms of our older understandings of politics and political organizations and in the newer sense of cultural politics—but without succumbing to the etiolated idealism of political economy-less postmodernism.

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The late Pierre Bourdieu wrote compellingly about homes and habitus among both village Algerians and the French working and middle classes—about how the very physical organization of housing space enacts a population's apprehensions of social order and about the ways in which class habitus is reflected in home organization and décor (1977, 1984). Historians and social scientists have also contributed greatly to our understanding of shifting local apprehensions of gender and domesticity in the contexts of global colonial, capitalist, and postcolonial transitions (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Davidoff and Hall 2002; Hansen 1992; Stoler 1991). But, as we will see, Bourdieu's and other scholars' insights have not really been adequately translated to the contemporary American scene. God is in the details, and we need to engage with details of home in American history. The people with whom I worked in New Haven, like all of us, have inherited this array of representations, and made and make selective use of them in explaining their lives to themselves and others. So, we should be clear at the outset about what they are. For that reason, rather than entering immediately into the lives and apprehensions of Patti Hendry and her sister New Haveners, I will go the long way around, through a historical, cultural, and political–economic review of "home" in America.

"Home" underscored the nineteenth-century sense of American differences from Europe—in the Jamesian sense that "we" somehow had nice homes without the decadent baggage of the European class system. It explains the deep strength of the notion of the family farm and lies behind pioneer, Manifest Destiny mythology—that Americans could and should domesticate what we defined as uninhabited wilderness. And, of course, along with all of Europe and indeed its colonies, American notions of home became deeply gendered as female over the course of the long nineteenth century, with the rise of separate spheres ideology. Many scholars have articulated for us the development of the paired notions of the outer, urban, business world as both dirty and corrupting and inherently male and the inner, tranquil, spiritual, "non-economic" domestic realm as entirely female (Bloch 1978). Thus, we have inherited a tendency to conceive home as a female realm somehow outside the world of economy and labor.

In the post-World War II environment of rapid economic expansion, home took on added symbolic baggage. Widespread suburbanization, widely available household technology such as improved vacuum cleaners and automatic washing machines, and postwar anti-working woman ideology (American women stayed in the labor force in this era but were newly invisible after their War apotheosis as Rosie the Riveter) combined in an image of the safe suburban home presided over by the

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contented housewife aided by labor-saving devices. This construction became official in the notorious Cold War "kitchen debates" in which Richard Nixon boasted to Kruschev about the splendor of American women's household lives (May 1988).

Beyond the Afros and bellbottoms

Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, predated the actual Second Wave of the feminist movement, but she helped put the ball—the critique of the "housewife in splendor" model—in play. 1970s feminists exploded the notion of the economy-less domestic realm, succeeded in shifting popular consciousness to an apprehension of housework and childcare as real labor, and brought women's labor force participation, which was in any event already rising rapidly, into sharp visibility. "Home" began to be represented as a site of gender struggle as well as the haven from a heartless world.

This early Second-Wave period, however, also was the era of civil rights/black power, anti-Vietnam War mobilizations, and the general youth revolution symbolized by the silly but notorious trinity of "sex, drugs, and rock n roll." Popular American notions of home shifted to include—at least in some precincts—unmarried couple, hippie, communal, or movement households. And due to civil rights organizing, Americans very broadly came to understand themselves as a nation of segregated housing. They varied enormously, though, in their understanding of what should be done about that state of affairs.

Most discussion of housing segregation focused on urban neighborhoods, and here yet another element of the era enters, one I in fact cut my scholarly teeth on back in the 1970s (di Leonardo 1984). The very term "white ethnicity"—meaning European-Americans—hails from the 1970s, from what came to be called the "white ethnic renaissance," which had a short flurry of media attention and then was crowded off the public stage by other concerns. White ethnics are important for our discussion, though, both because New Haven historically was a largely white ethnic and black city—the growing Latino population is of more recent vintage—and because the nationwide construction of "white ethnics" in that era was both heavily gendered and tied into shifting notions of proper and improper homes.

"White ethnics" discovered themselves and were discovered by others in early 1970s American cities in the context of complex cultural and political–economic shifts: continuing economic expansion, the ongoing war in Vietnam, and a linked set of social movements directly related to these two key political–economic realities: civil rights/black power, the antiwar movement, the student/youth movement, and the

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revived feminist movement. These multiple movements for reform and liberation challenged both the federal, state, and institutional structures—such as those of colleges and universities—and individuals who perceived themselves to be threatened by particular demands for social change. The Nixon Administration (1969–1974) in particular sought to exploit and enhance these social divisions through the use of the polarizing discourse of the Silent Majority—as opposed to the protesting anti-Administration "minority." Between Administration rhetoric and media response, an image grew of this stipulated entity: the Silent Majority were white—implicitly white ethnic—largely male, blue-collar workers. They were held to be "patriotic" and to live in "traditional" families—ones in which males ruled, women did not work outside the home for pay, and parents controlled their children (di Leonardo 1991). White ethnic homes and neighborhoods, in other words, were widely represented as "traditional" entities, those under duress in a disordered era.

This media image, of course, did not reflect an aggregate social reality. This was the era, after all, in which married working-class women were entering the labor force at record rates and in which their additions to family income maintained working-class living standards in the face of declining real incomes. And sexual adventurism and drug use in the late 1960s to early 1970s were the property of working-class no less than middle-class youth. Nevertheless, as a media construct, as a symbol of the hemorrhaging of Democratic voters to the Republican Party, the conservative white ethnic blue-collar worker—the cigar-chomping, unstylish Archie Bunker—gained salience in this period (see, e.g., Glazer and Moynihan 1970). This salience was much enhanced by the shifting populations and power relations in American cities.

In the 1960s, poor black Americans became newly visible and newly defined as a social problem in Northern cities. The two great waves of black migration from the South, during the First and Second World Wars, had each resulted in cohorts of permanent Northern black urban residents. These men and women had come North (often through employer recruitment) both to take advantage of lucrative war jobs and to flee Jim Crow and the effects of the mechanization of Southern agriculture. They had then often been laid off and largely had become part of a permanent army of reserve labor. Urban-renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s—an employment boondoggle for white ethnic blue-collar workers—destroyed countless urban black neighborhoods, replaced them with office blocks and sports complexes, and shifted and concentrated the poor black population in areas dominated by inhospitable, poorly built, and badly maintained government

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housing projects. Ninety percent of the housing destroyed by urban renewal was never replaced and two-thirds of those displaced were black or Puerto Rican. The Federal Housing Authority deliberately fostered segregated white housing and refused loans to blacks until the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968. Big-city governments refused to shift budgetary resources to basic services for these impoverished areas (Brown 1988; Fainstein 1987; Hirsch 1998; Reed 1986; Shefter 1985).

Neighborhood deterioration, increased crime and urban uprisings—combined with intensive political organizing—stimulated the establishment of highly visible federal Great Society programs. At the same time, a small cohort of socially mobile blacks, emboldened by the civil rights movement, attempted to buy homes in formerly white urban and suburban neighborhoods. The resulting 'white flight' greatly enriched the real estate speculators who fanned its flames and exacerbated inner-city white racism. Black (and Latino) struggles for higher quality public education, neighborhood services, and civil service and union jobs led to increased friction between white, often white ethnic, and minority citizens in Northern urban environments. The first scattered fringe of desuburbanizing better-off whites entered into this polarized and often dangerous environment, benefiting, of course, from its resulting low real estate values.

Thus, the white ethnic community construct arose from an extraordinarily complex historical ground. This complexity was reflected in its multiple expressions and political uses. Notions, for example, of the strength and richness of white ethnic cultures and their repression by WASPs mimicked black cultural nationalist (and white scholars') celebrations of black culture's endurance despite white domination.

Both popular journalistic accounts and grass-roots white ethnic discourse, for example, focused on the strength and unity of white ethnic families as opposed to those of black Americans—whose popular image had been shaped in the early 1960s as a "tangle of pathology" by the Moynihan Report. In my own first study, many Italian-Americans' racist expressions against blacks focused on inferior black family behavior as both explaining and justifying widespread black poverty. Thus, the argument that, as the undeserving poor, blacks were not entitled to the largesse of Great Society programs and the approval of elite sponsors, which should instead flow to "deserving" white ethnics (see, e.g., Gambino 1974; Novak 1971).

This relative entitlement frame is attached, as I have argued (1984), to a "report card mentality," in which shifting American class divisions are seen as caused by proper and improper ethnic/racial family and economic behavior rather than by the differential incorporation of

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immigrant and resident populations in American capitalism's evolving class structure. Scholarship, journalism, and grass-roots expressions celebrated white ethnics for their family loyalties and neighborhood ties. In fact, advertising in this period began to exploit "cute" white ethnic imagery—the pizza-baking grandmother, the extended family at the laden dinner table—in order to invest frozen and canned foods with the cachet of the *Gemeinschaft*—of community in the deepest sense, of knowing how to live in and reproduce proper homes.

This *Gemeinschaft*, this community, was delineated as an urban phenomenon existing alongside of and in opposition to urban black populations. In fact, there was the distinct flavor of a "three bears" analogy in much 1970s/1980s rhetoric on white ethnicity. (And this Eastern Seaboard and industrial Midwest-based trinity neatly wrote non-black Latinos, Asians and others right off the American stage.) While WASPs were "too cold"—bloodless, modern, and unencumbered—and blacks "too hot"—wild, primitive, and overcumbered—white ethnics were "just right." They could and did claim to represent the golden historical mean between the overwhelming ancientness and primitiveness of *Gemeinschaft* and the etiolated modernity of *Gesellschaft*. For a hot minute in the 1970s, American white ethnics commandeered baby bear's chair.

Central to the new construction of white ethnic community was the Madonna-like (in the Catholic, not popular–cultural sense) image of the white ethnic woman. Early 1970s popular writers extolled her devotion to home and family, and many of the more conservative Italian-Americans in my late 1970s study echoed this fusion of ethnic chauvinism and antifeminism (di Leonardo 1984). Part of the appeal of this construction was the notion that white ethnic mothers, unlike "selfish" WASP and "lazy" black mothers, could control their children and thus were exempt from blame for then-current youth protests (di Leonardo 1984). But, in fact, white ethnic women were no less subject to the pressures and opportunities of the shifting American political economy of the 1970s, and many more of the Italian-American women with whom I worked actively altered or rejected the popular image of the self-sacrificing, kitchen-bound ethnic mother. In an era of rising feminist activism, the sudden celebration of a group of women socially labeled as backward, stolid, and possessive wives and mothers functioned very clearly as antifeminist—particularly anti-women's workforce participation—rhetoric. As well, in focusing on women's "duties" to husband and children, it worked against prevalent civil rights imagery of heroic black movement women whose duties lay in the public sphere. Many feminist scholars celebrated the strength and endurance of "traditional" ethnic women and used, for example, narratives of past union and strike activities, or consumer protests, in order to suggest a vision of innately progressive,

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rebellious ethnic womanhood (see, e.g., Smith 1978, 1985). This attempt, however, was overwhelmed by dominant conservative media images, images that live on in, say, Olive Garden commercials, while their original political usages have withered.

Since the late 1970s, white ethnic community is no longer a hot topic for academic papers and popular cultural accounts. Festivals and meetings of ethnic historical associations and social groups do not receive the public attention they once did. During the Reagan era (1981–1988), we saw instead a return in public culture to the *Great Gatsby* romance—the notion that the really proper American homes were those of wealthy WASPs. *Good Housekeeping* began its "New Traditionalist" advertising campaign featuring obviously affluent, non-working blond women and their well-groomed children on the spacious grounds of their suburban or country estates: "She knows what she values—home and family." Wealthy whites took back baby bear's chair with a vengeance and a new romantic halo was constructed over the image—embodied by First Lady Nancy Reagan—of the elegant, dignified, adorned, and (publicly at least) devoted wife and mother, the curator of the proper WASP bourgeois home and children. Through the Bush and Clinton and now Bush Jr. administrations, these images have waxed and waned and ultimately have retreated to the symbolic backstage of American life, but, with notions of white ethnic community, remain "on hold" for activation in particular social settings for particular ends. The frontstage was soon populated by a new, heavily symbolically freighted construct involving race, class, gender, and notions of home, that of the "minority underclass." Let me lay out its evolution.

The mid-1970s energy crisis, so profitable to the big oil companies, was the first of a series of shocks to the American economy that helped to usher in the new public ideology that we had entered an "era of limits." During the Carter Administration (1977–1980), rapidly escalating inflation, particularly in the rising real estate market, set the symbolic stage for the dismantling of Great Society programs, newly seen as "too expensive." Welfare cutbacks under Carter became wholesale shrinkage of the federal social welfare budget under Reagan, then the abandonment of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) altogether under Clinton. Concomitant recession drove unemployment figures into double digits. Numbers of individuals and families made homeless by unemployment, real estate speculation, and the federal abandonment of low-cost housing programs grew rapidly (Johnson 1991; Shoup 1980).

Reagan, the "underclass," and new misrepresentations

With the economic recovery of the middle and late 1980s, unemployment shrank to early 1970s levels, then rose again with the Bush

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recession, fell with the Clinton economic renaissance, and are now rising again in the post-9/11 recession. Unemployment always shrinks less for minority Americans (thus the black American aphorism, "When America catches a cold, blacks get pneumonia"), and of those successively re-employed, many worked part time or at jobs with lower status and pay. As a combination of these shifts and regressive tax legislation, over the Reagan/Bush years the numbers of both the very poor and the very rich rose, the shifts of the Clinton years did not alter those tendencies, and they have become more exacerbated during the Bush Jr. Administration. The United States now has the highest levels of poverty and the smallest middle class, proportionately, in the industrialized world. And although Americans abuse drugs at rates no higher than those of other industrial democracies, United States drug laws determine our grotesquely higher imprisonment rates—and, of course, minority Americans are disproportionately incarcerated for identical crimes. Despite much local and national organizing, popular political discourse shifted significantly rightward from the 1970s into the new millennium. Civil rights and women's, gay, and labor groups were labeled "special interests." But, most crucially, public discourse on the poor, particularly poor blacks and Latinos, turned once again nearly hegemonically to automatic deprecation and "blame the victim" rhetoric (Bernstein and Adler 1994; Block et al. 1987; Krugman 2002; Wolff 1995; Mauer 2003; Piven and Cloward 1982).

The new underclass ideology functioned specifically, as had an older culture of poverty formulations, to focus attention away from the political-economic production of poverty to the "pathological" behavior of the poor whose characteristics were presumed (in the hard version) to cause or (in the soft version) merely to reproduce poverty. For Afro-American Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson, for example, who wrote the 1987 book *The Truly Disadvantaged*, the work that rationalized underclass ideology for scholars and policy makers, advanced capitalism is assumed, and assumed benignant. Writing in Reagan's second term, Wilson used passive-verb political economy: blacks "get concentrated" in inner cities, *jobs just happen to leave*. He scorned "racism" as an explanation for any social change—interpreting it narrowly as malign dyadic encounters in which individual whites do dirt to individual blacks. To put it bluntly, Wilson effectively said, "It's nobody's fault, but poor blacks got screwed and now they're acting ugly." Wilson and other underclass ideologues adduced rising unmarried mother birthrates, uninvolved biological fathers, welfare abuse, poverty, drugs, and crime to prove the existence of a new pathology in the black and brown poor.[2]

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Countering elements of underclass mythology, scholars noted that black adolescent childbearing rates began falling *in the 1960s*. It was not birthrates but marriage rates that had altered (Geronimus and Korenman 1992). Further, most poor Americans are white, African-Americans were never the majority recipients of welfare, and forty percent of welfare mothers worked for pay as well. Despite media portrayals, most welfare recipients had few, not many, children—the average was two—and most cycled off the dole whenever they could line up a job, childcare, and health insurance. Further, it was welfare for the often financially stable elderly—Social Security—not for poor mothers—AFDC—that took up the bulk of the federal social welfare budget (Spalter-Roth and Hartmann 1992). Black and white pregnant women consume illegal substances that may be injurious to their fetuses at the same rates—but doctors report black women to law enforcement authorities ten times more often (*New Haven Register* 1990). The exception to the above rule is cigarettes, which of course are legal. A government study indicates that black mothers smoke much *less* than white mothers (United States Department of Health and Human Services 1992).

Federal government studies indicate that black adolescents actually consume illegal drugs at *lower* rates than whites (United States General Accounting Office 1991). They have admitted that blacks now graduate from high school at close to the same rates as whites, but that "returns to education" (job remuneration and status), at all educational levels, are significantly lower for both male racial minorities and all women than for white men (Hacker 1992). Employers openly admit to interviewers that they discriminate against minorities in hiring and federal studies indicate that minorities with the same resources and credit records as whites are denied home mortgages at twice the rate (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Quint 1993). Minorities are more frequently harassed by police, arrested for crimes when whites are not, convicted more frequently, and given heavier prison sentences. Finally, on the family values front: federal data indicate that the *higher* a man's income, the *less likely* he is to make his court-ordered child support payments (Hacker 1992; Hochschild 1989). In sum, underclass ideology, which has faded since Clinton eviscerated welfare and the go-go economy of the 1990s took off, both entirely misrepresents empirical reality and is waiting, backstage, much like white ethnic community ideology, should the need arise to redemonize the minority poor.

Home in New Haven

New Haven's historical political-economic shifts fit all these national urban patterns only too well as a medium-sized deindustrialized

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Southern New England city, with all the impedimenta of abandoned factories, recurrent municipal financial crises, and white flight with which we are so familiar in other deindustrialized towns and cities. The majority of the population is now black and Latino—during most of the twentieth century, though, New Haven was majority white ethnic, with Italians, Irish, Slavs, and Jews of all nationalities predominating (Fainstein and Fainstein 1983).

In the 1980s, in part because of the depredations of urban renewal that I have described for the country as a whole, but more importantly in tune with the starvation of American cities by successive Reagan and Bush administration policies, New Haven was repeatedly figured in its own local media, and in the national media, particularly the *New York Times* and in a widely read *New Yorker* (Finnegan 1990) series, as an emblem of urban dirt, disorder, and danger writ small, a vestpocket New York, a site of desperate black and brown youth caught up in crack wars—and thus a nicely digestible seeming empirical rationale for the blame-the-victim pieties of the underclass ideology hegemonic in that era. In *Exotics at Home*, I describe this process from the optic of my working-class neighborhood under the onslaught of wide-scale immiseration, a neighborhood that shifted from nearly all-white to nearly all-black over the five years of my residence.

Spatially speaking, New Haven has an eighteenth-century village green that now defines downtown, with Yale buildings, federal and municipal offices, an urban renewal era mall and other shopping areas, and a medical complex radiating out in different directions from its orienting grid. What we might call the Yale Zone—and Yale is now, after decades of deindustrialization, the city's largest employer—encompasses some neighborhoods north of campus that had been mixed WASP and white ethnic and now are heavily occupied by faculty and graduate students, and some much shabbier areas east of campus, mixed business and residential, where poorer or more cosmopolitan-minded graduate students live. An Italian literature professor recently told me she rented in this latter area when she was a graduate student, calling it the Left Bank, and preferring its racial mix and proximity to black areas to the much whiter complexion of the northern neighborhoods. Since the 1980s, Yale has pushed back the Left Bank, and the ghetto it abuts, through buying up and rehabilitating property, even buying and closing off a public street. This expansion of a *cordon sanitaire*, pushing poor people and their activities away, is not unique to Yale, but now a common practice of the part of universities and hospitals in the United States, really a part of larger growth politics and gentrifying processes.

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Due west of the Left Bank, my neighborhood stretches several miles, with two of the three named city ghettoes on its north and south flanks. In terms of what the technocrats call housing stock, New Haven is unlike many large cities in that there are fewer apartment houses and more large multi-family homes that, in poorer areas, have been cut up into individual apartments. The block I lived on was made up of such houses, actually in the process of the final cutting-up and renting out during my five years' residence. Farther east, across a large park, was a somewhat more affluent series of neighborhoods that were, in the 1980s, very white. But, unnoticed by New Haveners, during the economically expansionist 1990s, the park boundary erased as both areas became racially integrated. Most astonishing in the last decade, and also unnoticed even by city politicians, the east-west arterial, which had been lined by heavily Jewish-owned small businesses, including the Hadassah thrift store in which I practically lived in the latter half of the 1980s, became dominated by black ones, including innumerable hair and nail salons, various soul food and Caribbean diners, a small music store, and the storefront aerobics center I have mentioned. In 2002, for example, there was a political fuss over the sale of a small business in the Dixwell area—which is overwhelmingly black—to an Asian couple. A local black alderman, in justifying his protest, astoundingly asked in a public forum whether Jewish shopkeepers on Whalley Avenue would welcome black incomers.

In following urban lives from the mid-1980s to the present, I was highly aware of overarching political-economic shifts—the Reagan/Bush recession, the Clinton recovery—and associated local demographic, economic, and political changes. Over the 1990s, for example, unemployment fell precipitously, the crack wars dried up, and the prostitutes who had come to perambulate my neighborhood nightly at the end of the 1980s either moved indoors or turned to other means of livelihood. But the New Haveners with whom I worked were simply living out their daily lives and often did not follow these shifts. Thus, not only earlier ethnic and racial residential and business patterns, but also particular images of urban poverty, crime, and danger that were inscribed in New Haveners' minds in the 1980s remained part of their urban imaginary into the new millennium, despite the evidence of their own daily experiences.

Now we are ready to consider the disjunctive elements of "home" in the contemporary American public culture, a disconnect that living in working-class New Haven forced to my attention. That is, since the 1970s, we have seen two major public sphere arenas develop in which "home" is discussed, which we might label the Gentry Arena and the Underclass Arena. On the one hand, with the rising cost of real estate,

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the glorification of the notion of well-off WASP homes (think Ralph Lauren advertisements and Martha Stewart), and re-establishment of shelter magazines, "home," meaning beautifully appointed living spaces for better-off whites, is a major national industry. As American newspapers' "women's pages"—in part under feminist pressure—transmogrified into Style and Living sections, we read more and more each year about sponge-painted walls, Great Rooms, lofts, ethnic/country/European kitchens, and the installation of vintage or vintage-like bookcases, hardware, and fixtures. Well-off white couples—and sometimes gay couples or single women—pose happily in their "after" living spaces all over mass and middlebrow media.

On the other hand, newspaper front pages periodically run frightening stories, complete with stark black-and-white photos, of ghetto apartments discovered to be overrun with drugs, crime, rats, and roaches, and thus from which social services have just yanked children. Front page vs. Style section, crime and neglect stories vs. fluffy gentrifying ones, narratives of the failure of poor black mothers vs. the obsessions and triumphs of well-off white ones. This is the new race and class-divided representation of home in America. Occasionally, particularly in black and Latino media, we see black and Latino actors, music stars, or athletes in their carefully appointed homes—and *The Village Voice* has a recurrent column in which New Yorkers across race and class are interviewed in and comment on their tiny rented or owned apartments—but the very rarity of these representations underscores the underclass norm. And the extraordinary misrepresentation of these representations really comes home to us, as it were, when we reflect that the vast bulk of the black American population is neither impoverished nor well-off, but solidly workingclass. In that sense, Patti Hendry and her family are black America.

It is now clear that I developed this analysis of shifts in race, gender, and representation because my New Haven fieldwork virtually rubbed my nose in it. I could not help but be struck with extraordinarily clean and well-appointed living spaces into which I was welcomed by my black and Puerto Rican neighbors, so utterly at odds with what I was reading in the *New York Times* and the *New Haven Register*. And I was thoroughly amused to go into well-off white home after New Haven home that could only be described as Martha Stewart's worst nightmare (before, of course, she was tried and convicted of insider trading). We can now also see how Patti Hendry's seemingly anti-black statements, her compulsive tidying-up, and her class concerns are defensive attempts to define herself and her family outside dominant underclass characterizations, outside the racial report card, while, sadly, their empirical falsehoods seem commonsensical to her,

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as they do to most Americans since the 1980s. The black lawyer, on the other hand, has both long-term political and religious reasons for explicitly resisting underclass ideology. And, of course, she is aware of her class status, not to mention her appropriately older-model Mercedes, and does not fear being identified with the black poor she defines herself as in solidarity with and attempting to help.

Afro-American women have inherited not only all the ideological baggage I have just laid out, but also the long historical racist white tendency to define them as inherently dirty and degraded, a tendency also extended to other racial minorities and, in the past, to white ethnics. One of the autobiographical sources of my analysis is my strong memory of my Italian-American aunts' obsession with cleanliness and gentility. Their 1950s doilies and Patti Hendry's 1990s sponge-painted walls have the same roots in American women's and racial/ethnic history. And my professional-class white New Haven friends literally could "afford," if they wished, to have disheveled homes and unruly children. There is, of course, tremendous variety in the ways in which American women of all race/ethnic identities and across class put together interiors, but no one was going to think these Jewish families' households resembled TV video footage of abuse and neglect cases, nor did those wives and mothers worry, as their grandmothers may have, and my grandmother did, that WASPs would think them dirty, ungenteel sluts.

What can we say, then, about the larger issues of gender, class, and race and varying home and urban imaginaries on the contemporary American scene? First, individuals in cities extend their notions of "home" outward into other venues, as we saw from the behavior and statements of the patrons at Cavallaro's in my beginning vignette. But sites of urban pleasure and danger are not at all unambiguous, not widely agreed-upon, as we also saw. Cavallaro's is a home away from home for large numbers of working-class New Haven black women, straight and gay—literally a site where family are recognized—but for Patti Hendry it is just a building on a dangerous, dirty street. And, again, the stretch of block with the aerobics center strikes her as low-class, but that is not the opinion of the black lawyer who enjoyed the sweat sessions and the lively company there with me. As well as pure issues of habitus, we have here questions of wildly differing notions of gentility. This latter point is underlined by other ethnographic vignettes: hilarious episodes of working-class black women at other bars skillfully swearing like proverbial fishwives and in the next breath extolling their hardwood floors and crystal ornaments at home. It is buttressed as well by the life-history narratives from the elderly black woman, now dead, who lived across the street from me, who

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focused away from her cramped, overstuffed apartment and tended to stress instead her friendships with long-dead white neighbors, her New England ancestry, and her grown son's banking industry executive position.

The further important point here is that neither Patti Hendry's home nor the homes of the aerobics center patrons nor my elderly neighbor, nor the retirement-age librarian with whom I visit—the fulcrum point of black womanhood in America, statistically speaking—are in any way represented in our contemporary public sphere. Nor, it is important to add, is the easy interracial mingling and open acceptance of homosexuality in the glorious working-class bar part of our public culture where, at best, we see liquor commercials featuring upscale but definitely heterosexual interracial friends.

Not only does American public culture misrepresent "home" along gender, race, and class lines, but it cuts off pleasure from danger. Harvard literary critic Marjorie Garber can comfortably write a book like the widely reviewed *Sex and Real Estate* (2000), which blithely assumes an entirely upper-middle-and upper-class America in which our only analytic concern should be how the libido enters into home-buying and decorating. And it does, of course, but even for those, as we have seen, who cannot afford to buy a house, or even a condo. At the same time, "home" is danger both in the sense of concerns about crime—one need only listen to the narrative of the Puertorriqueña who now lives just below my old New Haven apartment, and who will not walk outside without her husband present—and in the sense of the ways in which people's residences are part of the emotional violence of the evolving American class system.

Finally, all of these points illustrate the complexities of the impoverishment of American civil society in the era of neoliberal capitalism. We can see New Haveners struggling to maintain public spaces, to forge community, within the interstices of the capitalist market. And we see them struggling to invest "home" with meanings no longer expressible in the public sphere, and the particularly privatized class anxieties articulated by black American working-class women in the highly marketized and misrepresentative atmosphere of the neoliberal present.

How New Haveners variously conceive home, then, is William Blake's world in a grain of sand—it reflects wider national and international historical and contemporary realities. And the class, race, and gender inflections of those realities are both occluded by and parallel the current international crisis over homelands here and in Central Asia and the Middle East, a crisis that may soon include the entire globe. Virginia Woolf is well known for having asserted that her

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country was the whole world. Our homes, and our understandings of them, in ways that American public culture does and does not allow us to see, are fundamentally political. They both index and manifest gender, class, race, power, and the world of nations.

Notes

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1. Portions of the following essay are reprinted, with permission, from Micaela di Leonardo, "Gender, Race and Class," in David Nugent and Joan Vincent, eds., *A Companion to an Anthropology of Politics*, Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, pp. 135–151. I thank David Nugent and Joan Vincent, and also Roger Lancaster, for his careful reading of this article.
2. For a full description, contextualization, and critique of Wilson's model, see di Leonardo (1998: 112–120).

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