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Review of 'Elizabeth Korver-Glenn, Race Brokers: Housing Markets and Segregation in 21st Century Urban America'

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Race Brokers: Housing Markets and Segregation in 21st Century Urban America, by Elizabeth Korver-Glenn. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021. ISBN 0190063874; 240 pp. $99.00 hardcover. $27.95 Paperback

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For urban sociologists, *Race Brokers: Housing Markets and Segregation in 21st Century Urban America* is a book we needed. This comprehensive and in depth mixed methods study of housing market professionals provides an essential contribution to the literature on housing and racial segregation. While quantitative and qualitative urban researchers have documented the extent of racial segregation, its persistence overtime and its consequences for neighborhoods and individuals, and a growing literature is investigating the role of the housing search process in perpetuating contemporary racial segregation, we knew very little about the practices of the professionals who clearly play an outsized role in shaping the housing market. Previous quantitative work has demonstrated effects of racial discrimination from housing market professionals but there has been limited quantitative work uncovering how discrimination happens. Recent qualitative work from Max Besbris has also focused on real estate agents but only in the particular context of very high end real estate markets. Korver-Glenn expands on the limited previous work in this area with one year of ethnographic data from following 13 housing market professionals, in depth interviews with 102 housing market professionals and consumers and quantitative analysis of housing market data.

In this ground breaking and highly accessible book, Elizabeth Korver-Glenn describes these housing market professionals as "race brokers", gatekeepers who are especially influential in shaping ideas about race and the ways those ideas shape who gets access to resources through their professional role. In the case of housing market professionals, these race brokers uphold and build on (or in some more rare cases intervene in) a system of racial segregation and racial inequality by acting on their own ideas about race in their professional activities.

As a discipline we are often focused racism as social structure, which is essential for explaining the pervasiveness and persistence of this social force in our society. While, *Race Brokers*, never loses site of the structural forces upholding racial inequality, it also reckons with the ways in which housing market professionals overtly and covertly engage in racism at a microlevel. This project demonstrates how racial inequality on a large scale is produced through the racist actions of individuals. Ultimately this analysis that accounts for both structure and agency, allows for real insight into racial processes and lays the ground work for understanding how we could intervene in those processes.

Most of the housing market professionals examined in this project (developers, real estate agents, lenders and appraisers), in particular almost all White housing market professionals, used a racist market rubric, or a racial frame specific to understanding the housing market, to guide their professional actions. Using the racist market rubric, these race brokers applied the idea that White neighborhoods and individuals are the most desirable, valuable, and lucrative. By contrast, most professionals of color in the study used a counter frame, a people oriented market rubric,

that resisted the dominate racist frame by affirming the value of neighborhoods and individuals of color.

The first chapter, H-Town, provides an overview of some of the neighborhoods discussed in the book, how they are racialized by market professionals and the housing market dynamics that shape them. Korver-Glenn makes a convincing case for why Houston is a great case for this study. It is both highly racially diverse, and highly racially segregated, while also being a relatively affordable housing market, so it provides opportunities to look at the role of more direct effects of racism on housing outcomes.

The second chapter looks at the role of developers in shaping racialized space. I believe this is a particularly innovative section of the book, as housing developers have been especially understudied in the urban sociology literature. The book demonstrates how developers support racial segregation and racial inequality through their choices of where to build and who to build for. Most developers, especially White developers consciously choose to build in White neighborhoods in an effort to appeal to white buyers. Some developers also engaged in a practice Korver-Glen calls "reverse block-busting" where they targeted homeowners of color when buying land, encouraging them to sell their homes quickly on terms that were favorable to the developers, a practice that likely contributes to gentrification.

"Brokering Sales", the third chapter, investigates how real estate agents act as race brokers. Real estate agents relied on personal networking to build their clientele and connect to other kinds of housing professionals, and those networks were highly racialized, with White real estate agents in particular seeking White clients and excluding non-White professionals from their networks. They then maintain these networks by tolerating the racism of their clients and offering their own racially charged opinions about neighborhoods and schools.

The fourth chapter, "Lending Capital" demonstrates how mortgage lenders imprint their racial ideas on to the housing process. White mortgage lenders worked to sustain racially segregated networks of buyers, agents, lenders and loan opportunities. They also applied a racist market rubric when using their discretion to evaluate the risk of buyers and homes, which advantaged White buyers and homes in White neighborhoods and disadvantaged buyers of color and homes in neighborhoods of color.

Chapter Five, "Appraising Value" interrogates the role that appraisers play in furthering racial inequality in the housing market and demonstrates that racial inequality in appraisals is produced not just by historical legacies but through the active application of racist rubrics by contemporary appraisers.

Finally, the sixth chapter, presents innovative solutions for intervening in this racially structured market. By studying all four types of housing market professionals, Korver-Glenn is able to offer suggestions for how federal, state and local governments could audit and enforce fair housing practices for developers, appraisers and lenders, in addition to real-estate agents. She argues for a more systemic approach to fair housing which would include intervening in racialized housing market routines, including racially segregated industry networking and racial logics in appraisals. Some creative proposals coming out of this approach are implementing penalties for "pocket listings", the practice of real estate agents showing homes to their networks that are not publicly listed and ending the neighborhood based sales comparison approach to appraisals. These policy solutions hold a lot of promise, because they are based on such fine grained analysis of the racialized patterns of these influential actors and so I hope that both urban scholars and policy professionals take note of these ideas.