

Center for Poverty Research

<http://poverty.ucdavis.edu>

Discussion of Middle Class Poverty Politics: Making Place, Making People

Adrienne Hosek, University of California, Davis

Welcome, you are listening to a UC Davis Center for Poverty Research Conference podcast. I am Lisa Pruitt, a Center faculty affiliate and the organizer of our November 2014 Poverty in Place conference. This conference brought together scholars from across the social sciences to present and discuss new work on how space and place inflect various dimensions of poverty.

In this presentation, Adrienne Hosek discusses Victoria Lawson and Sarah Elwood's work on the neighborhood formation of class, race, and poverty politics. Hosek is an assistant professor of political science at UC Davis.

>> I'm Adrienne Hosek, I'm a professor here at UC Davis as of this fall. So, I'm new and also, I study political science questions about the middle class and redistribution of policy.

And so, the idea that the middle class is very critical in understanding how middle class think and behave is so critical to the politics of poverty is for me just obviously true. Because if you know anything about voting, it's the median voter, maybe not, but let's say it's the median voter that determines what outcomes happen.

So this coalition between the poor and the middle class is the traditional coalition that gets things passed, right? So I found this paper incredibly interesting, and I want to issue a little bit of a warning in that I'm a quantitative person. And that makes me really ill-equipped to provide anything, I think, to evaluate the methodology of the study.

But more than that, it was really nice for me to read this paper cuz it really opens my mind to different ways you could study a question. Okay, but you'll see in my slides that I can't get away from this quantitative aspect of my life.

>> Okay, so we've talked about these two places.

One of them is Packdon and the other one is Spruce Ridge. I think it's Packdon, sorry, and-

>> It's just made up, it doesn't matter.

>> Yeah, and so I, and also I could be using incredibly wrong terminology. These are my impressions of the work and so please understand.

So in one sense in Packdon I get the sense it's a place that's gentrifying. And when it was in hard times and the 1970s, 80s and then it's sort of coming back, partly because other places in Seattle are becoming wealthier and then pushing out middle class residents. And so Spruce Ridge, however, is a redeveloped place, it's a place that was previously public housing that was razed and then sort of mixed housing was built up on top of that.

So it's entirely planned and it's planned to be residences for both middle class and poor residents. And so in the paper they interview, I think, 20 individuals. 75% of them are white. And as I said, most of them are college educated, have white-collar service jobs, and own their own homes.

They also identify through community organizations. And the only reason why I mention this is because in political science, those people who are actively engaged in community organizations are different

Center for Poverty Research

<http://poverty.ucdavis.edu>

than your average, generally different than your average voter. They're people who care more about policy. They're more invested in the community and they tend to have more biased view points right?

More extreme, right? We're not told about the actual political identities of these individuals. So I don't know if they're Republican or Democrat. Although I'm assuming actually most of the are Democrat, I don't know why. Okay, so, here is the first quantitative insertion to my slides. So, again, Packdon, but.

So, we really see these two places are going through a transformation but there's a difference in the kind of transformation that has occurred. In Packdon, we see a more continuous transformation that's occurring. It's a more organic transformation that's accomplished through gentrification. There are now fewer derelict houses. There's improved safety.

There is more home ownership. And there's this anticipation that these trends are gonna continue, that this neighborhood is going to gentrify. At least that's the sense I got. In Spruce Ridge however, we get the sense that it is transformed, right? It used to be public housing and now it's this other community.

And it basically went from 01, right? And it's described used to be a slum, no longer a ghetto. That past is behind us, right? We've moved forward from that. We've distanced ourselves from that identity. I think this this is very important to the perception of poor residents among the middle class.

In Packdon, we have the first book, Positions, Persons of Color as a supplement that enhances a normatively white neighborhood, and this is an idea as diversity as an asset as long as it's limited diversity. And that's underlined by the fact that everybody anticipates this process of gentrification. This is not a, we know the diversity as it is, if anything, it's gonna become less diverse, so it's an asset that we need to protect, and there's very few fears that it's gonna reverse the other way.

You don't see anybody expressing, well we need to make sure that more poorer residents aren't moving into this community. In a sense, poor remain sort of separate. They have their own identity. They're pursuing their own individual lives but their numbers are reducing over time. Through gentrification. In Spruce Ridge, however, we have this quote, enrolls middle class and poorer residents in a collective aspirational project.

So here, the poor are integrated in the sense that there is a permanent position for the residents who are identified as poor in the community, right. There's a commitment to their permanent residency in the community, however, their status is poor. It's hopefully, going to be changed over time.

So that's what I mean by integrated, right. So they're going, the individuals who are poor will remain within the community. But they will become middle class. And here we see these expectations, we see expectations of hard work attached to this sort of, the spirit of the Spruce Ridge community.

The goals of this community. And so all three of these people see, value hard work. They see it's really important to accomplishing the goals of Spruce Ridge to transform poor residents to the middle class. And so Louise says, sewing is for job training and not socializing. I thought that was pretty funny.

And then Annie says that the women who are really serious about learning to sew, they kind of separate themselves out. So she's seeing them as already closer to middle class than poor. She's seeing them

Center for Poverty Research

<http://poverty.ucdavis.edu>

physically separate, like she separated themselves out from the other poorer residents who basically she's calling lazy.

Because they want to come here, they want a chance to get out of the house, and don't we all want a chance to get out of the house sometimes. We have a non-identified volunteer who says, I'm going to target and focus on people that are just a little step above.

And this is an even further statement that says, I'm going to invest my time and effort into those individuals who I see are hardworking, and I'm going to disregard the other ones. I'm going to punish them in a sense. And this made me immediately think of an important experiment in political science that I want to talk about cuz I think it has some relevance to this finding.

So Sniderman and Piazza asked, do political conservatives discriminate against African Americans? Beyond just having prejudiced views of them, are they gonna take actions that actually treat African-Americans differently than whites? And how do they do this? Well, they create unemployment. They generate fake unemployment forms, and they randomize both the race of the individual who's applying for unemployment as well as whether they're described as hard working or lazy.

I don't think it's lazy, but it's lazy. And then, the respondents in the survey get to see these unemployment forms and then they determine what level of assistance these individuals should receive in dollar terms, okay? And so Sniderman and Piazza go into this thinking yeah, for sure we're gonna find an effect, right?

We're gonna find an effect that conservatives discriminate against African Americans, but what do they find? Well they find that political conservatives are more likely to favor government assistance for black workers compared to white workers. But why is that? Well there's an interaction effect. And that's the idea that political conservatives rewarded hardworking black workers the most while they punished lazy black workers the most, the least.

Well they rewarded them the least, they punished them the most, I guess. Rewarded them the least. So yes, this is evidence of discrimination, right? But it also shows this thing that I think what we were seeing up here, right? Which is, in both cases, you know Republicans kind of see themselves to some degree as the benefactors of society, right?

They're the one paying into the system, right? So they're generally gonna have this sort of viewpoint. Sorry, where am I? Oh, here we go. The patronizing viewpoint, right? Which is sort of shared by these people in Spruce Ridge, which are also considering themselves the benefactors of this process, right?

They're the leaders who are helping to initiate this transformation, right? But, Yes, and what you see is that there's a great deal of support for trying to help those poorer residents who seem hard working. Because, in some part, they're not conforming to their expectations and stereotypes of the poor.

But, among those who are not conforming, and they're not toeing the line. There is some idea of distrust of, I guess distrust, yeah. So anyway, now let's contrast these with the expectations in Packdon. And you can really just say that there aren't really any expectations in Packdon. So the first is Annie, and Annie is a really warm hearted woman, you get a sense.

Center for Poverty Research

<http://poverty.ucdavis.edu>

She says, my neighbor has the junkiest yard in the world and no one complains except for Emma, who's standing right there, and says yeah, we have lower expectations of our residents. And then Annie says, no, just different expectations, right? And so looking at Emma, we see, I'm forced to look at my own assumptions rather than somewhere where the lawns are all nice.

And why is she forced to look at her own assumptions? She's forced because the choice of living in that neighborhood was not hers. She was pushed into that neighborhood cuz she couldn't afford better neighborhoods. And so, being in that neighborhood was out of her control. And you see a loss of agency in Marshall's comments, too.

Well good or bad, they're have been several things that changed the landscape, right? There have been several things, the passive voice, right? Well, he may have been one of them.

>> So you see a complete, there is absolutely no lack, there's a lack of accountability or taking responsibility for how their community is changing.

And I only have five minutes left, so I'm not gonna really be able to go through this design. It's in Uganda. It's like, why am I mentioning an experiment from Uganda, right? But I actually think it says something very important. So the purpose was to see, does taxation increases the citizen's demands on politicians for community investment?

So if you are paying taxes are you more likely to demand more from your politicians then if the politicians are getting their money from outside sources, like non profit organizations and stuff? And those donations are given with the intent of improving the community. So the residents of that community should demand that they're spent correctly.

But are they more willing to actually make those demands when it's their own tax money, versus outside money? So when they've invested, are they going to demand more? And in fact, they find a huge, huge effect, which is that taxation increases citizens' willingness to punish leaders by 12% overall, 30% among, anyway they're more willing to punish, right?

And going back to how we think about Packdon and Spruce Ridge. And in Spruce Ridge there has been a sort of commitment made by the middle class residence who moved there, to have this integrated community which is dedicated to improving the situation of the poor residents, right? Whereas in Packdon, we see an acceptance of the fact of gentrification.

We see in the policies a loss in retentionment of non-governmental organizations serving the poor, and we see an unresolved battle over new housing residents. So tangible policies have diminished in Packdon. In Spruce Ridge, on the other hand, we see dedicated housing assistance. Though diminished from when it was a public housing project.

And job training programs and public recreations facilities. And my question is, is it inevitable that when the middle class makes investments in programs for the poor, services in the poor, do their expectations and demands on the poor increase? And so I leave that question up. And those are my comments.

I really enjoyed reading this paper.

>> I'm Ann Stevens, the director of the Center for Poverty Research at UC Davis and I want to thank you for listening. The Center is one of three federally designated poverty research centers in the United

Center for Poverty Research

<http://poverty.ucdavis.edu>

States. Our mission is to facilitate nonpartisan academic research on domestic poverty, to disseminate this research, and to train the next generation of poverty scholars.

Core funding comes from the US Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the Center, visit us online at poverty.ucdavis.edu.