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THE MINORITY-RACE PLANNER IN
 THE QUEST FOR A JUST CITY

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Abstract This article reviews some basic concepts about planners' role in obtaining a just city, focusing in particular upon the possible role of racial minorities in the process of reaching such a city. We adopt Fainstein's two-part definition of what is 'valued' in a just city, and then discuss how planners who are racial minorities might be helpful for one part of that definition. Minority-race professionals may help bring tangible benefits to the workforce, but these benefits become difficult to cultivate if minority-race professionals experience difficulties in their work environment. Interviews with several US black planners provide illustrative examples concerning these points.

Keywords diversity, minority, planning, race, social justice

Ann Markusen once suggested that the urban planning profession is losing the battle with economics for the shaping of urban space in part because planners value equity as a normative criterion, whereas economics values market efficiency. Efficiency has won out in whatever war of values might have taken place (Markusen, 2000). While it may be true that planners value equity, any such commitment may run counter to political and social conditions. Furthermore, either widely accepted tools are not available to create such equity, or political conditions in fact support inequitable, purposeful oppression. These situations have emerged in several very different contexts around the world (Bollens, 1999, 2004; Fainstein, 2005; Flyvbjerg, 2002; Forester, 2000; Yiftachel, 2006; Yiftachel and Ghanem, 2004).

One modest but tangible way to help bring about equity in the urban context may be to ensure that the ranks of professional planners include diversity in race and ethnicity, particularly in urban societies where severe inequities by race and ethnicity exist. Diversity in the urban planning profession and the connection between diversity and the 'just city' are not topics that have recently received a great deal of attention in the scholarly planning literature, but professional diversity would seem to be one visible, tangible, and basic measure of the profession's commitment to social equity. If the urban planning profession cannot itself reflect commitment to social equity in the form of its own demographics, it could seem contradictory for professional planners to argue for social equity in society at large.

This article will explore possible reasons for focusing on the diversity – in this article, we will largely address racial diversity, particularly in the United States – of the profession as we continue to dialogue about the just city, and we will discuss some of the subtleties of circumstance that may make the diversity of the profession difficult to maintain. Racial diversity could conceivably bring tangible benefits to the workplace and to the community, especially in those social contexts characterized by racial conflict or segregation. If this potential contribution is to unfold, however, we will need to come to terms with the difficult work contexts which may face minority-race planners, and with the possible need to address dysfunction within these contexts before attempting to address dysfunction within the world at large. After offering a few definitions related to race, we will explore these issues by considering the theoretical background of the 'just city', as well as initial thoughts concerning the means for reaching such a city. We will reference as well the results of interviews with a few African American US planners, to gain some sense of the challenges that may face minority-race planners in their work environments in at least one country, the US.

Minority-race people

In this discussion, we reference 'minority-race', 'race', and 'ethnicity' because of a lack of better language. We continue to use these terms only because they have social meaning to many people today, but their scientific meaning is vague, and meaning varies by nation or continent. 'Race' is a social construct with little biological justification. Its modern usage arose only a few hundred years ago in order to justify the economic oppression of darker-skinned people under conditions of slavery, colonialism, and industrialization, and it serves particularly poorly as a concept in societies characterized by populations of diverse origins which have intermarried.¹ In the US, the context for much of the discussion of this article, definitions are sometimes fluid but race remains a powerful concept because of a cultural reality: people continue to treat others differently because of perceived race, with particularly strong distinctions between 'black' or African American and 'white' or Caucasian, even though both of these categories include extensive mixture and variation (Farley et al., 2000; Hirschman, 2004; Moses, 2004). Furthermore, centuries of different

treatment, by individuals and by institutions, have left a lasting mark on the urban landscape, with far different circumstances for people perceived to be of minority race or ethnicity in terms of living conditions, residential patterns, and social and economic opportunities, particularly for those of low income (Wilson, 2003).

While in some national contexts 'ethnicity' is a good substitute for 'race', this is not necessarily true in the US. 'Ethnicity' often refers to tribal, national, regional, language grouping or other variations which may be less physically obvious than the popular conception of race (Hirschman, 2004). Yiftachel (2006) has argued that ethnic divisions, more so than racial divisions, are particularly difficult in the Southern and Eastern parts of the world. He suggests that the North and West – meaning North America and Western Europe – benefit from a number of basic liberties and social welfare provisions that make life even for their disadvantaged racial minorities relatively more stable than life for many oppressed ethnic groups in Southern and Eastern places such as Israel, apartheid South Africa, Eastern Europe, and many other countries.

While this is undoubtedly true, the economic, social, and spatial divisions by race and ethnicity in his designated North and West – particularly in US cities – pose continuing, ongoing dilemmas that have yet to be resolved and may not be resolved in the foreseeable future. Planners will probably have much less credibility and efficacy in helping to bring about social equity in situations of racial or ethnic division or conflict if their membership is composed largely of the dominant race or ethnicity, or if their planning work environments do not support the effective functioning of members of minority races or ethnic groups as planning professionals. These are two variants of the phenomenon wherein planners in conflict-laden societies have found it necessary to negotiate difficult shoals of allegiance and reform, or in fact have become tools of the state used to create and legitimize situations of spatial control of oppressed racial, ethnic, or religious groups (Bollens, 1999, 2000; Yiftachel, 2000).

The postmodern era celebrates non-exclusion, and so it is unfortunate that it is necessary to raise yet again this topic of racial diversity in the profession. The main reason is not to hold on to modernist or structuralist notions of binary reality that Soja (1997) referred to as outmoded – that is, to view everything in exclusionary terms of black or white, worker or capitalist, immigrant or native, male or female – but rather to ground dialogue in the reality of the fragmented metropolis and to understand that the 'politics of difference' (Merrifield, 1997) is a messy affair, requiring focused attention and effort. In the US, it is not surprising that professional organizations such as the American Planning Association (APA) (2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b) and the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) (2005b) have witnessed or participated in continued dialogue about racial diversity in the profession.

The ends

In this discussion of the just city, it is important to consider both means and ends. By ends we refer to the goal that planners are trying to achieve in today's

cities and urban regions, and means refers to the process by which this goal is attained. Ends and means may be interrelated, contingent upon one another and dynamic according to situation (Healey, 2003).

Concerning the goal of a just city, first we must note that values such as equity or justice may not be so much universal as individualized, necessitating that we take great care in analyzing the context under consideration (Watson, 2006). Furthermore, definitions are not simple matters. The definition of justice, for example, varies according to conditions of knowledge and power, or context (Healey, 2003; Young, 1990), with not a little confusion caused by successively varying historical understandings of the meaning of the concept of justice, dating from Aristotle to Marx to Rawls and beyond (Fleischacker, 2004; Merrifield and Swyngedouw, 1997; Stein and Harper, 2005). Some Marxists or political economists may eschew 'justice' as a vague moralism, while some liberal scholars may champion the concept but strip their discussion of urban context or means of implementation (Katznelson, 1997). Nevertheless, it is still possible to argue that planners should strive for the 'just city' as a main end or goal of planning action (Fainstein, 2000, 2005; Krumholz and Forester, 1990; Harvey, 2003; Krumholz and Clavel, 1994). Fainstein argues that planning theory should take 'an explicitly normative position concerning the distribution of social benefits' (Fainstein, 2000: 467). She presents a definition of the 'just city' that is twofold, looking at both process and product: 'A theory of the just city values participation in decision making by relatively powerless groups and equity of outcomes' (Fainstein, 2000: 468).² It is this dualistic definition that we use in this article.

Focusing on results or 'equity of outcomes' – as opposed to process – is an important component of this definition, even though the power of planning to shape outcomes is and always has been limited (Fainstein, 2005). Outcomes often stem from processes during which powerful economic interests dominate decision-making, a fact which has taught us to beware of actions touted as being in the 'public interest' which nevertheless have led to grossly inequitable results for vulnerable populations. Scholars such as Paul Davidoff and Norman Krumholz have called for advocacy and equity planning, approaches which focus on process but also on equity of results in the field, particularly for the disadvantaged (Davidoff, 1965; Krumholz and Forester, 1990). Their work helps keep us on track, although it is important to note that they have not focused on the social structures that underlie uneven distribution, a situation described by Fainstein in her criticism of 'post-structural'³ thinkers, who have 'identified the way in which space embodies power without necessarily locating its source in particular groups of people' (Fainstein, 1997: 26). It is one thing to identify with the disadvantaged, as did Davidoff, but it is another to recognize and analyze what people and organizations are in power, creating the situation that leads to others' disadvantage. The work of political economists such as Harvey reminds us that economic considerations, particularly structural manifestations of economic power, influence the outcomes we see in cities (Harvey, 1973, 1992; Watson, 2006).

Watson has explicitly examined the usefulness of normative theories such as the just city for oppressed residents of urban South Africa, warning that solutions supposedly designed for social justice (such as the destruction of substandard housing) may indeed work to the detriment of people seeking autonomy (as in intentional informal settlements; Watson, 2002). She has also argued that current forms of justice as defined and promoted by authors such as Rawls and Habermas assume conditions of liberalism and universality which do not fit non-Western contexts, particularly situations characterized by 'deep differences' (Watson, 2006). Building on Bollens's work concerning fractured urban societies (Bollens, 2004), she has seen the situation of 'deep difference' – which appears to be growing in part because of the uneven development that accompanies globalization, leading to enhanced fragmentation by race, income, class, and other categories – as particularly problematic because of vastly different value systems that accompany growing social disjuncture around the world. Although she argues that no universal definition of justice exists, she too urges planners to undertake efforts that create just outcomes, and she references several of Harvey's suggestions, such as creation of social organizations and economic systems that minimize the exploitation of labor, and action that recognizes the ecological impact of social projects (Watson, 2006).

Leonie Sandercock has suggested that diversity is part of the goal in urban contexts (Sandercock, 2003). She defines a just city as one in which everyone is treated with respect, no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, or sexual orientation. During some such discussions of diversity, however, race may be submerged under the larger umbrella of multiculturalism.⁴ This in itself is a problem because some dilemmas (ethnic oppression in some parts of the world, racial oppression in North America, poverty) are much more deeply ingrained within key social and economic institutions than other forms of inequity (Catlin, 1993; Thomas and Darnton, 2006; Thomas and Ritzdorf, 1997; Yiftachel, 2006). Therefore, a simple call for respect for all kinds of difference may not be enough to address the concerns of those suffering the longest and deepest inequities. This situation, too, reminds us of Fainstein's warning that post-structuralist thought, although rightly concerned about social injustice, may place too much emphasis on diversity as opposed to political action and economic equality (Fainstein, 1997).

The goal of the 'just city' appears to be important even if a commonly accepted definition of what this means may not exist. Even without transparency of definition, at least one professional organization in what Yiftachel calls the North-West, the AICP in the US, has adopted a Code of Ethics (2005a) which refers to 'social justice' as a legitimate goal for planners. One of several main principles of that code states: 'We shall seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration.' If we assume that the just city, characterized by some form of 'equity' of outcomes, is indeed an important goal or 'end' for urban planning, how are we to reach it?

The means

The above discussion suggests that the definition of means to reach the 'just city' will vary by national or regional (continental or sub-continental) context. For the US, the AICP Code assumes that the means is clear: planners must simply plan for the disadvantaged and promote integration, as well as 'urge the alteration of policies, institutions, and decisions that oppose such needs' (AICP, 2005a). This is essentially the approach of 'equity planning', as well (Krumholz and Forester, 1990), with an important difference in assumptions. The US professional code does not mention political context, has conceptual roots in the faith in expertise characteristic of the rational process, and implies that the practice of planning can help lead to 'social justice' if this is so mandated by the professional organization. The code gives no guidance about what to do when principles of loyalty (to employers and other powers-that-be) and social reform (for the disadvantaged) *compete*, a not-uncommon situation for planners. This code also does not address the simple question of how to insure that a planner has the motivation or ability to pursue social justice when local contexts argue against this. Krumholz (and his co-authors) clearly knew that the political context was complicated, and these writings attempted to educate planners about the essential nature of social justice and its promotion, but again the issue of motivation was barely addressed (Krumholz and Clavel, 1994; Krumholz and Forester, 1990).

Davidoff's conception of advocacy planning suggested that planners recognize the presence of multiple publics, and provide professional services for disadvantaged populations, but these concepts of advocacy (Davidoff, 1965) arose at a time in the US history when federal programs such as Model Cities provided disadvantaged central-city residents with the resources and autonomy necessary to hire planning services, a situation that seldom exists in modern times (save for developmentally advanced organizations such as certain community development corporations). Theorists of neither equity planning nor advocacy planning addressed the possible danger of planners focusing on social equity as philanthropic act rather than collaborative endeavor among equals.

Communicative (Innes, 1995, 1996) and collaborative (Healey, 2003) planning have emerged as popular vehicles for addressing the concerns of multiple parties in situations characterized by competing values and interests. These paradigms clearly have drawbacks in situations of uneven power, however, a situation that has been explored in the planning theory literature (Flyvbjerg, 2002; Watson, 2002; Yiftachel, 2006). To put the commentary simply, some people are more powerful than others, and the less powerful are usually disadvantaged in any dialogue or collaboration that might take place. Although these authors rely upon a Foucaultian framework and so they surely understand that power is always manifest (Gutting, 2005), the question is whether the innately uneven distribution of power can be suspended at least while deliberations are underway.

Flyvbjerg (2002) has offered possible strategies for overcoming such manifestations of power, such as exploring the abuse of power, and then publicizing

and moving to counteract injustice, an approach which he has modeled in Denmark concerning transportation plans for the central business district of the city of Aalborg. Denmark, however, is more homogeneous than several other countries in the North and West, and exhibits relatively few internal differences of the kind Watson describes as 'deep differences'. Flyvbjerg's ability to publicize his research in the local Danish media, revealing the negative effects of an established pattern of power, in effect illustrates Watson's point that not all contexts offer equivalent opportunities for reform.

For societies characterized by long-standing inequities, reflected in an urban landscape fractured by major differences in social and economic opportunity, with patterns of racial or other segregation that affect all aspects of daily life, the following questions are very important: what might motivate a planner to seek to work for the goal of the just city? How can we find or train planners willing to overcome the strictures of bureaucratic complacency and seek to work at least in part to enhance either the outcome or process of the just city? For it does little good to promote the goal of social justice if means for insuring or encouraging practice which leads to social justice are not at hand.

Here is where, among a collection of strategies, we might place recruitment and retention of members of the minority-race population into the ranks of the planning profession. The desired behavior – which for the sake of shorthand discussion we might term *advocacy*, by which we mean the promotion of the just city as defined by Fainstein in citations above – can be exhibited by any one, of any race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or any other criterion, and we should expect support for principles of social justice from all planners of good conscience. Inevitably, however, some will be more motivated in this direction than others.

Hypothetically, we might expect that a profession which contained representatives of populations disadvantaged *for that societal context* might very well find its responsiveness towards social justice *in that society* to be enhanced. In modern South Africa, for example, it would seem to be very difficult for the urban planning profession to attend to the needs of social justice in the spatial reorganization of urban society if the former ethnic and racial victims of apartheid did not also become lead politicians or members of the planning profession, or at least become involved in the planning process, and develop the knowledge, will, and motivation needed to help steer decision-making toward the goal of social justice. This is not to suggest that professional inclusion is a sufficient condition – in modern South Africa, for example, economic conditions of inequality and underdevelopment are so entrenched that largely black governmental leadership and increasingly inclusionary planning have generated progress but have not yet been able to bring about equitable cities (Lund and Skinner, 2004; Ozler, 2007; Parnell, 2004) – but rather that it is a necessary one. In apartheid South Africa and in Israel, and in other places characterized by 'deep difference' backed by rule of law (Yiftachel and Ghanem, 2004), it is not clear that the racial and ethnic characteristics of planners would matter at all.

In at least the North American context, however, particularly in metropolitan areas severely fractured by race and poverty lines or their intersections

– as is the case in US metropolitan areas, which have many such intersections (Wilson, 2003) – it would seem to make sense to recruit to the profession members of the society's most marginalized racial minorities. Many large metropolitan areas still reflect high levels of racial segregation, with central cities typically containing much larger percentages of minority races than surrounding suburbs, and the level of racial segregation is particularly high in Midwestern and Northeastern metropolitan areas such as Detroit, Chicago, and New York City (Farley et al., 2000). Although subtle barriers such as municipal fragmentation and socio-economic stratification supported by tools such as zoning and inadequate public transportation often reinforce informal barriers, particularly for the poor, gains in civil rights legislation and popular perception have loosened racial constraints supported by law, and blatant racial discrimination in such matters as formal access to housing is not legally defensible. Differences are deep, therefore, but not so deep or so entrenched legally as to be insurmountable.

The minority-race planner

It is of course not so much the race or ethnicity of planners as their orientation and skill sets that are important. Forester (2000) has noted that planners will increasingly need to work with social inequalities, and they will need to be aware of the role of race, gender, and ethnicity. He suggests that planning does not need complacent bureaucrats, but rather people who 'speak articulately to the realities of poverty and suffering, deal with race, displacement, and histories of underserved communities in ways that do not leave people's pain at the door' (Forester, 2000: 259). Given this situation, planners of many different racial or ethnic backgrounds could meet these criteria concerning the ability to 'deal with race' and to address problems of poverty, displacement, and insufficient service without leaving 'people's pain at the door' – a possible reference to advocacy – and all minority-race planners would not necessarily have the ability to do so. However, it would seem conceptually reasonable to assume that some minority-race planners could prove to have particularly useful skills related to these specific tasks, perhaps because of bonds of culture, history, community, or sentiment. If so, agency effectiveness could be diminished if racial minorities were severely underrepresented in the planning profession.

In a remarkable book chapter on urbanization and injustice, Marshall Berman (1997) once wrote about the political value of African American rap, an art form that was perhaps purest in its earliest state, before violent tendencies took over certain 'gangsta rap' practitioners. As he described the early characteristics of this phenomenon, rap was once a way for disenfranchised, disadvantaged ghetto youth to address the circumstances of their confinement in ways eloquent and focused. He noted that the humble but sophisticated lyrics written by the first wave of rappers said a lot of what we need to know about power and protest in the contemporary US, and this form soon became popular for a wide range of people around the world who wanted to speak from the street. If black youth raised in the ghetto have special skills or insights which

enable them to represent the truth of disadvantage in creative ways, might not planners living as racial minorities in a severely fragmented metropolis have comparable effects in the milieu of urban planning and decision-making?

And yet underrepresentation by both race and gender has been a problem in the past. In Canada and the US, diversity by gender has grown over the last few years, although not as rapidly as might be expected given the increasing presence of women in planning student populations (Rahder and Altilia, 2004). The presence of racial minorities, however, is low relative to total population figures. In the US, the body of professional planners, APA, probably includes fewer than 10 percent racial minorities, compared with over 30 percent of the general population. In 2004, APA estimated that 2.7 percent of its members were black or African American, 2.9 percent Asian, and 2.2 percent Hispanic (APA, 2005a). This situation has led the professional planning organization in the US to initiate a series of strategies designed to increase recruitment and retention of racial minorities in the planning profession (APA, 2005a).

Does the presence of racial minorities in the urban planning profession better lead to the 'end' of the just city? To this simple question it would be hard to reply 'yes'. The conceptual difficulties of claiming this would be several, but the main problem is the required indication that planners who are racial minorities somehow help produce better outcomes leading to a just city than planners who are not. Berman (1997), Merrifield (1997) and Soja (1997) among others have warned against the tendency to claim exclusion of reform sensibility or binary thinking characteristic of modernism, that is to claim that 'just us' (of a certain race or of certain disadvantages) can bring about positive social change, a position which can cause serious problems of isolation and exclusion. To be sure, a few planning narratives have suggested that the race of the planner can have a positive effect on planning results. Two primary US examples are Catlin (1993), who argued that his African American heritage was of decided advantage in the quest for just solutions to the planning problems of Gary, Indiana, and Thomas (1997), who offered narrative accounts of black planners who saw themselves as the best representatives of the black community during the battles in Detroit over urban renewal during the 1950s and 1960s, and who logged limited successes in changing the outcomes of specific urban renewal projects to the benefit of predominantly African American communities. Other supportive commentary for such a concept is difficult to find, however.

Another problem with answering such a question in the affirmative is that it implies that a planner's efforts can change conditions of injustice in the urban context, *and* that the race or ethnicity of the planner affects this effort. Although efforts to correct injustice do exist, some would argue that the political economy is in effect rigged to subvert true reform, and some evidence supports this claim (Fainstein, 1997; Logan and Molotch, 2007; Soja, 1997).⁵ This would logically be true regardless of the genetic background of the planner, and indeed one might argue that planners who are racial minorities in situations of uneven opportunity may have much less personal power to move the system than planners who are not.

While much of the above commentary concerning the just city and minority-race planners stems from conceptualization, it is possible to envision empirical research designed to explore these thoughts. In some allied disciplines, researchers have found that the race of the professional does appear to lead to more just outcomes for minority-race communities; this is not exactly the same as a just city, but it comes closer than several alternatives. The most prominent of such examples of research would be in public administration. In one branch of public administration scholars have pursued a concept known as ‘representative bureaucracy’, referring to the relative presence of various classes, educational levels, etc. in government service (Brudney et al., 2000; Lim, 2006; Meier, 1975; Murray et al., 1994; Sowa and Selden, 2003). One subset of research studies looks at racial diversity within government as being of particular benefit for racial-minority communities, for several tangible reasons. Often based on a number of large-scale survey questionnaires, this research suggests that minority communities may gain greater access and better service results when served by a public sector which includes representatives of their racial group (Brudney et al., 2000; Sowa and Selden, 2003).

One potential step between conceptualization and extensive empirical work comparable to that in public administration would be to carry out qualitative research designed to explore the processes at work from the perspective of a few individuals belonging to some subset, such as, here, minority-race planners. Creswell (1994) describes this approach particularly well. As he noted, such a qualitative approach could start with theory – as, in this case, the possibility that minority-race planners make unique contributions but face unique challenges – but not *test* the theory so much as explore possibilities for further inquiry. The examples he cites often reflect interviews with or intense study of a very few individuals or cases (Creswell, 1994). In such studies, the aim is not to generalize to any population or to proclaim ‘findings’ but rather to further clarify the issues at play (beyond, in this case, the author’s own thoughts).

The author identified a few African American planners to interview in the fall of 2006, based on questions informed by the representative bureaucracy literature and the need to explore this concept of the ‘just city’. The attempt was not to represent all black American planners, but rather to anchor theory in reality by seeing how a few such planners reacted to in-depth questions concerning the interconnections of race and the planning profession, an area not well explored, and to identify issues needing further research (APA, 2005a; Hoch, 1994). These six were ‘representative’ of only their subset: graduates from one urban planning program in Michigan, representing perhaps a fourth of the group who had graduated from that program between 1990 and 2001 and who could be traced, and about one-half of this university’s black graduates in that cohort who were working for in-state public agencies.⁶ We chose these planners not because of any outstanding professional accomplishments or expressions of content or discontent, but rather because of their accessibility to the author, their work experience in a US state where at least moderate if not ‘deep’ difference – racial segregation and greatly unequal life circumstances – are known to

exist (Darden et al., forthcoming; Farley et al., 2000; Orfield and Luce, 2003), their employment by public sector agencies, and the fact that they had been in the field (since at least 2001) long enough to be at least tentatively 'established'. The six were located throughout the state, but all had at least some experience working as a planner in metropolitan Detroit, an area characterized by extensive historical and contemporary racial segregation, inequality, and antagonism (Farley et al., 2000; Sugrue, 1996; Thomas, 1997).

When asked directly if their work benefited the needs of African American or other minority communities, these Michigan planners were able to offer very few specific examples of such benefit. One transportation planner mentioned his ability to facilitate a project involving an Indian tribe more quickly than had been the case before, and he directly credited this to his personal experience with disadvantage as a minority, but his explanation focused more on process than on product. 'Being black in this country, you are able to understand how to sympathize with people when they are put out. When they are being worked against for the wrong reasons. . . I could be seen as more sensitive to their needs.' Another planner referred to her work with HOPE VI, again citing her ability to advocate for the needs of the local residents and help complete the project. Such examples, however, do sound more process-oriented than product-oriented, since they apparently focus on communication and access rather than on altered results.

For the second category of concern, process or means, we have suggested that the presence of minority-race urban planners may offer distinct advantages for certain kinds of work. The workplace diversity literature notes tangible benefits of a diverse work staff for the internal workings of organizations and for their work in society at large. Although much is yet to be learned and documented about this process, specific benefits internal to the workplace seem to include improvement in functionality and creativity. For example, the presence of a diverse workforce may bring ideas and strategies to the organization that would not otherwise be present. Wise and Tschirhart (2000) review this burgeoning 'diversity in the workplace' literature and summarize these arguments. Other, related sources suggest that diverse workers create more effectiveness in the field for some professions. Social work scholars have explicitly determined that effective practitioners need to understand oppression and value diversity, in part by developing 'cultural competency', and they have developed models of classroom training which help future practitioners develop necessary skills and sensibilities (Marsh, 2004; Min, 2005; Schmitz et al., 2001). Such efforts could conceivably benefit from the presence in social work of professionals who already have, because of their personal background, facility with the culture experiencing oppression.

When we asked these black Michigan planners how their work benefited minority communities, their process-oriented answers suggested that they saw themselves as playing an important role in improving processes. These planners became extremely animated and detailed when describing their contributions to the process of inclusion for minority-race or low-income communities. One

of the questions that seemed to elicit the most response was: 'What are the particular advantages or disadvantages associated with being a black planner in your workplace, or in the areas you serve?'

The commentary that erupted is too detailed to explain fully here, but two main categories of response related to these planners' ability: 1) to defend the interests of the minority or disadvantaged community within the agency, and 2) to serve as a bridge, that is to link communication between urban communities and planning agencies. Concerning the defense of community function, several of these planners were very assertive in their stated belief that they were able 'watch out for' the interests of low-income minority communities. A typical account would relate to a specific project, such as a transportation project involving a community with a high proportion of minorities, where the planner found himself or herself explaining to his or her colleagues that public meetings would have to be held at times convenient to the working-class residents, and the planner attributed this greater sensitivity to the planner's minority race. One planning agency staffer discussed the reactions of her majority-race colleagues to the presence of representatives of the minority-race central city on a multi-jurisdictional board, and suggested that the central-city residents were treated by majority-race planners as 'retards, but they are city officials, experts, planners, engineers and they have a background in doing quality work for decades now'. This planner claimed that without her presence this casual dismissal of the minority-race representatives' opinion would go unchallenged.

Concerning the 'bridge' function, the second major category, several of these planners indicated that they communicated with underrepresented populations better than their colleagues. One said 'you figure that you can work better with your kind'. Another noted: 'I feel like when I do go to Detroit or smaller communities that feel like they don't have a voice, it is easier for me to build a relationship with those communities. And it doesn't necessarily have to be a black community, it could be the Latino community, it could be a poorer community.' She felt that her 'sincerity' was stronger than that of most planners. 'I can't say it is for all blacks in the planning profession, 'cause there might be some sincere other folks as well.' Speaking of her colleagues in one former job, located in a predominantly black city, and apparently linking race and motivation, she commented: 'they were all black planners and [therefore] they all felt compelled to really do something for the greater good'.

One noted that his white colleagues saw him as a bridge:

In the field, sometimes as an African American you are always expected to be able to deal with urban environment issues and you are kind of a guide. You may get tagged to do certain things because some of your white counterparts might not feel comfortable working in these areas.

This planner saw a distinct disadvantage to being one of a few blacks in the workplace; colleagues relied upon him to serve as a bridge, oblivious to his other work commitments. Other black planners offered specific examples of community residents, rather than themselves or their colleagues, offering the

opinion that black planners served as a bridge. One planner noted that, when her white colleagues went to a particular public meeting with a large number of low-income racial minorities, the planners came back to the office and reported that no one seemed to have anything to say about the issue the planners were trying to discuss. When the black planner went to meet with the same population, however, she heard a flood of opinions, which apparently had been saved until she – perceived either as a part of the community or as a more sensitive ear – arrived.

These few accounts suggest that it is important to explore whether indeed a special role exists for minority-race planners to assist with the process of inclusion, by facilitating enhanced participation by disadvantaged minorities, helping to fulfill one half of Fainstein's definition of what a theory of a just city 'values' (2000: 468). But the interviewed planners, and the literature, suggest that a steep price may be paid for these apparent benefits.

Researchers in other professional fields have noted the possible problems. In the medical field, a recently published study of African American internal medicine physicians in six states outlined the substantial experience of race-related challenges for interviewed physicians. Among the implications of race was the emergence of what the researchers called 'racial fatigue', born of persistent experiences of racial discrimination and distrust, and leading to several negative consequences for their personal and professional lives (Nunez-Smith et al., 2007).

Public administration researchers have found that those racial minorities working in the public sector (and offering better service to racial minority communities) may pay a price. One of the first public administration scholars to describe that price was Adam Herbert (1974), whose work laid the groundwork for more recent research (Murray et al., 1994). According to what is known as the 'Herbert thesis', minority public administrators can find themselves facing at least six key dilemmas. The first 1) is that their workplace may expect them to comply with official policies, but those policies could be in conflict with the goals of the minority community. Two other concerns were: 2) they are likely to be assigned to marginal job categories which deal with minority issues but true resolution of those issues could be very difficult to achieve; and 3) they may experience pressure from their colleagues to support the organization and its goals rather than to support the minority community's interests. Finally, three other concerns were: 4) the minority community expects them to be accountable to that community, in spite of their work situation demanding accountability to the organization; 5) they may indeed feel a strong personal commitment to carry out policies that promote the interests of that community; but 6) they may also feel pressure to ignore the interests of the community in order to advance in their personal careers (Murray et al., 1994). Such professionals must decide how to respond when competing goals confront them in their work, and their work may indeed suffer because of the effort involved.

In terms of the Herbert thesis, our interview questions asked about only three dimensions of the six listed above – concerning system demands (the first problem listed above), community accountability (the fourth listed), and

personal commitment (the fifth) – but respondents offered comments, on their own, about other dimensions as well, particularly concerning colleague pressure.

It appeared that the pressures described by the Herbert thesis did apply to these black planners in Michigan. To a series of questions about system demands, accountability, and personal commitment, several respondents noted that they were indeed feeling pressure and conflicting demands at their workplaces, serious enough to cause at least two of the six to consider leaving the field.

System demands largely related to the expectation that the planner conform to the policies of the agency, even if he or she perceived those policies to be harmful, or not helpful, to the black community. For example, one planner noted that his organization was supposed to look at impacts on the community of its actions, and that it gave lip service to this goal, but that the agency appeared to have a blind side when it came to certain decisions related to a project that could pose great difficulties for a nearby minority or low-income community. Another planner recalled the reaction when she specifically asked to study an issue that related to the health of a project's nearby low-income community, populated in large part by Hispanics; she was told that such concerns were 'a lot of crap'. Asked to rate their organizations' 'dedication to seeking minority community input and participation', on a 10-point scale, the six gave responses ranging from 1 to 10, with an average of 5.5. Efforts to change the culture of the organizations seemed futile, however: one person noted, 'it's difficult to move an organization of this size'.

Concerning community accountability, these planners saw themselves as accountable to the 'minority community', which in the case of one respondent actually made up the majority of her community or area of jurisdiction. They rated their role as 'actively advocating on behalf of and providing leadership to increase minority or disadvantaged community participation and input' from 8 to 10, with an average for the six of 9.1. However their perception was that either they had to persuade their majority-race colleagues and supervisors to include the minority community in meaningful ways, or the reaction of their fellow planners blocked their efforts to engage, or at least respect, representatives of that community who attempted to participate in decision-making. One example is the previously referenced situation of a planner's constant need to remind his colleagues that daytime 'participation' meetings were of no use to working-class people.

As far as 'personal commitment' was concerned, these planners saw themselves as highly motivated and committed to advocating within their agency for the needs of minority or economically disadvantaged groups, and several gave personal accounts of such commitments. When asked whether they would suggest the profession as an option for students choosing a career, these planners' responses indicated a high level of personal commitment and dedication to their profession, at least before they encountered such difficulties. Concerning recruitment, five of the six indicated that they would recommend planning as a career for young students, and the sixth said he would not but only

because 'there are better ways to effect change'. One made comments arguing for representatives of several races and age groups, such as: 'We need more color represented and I would say that for every race . . . and we have a poor planning system because it is underrepresented by the population that we have.' He went on to argue: 'You need a champion for you to say, I'm a black person, I understand your problems and that goes a long way . . .'. Another commented that:

I think having blacks in planning that are committed to civic pride and service and who can really stand firm whatever their belief would definitely help the future of communities . . . it's really important to keep that diversity in there because you're not dealing with monotone populations, you know. You're dealing with diverse populations these days.

In addition to such accounts, several respondents offered personal stories of their attraction to the profession speaking to the issue of motivation: they indicated that they entered planning because they were responding directly to the conditions of poverty and disinvestment which affected their own minority-race neighborhoods.

Yet these respondents felt insecure in their efforts. One interviewee mentioned, several times in his interview, the danger of being 'pigeon-holed' if he pressed too hard on behalf of minority or disadvantaged communities. Another interviewee frankly felt harassed because of his efforts to support low-income disadvantaged minority populations, and at least one of his colleagues – also interviewed for this study – agreed that she perceived the colleague as being regularly harassed because he was an outspoken black male. Several told stories of what they perceived as flagrant mistreatment by their colleagues or supervisors, such as the planner who commented that:

there are a lot of white men in planning and they really don't trust or feel that blacks are capable of making higher-level decisions that most planners have to. I think that sometimes black planners are very honest in their assessment of what's really going on and people don't like that.

Some interviewees questioned how long they would be able to work at their agency under these conditions.

Diversifying the profession

These planners indeed found the workplace itself challenging, and felt that system demands and other pressures unique to minority-race planners stymied their efforts to promote the cause of social justice. The theme that emerged most often was that they felt that they offered a unique perspective concerning the special needs of minority communities, as well as low-income communities of any race. They saw themselves as serving the agency in special ways, and serving particularly minority communities in special ways. They claimed that they were highly motivated to enter the profession because of the perception of severe inequalities in their own communities. But they did not feel

supported, by the planning agency or by their colleagues, in their work for social equity.

At least in Michigan, and by implication perhaps in the US, and possibly beyond, the planning profession may need minority-race (or minority-ethnic, etc.) planners in order to help create local conditions of access in those processes necessary for a just city. Yet the effective presence of such racial minorities in the profession may face major barriers, not a few of which exist on the job. Little justification exists for any claim that only minority-race planners can bring about just results, the 'ends' we discussed earlier. Neither can it be argued that only minority-race planners can work in minority-race contexts or create better access for minority-race communities; the necessity of fighting for social justice should rest with all planners. As a practical matter, however, in deeply conflicted contexts, communities disadvantaged in some way may very well look at the diversity of local urban planners as a symbol of access or 'means' toward the goal of social justice. Minority-race planners may see themselves as having a special role to play in the process of local decision-making, and it is entirely conceivable that the perceptions of local minority-race communities may reinforce that tendency. But if minority-race planners cannot survive in the profession, their potential to assist with the process of social change is stillborn.

As we have noted, these thoughts need further exploration and research. Yet if our conceptualization of the issues is correct, one theory to be tested is that minority-race planners in fragmented metropolitan areas can help improve the planning process for minority-race people in matters such as access and connection. If this is indeed true, then at least one appropriate course of action would appear to be fairly obvious. This would be to enhance efforts in minority-race recruitment, in educational programs as well as professional settings, in the reasonable hope that such acts will give greater voice to those who have little. Another theory to be tested is that such minority-race planners face major institutional barriers to their success and effectiveness comparable to those identified by researchers in other professions (Murray et al., 1994; Nunez-Smith et al., 2007). If this is indeed true, much wider institutional and bureaucratic reform would be necessary, far beyond simply recruiting racial minorities to the profession. Corrective action would necessitate examining the social and institutional contexts of planning organizations, in order to discern and correct those barriers which minority-race planners face and which threaten retention, recruitment, and job effectiveness.

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Notes

1. 'Minority' as a sole descriptor, without linkage to race as in 'minority-race', is problematic; it collapses together a number of categories of social groups which may have little in common with each other. Some have therefore called for social

scientists to abolish use of the term (Wilkinson and Butler, 2002). In the context of the US, the focus of much of this article, minority-race people may be considered to be those of African American, American Indian, Asian, and other specific racial backgrounds as defined by the US Census Bureau (2008). 'Race' (or racial background) is also a problematic concept, however. Former thinking that humanity is composed of separate and fairly exclusionary racial categories such as 'black', 'white', 'Asian', etc. has begun to yield to scientific evidence that humanity forms a continuum not easily classified, and to the social reality that many people have ancestral backgrounds from several different 'races' (Hirschman, 2004). Hirschman recommends replacing the concept of 'race' with 'ethnicity', but he recognizes the complexities of this suggestion, particularly for purposes such as national censuses.

2. Although we could further explore the term 'equitable', we may for this article infer the concept of 'fair' and clarify that this does not mean absolute equality in services or outcomes, which is not possible in a democratic society, and quite possibly not in any society.
3. Fainstein (1997) uses post-structuralism as a term inclusive of several theoretical approaches which tend to focus on cultural criticism rather than a strong political-economy analysis.
4. As is gender; see Rahder and Altilia (2004).
5. Some evidence suggests the contrary, arguing that planners can bring about positive change; see in particular, Krumholz and Clavel (1994).
6. Michigan does not have a large number of minority-race planners, with minority-race attendance at statewide planning conferences notably lacking, and the state professional planning chapter does not have a major initiative to enhance racial diversity in planning, as does California (Dinwiddie-Moore, 2006). The six people interviewed were in positions of reasonable responsibility (none were in entry-level jobs, and two headed small planning divisions), and were known to work in locations of potential interest: state, regional, or local agencies with mixed-race staff, covering jurisdictions with at least some racial mixture. Three were women, and all graduated from the accredited planning program referenced. Four had an undergraduate degree in urban planning, and the other two had higher degrees in planning. All 60- to 90-minute interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed through formation of categories of responses suggesting certain patterns, as described in Creswell (1994). The author has maintained communication with the three women over some period of years, allowing for a more in-depth knowledge of their careers.

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