

David J. Karjanen. *The Servant Class City: Urban Revitalization versus the Working Poor in San Diego.* Globalization and Community Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. 312 pp. \$98.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8166-9462-4.

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The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire / We don't need no water let the motherfucker burn—Rock Master Scott

San Diego, similar to many cities throughout the country, invested in redevelopment projects as part of revitalization initiatives within the broader context of economic development. In *The Servant Class City*, David J. Karjanen reveals that such revitalization efforts typically only exacerbate matters for specific segments of the population. As expected, new jobs were created and unemployment rates decreased. But what do these facts really indicate? Karjanen posits that, contrary to the success touted by conventional revitalization strategists, greater disparity is created along racial and gender lines that push the poor and working poor deeper into poverty while only giving the illusion of prosperity. Karjanen focuses on three areas for his analysis: urban and economic development policy, economic institutions and the workplace, and individual and household decision making in relation to economic mobility. He argues that the expansion of the low-wage service sector, a fundamental component of conventional economic development strategies, is seriously flawed. Conventional revitalization strategies are “reduced to architectural and fiscal concerns” with the disproven theories of the trickle-

down effect for poverty alleviation, Karjanen asserts (p. 89). As a result, the exploitation of a servant class—workers that require little education or training—substantively contributes to economic, racial, gender, and class disparities in urban areas. Paradoxically, Karjanen notes, the stated intent of revitalization initiatives is to alleviate poverty, blight, and joblessness. However, through his investigation of San Diego, California, a city that has been engaged for over thirty years in one of the largest revitalization programs in the country, he discovered that in spite of lower unemployment rates, poverty rates substantially increased between 1980 and 2013 as a result of the city's economic development efforts. Metaphorically, “The roof is on fire! And while it burns, our collective policy efforts amount to tinkering with a faulty light bulb,” he asserts (p. 260). Karjanen thus argues that restructuring the entire industry and business model is necessary in order to “develop better evaluations of economic development to capture labor market impacts” (p. 255). The poor, on the other hand, cognizant of their exclusion from the privileges of citizenship based on spatial differentiation, that is “differences of education, property, race, gender and occupations,”[1] shout in concert with Rock Master

Scott's 1984 hit record, "let the motherfucker burn." [2]

The first section of *The Servant Class City* focuses on the evolution of a servant class in the urban core as a result of structural forces. In this section Karjanen aptly illustrates how the lack of quality jobs, not the lack of jobs, is the issue. Although what is meant by quality job is complex, Karjanen defines it as a position with a higher wage, particularly since over the last three decades nearly 60 percent of San Diego's workers made less than ten dollars per hour. Part 2 illuminates how the hospitality and retail industries rely primarily on on-call and part-time work and discusses the effects on the working poor. The final section provides an analysis of the challenging decisions individuals and households must make existing in a servant class economy. Beginning with externalities that influence local practices and behaviors, Karjanen argues that the city's adoption of a neoliberal capitalist approach to urban revitalization, in which constant economic growth and development are fundamental, lacks proper accountability measures. In fact, he provides intriguing accounts of contradictory strategies. In one example, an inner-city revitalization initiative was severely compromised by a competing economic development strategy of home mortgages, commercial development, and highway subsidies that "drew more and more industry and relatively affluent residents to the suburbs" (p. 13).

As they lack the requisite income, good credit, and access to financial institutions to take advantage of subsidies for living in suburbia, Karjanen aptly notes, low-wage workers are forced to become service providers to tourists, conventioners, and the small segment of high-wage workers living in the suburbs. As a result, distinct racialized space is produced in which an individual's perceived citizenship is directly correlated. Lack of access to particular areas, quality jobs, and education is also effective in formulating the surplus

low-wage labor market that is not only fundamental to national markets but also vital to global economies. The influx of immigrants from across the border into San Diego escaping Mexico's depressed economy, for example, increases the supply of laborers (surplus servant class workers) seeking work at higher wages than paid in Tijuana, but lower than the average wage paid in San Diego. The global economy is affected in two fundamental ways: Mexican immigrant workers become consumers in American markets, and they provide remittances that enable family members to purchase goods and services integral to the Mexican economy.

Using compelling vignettes, Karjanen does an exceptional job of humanizing individuals seemingly paralyzed in a hopeless cycle of low-wage jobs that lack advancement opportunities or health benefits. Poor workers, when placed in the untenable position of having to choose between paying for vocational training without job prospects, loaning money to family with little hope of repayment, or accepting a promotion with less job security, experience a condition Karjanen refers to as "cumulative disadvantages" for poor workers (p. 158). Further, Karjanen notes that "often the urban poor and working poor *do not have any good choices that can be made!*" (p. 249). As a result, the poor engage in practices that cause them to spiral deeper into indebtedness, such as using the services of predatory lending institutions. Due to the absence of good choices, he argues, workers are forced to rely on "Do-It-Yourself Safety Nets" as part of an informal economy. For instance, consider the plight of Raymond, a key informant from the inner-city who has worked with Karjanen since the beginning of the ten-year research project. Described as an enterprising hardworking and determined thirty year old, who barely finished high school, Raymond is not deterred by his inability to secure employment in the formal sector at factories or shipyards. Instead, in the genuine spirit of entrepreneurship, Raymond establishes an informal

taxi service for friends and neighbors. Although the safety net approach staves off evictions and car repossessions, for example, Karjanen argues that removal of workers from a formal economy to an informal economy is not the solution. Rather than indirectly promoting the expansion of informal economies due to inadequate policy prescriptions, Karjanen notes, revitalization strategies should include supportive services, such as paid education and training, quality jobs with upward mobility, and access to regulated financial institutions.

Karjanen further argues in writing about Raymond that “the barriers he faces are not spatial, nor are they racial discrimination in the labor market (he is white), but they are economic” (p. 4). I agree that economics play a vital role in Raymond’s dilemma; however, due to the prevailing understanding of race, whereby race equates to national identity and an individual’s sense of belonging or citizenship, Raymond’s whiteness is more than parenthetical. As I found in my investigation of South Carolina’s Gullah Geechee, an indigenous population of African descent, postcolonial spatial realities were a reiteration of colonial expectations of race in relation to “caste-type-access” to servant class jobs.[3] Thus, I argue, similar to the Gullah Geechee, Raymond’s whiteness positions him within a tourist class and servant binary based on a colonial planter class and slave binary. Only specific jobs are available to him as a result. Stuart Hall argues against such a reductionist approach in which structural forces constituting social formations are relegated solely to economics.[4] The displacement of African American workers in the hospitality service sector by Latinos “who don’t complain” constitutes specific formations of citizenship due to spatial differentiation (p. 103). Is the Latino workers’ silence about the workplace and lack of quality jobs acquiescence, or is it an acknowledgment of the reality of racial profiling that places naturalized citizens at risk of deportation? As Karjanen illustrates, poverty is a lucrative enterprise. Poor communi-

ties on the periphery of urban centers are inundated with services that charge exorbitant fees. Pawnshops, check-cashing stores, furniture rental outlets, and financial institutions that provide tax refunds, car titles, and payday loans are just a few of the services Karjanen highlights. Coupled with low-wage jobs, these services aid in perpetuating a cycle of impoverishment that in turn maintains racial hierarchies and exclusion from the full privileges of citizenship. Yet as dire as the situation appears, and as Holston, Ananya Roy, and I argue, individuals perceived as poor within dominant discourses on race and economics often construct “alternative formulations of citizenship” through intentional and substantive participation in informal economies (p. 246).[5] In so doing, ostensibly disempowered segments of society conspicuously destabilize normative notions of citizenship.

Contrary to Karjanen’s assertion that good choices elude the poor and working poor, I argue that participation in informal economies is more than happenstance. It is a distinct representation of people’s intention to claim citizenship on their own terms. Although admittedly rarely acknowledged formally, informal economies are often an integral component of urban economies. As a result, those perceived as poor within neocolonial capitalism emphatically assert their right to alternative formations of citizenship by allowing the “burning” of a construct of citizenship for which they receive little or no benefits. The Gullah Geechee, for instance, were able to achieve a level of autonomy in the racially segregated South by using a complex system of self-defined kinship networks of distribution. In other words, in their construction of self, a degree of self-sufficiency was attained. In *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (2001), Karl Polanyi also posits that redistribution networks based on a non-materialistic epistemology that prioritize the community’s collective well-being over individual interests promote community cohesion while enhancing an individual’s

sense of belonging. In *The Servant Class City*, Karjanen expertly illustrates the ineffectiveness of conventional revitalization initiatives devised to reduce poverty. However, to situate race and class within a spatial and temporal context would help illuminate the entanglements of citizenship. The recognition of informal economies based on reciprocity as an effective strategy “to mitigate some of the vulnerabilities of the urban poor” could also assist in formulating viable approaches to poverty alleviation beyond merely an economic determinant.[6]

Notes

[1]. James Holston, “Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries,” *City and Society* 21, no. 2 (2009): 245-267, quotation on 255.

[2]. Lyrics.coms, STANDS4 LLC, 2017, “The Roof Is on Fire Lyrics,” <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/1284147> (accessed July 13, 2017).

[3]. Lisa Faulkenberry, John Coggeshall, Kenneth Backman, and Shelia Backman, “A Culture of Servitude: The Impact of Tourism and Development on South Carolina’s Coast,” *Human Organization* 59, no. 1 (2000): 86-95, quotation on 90.

[4]. Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen and David Morley (London: Routledge, 1996), 411-440.

[5]. Holston, “Insurgent Citizenship”; and Ananya Roy, “Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning,” *Journal of American Planning Association* 71, no. 2 (2005): 147-158.

[6]. Roy, “Urban Informality,” 147.

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