

# Grow Old With Me! Future Directions of Race, Age, and Place Scholarship

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## Abstract

This article reviews current theories of age and place to demonstrate a more inclusive perspective in sociology that considers race, age, and place. Scholars who study age have advanced our knowledge about what place means to old people or how environment operates in an oppressive way to aged bodies. Likewise, race scholars have advanced our knowledge about the ways oppression and White supremacy are rooted in place. Yet the two bodies of literature do not inform one another, and there are potentially dangerous gaps in our knowledge that contribute to oppression. The result is age scholarship about environment that lacks a critical race perspective and race scholarship on place that ignores the oppressive conditions of age. By reviewing these pieces, I argue that scholars must inform themselves of the ways in which we overlook important analyses and may potentially contribute to our own ageism.

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As a graduate student, I had the opportunity to present some very early findings of my dissertation research about age and place at the Midwest Sociological Society (Byrnes, 2007). During the question and answer period, an old woman, a Black old woman, and distinguished professor (ashamedly, I do not remember her name), remarked (and I paraphrase),

I think this is the first study I have seen about old black men that did not problematize them as a body of diseases or criminals. They are a real group of people with very ordinary lives, desires, and dreams: nice work.

I do not open with this anecdote to pat myself on the back. I offer this story because it reinforced my own lifelong frustration as a gerontologist – scholarship never seemed to reflect the somewhat ordinary and everyday lives of older adults I worked for as an activist in Detroit, Michigan. I longed for scholarship that moved marginalized individuals and narratives to the center of our discussions. And as a scholarly young romantic, I hoped this decentering scholarship smashed paradigms, interrogated processes, and ultimately improved the lives of those individuals we study. I simply could not understand at the time why there was not a critical race perspective in gerontology rather than reducing non-White aged bodies to essentialist discussions of diabetes intervention in mostly Black senior housing and communities. At the root of this overly kind professor's comments was something most sociology of age scholars and critical gerontologists know, we are fighting ageism and racism in every area of scholarship. Nearly 8 years later I still ask myself, where are the critical race theorists on old age, place, and age relations? There is a dangerous gap in our sociological imaginations when it comes to race and old age: nowhere might this vacancy be more evident than in place-based studies.

As feminist sociologists Toni Calasanti and Kathleen Slevin (2006) point out in feminist studies of age,

[Feminist literature] mention age based oppression but treat it as a given—an ‘*et cetera*’ on a list of oppressions, as if to indicate that we already know what it is. As a result, feminist work suffers, and we engage in our own oppression (2006:1).

I echo the sentiments of Calasanti and Slevin and further extend this invitation to race and place scholars to examine age, as I do to those who study age, to push beyond *et cetera* as explained away variables. When we treat old age or race as *et cetera*, we silence non-White and White older adults and also fail ourselves in understanding how intersecting oppressions operate in old age and how these oppressions might be situated or shaped by place. My aim in this review is to (1) outline the significant body of work that gerontologists who work in place have contributed to our knowledge, (2) highlight some of the work that has been created in age, race, and place, and (3) advocate for race research that is age and race inclusive by providing three areas for deeper scholarship. I suggest that we expand and interrogate our sociological imaginations to provide a new “place” for inquiries of race and racism in old age. In doing so, I join an expanding group of gerontologists who have made a nearly three decade long plea for a more inclusive and critical gerontology (Moody, 1992; Laws, 1993; 1994; Dressel et al., 1997; Minkler and Estes, 1999).

## Age and place

Those who study aging have considered place/environment as a site of discourse and research for several decades (Lawton, 1983; Gitlin et al., 2001; Gitlin 2003; Golant, 2003; 2008; Rowles, 1983; Wahl, 2003). Some scholars in gerontology want to understand the role of the environment in the aging process (i.e. how older people manage physical disabilities), how people age in particular places (i.e. urban or suburban places), or how people feel about or relate to certain places (i.e. attachment to place). Scholars who make a career out of studying the intersections between age and place are referred to as environmental gerontologists.

Literature known as environmental gerontology was brought forth primarily Lawton & Nahemow (1973; Lawton, 1983, 1998). One of the most influential outcomes of their work is Lawton and Nahemow’s theory of environmental press, which sought to understand how a person “fits” into their environment (P-E Fit) and to explicate the role of environment on the physical health and emotional well-being of older people. Environmental press is a theory of adaptation, meaning, an aging individual will adapt to physical constraints located in the environment (e.g. managing steps leading from sidewalk to home) or the place might be altered in a way to adapt to the individual (e.g. installation of a wheelchair ramp). When the environment supports the physical needs of the individual, the person and environment are said to be in equilibrium. Should the environment not suit the physical needs of the person, the theory suggests that the environment may press, or make the physical environment a challenge and this may have a significant impact on the emotional and physical well-being of an older adult. If there was fit between the older person and the environment, then Lawton and Nahemow suggest that person might be able to live “the good life” in old age, which they thought all old people deserved. Lawton and Nahemow seem to assume that older people are entitled to and deserve a “good life” whatever this subjective experience may mean. This often translated to research that examined structural aspects of environments to make the day-to-day life more bearable as an older person, for example, removing throw rugs or installing handrails in the bathroom (Fisher & Giloth, 1999).

Environmental press showed great promise as a theoretical launching point for gerontological scholars (Cutchin, 2001; Kendig, 2003; Golant, 2003; Wahl, 2003). The decades of the 1970s and 1980s was marked by an influx of studies that looked to Lawton’s theory as a way to

understand decision-making processes, emotional and physical well-being, and the residential environments of older people. The field of environmental gerontology in this period frame used Lawton's theory as a given, rather than rigorously examining and testing the hypothesis he brought forth (Kendig, 2003). And while environmental gerontologists brought attention to the sociophysical environments of older people, they did not generate any empirical research to fully explore the multi-dimensional aspect of the spaces and places older people occupy (Author, 2009).

During the 1990s, literature in environmental gerontology slowed and stalled (Golant, 2003; Kendig, 2003; Wahl & Weisman, 2003), and the "promise" of environmental gerontology and Lawton's model continued to remain unfulfilled. While some scholars focused their research on different types of older people (e.g. community dwelling) or specific types of aging places (e.g. assisted living), most scholars utilized environmental press as a theory within empirical research (Lawton, 1989; Longino et al., 1991; Evans et al., 2002; Wahl et al., 2009). In the early 2000s however, *The Gerontologist* published a special issue of the subfield of environmental gerontology where scholars critiqued and showed concern for the lack of research that considered or focused on the environment in relation to older people and the reliance on Lawton's model as a given and set out to renew and revitalize the field of environmental gerontology (Golant, 2003; Gitlin, 2003; Kendig, 2003; Wahl, 2003). Yet nowhere in these important discussions of how to advance our gerontological knowledge did we happen to discuss race.

## Attachment to place

Environmental gerontologists who study place attachment make the assumption that day-to-day experiences happen somewhere and in a certain time; thus, these places and times are also given meaning (Rowles, 1980, 1983; Rubenstein & Parmalee, 1992; McHugh & Mings, 1996; McAuley, 1998; Lysack & Seipke, 2002; Cutchin et al., 2003; Shenk et al., 2004). That is to say, individuals create and maintain meanings in geographic space that bond them emotionally and affectionately to space. As people experience place in their day-to-day lives, there may be certain emotional components and/or bonding that a person may attach to a certain place based on the activity that occurs within the space (e.g. an individual may feel attached to particular geographic places such as a neighborhood corner store because it represents something else to the person). Because these are places that are usually familiar to us, where we repeat activities on a daily basis, we begin to create a particular attachment to the place that is occupied. Associated with the meaning of these places are memories that people associate with or attach to certain places (Rowles, 1980). The idea of memory and meaning of place is particularly salient to those who study older adults. If we accept that memory retrieval is taxed in normal aging conditions, the idea of a place as familiar, known, or having of the feeling of being attached to a place may be of even greater significance in gerontology than has previously been discussed.

Environmental gerontologists have most often looked to the dimensions of place attachment brought forth by the gerontologist and geographer Graham Rowles (Chaudhury, 1999; Cutchin, et al., 2003; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; McAuley, 1998; Marsden, 1999; Manzo, 2003; Perkins Taylor, 2001; Spencer et al., 2001; Swenson, 1998). In his 3-year study of place and personal identity in rural Appalachia, Rowles (1983) identified that the phenomenon of attachment was largely guided by a construct known as "insideness." To be inside a place, or have "insideness" is to identify as belonging to a group or subgroup that occupies a place (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; McAuley, 1998; Swenson, 1998). In this way, social actors feel that they identify with both the place itself and the people within the place; the greater sense of belonging one may feel with the people or the memories of the place, the deeper the level of attachment one may feel to the place.

The central idea behind physical insideness is that people are physically aware of their body in relation to the place they occupy. Social actors are aware of their own body in relation to the details of the physical construction of place, and this knowledge is often tacit or inferred (Chaudhury, 1999; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; McAuley, 1998; Rowles, 1983; Swenson; 1998). It is argued that, over time, social actors will develop a familiarity with a place or home; they travel the same paths in place time and time again so that these pathways become internal rhythms of place and part of everyday life (Rowles, 1980, 1983). And this may be an important rhythm for older adults; as physical and cognitive changes occur in an aging body, it might be important for older adults to be more physically inside an environment.

### Aging-in-place

Aging in place as a body of literature did not surface in gerontology until the late 1980s. The earliest mention of aging-in-place as a theory was mentioned by the Association for the Advancement of Retired People (AARP) in 1990 after publishing their report based on AARP research, *Understanding Senior Housing for the 1990s* (1992). Because of this AARP report, an influx of literature began to deal with the concept of aging in place (Byrnes, 2011). The premise of aging in place is a belief that older people want to grow into old age and potentially their own end of life in a place that is familiar and comfortable to them (Rowles, 1993). One specific reason gerontological scholars have begun to emphasize aging in place in the last 5 years is because they assume that older people will remain independent if allowed to remain in the place they have always lived (Novelli, 2002; Gitlin, 2003).

According to the literature, aging in place is a desired state for older adults and society at large because it fills two requisites: (1) older adults will be independent and not feel like a “burden” to others in society; and (2) society will not be financially “burdened” by older people. Gerontologists, sociologists, economists, political scientists, policy makers, and the mass media have not been timid in asserting the potential fiscal “trouble” Baby Boomers may cause by entering into old age as dependent on social security programs and health care institutions (Estes, 2001; Dillaway & Byrnes, 2009). As argued in the literature, most older people want to be independent but can only be allowed to do so because the place is familiar to them, and older people may have decreasing physical and cognitive function. Therefore, aging in place literature suggests that older people want to age in their home because they can manage the day-to-day “realities” of aging within a place they feel attached to while maintaining the life they have always lived.

The AARP study brought forth several premises that would seem to make sense for an argument for aging in place. For example, 62 percent of the sample owned their homes outright, and 18 percent held mortgages on a home (80 percent then live in single family homes), while only 6 percent of the sample lived in housing specifically designed for older people. Of older adults sampled, 25 percent lived in a city, 27 percent lived in a suburban area, 28 percent lived in a small town, and 20 percent lived in the country. Because 75 percent of this sample lives outside of a city, it could be argued that this sample is biased to suburban/exurban older people, thereby neglecting older adults who occupy oppressed racial, class, and gender groups. Furthermore, 92 percent of the sample identified as White furthering the potential argument that the very foundation of aging in place is rooted in the attitudes and beliefs of older White suburbanites.

The AARP study's use of language and wording reinforces an agenda to age in place. For example, “Consistent with their stated desire to age in place,” 28 percent of older adults had lived in their current residence for over 30 years (AARP, 1993, pg. 9). Finally, 84 percent of older people sampled agreed with the statement “What I'd really like to do is stay in my own home and never move” (1993: 69). This particular loaded question is troublesome because

often times moving, particularly in old age, is not a choice. Moving to a place like a nursing home, assisted living, independent living facility, or some other age-segregated facility is not always a choice; rather it is based on individual circumstances. Therefore, the AARP study seems to legitimate that need for scholarly inquiry and applications to the notion of aging in place, thus, following the 1993 AARP study, a surge of aging in place literature surfaced.

This review has given a brief and general outline of the ways in which gerontology has approached the study of place. The three branches of literature, fit with place, attachment to place, and aging in place are interrelated and speak as a cohesive body of knowledge about what gerontologists think is important when considering environmental context of older adult's lives. What is important to gerontologists is enabling a safe and secure environment for older adults, so that as the seemingly inevitable physical and cognitive changes occur in older adults, the environment can shift with the changing body. Gerontologists are interested in making a lived in environment secure for older adults because it is also presumed that older adults are attached to a "home" and that this "home" has most likely been occupied for several decades. It is argued in the attachment to place literature that home is really a symbol; a symbol that represents a personal identity or a "shell of self" (Mitty & Flores, 2009). Furthermore, this personal identity is wrapped in what it *means* to become an older person and it is assumed that to be an older person means dependency because aging bodies work differently than younger bodies. As is hinted in the literature this "dependency" informs older adults that because they have grown old, that growing old is a bad thing, and that the person they once were (in their younger years) is now gone (Butler, 1975). The person they once were can only be found in the things, memories, places, and shell of self known as "home," so it is in gerontologists best interests to facilitate "independence" in home.

Intersecting social locations of race, class, and gender have been largely overlooked by gerontology scholarship as a whole, and even more so in environmental gerontology (Calasanti, 1993, 1996, 2004; Holstein & Minkler, 2003). Gerontologists have focused on differences between raced or gendered groups of older adults but have not done the necessary work to explicate the roots, meanings, causes, and consequences of intersecting social locations and the impact in old age. While gerontological scholars have been calling for a new "critical gerontology" that moves diversity research to the forefront of scholarship (i.e. Calasanti, 2004; Gubrium, 1992; Holstein & Minkler, 2003), critical gerontologists are largely overshadowed by dominant and prevailing biomedical research in the field. There is, however, some environmental gerontology scholarship that aims to understand race and age in more critical ways.

### Place, age, and race

Because of a biomedical focus in gerontology that often marginalizes the lived experiences of older adults, it makes sense that inequalities, particularly as it relates to place, have not been tackled in any substantive way. Nonetheless, some scholars have qualitatively investigated the intersections between race, age, and place. As a raced-based study, attachment to place may be a particularly useful theory (Perkins Taylor, 2001; McAuley, 1998). Some literature in gerontology has begun to uncover the unique relationship older African Americans have with places and how they build identities based in place. In one such study, McAuley (1998) examined place attachment and identity of African American older adults in historically all Black towns of Oklahoma. McAuley situated his study with the expressed understanding of the historical (i.e. Jim Crow laws) and social (i.e. unequal access to resources) oppression that exists in place and thus, potentially reflected in people. Citing the places of all Black towns as a refuge from oppression that older adults have experienced across their lives, McAuley's study brings forth the idea that older African Americans develop and attach to a place might be different

than what literature had suggested. Some of these differences were discovered in the way individuals formed attachments to place and the meanings of these places. While escaping White supremacist societal norms was impetus to create all-Black towns, there were also spaces of “racial fulfillment self-realization” (p. S38). Where White older adults may attach to particular places because of positive memories and these memories are situated in systems of privilege (i.e. home ownership), older non-White individuals may attach to place because of negative consequences of systems of oppression. All-Black towns for McAuley’s sample were a place where older adults could find freedom from racism in the US south.

Susan Perkins Taylor (2001) demonstrates how even when non-White older adults are utilizing place as safe harbor from racism, oppression is not the mechanism in which place attachments occur. Taylor examines race and place identification in a small town in Indiana through a collection of life stories and explores the contradictory nature of gerontological literature and the way it has portrayed African Americans as vulnerable to poverty and suffering from multiple chronic conditions and disabling conditions. Yet, Taylor argues that African Americans do not view themselves the way they are portrayed in scholarship; one way to begin to understand this discrepancy is to examine attachment and identity formation in place(s). Perkins Taylor argues that attachment to place or autobiographical insideness allows older adults to sustain positive self-images despite the racism her sample encountered in day-to-day life.

Both of these studies informed my own research in age and race in an age-segregated publicly subsidized apartment building in Detroit, Michigan (Byrnes, 2009). Through a series of photographic elicitation interviewing and 9 months of fieldwork, I found that older adults who lived in Detroit’s central city created positive aged identities despite structural racism that limited their housing opportunities across their lives. One contribution from this work explores the ways older adults in this study did not want to age in place at all if aging-in-place means to remain in the community where they had previously lived. Many of these communities were places where older adults were forced to live because of racist federal policies that limited home ownership. In fact, older adults saw this newly built public housing as a way to escape deleterious neighborhood conditions and often extreme poverty and live the “good life” they thought they deserved. Individuals saw this age-segregated building as an opportunity to not only escape rough neighborhood conditions but also to escape a history of lifelong oppressions related to racism, classism, and sexism. This “good life” meant being left alone and living in a “nice, quiet, place” because they could create identities in a private space away from racism, classism, and sexism. In addition, older adults never considered their bodies when thinking about environmental “fit.” Instead, individuals in this study based their decisions on where they should live by comparing themselves to other people in the community and whether they “fit” with that race, age, and class of people.

I have provided three examples of research that has, to some degree, viewed age and place through the lens of critical race. As these examples demonstrate, gerontological theories sometimes fall flat when we design studies and analyze our data through a raced understanding. While these studies begin to chip away at non-inclusive gerontological theories, they fall short in generating new theory in any discipline or field. Much of this research is also “safe” in that the foci of race, age, and place study centers on identity building in community and fail to tackle race and racism head on in age and place. In this way, even critical race gerontologists are quietly slinking around racism, never calling it by name, and thereby reinforcing inequalities. Unfortunately, there are only a handful of articles in aging scholarship that consider race theories and even less in race scholarship that consider age. In thinking about how to benefit from one another, I urge race scholars to show why “age matters” in race and gerontologists to inform themselves on the why a critical race perspective challenges theory making and research design.

## Moving the discussion forward: a call to race and age scholars

As race scholars, we are young adults, middle-aged, and growing old. Just as we understand socially defined categories and power relations in race, we do not fully recognize how these relations operate by or between age. William Brazziel (1973) argued that White researchers may be counterproductive in race research, "...not because they are white, but because they are poorly trained [about race and racism]." (41). I may not be so bold to suggest we are *poorly* trained in matters of age: certainly we are all aging (albeit on different cycles of the life course) and know something about growing old. However, we may in fact be counterproductive if we continue to ignore older individuals and the ways in which age intersects with or even tempers other identities such as race. We cannot continue to conduct research that renders non-White older adults invisible in place, but we must also be aware that we cannot simply "add and stir" a raced and aged analysis. Informed by the three major theories that were birthed out of environmental gerontology, I offer suggestions that may help guide scholarly research. In doing so, I also attempt to offer suggestions that may push us to be more inclusive of race and other interlocking oppressions as well as to our own limitations in scholarly practice.

### *Racism, age, place*

A history of racist practices by the state in homeownership and other living arrangements are well documented by race and/or place scholars (i.e. Omi & Winant, 1994; Sugrue, 1996; Freund, 2010). For example, Federal Housing Authority (FHA) policy enforced housing segregation and granted the privilege of home ownership to Whites, thereby controlling spatial practices and wealth accumulation through the ownership of land. Because of this important scholarly work, we understand much about how state control organizes racial politics thereby reinforcing social construction of race. However, we know very little about how place-based and state racism *accumulates* in everyday life for old people. That is to say, we know inequalities accumulate over individual lives as in cumulative disadvantage (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009) but we do not really understand what this means or what it looks like to older adults because we have not asked them or have not analyzed this from an older adult's perspective. Furthermore, might older adults "fit" into places from which they have been systematically and purposefully excluded? For those older adults who faced this racism head on in the 1950s and 1960s in the housing market, how did this effect where they will or can grow old or what we call, aging in place?

We know even less about the interplay between race, age, and place when older adults occupy multiple oppressions such as those who may live in public housing. Older adults make up a sizeable resident body of public housing with 30 percent of all programs and 46 percent of Section 8 recipients are over the age of 62 years (HUD, 2012). For example, Section 202 housing, that is, age-segregated "supportive" public housing, where 18 percent of Black individuals live in buildings in census tracts where more than 40 percent of the population live below poverty. Compare this to the 2 percent of White individuals who live in high poverty census tracts and also live in Section 202 housing. A significant contribution to the growing body of sociological, political, and historical work on public housing would certainly be filled by a systematic study of policy making, economic development of, and spatial practices of Section 202 housing. State policies directed at place have significant implications for race and race relations. Yet the notion that state policies and practices have potentially negative implications in age and age relations has yet to be systematically explored. Because research in policy and housing has significantly contributed to a deep understanding of the role of government in race and relations, it is not irrational to suggest that similar studies that consider age and race would have deep and

far-reaching consequences to understanding government spatial practices. Furthermore, informed by environmental press, and as previous age and race studies considers, what does the “good life” mean in age-segregated, race-segregated, class-segregated housing?

### *Race, place, identity*

I have mentioned a few studies in this review, McAuley (1998) in particular, that have explored the ways Black identities are situated in place and rooted in White supremacy. McAuley’s work is considered, at least amongst critical environmental gerontologists, a classic article, but we still have plenty to do. As we think about attachment to place, a useful theoretical starting point, we can use critical perspectives of race and place to add dimension and depth to understand identity and in so doing, how White supremacy operates in old age. Take for example, the work on place and identity by Bell Hooks (Hooks, 1991) in her essay, “Homeplace”:

This task of making homeplace...was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that “homeplace,” most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits (42).

Hooks argues that home, often viewed as a site of oppression based on a gendered division of labor for White women, is a safe space for Black women. The home serves as a place to escape the everyday and harsh realities women confront in both sexism and White supremacy. My own research in Detroit, for example, connected Hooks’ idea of homeplace as a safe haven where identities could be created or restored outside of White supremacy. This discussion seeks to be immediately advanced. We can do so through a discussion of aging-in-place when we understand home as a site of resistance for Black liberation and potentially, old age liberation. This could significantly shift the way we think about the theory of aging in place and even the slippery concept of place at all.

### *Community and spatial justice*

Although in its infancy, scholarship in age-segregation has begun to take shape (Winkler & Klass, 2012). Using census data and informed by the groundbreaking work in segregation by race theorists (Massey & Denton, 1993), we understand now that old and young people scored high on an age-segregation index that mirrored White-Latino/a segregation in race indexes in other studies (Massey & Denton, 1993). Not only did Winkler and Klass bring forth the notion that there were regional differences (for example, Appalachia is less segregated than Florida) but analyzed on the census-block level, older adults and young people also suffered from micro-segregation. That is, census blocks of youth-segregation and old age segregation even within the same community. At some fundamental level, this might seem to make sense because older adults sometimes live in age-segregated institutions like senior apartments, and they may very well do so to escape children (Byrnes, 2009). However, we need to push this research into the depths of White supremacist and ageist ideologies.

Sociologists may benefit in age-segregated research by expanding on the interesting work of geographers who pioneered age-segregation in gerontology. Before her untimely and tragic death, Glenda Laws passionately argued for a socially just and critical geography of age (1993, 1994, 1995). Her work in urban history (1994), for example, demonstrated how societal

attitudes about aging in urban places are expressed in spatial arrangements where age relations play out. Where older adults were previously housed in “poor houses” cities now recruit older adults to downtown to serve as economic development stimuli. While this brief summary does not do Laws’ scholarship justice, Laws demonstrates the role of policy and the state in how individuals actively use space in terms of age relations. Sociologists might benefit from a careful reading of Laws work to inform theoretically driven research that attempts to understand societal attitudes embedded in place about non-White older adults. Meaning, can we attempt to uncover systematic segregation between non-White and White older individuals that parallels or diverges from what we already know about segregation? In addition, Kevin McHugh’s (2003) fascinating visual and critical expansion of Law’s research on the Sun Belt sheds light on the way place-based images and the way cities “sell themselves” reinforce other deeply ingrained ageist societal values, such as older adults should always be “young.” Despite the Sun Belt as migratory retirement destination and draw for northern snowbirds, McHugh shows how the Sun Belt offers a singular vision of aging rooted in “successful aging” (for a critical analysis of successful aging, see Dillaway & Byrnes, 2009).

Those sociologists who do work for spatial justice in community and place may also benefit by framing the current movement of racial justice in the United States as both a race, age, and place-based issue. Or, at the very least, a race issue that involves age relations in place. That is to say, who is “allowed” to use particular places and how is their public behavior controlled by concepts of age? Although I may be making a risky argument, what role does ageism play in the very public deaths and brutality of young Black men at the hands of the state? Take for example the case which continues to hold our national gaze, Michael Brown, who walked down the “middle of the street” instead of the sidewalk in Ferguson, Missouri (Palmer, 2014). Or other young Black men who use public and community space, “incorrectly” and so are controlled and corrected by the state? We see this as an issue of young adults and youth in public space as the average age of death by police force for Black men is 30 (Gabrielson, et al., 2014). But does state control of Black bodies simply go away in old age? What does state control in public space look like for old people? How can we theorize on this as an issue of race and age relations in place and community?

In 2008, *The Journal of Aging Studies* published a special edition of scholarly autobiography and reflections on the discipline from well-known critical gerontologists. Edited by feminist gerontologist, Ruth Ray and humanist, Thomas Cole, this special edition sought to push the boundaries of the more marginalized theoretical area of critical gerontology through the use of personal story-telling to situate scholars’ aging selves not only as a “test of validity” but also to broaden the scope of often myopic theory making in gerontology (Ray and Cole, 2008). In this collection, Jon Hendricks argued, “social gerontologists need to take heed: human beings do not live life two variables at a time, but come as complex, oftentimes messy packages lodged in life worlds that have been years in the making. Try explaining that in a way that captures its richness,” (p. 113). As scholars who live in raced and aged bodies, we may collectively, and through our own storytelling, show how and in what ways we occupy place as “complex and messy packages.” Perhaps this might look something like Daniel Solorzano’s (1998) important study in racial microaggressions and autobiography in the place of the academy. Or, like Ray and Cole, we might consider a special edition of race, age, and place autobiographies. Although autobiography may not be considered wholly legitimate by many in our quantitative and theory driven discipline (and this potential future direction is certainly just a launching point to advance our own knowledge), autobiography can be an important tool to not just simply open doors of understanding and reflection but to inform a socially just scholarly praxis. That is to say, we have much to learn from our own lives about race, age, and the intersection of place, particularly when we confront our inabilities to design methods and create theory that

considers such intersections. As important as Ray and Cole's special edition was to understanding, giving context to, and reconceptualizing critical gerontology, this body of work failed to address individual race and ethnic inequalities and instead offered reflections that "bleached out" racial inequalities (Nikander, 2009). This oversight underscores the very real need to engage in reflexive understanding of our collective inabilities to drive an intersectional approach in place studies.

This article outlined the ways scholars have theorized old age and place and to a lesser degree (because of lack of scholarship) race, age, and place. I advance these ideas based upon the same call Calasanti and Slevin (2006) make to feminist gerontologists. When we leave age as unexplored, we not only reinforce age oppression but also other oppressions that are shaped by age and, "...one that we reproduce for ourselves if we live long enough," (14). In this case, I specifically refer to oppressions that are situated in race and place. I do so to highlight the enormous gaps and opportunities for future research in race, age, and place-based studies and although slight, offer examples, launching points, or reflections on, potential work to be completed. With a dearth of race, age, and place scholarship, it is not hyperbolic to claim that any attempt to begin analysis is beneficial to sociologists of place. I make the call to race scholars to not only simply consider age by adding age as a variable in analysis but also to sweep the halls of racism in age scholarship. In the same vein, gerontologists should make a place for critical race in both method and analysis instead of plugging in race variables, as we are ought to do. In our attempts to create methodologically sound and theoretically inclusive scholarship, it may mean as Dressel *et al.* suggest (1997), initially going outside traditional ways of training and knowing to uncover new conceptual ways of thinking and doing to understand raced and aged identities and experiences in more inclusive and critical ways.

## Short Biography

Mary E. Byrnes is associate professor of sociology and the Institute for Detroit Studies at Marygrove College. She earned her PhD in 2009 at Wayne State University where she was a National Institute of Aging predoctoral fellow at the Institute of Gerontology. She is a visual sociologist who examines the intersections between place-making and age, race, and class specifically as it relates to the socially constructed notion of "home". Some of her publications can be found in the *Journal of Aging Studies*, *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, and *Sociological Perspectives*. Dr. Byrnes worked extensively with Detroit Eviction Defense, a collective of activists in the city, to seek spatial justice through eviction blockades and the development of a tenant's union. While she is not teaching sociological theories, Detroit Studies, or intersectionality in the classroom, she is working to organize the city's senior buildings to organize around their interests. She is visually documenting this experience as public sociology.

## Note

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