

TIERRA Y LIBERTAD

The commandeering of a Bernie Sanders rally in Seattle by two young women who said they represented "Black Lives Matter" created a lot of anguish and hand-wringing on the left. Sanders seemed to be sincerely surprised, saying he had always been a champion of civil rights. The Sanders followers were outraged that he should be a target when the Republican field of candidates was so clearly the real enemy, promising to cut social programs, deport "illegals," and enforce voting restrictions aimed at disenfranchising people of color. However, proclamations of innocence are premature.

Taking the long view, almost every ethnic group that has come to the United States, or the colonies before the American Revolution, was ghettoized. Irish, Italians, various Eastern Europeans, including Ashkenazi Jews, all had their designated areas. While it was true there was some comfort in being surrounded by people who spoke the same language and had the same customs, there was no choice in the matter. The immigrants were for the most part poor renters, and even those who had money were not allowed to buy property in the outlying areas inhabited by Anglo-Americans. Written and unwritten compacts enforced this.

Despite the glitter of Grant Avenue in San Francisco, Chinatown has always been a ghetto plagued by grinding poverty.



In the 19th century, union organizers and nativists agitated for the expulsion of Chinese immigrants. Apparently the long list of laws to control and limit the Chinese was not enough. Police in San Francisco often violently harassed the inhabitants of Chinatown. There were lynchings and incidents of "driving out" throughout the West. Ironically, the group that was claimed to be beyond assimilation has long since broken out of Chinatowns and moved into suburbs throughout the U.S. The same was true of Korean immigrants, who quickly moved from Koreatown in L.A. to the suburbs of Orange County. It is a sociological commonplace that Asian-Americans have overcome the historical limits imposed upon them better than any other non-white group. That doesn't mean they have not encountered problems, and still do, but their demographic diaspora is proof of that success.

There are three groups in American history that have made remarkably little progress in this regard: African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. It is also worth noting that none of these groups were immigrants per se. The Native Americans populated the continent in large numbers (as opposed to the Manifest Destiny argument that they were few and weren't making efficient use of the land). Early treaties restricted the movement of the tribes, and each new treaty shrunk their land claims until many ended up as tiny reservations or disappeared entirely. Once again, as in the case of the Chinese, the U.S. Army, vigilante groups, and later police forces violently restricted the movement of the tribes. In many cases, there were genocidal programs to eliminate them altogether.

It always comes back to land: taking away land and making the previous possessors of that land serfs to the new owners. The other part of that game is having enforcers restrict and intimidate the new serfs to make sure they don't revolt. Emiliano Zapata did not coin his slogan, "Tierra y libertad," but it was the battle cry of the Mexican Revolution. People needed land so they could make a living for themselves as opposed to enriching the landowners for whom they labored. And they needed freedom from oppression and from the forces that had always restricted their movements, both the literal ability to move from place to place and the

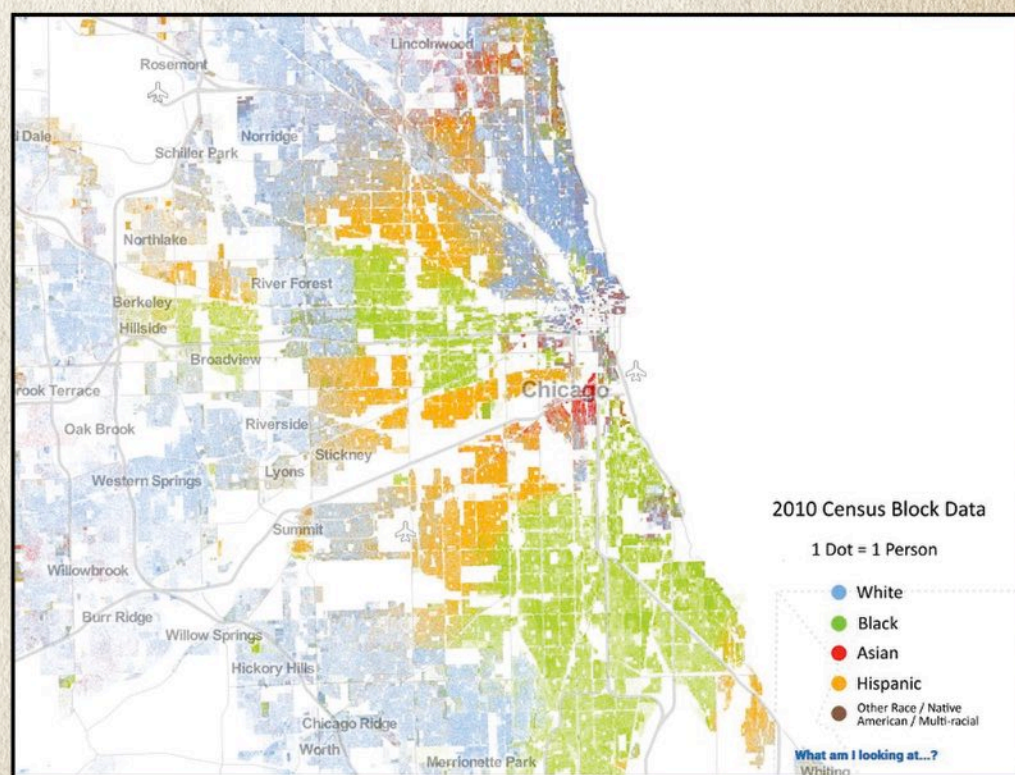
ability to achieve social mobility. Virtually all the greater Southwest was Mexico once. The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, at the end of the Mexican War, guaranteed that no Mexican would lose land and that the Spanish language and Mexican customs would be allowed to continue in the U.S. as before the war. Tell that to anyone in East L.A.

When Africans were enslaved and shipped to North America, and not just the South, they had absolutely no freedom of movement. But when you look at the 2010 census racial dot maps of American cities, where racial ghettoization is dramatically depicted, not much has changed. We have had a Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction (which ended far too soon), the Civil Rights Act, the Great Society, and yet the physical concentration of African-Americans throughout the land continues unabated. This is not voluntary. As a young man in the 1960s, I had a dramatic lesson in this regard. I was starting down the stairs to the subway station at Lexington and 68th St. in New York when I noticed several young black kids coming up the stairs. Suddenly two cops came from behind me and attacked them with billy clubs, driving them back downstairs, shouting that they weren't allowed in this area. The police in various cities, towns and villages in this country do things like this, and much worse, every day. It is no coincidence. They are the enforcers who, through unregulated violence and intimidation, keep people "where they belong."

As long as this goes on, there will be no resolution to what has always been the greatest American problem: the elaborate and deadly structure of institutional racism. We can talk about income inequality, but the blue collar workers who turned their backs on unions while cheering Reagan's war on "welfare queens" in

the 1980s were unwitting participants in bringing about the appalling situation we are in right now. African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans were the victims of these changes, not collaborators. So while Bernie Sanders strikes me as right about much of what he says, he is not talking to people of color or understanding that race trumps ideology every time in the history of the U.S. Until everyone has "tierra y libertad" in this country, and that means access to good jobs, education, and the ability to move out of ghettos, there will be no solution to the problem that has plagued us for centuries. All of us, especially progressives, need to participate in creating a viable plan for breaking down these barriers. It will need to be as intensive and comprehensive as the Marshall Plan in Europe after World War II, but it is the only approach that will work. This means an all-out attack on red-lining, with severe penalties for violators. Let it also be required that housing projects, urban and

suburban, earmark a certain percentage of houses or condos for lower income families, and make those homes and condos equally available to all. It also means that every ghetto kid needs to have access to the same level of public education as kids in wealthy areas, and it means rigorous enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in hiring and the workplace. We already have laws on the books that deal with these issues, but they are not often aggressively enforced. That is true in blues states as well as red, and I don't believe this is an accident. Getting our new Marshall Plan right would stir up even more anger and chaos than the school bussing crises of the 1970s. But if we want to move forward, it has to be done. If Bernie Sanders would address these issues adequately, the demographics of his rallies would look like the amazing Obama rallies of 2008 and 2012. We need to remember that without the rainbow coalition, the Democrats will not win the presidency in 2016—or in any other year.



RACIAL DOT MAP OF CHICAGO