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Access Denied: Mapping Inequality for Urban (Black) Omaha

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Urban (Black) Omaha



OCTOBER 2014

About the College of Public Affairs and Community Service

The College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) was created in 1973 to ensure that the university was responsive to the critical social needs of our community and state. The College was given the mission not only to provide educational programs of the highest caliber to prepare students for leadership in public service, but also to reach out to the community to help solve public problems.

The College has become a national leader among similar colleges, with nine programs ranked in the top 25 in the nation. Our faculty ranks are among the finest in their disciplines. Faculty, staff, and students are integral to the community and state because of our applied research, service learning, and community partnerships. We take our duty seriously to help address social needs and craft solutions to local, state, and national problems. For more information, visit our website: cpacs.unomaha.edu

CPACS Urban Research Awards

Part of the mission of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) is to conduct research, especially as it relates to concerns of our local and statewide constituencies. CPACS has always had an urban mission, and one way that mission is served is to perform applied research relevant to urban society in general, and the Omaha metropolitan area and other Nebraska urban communities in particular. Beginning in 2014, the CPACS Dean provided funding for projects with high relevance to current urban issues, with the potential to apply the findings to practice in Nebraska, Iowa and beyond.



Access Denied:

Mapping Inequality for Urban (Black) Omaha

Franchell Abdalla

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October 2014

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College of Public Affairs and Community Service Dean's Office.





PROJECT ABSTRACT

In an environment where cities are drivers of economic growth, urban inequality within the local and national context, must be examined. According to Glaeser and Tobi (2008), "Twenty years ago, metropolitan (urban) inequality was strongly associated with poverty, but today, inequality is more strongly linked to...wealth".

Since Harry Reynolds' work in 1966, urban Omaha has been defined as the "tale of two cities".

Where, Omaha is home to some of the country's wealthiest people, it is conversely is home to some of the country's most economically isolated and disadvantaged people. How can this be possible? Moreover, how do we begin to ask the hard questions effecting unequal distribution of access, such as:

- What impact does inequality have on urban Omaha?
- What are the consequences of generational inequality in urban Omaha? And,
- Why focus on inequality rather than poverty?

This project will serve as a catalyst in understanding the rhetoric around urban poverty (inequality) in Omaha. As well as, begin the discussion on how we can begin to redefine/remap urban equity, rather than reify urban inequality?

INTRODUCTION

According to Marx, "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, and mental degradation at the opposite pole."

In an environment where cities are drivers of economic growth, urban inequality within the local and national context, must be examined in greater depth. Over the last six decades, there has been significant research conducted on poverty,

and its impact on communities of color in Omaha, Nebraska. Moreover, poverty and statistics related to its outcomes and impacts have garnered attention at both the national and local levels. Beginning with Harry Reynolds' work in 1966, urban Omaha has been defined as the "tale of two cities". Meaning, Omaha is home to many of the country's wealthiest people, and is conversely is home to many of the country's most economically isolated and disadvantaged people. How could this be? And, why have we continued as a community to focus on poverty, rather than stepping back to firmly evaluate the role that inequality and lack of access has had on urban (Black) Omaha.

SPECIFIC AIMS

According to Glaeser and Tobi (2008), "Twenty years ago, metropolitan (urban) inequality was strongly associated with poverty, but today, inequality is more strongly linked to...wealth". As previously mentioned, there has been little discourse or research focused on the impacts of systemic inequality/lack of access, its causes, impacts/outcomes and consequences. Moreover, the research, data and narratives on inequality that do exist in the local sphere, have focused on the role of elites and corporations in shaping the policies that produce and reinforce inequality. While this scholarship has been successful at documenting patterns and trends relative to social inequality, is has fallen short in demonstrating its consequences, properly engaging affected communities or developing effective strategies to reduce it. Again, the problem of inequality has been framed as a problem of poverty (or some other form of social disadvantage).

Socioeconomic, health, political and sociocultural inequality in the US has grown steadily for nearly 40 years (Gottshalk & Ddaniznger 2005; Picketty & Saez 2010). Despite numerous gains in legal rights, education and housing access, urban (Black) Omaha remains starkly behind the City, the State

and much of the Nation in achieving parity with its White counterparts. Lack of equity, access and opportunity for urban (Black) Omaha leads one to wonder whether America really is the land of opportunity, and whether Nebraska is truly home of the “good life”. To begin answering these questions and others, we must begin to create public discourse and research around inequality that informs policy, practice and interventions to reduce it. The aim of this project is to do just that. In partnership with UNO’s College of Public Affairs and Community Services, this project will serve as a catalyst in understanding the rhetoric around poverty and urban inequality in Omaha. As well as, begin the discussion on how we collectively can begin to redefine/remap urban equity, access and opportunity, rather than reify urban inequality?

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

There has been extensive research done in the area of poverty, its causes and consequences. In 1965 Harry Reynolds, then Director of UNO’s Urban Studies Center, conducted research on 1,112 families residing in North Omaha. Through a series of questions, participants were interviewed about various aspects of their incomes, family compositions, and opinions on “living in poverty”. According to Reynolds, the purpose of the interviews was to, “facilitate preparation of a community action program in Omaha capable of attacking some of the root causes of poverty and improving the conditions, present and future, for those families who were its victims”. Fast forward four decades later, the same University unit, the now Center for Public Affairs Research, conducted a similar project detailing “The State of Black Nebraska” in 2000. With great hope, the project was undertaken in partnership with the Urban League of Nebraska, to “serve as an action agenda for the future, that examines vital social, economic, and political issues that impact (Blacks’) quality of life” (Deichert 2000). Based on 474

telephone surveys with Black head of households residing in urban Omaha/Lincoln, jobs, job training and education were identified as the three greatest poverty “problems” impacting urban Blacks.

Much of the contemporary scholarship and research on Blacks and communities of color in Omaha centers on asking the poor, why they believe they are poor. This and similar questions lead researchers and practitioners to believe that, “remedies to the causes and afflictions of poverty varied... and, that more jobs and additional job training are important in the alleviation of poverty’s cause and effect” (Reynolds 1966). Moreover, increasing the employment prospects for Omaha’s urban (Black) poor and increasing educational attainment opportunities, have been hailed as antidotes to the “poverty problem”. However, what many researchers, social demographers and practitioners fail to see, and thus understand, are the subtleties and sociocultural and linguistic nuances of the communities being surveyed. The research on this community from 1965 to date, while important, admittedly include a statistically significant number of responses that are either “I don’t know” or have “no response”. Understanding the increasing ambivalence within urban (Black) Omaha, relative to surveys and interviews on poverty, is critical in understanding what these citizens see as problems and producers of poverty for themselves and their neighbors. This lack of community trust, and influence, lead researchers and scholarship to generate half-informed conclusions and hinder the community’s ability to create holistic policies aimed at alleviating poverty, achieving equity and providing access to all of its citizens.

Through this project, exploratory ethnographic research will be conducted, aimed at collaboratively engaging urban (Black) Omaha. By “unpacking” the sociocultural and linguistic nuances of the community relative to being interviewed, the principal investigator hopes to understand and map the social, political, economic and sociocultural

influences/structures/institutions that shape a community's life chances and overall welfare. Far too little is known about the inequality of access and opportunity, relative to what is known about inequality outcomes. Far too little has been done, to inform policy and practice in ways that innovatively, holistically and strategically build a broad base of consensus aimed at reducing inequality.

SETTING

This is a zip-code/neighborhood-based, ethnographic project that will examine the role structural inequality and lack of access and opportunity have on the individual and community's life chances, outcomes and overall welfare. This project will seek to understand what the consequences of inequality are for communities of color, specifically, urban (Black) Omaha. Based on the premise that urban Omaha is a great "destination", life in zip codes 68104, 68111, 68131 and 68132 will be investigated to better understand the circumstances that shape daily life in urban Omaha.

A once thriving, early-1900s Black metropolis, urban Omaha's history and community cohesion quickly turned bleak following the race riots of the 1960's. Like many urban communities across the Nation, Omaha's past became littered with outmigration of people and opportunities to the suburbs, economic disinvestment, concentrated poverty, crime, deteriorating schools and neighborhood violence. Through this proposed field research project, the PI will conduct informal and formal interviews with community stakeholders, neighborhood leadership, business owners, community advocates and community-serving organizations/agencies in an effort to shed light on the causes and subsequent impacts of these inequalities. Furthermore, the PI, with the assistance of the PhD graduate student, will collect and code printed materials, review the community's digital images and conduct secondary analysis of previous American Community Survey and Omaha Community Survey 2008-2012 data

sets.

This ethnographic and exploratory approach will be useful in uncovering the various meanings that individuals and communities attach to their real and perceived experiences. Ethnographic research allows communities to become engaged in new and innovative ways. Moreover, it provides understanding as to how inequalities emerge from the set of interactions among individuals and institutional actors. The ultimate aim of this project is to develop a "product" that becomes embraced, owned and embedded into the very fabric of the community being investigated.

DEFINITIONS & KEY CONCEPTS

In Carter and Reardon's (2011) work, *Income Inequality and Income Segregation*, two distinctions are made when discussing social inequality,

First, is the difference between the unequal distribution of desirable life *outcomes* (such as health, happiness, education success, or material possessions) and the unequal distribution of *opportunities* (access to power and life chances that facilitate attainment of desirable outcomes).

Second, is the distinction between the unequal distribution of opportunities and outcomes among *individuals* and between *groups*.

Other key concepts and definitions, are critical to understanding the impetus for this project. Moreover, they undergird and guide the project, as well as, give greater meaning and depth to the project's findings.

Ethnographic research: the observation and interaction with persons or a group being studied in the groups own environment; the investigation of culture often through an in-depth study of the members of the culture; it involves the systematic collection, description, and analysis of data for

development of theories of cultural behavior.

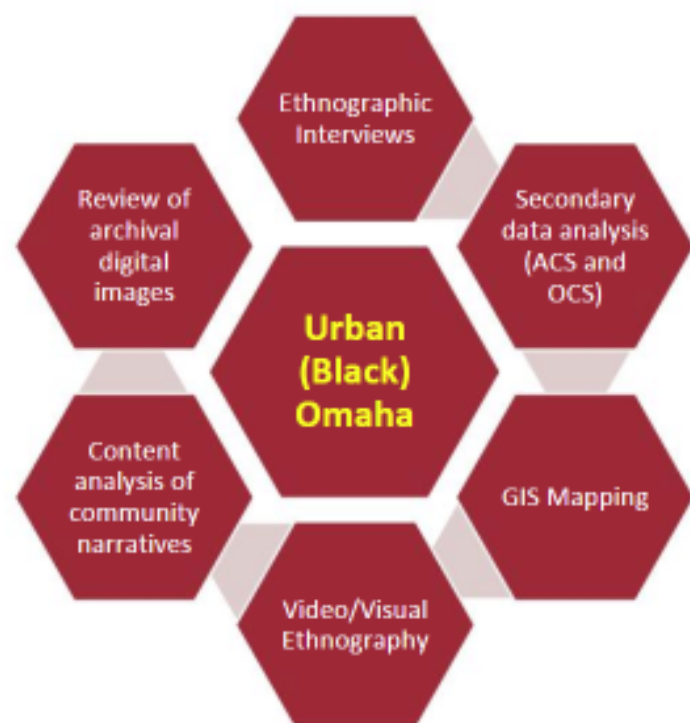
Field Research: a broad approach to qualitative research or a method of gathering qualitative data, where the essential idea is that the researcher goes “into the field” to observe the phenomenon in its natural state or in situ.

Four (4) Interacting Social Domains of Inequality:

(1) **socioeconomic:** financial and human capital related to wealth, income and work; (2) **health:** the physical, psychological, spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals and communities; (3) **political:** access to power and political representation, participation in addition to social and public policy; and (4) **sociocultural:** identity, power, media control, cultural freedom, representation, human rights and access to cultural tools.

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

RESEARCH DESIGN



In order to obtain a holistic portrait of inequality for urban (Black) Omaha, the project will develop a mixed-methods approach that integrates multiple qualitative and quantitative research techniques designed to generate verbal, textual, and visual data. The project will review:

METHODS

The methodology employed in the project have been chosen in order to acquire “insider” information and deduce conclusions about the creation, progression and role of urban inequality for urban (Black) Omaha. For that reason, the project will take an ethnographic, exploratory approach. The project’s principle methodology will consist of 30, 45-60 minute interviews, with key community stakeholders, advocates and citizens. These interviews will follow a common structure and will utilize open-ended questions intended to elicit specific information related to perceived “state” of urban Omaha, the role of structural inequality and its impacts and consequences on the lived experiences of Omaha’s urban poor.

It is anticipated that 30 interviews and any necessary follow-up interviews will be conducted during the 12-month project period. Moreover, follow-up clarifying interviews may need to be conducted in order to clarify data/information obtained and to better, more completely understand the project’s findings.

All interviews will be video-recorded and, are expected to vary in length from 45 minutes to one hour. Again, the interviews will be informal and open-ended, and carried out in a conversational style. Visual/video ethnographic data will be collected in order to gain greater insight into the sociocultural and linguistic nuances of responses provided by participants. GIS mapping and Geospatial analysis will be utilized in order to map inequality within the four zip codes identified.

Following the secondary data analysis and upon

completion of all ethnographic interviews, the PI will “bring back” research findings to those agencies, individuals, stakeholders, advocates and citizens that informed the project.

NATURE & LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The proposed project follows a qualitative, exploratory ethnographic research approach, involving the use of the semi-structured interviews as the primary method of investigation. The project will be limited to no more than 30 participant interview, within the 12 month project period. Because of the time constraints involved in interviewing and conducting subsequent data analysis, the project recognizes minor limitations in generalizing the data.

IRB

The University of Nebraska at Omaha utilizes the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (www.unmc.edu/irb/). The Principal Investigator (PI) has experience working with IRB, and is up-to-date on the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI). When awarded, the PI will obtain IRB approval to cover all interview aspects of the project, thereby ensuring the protection of all human subjects. The highest standards of research ethics will be maintained including confidentiality and informed consent.

MANAGEMENT PLAN & TIMELINE

CAPACITY

Franchell Abdalla, Principal Investigator

This project will be conducted by Principle Investigator (PI) Franchell Abdalla, MPA. As PI on the project, Ms. Abdalla brings extensive experience in resource development, community/civic engagement, program/project management and

grant writing. Ms. Abdalla’s expertise lies in forging collaborations across sectors, building sustainable partnerships, strategic visioning and fostering community investment. As the Grants Specialist for UNO’s College of Public Affairs and Community Service since 2012, she has unique insight into the role research, both basic and applied, can have on the overall engagement and growth of a city and state. And through her support of various projects throughout the College, has been afforded the opportunity to both directly and indirectly impact the landscape of Omaha by garnering financial and relational resources to benefit the College’s projects. Ms. Abdalla is truly committed to utilizing this project as a platform to meaningfully *engage citizens, create solutions and serve the community*.

As PI, Ms. Abdalla will be responsible for all tasks related to the project. Specifically, the PI will be do the following on the project:

- Identifying, contacting and interviewing key community stakeholders/stakeholder agencies, leaders and citizens for the project.
- Conducting secondary analysis of existing American Community Survey data sets.
- Conducting literature review.
- Hiring Public Administration PhD graduate student worker.
- Designing interview protocol.
- Collecting and analyzing ethnographic interview data.
- Writing summative report identifying findings and project recommendations.
- Applying for additional internal and external funding for Phase II of project.
- Presenting findings/data dissemination.

TBD, Public Administration PhD Graduate Student Worker

As a national leader in public service education, with five of its programs ranked in the nation's top 25 by US News and World Report, the School of Public Administration "prepares tomorrow's leaders to manage organizations, plan cities, protect natural resources, hold elected office and ensure access to human services. Simply put, the School of Public Administration prepare leaders to face challenging questions and to collaboratively guide the discussions". Based on its global and local reputation, potential policy implications and practice opportunities, the PI believes the best "fit" for the project is to partner with mentor faculty and a PhD graduate student from UNO's School of Public Administration (PA). The synergistic benefits to all involved, have the ability to leverage additional research, publications and resources. As well as, broaden the scope of the project so that its findings and recommendations have broader reach and impact into the community.

The PA PhD Graduate student worker will be hired, for two months in the Summer of 2015, to assist with:

- Design of interview protocol
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Transcription of ethnographic interviews
- Prepare research findings

The project will effectively utilize and maximize the time, skills and expertise of both the PI and PhD Graduate student in an effort to provide sound research and theory that enhances current scholarship regarding the local impact of inequality; bridges the discourse from one of poverty to one of equity and access; as well as develops robust recommendations that lead to increased community engagement, ownership/sustainability, policies and builds a platform for future scholarship.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Listed below are the details, roles and proposed level(s) of effort related to grant activities for the project.

Title/Role	Name	Responsibility	Effort/Time Allocation
Principal Investigator	Franchell Abdalla	Conduct interview/ design interview protocol/ ethnographic research/ data collection/data analysis/develop report/ data dissemination	240 project hours (.12 FTE)
PhD Graduate Student Worker	TBD	Data analysis/assist with data collection/interview transcription/data dissemination	2.0 summer months



The following table includes a detailed management plan for implementing and carrying out all project activities within the specified 12-month project period. Each project task identified, correlates to a specific project person, the project timeline and specific project deliverables.

Mapping Inequality for Urban (Black) Omaha	Project Management Timeline	1/1/15 - 12/31/15		
Date	Project Task	Abdalla	Ph.D.	Total
1/1/2015	Project Start; IRB Application; Lit. Review; Secondary Data Analysis	30 hrs	-	30.0
3/1/2015	Identify interview participants; Contact participants/partner agencies/ organizations	30 hrs	-	30.0
5/1/2015	Hire PhD Graduate Student worker; design interview protocol	15 hrs	-	15.0
6/1/2015	Conduct interviews/ethnographic research; collect data; initial interview transcription	90 hrs	145 hrs	235.0
9/1/2015	Complete data collection, transcription and data analysis; identify trends/findings; generate project recommendations; generate draft of final report	20 hrs	15 hrs	35.0
10/1/2015	Send out LOI to potential local funders to sustain project funding	40 hrs	-	40.0
12/1/2015	Complete project summative report; Data dissemination; develop article for publication; apply to present at Race Matters Conference	15 hrs	-	15.0
12/31/2015	Begin Phase II of project	NA	NA	NA

BUDGET/NARRATIVE

Personnel funds, in the amount of \$9,467.20, are requested for the project. Funds will be used to provide the PI and PhD Graduate student with dedicated time to engage the community; build relationships; conduct ethnographic research/interviews; collect data; transcribe interviews; conduct data analysis; and prepare both the final report and one journal article for publication. Additionally, operating funds in the amount of \$450, are being requested to provide stipends for interview participants. The stipend will be used as a tool to engage community stakeholders, as well as recruit participants to the project.

Budget Item	Calculation	Total
Personnel		
PI, Franchell Abdalla		
	240 project hours @ \$22.78/hour	\$5,467.20
1 Ph.D. Graduate Student Worker, TBD		
	2 summer months @ \$2000/month	\$4,000.00
Subtotal Personnel		\$9,467.20
Operating		
Participant Stipends		
	30 interview stipends @ \$15/stipend	\$450.00
Subtotal Operating		\$450.00
Total Grant Request		\$9,917.20

Total funding request in support of the 12-month project is \$9,917.20.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PROJECT

This research project is important for many reasons. First, this project seeks to understand inequality in the global and local context. Second, the project seeks to bridge the gap in current scholarship relative to Omaha's urban (Black) poor. Third, the project determines to expose the multidimensionality of urban inequality and create an agenda for greater interdisciplinary, collaborative scholarship and practice. Finally, this project, *Access Denied: Mapping Inequality for Urban (Black) Omaha*, has the ability to expand the reach of the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the relevance of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service into the community. Together, solutions to our community's greatest challenges, can be forged.



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