"*Race and the Politics of Deception* is a classic study which painstakingly details cities development and demise alongside their being inextricably tied to race and space. Mele's relational approach outlining contemporary urban social life—deindustrialization, globalization, and continued structural inequality—adds to the social history of cities and the structural inequality plaguing American cities and their residents. A great read!"

— Marlese Durr, co-editor of *Race, Work, and Family in the Lives of African Americans*

Known as the city that "used to be nice", Chester, Pennsylvania has become a forgotten, dangerous, and mostly deserted urban wasteland. Situated on the edge of the very wealthy Delaware County, the juxtaposition of decades of political and economic neglect that Chester displays in its landscape peppered with dilapidation, empty storefronts, and abandoned lots highlights the reality of racial strategies used for urban development or lack thereof. *Race and the Politics of Deception* explores not only the history of Chester and its suburbs, but also the modern development of the city today, and how each new urban development project is engineered, facilitated, and legitimized through the careful strategic manipulation of racial ideologies and rhetoric.

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Race Strategies and the Politics of Urban Development

SUMMARY:

In 2005, local economic development officials, politicians, business leaders, and developers worked tirelessly to make Chester a more desirable city to visit, but their solution provided very little for the residents of the city. Instead, they capitalized on the location of Chester, investing time and money into building a riverside casino, a soccer stadium, and a waterfront esplanade park. While residents are employed at these waterside attractions, jobs primarily consist of low-wage service sector jobs and, through new crime control initiatives, residents are forced into the city center through newly prohibited past activities on the waterside, such as fishing and barbecuing. This purposeful marginalization of minority groups causes the city center to be swamped with street gang activity, assault, and homicide, poorly performing schools, long-term unemployment, and sagging community health levels, earning Chester the title of the second most dangerous city in the country, according to Neighborhood Scout in 2015.

Today, Chester finds itself viewed as a reinvented destination for middle-class suburbanites, its visitors consisting of suburban Delaware Valley residents flocking to the casino, and soccer fans coming to support their home team, the Philadelphia Union. Embracing a post-racial, politically swung view of urban development, the city itself becomes the winner of the metaphorical race, and the losers are the minority communities forced into the under-developed dismal terrain of the city center. In the case of Chester, and so many other cities, redevelopment is not intended to address the collective needs of the poor black residents shroud in decades of racial segregation and deindustrialization, it is intended for the benefit of the political, economic machine.

With a focus on how predominantly white local political leaders, developers, the real estate industry, and other powerful stakeholders intentionally and strategically employ racial ideologies to exclude particular communities, Mele outlines these racial strategies through carefully selected vignettes of Chester's past. From racial segregation and the emergence of a black ghetto to inner city disinvestment and the more recent revitalization of the waterfront, the use of color blindness, a strategy used to provide ideological cover for urban development policies, is brought to light, littering the foreground of almost every urban development project that has taken place in Chester since the early 1900's.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Through the intentional segregation of minority communities into a confined environmental space, how might political leaders benefit? Why would they employ such strategies?

- Chester is a perfect example of a city abandoned and left to its own devices. What ultimately caused this? And why is nobody trying to help meet the demands and needs of the community residing in the city center?

The Racial Divide in the Making of Chester

SUMMARY:

In 1910, although separated from the white residents of Chester, the black community was not yet confined or strictly segregated within a single area of the city. Many residents of the black population created flourishing and vastly representative businesses in the parts of the city that they held as their own, with no immediate risk of being driven into less stable, over-populated areas. But in 1917, following WWI, Chester became a fully-fledged industrial boomtown, with a population jump of 38,000 to 58,000 residents between 1910 and 1920. This was due to an influx of European Immigrants and Southern U.S. blacks coming to Chester to work at one of the many waterfront factories and businesses. Whilst the growth in population and infrastructure of a city usually provides an array of positive changes, Chester was unprepared for the dramatic social change, causing heavy tension and a rift between instigated classes and ethnicities.

In July of 1917, a racial riot took place, only further dividing the black and white communities in Chester. Race became a blame tactic and various social ills were made the fault of the black community, in particular, the black workers from the South. All of Chester's immoral, criminal, and scandalous affairs were perceived as a "distinctly black problem". Suddenly, the residential division between blacks and whites that had otherwise gone unnoticed for decades was fully embraced by the white community. Thus, the solidification of separate racial neighborhoods began.

In this chapter, Mele pays homage to the way in which the Republican political machine and its political boss, McClure, utilized race strategies in the labor sector during, and post, WWI for business, political, and economic gain. Through outlining the movement and growth of Chester throughout the early 20th Century, Mele pieces together the racial ideologies surrounding the politics of city building, the workplace, and the community. This marked the way in which Chester would be shaped in terms of suburban development for decades.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

• What prompted the white community to suddenly embrace racially segregated neighborhoods?

• How, and in what ways, did McClure utilize race strategies for Republican political machine gain?

• What prompted the racial riot in July of 1917? Did the riot solve any of Chester's existing racial problems? Or did it create further repercussions for the black community? What were they?

How to Make a Ghetto

SUMMARY:

The WWI population boom in Chester created a shift between too much available housing and not enough for the sudden demand, but in the late 1940s, following the end of WWII, the shift took the opposite effect. Suddenly Chester no longer needed to accommodate the influx of European immigrants and black U.S Southerners that came to Chester in the early 1900s, further solidifying racial separation by allowing entire neighborhoods to remain racially segregated. Chester was now seen as smaller, poorer, and disproportionately black compared to Delaware County, which was, and still is, larger, wealthier, and overwhelmingly white. Nearly 60% of the total black population resided in the city's Eighth and Ninth Wards, where over half of the black population lived in antiquated dwellings without adequate sanitation, ventilation, or heat. Focusing on the intentionality, not the inevitability, of suburban exclusion, Mele explains the reasoning behind this status, tenure, and social class divide between different racial communities.

1942 marked the proposed construction of Day's Village, an all-black residence which was to be built adjacent to an all-white residence. The village came very close to being built, but through persistent white protests, violence, and the fear of racial integration in nearby schools, the village was never built. These reactions to the prospect of an all-black community conformed to and upheld the expectations of racial segregation as defined and policed by whites. Racial fears began to be utilized as a manipulation method by various forms of authority and business figures to govern and control the black-white divide within Chester's city center and the surrounding suburbs. Specifically, race was used as a sale incentive for the finely coordinated and managed sales of homes in white neighborhoods to black buyers to encourage panic selling among other white residents.

Chester found itself in complete segregation; retail and entertainment areas barely tolerated black customers and provided separate services or banned then altogether; its central hospital maintained different wards for black and white patients, and black and white students attended separate schools. In this chapter, Mele outlines the significance of urban segregation to city-suburban racial division. It was clear that the suburban lifestyle and residential areas were exclusively for Chester's white population, and the violence, protests, and vandalism that ensued upon black families attempting to integrate into them displayed a very clear message: You are not welcome.

How to Make a Ghetto

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

• What factors, racial strategies, and community influence caused such a clear-cut segregation between the black and white communities of Chester? Were any of these factors coincidental? Or were they all a result of manipulation?

• What prompted such violent and relentless attacks against black families attempting to integrate into all-white neighborhoods? What was the white community so fearful of?

The Birmingham of the North

SUMMARY:

Suburbanization ensured that Chester was quickly becoming a majority black city. The boundaries of white neighborhoods began to crumble in wake of the continued white flight and the expanding numbers of black residents in need of housing. This threatened the already unsustainable racial status quo. Racial covenants and other collective, neighborhood-wide efforts to defend the status quo tore at the seams as individual homeowners chose expediency and money over a commitment to racial order.

The early 1960s prompted the work of the Civil Rights Movement and its disruption to the racial status quo. The decade implemented strategic employment of race in Chester, holding the demographic and economic changes that enveloped the region under pressure to relieve the racial social and spatial order in which blacks were separately and unequally contained. In particular, but among many other things, the movement demanded that the current state of school segregation be rectified. Activists and leaders believed that school segregation was an intentional ploy made by governmental and political powerheads to keep racial communities separated in niche, and vastly different, areas of the city. Through countless civil attempts to make it known to the school board that a change was necessary, the Civil Rights Movement initially achieved very little. The school board claimed that the underlying problem with school segregation was down to geographical issues and had nothing to do with them. This kind of reaction prompted mass demonstrations, racial unrest, and police violence, not only in Chester but across the USA. The fear that these protests and displays of violence injected into the white communities of Chester, representing the ghetto as a threatening place, proved useful to local stakeholders in urban change for decades to come.

Despite the positives that came from the political and civil activism in Chester in 1964, the civil unrest solidified the suburban option for whites, making it not only ideal but also a solution that was urgently necessary and incriminated the city as a space to fear. This chapter aims to showcase how local political leaders shaped and manipulated organized mass dissent against racial segregation and discrimination to benefit their own political aims and financial objective, namely, furthering the racial divide between the city and the suburbs

The Birmingham of the North

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

• Why was the white community's fear over the ghetto a useful tool for stake-holders in urban change? Why was the racial divide so beneficial?

• What did the Civil Rights Movement achieve in terms of creating a less seg-regated Chester?

• What prompted the racial unrest between black political figures and the NAACP? How did this display of same-race disagreement push the Civil Rights Movement back?

EXPANDED ACTIVITIES:

• Birmingham, Alabama was nationally and internationally recognized for its involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Upon doing some further research, why was Chester deemed 'the Birmingham of the North'?

FIVE SQUARE MILES OF HELL

SUMMARY:

From the late 1960s to the mid-1990s the racial division in Chester only worsened meaning that minority groups were under greater vulnerability to political and economic exploitation at the hands of the elites. Racial stereotypes were readily deployed as the underlying cause of the city's woes, and shifting the blame onto the black community became recklessly easy. This racial stigmatization of Chester provided reliable cover for various forms of officially sanctioned vice and corruption, as the social problems caused by such activities were effortlessly attributed to the cultural lifestyles of poor minority residents. Local politicians and affiliated business partners brazenly harnessed networks to profit from their own creation of a parallel economy based on embezzlement and extortion at the hands of poor black residents. This prevailing and sustained racialized narrative of Chester as a black, poor, and increasingly dangerous city enabled this system of corruption to operate and flourish with minor setbacks and minimal pressure.

Mele explores how politicians and their associates managed to keep such tight wraps on their economic, political, and systematic gain at the expense of the poor, black community of Chester. In particular, the practice of incorporating black political leaders and black functionaries into white-dominated county-based party rule provided racial cover for all of the corruption and vice. By providing a racialized veil over the underlying corrupt intentions of Chester's leadership, black communities found themselves blindly exploited for decades.

A clear example of this kind of blinded corruption lies within the city's development of an incinerator in 1991. The industrial waterfront was cannibalized and transformed into one of the major toxic waste zones of the East Coast, a zone that emblazoned the poorer community in horrifying living conditions. This chapter aims to explore the strategic political decision to use race to win over cooperation of corporations, regulatory agencies, and briefly, the people of Chester.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

• What strategies did Chester's political leaders employ to create profits out of the exploitation of the black community? How did they achieve so much with such minor setbacks?

• As well as the health risks created by the development of an incinerator, what racially motivated issues arose from it? Why was it so problematic?

Welcome to the "Post-Racial" Black City

SUMMARY:

Today, Chester continues to be identified as a city besieged by rampant crime, poor housing conditions, joblessness, and poverty. Through decades of color blindness used as racial ideology, the toxic attribution of blame has only continued to manifest. Unemployment, weak social ties, high crime rates, and a host of other social problems are attributed as a 'black problem', wherein their supposed lack of work ethic or impulse control, their irresponsibility, and other internally controllable factors are the black community's fault, not manifestations of structural inequalities as detailed throughout Mele's narrative.

Chester's residents have been left behind as the waterfront has been developed into several political economic benefitting projects that provide very little for the people inhabiting the poorer inner-city area. The best interests of Chester's largely black community are still clearly being ignored. When the development of a casino, a stadium, and a racetrack are seen as more favorable over a real supermarket for Chester residents, racial stigmatization and warped political intentions are still a prominent issue. These manipulation strategies remain effective largely because fictions about race consistently resonate in the public consciousness as seen in the media, on college campuses, and in national politics.

This chapter focuses on the way in which race has been explored as being systematically employed over the course of Chester's history and, as Mele has done throughout the stories recounted in this book, reveals that race is immensely practical to the politics of urban development. Race strategies are repeatedly shown to be practical and effective in the routine expression of institutional power over the course of urban development; in economic investment and disinvestment in the built environment; in the siting of environmentally harmful industries; and in the production of destinations in urban enterprise zones.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

• What racial fictions are still largely believed today? Why? Is it a result of years of political and social manipulation ingrained within society? Or is there a deeper explanation for it?

• How could Chester generate the kind of urban development that is socially advantageous without furthering racial exclusion?

Welcome to the "Post-Racial" Black City

EXPANDED ACTIVITIES:

• Find some examples of manipulation strategies used today. This could be in the form of visual or written media, a political statement, or just an overheard utterance. How closely does this example compare to the strategies used in Chester's history? Will it be as effective as it was in the past?

• Research the history of Chester before it was overruled by racial stigmatization in the early 1900s. How does Chester today compare to the Chester back then? How far has it come, or how far has it not?