

March 2nd: Use William Julius Wilson, [2009 Chapter 1](#) and [American Denial](#) (PBS-Independent Lens) watch [video online](#) along with [FBI Director's Comey's](#) recent speech to answer question LDQ 5.1 Here is a brief [summary](#) of Wilson, 2009 *More than Just Race*. See also the lecture notes on [urban poverty](#) and [Wilson, 2010](#). Where does [FBI Director Comey](#) agree Americans may be in denial? (the first 10 minutes of [his speech](#) related to “unconscious” racism). Both the film and the Wilson readings provide some explanations of

LDQ 5.1 (6 points) a) Give examples of cultural and structural forces Wilson (2010) says contribute to racial inequality and a lack of mobility. Who sponsored Myrdal’s American Dilemma research and why was its findings important for race relations in America? b) American Denial outlines what Wilson 2010 describes as “laissez-faire racism” relating American’s belief in high mobility with its corollary that the poor are responsible for their own destiny, regardless of race. How do these views differ between America and Europe? Which countries have higher mobility (see the Gatsby Curve diagram)? Use the Lego movie scenes to compare mobility between white and black races in America. c) Does FBI Director Comey think the civil rights movement and Brown v. Education ended discrimination in America. How might “unconscious bias” affect the mobility of African Americans? e) “Resignation as a response to repeated experiences with discrimination and disrespect is one good example. Parents in segregated communities who have had such experiences may transmit to children, through the process of socialization, a set of beliefs about what to expect from life and how one should respond to life circumstances.” (Wilson, 2010, p. 211) Discuss the evidence for this cumulative and persistent effect of racism presented in the videos. f) *Does your answer to part e “cultural” or “structural” explanation of higher poverty and social exclusion for African Americans? How do you know? What does this imply is a “solution” to the relative poverty and social exclusion of African Americans?*

Wilson, 2010 excerpts *Advancing the argument that structural conditions provide the context within which cultural responses to chronic economic and racial subordination are developed, the author suggests a holistic public policy perspective whereby the complex web of structural and cultural factors that create and reinforce racial inequality is recognized and appreciated. (Wilson, 2010, p. 200)*

The studies by Sharkey and by Sampson and his colleagues both suggest that neighborhood effects are not solely structural. Among the effects of living in segregated neighborhoods over extended periods is repeated exposure to cultural traits (including linguistic patterns, the focus of Sampson’s study) that emanate from or are the products of racial exclusion—traits such as poor verbal skills that may impede successful maneuvering in the larger society. (Wilson, 2010, p. 210)

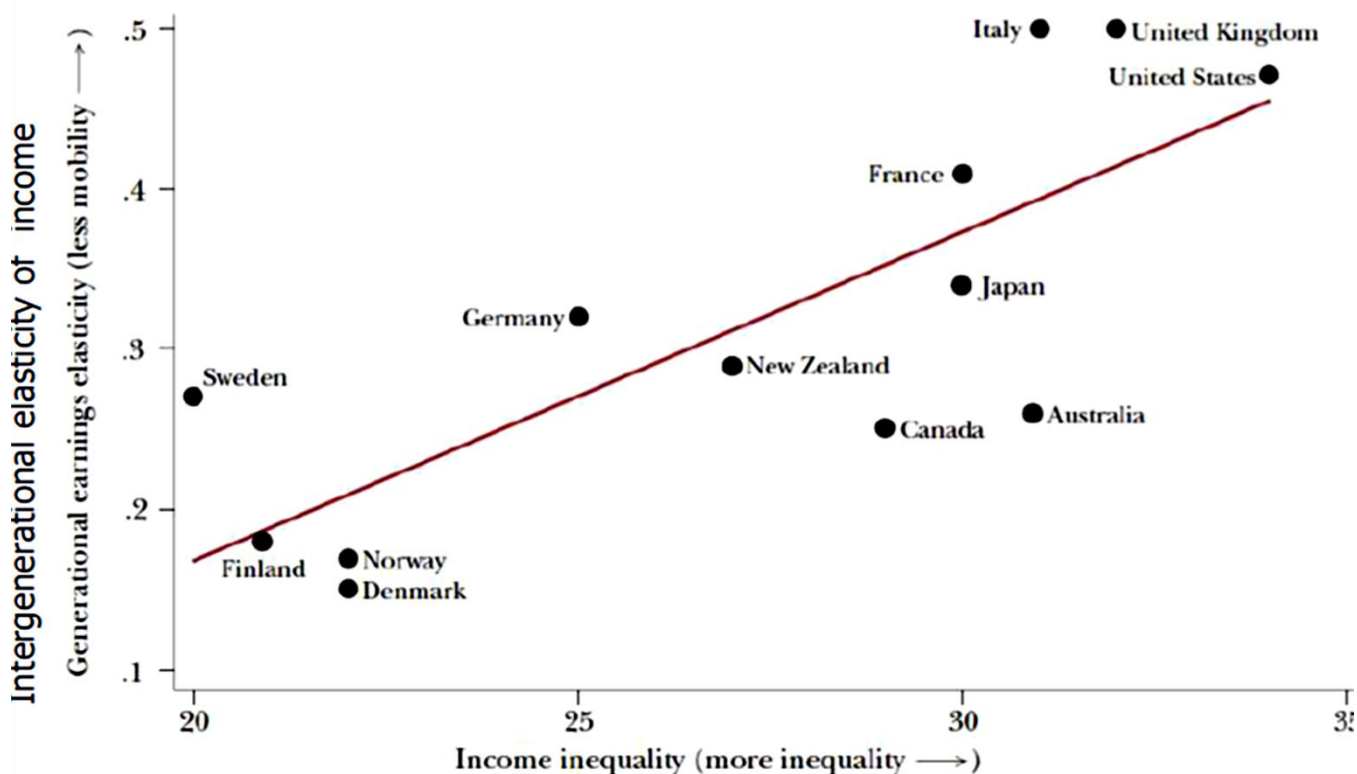
As Sharkey points out, “When we consider that the vast majority of black families living in America’s poorest neighborhoods come from families that have lived in similar environments for generations . . . continuity of the neighborhood environment, in addition to continuity of individual economic status, may be especially relevant to the study of cultural patterns and social norms among disadvantaged populations” (Sharkey 2008, 964).

Unfortunately, very little research has focused on these cumulative cultural experiences, and it is sometimes difficult to separate cumulative cultural experiences from cumulative psychological experiences. Take, for example, repeated experiences of discrimination and disrespect that a lot of blacks share. As University of Wisconsin sociologist Erik Olin Wright has pointed out, if these experiences are systematic over an extended time, they can generate common psychological states that

may be erroneously interpreted as norms by social investigators because they seem to regulate patterns of behavior (Erik Olin Wright, private communication, May 7, 2008). Resignation as a response to repeated experiences with discrimination and disrespect is one good example. Parents in segregated communities who have had such experiences may transmit to children, through the process of socialization, a set of beliefs about what to expect from life and how one should respond to life circumstances. In other words, children may be taught norms of resignation—they observe the behavior of adults and learn the “appropriate” action or response in different situations independently of their own direct experiences. In the process, children may acquire an inclination to interpret the way the world works that reflects a strong sense that other members of society disrespect them because they are black. (Wilson, 2010, p. 211)

Figure 1

The Great Gatsby Curve: More Inequality is Associated with Less Mobility across the Generations



Source: Corak (2013) and OECD.

Corak, Miles. 2013. "Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27(3): 79-102. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/jep.27.3.79>