

**THE DIVERGENCE & CONVERGENCE OF PARALLEL PATHS:
A PERSONAL STORY**

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It is with both trepidation and excitement that I commence the delivery of my inaugural paper at the Literary Club. I have paused and pained over my paper for some time now, daunted by the collective history and experience of the Literary Club and those before whom I humbly present. It is also with excitement, for it has been many years since my law school days when I was last responsible to create and deliver a rather lengthy paper. I maintain a naïve hope and aspiration that the love of letters and diction and the very process of creation may prove to transcend time and age.

“The Divergence and Convergence of Parallel Paths: A Personal Story.” The title of my paper this evening reflects my deep-seeded interest in the subject matter, on both a personal and academic basis. My paper this evening explores the history of race relations, and segregation in particular, in South Africa and the United States, two countries that have been a formative part of my life.

Having been born in Cape Town, South Africa of South African parents who emigrated from there to raise their family and pursue academic and professional ambitions in less oppressive environments, the evolution of race relations has been of keen interest to me from the time of my earliest youth. Early memories of visiting my grandmother, aunts and cousins in South Africa and frolicking on Durban’s expansive white beaches are tainted by large, foreboding signs threatening “This Beach is for Caucasians Only” while other signs warned “For Africans Only.” Visiting my extended family in South Africa every three to five years afforded me the opportunity of witnessing the significant social, cultural, economic, and political changes that have occurred there from the 1970s through the present.

While the aforementioned beach signs tormented me on one of my trips to visit my grandmother in South Africa, by the time of my next visit the signs were gone. Yet, as we all know, attitudes, beliefs and underlying ideologies run far deeper and prove far more recalcitrant to change than their physical manifestations of signage and the like. My grandmother’s reactive tendency during her infrequent trips to Cincinnati to furtively lock the car doors whenever we drove through Madisonville epitomizes to me the endemic challenges that South Africa faces as it continues on its dramatic evolution from apartheid to democracy. At the same time, what Madisonville represents to a number of people I know in and from Cincinnati – the stereotypes and fear Madisonville and Over-the-Rhine evoke, the aversion they provoke – are suggestive of the parallel paths into which I shall delve in this paper.

As one traces the history of race relations and segregation in South Africa and the United States, the similarities and areas of convergence, and the reasons therefor, are more similar than one may otherwise assume. In fact, I have found myself far more intrigued by the vast overlap between the experiences of both nations, than the more slender distinctions. Given the parallels with my own personal life and the contours my path has taken to date, the impression an important work I came across during my university studies by Duke historian John W. Cell

analyzing the origins of segregation in South Africa and the American South was dramatic for me at the time, nearly twenty years ago. Cell's work, The Highest Stage of White Supremacy, is one I have found myself coming back to over the years, and is a source to which I owe much credit for this paper, and from which I hope I derive some inspiration.

From recent United States Supreme Court decisions to dedicated series on CNN, from frequent discussions during Sunday morning news shows among the various "talking heads" to a rash of news coverage about Harvard professor Skip Gates finding himself arrested on the porch of his own house by the Boston police department, it seems clear that America today has decidedly not transcended "beyond race." I would argue that it fast becomes apparent that W.E.B. DuBois's much-quoted assertion that the "color line" represented the most pressing problem facing the twentieth century has sadly proven optimistic, as the issue has certainly extended well into the twenty-first century.

Rather than live in a "color blind" society in the United States today, there are a number of indicia that suggest the disparities between and among the races only continue to grow. In fact, there is a wide corpus of research that indicates that in periods of recession such as we have suffered through the last couple of years, the gaps between whites and African-Americans in fact perceptibly grow in terms of education levels and salaries achieved, unemployment, and overall standards of living. As scholars such as Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton have written, in somewhat racially segregated cities, any increase in African-American poverty that is created and perpetuated by an economic downturn is by definition constrained to a small number of isolated and somewhat homogenous neighborhoods. These neighborhoods quickly become transformed into intense areas of socioeconomic deprivation. Given the harrowing images of abject poverty among primarily African-American neighborhoods that came out of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina *before* the recent recession, it is hard to fathom the extreme depths of this deprivation today.

While the discussion of race in connection with the recent election of President Barack Obama is an independent subject matter that certainly merits analysis on its own right, the recent nomination and appointment of Justice Sotomayer to the United States Supreme Court is worthy of pause. In particular, some of the legal and social discussions that occurred in connection with Sotomayer's appointment illustrate a number of the current race-related issues our nation confronts today.

On June 29, 2009, in a 5-4 decision in Ricci v. DeStefano the U.S. Supreme Court reversed an appeals court decision in which now Justice Sonia Sotomayor joined as an appellate judge. In Ricci, the Supreme Court ruled that white firefighters in New Haven, Connecticut were subjected to race discrimination when the City of New Haven threw out a promotional examination on

which they had excelled, and African-American firefighters had fared poorly. White firefighters had passed the promotional exams in 2003 at roughly twice the rate of Hispanic and African-American test-takers, and no African-American firefighters scored high enough to be eligible for promotion in the department.

The statute at issue in the Ricci case is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. When Congress enacted Title VII, the directive to employers appeared simple: do not discriminate on the basis of race or other protected characteristics such as sex and religion. Needless to say, as the passage of time so often demonstrates in such situations, the simple has proven complex.

In response to the disparate *impact* of such employer-mandated tests as Duke Power requiring all applicants for blue-collar jobs in North Carolina holding a high school diploma, thus effectively wiping out 88% of the African-American men in the area at the time, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1971 ruled in Griggs v. Duke Power that a test that was “fair in form, but discriminatory in operation” could violate Title VII, even without proof of discriminatory intent.

Powerful voices on the Supreme Court, Congress and throughout our society soon began calling for a “zero-tolerance policy” regarding government counting its citizens by race *for any purpose*. Given that preemptively avoiding or resolving a disparate impact issue by definition requires an employer to take race into account, the apparent collision course with the disparate impact prong of Title VII became inevitable. It is little wonder that Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg dissented in Ricci, writing in part, “Congress endeavored to promote equal opportunity in fact, and not simply in form...The damage today’s decision does to that objective is untold.”

So, how exactly did American society get to this point, and where and how did the racial context in which we find ourselves in the United States today diverge from the South African one my parents worked so hard to escape? It is certainly an interesting tale with many more parallels than one may assume on first blush. In addition, comparing race relations and the history of segregation in the American South with South Africa enables us to better understand American race relations, both historically and prospectively. Needless to say, some historical context is first in order.

While South Africa has been inhabited for tens of thousands of years, recent history of South Africa spanning the last several hundred years has been characterized by significant racial and ethnic conflict. At the time of European contact with South Africa, the two major indigenous tribes that had achieved some degree of dominance were the Xhosa and the Zulu.

In 1652, the Dutch East India Company established a refreshment station at a site that would eventually become Cape Town. By 1806, Cape Town had become a British colony. European settlement expanded throughout the country during the 1820s, as the British and Boers claimed

land in the north and east. Competing for territory, conflicts soon arose among the Xhosa, the Zulu and the Afrikaners. The discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1884 in the interior of the country further exacerbated racial and ethnic tensions, including among the British and the Boers who began to fight for control of South Africa's vast mineral wealth. In addition, tensions arose between the Europeans and the indigenous people in connection with the economic growth opportunities the new-found mineral wealth elicited. While the depth and history of the underlying roots of race relations and segregation represents a commonality between South Africa and the United States, the demographics are vastly different. As we explore the points of similarity and difference in the evolution and development of both nations, it is critical that we never forget that the ratio of whites to blacks in South Africa is approximately One to Nine. This simple demographic fact has widespread impact as we look back historically, and consider opportunities going forward.

Political events of the last three decades in South Africa, including the 1994 watershed election of Nelson Mandela to the Presidency, clearly both herald and celebrate significant change and evolution in the country. At the same time, however, from vast disparities of wealth, education, crime, disease, and life expectancy, among other variables, there are vivid examples manifesting that many age-old issues in South Africa have neither disappeared nor been satisfactorily resolved. Rather, they have simply taken on a new face, a new complexion if you will.

Sadly, so, too, with the United States. It was approximately 80 years ago today that Gunnar Myrdal, the acclaimed Swedish economist who directed a massive survey of the American "Negro Problem" on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation, hypothesized that segregation would be a temporary American phenomenon that would soon be eliminated. Myrdal erroneously assumed that the blatant contradiction between segregation, on the one hand, and the ideals of democracy and the American Dream, on the other, would soon prove a fatal combination. Few today, however, believe that the "Negro Problem," especially its socioeconomic aspects, is close to being resolved. Rather, as we learn that some of the underlying issues are deeply ingrained, even institutionalized, in our society, we are no longer surprised that intensive efforts to break the cycle of poverty and poor education have so far largely failed.

As comparative historians such as Pierre Van den Berghe have compellingly maintained, race relations is far from homogenous across nations and across societies. Van den Berghe argues that all systems, however, fall between two "poles," the paternalist and the competitive.

Found in many African settlement colonies, the paternalist paradigm is typically associated with preindustrial economies focusing on one or two cash crops for export. The society is often characterized as having a small white ruling class, with wide gaps separating the different "castes" in terms of standard of living and social status. With the ruling group's hegemony or

power structure securely in place, interracial contact is frequent, and to the extent there is violence, it generally comes “from below” in the form of slave revolts or peasant risings.

On the other hand, the competitive model is often found in a comparatively sophisticated industrializing economy with a higher level of social mobility. With the dominant race either the majority or a significant minority, the degree of personal contact across racial lines is less frequent, with both de jure and de facto segregation. Importantly, the tone of race relations in such racially competitive societies is volatile and virulent, with violence initiated from below and from above, including in the form of lynchings and waves of blatantly discriminatory legislation. In terms of perception and portrayal, the subordinate group is infantilized and rendered inferior, and at the same time also portrayed as being innately aggressive and dangerous.

As we shall discuss, at different points in their respective histories, both South Africa and the American South moved from the paternalist to the competitive model. In both societies, slavery was abolished by outside authority. In South Africa, slavery was abolished by an act of the British parliament in 1834, while in the United States and the American South, slavery was destroyed the Thirteenth Amendment after the Civil War. Interestingly, while the notion of white supremacy remained at the core of the “social relations” of slavery, the vertical relationships of white over black which were often characterized by close contact between the races gave way to more “horizontal” racial demarcations upon the abolition of slavery. Although separated by geography, demographics and history, the competitive paradigm of race relations that developed in both South Africa and the American South was borne out of a changing economic and political context, which in turn gave birth to segregation.

According to Webster’s Intercollegiate Dictionary, segregation is defined as “the separation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means.”

Contrary to what one may expect from our vantage point today, in fact the evolution of segregation in South Africa ran approximately ten to twenty years behind the American South. In the American South after 1890 and in South Africa after 1910, fundamental social, political and economic changes – including early industrialization and urbanization and the further development of the state in South Africa and of political parties in America – began to threaten social order and power relations. Segregation as an ideology developed in this environment.

As C. Vann Woodward argues in both Origins of the New South and The Strange Career of Jim Crow, from large plantations to small farms, segregation was not endemic to the American South before the Civil War. In fact, while the general ethos of white supremacy was clearly both powerful and pervasive, the Old South was characterized by close interracial contact. Some

historians argue this closeness was best demonstrated by the surprising incidence of interracial worship, including of black ministers preaching to mixed congregations.

Sir James Bryce, an English aristocrat, diplomat and historian who served as the British ambassador to the U.S. in the 1880s and who authored the seminal work The American Commonwealth, reported that the once “close personal relations” between masters and slaves in the antebellum South had become “bitter and competitive” by the late nineteenth century. Bryce was much disturbed by the lack of social intercourse he witnessed between the races, including as evidenced by separate railway carriages, separate washrooms, separate schools, and separate churches, let alone by the rise in abhorrent lynchings.

Already by 1896, when the United States Supreme Court rendered its famous “separate-but-equal” decision in Plessy v Ferguson, the decision not only helped further accelerate the segregationist movement, but validated and affirmed that segregation was already strong at work at the time. From schools and hospitals to buses and trains, in a short period of time Jim Crow became both the law and the practice, affecting essentially all aspects of life in the American South. So, while the black voter in the South was largely excluded by informal means from participating in the democratic process in 1888, he was effectively disenfranchised throughout the South by 1910.

Although its history was young and its direct roots shallow, Woodward argues that Jim Crow segregation was mythologized into, and as, tradition, fast becoming seen as, and believed to be, an integral part of the South’s history. According to Woodward, this was neither coincidental, nor simply convenient. Rather, the development of segregation at this particular juncture in Southern history was in large part in response to the industrialization of the South that started in the mid-1870s. While the Civil War severely weakened the economic roots of the previously dominant planter aristocracy, the capital infusion from the more industrialized and financially developed North and the rapid building of railways and factories created a new class of Southern businessmen and industrialists who were able to challenge the planter class. Playing into the rhetoric of Social Darwinism and the burgeoning eugenics movement at the time, the development of segregation was related to, and contingent upon, the formation of this Southern capitalist power base.

Epitomized by cities such as Birmingham, Alabama - where 75% of all workers in iron and steel were black - the industrialization of the New South demanded a large supply of urbanized, low cost labor. The black reserve army became a potent weapon to intimidate and threaten white workers, including by breaking strikes. Writing of the apparently strong encouragement of deep antagonism between poor whites and poor blacks, the populist leader Tom Watson said, “You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings.” Or as Frederick Douglas once explained to President Andrew Johnson, “Those masters secured their ascendancy over the poor whites and the blacks by putting enmity between them. They divided both to conquer

each.” In this environment, blacks who tried to become landowners, exercise their rights, and/or leave “their place,” as it had been designated for them by others, were seen as a threat to white supremacy and labeled “uppity” or excessively “pushy.”

It was critical in the fluidity of the New South epitomized by industrializing cities such as Birmingham that African-Americans firmly knew and understood “their place”. It is thus not surprising that while the traditional methods of race and class relations and control remained much very much in place in rural areas, segregation expanded most dramatically in the cities that were fast modernizing. As John Cell compellingly argues, it was in these urban environments, with their formation of a new Southern capitalist power elite, that white supremacy had to be redefined. The violence of the times, epitomized by frequent and gruesome lynchings of African-Americans across the New South, demonstrates the volatility and clear need to manifest power and control that accompanied this process of redefinition. For those in power, the very basis of social order was changing and potentially under attack. The horrifying violence of the time was an external manifestation of the crisis felt from within.

Both the crystallization of segregation after 1890 in the American South and the process of its later apparent dismantlement after the 1960s were largely political and economic events. Before reviewing how the socio-political and economic events of the twenty-first century in America contributed to the decline of segregation, it is important to first review how political and economic forces were aligning thousands of miles away in South Africa.

The evolution of segregation in South Africa lagged the American South by more than a decade. With a number of prominent South Africans such as Howard Pim and Charles Evans having spent some time in the United States, white South Africans were well aware of the dynamics of race relations in the American South at the time, and were watching the situation closely. Recognizing that the facts of demography would make South Africa’s problems far more challenging and potentially dangerous than their American white counterparts, many were clear that the approach in South Africa had to be both more comprehensive and more rigorous.

From the Great Trek of the 1830s until the Boer War of 1899-1902, the political power of South Africa’s whites was largely decentralized. There were four competing units - Natal and the Cape Colony, which had remained subject to some control from the British Colonial Office and which maintained economic and political power in English-speaking hands, and the two northern republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, which were controlled by the Boers.

The opening of the gold industry in the late 1880s changed the dynamic among the Boers and the English, with everyone clamoring for control of formerly agrarian areas and the vast wealth they now represented. Representing the climax of this effort for control, the Boer War helped

centralize white political power in South Africa for the first time, with state formation following soon thereafter.

In 1900, Cape Town was suffering from an outbreak of the bubonic plague. Instead of placing responsibility on the spread of a world pandemic from Asia, blame was cast on the squalid conditions of the Africans, adding further fuel to the growing argument about the need to establish “Native locations.” The formal debate on South Africa’s “Native Policy” began with the 1903 appointment of the South African Native Affairs Commission, or SANAC, under the chairmanship of Sir Godfrey Lagden. SANAC quickly concluded that the open political participation evidenced during Reconstruction in the U.S. represented a grave threat to South Africa given its demographics and could not be allowed. With the exception of the Cape Colony, which through 1936 maintained a color-blind franchise based on educational and property qualifications, SANAC’s recommendations were followed across South Africa’s other colonies – the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, and Natal. SANAC recommended territorial separation, dividing the country into clear white and African areas. As it turned out, this separation represented an elegant solution to the country’s labor issues, and likely a crucial component of the development of twentieth-century capitalism in South Africa.

An exhaustive industry-by-industry review by the Transvaal Labour Commission of the nation’s labor situation concluded in 1903 that South Africa’s growing mining, industrial and agricultural industries required an additional 300,000 or more workers. General Louis Boetha, a general during the Boer War and the future prime minister of South Africa, appeared before the Labor Commission. Boetha argued that mining and railroad industrialists, as well as farmers, needed labor at affordable wages, and that the huge virtually unlimited supply of African labor should be utilized for these purposes. The laws and policies of the nation had to respond to this labor need, in a controlled and systematic way. Both the challenge and the opportunity South Africa faced was ubiquitous, cheap black labor against which the white working class could not compete. General Boetha was not shy to voice his views that reconciliation between the Boers and the British depended on maintaining white supremacy. With potential for competition for land, politics, and jobs, segregationist policy evolved into an effective strategy to accomplish various social, political, and economic goals. Additionally, it provided a convenient ideological justification or “cover,” theoretically allowing each race the opportunity to preserve its own culture.

Representing the fulcrum point of segregationist policies in South Africa, the Natives Land Act of 1913 formally and legally divided the nation into white and Native areas. The Natives Land Act prohibited white landowners from leasing their land to African tenants; as several South African historians have written of the Native Lands Act, “At a stroke, peasants were transformed into rural proletarians.”

The Native Lands Act was followed approximately ten years later by the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923. This Act allowed municipalities to create nearby Native locations where the economically necessary African labor force would be temporarily housed, with Pass laws controlling the influx of workers to and from the white cities. It is easy to forget that the development of such prominent sites as Soweto actually trace their roots to the Native Urban Areas Act. As General Smuts was proud to proclaim to a London audience in 1917, “‘Instead of mixing up white and black in the old haphazard way, which instead of lifting up the black, degraded the white, we are now trying to lay down a policy of keeping them apart as much as possible in our institutions.’”

There were clearly differences among the powers in control of the four different provinces of the Union of South Africa, including among the Afrikaners and the English-speaking whites. At the same time, the development of a centralized state structure starting in 1910, coupled with the unifying cohesion among white South Africans caused by sheer demographic fear, enabled South Africa to modernize economically throughout the vast majority of the twentieth century without dismantling its segregationist policies. As John Cell wrote, “‘What is impressive is the South African economy’s ability to incorporate growing numbers of skilled African workers while continuing to maintain a persistent pattern of discrimination.’”

It is at this historical juncture that we see a significant divergence appear between both nations. What we have witnessed and documented thus far is the parallel development of segregationist policies in both the American South and South Africa, in large part in response to similar social, economic and political forces. In neither nation was segregation merely an extension of the racist thought and behavior that preceded it. Rather, segregation was a new order of race relations used to mystify a developing system of class relationships. It soon became a critical component of the process by which industrial capitalism evolved and developed in both countries. Both the ideology and practice of segregation developed to provide the new mechanisms of control needed and required by the times. And yet in South Africa, despite being born from a similar context experiencing similar changes, a significantly longer trend of continuing racial stratification developed, eventually encompassing most of the twentieth century. So, why in the mid-twentieth century did these parallel paths appear to go in seemingly inapposite directions? (Or did they?)

In South Africa, General Jan Christian Smuts - who had replaced General Boetha following his death in 1919 - was swept from power in 1924 by the Nationalist-Labor party, led by General Hertzog. Largely in response to the Depression and the crisis that enveloped South Africa in its aftermath, the nationalist government was formed in 1931. Within several years the “Purified Nationalists,” as they came to be called, splintered off to the right under the leadership of Dr. D.F.

Malan. Sharing ideology and with close ties to Nazi Germany, Malan's Nationalists came to power in 1948 in a watershed election.

With their election in 1948, the Nationalists helped usher in a new era of segregation, one the world has come to call apartheid. In a series of legislative acts – including the Group Areas Act, the Bantu Education Act, and the Natives Act - the Nationalists took what they perceived to be the “laxity of mere segregation” and tightened, hardened and honed it into a system the thoroughness of which is unprecedented in world history. At the same time, the Nationalists effectively suppressed all African political organizations, including the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress. And so it was that in 1960, the very same year that witnessed racially-charged protests in the United States that helped unleash strong forces for change, a passive protest of the pass system for workers in Sharpeville, South Africa met with a particularly violent government response, leaving scores dead in the street. In fact, it took yet another three decades for the winds of racial and political change in South Africa to gather sufficient momentum to effect real change. The unitary nature of South Africa's parliamentary system, with the provincial authorities' power explicitly subordinated to the central government, helped ensure the power of the state was not divided. Change was therefore slow to come.

In the United States, starting around 1915 the “great migration” of African-Americans from the South to the North and the process of enfranchisement that came along with the migration began to affect the balance of political power in several key Northern cities. World War II in particular represented a significant turning point. In contrast to the Nationalists in South Africa, who shared ideology with Nazi Germany, the democratic philosophy on which the United States was founded and built gained “irresistible and irreversible momentum.” As Gunnar Myrdal argues in An American Dilemma, World War II challenged the nation to resolve the “Negro Question” by extending full freedom and equality across racial lines. In addition to the ideological and philosophical underpinnings for the change, World War II helped usher in significant economic changes in the South, including the collapse of the plantation system in cotton, the magnetic allure of Northern industry, and the more pervasive availability and adoption of machinery. In addition, with growing voting power maintained by African-Americans in the North and the evolving voice of the civil rights movement in the South, political powers were also changing, in the process challenging the legal structure of segregation.

While state governments in the American South had enjoyed a decades-long history of deferral from the federal government, including as it related to various legal matters, the fact is that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution remained the law of the land. As a result, there was always some degree of ambiguity and uncertainty as it related to the legal and social situation of African-Americans. The NAACP's strategy of continually challenging the constitutionality of segregation in the court system based on this legal ambiguity, as well as on moralistic grounds, began to resonate in this period. And so it was that on a day in 1960, some African-American college students in Greensboro, North Carolina sat-in at a lunch counter,

launching a wave of protest and non-cooperation that exposed to the world the ugliness of segregation for what it was, and helped to contribute to its eventual demise. With the valiant efforts by African-Americans and others for their own civil liberties and political rights, coupled with the large increase of African-American voters in the North after World War II and the changing climate of American opinion both domestically and internationally, the desegregationist movement quickly developed momentum. As we have seen, the same approach at approximately the same moment in time in 1960 thousands of miles away in Sharpeville, South Africa unfortunately met with a very different response, yielding a very different result.

An Epilogue

As the popular aphorism claims, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” While race relations and segregationist policy and practice in South Africa and the United States appear to have significantly diverged in the mid-1940s and 1950s, on the other hand the similarities between the nations even today remain glaring. Few in America today would argue that the socioeconomic aspects of the “Negro Problem” in the United States that Gunnar Myrdal wrote about in the 1940s are resolved, or even close to being resolved. While our collective social memories are short, there was indeed a brief moment in time the nation recoiled in horror as images of Third-World poverty and desperation out of New Orleans flashed before our media-saturated and quickly satiated eyes. We paused but a moment when we recognized we were witnessing a hidden and typically unforeseen segment of life in America - not Somalia, not Ethiopia, and not South Africa, but our own United States of America. In fact, one need look no farther than Cincinnati’s own Over-the-Rhine neighborhood but a stone throw away from the Literary Club to recognize the extent to which many of the social aspects of the New South simply became national problems, as opposed to remaining regionalized. The results of the aftermath of the numerous race riots that sizzled and burned throughout a number of American cities approximately forty years ago and the “white flight” that often followed seems eerily reminiscent of the segregationist policies of the American South dating back over one hundred years.

At the same time, more than 15 years subsequent to Nelson Mandela’s 1994 watershed election, my grandmother in Durban still works with the same maid, Elsie, that she has worked with for the last thirty years. For at least five days per week, if not more, Elsie still finds herself separated from her family, living with other African help in the same humble basement quarters of my grandmother’s building where she has stayed for the last thirty years. With African shanty towns outside the cities that stretch into the farthest corners of the horizon, rampant unemployment, and few opportunities for true socioeconomic mobility, I cannot but wonder if what my grandmother sees when she drives with us through Madisonville or downtown

Cincinnati during her ever-infrequent trips to Cincinnati is far more familiar to her old eyes than we would care to imagine.