


2013

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Recommended Citation

Sundstrom, Ronald, "Comment on Elizabeth Anderson's The Imperative of Integration" (2013). *Philosophy*. Paper 45.
<http://repository.usfca.edu/phil/45>

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Symposia on Gender, Race and Philosophy

Volume 9, number 2. Fall 2013

<http://sgrp.typepad.com/sgrp/>

Commentary on Elizabeth Anderson's *The Imperative of Integration*

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Elizabeth Anderson draws the attention of moral, social, and political philosophy to the idea of integration, an idea that is most often associated with the struggles to desegregate schools and neighborhoods in the years before and after the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board* (Patterson 1997). Her book, *The Imperative of Integration*, is a remarkable contribution because integration is not frequently mentioned outside of debates in the fields of urban affairs and education policy, and residential integration and segregation are rarely mentioned in academic philosophy.

When housing, as a general issue, is raised in academic philosophy in the United States, it is done so in regards to homelessness, and when the subjects of integration and

segregation do appear, it is in reference to education. Housing and education are deeply connected (Schwartz 2001), but housing, and the related issues of access, segregation, development and redevelopment, affordability, and fair housing policies, are important social indicators in their own right. Therefore, it is about time that normative and applied philosophy pay attention to the topics of integration and housing, and the problem of residential segregation. Not only is housing a proper subject of justice, but it is also a fundamental component of society, and in a democratic republic, is a physical indicator – a display – of the equality and quality (or its lack) of its citizenship. And more than that, the home (situated in a neighborhood, which in turn is situated in a *polity*) is where the value of democracy and a sense of justice is initially imparted to individuals. The home is the first place that democracy abides.

Thus, integration remains an important idea and value. It can be defined by starting with a narrow, quantitative conception of its purported opposite, segregation, which is “the degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another, in different parts of the urban environment” (Massey and Denton 1988, 281). Degrees of segregation are determined by the evenness, exposure, concentration, centralization, and clustering of populations in specific areas. Integration, however, is not just a neutral or value-free social scientific indicator – the numeric opposite of segregation (Sundstrom 2004). It connotes more than the demographic status of mixed ethnic and racial populations within some locale; instead it reveals how effectively any particular society has established the bonds of common life. Here is Anderson’s definition:

If segregation is a fundamental cause of social inequality and undemocratic practices, then integration promotes greater equality and democracy... In our preoccupation with celebrating our particularistic ethno-racial identities, we have forgotten the value of

identification with a larger, nationwide community. Integration in a diverse society expands our networks of cooperation and provides a stepping stone to a cosmopolitan identity, which offers the prospect of rewarding relations with people across the globe (Anderson 2010, 2).

As is seen above, integration is usually thought to be the other of *de jure* or *de facto* segregation. Segregation in housing, neighborhoods, schools, and communities signals and causes further disparities in education, and access to political power and economic opportunity (Oakes 2004; Orfield 1996; Massey and Denton 1993). Segregation has negative consequences, so desegregation, and even more so integration, would have equally serious positive consequences in improving the quality of life and opportunities for those who would benefit from greater access to education and housing resources. Moreover, integration in public life and the political culture, not only benefits the individual but it also improves the democratic life of society. There is strong evidence of the general positive effects of policies, such as the [Moving Toward Opportunity](#) (M.T.O) projects that sought to integrate families from poor neighborhoods to those with less poverty, or the post-1990 "Housing and Opportunity for Everyone" (HOPE VI) policy that sought to replace past public housing (much of which were modernist concrete towers erected on superblocks) with developments guided by New Urbanist principles and that sometimes involved inclusionary housing: a mix of affordable housing, and market-rate units. The results of M.T.O. policies are [mixed](#), but their limited positive effects and [potential](#) should not be dismissed. Similar concerns have been registered about HOPE VI developments, but its effect on the quality of life in public housing and the reduction of concentrated poverty has been substantial (Cisneros 2009).

So integration is a social good, but what sort and whose concept of integration should be judged as good? And by

whom? Integration can be thought of as a simple, quantitative demographic goal, as the result of secure political belonging and full inclusion as a citizen with the access to social goods and rights that attend that status, or it can focus on the relations between persons and their interactions across social activities. Who is offering integration as an ideal also matters because their perspectives and interests and the social and geographic place they inhabit in our society affect their judgment. Thus some might stress integration as combination, making whole, unity, and homogeneity, while others put greater emphasis on access, connection, and equal participation and membership.

As a theorist one is tempted toward the abstract and ideal, even while one engages in non-ideal theory, but it is important that the theorist step back and listen to the demands, interests, and perspectives of the effected individuals, families, and communities that are marginalized and segregated. It is important to listen, as a matter of political theoretical method. And what one hears when one listens to the voices of the diverse communities is that sometimes integration does come up (as I had found in interviews with fair and affordable housing professionals and activists in Oakland and San Francisco), but it is not a prominent demand; rather, more often one hears claims for affordable, safe and decent housing, community-based development, and reference to principles such as community, democracy, accountability, equity, and inclusion (Right to the City 2009). These principles and demands may be consistent with some version of integration, but what that term means in the here and now, and for policies that seek to shape the future, should be discursively generated from the communities most immediately effected; in the mean time community-building and organization, or local forms of solidarity, precede and have normative precedence over integration.

Anderson's account of integration is consistent with the community-affirmed values of inclusion, equity, and participation in so far as it is motivated by the ideals of democracy and equality in social relations (Anderson 2010, 90). Her focus on equal and non-dominative communication and relations is important because it illustrates the ongoing value of integration. All the same, given that integration is closely associated with assimilation, some groups and communities will likely resist and be offended by policies labeled as racially and ethnically integrative. Anderson takes pains to distinguish integration from both mere desegregation and assimilation (Ibid., 112-34), but her judgment about "our preoccupation with celebrating our particularistic ethno-racial identities" (Ibid., 2) is not helpful nor is it tied to how communities build bonding-social capital within and bridging-social capital with other communities. Anderson seems distracted by American spectacles of social identities, which leaves her analysis unreceptive to how those festivals engender community building and mobilization.

This problem might be related to her use of Charles Tilly's theory of "durable inequality" (Tilly 1998). One of the features of Tilly's theory is its assertion that the structures that lead to disparity are unintentional, and that opportunity hoarding and the emulation of such practices across social networks, rather than belief structures, are what causes inequality to be persistent. Tilly's critics have argued that his methodology fails to consider the prominent role of racial ideology in inequality (Morris 2000). Tilly is likely correct that there are many cases of opportunity hoarding due to unintentional discriminatory practices but there remain political projects that are intent on securing long-standing racial privileges as seen in nation-wide fights over immigrant rights, and fair and affordable housing policy (HoSang 2010; Campbell 2011).

Policies that mitigate such hoarding are clearly needed; however, solidarity, whether local or trans-institutional, within

and between communities of color, and others effected by housing disparities remains an effective and legitimate strategy to respond to such injustices (Shelby 2005). For example, [Causa Justa :: Just Cause](#), a multiracial organization in Oakland and San Francisco, has been valuable part of the fight for housing justice in the Bay Area. Another, example is the strategy of the [Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign](#), which was recently covered by the [New York Times](#), to break into and rehabilitate abandoned and neglected homes, and then organize individuals and families to illegally reside in those homes, thereby confronting the neglect of neighborhoods by the city, and the role of banks in the foreclosure process and the immiseration of communities. Tilly's method focuses too much on plugging in those who suffer disparity into presumably resource-rich social networks rather than community building.

Moreover, community building and mobilization leads to the ends that sociologists and political theorists call "integration." Social capital is built by communities engaged in building resources inside their communities, connecting with residents, and then connecting with outside resources. Recent attention and social science about the Chicago neighborhood of [Chatham](#) illustrates this process (Sampson 2011). Likewise, even when communities need "outside" resources, such as the provision of affordable housing, which by itself is not necessarily integrative, successful developments are those that provide resident services to connect residents to social services and to each other and to the community at large. Community development work within residential developments builds and encourages civic engagement on local as well as larger City-wide, regional, and state-level politics (Jois 2007; Right to the City 2010; Samara 2012). It is remarkable, for example, in a study of residential developments in Berkeley, CA, that more community building occurred within affordable housing developments, the residents of which were low-income, rather than in mixed-income developments (Berkeley Housing Survey 2012). More integrative ends were met by building community

among poor and low-income residents, rather than merely “integrating” classes of people. It is important to note that it is precisely the lack of community building that is one of the biggest [limitations](#) of M.T.O. projects.

Solidarity of this sort, also serves as a break against the appropriation of liberal ideals for illiberal ends, for example, the use of the ideal of integration in redevelopment and de-concentration programs that result in land grabs, displacement, the breaking up of communities and the further immiseration of poor people rather than any real integration. Anderson’s analysis is a work of non-ideal theory, but it is precisely in our non-ideal world that liberal values are used (as she recognizes in the colorblindness debate) to willfully ignore and defend injustice (HoSang 2010).

Integration need not be opposed to solidarity, including those solidarity movements built on the foundations of communities that organize around particular identities. In fact, Anderson makes reference to solidarity through the words of Senator Charles Sumner in his 1849 argument for equal Common Schools before the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Sumner’s reference to solidarity is striking, and it is also consistent with local solidarity, such as the solidarity free Blacks displayed in organizing, building, and teaching in their own schools, the African Schools, of the period. Although Sumner argues that it was the bigotry of the whites, and the creation of segregated schools, that created the need for maintaining African Schools in the first place, he seems to note that in the creation of these schools free Blacks asserted their right to have their children educated. The solidarity of African Americans to fight for the rights of their children was a building block for Sumner’s argument for Common Schools.

Local solidarity builds community, makes a path for trans-institutional solidarity, and provides a basis for larger social and political inclusion. Public policy interested in integration,

therefore, should focus on supporting and generating local solidarity and community building, as well as inclusion and equity. One might call the results of such efforts “integration” but that remains an abstraction. From the street view, what comes first is local solidarity.

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