

D I G I T A L P R E S S K I T

Uncovering *the* Legacy  
of Poverty in America

“This book forces you  
to see American poverty  
in a whole new light.”

—Matthew Desmond,  
Pulitzer Prize-  
winning author of  
*Poverty, by America*

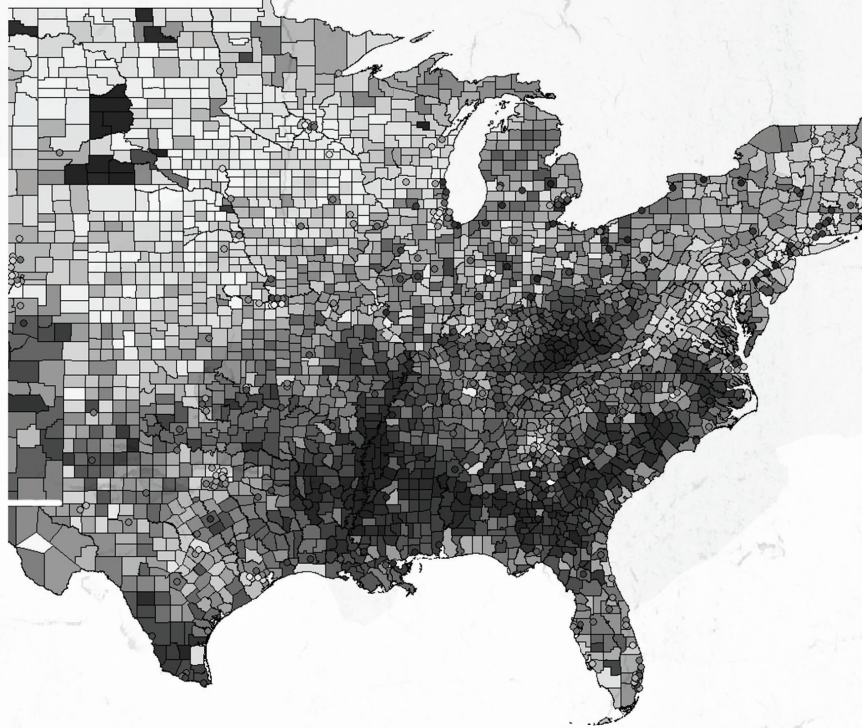
**THE  
INJUSTICE  
OF PLACE**

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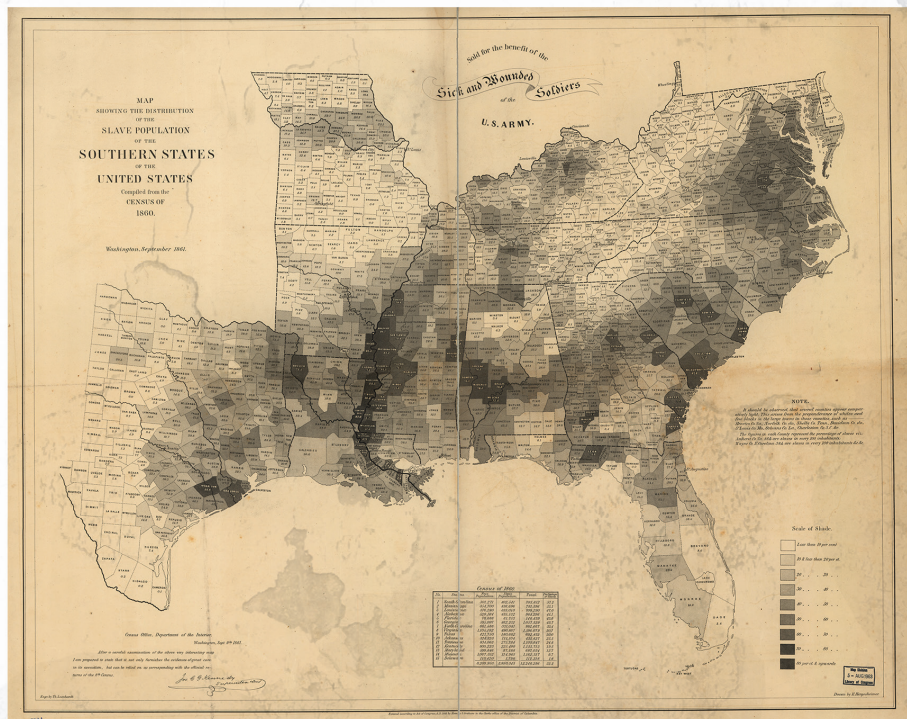
# MAP OF DEEP DISADVANTAGE IN AMERICA

Our Map of Deep Disadvantage Compared to a Map of Enslavement from 1860



Most Disadvantaged

Most Advantaged



# KEY INSIGHTS FROM **THE INJUSTICE OF PLACE**

- The places with the lowest income, poorest health, and worst life chances are in rural America.
- Many people think of rural America as predominantly white, but the most disadvantaged places in the nation are rural communities of color.
- Those living in America's most disadvantaged communities can expect to die nearly a decade earlier than those living in the most advantaged places.
- The unemployment rate in America's most disadvantaged communities is about three times higher than in the most advantaged places.
- American babies in the nation's most disadvantaged communities are twice as likely to be born with low birth weight as babies born in the most advantaged places.
- Today, our nation's schools remain as segregated as they were in the years just before Brown.
- For generations, violence was used by a small cadre of powerful people to keep vast numbers of "have-nots" from achieving upward mobility. Today, many of America's most disadvantaged communities are caught in a structural cycle of violence, where violence limits social mobility, just as mobility incites further violence.
- In many of America's most disadvantaged rural places, rates of violent crime are similar to those seen in urban areas like Chicago.
- In America's most disadvantaged places, rebuilding the social infrastructure—the places where people gather to create social bonds—is as vital as rebuilding the physical infrastructure.
- Sprawling corruption schemes feature largely in America's most disadvantaged places, enriching elites while consigning their regions to continuing economic stagnation.
- When disaster hits America's most disadvantaged places, government help most often deepens rather than heals preexisting divides, benefiting the "haves" while leaving the "have-nots" behind.

# A SPOTLIGHT ON PLACES OF DEEPEST DISADVANTAGE IN AMERICA

—**Leflore County, MS**, is where King Cotton ruled and where the antebellum plantation economy was most faithfully reproduced after the Civil



War. Today violence is the number one problem facing the community according to Black residents the authors spoke to, though white folks were largely oblivious to it. This rural county and the larger region it represents—the vast Cotton Belt stretching

from the Carolinas to eastern Arkansas and Louisiana—is among the most violent in the nation. Violence has plagued this region for well over a century.

—**Marion County, SC**, is along with Leflore County one of the most disadvantaged majority-Black places in the nation. Marion County’s largest city,



Mullins, was once known as the “Tobacco Capital” of South Carolina. This was the place where the “bright leaf” strain was first introduced, producing a system of tenant farming

akin to that of the antebellum plantation economy of the Cotton Belt. Here the authors found that “every one of our conversations started with a discussion of the flooding that had come in the wave of back-to-back hurricanes.” Centuries-old racial inequality in the region deepened in the wake of these disasters, due to systemic racism embedded in the very government programs that were supposed to help people recover. Those who already had been struggling before the floods were struggling even more after.

—**Clay County, KY**, was once the salt-mining epicenter of the eastern US, its captains deploying the labor of enslaved people to generate wealth



along the creek beds. King Coal came next. Today an opioid crisis continues to ravage the region. Locals lament

the decline of the local movie theater—now a Pentecostal church—the loss of the bowling alley, numerous bars, cafés, beauty salons, and the park that has been plowed up for a highway construction project. The very features of a community that draw people together and create the social bonds that, when strong, can catch people when they fall have grown weak. People blame the rise of opioid use on the fact that, in this place, there is “nothing to do but drugs.”

—**Zavala and Brooks Counties, TX**. Zavala County was “Spinach Capital of the World” in the 1930s. In these South Texas counties, spinach and onion



fields yielded fabulous profits for those who owned those lands. In some areas, the fields still stretch to the horizon today. Yet the forced migratory patterns for the landless laborers stripped generations of

children of their right to a decent education. Even today, adult illiteracy rates in these South Texas communities are among the highest in the nation. High school graduation rates among the younger generation have soared, but test scores remain abysmal, especially in reading.

## AUTHOR BIOS



**KATHRYN J. EDIN** is the William Church Osborn Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University. The author of nine books, Edin is widely recognized for using both quantitative research and direct, in-depth observation to illuminate key mysteries about poverty: “In a field of poverty experts who rarely meet the poor, Edin usefully defies convention” (*New York Times*).



**H. LUKE SHAEFER** is the Hermann and Amalie Kohn Professor and Associate Dean at the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. There he directs Poverty Solutions, a presidential initiative that partners with communities to find new ways to prevent and alleviate poverty.



**TIMOTHY J. NELSON** is Director of Undergraduate Studies in Sociology and Lecturer of Public Affairs at the School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. He is the author of numerous articles on low-income fathers and is the co-author, with Edin, of the award-winning *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City*.

# PRAISE FOR **THE INJUSTICE OF PLACE**

“Three of the nation’s top poverty scholars deliver a profound inquiry into the most disadvantaged communities in America. Combining historical and statistical analysis with on-the-ground interviewing, the authors present novel and provocative arguments for many social ills that plague these regions. This book challenges and enrages, humbles and indicts—and forces you to see American poverty in a whole new light.”

— **Matthew Desmond, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Evicted* and *Poverty, by America***

“Captivating and insightful, *The Injustice of Place* sheds new light on how the places in which we live shape so many aspects of our lives—from our jobs to our health to our children’s prospects. By interweaving big data with on-the-ground ethnography and historical analysis, the authors exemplify the best of social science today, and will surely help frame policy discussions in the years to come.”

— **Raj Chetty, William A. Ackman Professor of Economics at Harvard University, recipient of the John Bates Clark Medal, recognizing the economist under forty whose work has made the most significant contribution to the field**

“Woven with vivid, firsthand accounts and bolstered by fresh data, *The Injustice of Place* convincingly knots present-day disadvantage to the long tail of racism and extractive capitalism. This book delivers new insights into solving today’s most intractable injustices.”

— **Mona Hanna-Attisha, Flint, MI, pediatrician and author of *What the Eyes Don’t See: A Story of Crisis, Resistance, and Hope in an American City***

“There is no book on poverty in America quite like this one. Original reporting and rigorous data analysis reveal a living history of injustice maintained through corruption, resource extraction, and violence; but the book doesn’t leave us there. We meet everyday people who, even in the face of backlash from the economic and political elite, try to bring about change. Incisive, surprising, enraging, and hopeful, *The Injustice of Place* is the book on poverty we’ve needed all along.”

— **Reuben Jonathan Miller, 2022 MacArthur Fellow and author of *Halfway Home: Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration***