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AUTOMOBILITY AND RACIAL INJUSTICE IN SPATIAL PRODUCTION

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Automobility—the centering of society around automobiles and their supporting infrastructure—has configured urban life across the United States by entrenching distinctive ways of production, circulation, and social relations in the built environment. Through the twentieth century history of St. Louis, MO, discourses and politics surrounding the automobility were closely tied to racist and anti-urban sentiments driving spatial production. The construction of interstate highways through African-American neighborhoods, rapid suburbanization and segregation of postwar planning policies, along with racist politics of the city’s current mass transit development, are deeply implicated in the city’s system of automobility. Automobility presents “a site of special struggle over how the city is configured and for whom.” The question that this research seeks to answer asks: how has St. Louis created a geography based on automobility, and how has this geography of automobility marginalized minority communities? To answer this question, this study contests the persisting essentialization of the automobile in modern society, and evaluate the history of racialized and anti-urban politics of automobility that influenced spatial production in the St. Louis region through this framework. From this historical view, connections will be made to current transportation and demographic data and political trends to evaluate persisting effects of automobility. This research ultimately aims to provide a basis of knowledge of automobility and racial politics in the production of space in St. Louis to better understand implications and barriers involved in creating an urban environment based on principle of social justice.