Description: Since the end of the Civil Rights Movement, large numbers of black people have made their way into settings previously occupied only by whites, though their reception has been mixed. Overwhelmingly white neighborhoods, schools, universities, workplaces, restaurants, and other public spaces remain. Blacks perceive these settings as “white space,” which they often consider to be informally “off limits” for people like them. Meanwhile, despite the growth of an enormous black middle class, many whites assume that the natural black space is the ghetto, or the place where “the black people live,” symbolizing an impoverished, crime-prone, drug-infested, and violent area of the city.

Aided by the mass media and popular culture, this image of the ghetto has achieved an iconic status, and serves as a powerful source of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination. The history of racism in America, along with the ascription of “ghetto” to anonymous blacks, has burdened blacks with a negative presumption they must disprove before they can establish mutually trusting relationships with others. The poorest blacks occupy a caste-like status, and for the black middle class, contradictions and dilemmas of status are common, resulting in their enduring provisional status.

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