Discussion questions for readings by Elijah Anderson
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This article by Anderson present three core social science concepts that we ask you to reflect on throughout the Urban Mods. 1) The lived experience of racial identity in urban centers in USA. 2) The influence of public urban spaces on how we navigate cities and racial identities. 3) Participant observation as a research methodology for social science.

1. The lived experience of race in America: Anderson describes the tension and challenges of a minority group inhabiting the spaces of the majority. In urban centers in USA this often plays out at “black spaces” versus “white spaces”.
   • What is your experience with racial diversity and the ways people move through public space? Beyond race, what are others experiences of identity and difference might be encountered on a regular basis?

2. The influence of public urban spaces on how we navigate cities and racial identities: Anderson’s paper is an example of what many people see in today’s society of “#livingwhileblack”. This is also entwined with Anderson’s concept of “moral authority”—which gives a person a level of acceptance and protection against random and biased accusations.
   • How would you describe the experience of having moral authority or lacking moral authority? Can you give a specific example?
   • In your observations of public space in New Haven can you see ways in which public space shapes racial interactions? Can you find anything resembling Anderson’s “cosmopolitan spaces”—“racially diverse islands of civility”—in your home or in New Haven?
   • Anderson talks about “white spaces” being the places of social rewards (where you can find culture, entertainment, education). He also describes places where “white spaces” begin to intrude into “black spaces”, a process we often think of as gentrification. How can we disentangle this idea of social rewards and gentrification going hand in hand.? Can you see evidence of this phenomenon in New Haven?

3. Participant observation as an ethnographic research method
   • For further thought: one of the key methods for anthropologists and sociologist. Anderson, as a skilled social scientist, presents his research method “participant observation, which he described as akin to “people watching”. And much of his data is conveyed through first person narratives (both is own and his subjects). Skeptics might dismiss these data as anecdotal stories. Reflect on this method of research and the ways in which we judge the validity of this form of social science.