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# Mobility Justice

Mimi Sheller

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Interviewer: Allison Ferry

Mimi Sheller is Professor of Sociology and founding Director of the Center for Mobilities Research and Policy at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She is founding co-editor of the journal *Mobilities*; Associate Editor of *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*, and co-edited *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities* (2013). As co-editor, with John Urry, of *Mobile Technologies of the City* (2006), *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play* (2004) and co-author of the article “The New Mobilities Paradigm” in their special issue of *Environment and Planning A* (2006) on Materialities and Mobilities, she helped to establish the new interdisciplinary field of mobilities research. She has also authored several books and numerous articles in Caribbean Studies, including *Democracy After Slavery* (2000); *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003); *Citizenship from Below* (2012), and *Aluminum Dreams* (2014).

## **When did you first become involved with mobilities research?**

In 2003, John Urry and I co-founded the [Centre for Mobilities Research](#) at Lancaster University. We started a new journal called *Mobilities* (in 2005) and that really kicked off, in a sense, this idea that there was a field of mobilities research. And there were other researchers who were cross-disciplinary and even trans-disciplinary, who were starting to think beyond disciplines and also using ideas of mobilities. We were coming out of cultural geography, sociology, media studies, migration studies, transport studies, and all of those informed the way I started using mobilities as a concept, a method, and a theoretical perspective in my own research. I also think it's important for me to remember how my approach came out of thinking of histories of the Caribbean as a mobile region, but then I started working on things like auto-mobility and sustainable

transportation, and also mobile media, mobile art. All of those are different areas in which I have been working but they are all related to this general perspective on looking at things through relationality, and movement, and power structures around mobility and immobility.

### **What is Mobility Justice?**

Mobility justice, for me, is a way of thinking about the differential mobilities and thinking about the ways in which people's mobilities are interrelated, and that we have different capabilities for mobility and different potentials for mobility. It's not to say that being mobile is always good, or that it equates with freedom, because sometimes there are coerced forms of mobility and sometimes staying still is important – being able to remain in a place. So mobility justice is a way to talk about those different relations around mobility and that is a way to highlight the power differentials that come into play in any form of mobility, and the different affordances that different people are able to make use of, or appropriate, in becoming mobile or not.

There was a panel at the Differential Mobilities Conference on race and mobilities that Judith Nicholson organized and I think it's a really important topic, because a lot of mobilities literature is equated with the literature on globalization, which in the 1990s, talked about a sort of borderless world that we would all be free to move through. This literature suggested there could be a liquid modernity, and that everyone was changing in a certain direction. And for me, coming out of the field of Caribbean studies and histories of the Caribbean (where people have always been very mobile), I looked at that

very critically. Questions of race and other kinds of difference – national, class, gender, sexuality – are really important for thinking about these differential mobilities. But race has been, in a way, less of a topic of focus in some of the recent mobilities research.

There's sort of an unmarked whiteness in a lot of it. And I think it's really important to highlight how mobilities are constructed through processes of racialization, and forms of racialization are really marked by differential mobilities. In fact, Judith Nicholson and I plan to issue a Call for Papers for a special issue that we want to co-edit on Race and Mobilities.