Saving “America’s Iconic Liberal City”: The Late Liberal Biopolitics of Anti-Gentrification Discourses in San Francisco

Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis argues that liberal anti-gentrification discourses play a powerful if unacknowledged role in the governance of social difference in our contemporary neoliberal moment. The thesis examines anti-gentrification discourses in San Francisco that oppose gentrification in defense of treasured liberal ideals of the good life and just city—namely, the belief that liberal subjects have successfully disaffiliated from histories of xenophobia, and the attendant desire to foster social harmony by celebrating and living alongside “the otherwise.” Liberal anti-gentrification discourses posit these regulatory ideals as a corrective to the unapologetically exclusionary and violent “revanchist city.” An appeal to keep “the otherwise” inside the project of citizenship amidst the competing valuations of the market, these discourses are a site at which late liberal governmentality negotiates the terms of social inclusion and reasons about the simultaneous worth and dangers of social difference. Liberal anti-gentrification discourses enlist a range of biopolitical technologies to figure differential inclusion in the image of liberal social harmony. They create a field of uneven exposure to gentrification, and in so doing quietly and unwittingly endorse and prolong longstanding patterns of xenophobic exclusion and violence in the U.S. city. Articulated in the name of an anti-gentrification politics that stakes its claim on including, accommodating, and celebrating “the otherwise,” this late
liberal biopolitics make differential inclusion seem politically and ethically sensible, right, and good.
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Introduction

I have always been proud of San Francisco’s culturally and ethnically diverse population. This diversity lies at the very core of our city’s character…. San Francisco’s strength is the fact that we don’t just tolerate our diversity, we celebrate it.

—Former San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom

If you happened to read a story about San Francisco in the past five years, it was likely a doomsday tale about the “tech boom.” Picking up where the 1990s dot-com boom left off, this tech boom has had such a staggering impact on San Francisco’s cost living and on its real estate markets that urban planners are using the term “hyper-gentrification” to describe it.¹ Despite strong tenant protections, landlords are finding ways to evict low-income residents and convert rent-controlled apartments into market-rate units. The statistics are endless. As of January 2013, median rent was just over $3000 per month.² Between 2011 and 2012, the average apartment rental in once-affordable neighborhoods such as the Mission and the Western Addition increased by 40 and 53 percent, respectively.³ In 2013, the city lost 1,017 rent-controlled apartments due to

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condo conversions. Evictions increased by 175 percent in 2013 from the year before. San Francisco has the second highest inequality gap of any major city in the U.S. By one measure, its Gini coefficient is on par with Rwanda’s. In an interview with *Time* titled “Mayor of Resentment City,” pro-business mayor Ed Lee nonchalantly commented that to be considered middle class, one has to earn between $80,000 and $150,000 per year. San Francisco is increasingly becoming a citadel for the young, the wealthy, and the white. The crisis of livability is resulting in the exodus of families and people of color and the eviction of celebrated neighborhood institutions, including the nation’s oldest black bookstore. People are deploying the word “gentrification” to catalogue what is happening to the city. But it is an odd choice, for gentrification is a term usually reserved for neighborhoods and not entire cities.

The gentrification of San Francisco has garnered the attention of local, national, and even international media outlets. *Mother Jones* and the *Huffington Post* both recently featured photo essays on what San Francisco looked like “before the Silicon Valley bros invaded,” prefiguring a near-future when entire parts of the city are reduced to historical

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memory. The “Google Bus,” a trenchant example and symbol of the tech enclosure of San Francisco, made the rounds first in the London Review of Books and then in the New Yorker, Al Jazeera America, NPR, The Nation, the Wall Street Journal, and the Bay Guardian—not to mention in local weeklies and blogs. Everyday, my Facebook newsfeed is awash with posts by friends linking to images of eviction notices, alarmist news stories, and infographics of income inequality. The phrase “I’m moving to Oakland,” once figured as San Francisco’s lowly unenlightened cousin across the Bay, no longer requires explication or qualification. But the frenetic anxiety surrounding the tech boom is perhaps best conveyed by San Francisco-based writer Rebecca Solnit:

Everyone talks about the transformation of the city, and almost every tenant talks about fear of losing his or her perch here. It’s in the news every day. It is the main news here, and has been for the last few years. It’s a crisis, a boom, and an obsession.

Solnit wrote this at the height of the dot-com boom in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but her diagnosis resonates with the affective charge of our contemporary moment. Fourteen years later amidst a second tech boom more ruthless than the first, Solnit revisited this diagnosis. “What began as vague anxiety,” she observed, “has turned into fear, rage, and grief.”

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In the past few years, the gentrification of San Francisco has become a global obsession that rouses not only social and political curiosity, but emotional unease and indignation. While “the crisis” is often articulated as a matter of growing economic inequality, this is not the reason for our intellectual and affective investments in this story. The gentrification of San Francisco is not just another episode of neoliberal development, the “growth machine” of city politics, or working-class displacement. Rather, these developments capture our attention because of a specific set of meanings, investments, and stakes we attach to them. For the gentrification of San Francisco is also a matter of what is being lost as a result of gentrification. The same news articles that cite eviction statistics and rising costs of living also oppose gentrification on the grounds that it is destroying, as George McIntire of Salon puts it, “America’s most important and iconic liberal city,” where “radically liberal ideas that never see the light of day in the rest of the country come to fruition.”

Commentators critical of gentrification argue that the tech boom is endangering a “a city built on diversity”; that San Francisco’s culture of “tolerance and dissent” is quite literally “being replaced by condominiums”; and that the “disappearance of diversity threatens the city’s character and its people.” The gentrification of San Francisco, then, is not just about increasing economic inequality. It is also about the loss of treasured liberal ideals of the good life and just society—ideals such as diversity, tolerance, and social harmony—that profoundly shape the terms of

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15 McIntire, “San Francisco’s Rightward Turn.”
social belonging and our negotiations and encounters with social worlds that are not our own.

In this thesis, I argue that while anti-gentrification discourses of this sort launch a much-needed critique of economic inequality, they also constitute a powerful and unacknowledged element of late liberal governmentality. Following Elizabeth Povinelli, I use the term “late liberal governmentality” to describe the governance of social difference and the politics of social inclusion in our contemporary neoliberal moment. At its core, contemporary liberalism predicates social inclusion on two core tenants: the belief that liberal subjects have successfully disaffiliated from brutal and embarrassing histories of xenophobia, and the attendant desire to “move on” and foster social harmony by celebrating and living alongside “the otherwise.” Late liberalism pledges “diversity” and “tolerance” as political testaments to these recovered good intentions.

The San Francisco-based liberal anti-gentrification discourses I examine in this thesis frame gentrification as an assault on late liberal aspirations of the good life and just society. They oppose tech-fueled gentrification on the grounds that it will destroy a San Francisco “way of life” rooted in diversity, tolerance, and social peace. These discourses posit late liberal regulatory ideals as a corrective to the unapologetically exclusionary and violent “revanchist city.” An appeal to keep “the otherwise” inside the project of citizenship amidst the competing valuations of the market, these discourses are a crucial site at which late liberal governmentality negotiates the terms of social inclusion and reasons about the simultaneous worth and danger of social difference. In this thesis, I demonstrate that anti-gentrification discourses enlist a range of biopolitical technologies that make temporally inscribed claims on urban space and figure differential inclusion in
the image of liberal social harmony. These discourses create a field of uneven exposure to gentrification—and in so doing, quietly and unwittingly endorse and prolong longstanding patterns of xenophobic exclusion and violence in the U.S. city. Articulated in the name of an anti-gentrification politics that stakes its claim on including, accommodating, and celebrating “the otherwise,” these biopolitical maneuvers make differential inclusion seem politically and ethically sensible, right, and good.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. In the first two chapters of the thesis, I construct a theoretical framework for understanding the governance of social difference in the context of liberalism’s be(late)ed 20th-century turn to the politics of inclusion. Here I build on Foucault’s twin concepts of governmentality and biopolitics, as well as the insights of critical theorists in feminist philosophy, queer studies, and race, settler colonial, and postcolonial studies. I further argue for “the urban” as a generative analytical site for exploring questions of how late liberalism governs social difference. The remainder of the thesis reconceptualizes liberal anti-gentrification discourses in San Francisco using the theoretical framework I developed in the introductory chapters. In Chapter Three, I make the argument for understanding liberal anti-gentrification discourses as an element of late liberal governmentality. Chapters Four and Five begin to trace the contours of this late liberal biopolitics by examining the biopolitical maneuvers that liberal anti-gentrification discourses enlist in the “securitization” of the late liberal urban imaginary. In these chapters, I suggest that one of the costs and consequences of an anti-gentrification politics that stakes its claims on late liberal ethics is the willful abandonment and neglect of “racial ghettos,” where the late liberal ideas are subverted by the persistent violence of anti-black xenophobia. In the conclusion, I recap the stakes of
my proposed line of inquiry. I then offer some final comments on how this line of inquiry—which takes liberalism, difference, and a Foucauldian analytics of power as its central theoretical concepts rather than the more conventional categories of capital and class—productively aids and complicates the strictly economic focus of most gentrification research.

Before I continue, some remarks on how my reframing of anti-gentrification politics intervenes in theoretical debates in critical social theory and urban studies beyond the narrow scope of “gentrification research”: In framing anti-gentrification discourses as an element of late liberal biopolitics, I depart from much of the work in political philosophy and urban studies that approaches liberalism through an analytics of exclusion, violence, and sovereign power. In his lectures at the College de France, Michel Foucault argued that power in modern liberal societies turns on the apparatus of governmentality and the incorporative logic of biopower rather than the exclusionary logics of sovereign and disciplinary power. According to Foucault, the sovereign establishes the territorial “line” that divides obedient subjects from willful enemies. The sovereign expels these enemies through the juridical force of laws as well as through overt displays of violence. Similarly, disciplinary institutions like prisons regulate individual bodies through techniques of isolation, containment, and enclosure. In contrast, biopolitical technologies fold subjects into the social body and into the administration of life in the broadest sense. Of course, this does not mean that sovereign

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18 Ibid, 144.
19 Ibid, 44.
and disciplinary power disappeared with the emergence of biopower. Rather, the “problem of sovereignty was more acute than ever” and “discipline was never more important or valued than when the attempt was made to manage the population [through biopower].” The difference was that liberal governments now largely eschewed rationalities of spectacular killing and outright exclusion. Instead, the arts of government recast discipline and sovereignty within a biopolitical concern for enlarging and enlivening the social body. Liberal biopolitics still enlists biopolitical, disciplinary, and sovereign techniques in acts of direct and indirect murder, including exclusion, political death, and social death—but it does so by reasoning in the name of social inclusion and wellbeing.

Recent scholarship in political philosophy and urban studies rightly suggests that Foucault may have overstated liberalism’s turn to inclusion and biopower’s attendant capture and rearticulation of sovereignty. Uday Mehta, David Theo Goldberg, and Falguni Sheth all argue that liberalism’s universal ideals and promises are sustained in and through racial exclusions, and Sheth is not alone in noting the resurgence of sovereign power in the post-9/11 era. Likewise, Achille Mbembe’s concept of “necropolitics” orients us to the constitutive outside of the biopolitical, where sovereign power continues to condemn bodies of color to death in unapologetic, overt, and fantastic ways. Although they write in the lexicon of Marx rather than Foucault, theorists of the revanchist city have pointed to zero-tolerance policing, gated communities, private security forces, and the retrenchment of public space as examples of practices that fortify

the city for capital accumulation by violently expelling those who threaten the security of urban property markets. And the persistence of anti-black state and para-state violence in the United States and elsewhere has prompted impassioned inquiries into the operations of necropower in the contemporary metropolis. These are critical interventions, for they point us to liberalism’s exterior limits and the means by which certain peoples and practices “get marked beyond the pale of tolerance.”

However, in this paper I take a different but complementary tack by examining the politics, technologies, and rationalities of liberal inclusion. I return to Foucault’s original formulation of biopolitics and liberal governmentality to understand how appeals to inclusion rationalize forms of “letting die” that duck the analytical and affective registers of exclusion, death, outrage, and violent spectacle. Late liberal discourses often articulate claims to inclusion by contesting and objecting to blatantly pernicious acts of “making die.” The anti-gentrification discourses that interest me do exactly this. They express genuine outrage at the transformation of San Francisco into an elite and exclusive citadel. They are deeply optimistic and well-meaning engagements with the urban social form in the midst of pressing insecurity about the future. Such discourses wholeheartedly believe in the regulatory ideal of liberal social harmony as the secret to the good life and just society and as the best way to think, accommodate, empower, and live

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alongside “the otherwise.” They hedge their vision of the inclusive, benevolent “good city” against a future “revanchist city” characterized by tech-fueled gentrification, dispossession, exclusion, and impoverishment. It is the consequences and implications of this optimism and self-positioning that interests me and that the framework of late liberal biopolitics enables me to trouble. The interrelated concepts of biopolitics and governmentality help us discern the unremarkable violences and harmful attachments that persist in the shadows of liberal inclusion and social harmony. For in the end there is still, as Ananya Roy alleges, “a great deal to be learned about power and authority by studying how subjects and spaces come to be ‘inside’ the project of citizenship.”

Finally, in conceptualizing neoliberalism as an uneven and contested “field of social maneuver” and late liberalism as an apparatus of governmentality, I depart from much of the neo-Marxian scholarship in urban studies that, following Jamie Peck’s critique of the creative class, reduces late liberal ideals and aspirations to elements of market ideology. Peck contends that diversity and tolerance are cornerstones of neoliberal place-marketing strategies that open the city up for capital accumulation. In order to attract creative types, cities brand themselves as “diverse, progressive environments,” wherein diversity entails prohibitively expensive sushi restaurants, yoga studios, and “gay” neighborhoods. For Peck, appeals to “diversity” and “tolerance” make difference available for consumption and commodification. In so doing, they work “with the grain” of extant neoliberal development agendas that set gentrification in motion and secure the

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city for subjects who produce market value.\(^{27}\) In this thesis, I am interested in liberal anti-gentrification discourses that articulate a critique of market ideology, but do so in the defense of late liberal ideals and aspirations. As a recent article in *The New Republic* observes, such arguments are largely “middle-class” formulations of the problem of gentrification.\(^{28}\) They primarily reflect the concerns of the city’s white, middle class intelligentsia—writers, artists, journalists, neighborhood preservationists who are concerned, as Rebecca Solnit is, about “the fate of a city that poets can’t afford.”\(^{29}\) There are reasons to be wary of the transformative potential of these discourses. As I show, these discourses gloss over the complex relationship of gentrification to unequal histories of violence, resources and opportunities, and socioeconomic hardship in North American cities. But I do not think we glean much by dismissing such discourses as an ideologically compromised, misguided, or disguised form of creative class politics that simply abets neoliberal development agendas.

Moving beyond a preoccupation with “inside” and “outside” geographies, I understand liberal anti-gentrification discourses as a legitimate (albeit certainly not radical) “contestation” of the capacity of the market to set the terms of urban citizenship. I draw on the framework of late liberalism to build out a three-dimensional understanding of how claims to inclusion in anti-gentrification discourses constitute a field of uneven exposure to gentrification. Indeed, insofar as late liberal governmentality cites a way of figuring and governing social difference, its rationalities, regulatory aspirations, and

\(^{27}\) Ibid, 740.
technologies are available to properly “neoliberal” projects as well as to its contestations. Paying attention to late liberal ways of understanding and navigating social difference can help us understand how an anti-gentrification politics that speaks in the name of an abstract and inclusive “we” ends up preserving the “right to the city” for some populations while giving other populations up to the forces of urban development—even as it “stays true” to its contestation of market-based logics.
Chapter 1: Late Liberalism, Governmentality, and Biopolitics

How do we, and why would we, critically engage a seemingly irreducible good and truth—the liberal regulatory ideal of decreased harm through increased mutual understanding of social and cultural difference?...To ask if we should critique these ideals is to allow for the possibility that liberalism is harmful not only when it fails to live up to its ideals, but when it approaches them.

—Elizabeth Povinelli, The Cunning of Recognition

Violence is most easily perpetuated in the spaces where its possibility is unequivocally denounced.

—Jasbir Puar, Terrorist Assemblages

As a political philosophy, liberalism is a doctrine of “being human and being human together” that is typically associated with the self-making rational individual, the “invisible hand” of the market, rule of law, and pluralism.\(^{30}\) Liberalism identifies as its primary moral and political unit the abstract universal subject guided by reason, one “divorced from the contingency of history.”\(^{31}\) The foundation of a liberal society is a laissez-faire economy. Committed to the principle of minimal state intervention, liberalism is concerned with the freedom and capacity of rational individuals to participate in the market economy, govern their own affairs, and manage their own relationships. At the same time, liberal societies also rest their legitimacy on rights and

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\(^{30}\) Brown, 23. The term “liberal” is used to refer to a range of philosophical traditions, from utilitarianism to Rawlsian political liberalism. In this brief overview, I am simply identifying some ideas that are common to liberal thinking. My overview is taken from Wendy Brown, Regulating Aversion; David Theo Goldberg, Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1993); Falguni A. Sheth, Toward a Political Philosophy of Race (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009).

\(^{31}\) Goldberg, 4.
equality before the rule of law. Given its ahistoricity and its emphasis on legal neutrality and political formalism, liberalism is largely unencumbered by and accommodating of “difference,” so long as the differences in question are subordinated to the principles of universal reason.32 The founding of the United States, a liberal society “par excellence,”33 is coterminous with the enshrining of tolerance and pluralism as key liberal tenets.34

In this paper, however, I am interested in liberalism as a form of governance rather than as a political philosophy. Following Foucault, I am interested in how liberal ways of reasoning and figuring the world find their way into the mechanisms, techniques, and technologies of rule.35 In his 1977-78 and 1978-79 lectures at the College de France, Foucault defined “governmentality” as a mode of governance specific to liberalism.36 Liberal governmentality has a complex and diagonal relationship to what conventional wisdom sees as “true” liberal precepts.37 Referring to the “conduct of conduct,”
governmentality is the means by which the relationship between man and society is brought under the project of governance. Government in this broad sense is not reducible to the rule of law or to formal state institutions. It is multifarious and polyvalent and includes knowledges, discourses, and institutions that govern outside the rubric and accountability of the state.38 This diffuse, mobile, and disparate ensemble produces

32 Brown, 23.
36 Foucault, STP, 110. Foucault traces pre-liberal forms of governmentality to the Christian pastorate and to the specific form of governmental sovereignty associated with raison d’État. However in his view it is only with liberalism that we have the full “governmentalization of the state.”
38 Foucault, STP, 93.
governable subjects by quietly regulating the interrelationships of man to himself, to others, to populations, to “things” in the world, and to ways of thinking and acting—in short, the stuff and conduct of everyday life. Anthopological, scientific, and cultural knowledges play a critical role here. They endow “intelligibility” and “truth” to social relationships, producing forms of knowledge and inventing concepts that contribute to the “government” of new domains of regulation—new targets, problems, objects, and instruments. “Governmentality” hence refers to the moral, epistemological, and technical styles of reasoning (“rationalities”) that render social reality thinkable, knowable, and internally consistent in such a way as to make it amenable to governmental programming and reflection.

More specifically, I am concerned with liberalism as a rationality and practice of “governing” social difference. To that end, I want to make two points about liberal governmentality. First, liberalism brings unprecedented dimensions of social, cultural, and ethical life inside the purview of rule, but it is difficult to detect as a form of power and regulation. The liberal principle of minimal state interference begets a modality of power that “governs at a distance” by acting on the conceptions, needs, and aspirations of the governed. The subject of governmentality is at once “aware of what it wants 

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39 Ibid, 96.
41 Foucault, STP, 246. Foucault understands rationalization as a process that renders different elements internally consistent. Rationality refers to ways of reasoning that are “fully integrated at the level of institutions, practices, and ways of doing things” that render the exercise of power “rational.”
government] and unaware of what is being done to it.” As Wendy Brown notes, in the
United States the governance of social difference occurs largely through the non-statist, 
non-legal apparatuses of governmentality. Late liberal techniques of governance such as 
“tolerance” and “diversity” are not so much enshrined in law but instead appear as 
“genial neighborly values” that circulate through a range of knowledges, discourses, and 
institutions—including, as I demonstrate in this paper, a certain strand of anti-gentrification politics.

Second, liberalism reformats its governing principles as it adapts to new 
challenges. Liberal rationalities introduce an element of uncertainty and infallibility into 
governmental practice because they are always undergoing modification in the face of 
some newly identified problem or solution. Liberal rationalities are therefore constantly 
reappraising the problems of government in light of its shortcomings and excesses. This 
prompts liberal governmentality to continuously reflect on “how to be governed, by 
whom, to what extent, to what ends, and by what methods?” Liberalism lends itself to 
perpetual reinvention because it is constantly redefining its techniques in search of the 
answer to these questions. This propensity for self-reflection and self-correction makes 
liberalism a “prodigiously fertile problematic” and “continuing vector of political

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44 Foucault, STP, 71, 105. This is in contrast to sovereign power, wherein the relationship between the sovereign and the governed is one of obedience/refusal.
45 Brown, 38.
48 Foucault, BOB, 42, 282.
49 Foucault, STP, 89. It is in this sense that liberalism presents itself as a “critique of governmental reason” and an “instrument for the criticism of reality.”
invention,” endowing it with its unique flexibility, openness, and “social vitality.”

50 Thus from the perspective of governmentality, liberalism’s insidious entanglement with colonialism, slavery, and other atrocities does not constitute a contradiction of liberal thinking that demands ideological obfuscation. 51 Rather, liberal governmentality rationalizes the atrocities that occur under its watch as accidental mishaps and as deeply regrettable misunderstandings and misapplications of liberal precepts. Through its self-correcting maneuvers, liberal governmentality recasts such atrocities as pretexts for self-reflection and self-improvement. 52 This self-correcting tendency enables liberalism to “develop its worth without subjecting itself to the throes of contestation and opposition” and present itself as the best way to “think the otherwise.” 53

I am interested in the self-correcting moves that accompanied the practice of liberal governance in the wake of the legitimacy crises of the mid to late 20th century. Scholars have long pointed out that the so-called “universal” categories of liberal belonging—citizenship, rights, freedom, property—are constituted in and through an intense aversion to difference. As Uday Mehta, Falguni Sheth, and David Theo Goldberg have all argued, liberal societies justified these exclusions by deeming radically “different” peoples “irrational” and unfit for self-rule and full membership in the liberal polity. For example, both James and John Stuart Mill insisted that it was in the natives’ best interest to give up their autonomy and submit to colonial rule because they lacked

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50 Burchell et al, 16-18; Povinelli, Cunning of Recognition, 11.
51 For more on the distinction Foucault draws between liberalism as an ideology and liberalism as a technology of power, see STP, 48-49.
52 Sheth, 16-17.
53 Povinelli, Cunning of Recognition, 17.
enlightened reason.\textsuperscript{54} The criterion of rationality mandates exclusion in the name of liberal principles, thereby resolving liberalism’s paradox of how to eliminate adversaries while maintaining neutrality.\textsuperscript{55} This xenophobic incitement to exclude, an incitement endemic to classical liberalism and to all of its historical and progressive variants, establishes external limits on social tolerance and universal inclusion. The 20\textsuperscript{th} century witnessed a number of social movements both in the U.S. and internationally that launched this critique from a range of epistemological, political, and geographical locations. Including but not limited to anticolonial, anti-imperialist, and new social movements, these struggles placed immense pressure on the legitimating frameworks of liberal democracy by calling attention to its xenophobic exclusions and partial universalism.\textsuperscript{56}

This legitimacy crisis was deferred as it was translated and transfigured into a problematic of liberal governmentality. Following Elizabeth Povinelli, I use the term “late liberalism” to refer to the be(late)d response of late 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} century liberal societies to the challenge of social difference.\textsuperscript{57} As liberal societies morally disaffiliated from earlier, more explicit and brutal forms of racism, they began to recognize subalter and minority groups as members of the liberal polity.\textsuperscript{58} In the governance of social difference, this marked a turn from a politics of exclusion to a politics of inclusion. Going back to Foucault’s sovereignty-discipline-governmentality triad, this does not mean that exclusionary practices disappeared, but rather that the

\textsuperscript{54} Goldberg, 35.
\textsuperscript{55} Goldberg, 36; Sheth, 77.
\textsuperscript{57} Povinelli, \textit{Economies of Abandonment}, 25.
\textsuperscript{58} Puar, 31.
problem of social difference was now formulated as a problem of inclusion. By
“inclusion,” I do not mean legal membership in the nation-state. Rather, I use the term to
refer to access to political, socioeconomic, and cultural resources—and more importantly
for the purposes of this paper—moral and performative claims over the meanings,
practices, expectations, and boundaries that define full membership in society.59

Late liberal governments made the turn to inclusion by regulating the relationship
between marked populations and the social body in new and different ways. They
predicated inclusion on a “historical break” with the xenophobic and exclusionary past.60
In the 1980s, late liberal governments began to hail “multiculturalism” and more recently
“diversity” as essential to the flourishing of liberal democracy. This was accompanied by
a resurging embrace of “tolerance” as the telos and vision of the “good society.”61 This
shift articulated a break with and purging of the harms of the past, which late liberal
subjects associate with feelings of shame, guilt, trauma, pain, and regret.62 Late liberalism
pledges multiculturalism, diversity, and tolerance as externalized political testaments to
recovered good intentions and to promises of an inclusive future absent of social conflict

University Press, 1999), 4, 14; Nayan Shah, Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s
60 I adapt this term from Jodi Melamed’s notion of the “racial break.” Reworking Howard Winant’s original
use of the term, Melamed argues that the post-World War II era has given way to a “new worldwide racial
project” where antiracism is now hegemonic common sense. This “formally anti-racist, liberal-capitalist
modernity revises, partners with, and exceeds the capacities of” the old racial order of white supremacy
“without replacing or exceeding it.” See Jodi Melamed, Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in
the New Racial Capitalism (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2011), xvi, 4-7, 10-18.
61 Brown, 5. In this paper, I use the terms diversity, tolerance, and multiculturalism interchangeably. That is
because I am interested in how this triangular constellation of terms cites certain articulations and
operations of late liberal governmentality and biopolitics. However, recent scholarship has shown that each
of these terms has its own genealogy that should not be confused or conflated with its sibling terms. For
example, Brown’s Regulating Aversion discusses the specificities of tolerance discourse, while Jodi
Melamed’s Represent and Destroy traces the emergence of diversity talk to post-racial neoliberal politics.
62 Povinelli, Cunning of Recognition, 29.
and xenophobic violence.63 These regulatory ideals cite a definitive rupture in how late liberal subjects relate to social difference, from acting on explicit xenophobia to respecting, valuing, celebrating, and cohabiting with “the otherwise.” In so far as late liberalism relegates the conflict of xenophobia to a closed chapter of history, then, “multicultural happiness” is predicated on an ideal of coexistence that aims to “get over” xenophobia by avoiding social conflict altogether.64 To that end, the regulatory aspiration of late liberal governmentality is a form of nonviolent social harmony rooted in mutual understanding across difference, sans any recognition of conflict.65

But this social formation is delicate, fragile, and highly contingent, given that xenophobia and its attendant violences continue to shape our encounters with difference.66 As Wendy Brown argues, the very meaning of tolerance entails enduring something that one finds threatening or odious. Tolerance is not a radical remaking of one’s relationship to difference, but rather an imperative to cope with peoples and practices we would prefer not exist.67 Tolerance signifies the limits of what “foreign, erroneous, objectionable, or dangerous element can be allowed to cohabit with the host” without rupturing the host’s sense of self and world.68 We only need to look to the murders of Oscar Grant, Jordan Davis, and Trayvon Martin to see that the image of a harmonious polity bound by a mutual respect for difference falls apart when the limit of this tolerance is tested or crossed. At these moments of encounter-across-difference, the

63 Ibid, 18.
65 Povinelli, Cunning of Recognition, 6, 12.
67 Brown, 25.
68 Ibid, 27.
spaces of the body “jam” late liberalism’s progress narrative. Certain bodies, as Sara Ahmed reminds us, are “sticky” in the sense that they reopen past associations that unlock dangerous and troubling histories, such as slavery or colonialism.\(^{69}\) These bodies carry historical ontologies “that cannot so easily be expunged”—ontologies grafted onto bodies by “long patterns of sustained, systemic xenophobia.”\(^{70}\) As bearers of a history that “does not need to be declared,” sticky bodies “get in the way” of multicultural happiness by defying the clean break with the past on which such happiness is built.\(^{71}\) In so doing, they prompt feelings of unease, fear, and aversion, activating the xenophobic violence that lies at the core of (in)tolerance. Encounters with such bodies are embarrassing and deeply shameful reminders that histories of violence are alive in the bodily life of the present.\(^{72}\) Indeed, we can’t but not hear Fanon’s whispers in the encounters that killed Grant, Davis, and Martin: “The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly; look, a Negro….the Negro is trembling with rage….Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me”—queue gunshot.\(^{73}\)

When encounters like this occur, our commitments to diversity and tolerance—however well-intentioned—run up against our still-present investments in xenophobia and histories of concrete oppression. These confrontational impasses constitute, as Povinelli says, an unavoidable “social fact” of late liberalism.\(^{74}\) They represent critical junctures when one’s reasoning and sensibility are out of joint: “I should be tolerant but you make me sick; I understand your reasoning but I am deeply offended by your

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\(^{69}\) Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 127.


\(^{71}\) Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 127.


\(^{74}\) Povinelli, *Cunning of Recognition*, 3.
presence.” These impasses mark the distance and incommensurability between
“[understanding and celebrating] the practices of another person or group and [accepting] them as viable neighbors.” At these moments, the subject of difference becomes
dangerous rather than “good to think.” Insofar as these confrontational impasses expose the limits and even impossibilities of cohabiting with the otherwise, they must be avoided so as to preserve the promise of liberal social inclusion. Paraphrasing Povinelli, then, the defining problematic of late liberal governmentality is how to care for difference and allow marked populations a space within liberalism without disrupting basic ways of figuring liberal experience. To put it another way, liberals value forms of thinking and being “different,” so long as there are safeguards in place that alleviate and divert conflict, pain, and trauma. Late liberal governmentality thus aims at “making thinking otherwise safe” by figuring the conditions of cohabitation and social inclusion in ways that preempt these confrontational impasses. The point, to quote Shannon Winnubst, is to “[avoid] any kind of social contact that might provoke suppressed histories of violence.” Social inclusion in late liberalism, then, is always differential inclusion.

Biopower enacts the “differential” in late liberal governmentality’s differential investment in wellbeing. As Jasbir Puar notes, biopolitics is a “generative project” of liberalism, one that “labors in service of the rational politics of liberal democracy.”

Here it is instructive to revisit Foucault’s original formulation of the concept. Unlike sovereign power wherein the state rules “over” its subjects by threatening exclusion and

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75 Ibid, 5.
76 Ibid, 4.
77 Ibid, 14.
78 Povinelli, Economies of Abandonment, 26.
79 Povinelli, Cunning of Recognition, 11.
80 Winnubst, Way Too Cool, 214.
81 Puar, 33, 114.
violence, biopolitics governs “on behalf of the existence of everyone” through the power of life.\textsuperscript{82} Biopower strives to enlarge, protect, sustain, and invigorate the social body by managing its constitutive populations. As a technology of rule that brings the “problem of living”\textsuperscript{83} into the field of power, the biopolitical domain stretches from questions of health to the social, cultural, and ethical politics of worldmaking, coexistence, and dwelling.\textsuperscript{84}

Crucially, biopolitics fashions the terms of inclusion according to densely layered, interrelated, and differentiated dynamics of “making live” and “letting die.” In History of Sexuality, Foucault notes that biopower cultivates an array of life experiences that crisscross the individual body, the population, and the social body. These experiences range from basic survival to the “satisfaction of needs” to pleasure to the capacity of the social body to fully “discover what [it] is and all that [it] can be.”\textsuperscript{85} Insofar as it governs on behalf of the social body, biopower is invested in certain regulatory ideals of the good life and just society. The “making live” of this regulatory ideal involves the differential capture and regulation of embodied life, such that even within the spaces of inclusion some subjects and populations are “made to live” while others are “allowed to die.”\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} Foucault, SMD, 241.
\textsuperscript{83} Foucault traces the emergence of biopolitics to the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries, when medical policing and public hygiene became primary vectors of urban governmental practice. However, he stresses that the biopolitical domain extends beyond the realm of the strictly biological to include “related political and economic problems,” many of which “would appear later” in the course of liberal governmentality. However, save for some sparing remarks in the final chapter of History of Sexuality, Foucault never fleshed out this last point. In keeping with the work of Mitchell Dean, Nikolas Rose, and Jasbir Puar, my definition of biopolitics follows out Foucault’s suggestive gesture to theorize the biopolitical beyond the strictly biological.
\textsuperscript{84} Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 145; Dean, 47; Rose, 144; Puar, 32.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 136-137, 145. Following Winnubst, I depart from scholars who understand biopolitics solely in terms of the production and generalization of abandonment and precarity.
\textsuperscript{86} Foucault, SMD, 256. The reasoning goes something like this: “his death guarantees my safety,” “the death of the other…will make life in general healthier.”
Puar puts it, in the biopolitical regulation of populations, “everyone is accounted for, however minimally and brutally”; “no one is left out, though many are left behind.”\(^8^7\)

I am interested in the dynamics of “making live” and “letting die” that constitutes late liberalism’s inclusionary imperative. Late liberal biopolitics is marked by the twin mandate of producing a diverse, tolerant society and managing encounters that challenge this regulatory ideal. Biopolitical management involves tempering “sticky” bodies that refuse to “let go”\(^8^8\) of historical violence, either through technologies of killing that appeal to public safety, or through technologies of disinvestment and abandonment that increase exposure to harm.\(^8^9\) In both cases, the celebratory desire, willingness, and imperative to include shrouds the violence that transpires inside the “brackets” of inclusion.\(^9^0\) As Foucault argues, in the biopolitical realm inequality and suffering are “the most private and shameful things of all”—things meant “to be hidden away.”\(^9^1\) The life, spirit, and legitimacy of the late liberal project rests on this delicate calculus of “making live” and “letting die.” An attention to late liberal biopolitics orients us beyond simple inside and outside geographies to the uneven distribution of life within the brackets of inclusion. It incites us to open these brackets and ask, “how do [differently marked

\(^8^7\) Puar, 59.
\(^8^9\) Foucault, *SMD*, 256. By “letting die” Foucault means not only murder but forms of “indirect murder” including “exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people,…political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on.” For those who have followed this strain of inquiry, see Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*; Lauren Berlant, “Slow Death,” *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2007), 754-780; Jackie Wang, “Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety,” *Lies: A Journal of Materialist Feminism* 1 (2012), 145-171.
\(^9^0\) I adapt the remarkably useful notion of the “bracket” from Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment.*
\(^9^1\) Foucault, *SMD*, 247, 256.
subjects of liberalism] give life? To what do they give life? How is life weighted, disciplined into subj ecthood, narrated into populations, and fostered for living?”

Biopolitical technologies bring subjects inside the project of citizenship by identifying them as members of populations and then assessing their relative value to the late liberal project. Populations, each distinguished by specific phenomenon, exist in a variety of contexts and can be defined by territory, economic attributes, racial groupings, lifestyle choices, or any other social factor. As Eugene Thacker states, biopolitics “accounts for ‘each and every’ element of the population,” making possible the government of the poor, the resident alien, the homeless, and so on. In this way, marked populations are made available for targeted governmental intervention. One can already see the biopolitical work of discourses like diversity, in the sense that the act of inclusion is predicated on the delineation and maintenance of “difference.” Once rendered penetrable to the operations of power, “diverse” populations are surveilled, scrutinized, and appraised by governmental knowledges. Primed for studying the “problems of population,” liberal rationalities enable governments to identify which of their member populations constitute internal “threats” to the social body. In the context of late liberalism, these “threats” consist of populations that disrupt and upset the regulatory ideal of social harmony. But late liberal governments cannot openly expunge or banish

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92 Puar, 36.
94 Thacker, 25. Hence the “social body” that biopolitics acts in the service of is a constantly expanding “multiple body…with so many heads.” See Foucault, SMD, 245.
95 Foucault, HS, 144; Puar, xii, 120; see also Brown, 28.
these groups from the social body.\textsuperscript{96} Such displays of “murderous splendor” would belie the celebratory rhetoric of tolerance and diversity.\textsuperscript{97} Exclusionary logics have little traction in late liberalism, given that the very legitimacy of the late liberal project rests on its capacity for including, appreciating, and living alongside “the otherwise.”

Instead, late liberal biopolitics deploys “technologies of security” to make good on the promise of inclusion while simultaneously protecting the social body from internal threats. According to Foucault, technologies of security mitigate internal threats by managing how populations interact in the “spaces of circulation.”\textsuperscript{98} They regulate the interrelationships of populations with the purpose of minimizing risky, inconvenient, and dangerous encounters.\textsuperscript{99} The objective is to allow people the “freedom” to live as they please, but to do so in such a way that the “internal dangers of circulation are canceled out.”\textsuperscript{100} Scholars who deploy notions of biopower and security in the context of the city typically stress the spatial regulation of bodies and populations.\textsuperscript{101} But Foucault was careful to specify that security enacts a spatial as well as temporal maneuver. As he says in his 1977-78 lectures, security “refers to the temporal and the uncertain which have to be inserted within a given space.”\textsuperscript{102} Technologies of security defer unwanted encounters in the here-and-now by citing past harm and invoking future conflict. For instance, they

\textsuperscript{96} It is a matter, as Foucault says, of knowing that such threats are “permanent factors” that “will never” (and in the context of late liberalism I would add, cannot afford to be) “be completely suppressed.” See \textit{STP}, 19.
\textsuperscript{97} Foucault, \textit{SMD}, 244; \textit{STP}, 19; \textit{HS}, 144.
\textsuperscript{98} Foucault, \textit{STP}, 326.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, 19, 65.
\textsuperscript{100} According to Foucault this “interplay of freedom and security” sustains the “economy of power peculiar to liberalism.” See \textit{BOB}, 65, 70.
\textsuperscript{102} Foucault, \textit{STP}, 25.
prime the social body for possible or future danger by delineating zones of risk where that danger might lurk.\textsuperscript{103} Concepts such as “case, risk, danger, threat, and crisis” all emerged in the eighteenth century as attempts to effect this temporally inscribed securitization of space.\textsuperscript{104} In short, the spaces of security are contingent on and circumscribed by temporal claims about the past, present, and future. To that end, it is perhaps more accurate to approach the striations of the biopolitical as “spacings” rather than “spaces.”\textsuperscript{105}

Reworking Foucault for my purposes, technologies of security recast the exclusionary impulse of classical liberalism into late liberal concerns of coexistence, social harmony, and cohabiting across difference. They defer and defuse late liberalism’s “confrontational impasses” by regulating how populations orient themselves vis-à-vis others and the collective social body through temporal and spatial maneuvers.\textsuperscript{106} The space-time operations of security are important to bear in mind here because, if one recalls, the confrontational impasses of late liberalism are cited not only by a spatial but by a temporal encounter, wherein the collision of bodies jolts painful memories into the living present.

Late liberal governmentality secures against these confrontational impasses partly by figuring mutually implicated populations in different “tenses,” or configurations of space-time. In \textit{Economies of Abandonment}, Povinelli directs our attention to a specific deployment of social tense that she calls the “governance of the prior.” As I will illustrate in the second half of the thesis, liberal anti-gentrification discourses make use of social

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 61.  
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 61-62.  
\textsuperscript{105} Povinelli, \textit{Economies of Abandonment}, 109.  
tense and the governance of the prior in their appeal to urban inclusion. In the governance of the prior, subjects who shore up dangerous or problematic associations are figured in the past, while those who do not are figured in the present. The rationality of priorness legitimates certain ethical and political claims while delegitimating others. On the one hand, it assigns ethical import and political urgency to populations who occupy the time-space of the multicultural present. These populations secure their lifeworlds through a claim of “priorness” that is hedged against an undesirable or tainted future—“we must protect our diverse, tolerant way of life against [insert impending threat here].” On the other hand, the rationality of priorness dissipates claims that are disagreeable to late liberalism’s regulatory ideal and to the clean historical break on which the ideal is predicated. It excuses late liberal subjects of their still-present xenophobic investments by figuring both the recipients and the recognition of that violence in the time-space of the past. Because the claims of the otherwise are always written in the past, they suffer from an “ever decreasing moral weight as the event [of harm]…recedes into historical time.” Such claims go unnoticed and unanswered.

107 Povinelli’s notion of the governance of the prior emerges out of a specific engagement with Australian settler colonialism. Nonetheless, she insists that the governance of the prior “provides an essential formation of tense…to the governance of difference in late liberalism.” There is still a great deal to be learned about how these settler colonial technologies of rule “travel” and in so doing (re)constitute categories of difference—a task I do not take up here. The thesis does however suggest that liberal settler colonial rationalities and technologies—perhaps because of their attention to the problematics of past-present-future temporalities, land, belonging, and ownership—are deployed in the governance of urban difference. John D. Marquez makes a similar point in his 2012 article in American Quarterly, in which he shows that the spatial and socio-logical technologies of settler colonialism manifest in the liberal-capitalist preoccupation with pathologizing and securitizing “ghetto” spaces.

108 Indeed, not all marked populations are written in the past tense. Rather, Povinelli’s larger point is that the “tense of the other” is always on hand to defer and rationalize the xenophobic violences of the present. For instance, post-9/11 liberal societies justify violence against undocumented immigrants and suspected terrorist groups in part by writing them in the future tense (“we must secure the border and fight Islamic terrorism because undocumented migrants and unpatriotic Arab Americans will compromise the safety, security, and social fabric of our nation”).

109 Povinelli, Economies of Abandonment, 35.
because the lifeworlds of the otherwise do not register in the time-space of the present—they are far too prior to be relevant today. Hence, the xenophobia that these claims bring to the fore gets “stuck” in the past—a past that late liberal subjects have already belabored, condemned, and surpassed through the embrace of diversity and tolerance.\textsuperscript{110} In this way, populations that occupy different tenses never actually meaningfully confront each other across difference.\textsuperscript{111}

In sum, technologies of social tense safely incorporate the otherwise into the liberal lifeworld by reifying the time-space of the multicultural present while displacing ongoing acts of xenophobic violence. Technologies of tense “account” for this violence—not by denying it (classical liberalism’s crucial mistake) or by foreclosing on it (that would require a painful reappraisal of liberalism’s relationship to the other), but by quietly making the violence disappear from public imagination, sentiment, ethics, and discussion. In this way, technologies of security make differential inclusion seem sensible, responsible, good, and just. They effectively contort the confrontational impasse to such an extent that it no longer appears as a confrontation, thereby preempting those affects—shame, blame, trauma—that catch us “in the act” of xenophobia and disrupt the late liberal order. This preemptive maneuver is central to the biopolitics of late liberalism. It allows “dangerous” populations to suffer (“to let die”) in order to enact, uphold, and protect (“to make live”) the syntax of multicultural happiness. Indeed, what makes late liberal biopolitical violence especially pernicious and difficult to detect is that it occurs in

\textsuperscript{110} There is ample evidence of this in U.S. discourses on anti-black racism. Political and ethical claims that insist on the force of anti-black racism are often met with skepticism by those who argue that the “original harms” of slavery, Northern segregation, and Jim Crow have faded into the past.

the shadows of multicultural happiness. Late liberalism’s celebratory emphasis on inclusion vis-à-vis tolerance and diversity distracts from and rationalizes the suffering that occurs under its watch. Such suffering must remain illegible to late liberal ways of understanding social difference. This illegibility is the necessary precondition for producing late liberalism’s highly qualified ideal of multicultural sociality and sidestepping the social consequences of that sociality.
Chapter 2: The Urban Context of Late Liberalism

Liberal...narratives [develop] and become embedded through time in the crusty layers of urban social life.
—Katharyne Mitchell, Crossing the Neoliberal Line

Recent scholarship in the humanities and interpretive social sciences on the contemporary politics of liberal inclusion privileges the spatial and theoretical register of the nation-state. For instance, Chandan Reddy argues that liberalism is necessary coextensive with the nation-state. Others such as Falguni Sheth do not make such explicit claims, but nonetheless position their work within the scope of the nation-state by focusing their analysis on federal laws and national politics, thereby deemphasizing the spatial specificities of social formations and technologies of rule. In this paper, I follow Eva Cherniavsky’s suggestion that we attend to territorial and jurisdictional spaces that sit within and beyond the scale of the nation-state.112 To go back to Foucault, “government” is by definition a multi-scalar modality of power. In privileging the nation-state format, we risk missing the dense, mobile, layered, and overlapping articulations of late liberal governmentality. By reorienting the study of differential inclusion to the level of the urban, I hope to identify vectors of late liberal governmentality that articulate but

also interrupt and cut across national and nationalist projects. As Mariana Valverde reminds us, “seeing like a city” is not the same as “seeing like a state.”

Urban life poses the problems, limits, and challenges of differential inclusion in late liberalism in especially stark and telling terms. First, cities are at the frontier of managing the complexities of differential inclusion. As Foucault notes in his lectures on liberal governmentality, the contingencies of urban social life are at the very heart of the biopolitical imperative. In Foucault’s account, biopolitical technologies of security emerged as a response to the eighteenth-century city, which “posed new and specific economic and political problems of government technique.” The earliest security mechanisms were developed in order to address various dimensions of “the urban problem” such as overcrowding, disease, and hygiene. Moreover, it was the city that foregrounded the problem of differential inclusion. According to Foucault, the modern city was a highly insecure space, because the round-the-clock nature of commercial trade and industrial manufacturing made it impossible to simply “[close] it down in the evening” or “closely supervise its comings and goings.” For this reason, the city invited an influx of “beggars, vagrants, delinquents, criminals, thieves, [and] murderers,” who were believed to pose a danger to the social body. The presence of this permanent

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113 Mariana Valverde, “Seeing like a city: the dialectic of modern and premodern ways of seeing in urban governance,” *Law & Society Review* 45, no. 2 (2011), 277-312. According to Valverde, while “the state” governs through disciplinary institutions that operate through impersonal and “objective” rationalities, local zoning and nuisance laws stem from premodern forms of power that govern through embodied, experiential, and relational categories. I am not so interested in urban regulation as a dialectical relation between “premodern” and “modern” ways of seeing, but I do hold on to Valverde’s idea that power takes on distinct formations, rationalities, and technologies within the territory of the city.

114 Foucault, *STP*, 64.

115 Ibid, 12, 14; Foucault, *SMD*, 245.

116 Ibid, 18. According to Foucault, closing down the city would go against the economic interests of both the sovereign and the population because it would restrict trade and commercial vitality.

117 Ibid, 18.
and proximate threat—a threat that could not easily be wished or willed away—gave rise to a newfound governmental imperative to mitigate “dangerous” encounters by managing the circulation of and between bodies. Foucault’s point is this: It is at the level of the urban that social difference becomes embodied, proximate, and undeniable—and thus, where one runs the most risk of running up against the limits of late liberal tolerance. The city is where the pleasures, the dangers, and the stakes of living alongside “the otherwise” are waged. Therefore, this highly volatile and heterogeneous lived space not only necessitates careful biopolitical management but also produces perpetual innovation in technologies of security.

Bringing Foucault’s insights into the late liberal present, the governance of social difference is still largely an “urban problem,” for two reasons. First: For much of modern history, the misery and dangers of city life were chalked up to the proximity of social difference. Social difference was something that had to be “managed,” but only grudgingly so. Today however, cities like San Francisco are hailed for their multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusivity. The city is the locus of the late liberal experiment, meaning that urban biopolitical technologies are enlisted in not only regulating the “spaces of circulation,” but in doing so in ways that celebrate and valorize difference. Second, “the urban” poses a challenge to the presentism of late liberal governmentality and its insistence on a clean break with the past. Specific spaces of the city—be it the ghetto, the barrio, Chinatown, the gayborhood, the suburb, or the ethnoburb—shore up particular populations and bodies, triggering specific associations, histories, and affects. Space, as so many geographers have shown, is social, unstable, haunted, and historicized. New ways of thinking and organizing the socio-spatial do not
and cannot “wipe the slate clean of [these] long-standing investments.” Such investments, after all, are grafted into the built environment as well as our understandings of how to navigate and make sense of “the urban” and its terms and spaces of belonging. Insofar as the city-space is one in which the past consistently rears its head in claims on the present and future, we might approach it as an analytical site where security technologies such as social tense are always on hand—and also always running up against their own limitations.

Second, cities figure the problems of late liberal governmentality in new and unforeseen ways because “the urban” itself is a source of collective imagination. The “arts of government” are born, shaped and imagined within specific contexts, through what James Donald calls “urban imaginaries.” According to Donald, urban imaginaries “[teach] us the arts, the techniques, and the tactics of living in the present.” In his critique of governmentality studies, Donald argues that a singular attention to the “pragmatics” of government—that is, to technologies and techniques—misses the force of geographical imaginations and attachments in how problems of inclusion and cohabitation are thought, framed, and tackled. For Donald, the city is not just a spatial container of government, but also a category of thought that enables us to make sense of the social. Urban imaginaries are the stories that cities tell of themselves, stories that attempt to make sense of “not only the way we live, but above all the way we live together.” The city presents itself as “an idea with which to think politics.” Thus if

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119 James Donald, Imagining the Modern City (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), 7.
121 Ibid, xi.
urban technologies are necessarily oriented to questions of managing “the otherwise,” these technologies are dialectically constituted in and through urban imaginaries. Urban imaginaries are also unique among the disciplines in how they render the world intelligible to governmental intervention because they figure the problems of cohabitation in terms of a place-specific historical and social itinerary. This historical and social itinerary makes the governance of social difference seem reasonable, sensible, and just within particular contexts.

While Donald is interested in how specific urban imaginaries come to stand in for how we experience “the city,” I insist that different urban imaginaries animate and ignite different anxieties of late liberalism. The concept of urban imaginary allows us to see that as spaces of biopolitical management, cities are more than spatial metaphors for social relations. As historically and geographically situated knowledges, urban imaginaries vary in how they pose the problems of the biopolitical. Or rather, to use Lauren Berlant’s terms, urban imaginaries help to make “cases” out of things in the world. A case, Berlant notes, is not equivalent to the singular, the general, or the normative. Rather, the case is a “problem-event” that “incites an opening.” In figuring problems of cohabitation through place-specific referents, different urban imaginaries incite different openings into the challenges that confront late liberal governmentality.

Case in point: Every spring, when the sun finally comes out, gun shots ring throughout Chicago’s south and west sides. In this notoriously divided city of

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122 Ibid, xi.
124 A sampling of April headlines reads, “3 Dead, 26 Wounded in Weekend Shootings,” “45 People Were Shot in Chicago Over the Weekend,” “15-Year Old Chicago Boy Killed on Mothers Day in Suspected Drive-By Shooting.”
neighborhoods, where segregation is “almost a civic art form,” everybody knows that the fallen bodies are black and brown.\textsuperscript{125} In Chicago, home to the nation’s first black president but also to Cabrini Green, failed Open Housing marches, and to one of the highest homicide rates in the nation, it is impossible to ignore the devaluation of black and brown life and its troubled relation to liberal democracy. It is precisely Chicago’s urban imaginary—an imaginary that is overdetermined by anti-black violence and black-white race relations—that makes a “case” for late liberalism’s shortcomings and failures by recalling the unavoidable subject of racial death. In the progressive media, this year’s eruption of spring prompted inquiries into systemic racism, criminalization and police brutality, and the defunding and militarization of public schools. These are trenchant reminders of the ways in which violence, exclusion, and sovereign power continue to inflect, pervade, and upend liberal democracy along racial lines. As we will see, in contrast to Chicago, the San Francisco imaginary affirms the late liberal project and is firmly situated in the realm of the biopolitical. It is San Francisco’s status and reputation as a “progressive refuge”—a place where the biopolitical project of inclusion has flourished—that stages the current moment as a need to salvage late liberalism for its successes rather than, as in Chicago, indict it for its failures.

Third, it is at the level of the city that we can discern the shape that late liberal governmentality is taking in response to the challenges of our “neoliberal” moment. In this paper, I use “neoliberalism” to mean a heterogeneous, contested, and uneven “field of social maneuver” that is reconfiguring the terrain of North American urban citizenship.

This “field” is given by an array of political-economic processes and regulatory arrangements that has marked the era of flexible accumulation. In the U.S., the shift from Keynesian forms of demand-management to supply-side forms of state intervention meant, among other things, the rescaling of production from the national to the urban level.\textsuperscript{126} Cities became key “engines of economic growth,” as well as centers of innovation, entrepreneurialism, and competition.\textsuperscript{127} Part of this rescaling involved the mobilization of city space as a “purified arena” for capital expansion and accumulation.\textsuperscript{128} Entire urban areas have since been commodified into spaces for consumption, leisure, and luxury housing. Cities now compete to lure members of the “creative class,” the idealized subjects of today’s innovation and knowledge industries, by producing “place” as a territorialized commodity that designates desirable lifestyles and belongings.\textsuperscript{129} Speculative real estate development, neighborhood revitalization, and place-marketing are all critical aspects of the contemporary urban economy. They put a premium on city living, such that those who do not produce market value are pushed out by gentrification—while subjects who threaten the security of the property markets are ferreted out and expelled through “revanchist” policies that privatize public space and criminalize “undesirable” behavior.\textsuperscript{130}

But these urban transformations are not “complete” in any sense. Insofar as neoliberalism is an uneven field of social maneuver, it also comprises socio-spatial “contestations”—imaginaries, claims, and practices of all political hues—that precede,

\textsuperscript{126} Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, “Cities and the Geographies of ‘Actually Existing Neoliberalism,’” \textit{Antipode} 34, no. 3 (2002), 349-379.
\textsuperscript{128} Brenner and Theodore, 374.
\textsuperscript{129} Peck, “Struggling with the Creative Class.”
\textsuperscript{130} Smith, \textit{The New Urban Frontier}. 
exceed, and articulate with these market-centered urban transformations.\textsuperscript{131} Contestations to neoliberalism, as Bob Jessop notes, are often attempts to “manage issues of social exclusion and social cohesion.”\textsuperscript{132} While these contestations articulate ways of living and being that are in one way or another at variance with market-oriented ideologies and practices, they are neither “inside” nor “outside” neoliberalism. Rather, they rework the terrain of urban citizenship, “each action changing if only slightly the field of maneuver itself.”\textsuperscript{133} Together, this heterogeneous, contested, uneven and shifting field of social maneuver that I am calling “neoliberalism” is forcing place-specific reappraisals of the problem of social inclusion. And in so doing, it is occasioning, staging and inciting new articulations and modalities of late liberal governmentality.


\textsuperscript{132} Jessop, 464.

\textsuperscript{133} Povinelli, \textit{Economies of Abandonment}, 19.
Chapter 3: The Crisis of Late Liberalism in San Francisco

If you need more reason to be convinced why San Francisco is America’s most important and iconic liberal city, then let me ask you this: Have you ever heard the term “New York Values” or “Seattle Values”?
—George McIntire, Salon.com

Why is there so much libidinal investment in this town?
—Juliet F. MacCannell, Reclaiming San Francisco

While the “neoliberalization” of San Francisco has been underway since the 1970s, the tech boom has precipitated and intensified the pace of this transformation. The rapid and concentrated influx of high-income “creative” residents has given way to what analysts are calling “hyper-gentrification” in the form of steep rental hikes, condo conversions, and mass evictions. These dramatic movements have cast the increasingly cost-prohibitive dimensions of urban citizenship into sharp relief. Late liberalism’s inclusionary imperative is encountering new challenges as neoliberalism recalibrates the social value of populations based solely on their economic viability. These challenges are being articulated in the crisis-laden framings of San Francisco’s tech boom.

In outlets ranging from Newsweek to local progressive weeklies, cultural commentators frame the tech boom as an assault on “San Francisco values,” which they understand as coterminous with late liberal values. They proclaim that the tech boom is endangering a “a city built on diversity”; that San Francisco’s “counterculture [is being] replaced by condominiums”; and that the “disappearance of diversity threatens the city’s
character and its people.” One columnist even compares the techies to seagulls, an invasive bird that endangers local species diversity. The pronouncements against gentrification take on a metaphorical valence here. The endless stories of the Google Bus, forceful and conniving evictions, rising inequality, storied establishments closing their doors, residents moving to Oakland—they all act in the service of a broader narrative that pits the evacuative forces of tech-fueled gentrification against a “San Francisco” ethos of urban social life that respects, cherishes, and practices diversity and tolerance. As San Francisco becomes a “playground” for “affluent new arrivals,” gentrification pushes out the deviant and marked populations that sustain this late liberal form of social life and serve as its living proof. Reflecting on the rhetoric and self-positioning of these claims vis-à-vis diversity talk, one San Francisco resident aptly captures the strategic slippages of this anti-gentrification discourse:

The Change [a play on the pernicious agency ascribed to “gentrification”] truly is a matter of good vs. evil: an unholy trinity of greedy developers, compliant city bureaucrats, and arrogant overpaid libertarian techies in a showdown against artists, people of color, downtrodden workers, and other virtuous keepers of the San Francisco flame. It’s a life and death political struggle…The fate of the city is at stake [emphasis mine].

Gentrification happens in all cities, and more often than not it involves the displacement of “diverse” populations. But these cultural commentaries speak in the language of singularity rather than generality. As George McIntire of Salon laments, what is happening to San Francisco is singularly pernicious because the city has a “unique and

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136 Ibid.
storied place in liberal America.”

San Francisco is “one of American liberalism’s driving forces,” “where radical liberal ideas that never see the light of day in the rest of the country come to fruition.” The point is not whether San Francisco’s empirical record lives up to McIntire’s praises, but rather that the city cites a powerful imaginary: a social climate and economic lifeline for residents who do not produce value according to market logics and a way of urban life rooted in ideals of diversity, tolerance, and inclusion.

Indeed, what transforms the tech boom from a “case study” of hyper-gentrification into a problematic of late liberal governmentality is San Francisco’s exceptional status within the problem-space of American liberalism. This is evidenced perhaps most clearly in an April 2014 Newsweek article on the “ruthless gentrification” sweep San Francisco. The article begins by profiling Patricia Kerman, an elderly white Detroit native and longtime San Francisco resident who was recently evicted from her rent-controlled apartment. It prefigures the promise and allure of San Francisco by explaining why Kerman left her hometown for the west coast in the 1960s. For all its prosperity, the article states, “America’s ‘Arsenal of Democracy’” was simply “a violent place to live,” wrecked by “violence, police brutality, race riots, [and] urban renewal.” San Francisco offered Kerman “a way out.” Postwar Detroit, we should remember, was an incredibly diverse city that attracted floods of people across nationality, race, and class. But, the Newsweek article suggests, Detroit had the wrong kind of diversity.

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138 McIntire, “San Francisco’s Rightward Turn.”
139 Ibid.
141 Joe Kloc, “Tech Boom Forces a Ruthless Gentrification in San Francisco.”
Detroit’s diversity was one that prompted violence and conflict. The implication—which the rest of the discursive field draws out for us—is that San Francisco’s diversity was different—special, somehow. Rooted in an ethics of tolerance and social harmony, San Francisco eschewed the violent and exclusionary impulses that beleaguered postwar urban liberalism elsewhere in the U.S. We can call it, as a recent *New Republic* article does, “San Francisco exceptionalism.”

In many ways, the 21st century has witnessed the erosion of the late liberalism’s promise of social inclusion. Post 9/11, the U.S. nation-state is engaged in a “clash of the civilizations”-type politics that justifies torture and killing abroad and profiling, detention, and surveillance at home. We only have to look to Chicago, Oakland, and Detroit to see that the stories of our cities are largely stories of racial violence, police brutality, and austerity measures—all of which preserve urban citizenship for a select and privileged few. At a time when the late liberal imperative seems especially compromised, San Francisco appears at once as promise land and final frontier: a “refuge” and “sanctuary” where the late liberal experiment in diversity, tolerance, and inclusion not only works but thrives. And so tech-fueled gentrification stands to not only eviscerate San Francisco’s city-space and urban imaginary, but in the process to destroy, indict—and perhaps most damangingly, mark the impossibility of—late liberal social inclusion in our neoliberal times.

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142 Greenberg, “I Left My Home in San Francisco.”
143 I am thinking of springtime gun violence in Chicago, the murder of Oscar Grant and the violent suppression of Occupy Wall Street protestors in Oakland, and post-recession austerity measures in Detroit.
But as we know, liberal governmentality adapts and self-corrects in response to crises. As market forces put pressure on liberal ambitions, late liberal governmentality assumes new modalities, including the very anti-gentrification discourses I cited above. As an appeal to keep subjects inside the project of citizenship amidst the competing valuations of the market, these discourses are “liberal” in the sense that they approach the problem of gentrification as an assault on treasured late liberal ideals and regulatory aspirations. Specifically, they oppose tech-based gentrification in the name of preserving and maintaining a “San Francisco” ethos of urban social life rooted in diversity, tolerance, and social harmony and mutual understanding across difference. We can understand these discourses as a modality of governmentality because they seek to “correct” the shifting tides of urban citizenship under neoliberalism. Moreover, by articulating gentrification as a matter of the fate and future of U.S. liberalism, these discourses govern by acting on the “needs and aspirations” of not only San Francisco-based progressives but also anybody who self-identifies with the liberal imagination.

Liberal anti-gentrification discourses serve the goals of late liberal governmentality by installing certain notions of “the good life” and “just city” as ethical and social truths that are worth “saving.” To that end, liberal anti-gentrification discourses are also a site at which differential inclusion in the form of biopolitical management is restaged and recalibrated. Occasioned by the language of gentrification, which cites a spatial-cum-temporal transformation, these discourses employ a range of biopolitical technologies, including technologies of social tense and the governance of the prior, to “secure” the late liberal imaginary from critical and ethical scrutiny. Articulated in the name of an anti-gentrification politics that stakes its claim on accommodating “the
otherwise,” these maneuvers make the terms of late liberal social inclusion—terms that are always-already unequal—seem politically and morally sensible, right, and good. The rest of this paper turns to spotting the operations of this late liberal biopolitics.
All cities are more or less segregated. . . . But San Francisco has to be in the vanguard of separation by ethnicity, class, income, profession, family type, sexuality, age, style of dress, and other markers; even when people rub shoulders, their differences almost ensure that interaction will be perfunctory and asocial.

—James Brook, Reclaiming San Francisco

The transformation of the city . . . is a crisis, a boom, and an obsession.

—Rebecca Solnit

Perhaps nothing so neatly encapsulates, materially and symbolically, the gentrification of San Francisco as the “Google bus.” A shorthand for the private luxury buses that transport tens of thousands of high-tech workers from their San Francisco apartments to corporate campuses in Silicon Valley, the Google bus is a trenchant reminder of the changing tides of urban citizenship. In addition to driving up rents in areas bordering bus routes and encouraging commute-weary techies to move to San Francisco, these tinted Wi-Fi-enabled private buses have come to represent a cold, asocial “Silicon Valley” sensibility that bears little concern for coexisting across difference.146 The Google bus was brought to public attention by Bay Area-based writer Rebecca Solnit in her February 2013 essay in the London Review of Books. In her characteristically powerful and poetic prose, Solnit posed the problem of gentrification in terms of the

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146 A recent study of San Francisco showed that rents have increased by almost twenty percent in areas that are in walking distance of Google bus stops. Until January of this year, the tech shuttles ran mostly unregulated, using curb space designated for San Francisco’s public buses and causing major traffic and public transportation delays.
demise of “a once-radical and diverse city.” The essay was endlessly re-blogged and re-tweeted and sparked a slew of social commentary from all quarters. Since the publication of that essay, Solnit has arguably become the most visible face of liberal anti-gentrification politics in San Francisco.

In this section, I analyze Solnit’s writings to show how liberal anti-gentrification discourses serve the goals of late liberal governmentality. I sample from Solnit’s 2013 essay, as well as follow-up essays she wrote in the *London Review of Books* and the online magazine *Guernica*. In addition, I pull from her full-length monograph, *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism*, which rehearses an almost-identical argument in the context of the dot-com boom and sets the stage for her more recent work. Focusing on Solnit’s deployment of the concept of “crisis,” I trace some of the biopolitical maneuvers of tense that liberal anti-gentrification discourses enlist in the “securitization” of the San Francisco urban imaginary.

In his *Security, Territory, Population* lectures, Foucault suggested that the concept of crisis emerged with the maturation of liberalism, biopolitics, and technologies of security in the 18th century. Crisis narratives enact a temporal securitization of space by deploying technologies of social tense and the governance of the prior. As Sara Ahmed argues, the announcement of crisis is often used to justify a “return” to a way of

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148 Solnit’s essay also sparked protests and policy debates around the legality of the Google buses and their cost to the public. Protest actions included activists forming rings around Google and Apple buses to prevent them from moving, slashing bus tires, and publicly beating a bus-shaped piñata. A contest held to decorate a Genentech bus yielded mocking images of Trojan Horses, cattle cars, and Craigslist listings for overpriced apartments.
149 Foucault, *STP*, 61-62.
life perceived to be under threat. What Povinelli calls the “priority of the prior” is asserted through the appeal to crisis, which is really an appeal to “preserve or maintain that which is” against the specter of future harm. By invoking the “priority of the prior,” crisis narratives ordain an idealized version of the “present” as an ethical “truth” that is worth saving. Put another way, crisis narratives operate in the tense of the present-future. They enact a kind of temporal suspension of the past, denying and ignoring the ways in which histories of violence disrupt and complicate the idealized present they are called on to salvage and protect. Hence they posit this idealized present as the sole horizon of ethical reflection and action. The most striking example of this is the post-9/11 “crisis of national security” that occasioned “civilizational securitization” in the form of civil liberties violations, the militarization of the US border, a renewed Islamophobia, and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Pundits and policymakers who characterized the post-9/11 moment as a crisis of national security largely refused to acknowledge the centuries-long economic exploitation and (neo)colonial violence that motivated the attacks in the first place. The prevailing rhetoric was: the terrorists are trying to destroy America not because of what we did in the past but because of who we are in the present.

Solnit constructs the problem of gentrification as a crisis of the San Francisco late liberal imaginary. Because of its geopolitical importance and its status as an economic, financial, and military hub, San Francisco has long been, as urban geographer Richard

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151 Ibid.
152 Povinelli, Economies of Abandonment, xvii.
Walker calls it, the “playground of US capitalism.” Fantastic and volatile booms and busts—from the Gold Rush to the building booms that followed the 1906 and 1989 earthquakes to the dot-com boom-and-bust—have continuously engulfed, destroyed, and recreated the city at every turn. But even in this quintessential boomtown, there is one thing the forces of hyper-development have never been able to touch: the “San Francisco ethos” of “diverse urban life with lots of chances to mingle” across difference:

You can think of these booms as half the history of the city: the other half is catastrophe, earthquake, fire, economic bust, deindustrialization, and the scrounge of AIDS. And maybe you can think of them as the same thing: upheavals that have remade the city again and again. Though something was constant, the sense of the city as separate from the rest of the country, a sanctuary for nonconformists, exiles, war resisters, sex rebels, eccentrics, environmentalists in the arts and sciences, in food, agriculture, law, architecture and social organization. The city somehow remained hospitable to those on the margins throughout its many incarnations, until now [my emphasis].

Here, Solnit introduces the “San Francisco ethos” by staging it against the extreme creative destructive dynamics of the city’s boom-and-bust economy. Because of its inclusive and tolerant (“hospitable”) culture, San Francisco’s diversity has managed to survive onslaught after onslaught of ruthless development—that is, “until now.” The current tech boom is the latest in San Francisco’s longstanding historical pattern of creative destruction. “The Bay Area,” Solnit reflects, “is once again a boomtown, with transient populations, escalating housing costs, mass displacements, and the casual erasure of what was here before.” However this time, the stakes are more acute, more amplified, more violent. For this boom—with its hyper-gentrification, hyper-speculation,

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and hyper-displacement—is not simply endangering but actively destroying that cherished San Francisco ethos. This boom, as Solnit says, is actually “transforming a once-radical and diverse city into a bedroom community for employees of technology corporations.”\textsuperscript{156}

In this prototypical crisis narrative, the impending forces of gentrification throw an established San Francisco “way of life” into jeopardy. This “way of life” assumes a quintessentially late liberal expression. San Francisco, she insists, has \textit{always} been a “sanctuary” for including, celebrating, and cohabiting with “the otherwise.” Two different but complementary claims of priorness are at work within this crisis narrative. First, Solnit asserts the “priority of the prior” by juxtaposing the San Francisco imaginary—a preexisting, homespun, near-perfect social formation by late liberal standards—against the cold, alien violence of creative destruction. Second, she celebrates the “San Francisco way” by comparing its progressivism to other cities (say, Detroit or Chicago), where an urban ethic of violence and exclusion still reflects classical liberal ways—“prior” ways—of dealing with questions of difference. In so doing, she installs the San Francisco imaginary and with it the late liberal imaginary as an ethical truth—as \textit{the} definition of the good life and just society. In this way, Solnit’s texts serve the goals of late liberal governmentality. Indeed, I would argue that this is the primary thrust and purpose of Solnit’s anti-gentrification politics. As she herself claims in an astute moment of self-reflection, ultimately her writing is “not about the new technology economy, nor is it an economic history of cities or gentrification.”\textsuperscript{157} Rather, “it is a portrait of what a

\textsuperscript{156} Solnit, “Resisting Monoculture.”
\textsuperscript{157} Solnit and Schwartzenberg, \textit{Hollow City}, 35.
sudden economic boom is doing to a single city, and an [ethical] *reflection on what is being lost and what its value—its nonmonetary value—is [emphasis mine].”*\textsuperscript{158}

Of course, Solnit’s idealized projection of San Francisco life is simply that: an ideal. As Chapter Two argued, it is not easy to extricate social difference from its historical associations, embodied locations, and affective registers—particularly in the socio-spatial context of the urban form. And as Chapter Four attests, one need not look far before social realities of sustained inequality belie the post-xenophobic rhetoric of late liberalism. However, crisis narratives do a great deal to figure the world in the image of late liberalism’s regulatory ideals by “securing” the late liberal imaginary from undesirable confrontations-across-difference. They preempt the confrontational impasses of late liberalism by locating the San Francisco urban imaginary in the time-space of the present-future, narratively and conceptually cordoning it off from living histories of violence.

By creating an artificial cleavage between the “present-future” and the “past,” crisis narratives install serious strictures and blinders with respect to how we approach and reason about social difference. Inhabiting the tense of the present-future, crisis narratives have no language for interpreting and understanding social difference as a function of the past. That is, in order for difference to be legible it must be stripped of its historical residues. In Solnit’s writings, this dehistoricizing of difference manifests through the rationality of “fungibility.” Feminist philosopher Shannon Winnubst developed the concept of “fungibility” to describe the changing social rationality of

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
difference in late liberalism. In economic terms, fungibility refers to a “relationship of equity that requires purely formal semblance.” According to Winnubst, late liberal discourses make difference fungible by “hollowing” it of “all character and content,” including the burdens of historical xenophobia. By transforming historically derived concepts of social difference into units of fungibility, late liberal discourses wrest difference of its ability to evoke or stir conflict. This “hollowing out” of difference accomplishes the very “historical break” on which the promise and legitimacy of the late liberal project depends.

Solnit makes difference fungible through what I am calling the act of “enumeration.” On more than one occasion, she indexes San Francisco’s culture of diversity and inclusion through an itemized list of “marginal” populations that reside in the city:

[Through all the booms and busts] something was constant, the sense of the city as separate from the rest of the country, a sanctuary for nonconformists, exiles, war resisters, sex rebels, eccentrics, environmentalists in the arts and sciences, in food, agriculture, law, architecture and social organization [emphasis mine].

Likewise:

What happened [in San Francisco] was interesting precisely because it was different from what was happening anywhere else. We were a sanctuary for the queer, the eccentric, the creative, the radical, the political and economic refugees, and so they came and reinforced the city’s difference [emphasis mine].

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159 It should be noted that Winnubst uses the chronotope “neoliberalism” and not late liberalism. By neoliberalism, Winnubst means the changing rationalities and ontologies of social difference. Her definition of neoliberalism is more or less consonant with my definition of late liberalism.


161 Ibid, 92.


163 Solnit, Hollow City, 31.
Echoing what Judith Butler once deemed the “embarrassed etcetera,” Solnit represents San Francisco’s diversity through a running list of populations. This act of enumeration figures difference in purely abstract, fungible terms. Solnit expresses no acknowledgment or concern for what it means to be a member of one of these populations. For her, what matters is that the populations register as acceptable “forms of difference” in the late liberal imagination—and that together, they conjure an image of inclusion and diversity. “Normativized through their deviance,” queers, refugees, artists, and non-conformists are all indiscriminately enlisted in this glowing representation of San Francisco as late liberal sanctuary.  

Solnit’s act of enumeration strategically elides the differential capture and regulation of social life. It ignores how populations are brought into the project of citizenship and what happens inside the “brackets” of inclusion. It disregards and erases the embodied location and substance of difference; conditions of life and survival; histories of emergence, settlement, and cohabitation; histories of xenophobia, violence, and struggle; and the overlapping as well as divergent ethical and political claims that such experiences, conditions, and histories bring to the fore. In short, it defangs difference by emptying it of any and all sources of historical xenophobia and social conflict. In so doing, it “secures” the syntax of multicultural happiness. Difference-as-fungible enables Solnit to endorse and celebrate San Francisco’s inclusive social climate

164 Puar, xii.
165 Solnit’s hailing of San Francisco as a “sanctuary” accomplishes this same elision-cum-reorientation. Sanctuary politics reinforces the tolerant and accommodating impulse of the asylum-granting nation. But as critical theorists have so convincingly shown, the emphasis on sanctuary distracts from the brutal abuse refugees and asylum-seekers endure at border checkpoints and detention centers, as well as the histories of geopolitical violence—orientalist cultural politics, military invasions, free trade arrangements, U.S.-funded coups—that prompt people to flee their places of origin in the first place.
while disabling the complex histories of inclusion that damper and contradict this regulatory ideal and the post-xenophobic mantra that sustains it.

What does all this mean for an anti-gentrification politics? The hollowing out of difference is also the leveling out of difference. The “fungibility machine” wrecks concepts of social difference of their ethical force and meaning by denying their relative analytical standing with respect to striated, uneven, and ossified fields of privilege and power. It renders all forms of difference commensurable, equating historically and somatically loaded categories such as nationality, gender, race, and sexuality with disembodied cultural and lifestyle categories. As a result of this leveling, gentrification appears as “common injury” that affects all populations equally:

The current boom is dislodging bookstores, bars, Latino businesses, black businesses, environmental and social-services groups, as well as longtime residents, many of them disabled and elderly.166

And again:

[A] Latino who has been an important cultural figure,…one of San Francisco’s most distinguished poets,…a notable documentary filmmaker,…two much-loved used bookstores, [and] dozens of small waterfront businesses [have been or are being evicted]….All this is changing the character of what was once a great city of refuge for dissidents, queer, pacifists, and experimentalists [my emphasis].167

In this selection of quotes, the dispossession and displacement of “a Latino” is qualitatively the same as the dispossession and displacement of “queers,” “blacks,” the “disabled,” and “the elderly.” For all these people, gentrification can only mean one thing: the loss of a “great city of refuge” for those banking on the promise of liberal social inclusion and its attendant regulatory ideals: social harmony and multicultural

happiness. The announcement of gentrification as “our injury” reconsolidates the late liberal present and reasserts its ethical and social truth. In keeping with the present-future orientation of crisis narratives, it vanquishes patterns of (re)settlement, removal migration, cohabitation, and dispossession that evoke living histories of xenophobia. We are made to forget the fact that the “destruction” of one’s community and the “loss” of one’s home are unequally distributed “injuries” that articulate with complicated and overlapping histories of xenophobia. By erasing these histories through maneuvers of tense, mainstream anti-gentrification discourses enact and excuse the unequal segregated topology of late liberal social inclusion.
Chapter 5: “The Google Bus Doesn’t Stop Here”

I wonder if the Fillmore will ever be done with its “renewal.”

On May 10, 2014, the news outlet Daily Mail published an article titled “The Google bus doesn’t stop here,” featuring photographs by documentary photographer Alex Welsh and a brief editorial introduction by James Gordon. The photo essay chronicles the conditions of urban life in Bayview-Hunters Point, a collection of neighborhoods located on San Francisco’s far southeastern side. The piece begins with an intriguing and illustrative framing by Gordon of Welsh’s object of analysis. In a now-familiar refrain, Gordon opens by acknowledging the “ruthless gentrification” that is sweeping San Francisco. But, he goes on to qualify, the creative destructive forces of gentrification have barely touched Bayview-Hunters Point, a “black neighborhood” “on the other side of town” “besieged by crime, poverty and incarceration,” where “things have remained stagnant.” In this “forgotten neighborhood,” “[it] is as though the dot-com bubble and the tech booms never even happened.” Bayview-Hunters Point, Gordon concludes, “remains stuck in the past.” The article then segues into a series of photographs of all black, mostly men standing in and around “dilapidated and largely abandoned” public housing buildings. The first photograph is of a child looking on as the

playground of a public housing project burns to the ground after being set on fire by an unknown arsonist. The second is of a young black man being arrested by six police officers. In the background, a woman films the arrest using her cell phone, suggesting mistrust and tension between residents and law enforcement. Then, we see several photographs of funerals that call attention to the high rates of gun violence in the neighborhood. The caption for one picture states that the homicide victim had “been shot 16 times in the Army street projects.” The collection is rounded out by images of gang members showing off their tattoos and chains for the camera. Derelict buildings and barren, rubble-strewn, overgrown lots figure prominently in all the photographs, sometimes overwhelming and overshadowing the men, women, and children who live in their midst.

Figure 1. Child watches as the playground at Alice Griffith housing complex burns. Alex Welsh, “Untitled,” We Out Here: The Redevelopment of Hunters Point, reproduced from Gordon, “The Google Bus Doesn’t Stop Here.”
Figure 2. A young man is arrested by a group of cops in BVHP. Alex Welsh, “Untitled,” *We Out Here: The Redevelopment of Hunters Point*, reproduced from Gordon, “The Google Bus Doesn’t Stop Here.”

Figure 3. Friends and family mourn the death of Andre Helton, 18. Alex Welsh, “Untitled,” *We Out Here: The Redevelopment of Hunters Point*, reproduced from Gordon, “The Google Bus Doesn’t Stop Here.”
We can read this essay, with its flippant nod to the Google Buses that have consumed the attention of the progressive media, as a critique of mainstream anti-gentrification discourses. The piece presents life in Bayview-Hunters Point as a forceful and incisive counterpoint to Solnit’s depiction of San Francisco as a beacon of tolerance and diversity. Welsh’s photographs tell the story of a very different San Francisco, one of anti-black violence, urban renewal, and public housing. The geographically large Bayview-Hunters Point district, isolated from the rest of San Francisco by two major freeways, was an industrial dumping ground for much of the early and mid-twentieth century, filled with junkyards, manufacturing and recycling plants, and the bustling Hunters Point shipyard. When industry began to disappear in the 50s, the area became a “sink hole” for “unwanted and unsightly deposits, including San Francisco’s public
housing projects.”\textsuperscript{169} As postwar urban renewal forced residents out of other
neighborhoods, the city of San Francisco “funneled displaced black public housing
residents into Hunters Point” through an explicit policy of geographical and racial
segregation.\textsuperscript{170} As part of its urban renewal agenda (or rather as it was called then,
“Negro removal”) the city destroyed most of the Fillmore, the then-epicenter of black
settlement and cultural production. Under siege, many black Fillmore residents relocated
to Bayview-Hunters Point, charting a structural line of descent between the racial
violence of urban renewal and the fate of what became identified as San Francisco’s
(only) “black neighborhood.” Like many postindustrial neighborhoods of color afflicted
by disinvestment, redlining, and unemployment, Bayview-Hunters Point became the site
of drugs, violence, and survival crimes. All through the 50s and 60s, policing in the
district was marked by a combination of containment, neglect, and coercion. Young black
“hoodlums” who ventured from the Hunters Point “ghetto” into other parts of San
Francisco were banished back to their neighborhood.\textsuperscript{171} Repeated acts of police brutality,
including the fatal police shooting of a black youth in Hunters Point in 1966, sparked
several race riots during this period.

Welsh’s photos cast Bayview-Hunters Point as the representative of a
quintessentially American story of racial antagonism and black-white relations. Indeed,
perhaps the most damning aspect of Welsh’s photographs is that they trace a history
hardly unique to San Francisco. As urban historian Thomas Sugrue notes, the patterns of
anti-black racial politics and policymaking that shaped postwar Bayview-Hunters Point

\textsuperscript{169} Keally McBride, “Sanctuary San Francisco.”
\textsuperscript{170} Mona Lynch et al, “Policing the ‘Progressive’ City: The Racialized Geography of Drug Law
Enforcement,” \textit{Theoretical Criminology} 17, no. 3 (August 2013), 12.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 8.
were mutual to metropolitan areas throughout the country. Remarkably similar accounts have been written about Chicago, New York, and even that most un-San Franciscan of cities Detroit.\textsuperscript{172} The resemblances between these accounts signal the reach and persistence of black-white divisions in cities throughout urban America. Welsh makes so much as that point in his curative choices. The housing projects, black bodies, dead black bodies, gangs, guns, police, empty lots: this “sticky” constellation of images forces the long history of racial strife and specifically anti-black racism associated with “the ghetto” to the fore. In so doing, it challenges the San Francisco exceptionalism that pervades liberal anti-gentrification discourses. Indeed, part of the argumentative and affective power of these photographs lies in the fact that they could have come straight out of \textit{The Wire}—except that while we expect such pictures of post-industrial cities like Baltimore, we do not of “America’s most iconic and liberal city,” where the ethic of diversity and tolerance purportedly infuses urban social life.\textsuperscript{173}

In her brilliant and searing critique of liberal progressive politics, Jackie Wang argues that the media construction of ghettos as “alternate universes” of racial violence, death, and abjection marks them as faraway zones of unintelligibility.\textsuperscript{174} What happens in these zones usually does not register in the late liberal imaginary. In the case that an


\textsuperscript{173} Baltimore witnessed one of the nation’s biggest race riots in the aftermath of Dr. King’s assassination. Spiro Agnew, the Governor of Maryland, called out nearly the entire Maryland National Guard as well as federal troops to quell the riots.

\textsuperscript{174} Wang, 155.
“injustice” does register, it has to be “translated into more comprehensible terms.”\textsuperscript{175} The Daily Mail article alerts heretofore-oblivious audiences to the deleterious conditions of “ghetto” life in Bayview-Hunters Point—conditions that do not typically register in the San Francisco liberal imaginary. But in the process, it displaces (translates) anti-black racism into the past, positioning it “faraway” from the problems of the present.

Welsh’s photographs censure Solnit and her interlocutors for “ignoring” and “missing” the specific conditions of black urban life in Bayview-Hunters Point. And it’s true. When Solnit and other liberal commentators turn to the language of geographical specificity, they tend to spotlight the Mission, South of Market, the Tenderloin, and the Western Addition as the neighborhoods where the fiercest battles over gentrification are being waged. Bayview-Hunters Point is never mentioned in these accounts. While Solnit does not explicitly exclude Bayview-Hunters Point from her claim to inclusion, the neighborhood in its embodied, affective, historical and “thick” description remains illegible and invisible as a socio-spatial referent for her anti-gentrification politics. Yet interestingly, Gordon does not find fault with Solnit for failing to route or think an anti-gentrification politics through Bayview-Hunters Point. Instead, he suggests that the reason liberal anti-gentrification discourses “forget” about Bayview-Hunters Point is because of their exclusive orientation to the problem of gentrification, a problem of the present-future. An anti-gentrification politics, which aims at protecting a “living present” from a destructive “future,” simply cannot account for Bayview-Hunters Point, a neighborhood “stuck in the past.” Or in other words, if Solnit’s claim to inclusion takes as its basis those neighborhoods that are caught in the throes of urban change (where the

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 155.
Google Bus stops), it necessarily misses areas where “things have remained stagnant” (where the Google Bus is nowhere to be found).

Reading Solnit’s writings alongside the *Daily Mail* piece opens up a conjectural window into the biopolitical operations of social tense in liberal anti-gentrification discourses. Together, Solnit, Gordon, and Welsh accomplish a biopolitical maneuver of “temporalization and territorialization” wherein Bayview-Hunters Point is figured in a different time-space (the past) than the San Francisco liberal imaginary besieged by gentrification (the present-future).\(^{176}\) The workings of the governance of the prior are all too apparent here. Solnit, as we know, frames gentrification as an impending assault on the present. Her anti-gentrification politics asserts the “priority of the prior” by pitting the techie crowd against a preexisting form of urban social life that approximates late liberal social harmony. By declaring Bayview-Hunters Point as a neighborhood “stuck in the past,” the *Daily Mail* photoessay projects anti-black ghetto violence as a problem that “precedes” tech-fueled gentrification in the double sense—precedes it temporally and precedes it as a “fact to be faced.”\(^{177}\) As a result, the anti-black racism that Welsh’s photographs so forcefully bring to the fore seems unrelated to and disarticulated from the problem of gentrification; anti-black racism is cast beyond the scope of ethical reflection and action for a politics that takes gentrification as its primary target. The governance of the prior is also attached to a set of value judgments that make ghetto violence seem like a lower priority than gentrification. Whereas gentrification appears as a crisis that threatens the immediate erasure of the present and demands urgent action, anti-black racism appears to occupy a stubborn, banal temporality—a dull “historical hangover” we

\(^{176}\) Povinelli, “The Governance of the Prior.” 16.
\(^{177}\) Ibid.
can attend to when we are not so preoccupied with more pressing concerns.\textsuperscript{178} So while the \textit{Daily Mail} piece “accounts” for the long historical violence of racial xenophobia, it ultimately enacts the temporal securitization of the late liberal present by acquiescing to and reinforcing the “historical break” accomplished by Solnit’s crisis narrative. The \textit{Daily Mail} article criticizes Solnit, but it also works in tandem with her.

Maneuvers of tense make troublesome social worlds fade from public sentiment and discussion in order to distract from and rationalize away the violences of the present. Indeed, although Solnit and Welsh suggest otherwise, Bayview-Hunters Point is very much affected by gentrification, a “problem of the present.” In fact, the area faces greater redevelopment and gentrification pressures than anywhere else in San Francisco.\textsuperscript{179} To understand why, we need to update Welsh’s truncated history by tracing the living consequences of urban renewal. For much of the late-twentieth century, the combination of white flight, redlining, concentrated public housing, brownfield pollution, and postindustrial decay kept property values in Bayview Hunters-Point low, making it possible for working-class blacks to become homeowners. As Jodi Melamed argues, the opening up of housing and credit markets in the post-Civil Rights era was part of late liberalism’s pledge to reverse decades of housing segregation.\textsuperscript{180} Liberal policymakers and financial institutions framed increasing access to homeownership for people of color as a corrective to policies like urban renewal (and its counterpart, the federally-sponsored population of white suburbs). However, as we now know, black and brown communities were inaugurated into the dream of homeownership by way of risky financial instruments.

\textsuperscript{178} Winnubst, \textit{Way Too Cool}, 147.  
\textsuperscript{179} Lynch et al, 13.  
\textsuperscript{180} Melamed, 155.
and subprime loans. A Wells Fargo loan officer even testified that employees called such loans “ghetto loans.”\textsuperscript{181} When the housing bubble finally burst in the mid-to-late 2000s, the loss due to foreclosures represented the single-largest decline of black wealth in US history. Bayview-Hunters Point follows this script almost too neatly. Black homeowners were targeted for predatory subprime and adjustable-rate mortgages, and today the area is the epicenter of San Francisco’s foreclosure crisis.

In the minds of many neighborhood residents, the foreclosures “clear a path for the city’s plans to redevelop and gentrify Bayview-Hunters Point.”\textsuperscript{182} As banks foreclose on and dispossess black residents, developers are turning foreclosed properties into upscale residential and commercial establishments. In a city where there is little room to build, Bayview-Hunters Point is the “final patch of San Francisco not yet redeveloped,” therefore constituting some of the city’s most valuable land.\textsuperscript{183} Former mayor Willie Brown recently remarked that “there is no other piece of soil that is as lucrative” as the Bayview-Hunters Point peninsula.\textsuperscript{184} In 1997 Brown cut a deal with the Lennar Corporation to replace the public housing projects in Hunters Point with mixed-use developments comprising affordable and market-rate units. Lennar waited to break ground on the affordable housing units until 2013, when the tech boom was approaching its peak. Activists claim that Lennar was waiting for property values to increase “and for other developers to lead the way in gentrifying Bayview Hunters Point” before

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
constructing any affordable housing so as to price out the city’s lowest-income residents.\(^{185}\)

Furthermore, the gentrification of Bayview-Hunters Point cannot be understood separately from the racialized deployment and exercise of law enforcement. As Lynch et al note, the S.F.P.D.’s strategy for policing Bayview-Hunters Point is tied to the area’s construction as “the ghetto” or the “the hood”—a space dominated by violent “gangster” black men who are seen as the root of the city’s criminal problems.\(^{186}\) Policing in the area today is characterized by heavy-handed War on Drugs-type campaigns that include indiscriminate racial profiling, low-level drug arrests, mass incarceration, and police brutality.\(^{187}\) Both John Marquez and Jordan Camp, writing in the context of Chicago’s south side and Los Angeles’s Skid Row respectively, argue that the militarized policing of “ghetto space” operates in tandem with gentrification, “clearing space” for capital accumulation by incarcerating people for poverty-related survival crimes.\(^{188}\)

If it is not already clear by now, one cannot meaningfully discuss the gentrification of Bayview-Hunters Point without accounting for the deep historical

\(^{185}\) Ibid.


\(^{187}\) San Francisco has a sustained pattern of racialized drug enforcement. Some illuminating statistics: San Francisco’s black-white drug arrest disparities are the greatest nationally for mid-size cities. The city has the highest overall mid-size city black drug arrest rate in the country. And it has the highest per capita rate of prison admissions for black drug defendants among the largest 198 counties in the nation. Much of the city’s drug policing is concentrated in Bayview-Hunters Point, the Tenderloin, the Mission, and South of Market. See Lynch et al, 2.

\(^{188}\) John D Marquez, “The Black Mohicans: Representations of Everyday Violence in Postracial Urban America,” American Quarterly 64, no. 3 (September 2012), 625–51; Jordan T. Camp, “Blues Geographies and the Security Turn: Interpreting the Housing Crisis in Los Angeles,” American Quarterly. 64, no. 3 (September 2012), 543-70.
violence of anti-black xenophobia.\textsuperscript{189} Indeed, for many residents, comprehending the
gentrification of Bayview-Hunters Point as a “problem of the present” involves a
historical lens that starts with the anti-black violence of postwar urban renewal and police
brutality and ends with the anti-black violence of mass incarceration, subprime lending,
and privatized public housing. This long historical view is expressed by residents who
make sense of the gentrification of Bayview-Hunters Point by likening it to the urban
renewal of the Fillmore, an event that expressly and overtly carries the charge of anti-
black racism vis-à-vis state violence and housing segregation:

\begin{quote}
They’ve done it to the Fillmore and all the other areas and now it’s time for the Bayview.\textsuperscript{190}
\end{quote}

Like they did to the Fillmore.\textsuperscript{191}

\begin{quote}
[We’re talking about] three generations of ‘black removal’ under the guise of redevelopment.\textsuperscript{192}
\end{quote}

Refra...
traction nor legibility in late liberal anti-gentrification discourses. Indeed, not only do anti-gentrification discourses not have a language, they cannot *afford* to have a language for understanding race as a persistent marker of historical violence. For the diagnoses put forth by Bayview-Hunters Point residents, which directs us to the living history of anti-black xenophobic violence, undoes the rosy image of late liberal social harmony and the “historical break” on which this image rests. To that end, we might understand Bayview-Hunters Point in its historical “thick description” as the site of a “confrontational impasse” of late liberalism. Liberal anti-gentrification discourses preempt this impasse through technologies of tense and the governance of the prior. Technologies of tense render difference fungible and ahistorical in the present, thereby emptying it of any ability to evoke shame, pain, or trauma and to trigger meaningful ethical reflection (re: Solnit). If and when late liberalism is forced to account for the continued existence of xenophobic violence, technologies of tense defer “sticky” bodies and spaces into the past, effectively declaring xenophobia a “bad historical hangover of bygone times” (re: Gordon and Welsh).193 Through these biopolitical maneuvers, anti-gentrification discourses recast neighborhoods like Bayview-Hunters Point beyond the horizon of the gentrifying present. By failing to acknowledge the relationship of gentrification to historical patterns of racial xenophobia, they disproportionately expose neighborhoods like Bayview-Hunters Point to the forces of racialized gentrification and redevelopment.

Conclusion

Liberal anti-gentrification discourses predicate ethical urban inclusion on a San Francisco ethos of urban life that celebrates diversity and practices social harmony. At the same time that they protest the market as the sole barometer of urban citizenship, these discourses serve the goals of governmentality by projecting late liberal regulatory ideals as the best way to include and coexist with “the otherwise.” These well-meaning discourses insist on “leaving xenophobia behind.” But, as I have shown, this insistence “translates,” to use Jackie Wang’s terms, into an anxiety-ridden refusal to acknowledge the ways in which historical xenophobia still shapes our relationships to (particular) forms of difference. The texts I have examined in this thesis—Solnit’s writings, Welsh and Gordon’s Daily Mail article, and the remarks by Bayview-Hunters Point residents—sketch out the biopolitical implications of this insistence-cum-refusal. On the one hand, an anti-gentrification politics that bases inclusion on (“makes live”) late liberal ethics protects (“makes live”) those who conform to certain regulatory requirements—namely, the capacity and willingness to present one’s difference in an ahistorical way that affirms multicultural happiness and averts social conflict. On the other hand, this same anti-gentrification politics abandons (“lets die”) those whose bodily and socio-spatial associations evoke suppressed histories of xenophobia. I have suggested the “racial ghetto” as one such space that shores up these histories and that is accordingly put to pasture by liberal anti-gentrification politics.
The social anxieties of late liberalism have real, material consequences. San Francisco’s black population as been dwindling since the 1940s when thousands first migrated to the city looking for wartime employment. Blacks went from 13.4 percent of the city’s total population in 1970 to 6.5 percent in 2005 to just 3.9 percent in 2010. In what can only be described as a “hemorrhaging” of black bodies, this is the worst percentage decline in any major U.S. city—nevermind in a city with a reputation for tolerance and diversity! Not to mention that these figures do not include the record numbers of black men and women who are put behind bars by San Francisco’s criminal justice system and physically removed from the urban space of the city. The kind of anti-black violence and exclusion I am chronicling here is related to yet analytically distinct from the murders of Trayvon Martin and Oscar Grant. Whereas those murders registered as spectacular deployments of sovereign power and invited national scrutiny, these strains of anti-black xenophobia elude the late liberal imaginary and therefore go largely unanswered. Moreover, the fact that they go unanswered provokes little meaningful outrage. We have already accounted for and rationalized away our silences and deferrals.

We have traveled a long way, far from what most people think of when they think of gentrification. To that end, it is perhaps most fitting to conclude this thesis by turning to the original formulation of the term “gentrification” and its relationship to the line of inquiry I have developed here. In 1964, sociologist Ruth Glass coined the word “gentrification” to describe the changes besetting the working class quarters of London:

One by one, many of the working class quarters have been invaded by the middle class – upper and lower….Shabby, modest mews and cottages…have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences….Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts…it goes on rapidly until all or more of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.¹⁹⁵

Forty years later, urban geographer Neil Smith wrote what many consider the definitive academic text on gentrification, *The New Urban Frontier*. Gentrification, Smith observed, was no longer a marginal phenomenon as it had been at the time of Glass’s writing. Under neoliberalism, it constituted a significant dimension of contemporary urbanism. In an argument that set the stage for the next two decades of gentrification research, Smith theorized gentrification as a process of capital accumulation and class struggle. Since then, scholarly and popular discourses have largely conceived of the problem of gentrification through Marxian categories of analysis: class, accumulation, speculation, commodification. Despite her liberal orientation, a Marxian sensibility certainly undergirds all of Solnit’s writing, which at its core concerns the increasing unaffordability of urban living for those who do not belong to the highest economic stratum.

By definition, gentrification is bound up with economic processes. Anti-gentrification politics are therefore typically understood as resistance to or contestations of these processes. In this paper, however, I have suggested that anti-gentrification politics also articulate with ideals of inclusion and coexistence, of the good life and just society, of difference and history, that are embedded in and yet resonate beyond the

immediate city-space. Much can be gleaned by rethinking gentrification with a critical attention to these ideas.

So, to recap: In the first two chapters of the thesis, I constructed a theoretical framework for understanding the governance of social difference in the context of liberalism’s be(late)ed 20th-century turn to the politics of inclusion. Here I built on Foucault’s triadic conceptualization of liberalism-governmentality-biopolitics, as well as the insights of theorists of social difference in the fields of feminist philosophy, queer studies, and race, settler colonial, and postcolonial studies. I further argued for “the urban” as a generative analytical site for exploring questions of how late liberalism governs social difference.

The remainder of the thesis sought to reconceptualize mainstream anti-gentrification discourses in San Francisco using the theoretical framework I developed in the introductory chapters. Liberal anti-gentrification discourses oppose tech in-migration on the grounds that it will destroy a San Francisco “way of life” rooted in diversity, tolerance, and social peace. Within this discursive milieu, the San Francisco urban imaginary is equated to late liberal imaginary, and the gentrification of San Francisco is equated to the destruction of late liberal ideals. Anti-gentrification discourses of this sort, I argued, constitute a modality of late liberal governmentality. Their critique of gentrification not only asserts but also depends on the ethicality, legitimacy, and integrity of the late liberal project. In the final two chapters, I showed that liberal anti-gentrification discourses deploy biopolitical technologies of security such as crisis narratives, social tense, and the governance of the prior to secure differential inclusion in the image of liberal social harmony. I suggested that late liberal differential inclusion
rests on an anxious disavowal of anti-black historical violence and on the abandonment of black bodies who cannot divest themselves of this violence. Articulated in the name of an anti-gentrification politics that stakes its claim on accommodating and celebrating “the otherwise,” this pernicious modality of late liberal governmentality makes anti-black violence seem politically and morally sensible, right, and good.

I have not lost sight of the material consequences of gentrification. The line of inquiry I have sketched here has everything to do with the economic and socio-spatial processes operating on the urban landscape. For decades, Marxian scholarship that has followed Smith’s lead has clearly and convincingly documented the wholesale displacement and replacement of low-income communities of color by middle class urban dwellers. But this scholarship cannot explain why even those who oppose market-based solutions, who really do believe in the positive (non-monetary) value of difference, still harbor such intense fears and anxieties around inhabiting the same city-space and social world as certain “others.” It cannot explain how and why those who attach such stakes to the gentrification of San Francisco do not seem to be much bothered by the gentrification of the city’s only black neighborhood. It cannot explain how race articulates not only with socio-spatial class processes but also with questions of cohabitation, coexistence, belonging, and “the good life.” To address those issues, we need to supplement Marxian approaches to gentrification research with the line of inquiry I have proposed here. Combining these approaches can inspire much imaginative thinking, not only about gentrification but more generally about “the urban” and the ways in which it subverts, reinvents and articulates with capitalist liberal democracy.


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