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Progressive Dystopia: Multiracial Coalition And The Carceral State

Abstract

Policing and prisons have been the focus of recent community mobilizations in the US, particularly because of their disproportionate impact on Black communities. Along with the excesses of law enforcement officers, vigilante attacks have brought the fatal costs of Islamophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and anti-Black racism to the fore of the American consciousness. As a strategy to combat both carceral violence and socioeconomic inequity, scholars in African American Studies and the social sciences have advocated for multiracial alliances between racialized groups and more privileged communities. What, though, are the limits of multiracial coalition building as a tactic for democratic social change? This dissertation answers these questions through an examination of the locally situated practices of progressive institutions and their relationship to the logics of prison and policing. Using a spatial lens, I argue that the local practice of multiracial coalition politics is shaped by the terrain of anti-Black racism, and that the brunt of its impact is borne by Black girls, women, and queer people. I center my data collection on a public high school focused on social justice in San Francisco. The school, which was itself the product of community organizing efforts, serves contradictory functions as both a strategy for activists struggling against systemic inequities, and a site where those inequities are perpetuated, particularly against young Black people. The patterns of racialized inequity within the school were paralleled in a broader suite of forces constraining Black life in liberal San Francisco through gentrification and criminalization. I conceptualize this dynamic as carceral progressivism, a form of late liberal statecraft in which the gains of redistributive social movements are undercut by their collusion in Black disposability and punishment. The aching persistence of anti-Black practices and logics in progressive institutions allows us to do the analytic work of distinguishing anti-Black racism from white supremacy, as well as the political work of devising a notion of multiracial coalition based on the abolition of the former, rather than the amelioration of the latter.

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PROGRESSIVE DYSTOPIA: MULTIRACIAL COALITION AND THE CARCERAL STATE

Savannah Shange-Binion

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PROGRESSIVE DYSTOPIA: MULTIRACIAL COALITION AND THE CARCERAL
STATE

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DEDICATION

For Mace,

Waga,

Sleep,

Nae,

Zalaytheo,

Ori-Scori,

and every other Frisco kid who is loyal to their soil.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The words on the pages included herein are the product of generations of labor, across continents and oceans, and only a small bit was done by my hand. As always, I first thank my ancestors, the long stream of survivors who lived through the Middle Passage and its wake, and who were dispersed across the Americas. You fought, cried, struggled, gave up, grieved, laughed, loved, and survived the unsurvivable. My life, and this work, is an altar to you. The path I walked to, through, and beyond this project is paved by the triple gem of the Buddha, dharma, and sangha, in whom I take refuge over and over in the service of liberation. May all those who struggle under the weight of structural and personal suffering claim freedom, in this lifetime.

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I began graduate school with a BFA in my pocket, several years in the field, and no academic training *at all*. My supervisors both granted me incredible patience, and nurtured my capacity to think both with and beyond the canon. John L. Jackson, Jr., aka “JJ,” aka Anthroman, gave me space to be unapologetically Black in the academy, and adopted me into an intellectual lineage of Africana thought and practice. Kathleen D. Hall created a sanctuary for ethical, rigorous, and *just* scholarship in an institution that felt more alienating than inviting. Because of her, I was able to bring my spiritual practice in resonance with my professional practice. Thank you both for your unwavering faith in me, for writing more recommendation letters than you can shake a stick at, and for trusting me to do the work. I hope to make you proud.

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Homegirls make the world go round, and without Gina’s dharmic sisterhood, Paris’s Black feminist fire, Dhira’s courage and whimsy, Che’s femme badassery, Susie’s nonattached cheerleading, Noor’s ENDLESS MEMES, and Audrey’s unconditional reciprocity, I would have no world at all. Sammy, you are the best homeboy a homegirl could have. My two besties have shown me sisterhood at its finest: Sahar, you have made me better for twenty years, and I can never thank you enough for how much you have changed how I see the world through your art, your parenting, and your friendship. Oriana, you make the

whole world golden, and it was your ferocious love for your city that sparked this^x
project to begin with.

The young people of San Francisco have taught me everything I know
about pedagogy, activism, and what it means to survive the end of the world.
Thank you for sharing your home with me, and for allowing me to fight alongside
you in the struggle for the future of The City.

ABSTRACT

PROGRESSIVE DYSTOPIA: MULTIRACIAL COALITION AND THE CARCERAL STATE

Savannah Shange

Kathleen D. Hall

John L. Jackson, Jr.

Policing and prisons have been the focus of recent community mobilizations in the US, particularly because of their disproportionate impact on Black communities. Along with the excesses of law enforcement officers, vigilante attacks have brought the fatal costs of Islamophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and anti-Black racism to the fore of the American consciousness. As a strategy to combat both carceral violence and socioeconomic inequity, scholars in African American Studies and the social sciences have advocated for multiracial alliances between racialized groups and more privileged communities. What, though, are the *limits* of multiracial coalition building as a tactic for democratic social change? *Progressive Dystopia: Multiracial Coalition and the Carceral State* answers these questions through an examination of the locally situated practices of progressive institutions and their relationship to the logics of prison and policing. Using a spatial lens, I argue that the local practice of multiracial coalition politics is shaped by the

terrain of anti-Black racism, and that the brunt of its impact is borne by Black girls, women, and queer people. I center my data collection on a public high school focused on social justice in San Francisco. The school, which was itself the product of community organizing efforts, serves contradictory functions as both a *strategy* for activists struggling against systemic inequities, and a *site* where those inequities are perpetuated, particularly against young Black people. The patterns of racialized inequity within the school were paralleled in a broader suite of forces constraining Black life in liberal San Francisco through gentrification and criminalization. I conceptualize this dynamic as *carceral progressivism*, a form of late liberal statecraft in which the gains of redistributive social movements are undercut by their collusion in Black disposability and punishment. The aching persistence of anti-Black practices and logics in progressive institutions allows us to do the analytic work of distinguishing anti-Black racism from white supremacy, as well as the political work of devising a notion of multiracial coalition based on the abolition of the former, rather than the amelioration of the latter.

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1.

#OurLivesMatter:
Mapping an Abolitionist Anthropology



Figure 1: Photo on Robeson Justice Website, by Johnny Caples 2014.

In the fall of 2014, the website of the Robeson Justice Academy¹ prominently featured an image of two hundred or so mostly brown hands raised in the air, some resolute, some reluctant. The young people were crowded onto a crumbling blacktop basketball court, holding signs that read “Hands Up! Don’t Shoot!” and “Murder is Illegal – Arrest the Officer.” The whole-school photo shoot was organized by youth leaders with the consent of school staff, and taken

¹ All of the institutional and individual names in this manuscript are pseudonyms.

the week after a grand jury in Ferguson, MO refused to charge police officer Darren Wilson in the killing of Black² teenager Michael Brown. The image is a reflection of the small public high school's mission to offer culturally responsive, social justice-themed education to low-income youth of color— the walls are emblazoned with graffiti murals reading 'Equity' and 'Decolonize' and Audre Lorde and Frantz Fanon are enshrined into the core curriculum. Nestled in the hills of one of the last working-class neighborhoods in San Francisco, Robeson is the product of a hard-fought campaign led by Black, Latinx,³ Asian-American and Polynesian parents, students and educators to open a community-based high school, and thus represents the fruits of collective, multiracial struggle. The photo's presence as the outsize header on the Robeson website, overlaid with the caption #OurLivesMatter, indexes a critical, even combative, relationship between the institution and the carceral state of which it is a part.

However, despite this public stance of opposition to racial bias, the year this photo was taken, Robeson had the district's highest suspension rate for Black students, as well as far higher rates of disciplinary referrals and expulsions. How, then, do we reconcile Robeson's exceptionally punitive disciplinary practices with its institutional narratives of social justice and liberation as exceptional? Further,

² Though American Anthropological Association style guidelines stipulate the use of lowercase "black," I capitalize "Black" in order to signal orthographically the specificity of racial condition of Black people. I do not capitalize "blackness" as a state of being, because is it more capacious and permeable than the ascription of "Black."

³ "Latinx" is a gender neutral descriptor, pronounced "Latinex," that is an alternative to Latina/o. The ending 'x' is an intervention of feminist and queer cultural workers as a form of linguistic resistance to the binary gendering of the Spanish language. Earlier neologisms included Latin@, but with the advent of '@' being used as a key command in online spaces, new adaptations were required. For more on the racial and political implications of the 'x', see Jessica Marie Johnson's (2015) "Thinking About the 'X'."

what does a place like Robeson, roundly regarded as a ‘win’ for progressive-left reformers tell us about who loses when “we” win? How is the “our” of #OurLivesMatter raced, gendered, and classed? Who is disposable in a progressive dystopia?

By replacing “Black Lives Matter” with “Our Lives Matter,” Robeson discourse uneasily skirts the tension that erupted around the co-opting of the hashtag by other marginalized communities, like #brownlivesmatter and #muslimlivesmatter.⁴ When “our lives matter” at multi-racial Robeson, blackness is eclipsed by the more equivocal ‘people of color.’ The dissonance within what initially feels like such a liberatory coalitional move is sharpened by the signs in front row held by a series of Latina girls reading, “my generation is next – don’t shoot.” The performance of racial analogy is both cathartic and politically strategic. A young Latino man, Alex Nieto, died in the street after he was gunned down by the SFPD just weeks before this picture was taken. In part, these young women’s plea represents the blackening⁵ of Polynesian and Latinx bodies in a white and Chinese city, and the brutality of dispossession as distributed across inherited axes of racialization. This mode of racial solidarity is costly – in order to state that their generation is next, non-Black people of color have to set Black

⁴ The relationship between appropriation, solidarity, and co-optation was a subject of many online and offline clashes within overlapping Bay Area leftist communities. A public event was even convened at the shoestore-cum-arts venue SoleSpace in Oakland in order to host a public dialogue between Black and Latinx activists to discuss when, if, and how “Brown Lives Matter” was a problematic political framing. For more nuanced critique of the various permutations of the Black Lives Matter framework, see BLM co-founder Alicia Garza’s “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement” (2014).

⁵ Unlike the adjective form “Black,” I do not capitalize blackening, blackness, or any other derivative terminology because these words point to the mobility of blackness, while Black points to the stasis of its referent.

death in stasis, already a fact, a cautionary tale that might save them from being next.

Progressive Dystopia attends to the tension between coalition, anti-blackness, and the state by documenting and amplifying the afterlives of slavery as lived in one corner of San Francisco. This study turns on the generative antagonism between “our” and “Black” in the mattering of lives, and in the respective epistemologies of ethnic and Africana studies. As an interdisciplinary project that weaves together the concerns of Africana studies with the tools of queer and feminist scholarship, my dissertation expands the subfield of urban anthropology.

In his treatise on the aims and methods of Black studies, Fred Moten argues for the conceptualization of

abolition and reconstruction... as ongoing projects animating the study of comparative racialization as well as black studies, two fields that will be seen as each other’s innermost ends, two fields that will be understood through the claim they make on – their thinking of and in – blackness. (Moten 2008:1745-6)

“Reconstruction” here both invokes the post-bellum experiment with democracy that was precipitously crushed by de jure racism (Du Bois 1935), as well as the leftist recuperation of the state that animates the political imaginary of mainstream ethnic studies and its political corollaries in the movements for immigrant, racial, and economic justice. By splashing the #OurLivesMatter photo on their website, Robeson makes what Moten calls “a claim” on blackness, as does the broader multiracial progressive movement that enlists blackness as a central conceit of people-of-color politics. But when #ourlivesmatter, it is only in

their *ourness* that Black folks' lives matter, because they, *we*, are one of "us."

And yet, as I demonstrate over the course of this manuscript, being hurt, being mistrustful, being unapologetically Black can get both students and teachers expelled from "us" because they no longer deserve to be in this special place or be a citizen of this ad hoc polity. Robeson is a small, resistant, progressive, and yet imminently *civil* society, the meniscus of which is kept taut by the internalized policing required under the regime of carceral progressivism, and punctuated by the threat of spectacular expulsion from its exceptional space.

The lethal distance between pedagogies of liberation and pedagogies of emancipation is particularly instructive at a moment when democratic socialism has reentered mainstream political discourse with Bernie Sanders' recent presidential bid. Though Sanders lost, Black people and people of color were the presumed beneficiaries of a democratic socialist presidency. The presumption fails because Black flesh is always in excess, uncivil, and marked by its incongruity with the progressive project, to which we remain narratively central, and yet materially surplus. To tease out the incongruities between "our" and "Black," abolition and progress, centrality and excess, I zoom out from this snapshot of kids on a foggy hill in Frisco⁶ to the broader intellectual topography that shapes this project. In the following sections of this chapter, I briefly review the literatures that inform *Progressive Dystopia*, and then introduce the three

⁶ "Frisco" is a contested nickname for San Francisco, used mostly by working-class communities, Black communities, and communities of color in the Bay Area and throughout California. For more the politics of Frisco nomenclature, see Chapter 2, "A Long History of Seeing."

key themes that weave through the dissertation. Finally, I describe each chapter and how it fits into the broader argument of the study.

Intellectual Genealogies

I approach this project in conversation with several bodies of literature. I build on scholarship in educational anthropology that engages youth programs and K-16 institutions as crucibles of race, subject and citizen formation, generating fine-grained analyses of the reproduction and interruption of inequality (Bettie 2003; Foley 1990; Fordham 1996; Hall 2002; Kwon 2013; Pollock 2005; Sojoyner 2016; Willis 1977). In terms of thinking with and about San Francisco as a place, I am in dialogue with social geography and what it offers to an analysis of neoliberalism and its discontents (Gilmore 2007; Harvey 2007; King 2013; McKittrick & Woods 2007; McKittrick 2010). Though Robeson Justice Academy and its surrounding neighborhoods are topically at the heart of this study, neither schools nor cities are my primary objects of analysis.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) counseled anthropologists against examining cultural phenomena as closed circuits independent of broader forces like colonialism and capital, and instead engaged ethnographic methods as a lens into a larger web of power and history. For instance, in her work on Muslim French communities, political anthropologist (and Trouillot student) Mayanthi Fernando (2014) distinguishes between her object of observation (Muslim French people), and her object of analysis (liberal secularism, or *laïcité*). Like Fernando,

I engage a small, marginalized community as a lens into late liberal democracy.

Robeson and Frisco are objects that I observe ethnographically in order to analyze the relationship between antiblackness and late liberal statecraft.

As scaffolding for apprehending the latter, I engage scholarship that interrogates liberalism as a normative state and subject form. Within anthropology, my work is in long-form dialogue with Elizabeth Povinelli and her moves toward an anthropology of the otherwise (2006, 2012, 2016), while also informed by Saba Mahmood's (2005) critique of secular Western feminism's narrow perception of the political. In my rendering of Frisco, I heed Deborah Thomas' (2009) call to attend to the role of political economy in producing racial and gender formations so as to resist the epistemic violence that subtends culturalist readings of Black social life. Audra Simpson's (2014) attention to form and voice as sites of illiberal sovereignty has also shaped my methodology. Across disciplines, I draw on literary theorist Lauren Berlant's (2010) exegesis of affect in late liberal times, and gender scholar and feminist killjoy Sara Ahmed's (2014) archive of willfulness as an alternate history of the present.

I synthesize this body of scholarship on late liberalism with anthropological literature on racialization and antiblack racism, particularly as it relates to national belonging and deterritorialization (Clarke & Thomas 2006; Fields & Fields 2012, Jackson 2001; Lomnitz 2001; Perry 2011; Pierre 2012; Thomas 2004; Trouillot 2001). As I think through the multiracial group of young people gathered in the #OurLivesMatter photo, I weave together the longstanding Black scholarly and activist investment in interest-based alliances

(Du Bois 1935; Bambara 1981; Cohen 1997; Wilson 1999; Marquéz 2014) with critiques that examine the asymmetries of power covered over in some notions of coalition (Nopper 2001; Rodriguez 2006; Hartman & Wilderson 2003; Sexton 2011).

Perhaps most intimately though, this project is hailed by the work of Africana studies scholars who center the singularity of chattel slavery as a gendered incursion on the human condition (James 2007, 2013; Keeling 2010; Sexton 2008; Sharpe 2016; Spillers 1987, 2003; Weheliye 2014; Wilderson 2010). Hortense Spillers' oeuvre spilling forth from "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (1987) makes this body of literature possible, and Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) is the next major node in its development. Spillers' insights on the flesh as (un)gendered chattel and Hartman's (2007) notion of the afterlife of slavery undergird my understanding of Black embodiment, along with Christina Sharpe's (2016) invocation of "the wake" as the structuring temporality of blackness in/as/beyond the violence of slavery. One of the goals of this project is to bring these two unruly fields of inquiry into relation. Too often, blackness falls out of our frame when engaging late liberal governance, or else becomes subordinated as an exemplar of another phenomena. Similarly, scholars of antiblackness ritually return to the Black body as a theoretical site, but because they work largely in the fields of English, history, and film studies, we don't know much about how their interventions map onto blackness as lived and loved on a daily basis across the diaspora.

Toward an Abolitionist Anthropology

In an effort to bring these divergent traditions into ethical relation, I offer *abolitionist anthropology* as one of many possible names for apprehending the necessary conjuncture of antiblackness theory and a critical anthropology of the state. Abolitionist anthropology could be imagined as one of an unruly brood of intellectual projects descended from the “decolonizing generation” christened by Jafari Allen and Ryan Jobson (2016). They use the term to refer to the wave of Black and allied anthropologists working in the 1980s and 1990s to forge an epistemological and methodological path toward an “anthropology for liberation” (Harrison 1991:10). One of the key interventions of Faye Harrison’s landmark edited volume *Decolonizing Anthropology* was to develop an anthropology based in the “critical intellectual traditions and counter-hegemonic struggles of Third World peoples” (1991:1), and thus most of the collected essays focused on the Caribbean and Latin America, particularly because it was published at a time when both political insurgence and repression were at a high tide in the region. This dissertation, and my work more broadly attempts to apply the insights and imperatives of the decolonizing generation to the unhyphenated Black US context, to those of us stuck stateside with no flag of our own to wave amongst the Labor Day throngs on Eastern Parkway.⁷

For Harrison, decolonial anthropology is all the more urgent because Black diasporic nations like Jamaica have achieved “sovereignty without

⁷ Every Labor Day, the West Indian Day parade marches on Eastern Parkway, a broad thoroughfare that bisects Brooklyn, NY. Over a million revelers attend, most of whom carry small flags from any one of dozens of Caribbean countries and colonies, if they are not festooned from head to toe in their national colors.

emancipatory substance” (Harrison 2008:243), as they continue to struggle against the weight of neoliberal-cum-neocolonial dispossession. Black people descended from slaves held in the US have almost the inverse predicament: we have won the prize of legal emancipation without access to meaningful sovereignty. Because of this, an “anthropology for liberation” in the Black US context may necessitate a focus on surviving the *ends* of states, instead of, or at least prior to, the struggles of creating new ones. Abolitionist anthropology transposes the analytic choreography of decolonial anthropology onto the late liberal US: *one more time from the top, this time on the right foot.*

Though the US is often skipped over in discussions of postcoloniality, it the first nation to throw off the yoke of European dominance, only to fasten it onto the necks of enslaved Africans. The ongoing settler colonial genocide of indigenous people and the sublimation of African people into Black objects through chattel slavery are twin structures upholding US sociality. Rather than exceptional to the US, abolitionist scholarship is rooted in diasporic Africana studies, as indeed is the dream of abolition itself: Haiti was the first decolonial nation in the world, which fought off both slavery and empire at the same time, and has been punished ever since. Much of the work happening in Black anthropology is already oriented toward abolition (cf. Bolles 2001; Buck 2001; Cox 2015; Drake & Baber 1990; Gwaltney 1993; McClaurin 2001; Thomas 2013; Williams 1996); I am using the term to highlight this existing scholarly tradition and my debt to it.

Antecedent to its location as a disciplinary mode, abolitionist

anthropology is a genre of Black study. For Fred Moten and Stefano Harney,

study is what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice... the point of calling it 'study' is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present. (Moten & Harney 2013:110)

The “speculative practice” of study as sketched here is immediately recognizable to any ethnographer: we call it fieldwork. For anthropologists of Black people in the Americas, that *fieldwork* is never completely out of sight of another set of fields – cotton, cane, tobacco, rice. Our real-time is stitched together from “plantation futures” (McKittrick 2013), a variegated time-space called forth from the hold of the ship, the social life that animates the socially dead (Patterson 1982). If, as Sharpe posits, “the question for theory is how to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery’s afterlives, the afterlife of property, how, in short, to inhabit and rupture this episteme with their, with our, knowable lives” (2016:50), an abolitionist anthropology finds its answers in the register of the quotidian, in the cruddy, ordinary facts of blackness (Povinelli 2011; Fanon 1963). Though I do not seek to make Black lives “knowable” as Sharpe suggests, given the tendency toward hubris that swells under the skin of thick description (Jackson 2013), the balance of this manuscript turns on how even a few glimpses of Black life as lived in a foggy city by the Bay might “inhabit and rupture this episteme” of late liberalism. Significant, here, is the dyadic relation between inhabiting (living),

and rupturing (destruction): the syncopation, or ‘two-step’⁸ between the present durative tense of Black survivance and the future perfect of abolition. In this sense, abolitionist anthropology is in rhythm with what Povinelli calls the “sociology of potentiality” (2011:16) while still getting down on The One of endurance.⁹ Given this stance of inquiry, in the following sections I sketch the key analytic themes that structure this dissertation.

Progressive Dystopia

As an organizing frame, I figure San Francisco as a *progressive dystopia*, a perpetually colonial place that reveals both the possibilities and limits of the late liberal imaginary. In the current national climate, ‘progressive’ has come to mean anyone to the left of the Democratic Party platform. The term can reference an incredibly diverse group of communities and individuals, some of whom have conflicting political imaginaries. For instance, Robeson as a school has an explicitly decolonial vision.¹⁰ In contrast, the Congressional Progressive Caucus lauds the “the progressive promise” as a patriotic duty. Their 2016 “The People’s Budget” platform reveals the allegiances inherent to their brand of

⁸ John L. Jackson, Jr., in his seminar courses at Penn, would often use the heuristic of a ‘two-step’ as an embodied mode of reading across and against intellectual and political tradition.

⁹ For more on The One and its relevance to funk aesthetics in Black musical and cultural traditions, see LaMonda H. Stalling’s *Funk the Erotic* (2015).

¹⁰ An example of how decoloniality played out at Robeson was the day the school moved into its current building in the summer of 2004, which they shared with a middle school that had been open for 30 years. When the staff gathered for a planning meeting in auditorium, the only real veteran teacher, a Spanish teacher who had lived through the Noriega years in Panama, climbed up and unhooked the huge American flag that hung on one side of the stage, next to the flag of the state of California. “Should we burn it?” she asked. The staff voted not to burn it, and instead put in a box in a storage closet, but the fact that the staff voted on it in the first place is an indication of the Robeson’s skeptical relationship to the American project, at least in its early institutional years.

progressivism: “Prosperity, not Austerity: Invest in America” (CPC 2016). The notion of ‘prosperity’ evokes a kinder, gentler, more just capitalism, one just as tightly bound to US nation-hood. “The People’s Budget” is particularly relevant to this study because among the 50 national organizations who endorsed the platform, including labor unions, environmental groups, and Planned Parenthood is Prayers for Progress (P4P),¹¹ the very same faith-based organizing agency that helped to found Robeson 15 years ago. P4P’s presence in this web reveals the political diversity masked by the umbrella term “progressivism,” as well as the internecine relays of power and resources that link different factions of the US left. In this text, when I use “progressive,” I do so to reference both the redistributive ideal and contests over how to realize it.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus’ “progressive promise” framework signals the inherently utopian nature of the reformist endeavor, oriented as it is toward the recuperation of the American dream. To highlight the social conditions produced when the progressive promise is broken (or perhaps it was always already broken), I use the framework of *dystopia*, conventionally imagined as a fictional world that is considerably worse, yet uncomfortably close to one’s own. Like utopia, dystopia is also suffused with futurity, but weighted toward a negative valence that can produce anger, fear, hope, or complacency vis-à-vis the present. In *Economies of Abandonment*, Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) drafts science fiction foremother Ursula K. Le Guin as an intellectual collaborator, and uses the latter’s short story “The Ones Who Walked Away from

¹¹ Pseudonym.

Omelas” as the impetus for her exploration of tense and eventfulness in late liberalism. I follow Povinelli’s lead to engage speculative fiction as an anthropological resource, and look to Black science fiction icon Octavia Butler as a thought partner in rendering the progressive dystopia.

Written 25 years ago, Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* is set in a California that is not post-apocalyptic per se, in that there has been no single world-shattering event like a permanent eclipse, and yet the social has crumbled in the ruins of more mundane violence. The novel’s protagonist is Lauren Olamina, a young Black girl the same age as several Robeson students featured in this text. Indeed, in the fictional narrative, Lauren was born in 2009, the same year I began graduate study to work on this project. Over the course of the book, Lauren leads a rag-tag, multiracial group of survivors on a sojourn from the Los Angeles suburbs to a small town in Northern California, figuring out a way to live after the end of their world. For Black and Indigenous people in the Americas, the apocalypse came and never left, resulting in the dystopian reality of those enduring settler colonialism in the wake of chattel slavery (Tallbear 2016). Far from fantastic, Butler’s work is thus instructive in helping marginalized communities imagine a futurity that is not hitched to the continuation of the status quo.¹² If, as Sexton suggests, “a politics of abolition could never finally be a

¹² My engagement with Octavia Butler began when I myself was the same age as Lauren Olamina – fifteen. My relationship with Butler has been immensely enriched by participating in a broad community of activists and creative who use her work as a resource for social change. The Wildseeds Emergent Strategy Collective, a feminist of color creative collective founded by Desiree Evans and Soraya Jean-Louis McElroy in New Orleans, was a key locus of these conversations. Further, the work of Adrienne Maree Brown and Walidah Imarisha has helped to facilitate this work nationally; for more, see their stellar anthology *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (AK Press, 2015).

politics of resurgence, recovery, or recuperation. It could only ever begin with degeneration, decline, or dissolution” (2014:11), then dystopian narratives are key to constructing just such a politics. Abolition starts at the end of the world, and just like Lauren Olamina, Black folks in Frisco have a lot to teach us about how to survive the apocalypse.

I also use “dystopia,” which invokes an imagined world, as a way to foreground place and place-making, and to spatialize the encounter between cruel optimism (Berlant 2011) and racialized state violence. The state of California is a primary site of this collision. Critical geographer Ruthie Gilmore calls California *The Golden Gulag* (2007) because of its incongruous melding of ostentation and incarceration. Robeson in turn provides a concentrically nested instance of this phenomenon, in that its practices of exclusion as an overtly ‘radical’ space reverberate with the exodus of Black people and people of color from the official ‘sanctuary city’ of San Francisco.

Carceral Progressivism

As a second overarching theme, I offer the concept of *carceral progressivism* to illuminate the paradoxical dynamic in which social reform practices, particularly those that target inequities in communities of color, can perpetuate antiblack racism even as they seek to eliminate it. If the landscape is a progressive dystopia, then carceral progressivism is a key way to move material and discursive resources through that space – it is a routing and re-routing of power through the uneven, interlocked mechanisms of the state, private funders

and civil society. Carceral in this sense refers not primarily to the state of being currently imprisoned or detained, but to the “carceral continuum” conceptualized by Loïc Wacquant (2000) as the circuit between the ghetto and the prison, relayed in large part by the punitive system of social welfare. Carceral progressives lament the systemic racism of the penal system, only to call upon police as collaborators in protecting their vision of community. More broadly, carceral progressivism is critical of capitalism, but not its enforcement, and seeks redistribution, not reparations. Carceral progressivism functions as a pinnacle of late liberal statecraft because the discursive narratives (i.e. liberation) and material gains (i.e. a justice-themed public high school) of redistributive social movements are cannibalized and repurposed as rationales for dispossession.

In schools, carcerality is most often viewed through the lens of the school-to-prison pipeline, whereby zero-tolerance-style disciplinary policies disproportionately impact students of color, resulting in their arrest, detention, and eventual imbrication in the prison system. In contrast, Robeson Justice Academy pours immense resources into *avoiding* the school-to-prison pipeline through restorative justice and democratic practices, and yet *still* reenacts the logics of black punishment and disposability by counseling young people out and criminalizing the border between the school and the neighborhood (this dynamic is the focus of chapter six). In the current national climate, scholars and activists are faced with a Manichean divide between friends on the left and foes on the right, whereby the former are invested in ending mass incarceration, and the latter in a law and order future. But what happens when both sides of the

struggle for America's future rely on the same common sense of Black captivity? The marginalization of Black staff, students, and families at Robeson is an instantiation of how racialized carceral logic has stretched beyond literal confinement to shape the practice of social justice movements. As a framework, carceral progressivism brings our attention to the continuities between racism and anti-racism, allowing us to disentangle intention from impact, and disrupt right/left dichotomies that can obscure emergent political worlds in places like southeast San Francisco.

Willful Defiance

The final theme woven through this study is *willful defiance*, which I use to trace the agentic flows that creatively adapt to and subvert the terms of carceral progressivism, exposing its incoherencies and fissures. The phrase “willful defiance” originates in the California state disciplinary code, and I choose to repurpose state language as part of my analytic framework as a way to highlight how marginalized communities adapt the odds and ends of restrictive mechanisms as tools for survivance. “Willful,” too, invokes Sara Ahmed’s work on the willful subject and its capacity to thwart liberal sovereignty. For Ahmed willfulness is “what *gets in the way of what is on the way*.... To be judged willful is to become a killjoy of the future: the one who steals the possibility of happiness” (2014:47). In the progressive dystopia, the will is that which pulls against the inevitability of social justice, who robs the imminent reformed and antiracist state of its legitimacy. Rather than trying to fix upon the ontology of a

willful subject, Ahmed instead traces the effects of that willfulness. Like her I ask not “what is willfulness, but what is willfulness *doing?*” and offer an anthropological response to her philosophical question.

When faced with the chicanery of the nonprofit industrial complex, Black employees and clients of Robeson willfully defy the constraints placed upon them, and are sometimes punished with expulsion from both the school space and belonging in the just polity it anticipates building. However, rather than read this *willful defiance* as what Audra Simpson (2016) calls the “easy answer” of political resistance, or as a transparently liberatory project, I argue that it is better understood as a mode of Black refusal that rejects not only the political, but challenges the foundational assumptions of civil society. Over the course of this dissertation, I will share stories that illustrate the relationship between willful defiance and carceral progressivism, and how each exceeds the grasp of the other as they flow through the geography of the progressive dystopia. In the final section of this prologue, I outline the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter Descriptions

In the first chapter, “‘A Long History of Seeing:’ Historicizing a Progressive Dystopia,” I engage San Francisco as a progressive dystopia, a perpetually colonial place that marks the frontier of both the national imagination and the late liberal project. I widen the frame to contextualize San Francisco as a node of transnational capital and racialized self-making. As a lens into the political economy of San Francisco, I recount the attempted takeover of the governing

council of Robeson Justice Academy by elite white gentrifiers, and the tension between Robeson's social justice mission and state-mandated democratic bureaucracy. I trace the history of racialized dispossession in the city from the massacre of indigenous Ohlone people, through the settlement and re-settlement of Asian American, Latinx, and Black communities. Using the frame of 'militant liberalism' (Hanhardt 2013), I position Robeson as a key battlefield in the long fight between neoliberalism and progressivism in revanchist San Francisco.

In the second chapter, "“Why Can't We learn African?": Academic Pathways, Coalition Pedagogy, and the Demands of Abolition," I use a Beginning Spanish classroom as a lens into the "progressive" side of the paradox of carceral progressivism. Across the US, austerity measures have dealt deadly blows to social services, particularly health care and education. In the midst of school closures in Black and Latinx neighborhoods and the aggressive rise of standardized tests as a coercive tool, Robeson's social justice curriculum makes it an aberration in the state education system. By attending to the differential practice of form and content in Robeson's classrooms, I conceptualize Robeson here as both a *strategy* and a *site* of struggle. To illuminate the former, I discuss the practice of coalition pedagogy, where instructors successfully use examples of multiracial coalition to combat what Christina Sharpe (2016) calls the "weather" of anti-blackness. On the latter, I lift up moments where this sincerely anti-racist curricular content is challenged by Black students who critique the scope of its impact, revealing the antagonism between anti-racism and abolition.

“The Kids in the Hall: Mapping Fugitivity in a Progressive Dystopia” is the third chapter, and in it I use the hallways of Robeson Justice Academy as a lens into the twin geographies of the colonial settlement and the plantation. In the past two decades, colonial metaphors for gentrification in San Francisco have become commonplace – new white condominium buyers are derided as “settlers,” while artisanal coffee shop owners are both celebrated and sneered at as “pioneers.” Using the tools of spatial theory, I map the institutional spaces of Robeson onto the spatiotemporal landscape of The City¹³ through the physical and discursive space of the Hallway. I focus on the overlapping geographies of the plantation and the colonial settlement, and map the contemporary school space as contiguous with these sites of confinement and expulsion. As empirical grounding, I draw on official disciplinary practices and discourses of punishment, as well as on observant participation in staff decision making about discipline policies. Throughout the chapter, I draw on the work of Saidiya Hartman (1997) to trace the afterlife of slavery at Robeson as it manifests in the links between Reconstruction Era approaches and reactions to the policing of black comportment and the management of hallway behavior in the school site. Finally, I follow the flight of the settled/slave toward what we might call a Frisco fugitivity, one that manifests in motion both within and away from the carceral city and its bookish jailers.

¹³ “The City” is a common nickname for San Francisco, used by Bay Area residents across racial, linguistic, and class categories. It is used in a manner reminiscent of how “The City” refers to Manhattan for residents of New York’s tri-state area. Oakland, by contrast, is known as “The Town,” a term that is used by a more bounded set of folks who are marked as working class, Black, and/or of color, and is a mark of pride in the provinciality and insularity of old Oakland.

In chapter four, “Escaping Emancipation: Black Girl Ordinary and the Borders of Belonging,” I explore the gendered dimensions of citizenship and imperialism at work in Robeson as a state space. Within the context of schooling, the particular association of black girls as ‘loud’ and disobedient is well documented in the literature. Black girls’ assertive use of their voices is interpreted as unladylike and deviant, indexing the enduring incompatibility of Blackness with hegemonic white bourgeois norms of femininity, and as Spillers (1987) suggests, perhaps the entire oeuvre of gender. I do a close reading of institutional discourse around one student, Tarika, that position her as a ‘loud’ troublemaker and ill-fitted for the school to highlight the linkages between performances of social class, race, and obedience. Tarika is dismissed as a “Sunnydale girl” because she lives in a particular housing project, and I connect her expulsion from Robeson to the experiences of other “Sunnydale girls” as instantiations of the exclusion of black girlhood from the boundaries of the citizen-human.

The fifth chapter, “Black Skin, Brown Masks: Carceral Progressivism and the Co-optation of Xicanx Nationalism” centers on a racially charged brawl between Black and Latinx students, and subsequent efforts toward reconciliation. I uncover the way policing and punishment form the foundation of the carceral progressivism that undergirds this iteration of multiracial coalition. First, I examine a meeting between the school’s co-founder and young people tangentially related to the fight as a lens into the relationship between gender and race as primary markers of belonging. I then shift to a Town Hall meeting

convened in response to the fight as a lens into the web of contradictory narratives that characterizes the terrain of left-of-center struggles in the Bay Area and beyond. In a cruelly vampiric move, the carceral progressive institution mobilizes Xicanismo as an antiblack state strategy, foreclosing both the liberatory impulse of Atzlán's cultural nationalism and the institutional promise of a sanctuary for Black children in the City by the Bay. Ultimately, the material exclusion of Black young people from the institutions founded to serve them belies the promise of state-funded progressivism in late liberal San Francisco.

The final chapter of the dissertation, "Coda: My Afterlife Got Afterlives," is a sort of reprise that examines the ways that this research project has been taken up by those whose lives animate it. Returning to the photograph that opens the text, I recount a school leader's deployment of an early book chapter of mine as a strategy to thwart Black political mobilization at Robeson. I juxtapose this bad faith citation practice with the range of reactions from the participants who have read drafts of these chapters and responded with joy, doubt, and indifference. I examine how these recirculations of the work mirror the possibilities and limits of social movement work within the context of carceral progressivism, as well as the caveats embedded in the practice of anthropology of and as abolition.

2.

“A Long History of Seeing:”
*Historicizing a Progressive Dystopia*¹

I pretended to check the time yet again as my phone lit up under the edge of the conference table. Josue’s text read, “They giving u a lot to write about the two middle class white men not from Frisco – Gentrification.” Stifling a laugh, I looked across the table at him. Josue Magtoto, a Filipino San Francisco native, was leaning in towards Jake, the concerned white parent seated next to him, nodding and feigning interest at his hand wringing. We sat at the table as members of the School Site Council (SSC), the state-mandated governing body of Robeson Justice Academy, a small public high school in southeast San Francisco. That year, the council was composed of four parents, the two co-administrators of the school, Josue as the lone teacher representative, and myself, technically listed as a “community member,” but with the implicit credentials of my history as a staff member and my new Ivy League digs. At issue this time was the school’s security protocols.

Because of a vague bomb threat phoned into to the central district office, the front door to the school had been locked earlier in the week, prompting a wave of complaints from students and staff who had to bang on the door and wait for someone to let them in. Josue ridiculed the situation at the SSC meeting, and

¹ Portions of this chapter are adapted from my previously published book chapter, “This is Not a Protest: Managing Dissent in Racialized San Francisco,” In *Black California Dreamin’* Center for Black Studies Research, 2012.

the co-director Aaron recounted that Ms. Ivy, a long-time black parent who had come up to the school to register her youngest child had asked him, “what’s up with the door being locked – that’s not the Robeson I remember!” What had been mentioned as an aside about a specious terrorist threat became a bone of contention that polarized the members of the SSC.

Jake was aghast when he learned that the locked front door was a temporary fluke, rather than a new protocol. “Have you seen what has been going on on the news lately? How many times are schools not secured lately, and all this stuff is going on?” he demanded, referencing the deadly Sandy Hook elementary school shooting a few months prior. After hearing from staff about the community-oriented, welcoming environment that they had tried to cultivate since Robeson’s founding, Jake pursed his lips and pounded his index finger into the table, insisting that “it’s different now than it was seven years ago – with all respect to you Josue – it’s different.”

I could barely suppress my side-eye at the dismissal veiled in Jake’s gesture of respect. Robeson was certainly different, but Jake missed was that the difference was *him*. Nothing could be more incongruous than his black-on-black Mercedes Benz SUV speeding up the potholed hill to Robeson’s parking lot, passing a posse of kids on the left waiting at the bus stop, and another on the right chilling on a park bench waiting for the first opportunity to spark a blunt. As Josue put it, Jake was “a middle class white [man] not from Frisco” and brought with him an imagined American geography, a place where kids are more

at risk from trenchcoated school shooters than they are from police bullets and handcuffs.

What happens when racial geographies collide? If Jake and Ms. Ivy were right, and Robeson had transformed in seven years, how had the city around the school also transformed? How is the Frisco of seven years ago, seventy years ago, and even 700 years ago refracted across one wobbly conference table in the corner of a crowded schoolhouse? Over the course of the rest of the SSC meeting, each of the major social and political fault lines running through the hills of southeast San Francisco is revealed, and I use the meeting as a legend for the historical and political topographies that produce The City and the school. Part of the work Robeson does is to offer retellings of history: of San Francisco, of the US nation-state, and of its own institutional legacy. By weaving a narrative of how things got to be the way they are, Robeson teachers and families are able to then make a bid for what needs to happen next. One problem with this kind of futurecasting at Robeson is, as I will illustrate from the standpoint of the SSC meeting, the painfully divergent range of origin stories circulating in the social fields of the school, even under the rubric of a unified push for equity and social justice.

While Robeson was founded through an organizing push by activist educators and parents of color as a way to provide meaningful education for Frisco youth, in the decade of its existence, the school itself has come under attack both through external threats of closure and internal reconstitution. In this sense, the institution formed as a weapon against inequity becomes itself a

battleground, rendering the school as both a *site* and a *strategy* of struggle. In the rest of the chapter that follows, I first position Robeson in relation to the political economy of California and the Bay Area, as well as its connection to national school reform processes. I then provide a historical sketch of racial displacement in San Francisco, particularly as it relates to the folks gathered at the SSC meeting. Finally, I discuss how these contexts shape my methodological approach to the project, and outline the kinds of data that inform *Progressive Dystopia*.

Imagining San Francisco: The Political Economy of a Progressive Dystopia

San Francisco is mythologized as a land of liberal tolerance, progressive politics and picturesque cosmopolitanism. This image is fortified by scholars of region who, like Robert Self, reductively typecast the city as a “bourgeois utopia” (2003:159) in order to clarify its relation to the rest of the Bay Area. Because San Francisco’s rosy image is attended by fatal realities for those whose presence sullies paradise, I instead render it as a *progressive dystopia*.² Glossed over in The City’s laudatory depictions is a brutal history of racialized displacement and gentrification dating long before the internment camps of the 1940’s. As a “quintessential post-Fordist city” (Browne, et al., 2006), San Francisco has one of the highest per-capita income levels of the nation’s largest cities, a feat accomplished by prioritizing the FIRE sectors (finance, insurance, real estate)

² Most glaring in terms of social and material exclusion from the city is San Francisco’s large and diverse homeless population. For ethnographic research on the survival strategies and structural constraints of unhoused people in San Francisco, see Gowan 2010; Bourgois and Schonberg 2010.

above the needs of the city's poorer residents. The rise of the tech economy over the past 15 years and the role of San Francisco as one of its command centers now positions it as a global city (Sassen 2000), and these dynamics combined with a dearth of manufacturing jobs and skyrocketing housing costs has made San Francisco one of the most unaffordable places to raise a family in the nation. In 2016, a family of four with an income of \$129,000 qualified for the city's affordable housing assistance, while the equivalent cutoff for Philadelphia was \$64,350 (SFMOHCD 2016; DHCD 2017). As a result, there has been a steady stream of working class and middle class people emigrating from the city, including a drain of up to a thousand children per year from the school district (Knight, 2006). While San Francisco is one of the nation's most rapid and extreme cases of racial and economic urban displacement (Solnit & Schwartzberg 2000; Browne, et al. 2006), it is only the crest of a wave of population shift occurring in cities across the United States. If San Francisco is a harbinger of things to come as the urban renewal plans of the mid- 20th century ripen in this season of neoliberal privatization and rollback of state provisions, then the struggle of its last poor residents against displacement and disempowerment is a key site for understanding the mechanisms by which individual and collective subjects resist, negotiate, and transform the macro-level processes that overdetermine life under late capital.

Though the global recession of 2008 dealt a huge blow to public funding of basic services across the US, California had already been operating in a chronic budget crisis for almost a decade before the market crash. An examination of the

political economy that produces Robeson reveals it as a nexus of forces that ensnare neoliberalizing California, and that course through the political terrain of the US. At the federal level, well over half of our discretionary spending goes directly to the Pentagon. After the cost of government operations, the largest chunk of discretionary spending goes to education, followed by health care and housing. These sectors represent the remains of the Fordist-Keynesian social settlement and as such are crucial sites of analysis in terms of a robust anthropology of the state.

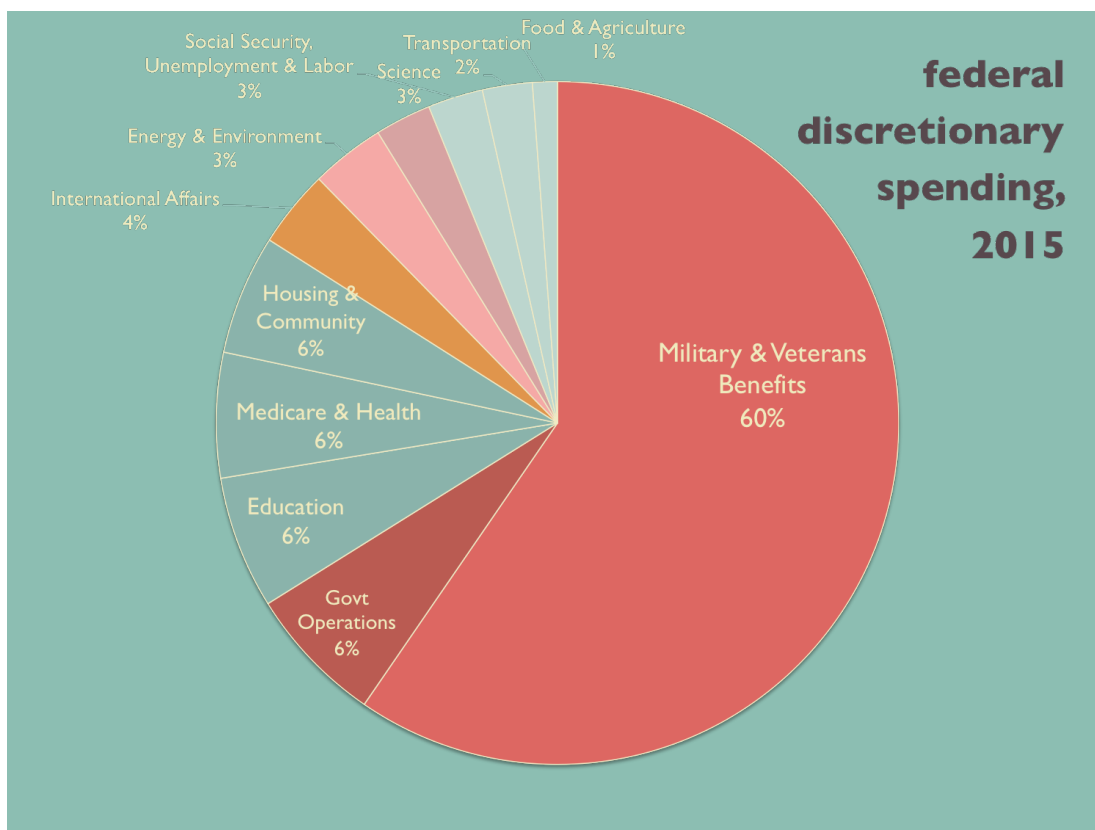


Figure 2: Adapted by author from National Priorities Project and OMB

While most urban schools nationally are underfunded, California's uniquely paltry school funding is chiefly a result of Proposition 13, a 1979 ballot referendum that sharply limited the amount of property taxes that could be used

for public school funding. California's rachitic school funding is reflected in its (lack of) a welfare state. Indeed, the state's counties haven't been fully funded for the cost of most of their social services since 2000-01, resulting in fewer and fewer public contracts for community-based organizations, smaller welfare payments, and an overall lack of adequate services for working-class communities (California Budget Project 2008). Thus, while the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 threatened a death knell on the state's safety net, the structural vulnerabilities facing residents of southeast San Francisco are also a result of compounded retraction of resources allotted to what Loïc Wacquant calls the "nanny state" in California (2009).

In order to explain the relationship between an expansive US penal system and a withered, distorted system social welfare provision, Wacquant (2009) develops the conceptual frame of a *carceral-assistential state*. Wacquant layers gender onto governmentality to declare that the last wave of US policies that expand punishment "pronounce and promote the transition from the kindly 'nanny state' of the Ford-Keynesian era to the strict 'daddy state of neoliberalism'" (2009:90). In the former, the role of the state is to control resources in order to ensure the employment and well being of the populace, while in the latter is reversed: the role of the state is to control the populace in order to ensure the well being of capital. Certainly, for those communities for whom "nanny" is a job, rather than a metaphor, and for whom the state has never been kind, Wacquant's terminology may fall short. Still, his articulation of a sea change in US government practices sheds light on how Robeson fits into these macroprocesses.

In this frame, Robeson’s institutional mode of carceral progressivism is revealed as one way the vestiges of the assistential state negotiate and adapt under neoliberalism.

I contend that direct service providers like Robeson function as both *sites* and *strategies* of opposition, whereby community members use the organizations as tools to achieve particular ends, whether for getting into college or for stopping their eviction, but at the same time overtly challenge perceived injustices in *how* those ends are met. In this way, community members engage a multiscalar “politics of interruption” that prevents the smooth operation of state power (Stovall 2016). As a public school, Robeson is funded through the same paltry annual per-pupil funding formula from the state Board of Education that every school across the state does – an average of \$10,795 (CDE 2016). In comparison to other states, California ranks as low as 41st place³ in terms of education funding across the US. If they were a charter, they would receive the full ADA⁴ funding per student, or about \$2.4 million dollars for 230 or so kids a year, but instead almost a third of that is routed into the district office. Before the school’s opening, the founders decided that it was important to demonstrate the possibility for transformative education within the district, as opposed to

³ Education Week Research Center’s *Quality Counts 2017* report ranked California 41st out of 50 states in terms of public education provision. On the *Quality Counts* rubric, the state earned a D+ in the arenas of K-12 Achievement and School Finance, and a C in terms of Chance for Success. Other national rankings reports use different algorithms, and rank California higher. For instance, the National Education Association’s *Rankings and Estimates* report for 2016 ranks California 26th out of 50, but the NEA’s methodology does not take into account the kind of mid-year budget cuts that are common in the state’s legislature. For more on ranking methodologies, see Fensterwald, 2017.

⁴ ADA, or average daily attendance, is the algorithm by which publicly funded schools are allocated resources from the full school year. In the case of Robeson, ADA was determined in large part by the number of students in the building by mid-morning on the tenth day of school.

seeming like an asterisk that was only possible outside the prevailing system. A few years later, when the school was under threat of closure for falling test scores and an acrimonious relationship with the school superintendent, a vote was held among staff whether to convert to a charter to save the school. The vote failed, mostly because of strong pro-union sentiments on staff, and the fact that unlike district schools, charters are not automatically included in the collective bargaining agreement.

The school's relationship with the teachers' and administrators' unions has been another site of struggle. The unions and the Robeson staff were at odds because the latter sought to have a horizontal decision-making structure, a smaller pay gap between administrators and teachers, and autonomy in terms of hours and working conditions. These conflicts were largely quelled through the negotiation process that produced the Small Schools By Design policy, which was adopted by the city's Board of Education as a reflection of the "District's desire to collaborate with all partners in education to devise a policy for SSD that will increase options for underserved families and promises to enhance district enrollment, attendance, and achievement rates" (SFUSD 2006). The policy defined key elements of a "small school by design," and granted qualifying schools a measure of autonomy in five arenas: *budget, curriculum, staffing, governance and schedule*. Drawing on similar policies governing Boston's pilot schools (Tung & Ouimette 2007) and New York City's small schools of choice (Iatarola, et al, 2008), the SSD policy for San Francisco was produced by a working group composed of representatives from Robeson and two other small

schools, the SFUSD, the teacher's unions, and the administrator's union. Along with the school's co-founder Elizabeth, I attended all the working group meetings as an alternate member.⁵ Over the course of the academic year, the working group hammered out riders to the collective bargaining agreements granting Robeson teachers some autonomy in terms of hours and working conditions, as well as agreeing for the two co-administrators to be paid roughly \$15,000 less than the base rate of the principal's union, thus freeing up more money for classroom operations and reducing the material hierarchy between management and teachers.

Alongside the more typical players in public school politics, there was another party in the room with us as we negotiated the Small Schools by Design policy: a cadre of representatives from local family foundations. One effect of the neoliberalization of service provision is the increased role of private philanthropy in shoring up the welfare state. Rather than just providing cash flow, the presence of funders in shaping the nuts and bolts policy structures of this progressive school reform points to the interpenetration of state and private governance not only in the nefarious corners of K street, but in the making of leftist concessions as well. Along with almost a quarter million of start up funds from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, Robeson's annual operating budget has been augmented each year of its existence by varying levels of privately

⁵ During the SSD negotiations, I was still employed at Robeson as a program coordinator and classroom teacher. Because my split position afforded me a more flexible schedule, I was one of few Robeson staff members who were able to serve in this role. While I was not aware of it at the time, in some ways this project was seeded in those meeting, as it was the first time I became aware of the intricate web of interests and collusions that constrained Robeson's social justice mission.

funded grants, some years to the tune of \$200,000. Skirting the bureaucracy of the district's clunky fundraising, Robeson has its own shadow nonprofit that operates essentially as an independent pocketbook for programs difficult or impossible to fund through the district. Without it, any funds donated directly to the school would have to be filtered through a central office and earmarked for specific district-wide goals before trickling back to Robeson's coffers, less the cost of administrative processing. When I was still on staff at Robeson, the nonprofit's grant funds paid me to build a social justice internship program that linked students with anticapitalist and antiracist organizations. Of course, what can feel like autonomy from the state comes at the expense of vulnerability to the shifting whims of private philanthropy.

In the early 2000s, small schools were 'hot' in funding circles, but by the time I returned for fieldwork in 2012, the Gates money had long since dried up, and California public services were still staggering out of the Great Financial Crisis of 2008. Many of the programs that had buoyed up the school's success in terms of academic outcomes and developing political consciousness among students had been gutted or completely cut. The institution's financial scarcity reflected the ratcheting up of pressures facing poor residents of San Francisco – these austere times bled into the school's institutional affect, and set the mood for the implementation of progressively carceral technologies.

Robeson is also a direct descendant of the legacy of people-of-color and youth activism in California writ large, and specifically in the Bay Area. Among the Robeson staff members who grew up in California, many recounted being

politicized by the fights against Propositions 21 and 187 that criminalized youth of color and sought to bar undocumented students from public schools.

Proposition 187, dubiously dubbed the “Save Our State” initiative barred unauthorized immigrants from receiving any public services, from MediCal (the state Medicaid program), to welfare benefits, to public schools; though it was found unconstitutional days after voters passed approved it and never went into effect, Proposition 187 foreshadowed some of the more recent nativist legislation passed in Alabama (HB 56, 2011) and Arizona (SB 1070, 2010). Proposition 21, or the Gang Violence and Juvenile Crime Prevention Act, was passed in 2000 and imposed harsh penalties that disproportionately affected young people of color, including a mandatory registry for suspected gang members, “gang enhancement” sentencing that added prison time for youth offenders, and requiring judges to try young people accused of certain crimes as adults. The two propositions bookmark a high tide of youth of color organizing in the state, and they both galvanized social movement responses including walkouts, teach-ins, and boycotts (Kwon 2013). Several organizations were spawned during this time of legislative repression, including Californians for Justice (CFJ) and Third Eye Movement, both of which trained future Robeson staff in youth organizing and direct action.

Formations like CFJ and Third Eye are precipitated by the Xicanx, Native, Black Liberation, Asian American and anti-Vietnam War movements, each of which are enshrined in the curriculum taught in Robeson’s humanities classes. The iconography that lined the hallways of the school evokes the liberation

movements of the 1960's with a larger-than-life Che Guevara stencil abutting student-made screen prints of Malcolm X. Legacies of social justice were ritually invoked by teachers in meetings and venting sessions: *What would Yuri Kochiyama do?*⁶

Robeson was a composite of these sectors: over half their full time staff were people of color, but they were concentrated into lower-paying student support positions that didn't require a teaching credential. The leadership, however, skewed white. The founding administrative team had been composed of Emily, a hapa⁷ veteran SFUSD teacher; Elizabeth, who was part of the SSD working group; and Aaron, the current co-principal of Robeson, both of whom were white. In addition to white privilege, the founding team also brought a dose of East Coast prestige with them, and skillfully leveraged it in their advocacy for the school among lawmakers, academics, and funders. Among them, only Emily was even from California, and it wouldn't be until 2016 that a Frisco native was in school leadership at Robeson. The pattern of regional provenance mirrored racial demographics: most people from San Francisco who worked at the school were paraprofessionals, custodial, or lower-paid student support staff. Of the 23

⁶ Yuri Kochiyama was a Japanese American activist, intellectual, and internment camp survivor who was an avid ally of the Black Power movement. In the majority Asian-American rioscape of the Bay Area, her figure was often invoked both as an antidote to depoliticized model minority stereotypes, and as a possibility model for concrete multiracial solidarity.

⁷ *Hapa* is a racial signifier commonly used in West Coast Asian American communities to denote someone with one Asian parent, and one non-Asian parent. Derived from the Hawaiian pidgin word for "half," *hapa* first was used to describe the children of indigenous Hawaiians and European colonizers, but is now used more broadly as a neutral term for those of mixed Asian heritage. For some, the use of *hapa* by Asian-descendent communities is part of a larger pattern of cultural appropriation of indigenous lands and language by several centuries of migrants to the region. For more, see Nicole Rabin's "Excursus on 'Hapa,' or the Fate of Identity" (2012).

or so core staff that attended whole-staff meetings (including classroom teachers, administrators, special education teachers, program coordinators, and full-time Wellness Center staff), five were born and raised in The City and had come through SFUSD schools. I include information about city of origin as part of demographics because of how social categories like race and gender were regionally inflected in the institutional space; as I detail over the following chapters, both staff and students cited “being from The City” as a site of epistemic and political privilege.

A key element of Robeson’s governance was the commitment to shared leadership, which was epitomized in the co-principal structure, in which two (and at times three) people shared the administrative tasks usually delegated to a principal, and then also remained in the classroom to teach at least one course section. The first co-principal team was composed of all three founders, and then Elizabeth and Aaron shared leadership for several years. Aaron was the longest standing fixture of Robeson leadership, having remained at the helm for the school’s first twelve years. After Elizabeth stepped down, he shared his office with a series of ‘co-principals’ of color who switched out every couple years. This pattern resulted in school leadership that was shared unequally, because Aaron’s authority accrued with his years on the job.

The SSC meeting that opens this chapter affords an opportunity to concretely examine both the institutional and individual negotiations of these transformations. In particular, I would like to foreground the ways in which the spatial, political, and economic context of San Francisco converged to produce

the tensions within the School Site Council. Further, although Robeson as an institution is a prominent site of observation, I am also guided by Bourgois' (1996) imperative to expand educational ethnography beyond the arbitrary convention of curriculum and classroom. When the uneasy bedfellows that produce Robeson: public and private, political and bureaucratic, elite and radical, meet the teenagers of southeast San Francisco, urban social fields collide across race, gender, sexuality, and space in a contest over the meaning of citizenship in a transformed city.

Remembering Robeson, Remembering Frisco

The primacy of race and place in apprehending the school's work is made evident by Robeson's institutional marketing. In the Demographics section of the website, a visitor is offered this commentary about where their students live:

[Southeast San Francisco is] working-class and low-income, with some of the highest concentrations of families with children in the city. At the same time, many of these communities are experiencing rapid gentrification, which is forcing long-time residents to leave the city and undermining community-based efforts to stem rising crime and violence. For example, San Francisco's Black population, concentrated in Bayview/Hunters Point, declined from 96,000 in 1970 (13% of San Francisco residents) to 51,000 (only 7%) in 2006. And in 2007, 25% of the San Francisco's homicides took place in the Bayview, which has about 5% of the city's population... Robeson serves the second highest percentage of African-American students of any non-continuation high school in the city, and a much higher share of Black and Latino students than other SFUSD high schools.

In this excerpt, we see the ways that Robeson institutional discourse draws on what we might call the racioscape⁸ (Jackson 2005) of San Francisco to contextualize their work. By linking economic marginalization, displacement, and violence in a narrative of race and neighborhood, this statement from Robeson acts as a politicized counterpoint to the city's deraced official discourse.

According to the San Francisco tourist board, the most notable facts about the neighborhoods of the Southeast is that "this area, south of the I-280 freeway, is home to the former Hunters Point shipyard where The Point is billed as "America's largest artist colony" (SF Travel Bureau 2011). Gone are the "long-time residents" and "community efforts" that people Robeson's depiction of the Bayview, not to mention the unhoused addicts who live beneath that very freeway (see Bourgois & Schonberg 2010), or indeed, any mention of race at all. Instead the Travel Bureau presents a thinly veiled celebration of gentrification, in which a neighborhood of Black working-class families battling street violence and disinvestment is recast as an "artist colony," but without a hint of irony about the literal colonial violence that founded the city in the first place. Indeed, in a city where around one in twenty residents are black, almost half of the residents of public housing projects are black (SF Housing Authority, 2011). A significant portion of these public housing residents live in the very same "artist colony" of Hunter's Point, but are deftly invisibilized in the deraced portrait of the city painted for tourists and potential gentrifiers.

⁸ Developed specifically as a way to describe the uneven processes of gentrification in New York City, Jackson's "notion of racioscapes speaks to the inescapably non-*flow*like constancy of racial inequality as an effective analytical template for understanding globality, diasporic relations, and transnational interconnections in the past, present, and unforeseeable future" (2005:56).

The erasure of neighborhood history is by no means exclusive to the Bay Area, but Solnit and Schwartzberg make the argument that in San Francisco, increased material wealth and amnesia go hand in hand.

The new San Francisco is run for the dot-com workers, multimedia executives, and financiers of the new boom, and memory is one of the things that is being lost in the rapid turnover and all-out exile of tenants, organizations, non-chain businesses, and even communities. (2000:22)

The “new boom” at the time was based in the knowledge economy of Silicon Valley, a few dozen miles south of San Francisco. Although in the almost two decades since Solnit and Schwartzberg published *Hollow City* the Great Recession has burst California’s speculative real estate bubble, the “rapid turnover” has by no means reversed. Instead, economic precarity has hastened the exodus of working-class residents from Southeast San Francisco; the bulk of those who remain can only stay because they live in government-subsidized housing. Alongside this hemorrhage of the dispossessed is a surge in San Francisco’s international standing. In the two years after the 2007-08 global recession, the city’s ranking among “global cities” edged up 3 notches to 12th place worldwide (Hales, King, and Pena 2010) because it is a hub of international finance and cultural consumption.

The SSC was a crossroads of the old and new San Franciscos. Both Jake and Garrett had recently moved to The City as midlevel tech workers, and Garrett referenced the city’s gay-inclusive culture as part of his excitement in bringing his son to Robeson. In the original SSD policy, parental involvement was supposed to be a central part of Robeson’s school design. Years of budget cuts and

“mission drift” did away with the two paid parent liaison positions, as well as the parent organizer gig. What remained in terms of parental oversight was only the mandatory SSC, the governing body required for every public school in California (California Education Code § 52852). Deirdre was keenly aware of this shift, as she had successfully advocated for herself to become chair of Robeson’s SSC. She sat imperiously at the head of the conference table, her lilac paisley scarf looped gently beneath long, freshly plaited braids.

Deirdre riffed somberly on Jake’s assertion that “it was different now:”

Remembering who this school is founded by, we are a completely different school. We are not the Robeson that was originally founded. Your parents are not a part of the school anymore, and I have always said that... I have never been in a place where I had to come in and say, ‘no I am going to be here.’ Praise God that there *is* room for me.

Here, she speaks to the contradictions inherent in Robeson’s attempt at progressive schooling. Like Ms. Ivy complained to Aaron about the locked front door, Deirdre agreed that the Robeson of 2013 was not that of 2006, and dismissed the significance of her positional leadership on the council: “your parents are not part of the school.” Her campaign for chair the previous spring was her way of saying to the co-principals “no, I am going to be here,” as the SSC before her tenure only existed on paper. Deirdre’s commitment to show up for her daughter and her vision of the school dovetailed with Aaron and Tina’s desire for additional support as co-principals to make the SSC of 2012-13 one of the most active in the school’s history. The divine grace she thanked for making space for her at the head of the table could not do the same for The City: there

was no room for her in Frisco.

While Deirdre’s daughter Mellie used an address for an apartment on top of a liquor store in the Moe⁹ on her school paperwork, they had not lived there for years. Instead, Deirdre had driven an hour and a half from her home in the working class city of Vallejo to get to the SSC meeting, crossing two tolls bridges and fifteen small cities to make it to the Excelsior neighborhood. In the context of gentrification, “your parents are not a part of the school” underscores the gap between the imagined population of both Frisco and Robeson; clearly the two white parents and one Chinese-American parent seated across were not what she claims as intended base of “the Robeson that was originally founded.”

What’s Broken Inside: Racial Dispossession and Frisco Geographies

They giving u a lot to write
about the two middle class
white men not from Frisco
– Gentrification 😂

Emoji aside, Josue’s text was more than a passing joke. The focus of the last several SSC meetings had been hammering out a final budget for the following school year, by taking into account enrollment changes, impending budget cuts and upcoming grant cycles. In the latter part of the meeting we were voting on whether to allocate funds to revive the same social justice internship

⁹ Fillmore, San Francisco’s oldest plurality-Black neighborhood, is affectionately known to working-class and Black inflected city residents by its Black English moniker “The Moe.” Just as Frisco and San Francisco are different social geographies layered onto the same piece of physical land, The Moe and the Fillmore Jazz Preservation District denote the same neighborhood, but have radically divergent class and race implications.

program that I had developed eight years prior, Mentoring Youth in Community Action (MYCA). Before I left for graduate school, MYCA was one part of a whole-school service learning program in which 120 9th and 10th graders spent a few hours a week in direct service positions like tutoring elementary school kids and playing board games at a senior home, while a self-selected group of 20 juniors took the MYCA seminar that combined a social justice history and theory seminar with a project-based internship at an activist organization. MYCA participants helped build campaigns for free public transit for youth, got queer-inclusive school policies drafted, and created youth-centered podcasts of Bay Area Black Panther history. In the fat years of Gates funding and dot-com surplus, MYCA was possible because Robeson had more discretionary monies and was able to fund the program with two-and-a-half staff members.

Predictable debate ensued over whether it should be a full or half time position, the fit of the current personnel for the program, and both Jake and Garrett remained relatively silent. The proposal was put to a vote; they were the only two dissenters to the measure. Explaining his nay vote, Garrett argued, “I think we could spend the money on increased security, instead of having to create the ‘community’ aspect of it.” Putting down the finger scare quotes he used for ‘community,’ he waved off the central tenets of the school with a manicured hand. “I do know that that’s what the mission is, but my personal stance is we have got to correct the internal attitudes before we can put ourselves outside. So we need to fix that – what’s broken inside – before we go outside.”

In this frame, “what’s broken inside” is the students themselves – unruly in their blackness and brownness, in need of corrective, rather than collective action. Garrett’s framework falls in line with the last generation of deficit-oriented theories of urban schools in crisis, where students and families are to blame for the “achievement gap,” retheorized by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) as an “educational debt” owed to communities of color. In the Robeson SSC, and more broadly as a symptom of the resettlement of urban settlers by white elites, gentros¹⁰ insinuate themselves into the first person plural as justification for a takeover of community resources. Garrett positions himself as “we” based on a couple months of experience as both a San Francisco resident and a Robeson parent in a political move that strips history and power away from the notion of “us.” In so doing, he creates a false equivalence with Josue and Deirdre on the one hand, who were raised in The City, and with Aaron on the other, who even with all of his inconsistencies, had spent the last two decades working with Frisco youth.

Though the MYCA proposal passed, Garrett’s eagerness to dismiss the mission of Robeson Justice Academy in a bid for ramping up surveillance points a faultline creeping along the school’s foundation, and one that is constitutive of not only the carceral progressive paradox, but to the liberal democracy of which it is a part. As a form, progressivism prizes democratic, horizontal decision making that levels the playing field in such a way that someone like Garrett could indeed block a proposal based on his parental priorities. Community organizing in the

¹⁰ A common colloquialism for gentrifier in San Francisco is “gentros,” used in a variety of dialect forms, including Black English and Spanglish. In the latter, it may be pronounced “*chentros*.”

tradition of Saul Alinsky (1971), practiced by both a young Barack Obama and the faith-based group that helped to found Robeson, is based on just this sense of horizontal citizen voice, and can be incredibly effective at building successful campaigns. Indeed, one of Alinsky's protégé's and biographers was hired as an organizational consultant at Robeson that very school year. At the same time, this tradition of populist inclusion has been critiqued as privileging the form of democracy over its content, in such a way that entrenched inequities of race and gender may not be sufficiently addressed by simply bringing everyone to the table. The "community aspect" that Garrett was so ready to eliminate at Robeson was the impetus for the institution's founding, and one of the few precious autonomies granted by its inclusion in the Small Schools by Design policy. At best, he misrecognized the substance of the school for fluff. At worst, he was strategically leveraging his relative wealth and whiteness to 'flip' an undervalued institution for his own benefit, playing Monopoly with one of the last Black-serving high schools in The City.

The close of the meeting skewed toward the latter.

Tina facilitated a group check-out, in which she asked each board member to reflect on what had been accomplished during the meeting. Roseann, a Chinese American parent whose autistic child attended the Special Day program, was glad that funds for special education students to attend field trips were prioritized. Deirdre reiterated the need to involve a broader community of parents in the budgetary process. When it was Garrett's turn, he said, "to be quite honest, this budget process has been very eye opening to me, and to be

quite honest, quite scary. I couldn't imagine sitting in an office meeting like this, I would be ripped to shreds." Turning to Tina, he smiled too broad and continued, "no disrespect to you, of course."

Jake amplified Garrett's corporate logic. "I agree with you – in the business world, if I had come back with a budget like this, I would have been ripped to shreds. I would have been fired." Overly gracious, he stood up before the meeting was adjourned, "I have to get my children!" Jake left, and though the meeting ambled on for a few more minutes, his abrupt departure made his comments feel like an ultimatum dangling over the proceedings. Jake and Garrett use their positions in the bottom rungs of San Francisco's elite financial class to intimidate Robeson's leadership – *I would be ripped to shreds. I would have been fired.* Though they had lost the vote that evening, their closing comments were a reminder of all that was at stake in these meetings. Jake's insinuated threat of firing Tina was not empty. Outside of the SFUSD superintendent, the SSC was the only body that had jurisdiction to request a principal reassignment. Similar to the ALSC (Advisory Local School Council) at Greater Lawndale High School for Social Justice in Chicago, the SSC bore the "residuals of a decade-long struggle for community control that has been constrained by White supremacy" (Stovall 2016:148). Intended as a community-based strategy of checks and balances to school leadership, Jake and Garrett threatened a hostile takeover of the SSC, transforming the governing body into another battleground of racial and economic dispossession in San Francisco.

The symbolism of Jake and Garrett joining the SSC was not lost on Josue. The neighborhood he grew up in, Bernal Heights, was hit by the first waves of gentrification, and the sidewalk leading to his mother's house is now clogged with four-figure baby strollers and organic wine bars. As he mused eloquently a few days later in our interview,

Those two, even though they could be the greatest guys on earth, if you don't have that consciousness, and you have two middle-, upper-middle class men, queer or not, coming into your school, it represents a lot for a neighborhood. For me, born and raised in The City, seeing a community organization and them comin in and tryna take shit...

For Josue, "that consciousness" is the kind of political analysis central to his own family and neighborhood upbringing. The son of a Filipino labor organizer, Josue was the only certified teacher at Robeson who not only was born and raised in Frisco, but came through the dysfunctional neighborhoods schools of the southeast, rather than the elite west side high schools that funneled other Frisco natives on staff like Simone and Sofia into the four-year University of California system. He had been an activist since his teen years, mobilizing against police brutality, evictions, and budget cuts as he worked his way on and off through community college. The caveat "queer or not" points to his assessment that the race and class status of Garrett and Colin trumped their marginalization due to sexuality.

"Queer or not" also signals the ways that Garrett and Jake's self-fashioning and location in intersecting social hierarchies is homonormative, if not heteronormative. Elsewhere, I have argued that

homonormativity often dovetails into homo-nationalism, which we might sketch as a hegemonic patriotism that hinges on the queer liberal subject's investment in the Western state apparatus... Homonationalism's "good gay subject" is not only white and bourgeois, but is also monogamously partnered, normatively gendered, and as committed to the flag as he or she is to the nuclear family. (Shange 2014)

While homonationalism is often apprehended in relation to Islamophobic, 'America First' style renderings of foreign Others as threats to US exceptionalism (Puar 2007), the dynamics of the SSC reveal that schools and non-profits are also state interfaces for homonational investments. The San Francisco context is itself the genesis of a particular form of queer reformist politics, dubbed "militant gay liberalism" by Christina Hanhardt (2013). The confluence of real estate speculation and the ascendance of white gay men as a political bloc in the Castro neighborhood resulted in a protest culture in The City in which "radical tactics and liberal goals were expressed in the same terms" (2013:83). Hanhardt's analysis allows us to see how Garrett can reconcile his conservative security camera proposal with the social justice mission that attracted him to Robeson. When Josue ruminated on his memories of Bernal Heights in the eighties, and sitting in the SSC seeing Jake and Garrett "tryna take shit," he stopped at one point to breathe and gather himself. My recording of that part of the interview is the low hiss of feedback and people chatting in the background of the park. Josue sighed audibly.

"It's just a long history of seeing."

Historical Context

Long indeed. San Francisco is gentrification's endgame, with the highest per-capita income of the nation's largest cities, and is one of the most unaffordable places to raise a family in the US. An essential node in the financial circuitry of the Pacific Rim economy that stretches from Hong Kong to Tokyo to Los Angeles, San Francisco is the crown jewel of neoliberal urbanism. Michael Burawoy (2008) has argued that the split between the Global North and the Global South is mimicked in the political economy of California, with manufacturing and low skill jobs concentrated in LA and the sprawl of SoCal, while high tech, high skill jobs skew toward the north. Even though San Jose is larger and closer to Silicon Valley, Frisco's ornate architecture and cultural eminence positions it as one pole of this uneven social geography, the North within the North. These dynamics intensify the alienation of poor racialized people who haven't benefited from the booms of tech and financialization.

Since its founding in the eighteenth century, San Francisco has been a site of spatialized racial difference, beginning with the enslavement of indigenous Muwekma Ohlone people, whose unpaid labor built the famous Mission Dolores church. Though native histories have since been systematically erased from the nominative and political geographies of The City, Muwekma Ohlone descendants continue to struggle for material replacement in Frisco despite the lack of federal tribal recognition (Field 2013). In addition to Ohlone communities, The City functions as a *native hub* for indigenous folks from across North America to build collective political power that reverberates through the city and the rez (Ramirez 2007). After the first wave of native genocide, the spatial racialization

of The City continued through racist restrictive labor and housing covenants against Chinese communities that relied on heteronormative denigration of Chinese gender performance and sexuality (Shah, 2001). Indeed, while both Black and Chinese laborers faced parallel barriers to economic and political participation, early San Francisco restrictive housing covenants only applied to Chinese residents, producing an overcrowded Chinatown in a city that was otherwise white with speckles of Black residents all over (Broussard 1993).

The carcerality of Frisco geography intensified with the mass incarceration of Japanese residents during WWII, whose abandoned tenements in Japantown were filled virtually overnight with Black migrants seeking the warmth of other suns (Wilkerson 2010). When tens of thousands of San Franciscans of Japanese descent were taken from their communities to internment camps in the Northwest, the vacant, inexpensive housing of Japantown was filled in by Black Americans drawn to the city by the promise of jobs in the ship yard during WWII (see Brook et al. 1998; Seyer 2002; Browne, et al. 2006). In its wake, the Fillmore was born, and would soon birth a jazz scene that earned the moniker “Harlem of the West” (Jackson & Jones 2012). Across town, the company barracks built for workers at the Hunter’s Point shipyard were abandoned at the end of WWII, and eventually bought by the city for conversion to public housing. The influx of working-class Black people from the South and the abrupt wind-down of military employment ended a century of relatively unrestricted black residence and movement and led to the refocusing of racial animosities from Asian communities to Black ones.

More recently, rapid gentrification has forced the exodus of more than half the Black residents in less than a generation, resulting a current population that is only 3.9% Black, as compared to the high of almost 15% in the 1970s. This demographic loss happens in the context of the state of California, where despite its outsize presence in Black popular culture, the Black population is proportionally only half that of the US as a whole.

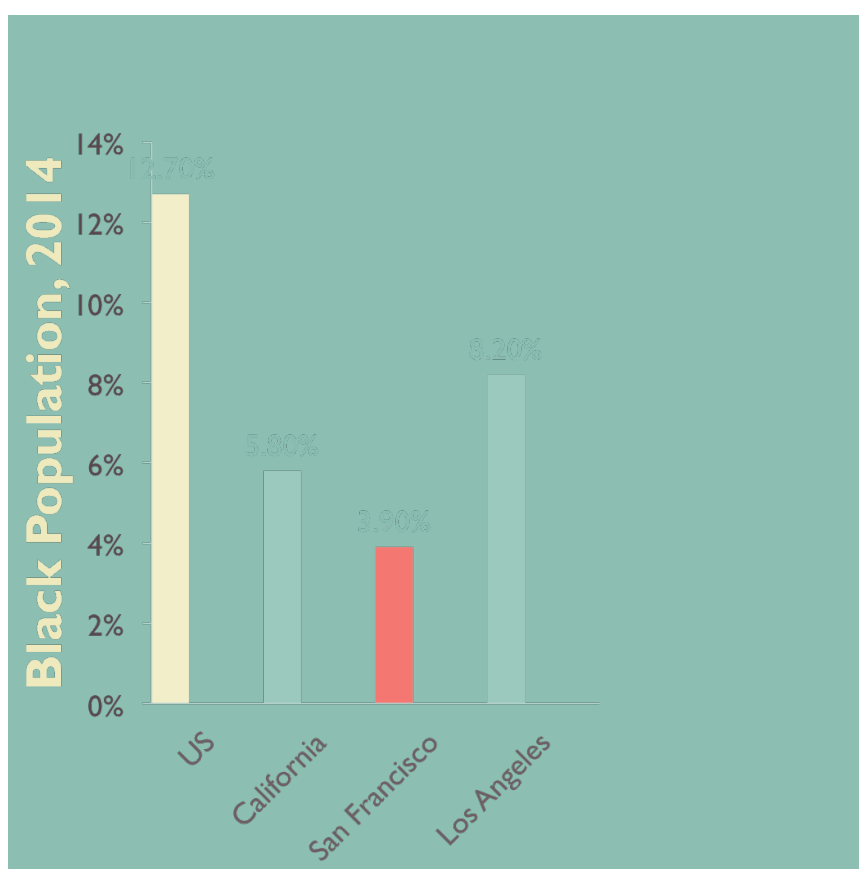


Figure 3: Black proportion of Total Demographic Population, 2014. Figure by author based on data from US Census Bureau (2016) and LAEDC (2016).

In contrast to Los Angeles, San Francisco has even *less* Black people than the state. However, San Francisco is unique in that the shrinking Black population is not tied to a burgeoning white majority; indeed, San Francisco is less than half

white and has one of the highest concentrations of Asian-Americans in the US among major cities. These demographics are amplified in the San Francisco Unified School District's 47.1% Asian American student body, the highest proportion of any large school district in the US (FEBP 2012).

In this context, Robeson is the Blackest school in the least Black major city in America, and the poorest high school in one of the country's richest cities. Thus, not only is Robeson 'majority-minority,'¹¹ but as a school with a Latino and Black majority, it also disrupts the tandem Chinese-American and white portrait of who San Franciscans are. Robeson is a node in the "racioscape" of the city, a nexus where racial, sexual, economic, and spatial realities compete, collide and make one another anew.

¹¹ The term 'majority-minority' is misleading in two ways, primarily by legitimizing the myth that non-white people have ever been in the minority of the human population. Secondly, it relies on a sort of demographic determinism that is not helpful in developing a nuanced portrait of a local political economy. However, it is a term in heavy usage in the fields of sociology and political science, so I flag it here for that purpose.



Figure 4: "Don't Call It Frisco" Laundromat, Hayes & Laguna, SF. Photo by FngKestrel, 2006.

Robeson is in inextricably in *Frisco*, the grimy web of hoods papered over by the new wave of techie arrivants and yet still palpable in the urban palimpsest. A contested nickname for San Francisco, “Frisco” (or “Frisko”)¹² is widely used by working-class and poor Black residents and residents of color, yet scorned by old

¹² The “Frisko” spelling is Latinx-inflected, and reflects affiliation or affection for the transnational Norteño (Northern) street gang. The Norteños’ are loosely affiliated with the Bloods, and wear red as a primary color, while their rivals the Sureños wear blue in part because of their affiliation with the Crips. The ubiquity of “k” in the place of “c” denotes the supposed inferiority of the Crips. In the broader geography of California, San Francisco is more red territory, as opposed to Los Angeles which is mixed. Within The City, Robeson was located in an almost exclusively Norteño topography, with only two “blue” claiming students in attendance according to most accounts between 2004 and 2012. One had already gotten “out of the game” by the time he began high school, having spent time in juvie as a young adolescent. He was granted elder statesman status, and ended up starting a multiracial family with a Norteña affiliated student in a Citified Romeo & Juliet twist. The other was jumped by a rare Black Norte during her first week of school; neither of them returned.

guard white elite and middle-class residents. There is an award-winning book of poetry (Caen, 1953) called *Don't Call It Frisco*, and even a laundromat in the Fillmore by the same name, pictured here. The book was published at the crest of Black migration to San Francisco, and the linguistic policing it indexes was in part a reaction to the shifting linguistic and cultural landscape of the previously White and Chinese city by the Bay. Ironically, the Don't Call It Frisco Laundromat couldn't survive the assault on Frisco and shuttered its doors in 2011. In collusion with the remaining Black, Latinx and Polynesian city residents and their third order diaspora spread across the twelve county Bay Area, I, too, call it Frisco. It is in this layered social geography that we are able to fully apprehend the import of a few spiky interactions at a school governance meeting. Each of the members of the SSC is implicated in one or more of the city's histories of racial displacement, and we were then thrust together by the political economic forces that have emerged to produce Frisco as a late liberal city.

A Note on Methods

My methodological approach to *Progressive Dystopia* has been informed by the historical and political economic context of The City. I draw on a range of data sources to structure my analysis, and each of the central arenas of inquiry has been highlighted in this chapter. In the final section of this chapter, I briefly outline the timeline of my fieldwork, my data collection methods, and how they map onto this introductory chapter. In terms of timeline, I conducted formal fieldwork over the span of seven years, 2010-2016. However, prior to entering

the academy I myself was a program coordinator and teacher at Robeson, and thus, some of the social and political entanglements informing my research reach back to the institution's opening year in 2003. I began formal fieldwork in the summer of 2010, conducting initial interviews with veteran community activists and former Robeson students in the Bay Area. I returned for a three-week pilot research trip a year later in 2011, and attended the weeklong professional development and orientation for Robeson teachers. Because of a wave of fiscal austerity at the state level in California that year, Robeson did not have a final budget in time for the start of school that August, and could not hire any auxiliary personnel, including office or security staff. For the first two weeks of school, I served as a volunteer "student advisor," the revamped title for Robeson's security staff, keeping a walkie-talkie on me and making sure students cleared out from the corner store in the morning and got to class in a relatively timely fashion. The most intensive period of fieldwork began the following year, when I spent another summer of community research and the full 2012-13 academic year at Robeson. After that, I conducted follow-up research trips in the fall of 2013, the spring of 2015, and the spring of 2016.

I use a multi-scalar methodological approach to triangulate four spheres of data: a) multi-sited observant participation in four locales that function as sites/strategies of racial struggle: Robeson Justice Academy, homes and informal social spaces, neighborhood non-profit organizations, and political rallies and protests; b) semi-structured interviews with twenty-nine current and former Robeson students, six Robeson parents, fourteen current and former staff

members, and four current and former administrators; c) four focus groups with invited groups of teachers and students focused on specific themes; and d) schematic content analysis of institutional and district policy, curriculum and relevant legal decisions impacting southeast San Francisco.

Multi-Sited Observant Participation

My central methodological mode is observant participation, an approach that emerges from the traditions of narrative ethnography (Tedlock 1991) and organizational ethnography (Moeran 2009). In keeping with the approach of the “Austin School” of black diaspora anthropology, I too center participation as a mode of transformative research (Gordon 2007). I focused on four overlapping arenas: Robeson Justice Academy, homes and informal social spaces, neighborhood non-profit organizations, and political rallies and protests. My fieldnotes are based on both jottings made during these interactions, hundreds of hours of classroom and meeting recordings that I made, only when appropriate and pursuant to both my IRB protocol and ongoing consent of staff and students.

Robeson Justice Academy: Due to the deeply relational mode in which the staff interacts with one another and with students, it was apparent to me at the outset of this project that the only way to gain meaningful access to this insular school community is to take on a functional role at the school beyond that of an active observer. Thus, I took on several unpaid roles¹³ at the school, including

¹³ While I volunteered my time in exchange for the opportunity to conduct research, I do not use the term ‘volunteer’ because these roles were generally those that would have been filled by paid, certificated personnel rather than a community volunteer. Because I held a California state teaching credential and had

servicing an Advisor for one of the 11th grade classes, coordinating online credit recovery for students who had previously failed courses, and teaching two theater classes. Serving as in these capacities provided me a unique entrée into the staff community while also giving students a situationally meaningful way to understand my role in the school. Crucially, the Advisor position is not one responsible for disciplinary action and in that way minimized the power imbalance between myself and study participants.

In my own Advisory and theater classes I conducted practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009) focused on young people's relationship to The City, their performances of race, and practices of multiracial coalition. Though Cochran-Smith and Lytle's framework is most often used by K-12 teacher focused on improving learning, they also include university-based researchers in their definition of practitioner inquiry, insofar that they "take on the role of teacher in K-12 settings for a specific period of time in order to conduct research on the intricate complexities involved in theorizing and working out problems of practice" 2009:40). In my case, the "practice" I theorize is not only day-to-day schooling, but the broader practices of progressivism, late liberalism, and abolition. In addition, I observed combined 9th-12th grade Humanities classes and mixed-grade Heritage Spanish and Spanish 1/2. I chose the prior three courses because they are all courses required by the district, but have curriculum built in-house by Robeson teachers in line with the school's social justice philosophy. The Humanities courses focus centrally on racism and

experience with the site and the students, I was able to effectively stretch Robeson's budget by 0.5 FTE, or \$37,643 during the 2012-13 school year.

institutionalized injustice in the curriculum, but each teacher's pedagogical and political stance can shift in relation to how these themes are presented as either anomalies in a moderately triumphal narrative of the United States (Levinson 2012) or as arenas ripe for the civic action of students (Banks 2008). Further, students come to the courses with a diverse set of funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; González, et al. 2011) that shapes how they take up, adapt, and refute the curricular content.

As a complement to the Humanities courses, the Spanish classes offer a unique lens into the relationships between color consciousness, colorblindness, and notions of political community as enacted by students and faculty. While most of the rosters at Robeson are specifically balanced to reflect the racial demographics of the student body, the Spanish classes provide a counterpoint because the Heritage Spanish class is only taken by Latinx students, while the Spanish 1/2 course is almost all Black and Pacific Islander. These racially segregated spaces offer a particularly sharp lens into the rationales circulated by students and teachers around the learning of a language that is inextricably related to the racialization of Latinxs and narratives of authenticity, citizenship, and belonging that underwrite how young people enact their citizenship in the progressive dystopia.

Beyond classroom spaces, one of the most important sites of inquiry that emerged within Robeson's walls were the various configurations of meetings that created Robeson's governance structure. The SSC meeting that weaves through this chapter is an excellent example of the richness of meeting spaces as a place to

illuminate the competing logics and practices of justice that animate the social fields of Robeson. My positional roles as SSC member, Advisor, classroom teacher, and credit recovery coordinator each granted me access to a different set of meetings. Taken together, these meetings afforded me a lens into most of the governance structures at Robeson, and allowed me to establish credibility with at least one staff member in the various social pockets of the Robeson staff.

Homes: I selected thirteen students and four staff members as key informants to work with more intensively through a purposive sampling approach (Creswell 2007; Maxwell 2005) that based on initial findings and the salient dimensions of contrast that emerge from fieldwork, reflects these contrasts, including the diversity of racial identity, neighborhood, sexual orientation, and academic success within the broader sample I am working with at Robeson. I visited with them both for informal social ‘hang out’ time on the way home on the bus or at home, as well as for more formal large gatherings like *quinceañeras*,¹⁴ baby showers, and dinner parties. Observant participation in these spaces is key to examining how understandings of racial belonging, urban indigeneity, and social movements are circulated between family members, particularly in multigenerational households where students’ understanding of their neighborhood, city and the US itself is potentially shaped by the im/migration stories of earlier generations to San Francisco.

¹⁴ A *quinceañera* is a cultural tradition many Latin American nations and in Latinx communities in the US in which a large party is thrown for a young woman’s fifteenth birthday; it can be understood as a corollary to the American Sweet Sixteen custom.

Political Rallies & Protests: Political rallies can be important conjunctures for strategies of insurgence and inclusion. Over the course of fieldwork, I participated in rallies coordinated by young people in response to police brutality and education budget cuts, as well as those coordinated by a local non-profits to combat violence against transwomen of color, end the occupation of Palestine, and defeat a discriminatory ballot proposition. These spaces provide an opportunity to observe the explicit demands that Frisco residents make onto the racialized state as they publicly enact their citizenship. What are the grounds for their claims, and how/do they understand claims-making as part of a larger political project? Indeed, this question at the core of my inquiry, and is taken up across the data collection and analysis.

Non-Profit Organizations: In addition to spending time at Robeson and in the homes of participants, I volunteered my time, sat in on meetings and participated in workshops with two non-profit organizations that have a long history of collaboration with Robeson through co-writing curriculum, hiring students as interns, and counting staff and parents among their membership base. By spending time at these explicitly multiracial organizations, I am developed a keened sense of how the logics of coalition, progressivism, and antiblackness are produced, refuted, adapted, and transformed in the broader political context that coheres in Frisco.

Interviews

To deepen the data from participant-observation, I have conducted both semi-structured and unstructured interviews with key participants, as well as with other current and former students, staff members, parents, and community activists in the study, chosen for their representativeness via purposive sampling (Creswell 2007; Maxwell 2005). Unstructured interviews constitute the interstitial space of participant observation, and most often were casual conversations in transit, sparked by the incidents at hand (Weiss 1994). I availed myself of these opportunities by walking with folks to and from home or the store, riding the MUNI bus together, and serving as a virtual car service ferrying young people who had been gentrified out of Frisco back to the far-flung suburbs they now called home. After such interactions, I would jot down all the key details I remembered, and sometimes followed up for taped interviews, but often those jottings simply informed the broader ethos of the project. Semi-structured interviews were more formal and I used an open-ended question protocol (see Appendix A).

Focus Groups

In addition to interviews, I also convened five focus groups to engage specific themes. The first two emerged from a protracted tension within the staff about whether and how to discipline students for using the word “nigga” at school. I gathered two focus groups of self-selected students who used the word, one for non-Black identified students (8 participants), and another for Black students (9 participants). I convened two more focus groups for Black Robeson

staff to discuss their experiences at work; after I left the Black staff members continued meeting as a caucus (5 participants each time). A final focus group was focused on fictive kinship and was open to any young people in a particular extended “play-family” descended from a Black sophomore matriarch. I held these focus groups in my classroom, provided food (homemade black eyed peas and greens for the staff, pizza and organic lemonade for the youth), and played instrumental hip-hop on my stereo in an attempt to create a nurturing space conducive to reflection and interpersonal connection.

Schematic Document Review

In order to contextualize the racial logics at work at Robeson context in the broader discourse of state, municipal, and federal governance, I also conducted a document review of relevant institutional, district, and state policy, Robeson curriculum, and key legal decisions on race consciousness policy in California, including the 1983 consent decree that effectively ended desegregation in San Francisco public schools. Using a schematic analysis (Bernard 2011) that involves looking for repetitions, omissions, and patterns across a corpus of texts and then cutting and sorting (Ryan & Bernard 2003), I am built sub-codes that reflect the ‘schema’ or operative logics around the key concepts of progressivism, multiracial coalition, and antiblack racism at work in the data, particularly as they inform the emergent meaning of carceral progressivism vis-à-vis the state in the San Francisco context.

Conclusion

In addition to providing a sketch of the historical and political economic context of Frisco, this chapter also sought to experientially introduce readers to formal methods outlined above. Both the observant participation in the SSC meeting, and the narrative approach I take to rendering that meeting ethnographically are foundational to my analysis. Josue's comments that provide the title to the chapter emerge from our three hour interview, conducted walking through the financial district and to the Ferry Building as we observed the "new San Francisco" firsthand. The text of the Small Schools by Design policy is part of my larger document review of policy, legal, and curricular texts that inform the Robeson context.

However, undergirding these discrete, formal arenas of data collection is another set of knowledges and relationships that inform my work at Robeson. When Josue texted me "these two white men giving you a lot to write about," he did so using a number he had long before I left for graduate school. While we were not close friends, there was still an existing infrastructure of collaboration leftover from my days as a staff member. At the same time, the content of his text is an example of the kind of investment several participants demonstrated in shaping the research. *Progressive Dystopia* is not a participatory research project in the sense of working on a team composed of those directly affected by the issues under study to develop the research questions, collect data, and share findings (Cammarota & Fine 2010). At the same time, throughout the process, folks like Josue contributed intellectual labor to the project, and I honor that

labor by taking significant theoretical cues from invested participants. His assertion that “2 white men giving you a lot to think about” prompted me to spend more time on that particular SSC meeting than I otherwise might have, which led to me analyzing it as a node of forces coursing through Frisco’s social geography. Throughout the rest of the manuscript I have linked my analysis of networked forces like gentrification and racialization to specific interactions in and around the Robeson space, like in the following chapter where I focus on one Beginning Spanish classroom as a locus of competing models of multiracial coalition.

3.

“Why Can’t We Learn African?”:
Academic Pathways, Coalition Pedagogy and the Demands of Abolition

Sofia Torres’ Beginning Spanish class was first period, so it often got off to a slow start as students trickled in over half an hour or so after the 8:10am start of the school day. Instead of her usual attendance ritual, Sofia instead began this class session by ringing a small meditation bell to invite students to a full minute of mindfulness,¹ instructing them to breathe deeply until they could no longer hear the ending bell. The room was silent, save for the shifting of antsy butts in seats.

“Thanks y’all for doing this meditation!” Sofia gushed, as impressed as I was that the meditation went smoothly; it was a practice usually reserved for the school’s weekly Town Hall.

“We ain’t finna do it everyday,” *Pan Dulce* said authoritatively, cocking his head to the side with one hand on his hip, taking a little wind out of Sofia’s sails.

Like almost everyone else enrolled in Beginning Spanish, *Pan Dulce* was Black. At Robeson, great pains were taken by the leadership teams of each grade level to make sure that classes and advisories were roughly balanced by gender, race, and propensity to get “out of pocket.” A chunk of the last day of the summer was spent trading names on white boards, with rationales and pleas going back

¹ Mindfulness is a secularized approach to meditation that draws largely on Zen and Vipassana Buddhist traditions. Stripped of the mystic and moral elements of Buddhist religious practice, secular mindfulness has been lauded as boosting cognitive function and reducing stress (Zeidan, et al. 2010). At the same time, mindfulness has also been critiqued as a neoliberal co-optation of ethical cultural practices in the service of white supremacy and the optimization of capitalism (Ng & Purser 2015).

and forth between teachers to keep one kid or switch them out for another, usually with explicitly racialized justification – “I’ve got nothing but Latino boys in my period 3/4 section!” “Do we really want Lynette to be the only Black girl in her class? That’s not really fair.” For instance, this is how I got Keenan, bemoaned by staff as a disciplinary problem, as an advisee. When I arrived at Robeson for fieldwork, I didn’t know most of the students, as I had been gone for several years and had only visited briefly the previous fall. Keenan was on Mr. Agusalim’s list, and even he said in the planning meeting that he predicted butting heads with him, and the other 11th grade teachers agreed that Keenan would benefit from a strong Black woman mentor after years of disciplinary struggles might be.² Robeson’s design institutionalized multiracial educational access: the school taught all 11th & 12th grade classes at the Honors level, rather than separating students into academic tracks, which are almost unavoidably

² Keenan is dead. The violence of his loss is compounded by its inclusion and exclusion from this text as a footnote, but I write his death here because his loss haunts the ethnographic text, the halls of Robeson, and the practice of progressivism. Of course there is nowhere to “fit in” his too-soon death on the cracked asphalt of a gas station in the Bayview, because there is nowhere to “fit” the expanse of grief for Black children caught in the lost to the hands of their peers in any of the narratives included herein: respectability, progressivism, or even abolition. Unlike the three former Robeson students who were shot in the ‘Sco and are immortalized in murals on the school grounds, Keenan is invisible in the public memory of Robeson. His involvement in survival economies and gang geographies disqualified him from progressive canonization. Keenan was shot and killed repping a set of projects that was demolished before he made it to kindergarten, and his death is the collateral damage of the new San Francisco. He was brilliant, hilarious, loved to play video games and speculate on other worlds. More than any of that, he loved to talk. As he put it “see, I’m a good kid. I’m cool with a lot of adults.” However, it was the very adults he wasn’t “cool with,” who had led the charge to get him expelled from Robeson, who were the first to inundate their social media feeds and email lists pontificating about his “heart wrenching” death. What is it that makes his value, his sacredness, clear in death, but not in life? I also tell this tiny bit of his story in this footnote because Keenan’s life and death are not for skimming. It is a pain I have yet to fully process or mourn, that is to tender to share it with those who are not willing to labor with the fine print.

skewed by race and socioeconomic status.³ Further, ethnic studies was required for all students, and was credited as World History and US History. Compared to other high schools that might offer African-American Studies or Raza Studies n elective courses that serve as a default racial caucuses because of which students sign up, Robeson's curricular design, master schedule, and class balancing review process ensured that both academic classes and advisories roughly mirrored the demographics of the racially mixed school.

However, Robeson's careful attention to demographic representation necessarily fell apart when it came to language classes. The school offered Spanish as a foreign language, but almost half the students were Latinx, most of whom were fluent or near-fluent, and took Heritage Spanish as a native speakers course.⁴ As a result, the Beginning Spanish classes were the Blackest academic spaces at Robeson, with one or two Asian-American or Polynesian students also present in each section. As my research project turned on the modes of racialization and coalition at work at Robeson, I spent some time shadowing in Spanish classes, and wanted to choose one section to come to every day as an in-depth observation site. But before I could run my idea for in-depth research in her class by Sofia, she came to me to ask if I could be a support person in her first period class. She mentioned that she noticed kids were more focused and on task

³ The decision to teach high-level courses to heterogeneous groups was influenced by the founding collective's experience at racially stratified schools. For an analysis of the effectiveness of detracking as a strategy for racial equity, see Burris, et al. 2008.

⁴ To avoid this conundrum, early in its existence Robeson had offered Japanese as the primary foreign language to ensure that all students started on equal footing. However, the core teacher who taught Japanese moved on, and they did not find Japanese-certified teachers who shared the same zeal for social and racial justice, and thus shifted to Spanish instead.

when I was there, and that she thought it was beneficial for them to see other Black American people who spoke Spanish.

I attributed the shift in student behavior in large part simply to my being a more experienced classroom teacher with a toolkit to manage bubblyness and side conversations without feeling stressed, but also to the kinds of extended family relationships I had with Sofia's students and their peers. For instance, earlier that school year, I ran into *Dormilón's* mother Ms. Yolanda and her partner Ms. Liz at one of the few long-running Black lesbian parties in the Bay Area. Our co-presence on the dancefloor points to both the intergenerational nature of queer women's communities, as well as the fluidity of those very generational lines as I called all Black women guardians by the honorific "Ms." due to their parental status, even if they were only a few years older than me. Before they got together, both Ms. Liz and Ms. Yolanda had sent two children to Robeson, and met through their kids – I had taught both of their elder daughters before I left for graduate school, and now years later, mentored their younger sons. I happily accepted Sofia's invitation, both in order to trace the way racialization worked through curriculum and because there were several Black students in that class with whom I was eager to build a closer research relationship, including *Pan Dulce*.

In this chapter, I use Sofia's class as a lens into the "progressive" side of the paradox of carceral progressivism. Sofia was a Frisco Native and novice teacher with deep roots in Bay Area activist and arts communities. In her Spanish classroom, she engaged a mode of *pedagogy of coalition*, defined by

Betty Sasaki as “a collective endeavor to bring to the surface the unconscious and buried knowledges that will ultimately complicate and question, destabilize and open up for critique the normative ways of seeing ourselves and others” (2002:50). In her discussion of feminist foreign language pedagogy on a predominately white college campus, Sasaki contrasts coalition with consensus, because the latter “forecloses the possibility for coalition precisely because it insists upon a seamless correspondence both within and between constituents of the ideal community” (2002:33). However, the Robeson context shifts both the meaning and the practice of coalition because while some of Sasaki’s undergraduate Spanish classes had only white students, Sofia’s Beginning Spanish section had none. As opposed to destabilizing the unmarked normativity of whiteness, Sofia’s coalition pedagogy used language as a bridge between hypervisible Black and Latinx communities on the margins of neoliberal Frisco. Still, Sasaki’s observation that “coalition work is both oppositional and relational at the same time” (37) resonates at Robeson, where staff of color use coalition pedagogies to forge meaningful multiracial cross-identification and solidarity.

The pedagogy of coalition is one way Robeson attempted to use its school design and classroom curriculum as tools to uncouple schooling from oppression, transforming the school-to-prison pipeline into a set of pathways to college, activism, and wellness. Simultaneously, the institutional move to leverage culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 2014) for progressive outcomes is challenged by the young people in Sofia’s class on pragmatic and epistemological levels. By engaging the pedagogy of coalition as both a *site* and a

strategy for opposition, we can better grasp the nuances of the carceral progressive paradox in which the same institution can provide both culturally affirming and racially exclusionary experiences of a state space. Ultimately, coalition pedagogies as practiced at Robeson failed to meet the abolitionist demand for the end of captivity, even when they succeed at eradicating anti-blackness.

A Note on Names: Race, Language and Ethnographic Sincerity

While it's customary for foreign language teachers to call students by a cognate, for instance calling a student named Michael "Miguel" in Spanish class or "Michel" in French class, that tradition works mostly for Biblical names due to the imperial reach of Christianity. In the context of Robeson, that practice would have excluded most Black students, because while some had Biblical names or other Anglo names, most did not and instead had Arabic-derived names (i.e. Jamal, Aaliyah), country/regional names (i.e. Kenya, Asia, etc.) or Black English neologisms (i.e. Chauniqua, DeShawn, etc.).⁵ At the beginning of the year, Sofia instead asked each student to choose a name for themselves to use in Spanish class based on either a personality trait or aesthetic preference, in a move that privileged self-determination over inheritance. Whimsy abounded: *Ardilla* (chipmunk) chose her name because she loved her babyfat face. *Dormilón* (sleepyhead) took a humorous approach to his struggle with clinical narcolepsy.

⁵ Assuming name-cognates in Romance languages is one of many specifically anti-Black micro-aggressions common in classroom practice, akin to teaching 19th century immigration waves by asking students about their own immigration histories.

Bonita (pretty) reveled in self-appreciation, while *Abuelita* (Granny) liked to fuss at people. There were also some names that gestured toward social hierarchies: The only Asian student in the class insisted on his name being *Chino* (Chinese) as a ‘joke.’ And *Pan Dulce*, who ritually professed his heterosexuality, also performed his gender in ways that defied normative masculine scripts.

Sofia was a first-year teacher, and as would be expected, she had a steep learning curve with the mechanics of teaching high school (classroom management, consistent assessment, gauging the appropriate level of rigor, etc.). However, in this first period section, which she identified as the hardest for her to feel successful with, students almost exclusively used their Spanish names while in class, even when talking out of turn. For instance, in the middle of a small group storytelling activity, *Dormilón* yelled out, “¿Ayy, maestra, donde está *Bonita* tho?” Sofia hushed him back to work with an assurance she was at the doctor, but his mixed use of Spanish and Black English as a language of communication and the use of his classmate’s chosen nickname demonstrate the varied modes of buy-in and disruption on the part of students. It also is a concrete manifestation of Black-Latinx coalition, unmediated by the whiteness of Standard American English. This is part of a broader pattern of Black-POC alliance that emerges at the edges of Robeson’s white-led social fields, and gestures to the possibilities for robust multiracial co-survivance that is not predicated on either white supremacy or antiblackness.

Because both the students and instructor in this class used primarily their Spanish nicknames, I use their chosen names in the bulk this chapter. Though it

may initially cause confusion for the reader, the linguistic disorientation is intentional as it reflects my experience of being with the same young people in Sofia's classroom while we spoke a new hybrid of languages with new names for ourselves and each other.⁶ As John Jackson, Jr. (2005) points to in his discussion of "real names" in Black communities and ethnographic texts, "naming can help us recraft our social *reals*" as it allows us to "rethink sincerity as a powerful alternative to authenticity's embedded essentialism" (199).

My ethnographic investments in authenticity are belied by the systematicity with which I chose the pseudonyms used in the text. I wanted to honor the diversity and specificity of naming traditions while also avoiding immediate identification. My own nomenclature system is as follows: unlike Jackson, alliteration is proscribed – initial letters must be different. Within Black naming traditions, the genres stay the same: Arabic-derived names are replaced with the same, while Black vernacular names are likewise remixed with the assistance of the most common Black names on the census registry with a dose of my own creativity. Place names (Kinshasa, Savannah, Asia) are relocated, while Biblical names stay somewhere in the Good Book. Across the board, I tried to alter the number of syllables in a name such that John might become Elijah and Chaniqua might end up as LeNae. My assiduous attempts at retaining a sliver of participants' "real names" also point to my convoluted relationship with Black autonomy, because I initially planned to use pseudonyms chosen by each

⁶ In addition, use italic font for the chosen names as a visual reminder that this nomenclature is different from what appears elsewhere in the text. For reference, the Spanish names for interlocutors mentioned elsewhere in the manuscript are as follows: *Pan Dulce* (Nate), *Ardilla* (Tarika), *Abuelita* (Bashirrah), *Dormilón* (Bryan), *Bonita* (Deja), *Estrella* & *Chino* (Gary).

participant. During interviews I asked folks to choose a name they would like to go by, but was almost universally unsatisfied with what they chose. Chosen pseudonyms were either too obvious (John wanted Johnnie), too fantastic (Keenan wanted Escobar), or playfully racially re-coded in ways that exceeded my ability to reconcile them (Chauniqua wanted Becky). In short, they were *too* real for my sense of ethnographic fiction. As a result, the ‘fake’ Spanish names in this chapter are the realest in the manuscript because they were actually chosen by the interlocutors. In a text about Black autonomy and capture, it felt too violent for me to replace these tiny, accented sincerities – *Abuelita* and *Dormilón* signify with a levity and sovereignty too rare to euphemize.

College Access as Social Justice

In order to understand the political stakes of daily classroom interactions between students and Sofia, it is important to locate the class in the larger political project of Robeson. Before the school was founded, a group of community organizers, parents, and educators in Southeast San Francisco had mobilized the SFUSD (San Francisco Unified School District) to provide college-preparatory education for Black, Latinx, and Polynesian young people in their own neighborhoods. There were two comprehensive high schools in that region of the city, and while both sent students to college every year, their college-going rates were abysmal compared to the schools on the west side. Members of this same community group eventually became the design team for Robeson, who saw a key part of ‘social justice’ as remedying the lack of college access for racialized

youth in The City. Robeson reformulated individual, choice-based neoliberal frameworks of *college preparation* into a communal approach of *college access* for all.

California has a highly regimented three-tier state college system, which includes the ten elite research institutions of the University of California, the twenty-three California State University teaching colleges, and the 113 open-access community colleges that provide transfer units for the former two systems alongside terminal technical and vocational programs. Formalized a half century through the Master Plan for Higher Education in 1960 (Coons 1960), this system was intended to increase educational attainment in the state. However, the combination of abysmal per-pupil funding for K-12 schooling statewide and systemic inequities across race, class, and regional lines have resulted in only 26% of graduating high school seniors of all races even being *eligible* to apply to the public four-year universities in their state. “A-G eligibility” is a term that indexes academic access and equity in California, and one often touted as the marker of success for public high schools, including Robeson.

With the autonomy granted by the Small Schools by Design SFUSD policy, the founding staff of Robeson created an academic structure that diverged from the rest of the district in two major ways order to transform pipelines into pathways. First, they changed the school graduation requirement to be the completion of A-G coursework, rather than the far less rigorous minimums required by the district at the time. Second, Robeson eliminated the grade of “D” altogether, because while a “D” counts as passing a course, it is not accepted by

the UC/CSU system as fulfilling course credit. The elimination of “D’s” is a crucial element of Robeson’s success in producing far higher levels of academic attainment for Black and Latinx students, because there is no longer a gap between passing and college-eligible. As a result of these key shifts, along with other design choices like small class sizes, increased meeting time for teachers, and an advisory system that linked each student (and their family) with a staff advocate, Robeson boasted both graduation rates and A-G eligibility rates for Black and Latinx students that were far higher compared to outcomes for other schools across the city and state.

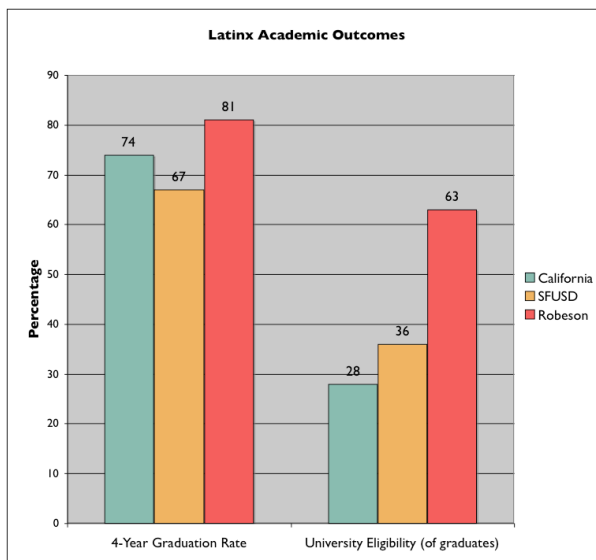


Figure 5: Adapted from Robeson Justice Academy and the Public Policy Institute of California

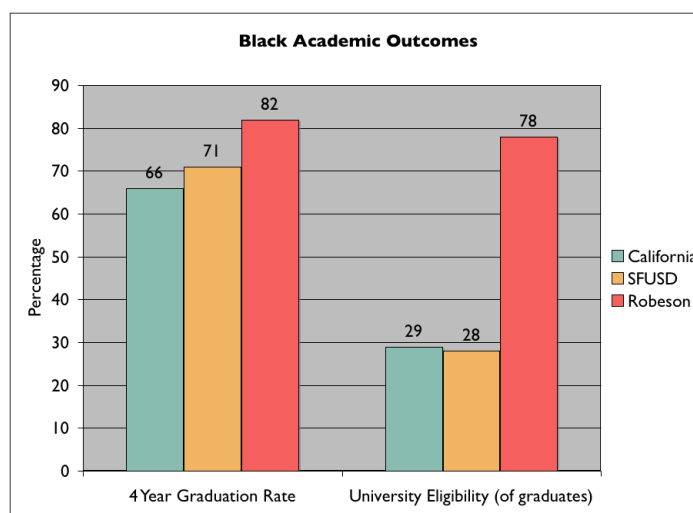


Figure 6: Adapted from Robeson Justice Academy and the Public Policy Institute of California

Robeson created the no-D policy upon its founding in 2003, as a result of the racialized gap between high school graduation rates and college matriculation rates in the city – recall that the community mandate for the school’s founding was college access for southeast San Francisco. While there were other schools with this practice in place in other parts of the US, particularly among other members of the Coalition for Essential Schools network,⁷ Robeson was the first to make this shift in The City. Since then, several charter schools networks and a few small districts have eliminated D’s (Hu 2010). Over ten years after Robeson’s founding, the San Francisco school district mandated A-G course completion in order to graduate, but continues to allow D grades. Most recently, the Los Angeles Unified School District is in the process of moving toward the same reforms as Robeson, aligning A-G coursework with graduation requirements and eliminating the D grade starting with the graduation class of 2017 (LAUSD 2016).

⁷ The Coalition for Essential Schools, or CES, is a national network that provides support for small schools by design. Founded by education researcher Ted Sizer, it developed ten common principals of school design for small schools, and played a large part in the Gates Foundation’s philanthropic investment in small schools at the turn of the century.

The shift to mandating A-G eligibility had the greatest impact on foreign language and Math classes, as at Robeson students were required to pass at least two years of foreign language, rather than one, and three years of Math, rather than two. This meant that Sofia's Beginning Spanish students were mostly sophomores who were scheduled to begin foreign language early enough to not only get the credits necessary for graduation and college, but with a year of wiggle room in case they needed to retake one or more classes to graduate on time. The position of foreign language in the Robeson course sequence is one instantiation of how the institution not only provides a pathway to four-year college, but actively expands access to that pathway by building in second chances and using culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris 2012) as a way to get buy-in to the classroom from students.

Carceral Schools: Spatial Models from Pipelines to Enclosures

In the broader landscape of progressive politics, educational attainment is not just seen as a neutral social good that offers the promise of economic mobility, but as a direct antidote to mass incarceration. "Education Not Incarceration" continues to be a common rallying cry at protests against budget cuts to social services, and was the name of a now-defunct California organizing coalition (ENI). In its founding document, ENI indicts the state for building 23 new prisons and only one University of California campus since 1980, a stat often cited by youth activists and non-profit workers in the Bay. While the ratio of schools to prisons is a stark and compelling snapshot, it also reproduces a

common sense dichotomy between the two institutions. Along with the parallel phrase “schools not jails,” the notion that education is an antidote to incarceration has been critiqued as a reformist repackaging of more radical propositions made in the wake of California youth activism in opposition to Propositions 21 & 209 in the late 1990s (Acey 2000).

The common sense opposition between education and incarceration is also reflected in the literature and activism lamenting the school to prison pipeline (STPP), also called the schoolhouse to jailhouse track (Wald & Losen 2003). The STPP framework continues to be dominant in social justice activism and critical education scholarship, though it has been critiqued as reductive and masculinist. In particular, Monique Morris’s work on Black girls and school discipline (2012, 2016) demonstrates the limitations of the pipeline metaphor because “a direct trajectory (i.e., “pipeline”) may not be as constant for Black females as it is for Black males” (2012:10), in part because girls are less likely to be arrested at school. Police officers arresting students for typical school-age and adolescent behavior is the tragedy at the heart of the STPP, and one that is all too common. But for Morris,

the primary epistemological shortcoming of the pipeline analogy is the assumption that by addressing a pipeline, we will affect the conditions of Black males and females alike. However, assuming that the pathways to incarceration for Black females is identical to that of males has failed to curtail the use of exclusionary discipline on Black females. (2012:2)

Notwithstanding her presumption of binary gender categories, Morris’ feminist critique of the STPP framework is central to theorizing carceral progressivism.

No student has ever been arrested on Robeson's school grounds, not in small part because of the vehement opposition to the STPP on the part of school staff and administrators. For years, the co-principal had an arrangement with the local police precinct that officers would park down the hill in the neighborhood as opposed to in the parking lot if they had business in the building, creating a buffer between schools and jails. At the same time, that very vehemence that plugs the school-to-prison-pipeline can overlook the kinds of "exclusionary discipline" that targets Black girls. Further, in the progressive context of Robeson, Black children of all genders are subject to the more diffuse modes of exclusion that occur outside the encased steel of the school-to-prison pipeline.

More broadly, the explanatory power of the STPP framework is limited by its presumption that prisons are immutable fact of the landscape, rather than obsolete (Davis 2003). There have been several alternative heuristics offered, including education researcher Erica Meiner's *school to prison nexus* which she asserts that though it is "perhaps less sexy than the *schoolhouse to jailhouse track*, is more accurate as it captures the historic, systemic, and multifaceted nature of the intersections of education and incarceration" (2010:32, emphasis in original). Going a step beyond intersectionality to interdependence, anthropologist Damien Sojoyner argues that the STPP framework "neglects to interrogate the coalescence of schools and prisons including the political, economic, racial, gendered, and sexed complexities that undergird both of their foundations" (243:2016). In Sojoyner's analysis, schools and prisons both function as *enclosures* of Black social, political, and cultural life. Based on

extended fieldwork in Los Angeles public high schools, he concludes that the “first strike” against Black children does not happen at the moment of arrest, but rather upon enrollment into a educational system designed to depoliticize Black rage.

Pipeline. Pathway. Nexus. Enclosure. Each of these metaphors for the relationship between education and incarceration is not only spatial, but *infrastructural* in a way that evokes and invokes the most basic responsibilities of the state to build and maintain roadways and water systems. Because of the critiques discussed herein, the pipeline metaphor is insufficient for discussing the modes of carcerality at work at Robeson Justice Academy. Robeson is certainly a nexus of institutional and political forces, but includes more than education and incarceration given its interrelationships with the non-profit sphere, private philanthropy, and leftist social movements. Sojoyner’s theory of educational enclosure is deeply revealing and is well suited for his study of dysfunctional, militarized school spaces. However, it is less useful for my research site because at multiple institutional levels Robeson is trying to uncouple, rather than conjoin, the systems of education and incarceration. As a way to conceptualize these attempts to disrupt the pipeline/nexus/enclosure *and* the limits of those attempts, I instead use pathways as an infrastructural metaphor for carceral progressive schooling.

If we imagine Sojoyner’s enclosure as composed of brick walls of disposability, punishment, and control, then what Robeson has done is to break apart those walls and repurpose the very same bricks as cobbling for pathways to

higher education, racial solidarity and participation in social justice movements. The transformation is dramatic, but incomplete. Robeson has indeed heeded Wald and Losen's (2003) call to "reverse the flow from the school-to-prison pipeline toward the school-to-graduation-to-postsecondary-education pipeline" (14), but their very phrasing belies the dismissal of self-determination and agency as prerequisites for justice – young people of color are rendered as raw materials like water or oil to be shuttled to a putatively prosocial destination.

Even though the visceral experience of sitting in Sofia's classroom left me feeling wondrous and reassured of the capacity for a just education, Sojoyner reminds us that the legally mandated presence of young people in the classroom to begin with compromises Black autonomy – they, too, are captive. As a reform strategy, Robeson's pathways broaden the range of outcomes for young Black San Franciscans and align them with common sense social goods. However, pathways also function as disciplinary technologies in three ways: first, a pathway, like any road or sidewalk, serves to limit the range of movement in a spatial terrain. Pathways cut through the wilderness of possible lives lived to make mobility easier in exchange for narrowing the range of those possibilities. Second, pathways predetermine not only how we move through space, but *where* we can go. By prefiguring the destinations (college, racial solidarity, progressive activism), Robeson's pathways shortcut self-determination as a foundational tenet of liberation. Finally, pathways as practiced at Robeson depart from Wald and Losen's mechanistic "reverse pipeline" in that a path requires a modicum of agency on the part of those walking them, unlike pipelines which

deterministically force bodies through them. In this sense, pathways also function as a technology of the self in which the progressive institution educates the desires of both young people *and* educators to conform with a notion of justice that is deeply compatible with the existing social order.

To be clear, Robeson's pathways lead to objectively better outcomes for the young people of color who walk them, and I myself played a large part in setting the bricks down beside each other in my six years teaching and running programs at Robeson. What, though, is the difference between what is good and what is just? Can that which is emancipatory (freeing youth from the enclosure) run afoul of that which is liberatory (abolishing the conditions that produce the enclosure)? I engage these questions in the next section through a close reading of interaction in Sofia's classroom. Though Beginning Spanish is a key pathway to college, Sofia's anti-racist pedagogy also makes it a path to multiracial coalition by centering the overlaps between Black and Latinx experiences.⁸ *Pan Dulce* (Nate), *Ardilla* (Tarika), *Abuelita* (Bashirrah) and *Dormilón* (Bryan) challenge the logistical and epistemic 'progress' down both these paths in ways that reveal the tension between what is good and what is just/liberatory. We return to their class not too long after the mindfulness meditation that opened the chapter.

⁸ Certainly Blackness and Latinidad are not mutually exclusive, and indeed are co-constitutive. In a racioscapes like that of New York City, a large proportion of people who are marked 'Black' or Latinx' share a common Caribbean history, and phrases like "Black and Puerto Rican" mark a joint, rather than coalitional identity. In the California context, on the other hand, Xicanidad is the basis for Latinx racialization, and its hegemonic cultural role is based in part in promoting an indigenous Xicanx figure, rather than highlight the long histories of Africans in Mexico as well as in Central and South America. Thus, the "Black and Brown" graffiti banner carried by Robeson students at rallies and in marches indexes a coalitional unity *across* racial boundaries.

“Which Came First?”: Language, Indigeneity, and the Impossible Demand

“El elefante vivía en...?” Sofia’s voice lilts upward as she gestures for people to complete her sentence based on the “mini-cuento” or short story at hand. Each week, she would narrate a *mini-cuento* to be acted out by students improvisationally, and then illustrated by each student in their binder as a storyboard (see below), and eventually internalized as a way of evaluating emergent fluency.

Mini-Cuento #6	
Habia un elefante pequeño. Habia un gato.	El elefante vivía en un hotel. El gato vivía en un hotel.
El elefante tenía mucho dinero.	El gato quiere comer tamales de ratón.

Figure 7: Mini-Cuento Worksheet

Met with rustling papers and sighs, she asked again, “el elefante vivía en...?”

“Afreeeeeeca!” *Pan Dulce* crooned in a falsetto.

Abuelita snapped, “It’s Africa,” correcting his pronunciation.

Sofia was also frustrated by his outburst, and responded in English as opposed to her usual attempts to use Spanish as the language of instruction.

“No, not in Africa, in the hotel.”

Pan Dulce muttered, sang, and chanted “*Afreeeeca*” under his breath for the rest of the period. Sometimes stretching out the “eee”, sometimes emphasizing the plosive consonants (“Uh-freakk-uh!”), but never conforming to *Abuelita*’s standard pronunciation, his intermittent refrain wound through my fieldnotes for the day. Because I sat in the talkative corner, *Pan Dulce* sat only two desks to the left of me, on the other side of *Abuelita*, I could hear his vocalizing even if Sofia couldn’t. His voice was one note in a quiet symphony of rhythm scoring the scene of classroom life – both he and *Abuelita* tapped their feet almost constantly, sometimes ticky-tacking out a beat from a song by rapping knuckles and pens on the desktop for the snare and then coming through with the bass of their J’s thumping on linoleum.⁹

“*El elefante quería comer ratones?*” Sofia asked.

“*No! Cacahuates!*” joked *Abuelita*. I could see her illustrated binder notes from where I sat – she knew that when Sofia asked what the elephant wanted to eat, she was supposed to say mouse tamales, not peanuts. Like *Pan Dulce* saying elephants live in Africa, she answered in a way that both showcased her knowledge of Spanish and undermined Sofia’s lesson plan. Their critical engagement with course content and pedagogical strategies is a reminder that the

⁹ The popular and expensive Air Jordan basketball sneaker brand, a subsidiary of Nike, are commonly referred to as “J’s.” Though there have been hundreds of versions of the shoe released, from the classic “One” worn by Michael Jordan to more recent player models from the likes of Russell Westbrook and LeBron James, the silhouette of the sneaker is distinctive enough to be recognizable half a block away. For Black and English-predominant Latinx Frisco kids of all genders, to wear J’s is to be fully dressed, to telegraph that you are taken care of and have a modicum of social stability. The communities in and around Robeson are almost universally poor and working-class, so J’s do not signal middle-class privilege, but rather assert a sense of thriving and ‘doing you’ *despite* the hustle to stay fed and housed. Of course, any number of other markers of self-presentation can signal the same, from hair style to the cut and brand of clothing, but no other single item of apparel does it like a clean pair of J’s.

distinction between “on-task” and “off-task” talk is dubious (Yonge & Stables 1998). Further, it is a classroom instance of Robeson’s broader site/strategy dynamic in that Sofia’s lesson functioned as a site of opposition for young people as they challenge moment-to-moment teaching strategies, even as they meet the larger learning outcome of developing Spanish language skills.

“Afrrrreeeeeca!”

The strategies of language mixing employed by young people in Sofia’s classroom is very different from the Mock Spanish theorized by Jane Hill (1998) as a mode of elevating whiteness. Through the purposeful butchering of Spanish grammar and pronunciation and satirical combinations of English and Spanish words (i.e. Hasta la Bye Bye), Mock Spanish lampoons Spanish speaking communities as “stupid, politically corrupt, sexually loose, lazy and dirty” (1998:683). In contrast, *Abuelita* and *Dormilón* had excellent Spanish accents and strong vocabularies for novices. The punchline of the “*cacahuates*” joke was not on Spanish as a language, or Latinxs as a community, but on Sofia for proposing mouse tamales as a dish in the first place. In this dynamic we can see how the pedagogy of coalition did at times function as a collective endeavor grounded in play – *Abuelita* was playing *with* Sofia, not trying to play *her*.

However, as the class period continued, the playful pushing against Sofia’s classroom management techniques escalated into a more pointed critique, while the young people also increased the volume of their side conversations and got out of their seats to putter about or step into the hall for a forgotten bag or just to see if their friends were around. Sofia wrapped up the mini-cuento lesson and

moved into vocabulary review by asking individual students to come to the front of the room and act out the verbs she used.

“Show me *corrió*,” she instructed. *Pan Dulce* obliged, running full speed across the classroom as *Dormilón* returned from a thirty minute water break.

“Wait, did Spanish or English come first?” *Luna*’s question to Sofia was the first time she spoke in class that day, as she had the laconic, yet polite, demeanor of a stoner for whom academics came easy.

“I don’t know,” Sofia responded with an audible exhale as she pointed to the next verb: *comió*.

I piped in with my hazy knowledge of language etiologies, “Spanish!”

“English!” *Ardilla* retorted, and then yelled “No, African!

Wuwuwuwu!” She then began making the high pitched ululations of fake Indian war whoops while tapping her hand on her mouth and giggling. In retrospect, my response was likely out of turn because I was not helping Sofia to keep her lesson on track. But *Luna*’s question spoke to a greater issue: the legitimacy of that very lesson. Framed in terms of historical precedent, *Luna* evokes what Povinelli (2011) calls the *governance of the prior* – who came first, and what purchase does that give them on the present? The specter of indigeneity that *Luna* hints at takes center stage with *Ardilla*’s response. First, by stating that English comes before Spanish, *Ardilla* affirms her own language and questions the value of the bilingual pathway offered by the course. Then, by privileging ‘African’ over English, *Ardilla* asserts the value of blackness as a kind of origin story. Most revealing though, is the conflation of ‘African’ and ‘Indian’

with the stereotypical and offensive whooping. Hers is not a mode of “playing Indian” that reasserts white national identity on the basis of native conquest (Deloria 1998), but rather engages in dark jest about lands and languages lost. “Wuwuwuwu” speaks to the lack of real-world models of African diasporic language practices available in San Francisco – the Black community in The City is as homogenous as the Latinx is diverse, with most residents descending directly from Great Migration-era transplants from the deep South. On the other, *Ardilla* found this hilarious and could barely contain her laughter enough to whoop properly – Black indigeneity is a joke.

Sofia wasn’t laughing.

“*iArdilla! Págame otra vez.*” Sofia gestured to the money jar, where misbehaving students would have to ‘pay’ her with the paper money she distributed at the beginning of the semester that could otherwise be saved up for prizes and quiz points. As *Ardilla* whooped her way to the money jar, *Abuelita* took a more serious tack.

“Why can’t we learn African?” she asked her teacher.

Caught for a moment by the girl’s switch in affect and the scope of her question, Sofia stammered “because... we are in Spanish class.” Trying to keep *Abuelita* engaged, Sofia then asked her about her peanuts comment earlier in class and commenced to teaching the class how to spell “cacahuates.” The lesson tumbled on, but *Abuelita*’s question stayed with me, underlined twice in my field notes.

“Why can’t we learn African?”

One interpretation of this phrasing may seem like a technical error, in which *Abuelita* meant “why can’t we learn Saho?” or “why can’t we learn Kiswahili?” Those questions have clear-cut answers that fit within the paradigms of public education: Saho is spoken only by a small minority of folks in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and there isn’t much infrastructure for training teachers for speakers of other languages. Kiswahili, on the other hand, is spoken by over 50 million people and has robust resources for teaching to English speakers including textbooks and standardized assessments. However, while either language would be accepted as the “E” portion of the A-G requirements for public college eligibility, neither is included among the 22 languages other than English that qualify for a state teaching credential. Nor is any other non-colonial African language, besides Arabic (the coloniality of which is contested).

However, *Abuelita* is the last young person who I would expect to think of Africa as was a country, much less its own language. Her family was complex, as all are, and steeped in a pro-Black version of Islam that produced two outspoken, self-confident Robeson students. Both *Abuelita* and her older sister ran hot and cold, pairing quick wit and quick tempers, intellectualism with irreverence. Neither made to the end of their senior year as Robeson students, as both were asked to voluntarily transfer because of behavior and low grades. Rather than dismissing the incongruity of “African” as a “language,” I return to *Abuelita’s* question because of that very juxtaposition – why *can’t* we learn African?

We can’t learn African because it doesn’t exist – the 2500 continental languages are distinct cultural and social units. Because of the intense domestic

and trans-continental patterns of slave-trading and kidnapping that filtered into the major slaves ports on the west coast of the continent, chattel slavery ruptures belonging to any cultural root, as fluid and contested as that root might be. Further, in the intervening years since the triangle trade, continental residents have also been subjected to colonial languages of instruction that they have since made their own – there are more daily speakers of French on the African continent than in France (OIF 2014). Any one of those 2500 languages could have been spoken by one or more of our ancestors, so just as we have a claim to all of them, we have a claim to none. ‘African’ is exactly what Black people in the Americas would have to learn if we were to have ‘Heritage Language’ classes.

Why can't, not can we. *Abuelita* already knows that the Middle Passage doesn't go both ways and asks *why*. By posing this question in the wake of her classmate's invocation of the continent as quintessentially native, *Abuelita* pushes on the aporia of late liberal life in which origins are stories and not crimes, and ours is a nation of immigrants. “Why can't we learn African?” challenges the pathways and destinations Sofia is working so hard to make available: four year college, bilingualism, high school graduation. Sofia coaxes her back on path with a few peanuts – African indeed – leaving the paradox of Blackness and belonging in the wilderness beyond the paved trail.

Roadblocks and Reparations: Negotiating the Terms of Multiracial Coalition

The particular class session that grounds this chapter is that it traffics in Africa and Africanness in more than any other Beginning Spanish class that semester, from *Pan Dulce's* elephant reference to *Ardilla's* ululations. At the same time, the impasse Sofia and *Abuelita* come to is an instance of a larger tension not only between the two of them, but one embedded in the practice of progressive education. For a while earlier in the year, *Abuelita* had taken to singing a hook from the upcoming animated film *The Boondocks* while in class and in the halls. “*Colored folk always tabout slaaavery. Wudn’t nothing wrong with slaaavery! Least it was good food back then.*” Sung in the film’s trailer by the exaggerated Uncle Tom figure of Uncle Ruckus, *Abuelita's* repetition of the tune landed on me as satirical. Her dark, absurd humor brings to mind Donna Goldstein’s work on humor as a “fugitive form of subordination” (2003:6) that functions as a “window into the sense of injustice oppressed peoples feel about their condition” (10). However, Sofia saw it quite differently. “Bashirrah thinks she can just say whatever she wants!” Sofia vented in one of our catch-up sessions outside her classroom door during passing period. “You can’t make jokes about slavery – that is so inappropriate!”

Sofia’s notions of appropriateness were not a reflection of white liberal norms of political-correctness. Rather, as a Xicana woman born and raised in The ‘Sco¹⁰ by activist-artist parents, she was acutely aware of the deep racial inequities in her city. When she sat with me for an interview, she recalled going to the same hypermilitarized feeder middle school as many of Robeson’s

¹⁰ Like Frisco, The ‘Sco is a classed and raced moniker for San Francisco, commonly used by Black English speakers and in local rap music.

students, where there would be “whole school Black versus Latino fights, like everyone come to the yard!” For Sofia, part of her work as a teacher was to heal rifts between communities of color and center the contributions of marginalized voices. In Beginning Spanish, that looked like investing valuable curricular time on the history of Africans in Mexico and screening the Spanish-language film *Sugar* (2008), which features Black Dominican baseball players struggling against systemic racism and xenophobia. In her English class, she taught Black psychologist Claude Steele’s theory of stereotype threat both as a way to give a multiracial group of students tools to help them manage the college transition, as well as providing a model of Black intellectual excellence. Beyond curricular content, Sofia’s small technical choices like chosen rather than ascribed nicknames mark her classroom practice as not only anti-racist, but purposively countering anti-blackness.

Still, Sofia’s anti-antiblack practices are interrupted by *Abuelita’s* mode of Black practice – this is the friction between antiracism and abolition. As Anna Tsing asserts, “friction inflects historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing” (2005:6). If friction is produced in the awkward encounter across difference that “refuses the lie that global power operates as a well-oiled machine,” it also impedes the smooth operation of progressive politics (Tsing 2005:6). Beyond Sofia’s classroom, *Abuelita/Bashirrah* used humor, defiance, and intellect as levers of friction, finding delight in being the “fly in the elephant’s nose” (Tsing 2005).

The joke that Sofia interprets as belittling slavery instead is a way that *Abuelita* foregrounds it, asserting its primacy in each and every corner of the Robeson state space as she croons “*Colored folk always tabout slaavery!*” down the hallway. *Abuelita*’s reverence for slavery and resistance to an easy equivalence between Black and Brown communities was demonstrated in a focus group I held for Black students. The central topic was the word “nigga,” who should use it and why. While all of the young people drew a bright red line around why “white people” had no business calling themselves niggas, several counted “Samoans” or “Mexicans” as niggas, as one student said, “depending on how they was raised.” However, Bashirrah refused multiracial entry in to nigganess, instead asserting, “No, I don't think its okay. I don't care where you grew up, [pause] I dont know, it just feels wrong for you to say it, like.”

Later, our discussion turned to the election and whether then-President Obama was still a nigga, or as I defined for them in an unexpected pedagogical moment, the HNIC.¹¹ Ricky, a self described “proper nigga,” argued that Obama was doing the best he could, but without more black officials, it would never be enough. *Abuelita* pushed back:

Abuelita: But no, that's what they do. They just tryna make it seem like we got a Black president so it seem like we actually getting something for once, but we don't need that. We need them to be doing stuff like letting us go to college for free or something, but no.

Ricky: not for free...

Abuelita: Yes for free! What do you mean? They put us in slavery!

¹¹ The HNIC is a Black English colloquialism for the “head nigga in charge.”

Whereas earlier, the bright red line was drawn around white folks as those who are structurally prohibited from ever using the word 'nigga,' here we hear *Abuelita's* reading of the present as always already interpellated with the past, and the bright red line leads back to the slave ship. Her analysis here casts her tense relationships Sofia in a different light – while her complaints to school leadership that teachers are 'racist' were often looked at askance, *Abuelita's* discursive bookkeeping of black debt raises the stakes for her confrontations over what she can sing when, and why the hell we can't learn African.¹²

Further, *Abuelita's* use of college tuition as an example of concrete reparations brings us back to Robeson's dual role as a site and strategy of anti-racist struggle. Even though she challenges Spanish as the only pathway available to her in a way that makes Sofia's classroom the site of opposition, *Abuelita* also demands free and unfettered access to the very university pathway that Spanish is intended to provide. In isolation, "yes for free!" may seem like the kind of compensatory notion of reparations Deborah Thomas (2011) critiques as ultimately conservative in its attempt to quantify away Black suffering. When we take *Abuelita's* broader commentary into account, including "why can't we learn African?" and her lampooning of late liberal progress narratives ("least it was good food back then!"), *Abuelita* is pushing Robeson to have the very kind of "sustained conversation about history – and the place of the past in the present"

¹² For more on the actuarial relationship between debt, death, and Black bodies, see Ian Baucom's monograph *Specters of the Atlantic* (Duke Press, 2005), and Michael Ralph's article "Life... In the Midst of Death: Notes on the Relationship Between Slave Insurance, Life Insurance, and Disability" (2012) in *Disability Studies Quarterly*.

that Thomas presents an ethical imperative in the wake of contemporary systems of violence (2011:238).

Sofia and *Abuelita*'s relationship also stands out in the context of Robeson because of *Abuelita*/Bashirrah's reputation as a "ratchet"¹³ kid who was a usual suspect for disciplinary action. In another focus group after she left the school, Zahra, a Black college counselor, used her as a prime example of what was wrong with Robeson.

There was a lot in her that reminded me of myself, especially seeing her parents and talking about what it was to be raised Muslim and the frustrations and being a teenage girl living in the city. She was, she IS amazingly intelligent. Ridiculously intelligent. And I feel like... she negotiated different levels of blackness that I feel like – that I feel... a lot of the staff were really – they were so quick to just throw her under the bus, like to be so real. I just want to know if people actually gave as much effort into Bashirrah, as they did into DeAndre – what differences would have come, you know?

Zahra was right that many teachers gave up on Bashirrah, and several mentioned her name when I asked them about who should have been kicked out earlier than they were. But Sofia was not one of them. The '*cacahuates*' lesson is just one example of the ways that Sofia did indeed invest effort into *Abuelita*.

Rather than put responsibility on *Abuelita* for her outbursts, Sofia blamed herself for her struggles with discipline:

I been pretty frustrated, and I place a lot of the blame on myself, cause I feel like with certain kids I have

¹³ Ratchet is a pejorative slang term used to describe working class, Black femininity that defies bourgeois norms of propriety. Like many epithets, it has been reclaimed by those that it denigrates and is featured in a celebratory way in hip hop songs, social media posts and reality TV shows. For more on the use of "ratchet" at Robeson, see Chapter 4, "Escaping Emancipation."

developed relationships that have allowed me to not discipline per se, but rather anticipate a problem and kinda avoid it or talk them through it, and with other kids I feel like a total roadblock, or I don't have the relationship with them, so there is just no trust or respect. And it's like, similar looking kids: Bashirrah, DeAndre, Azizi.

Sofia uses “roadblock” as an infrastructural metaphor for what she sees as a failure to build the relationships necessary for success with some of her Black students. Certainly many Black students excelled in her classes, *Dormilón* being one of them. But *roadblock* is an apt way to think about the relationship between pathways, futures, and refusals. Given the spatial determinacy of pathways, forward progress is presupposed without the impedance of a physical barrier. Roadblocks index the friction produced in the encounter between racialized futures and pasts, between politics and their refusals, and between anti-racism and abolition.

Even with the normal hiccups of novice teaching, Sofia's classroom was one of Robeson's strongest examples of anti-antiblack pedagogy, a pedagogy of coalition rooted in the valuing and centering of Black experiences and Black voices as a way to bring a modicum of justice to state-mandated education provision. “Why can't we learn African?” is a roadblock on the progressive pathway – a type of willful refusal of the best left politics has to offer. However, the demands of abolition exceed a simple respite from anti-Black racism. Abolition is the unreasonable, irreverent wilderness that exceeds any pathway that attempts to tame it. Abolition is not a pathway – it is the end of paths and

the end of worlds, a roadblock barring passage to the destination-cum-mirage of late liberal democracy.

“Afreeeeeecah!”

4.

The Kids in the Hall
Mapping Fugitivity in a Progressive Dystopia

"Ten!"

Nyla's sweet soprano soared above the rustle of backpacks jostling and the tinny tink-tink-tink of basslines filtered through off-brand white earbuds slung from shirt collars. She stood in her classroom entrance, door as wide as her smile, as kids shuffled a bit faster to finish at their lockers.

"Nine!"

Across the hall, Kate barked at no one in particular, interjecting instructions to the students already inside between numbers - "the Do Now is on the board."

"Eight!"

"Seven!"

Their unison is disrupted by DeAndre, who lumbered around the corner bellowing "ten! Nine point five!," sparking chuckles among the three dozen or so kids left in the corridor connecting Nyla's English class, Kate's Trigonometry room and my now-empty theater classroom.

"Quit cutting up, DeAn-," Nyla chided as Kate kept counting.

He interrupted her, protesting, "But they ain't even start counting on the other side."

"Four!" Kate continued, as brown and Black bodies filed past her to find seats in the sunny classroom. "Get in my class now or you're not getting in without a pass!"

Rolling his eyes dramatically, DeAndre slowly sorted papers in his locker and gathered a few in his fist before closing it and checking his phone. Kate and Nyla's classroom doors shut definitively and he looked up to see me watching him from my doorway as relative silence settled upon the hallway.

"Oh well, Ms. Shange." He strolled past me away from Kate's room, "I'm doing good in Math anyway," and then quickened his pace toward the sound of laughter spilling from the hallway bench just out of sight.

The countdown system had been instituted a few years prior as a compromise after a major staff backlash over a proposal to activate an automated passing period 'bell' tone that came included with a overhaul to the PA system. Student lateness was a perennial staff concern at Robeson, both arriving to school in the morning and to class after the 5 minute passing period between block classes, but some teachers still balked at the thought of a centralized bell system. Veteran Robeson teacher Sonny Hammad even made a short PowerPoint presentation for a staff meeting, in which he connected prison panopticons and surveillance to labor history and the inception of factory-floor clocks as a way to control working-class people as a counterweight to the bell proposal. Drawing on his Syrian heritage and personal experience of menial labor – he was a ditch digger before college – Sonny made a compelling case against a centralized bell system.

As compromise given the inconsistency of the SFUSD wall clocks throughout the building, the collective countdown was chosen to appease both the “Robeson is a school before everything else!” set, headed by Kate and Mr. Agusalim, and the “Robeson is so much more than a school!” faction, with Sonny and Josue as its vanguard. Certainly, most of the thirty-or-so Robeson adults¹ fell between these artificial poles, and the political formations within the institution’s governance were perpetually shifting in response to both internal and external narratives. At the same time, this rift between understanding Robeson as a *school* on the one hand versus *not-school* or *more-than-school* on the other hints toward the centrality of exceptionalism as an engine for both civic life and social death within its walls.

But why is DeAndre in the hall in the first place?

In the chapter that follows, I place the discourse around hallways at Robeson in the context of literatures on both school discipline and student

¹ The number of staff at Robeson was in flux during the 2007-8 school year when that bell decision was made, as well as during the 2012-13 school year that this dissertation focuses on most closely. That flux reflects the overall institutional precarity that typifies public services under neoliberalism – for instance, in the fall of 2011, statewide budget cuts during the summer meant that all San Francisco Unified school District (SFUSD) schools started with drastically less funding than planned, prompting citywide layoffs and hiring freezes. At Robeson, that meant there was no security guard for the first two weeks of school, the time of year most likely for fights and thefts to occur while the sense of community that can serve to protect against such violations is still being built with brand new students. During that time, I stepped in to serve as security guard until the Board of Supervisors approved an emergency influx of funds to the city’s schools. So during that time, would I count as staff, unpaid and not on any official list of employees? Robeson’s official list of FTE (full time employees) only included those paid through the district as certificated (clerical) or classified (teacher credentialed) hovered between 21 and 24.5 positions between the 2004 and 2013 school years. However, that number is augmented by grant-funded counselors, AmeriCorps volunteers, and special education paraprofessionals funded through the central district office. Thus, I often use the term ‘adults’ to index the broad swath of non-students (and non-parents) who function as loci of state authority, however contingently and contradictorily.

resistance, and ask how Robeson's institutional practice of carceral progressivism maps onto the political economy of restructuring San Francisco. I offer that while schools are rich sites for understanding the nature of both entrenched social inequity and the multiplicity of struggles against it, they also offer a sobering account of how social movements antagonistic to the settler-state can be co-opted under the neoliberal rubric of service provision as a strategy for societal change. Using the settlement/plantation as a guiding frame, I track the afterlife of slavery at Robeson as it manifests in the links between Reconstruction Era approaches and reactions to the policing of Black comport and the management of hallway behavior in the school site. Finally, I use the tools of spatial theory to follow the flight of the settled/slave toward what we might call a Frisco fugitivity, one that manifests in motion both within and away from the carceral city and its progressive jailers.

Corridor Customs: Walking the Halls of Robeson

Ostensibly a transit space between classrooms and other 'real' spaces of the school, the hallway itself is a hub of life, a central counterspace (Schmidt 2013) for young people, one that was a common site for struggles over what kind of exception Robeson could be. As reflected by Kate and DeAndre's interaction at countdown, corridors have a dual push/pull function whereby young people may be banished *into the hall* when they act up in class, but are then lambasted to get *out of the hall* when they linger of their own accord.

Sonny remarked upon this last dynamic in a grade-level team meeting when he challenged us as staff members to acknowledge how we helped to create the hallway dynamics. Casual and confrontational, Sonny played his usual role of lefty antagonist in the meeting's dynamic, loosening his tie and rolling up his sleeves to great effect as he exposed his densely tattooed olive forearms. Leaning into the co-principal Aaron, he reasoned

You want them to come correct in the class and they are not, so they are out in the hallway, and Kate's notion of get all the kids *into* the classroom causes the hallways to become a depository for kids not in class.

The multiple functions of the hallway space are compounded with "sanctioned" hallway time at lunch and passing period, where students are indeed permitted to be in the hall, but are expected to adhere to both written and unwritten rules of decorum.

Class cutting scenes familiar from angsty high school films like *The Breakfast Club* and *Dangerous Minds*, where students smoke weed or gamble in the halls and stairwells were rare at Robeson. This was due both to the limited square footage of the four connected hallways, as well as the hassle a would-be miscreant faced. Substance use was treated as a wellness crisis, and even students who were suspected of coming to school high were mandated to go through substance use counseling on campus, as well as ongoing therapy sessions during the school day. For those caught getting high on campus, a disciplinary write up accompanied the psychological intervention. As Sonny told my advisee

Keenan after he sent him to the Wellness Center again for coming to his English class high, “Dude, it’s just not worth the trouble – smoke on the way home, like a fuckin’ adult.” Also unlikely was another trope of urban miseducation: fights. At Robeson, physical altercations between students are relatively rare. Safety was one of the top reasons families chose Robeson over larger, more established schools. On average, there were usually only one or two fistfights on the school grounds each year, while transfer students from nearby Valencia High reported that lunchtime fights had become a weekly ritual.

The corridor customs at Robeson were far less dramatic. In order to get into the halls, some young people used DeAndre’s approach of never going back into class after passing period, while others might conveniently forget their books or materials, just slip out when the teacher’s head is turned. A few others would purposefully get into conflict with an instructor, hedging the bet that they would be sent into the hall to wait for a talking-to. On occasion, teachers complained that their laminated bathroom passes had never come back after excusing a student to the restroom – the long red lanyards could be seen all the way from the other end of the hall and could potentially avoid a disciplinary skirmish. Because of the easy-to-lose hall lanyards, some teachers made makeshift, and often absurd, replacement passes. For a while, students had to tote around an industrial push broom labeled “On my Way Back to Ms. O’Shea” when they stepped out of Evelyn’s science class, and others schlepped analog telephone receivers or blackboard erasers. Once in the hall, Robeson youth used their stolen minutes of class time to rebraid their edges, talk a crying friend through their

drama or just to stroll along crooning a favorite song in unison with a video playing on their phone – in short, for remarkably unremarkable activities.

As Black senior Jabril put it, the hallways were for *chilling*, much to his frustration.

Every time I am in Mr. Agusalim class, the same students are in the hallways. And I understand if you have family problems, or things are going down on the way to school but it's like, there's the Wellness center to talk to – go talk to somebody. But they don't wanna go to class, they just want to come to school and chill in the hallways. At lunch, you could go outside, but you are *still* in the hallways. What's the point of coming to school if you just gonna chill in the hallways? And then afterschool its like "oh, I don't wanna go to home," but you are still in the halls!

Jabril's annoyance at his peers belies easy binaries between the prerogatives of students and teachers in the school space. Like his advisor Kate, he thinks of Robeson's primary purpose as academic education. As a college-bound student with a 3.52 cumulative GPA, Jabril was often called upon to speak at public events and recruitment fairs on behalf of the school, he is quite invested in and identified with Robeson. Though Jabril finds it irritating, couldn't "the same students" commitment to chill in the hallways, sometimes hours after the end of the academic day, also reflect an investment in and identification with the school space?

DeAndre, a junior whose name is usually the first mentioned by students and staff when discussing behavior problems at the school, spoke of Robeson idyllically in his interview:

This school started my life for me... Honestly, I think coming here changed everything. This has really – I’m not saying this just to say this, or just to make someone happy, or because you doing this [research]. This is really the best school.

When DeAndre says Robeson is the “best school,” the comparison carries weight because of his breadth of experience: due to expulsions and academic transfers, he went to four elementary schools and three middle schools before starting his freshman year at Robeson. However his pride of place manifested differently than Jabril’s – while Jabril was scribbling away in Pre-Calc, DeAndre was strolling the corridors as if he were the Mayor. Maybe, for the constituency gathered in a corner of the Excelsior, he was.

While student (mis)behavior like DeAndre’s has been the focus of most of the scholarly examination of school corridors, the content of expectations for comportment have been underexamined, particularly given the raced and gendered dimensions of behavioral norms. Deeply insightful works on student resistance still tend to assume the schoolhouse walls as an analytically meaningful boundary, and educational attainment as a natural teleology (see Giroux 2003). The educational research frame engages actors in the school space as categorized first by institutional roles - students, teachers, staff - and then looks to race as descriptive of how they experience or embody those roles. But what if we reverse that logic, and analytically engage Nyla, Jabril, and DeAndre primarily as Black people in an always already anti-Black state space, and then

see their roles as descriptive of how their blackness shows up (and out)?² This shift may help us to track the moves of race and racism across and through space, without indebting us to the inherited conventional power distribution of students and teachers. If we take schools as one of the many organs of the state's anatomy, the cellular wall that separates it from the jailhouse and the social services office, the military bunker and the hospital ward starts to dissolve, leaving us with far fewer problems that can be solved by "students" and "teachers," and yet greater utility for the insights we can gain about Black life and death under late liberalism. For those of us invested in justice, this approach may seem disheartening because we *want* to solve problems, to make programmatic recommendations and policy shifts – these kinds of concrete steps both offer immediate succor for communities most impacted by disinvestment as well as a kind of catharsis for the overworked community-engaged researcher.

Why Are the Kids in the Hall?: Educational Research on School Hallways

As a literally interstitial space, the hallway of a school building oscillates across a range of sometimes-contradictory purposes. While school hallways receive scant attention in much scholarship, researchers tend to examine them from one of three vantage points: resistance, surveillance, or harassment. Most of the recent scholarly work that has looked at hallways has been along the lines of

² To "show out" is a Black English idiom that is a rough synonym of "to stunt;" one shows out when one intentionally performs their own greatness through self-styling and comportment and revels in it despite any external judgment. While 'showing out' suggests ostentation, it is not compatible with bourgeois norms of respectability and instead tarries in the gendered and classed economy of what Deborah Thomas (2006) calls racial respect.

the latter, casting school corridors in a dangerous light with titles like *Hostile Hallways* (Harris, 1993; Lipson, 2001) and *Homophobic Hallways* (Crocco, 2002). Studies in this vein, often commissioned as research reports by educational foundations, emphasize risk as a key analytic for understanding hall dynamics, particularly as it impacts individual students whose gender or sexuality made them targets for bullying and harassment. For harassment-focused studies, the next step is clear: schools need to develop and enforce clear disciplinary policies around sexual harassment (Lipson, 2001; Crocco 2002). More recently, hallways have become central to the narrative of surveillance and militarization of schools in the wake of neoliberal educational reform. Scholars using surveillance as a lens into hallways are less likely to suggest increasing punishment, as they begin from the critique of a militarized school space, and instead recommend exposing the racialized nature of school discipline policies with an eye to transforming them (Meiners, 2011).

The scholars that have the most to say about DeAndre, Sonny, and Kate's disparate positions in the hallway are those building on the tradition of resistance studies in education (Foley 1990; Fine 1991; Solomon 1992; Valenzuela 1999). Starting with Paul Willis' (1977) landmark study of working-class young men in an industrial town in England, a generation of educational theorists look to 'oppositional' student behavior as a key site of resistance to a repressive educational environment that was indicative of their resistance to society at large. Willis (1977) saw "the preservation of personal mobility" (27) by roaming hallways, being in class but doing no work, or cutting school altogether as a way

for 'lads' to claim time for their own as they resisted institutional incursions on their autonomy. However, because that resistance manifested as a rejection of mental labor and educational attainment in favor of manual labor and masculinist acculturation, it also doubled as consent to class immobility on the factory floor, in a move that "hammers freedom to inequality in the reality of contemporary capitalism" (Willis 20). While his attributions of resistive behavior to the lads were later critiqued as overly rosy (Hill 2009; Foley 1990) and give scant attention to race and white nationalism as strategies of class cohesion, Willis does demonstrate why simple 'truancy' is too crude of a frame for understanding why the kids are in the hall.

Kathleen Nolan (2011) revisits Willis by way of Erving Goffman to add nuance to the narrative of student resistance. Instead of working class kids resisting middle class norms in a high employment industrial era, she looks at student resistance in the context of mass unemployment and incarceration that structures life in the contemporary US city. Engaging the same oppositional behaviors as previous scholars, including talking back, class disruption, and cutting class, Nolan uses data from a dysfunctional, militarized comprehensive high school to suggest that if "students were to be provided welcoming, relevant, and respectful educational experiences and/or engaged politically, they could move toward more constructive and overtly political forms of contestation" (570-71). While providing insight into the role of neoliberalization in the shifting sands of public education, Nolan uses the racial category of "Blacks and Latino/as" to make meaning, one which has a circumscribed applicability in New

York City where her study was based, but that serves to obfuscate the differential costs of antiblack racism as manifest in a Pacific racioscape (Jackson 2005).

Contributing to the literature on schools as sites of civic socialization (Dewey 1916, Levinson 2012, Gutmann 1995, Youniss 2011, Kahne & Middaugh 2008), Sandra Schmidt (2013) spatializes notions of civic education, documenting how public spaces like schools produce citizens. She uses participant mapping techniques to demonstrate the outside role hallways play in young peoples' experiences of school. While she pays some attention to social and racial "self-segregation" among students and its spatial maintenance, she still engages the school building as the social whole, discounting the role of adults in creating racial climate and making no reference to systemic oppression. However, she builds on Warner (2000) and Fraser (1990) to offer a concept of hallways as 'counterspaces' that is instructive in the Robeson context, and to which we will return later in this chapter.

Sporting dog-eared copies of *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (Loewen 1995) and *Other People's Children* (Delpit 1995), the Robeson administration and staff have implemented almost every major progressive educational reform proposed over the past two decades. From small school structure (Meier 2002; Benitez, Davidson & Flaxman 2009), block scheduling (Thayer & Shortt 1999) and advisories (Meier 2002) to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995) and antiracist education (May 1999), Robeson does it all. In contrast with the "colormute" (Pollock 2005) discourse typical of urban US schools, systemic

racism was explicitly mentioned or referenced by a staff member at every weekly full staff meeting in the 2012-13 academic year, save the one that was a celebration party for departing teachers. And still, Robeson has the same concerns with Black student behavior that we see in a place like UPHS, the focus of Pollock's mid-1990's study. What if, as opposed to an example of students resisting teachers as such, we reframed hallway circumambulations as a reaction to history itself, as manifest in the very bones of the building in question? Much like I believed for most of my tenure as a schoolteacher, each of the authors cited in this section suggest that there is a programmatic or curricular answer to the question of "*why are kids in the hall?*"

Issuing a powerful critique of teleological resistance theories, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2011) argue that the logic used by liberal educators to rationalize student 'misbehavior' as inchoate demands for better schooling is the same logic that underwrites ongoing settler colonialism and genocide by placing white notions of democracy as the endpoint of all political struggle. Their insight holds true as well for the logics of antiblack racism. The subsumption of Black excess (of motion, time, volume) under a generalized heading of 'student resistance' prompts the narrow question "why are the kids in the hall?" in lieu of the more pressing demand, "where can we be free?"³ One of the risks of the multiracial coalition presupposed in the rubric "people of color" is the ahistorical subsumption of the specificity antiblack racism under the general heading of

³ Given the tight weave of space-time in the de/construction of the Black body, and following Kara Keeling's (2009) imperative to build the future in which Black bodies can exist unpursued, this question might more crucially be posed "*when* can we be free?"

white supremacy. For instance, Nolan (2011) tracks Black kids in the hallway, illuminating their travel as “movements of liberty” (Goffman 1961:304), but never seems to connect that seeking of freedom to the bondage of slavery. Similarly, Schmidt (2013) remarks on the ‘incivility’ that unraced, thus deraced, students show one another, evading the possibility of incivil discourse between adults and youth, not to mention the broader impossibility of Black civility in an antiblack world (Wilderson 2010, Gordon 1995).

The Usual Suspects: Disciplinary Rationales at Robeson

Caught mid-text, I sheepishly tucked my phone into my back pocket as I entered the silent business meeting, only to slip it out again in order to record the proceedings. The circle of twenty-one staff members sat, eyes closed, a few fidgeting, one with her head cocked to the side as if listening for a far-away whistle. The co-principal Tina clinked together a pair of Tibetan *tingsha* meditation bells and they rang shrill, to her surprise. "Whoa there!" she jumped. "Well, thanks to those who arrived on time for starting us off with mindfulness. Aaron and I were just talking about what a difference it makes in our meeting time."

With that, Josue, a proud Pinoy⁴ Frisco native and History teacher seated to Tina's left, caught my eye from across the circle and bugged his eyes out with a pursed lip, creating a mash-up caricature of an English schoolmarm and elitist

⁴ Pinoy is a colloquial term for Filipinx/a/o people; the spelling is meant to signal reverence for indigenous nomenclatures that predate the European naming of the "Phillipines."

foodie wrapped in one. Rolling my eyes at him, I refocused on the photocopied text being passed around. As a way to start the agenda, Aaron had brought in an excerpt from Lisa Delpit's *Multiplication Is For White People* (2012), a trade book focused on white teachers of Black children in the context of contemporary school reform.⁵ Being already quite familiar with the text, I skimmed quickly, more interested in what was missing from these four pages of isolated text. Aaron had chosen a pair of two-page passages from the "Warm Demanders" chapter, which argues that white teachers should look to the tradition of high expectations and cultural engagement as a model for their own pedagogy. In a typical Robeson move of modeling classroom best practices in professional development meetings, he then asked Robeson staff to annotate the text, choose resonant passages, debrief with a partner for five or ten minutes and then come back to the larger circle of chairs for a full staff discussion.

Both Nyla and Zahra, Black teachers from the greater Bay Area, raised their hands to debrief in the larger group, the former sharing her concern that due to less community building time as a school due to draconian budget cuts handed down from Governor Jerry Brown's office, she lacked the close relationships necessary to be a 'warm demander' for students in the hall.

"It feels really generic to be like," Nyla effected a husky, faux concerned voice, "I know you could be in class and doing better,' but I don't know your name." Chuckles peppered forth.

⁵ There is slippage between Black and POC both in Delpit's book (i.e. using examples of Black teachers and students as evidence for broader POC conclusions) and in the meeting (applying evidence from Black students to broader POC school space).

Zahra, in her customary earnestness, pulled out Delpit's point about living in community with your students, and that those relationships need to be built outside of the classroom. This flew in the face of customary Robeson narratives of the classroom being the moral and logistical center of the school, the space that determines the shape and pace of institutional life. Freedom 'fro and palm-sized green lily earrings swaying in unison as she gesticulated, she added "you know, the girls who are in the hallway, just playing their tunes and doing their dances? I knew all their names after three weeks, just making myself go out into their spaces and connect." Here, not only does Zahra offer a lived example of Delpit's axiom "knowing students is a prerequisite for teaching them well," (87) but she also names the hallway as *their space* without animosity or competition, filled rhythm rather than trouble.

Whether the hallway is "theirs" or "ours" indexes a broader tension about the rightful owners of the space of the school, and even of the City. Robeson's founders were devotees of the Deweyian tradition of progressive schooling, there is more than a nod to a democratic notion of commonly held school space. Aaron's head is usually the one doing the nodding. As co-founder and principal, his balding salt and pepper hair gives gravitas to the institutional memory he holds. Running parallel to democratic idealism is a powerful narrative of Robeson as an exceptional space - a special school, with special teachers and a special mission. In many ways, this narrative is borne out in reality. Robeson was footnoted as a *literal* exception to the teacher's union contract governing labor conditions and evaluation structures, a concession won after a year-long

negotiation process between four “small schools by design,” the district, and the teachers’ and administrators’ unions.⁶ Similarly, the “alternative schools and programs of choice” designation that co-founder Elizabeth had sought from the state Department of Education also exempted Robeson from the lockstep, textbook-based curriculum that masqueraded as a decent education for most Californians. In each and every interview I conducted with students, including those who had been kicked out, they remarked about how much better Robeson was than other schools they had attended. Maricela, a Salvadoreña sophomore transfer to Robeson, remarked:

At [my old school] sometimes I felt like I’m walking around with people who hate me, and for just no reason. Here, it’s just like, I feel chill. People are very welcoming, and like the vibes are so good here.

The “chill” feeling that Maricela cites vibrates through Robeson’s halls, echoing through high energy greetings with dap and chest bumps and effusive compliments about hair and makeup interspersed with snippets of Spanish *chisme* and Samoan *fa’aumu* “cheee-hooo!” whoops.

However, the “vibes” at the staff meeting about the hallways were anything but chill. Aaron spoke hesitantly into the group of adults, whose mood had gone from reflective to taciturn.

"Anybody have thoughts on the yelling, in particular?"

⁶ For more on the Small Schools by Design policy, see Chapter Two, “A Long History of Seeing.”

Picking up on Zahra's hallway marker, Aaron directed us back to the part of the excerpt where Delpit references meanness as a pedagogical tool. In it, she recounts an anecdote of a "tough" Black teacher whose students valued her anger as an asset to their learning. She cautions, "I am not suggesting that everyone should proceed to be mean to or yell at Black children" because that generally works better for Black teachers for whom "your own cultural background is so similar that you also associate a raised voice with caring" (Delpit 2012:81). Aaron cleared his throat and peered one at a time around the circle at the staff members who had yet to speak up that meeting. Explicitly inviting input from those who are being quiet was by no means out of the ordinary, and indeed was in keeping with one of the original Robeson staff core values of "attending to patterns of participation".⁷ However, Aaron's dramatic "ahem" combined with Delpit's commentary that yelling is probably not for you if you ain't black, shifted the energy in the room. The loud silence that followed was punctuated by butts shifting in seats, a sidelong glance between Kate and her fellow white STEM teacher Arnie, and the flipping and re-flipping of the double-sided single sheet excerpt. With Nyla and Zahra already accounted for, half of the Black staff had already spoken. That fact made it seem more likely that Aaron

⁷ For the first several years of the institution's operation, each weekly staff meeting had a printed agenda that listed out the four 'professional learning agreements' [1) Speak your truth. 2) Assume Positive Intent. 3) Observe and Surface Patterns of Participation. 4) Appreciate the Contribution of Others.], as well as a place to record the four rotating meeting roles: Facilitator, Recorder, Timekeeper, and Friend of the Chair (FOC). The last role was for someone who would take down the names of those who raised their hand to speak, and call on them in order in an attempt to ensure equitable participation. Even though the custom of printed agendas had been abandoned by the 2012-13 school year, the meeting roles persisted.

brought in the Delpit text to orchestrate a moment of accountability for some of Robeson's yellers.

Like a cable car, the conversation creaked to a roll again. The special education teacher Ellen lilted in her Hungarian accent, "somebody yells, but it depends on *how* they yell," and Nyla piped up again to push back on the effectiveness of yelling at all. Confirming my hunch that today's professional development session was targeted toward the yellers, Tina then passed out a handout titled "Escalation & De-Escalation" that included a table summarizing the previous week's conversation about how to respond to students acting out, followed by a few prompts.

De-Escalate	Escalate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - calm voice - "take a pause" - calming hand motions - questions - reference the future & positive alternatives - time for reflection - peer support - zone defense rather than 'man on man' - joking indirect approach (be more crazy than the student) - use humor & prior knowledge of students - stay positive - focus on resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - raised voice - aggressive tone - took it personally ("my class," "you promised me") - commands ("listen") - ranking students/pitting against each other - following & escorting - making it annoying to be out of class - arguing - focus on "winning"

Figure 8: Escalation handout from Robeson staff meeting.

While ostensibly an objective accounting of the meeting, a closer examination of the summary distributed to staff members reveals a bias against escalation. Not only are there simply more entries on the 'de-escalation' side, but

the entries themselves are not written in the same moral register. “Take a pause” seems to have an edge on “aggressive tone,” and “use humor and prior knowledge of student” could have been lifted directly from Delpit’s text, while “focus on ‘winning’” somehow insinuates losing. Taking the reins of the meeting, Tina directed us to brainstorm when it was most effective to de-escalate, and when the reverse was true. In true classroom teacher style, it was a stealth review session. The previous week’s meeting about escalation had laid out several scenarios for each. Ellen, Aaron and myself had starred in a skit titled “When Going Hard Goes Wrong,” which ended in literal Laughing Out Loud and started a conversation about tactics to handle student “misbehavior.”

The first hand up was Julia's, the director of the Counseling Center and one of two white City natives on the Robeson staff. Her full frame and self-styling – festooned with wooden bangles, a coral beaded choker and perfectly gelled curly hair – set her mode of white womanhood apart from the Gap-meets-Patagonia aesthetic preferred by Kate and Sarah. In her iron-edged West Bay⁸ lilt, she argued that escalation is a set up, where students don’t have an honorable way to exit the situation, so they are forced to choose between humiliation and what Eve Tuck (2011) might call "dangerous dignity."

Josue hopped in with the singsong cadence of a stand up comic on a roll. “Eight years ago when I first got here I was all on this side,” he said, gesturing to

⁸ “The West Bay” is a tongue-in-cheek phrase used to describe San Francisco. “The East Bay” is the standard name for the collection of towns and cities in and around Alameda county, including Oakland, Berkeley, and Emeryville, and though The City is obviously on the west side of the San Francisco Bay, it is less commonly referred to as The West Bay.

the 'escalate' portion of the handout, "I would be making this whole speech about The Revolution and how now it isn't gonna happen cause you didn't do your homework and shit!" Reflections continued around the circle, most following Josue's model of veteran wisdom for folks greener in the game.

Arnold, a white special education teacher in his mid-fifties mused, "the longer I have been doing this, it's... When it's out of anger, and out of frustration, it just doesn't work, and it takes so much out of you."

Elevated arm crooked hesitantly, long-time white Humanities teacher Leonard peered over his glasses intently, carefully choosing his words after the friend of the chair nodded his way.

One question I have is about when our students, or some of our students, get used to being communicated with, or only with anger. Having students listen to directions or concern when it's not coming from that place becomes challenging. So I wonder how do we use escalation, but also, *how do we build students* so that that is not a place that we or they have to go to for communication?

In my notes from the meeting, there is a string of deeply etched exclamation points and question marks next to my jottings for Leonard's remark. I was struck so deeply by his choice of passive grammatical construction - particularly from an English teacher whose department was obsessed for years about active sentences. He was leaping over himself create distance from an identifiable locus of authority. He only used the first person in reference to questioning or wondering, thus highlighting his identity as an intellectual but sidestepping his institutional role both in the school and in the broader racial power structure. Because of these

grammatic gymnastics, young people first appear in Leonard's rendering as stranded in a series of circumstances beyond their control. They "get used to being communicated with" anger because "that place" is ostensibly natural for adults in their lives.

Leonard's insinuations echo Daniel Patrick Moynihan's infamous "tangle of pathology" (1965) characterization of Black families, along with a century's worth of policy landscapes and social science research dominated by racialized notions of family structure, sexual propriety and heteropatriarchal respectability in relation to the civic worth of Black people in the Americas. In the US, this anxiety was at fever pitch during Reconstruction, when the Freedman's bureau enforced marriage upon recently emancipated men as a requirement not only for their pensions, but at times as a requisite for their freedom itself (Ferguson 2004). While pathologizing discourse about Black sexuality and domesticity is largely carried out in the register of the moral, it also had material and civic consequences because "African American poverty was often explained by reverting back to the question of African American intimate relations and denying the irresolvability and historicity of state and capital's own exploitative practices" (Ferguson 2004, 86) that position Black households in perpetual economic precarity. Thus, when Leonard deploys the cultural deficit frame that has become par for the course in state charter applications and KIPP⁹ teacher

⁹ KIPP, which stands for Knowledge is Power Program, is a national network of charter schools focused on militaristic discipline, individual uplift, and educational attainment. They predominantly serve communities of color, and have been critiqued for miseducating Black and Latinx children. For more on KIPP, see Brian Lack's "Anti-Democratic Militaristic Education" (2011).

training manuals, he also reflects over a century of post-emancipation fretting over the competence of Black families in the Americas.

However, Leonard was no neoliberal technocrat - he was an avowed antiracist activist and board member of The People's Educators, a leftist organization focused on building the skills and sustainability of justice-minded teachers. His political ethos sets in even starker relief his query "how do we build students," a single turn of phrase that invokes both a messianic notion of teachers as the Great Architects of humans, as well as a settler colonial imperative to develop this oh-so-Black *terra nullius*. He reneges on his role as an authority figure again as he shrouds screaming at children in obligation. It's a place *we have to go to* until we shift not the geographies of power, but in his framing, the geography of the students themselves. Leonard's apparent juxtaposition of white supremacist ideologies and progressive multiracial commitments is an example of how the former is foundational to the latter.

Whether described in Leonard's words as a weighty "*some of our kids*," "just a few kids," or "the same ten kids," as was bandied about in an impromptu upper-class staff ranting session a few months earlier, these seemingly neutral terms for apportioning the student body actually function as racialized signifiers of blackness. When I asked in that rant session who people thought the "ten kids" were, Kate's response was, "well you know - the ones who are always in the hall!" Laughter followed, but I pressed further, asking each person to write their

own list and see if we were actually on the same page. Of the five other staff present, the students appearing on at least three of the six lists were Nate, Meisha, Tarika, DeAndre, Nashanta, Azizi, Arturo and Cyarea (only DeAndre and Tarika appeared on all five). After a little NBA draft-style discussion nominating additional students, I mentioned that all the students were Black. "Nah-uh, what about Arturo?" Kate fired back. Clearly, the presence of one Latinx kid, whose adjudicated status and choice of AAVE¹⁰ arguably blackened him, evacuated the blackness of the Usual Suspects. Further, the collective list was mostly girls, reflecting a pervasively gendered framing of propriety in the Robeson space, one that I take up as a central concern in the next chapter.

Settling Justice: Coloniality and the Robeson Racioscape

In the meeting at hand, Aaron deployed the Usual Suspect rhetoric when he asked us to keep in mind how great Robeson students are, reminding us that "the problems are a distinct minority, so don't let them set the tone." Ironically, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) sat prominently on Aaron's office bookshelf, as he echoed Du Bois century old ruminations on how it feels to be a problem. Shifting gears from reflection to action steps, Aaron asked what support teachers felt they needed from administration and from each other to effectively use (or stop using) the tools of de-escalation and escalation. Curiously, this was the point in the meeting when the Escalaters stepped forward, citing one example after another where students with whom they sparred in the hallway were not suspended when

¹⁰ African American Vernacular English

they thought they should be, or that they 'got off easy' by the time they got to Tina and Aaron.

Aaron pushed back on this assertion, saying bluntly, "It's okay to escalate with kids, but don't be surprised if you get disrespected. It's happened to me, but if *I* started it, *I'm* not gonna be pissed." He thumped his hand below where his button up shirt parted, to emphasize the "I"s, his caved chest inverting Mr. Agusalim's braggadocio. His physical performance of humility could have been a tactic to compel the Escalaters to de-personalize student conflict or an impromptu impassioned reflection; this ambiguity between strategy and spontaneity was a hallmark of Aaron's leadership style at Robeson.

"Well, maybe we should be pissed!" Kate retorted, amidst a gurgle of side chatter and fidgeting that had erupted. Returning to her insistence that achieving a social justice mission meant holding kids to higher behavioral standards through increased disciplinary penalties. In the familiar strident voice that I could hear barking out equations through the wall that separated our classrooms, she argued that it was important for teachers to stand their ground with students.

As a school, we need it to be the Apocalypse to be in the hallway when you are not supposed to. The only ones who pop off on me are the ones I don't know, and honestly at that moment I don't care. This is not your school, right? This is our school. That's it. You can disrespect me, and you can get a referral - that's it. I am not going to provide therapy in the hallway, I am not going to think about your trauma. Get in your classroom - that is your only choice. *We all* need to flex on this a little bit. Often, when kids are being out of pocket in my class, have them go outside and read the name on the door - I'm like, that's not your name, that's

my name. So what I said goes, and that's all it needs to be.

Woven into the ire of this soliloquy are three key markers of Robeson's racial terrain. First, in the deluge of Black women's voices from her colleagues Nyla and Zahra to Lisa Delpit's studied prose speaking to the importance of building relationships with students, Kate still insists that she "doesn't care" when that gulf of knowing results in confrontation. In that moment, her feelings trump the information that she been known about pedagogical best practices, ignoring the gentle moral directives Tina and Aaron offered in the "escalate" vs. "de-escalate" handout from just fifteen minutes earlier. Even in the color-conscious progressive space where institutional narratives of racism are locally hegemonic, the enactment of policy is still overdetermined by the affective experiences of individual non-Black people, resulting in pattern of *emotionally contingent politics* whereby cerebral commitments to racial justice are rendered unstable by non-Black people's visceral commitment to order.

Second, there is an active *denial of Black suffering* indexed by her opposition to "providing therapy in the hallway." From a rudimentary labor perspective, a teacher's contract involves only so many hours for so many tasks, and the chronic underfunding of California's schools ensures that far too many tasks are packed into far too few hours. However, Kate was not arguing that she didn't have the skills or time to effectively counsel students. Instead, her remarks and her pedagogy more broadly position DeAndre and them in what Saidiya Hartman and Frank Wilderson call the "position of the unthought" (2003). Her declaration that "I will not think about your trauma" in the context of a racial

slave-estate built and maintained through violence effectively means ‘I will not think about *you*,’ thus evacuating the possibility of a Black subject in the sociopolitical field of the school. Kate then reminds us of the ruse of agency in the afterlife of slavery: “Get into the classroom, that is your only choice.”

Finally, Kate engages *xi* to legitimize her disciplinary approach. To rationalize her *#whitefeels*¹¹ and the denial of Black subjectivity, Kate positions Robeson as a colonial settlement in which she has rightful dominion. Rather than a benevolent vision resonant with the “Community, Social Justice, Independent Thinkers” mission of Robeson, Kate here advances a plainly colonial view of the school space: “This is not your school – it is our school.” Employing the spatial settler strategy of possessive nomenclature (“read the name on the door”) and then using that name to justify ownership of the land, Kate then drafts the rest of the staff to join forces with her – “we *all* need to flex on this.” Her inclusion of all staff members in her colonial imperative follows the logic of the settler-slave estate in which all white folks are settlers, regardless of their current class position (Smith 2006). In the afterlife of slavery, this ubiquity of enforcement has transmogrified into the figure of the white police officer, whose authority is embodied in every white person (Martinot & Sexton 2003). Slippage, though, is primary in this kind of assertion of authority, which perhaps amplifies its expression.

¹¹ #WhiteFeels, closely related to #WhiteTears, is a hashtag used by race-conscious social media users to highlight the fragility of white liberal allyship, and to more broadly critique the centering of white people’s emotional experiences at the expense of material costs to Black lives and lives of color. For more on #WhiteFeels, see Damon Young, “White Tears, Explained for White People Who Don’t Get It” (2015).

Kate is unaware of her relative privilege during her diatribe, not only in the obvious racial and geographic sense, but also of her classed position in the uneasy hierarchy of the staff. Not every adult could tell kids to “read the name on the door because lower paid adults like paraprofessionals and AmeriCorps interns who did not have a teaching credential or a master’s largely had to share classrooms or migrate from one room to another to beg space to work with students, or were charged with the physical maintenance of the space itself. What, too, does it mean for Kate to recruit this multiracial room of adults, some Frisco natives, some transplants, some Black, and some wishing they were, to the project of “flexing” in the hallways? As I discuss in the next section, while a broad swath of members of the school community engage in racial mapping, they do so from different vantage points in the social topography, resulting in vastly different renderings of the grounds.

This colonial stance also extends into the space of The City. During our one-to-one interview, I asked Kate about her experience living in the traditionally Black Western Addition neighborhood. She abdicated any role in gentrification, because in the 'Moe there was only one new bar that had opened during her tenure, and that the Divisadero business district was still “pretty sparse.” The fact that her residence, along with hundreds of other out-of-town renters *preceded* and indeed facilitated the slew of new restaurants on Divisadero (including one that specializes in [delicious] five dollar toast) eludes her. At the moment of her “Apocalypse” outburst, Kate lived in the Mission District, where private Google buses have helped to transform the historic Latinx neighborhood

into a bedroom community for Silicon Valley. Kate's racial map of Frisco omits her agency as an actor, and pulls the city out of its historical context, thus defying space-time. Her presence is analogous to anyone else's, and her "cheap" \$1700 rent is happenstance, rather than design.

Yeah, so far it's been, like, "oh, my neighbors are Latin." It hasn't been like I'm displacing somebody because I'm white. It's just that I'm renting this place, but you could have rented this place because it's cheap and it's not really very nice.

In order to accomplish her feat, Kate invokes her rights as an autological subject (Povinelli 2006), an actor unencumbered by history or relationality who functions as the basic building block of liberal civil society. As an aside, a year later Kate was no longer living in the Mission or teaching at Robeson, not because she had been pushed out for her approach, but because she left the K-12 classroom to embark on a career in educational policy.

While the comparison between hallways and plantations may seem grandiose, reading across space-time is a crucial tactic for writing Black futures. When we think of the contemporary public school as a plantation site, the easy move is to create an analogy between cruel masters/racist school staff on the one hand, and trapped slaves/impoverished students on the other. First, my assertion (in keeping with theorists of antiblackness) is that slavery is not an analogy for the present, but an ongoing structural relation from which we are still seeking relief. Thus, any rhetorical moves that position present carcerality and dispossession as "like slavery" or even as *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander 2010) inadvertently assert the finishedness of the slave-estate, and reinforce the

hegemonic narrative of Emancipation as a truth rather than a promise.

Second, in the Robeson context, the founders and school leaders not only acknowledge structural racism, but go further to deploy Robeson's curriculum, disciplinary practices, and governance structure as tools in a struggle for social justice. Because of this political commitment, Robeson staff and even students and families are asked to read Robeson as an *exceptional space*, a zero gravity chamber immune from the gravitational pull of systemic oppression.

In Robeson's own promotional materials, the institution draws on the fantasy of prospective teachers:

One thing that is unique is that we are a school for social justice. Words like justice and equity get thrown around a lot here in the Bay Area, and sometimes it's hard to know exactly what people mean by them... Many working class families, especially African-Americans, are being driven out of the city by gentrification, and only 13 percent of San Franciscans are children, the lowest percentage of any major city in the country. One in 100 American adults is incarcerated (2.3 million people)—the highest rate and number in the world. And public policy supports these trends: In California, spending on prisons has skyrocketed for decades while public school spending languishes at 49th in the nation. Here at Robeson, we think social justice means acknowledging the oppression inherent in this context, and making the deliberate choice to be part of the solution.

Because of its spatial location, Robeson discursively functions as an exception nested within another - a progressive sanctuary of liberation pedagogy in the nation's symbol of liberalism - San Francisco, whose literal 'Sanctuary City' status seems to set it apart from the imperatives of nationalism and empire. Frisco, of course, is itself nested in California, the drought stricken paradise where the

globe's dreams come true. But sadly, there is no sanctuary from a world held together by the gravity of the violable Black body. Rather than render Robeson as a bounded antiblack space, I want to re-map Robeson and other progressive dystopian spaces like it as coordinates in a global antiblack space. Its terrain is contiguous with Ferguson and New York, with Charleston and McKinney, with Santo Domingo and Capetown.

At the same time, we need to remap multiracial modes of contemporary progressivism into the continental reach of white supremacy and antiblack racism. Each of the Robeson staff and school leaders that I have worked with over the past decade are genuinely and unequivocally committed to a vision of racial equity. However, that commitment fails to the extent that they continue to see themselves and their school as working *outside* the bounds of systemic racism, rather than always already ensconced within it. How though, is this nested exception experienced by those of us who manifest the afterlife of the slave, while wearing the guise of authority?

Not all Settlers are Masters: Uneven Geographies of Power

Each person who pushes through Robeson's heavy steel door navigates its racial landscape, but their different vantage points in the social topography result in vastly different renderings of the grounds. Part of how these vantage points are constructed is through everyday grammars of belonging: "*their* neighborhoods," "*our* school," "*my* classroom," and the like. Possessive discourses are a tool for staff members to make positive claims and exhibit pride

about student achievement, as well as a method of creating meaning through discourses of distance and proximity. Wrought with tension, these kind of claims on spaces and bodies seek to establish narratives of duty and filiality, but can be met with wariness, particularly across social locations of race.

Such ambivalence was on display at the first Black staff caucus-cum-interview I convened in my classroom, complete with vegan Black eyed peas, mustard greens and cornbread warmed on hot plates I borrowed from Evelyn, the freshman science teacher. Simone, a middle-class Black math teacher raised in The City, maintained a diplomatic tone, in keeping with her role as a bridge between staff factions, couching her critique in “not all” rhetoric and using the “I statement” format hegemonic in liberal-progressive dialogue.

Simone: It’s not every teacher, but I feel like sometimes people assume negative intent when they see a Black kid. We have a lotta Black students who are very hungry for Black community. They not only kick it with each other, but try to have solidarity with each other. How they frame that in their little 15 and 14-year-old minds is a whole different thing! But when they see a teacher coming down the hallway, even if it’s me, or if it’s a white teacher, you can feel that tension with Black students, like “what is he or she gonna say to me?” It’s like this constant bucking against - it’s something that’s been institutionalized throughout their whole education. I think teachers do it subconsciously, thinking “what are they up to? Are they up to no good? Why are they being loud?”

Zahra: Loud voices! That’s another thing that’s getting on my nerves – that people assume that just cause a kid is being loud that they are doing something wrong!

Simone's attention to how "bucking against" can manifest in reaction to the Teacher role, whether it is played by herself or by white staff members is central. Rather than attributing this tension to simply student resistance or race neutral 'boundary testing', by linking it in her narrative to a certain nascent Black solidarity among young people, Simone helps to pull apart anti-black racism, and its attendant "black solidarity" from self-evident Black bodies. The fact that students buck against her as a Black teacher does not undermine the notion of their actions being racialized, which is an interpretation in line with multiculturalist liberalism (Cousins, 1999). Instead, it is an example of how Black teachers struggle through tactics of both covert subversion and overt confrontation. For instance, duty-driven directives like Kate's "*we* need to flex on this" can have a counterintuitive impact on Black teachers; Cousins (1999) noted that when increased policing was desired, "such coercion of teachers, especially those who had tenure, generated increased empathy and acquiescence toward students and their behavior" (306).

At Robeson, this increased empathy was not only manifest by Black teachers, but also by some Frisco native NBPOC¹² and white staff members who had variously been 'blackened' by dint of their use of Black English, familiarity with City geographies, and predilection to call a spade its true name, even when it was "cracker." Josue was chief among them - notorious for refusing to count down outside his classroom and harboring hallway wanderers in his class during preps, he used his social location as a City born Pinoy to build connections with

¹² NBPOC is an abbreviation for non-Black people of color.

Black students and families. Further, Simone refers to the impulse of refusal as being institutionalized in Black children throughout their education, but its important to highlight that the [nonblack] teachers subconscious suspicions that she names have also been shaped through institutional processes.

Zahra and Simone's comments come in a broader national context of increased militarization and police presence in schools, particularly those serving Black and Latinx youth (Meiners 2010, Tuzzolo & Hewitt, 2006). The past two decades years have seen the emergence of the school-to-prison pipeline as the dominant critical framework for problematizing harsh disciplinary measures in urban schools, with California as a common case study given its infamy as the carceral capital of the US (Gilmore, 2007). These critiques infuse Robeson's institutional common sense, with Simone's stats class even using racially disproportionate incarceration rates as a topic for learning how to apply the mathematical skill of probability. For several years after a fight broke out in the school's second year, Aaron had brokered a deal with the school police assigned by the SFPD to cover Robeson that they park down the hill and walk up if they had business in the building, rather than have a cop car in the parking lot that could make students and their families feel unwelcome in the school space. Like the promotional materials declare, Robeson wants to be "part of the solution" to oppression. However, all these signals of Robeson's exceptionalism have failed to actually make Robeson an exception to the rule of Black punishment. Instead, it persists as a manifestation of the school-prison nexus (Meiners 2010).

When put in the context of the other high schools in the district, Robeson's overall 6% suspension rate for students across race puts it in the middle of the pack. The suspension rate spikes to 20% for Black students, signaling a major discrepancy in practice, but one that is still normative in San Francisco - five schools have higher suspension rates for Black students, the two highest at 50% and 49% respectively. However, Robeson actually is exceptional in one arena: with a population of 24% Black students and 80% of student suspensions being for Black students, *Robeson has the most disproportionate suspensions of Black students in the city* out of all nineteen public high schools serving students in the 2012-13 school year. As could be surmised, this disproportionality in punishment is not equitably distributed. Even though Robeson's Latinx student population was 54%, only 13% of suspensions went to Latinx students that year at Robeson. How, then, do we reconcile Robeson's exceptionally punitive disciplinary practices with its institutional narratives of exception? What are the mechanisms that allow Robeson schoolpeople to continue to celebrate the institution as a social justice space? Further, how do Black folks navigate the contradiction inherent to Robeson's progressive carcerality?

When I asked Tina, the Asian-American co-principal to account for the disproportionate number of behavioral referrals and suspensions meted out to Black students at Robeson, she responded at first with a hesitation out of keeping with her self-described 'alpha Scorpio' demeanor. Tick-ticking her rhinestone speckled acrylic nails on the side of her walkie-talkie, she equivocated, "Um, I

think it's... I think it's culturally... respo-.. I think it's the fact that... .”

Dropping her hands onto the table, she leveled with me.

I think it's racism. I was trying to think of a different... but I think it's racism. I don't mean it as a negative way. I think folks who didn't grow up predominately in African-American culture find high volume extremely disrespectful, whereas my family is very loud. And so, I, although find it annoying, don't find it necessarily, like, disrespectful. I think that folks do have an emotional reaction to volume, and our Black students are loud. It's interesting. When folks write a referral, I see why they're writing it. A lot of times, the word 'volume' comes up, like inappropriate volume. For *you*. That *you* find inappropriate.

For Tina to say that she didn't mean racism in a “negative way” means she is using a notion of racism that is not synonymous with intentional bigotry and hatred. Her racially coded, indirect language choices allow her to name systemic racism without naming racists. The phrase “folks who didn't grow up in African-American culture” stands in for whiteness, or perhaps for those allied with it - she herself, as a Chinese-American raised in alabaster white Colorado, wasn't raised around any Black people at all, and yet she doesn't feel assaulted by raised voices. Further, by saying “my family is very loud,” Tina reaches back to racist caricatures of Chinese people as noisy and uncouth (Shah 2001) as a source of kinship with Black people. That these “folks” have an “emotional reaction” that leads to disproportionate policing and punishment of Black children points again to the outsize role nonblack affective experiences of blackness play in shaping the practices of progressive political projects.

By leaning on “you” several times, she enacts a style of administrating white (and whitened) teachers that asks them to take personal responsibility for their disciplinary impulses, rather than lodge the weight of their complaint onto the bodies of students. Tina rehearsed this move of turning the lens back onto teachers over and over during her first year as an administrator. The tactic was quite effective, and in one case led to Mr. Agusalim leaving Robeson because she refused to suspend a student over his feelings. Tina continued with her analysis, shifting toward the pedagogical responsibilities entailed in assuming white middle-class norms as disciplinary limits.

If we’re gonna define what appropriate volume is, then we have to be explicit about it. What is the appropriate volume, and how are we going to teach that to students, because they’re using this ‘inappropriate volume’ when they’re outside of school, and it would be actually completely appropriate and acceptable for some of them.

Part of what happens here is that the “we” and “they” Tina is operationalizing do indeed account for how the boundaries of appropriateness are racialized, but they also homogenize the Robeson staff into a “we” that subscribes to bourgeois white notions of propriety. When laid up against the tendency toward punishment, Black Robeson staff can be pushed from the safety of “we” to the target of “they” at any point during their workday, reflecting the tenuousness of multiracial alliance under the heading of “teacher.” Emergent from this tenuous position straddling boundaries in the racial landscape, Black staff members shared about a sense of hypervigilance that they brought to work with them.

Zahra, a mid-twenties Black woman who grew up in various towns throughout the Bay Area, made a link between the positive connection she is able to have with Robeson youth, and the sense of exposedness she felt as a result of that association with students. This was only her first year working at Robeson full-time, and often her relative youth, along with her role as a guidance counselor rather than an academic teacher, made her a target for other staff to pull rank.

Like in my classroom, if I have my door open and like we are laughing and joking and singing something and it's after the bell, I'm thinking, 'is that going to be a problem?' And it has been a problem. Last week there was an interaction in my classroom with Mr. Agusalim and one of the students, he busted in after the student and was like, "Where's your pass?" And he was asking me if he had showed me his pass. And I was like, "No, I knew he was in my room, but I'm helping another student and I'll get to him in a second." But he ignored me and said to the student in a clearly angry way, like, "Well, where's your pass. I just talked to you." And the student escalated then too. So there is a certain level of policing that I feel on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Agusalim, projected a sense of self-importance so great that most of the staff, save his two or three friends and factional allies, referred to him as "Mr. Agusalim" even in the casual environment of Robeson where the principals went by first names to fellow staff members. A child of middle-class Indonesian immigrants, Mr. Agusalim had moved to San Francisco from the Midwest and often functioned as the political and pedagogical advocate of "law and order" solutions to Robeson's ills. Here, his drive to monitor Black children's movement was so powerful that it dissolved the boundaries around Zahra's classroom,

neutralizing her authority in her own space and literally embodying police presence in the ostensibly safe space of the classroom. The Black teacher's classroom, invaded in this way by a carceral presence, becomes indistinguishable from the MUNI trolley car boarded by transit cops looking to ticket those without passes, or from the New England boarding house full of fugitive slaves, or from public housing apartments in the Sunnydale projects down the hill, subject to inspection by a social worker on a whim.

The connection to bondage is one made over and over by Black Robeson folks across boundaries of staff/student, professional class/working class, and native/transplant. Maurice, a Frisco native and student wellness advocate in his early twenties, talked about his desire to be “free.”

Sometimes I have to catch myself, cause I wanna be free too. Sometimes the kids are singin in the hallway, and I'll start singin with em – they need to be conscious of their volume, sure, but shut em down? No! But I have to be careful because I don't want other staff to be questioning me like, “how is he setting an example if he is just like the kids?” If I see a teacher that's not of my race, I will be different, because that's the way I grew up. If I see someone of another race, I feel like I have to hold more of a standard.

Rather than name whiteness, Maurice used “not of my race” to index a Black/non-Black framework for how he operationalizes his code switching, or the imperative to “be different” upon sight of a nonblack colleague. Further, by saying he “wanna be free too,” Maurice positioned Black Robeson youth in proximity to that freedom. While it could be thought of as if the young people are already free, and he wants to join them there by singing, his phrasing also leaves

open the interpretation of “wanna” as the key link between Maurice and the hallway denizens - just like they *wanna be free*, he does too, and so starts singing that freedom song to the tune of the Jacka, Erk tha Jerk, or whichever other Bay Area rapper had dropped a hot single that month.

Simone built on Maurice, articulating a more fully actualized notion of freedom in relation to the demands of the racial landscape. Like him, she was also born and raised in the City, and attended elite magnet schools as a kid.

But it’s hard because it’s still important for us to be free and manifest who we truly are with our students *and* at the same time manifest great thinking. Sometimes those misunderstandings between Black and nonblack staff suppress that energy that we need. I was an undergrad math major, and there was no one in my department who was black. My idea of being professional, of being mathematical, was completely shaped by that environment.

Expressing an ethos that emphasizes the “warm” in the “warm demander” pedagogy celebrated by Delpit, Simone refused to separate Black excellence and Black ratchetry. Her classroom was one where she combined languages and habitus across class and race, mixing in bits of Tagalog and AAVE into her instruction around mathematical concepts, striking bus stop poses and Instagram duck faces during a lesson. She located the Black/non-Black divide as a site for “misunderstanding” DeAndre as a scholar instead of a troublemaker. While Simone usually articulated her politics in the frame of the schoolhouse, her comments have much broader implications. Her narration of being isolated in her blackness in intellectual spaces recalls the impulse to solidarity that she discussed among loud students in the hallway, as well as Robeson’s contiguity

with other academic spaces governed by white norms, even in the absence of white bodies. Internalized behavioral norms resulting in hypervigilance and a longing for embodied Black liberty are two ways that Robeson's racialized carceral logics land on the bodies of Black adults, and both inform the broader racioscape traversed by each person in the building.

Frisco Fugitivity: La Perruque and the Apocalypse

Twelve feet wide, 50 yards long - Robeson's corridors are spatial containers for the encounter between the state and the body, and yet we must pay as much attention to the 'when' as to the 'where' of Frisco's racial map. Time and temporality are what transform space into distance, line into boundary, stasis into movement. Only by holding both space (geography, body) and time (history, memory) in the same frame can we begin to trace the travel of Black and nonblack subjects across Robeson's racial terrain. The temporal can be viewed as a zone of opportunity for subaltern subversion. In lieu of the spatial strategies of the "proper" - owning a condo instead of living at in the precarity of a Section 8 subsidy, having one's name printed on top of a classroom door - the ever improper Other must engage temporal tactics; "because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time - it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' Whatever it wins, it does not keep" (de Certeau 1984, xix). In this light, we need to think more about the bodies who escape into the hall, through ever more crafty methods of leaving class - and even those adult bodies

who seek their own freedom in the hall space under the cover of teacher authority.

For those who “do not have a place” to seize time, they have to reshape the content of that time in their own interests. Writing about the practices of popular culture in the twilight of Fordist-Keynesianism, Michel de Certeau uses a factory metaphor to flesh out the idea of ‘*la perruque*,’ in which “the worker who indulges in *la perruque* actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit” and is able “to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through *spending* his time in this way” (de Certeau 1984, 25-26). While the relation to time seems kin to the whimsy of DeAndre’s wanderings, the disorienting wealth of deindustrialized San Francisco, flush with financial-industry cash but all but unliveable for the few remaining Black families seems irreconcilable with a political economy based on near-full employment in manufacturing. Given that gap, what kinds of work can *la perruque* do to help us understand the re-purposing of time in the liminal spaces of Robeson? As a state site, Robeson is pressed upon to produce goods, not in the sense of the bolts of cloth or cartons of processed foods that are churned out of a factory, but in the form of reams and reams of paper, gigabytes of data that represent student achievement: test scores, attendance rolls, graduation rates and college eligibility and matriculation stats. Giggles, tears, and skirmishes in the hall will never show up in reports for the Department of Education, and vie for each minute that could other wise be spent analyzing Gloria Anzaldúa quotes, breaking down the asthma

rates in Bayview-Hunter's Point, or otherwise *on the job* at Robeson, however subversive that job appears to be. Thus, through *la perruque* Robeson folks in the halls challenge the very notion of productivity itself as the basis for Black belonging in the school space. Who better than the descendent of a slave to devise ways to unshackle themselves from the task at hand?

Following this line of inquiry, are these kids what we might call the “functional surrogates” of fugitive slaves (Wacquant 2002)? If we are seriously engaging the plantation as an analytic, do Robeson students transform the hallway into a maroon space? What then does that say about the value of class time, especially when the classes they are cutting are teaching Fanon, Anzaldúa and Manning Marable? Is the vision of liberatory public school serving Black kids always already doomed? On the other hand, what can maroonage mean in the contemporary US, where the map of unceded native territory is coterminous with the borders of the settler state? Does it mean that instead of fleeing into the negotiated safety of land under indigenous control, the flight of settled-slaves takes us beyond the state?

Given that maroon spaces were historically autonomous alternate social spaces for Black survival, lasting from months to years, ensconced and heavily guarded in forest thickets and mountain ranges across the Americas, it seems like the moment-to-moment tactics at work in this chapter, are not akin to maroonage.¹³ Instead, like the hallways themselves, actually occupy a liminal

¹³ My conception of maroonage as described here has been greatly enriched through conversations with Page May and Jasson Perez, who are Black activists and organizers working in Chicago.

space between liberation and captivity – the peripatetic space of fugitivity.

Tactics, in the Certeauian sense, take *time*, both in the possessive and durative senses. Robeson's hallways are a snapshot of blackness in motion, in one moment traveling in syncopation with the "ten, nine, eight!" booming down the hall, in another dancing away from the non-event of 1863 toward an asymptote of the possible.

In this sense, movement serves as a mechanism that seeks to fill the gulf between what we might call "freedom," or liberation, and "emancipation," or formal inclusion in the [late] liberal state. The trajectories of Robeson's schoolpeople into and through the halls function as a kind of Frisco fugitivity, a flight that in its search for a landing itself manifests the definitional longing of blackness – an embodied declaration that like Maurice, we "wanna be free, too." Made more poignant as a counterspace to Robeson's left-progressive curriculum, this fleshy Black flight is not articulated as a politics qua politics – a "we demand more Black studies" or "hire more teachers of color at Robeson now!" which requires the [illusion of] access to the proper – but rather as a ratchetry that is its refusal.¹⁴ Not in opposition to Robeson but not *not* in opposition to Robeson, the corridors are the exception's exception, a space filled with the excess of those without access to place.

Restlessness here is a Reconstruction practice – a loving discontent that is "the general antagonism to politics looming outside every attempt to politicise," in this case just on the other side of the door (Harney & Moten 2013, 20). In that

¹⁴ The dimensions of this refusal are further explored through the rubric of *willful defiance* in the fifth chapter.

sense, Kate might have been right when she said it should be the Apocalypse – the end of the world – for Robeson students to be in the hallway. What she may not have realized is that it was *her world as she knows it* that they are hinting toward ending. By being *out* of pocket, these ratchet young fugitives spatialize the abolitionist imperative to incivil disobedience, and remind us of the painful naiveté of respectability as a strategy for Black citizenship. In the next chapter, I turn to the gendered dimensions of incivility at Robeson, and institutional modes of removal for those to both the right and the left of its progressive tightrope.

5.

Escaping Emancipation:
Black Girl Ordinary and the Borders of Belonging

The toes of Cyarea’s kiddie size Nike Air Force 1’s squeaked as she dragged them across the speckled linoleum floor.

“Go on ahead,” said Jeff, “we ain’t got all day.”

Craning her neck in order to make sure he could see her rolling her eyes at all six-plus feet of him, she exaggeratedly picked up her feet and speed-scooted toward the principal’s office. Jeff, the security “advisor” on duty, looked over at me on my perch at a student desk in the hall, and broke into a wide grin. He shook his head and tried to suppress laughter at Cyarea’s comedic timing. As a symptom of the faulty infrastructure endemic to SFUSD buildings, half the classrooms at Robeson had radiators that never turned off, even on the sunniest of days, while the rest of the rooms were jerryrigged with heaters teachers brought from home because the radiators never turned on. My room was one of the former. I had a plastic chair with flip-down desktop stationed outside the door for myself or a sweaty student to escape to whenever the room got too hot. There, as I graded papers or fiddled with fieldnotes, I got to see the parade of smaller and larger beings rounding the corner near my room as they made their way along the square path created by Robeson’s four hallways.

Cyarea seemed to come past at least once a day during her freshman year,

usually on her own, but sometimes escorted by Jeff, the brawny school security guard who spent most of the last ten years as a bouncer at gay clubs. His round cocoa face sparkled with steel hoops in his eyebrow, septum and even a labret piercing poked through his beard. The imposing “don’t even think about stepping to me” air to his self-presentation was scented with a queer impishness exemplified by his nickname “Sweetie Pie,” also the moniker of a weekly party he hosted at a local bear bar.¹ Jeff’s official title as *student advisor* was creatively designed by the principals so that Robeson could avoid hiring a security guard from the district pool of union security guards, notorious for corruption and incompetence and who, in the first two years of Robeson committed acts of sexual harassment and fomented conflict among students. Jeff’s position had more hours per week than typical SFUSD guards, was better paid, and most significant in terms of institutional governance, had a new restorative justice-based job description that allowed site-based hiring, rather than being shuttled through the central office like the Special Education and counseling positions often were.

Even with the fancy title, the piercings, the blackness, the queerness, and the Sweetie love, there were still times that Jeff served the same function of school security across the US - removing mostly Black children from classrooms and delivering them to their administrative fate. While Robeson’s student body is majority Latinx, Latinx students are drastically underrepresented in

¹ A ‘bear bar’ is a fixture of a particular strain of gay men’s leather culture in which copious body hair is a valued erotic and social asset. The bar functions as a gathering space and a alternative node of sexual geography.

suspensions and referrals at Robeson. The school had the highest rate of suspensions for Black students in The City - though only 1 in 4 Robeson students are Black, 80% of suspensions go to Black students, including Cyarea, escorted as she was down the hall past the graffiti portraits of Che Guevara and Malcolm X to sit and wait outside the principals' office.

This chapter explores the politics of belonging at Robeson as a way of rendering the limitations of carceral progressivism as a liberatory project. Put another way, who belongs at Robeson, and who decides? Distinct from the internal, psychic experience of belonging, I use Nira Yuval-Davis's sociological notion of the politics of belonging, which "involves not only the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers but also their contestation and challenge by other political agents" (2006:205). Her approach is chiefly informed by struggles over national citizenship in post- 7/7 Britain, and helps to provide a framework that accounts for staggering power differentials while still affording space for their vulnerabilities and transmutations. I dial into a more intimate scale of analysis here to develop an ethnographic account of the politics of belonging as enacted along the axes of race and gender at Robeson.

I situate this account in the field of Black girlhood studies, and demonstrate how the politics of belonging exposes the gap between pedagogies of liberation and pedagogies of emancipation as inscribed onto the flesh of Black girls. As conceptual frames, I engage flesh, loudness, and geontology as topographical markers in this exploration. Along with Cyarea, I discuss Tarika,

another unruly Black girl who was eventually asked to leave Robeson, along with two of the teachers who led the charge to get rid of young people like them. Ultimately, both the teachers were also pushed out of the school, joining Cyarea and Tarika as those who did not belong, the exceptions to the exceptional space of Robeson. The struggle within Robeson to manage the right-wing elements within their leftist space and while also neutralizing insurgence from below, reveals the deep imbrication of multiracial progressivism with liberal retrenchment, an old story in the City by the Bay.²

Feeling the Flesh

Cyarea's Peter Pan frame folded onto splintered wood chair older than she is, neither the first nor the last to sit in it that day. The collection of [un]disciplined Black bodies that come to wait outside the principals' office manifest the liminality of *flesh*, suspended as they are, from the real time of the school day. In this section, I explore flesh as a hermeneutic to follow the racialized transit between belonging and exile traveled by Black beings under carceral progressivism. Offered as a searing intervention by Hortense Spillers in her ovaric essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), the flesh has been taken up by scholars in Africana Studies and queer studies as a foil for dominant discourses of gender, the body and the human. Spillers (1987) distinguishes the "body" from the "flesh" such that the former is

² See Christina Hanhardt's *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood and the Politics of Violence* for a historiography of liberalism's shifting tactics in twentieth century San Francisco.

the paradigmatic subject of the social world – a normative “person” with access to citizenship and genealogy. Conversely, “flesh” is the sentient object manifest as the slave – she who can be a literal *belonging of* a person proper and thus never can *belong to* herself, much less to a genealogy or to the body politic. In this sense, *flesh* invokes a kind of kinlessness endemic to blackness in the New World, so vertical ties across time are forcibly supplanted with horizontal ties across space, the nexus out of which Black social life is forged. Spaces like Frisco, like Ferguson, like Ponce, like Robeson, like the Sunnydale housing projects, like the pages of this manuscript.

Building on the tandem intellectual genealogies of Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, Alex Weheliye’s *Habeas Viscus* (2014) is a book length slaying of the genre Human. Rendered as what we might imagine as the animate manifestation of Biggie’s *Life After Death* (1997) the flesh

operates as a vestibular gash in the armor of Man, simultaneously a tool of dehumanization and a relational vestibule to alternate ways of being that do not possess the luxury of eliding phenomenology with biology. Not an aberration, yet excluded, not at the center of being but nevertheless constitutive of it, the flesh is ‘that ether, that shit that make your soul burn slow’ as well as a modality of relation. (Weheliye 2014:44)

Riffing on the diasporic imperative to “make a dolla out of fifteen cent” (Shakur, Brooks & Jacobs 1993), *flesh* is the script and its flippage, the wound and the platelets that rush to close it, the pigeonhole and the escape hatch. Vestibular in form as well as content, Weheliye’s rendition also allows us to understand flesh as a *spatial relation to/as blackness*.

This fleshy relationality, then, in its most visceral form – may be kin [even in its kinlessness] to queer theorist and anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli’s (2006) notion of *carnality*: the “socially built space between flesh and the environment” (7). Carnality erupts in Robeson’s hallways, doodled into margins, cryptically texted during a class lecture, pulled aside when Cyarea gets a talking-to from a teacher-turned-auntie. Much like Spillers’ flesh/body functions as an asymmetrical opposition that helps us to apprehend blackness, Povinelli differentiates carnality from corporeality, the juridical-statal lens that seeks to make the body visible in late liberalism’s grid of power – subject of/to the illusions of settler democracy. Carnality and corporeality sit diagonally from the binary relationship between the *autological subject* and the *genealogical society*, with autology functioning as the domain of the conventional capital S self of the Enlightenment, while “genealogy is a specific reckoning of time and the human(ist) subject of reason; genealogical inheritances threaten to determine the present by the past” (Povinelli 2006:200). Time is reckoned over and over in the halls, classrooms, and meeting spaces of Robeson, in an ill-fated attempt to wrest a legibly autological Subject from the hoods of Southeast San Francisco – to conjure a body in the place of flesh. As we will see later in this chapter, this reckoning is often happens in the discursive register of belonging.

Returning to “An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers *been* demonstrated the inadequacy of both autological (she who is owned cannot choose for herself) and genealogical (there is no inheritance for she who can be inherited) frames for understanding Black subjects in the US. Further, as we

exist in and out of what she calls the “enforced state of breach,” as embodied vestibules for the wealth of others, Black folks are also *flesh out of time*, given that the inability for an enslaved woman to claim the child she births as ‘her own’ alters any notion of how genealogy could function in this hemisphere. Flesh is that glitch in the Matrix, the asterisk that undoes centuries of sentences, a Berlantian ‘impasse’ that holds open the broken promise of the now, holds it *in the break*.³

The body/flesh distinction that Spillers makes has been taken up by a generation of scholars across disciplines working on the intersections of race, capital, and the gendered body. Among them is visual studies scholar Nicole Fleetwood, who in her monograph *Troubling Vision* (2011s) uses the concept of *excess flesh* to describe the troubling presence of Black women’s bodies as a hypervisible foil to the normative field of vision. For her, “excess flesh is an enactment of visibility that seizes upon the scopic desires to discipline the Black female body through a normative gaze that anticipates its rehearsed performance of abjection”(112). Using examples from fine art, performance and popular culture, she focuses on circulated forms of blackness to track the libidinal economy of visibility. In some ways, the \$30,000 photographs of Renéé Cox and globally viewed music videos of Lil’ Kim occupy a wholly different field of inquiry than the circumambulations of a blackgirl in a Frisco school. However, the centrality of surveillance (of bodies, movement, premises) and monitoring (of academic performance, physical and emotional development, hearing and sight

³ Berlant, 2011; Moten, 2003

abilities) within contemporary public schools lends itself to the insights of visual and cinema studies scholarship.

As a heuristic, flesh allows us to discern between our sentient, agentic, brilliant beings, and the overdetermined genre of the western construct Human.

Tracing the outline of the juridical Human, Povinelli argues

the forms of equipment that compose the discursive constructions of materiality are constantly producing embodied life and unintegrated life at the same time. There is always a shaping and an errantness. The unintegrated, errant aspect of materiality is what I am calling carnality. (2011:109)

Errant [black] [girl] flesh spills forth in excess of the discourses that seek to locate it, to know it, to translate what Frank Wilderson calls its “noncommunicability” (Wilderson 2010:59). Shift the scalar view and Robeson itself is errant – this community based school, founded by Black , Latinx and Polynesian parents in partnership with dissident white and Asian-American educators, where district mandated textbooks gather dust in a closet while teachers build their own curricula about US imperialism in the Phillipines and mass incarceration. This is not the school reform of Teach for America. At the same time, there is another mode of being out of step at work within the walls of Robeson, one embodied by staff members whose blunt disciplinary approach is out of step with the kinder, gentler carcerality privileged by organizational leadership.

As I charted in more detail at the opening of this manuscript, Robeson is a nested exception – a especially progressive school within the especially

progressive city of San Francisco, which itself is part of the nationally progressive exception of the state of California. But what comes of the errantries that are difficult to incorporate into this neat ascension of scales? Elsewhere I have argued that a key strategy of contemporary progressive movements is *managing dissent*, whereby social justice non-profits provide avenues for highly visible but functionally limited critique of the state by directly impacted communities (Shange 2012). The focus on performative spaces like rallies and press conferences allows for community members to have a cathartic experience of “speaking truth to power” without shifting the balance of that power. When applied on the institutional scale, rather than at the municipal level, we can see a similar pattern at work at Robeson as the school leadership attempt to manage dissent from within. In order to maintain its position that is critical of and yet complicit with the late liberal state apparatus, Robeson must [appear to] cohere as a political unit, one unified around a clear articulation and practice of a progressive mission. Put another way, Robeson’s ability to successfully mobilize for change on a municipal and state scale beyond its walls was limited by the amount of institutional energy spent on managing errant forces within – whether they be out of pocket Black girls or draconian teachers intent on punishing them.

Black Girl Ordinary: An Exception to Exceptionality

Cyarea never stops moving, and aspires to dance in music videos like Ciara, the multiplatinum R&B star whose name she invokes every time a new teacher hesitates when they see the attendance roll. In my case, she jumped out

of her seat to do a quick 8-count footwork and gyration combination, announcing “duh, it’s pronounced... [chest pop, chest pop] *Ciara!*” Cyarea’s projection of self is, on the one hand, quotidian in its mass market ubiquity, and yet foreign to much of the staff of Robeson, which is dripping in what one teacher, Benita, called “Black alterity.”⁴ In contrast, Cyarea instantiates what we might call “Black girl ordinary,” a genre of *crisis ordinary*, which posits “the ordinary as an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on” (Berlant 2011:8). Within San Francisco, those pressures include gentrification, criminalization, and the grinding disorientation of having-been-a-slave. Ordinary in this sense is marked by the temporal – an impasse, a lacuna in the ongoingness of linear time. In this frame, Black girl ordinary is that which signifies on (but does not conform to) normative notions of gender through a performative blackness shaped by hip hop, social media, and conspicuous consumption: it is a mode of disidentification (Muñoz 1999). However, those of us who are Black girls, who have been Black girls, and who love Black girls know that there is nothing unremarkable about Cyarea, Ciara, or any other Black womanchild refusing to be disappeared at the margin of common sense.

⁴ Of the five Black classroom teachers who ever worked at Robeson, I was the only one with two Black parents. Three others had white mothers and Black fathers, and another had a Flipinx parent and Black parent. Even among the other folks of color on staff, mixed-ness was such the norm that one teacher called a POC caucus called at a staff meeting the “White Mamas Club.” Even within the black-on-both-sides staff, like myself, Zahra (college counselor), and Jeff (security advisor), our dreadlocs and Afropuffed bohemian look set us apart from normative notions of Black style.

Even ordinary Black girls is allergic to ordinary.

Cyarea's constant dancing, stomping, and booty popping in classrooms and hallways is a reminder of Aimee Cox's assertion that "choreography, in its most radical sense, can disrupt and discredit normative reading practices that assess young Black women's bodies as undesirable, dangerous, captive, or out of place" (28-9). *Black girl ordinary* stands in contrast to #blackgirlmagic, a circulated, selfied, carefree mode of Black femininity that has been critiqued for being limited to a light and curly stratum of bourgeois negroes (Shackleford 2015). It is an oxymoronic frame that centers a materialist reading of gendered Black self-making, while also critiquing the misogynoir⁵ that elides what is common to Black girls in order to elevate that which is seen as exceptional. Further, *Black girl ordinary* can also serve as a counterweight to what we might imagine as *Black boy special*, a category of reverence and urgency that has coalesced around a century of handwringing over the fate of Black men.

At Robeson, those hands are wrung to the tempo of respectability-driven anxiety about the hyperincarceration of Black men, and wipe away tears shed in staff meetings over having so few Black boys in a given graduating class. Only four young Black men crossed the stage at the 2013 and 2014 commencements, and a whopping seven out of the 56 graduates of 2015 were Black boys. Both non-Black and Black staff participated in the institutional focus on Black boys,

⁵ Coined by gender studies scholar Moya Bailey, "misogynoir" refers to anti-Black modes of misogyny that seek to denigrate or expel the bodies and voices of Black women. Misogynoir seeks to name the specificity of attacks on Black women without reinforcing the violences that maintain the category, and is purposively inclusive of trans and non-trans Black women, girls, and those who are perceived as such.

and some Black staff saw working with Black boys as central to their teaching identity. For instance, in a focus group I convened for Black Robeson staff, Nyla, a fair-skinned Robeson English teacher who had been in her position for nine years, recounted going to the mat for when her students were threatened by her fellow advisors with not being able to participate in the graduation ceremony: “they were saying two of my Black male advisees couldn’t walk onstage!” She ended up walking out of the meeting because “at that point I’m going to have a personal beef with you, and its not going to be professional.” Maurice, a young Black retention counselor and Frisco native in his early twenties, agreed: “I feel that. The graduation means so much for an African-American male, it’s like being drafted to the league or something.”

While both Nyla and Maurice lift up their concerns about Black boys, a closer look at achievement data from 2013-2016 reveals that Black girls did not fare much better. In the 2013 and 2014 graduations, only five Black girls graduated each year, compared to four Black boys. In 2015, when seven Black boys graduated, only *four* Black girls crossed the stage. Zahra, the college counselor, explained the gender differential in how Black children at Robeson were treated this way:

Because there’s this bleeding thing of like Black boys are not being educated and, you know all of these terrible things: they’re going to get caught up in the streets and all these different things. When a Black boy is completely off the Richter, but then shows some kind of promise or progress people are so ready to just grab him and coddle him in such a frustrating way. And I think for Black girls I don’t think there’s that much space. There is a fear associated with angry

Black women, like angry Black young girls, and I feel that folks don't necessarily know how to deal with that.

When “folks don't know how to deal,” what do they do? How do they rationalize their reaction to Black girl anger? What are the boundaries for belonging when there is “not that much space” for Cyarea and her homegirls? Zahra uses spatial language in rendering the terrain of racialized gender, one that I explore further in the rest of this chapter. First, I take a step back from the ethnographic rendering of Robeson to locate this discussion in the existing literature on Black girlhoods, ordinary and otherwise.

Hear Our Truths: Black Girlhood Studies

One of the first monographs coming out of the humanities to center the lived experience and cultural contribution of black girls is Kyra Gaunt's (2006) *The Games Black Girls Play*, which in many ways lays the groundwork for start of the burgeoning field of black girlhood studies, even as it also is a key text of hip hop feminisms. An early proponent Black girlhood studies as a disciplinary field of is Ruth Nicole Brown, who grounds much of her academic work in her role as a co-founder and advisor for the Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT) performance program created by and for young Black women in Urbana, Illinois. Through the practice and theory of SOLHOT, Brown conceives of Black girlhood as a “visionary, creative space of freedom,” indeed, a fount of Black girl genius (Brown 2013). Working in the tradition of SOLHOT, Dominique Hill (2016) asserts that transgression of both racial and gender norms is central to both being

a blackgirl and researching blackgirls. She, like Robin Boylorn (2013) use the neologism *blackgirl* to denote the mutual imbrication of blackness, gender, and coming of age. Several scholars have challenged the notion of Black girls as victims of rap music stereotypes by highlighting the agentic relationship that Black girls develop as critical consumers of hip hop (Clay 2012; Lindsey 2013; Love 2012).

Given the difficulty of locating Black girl lives in the archives of the past and present, Field, et al. (2016) lift up cultural geography as a methodological approach because it allows us focus on one local site of Black girlhood as a strategy of analysis. Marcia Chatelain's *South Side Girls* (2015), a study of young women in Chicago's experience of the Great Migration, is an excellent example of this approach, as is Aimee Cox's *Shapeshifters* (2014), an ethnography of young women living in and around a homeless shelter in Detroit. Cox highlights the role of non-profits and educational institutions as sites of Black girl self-making, one that Brown, et al., envision as a space to "stage Black girl utopias" (2016). My approach to Robeson is deeply indebted to Cox's work with the Fresh Start shelter, and though I focus more on the dystopian elements of Black girlhood, Brown, et al.'s notion of community organizations as "stages" is instructive.

Among activists and academics who work on and with schools, there is a growing awareness of the disproportionate targeting of Black girls in school discipline for behavioral concerns like disrespect (Crenshaw, Ocen & Nanda 2015), as well as the relative dearth of research and intervention efforts directed towards them as opposed to Black boys (Morris 2012; 2016). Connie Wun's

(2014; 2016) research on antiblackness, school discipline, and Black girls is among the first to apply the afterlife of slavery (Hartman 1997) as a heuristic to engage Black girl's educational experiences. Across this body of literature, researchers highlight the criminalization and pathologization of everyday Black girl practices on the one hand, and the multitude of strategies Black girls use to make space for themselves in hostile terrains. Hartman's oeuvre of work grounds both of these dynamics in the practice of chattel slavery, and in turn provides the central logic of this chapter.

Internalizing the Whip

As part of the project of exhuming the afterlife of slavery in the contemporary progressive movement, I read the gendered patterns of disciplinary logics at Robeson through the lens of Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) and reveal the policing of Black flesh at Robeson is to be a Reconstruction practice, with its roots at the nexus of chattel and choice. In particular, I pay attention to the policing of "ratchetness" as a superlative of *Black girl ordinary*, associated with loud, working-class Black bodies marked as female or feminine. Hartman's exegesis of Black female subjecthood before and after the formal abolition of slavery provides the notion of "burdened individuality" as a powerful analytic throughline from 1866 to 2015. Speaking to the contortion of subject and object manifest in unbound Black folks, burdened individuality highlights "the antagonistic production of the liberal individual, rights bearer and raced subject as equal yet inferior, independent yet servile,

freed yet bound by duty, reckless yet responsible, blithe yet brokenhearted.” (Hartman 1997, 121). Burdened individuality is useful here as a framework because it helps us pay attention to the shift in tactics, but not in power, that attended Jubilee.

The role of educators and freedmen’s schools in realizing this shift is crucial – Hartman’s work excavates what I am calling a “pedagogy of emancipation,” one overly concerned with the proper comport of freed slaves and committed to stoking an inner fire of duty and deference.

In freedman’s handbooks, the displacement of the whip can be discerned in the emphasis on self-discipline and policing. The whip was not to be abandoned; rather, it was to be internalized. The emphasis on correct training, proper spirit, and bent backs illuminated the invasive forms of discipline idealized as the self-fashioning of the moral and rational subject. (1997:140)

Certainly, it’s easy to see the link between the emphasis on proper spirit and the character training espoused in the official institutional discourse of a place like KIPP, the neoliberal school reform behemoth with its motto to students: “Work hard, Be Nice.” It’s harder in a place like Robeson, which as an organization is explicitly committed to liberation as a pedagogical outcome, and where staff members are well versed in the literature on the school to prison pipeline and are adamantly opposed to the privatization of education. However, I argue that it is in this bastion of state-funded progressivism, which is probably the best place to send your kid as a Black parent in San Francisco, that we can most clearly sense the sting of the lash, where pedagogies of emancipation mask themselves behind

the language of decolonial liberation. When we stitch the hermeneutic of the flesh onto the afterlife of slavery, we can feel the bruising contours of a *vestigial whip*, one holstered in the affective “sensorium of the present” (Berlant 2011:12) and yet reverberating through the fields of material survival with each crack.

At Robeson, the vestigial whip is revived in the policing of external affect – “does she really want to be here?” “He doesn’t seem like he is taking this seriously.” “I don’t believe that apology for a second.” Here, affective performance shapes belonging *in* and *to* a state-funded space. Significantly, these phrases are also common at zero tolerance charter schools, the political nemeses of Robeson, which went through a series of battles with the teacher’s and administrator’s unions to *not* become a charter. But yet both types of institutions function within the same libidinal economy that is repulsed by unruly blackness. What are the gendered dimensions of this unruliness? What happens to those overseers, I mean officers,⁶ who police too vigilantly, who don’t obey the affective guidelines for teaching staff, and who exhibit glee rather than rue when disciplining students? Can ratchet kids ever belong at Robeson, or are they always awaiting exile?

Lash Out Loud

⁶ The alliterative near-rhyme of “overseer” and “officer” was highlighted in rapper KRS-One’s 1993 single “Sound of the Police” (Parker 1993). In it he asks listeners to “check the similarity” across centuries. “The overseer rode around the plantation/ the officer is off, patrollin’ all the nation/ the overseer could stop you, ‘what you’re doing?’/ the officer will pull you over just as he’s pursuing/ the overseer had the right to get ill [rude]/ and if you fought back, the overseer had the right to kill/ the officer has the right to arrest’ and if you fight back they put a hole in your chest.” In two succinct bars of lyrics, KRS-One traces the unbroken line of carceral enclosures around Black life in the Americas.

Mr. Agusalim took in a long, officious sniff and cleared throat after his name was called by the Friend of the Chair in the latter half of the staff meeting. He was a veteran History teacher at Robeson in his mid-thirties, the child of Indonesian immigrants who wore a button-up shirt almost daily; today's selection a white and blue plaid, crisp against his burnished brown skin. While he spoke, the other twenty-odd teachers shifted their feet from side to side, cross and uncrossed legs and arms, and all cocked their heads toward him to listen somewhat impassively. Mr. Agusalim, as he was called by students and teachers alike, (save Tina, one of the co-principal, an incongruence we will return to), had insisted that he "just wanted to pop one thing in" to the facilitated reflective workshop about classroom management and disciplinary rationales. My field notes read "NOT ONE THING!! MANY A THING!! 4:26 solo talk time!!", scribbled in the margins next to his name, denoting the mismatch between his stated intentions of how long he speaks and how much space his diatribes took up in collective space. This one meandered through dismissals of "semantic differences," ultimately asserting "You need to be an authority in your classroom, otherwise, the alpha child will step and be that authority, and that is unacceptable." Josue, a Filipinx Frisco native and SSC member who often clashed with Mr. Agusalim during Humanities team meetings, raised his hand as if to interject.

Mr. Agusalim continued, looking directly at Josue.

"The reason why is if we are actually humanizing students who are coming from incredibly traumatized neighborhoods, a really fucked up society, and

messages that do not promote humanity at all, we cannot assume that—,” he trades in his elder statesman tenor for a sardonic soprano, “—just by giving them respectful gestures and being nice to them that they are going to all of a sudden automatically switch onto being positive members of you classroom community, school community, or any community at all.” Snarling his brow like SoCal⁷ rap legend Ice Cube, “the only message I feel like that sends out is, ‘oh, I’m gonna punk this motherfucker.’” Rebecca, the special education teacher who grew up white on a Black block in the city’s Bayview neighborhood, inhaled sharply and bit her lips into her mouth, while Kate, another white teacher from the east coast peppered in a churchly “mmhmm.”

Galvanized, he went on:

And I think we’re gonna get into these phases where, “well, I’m cool with this, but I won’t do that. This is against my moral code...” [repeated in the same high pitch as ‘respectful gestures’] It’s not a comfortable place standing in front of 25 kids who are looking to you – half of them to make sure they’re safe in your classroom, and the other half thinking of a different way they can side-rip – just derail the entire process and get a little attention for themselves. You are not going to walk away from class feeling like a million bucks, and that everything is hunky dory, and you are the best person in the universe and that you emanate love... *When you really step up to be the authority to help keep the quiet kids safe and the loud kids quiet, you don’t walk away from that experience feeling awesome.* You have to work through whatever comes up for you – the pain, the freakiness, all of that. Our *job* as teachers is holders of the safe space.

Mr. Agusalim uses the emotional archetype of a bleeding heart progressive as an

⁷ ‘SoCal’ and ‘down South’ are regional references to Southern California.

incisive tool of critique. Calling out the staff's liberal desire to feel like they "emanate love" as problematic, he tries to shift the conversation away from the needs of teachers and onto the needs of students facing street and state violence to be in a "safe space." However, a closer look reveals that he, too, centers his own affective experience in his disciplinary strategies. Mr. Agusalim positions a prototypical "alpha child" as his adversary, shaping them as a threat to his own masculinity with his guttural invocation, "I'm gonna punk this motherfucker." Importantly, many of the students he faced off with were young Black women, who are disproportionately disciplined for their failures to adhere to white middle-class feminine gender norms of docility, agreeability and the desire to please (Morris 2012, Meiners 2010). By invoking the specter of being "punked," Mr. Agusalim reveals how much his own ego is also at the center of his disciplinary theory, just as it is for the love emanaters he criticizes. Further, he also depicts a classroom in which *half* of the students are up to no good; just seeking attention in an effort to "derail the process." This is a marked departure from the pair of principals' refrain of "the same ten kids" – Mr. Agusalim imagines there are 120 of them. It is no error that roughly half the student body is Latinx, with the rest made up of Black and [blackened] Polynesian kids⁸, and a few Asian and white students. How, then do we imagine that the threatening half maps onto the student population? Or conversely, how does "quietness" map

⁸ As is explored more in Chapter One, the broader history and ongoing state of settler colonialism and state violence in the Pacific produces a racial geography in San Francisco where Polynesian communities, chiefly Samoan and Tongan, are assimilated into Black spaces like Sunnydale and Double Rock housing projects, and face many of the same structural vulnerabilities that Black Frisco denizens do.

onto this racioscape (Jackson 2005)?

Mr. Agusalim uses counterintuitive emotional markers to define the boundaries of safety, positioning the not-awesome-feeling teacher as a righteous border agent patrolling the boundaries of this safe space. He underscored the need for absolute authority in the classroom, even in the face of ambivalent emotions about playing that role. As Mr. Agusalim asserted, his job as an authority figure was to “keep the quiet kids safe and the loud kids quiet.” In his view, by being quiet, one performs deservingness, earning safety and subjecthood.

Loudness, though is not just about chatting in class – he is “keeping loud kids quiet,” – that syntactic construction means they stay ‘loud kids’ even when they are not talking, and indexes volume, both as muchness and noise, as excess and [lack of] access. Thus “loud” takes on an ontological rather than a audiological force, superimposed over other inherited categories of difference. Mr. Agusalim applies a Manichean logic to loudness - wherein to be loud/quiet functions as a dividing line between kept safe/kept safe from. Note, too, how Mr. Agusalim’s critique of loudness maps onto his own booming voice and its outsize influence on staff discussions at Robeson. To invoke hip hop foreparent KRS-One, if to be loud is to be a danger, “Who, who protects us from you?”⁹ The notion of loud blackness as a peril can be fatal, as it was for the teenager Jordan Davis whose body was riddled with bullets after a white man at the gas station found his music to be playing too loud. In order to be ‘kept safe’ in Mr.

⁹ Parker, Lawrence. 1993. “Black Cop.” *Return of the Boom Bap*. Album. Jive Records.

Agusalim's class, flesh must be subdued, quiet in the face of authority, lest its wincing at the lash attract too much attention. Even more so than any particular infraction – cutting class, stealing, talking back – the way a student behaves when confronted with adult criticism is central to determining their fate. Do they show what Hartman calls the “proper spirit and character?” Are they *acting like* a citizen?

Significantly, this affective sorting of proper from improper blackness interpellates all blacks in the building, the discourse functioning in excess of its putative goal of ‘supporting’ students. Zahra flips Mr. Agusalim's notions of both ‘loud’ and ‘kid’ in this excerpt from one of our interviews.

Let's be real, I am a very loud person off top and my noise level in my classroom will be loud, and it's not bad. Kids will be singing, making fun of each other, and it's all good, but when another teacher walks in I feel like I have to shush them. In the hallways, or when they are at lunch, they need that space to be loud, to be with each other, and to use their bodies. They don't have a PE, they don't have that space to let out energy. If we keep being like, “why are you being a kid?! Why are you being a kid?!” they get the message that social justice is not gonna be fun. It's not always gonna be fun, but it needs to be a community, where kids are constantly being replenished and supported. We don't offer enough spaces for our kids, and then wonder why they wile out – *I start to wile out, I have to turn up my music if I don't have that.*

Here, Zahra reads loudness as a function not only of youth, but as one intrinsic to her sense of self. Like Jordan Davis, she too “has to turn up her music” in the face of repression. The same rambunctious actions that students are disciplined for “being out of pocket,” she re-reads as not only “being a kid,” but being *in one's*

body. She pushes the responsibility back on Robeson as an institution, not to transform the loud kids into quiet ones, but to “offer space” – *cede* space, give room(s), release authority, subvert settlement – for us *all to be loud* together. The risk of policing loud student behavior for Zahra is losing young people’s interest in “social justice” - their experiences in hallways and classrooms provide a hint of what a revolutionary future could look, sound, and feel like, and she wants it to be “a community.” Safety in her vision comes not from the expulsion of the loud, but rather from its invocation. Zahra and Mr. Agusalim’s competing theories of safety collided when he burst into her classroom while she was teaching because he thought it was ‘too loud,’ and chastised her for her lack of classroom management in front of students. Though I described this incident from Zahra’s perspective in the last chapter, I return to its aftermaths from the viewpoint of Tina and Mr. Agusalim in the closing section of this chapter.

Zahra theorizes embodied blackness from the stance of her own grown Black girl flesh, the very kind that magnetizes scrutiny for its *muchness* under late liberalism. Within the context of schooling, the particular association of Black girls as “loud” and disobedient is well documented in the literature (Fordham 1993, 1996; E. Morris 2007; M. Morris 2012, Meiners 2010). Whether actually labeled as a “Loudie” (E. Morris 2007), Black girls’ assertive use of their voices is interpreted as unladylike and deviant, indexing the enduring incompatibility of blackness and hegemonic white bourgeois norms of femininity, and as Spillers suggests, perhaps the entire oeuvre of gender. The gendered dimensions of citizenship are shaped by over a century of scholarly and political

investment in theories of Black family pathology that crystallize in the US in the infamous 1965 Moynihan report, but are reflective of a transnational push to use respectability as a tool to manage Black people across the hemisphere (Thomas 2009) in the wake of emancipation and decolonization (Ferguson 2004, Higginbotham 1993, Cohen 1997, Alexander 2010, Browne 2015). Surveillance of Black sociality - particularly family formations and patterns of intimacy - is a central Reconstruction technology, which also manifests as an intense attention to Black performativity, or what we might think of as *The Search for the Well-Behaved Negro*. At the interface of scopic power and the flesh, that surveillance is met with what Browne (2015) calls dark sousveillance. Just as *surveillance* gazes down from above, *sousveillance* is the practice of looking up at power from below. Dark sousveillance is a racialized technique of counter surveillance that “appropriated, co-opted, repurposed, and challenged” the means of social control “in order to facilitate survival and escape” (2015:21). In order to better understand the interplay between these surveillance and sousveillance mechanisms, I now turn to one of its most enthusiastic deployers, Robeson science teacher Kate Farnum.

You Can Tell a Sunnydale Girl

Kate took pride in her reputation as a hard-ass, both with students and with other staff. A white Science teacher who moved to San Francisco from the Midwest, she was part of the ‘law and order’ flank of the Robeson staff, alongside Math team member Arnie and Mr. Agusalim, usually voting as a bloc in

consensus building sessions, and playing Devil's Advocate to proposals that sought to democratize the space between teachers and students. The carceral nature of her logic was on display at one meeting where the co-principal Tina asked the 11th-12th grade team to help shape the school-wide goals for the following year, because "a lot of times we are jumping to the solution, and we are not even sure what problem we are fixing." She guided us through a process of identifying bright spots and obstacles in relation to reaching Robeson's mission of "community, independent thinkers, and social justice." As usual, Tina tic-tacked her glittery nails absently on the desk as she listened to our responses. Along with stretch skinny jeans, graphic tees and cropped blazers, Tina's nails were made her appear younger than her thirty-seven years. At the same time, her self-presentation also was a strategy to set herself apart from the dozens of other Chinese-American women in school leadership in the SFUSD; Tina had confided to me that it was harder for her to win the trust some families because they were used to racist principals who looked just like her.

When it came time for Kate to read her post-it note obstacles and place them in the flow chart on the white board, she rattled off:

kids struggling to take responsibility for learning; kids being disrespectful to teachers and peers; a core group of kids don't seem to adhere to our values, *like repeat offenders*; kids being truant; teachers seem to believe in our mission more than our kids do.

My eyebrows weren't the only ones to perk up at Kate's penal system reference to 'repeat offenders.' Several other staff piped in that the obstacles were on the sides of both students and teachers, and that things like "lack of diverse student

leadership” and “systemic oppression” might also be making hard to achieve the school’s mission. In this sense, Kate was not representative of the general tone of Robeson staff. However, in the context of consensus-based decision making, her perspectives got a significant amount of airtime, and combined with her standing as one of the strongest content instructors at Robeson, made her formidable even to those she disagreed with. She minced few words, and fashioned herself as both valiantly committed to racial justice and taking no shit. During the same staff strategy session that evoked Mr. Agusalim’s diatribe recounted in the previous section, she scoffed, “I think you *should* be scared of me because it’s my fucking classroom.”

Returning to the warmth and coolness of the flesh, and the relation of time-space, I want to engage Kate’s progressive practice as another way into thinking about whether and when ‘burdened individuality’ – “reckless, yet responsible” – is useful as a lens for discourse at Robeson. During our interview, I shared with her some of my findings from descriptive analysis of disciplinary data at Robeson, and asked her to reflect on the demographic bias I found, in which Black children had far more referrals and suspensions than Latino and Asian children, and in which Black girls were more likely to have disciplinary write-ups than Latina girls. Kate denied that there was a pattern of bias in the disciplinary action, and argued that instead Robeson was far too lax with students, giving Tarika, a Black sophomore, as a prime example.

Kate: I think Tarika’s story was largely written before she walked into Robeson. Right?
I think the kids from Sunnydale are really, really,

really interesting to me, because you can almost always tell they're from Sunnydale. It's just this little part of the city, right?

Savannah: How can you tell, what is it that makes you feel like you can tell a Sunnydale kid?

Kate: You can definitely tell a Sunnydale girl. The boys are a little bit tougher to figure out... I think it's two things. I think that it's skill-level, which is really interesting to me. I don't know how that transfers through neighborhoods. But, really the kind of thing where you just, what happened before now that you, that there wouldn't have been some intervention that would have —? Whatever. Really, really alarming skills.

And also, I don't know a word other than hurt. These Sunnydale girls are just, really, really mistrustful of the world. Really, really mad. Really, really defensive. Really unconcerned with, really unconcerned with how other people think about them... That, that's all already gone when they get to us.

Like, when I would be having trouble with a student in class, I would ask other teachers for advice, and somebody would eventually say, "oh, they're from Sunnydale." And that would be an explanation for, like, there's nothing really that we're going to be able to do.

While Kate names poor academic preparation as the primary marker of what makes a 'Sunnydale girl,' the ethnographic record contradicts that assertion. Even though she can tell that Tarika's low skill story has already been written, she had never actually taught Tarika, or seen her in a classroom setting. If Kate had spent time in Tarika's classes as I had, she would have seen her begrudging attentiveness in US History, heard the hesitant curve of her tongue around Spanish vowel drills, witnessed her bored irritation after finishing the Do Now

equation before the rest of her peers in Geometry. Unlike most of her peers at Robeson, Tarika actually passed the Math portion of the high stakes, standardized California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) on her very first try. But Kate wouldn't know that, because she had never had Tarika in her math class. All of her encounters with her were disciplinary, and mostly happened in the hallways. Kate's leap in logic reveals the way that Black girl affect can be made to stand in for both structural location and the capacity for agency - if Tarika acts defensive, it's because she can't do school and her story was over before it began.

Like Kate and Queens-bred rapper Nas, I also believe that when it comes to the story of Black girls in the Americas, *It Was Written*.¹⁰ However, we diverge radically on the beginning, middle and end of this always-already-written story, with me always writing from the hold of the slaveship, and towards an elsewhere beyond the grip of racial democracy. Kate's storyline seems to hinge on the very notions of respectability and poverty pathos that so frustrate her coworker Zahra. Her professed ignorance of how structural racism and community disinvestment impact educational attainment is a bit disconcerting given the airtime the school leaders gave to those very topics in professional development sessions during her tenure at Robeson. From redlining in housing, to the impact of PTSD in violence-ridden neighborhoods, to the intersections of race and intimate partner violence,

¹⁰ Nas's sophomore album, *It Was Written*, was released on Columbia Records in 1996 to a mixed critical reception, given its indulgence in gratuitous violence and disconcerting oscillation between Mafioso fantasy and Black masculinist uplift. On the cover, the rapper's face is interpolated with the Queensbridge housing projects where he was raised, knitting his visage onto the wintry bricks. Fittingly, the album opens with the scene of an imagined slave rebellion: "Harriet done left the night befo.' It's time we go - ain't no *place* for Black folk here."

the adult curriculum at Robeson provided every opportunity to integrate these themes into staff members' analysis.

Sunnydale, nicknamed The Swamp, is The City's largest public housing project, with just under 800 units held together by duct tape and desperation. From exposed wiring and toxic mold to lack of access to fresh food and health services, to its complete erasure from any mainstream image of San Francisco, Sunnydale is a portrait of urban disinvestment. Like the other four remaining "severely distressed" (SFHA 2010) subsidized public housing projects in The City, the Swamp is slated for demolition in Spring 2018, destined to go the way of the Towers and the VG's, places that used to be home, and now are just an excuse to fight, to get ink, to defend your right to be from some *place*, even in a city that has no place for you at all. Project residents are disproportionately women¹¹, and are overwhelmingly Black in the context of San Francisco's Black-less diversity. In this sense, Kate's deployment of Sunnydale girl is shadowed by narratives of the Vanishing Indian, turned Disappearing Negress, for by 2018 the Swamp will be eroded by neoliberal urban expansionism.

In Kate's rendition, the Swamp is less a political economic force than an ontological one. Tarika and her ilk are somehow *of* the land – they become '*these Sunnydale girls*.' Black ness is recast as indigeneity in the second order settler colonial landscape that has already been (as far as Kate can imagine) exhausted

¹¹ NLIHC tabulations of Public Use Microdata Sample. www.huduser.org/portal/pumd/index.html.

of native bodies. Kate's ethnological move to categorize Tarika as *Sunnydalius feminem*, while doused in the ruse of Black girl knowability, points to the contested relationship between blackness and land in the Americas, and to "the Black female body as a process that is constituted by and constitutes landscapes" (King 2013:16). Perhaps this is why she finds it harder to "tell" boys from Sunnydale – place is etched more deeply into the flesh marked as female, even when *displacement* is a constitutive characteristic of blackness in the first place.

The tangled set of tensions between displacement and emplacement, Blackness and indigeneity, diaspora and nativeness invoked in the figure of the Sunnydale girl are illuminated by Mark Anderson's conception of a Black indigeneity that is "marking a particular cultural status or condition, a mode of being more than a matter of blood" (2009:8). Based on the cultural and political mobilizations of Garifuna communities in Honduras, Anderson argues that indigeneity in the Americas does always have to mean Indian, and that since Black Honduran communities predate the establishment of the current political regime, they have the grounds for indigenous claims to land. The remaining Black communities of San Francisco could also be said to be producing "forms of Black indigeneity that disrupt a conceptual-political grid that links indigeneity with Indians and Blacks with displacement" (Anderson 2009:22) in that Sunnydale predates the "new" San Francisco, and is already slipping into the past as its 2018 death looms. Akin to the Garifuna who began using indigenous political frameworks to resist land grabs by transnational corporations attracted

by Honduras' neoliberal restructuring, black folks in San Francisco began to coalesce around the language of "Frisco Natives" and "Gentrification is Colonization" as displacement tightened its grip around The City. Of course, Frisco indigeneity is palimpsestic, only legible when written over three centuries of ongoing Muwekma Ohlone genocide. As Anderson reminds us, just because Black indigeneity flummoxes what we know about Indianness and blackness, it does not collapse the distinction between them. The politics of belonging are a set of volleys between and across inherited categories of settler, savage, and slave, Frisco Native and out-of-towner, here and there, then and now.

Emancipation (Counter)Logics: Pedagogies of Containment & Respectability

If we take up the assertion that slavery has no proper end, then that shifts our temporal frame to a nonlinear one - the long moment of Jubilee extends into this staff meeting in 2012. Of course, this is not to say that time is static or that material conditions are not different for many Black people in the US in 2015 compared to 1815. Instead, the long unmet promise of freedom means that the foundational relations of settler-slave-Savage are not only intact, but primary in the social life of what is called the US. Given this long view of history, how does that shift how we think of place? If time is long, perhaps then space is deep. More than a three story crumbling school building, we can understand Robeson as being inextricable from its neighborhood, in its city, and the very ground underneath it as unceded Ohlone territory. By pressing on the 'time' in the space-time continuum as manifest in this palimpsestic place, we may be able to

forge a path from what at first glance appears as a jumble of classrooms and corridors to a decolonial future. But given that there are no shackles or tribal enrollment cards in the building, what does it mean to write, think, or act towards abolition and sovereignty?

When we pair Kate's maneuverings of racialized space in the school with her dealings in *The City*, it appears that her role as a liberal teacher may actually function as the hyphen in Wilderson's (2010) settler-master archetype. She is settling San Francisco's 'sparse' landscape as a gentrifier, at the same time as enacting plantation logics in the terrains of the school. Indeed, when viewed through the lens of slavery and freedom, Kate's notion that it is an emergency "to be in the hallway when you aren't supposed to" is straight outta Reconstruction. Robeson staff anxiety about students being in the hall without a pass is haunted by pass laws restricting Black movement both before and after the "nonevent of emancipation" (Hartman 1997), like the postbellum Georgia statute that read:

All persons wandering or strolling about in idleness, who are able to work, and who have no property to support them; all persons leading an idle, immoral or profligate life, who have no property to support them and are able to work and do not work... Shall be deemed and considered vagrants, and shall be indicted as such, and it shall be lawful for any person to arrest said vagrants... (Du Bois 1935:142)

Here we see not only a moral indictment of poor unpropertied Black folks, but also an imperative towards work and productivity that on its face invalidates claims of Black freedom.

What's significant here is that these are not the frameworks of some reactionary planters, just as Leonard's musings in the previous chapter about the deficits of Black children's' home lives was not rooted in mean-spirited white supremacy. Many of the laws prescribing the behavior of Black people were written by well-meaning liberals who wanted to help the emancipated Negro become worthy of his [sic] freedom by teaching decorum and industry (Hartman 1997). In this sense, we could understand Aaron, Leonard and the broader swath of progressive school reform peers as inheritors of this white progressive tradition. Instead of liberating blacks from chattel slavery, they see their role as freeing low-income youth of color from the bondage of dysfunctional, test-driven public schooling.

Kate laments Tarika's gendered deviance from affective norms – you can tell a Sunnydale girl cause she is distrustful, angry and hurt, but rather than engage the twenty generations of good reason for her not to trust the State and its agents, however benevolent, Kate is distraught that 'there's nothing really that *she* is going to be able to do.' Perhaps, then, it is Kate's own fear of ineffectiveness, of impotence in the face of Black sass and antiblack racism, that marks Tarika most deeply as a Sunnydale Girl.

It is ultimately Tarika's anger that marks her expulsion from the proper(ty) Black, her affective violation too unruly for the maintenance of carceral progressive progress. Anger is an "outlaw emotion," a category developed by Erica Meiners (2010) as a way to operationalize the relationship between the White Lady Bountiful teacher archetype that emerges amidst

nineteenth century expansionism, and the school-prison nexus at the core of most schools serving Black and Latinx youth. She argues “the ontological disqualification of individuals perceived to be superfluous to the economy, and to the ideologies at the core of the nation-state, has long been the purview of teaching, specifically the work of white women teachers” (Meiners 2011:54).

Meiners uses the archive to cement the link between benevolent white women’s labor and the carceral continuum that expands across sectors of social service provision in the US.

Kate’s version goes something like this:

[in the hallway] she will go from nothing to very, very, very mad. And maybe Tarika’s going to be fine. Maybe she’s fine. It’s hard for me to imagine her in the world. It’s hard for me to imagine her in a retail job, or however people transition from youth to adulthood. It’s hard for me to imagine her, I don’t know, interacting with outsiders. And I think that’s really scary. That’s how the cycle continues. Right? If Tarika has a baby, and she brings the baby up the same way. Right? I can’t stand the cyclical nature of this whole thing. And I, I feel like Tarika is not going to help break the cycle.

She can’t imagine her in the world, in part because for Kate, Sunnydale is not in the world. The community center, the library, both corner stores, the families, the homies, none of this counts as life for her because The Swamp is a space of social death, excised from the map of the Human. Sunnydale as the spatialization of social death counters the claim that the Black is no-where-to-be-found, without spatial coordinates (Douglass & Wilderson 2015). Instead, we might imagine the map of blackness starting within the bodies of *les damnés*

(Fanon 1962), with Black girl flesh as the cartographic (im)possibility that sutures life to death, then to now, settlement to plantation. When Kate encounters Tarika in the hall, she *fails to see* the possibility of her future (“transition from youth to adulthood”), or her escape from the muddy terrain of The Swamp (“in the world”), or even an encounter between her and a Human Being (“interacting with outsiders”). In her flesh, Kate sees an unmistakably gendered void, an invagination that is non sequitur to the loops of Time, Space, and the Social.

Kate cannot fathom a future for Tarika, and yet she fantasizes about her [as a] Black Hole – ruminating on her reproduction, her impending failure Black parent, responsible for her community’s downfall, echoing decades of professional anxiety about the culture of poverty. Kate’s foreclosure of Black futurity also anticipates the demolition of The Swamp and pulls discussions of time into those of space. Note, here, that Tarika is unthinkable as an adult, even as someone who takes your money at Old Navy, but crystal clear as a parent. Kate recycles antebellum notions of Black people as perpetual children and breeders (Davis 1972, Dagbovie-Mullins 2013, Jones 1985, Morgan 2004).

What if, instead of an alien outside the circuits of settler sense, we imagined the un-seeability of Tarika’s blackness, the impossibility of her obstinate little Black girl Self, the Black (W)hole that preoccupies Kate, as the very center of a knot tying together the world as we know it? Thus is the Afrarealist imperative. Developed by Joy James (2013) as a rejoinder to the masculinism of some Afro-pessimist scholarship and the foundational racism of

democracy, Afrarealism centers on the Black Matrix, which is both the material and signified maternal Black body. The Black Matrix is where antiblackness is yoked to anti-feminism, and where their disimbrication provides an embodied departure point for marroonage. Afrarealism recovers Black girl flesh from its disposability at the margins of settler democracy and *places* it/her/me at the center of freedom's landscape. What happens if we do the same in the social fields of Robeson, remapping its topography with Tarika and her homegirls as the compass point?

James observes "Western democracies manufactured the Black matrix as disposable through libidinal, linguistic, and material economies" (2013:127). In its commitment to a progressive reinvigoration of democracy through consensus-based decision making and racial equity, Robeson at times also reinforces the boundaries of democracy by excluding those who challenge its terms. Ironically, Tarika is made disposable at Robeson through professional discourses of equity and inclusion. She is one of a flank of Black girls in her incoming class - along with Bashirrah, Diamond and Azizi - who were pushed off the Robeson rolls between their sophomore and senior years. Black boys also left during that time, but generally because of academic concerns, or more straightforward disciplinary infractions like fighting or selling drugs on campus. Lamented occasionally, the girls' departures were seen paradoxically as evidence of progress on the part of Robeson's disciplinary machine: they were finally getting rid of the loud kids. Conversely, the paucity of Black boys was seen as an emergency in need of interrupting. For instance, Nyla broke down in tears at a 12th grade faculty

meeting in which one of her advisees was almost prevented from crossing the stage at graduation because of disruptive behavior on a school trip.

Kate's long jag on poverty pathology was actually part of Kate's argument that more kids need to be kicked out of Robeson, because that is what racial justice looks like. When I asked her who she was thinking of, she identified that little crew of tiny black girls. You know who I'm talking about. Like, Cyarea, Jacki, that group of tiny ones... Like Tarika – I can't believe she's still there!" At the time of our interview, Tarika was a junior at Robeson, and Kate had moved back to the Midwest for graduate school. She reflected,

If I can't really be a social justice educator because I have just a couple of kids being cray-cray,¹² then how are we any different? And I want kids to know that they are in a special place. And I want them to treat it like they're in special place.

Tarika, Cyarea and Jacki were being "cray-cray" in her special place, and now they've got to go, because otherwise Kate won't get to live her dream of "really being a social justice educator." Of the three young women Kate names directly in this invective, only Tarika lives in Sunnydale, while Cyarea traveled over an hour to get to school from a predominately Chinese middle class neighborhood on the other side of town, and Jacki lived in Oakland, using an aunt's address to stay in San Francisco schools. However, the abjection Kate identifies with Sunnydale seeps beyond the few square block of the housing project to ensnare these Black girls across a wide swath of urban topography, and it becomes

¹² "Cray-cray" is slang for "crazy," popularized through social media and popular culture in a way that may have started with Black women's usage, but soon mushroomed into a mocking pejorative that dismissed their rage.

apparent that Sunnydale can be made to stand in for a certain kind of ratchetness that cannot be emplotted in her 'special place.' Rather than Kate's boastful prowess of "being able to tell a Sunnydale girl," housing project geography is revealed as yet another alibi for antiblackness.

In Kate's lament, we see echoes of white abolitionism as well – America is a special place, and you need to treat it that way now that you are free and all. But instead of rescuing Black folks from the ravages of the plantation and delivering them to participate obediently and deferently in the free market, by creating this special social justice high school, the educators at Robeson have rescued Tarika & her peers from the dysfunction of militarized, miseducating comprehensive public schools and given them this incredible place to learn.

And they *were* learning – Kate was a deeply competent classroom teacher, as were most of the Robeson faculty. Young people in her class really did grow in terms of numeracy, and develop confidence as mathematicians. Kate quit her teaching job after a few years at Robeson, partly because of increased tension between her and the administrators, who questioned the utility her strident approach to discipline, and partly because she wanted to enter academia to pursue a career in educational policy. She was not alone – Kate's last year at Robeson was also the year Mr. Agusalim left the school, followed soon after by Tarika and Cyarea. What, then, were the conditions that facilitated their departures, and what were the costs?

Departing Dystopia

By all accounts, Kate quit of her own accord when she returned to the Midwest to pursue a career in educational policy. During our interview a year after she left the school, she said “I use Tarika as an example over and over because she is pretty much why I went back to grad school.” She said she missed teaching and the students, but was happy to move on. In part a reflection of the demographics of credentialed Science teachers, Kate’s replacement was also a white woman from the Midwest who reproduced some of the same patterns that we glimpse in Kate’s classroom.¹³ Amma, the hapa restorative practice coordinator and Frisco native, mused that “it’s like Kate never even left.” Mr. Agusalim, on the other hand, resigned after a series of confrontations fraught by race, power, and the meaning of progressive politics.

Looking back, it seems the pattern started perhaps as early as June 2012, when during graduation, someone urinated on Mr. Agusalim’s car. Given that Robeson is on a public street adjoining a massive public park that is space of refuge for unhoused people and survival workers, it is conceivable that almost anyone could have decided to relieve themselves in the parking lot. However, Mr. Agusalim was convinced that it was Sam, a Black kid who was a junior at the time. He could never prove it. Throughout the following school year, Mr. Agusalim would bring up the peeing incident in all sorts of unrelated contexts, whether in staff meetings about discipline, or in jokes about party planning – it

¹³ Coincidentally, before Kate quit, I had chosen what I imagined as an archetypically “white-sounding” pseudonym for her in my memos. I had to change it to ‘Kate’ because the fictional name I had chosen was the *actual name* of her replacement, producing in me an affective experience of defeat at what felt like the inexorable resilience of the White Lady Bountiful.

was like a tic. Just as he had in years prior, Mr. Agusalim sternly addressed students in the hallway who he imagined were not where they were supposed to be, and could be heard yelling through his classroom door. Even after the full staff decision-making process described in chapter three, where teachers decided that de-escalation should be the first tactic used when addressing student behavior, Mr. Agusalim continued to confront students in the hallway, because as he said in a small 12th grade team meeting earlier that spring,

if some bullshit is happening, then its a problem that is happening everywhere. If I ignore it, then I am implicitly allowing it to continue. But that's what ends up getting *me* into a lot of trouble. It comes from a place of 'I'm not gonna put up with this crap,' not at the place where I work. I want to feel safe.

Mr. Agusalim imagined the “bullshit” he sees – kids singing rap songs, walking slowly in the hallway, being late from lunch – as ubiquitous, and notably, a threat to his own feelings of security. Perhaps he envisioned himself as a “quiet kid.” The “trouble” he references getting into here was only set to get worse, as after this meeting two key incidents occurred that resulted in direct run-ins between him and one of his supervisors, Tina.

I saw the beginning of the first incident as I walked to the front office from the bathroom – Mr. Agusalim was standing outside his classroom door, facing Arturo, a quiet, brooding Xicanx 11th grader. Arturo’s back was to the wall, and Mr. Agusalim was leaning towards him, less than a foot from his face. I remember making eye contact with Arturo on my way past and rolling my eyes in solidarity – it was just before Spring Break, and everyone just wanted to get out

of there. I wouldn't have thought much of it until I heard later from Tina that Mr. Agusalim had wanted her to suspend Arturo for cursing at him in the hallway. When she spoke to Arturo, he was angry, complaining that the teacher had cursed at him for no reason. She confronted Mr. Agusalim, who said that he had indeed cursed at Arturo, but only because he was frustrated that Arturo was being so disrespectful. He insisted that the only way to address the behavior was through disciplinary consistency, and demanded that Tina suspend Arturo. Livid at his transgression, Tina made the following deal: she was willing to suspend Arturo only if she also made an official incident report in Mr. Agusalim's personnel file detailing his use of profanity with a student. That way, everyone would be held accountable. If he didn't want the incident in his file, Tina wouldn't suspend Arturo, *and* Mr. Agusalim would have to apologize to him.

Mr. Agusalim chose the latter, and went a further step to make a public apology to the entire student body the next day. It was at a Town Hall assembly during the announcements portion of the agenda, and he spoke for about five minutes, noting that many students thought he was an "asshole," the exact language that Arturo had used. He went on, "I humbly apologize if I have disrespected you, but my name is Mr. Agusalim, and I have taught at Robeson for eight years – it's nice to meet you." The auditorium was silent during his speech, and he received the loudest applause in the auditorium that morning – a combination of vindication and inspiration. The fact that Arturo is not Black may or may not be related to why Tina chose to escalate with Mr. Agusalim over his treatment of him. More pertinent to this analysis is that Mr. Agusalim's

investment in patrolling the boundaries of behavior at Robeson was inherently anti-Black, given the racialized and gendered norms of appropriate comportment; as Tina said in the previous chapter “inappropriate for *who*?”

While he avoided a formal reprimand in the incident with Arturo, Tina drew the line when that same week Mr. Agusalim upbraided Zahra in front of students because he felt her classroom was too loud. I referred to the incident in the above section on volume, but when we layer on Mr. Agusalim’s assertion that he “wants to feel safe,” it appears that he may have perceived to be Zahra as much of a threat as the students. Whispering to me in the library as we proctored a mock standardized ACT test for the 11th graders, Tina shared with me the stress she felt about Mr. Agusalim’s undermining of who she felt was one of Robeson’s most promising new teachers. “I told him, William, this is a verbal warning: do not talk to staff members like that in front of students.” Her use of his first name signaled not only of her position of power over him, but also her dismissal of his aura self-importance. Crying throughout the conversation, Mr. Agusalim told Tina that the only two people who agree with him were leaving (Kate and chemistry teacher Arnie), and that he would be left alone to hold the line with students. Tina intimated that she reminded him that Robeson was not a typical school, with a typical approach to discipline, and that “he either needs to choose to deal with the challenges he is facing here, or he needs to take a break... He’s been here for eight years – honestly!” Less than a month after our conversation in the library, Mr. Agusalim announced his plans to resign.

While there was much fanfare about the trio of teachers leaving –

including a special montage video put together for graduation, class time dedicated to students writing thank you cards, and a going away party – there was no ritual to mark the departure of Black girls from the school space. Of the eleven Black girls that completed tenth grade with Tarika, only four made it to the end of senior year. Cyarea’s class fared a bit better – four out of seven Black girls in her class graduated from Robeson.¹⁴ Since I had left the field by the time both girls transferred out of Robeson, I asked around to see what had happened, and no one could give me a clear account – it was academic and behavioral ‘stuff.’

“Ms. Shaaangaaaay!!” Cyarea exclaimed on the phone, in the extended vowel style most young people used to say my name. I had called to tell her I was in town for the Robeson graduation, but that I had heard she was no longer there.

“I was through with them! They was always getting me in trouble and wasn’t gonna let me graduate, so I went to Urban Options instead, and it’s lit.” I had Cyarea’s old number from when she was my student, so when it was disconnected, I asked her bestie¹⁵ for her new number, and we chatted for a while before she invited me to her graduation. Even though it was just a short walk through the park from the Robeson building, at a time slot when there were no classes or staff meetings happening at Robeson, I was the only Robeson staff

¹⁴ One contributing factor to the difference in Black student population between the younger Cyarea’s class and older Tarika’s class is that the latter’s class was the last one to enter while the former Black co-principal, Randall, was in leadership. During his tenure, he conducted targeted recruitment of Black families to enter Robeson, and those three incoming classes have significantly higher proportions of Black students. However, the increased enrollment did not result in increased matriculation, since so many of the Black students who entered as 9th graders left or were pushed out before they could graduate.

¹⁵ Bestie is gendered millennial slang for “best friend,” akin to BFF, or “best friend forever.”

member in attendance. Unlike my relationship with Cyarea, which remained warm even three years after she had last been in my classroom, Tarika and I were cordial, at best.

The Opacity of the Flesh

“You can follow me, but I am not going to talk to you.”

That’s what Tarika told me when I had asked her if I could shadow her classes. My first impulse was to cajole her with jokes and build rapport - surely she *would* talk to me eventually. Or else I could have simply default back to of the other dozen or so Black girls with whom I had an easy bond, whose text messages bottlenecked on the screen of my phone, whose mother’s voices I knew by heart. But I bit my tongue, and in the interests of taking young people at their word, I assented and silently sat beside her, not only through the Beginning Spanish class that I spent a part of each day in, but shuffling on through the halls to Algebra, Humanities, and Advisory period.

Even now, I know former Robeson staff who have Tarika’s current number, and I have her Instagram handle. I could ring her up with a few questions, slide in her DMs,¹⁶ or take her to In & Out for a follow-up interview next time I am in the Bay, but I won’t. To reach out with the intent of hearing her perspective, even in the interests of a putatively liberatory ethnographic project,

¹⁶ The phrase “slide in the DMs” emerges with the rise of social media messaging in which public interfaces on Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat are paralleled by private exchanges via direct message, or DM. Direct messages can be used for a variety of exchanges, from inquiring about rates for a photography shoot to finalizing logistics for a direct action protest to arranging an extramarital soiree. The expression carries with it a furtive whiff that is apropos in this discussion of slippery ethnographic ethics.

still demands access to Black girl interiority as the price to ride on the freedom train. If both the carceral and the decolonial engagement with young Black women rely on the same remedy - her performative transparency - then both political projects prioritize their preauthored frameworks over Black girl self-determination.

Perhaps here I fail as an anthropologist, and this document I am writing to gain access to the academy will miscarry in its efforts. But I sense there is more explanatory power in her absence, in the gap of knowledge, that I would find tracking her down [*like a runaway*] and feigning a complete circle of analysis. Tarika don't want me to find her. We were never close, and while she assented to participation in the study, she also drew clear lines around her involvement, just as she did with Robeson. Tarika's counterinstitutional [and counterdisciplinary] negotiations signify on the politics of belonging by remaking the rules of participation. In her Math class, I watched her obstinately roll her eyes and refuse to speak when called on, and yet had completed all of the algebraic equations correctly, along with the extra credit problem.

Instead, I am trying to write in collusion with Tarika's dark sousveillance - following her "no" without trying to transform it into a "yes." Her manifestation as a Black Matrix straight outta Sunnydale¹⁷ brings us back to the utility of indigenous political theory in The City, where Frisco indigeneity is a new foil for the old dispossessed twins, the Ohlone and the Negro. Audra Simpson (2014)

¹⁷ *Straight Outta Hunter's Point* (2001, Kevin Epps, dir.) is a feature length documentary made about street violence in Black communities in southeast San Francisco, and is one of a handful of instances in which Frisco appears in the Black popular imaginary.

articulates an indigenous politics of refusal in her engagement with Kahnawa'kehró:non communities facing ongoing settler colonialism. In lieu of DuBoisian/Fanonian and later Coulthardian double consciousness,¹⁸ Simpson theorizes proliferating consciousnesses that refuse the recognition of an external gaze, producing “endless play,” along the lines of “I am me, I am what you think I am, and I am who this person to the right of me thinks I am, and you are all full of shit, and then maybe I will tell you to your face” (107). Understanding slavery as structure rather than event (King 2013, Wolfe 2006), I borrow Simpson’s caution that “to think and write about sovereignty is to think very seriously about needs and that, basically, it involves an ethnographic calculus of what you need to know and what I refuse to write” (105). I refuse to write light into dark, to coerce quiet from noise, or to paint color on to a canvas bodied Black. Methodologically, I am attempting to compute the value of self-possession in the context of dispossession, and figure a way to get Cyarea and Tarika back into the equation.

What happens when we engage school spaces beyond academic content, and instead attune to them as interfaces between the state and the stateless, listening for what they can teach us about what it means for flesh to get free, or get kicked out trying? Just as Joy James reminds us, “in fantasies of democracy, the enslaver rescues the savage from barbarity, and the abolitionist saves the savage from the enslaver. Afrarealism sees both forms of “salvation” as captivity” (2013:125). We can see this contradiction inherent to both the broader promise

¹⁸ For more on the indigenous application of Fanonian theory, see Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

of liberal democracy and the specific project of liberatory schooling. Mr. Agusalim & Kate's proficiency in the classroom demonstrate that even when Robeson meets its community-driven mandate of culturally relevant teaching and learning, it depends on the benevolence of liberalism for both its funding stream and to round out its personnel. At the same time, the space of Robeson is punctured by the topographies of The City, and the contests over belonging in and to the school are also about who deserves dominion in San Francisco. While this chapter focused on Mr. Agusalim and Kate as vectors of captivity within the state apparatus of carceral progressivism, in the next chapter I engage their willfully defiant interlocutors who repurposed the space of Robeson as a refuge from the project of "liberation."

6.

Black Skin, Brown Masks:
Carceral Progressivism and the Co-optation of Xicanx Nationalism

“Tú eres mi otro yo.”

Bree trilled the r’s delicately, holding each vowel carefully in her mouth as if it might break. The other two hundred or so kids in the auditorium repeated the line in a murmur. Beside her on stage, Aura continued the *In Lak’Ech* poem confidently, “You are my other me,” and her peers repeated back more loudly. The two teenagers completed the stanza, the Black American one leading the call and response Spanish portion, and her Nicoya¹ homegirl leading the English:

Si te hago daño a ti
If I do harm to you
Me hago daño a mi mismo
I do harm to myself
Si te amo y respeto
If I love and respect you
Me amo y respeto
I love and respect myself

Whoops and applause rose up from the staff and students gathered for the emergency Town Hall meeting, and the clapping slowed into the rhythmic unified crescendo of unity clap, a United Farm Workers organizing ritual. At Robeson Justice Academy, the collective recitation of this poem, an excerpt of Chicano

¹ ‘Nicoya’ is a common colloquial term for people of Nicaraguan descent.

Movement leader Luis Valdez's forty year old epic *Pensamiento Serpentino*,² is also an organizing ritual of sorts, a performed and performative sense-making, an invocation that consolidates the unruly multitude into a unified, mirrored self – a *tú* and a *yo*, yoked by a friendly alterity. You are not *me*, you are *the Other me* (or other I, in an alternate rendition). *¿Pero, quién es el 'tú,' y quien es el 'yo'?*³ Who is positioned as the subject of Robeson's affirming credo, and who is positioned as the [beloved] object? Who gets to be “*yo*,” and who is relegated *tú* the educative reflection, the mirror ‘self’ that teaches ethics by analogy? Put another way, who is the paradigmatic citizen of this wee alternative polity, and who ain't?⁴

In the chapter that follows, I focus on the production of the Black as *la otra*, though the lens of racialized brawl that happened near the school, and the subsequent reactions by young people, staff members, and administrators as they attempted to grapple with the fallout. This is a story told in three parts. Though I am reluctant to restage the familiar scene of urban youth as violent with vivid depictions of the fight, I first revisit the scuffle to provide context for how the incident was narrativized in different spaces by various stakeholders, and repurposed toward a variegated, and sometimes conflicting set of political goals.

² Co-founder of El Teatro Campesino, a community-based theater troupe based in the farmworker's movement, Valdez used both poetry and theater as cultural organizing tools. *Pensamiento Serpentino* (1971) is an epic poem that recuperates parts of Mayan religious tradition to create a new Chicano subjectivity.

³ Who is the “you” and who is the “me”?

⁴ Throughout this text, I experiment with using Black English as an academic and theoretical language, in the tradition of fellow Black anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. I am also inspired by the interventions of Xicana feminism, particularly Gloria Anzaldúa. See, for example her essay “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987).

Then, I examine a meeting between the school's co-founder and young people tangentially related to the fight, and surface the way policing and punishment⁵ form the foundation of the *carceral progressivism* that undergirds this iteration of multiracial coalition. Finally, I shift to a Town Hall meeting convened in response to the fight as a lens into the web of contradictory narratives that characterizes the terrain of left-of-center struggles in the Bay Area and beyond. Taken together, these snapshots of institutional conflict highlight the structural antagonism between Third Worldist solidarity formations rooted in the legacy of liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the more recent emergence of multiracial coalitions suffused with white leadership.

In a cruelly parasitic move, Robeson's model of white-led carceral progressivism mobilizes Xicanx⁶ nationalism as an anti-Black state strategy⁷, foreclosing both the liberatory impulse of Atzlán's cultural nationalism and the institutional promise of a sanctuary for Black children in the City by the Bay. In a riff on Fanon's epochal formation *Black Skin, White Masks*, I argue that in the

⁵ I use the term 'punition' as a broader umbrella that includes formalized punishment, as well as more discursive and informal modes of targeted sanctions.

⁶ 'Xicanx' is a political term developed from the 'Chicano' movement of the mid-twentieth century that mobilized Mexican descended people in the US against Eurocentrism and systemic oppression. Both the 'x' at the beginning and the end of 'Xicanx' have ideological weight. The beginning 'X,' advocated by recent generations of activists, marks a break from the colonial Spanish language, and revives the 'x' used by Mayan and Aztec languages. The ending 'x' is an intervention of feminist and queer cultural workers as a form of linguistic resistance to the binary gendering of the Spanish language. Earlier neologisms included Xican@ and Chican@, but with the advent of '@' being used as a key command in online spaces, new adaptations were required. For more on the racial and political implications of the 'x', see Jessica Marie Johnson's (2015) "Thinking About the 'X'."

⁷ There is a long history of antiblackness within the Xicanx movement, as well as several generations of contestation within that community over the inclusion and centering of Afro-descended Spanish speaking people. However, in this instance the potential for liberatory transformation from within the movement is neutralized by its mobilization by non-Xicanxs as progressive state strategy.

context of ‘antiracist’ progressive San Francisco, the epidermal scheme of recognition that positions Blackness as ‘Other’ has shifted to an idealized immigrant Latinx⁸ ‘Self,’ hence the reformulation: *Black skin, Brown masks*. While the official discursive and disciplinary practices of the institution are stained with a carceral common sense, I also highlight proliferating countersenses that offer alternate configurations of race and power in San Francisco.

In Lak’Ech: The Other [in] Califatzlán

Before we can fully account for the practices of multiracial coalition, we must attend to how the political economy of neoliberalism and its racial effects/affects structure social life and social death in California. In San Francisco, the spatialized antiblackness of state progressivism as instantiated in housing and school reform displaces the body of the Slave, producing the Black as external to The City⁹ and the school, thus permitting the displacement of the slave relation from racial analysis. Part of the analytic utility of The City is the relative paucity of white bodies, permitting us to make good on the people-of-color plea to ‘go beyond the black and white binary.’¹⁰ San Francisco is the most

⁸ “Latinx” is a gender neutral form of “Latina/o,” which is part of a broader political project sketched in footnote 6.

⁹ In local parlance, San Francisco is referred to as “The City,” as opposed to Oakland, known as “The Town.”

¹⁰ As a formation, *people-of-color* is an implicit critique of the explanatory of blackness vis-à-vis whiteness. It turns analytic attention to the totalizing power of white supremacy, tucking all non-white bodies into an umbrella of oppression that is structured chiefly by the genocide of indigenous people and the *thingification* of the Black (Césaire 1955).

Asian-American major city in the US, and the public school district intensifies the demographic pattern, both because of the relative lack of children residing in the city, and the large proportion of white children who attend private schools instead of the San Francisco Unified School District. The SFUSD is 41% Chinese-American, with other Asian communities rounding out the majority of the young people served.¹¹ Robeson was founded as a result of a three year community and faith-based organizing effort led by Black, Polynesian and Latinx parents and church goers, along with a small crew of SFUSD teachers planning mutiny from their dysfunctional workplaces. Throughout that process, the emphasis was on serving “Southeast San Francisco,” which is coded language for non-white *and* non-Chinese neighborhoods, flummoxing conventional notions of ‘communities of color.’ Thus, not only is Robeson ‘majority-minority,’¹² but as a school with a Latino and Black majority, it also disrupts the tandem Chinese-American and white portrait of who San Franciscans are. However, because Robeson’s leadership duo is White and Chinese-American, its disruption of racial scripts is not vertically integrated. As part of its mission statement and grant proposals, Robeson emphasizes racial equity for Latinx and Black communities and countering Eurocentrism through culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-

¹¹Unless otherwise noted, the demographic data used in this chapter is from the 2012-13 academic year. Because of the rapid and racialized shifts in San Francisco’s population, it is important to note that this is a snapshot of a moving image, rather than a static portrait of The City. The SFUSD keeps disaggregated data on Japanese, Korean, and Filipino students, with Cambodian, Vietnamese, Lao, Hmong, Indian, and Thai students falling making up the bulk of the “Other” category.

¹² The term ‘majority-minority’ is misleading in two ways, primarily by legitimizing the myth that non-white people have ever been in the minority of the human population. Secondly, it relies on a sort of demographic determinism that is not helpful in developing a nuanced portrait of a local political economy. However, it is a term in heavy usage in the fields of sociology and political science, so I flag it here for that purpose.

Billings 2014). Despite these commitments, Robeson also has the district's most disproportionate suspension rate for Black students as 80% of suspensions go to Black kids, but only 24% of the student population is Black. The aching persistence of anti-Black practices and logics in progressive San Francisco allows us to do the analytic work of distinguishing antiblack racism from white supremacy, as well as the political work of devising a notion of racial coalition based on the abolition of the former, rather than the amelioration of the latter. By engaging the daily disciplinary and discursive practices at Robeson, we can better understand how antiblack racism is enacted at the interface of subject and state.

In the cultural imaginary of the sprawling nine county Bay Area, Oakland (affectionately called “The Town,” while San Francisco is “The City”) is the place most associated with Blackness, from its site as the founding of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense to its role as a hub for upcoming rappers and R&B singers. Conversely, San Francisco is celebrated as a ‘diverse’ multicultural mecca that is home to Latinx, Chinese, Filipinx and Japanese traditions. In particular, San Francisco was the northern hub of the Chicano movement of the 1970s. While the Panthers mobilized in The Town, the Brown Berets rode lowrider patrols up and down Mission Street, and *danza Azteca* circles burned sage and copal as they reclaimed San Pancho as indigenous land.¹³ The roots of Chicano¹⁴ nationalism

¹³ Because ‘Pancho’ is the nickname for the Spanish given name ‘Francisco’ (much as Frank is for Francis), ‘San Pancho’ is another nickname for the city of San Francisco used by Latinx communities.

¹⁴ I purposefully use the masculinist, original spelling of ‘Chicano’ as opposed to ‘Xicanx’ here because it better reflects the political landscape of that era.

set down by a generation of Mexican descended activists grew deeper as The City became a magnet for Central American immigrants fleeing wars backed by US military resources, particularly those from El Salvador. Pupuserías now dot as many corners as taquerías, and the Mission District, Excelsior, and Bernal Heights all developed into thriving brown-skinned neighborhoods.

San Francisco's brutal gentrification processes that ensued in the wake of the dot-com boom of the 1990s (Solnit & Schwartzberg 2000) were a terrible blow to working-class neighborhoods, especially the Latinx stronghold of the Mission District, and the City's Latinx population dropped 42% between 1990 and 2010. For Black communities, the tech boom was the culmination of waves of development-driven dispossession. Black Americans didn't arrive in large numbers to San Francisco until the tail end of the Great Migration, when their labor was needed at the Hunter's Point shipyard to feed the World War II machine. Their families filled the crumbling tenements of the Fillmore District in the vacuum left by the incarceration of Japanese Americans who used to live there, and were rendered disposable less than a generation later with the 'urban renewal' of the historically Black Fillmore district, dubbed "Negro Removal" by James Baldwin in his 1963 visit to The City (Moore 1964).

By the time Robeson opened its doors in 2003, the Black population of San Francisco had plummeted from its 1970 high of 15% to just 7%. With a Black student population that wavered from 45% to 51% in its early years, Robeson for a time held the distinction of being the Blackest school in the least Black city in America. By 2013, the City's Black population had been halved again to 3.9%,

leading to the moniker of the burgeoning Last Three Percent political movement based in Bayview-Hunters Point.¹⁵ As The City hemorrhaged Black families, Robeson's Black student population dropped precipitously, even with many students commuting ninety minutes or more from outer ring suburbs to stay in SFUSD. Over that decade, the Black and Latinx proportions of the student body at Robeson inverted, and what used to be a majority Black school became 48% Latinx, 24% Black, and 10% Polynesian. Importantly, even as demographics shifted wildly in San Francisco, Robeson was still distinctly *not* a Chinese-American or white space, even with the initial arrival of a few pioneer 'gentros' in the 2012 school year. In part, Robeson's decrease in Black students is a reflection of systemic residential displacement, but I want to highlight how institutional practices contribute to the loss of Black bodies in San Francisco's public spaces. The shift in majority population from Black to Latinx at Robeson enables, but does not predetermine, the displacing of Blackness from the narrative self of the school as a site of the benevolent state. How did a school for justice become yet another site of Black dispossession? Further, how are Black-Brown coalition politics denatured by the institutional practice of carceral progressivism?

"I Got People Too!": Sophomores in a Street Fight

It was the sun's fault.

¹⁵ Founded in 2014 by a group of Black residents in Bayview Hunter Point, and led by young Black women including Rheema Calloway and Ronneisha Johnson, The Last Three Percent is an ongoing mobilization against Black displacement and state violence in the city of San Francisco. Often using the slogan 'Black Homes Matter,' The Last Three Percent integrate issues of police brutality with affordable housing, health access, and gentrification.

If the blustery San Francisco grey hadn't been pierced by a rare 83° afternoon, then no one would have thought to start a water fight during lunch. If there hadn't been a water fight, then dozens of teenagers wouldn't have discovered the bliss of running wildly across the crumbling blacktop to escape the water balloons hurtling toward them. Giddy with heat and hubris, Neveah, a Black sophomore, and Spider, her Latinx classmate, egged each other's crews on as they chased each other down.

The next day, when the sun went back into hiding and kids again donned denim jackets and sweats, Spider came ready for round two. After the first water balloon burst near her and her friends, Neveah warned, "stop playing, it's hella cold outside!" Undeterred, Spider kept tossing balloons, and Neveah got in his face cursing, "why the fuck you do that?"

"Why you being such a bitch?" Spider retorted, and the yelling match escalated.

Neveah threatened, "keep doing that shit and I will being people up here!"

"I don't give a fuck – I got people too!" Spider spat in her direction as he retreated, sending her and her friends over the edge. Over the next day or so, rumors simmered throughout the younger grades that Spider wanted to fight Neveah after the half-day dismissal on Friday. Come that morning, more than a few people reported Neveah showing off a bottle of hot sauce in her purse to help level the battlefield between her and the brawny Spider.

Shortly after noon dismissal, a retirement-age white couple in khaki shorts wandered into the front office to say, "there's a big fight down there!"

“Goddamnit.” The security-guard-cum-advisor Jeff and co-principal Tina grabbed walkie-talkies and ran out the door and down the hill. I stopped making copies and followed them, only to double back for my car keys, thinking I might beat them the long block down to the bus stop.

I did. I pulled my grey Honda Fit up to the fire hydrant in front of thirty or so young people, most of whom seemed unfamiliar, standing around yelling at each other. There was a burgundy Buick beached in the middle of the street, trailed by a few cars trying to make it past the intersection. While I helped guide traffic around, the crowd rushed in the opposite direction, past the white principal of the Y.E.S. charter school that occupied the first two floors of Robeson’s building. He literally threw up his hands, one holding a clipboard and the other his phone, as I saw Maria G.¹⁶ get swung towards the ground while her fists were wrapped around the long braids of a black girl facing away from me. I dove towards Maria G. and hoisted her by the ribcage. As I dragged her backwards, I finally saw the face of her opponent and we locked eyes in mutual recognition. *Right – Chyna!* I yelled “what the fuck happened?” and Chyna didn’t answer, shaking her head and stalking off. She had attended Robeson a few years back, but was asked to leave for a school that would be a ‘better fit.’

Tossing the few stray extension braids she had pulled out onto the pavement like stones into a pond, Maria G. sat on the curb a half block away and barely listened to my de-escalation lecture. After talking to a smattering of other

¹⁶ ‘Maria G.’ was always called with her last initial because she was one of three Latina Marias in the senior class.

students and staff, I later stitched together the story of what happened.

Neveah and Spider had first squared off, flanked by their respective homies: Tyrell, Neveah's Black play-cousin whose family had been living in her house, and José, who had been in the water fight and taunted girls alongside Spider earlier in the week. Neveah threw hot sauce at Spider before he punched her, and soon after Tyrell's older brother rolled up in the Buick to fight Spider. Alongside them, José jumped in to fight Tyrell, and at that point Maria G. entered the fray, and depending on who recounted the story, she was either trying to stop the fight, or ran up on Chyna to get some licks in before the fight was broken up. Tyrell had driven the short uphill stretch from the Swamp, or the Sunnydale housing projects, and Chyna and the rest of the Black kids who were witnesses had ran over the same hill once they heard that Neveah might get jumped. Ultimately, the co-principal Tina and security-guard-cum-advocate Jeff were able to break up the fight before anyone was seriously hurt (still with no help from the Y.E.S. principal!), and everyone went home.

A precious sunny day and a schoolyard game devolved into the first racially charged scuffle Robeson had seen in seven years. I recount the story in detail to highlight the way that an almost inconsequential ill-timed water fight became more and more racialized as people told and re-told the story. Teachers got texts from colleagues at other schools: "I heard there was a race riot at Robeson?!" By the time Aura, one of the girls who read the *In Lak'Ech* poem, got to work that afternoon, her boss at the neighborhood center already knew what had happened. A Black kid walking down Mission Street was asked if she went

to Robeson – she lied and said she didn't. For Robeson, this relatively minor dust up was a branding crisis. As Mr. Agusalim, the Economics teacher put it that afternoon, “our reputation is shot to shit.” In San Francisco, fights are common at public high schools – weekly, or in a particularly rough semester, maybe daily. Conversely, one of the top reasons parents gave for choosing Robeson was safety. It is located in the Excelsior neighborhood, which is in general Norteño gang territory, but beyond the tightly controlled gang boundaries of the Mission or Bayview neighborhoods. In addition, the small size of the school and intentional focus on relationship building limited fistfights to only once or twice a year for most of Robeson's existence, and there has never been a shooting or stabbing on campus.

The ‘official’ account of this fight, the one repeated by Aaron and Tina as school leaders, positioned the incident in relation to larger systems of racialized oppression. We see in their version a very specific deployment of ‘justice’ as a progressive trope, enacted at Robeson in the idea of being a “school for social justice.” The hegemonic quality of that phrase is exemplified by Aaron's school-wide announcement on the PA system the morning after the fight. His voice crackled over the loudspeaker, interrupting the first class period:

As many of you know, there was some racial tension in a fight that had racial overtones, in which African American & Latino students were taking sides based on race, contrary to everything we do as a social justice school. The people who were involved in this are not bad people, but they are taking out their own oppression and suffering out on others and that has become dangerous to our community, so um, you will see that some people are being removed from the

community. They will be suspended. You may see them back taking some tests and things because we don't want to penalize them academically, but they will be finding new schools for next year. So just rest assured that if people violate our community in this way, they will be removed, in particular as a school for social justice, where we value solidarity among different among different racial groups in order to fight the real enemy. In addition, I really want to thank a number of Robeson students who really went above and beyond to preserve the peace, like Chuy Padilla, who tried to go across those racial lines to stop the fight. He even got hit by one of the outsiders who was there, but didn't jump in even after that. So that's just one good example of how we can bring peace to those situations. We want to be a strong community. We want to make sure we stand for what it means to be a strong Latino, what it means to be a strong African-American, which means solidarity and strength, not fighting each other in the street so that the people in power win out. I hope that you all have a peaceful day.

In this short speech, we see several moves that reflect what we might call the 'official discourse' of Robeson. First, the reconsolidation of the various people of the institution as a "community," a notion that has become a given framework in both non-profit and educational sectors, but that in practice has to be forged over and over by those within said community. Second, in a deft two step, Aaron both invokes a broader sociopolitical understanding of systemic oppression as causing violence, and then singles out the students in the fight for being the 'dangerous' ones – "rest assured" functions doubly as an anxiety reducer for anyone who was nervous, and as a warning to those thinking of fighting again. The attention he pays to announcing that those in the fight won't be penalized *academically* and that they are not 'bad people' positions Robeson as less punitive than mainstream schools, also alluded to in the idea that these students will be 'finding new

schools,' rather than 'expelled.' This institutional model of solidarity doesn't make much room for disagreement or anger, but instead demands removal without acknowledging that there may be valid concerns at the heart of the conflict. Significantly, he chooses Chuy, a socially powerful Xicano student who had previously been asked to leave Robeson himself for selling drugs on campus, as the exemplar student he holds up for the larger community, signaling a valuation of certain kinds of redemption over others. Chuy's status as model citizen is underwritten by an attack by 'outsiders,' a category that I explore more in depth in the following section of this chapter, where the incongruence of a middle-aged white man declaring that "solidarity and strength" are "what it means to be a strong Latino" or a "strong African-American" is underscored by his reluctant commitment to the police state.

"We got Outsiders Up Here": Shadowboxing with Carceral Progressivism

"Wait, Ricky got suspended too?" Jacki asked, her voice echoing down the long hallway, a reminder that she was supposed to be in class. Her homegirl Cyarea grabbed my phone to set the record straight, speaking into the voice memo app. "No, he didn't even start nothing. The Mexicans started it cause they was spitting on Neveah and calling her b-words!" The blanket indictment of 'Mexicans' was incidentally accurate for Spider and José, who were there during the schoolyard argument with Neveah, but not for the more diverse crew of Latinx kids that assembled around them.

“Don’t say b-words, they recording!” chided Jacki, shaping herself in response to the archive, anticipating her words in circulation, as they are on this page. Just then, Juan Carlos passed by. A hall pass dangling from his hand, he walked backwards, taunting in his Chilango-inflected¹⁷ sing-song, “if she calls herself a bitch, then she is one!” to which both spindly black girls perched on the table popped up to protest. “See?! Ooooh they so racist!”

Juan Carlos’ hallway jaunt was interrupted by one of Robeson Justice Academy’s co-founders, Aaron, who stepped in front of the teenager to guide him back towards our quartet. Addressing them all, he began, “So I need to explain something to all three of you & Ms. Shange, you may wanna wait” gesturing towards my ubiquitous iPhone recording. I assented almost thoughtlessly, following Aaron and the kids into his office, but three years later, it’s this moment, this gesture toward the phone, the record, the archive, the discipline, that now haunts me most. Aaron *knew* I was writing an ethnography about antiblack racism in the progressive movement, and asked me to document the interaction to come. When he invited the record into the room, Aaron intuited before I did that the ethnographic record was in collusion with his version of events, that a litigious reading of the evidence would show what an exceptional white man he was. This is why Aaron can trust the archive, why he will go on to say that Juan Carlos’ misogyny is “reasonable” and thus, he had done everything

¹⁷ ‘Chilango’ is used to refer to people from Mexico City, or el Distrito Federál. The residents of that region of Mexico often use a melodic dialect of Spanish.

he could do. His hands were tied, ours shackled. Robeson, and the America they imagine, are right.

The three young people and I sat in front of Aaron's desk in the principal's office – Jacki, a black freshman whose cousin was at the center of the conflagration, her young wodie¹⁸ Cyarea, and sophomore Juan Carlos, whose friend had also been in the fight. In some ways, it was like any other conflict mediation, where each side speaks on their experience, and tries to come to a space of overlapping responsibility and accountability. Happening at the same time, though, was a challenge to the entire project of Robeson, issued chiefly by Jacki. In the tumble of words and feelings that were the next hour, Jacki and Cyarea pummeled Aaron with questions while he tried to use the fight and subsequent gossiping on social media as teachable moments.

Aaron: What happened yesterday was so dangerous... what people were doing, including, to some extent, the three of you, is replicating, which means recreating, the prison culture that we have here in America, where working class and poor folks of different races are pitted against each other. It's called 'divide and conquer.'

Cyarea: What's that?

Aaron: Where the rich people, the people with power, the white people, allow and set it up such that poor folks, people of color fight against each other to the point where they don't see the real enemy. So they are

¹⁸ 'Wodie' is a slang term for a friend, originally derived from the New Orleans geographic term 'wardie' denoting people who were raised in the same municipal ward. It came into national Black parlance through the circulation of Cash Money Records hip hop artists starting in the mid-1990s with Hot Boys and Juvenile, and continuing into the aughts with multiplatinum rapper Lil' Wayne. Many Black Californians migrated through Texas and Louisiana, further cementing cultural ties between these two regions.

fighting their actual brothers and sisters, and they allow the real enemy to stay in power.

For Aaron, the responsibility for prison culture lies with Black and Brown children as he accuses Juan Carlos, Cyarea, and Jacki of perpetuating prison logics in the US. Further, he positions them as blind to the political realities structuring their lives – *they don't see the real enemy* – and then chastises them for facilitating ‘divide and conquer’ strategies.

He went on to describe prison yards as self-segregating, and feeling agitated by the disappearance of white culpability in Aaron’s narrative, I interjected with a little history of Black and Puerto Rican collaboration during 1971 Attica prison uprising, and the complicity of police and prison guards in systems of oppression.

Trying to come back to the fight the day before, Aaron laid down his political prescription, shifting jerkily into Black English grammar to make his point:

... one thing is like, *y'all* could be like its not worth getting pissed about, *it's whatever*. You could apologize if you disrespected someone, you could realize you have more in common than in terms of differences and move with our school's RICH values. Or you could take it to be a racial thing, like “those Latin boys are disrespectin’ me!” and “those Black girls are disrespectin’ me!” and before you know it, you have the prison culture. You have people actin’ all in the street yesterday in a way that is gonna get them locked up. That is exactly what the people in power want. So I had no choice but to call SFPD – we got outsiders up here!”

So, twice here, Aaron discursively distances himself from structural power – first by invoking the specter of the “real enemy” as rich white people without

acknowledging his own position as a white co-principal of high school, and the only six-figure salary in the building, and then by deftly shifting responsibility for incarceration onto young Frisco while he evades responsibility for actually making the call to the precinct. He “had no choice,” but apparently the children had nothing but choices, and made the wrong ones. Ironically, he deploys the RICH acronym of the institutional credo – Respect, Integrity, Courage, and Humility – to dismiss young peoples’ perceptions of disrespect, though we will see soon that he takes it very seriously when he himself feels disrespected. While this chapter explores the way that carceral progressivism encourages Black children to approximate Latinx modes of belonging in order to secure their citizenship to the benevolent state, handing Brown masks to Black kids, Aaron himself does not attempt to mimic Latinx cultural ways or even integrate Spanish words or Xicanx slang into his administrative lexicon. Instead, his chosen shtick was emulating Black English speech patterns, much to the annoyance of staff of color.¹⁹

Beyond the political pretzel logic, the pivotal move in Aaron’s speech is the invocation of Chyna, Tyrell, and the rest of the Black kids who gathered for the fight as “Outsiders.” In part, the apparent racial imbalance in the fight was a trick of postindustrial geography – the three percent of Frisco that is still Black lives

¹⁹ Aaron’s use of Black vernacular was a constant source of humor and annoyance for Black and NBPOC staff, and even from the white native San Franciscans. Just as an example of the running joke, during one assembly, college counselor Zahra started a group text to myself and Amma, a NBPOC staff member “OMFG [oh my fucking God] if he says YALL one more time.” Another former staff member and white native San Franciscan read this passage and put the linguistic practice into regional context: “this is all day everyday Bay Area white people business.”

almost uniformly in public housing, most of which is painfully isolated from the rest of the city and takes forever to get anywhere else, except for Robeson, which was located *on purpose* in the Southeast to be closer to ‘the community.’ It’s right over the hill from The Swamp, SF’s largest remaining housing project, racially marked as Black and Samoan. The closest plurality Latinx neighborhood was the Mission District, flanked by the Black and Latinx Potrero Hill and Army Street projects, so even if Juan Carlos had *carnales* on the way, they probably would have had to hop on the bus instead of just book it²⁰ up the hill.

Just as Chyna had been asked to leave Robeson because of her behavior, Tyrell, the other kid who jumped in the fight, had also once attended the school, but had been recommended for transfer out of Robeson, by Aaron. Another of the boys who came up from the Swamp to fight was the eldest brother of a set of Black triplets at Robeson, each one of whom would eventually be kicked out of Robeson, one by one, by Aaron. For anyone familiar with the school-to-prison pipeline, this pattern of removing Black students is par for the course in US urban public schools. Where the cruelty of this scene comes into view is in the context of multiracial Robeson, a state-funded organization that literally identifies itself with liberation, and then perpetuates the same anti-black disciplinary practices that it purports to end. Robeson has used the crisis, or what I in earlier chapters argue is the “crisis-ordinary,”²¹ of San Francisco’s black

²⁰ To ‘book it’ is Black English vernacular meaning ‘to run or move with urgency.’

²¹ Lauren Berlant (2011) develops the concept of ‘crisis-ordinary’ to bring our attention to how “crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about

community as a central rationale for their institutional exceptionalism and even as a fundraising tactic, explicitly politicizing the school's work in grant applications as helping to ameliorate the street violence that occurs in the wake of gentrification and poverty. It is useful here to think of Robeson as a locus of cruel optimism, the kind that occurs "when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or people risks striving" (Berlant 2011:2) For the Frisco parents, kids and educators who banked on Robeson as an avenue to a more just City, the mode of progressivism offered by Robeson's leadership ensnares them in just such a relation through the othering of Black children.

While Aaron presents Outsider as a ontological category inviting incarceration, Robeson, both *like* and *as* the late liberal state, produces its own externality as a mechanism to make its internal constitution coherent – *Them* is a necessary to antecedent to *Us*. The children he calls Outsiders once called him Mr. Ross, and now he calls the po-lice on them. The Outsiders beget Insiders, embodying the border around this tiny progressive polity, between the school and the hood, never mind that this might be another, blacker, iteration of 'we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us.' Of course, there are endlessly proliferating borderlines between Us and Them in the space of Robeson and in the city of Frisco, each person holding a different idea of who is at the center, and who belongs on the outside. Because of Aaron's positional power as both

navigating what's overwhelming...In the impasse induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown"(10).

principal and co-founder of the institution, as well as his positionality as a white upper middle class white man, his definition of “outsider” becomes *the* definition of Outsider, as he holds sway over who stays and who goes.

Hearing that he had called the po-lice, Jacki asked, “somebody went to jail?”

“No,” Aaron said, “because SFPD is so incompetent they didn’t get here soon enough. I wish they had.”

Incredulous, she clarified, “you *want* somebody to go to jail?”

Shaking her head, Cyarea indicted her principal with a slender pointed finger. “Exactly.” Still trying to give Aaron the benefit of the doubt, Jacki gave him a chance to walk back his statement, “so if the S-F-... whatever the hell they called, the *police* came up here and tried to take them boys to jail, you would let them?”

“The ones who don’t go here, yes. Not my own students.” The protected status he gives to his ‘own’ students belies the ways that the boundaries of community solidarity are structured by notions of ownership. Aaron continued, “I don’t have time for outsiders. I don’t give a crap about them. If they are gonna come up here and mess with our students, then I am gonna have the SFPD come up here and throw them on the ground, and knock their heads, knock their heads – yes.”

I went back to the tape twice just to make sure I had heard right, and not only did he say ‘knock their heads,’ he said it twice. His flippantness summons colonial white masculinity’s fetish of gratuitous anti-Black violence (Hartman

1997), rooted in Reconstruction logics and still bearing fruit. The disposability of Chyna, Tyrell and them as Black “Outsiders” reveals the cost of radical reforms internal to the state apparatus and the failure of progressive institutions to exceed the categories of exclusion validated by the state. Robeson has produced blackness as a stranger in a literal sense, making foreign kids who have lived round the way longer than the school had been in existence. Robeson wants desperately to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline as an insulation from the myth of meritocracy – kids should be groomed for college, not prisons. Young ‘people of color’ deserve better– but apparently ‘Outsiders’ don’t. Aaron reveals that he does not intend to interrupt the Black-to-prison pipeline. Instead, he endorses a diversion system for those young people who can be reasonable enough to be kept Inside. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney caution that “the slogan on the Left, then, ‘universities, not jails,’ marks a choice that may not be possible. In other words, perhaps more universities promote more jails” (2013:41).

Robeson’s twin investments in being a ‘school for social justice’ and a ‘community’ safe from ‘Outsiders’ reflect what we might call a *carceral progressivism* that has become common sense for the left of center. In order to develop the concept of carceral progressivism, I build on the critical intervention of ‘carceral feminism’ as a term that indicts the political investment in policing and imprisonment made by mainstream women’s organizations in the wake of the neoliberal turn (INCITE! 2001; Ritchie 2005; Bernstein 2007, 2010). Most dramatically, the link between sexual and carceral politics are evident in

widespread mainstream feminist support of VAWA (the 1999 Violence Against Women Act) even though it augmented the mass incarceration of Black people and people of color, as well as the more recent rise in the anti-trafficking movement that uses criminalization of prostitution and increased penalties as the primary weapons against survival economies. Like carceral feminists who abstractly acknowledge the role of the state in upholding patriarchy, but then turn right around and petition the state's military arm to dismantle it, carceral progressives lament the systemic racism of the penal system, only to call upon police as 'collaborators' in protecting their vision of 'community.' More broadly, carceral progressives are critical of capitalism, but not its enforcement, and seek redistribution, not reparations. In this instance, carceral progressivism is enacted by the school leader calling on police violence to criminalize the border between the institution and the neighborhood. The marginalization of Black staff, students, and families at Robeson is an instantiation of how racialized carceral logic has stretched beyond literal confinement to shape the practice of social justice movements.

The conjoining of punishment and progressivism is enabled by what Joy James (1999) describes as the 'mainstreaming' of radicalism, exemplified by the "erasure of revolutionary politics and a rhetorical embrace of radicalism without material support for challenges to transform or abolish, rather than modify, state-corporate authority" (83). The rightward slide in the US public sphere means that Robeson can accurately depict itself as to the left of neoliberal social service outfits like Teach for America or Harlem Children's Zone. James' work

helps to place the making of Outsiders at Robeson into a broader context in which

national cultures relegate their subordinated and marginalized people to the role of stigmatized Others – the lesser shadows of the ‘greater’ normative bodies. To the extent that they resist and fight for the legitimacy of their appearance and attendant rights, Others become shadow boxers. (1999:171)

Robeson’s leftist remix of normativity means that the ‘greater’ body is not necessarily white and male, as was true in James’ study of Black feminist politics. Instead, Black people seeking a place to stand in carceral progressive landscapes end up shadowboxing a host of different archetypes, both allies and foes, in an effort to speak and be heard.

Jacki and Cyarea shadowboxed with Aaron for half an hour, centering a gendered analysis of why his disciplinary choices were wrong. Neveah was spat on, and called a bitch, and that *mattered* to them. Cyarea just kept interjecting “they spat on Neveah! They spat on Neveah!” By centering the experience of a Black girl’s body, Cyarea contributes to the torrent of Black feminist and queer challenges to normative violence and ideological dominance. Arguing that it was necessary to call for help when the fight started, Jacki reasoned, “they said they was gonna bring people up here too. I mean a boy was tryna fight a girl? Come on now. She gon’ grab her cousin on them, and I don’t think he should go to jail for that.” For Jacki, the sanctity of Black girl flesh, the little bit of solidarity Black girls can get is an honorable cause, not a reason to get your head knocked in by the police department that committed more fatal shootings than any other in the

region this decade (Palomino 2016). The imperative to defend Black womanhood became more paramount as Juan Carlos piped up to justify the threat of jumping Neveah:

“Excuse me, but what did she do before the fight?”

“They spit on Neveah!”

“Um, what *did* she do?”

“They spit on Neveah!”

“She threw some hot sauce!”

“Oh well, he was talkin hella shit and *that’s a whole ass girl!* They was tryna fight her, she threw hot sauce, oh well! Like boys tryna fight a girl? C’mon.”

Aaron stepped in to validate Juan Carlos’ point, and Jacki was not having it.

“But Cyarea, no, listen to Juan Carlos...”

“Why you keep letting him talk but not me?”

“Cause he is saying reasonable stuff instead of interrupting me.”

“Okay, wow, I don’t care. I don’t care.”

Anticipating Beyoncé’s homage to hot sauce as a black girl weapon of war,²²

Neveah refused to be called out of her name, and Jacki in turn refuses to cede to

²² In February of 2016, platinum pop artist Beyoncé released the song “Formation,” a Black pride-inflected women’s empowerment anthem that included the phrase “I got hot sauce in my bag/ swag.” The song so saturated cultural consciousness that white Democratic presidential nominee and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced in an interview that she, too, carries hot sauce in her purse. When the visual album *Lemonade* was released a few months later, it featured Beyoncé destroying property with a baseball bat during the song “Hold Up,” which is about taking revenge on a lover who undervalues you. During the song, there is a close up on the bat, which is engraved with the name “Hot Sauce.” Taken together, these

Aaron's performance of democracy that doesn't take black life seriously. Juan Carlos is "saying reasonable stuff", but it was his dehumanization of black girls in the hallway – "if she calls herself a bitch that's cause she is one!" – that sparked the meeting in the principal's office in the first place. What Aaron calls "reasonable stuff" is less about the content of Juan Carlos' comments, and more about the form they take – he waits his turn to talk shit, defers to the white man in charge before he tells Cyarea "nobody cares about you, so why you always on my nuts?"

Reasonable is a rhythm, a stooped habitus of deference, however feigned. Reasonable is the police knocking black heads on gray concrete, it's leaving homegirls undefended and never interrupting me.²³ Aaron sounds real reasonable when he explains to Jacki why she should be quiet and listen.

I spend a lot of time listening to you, and we as a school spent a lot of time trying to help you and support you, and if you don't feel that way, that's your business, and then you have an inaccurate perception of how the world is treating you. So if you have an inaccurate perception of how the world is treating you, you are going to react in negative ways. I'm not saying we're perfect, I'm saying I treat you with a lot of respect. [pause] You have disrespected me in a lot of ways.

Jacki responds with the same question I have, "do you hear yourself? How I disrespect *you*?"

images both project an image of black women's strength and right to self-defense, and also provide an embodied response to the systemic undervaluing of Black women's material, psychic, and cultural labor.

²³ For a robust discussion of reason and rationality in relation to the lethal late liberal state, see Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" (2003).

Aaron: so I don't take it personal, but you not always on point yourself in terms of how you especially treat adults, then don't be complaining that we don't let you talk.

Jacki: You don't.

Aaron: We don't always have to let you talk, it ain't always aboutchu.

But ain't it though?

It's here that the liberal eclipses the liberatory. Democratic, horizontal governance is revealed as a treat, a privilege for those with "accurate" accounts of their suffering, those who "don't be complaining." When Aaron insists "I spend a lot of time listening to you, we spend a lot of time trying to help you," the inference is that he spends *too much* time, that the listening he does is an indulgence rather than a right, and the refrain "I'm not saying we're perfect" seems now to be said as much for the ethnographic record as it was for Jacki. Anything she says [to me] about the school, indeed about the world as he put it, is skewed by her "inaccurate perceptions." His testimony is an alibi for Jacki getting kicked out, two *years* before it happened. Recourse to rationality, reasonable and earnest exchange of ideas as the basis for democracy – these are the foundational logics of late liberalism, used to normalize the differential distribution of suffering. Jacki getting kicked out, two *years* before it happened.

Jacki was asked to leave during her 10th grade year after six suspensions for willful defiance, even with the wraparound student services support that Robeson attached to suspensions: teacher meetings, family meetings, and Wellness center referrals for counseling. She still had to go. Willful defiance was

also why Chyna, who had booked over the hill from the projects to make sure her cousin ain't get jumped – was pushed out. Buried in a list of violations like bringing an explosive to school or committing sexual assault on school grounds, the state education code warns that

A student who has committed the following acts is subject to suspension or expulsion:
 (k) disrupted school activities or otherwise *willfully defied* the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the fulfillment of their duties

Chyna and Jacki were not alone. Across the state of California, the willful defiance statute was used to suspend or expel Black children at four times the rate of white children, and three times the rate of Latinx children. First Nations students were also targeted with punishment for willful defiance. Because of this differential impact, community organizers and education activist successfully mobilized to abolish “willful defiance” as cause for suspension, first in Los Angeles in 2012, and later in San Francisco. Jacki was kicked out for willful defiance in the last year it was legal to do so. In a sense, her and Chyna’s removal helps constitute the archive of that political struggle – they were dots on graphs distributed to school board members, that revealed the antiblack effects of state policy, and made the status quo untenable.

Jacki herself theorizes an alternate telling – one in which she never commits the “willful disobedience of the *valid* authority of supervisors, teachers, or administrators” because Aaron’s authority is always already made invalid by his willingness to throw black children under the bus, or into the paddy wagon.

Just as he uses the refrain of ‘social justice’ and the official verbiage of the institution’s RICH values as tools to rationalize the impact of his decisions on Jacki and ‘nem’s homies, she turns the democratic ethos back on him, complaining that “y’all don’t never let nobody say they stuff.” Jacki’s critique resonates with Carole McGranahan’s (2016) observation that “refusals illuminate limits and possibilities, especially but not only of the state and other institutions” (319). We might perceive Jacki as part of Ahmed’s “willfulness archive” insofar as she got “in the way of what is on the way,” so she was made to *get out of the way* (2014:47). Rather than read this as what Audra Simpson calls the “easy answer” of political resistance, I argue that *willful defiance* is better understood as a mode of Black refusal that rejects the terms of the progressive promise. Willful defiance is fundamentally a critique of civil society, which theorists of antiblackness argue is made whole through the exclusion of Blackness from the social body, just as Robeson’s liberated zone is maintained through the expulsion of Outsiders.

Disproportionality is a key frame here: Robeson’s founder thinks ‘a lot’ of listening is happening, and for Jacki it’s never enough cause “y’all stay kicking people out,” cause he stayed kicking her people out. In a carceral progressive regime, blackness manifests *as* and *in* excess – black children’s “stuff” in excess, their voices, their behavior, the discipline they face. Frank Wilderson (2010) has offered a notion of blackness grounded in death, as that which causes bodies to magnetize bullets. I wonder here in the context of social death, what shape do those bullets take? Does blackness also work to magnetize scrutiny, punishment,

blame? In the iconic moment of Fanon on the train, we witness blackness as being in triplicate, or perhaps more aptly, non-being in triplicate.

In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other . . . and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea. . . .

Jacki, too, enacts a troika: she is for herself (“I don’t care),” then contends with Aaron (“do you hear yourself?”), then his presence in the argument’s dyad dissipates into Reason – he was not there for her to fight with, as she was grappling with common sense. It was as maddening for Fanon as it was for her, as he lamented “my unreason was countered with reason, my reason with ‘real reason.’ Every hand was a losing hand for me” (1967:132).

In the face of such a stacked deck, Cyarea offers us willful defiance as both a methodology and an imperative. Fanon wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* specifically to render the condition of Black people in the Americas as distinct from the terrains of decolonial struggle on the African continent, and his Antillean insights continue to demand a hemispheric context. Like the Black Brazilian mothers that demand the police resurrect the sons they have killed, Cyarea defies reasonableness in the face of state violence. Rather than the masculinized spectacle of state murder, she is confronting a tiny violence, what Beth Povinelli might call a quasi-event, just the grit on the late liberal emery board that files down black life to a nub of endurance.²⁴ A methodological stance

²⁴ See Povinelli, 2011.

of Black feminist defiance might allow us to return to the scene(s) of these subjections to meet the Outsiders scraped off by state, gather them together into unreasonable words that *do* interrupt the validity of antiblack authority, that dislodge the alibi of democracy. In the next section, I return to the Town Hall to see how an unexpected flank of employees also adopt a stance of defiance in the face of carceral progressivism.

Three days after Juan Carlos, Cyarea, and Jacki sulked in Aaron's office, they were among the two-hundred and forty-some young people filing into Robeson's cavernous, creaky auditorium. The planks of the stage had gaps, but were brilliantly illuminated by a brand new stage lighting system paid for by the charter school that shared the building, and thus the auditorium, with Robeson. The Town Hall had been scheduled for months, and was intended to be a critical-but-calming pep rally for the mandatory standardized tests that would take up the bulk of the week. Given the institution's commitments to both interrupting violence and promoting multiracial unity, as well as a pedagogical aversion to standardized assessment, the decision to forego the test prep was universally supported by Robeson staff. The question of what exactly *should* replace it was hotly contested – because the fight happened on a Thursday, and staff meetings were set on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, there was no official channel to collectively plan the agenda.

Instead, two divergent conversations happened – one in a lengthy staff email chain and the other in an ad hoc meeting in an empty classroom. As might be expected, the former was more evenly attended, with almost every staff

member weighing in, and included more grumbling and pronouncements like “we just have to talk some sense into them!” The latter, though it was announced on the school’s PA system by two twelfth grade students inviting “anyone who wanted to think about solutions, whether teachers or students” to come, was not attended by any white staff members, including Aaron. The administration was represented by the Chinese-American co-principal Tina, who came at the behest of four black women teachers advocating to use the Town Hall time for a ‘race split,’ in which caucuses could meet in a safe space and, as math teacher Simone put it,

address these feelings of not being part of a community with our kids, of it being us against them... Like we were doing gender splits, it could be really powerful to do a race split. Aura was like, ‘why do we have to split? It looks like we have a problem!’ Well, *we do!* This is not a split to intentionally split us apart from each other, but a split so we can focus on each other, and of course some of the issues that have been going on, but more so, to ask ‘how has it been *feeling* to be a black student at Robeson? How does it *feel* to be a Latin student at Robeson?’

Pushing against the institutional pressure to seem like social justice was already accomplished at Robeson, Simone did not cushion the urgency of what she saw as the problem. Nyla, another Black teacher who had been at Robeson for eight years, was cynical because she had already proposed racial affinity groups as a school-wide reflection activity, and had been stonewalled: “I just feel like this is happening as a reaction [to the fight]. For two years I have been saying I just wanna be with the Black folks, and it hasn’t been happening.” And ultimately, it still would not happen. Despite an hour and a half of strategizing messaging and

brainstorming which adults would facilitate each racial caucus and drawing up alternate class schedules for the Town Hall day that equally distributed minutes among each of the 5 academic periods so as not to upset curmudgeonly teachers upset to lose their curricular time to the extended assembly time, Tina deferred the caucus idea to the school year to come, “when we are more ready.”

Rather than beginning in affinity groups as was suggested by Nyla and Simone, this assembly started much like any other, with Robeson’s co-principal on the mic setting the agenda. While he and Tina held the intramural title of ‘co-principal,’ Aaron had also helped found the school and had been co-principal since the opening of the school ten years prior, lending him a seniority and gravitas that tipped the balance of the horizontal shared leadership structure.²⁵ Starting with the same ‘common enemy’ theme he stressed in the private meeting with Jacki, Cyarea and Juan Carlos, he cited gentrification as the culprit. “Rents are skyrocketing because more and more rich dot com dudes are moving into the city, right? They are moving into the neighborhoods, forcing you and your families to move out?” He went on to link the city’s 35% homicide rate increase between 2011-12, as well as increases in domestic violence and drug use, to the

²⁵ Aaron was part of the original group of educators from local large high schools that were part of the organizing effort to get the SFUSD to open a budget line item for new school proposals in the low-income Southeast district of the city, which at that time did not have any college preparatory high schools. After that, he served as the founding co-principal of Robeson, and hence has the longest ongoing relationship to the institution. By design, Robeson always has at least two principals, and though he has had several different configurations of co-leader, often people of color, his stability as one half of the dyad renders the co-principalship as a revolving door beside his enduring presence as school leader. Because of this structure, Aaron has far longer standing relationships with funders, district bureaucrats, and community leaders in other sectors who treat him as the de facto Principal, even though he operates in a power-sharing model.

“lashing out” that happened in the previous week’s fight between Neveah and Spider. Ultimately he used the fight as a way to point to Robeson as an exceptional space, saying that because they promote multiracial unity “what we’re trying to do here is really special. There aren’t that many people out there doing it.”

But what *were* they trying to do? Over the course of the Town Hall, sixteen different people took the mic, including students, activists from the neighborhood, staff and teachers, and each offered different, sometimes conflicting, visions of multiracial coalition. Some, like Aaron, relied on the analogic deployment of black struggle. He showed a clip of Black actor Morgan Freeman and Xicano guitarist Carlos Santana discussing immigrant rights in which Freeman declared “our next civil rights struggle will be immigration,” lamenting that recent anti-Latino legislation made him wonder, “what does it mean to be an American anymore?” The clip displaces Black struggle to a ‘civil rights’ past that is analogous to the anti-immigrant present, and supports the broader institutional shift to a paradigmatic Xicanx-Latinx citizen-subject. Other folks spoke on their own racial heritage and histories of coalition-building in California and the US, including my own loosely accurate riff on the history of runaway slaves and maroon communities in Mexico. Standing in the aisle in the middle of the auditorium, I belted out in my best theater voice, “any body ever think, if I was a slave I would run away? If I was a slave, I would be out!?” More than half the students raised their hands, and I called out the names of a few.

Y’all would go somewhere, right? Who runnin’?

Dalisay running, Tonio you running, you out, right? Where guess where you would go? The only country that refused to send black people back was *Mexico*! Some of y'all talkin' bout they comin' to take our jobs, and the only reason California and Texas is even part of this country is cause Mexico refused to send back runaway slaves, so the US invaded their land. That's what solidarity means.

As I banked on, I as met with a wave of applause, which I used to make the polemic counter point. "So anyone who rides for México, who rides for that red white and green flag, who rides for that *orgullo* you should have in *la raza*, should know that flag means riding for black people too." Switching purposefully between Spanish and Black English inflection, I tried to use my busted bilingualism to work against the Us vs. Them binary, but in hindsight I may have merely been a more deft version of Aaron's clumsy appropriation of Black English.

Of all the narratives offered on the stage, the one that stands out as best equipped to defang carceral progressivism was that of Hector, the Salvadoreño non-profit development director charged with raising funds for Robeson programs. The juxtaposition of his position in the institution with his significantly anti-statist views demonstrates the incoherence of carceral progressivism. Far from a totalizing structure, it is a formation on the move, vulnerable to encounter with its radical Other. Hector made a two part argument for coalition, first that Black and Latinx people have common Native ancestry, and the second that they have a common struggle. On the former, he recounted

some of the history of Black Seminoles, and then addressed the Latino students with,

you are half native American, you are part Native American and part Spanish, and a lot of us are African! We are the same blood. We might look a little different, speak different languages, but we are the same blood. We are the same blood!

His self-correction from ‘half Native-half Spanish’ to “*part* Native American” signals the rewriting of mainstream Latinx scripts that has to be done to accommodate Afrx-Latinidad. Even then, the emphasis on ‘common blood’ is on the mythical shared Indigenous blood, rather than the blood spilt in the streets of the ‘Sco. The notion of common blood is vexing for Black people in the Americas with no access to vertical kinship or blood ties (Hartman 1997, Spillers 1987, Patterson 1982). In this frame, Blackness is acceptable insofar as it is indigenous, and thus part of the common. The half truth works, because as Berlant reminds us, “recognition is the misrecognition you can bear” (2011:26). Just as I wove a too-neat tale of intercommunal solidarity speckled with bits of historicity, Hector builds a mythology of a shared Black and Latinx relationships to the land, and thus to each other.

However, Hector as a Frisco Native enlarges the frame of indigeneity to ground multiracial coalition in The City. He led the crowd in the traditional Longshoreman’s Union motto as a call and response: “An injury to one is an injury to all!” Behind him archival footage of striking workers battling police and notional guardsmen flickered by. He asked students to identify what was in the hands of the union members – the steel tenterhooks used to open crates that

were then used in self-defense against law enforcement.

Those hooks are a message to the police. Those hooks are a message to the national guard, that if you attack us when we are fighting for our rights, we will defend ourselves. If you go out on Labor Day, you will see them out there marching with these hooks – these are Black, Latino & Filipino people from every neighborhood in San Francisco.

He went on to historicize the struggles for ethnic studies and student walkouts in The City as confrontations with the police, asking the young people “will you go down in history as warriors who fought, as people who fought against poverty and racism? Or will you go down as the lambs who were led to slaughter?” He evokes the police station as slaughter house, an image incongruous to Aaron’s notion of the police as those who Robeson from *Outsiders*, even though they both are cognizant of the police as a harbinger of injury. Hector’s contrast between ‘warriors’ and ‘lambs,’ framed squarely in the context of revolutionary violence, was a direct affront to Aaron’s waxing about Robeson developing ‘warrior-scholars’ whose prowess shows in their academic achievements. Hector’s warriors indeed have a common enemy, but that foe is the police themselves, while Aaron’s brand of carceral progressivism puts him on the side of calling, rather than fighting the police. Indigeneity here is presented as a trope of both The City and the land – two registers of Nativeness that are echoing but dissonant.

Hector’s Frisco Native politics make a multiscale intervention in carceral progressive practice. On the level of ideology, he presented a counternarrative of what it means to be both people of color and from the City, one in which the

primary imperative is collective self-defense against state violence. Further, his presence as a working-class Latinx man openly contradicting his white, elite boss makes a materialist intervention into the ‘reasonable’ deference expected by later liberal progressivism. His, too, is a willful defiance, and his agile reworking of the school’s discursive space recalls Cyarea and Jacki’s refusals of confinement logics. After Hector’s subversive improvisation, the assembly came to a close back in line with institutional script, one which privileged Insiders over Outsiders.

Producing la Otra: Multiracial Anti-Blackness

Aaron thanked all the speakers who shared the mic at the Town Hall, and called Aura and Bree to the stage to close us out. He beamed proudly, “these young women are going to share part of the Maya tradition with us, that powerful bloodline we all hold!” Though Hector had made an argument about Black and Xicanx people sharing Native blood, Aaron here slips his own whiteness into the first person of nativity. The girls walk onstage in front of a mustard colored PowerPoint, lit up with the verse they were about to read. “Okay y’all, repeat after us.” Bree started with the Spanish line, and then waited for the crown to respond, followed by Aura reading the English.

Si te hago daño a ti
 If I do harm to you
Me hago daño a mi mismo
 I do harm to myself
Si te amo y respeto
 If I love and respect you
Me amo y respeto
 I love and respect myself

As a *ceremonia*²⁶, the reading of *In Lak'Ech* is cathartic. Tears flowed down Aura's face and Bree's voice trembled as she read the poem. Hundreds of kids –Nicaragüense, Xicanx, Black, Tonga, Pin@y, American Born Chinese, Viet²⁷ – speaking with them in one voice, articulating love for both self and other, Black and Brown borrowing each others tongues in a gesture of solidarity. Rituals like these are one mode of producing the category 'people of color.' While 'people of color' is a term used in the Americas since the eighteenth century, often as a reference to freed African-descended people,²⁸ the latter half of the twentieth century saw its resurgence and repurposing as a broader non-white political identity. In many ways, the category 'women of color' prefigures 'people of color,' because much of the theoretical labor that permits the imagining of a politicized multiracial collective was done by women of color feminists in on the ground activist work as well as in the canonical volume *This Bridge Called My Back*. Writing about impact of *This Bridge*, a 1981 anthology edited by Cherrié Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa that included Xicana, Black, Native, and Asian-

²⁶ The term *ceremonia* is used by English and Spanish speakers in broader Xicanx-influenced communities to refer to both informal and religious ceremonies.

²⁷ Throughout this text, I try to amplify the emic terms used by racialized and queered communities to name themselves, both as a methodological and political commitment. 'Nicaragüense' is a standard Spanish term for people from Nicaragua, while 'Xicanx' is a racial-political identity for both Mexican descended people living in the US, as well as the broader Latinx community that identifies with the cultural traditions of Xicanismo. Many Polynesian communities have migrated to San Francisco as a result of UC neocolonialism in the Pacific Rim, including those from the island of Tonga, for whom the adjective is 'Tongan.' 'Pin@y,' also written Pinoy/ay, is a cultural nationalist identity term for both those in the Filipino diaspora. 'American Born Chinese,' or ABC, is a term salient in the California racial context where 'Chinese' alone can refer to both immigrant and transnational migrant people from China, while ABC squarely identifies people as Chinese-America. 'Viet' is a neutral shortening of 'Vietnamese,' often used by young people born in the US.

²⁸ For more on the history of 'free people of color,' or 'free gens de couleur' in antebellum Louisiana, see the historical works of Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, and the contemporary scholarship of Joan Martin, both anthologized in Kein (2000).

American women, Caribbean feminist Jacqui Alexander reminds us that “we are not born women of color. We *become* women of color. In order to *become* women of color, we would need to become fluent in each others’ histories...” (2005:269). Bree and Aura practice that fluency of tongue and *became* women of color on that stage, but the succor generated from the sound of their voices harmonized with two hundred others cannot bridge the gap between discursive unity and material antagonism. Indeed, the discourse of ‘people of color’ enacted at Robeson works hegemonically because the more material conflict arose between racial groups, the more powerfully ‘unity’ is reasserted as a method of dismissal. Further, rather than the horizontal mutuality between non-white people imagined by Alexander, Anzaldúa, and Moraga, the terms of multiracial coalition here are arbitrated by white folks with positional power. White mediation of people-of-color politics is a defining characteristic of the enmeshed Bay Area non-profit and educational sectors, and is a result of the systematic underemployment of Black and Latino activists in the lower-paid direct-service positions within ‘social justice’ organizations, as well as the prevalence of ‘allyship’ as a mode of white progressive liberalism.

Though Bree is the one who speaks the phrase “*tú eres mi otro yo*,” she actually does not embody the ontological subject-citizen produced through the institutional and regional discourse of multiracial progressivism, but rather can only conditionally enter the status of citizen by performing her fealty to the yoke of Black-Brown unity. ‘People of color’ as operationalized here is a coalition of the known, haunted by the figure of *la otra*, the Outsider, who is also the slave.

She can *act like* a citizen, in this case through the symbolic speaking of Spanish. Her Black face is made welcome in the house of Robeson behind the Brown mask of “Yo.”

What the offering of the *In Lak'Ech* poem does, as an instantiation of the broader politics of coalition enshrined in the mission of the organization, is the chance for Black kids to play-act at Latinidad, a provisional reindigenization based on the decolonial maxim that *la cultura cura*. Often used by educators and youth workers in reference to the transnational structural and street violences that ensnare urban communities, *la cultura cura*, or ‘culture cures,’ is a reminder of the healing power of ‘indigenous’ traditions for Latinx youth. The conflation of Latinidad and indigeneity reflects the enduring political legacy of Xicanx Indigenism in the San Francisco rioscape. ‘Indigenism,’ or “the act of self-consciously adopting an indigenous identity – which may not otherwise be self-evident – for a political or strategic purpose” (Latorre 2008:42) provides an affirming and powerful lexicon of selfhood for both 2nd and 3rd generation Mexicanxs, as well as for the kids of more recent Central American migrants, who constitute a large part of the city’s Latinx youth. Left Coast genealogies of urban migration and activism can obscure both the contemporary and historic presence of Afrx-Latinxs²⁹ throughout Latin America, resulting in unduly clear

²⁹ ‘Afrx-Latinx’ is a term that can refer to both African descended people in Spanish-Speaking Latin America, like the Black communities of Nicaragua’s Atlantic coast, or arguably the entire Puerto Rican diaspora, as well as to people of mixed Black and non-Black Latinx heritage. It differs from the term ‘Black-Brown’ because while ‘Afrx-Latinx’ inheres in a single body or single community, ‘Black-Brown’ generally refers to relations *between* racially distinct communities or individuals. Even though the separation between

demarcations between “Black” and “Brown.” At the same time, Xicanx Indigenism advances a strategically essentialist Native-ness³⁰ to annex anyone with a Spanish surname into the enmeshed imaginaries of Turtle Island and Atzlán.³¹ Taken together, these two consolidations – Latinidad compacted into the West Coast of the Americas, and indigeneity grafted onto immigration – artificially exclude most Black folks from the “yo” or the “I” who can claim their home as Califatzlán.³² Thus, the re-indigenizing move of *In Lak’Ech* will always fall short because Blackness is bereft of indigeneity – we are the ones who can never come Home. In Fanonian thought, the Black functions in a “structure of never-having-had” (Marriott 2016), and the only way to avoid that truth is to mimic the sociogenic location of another, in this case, that of the Brown. The antagonism between homecoming and homelessness is one that Black and Native scholars, activists, and spiritual workers have been tussling over for at least a generation, and the relation between Blackness and indigeneity is a foundational question of Africana studies as a discipline. This is what the elders might call an ‘in-house conversation,’ one that might not look pretty but is necessary to the

Blackness and Latinidad is tenuous to begin with, I find it useful to delineate between these term for analytic purposes.

³⁰ The concept of strategic essentialism, defined as the “strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (1988, 13) was offered by Gayatri Spivak (1988) as a potentially ethical response to systemic oppression. She uses the example of a diverse set of subaltern groups articulating a collective identity that denies difference in order to make a claim on the Indian state.

³¹ ‘Turtle Island’ is a name for the conjoined continents of what are now called North and South America. The concept of Turtle Island has roots in Lenape and Anishinaabe oral traditions, and became a more widespread indigenous political moniker with the rise of the Red Power movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Atzlán, on the other hand, is the mythico-geographic term used in Mexica and Aztec texts, and revived by Xicanx indigenous Mexican activists. It can refer to either the landmass that encompasses modern-day Mexico and the Southwestern US, or to a mythical paradise that is not on an earthly plane.

³² The term ‘Califatzlán’ is a neologism that combines the Spanish-derived Xicanx slang for California (Califas) with the conceptual geography of Atzlán.

work.

Robeson, however, is none of our houses.

When Luis Valdez wrote *Pensamiento Serpentino*, it was part of a squarely in-house conversation among Mexican-descended people. In the longer epic that Bree and Aura read from, Valdez uses a metaphor of God-as-playwright to weave a new origin story for Xicanidad, one that hinges on the decolonization of consciousness and the cleansing of Eurocentric ideals. He tells his folks

We must all become NEO-MAYAS
Porque los Mayas
 really had it together

Valdez writes passionately to wake would-be-Xicanxs from the slumber of Anglo ideology, arguing that in order to be free, “first el CHICANO must Mexicanize himself.” His vision did not include Black folks, except as illustrative of the parts the Creator-playwright may ask us to play. Setting aside the ongoing battles over anti-Blackness within Xicanx movements, Valdez was not marginalizing or excluding Black folks in this poem, because it was an in house affair, one written to develop the sense of *orgullo* and autonomy necessary to construct a decolonial subject-self. However, the original intent of the poem is obscured by the isolation of a few lines in the *In Lak'Ech* exercise. The recitation by Aura and Bree after the fight was a response to crisis, and the first time that Robeson had used the poem at all. This Town Hall happened just a month before my intensive field work concluded, and I did not attend another assembly in my subsequent trips for follow-up interviews and archival visits.

When I returned to Robeson three years later for the graduation of Cyarea

and Jacki's class, the *In Lak'Ech* excerpt was printed on the graduation program as an epigraph. After all 53 names had been called, and each graduating senior crossed the stage and took their sixty seconds on the mic to give appreciations, Tina asked all present to stand. Before declaring the commencement complete, all the seniors and their families recited *In Lak'Ech*, guided by a Black student reading the Spanish and a Latinx student reading the English, just as it was the first time. Seeing my quizzical look, my former colleague Simone leaned over and said, "oh yeah, we do this at every assembly now." The crisis response has become normative, and the crisis-ordinary of late liberalism has taken a poetic work of Xicanx futurism and denatured it into a pledge of allegiance.

Before *In Lak'Ech* was institutionalized, even before Cyarea and Jacki were kicked out of Robeson, the material chasm between the Black "tú" and the Brown "yo" of carceral progressivism were made clear. After the Bree and Aura finished the poem, and all the PA equipment was lugged back up two flights of stairs to Robeson's main office, a few teachers were milling about, chatting and sharing their emotional reactions to the assembly's success and the loss of the four kids most involved in the fight. Almost as an afterthought, Aaron mentioned that after the big parent meeting handing down consequences to Neveah, Spider, Tyrell, and José, that he had pulled José and Spider's fathers aside to tell them that the boys could petition to be readmitted to Robeson in the fall, since they seemed contrite and really weren't responsible for starting the fight.

Ultimately, even after all the hullabaloo of the assembly and the school-

wide announcements to the contrary, the Latinx kids who were involved in the fight got a pass. The price of violating the multiracial contract was only paid by the Black children. Of course, that's not Spider's or José's fault – any kid who gets a chance to stay in a school that has all your homies and halfway decent teachers should take it. The decision to let José and Spider return was not even Robeson's as an institution – it was Aaron's prerogative in that moment as the white man who stood in for the state. He betrays the delicate Black-Brown trust built by rituals like the Town Hall, confirming that *la Otra* is as Black as ever. I later asked Tina about the exception made for Spider and José, and it was one more on the long list of things she was pissed off about with Aaron, but that she felt she could do little about as the far junior administrator, even with her nominative equity as 'co-principal.' In Valdez's utopian epic, he asserts that for the Neo-Maya,

racial distinctions
no existen
límites materiales
*no existen*³³

Tell that to Neveah.

³³ The stanza translates to:

"Racial distinctions
don't exist
material limits
don't exist"

7.

Coda:
My Afterlife Got Afterlives

“Between the fiat of ends and the ethics of new beginnings, the undercommons abides, and some find comfort in this.” (Moten & Harney 2013:38)

In their provocation to fugitive academics, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney ask us to lean into the liminal, even criminal, spaces of the academy, as generative sites of collaboration. The gap between ends and beginnings is instructive for abolitionist anthropology because of its resonance with the iterative, unfinished nature of long-term fieldwork. As a kind of conclusion, I explore the afterlives of *Progressive Dystopia* as glimpsed in a series of encounters between the ethnographic text and people at Robeson. In doing so, I attempt to take up Didier Fassin’s “call for a reflexive analysis of what becomes of our work once it is published” (2015:595). As Fassin sketches it, the “public afterlife of ethnography” (592) begins at the moment of publication, and is a crucial site of inquiry to understand the challenges and limitations of public social science. While Fassin acknowledges the community under study as one of several possible “publics” in which the ethnographic text can circulate, he primarily focuses on the press and policymakers as interlocutors with the afterlife

of his ethnography of prisons and policing in France. I instead extend a critical eye to the reception and circulation of my work among staff members at Robeson.

In my research on the racial politics of progressivism in San Francisco, I worked with Robeson Justice Academic and other state agencies and NGOs that fancied themselves an intrinsic part of activist movements, with phrases like ‘social justice,’ ‘equity’ and even ‘decolonize’ woven into institutional titles and mission statements. However, just as universities can appropriate activist scholarship as a selling point (Weiss 2016; Ferguson 2012), state-funded institutions compete against one another for funding by marketing themselves as ‘collaborative,’ ‘community-accountable,’ and in left-liberal Northern California, even ‘liberatory.’ Even when our collaborative ethnographic work is explicitly aligned with projects of justice and liberation, our texts can develop lives of their own—appropriated for ends we cannot predict. Perhaps appropriate as an abolitionist project, this ethnography ends at the beginning.

#OurLivesMatter: Reprise

The photograph that opens this manuscript, captioned #OurLivesMatter, was captured as part of a wave of protests and mobilizations across the US sparked by the police murder of Michael Brown. Dubbed Black Spring in honor of the previous year’s ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings in North Africa and Southwest Asia, young people took the lead in Ferguson, Baltimore and Chicago (Beydoun 2015). By this time, my fieldwork in San Francisco was over, and I was hustling between

writing and teaching. One night Zahra, a research participant and former co-worker, called me in livid tears. She was the college counselor at Robeson, just a few years out of college, and one of only three Black faculty on staff. She is the only staff member pictured in the #OurLivesMatter photo, hands raised on the far left side of the frame. Her body faces forward, but her gaze is turned back toward the young people gathered behind her. Zahra's half-turn is symbolic of her position at the threshold between the communities served by Robeson and those doing the serving. The very attributes that had made her an enticing hire for Robeson – her Blackness, youth, and activist orientation – were weaponized against her in the aftermath of this photo.

Around the same time as the photo was taken, a number of Black students had come to her after Ferguson, and together they planned a direct action at the Federal Courthouse. Within a week, the momentum swelled, and the young people had mobilized a multiracial group of Latinx, Black, Filipinx and Polynesian peers at schools across the city to attend a youth-led Black Lives Matter protest. As a matter of courtesy, Zahra sent a list of a dozen students who would be out of classes for the morning to the rest of the teaching staff.

In response, Aaron, the school's co-principal, reprimanded her in a lengthy email to the full staff reminding them that all field trips “must be approved by the administrators,” and describing staff coordinating protests as “inappropriate” and “illegal.”

Technically, you can take a day off work to attend a protest with students, but remember that we are teachers. If we want to be organizing students, we

should go work for Youth Uprising or Neighbors for Justice or ALIANZA (and we can refer students to those organizations!). We need to ask ourselves: Why would we want to participate in a protest with students? Are we afraid that they cannot do it on their own? Are we trying to satisfy our own emotional needs? Do we believe we know better than our students the best way to respond to injustice? These would be examples of what Freire calls false generosity.

The principal's thinly veiled critique of Zahra suggests that she is not a good fit for her job – this kind of 'organizing' activity is ill-suited for teachers – and more insidiously, that her collaboration with students was as self-serving and patronizing as White Savior Barbie (Chin 2016). He even turns Paulo Freire's theories of liberatory pedagogy (1970) *against* a young Black woman who identifies as an activist-educator. Aaron's disciplining move reflects the way institutional regimes recruit marginal bodies as putative collaborators for 'social change,' and then presume that paid employment works as a seal between 'us' (the staff) and 'them' (the served).

I, too, was one of those bodies bound to collaborate—my research was implicated in the school's disciplinary technologies. As legitimating proof that Zahra supporting a youth protest was out of line, Aaron cited a book chapter I had written two years earlier, "‘This is Not a Protest:’ Managing Dissent in Racialized San Francisco." Though the chapter was a critique of the school's co-optation of racial justice movements, he used the title out of context to assert that Zahra was in the wrong to support student mobilization. In his email to the full staff, Aaron wrote:

As the brilliant Savannah Shange asks in her paper

about the rally (which is attached if you want to delve deeper into this), "Was the school's institutional role just a pressure release valve to protect the ongoing legitimacy of the state, or one of political mobilization to challenge the practices of that very state?"

He called the chapter a "paper" because he was referring to the draft Microsoft Word document I sent him for feedback (and pushback) as a member check (Creswell 2012). The research collaboration between myself and the institution, the 'social justice' school's collaborative relationship with the community it serves, and the supposedly democratic governance structure were each thrown into crisis.

Betrayed by my own research, I wondered if this was "the point at which methods devour themselves" (Fanon 1967:12). In the practice of activist, collaborative research, member checks are used as both a validity and accountability measure, ensuring that the analysis of the researcher does not eclipse the theory-in-use of the research participants. However, this mode of activist research assumes good faith on the part of the researched. Instead, Aaron engaged a bad faith citational practice that painfully reveals the limits of our intentions as activist-scholars. He deployed the ethnographic against itself and used my Black feminist critique as a weapon against a Black woman engaged in principled on-the-ground struggle. The injury was exacerbated in the following months, when Robeson began to accrue institutional accolades for his leadership role in supporting youth activism in the district. Aaron and Tina went on to lead a professional development for other principals about integrating Black Lives Matter into their schools; they did so without Zahra or other Black

staff, and thus invisibilized their labor in producing Robeson's activist exceptionalism. I was hesitant to include to this incident in the dissertation because it reeks of collaborative treachery, and makes plain my own romantic attachments to Robeson as a site of liberatory social transformation. Aaron's email is an artifact of heartbreak. Like Zahra, Amma, and a few other staff members of color featured in the narrative of this study, I fell out of love with the place I had poured hope into.

Gaslit by our revolutionary paramour, we don't work there anymore.

At the same time, most of the staff members of color featured here still make it up the hill everyday before 8:00am. Among them is Sofia, the Xicana Frisco native and Spanish teacher featured in chapter two. She engaged the ethnographic text in a completely different manner than Aaron's bad faith repurposing, and her response constitutes another afterlife of *Progressive Dystopia*. I sent Sofia a draft of the chapter "Why Can't We Learn African?" with a slew of disclaimers and caveats, because I was nervous about her reaction to how she was depicted – I essentially used her classroom as an example of what is wrong with antiracism. Instead I was met with enthusiasm. "I love this chapter! I especially love remembering these students, with whom I struggled so much but remember so lovingly." Sofia's love is expressed in triplicate here: for the pleasure of the text, the experience of memory, and for Pan Dulce, Abuelita, and the rest of her students. She then goes on to think with the text, questioning new reforms to the language program because

now students will at least have (the illusion of...?) choice about what language they take. But I am just really feeling what you said about the carcerality of school- they are captive and how do we get away from it? It's a double-bind, it can't work, right...?

The ellipses and question marks included above are in her original email, and I include them here because they gesture to the space of abolitionist inquiry – the pause, the adagio, *the doubt* antecedent to the formation of our questions. Sofia's ellipses force a wedge between the Berlantian *cruelty* and *optimism* of carceral progressivism so that the “double bind” of choice and captivity is revealed. The ellipses is also the space of effort and labor in the direction of her loves.

Even if it can't work, Sofia continues to work at Robeson and on the puzzles it presents to her politics. For her,

Spanish presents a paradox- in order to center my students, I need to de-center myself as the font of comprehensible input. I MUST get to know my students' stories in order to teach them, but I can't do that in a language they don't know. So I'm speaking a lot of English and just feeling like a failure on various fronts.

Ironically, Sofia uses the language of failure to describe her attempts to ethically navigate the “paradox” of anti-Black progressivism. Sofia's efforts to “decenter herself as the font of comprehensible input” are destabilize the hegemonic “people-of-color blindness” that “misunderstands the specificity of antiblackness and presumes or insists upon the monolithic character of victimization under white supremacy” (Sexton 2010:47). Rather than obfuscate the differences between her Xicanidad and the Blackness of her students, she seeks to cede her own narrative privilege in order to shift the order of power. *This* is what

solidarity looks like. What Sofia speaks to are indeed the failures of carceral progressivism to contain the liberatory impulse, and in that sense represent if not a success, at least a reprieve, for Black life in the ‘Sco.

Moten and Harney look to endings as an escape from the tyranny of those very ethics, but what lingers on after the end? I revisit this series of exchanges as a *pracademic*, one who comes to the ‘what’ of the work through the ‘how’ (Davis 2016). Zahra’s furious phone call reconstitutes the collaborative bond, a practice of Black feminist solidarity in the face of institutional treachery. She labored alongside me in what Sharpe (2016) calls “wake work,” that effort of re/constituting Black life in the face of Black death; the effort that survives the end of the world. Sharpe helps us locate these labors as one of the afterlives of slavery, and points to the role of abolitionist anthropology therein.

Living as I have argued we do in the wake of slavery, in spaces we were never meant to survive, or have been punished for surviving and for daring to claim or make spaces of something like freedom, we yet imagine spaces for and practices of an ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention), an ethics of seeing, and of *being* in the wake as consciousness; as a way of remembering and observance that started with the door of no return, continued in the hold of the ship and on the shore. (2016:131)

Throughout this text and the research process that produced it, I have been motivated the ethical trinity Sharpe conjures: caring, seeing, and being *in the wake* of Black dispossession. Though, like Sofia, I failed to embody ethics more often than I succeeded, the affective orientation toward reparative caring still courses through this project.

After the #OurLivesMatter photo, after Aaron's searing email, after Zahra's teary phone call, after Sofia's successful failure, there was yet another ethnographic afterlife. This one was smaller and more ordinary, and sits at the fragile suture between my heart and mind. It woke me up. I published a version of the first half of this story on the *Cultural Anthropology* website as part of a curated conversation about collaboration as a mode of anthropological practices. Just as I did with the chapter I sent to Aaron years ago featuring him, I sent Zahra a draft of my essay about the censoring email and our subsequent phone call. She called me after reading the piece, and said that "it was healing to read" because "that moment became so much more than that one moment."

What Zahra points to here is the role of ethnographic practice in doing wake work. Abolitionist ethnographic texts narrativize the daily moments in which Black people "claim or make spaces of something like freedom" as we survive the afterlife of slavery – those spaces at Robeson include a Beginning Spanish classroom, the circuit of hallways that cinch the school, and even Aaron's own office. The ethnographic lens can also reveal the ways in which these spaces are co-produced by a multiracial group of people invested in sustaining Black life in Frisco despite the strictures placed upon it by the force of carceral progressivism.

Departing Dystopia: Implications & Future Research

In this manuscript, I have made three interconnected conceptual arguments. First, I argue that San Francisco is best conceived as a *progressive*

dystopia where the fatal limits of the late liberal imaginary are revealed. I then use the frame of *carceral progressivism* to describe the paradoxical dynamic in which multiracial social reforms succeed not despite, but through their collusion with anti-Black logics of captivity and disposability. Finally, I chart the practices of *willful defiance* that Black folks and Frisco natives use to pierce the liberatory façade of carceral progressivism, thus undermining both reformist and reactionary modes of Black dispossession. As a theoretical invitation, I offered *abolitionist anthropology* as a way to name and honor a long thread in the tradition of Black anthropological practice that this project seeks to continue.

At the outset of this project, I conceptualized both my method and my analysis as solidly in the realm of activist anthropology (Hale 2006), and assumed I would offer proposals to improve Robeson's work with Black communities. Instances like Aaron's disfigurement of my research and 'mediation' between Jacki, Cyarea, and Juan Carlos revealed to me the romanticism of my allegiances to the progressive project, and the risk of uncritically engaging a social movement on its own terms. Robeson's co-principal Aaron isn't spectacularly racist – he is earnest and reflective. Several staff members of color said he was the best boss they'd ever had – including Zahra. One school counselor quit her job at Robeson out of frustration with its inability to live up to its social justice vision, and yet continued to send her own child there because it was the best option in the city for her as a parent. If Robeson is the best-case scenario - and it *still* fails the basic needs of Black youth and educators in southeast San Francisco, what does that reveal about the political imaginaries that shape social reforms aimed at the

democratization of social services like education and health care? Further, what directions does it suggest for future ethnographic projects at the interstice of state, city, and the afterlife of slavery?

Most often, anthropological engagements with policy have either come from applied perspectives, which are often written with for the specific audience of the client funding the research, whether an NGO, or a corporate entity, and thus necessarily uses the funder's terms; from activist research, which in its most rigid formulation risks replicating the terms of the social movements under study; or from more traditional op-ed approaches to public anthropology that use common sense terms as an accessible starting point. My analysis points to the utility of another, complementary, mode of engaged anthropology, so that when we approach social inequity our analytic imaginary is not overdetermined by the organized discrete constituencies of nonprofits and state agencies, but also accountable to the disorganized and disorderly excesses that cannot be sustained by crystal clear platforms and bold mission statements. Abolitionist anthropology writes into those excesses and failures, as it helps perforate rather than reinforce the boundaries of belonging.

Once consequence of variegated neoliberalization processes globally has been the NGOization of politics, in the US that shows up as the rise of the nonprofit sector as a hub for all kinds of activism. The "non-profit industrial complex", as it is called by many Bay Area organizers, neatens unruly dissent into mission and values statements and shoehorns insatiable demands for sovereignty into winnable campaigns. More than just a political economy, this is a libidinal

economy that disciplines the desire for freedom into a quantifiable goal – an endpoint that can be lauded on a successful end-of-year grant report.

Jacki, Cyarea, and them are the remainders of Robeson's successful progressive formula, and it's incumbent upon both scholars *of* and participants *in* activist movements to be accountable *to* what is unaccounted *for* in the design and evaluation of reform initiatives. What, though, does such an accounting look like in the current White House? How does thinking through the limits of the best case scenario help when we are facing, what many in the public sphere are calling the worst case scenario? If we return to thinking about national spending, the conjunctural crisis internal to late liberalism (i.e. the hinge between the neoliberal policies Clinton-Obama era and the more populist approach of the Trump white house) is going to show up most forcefully in these remaining social service sectors, where billions of public dollars are still earmarked for, well, the public. However, conservative discourse vilifies government spending, particularly when the beneficiaries are poor and Black or of color. One key move for both social scientists and scholars of race in this moment is to turn our lens toward social service institutions like schools, health care centers, and public housing offices. In doing so, we can intervene in several realms. First, we can use the legitimacy of our academic positions to create a counterdiscourse to balance the vitriol against government program. Second, even as we can use research as a weight against the defunding and dispossession of public institutions at the hands of white nationalist austerity, we can also hold putatively progressive service providers accountable for the violences they perpetuate while trying to keep the

doors open. Finally, by attending to the day-to-day provision of social services, we can also reckon with the ways Black communities and communities of color combat their erasure and dispossession in ways that challenge academic boundaries around “the political.”

In his musings on activist research, Charlie Hale asserts that “the utopian image lies on a distant horizon, and the path to get there confronts harsh constraints and immediate needs that must be met with whatever contradictory means we have on hand” (2006, 115). *Progressive Dystopia* embraces this activist imperative to work through and across contradiction, but a dystopian reframing of Hale’s “utopian image” posits that *walking* that path may be the heart of the work, rather than the seduction and inevitable betrayal of liberal teleologies. Abolition as an epistemic and ethical stance in anthropology means revisiting how we conceive of the field(s) in which we work. If, as Bianca Williams declared to a packed room of anthropologists still reeling from Trump’s 2016 election, “the whole world is a plantation,”¹ then our only imperative must be to get free. Abolitionist anthropology engages the tools of our trade in this fugitive mission, and allows us to amplify the practice of black life as lived *in the wake*.

¹ Williams made these comments as part of a roundtable titled “Towards an Unapologetically Black Anthropology: Reflections on Grief and Rage” at the 2016 American Anthropological Association annual meeting; the panel was organized in response to a series of high-profile murders of Black people in the US at the hands of police, and the resultant backlash against popular dissent.

APPENDIX

Student Interview Protocol

1. Did you grow up in San Francisco? Tell me about your relationship with the city.
2. What did you hear about Robeson Justice Academy before you got here? Why did you choose the school?
3. Who were some of the teachers who you felt most connected to? Can you tell me a story about them?
4. What were some of the biggest problems you had at Robeson Justice Academy? Teachers you had tension with, etc. Can you tell me a time when that problem kind of blew up?
5. Do you feel like you have been treated fairly at Robeson Justice Academy? How would you change the discipline policies, based on your experience or what you have seen with other students?
6. Do you feel like your culture & community is represented in the education you get here at Robeson Justice Academy? Why or why not?
7. What about outside of school—how do you feel like your community is treated by the city? Do you feel included in what it means to be from San Francisco?
8. What are the issues impacting your community that you feel most passionate about?
9. Have you had the opportunity to take any action on these issues, either inside or outside of school?
10. What does the word ‘gentrification’ mean to you? Do you think it has any impact on your life?
11. What are your plans after high school? Who or what helped you decide on your post-high school plans?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add to this study of social justice education in San Francisco?

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Did you grow up in San Francisco? Tell me about your relationship with the city.
2. Tell me about the communities you identify with—racial, cultural, in terms of language, or any other community you feel you belong to.
3. How did you end up working at Robeson Justice Academy? What did you expect it to be like before you started working, and how did your experience differ?
4. Do you feel like you are part of the same community as the students you teach here? Why or why not?
5. The Robeson Justice Academy mission includes ‘social justice. What does ‘teaching for social justice’ mean to you? How often do you practice it in your classroom?
6. What are some of the ways you think social justice education makes a difference in the lives of students?
7. What are some of the limitations of social justice education?

8. Can you talk a little about your experience working at Robeson Justice Academy? There is a lot of emphasis on staff relationships – who have been some of the folks you have been closest to? Moments of greatest tension you have experienced on staff?
9. What does the word ‘gentrification’ mean to you? Do you think it has any impact on your life? What about on student’s lives?
10. How do you think the demographic changes in the city impact what it means to teach for social justice?
11. 10. Is there anything else you would like to add to this study of social justice education in San Francisco?

Administrator Interview Protocol

1. Did you grow up in San Francisco? Tell me about your relationship with the city.
2. Tell me about the communities you identify with—racial, cultural, in terms of language, or any other community you feel you belong to.
3. How did you end up working at Robeson Justice Academy? What did you expect it to be like before you started working, and how did your experience differ?
4. Do you feel like you are part of the same community as the students you teach here? Why or why not?
5. The Robeson Justice Academy mission includes ‘social justice.’ What does ‘teaching for social justice’ mean to you? How do you communicate what that means to the staff who work here?
6. Where do you think Robeson Justice Academy is closest or most successful at realizing its social justice mission?
7. Where for you is the biggest disconnect between Robeson Justice Academy right now and the social justice mission?
8. Can you talk a little about your experience working at Robeson Justice Academy? There is a lot of emphasis on staff relationships – what has it been like to be an administrator here?
9. What do you think some of the most difficult disagreements or differences that the staff has had over the past few years? What do you think is the root of those tensions?
10. What does the word ‘gentrification’ mean to you? Do you think it has any impact on your life? What about on student’s lives?
11. How do you think the demographic changes in the city impact what it means to teach for social justice?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add to this study of social justice education in San Francisco

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