Resistance/Refusal of Violence in the Neoliberal City: Black LGBTQ+ Communities in Chicago and New York (1989 – present)

Marc Ridgell

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Resistance/Refusal of Violence in the Neoliberal City:
Black LGBTQ+ Communities in Chicago and New York (1989 – present)

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, Black queer and trans communities across U.S. cities have experienced racist and classist exclusion from gay neighborhoods, police and interpersonal violence in neighborhoods more generally, and medical racism in the HIV/AIDS crisis. Despite these forms of antiblack and anti-queer oppression, Black queer and trans people have performed acts of resistance and refusal to build community and experience better worlds. This research project examines how Black LGBTQ+ communities have responded to systems of racism, classism, queerphobia, and misogyny by claiming their “right to the city.” Specifically, this project explores how Black LGBTQ+ people in both Chicago and New York City have expressed resistance and refusal since 1989. This project is interdisciplinary and utilizes mixed-methods, including archival-based research, visual and media analyses, urban sociology, performance studies, and critical geography.
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Introduction: What’s Prideful about Pride Parades in the City?

On June 30, 2019, I took the Metra and Chicago Transit Authority Red Line Train from the South Side all the way up to Boystown, Chicago’s gay neighborhood, on the North Side. Travelling with my two Black queer friends, I felt ecstatic to finally experience acceptance at a community-festival as big and as queer as I previously had heard Chicago Pride to be. When I arrived, my friends and I meshed against many bodies on the sidewalk, trying to find the perfect spot to view the procession. We finally got to a cute space on Belmont Avenue, where we took pictures with one of my friend’s Pride flags. During the parade, I cheered for the drag queens, drag kings, and trans people of color who marched in the procession and sometimes broke out in performance on sidewalks. I admired the Black and Brown queer and trans faces I interacted with.

While Chicago Pride at first glance seemed inclusive, fun, and progressive—all three tenets of community that I sought after recently graduating high school—I witnessed events that fundamentally went against my personal politics as a 17-year-old. Attendees on the sidewalk pridefully applauded the Chicago police officers marching in the parade. Additionally, people also cheered for the controversial Mayor Lori Lightfoot, as she recently won the election as the first Black lesbian mayor, yet she carries a haunted history through her corrupt involvement with the Chicago Police Department. Furthermore, white queer men in an open bar stared with what I interpreted as disgust at a Black gender-expansive person happily dancing on the sidewalk.

While these three separate events at this Pride festival made me nauseous to my stomach, I admired how the Black trans and queer people still showed up to this heavily policed event and still happily danced, marched, and protested. Only 17, I did not have this language to describe my bittersweet emotions as a Black queer youth first experiencing Pride.
The heightened police support at Pride conflicted with the purported liberal and anti-racist objectives that events like Chicago Pride claims to support. On Chicago Pride’s website, they claim that “pride has come to symbolize several things: the long history of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender dignity, the freedom of all people to meaningfully and proudly express their sexual and gender identities, and the commitment of LGBT people to combat oppression.”

Ironically, this “commitment” that LGBTQ+ communities have to combat oppression contradicts the queer collusion with the fundamentally-flawed carceral system and residential inequalities that disproportionately harms queer people of color. For instance, the family of LaQuan McDonald, a 17-year-old from Chicago who was murdered by cop Jason Van Dyke in 2014, did not receive legal justice a few months earlier in January 2019. The court sentenced Van Dyke to a mere seven years in prison, and in 2022, he got released early, barely serving half of his sentence. Additionally, white gay men gazing with hostility toward Black trans and queer visitors at Pride systemically reinforces the notion that Black people do not belong in neoliberal, predominantly white residential neighborhoods like Boystown.

I do not argue against the (white) queer collusion with the carceral state to claim that Black queer people should collude with the state as well, or that Black queer people have ever trusted the carceral system in the first place. I am also not arguing that Black queer people in Chicago actually prioritize Boystown as their primary space of queer life, as scholar Kemi Adeyemi has shown otherwise. Thus, my discernment does not align with the neoliberal idea...

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1 Chicago Pride Go Pride, “Pride Month 2022 in Chicago,”
2 “Former Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke won’t face federal charges in killing of Laquan McDonald”
3 Here, I use neoliberal, similar in my larger thesis, to indicate the current economic systems of late and neoliberal capitalism. The economic freedom that neoliberal capitalism allows middle to upper-class white people and corporations/developers influences systemic and geographic exclusion. For more, see Adeyemi’s Feels Right.
4 Adeyemi, Feels Right.
that white gay men should fully accept Black queers in the homonormative fabric of Boystown.\(^5\) My first Pride experience, however, details the complicated and precarious relationship that Black trans and queer Chicagoans have with the greater city and its smaller, beautified neighborhoods like Boystown, which are widely understood as offering a safe space for queer people.\(^6\) This experience also grapples with the false notion of urban multiculturalism that scholars like Martin Manalansan and Savannah Shange heavily critique, given that unrespectable queer and trans people of color—or queers who do not conform to homonormative standards—will never be protected by or fit within their cities’ multicultural paradigm.\(^7\) Lastly, this parade showcased to me that, amid this hostile and homonormative environment, Black trans and queer still frequented Boystown and expressed their right to be there.

Jason Orne’s *Boystown* and Amin Ghaziani’s *There Goes the Gayborhood?* posit that the gayborhood is not necessarily a sanctuary for all, but it is rather experienced as a violent entity by some.\(^8\) As sociologists, Ghaziani and Orne interpreted the racial dynamics of Boystown and interviewed significant stakeholders; however, I am also interested in how their interlocutors would speculate about Black queer youth—wondering where they should or should not be, and how they should not necessarily be roaming the streets of Boystown. According to some of Orne’s and Ghaziani’s interlocutors, these Black queers should stay where they are from—on the South and West Sides. Ghaziani and Orne’s interlocutors spoke about the most vulnerable Black trans and queer people as if they were ghosts. As work from other critical scholars like Kemi Adeyemi, Theodore Greene, and Zachary Blair ethnographically include a more diverse set of

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\(^5\) Duggan, “The New Homonormativity.” Homonormativity represents assimilation practices that some queer people embody. It is the usage of heteronormative ideologies and practices to advance queer politics, participate in neoliberal-capitalism, and become “more normal.”

\(^6\) Orne, *Boystown*; Hanhardt, *Safe Space*.

\(^7\) Manalansan, “Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City”; Shange, “Play Aunties and Dyke Bitches.”

\(^8\) Ghaziani, *There Goes the Gayborhood?*; Orne, *Boystown*. 
perspectives from vulnerable Black trans and queer Chicagoans themselves, my research project centers a Black trans and queer lens in their navigation of their larger, more violent and neoliberal city.

**Expansion to New York City**

In summer 2022, I lived in New York City while on a research fellowship at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. First, I attended New York City Pride, as it was my Pride parade since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, I visited Greenwich Village and Christopher Street Piers, two closely located historical sites of LGBTQ+ life. As my language and intellect matured through experience and coursework, I saw similar occurrences of racial inequality occur in New York City’s sites of queer life. Thus, the comparison between Chicago and New York City became the central focus of my research project.

**Black LGBTQ+ Resistance and Refusal as an Analytic**

To study Black trans and queer experiences in the greater antiblack gayborhood and city, this project traces Black queer resistance and refusal in Chicago and New York City, particularly looking from the late-1980s to the present moment. I chose Chicago and New York as pertinent sites to both examine because they are two of the most populated U.S. cities that display similar forms of racial and class inequality; they are in the Midwest and East Coast, respectively; and they are historically demarcated as cosmopolitan cities. Paying closer attention to the last point, I argue that terms like *cosmopolitanism* are neoliberal descriptors founded on both the investment and divestment of specific communities within the contemporary settler Metropolis.

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9 Ghaziani, *There Goes the Gayborhood*?
By this, I mean that racist policymakers—some of whom are Black and Brown people—in cities have divested resources from Indigenous, Black, and Brown communities because of structural racism and white supremacist and neoliberal claims to geography.10

While barriers exist for Black trans and queer people, Black trans and queer resistance and refusal against the City powerfully transcends violent geographic and temporal bounds.11 As I illustrated in my opening scene, the gayborhood represents one progressive site in the City in which Black queers have been historically kept out from. Many scholars on gayborhoods have questioned the notion of space, systemic racism, and neoliberalism when theorizing how gayborhoods (and City-geographies overall) contemporarily function for queer communities.12 Black queer people13 have historically not belonged in these gayborhoods because of both structural and social forms of racism, misogyny, transphobia, and classism. Drawing inspiration from formative work of scholars who have highlighted the marginal realities of queers of color in the gayborhood and larger neoliberal City, this thesis pays closer attention to the various spatial and temporal acts of resistance and refusal that Black queers enact back against their City. By centering Black trans and queer resistance and refusal against the City, I highlight how Black LGBTQ+ people have persisted against multiple axes of violence—including neoliberal, antiblack, misogynoirist, anti-trans, and anti-queer violences.

11 Lefebvre, “The Right to the City”; Harvey, “The Right to the City”; “Adeyemi, “The Practice of Slowness” and Feels Right. I begin to capitalize “City” (and “Metropolis) to personify the “City” as a violent and neoliberal construct and entity. Neoliberal-capitalism in the City, for example, allows for the privatization of public agencies and development projects. The system of neoliberalism is inherently exclusionary and furthers geographic inequalities.
13 “Black queer” for most of this essay signifies Black people overall who identify as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, queer, intersex, etc. I will specify more particular gender and sexual identities when at various points.
While recognizing the histories and contemporary legacies of antiblack and anti-queer structural violence is necessary, this project takes inspiration from the spirit of refusal: I believe in representing the stories of marginalized peoples imagining new worlds and transcending violence by speaking out, acting out, and affectively being against their corrupt City-communities. Centering resistance and refusal highlights how Black trans and queer Chicagoans have ensured futurity across fatal terrains of temporality.\textsuperscript{14} Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods posit that Black peoples within dominant sites of geography “can…trouble dominant modes of thought, [allowing] us to consider alternative ways of imagining the world.”\textsuperscript{15} In this thesis, I explore how Black trans and queer people have materialized “alternative ways of imagining” Chicago and New York through multiple avenues of resistance and refusal.

**Overview of Thesis**

In Chapter One of my thesis, I review previous scholarship on gayborhoods from Kath Weston, Charles Nero, Christina Hanhardt, and Amin Ghaziani. Additionally, I examine where the (urban) Black Queer Diaspora resides, as Black trans and queer people cannot claim full rights to and protection from the resourced gayborhood and larger City. This section places Jafari Allen, Rinaldo Walcott, Marlon Bailey, and Rashad Shabazz in conversation with each other, as these scholars emphasize that ongoing systemic acts of placelessness assigned to the Black Queer Diaspora can reduce the quality and longevity of Black queer time.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, to define “Black LGBTQ+ Resistance,” I combine theories of resistance and refusal with what French Marxist urban geographer Henri Lefebvre calls “the right to the City.” Lastly, in critically

\textsuperscript{15} McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, 5.
reviewing my methodologies to more ethically read Black trans and queer resistance and refusal, I expand Kemi Adeyemi’s ethnographic framework of the event-potentiality matrix to the archive and visual culture.

In Chapter Two, I examine how Black queer and trans people in Chicago have resisted and refused structural and neoliberal violence since the pharmaceutical introduction of antiretroviral therapy in 1996. I first highlight Michael, a Black gay teenager who served as an HIV/AIDS peer educator in the late 1990s, and how his actions transcended geographic and medical racism. Second, I interpret Black queer literary responses to antiblackness in Boystown, Chicago’s gay neighborhood. I center how the Black Youth Project, a Chicago-based activist organization, spoke against the 2011 Take Back Boystown events, a string of protests that increased racist policing and surveillance in the neighborhood. Third, I use performance theory to showcase the efficacy of a public Black queer street protest and performance that occurred in summer 2020. I end the chapter by calling for a future politic that centers Black trans safety and protection in Chicago, given the overlooked murder of Black trans woman Eshay Key six months after the protest.

In Chapter Three, I trace four points of Black queer resistance and refusal in New York City, utilizing mostly visual and literary analysis. I first use affect and performance theory to analyze the public refusal of mobility of a Black ACT UP/NY activist in 1989. Second, I explore the literary prowess of Black queer poet Travis Montez’s poem “War Cry,” which he published in 2003, shortly after Black lesbian teen Sakia Gunn was murdered after leaving Greenwich Village/Christopher Street Piers, a gay district in New York. Then, I use performance theory, visual analysis, and critical geography to examine how two Black queer girls hanging out on the Christopher Street Piers in summer 2009 express spatiotemporal resistance. Lastly, I re-
foreground a trans-centric framework for the future of Black LGBTQ+ politics, analyzing a protest for Black trans sex workers that occurred in 2021.

In the Coda, I expand from Shange and Adeyemi once again, as they created a framework of “Black Girl Ordinary” and “Black Queer Ordinary,” respectively. As this project analyzes resistance and refusal while grappling with the dangerous *event-potentiality matrix*, this conclusion valorizes a politic of refusal but equally calls for a politic of ordinary. When can Black trans and queer communities stop resisting and refusing? What happens when Black trans and queer communities choose to opt out of laborious activism? I do not devalue the significance of protest or disruption, but this conclusion primarily calls future scholarship to more comprehensively consider Black trans and queer people’s right to and deep desire for, what cultural theorist Shaka McGlotten calls, and Adeyemi builds upon, “Black queer affective ordinariness.”

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Chapter 1: Racist Origins of Gayborhoods, the Black Queer Diaspora, and a Black Queer “Right to the City”

Overview: Gay Neighborhoods in the City

*Settler and Racist Origins*

Gay neighborhoods have historically functioned as a significant geographic site of queer life in the West. Anthropologist Kath Weston and her foundational work traced the evolution of queer enclaves through the Great Gay Migration, a period in the 1970s during which gays and lesbians moved from their hometowns to large metropolitan cities like San Francisco, New York, and Chicago. In her work, Weston was primarily concerned with “under told” stories of queer sexual migrations during this period, considering most literature during that time centered the experiences of upper-class, white, gay men. She explains that Great Gay Migration was connected to a specific imaginary of what gay space should look like, thus arguing that “the gay imaginary is spatialized, just as the nation is territorialized.” This statement itself hints to the settler and neoliberal origins of queer spatiality in the United States. For instance, the historical territorialization of the U.S. nation was made possible through settler colonialism, extracting land from Indigenous peoples through genocide and institutionalizing space through racist spatial practices like redlining. Therefore, when certain gays and lesbians had the opportunity to migrate to specific cities in the 1970s signifies that they imagined queer spatiality and sexuality within a settler and redlined topography. These historic queer spaces created by white gay and

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19 Weston, “Get Thee to a Big City”
20 Weston, “Get Thee to a Big City,” 202.
lesbian settlers during the Great Gay Migration would eventually be city-designated as gay neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{22}

Charles Nero exposed the racist origins of the Gay Great Migration by asking the influential question: “why are the gay ghettos white?”\textsuperscript{23} Nero analyzed Faubourg Marigny, a gayborhood in New Orleans. Nero argued that the housing practices and social networks utilized by gay men in the 1970s to create gayborhoods solely catered to white gay men because Black queers did not have access to home ownership rights. White gay men gained home ownership rights because of their racial privilege and their systemically exclusionary ways of fostering community networks.\textsuperscript{24} White gay men in Fauborg Marigny, just like white people in white geographies, acted hostile and belligerent toward people of color because of antiblackness and settler logic. Many of these acts of hostility arise through “controlling images” mapped onto the bodies of Black people, especially Black gender and sexual minorities.\textsuperscript{25} For instance, the controlling image of the Black gay man as fraudulent “suggest[s] that [their] exclusion from gay neighborhoods may be crucial for the formation of white inner-city outposts.”\textsuperscript{26} Here, Nero exposes the racist function and position that gayborhoods have in the larger City-entity. The gayborhood thus was created through the ordained exclusion of Black gender and sexual minorities, signaling that the cosmopolitan demarcation of “gayborhood” as a historically progressive enclave is not fully accurate and does not confront its antiblack origins.

\textsuperscript{22} Nero, “Why are the Gay Ghettos White?”; Ghaziani, There Goes the Gayborhood?; Stewart-Winter, “The Law and Order Origins of Urban Gay Politics”; Kliner, “Pride and Property”
\textsuperscript{23} Nero, “Why are the Gay Ghettos White?”
\textsuperscript{24} Nero, “Why are the Gay Ghettos White?,” 232.
\textsuperscript{25} Collins,\textit{ Black Feminist Thought}; Nero, “Why are the Gay Ghettos White?”
\textsuperscript{26} Nero, “Why are the Gay Ghettos White,” 243.
Gayborhoods as a “Safe Space”? 

These white gayborhoods that Nero critiques have also had a historical connection to policing and criminalizing people of color. In San Francisco’s Castro gayborhood, historian Christina Hanhardt examined how the Butterfly Brigade, a neighborhood patrol group of primarily white gay men, protected themselves from a rise in anti-gay violence in the 1970s. While young white men from the San Francisco suburbs primarily attacked white gay men in the Castro, the Butterfly Brigade still had a tracking system in which they indexed the race of the attacker for police identification. Furthermore, white gay men in the Castro had a heightened sense of fear that the nearby Black and Latinx communities would still inflict antigay threat. Hanhardt found that these white gay patrols served as the historical precedent to gay and lesbian groups advocating for more queer police officers and police reform and an increased social sentiment that “cast gay people as white and local residents of color as homophobic.” Like Nero and Hanhardt have historically explored, Black queerness in the gayborhood has been historically fraudulent. Therefore, gay neighborhood formation, while contemporary places of community and solace for all LGBTQ+ people, has a haunted history of racism.

Sociologist Amin Ghaziani in There Goes the Gayborhood? explored the similar relationship between gayborhood protection and manifestations of antiblackness in the 21st century. In his ethnographic study on Chicago’s gayborhoods—Boystown and Andersonville—he found that some residents (still) feel “unsafe” and “uneasy” from the presence of queer youth of color. As Weston, Nero, and Hanhardt have shown, these feelings of uneasiness and unsafety are linked to a larger history of gayborhood formation—one built from white

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27 Hanhardt, Safe Space.
28 Hanhardt, Safe Space, 106.
29 Ghaziani, There Goes the Gayborhood?
30 Ghaziani, There Goes the Gayborhood?
territorialization and sustained through neoliberal and carceral practices of “cleanup.”” Hanhardt explains that ongoing reinvestment projects in U.S. cities have “call[ed] for neighborhood cleanups that concentrated on the removal of low-income people of color—including those of LGBT identity—while naming white, middle-class gay men as beacons of the future.”31 This naming of white gay men as the ideal citizen in the City, which has secured their position in the gayborhood, still has not successfully ridded the presence of Black trans and queer folks (which I further explore in the next section). Indeed, as Ghaziani has proposed, “gayborhoods still resonate for these young people of color, many of whom are African American and some of whom are also transgender.”32

I chose to open my literature review with gayborhoods to emphasize the ontological position of the white queer subject within historically gay spaces. Middle to upper-class, white, cisgender, gay men have fit the ontological frame of normative queer spatiality and modernity.33 To clarify, I am not arguing that white gay men and lesbians do not face homophobia or have not historically sought refuge from dangerous living situations in their suburban hometowns. I am also not saying that people of color who fit within the privileged/homonormative paradigms of queer have also not contributed to the harmful productions of queer spatiality. I am also not arguing that the historical or contemporary “gayborhood” has been/is the primary location of Black queer resistance, refusal, or overall life. I claim, rather, that gay neighborhoods have functioned as significant locations of queer geography. And, as this secondary scholarship has shown, Black LGBTQ+ people have historically not belonged there. Because Black (queer) geographies have been stricken by colonialism, divestment, state violence, and dispossession,

32 Ghaziani, *There Goes the Gayborhood?*, 171.
33 Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*; Morgensen, “Settler Homonationalism.”
like recent scholars have asked, where and how do Black queer people claim their “right to the City”? How do they claim space? What has happened to Black queers in these historically neoliberal and violent geographies? And—most important to my argument—how have they resisted and refused systems of antiblackness and other forms of oppression within these spaces?

Overview: Black Queer Diaspora and the City

What is the Black Queer Diaspora?

Since gay neighborhoods have historically, socio-economically, and residentially benefitted upper-class, cisgender, white and white-adjacent gay men the most, Black trans and queer people living in urban geographies socially, resourcefully, and exploratively contend between their local gayborhoods and larger Cities they reside in. Taking seriously scholars Marlon Bailey and Rashad Shabazz idea that, “Black queer space…is placeless, a space without geographic coordinates,” the Black Queer Diaspora thus occupies a precarious yet futuristic geographic, temporal, and theoretical location.

Anthropologist Jafari Allen has pointed to these precarious yet futuristically optimistic notions of space, memory, and temporality in the Black Queer Diaspora. Allen posits that, despite this precarious location that the Black Queer Diaspora navigates, “[we] constitute a way out of the nation-state.” Considering Jasbir Puar’s and Scott Morgensen’s collaborative ideologies that expose the U.S. nation-state’s queer “progressivity” as imperial and settler-colonial, respectively, the Black Queer Diaspora in the global North is not necessarily removed from participating in these exploitative systems, but they have rather fostered belonging and

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34 Here, the “Black Queer Diaspora” encompasses all Black LGBTQ+ individuals living on the continent and in the global diaspora. This essay, however, focuses on U.S.-based, urban Black LGBTQ+ peoples in the larger diaspora.

35 Allen, “Introduction”

36 Allen, “Introduction”
community outside of the U.S. nation-state’s intentional denial of Black and Black LGBTQ+ people access to safe living conditions and citizenship.\(^{37}\) Furthermore, this “placeless” position that the Black Queer Diaspora inhabits—physically through racist zoning ordinances and materially through settler and antiblack notions of citizenship—Allen pertinently asks, “can [Black queers] at least be free?”\(^{38}\) This project intervenes by responding to Allen’s call, illustrating the avenues that Black trans and queer people in Chicago and New York have continually moved toward a future in which they practice freedom.

Theorist Rinaldo Walcott elaborates on the culturally precarious yet futuristic place that Toronto’s Black queer community finds themselves located in. Walcott, like Allen, argues that the Black Queer Diaspora, under false national claims of (neoliberal) progressivity, graciously “develop language and styles uniquely theirs,” despite precariously being “caught between Eurocentric queer histories and homophobic communities.”\(^{39}\) Walcott here clarifies that Black trans and queer people navigate this precarious/futuristic matrix; when Black queers are excluded from community or denied citizenship, leaving them with social and material precarity, they still create culture and participate in worldmaking practices.

*Location of Black Queer Diaspora in Antiblack Heterotopias and Homotopias*

As previously stated, within urban geographies, Black trans and queer people contend with systems of antiblackness, misogynoir, transphobia, homophobia, biphobia that heighten their ontological vulnerabilities across geographies they navigate. To define these “placeless” and precarious Black queer geographies, Bailey and Shabazz offer the term “antiblack

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\(^{38}\) Allen, “Introduction,” 220.

\(^{39}\) Walcott, “Homopoetics,” 237.
heterotopia,” expanded from Michel Foucault’s theory of “heterotopia,” to understand one type of vulnerable geography in which the Black Queer Diaspora resides. Bailey and Shabazz expand from Michel Foucault’s theory of “heterotopia” to coin “antiblack heterotopia,” the stigmatized, “placeless” geographies that Black gender and sexual minorities perform sexual labor and experience gender and sexual marginalization from both nonblack and Black communities. In this thesis, I expand Bailey and Shabazz’s definition of antiblack heterotopias to consider antiblack homotopias, sociocultural places that operate similarly to antiblack heterotopias. Antiblack homotopias include sexually queer “places” that are predominantly white and catered for cisgender men; they also include white-centric, homonormative sexual places, like a gay club or gayborhood street, that marginalize and violate Black life.

Theoretically and Methodically Examining Black LGBTQ+ Resistance and Refusal

Resistance and Refusal as a Framework

Theorists Zoé Samudzi and William Anderson foreground that “Black people’s resistance against systemic oppression is not new.” While this project does not historicize Black trans and queer resistance that predates 1989, Black LGBTQ+ resistance does historically succeed from a larger genealogy of Black resistance against enslavement, colonialism, and imperialism. I do want to first make clear that “Black resistance” and “Black queer resistance” in urban geographies are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Before terms like “gay,” “lesbian,” “queer,” and “trans” have risen in our contemporary vernacular as minoritarian markers of identity, historical “Black resistance” could have been queer and trans oriented. Historically, Black

40 Bailey and Shabazz, “Editorial: Gender and sexual geographies of Blackness.”
41 Duggan, “The New Homonormativity”
42 Samudzi and Anderson, As Black As Resistance.
people’s gender and sexuality at large have “queered” the white heteronorms and homonorms of gender and sexuality, as scholars like Hortense Spillers, C. Riley Snorton, Patricia Hill Collins, Mignon Moore, and Charles Nero have explored.⁴³ However, manifestations of capitalism in the global North from the last few decades have allowed terms like “lesbian,” “gay,” and “queer” to become identities.⁴⁴ Neoliberal progressivism after Stonewall in 1969 has constituted the false notion that all people who identify as “queer,” “gay,” “lesbian,” and “trans” have become more socially accepted. Defining “Black trans and queer resistance” in this project can frame how racialized gender and sexual minorities, who queer the already pejorative and prescribed notions of what their gender and sexuality should be (i.e., Black trans women and masculine Black lesbian cis women), imagine liberation and practice a future towards freedom.

Samudzi and Anderson further clarify that Black people “strive to overcome [their] own fears to offer [their] understanding of structural violence, ways of subverting these systems, and ways to imagine new ones.”⁴⁵ Paying closer attention to the plural word “ways” in Samudzi and Anderson’s analysis, particularly in how they describe the multiple and diverse avenues in which Black resistance emerges, this project thus argues that there exists no perfect definition of Black LGBTQ+ resistance or refusal in the City, as resistance and refusal can actualize in uniquely abundant and contextually specific ways.

The diverse avenues in which Black LGBTQ+ resistance and refusal actualize connects to why this project analyzes both “resistance” and “refusal.” As Samudzi and Anderson explored different “ways of resistance,” other scholars like Tina Campt and Audra Simpson similarly

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⁴⁴ D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity.”
⁴⁵ Samudzi and Anderson, As Black As Resistance.
understand marginalized communities’ resistance and contestation against white supremacy as “refusal,” across visual culture and ethnography, respectively.

Visual theorist Tina Campt understands a practice of Black visual refusal as:

a rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation, i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise.46

For Campt, a Black refusal against the white supremacist visual eye is expansive and generated through the negation from and rejection of matrices of power that predispose your body and livelihood to violence or death.

Furthermore, Indigenous feminist theorist Audra Simpson studied how the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke have struggled yet persisted to maintain sovereignty under Canadian settler colonialism.47 She proposes an “ethnography of refusal,” a critical methodology that resists both state-sanctioned and academic surveillance. When an ethnographer engages in an “ethnography of refusal,” they respect the extent to which marginalized communities share information with them. In her study of the Kahnawà:ke people, she found that they refused state authorities to maintain political sovereignty, and her participatory engagements with them should solely work toward their full sovereignty or protection. Savannah Shange has taken inspiration from this methodology when she studied (and protected) Black girls’ experiences in a highly-carceral and progressive secondary school in the Bay Area.48 Thus, responsible and ethical Black/queer ethnography or analysis must align with the liberatory practices of the community themselves. Study or inquiry based in self-interest has the potential to collude with neoliberal notions of

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46 Campt, “Black Visuality and the Practice of Refusal.”
47 Simpson, Mohawk Interruptus
48 Shange, “Black Girl Ordinary”
academic progressivism and academic surveillance, not working toward the research subjects’ equity and freedom.

*Defining Resistance and Refusal: A Black Queer Right to the City*

Since 1985, Chicago and New York’s local Black queer diasporas have expressed multiple resistant and refuting ways to practice a “right to the City.” Sociologist Henri Lefebvre and later geographer David Harvey foundationally developed the idea of the “right to the City,” a concept that theorizes how marginalized people living in urban geographies do indeed have the right and capacity to transform their disenfranchised landscapes.49 This thesis builds an analytic from Harvey and Lefebvre’s foundational work on marginalized people’s “right to the City,” alongside critical transformers of Harvey and Lefebvre who consider Black LGBTQ+ communities’ “right to [Chicago and New York City]” (e.g., Kemi Adeyemi, Theodore Greene, Savannah Shange, Rachel Walker). These transformers of Harvey and Lefebvre’s framework consider the spatial and/or temporal stakes of Black trans and queer life.

In her ethnographic study on how queer youth of color in New York practice their “right to the City,” scholar Rachel Walker theorizes how they express “queer of color nomadism.”50 According to Walker, to nomadically navigate New York as a queer youth of color, one embodies their intersectional identities, resists the productive speed of neoliberal capitalism, and flees technologies of antiblack surveillance through community making practices. Thus, vulnerable queer youth of color in New York practice nomadism by “queering” and contesting the antiblack homotopian geographies of Greenwich Village and Christopher Street Piers.51

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49 Lefebvre, “The Right to the City”; Harvey, *Rebel Cities*.
50 Walker, “Toward a Fierce Nomadology”
51 Walker, “Toward a Fierce Nomadology,” 113
Furthermore, sociologist Theodore Greene explored how Black and Brown queer youth practice their “right to the City” through “vicarious citizenship.” Vicarious citizens include LGBTQ+ peoples who are usually zoned from the residential, economic, and social privileges in gay neighborhoods. Vicarious citizens, despite their ordained exclusion from antiblack homotopias, still “engage in a variety of spatial practices to protect their interests as legitimate community stakeholders.”

Lastly, in her work that studies how Black queer women party in 2010s Chicago, performance ethnographer Kemi Adeyemi considers the multiple, sometimes unaccounted for and overlooked avenues that Black (queer) communities practice “a right to the city.” Adeyemi expands Harvey’s framework, arguing that critical geography should more thoroughly analyze “the microgestures of dissent and reformation that…Black communities…have long practiced – often in ways that demonstrate fundamental ambivalences in their relationships to, and thus their understanding of the potential overhaul of, systems of capitalism.” For Adeyemi, as a performance studies scholar, these resistant microgestures that Black and Black queer communities express against their neoliberal Metropolises include dancing and partying. Therefore, Black trans and queer populations indeed practice a “right to the City” through modes of expression, mobility/immobility, and avenues of performance that extend beyond a singular model of political organizing.

Inspired from multiple scholars in visual culture, critical geography, and performance studies, I propose a holistic and unbounded framework of “Black queer resistance and refusal.” Black LGBTQ+ resistance and refusal in the City widely represent a communicative and reactionary response that contests and/or challenges white-dominated, carceral, neoliberal, and/or

antiblack heterotopian/homotopian geographic and temporal terrains. Black LGBTQ+ resistance and refusal in the City may take form in public confrontation or assertion, literary or artistic expression, collective protest and public performance, and/or the mere public existence and navigation across geographic spaces that continually zone you out (either residually or imaginatively).

Archival Research: Curating a Black LGBTQ+ Anthology

Interdisciplinary methods and frameworks across the fields of Black Studies, queer of color critique, Critical Geography, Sociology, and Performance Studies allow for a more capacious depiction of Black trans and queer resistance and refusal. To fully read resistance and refusal, I employ a mixed methods approach to this project, discerning what context and the physical and digital archive can narrate about resistance and refusal. How do Black queer people resist and refuse racism and homonormativity in the larger City and smaller gayborhood? How do Black queers express affect against judicial and extra-judicial forms of structural violence (carcerality, HIV/AIDS neglect, assault, etc.)? How does Black queer resistance and refusal actualize within the context of Chicago versus in the context of New York City?

To pursue this project, I conducted archival research at The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives in Chicago, and the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center at The University of Chicago. I also obtained permission from photographer Richard Renaldi to use his “Pier 45” photograph collection. This project also employs Professor André Brock’s method of “critical technocultural discourse analysis” to interpret articles from the Black Youth Project and videos on YouTube.

Furthermore, I theoretically frame all archival sources through a lens of queer of color critique and critical geography to gauge how the gayborhood and City represent microcosms of the larger securitized, neoliberal, and carceral United States.55

**Sticky Analyses of Resistance: Refusing the “Event-Potentiality Matrix”**

Through archival research, I have intentionally curated a chronological anthology of Black trans and queer resistance across Chicago and New York City from the mid-1980s to now. This intentional curation, however, has academic and ethical stakes. Literary scholar Saidiya Hartman says that scholars who study marginalized peoples are “forced to grapple with the power and authority and the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor.”56 As such, through curating the necessary primary sources to place and narrate upon in this thesis, I have had to contextualize and ethically challenge my own position as a Black queer historical and visual interpreter.

To define these ethical-analytical decisions that researchers make under the current, taxing conditions of late neoliberalism, Adeyemi astutely coins the term event-potentiality matrix. Researchers (like myself) can reproduce the harmful event-potentiality matrix when “they put a lot of pressure on [their] minoritarian objects of study: there is undue expectation that black queerness be productive, that it works, that it makes our research go, that it makes our learning…valuable.”57 According to Adeyemi, this event-potentiality matrix becomes reproduced when scholars solely focus on the spectacularism, excitement, and also fatalities of

55 Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black.*
57 Adeyemi, *Feels Right,* 101.
Black trans and queer life. As I curated a theoretical anthology from multiple physical and digital archives, this thesis intervenes directly with prominent resistant events and situations within the Black Queer Diaspora. In this thesis, I work in between and against this event-potentiality matrix. For instance, I valorize the sociopolitical capacity of Black LGBTQ+ resistance while challenging our romanticization with Black queers’ transcendence from marginality or the harmful production of the digital archive itself. Adeyemi’s framework, that contends with the taxing affects of neoliberal capitalism and predatory academic surveillance on marginalized research subjects, have helped me more ethically interpret the voices, experiences, and intentions of people in archived photos and articles who this thesis may never reach.
Chapter 2: Violent Chicago, Neoliberal Boystown, and Black Queer

Resistance/Refusal

Introduction

In June 2020, Black queer people participated in a prideful protest of performance, erotic sensuality, and barricade in Boystown, Chicago’s gay neighborhood. Black queer Chicagoans pridefully stopped, taunted, hopped on, and twerked on a police car. This performance was recorded and uploaded to YouTube by an account named “Insane Films,” and they titled the video “Black LGBTQ Kids Fighting Their Oppressors As They Take Back Boystown.” While I will further analyze this video later in this essay, both the video and its title signify ongoing Black queer responses to oppressive systems within the city’s geographies. For instance, this performance happened in summer 2020, around the time when police murdered Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Tony McDade, and deaths related to COVID-19 disparities proliferated in Black communities. This form of protest against the police indicated that Black queer people have been resisting the carceral state and its continuing anti-black, misogynistic, and transphobic manifestations. Furthermore, the title of the video alludes to the 2011 “Take Back Boystown” (TBB) events that happened in Boystown, which were protests that intended to limit the “sudden uptick” in the gayborhood’s burglaries and assaults in summer 2011, despite the crime rates displaying no statistically significant rise in crime.

As previous scholars have researched, TBB was an attempt to rid Boystown of Black queer youth visitors, who increasingly frequented the neighborhood for its queer-friendly scene and

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58 Insane Films, “Black LGBTQ Kids Fighting Their Oppressors as They Take Back Boystown.”
60 Orne, Boystown.
Boystown became a white gayborhood when (mostly) white gay men settled in the enclave in the 1980s. These men displaced the surrounding Puerto Rican community through gay gentrification, and the city designated the current Lakeview area as a “gay neighborhood” by the late 1990s. This city-designation as a “gayborhood” has ensured that Boystown receives development projects and that LGBTQ+ resources and social services are located there and receive privatized funding. These social services have primarily served vulnerable populations across Chicago’s South and West Sides, including Black queer youth who are unhoused and/or need sexual health resources. Housing practices and resource inaccessibility are not limited to the gayborhood; rather, these forms of systemic oppression speak to how the City—as a neoliberal geographic entity—disregards the needs of Black queer populations and amplifies their intersectional vulnerabilities to violence, neglect, and exclusion.

Existing literature on Boystown highlights that middle-class gayborhoods like Boystown, while a place of queer life and community, can simultaneously foster racism, neoliberalism, and transphobia, among other systems of violence and/or marginalization. This chapter builds from these scholars, focusing on the relationship between the Chicago as a neoliberal City-entity and Boystown as a functioning microcosm of the City’s violence. If most Black queer Chicagoans cannot claim Boystown as a site of residence or full safety, then both the gayborhood and the City at large co-conspire to inflict the violence that they experience. Nonetheless, I argue that

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61 Blair, “Boystown”; Orne, Boystown; Felner et al, “Anywhere but here.”
63 Ghaziani, There Goes the Gayborhood?; Orne, Boystown; Beam, “Gay Inc.”
64 Lefebvre, “The Right to the City”; Harvey, “The Right to the City”; Adeyemi, “The Practice of Slowness” and Feels Right.
Black queer Chicagoans across various time periods have transcended violence to claim what their “right to the City.”

This chapter excavates both the physical and digital archive to examine how Black LGBTQ+ Chicagoans have expressed both individual and collective acts of resistance and refusal against medical neglect, neoliberal-capitalism, and extra-judicial violence within the City. I specifically trace resistance and refusal during three points from the mid-1990s to the present moment. First, I recover the story of Michael, a 19-year-old HIV/AIDS peer educator, who was featured in a 1996 edition of BLACKlines. BLACKlines was a Chicago-based Black queer magazine that emerged when the FDA approved antiretrovirals—a pivotal moment in the HIV/AIDS crisis. Second, I fast forward 15 years to 2011 and analyze how the Black Youth Project employed digital strategy and discursive rhetoric against Take Back Boystown. In the final section, I return to this chapter’s opening vignette and explore the contemporary state and future possibilities of Chicago’s politics by highlighting the potentiality of the Black LGBTQ+ protest from summer 2020.

The FDA approval of antiretroviral therapy (ART) for HIV in the mid-1990s is a critical inceptive point to explore chronological threads of Black queer resistance because of Chicago’s antiblack spatial assemblages. Racial disparities in HIV/AIDS prevalence and mortality rates and the (in)accessibility to ART and other HIV/AIDS services are partially linked to historically redlined formations of the City, forcing Black people to live in communities that are cyclically under resourced. Additionally, the neoliberal, homonormative, and racist formations of gay neighborhoods in the same City have made it historically exclusionary and violent for Black

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66 Lefebvre, “The Right to the City”; Harvey, “The Right to the City.”
visitors. In Chicago’s context, many Black trans and queer people in the current moment frequent Boystown to access healthcare centers to receive services, such as HIV/AIDS testing, treatment, and prevention that are not as accessible in their home communities. Thus, racial disparities in Chicago’s HIV/AIDS crisis have historically co-mapped with the violence of the City and the neoliberal evolution of Boystown.

1996: BLACKlines, Michael, and the Refusal of Medical and Geographic Racism

According to a 1995 epidemiological profile of HIV/AIDS in Chicago, the Chicago Department of Public Health found that Black gay and bisexual men’s HIV/AIDS rate increased by 375 percent from 1987 to 1993. This report also noted that in 1994 Black gay and bisexual men’s HIV mortality rate was 70 percent higher than their white male counterparts. Locally in Chicago, this profile suggests that the HIV/AIDS crisis disproportionately affected Black queer men. Marlon Bailey suggests that this form of inequality is primarily structural because of Black queer men’s small sociosexual networks, partially due to the socio-spatial aftermath of racial segregation. The profile validates this claim, as it displayed that HIV/AIDS rates steadily increased in the “South and West quadrants” of Chicago yet decreased in the “North and Central quadrants.” While segregation can occur by neighborhood, on a macro scale, redlining is dispersed by the North, South, and West sides, and the South and West sides are mostly inhabited by communities of color. When ART became available in 1996, Black queer men, for instance, were less likely to receive treatment, based both on social stigma and oppression.

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68 Nero, “Why are the Gay Ghettos White?”
69 Blair, “Boystown”; Felner et al “Anywhere but here.”
70 Manalansan, “Race, Violence, and the Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City.”
73 Bailey, “Black Gay (Raw) Sex.”
74 Moyer and Hardon, “A Disease Unlike Any Other?.” Whitfield, “The Secret Plot to Destroy African Americans.”
Political scientist Cathy Cohen argues that “the black press...is well positioned to reconstruct or redefine the way AIDS has been characterized by the dominant media and is consequently understood by African Americans.”75 In Black (cisgender/heterosexual-dominated) newspapers in the 1980s, Cohen found that “the experiences of Black gay men, as they struggled against AIDS, remained largely cloaked.”76 Newspapers like BLACKlines—a Chicago based Black gay and lesbian magazine that ran from 1996 to 2004—however, gave Black queer Chicagoans the space to showcase intracommunal avenues of resistance—those that acted against institutionally-violent acts of medical neglect.

I argue that BLACKlines’ mere existence within an anti-queer city and time is a form of Black queer resistance, as this monthly-ran newsletter touched upon many issues affecting Chicago’s Black queer communities. Topics that BLACKlines covered include housing insecurity, HIV/AIDS, and pride festivals, and reporters from the magazine frequently covered stories related to Black queer life. In this way, BLACKlines also resisted the type of marginalization that dominant Black magazines inflicted onto their queer community members.

In February 1996, BLACKlines published an article about a Black gay youth who committed their time to HIV/AIDS prevention.77 “Michael”—the pseudonym in which BLACKlines chose—was a 19-year-old from Chicago’s West side. Shamara Riley, the reporter, asked Michael where he specifically conducts peer education around HIV/AIDS. Michael responds with,

I go everywhere. I’ve been out as far as 178th [Street] to raves, where a lot of people have unprotected sex and do drugs and distribute condoms.78 I go to Black clubs and white clubs. I do outreach at places where I know kids hang out, like the Halsted Street Café or

75 Cohen, The Boundaries of Blackness, 188.
76 Cohen, The Boundaries of Blackness, 207.
77 “Black Gay Youth Promotes HIV Prevention on West Side,” February 1996, BLACKI-01, BLACKlines Collection, Gerber/Hart Special Collections, Chicago, IL.
78 178th street is located in the south suburbs of Chicago, not within the zoned bounds of the City itself.
Dunkin Donuts [at Belmont and Clark] where a lot of homeless kids go. I also go to Madison and Pulaski, where a lot of Black youth shop, and distribute condoms. Black kids—both gay and straight—especially don’t believe that they can get HIV.79

When I conduct peer education, I tell people what will happen if they contract HIV so they really understand what AIDS is about. I tell them about the diarrhea, the different cancers, how bad your skin starts to look, and other things that the media doesn’t really show about AIDS. What most people see in the media about AIDS are the cute little red ribbons.

As previously mentioned, Marlon Bailey and Rashad Shabazz claim that “Black queer space is placeless, a space without geographic coordinates.”80 In the above excerpt, Michael reasserts this claim, as he discloses to Riley that he traverses multiple geographies across Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. While Black queer space is indeed placeless, Black queer people have inhabited, traversed, and organized across established places (including antiblack heterotopias and antiblack homotopias).81 For instance, Michael’s overall personal narrative of where he travels is not contained by one redlined enclave, neighborhood, or Black queer community space.

By Michael going “out as far [to] 178th to raves,” he enforces his “right” to existing and being an active participant in the larger neoliberal Metropolis. Michael travels to queer counterpublic spaces, which Jack Halberstam defines as the places that those who live outside of the logics of labor and (re)production inhabit.82 These queer subjects that Michael organizes for operate outside of late-capitalist temporal logics, and they could be “the ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed.”83

Therefore, Michael’s advocacy extends to Chicago-area residents whose life practices exist

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79 While Michael’s argument that Black people “do not believe” in HIV is problematic, I situate his analysis as a teen educator in a larger history distrust that Black people have against the institution of medicine. Not believing in a virus’ impact cannot be reduced to blame on the individual. For more on African Americans’ distrust with the institution of medicine, see Harriet Washington’s Medical Apartheid.
80 Bailey and Shabazz, “Gender and Sexual Geographies of Blackness.”
81 Bailey and Shabazz, “Gender and Sexual Geographies of Blackness.”
82 Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place.
83 Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place.
outside of the systems of heteronormativity and homonormativity, indicating that he strived to provide equitable healthcare and education to those who the City deemed “undesirable.”

Michael also details that he crosses racial boundaries of place, providing outreach services at both Black and white clubs—essentially wherever an environment of sexual culture exists. Across these environments that he traverses, Michael offers services to unhoused queer youth, specifically those who hang at the intersection of Belmont and Clark on Chicago’s North Side—which is located in Boystown (a developing antiblack homotopia at the time). As I mentioned in the beginning section, by the 1990s in Chicago, Boystown and Andersonville (a smaller lesbian enclave) became prominent sites for urban revitalization projects and investment, while Black neighborhoods across the South and West sides of the City—impacted by postindustrial racist demolition practices—regressed in housing quality and experienced divestment.84 Here, we see that—even since the mid-1990s—unhoused, vulnerable Black trans and queer youth claimed Boystown, despite them not residing there.

I argue that Michael’s reflections on his work demonstrate his intervention as a public and non-affiliated actor in the social services sector, materializing queer support and life-affirming networks. In their contemporary analyses on Boystown’s resources, Rae Rosenberg, Jennifer Felner et al, and Myrl Beam illustrated that Black queer youth have experienced barriers in accessing social services in Boystown from residents, police, and the privatized organizations themselves.85 Unfortunately, these accounts document conditions two decades after Michael’s BLACKlines interview, signaling that the barriers of Michael’s organizing endeavors were far more profound, considering Chicago in 1996 represented a place and time where state violence and neglect proliferated the HIV/AIDS crisis against Black queer populations. Thus, Michael, in

84 Stewart-Winter, “The Law and Order Origins of Urban Gay Politics.”
his work as a peer HIV educator and interlocutor for *BLACKlines*, performed structural and spatial forms of resistance, ones that transcend the spatial boundaries of racist inequality and refuse the oppressive determinants that the state inflicted against Black queer life. Michael, rather, actualized a *Black queer counterpublic* through his practice of navigating across Chicago’s antiblack heterotopias and homotopias to conduct HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

**2011: BYP 100’s Strategy of Discursive and Digital Resistance**

Since the early years of the 21st century in Chicago, the evolving culture of Black queer life has coincided with the rise of the digital sphere, an archival platform now essential to the vibrancy of Black queer resistance. Scholars Jeffrey McCune and Kemi Adeyemi have highlighted intricacies of Black queer life in Chicago. In *Sexual Discretion*, McCune highlights how the DL (or “down low”) represents a space for Black men to practice non-normative sexuality without stigma, especially within a persistent HIV/AIDS epidemic and state of hyper-surveillance. McCune primarily uses ethnographic interviews to explore the lives of DL men in Chicago during the early 21st century. Moreover, Adeyemi in *Feels Right* studies the politics of partying for Black queer women during the 2010s in Chicago. By utilizing performance studies, Black queer feminist frameworks, and ethnography, she illustrates how Black queer women organize and participate in nightlife under Chicago’s contemporary neoliberal landscape.

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86 McCune, *Sexual Discretion*.
87 McCune, *Sexual Discretion*.
88 Adeyemi, *Feels Right*.
89 Adeyemi, *Feels Right*. 
Outside of the terrain of downlow sexuality and nightlife, Black queer communities have also used social media within the digital space as a means of documenting events, pertinent information, and protests, making the digital space a powerful venue to both display and capture resistance. This section examines how the Black Youth Project (BYP), a political organization co-founded by Cathy Cohen that encourages Black youth civic participation, discursively resisted the antiblack and homonormative violence within the 2011 TBB events.\(^{90}\) I employ scholar Andre Brock’s method of “critical technocultural discourse analysis” (CTDA), an analytical method that prioritizes the standpoint of Black queer people and considers how they use discourse across digital media.\(^{91}\)

*Take Back Boystown*


“Boystown was built and created by gay whites with hard earned money years back…It’s sad that Boystown has been taken advantage by these fucking savage monkeys.”

“They also happen to be very noticeably out of place!! So why are they not questioned and asked to leave by the police is amazing! Check their ID and if they don’t live there ask

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\(^{90}\) Black Youth Project, “About Us”; “History”; “Staff.”

\(^{91}\) Brock, *Distributed Blackness.*
them to enter an establishment or leave!!! …They travel from all over the city to infest ‘Boystown’ with their ghetto mentality and violet [sic] attitude! Watching that video really has sickened me!!! It is what it is, and they were all Black!”

—Anonymous Boystown Resident, Take Back Boystown Facebook Page (2011)

In 2007, the Center on Halsted, a community center, opened in Boystown. After the Center’s opening, sociologist Amin Ghaziani noted that Boystown residents began to note a larger influx of Black trans and queer youth in the gayborhood. Through interviews with community leaders, he found that, despite Black queer youth in Boystown experiencing surveillance and extra-judicial forms of violence, they still claimed Boystown as a community space, alluding to what Theodore Greene theorized as “vicarious citizenship.”

Four years later in summer 2011, Boystown residents reported a string of crime incidents. Sociologist Jay Orne found the most pronounced crime story to be the stabbing of a white gay man by a young Black man, also referred to by residents as a “Black hoodlum.” This story, however, was a fallacy, as one young Black man stabbed another young Black man, and two groups of Black youth then came together in response to the stabbing. This stabbing and “brawl” disturbed the Boystown residents and business owners, and in response, they organized TBB, which consisted of community events, protests, and a Facebook page. The community event attracted both vulnerable youth, residents, and business owners alike. The protests and Facebook page, however, fostered antiblackness, homonormativity, and increased police surveillance in the gayborhood. Therefore, in a way, TBB was an avenue to preserve what

92 Black Youth Project, “Take Back Boystown: White vs. Right?” The Black Youth Project integrated these antiblack comments from The Take Back Boystown Facebook page into their published article.
93 Ghaziani, There Goes the Gayborhood?
94 Ghaziani, There Goes the Gayborhood, 178-179.
95 Ghaziani, There Goes the Gayborhood; Greene, “Gay Neighborhoods and the Rights of the Vicarious Citizen.”
96 Orne, Boystown.
97 Orne, Boystown, 188.
98 The opening epigraphs of this chapter/footnote 91 display a couple of discriminatory comments.
Ghaziani’s book is predicated on—the attempt to save the gayborhood. Martin Manalansan clarifies this phenomenon, as he claims that “…quotidian images of citizenship and safety in the [gay]borhood are encased in racialized terms and colored by fear and trepidation.”

Queer Collective Memory. “The Right to the City,” and Literary Fugitivity

In response to TBB events, one month later, the Black Youth Project published two blogposts within the same week of each other. While many BYP blogposts are written collaboratively under the name of “contributors,” the BYP also collectively wrote these two blogposts, using digital anonymity to protect the identity of the contributors. To resist the highly documented, homonormative violence that emerged in Boystown, the BYP contributors called for Black queer collective memory and employed a discursive strategy of resistance.

The first blogpost, “Racial Tension in Boystown, Attention Whores, and the Consequences of Crime,” opened with:

Crime scares me, because crime scares people. And when people are afraid, a more primitive instinct surfaces— an instinct that chooses a stereotype over diversity, accusations over building community, and authority (police force) over understanding. Crime scares me because people use it as a tool to decide who “belongs” and who is considered an outsider.

The BYP first marked a distinction between themselves, named collectively as “me,” and “people.” As the contributors reference their fear of crime, they hint at the ontological condition of Blackness—one marked of both difference and danger—when entering the antiblack homotopia that is Boystown. Black people across colonized geographies have historically been framed within the social construct of criminality. The construct of criminality has justified the

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100 Black Youth Project, “Racial Tension in Boystown”; “Take Back Boystown.”
101 Brown, “From the Philadelphia Negro to the Prison Industrial Complex.”
carceral surveillance and predation (i.e., the police patrols in Boystown) of Blackness. In the first sentence, the contributors implement a clever rhetorical strategy. For instance, these Black queer actors (re)consider themselves vulnerable humans, worthy of protection and a (re)imagined perception of “innocence.” This clever rhetoric places discursive power into the hands of Black queers, as they expose Boystown’s violence and its affect on their humanity.

The second and third sentences further resisted the construct of Black queer criminality by critiquing the homonationalist fabric of the gayborhood. In this sentence, the BYP reveals who “people” are. “People” active in TBB are now actually “primitive,” which is a descriptor that has been historically used to categorically differentiate racialized bodies from ontological whiteness. An aspect of this primitive instinct includes the sinister act of weaving the police state within the imagination of queer belonging in Boystown. Through homonationalist deployments of policing under the guise of protection, the gayborhood-entity and its more privileged stakeholders expose itself: this multicultural objective that the gayborhood prides itself for is rather carceral, antiblack, violent, and exclusionary.

Furthermore, the BYP ideas converge with Charles Nero and Christina Hanhardt, both of whom have historicized the racialized, socioeconomic, and gendered makeup of gay enclaves in New Orleans, San Francisco, and New York City. The BYP further argued:

the history of white gay male communities…revolve around the marginalization of queer people of color. There are the stories we cannot forget when crimes like the “Boystown brawl” gets the attention of the masses. I will say it again, crime scares me, because crime scares people, and I have seen what people are capable of when they are afraid.

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103 Keeling, “Looking for M —.” I center Kara Keeling’s framework of “affect” to emphasize the physiological, mental, and emotional responses that Black queers experience from homonormative and carceral violence. Black queers can also use their “affect” to resist and refuse violence.
104 Puar, Terrorist Assemblages. “Homonationalism” builds on Duggan’s concept of homonormativity. It refers to the legitimization of gay rights and politics into the United States’ imperial, militaristic, and capitalist projects.
BYP, along with Nero and Hanhardt, have exposed how white gay men have spatially and ideologically constructed gay enclaves to be antithetical and hostile toward its queer of color visitors who reside in the same City. Moreover, when the BYP said, “these are stories we cannot forget,” they emphasized the need for Black queer collective memory, as it carries the capacity to refuse violence and racist publicly imagery across generations of collective trauma. BYP also enacted literary resistance by restating that “crime scares them because crime scares people.” BYP utilizes the rhetoric of white fear and innocence to challenge the denial of Black (queer) humanity. This language of culpability first represents how white gay men in Boystown can publicly mask violence as innocence to protect Boystown. In public geographies, white sexual- and gender-marginalized people have historically weaponized their whiteness to criminalize people of color.106 In Boystown, white gays have deployed white violence to erase queerness from Black visitors, categorizing Black queerness as fraudulent.107 This fraudulence that has historically been mapped onto the bodies of Black queers include Black gay men not fully being read as gay (e.g., the “DL”) and Black queer women’s sexuality only serving the gaze of cis(hetero)partriarchy. The BYP’s rhetoric considers carceral violence in Boystown as harm that affects the interpersonal, social, and physiological comfort of Black queer Chicagoans.

Their next blogpost, which was published five days later, highlights how Boystown, as a neoliberal microcosm, increases the vulnerabilities and threatens the wellbeing of Black queer bodies. One main argument of the second blogpost, “Take Back Boystown: White vs. Right?” is:

what’s clearly at stake is the ability of black youth–homeless or otherwise–to move freely through neighborhoods regardless of their class, race, gender and non-violent cultural norms.

106 Daniels, *Nice White Ladies.*
107 Nero, “Black Gay Men and White Gay Men.”
The BYP contributors attuned the reader to Black queer youths and their “right to Chicago.” Both Greene and Adeyemi transformed David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre’s foundational notes on vulnerable people’s right to the City by considering Black queer subjects’ rights to thrive within contemporary neoliberal geographies. Greene theorizes the concept of *vicarious citizenship*, which are material claims that non-residential stakeholders attach to geographic places that they could typically be excluded from. Furthermore, Adeyemi foregrounds Black queer performance and its potential to refuse fatal logics of Black queer life, redefining hegemonic notions of Black queer pace and place. Thus, the BYP highlighted how the gayborhood has put structures in place to prohibit Black queer pace and place, restricting their rights to citizenship. From 1996 to 2011, Black queers in Chicago have had to “adjust to the tempo as they vacillate between submission to and survival of the imperative of speed that governs neoliberal subjectivity.” This “imperative of speed” coincided with the accessibility of the digital landscape, allowing resistance to manifest through this BYP blogpost. Across time, then, Black queer responses to vulnerability have evolved with the pace and conditions of neoliberal violence. As such, even contemporary Boystown—and its more privileged stakeholders—have transformed the gayborhood into an antiblack homotopia, rather than the diverse, multicultural utopia that it publicly conveys itself to be.

The BYP contributors concluded their acts of discursive resistance by introducing a framework, the “schizophrenic push and pull,” to emphasize the illegal violence that Black queer

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108 Greene, “Gay Neighborhoods and the Rights of the Vicarious Citizen.” Vicarious citizenship refers to stakeholders at large, but this project focuses on vulnerable vicarious citizens, like queer and trans youth of color.
110 Adeyemi, “The Practice of Slowness,” 552.
111 Manalansan, “Race, Violence, and the Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City.” Martin Manalansan emphasizes that gay neighborhoods falsely market their environments as multicultural and queer friendly.
youth have endured in Boystown and how white Boystown frequenters’ usage of digital media has also increased the ontological vulnerabilities of Black queers. The BYP claimed:

Some members of Chicago’s LGBTQ community, certain inhabitants…of Boystown, and certain [police] officers…exert a schizophrenic (read: contradictory) push and pull on black and brown youths—homeless or otherwise—in the area. To understand the schizophrenic nature of what’s going on, think of a yo-yo. Pull—many inhabitants, some lesbian and gay community members and even some police use black and brown youth as sexual toys, amusement, and club entertainers; Push—yet, in the same climax-laced voices, create character-assassinating media-bites, which cast a wide shadow over all black and brown bodies walking the streets of Boystown.

The BYP contributors pointed to both judicial and extra-judicial forms of violence that Chicago’s LGBTQ members, Boystown residents and homeowners, and the police administered to Black queer people. These forms of judicial and extra-judicial violence represented acts of physiological terrorism (physical abuse, digital surveillance, and sexual violence). Vulnerable Boystown frequenters have consistently policed their behaviors and experienced non-consensual sexual interactions. The concept of “schizophrenic push and pull,” discursively illustrated how privileged stakeholders inflict violence against queer youths of color. Literary scholar Elleza Kelley explored how Toni Morrison employed fugitive mapping tactics in Beloved, holding the possibility to resist antiblack surveillance within capitalist and violent plantation geographies.112 When the BYP published this theory of the “schizophrenic push and pull”—digitally accessible to the public—they employed literary fugitivity to refuse the City’s carceral and antiblack boundaries of ideology and geography. They also exposed the impossibility of fugitivity in Boystown because of both Blackness as sexual difference and the neoliberal and contradictory politics of queer visibility. In antiblack homotopias where being Black and not visibly queer makes you ontologically more threatening, yet still being Black and visibly queer exposes you to more violence, the BYP unveiled the complex bind that poor, unhoused, vicarious citizens exist

112 Kelley, Elleza. “‘Follow the Tree Flowers.’”
within. BYP placed theoretical emphasis on how Boystown and the City surveil Black queer
navigations and experiences, creating both discursive and digital possibilities for Black queer
justice. Thus, while Black queerness is placeless in the U.S. context, the BYP have responded to
this condition by using the digital sphere to foster collective belonging and challenge the
exclusion of and violence against Black queer people in the physical world. Furthermore, by
theorizing how surveillance harms Black queer bodies publicly, the BYP refused the historical
censorial practices that attempt to silence marginalized voices.

2019 - present: Black LGBTQ+ Chicagoans Contest Violence in Ongoing Late Capitalism

The year 2020 represented Black death. Black people like Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and
Tony McDade died by police brutality, and geographic racism predisposed global Black
communities to contracting and dying from COVID-19 at higher rates.\textsuperscript{113} After the 2020 Reclaim
Pride March, Black LGBTQ+ youth from Chicago organized a performative protest in Boystown
to speak against these increased forms of structural and carceral violence.\textsuperscript{114} As I opened this
chapter, this dramatic protest was recorded and uploaded to YouTube.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} Taylor, “Of Course There are Protests”; Reyes, “The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19.”
\textsuperscript{114} Schuba, “Reclaim Pride March shifts narrative around LGBTQ+ celebration.” The “Reclaim Pride March” is an
alternative pride festival that condemns rainbow capitalism and is organized for the liberation of marginalized
peoples.
\textsuperscript{115} Insane Films, “Black LGBTQ Kids Fighting Their Oppressors as They Take Back Boystown.”
The video begins with young Black queer people shouting, laughing, and jumping up and down while facing a Chicago police car, with a policeman parked inside of it. A Black queer person wearing a Bulls jersey jumps up and down on the hood of the car. Inspired by their performance, two other Black queers—both dressed in white t-shirts and gray shorts—start twerking on opposite ends of the car. Other Black queers and queers of color join in and begin to dance as well, waving their pride flags; some Black queers even lay across the car, shaking their buttocks back and forth. When another Black queer shakes their buttocks again and whips their hair, the policeman turns on the car’s sirens. When the twerking becomes more pronounced, the cop rings the sirens multiple times. While the police siren has historically represented a sound and image of emergency and carcerality for Black people, these Black queer protestors use the siren as soundtrack for their performance instead. Next, these protestors back away from the cop car, as the same policeman motions for them to move out of the street. The perspective from
which the viewer films these Black queers becomes larger than the initial visual field of the half-city block. The camera pans to many more youthful Black queer protestors outside the 7-Eleven across the street. The camera then shows the protestors blockading the entire street, holding up traffic. Two of the three initial Black queers who seized the police car began climbing up and twerking in front of a Chicago Transit Authority bus.

The Black LGBTQ+ individuals in this video showcase Black queer space-making practices within the antiblack homotopia of Boystown. Black queer space-making consists of “critical shade,” refuses the social order with excessive Black queer ontology, resists homonormative space-time, and honors Black queer youth violated from the 2011 TBB events.

In his research on Black queer performance in ballroom culture, Marlon Bailey explains that space-making is “the practices that Black [LGBTQ+] people undertake to support their non-normative sexual identities, embodiments, and community values and practices.” When these Black queer people confront a carceral and pro-homonormative Chicago, they engage in Black queer space-making through a collective Black queer performance like twerking and “being loud.” This performative space-making consists of what Tavia Nyong’o theorizes as “critical shade,” the act of performing both for and against the camera, while staying astutely aware to dominating outside forces like the spectator and the violent social order. These Black trans and queer youth enact critical shade by twerking and dancing for yet against all cameras and cops within (and outside of) their visual field. Additionally, the sexual embodiment and erotic affect of this performance “excessively” ruins the heteronormative and homonormative bounds of acceptable behavior within the social order of the antiblack homotopia and City, necessitating the heightened police presence and furthering the annoyance of residents, business owners, and

116 Bailey, Butch Queens Up in Pumps, 146.
117 Nyong’o, Afro-Fabulations, 92.
Adedayemi’s focus on the slow potentialities of Black queer space-time attunes the viewer to the temporal. These small acts of holding up traffic, slowing the police’s objectives, and inconveniencing the quiet and comfortability of the surrounding community hold a moment for recent Black deaths and perform against the broken promises of the failing, neoliberal City. These protestors/performers pause late-stage capitalist and homonormative space-time by inflicting Black queer space-time, a form of refusal that relies on communal support and performative confrontation against the carceral state. Lastly, the video title alludes to the 2011 TBB events itself, claiming that these young Black queers are now the ones actually taking back Boystown. Vicarious citizens of Boystown are literally confronting the state that has historically inflicted violence against them. The same police that Boystown residents and business owners utilize as surveillance tools against Black queers were now being ridiculed by them. These vicarious citizens protest vibrantly and happily through dance, laughing, physical bombardment, and without fear.

Dangerous Implications of Surveillance

Employing CTDA as a method also requires a holistic approach in reviewing who distributes the material. While I used CTDA and queer of color critique to understand how and why Black queer Chicagoans resisted the cop’s carceral oversight, these Black queer Chicagoans did not necessarily consent to the posting this video. A white gay man posted it to his own account.

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118 Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*.
119 Adedayemi, “The Practice of Slowness.”
120 Brock, *Distributed Blackness*, pp. 2-3.
The user behind the account “Insane Films” is a white gay man who is not relatively popular on YouTube, and he posts politically satirical content and comments on topics in queer popular culture. “Insane Films” only has 6.3 thousand subscribers, while the protest video, titled “Black LGBTQ Kids Fighting Their Oppressors As They Take Back Boystown,” received 30 thousand views. The titling of the video also signifies that Black LGBTQ youth are in an inherent oppressed position. If the actual Black LGBTQ youth in that video had the opportunity to title it, would have they used the same language? Furthermore, “ACAB,” which means “All Cops are Bastards,” is an acronym that was originally intended to critique the larger carceral system and emphasize that all parts need to be abolished; however, “ACAB” has been commodified into a buzzword to sometimes express pseudo-solidarity with Black people or trans people, like “BIPOC” and “LGBT,” respectively. Would these youth, especially during 2020, have tagged this video as “ACAB”? Could the majority dislike-to-like ratio on the video have come from the youth themselves, critiquing “Insane Films” for publishing this video without their consent? Furthermore, did these same youth even know about the 2011 Take Back Boystown events, considering it happened a decade earlier? Or are these youth just participating in a continually vicarious and push-and-pull battle with Boystown’s antiblack homotopian environment?

In her analysis on antiblack surveillance technologies within the archive of slavery, theorist Simone Browne questions her own reading practices: “do my reading practices act to reinscribe violence and a remaking of Blackness, and Black bodies, as objectified?” I foreground this important question to challenge my romanticized analysis of their resistance, as

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121 I explore Marquis Bey’s critique of “LGBT” neoliberalism and analysis of trans-fundamentality in the following section.
122 Browne, Dark Matters, 67.
this romanticization is tied to a longer history in which the media and its viewers surveil Black and Black queer communities and expose them to further violence. This is not to say that Black trans and queer stories of resistance and refusal are not valuable, as they are, and that is why I have centered my thesis on them. However, in my own interpretations of agency, I must work against my own grain, as well as the works of scholars, reporters, journalists, etc. who hyper-emphasize Black trans and queer activist labor. Particularly, I am reminded of how five queers of color featured in *Paris is Burning* were found dead within five years of when Jennie Livingston released it.\(^{123}\) I also think of the activists in Ferguson, MO who were “found dead” after Michael Brown’s murder, especially given the heightened media coverage.\(^ {124}\) Black and Black queer people are already subjected to surveillance as is, and digital technologies, as well as the analyses of them, can exacerbate their intersectional vulnerabilities to violence.\(^ {125}\)

Furthermore, this is not to say that the user “Insane Films” had bad intentions, as I believe that he may have even wanted to use his racial privilege and social platform to valorize the type of Black queer and trans worldmaking displayed in this powerful protest. However, his recording and posting is not removed from its historical or material stakes. As Adeyemi warns us, the event-potentiality matrix is a trap that we impose our research/recorded subjects to continually perform and resist against systems of power.\(^ {126}\) Would the lives of these Black trans and queer people be less valuable if they chose to yell at all the camera people so that they could stop recording? Would Black trans and queer people be less valuable if they didn’t organize against the police at all? While Black LGBTQ+ people twerking on a ringing cop car can help us envision how a quasi-revolution may look like due to the protest’s success in pausing

\(^{123}\) Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*; Keeling, “Looking for M—”
\(^ {124}\) Dickson, “Mysterious Deaths Leave Ferguson Activists ‘On Pins and Needles.’”
\(^ {125}\) I propose more ethical, academic solutions in the thesis “Coda.”
\(^ {126}\) Adeyemi, *Feels Right*. 
homonormative and late capitalist time, we must also respect how Black queers practice ordinariness and secrecy, as well as better respect their privacies when they decide to engage in acts of disruption, refusal, and protest.

**Honoring Eshay: Trans-Centric Necessity and the Potentiality of Queer Kinship**

Overall, the 2020 protest, similar to Michael and the BYP contributors, all highlight the capacity of what Savannah Shange calls “queer kinship,” an “intellectual and interpersonal practice” that prioritizes Black queer common sense.\(^{127}\) For instance, this practice can “[serve] as a bulwark against creeping homonationalism, the deadly promise that It Gets Better when queers contort their politic aspirations to fit rainbow stripes on the American flag.”\(^{128}\) Therefore, queer kinship can be a collaborative (and not multicultural) analytic and practice that stems from the intertwined histories of Chicago’s Black and queer activisms.\(^{129}\) All resistant agents in this chapter have engaged in queer kinship practices that resisted and refused the various forms of violence that the neoliberal City and homonormative/-nationalist gayborhood have inflicted against them and/or their Black trans and queer community members. Furthering queer kinship can advance Black LGBTQ+ futures when the City has persistently attempted to expunge them.

Six months after this protest, Courtney “Eshay” Key, a Black trans woman, was murdered on Chicago’s South Side. Loved by both her biological and chosen families, the City’s police—who claim to “protect” its citizens from “crime”—failed Key.\(^{130}\) Key’s murder happened under the current neoliberal state of Chicago’s sociopolitical landscape, one that claims to be “diverse” and welcoming for LGBTQ+ populations, especially given how residents have idolized

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\(^{127}\) Shange, “Play Aunties and Dyke Bitches.”

\(^{128}\) Shange, “Play Aunties and Dyke Bitches,” 47.

\(^{129}\) Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*.

\(^{130}\) Fry, “Courtney Key was found dead on Christmas, shot in the head and dragged by a car.”
figures like Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Critical theorist Marquis Bey explores how current neoliberal U.S. cultures collapse trans and non-normative sexual identities into the acronym “LGBT,” silencing trans-antagonism in politics and society. Hence, contemporary forms of violence inflicted against Black trans people gets simultaneously ignored and justified through assimilationist strategies and politics from (majority white and privileged non-white) cisgender gays, lesbians, and bisexuels. Black trans women like Key are predisposed to death because “LGB” priorities and normalization overshadow the needs of trans people of color. Key’s death also occurs within a larger field of antiblack violence that cyclically necessitates an expanding definition of “queer,” as a verb, beyond rigid boundaries of identity. For example, Black cisgender women and girls in Chicago have been experiencing a racialized femicide unaddressed by the state to this day, alongside the violence that Black trans and gender-expansive people.

Michael in 1996, the BYP contributors in 2011, and the Black queer Chicagoans in 2020 demonstrate the persistent ways that Black queer people have organized against many forms of violence in the neoliberal-capitalist City and gayborhood. What these three have in common, besides their self-identification or portrayal as Black and queer, is their ability to transform place and space—whether digitally or physically—to materialize justice and futurity. Violence against Black Chicagoans (of all sexualities and genders) will continue if Chicago’s stakeholders—including politicians, policymakers, scholars, activists, community members—neglect to implement longer-term, material objectives that resist the silence (e.g., neoliberal identity

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131 Táíwò, *Elite Capture*, 40. I cite Táíwò’s work to emphasize the danger of identity politics and idolization of political figures just because they have marginalized identities.

132 Bey, “Trouble Genders.”

133 Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens.”

134 Padilla, “Silenced Prey.”
politics), violence (e.g., police brutality, incarceration, gentrification), and gradual death (e.g., persistent HIV/AIDS epidemic) in this era of late-stage capitalism.

While accounting for the harm that the event-potentiality matrix can inflict against Black queers, I nonetheless underscore the exigent need for more queer kinship practices that push Chicago to implement material projects that protect and support Black/Black trans and women’s lives, undoing the gayborhood and City’s ongoing forms of anti-black, transphobic, and misogynistic violence. As C. Riley Snorton asserts, to believe that “Black (Trans) Lives Matter”—a driving framework for queer kinship—Chicago must not only theoretically consider “the ongoing struggle in the present by way of a future (aspiration) in which black lives will have mattered to everyone.”¹³⁵ To materialize Black trans futurities, the City must also transform the political and economic landscape that render Black trans lives unlivable.

This chapter highlighted the beautiful threads of care and kinship that Black LGBTQ+ Chicagoans have created to propel futurity amid violence. Moving from this chapter’s focus on Chicago, the next chapter showcases Black trans and queer resistance and refusal in New York, and the final chapter calls for academic proposals that can more ethically advance Black LGBTQ+ futurity, while also continuing to valorize the political affects of Black LGBTQ+ resistance and refusal.

¹³⁵ Snorton, Black on Both Sides, 198.
Chapter 3: Black LGBTQ+ Resistance/Refusal in New York City’s Carceral and Antiblack Heterotopian/Homotopian Geographies

Introduction

In March 2021, Black queer and trans activists organized their weekly protest for Black people murdered by police violence and for rights for Black trans sex workers.136 This protest occurred over many hours, but Zapoteco journalist Javier Soriano condensed the clips into a 40-minute YouTube video. This protest consisted of Black queers twerking in the street, a call-and-response led by Black trans women with megaphones, and Black queers throwing objects at and bothering white New Yorkers eating at restaurants outside. This protest displayed Black trans and queer resistance and refusal against neoliberal, homonormative, and gentrifying development projects in New York, mostly near lower Manhattan and near Greenwich Village.137

Previous scholarship on New York has shown how the City has primarily favored the geographic and material needs of cisgender white people.138 In the 1950s and 1960s, the City implemented many urban renewal and demolition projects that displaced the Black and Brown communities dispersed throughout the boroughs (e.g. Harlem in Manhattan and Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn).139 Furthermore, Spike Lee films like Crooklyn and Do The Right Thing, while deserving of critique, can further contextualize the racialized and socioeconomic spatial conditions of Black life in New York throughout the last 30 years of the 20th century. These spatio-racial conditions have further progressed into the 21st century vis-à-vis the speed of late

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136 Sorano, Javier. “March in Support of Black Trans and Queer Sex Workers”; “JS: March for Black Trans and Queer S3x workers.”
137 Greenwich Village is a gay district in New York. I will explore Greenwich Village alongside the Christopher Street Piers, a site near Greenwich Village and Hudson River Park that has been a lively site for queer of color life. 138 Manalansan, “Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City”; Keeling, “Looking for M—”; Gieseking, “A Queer New York”; Hayes, The Harlem Uprising; Baldwin, In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower
139 Hayes, The Harlem Uprising, pp. 25-27.
neoliberalism and the expanding role of the university, as urbanist Davarian Baldwin explains.\textsuperscript{140} Institutions like Columbia University have continuously territorialized Manhattan and have also geographically encroached and gentrified neighborhoods like Harlem, displacing and furthering environmental inequalities for Black and Brown residents.\textsuperscript{141}

Therefore, these residential inequalities have created what theorist Edward Said called “imagined geographies,” and these stakes of where the “Other” belongs is heightened for Black trans and queer New Yorkers/New York Frequenters.\textsuperscript{142} From the enumerated effects of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s to the exclusionary developments of gayborhoods, Black trans and queer New Yorkers have had to negotiate many different geographic places by publicly asserting their rights to exist. In the early 2000s, New York’s majority-white Greenwich Village, like Christina Hanhardt explores, has steadily increased policing to reduce violence and anti-gay attacks in the gayborhood.\textsuperscript{143} Of course, this increase in policing of the gayborhood had instead led to an emergence of deployed homonationalist technologies—including increased policing and neighborhood watch groups—that surveilled queer and trans youth of color, like Chicago’s 2011 Take Back Boystown protests.\textsuperscript{144}

Like many gayborhoods and the Cities they co-conspire with, New York has a particular unsettling and contradictory context within the 30 year time scope of this thesis. For example, the antiblack origins of New York’s HIV/AIDS epidemic and of ACT UP/NY (1980s), the

\begin{itemize}
\item Baldwin, \textit{In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower}.\textsuperscript{140}
\item Baldwin, \textit{In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower}.\textsuperscript{141}
\item Said, \textit{Orientalism}. Similar to my analysis on Puar, I compress Said’s critical use of “imagined geographies” when he theorizes orientalism from an international scope to a domestic scope to understand how race is both imaginatively and materially spatialized in New York. “Imagined geographies” are pseudo-representations of minoritarian spaces, created by the dominant apparatus to instill fear and/or desire about the space to the dominant population. Furthermore, I say “Black trans and queer New Yorkers/New York frequenters” to emphasize that Black people from surrounding cities in New Jersey like Newark, Jersey City, and Union City also traverse metropolitan lines to work in and/or experience New York City. For more, see Christina Hanhardt’s \textit{Safe Space}, p. 2.\textsuperscript{142}
\item Hanhardt, \textit{Safe Space}, p. 2.\textsuperscript{143}
\item Manalansan, \textit{“Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City”; Puar, Terrorist Assemblages}.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{itemize}
surveilling and capitalist implications after *Paris is Burning* was released (1990s), and state-induced and interpersonal forms of anti-black, misogynistic, and trans-antagonistic violence (1990s to current moment) have been overshadowed by the City’s imagined demarcation as liberal, multicultural, and cosmopolitan global metropole.

Thus, in this chapter, I highlight four major points of Black trans and queer resistance in New York with a focus on public displays or gestures. I first analyze how a Black queer ACT UP/NY activist in 1989 confronts the carceral state through his practice of immobility. Second, I fast forward to 2003, after Black lesbian teen Sakia Gunn was murdered from interpersonal violence after leaving Greenwich Village. Specifically, I showcase how Black queer poet Travis Montez resists censorship and homonormative political prioritizations by “saying [Sakia’s] name.” Next, I examine a photo of two young Black queer women at the Christopher Street Piers in 2009. I specifically analyze how they paradoxically emulate nomadism and slowness, a unique practice of Black queer resistance. Finally, I return to this chapter’s opening scene, which highlights the political efficacy of a 2021 Black trans-led protest in Manhattan. I illustrate both the impact of this protest after the multiple deaths in summer 2020, as well as the potential of Black and Indigenous coalitional politics.

1989: Surveillance, ACT UP/NY, and Black Queer Counterpublics

*New York’s “Geography of Risk” and Racist Housing Crisis*

As Rashad Shabazz (2015) examined Chicago’s “geography of risk” for HIV/AIDS, queers of color experienced a similarly racialized, disproportionate proliferation of HIV within

\[145\] “African American Policy Forum,” *Say Her Name.* “Say Her Name” was a movement began by the African American Policy Forum, a thinktank founded by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. This movement is meant to highlight the lives of Black girls and women who have been impacted gender and carceral violence.
New York City. Since 1990, Black residents in New York had accounted for most HIV/AIDS cases. As a response, activists in ACT UP New York (ACT UP/NY) fought back against the City’s geographies of risk and lack of attentive reaction to the epidemic. Following Campt’s comprehensive definition of refusal in the visual field, Black activists in ACT UP/NY “decided to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented.”

Like in most major cities at the time, racial, gender, and sexual minorities faced a housing crisis in 1980s New York due to decades-long discriminatory housing ordinances. To respond to this crisis, historian René Esparza notes that white male AIDS activists colluded with neoliberal housing policies and notions of citizenship. In their court hearings to save themselves from eviction, white gay men “cried out” for sympathy, using a homonormative framework to argue that they had monogamous partnerships and that AIDS devalued their ability to be productive citizens. The state, however, did not afford these same housing protections to people who did not fit within this homonormative paradigm—like lower-income women of color, queers of color, and drug users.

Jules Gil-Peterson informs that “[ACT UP/NY’s] politics were primarily based on visibility.” Many members in ACT UP/NY took their protests to the public streets of Manhattan, which Gil-Peterson claims were/are activist sites of superpanopticism. The HIV/AIDS epidemic, its racialized and spatial accordance, and the panoptics of media coverage and policing have ambivalently allowed for a rich visual archive of Black activism of ACT UP/NY. This chapter’s section focuses on a photo of a Black male ACT UP/NY activist, taken

146 Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness.*
147 Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness,* 27.
148 Campt, “Black Visuality and The Practice of Refusal.”
149 Esparza, “We Lived as Do Spouses.”
151 Gil-Peterson, “Haunting the Queer Spaces of AIDS,” 283.
152 Gil-Peterson, “Haunting the Queer Spaces of AIDS,” 293.
by photographer Tom McGovern and housed at the Schomburg. Specifically, I explore how this activist’s spatial and emotive positioning refused fatally scripted Black queer temporalities and patriarchal forms of racial-carcesal surveillance.

*Actualizing a Black Queer Counterpublic*

In 1989, social workers and ACT UP/NY activists have organized a protest outside Department of AIDS Services at the Human Resource Administration in New York. The first aspect of the photo that captures the eye is the Black person in the middle of the photo.\(^{153}\) It is unknown whether this Black subject is a social worker or a queer activist, but we can infer that he is working for HIV/AIDS advocacy from his ACT UP t-shirt. This activist, sitting rigidly on a New York Street, has handcuffed himself to a chair as a form of protest. Here, the police are

\(^{153}\) “Social workers and others demonstrate against cutbacks to the Department of AIDS Services at the Human Resources Administration in New York,” 1989, Tom McGovern Collection, Photograph and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York City, NY.
intentional agents to advancing inequities within the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The activist’s face expresses distress, pain, and indignation. This faceless white policeman takes a stern stance besides the young activist. The officer has positioned himself in a surveilling stance, as if the resisting Black “body” below him has no liberatory destiny. Behind the activist is a very focused policeman, attempting to both unlock his handcuffs from the chair, as well as arrest him for being a radical advocate. In the distant left, there is a white woman videographer recording events in the unseen field. This videographer is trying to capture the chaos and disorder happening in the distance, implying that the police is trying to halt activism against queer backlash, disorder, and resistance.

Reading this ACT UP/NY activist’s resistance first requires a practice that [recovers archives] “from lifeless theoretism that threatens the ‘spirit’ that drove the production of the original.” Therefore, analyzing this activist’s power would center how he refused temporalities extra-judicially inflicted onto Black queer people, which are “scripted by and seemingly always moving toward death in various social, theoretical, and material forms.”

When Black queers refuse these scripted temporalities, also known as what Sara Ahmed calls “lifelines,” they “get out of an impossible world or an unlivable life.”

While I will address the “ongoing calculus of vulnerability” that the anthropological eye exposes to Black queer people through the visual production of archives at the end of this chapter, I want to first highlight the way this Black ACTUP NY refused fatal Black queer temporalities by asserting his ontological rights to the City in the “sphere of appearance.”

154 Allen, *There’s A Disco Ball Between Us*, 219.
157 Keeling, “Looking for M—.”
158 Woubshet, *The Calendar of Loss*, 16. “Sphere of appearance” is a framework that Dagmawi Woubshet extrapolated from Judith Butler.
Generally, AIDS activists created these “spheres of appearance” by “carrying out funerals to the streets,” making “the AIDS dead visible, tangible, real.” Through actualizing the sphere of appearance, [activists] “helped to engender counterpublics and counterarchives in which queer deaths counted as deaths and queer lives were remarkable as lives.”

Facing this “geography of risk,” structurally violent housing crisis, and homonormative exclusion of judicial citizenship, this ACT UP/NY activist formulated a Black queer counterpublic through his physical resistance to policemen and handcuffing to furniture on the street. While Dagmawi Woubshet originally contributed to Butler’s “spheres of appearance” framework by positing how activists opened funerals and caskets to the public to compound awareness regarding the severity of HIV/AIDS, I further extend this theory by considering ACT UP/NY’s use of furniture. Activist and historian Sarah Schulman documented how ACT UP/NY also expressed concern and care for unhoused people living with AIDS through chaining themselves with furniture on sidewalks. This depicted activist thus generated a Black queer counterpublic by aligning with the missions of queers of color in ACT UP/NY and ACT UP Puerto Rico, two interconnected groups who centered anti-neoliberal and decolonial queer practices in their advocacy. Both groups advocated for inclusive housing justice and exposed the privacy of the white heteronormative and homonormative sphere to the public street and white-territorialized logics of private/public geographic rights. As mentioned previously, HIV/AIDS proliferation is inextricably linked to socio-spatial imaginings and realities of race, gender, class, and sexuality. This Black queer activist’s purported ontological condition, while

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159 Woubshet, *The Calendar of Loss*, 16.
160 Woubshet, *The Calendar of Loss*, 16.
161 Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, 734.
162 Esparza, “Que Bonita Mi Tierra,” 120.
realized in his regulated interactions with police, thus challenged both spatial and temporal expectations of where young Black queers are supposed to be, how they are supposed to behave, and as film theorist Kara Keeling investigates, when Black queers are supposed to be.  

_Affect, (Im)mobility, and Sexual Precarity_

Furthermore, I point us to this Black activist’s resistance to carceral violence, though the language of “resistance” is slippery. On one hand, the Black activist is resisting fatal scripts of Black queer space-time through his embodiment of the public/private in the larger panoptical sphere, speaking against medical neglect in the HIV/AIDS crisis. Generally, we can understand this avenue of resistance against state-sanctioned violence through Ahmed’s claim that “objects and bodies ‘work together’ as spaces for action…” Thus, this activist has created resistant action through the way his corporality remains immobile, as Black people are historically scripted to be, against the two policemen, the policemen’s weaponry, and the superpanoptical surveillance in the greater field. On the other hand, however, we must pay attention to how “…bodies are sexualized through how they inhabit space.” In her recovery of Black girls and women’s humanity in a sexually violent, misogynistic, and antiblack archive (e.g., Black Venus), Saidiya Hartman yearns to “to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death—social and corporeal death—and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance.” In McGovern’s photo, I similarly reckon with this activist’s sexual precarity and role in the larger sexual

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164 Keeling, “Looking for M—”
165 Ahmed, _Queer Phenomenology_, 57.
166 Adeyemi, “The Practice of Slowness.”
167 Ahmed, _Queer Phenomenology_, 67.
economy as a young, Black, male-identified, and queer person with the disturbing stance of the white police officer. Adeyemi clarifies spatio-racial stance of this cop in relation to the activist, as “Man/whiteness is instituted by and valorized as ninety-degree verticality,” and “Black life has been forcibly staged in its surrounding angles.”\textsuperscript{169} As such, this photo displays this white cop positioned in this ninety-degree vertical stance to inflict carceral dominance over this Black queer activist.

Therefore, in my analytical discern/concern with what this photo signifies for Black queer resistance against the carceral state, I have proceeded with caution. Without romanticizing this activist’s affective and traumatic experiences with police resistance and advocacy, I, of course, want to lastly commend this activist’s expressive register to “feeling brown, feeling down,” coined by late queer of color theorist’s José Esteban Muñoz. The scrunched and distressed face of this young activist, fighting for his already prescribed immobility to be legible for HIV/AIDS advocacy, represents a “felt” experience of being Black and queer. Muñoz describes minoritarian subjects who “feel brown/feel down” as “partially illegible in relation to the normative affect performed by normative citizen subjects.”\textsuperscript{170} As such, the chained activist corporality represented an immobile performance, and his humane reaction, both to frightening arrest and prohibited activism, represented an affective experience of being Black and queer in a place, a time, and with state agents that deemed your body and feelings illegible. Sensibly but not romantically, I read this activist’s reaction as an affective engagement to claiming a Black queer right to the City—one that includes housing justice, physiological safety, and ethical medical intervention for AIDS.

\textsuperscript{169} Adeyemi, “Beyond 90°.”
\textsuperscript{170} Muñoz, “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down,” 679.
Black queer poet Travis Montez in his poem “War Cry” writes against the violent heteronormative and homonormative conceptions of geography and temporality. He scribes in a particular time in Black queer history: the decade after the height of the national HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1990s, two years after 9/11, and the year of Sakia Gunn’s murder—Sakia was a Black lesbian teen who was murdered due to misogynistic and homophobic violence in Newark, NJ, right outside of New York City.

Montez begins his poem with an emotive ode, commemorating the losses of Sakia Gunn, Amanda Milan, Tyra Hunter, James Byrd, Brandon Teena, Steen Fenrich, and Matthew Shepard, who are all trans and/or queer folks across various U.S. geographic places and racial lines who violently died at the hands of perpetrators from discrimination and hate. By locating the various queerphobic places in which queer populations inhabit, I first argue that Montez’s Black queer refusal against the neoliberal City (New York) includes exposing the social order that the City upholds and enforces. The social order of the City is one that upholds white heteronormativity and cis-normative masculinity, while disposing the bodies of people who cannot adhere to those standards vulnerable to violence in both the public and private sphere. These vulnerabilities that harm Black queer and trans bodies are exacerbated by the hypocritical carceral state, which over-polices them but does not protect them against harm. Furthermore, while this poem primarily highlights the forms of queer and trans-antagonistic violence against Black queer and trans people in New York, by Montez commemorating queer and trans folks across racial identities, signifies that Black queer refusal pushes against systems of oppression for the liberation of all trans and queer bodies. At the end of this ode, Montez leaves off with “and…,” symbolizing the

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171 “War Cry” in Black Pride NYC, 2003, MG 736, Pride Files Box 2, In the Life Archive miscellaneous collections, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York City, NY.
countless names of trans and queer people who experience violence that we, the reader, do not know. This specific ellipsis, “…,” ensures that we grasp the temporal exhaustion of trans/queer of color violence, unknowing of when it will stop or when justice will be served.

Part I: “(no more harassment/no more violence/stop the murders/break the silence)”

Montez labels part one of this poem, “(no more harassment/no more violence/stop the murders/break the silence)” This title evokes three emotions in the reader. First, the parentheses underscore the message itself, telling us that whatever phrase is located inside of it signifies a call to action to a larger system issue for Black and LGBTQ+ lives. Second, the slashes work as punctuation, implying that each grouping of words represents importance in its own right. Third, paying closer attention to the phrasing within the parentheses and between the slashes, Montez encourages the reader, regardless of their social identities, to halt the harassment and the violence, as well as stop the murders and speak up in order to break the silence. Here, the poet foreshadows the messages that are behind the beautiful prose to follow.

Montez commences the poem with:

on the day of the march for sakia
my words were already chosen
because we die so often
i have poems
for such an occasion

On May 11, 2003, Sakia Gunn, a 15-year-old Black lesbian girl was walking home with her three lesbian friends from Greenwich Village in NYC. When she was waiting for the bus near her home in downtown Newark, two cisgender men from a car began to sexually harass her and
her friends; Sakia rejected their advances and asserted that she was gay. After that, the two men attacked and stabbed her, and Sakia died in her friends’ arms.\footnote{Stewart-Winter and Strub, “The Murder of Sakia Gunn and LGBT Anti-Violence Mobilization.”}

In this opening Stanza, Montez asserts his refusal against antiblack, misogynistic, and anti-queer systemic violence by employing his poetic power. This verse serves as tribute to Sakia Gunn, especially because Sakia was a young Black girl who was impacted by compounding antagonisms of misogyny, homophobia, and antiblackness that predisposed her to harassment, violence, and death. When Montez says that “[his] words were already chosen / because we die so often,” he is speaking to the anti-homonormative “paradigmatic markers of life experience” that vulnerable Black queer people in the City have to undergo.\footnote{Halberstam, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies.”} While Black queers, especially youth, cannot conform to the rapid heteronormative and homonormative logics of society’s temporality, making their life’s progression anti-linear, they progress slower under the neoliberal landscape.\footnote{Adeyemi, “The Practice of Slowness.”} This slower progression is still led to an earlier death due to interpersonal and state violence, which happens, as Montez claims, cyclically. Thus, while “poetry is not a luxury,” as Montez states in part two of his poem, his sociopoetics resist the silences and violence that attacks Black lesbian youth like Sakia.

Moving on to the third and fourth stanzas, Montez lyricizes:

because the harassment/assault/
rape/murder
of a 15 year old lesbian while walking
home with her friends
of a 19 year old gay man by his father
of a 25 year old trans woman outside
of Port Authority
happens everyday

so i have poems
In these stanzas, Montez particularly points to the “hostile terrain” that Black queers must navigate. Sakia Gunn is the 15-year-old lesbian, Steen Fenrich is the 19-year-old gay man, and Amanda Milan is the 25-year-old trans woman. Fenrich was murdered in Queens in 1999 by his homophobic stepfather, who dismembered his body parts. Milan was murdered in Times Square, Manhattan, in 2000 by a man who slit her throat on the public street. All listed in this stanza were Black queer and trans individuals navigating both the public and private places of larger New York. These lives, so unfortunately, were taken. Furthermore, Montez informs the reader of each person’s age because the Black queer life cycle is so young. While Black queers’ lives are reduced because of the HIV/AIDS crisis, the poet asserts us not to forget the other forms of violence that occur within these places. When Montez writes, “so i have poems,” he understands resistance as a literary method, as a mode of refusal that utilizes scriptural art to speak out against antiblack and heteronormative forms of fatal, interpersonal harm.

Montez ends the first part of “War Cry” by exclaiming that:

on the day of the march for sakia
[he] became aware
of all the ways [he is] censored

Here, “censorship” speaks to both homonormative/-nationalist priorities in queer politics and interpersonal forms of violence that queer and trans people experience. Homonormative/-nationalist priorities in queer politics—i.e., gay marriage and inclusivity in the military—overshadows the needs of vulnerable LGBTQ+ populations. Additionally, when visible LGBTQ+ populations speak out, they are more susceptible to violence by unknown perpetrators or even by their families. Therefore, if Montez’s position as a Black queer man is censored, he

175 Riggs, “Black Macho Revisted!”
176 Crowley, “Widow Mourns Suicide Hubby and Slain Son.”
177 Siegal, “The Crying Game.”
took a risk by refusing the structural power of censorial violence by writing and submitting “War Cry” to Black Pride NYC.

*Part II: (we will not/tolerate/your homophobic fucking hate)*[^178]

> at the feet of audre lorde  
> i have learned  
> that poetry is not a luxury

> if done honestly  
> it probably won’t pay the rent  
> or put rims on an unnecessary SUV  
> it won’t keep the lights on or the cable connected

> but if done honestly  
> it will feed the masses  
> and have them dreaming  
> outside the boxes life puts us in

Part two of “War Cry” begins with “we will not/tolerate/your homophobic fucking hate.” Montez speaks against a type of affective ignorance that scholars like Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, and Kara Keeling warn us of[^179]. In her claim that poetics can resist forms of misogynist and antiblack violence, similarly, poetry for Black queers, as Audre Lorde has claimed, can “form the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.”[^180] In the first stanza of this poem, Montez amplifies the active power of poetry, an artistic form that holds no “tolerance”[^181] for queerphobia and queer antagonism.

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[^178]: This chapter only highlights the first three stanzas of Montez’s second part of “War Cry.”
[^180]: Lorde, “Poetry Is Not A Luxury.”
[^181]: Montez’s play on “tolerate,” a (neo)liberal term that “progressive,” national queer projects like “It Gets Better” has predicated their platforms on.
In the second and third stanzas, Montez attunes the reader to material realities of art and performance. Because of late capitalism, modes of labor like activism and art do not “pay the bills,” despite their inherent inclination to speak to and improve the living conditions of marginalized folks. When Montez posits, “if [poetry is] done honestly / it will feed the masses / and have them dreaming / outside the boxes life puts us in,” he claims that poetry has the potential to transcend the structural boxes of identarian markers. To “feed the masses” and affectively dream for better lives, like Montez wants us to work toward, an intolerance to antagonism and late capitalism requires what critical theorist Sara Ahmed calls a “feminist” (and in this case, a Black queer) killjoy. Through expressing a killjoy, “there can [actually] be joy in killing joy.” Thus, a contemporary framework of Black queer killjoy, 20 years after the murder of Sakia Gunn, can use the art of sociopoetics to express distaste against our antiblack and queer/trans-antagonistic worlds. Not only can this killjoy speak against antagonistic violence, Montez’s expression of Black queer killjoy also disrupts the fallacious promises of rainbow capitalism that “It Gets Better,” which attempt to laboriously strain our personhood, when Black queers deserve to reach a state of ordinariness.

Part III: “(one/we are the people/two a little bit louder/three/we want justice for sakia)”

In part three of “War Cry,” Montez concludes:

(one/we are the people/two a little bit louder/three/we want justice for sakia)

do you remember how the rain

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182 Ahmed, “Feminist Killjoys.”
183 Ahmed, “Feminist Killjoys.”
184 Puar, “In the Wake of It Gets Better”; Shange, “Play Aunties and Dyke Bitches.”
185 Adeyemi, Feels Right. I return to Adeyemi’s idea of the “Black Queer Ordinary” in this chapter, as well as in the conclusion of this thesis.
came down
as we started down christopher
street?

the sky opened up and lord,
didn’t it rain?

but by the time we reached the
pier
there was nothing left
but a beautiful sky
and the clean smell that wet
bricks get
when the wind is blowing nicely

the sun was going down over
jersey
and we watched it
all of us watched it
and thought about that girl
who’d been killed
poets and singers performed
and her friend spoke to remind us
that was real
not just a picture on posters or
stickers
not just a name in a march song
not just something to add to a list
to prove we are right
she was S A K I A
a daughter a friend a lover a 15
year old girl
god made in his own image

we gathered for her and ourselves
we gathered for the reality
that she could have been any of
us
we gathered for the reality
that she could still be any of us

we gathered because that is a
reality we can no longer tolerate

Montez begins part three by calling people to action for Sakia. In this last section, when
Montez claims that “one/we are the people/two a little bit louder/three/we want justice for sakia,”
he foregrounds the cross-generational possibilities of queer kinship, which prioritizes a “Black queer common sense”186 “The people,” us the readers, are attuned to the temporal insecurities that structural and interpersonal violence inflict against Black queer populations. These temporal insecurities that I speak to are in conversation with Kara Keeling and Kemi Adeyemi, both of whom discuss how neoliberal-colonial space limits the futures of Black queer subjects.187

Referencing 1990s NYC, Michael Warner in *The Trouble With Normal* astutely questions, “many of those who hang out on Christopher Street couldn’t possibly afford to live there. Many are African American, young, and gay. Where are they being zoned off to?”188 In part three, Montez first narrates the double-bound contours of vicarious citizenship for Black queer youth like Sakia, as they are tethered between a Black queer right to the City and a state-sanctioned zoning out of the gayborhood.189 He first commemorates the time it “[was raining] on christopher street,” but a couple blocks away on the Pier, “there was nothing left but a beautiful sky.” While rain in New York’s Greenwich Village does not necessarily indicate a negative affect, it is worth noting Montez’s juxtaposition to the beautiful sky, brisk breeze, and setting sun on the Pier. Montez sadly yet beautifully symbolizes Sakia’s death as the sun that went down over Newark, New Jersey, where she was killed by her misogynistic and homophobic perpetrator. In scribing the relations between space (Greenwich Village, the Piers, and Newark), temporality (weather change and sunset), and affect (sensuality and visuality), Montez attunes us to the notion that the loss of Sakia ruptures the ordinary longing of Black queer space-time.

Black queer space-time, as I explained in my second chapter, represents moments that Black queers experience to take time, feel good, and not experience fear, rejecting notions of

186 Shange, “Play Aunties and Dyke Bitches.”
189 Greene, “Gay Neighborhoods and the Rights of the Vicarious Citizen.”
homonormative and neoliberal temporalities. Montez informs us, however, that violent perpetrators can cause hyper-vigilance in the comfort of Black queer people, violating our ordinary longing for Black queer space-time.

Centering Greene’s notion of vicarious citizenship, we can understand how Montez strategically captures the matrix Black queers occupy within the contemporary neoliberal City. Montez posits a spatial juxtaposition between post-9/11 neoliberal development in Greenwich Village and the queer of color cultural environment that the Piers historically represent (e.g., Paris is Burning).\textsuperscript{190} Perhaps, if the neoliberal City protected Black lesbian youth like Sakia and her friends—like they protect the capitalist interests of gay enclaves—she would not have been “out of time.”\textsuperscript{191} Similarly, if Sakia’s own City—Newark—protected Black lesbian youth and not support the objectives of violent cisgender patriarchy, maybe Sakia and her friends would have been safe.\textsuperscript{192} I say this not to remove accountability from Sakia’s perpetrator but to rather detail the predatory, intertwined objectives that urban geography and its actors have with each other. As vicarious citizens, Black queer youth like Sakia sought out the comfortability that gay enclaves brought to them, while also simultaneously being residentially and temporally zoned from City-enforced protections. At large, Montez, through these acute sociopoetics that contend with both the utopian imaginaries and real vulnerabilities of a Black queer right to the City, displaying complicated “fugitive mapping” literary techniques.\textsuperscript{193}

Montez in the latter half of part three deeply remembers and humanizes Sakia: “she was S A K I A / a daughter a friend a lover a 15 / year old girl / god made in his own image.”

Additionally, speaking to the unacceptable violent realities that Black queer girls and gender-

\textsuperscript{190} Manalansan, “Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City”; Keeling, “Looking for M—”
\textsuperscript{191} Keeling, “Looking for M—”
\textsuperscript{192} Adeyemi, Feels Right, 14.
\textsuperscript{193} Kelley, “Following the Tree Flowers.”
expansive youth have to experience in their home communities, Montez writes, “we gathered because that is a reality we can no longer tolerate.” Calling to action Shange’s notion of queer kinship, Montez asserts that change needs to happen because Black queer youth deserve futures. Similarly, Kara Keeling beautifully speaks alongside Montez’s call for a Black queer futurity. In her foundational article, “Looking for M—,” Keeling analyzes *The Aggressives*, a documentary released in 2005 in honor of Sakia’s life. Produced by Daniel Peddle, *The Aggressives* followed the lives of young studs of color in New York City. In conversation with José Muñoz, Keeling argues:

> At age fifteen, [Sakia] was out of time. But we still look for her in order to look after her. Out of time, she has become a figure of our time, one we invoke as a way to make palpably present the objectionable distance between, for instance, the contemporary focus on gay marriage by national lesbian and gay political organizations and an innovative, radical politics that looks after and therefore looks out for the lives of queer youth of color…when might Sakia be?

Here, Keeling and Montez converge in their literary assertion toward queer kinship, specifying an activist project for “we” or “us.” As Montez informs us that her premature death represents a reality that “we can no longer tolerate,” Keeling drives us toward solutions. Echoing Cathy Cohen’s call at the turn of the second millennium for a coalitional, radical queer politic, Keeling believes that this radical queer objective should take priority in cherishing and protecting the lives of vulnerable queer youth of color. Moreover, Montez in part three attempted to look for Sakia through affective words and geographic imagery. Similarly, Keeling reminds us that, while Sakia’s life may be taken, in order to work against these prescriptive antiblack and anti-queer fatal temporalities, we should engage in such kinship practices and coalitional politics that look after her and youth like her. 20 years after Sakia’s murder—are “we” still looking after vulnerable queers of color? Where can we locate the efficacy of these practices, and which scholarship or other texts display these improvements?
2009: Public Queer Expression in the Antiblack Homotopia

Martin Manalansan asks, “how do queer communities of color stake out a territory beyond ghettos and enclaves…?”194 While this photo did take place during pride month in 2009, this “stak[ing] out [of] a territory” that Manalansan is referring to is the act of “taking up space” outside of the spatial and temporal boundaries of antiblack homotopias. I argue that “taking up space” constitutes an act of resistance. Across Chicago and New York, Black trans and queer peoples have “taken up space” in places where the state frequently attempts to police and sanitize away their existence.

In New York specifically, the Christopher Street Piers have served as a historic site for queer and trans of color performance and camaraderie. Six years after Sakia’s death, Black queer youth and young adults are still hanging out there. Pier 45, since the 1980s, has been threatened by nearby neoliberal “redevelopment” and gentrification processes, gradually transforming the surrounding area into an antiblack homotopia.195 Manalansan assesses how these neoliberal spatial acts can produces specific acts of structural and physical violence for queers of color. Taking early 2000s New York as a case study, he argues that the increased visibility of gay enclaves (like Jackson Heights and Christopher Street) had led to a decreased visibility of the neoliberal City’s undesirable populations.196 Specifically, he poses a contradictory analysis of the relationship between gay spaces (viewed under the neoliberal landscape as progressive and multicultural) and the realized experiences for queers of color (violence, silence, marginalization, and policing). These neoliberal communities, in a post-9/11 world, have sanitized themselves by

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196 Manalansan, “Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City.”
increasing policing, gentrifying the community around them, and making forms of residence socioeconomically inaccessible.

This section thus focuses on how these two young Black queer women in photographer Richard Renaldi’s “Pier 45” collection display geographic refusal against antiblack heterotopias and antiblack homotopias by peacefully hanging out on the Piers.\textsuperscript{197}

\textit{Black Queer Women in a “Paradoxical Space”}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Two Black Queer Young Adults/Women at the Christopher Street Piers, 2009, DSC5166-127, Richard Renaldi’s Pier 45 Collection, New York City, NY. As a researcher, I assume the subjects’ genders just by the photo. However, these two people may not identify as girls/women. These non-static categories are just applied to this photo at this particular space and time.}\textsuperscript{197}
\end{center}

This photo depicts a fast-paced yet tranquil view of two young Black women.\textsuperscript{198} The viewer makes direct eye contact with the subject in the yellow shirt, while her partner in the green top stares into the distance. This asymmetrical gaze is obstructed by the rainbow-lined glasses worn on both their faces. Slightly above, we experience the breeze that ruffles the two girls, swaying green shirt’s hair towards the West, where the gaze either feels obstructed or

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\textsuperscript{197} Two Black Queer Young Adults/Women at the Christopher Street Piers, 2009, 127-DSC5166-127, Richard Renaldi’s Pier 45 Collection, New York City, NY. As a researcher, I assume the subjects’ genders just by the photo. However, these two people may not identify as girls/women. These non-static categories are just applied to this photo at this particular space and time.

\textsuperscript{198} I do not know the specific gender of these two Black people. From how I perceive the photo, these people could be cis women, trans women, or neither. However, because of how misogynoir functions in geographic places and how these two people’s ontological conditions are understood within static identity markers like “Black,” “queer,” and “woman,” I theorize their social position as two Black queer women.
\end{flushright}
reveals itself. On the left side of green shirt’s face, a purple butterfly and multicolored flowers are imprinted. Paying closer attention to the left, we can see a rainbow-colored butterfly earring dangling with the wind, serving as a midpoint of the photo. If we move our eyes below, a miniature pride flag stands tall from the green shirt girl’s top, nestled in her chest. Zooming back out, we can attune to the photo’s mood. Green shirt smiles while her partner slightly smirks in comfort. Both their hair is styled in a French roll, evoking familial memories for me, as I sent my sister off to prom in ’09, and she wore the same hairstyle.

Similar to Greene’s notion of vicarious citizenship, queer geographer Jen Jack Gieseking builds from Gillian Rose’s feminist framework of “paradoxical space” to describe queer women and trans people’s dynamic relationship to geographies in New York City.199 Paradoxical space contends with Black queer girls’ simultaneous inhabitation of binaristic descriptors within the larger of neoliberal City. As Kemi Adeyemi highlights how Black queers practice slowness to resist the speed of the neoliberal City, Rachel Walker similarly expands previous theories of nomadism to understand how queer youth of color, especially those in the queer of color organization FIERCE, contest queer geographies and temporalities on the Piers.200 Walker claims that “the nomad is intensely creative, wandering from point to point…rather than being limited by externally imposed spatial sanctions.”201 Queers of color who have long navigated the Piers have nomadically practiced a right to the City, organizing against and in between the sanitizing and gentrifying practices that New York has implemented into the surrounding area. Reading queer of color nomadism as another practice to claiming one’s right to the City helps scholars move spatially and temporally against static identity categories and expectations,

200 Walker, “Toward a FIERCE Nomadology”; FIERCE NYC
201 Walker, “Toward a FIERCE Nomadology,” 104.
allowing for an intersectional analysis for “embodied geographies.” These embodied geographies that Walker speaks of includes the interpersonal relationships that queers of color form with other queers of color, which are inextricably linked to one’s ontological position within paradoxical space.

Margin/Center

These two Black queer girls simultaneously exist within a paradoxical space of “margin/center.” Moya Bailey reminds us to describe Sakia’s murder six years earlier as a misogynoirist attack. Through detailing the death of Sakia and similar forms of cisheteropatriarchal violence against marginalized Black queer girls as misogynoir and antiblack lesbophobia, I argue that the young Black queer women in this photo express geographic resistance through their mere existence in the neoliberal public sphere. Their perceived romantic and/or platonic involvement with one another resist violent cisheteropatriarchal claims to Black queer women’s bodies. For example, the girl in the yellow shirt is nestled gently behind the girl in the green. The subtle physical touch between them in this space represents safety and comfort. Through expressing queer love, these two young Black women utilize the Pier as a geographic site for queer expression, as evidenced by the Pride symbols sported across their bodies. As scholars like Nicole Fleetwood, Marlon Bailey, Rashad Shabazz, and Jennifer Nash all emphasize, our sexual economies do indeed profit from and center the labors of Black femme and queer bodies. Even during a “LGBTQ+-friendly” time of year like pride month, to express public queer care outside of the romantic field of the cisgender male gaze communicates a

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204 Fleetwood, Troubling Vision; Bailey and Shabazz; Nash, “Pedagogies of Desire.”
paradoxical expression of resistance that these Black queer girls embody, even within the field of “margin/center.”

Nomadism/Slowness

Furthermore, I expand this paradoxical space theory to consider how these Black queer girls practice both “nomadism/slowness,” alongside queers of color not visible in the photo, to resist spatial developments of rainbow capitalist objectives and the larger, imperatively speedy pace of neoliberalism. Through Tina Campt’s concept of the still-moving image, we can contextualize how these girls are forced to navigate the Piers nomadically, yet the photo also showcases how these girls practice slowness to experience affective normality in the larger neoliberal City.”

By these two Black queer girls existing in a slowed version of fast-paced New York, they nomadically negotiate white homonormative temporalities. This photo represents a summer evening before dusk on the Pier during Pride month. The sun has slightly set but remains powerful enough to still illuminate the sky. Union City’s urban landscape paints the background, despite New York being the neoliberal metropolis in which these girls are positioned. While Sakia was murdered in her hometown of Newark, she had frequented the Pier with her friends shortly before. Union City, NJ painted as the backdrop of this photo showcases that the boundaries of specific Metropolises are blurred. While New York houses the Pier, many youth travel from various places outside of Manhattan—including nearby cities and enclaves with their own specific histories of redlining and spatial restrictions. Unless being subjected to artistic or

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sexual participation in the nearby economies, Black queers are not included in the continuous neoliberal development of Greenwich Village, which socioeconomically and imaginatively supports the embodied rights of white heteronormative and homonormative temporalities.207

To read slowness, I recognize how this serene landscape converges with reality. I recount my own experiences visiting the Piers as a 20-year-old in summer 2022 as a visible Black queer person. When I walked down the boardwalk with my friends, I smelled waves of marijuana and witnessed majority-Black people leisurely sitting around, smoking, and conversing with one another. I saw Black trans and queer people as well, taking photos of and with each other and laughing. My friends and I also took photos with and of each other with other Black queers before crossing Route 9A and heading down the historic Christopher Street to experience the nightlife as young adults.

The Black queer girls in Renaldi’s 2009 photo, alongside the Black queer and trans people that I communed with last summer, both practice slowness to claim their right to the City.208 Adeyemi contextualizes her argument on a Black queer right to the City by foregrounding neoliberal state agents’ desire to categorize Blackness and Black queerness as slow in relation to heteronormative and homonormative temporal markers. This demarcation of Black queerness as slow (e.g., “lazy,” “unproductive,” “unemployed”) has extra-judicially zoned Black queers away from safe and economic claims to residency in the City.209 The effervescently depicted Black queer girls and leisure-living Black queers go against the pressures of hetero-/homonormative reproduction and late-capitalist expectations of labor. At large, through this

208 Adeyemi, “The Practice of Slowness,”
practice of slowness, or forms of living that resists neoliberal governance, Black queers contest pinkwashed expectations of their role in the nearby formal and informal economy.\(^{210}\)

**Slowness and the Ordinary**

I pay attention to slowness and serendipity—both relational descriptors of Black queer positionality at the Piers—to emphasize a Black queer yearn towards ordinariness.\(^{211}\) Similar to Montez’s and Keeling’s calls to action to save and look after girls like Sakia, so that their lives can finally exist violence-/stress-free, I want to foreground the Black Queer Ordinary as a method. Adeyemi builds from Savannah Shange and Shaka McGlotten to explore the unfair expectations that researchers place on their minoritarian research subjects to perform for an event or provide creative data for the researcher’s fieldwork. Not only can this type of harmful anthropological eye expose Black queers to surveillance, but it can also place pressure on Black queers to not want to or experience normality. In the photo I analyzed, these two Black queer girls are just existing with each other, probably after a Pride festival; in my navigation of the Pier, Black queers are just hanging out. To make these Black queer subjects a heightened spectacle could signify my own capitalist pressures on these Black queer New Yorkers to speak to my own research objectives. Instead, like Adeyemi, I have intended to foreground these Black queers’ existence as a mere act of resistance to the larger neoliberal, carceral, antiblack, and misogynoirist, and transphobic matrices and temporalities that their geographic position is entangled within. I want these peoples’ happiness to be partly defined by the tranquil visuality I feel, marijuana smoke that touched my nostrils, and contagious laughs I heard.

\(^{210}\) Adeyemi, “The Practice of Slowness, 552.

\(^{211}\) Adeyemi, *Feels Right*. Again, I return to the Black Queer Ordinary in my conclusion.
Surveillance and (Hyper-)visibility

Lastly, I want to closely attune us to surveillance and colonial visibility against Black queers. Renaldi’s photograph reminds me of Afro-Brazilian trans artist Linn da Quebrada’s video “Oração.”\textsuperscript{212} The director of the video so beautifully positions queer and trans of color bodies in an urban-style, dilapidated building but with bright illumination by an outside field. Renaldi, like the director of “Oração,” executed a creative vision. While this vision depicts Black queers in a visual field that illuminates their bodies, conveying a contemporary and urbanized tranquility that exists outside of spatial depictions that attempt to marginalize and confine Black queer and trans life, this vision also exposes Black queers to the “unequal calculus of visibility distribution” that Keeling warns us of.\textsuperscript{213}

Moreover, in \textit{Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments}, Saidiya Hartman highlights how young Black women in early 20\textsuperscript{th} century New York “refused the terms of visibility imposed on them.”\textsuperscript{214} Surveillance and visibility has long impacted Black femme, queer, and trans subjects prior to and after the era Hartman explored in \textit{Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments}. For instance, Jennie Livingston’s foundation yet controversial documentary \textit{Paris is Burning} (1990) depicted queer and trans youth of color inhabiting various places in New York City—including the piers—as a location of performance and worldmaking amid a developing HIV/AIDS crisis. As I mentioned in my Chicago chapter, Jack Halberstam and Kara Keeling both note that five of the subjects depicted in \textit{Paris is Burning} were dead five years after the documentary’s release.\textsuperscript{215} This “calculus of visibility” that Keeling speaks of prohibits queers of color from freely navigating New York’s geographies without academic and media agents capturing their culture.

\textsuperscript{212} “Oração,” YouTube.
\textsuperscript{213} Keeling, “Looking for M—”
\textsuperscript{215} Halberstam, \textit{In a Queer Time and Place}; Keeling, “Looking for M—”
and labor without proper compensation, privacy, or safety. Through this lens, I still question the unintended surveillance that white photographer (and Guggenheim fellowship winner) Richard Renaldi may have inflicted against his multiple photographed subjects—including the girls I am analyzing. Like Keeling emphasized with her analysis on Livingston, I, too, do not seek to fully blame Renaldi for whatever visibilities he may have exposed these subjects to. However, considering that photos in this collection were taken from 1993-2014, a 21-year span, I similarly speculate with Keeling: In the last 30 years, have we looked after these queers of color, and more specifically? What political and sociocultural improvements have been made for these young Black queer women? Without seeking the specific coordinate whereabouts of these youth, as a Black queer 21-year-old, I still desire to know if these queers are okay and safe in our current moment.

**2021 – Present: Black Trans Sex Workers’ Yearn to Trigger Futurity**
On March 17, 2021, local residents protested in the streets of Manhattan to advocate for Black trans and queer sex workers. The protest was led and organized by Joel Rivera and Qween Jean, two Black trans women based in New York City. Independent Zapotecan journalist Javier Sorano wrote a report on, recorded, and published the protest to YouTube. Sorano titled the YouTube video, “JS: March for Black Trans and Queer sex workers.” Black trans women organized this protest to continue fighting for liberation and justice after the anti-black horror that represented summer 2020, as well as to vocally uplift the political needs of Black trans and queer sex workers. Since the previous summer, the marches had usually happened weekly on Thursdays.

The protest began in front of the Stonewall Inn in Manhattan. The march beginning at the Stonewall Inn, as this location was where trans women of color Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera led the Stonewall riots. Similarly, at this 2021 protest, there were multiple street performances by Black trans women, an open forum to platform Black trans people’s demands, and a march that continued to grow as the night progressed. While there are many parts to this protest, I will focus on three parts.

At the beginning of the video, Black trans and queer people begin actualizing a Black queer counterpublic performance. The recording opens with two Black trans women twerking to music on the public sidewalk, one dressed in a bright and flowy red dress and the other dressed in all black with knee-high boots. Then, more Black queer people begin vogueing between the

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216 Sorano, Javier. “March in Support of Black Trans and Queer Sex Workers”; “JS: March for Black Trans and Queer sex workers.”
217 I will analyze the intentionally cryptic title and Sorano’s standpoint as an Indigenous journalist below.
218 Qween Jean was the person wearing the red dress, but the name of the other activist is unknown.
boundary of the curb and sidewalk. The editor cuts to many Black queers in the street performing DJ Casper’s “Cha Cha Slide” and twerking to Juvenile’s “Back That Azz Up.”

Next, the protest stops in front of an apartment building, where Black trans women were handed microphones to discuss racial, gender, sexual, and class justice. Qween Jean, a Haitian trans activist and one of the protest’s lead organizers, began the open forum. Now nighttime, where all locals from New York surrounding her, she echoes a call and response, repetitively exclaiming “George Floyd deserved to live!” After this statement, Qween Jean shouts: “Liberation for our Black queer sex workers!”; “Liberation for our Black trans sex workers!”; “Liberation for our nonbinary sex workers!” Near the end of her call-and-response, Qween Jean says, “many Black people are just trying to get by…and we are moving in a space of liberation…we will have our liberation!” After two Black trans femmes speak to the collective, they bring the march back to the streets of Manhattan, waving intersectional pride flags and Caribbean flags.

Toward the middle of the video, protestors stop in front of an outdoor restaurant in the middle of the street, exclaiming “fire, fire, gentrifiers!” where the majority nonblack customers stared in disgust back at the protestors. The protests then continues to pace throughout the Manhattan streets, and protestors ensure to annoy every single outdoor restaurant they pass by. The protestors then conclude the march in Times Square, covering over 2 miles of distance and disrupting wealthy and segregated neighborhoods in lower Manhattan throughout the process.

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219 Juvenile’s “Back That Azz Up” is a vulgar and sexual song that many Black people twerk to at parties. Bringing the party out to the public street definitely disrespects heteronormative and homonormative cultural norms.
**Multiracial Coalitions**

Zapotecan journalist Javier Soriano recorded and uploaded this video, as mentioned previously, titled “JS: March for Black Trans and Queer s3x workers.” On his website, he says that he is “inspired by activists, people from different races, different countries, different sexual orientations, people who fight for what they believe in, nude bodies.”\(^{220}\)

Unlike the videographer and recorder who uploaded the 2020 Black queer protest in Chicago (a white gay man who does comical and quasi-political commentary), Soriano’s diasporic Indigenous position, explicit radical politics, and intentional crypticity in titling the video (“s3x” instead of “sex”) resists the violent antiblack, anti-Indigenous, and anti-queer surveillance that is inherent to the neoliberal digital sphere.\(^{221}\) His intentions converge with what academics Savannah Shange and Savannah Kliner have theorized about the intertwined and interconnected histories of dispossession and coalitional politics of the Ohlone people and African Americans in the Bay Area.\(^{222}\)

Thus, in discussing a diasporic/queer of color refusal in the contemporary City, according to Shange and Kliner, we must be racially-specific when needed—yes—but we must also pay attention to the collectivity and relationality between Black and Indigenous activisms.

**Black Queer Placemaking**

Additionally, scholar Sa Whitley’s dissertation examined how Black queer and trans organizers in Baltimore remapped and transformed their City by “placemaking,” the practice of asserting one’s right to the City by organizing and participating in events, amid anti-black

\(^{220}\) Soriano, “About / Javier Soriano."

\(^{221}\) Browne, *Dark Matters*; Benjamin, *Race After Technology*. I pay attention to the intentional use of “s3x” and “sex” in titling the video because marginalized peoples usually disrupt the spelling of target words on social platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter to reduce their chances of their content being taken down or shadowbanned.

\(^{222}\) Shange, “Black Girl Ordinary”; Kliner, “Pride and Property.”
Similarly, by these Black queer and trans people marching through the antiblack heterotopian/homotopian geographies of Manhattan, claiming justice for George Floyd and Black queer sex workers, they assertively *make place* and refuse imagined geographies of where Black queers should be, what they should say, and how they should behave in public.

Furthermore, through placemaking and asserting their right to the City, Black trans women call-and-respond for Black and trans liberations, as well as annoying and angering the nearby customers by yelling “fuck you” and tapping the windows. In theorist Simone Browne’s analysis of artist Adrian Piper’s *What It’s Like, What It Is #3*, she builds from bell hooks, claiming that the Black subject possesses the power to “[confront] the surveillance imposed onto Black life,” as well as “talk back.” When Black trans New Yorkers stroll through the Manhattan’s antiblack heterotopian/homotopian streets, they first resist nearby carceral technologies of surveillance by navigating the City with their literal Black/trans bodies. And through verbalizing their right to thrive in NYC, Black trans women are both “talking back” against the City and “triggering” the white gentrifiers, a practice that “unsettle[s], rattle[s] to the core, quake[s], provoke[s] discomfort” without warning.” As such, resistance thus emerges from these protestors’ fearlessness to trigger the white gentrifiers’ fear and (un)comfortability, as their ontological and material conditions benefit from the labor and exclusion of these same very activists—who happen to be lower-class, local, and queer minoritarian subjects.

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223 Bailey, Butch Queen Up in Pumps; Bailey, “Editorial: Gender and Sexual Geographies of Blackness”; Whitley, “The Collective Come-up”
225 Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, 189.
Enumerated Misogynoirist and Anti-trans Violence

Like Chicago, the political impetus of this protest is situated in a larger field of misogynoirist, transphobic, and queerphobic violence that has cyclically occurred in New York. Historically, I am reminded of the 2000 murder of Black trans woman Amanda Milan (completed in Times Square) and 2003 murder of Black lesbian teen Sakia Gunn (completed after she left Greenwich Village). And between Times Square and Greenwich Village are the locations in which this protest began and ended. As of recent, I think of the recent transphobic murder of Dior H Ova/Tiffany Harris and how Black girls like Kashmere Wright-Ortiz have gone missing.226

At large, these Black trans and queer activists in NYC have exposed the intersectional forms of violence that exist within New York’s neoliberal, carceral, and homonationalist geographies. This protest displayed Black queer participation within a quasi-event of life and death—the liminal space between romanticizing Black queer worldmaking yet mourning the surplus of Black femme/trans/queer loss.227 Activists like Qween Jean and Joel Rivera politically echo Javier Soriano’s purpose, as he exclaims that “I love freedom and my work shows it…freedom to say ‘I love you,’ freedom to say ‘fuck you,’…freedom to do civil disobedience.”228 To challenge (and eventually eradicate) New York’s intersectional forms of structural violence, further acts of civil disobedience that “trigger” the larger oppressive apparatuses are necessary to dismantle it, and Black trans activists have continuously done this in avenues beyond what this thesis is able to capture.

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226 Kozuch, “HRC Mourns Dior H Ova/Tiffany Davis”; Barker, “Gone and Forgotten.”
227 Adeyemi, Feels Right, 101.
228 Soriano, “About / Javier Soriano.”
While these continual acts of resistance and refusal remain necessary to achieve the liberation that Qween Jean called for in the protest, scholars should not over-romanticize this resistance, especially under the conditions of late-capitalism and continual intersectional violence. As I conversed with Kemi Adeyemi in my first chapter about the dangers of the “event-potentiality matrix,” I address further in my conclusion about the necessity of Black/queer/trans futures with practices of resistance and refusal while also foregrounding two of my project’s central questions: When can Black trans and queer folks stop resisting? How do they/we define the ”ordinary”? 
Coda: “We Just Wanna Feel Normal”

It seems wrong to “conclude.” My practice is to stay a piece, to continue to read and talk hopefully going further up or down the road with you…We have argued for and within Black gay time and aliveness here. Yet I know that to advance our exchange I must bring this trip to a close, even with an ellipsis still open for the entry of your stories (laid side by side)…

“Concluding” is not how I want to understand the practice we are engaged in in these last pages. Because even “coda” is too narrowly disciplined for our engagement…

—Jafari Allen (2021), There’s a Disco Ball Between Us: A Theory of Black Gay Life

As I conclude my honors thesis, antiblack, anti-queer, and anti-trans rhetoric continues to permeate throughout U.S. legislature and political discourse. On January 23, 2023, Florida governor Ron DeSantis rejected the Advanced Placement African American Studies course for high schoolers and expressed distaste for the course’s unit on Black Queer Studies: “Now, who would say that [queer theory] an important part of Black history…? That is somebody pushing an agenda on our kids.”

Florida legislature already approved a law that prohibited the teaching of critical race theory in public schools, and of course, this academic prohibition includes letting students learn about the historical nexus between critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and trans studies. Furthermore, legislatures have introduced over 300 bills dedicated to anti-trans policy from January to March 2023. In March 2023, conservative commentator Michael Knowles publicly exclaimed that “transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely – the whole preposterous ideology.”

Neo-conservative figures like DeSantis and Knowles, as well as their similarly-aligned legislating actors, engineer this violent discursive rhetoric to increase fear in Black and LGBTQ+ populations. Hearing this neo-conservative rhetoric and seeing its attempts to materialize in the legal system, all while writing stories of

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229 Wiggins, “DeSantis Blames ‘Queer Theory’ for African American Studies Course Rejection.”
230 Brown, “The odds are getting worse for trans Americans.”
231 Brown, “The odds are getting worse for trans Americans.”
Black LGBTQ+ resistance in this thesis, applying to PhD programs this year to continue similar research in graduate school, and just being a young Black, gay, and nonbinary adult have been difficult and tiring to say the least.

This thesis has displayed the diverse avenues of resistance and refusal that Black trans and queer people have enacted against structural violence in Chicago and New York City. Amid resistance and refusal, Black LGBTQ+ folks have indeed actualized meaning, resources, and community within the same urban geographies that have attempted to expunge and censor them. This research project engages with fruitful scholarship published in the 21st century that centers Black LGBTQ+ communities’ experiences amid living in antiblack heterotopias and homotopias that intentionally (try to) shorten the length and weaken the quality of their livelihoods.

Analyzing the Black LGBTQ+ archive between and beyond this sticky event-potentiality matrix, I have found that Black LGBTQ+ people across geographies and time periods live in both the spectacular and ordinary. Like Hartman, to study the “spectacular,” I have used the physical and digital archive, produced under our contemporary late capitalist landscape, to “represent the everyday experience and restless character of life in the [C]ity.”

232 “Looking for” these quotidian forms of Black LGBTQ+ resistance and refusal in our studies, as Keeling says, is an interpretive project that “seeks to think in a moment of crisis while remaining open and vulnerable to the (im)possibility of a rupture now.”

233 Both Hartman and Keeling explain to us the precarity yet possibility of the archive to protectively look after our research subjects; however, us researchers have a duty to treat our analysis of our minoritarian subjects with care.

Quotidian forms of Black LGBTQ+ resistance and refusal that emerge in urban geographies are powerful, and this project has intellectually valorized resistance and refusal to showcase their

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potential in evoking sociopolitical improvements and extending Black LGBTQ+ livelihood. Especially in our time now, where the most vulnerable Black LGBTQ+ peoples and the field of Black Queer Studies is at threat, resistance and refusal represent a necessary activist project that propels and will continue on.

While the Black LGBTQ+ spectacular excites us, the “ordinary,” however, is a more significant and exigent framework that scholars should better attune to on future studies of Black LGBTQ+ life. In this thesis, I have analyzed eight primary sources to capture Black LGBTQ+ resistance and refusal over two major cities and across a 35-year time span. Because of the smaller scope of this project and my intentional curation of Black LGBTQ+ spectacularism, I have left out the countless quotidian forms of resistance and refusal. When us scholars solely focus on these heroic events that highlight the exciting or fatal realities of urban Black LGBTQ+ life, we contribute to the event-potentiality matrix by romanticizing Black LGBTQ+ populations’ constant laborious engagements with late capitalist structures (e.g., academia, entertainment, media, etc.) that tax and fatigue them.\textsuperscript{234}

As Adeyemi writes, an interpretive project for scholars of marginalized communities should valorize the “subtle, quieter, less public, often invisible, and entirely ordinary modes of living black life [that] are [usually] devalued as seemingly carrying less political force.”\textsuperscript{235} Black LGBTQ+ people deserve to live in a society in which they do not have to constantly resist violent power structures. Black trans and queer people deserve to choose when to participate and also opt out of sociopolitical engagement to actualize futurity. Black queer people deserve to feel normal and ordinary living under the spatial and temporal constraints of neoliberal-capitalism.

\textsuperscript{235} Adeyemi, \textit{Feels Right}, 107.
For future scholarship that centers marginalized communities, academics should take seriously the deserved ordinariness, privacy, and self-determination of their research subjects. Shange, in her analysis on the “Black Girl Ordinary,” warns that even well-intentioned research can collude with neoliberalism and the carceral state. When we rely on our research subjects’ performative transparency about how they live, resist, or refuse, we prioritize our own “pre-authored frameworks” over their own “self-determination.”236 Instead, I too hope what theorist Jennifer Nash wants for Black feminist theory also for Black Queer Studies: “…[scholarship] that refuses to perform service work for women’s studies [and similar fields], and that instead compels the field to reckon with its own racially saturated fantasies and attachments.”237 Therefore, when we engage in future research practices, we should continue to highlight the organizing and activist work that our subjects engage in. More importantly, though, we should engage with the “Black Queer Ordinary” to highlight Black LGBTQ+ people’s quotidian acts of normal living, feeling good, and engaging in non-political work (which constitutes resistant work of self-preservation in and of itself). And most importantly, we need to more ethically work with our communities to understand what should or should not be shared for academic and media consumption.

As Jafari Allen notes in this chapter’s opening epigraph, it feels wrong to just conclude here.238 Black LGBTQ+ livelihood is still vulnerable and engaging in ongoing, uncaptured projects of resistance and refusal, within and beyond the urban landscape, and I leave this project with many more questions than answers. This journey of this thesis has been a challenging yet intellectually stimulating ride, and I am excited to continue this research beyond the completion

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237 Nash, Black Feminism Reimagined, 138.
238 Allen, There’s a Disco Ball Between Us, 295.
of this thesis. In March 2021, when I was selected as a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow, I intended for this thesis to be ethnographic. As I continue my studies as a future doctoral candidate, I am propelled to use ethnography, as well as work against its colonial and event-orientated origins, to contribute to scholarship on Black LGBTQ+ life. Regardless of how “mundane” it seems, I feel ready to move with and beyond the “spectacular,” intentionally valorizing the political efficacy when Black trans and queer communities choose to *rather not* actively refuse or resist.
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