On the Revitalized City, At-Risk Youth, and Other Ways of Telling

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Abstract

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This thesis builds on my work as an educator and organizer in the small city of Hudson, NY. It is focused on two dominant narratives about urban development in our city: the story of revitalization, and the story of risk. I begin by unpacking the celebratory story of Hudson's revitalization, drawing on oral histories to consider all that this story forgets, and the structural factors and conditions that it obscures. I examine the consequences of equating gentrification with economic health, and instead consider how what we call "revitalization" is inextricably bound with deepening inequalities. I then look at the construction of "at risk youth" to understand how our language justifies the erasure and displacement of marginalized communities necessary to this kind of economic development. I consider how young people, and especially youth of color, are imagined as both at risk of failing school, and as risks themselves to the city's growth. I utilize the lens of risk to examine the racial imaginaries that shape how we see and understand space, and the ways that seemingly race-neutral language serves to produce and maintain racialized inequity. After examining the context of revitalization and risk in Hudson, I make an argument for the critical role educators can play at the intersection of community organizing, youth work, and urban development. Reflecting on the work of Kite's Nest, a community organization in Hudson, I consider how we can develop teaching pedagogies that aim not only to transform the experiences of young people, but also the places we live.

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This thesis is dedicated to all the children and teenagers growing up in Hudson.

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Introduction: An Ethics of Entanglement

I. Entanglement

I grew up on one of the busiest streets in Manhattan, in a neighborhood that changed drastically before my eyes: by the time I was in high school, I knew that the particular neighborhood that had made me was on quick-sand, already gone. Perhaps this is true for all New York babies: that places are always under construction is a basic fact of life. I remember peering into the local history room at the New York Public Library as a teenager, and realizing that my story of New York loss wasn't even a page in a book in an ocean of books. Still, the disorientation was real. It taught me something that I have carried fiercely since: that our material and emotional geographies shape us, that they are worth listening to, understanding, and sometimes fighting for. And it has raised a set of questions for me, to ask of any place I go: Who lives here, and what are the many ways they see, know, experience, love, remember, and dream this place? Who used to live here, and doesn't now, and why? What are the particular historical and structural forces entangled with the life of this place, and the people who call it home?

I didn't mean to make home in a tiny city of under seven thousand residents, but when I moved to the city of Hudson in upstate New York seven years ago, I learned quickly that when you're guided by these questions, even a small city -- or perhaps especially a small city -- can reveal itself as a site of infinite complexities, histories and possibilities. When I moved here I became quickly involved in helping to organize and launch a community radio station, and so I spent my first years in the city with an audio recorder in hand: conducting interviews, and training people to record and document their own stories. A few years later I helped an oral historian and friend who was founding a small oral history school — to train people to record life history interviews and to build a local archive of voices. I have been humbled and honored to listen to so many voices that make up this place, in all of their complexity and contradictions. As Donna Deyhle says, every "community is made up of many different stories, sometimes speaking

to each other, sometimes speaking past each other, sometimes invisible to each other, and sometimes ignored by each other."[1]

Hudson is only two square miles, but like any place it is also a meeting place of forces, a product of relations which extend way beyond its borders. As Doreen Massey has said, "Any serious understanding of any one place necessitates standing back, taking a broader view, and setting it in a wider context."[2] Cities are not only made up of internal multiplicity and complexity, they are also always situated within a web of unequal interdependence, and it is in local places where we can glimpse the ways that what we call the "global" is constituted and made concrete. I am a believer in the politics of the small, where we see our communities as sites for building resistance and enacting visionary alternatives. This requires that we see ourselves not as isolated but as nested, interconnected and interdependent within the rest of the world: that we cultivate a "politics of place beyond place".[3] It asks that we "jump scales": diving deep into local relationships and sites of engagement -- classrooms, courtrooms, town meetings -- while developing analyses of the larger structures shaping our worlds, and building solidarity across places, peoples, and movements.[4]

This is the best way I can describe why I decided to go back to school. For several years I have been immersed in local organizing in Hudson around racial justice, economic justice, and fighting for the young people growing up in our city. In 2012 I helped to co-found an organization called Kite's Nest, a center for liberatory education for children and teenagers. We work in deep partnership with a number of other community groups: the SBK Social Justice Center, a community organization started and led by Black residents from the city; the Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood, another organization for youth in the city school district; the Columbia County Sanctuary Movement, a grassroots group organizing for immigrant rights and migrant justice; and Showing Up for Racial Justice Hudson, which educates and organizes white people to show up for racial justice. These community groups and the people working within

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[1] Donna Deyhle, *Reflections in Place: Connected Lives of Navajo Women* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), xvii, quoted in Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 117.
[2] Doreen Massey, "Questions of Locality," *Geography* 78, no. 2 (April 1993): 144.
[3] Doreen Massey et al, "The Possibilities of a Politics of Place Beyond Place? A Conversation with Doreen Massey," *Scottish Geographical Journal* 125, no. 3-4 (2009): 401-420; Aziz Choudhry, Jill Hanley, and Eric Shragge, eds., *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice* (Toronto: PM Press, 2012).
[4] Michelle Fine, Eve Tuck, and Sarah Zeller-Berkman, "Do you Believe in Geneva? Methods and Ethics and the Global-Local Nexus," in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies,* ed. Norman K. Denzin, Yvanna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 157-180.

them have become my family, and together we have been working to build solidarity across communities in Hudson, and learning how to organize to build power for a more just vision of our city and world.

Our work raises so many questions for me, daily, and I've been hungry to situate the challenges we face in Hudson — rapid gentrification, an extreme and growing wealth gap, stark racial segregation, a robust school-to-prison pipeline — within a broader context. I came to school eager for new language to articulate what we know, see, and feel happening around us, but can't always express; and I came for new lenses to unsettle my own comforts. I came to school interested in learning more about the roots of what we're fighting against, in encountering possibilities for deepening our work, and also to see what learnings we might have to share, from our small corner in the world.

Throughout this process, I have found myself consistently returning to a set of questions focused on the way that Hudson gets talked about, especially among white, liberal, middle- and upper-class people, and in newspapers like the *New York Times*: what I call, in this thesis, the "story of revitalization". In recent years, Hudson has gained some notoriety as a city that was transformed from a place characterized by dying industry and poverty to a place of upscale consumption and leisure. I keep returning to the partiality of this story, to the violence in all that it forgets, overlooks and obscures. But why this hang-up on discourse -- on how the city is described*?* I tried several times to shift focus, concerned about theorists who get too caught up in questions of representation, and in doing so, become increasingly removed from the real places and people they're writing with/about. But sometimes we have to listen to what nags us -- often there's a reason. In this case, the "story of revitalization" in Hudson came to represent a personal political project: an engagement with the liberal (center-left) political-philosophical outlook with which I was raised.

That is to say, parts of my thesis have turned into a conversation that I'm attempting to have with my people: white folks who have or come from class privilege and identify as progressive. I'm trying to understand the ways that we use narratives to justify or evade our active collusions in injustice.[5] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call these "settler moves to innocence": strategies through which we try to relieve ourselves of guilt or responsibility,

[5] Eula Biss, "White Debt,' *New York Times,* December 6, 2015.

without giving up land or power or privilege.[6] So this thesis can be read as an attempt, in part, to examine and unsettle some of the narratives around race, place, and education at play in my own imagination. This aligns with organizing work that I've become increasingly involved in, which is focused on bringing other white people into a movement that centers the leadership of people of color, Muslims, immigrant and undocumented families, LGBTQ people, disabled peoples, and the poor and working class. This requires, in the words of Robin D. Kelley, that we "expose whiteness for what it is -- a foundational myth for the birth and consolidation of capitalism," in order to free white people, too, "from the prison house of whiteness."[7] This thesis is not an effort to solve problems facing marginalized communities in Hudson, nor to cultivate my own, personal exceptionalism; it's a piece of a (lifelong) process of critically interrogating and unlearning the structures of dominance that I simultaneously abhor, resist and also perpetuate -- in order to better do this work with others.

And so this thesis takes, as its focus, some of the dominant narratives that make up liberal and neoliberal "common sense" about urban revitalization and at risk youth. I unpack the celebratory story of Hudson's revitalization, in which the city is framed as a model of successful economic development for de-industrialized cities. And I look at the construction of "at risk youth" to understand how we use language to justify the erasure and displacement of marginalized communities necessary to this kind of economic development. I look at how both of these stories are used to conceal significant contradictions, like the racialized consequences of supposedly color-blind policies, the belief that market-driven development will produce public gain, or the idea that hiding or containing social problems is somehow the same as solving them. I'm interested throughout in how these stories serve to position whiteness as neutral, and ultimately to protect and maintain property and privilege. It is my goal, as Eve Tuck writes, to constantly "frame and reframe": to move "between structural realities and inadequacies to the lived life, back to a lived life in context, to a context made of other lives and bodies, other institutions… all in order to frame and reframe."[8]

And while I believe this effort is relevant to the work we're doing in Hudson, I want to be clear that I don't see the representational -- the stories we tell -- as the primary site for our

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[6] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indignity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 9.
[7] Robin D. G. Kelley, "After Trump," *Boston Review,* November 15, 2016.
[8] Eve Tuck, *Urban Youth and School Pushout: Gateways, Get-aways, and the GED* (New York: Routledge: 2012), xiii.

struggle and resistance. I do believe that stories matter: that narrative is fundamental to how we make sense of the world and ourselves, our roles and responsibilities, and how our lives fit into the bigger picture. We "tell stories," but stories also *tell us* what's possible, what's radical, and what's unrealistic; which histories matter; who belongs in what neighborhood; what constitutes a crime.[9] Still I find it helpful to distinguish, like activist Jonathan Smucker does, between the work of "contesting meanings" -- i.e., analyzing and contesting popular narratives, and constructing new ones -- and "contesting state power," or intervening in the political terrain.[10] According to this distinction, this thesis might help to move forward our work of contesting meanings: I hope to arm us with more clarity, and history, and understanding. If we are to succeed in building a broader oppositional culture in Hudson and beyond, then we need to understand the political economic contexts that we're working within. I hope that it resonates with peoples' lives, and might inform our power to make change. But it poses the challenge to us, too: what alternatives to the stories of revitalization and risk do our movements offer? And how are we building collective power to bring them to life?

In Hudson, we've been exploring these questions in perhaps an unconventional way: with children and teenagers. Young people are our partners in engaging in critical inquiry about the city, in constructing narratives that disrupt and refuse the stories of revitalization and risk, and in fighting for a city that's truly accountable to its residents. In the words of Colin Ward, in our work the city is itself an education, "whether we are thinking of learning through the city, learning about the city, learning to use the city, to control the city, or to change the city."[11] In doing so we learn, too, from the frustrations, fears, and desires of kids and teenagers growing up here, from the stories they tell, and the ways that they imagine, maneuver within, and make this place theirs. This thesis poses possibilities for turning our classrooms inside out, collapsing the boundaries between learning and life, between the classroom and the city, between what is and what could be.

I write this, then, as an educator, as an activist, as a resident of Hudson, born in New York City, and also as a student, in a school located another four hours north. I write from all of these simultaneous locations. And throughout my thesis I move between various *we*s: sometimes referring to myself alongside other gentrifiers, moving to Hudson from the city with our own

[9] Jonathan Smucker, *Hegemony How To: A Roadmap for Radicals* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017), 227.
[10] Ibid., 150-151.
[11] Colin Ward, *The Child in the City* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 152.

visions for what this place could be; sometimes referring to myself as part of a network of people involved in community and movement organizing, in Hudson and beyond; sometimes referring to myself as part of the youth development and education field.

My promiscuous use of the "we" is perhaps also an indicator of the different accountabilities that I've found myself navigating in trying to write about the place I live. I feel particularly accountable to the complexity of the lives of my neighbors and students whose stories and voices I've included here. They are my teachers, as much as any of the professors I've worked with at school or the scholars I've read. I am accountable too to my collaborators in Hudson, to the people navigating the political labyrinths of our crazy little city, showing up in classrooms and courtrooms, fighting for a more just future even as many of them have to fight to heal the wounds of their own pasts. As hard as I try, my writing can't do justice to the complexity of our city, to the brilliance of the people in it, and to all the joy, resistance, solidarity, support, and challenges that we experience there together. While writing I have sometimes imagined other audiences, too: I sometimes imagine, for example, that I'm speaking to members of Hudson's Common Council or its local development corporation, and so I've sought to be pragmatic and clear. Other times I've imagined that I'm speaking to my own family members and friends, and so I've also sought to be bold in my call that people like me need to do better.

The tangled "we" throughout my writing is perhaps reminiscent of a positionality that Gloria Anzaldúa once termed *nos/otras*, which is the Spanish feminine for *we*, divided in two by a hyphen or slash: when split into two, the *nos* means *us*, and the *otras* means *other*.[12] Anzaldúa used the term to describe how the lives of oppressors and the oppressed, of colonizers and the colonized, leak into each other.[13] To "work the hyphen," writes Michelle Fine, is to recognize that we cannot separate ourselves from the power we seek to understand and dismantle, and to write from an understanding that our lives are always mutually implicated.[14] *Nos-otras* serves, on the one hand, as a reminder that privilege does not exist without oppression, and that in our writing and research we cannot take neutral, scientific, or apathetic distance: we have to probe how we too exist in relation to the contexts that we study.

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[12] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 254

[13] María Elena Torre and Jennifer Ayala, "Envisioning Participatory Action Research Entremundos," *Feminism and Psychology* 19, no. 3 (August 2009): 390, quoted in Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 162.

[14] Michelle Fine, "Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research," 1994.

But Anazaldúa's notion is also a reminder that our own locations are never fixed or singular: that we are all always multiple. In my case, I position myself both on the side of a mentality of colonization and domination, and simultaneously as standing in political resistance.[15] It is a clearly contradictory stance, and one that I am in a constant struggle to both understand and transcend. In writing about Hudson I have tried to stand in productive tension with these contradictions, negotiating both proximity and distance: I am both insider and outsider in this text, I am both in solidarity and I'm complicit, and this thesis sits squarely in the tensions in-between. The notion of *nos-otras* underscores interdependence within asymmetrical conditions, and in this I find something like hope: for me, to "work the hyphen" is to remember that we are all entangled: that our pain and our possibilities constitute each other. It means recognizing that there is no position of purity from which we can undertake research, there is only our commitment to "critically interrogating and remaking our shared relations, not just interpersonally but also institutionally, legally, structurally, and materially."[16]

It is from this location that I have attempted in this thesis to look at some of the ways that collusion in injustice is written into some of the most basic structures of our lives, and how simultaneously people like me are encouraged, at every juncture, to believe in our own deservedness and our own view of the world. It is from this location that I have tried to interrogate some of the logics of domination, specifically in relation to urban development, which I see both around me and inside me. I have tried to reveal how these logics are expressed through our daily conversations and micro-practices, and also to connect these to macrostructural dynamics of race, class, and capital. I have tried to not slip into narratives of damage, but also to share stories of everyday resistance and to pay attention to complexity, to remember that none of us are ever defined only by how we sit in relation to power.[17] But as Ju Hui Judy Han writes about her own work, "I remain haunted by questions of empathy and ethics, and remain uneasy about the hyphen."[18]

Perhaps the greatest challenge I've encountered has been writing about the place that I live and about people that I see every day. Real people in real contexts never fit so neatly into the boxes that social scientists draw through their theories, which is perhaps easier to forget when

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[15] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 145.
[16] Emilie Cameron, *Far Off Metal River* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 186.
[17] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 409-427.
[18] Ju Hui Judy Han, "Neither Friends nor Foes: Thoughts on Ethnographic Distance," *Geoforum* 41, no. 1 (2010): 13.

you write about elsewhere. The further away we are from the sites we study, the easier it is to fit entire communities into the category of good, bad, damaged or cruel; and yet the closer we get, the harder it is to make sense of the larger structures around us. In writing this thesis, I have felt variously nervous and excited to imagine my neighbors, collaborators, and students reading this work: they are the true measure of its relevance and resonance. And many are likely to disagree with my findings. My aunt published a memoir when I was 13 years old, and I remember that at her book release party I lied and said that I had read her book. In fact, I had read only the book's opening pages before closing it, overwhelmed by how personal it felt. I couldn't believe that she had published a book whose characters were not only real people, but were *my* people. I have always thought that she was extraordinarily brave to publish her version of events, when everyone involved was still alive to contradict her, to be wounded by her words. I have thought about her often in trying to write about Hudson, and in confronting my fears of misrepresenting, or contradicting, or criticizing the experiences and perspectives of the people around me.

My unease comes from knowing also that my own perspective is partial, situated, and political, and that I'm not interested in pretending that it is universal or declarative. This is important to recognize, but it isn't meant to serve as an apology or a disclaimer: as Emilie Cameron writes, "we must learn to both acknowledge the limits of what we know and can't know *and* take greater responsibility for what we do know and must know."[19] Because Hudson is my home, my research is grounded in what Eve Tuck describes as a "relational accountability": it is anchored in long-term relationships, and it is responsive to people and place. Relational accountability means being connected to the consequences of misrepresentation, because we're writing about places where we too have a stake. It means writing in and with community, not just about communities, in all their messy reality. It means being accountable to people, and to justice, rather than holding on to an allegiance to any grand theory; it means letting context lead the way. Juanita Sundberg says it simply, when she describes "entanglement as an ethical practice". To me, this means committing not only to writing/theorizing/representing the world as we see it, but to committing also to the work of unlearning our own colonial/supremacist ways of thinking, to understanding ourselves not only as individuals but as "part of a collective reality," and to taking responsibility for being part of creating a more just world.[20]

[19] Cameron, *Far Off Metal River*, 35.
[20] Juanita Sundberg, "Ethics, Entanglement & Political Ecology," in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology,* ed. Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2015), 122.

II. Sources and methods

Throughout my research and writing, I have been influenced by studies that describe large-scale processes like neoliberalism, capitalism, and privatization, and also those that zoom in and look at particular places, which tend to be more descriptive, awake to the not-so-neat complexity of context and relationship. I have been particularly inspired by those that do both: that look at both the large-scale structures that shape the bounds of the possible, as well as the experiences of people living, resisting, and adapting in our everyday lives— my favorite studies weave between these two scales "not with one as a frame for the other, but mutually interrogating one another."[21] With this in mind, and with my focus on the role of narrative and discourse that I described above, my methods have been mixed: this thesis weaves together my own experiences as a teacher and as an activist in Hudson, the voices of several of my neighbors and students, an analysis of journalistic representations of Hudson, and the theories and words of the scholars that I've found most helpful in thinking about our city. In trying to cite my sources in earnest throughout this thesis, it has been impossible to give proper acknowledgement to the many kids, parents, teachers, collaborators and neighbors whose perspectives have shaped my own.

In 2012, an oral historian, artist and educator named Suzanne Snider launched a new project in Hudson called the Oral History Summer School (OHSS).[22] It was an intensive ten-day training and introduction to the world of oral history, and I was Suzanne's first assistant, and a student of OHSS's first class. Each year, dozens of people travel to Hudson to learn about oral history; they are teachers, artists, historians, radio documentarians, filmmakers, health practitioners, lawyers. As part of the class, each student conducts an oral history interview with a resident of Hudson: an open-ended life history interview, recorded in audio, at least an hour long, with someone living or working in the city. Since the program's founding, I have helped to arrange some of these interviews: knocking on the doors of my neighbors to see if they might be willing to be interviewed, stopping to ask a parking meter attendant, or the person who runs the bodega on my corner, or the person who always seems to be sitting on the bench at the 7th street park. Hundreds of interviews have been recorded for an oral history archive in our local library.

The Oral History Summer School served as an introduction for me to the methods of oral history interviews. But it was also an invitation to dive into a web of questions about the politics of representation in the context of Hudson, whose voices we hear and where, and how people

[21] Talja Blokland, "Blaming Neither the Undeserving Poor Nor the Revanchist Middle Classes: A Relational Approach to Marginalization," *Urban Geography* 33, no. 4 (2012): 503.
[22] www.oralhistorysummerschool.com

might speak about the city differently, to different audiences. I was trained, as an oral historian, to listen for how narrators make sense of their lives, and the world around them: to listen for meaning, rather than mere information or facts -- or perhaps even more interestingly, to listen for the space between. I was trained to *lean into* the contradictions that emerge out of our narratives about ourselves and our surroundings, rather than shying away from them as inconsistent or lacking credibility. I was trained to listen to be surprised.

And so I began my process of writing this thesis by listening. It was the first opportunity I've had to listen to interviews in the archive, and I was the first researcher to request access. I began by reading paragraph-long summaries of dozens of the interviews in the archive, looking for which narrators seemed to discuss development in the city of Hudson -- I noticed, quickly, that most interviewees talked about the issue of Hudson's transformation — that perhaps I'm not the only one obsessed. I chose sixteen interviews to listen to, hoping to hear a range of perspectives about the city's development: I listened to the interviews of real estate agents and factory workers, to people who live in public housing, to people who have been priced out, to people who celebrate the changes our city has seen. Some of the narrators were people I have known well, others are people I haven't ever spoken to. The *interviewers*, primarily, are not residents of Hudson: they were students of the Oral History Summer School, some of them visiting the city for the first time. The interviews were all recorded between 2012 and 2015. I sat at my computer to listen to each interview, taking notes as I did: I listened for how narrators told the story of Hudson, and what elements in their telling were presented as normal, as inevitable, or unquestioned; and I listened for traces that related to race and class, spoken or unspoken. Every interview was a world in itself, every interview simultaneously confirming, confounding, and complicating my understanding of how our city is lived and understood.

Listening to interviews and drawing from my teaching posed even more questions, which I've wrestled with throughout the process of writing: How do I remain accountable to the complexity of peoples' life stories and perspectives, as I attempt to also develop my own larger analysis of what's happening in our city? How do I reconcile my own authorial voice -- and the power inherent in being positioned as the researcher or writer -- with the divergent voices, perspectives, and visions of those whose stories I seek to learn from? Oral historians have long explored the power that researchers have in representing peoples' lives, and the ethical challenges researchers face in navigating various accountabilities. Though this thesis is not primarily focused on interviews, the questions that oral historians ask have guided and challenged me along the way. But ultimately, the story I have chosen to tell in this thesis is very much my own. At certain moments my writing amplifies the voices of narrators, and at other moments it critically unpacks what I've heard and learned across interviews. I spoke to every narrator included in this thesis about my argument, and about the pieces of their interviews that

I've quoted or referenced; every narrator has consented to my use of their words. Most of the interviews I listened to didn't make it into my final thesis, but have shaped my thinking in profound and sometimes untraceable ways.

My thesis also draws heavily on my experience as an educator in Hudson, and as a co-founder and director of a youth organization. I am beyond grateful for the countless ways that the kids and teenagers I work with have given me glimpses into Hudson through their eyes, and I have tried to write in a way that honors their experience and expertise. They, too, have been my teachers, and throughout this thesis I reflect on conversations we've had both in and outside the classroom, and projects we've worked on together. As part of my research I re-listened to dozens of radio pieces and songs that young people have produced in classes at Kite's Nest, taking notes on the themes and threads that emerged in their own representations of Hudson. I reached out to several students of mine to have additional conversations, and to hear their thoughts in response to the argument I had begun to develop for this thesis. In 2016, Kite's Nest and the Oral History Summer School partnered for a day-long workshop, during which OHSS (adult) students and Kite's Nest (teenage) students practiced interviewing each other, and in my research I also listened to some of the interviews that were recorded with youth that day. I spoke with every student that I mention in my writing, and they too have consented to my use of their words. If anything, I hope this thesis encourages readers to spend more time listening and learning directly from young people, rather than just hearing from adult educators or scholars, like me.

I have also used various media publications as primary sources, putting the multiplicity of perspectives I heard *within* Hudson into critical conversation with the stories told about our city in the national media. For several years I have collected articles about Hudson in the *New York Times* and other national publications; when these articles are published, there is usually significant conversation among residents in Hudson about what they got right or wrong. For this thesis, I've read and analyzed these sources in an effort to think about how the stories of revitalization and risk have been made to seem commonsensical: while these texts are produced by different actors with different interests, I look at how they have helped to construct a discursive field, or a "regime of truth," about our city.[23] In analyzing these articles, I looked for the ways that media representations of Hudson articulate with dominant ideologies about urban growth and development, and the ways that they both overlap and diverge with the stories residents tell. I have taken a Foucauldian approach to analyzing these articles, which is to say that I have approached these them as socially constructed texts: not merely representing or

[23] Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984): 74.

misrepresenting the world, but actively producing it.[24] My goal has been to read all of these different narratives, from different sources, relationally: to listen to the accounts of neighbors situated differently within the city, to kids and teenagers, to journalists visiting the city for an afternoon, and to place them into conversation with my own, evolving, understanding of Hudson: to locate gaps, contradictions, and possibilities.

Research is a process, one that constantly weaves between reflection and practice. My own process has been simultaneously clarifying and destabilizing: I have opened my ears and eyes to a range of voices and perspectives, and have also, in my writing, tried to construct a clear and coherent narrative of my own. Feminist scholars have long asserted that all knowledge comes from somewhere, debunking the notion that if we stand back far enough, we might be able to see the world as it is, and that as researchers we should strive for a disembodied, dispassionate, objective, and rational "view from nowhere". Donna Haraway has argued that as researchers, we have to locate ourselves in the tension between the imperative to recognize that knowledge is always situated and contingent, and the simultaneous imperative to name injustice, clearly and without restraint: that is, we can't just "show radical historical contingency and modes of construction for everything," but have to also "insist on a better account of the world."[25] This thesis sits squarely in this tension: it seeks to construct a coherent and rational narrative, while simultaneously calling into question the structures that allow me to do so, and remembering always that my own understanding is necessarily partial. It is a methodology of both reflexivity and rage.

Education scholar Michelle Fine calls "theoretical generalizability" that which can be "lifted up and listened across in deeply place-based, locally meaningful histories": she argues that when context-rich stories from multiple places come together, they can reveal profound patterns.[26] In my effort to better understand Hudson, I have both dug locally, but I have also traced globally: I have been on a quest for theories from elsewhere that have relevance and resonance in the particular context of Hudson. This means that I have found myself walking a non-linear route across multiple academic fields and disciplines, grateful for the interdisciplinary

[24] Lawrence D. Berg, "Discourse Analysis," in *The International Encyclopedia of Human Geography,* ed. Rob Kitchen & Nigel J. Thrift (Oxford: Elsevier Publishing, 2009): 217.
[25] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 579.
[26] Eve Tuck, *Place in Research*, 156. For Fine's discussion of theoretical generalizability, see: Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine, eds., *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 226-229.

program that has allowed me to chart my own path as I've tried to stay in integrity to my home context and curious about the world beyond.

In my research I have relied heavily on the work of critical geographers and other urban theorists whose work has helped me to understand the political and economic structures that underlie what we experience as visible change in our neighborhoods: illuminating public policy, tracing the movement of capital, mapping cycles of development across history, and rejecting narratives of inevitability.[27] I have been especially influenced by those scholars who have documented the rise of neoliberalism and the emergence of the "neoliberal city," putting into focus the ways that development in our cities is increasingly driven by market ideologies, ideologies that then creep into how we think, and talk, about what's possible.[28] My own research contributes to a conversation about how we define success in our cities, and for who: it is a critical examination of our language of inclusions, exclusions, borders and belongings. And so I have paid particularly close attention to those geographers who look at how our narratives about places, over time, have served to both produce and naturalize extreme wealth gaps, segregation along race and class lines, and harsh punitive policies.[29]

At some point in my reading, I began looking for scholarship that could deepen and complicate my analysis of race and racialization in relation to gentrification. I have been both challenged and inspired by those intersectional anti-racist scholars who refuse race as a fixed category, and instead examine how race, gender, and difference are made and maintained through the production of space.[30] In this I have been particularly influenced by writing that

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[27] Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996); David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1973); Loretta Lees, Tom Slater and Elvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge, 2008);Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982); Loic Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality. (*Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008).

[28] Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as a Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002)**;** David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Cities and the geographies of 'actually existing neoliberalism," in *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in Western Europe and North America* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 2002): 2-32.

[29] Melissa Wright, "Gentrification, Assassination, and Forgetting in Mexico: A Feminist Marxist Tale," *Gender, Place and Culture* 21, no. 1 (2014): 1-16; Robert Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Caitlin Cahill, "Negotiating Grit and Glamour: Young Women of Color and the Gentrification of the Lower East Side," *City and Society* 19, no. 2 (2007): 202-231; Emilie Cameron, *Far Off Metal River: Inuit Lands, Settler Stories, and the Making of the Contemporary Arctic* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015)

[30] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Carotographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2011); Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

reveals historical and contemporary relationships between whiteness, property, dispossession, and the colonial imagination.[31] I have tried to write in this spirit, maintaining a meaningful interrogation of the social construction of race throughout, examining racialization not only as an outcome of uneven urban development, but itself as a critical force, deeply intertwined with class exploitation. It has been a primary goal of mine to interrogate the "stubborn, persistent, and profitable ties" that bind us to power, in order to raise urgent questions about complicity, mutual responsibility, and debt.[32] This has been difficult theoretical/conceptual work, but it has also been profoundly personal. I am forever grateful to the many Indigenous scholars, women of color scholars, and queer scholars making connections between intersecting systems of oppression, posing profound challenges to the seemingly intractable structures of property, ownership, and whiteness, and unleashing possibilities for radically different ways of being.[33]

For some time I was convinced that it was healthy to separate my academic research -- engaging in critical theory, trying to push past the boundaries of my own analytical lenses -- from my ongoing work with children and teenagers in Hudson. School, I thought, was an opportunity to dive into the world of ideas, separate from the everyday mess and the always-urgency of our teaching and organizing. In retrospect, I was falling into a trap, in which we see "activism as a practice," and "theory and research as something generated elsewhere," when in fact our on-the-ground work is a site of constant learning, research, and knowledge-production.[34] Fortunately, the walls I had built to separate these worlds collapsed: as I read, our work came into renewed focus, and I began to understand the power, the urgency, and the transformative possibilities of working with children and teenagers in the context of revitalization and risk. The reverse happened, too: the voices of kids, teenagers, and educators began to assert themselves into the conversation as I wrestled with new scholarly concepts and ideas, posing challenges and complicating theories. In the end I chose to focus a chapter on this work, and have tried to put

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[31] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple Unviersity Press, 1998); Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707-1791; Claudia Rankine, Beth Loffreda and Max King Camp, eds., *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind* (Albany, NY: Fence Books, 2015).

[32] Cameron, *Far Off Metal River,* 191.

[33] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indignity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014); Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology and Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

[34] Aziz Choudry, "Activist Research and Organizing: Blurring the Boundaries, Challenging the Binaries," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 33, no. 4 (2014): 484.

into words some of what I see happening in our day-to-day teaching, learning, and organizing with youth.

In this I have drawn from other scholars working with, and writing about, children and teenagers: I have been especially inspired by those scholars who work in collaboration with youth co-researchers, re-imagining who is considered a valid researcher of youth lives.[35] Though mine is not a participatory project, these co-produced studies have challenged me to consider what it means to be accountable to the young people I work with. I have drawn from the work of other scholars writing at the intersection of urban development and education, and especially those mapping the links between urban and education policy, and examining the increasing privatization of both.[36] I've paid particular attention to scholarship focused on the discourse of "at risk youth," and the many scholars committed to disrupting, unpacking, contextualizing, and re-framing dominant narratives about youth.[37] This work has allowed me to draw critical connections between how we define "success" for both our cities and also for our kids -- and also to ask: what else is possible? And how might we be a part of building more liberatory, multi-generational visions for our cities?

There is, of course, much that I failed to fit in the pages that follow. My analysis focuses primarily on race and class, and doesn't look at the mutually constitutive and intersecting formations of gender, sexuality, ability/disability, and space. My analysis of race and racialization is centered primarily on whiteness and on anti-Black racism, a focus that comes out of the particular context of my work in Hudson, but is also limited in its scope. And finally, this thesis only scratches the surface of situating gentrification, revitalization, and risk within the ongoing context of U.S. settler colonialism; I have significant work to do to continue to deepen my understanding of the overlapping and divergent displacements of colonial settlement and racialized gentrification.[38]

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[35] Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine, *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
[36] Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Lisa Arrastía, "Capital's Daisy Chain: Exposing Chicago's Corporate Coalition," *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007).
[37] Peter Kelly, "Growing Up as Risk Business? Risks, Surveillance, and the Institutionalized Mistrust of Youth," *Journal of Youth Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 165-180; Michelle Fine, "The Politics of Who's 'At Risk,'" in *Children and Families "At Promise": Deconstructing the Discourse of Risk,* ed. Beth Blue Swadener and Sally Lubeck, 76-94 (New York: SUNY Press, 1995); Caitlin Cahill, "'At Risk'? The Fed Up Honeys Re-present the Gentrification of the Lower East Side," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2006): 334-363.
[38] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skins White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 176.

III. What's to come

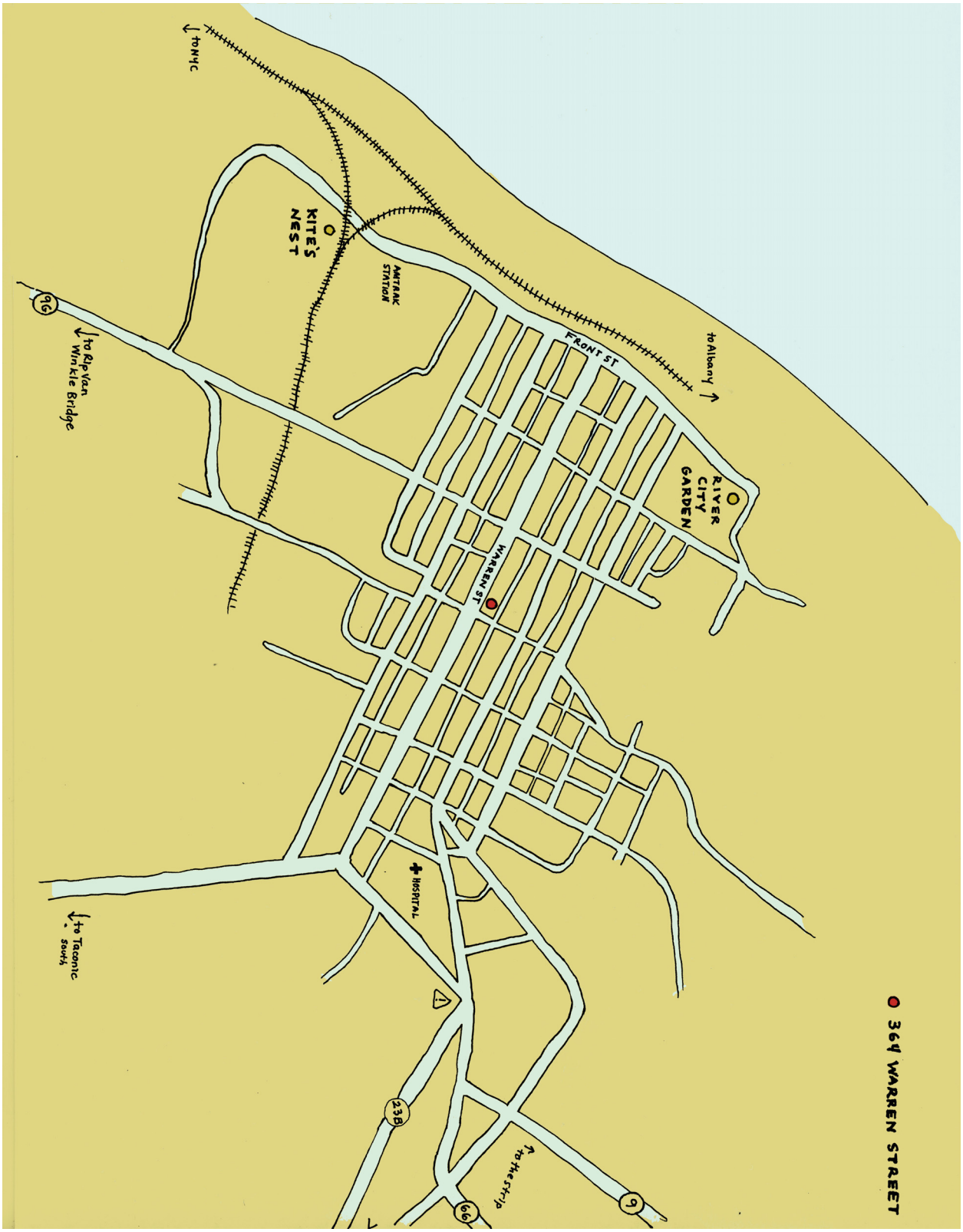
My thesis is centered around a single corner in Hudson. It begins by looking at a controversy that took place on this corner in the late summer of 2013, when the school district announced its plan to locate an alternative school for at risk students on Hudson's revitalized main street. My thesis unfolds from there, looking at this controversial moment first through the lens of revitalization, and then again through the lens of risk. In Chapter 1 I examine the story of revitalization that was mobilized during this controversy, drawing on oral histories to consider all that this story forgets, and the structural factors and conditions that it obscures. I examine the consequences of equating gentrification with economic health, and instead consider how what we call "revitalization" is inextricably bound with deepening inequalities. In Chapter 2 I focus on the construction of "at risk" youth to consider the ways that young people, and especially youth of color, are imagined as both at risk of failing school, and as risks themselves to the city's economic development. I look at how representations of risk are used to justify harsh accountability policies, punitive policies, and criminalization, in our schools and neighborhoods. I utilize the lens of risk to examine the racial imaginaries that shape how we see and understand space, and the ways that seemingly race-neutral language and landscapes actually serve to produce and maintain racialized inequity.

After examining the context of revitalization and risk in Hudson, I reflect on the evolving mission and work of Kite's Nest, a community organization working with children and teenagers in Hudson. I share some of the ways that our organization is working to engage our city as a site and source for learning and action, and ask: Where does the classroom begin, and where does it end? I argue that youth workers and educators, and especially those of us working within gentrifying cities, can play a powerful role in developing teaching pedagogies that aim not only to transform the experiences of young people, but also the places we live.

This thesis is a contribution to the growing constellation of critical place-based studies, steeped in context but with relevance for people fighting everywhere in and for their communities, and especially for those interested in developing creative pedagogies of resistance with children and teenagers. I hope, above all, that this work reads as an invitation: an invitation to ask questions about the ground beneath your feet. An invitation to consider your own location,

which means to engage honestly in the structural, historical, local entanglements of which we are all a part. I hope it reads as a reminder that as soon as "we think we know where we are," we have to always ask "what stories remain to be told."[39]

[39] Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Shapiro, *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 1.



Map of Hudson, NY. Map drawn by Cara Turett.

Chapter 1: The Story of Revitalization

"The opposite of dispossession is not possession. It is not accumulation.
It is unforgetting. It is mattering."[1] - Eve Tuck

I. The city, real and imagined, always both

It is a snowy Sunday in December, and people have gathered for a special tour of the city. Visitors are handed pamphlets when they arrive, printed on a single, unfolded sheet of paper. The tour guide, named May, introduces herself as a member of the city's planning board. "Welcome to Hudson," she says. She leads the visitors past a night club, past parking lots and affordable housing complexes, and she pauses in front of the contemporary art museum, an architectural tangle of silver that had caused major controversy when built. May proudly tells the visitors that the city is powered by solar panels. She explains that Hudson's main education center is shaped, perhaps surprisingly, like a star — because "a rectangle is not good for the imagination." On the tour she points out a playground and a basketball court, a restaurant and a jewelry store, the police station and the library. She becomes passionate as she describes the grocery store, called the Green Bean: it has an aisle specifically designed for people with braces. May's tour ends in front of Hudson's ice cream store, called *Lick,* which towers over Hudson, a skyscraper topped by a giant ice cream cone sculpture. Welcome, the city's pamphlet reads, to "our dream city, with dreams and dreams worth of ideas."[2]

This version of Hudson is made of cardboard. It was built over the course of ten weeks in the fall of 2013, as part of a weekly, five-hour class I co-taught with a group of twelve kids, aged 8-14. We began with the real city of Hudson's urban grid, taped onto the floor, to scale, and we built up: each week the kids collaborated on their utopian city, block-by-block. Our collective construction was based loosely on the city we know, but largely on our imaginations. Afternoons were spent building, but our mornings were spent in what we called "Town Meeting" — weekly conversations about the group's plans. When someone wanted to build something large, or controversial, it always had to be discussed. When one person wanted to build a school, for example, we had a conversation: should our Hudson have a school in it, and if so, what should it

[1] Angie Morrill, Eve Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective, "Before Dispossession, or Surviving It," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 12, no. 1 (2016): 1.
[2] Photographs and class description available at www.kitesnest.org/secret-city

be like? When someone proposed to place surveillance cameras on every corner, the class talked at length: what is the role of the police in the city, and what would it be in our dream city? The kids debated whether Hudson should have a chocolate fountain in its center for weeks until finally, after hearing every possible argument, the group unanimously voted against it. When someone revealed their plans to build a block-long mansion, Town Meeting was passionate: why do some people get big homes, and how do we make sure there's enough housing for everyone?

This thesis is about the (real) city of Hudson, NY, a small city of under 7,000 people in the Hudson Valley, about 120 miles north of New York City.[3] But I begin here, in a city built of cardboard and dreams, because when we talk about real places we are always also talking about how we see and understand places, and our own place within them. This thesis is about Hudson as it is, but also as it is imagined — both what we see, and what we see as possible.

Cardboard ice cream cone tower.[4]

[3] With a population of only 6,576, Hudson is not always referred to as a "city" -- technically, according to some rubrics, it is a rural community. I refer to Hudson as a city, and choose to do so based on Henri Lefebvre's notion of the "city as a place of difference." A "city," in Lefebvre's sense, is defined by the simultaneous presence of different worlds, values and ethnic, cultural, and social groups. An "urban" place is thus less a reference to a place's size or density, but whether "differences encounter and explore one another, affirm or cancel out one another." See: Christian Schimd, "Henri Lefebvre, The Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream," in *Cities for People, Not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City,* ed. Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse, and Margit Mayer (New York: Routledge, 2012): 42-62.

[4] www.kitesnest.org/secret-city

Since I moved to Hudson seven years ago, I've found myself in constant conversation about the city itself; I wonder, sometimes, do people who live elsewhere talk as much about the places they live? Conversations over dinner or on street corners are dominated by whatever is happening at Common Council meetings, and our efforts to articulate what it is that makes Hudson so special, so crazy, so compelling and so confusing — why we're here, why we imagine leaving, why we won't leave. But these conversations have a looping, choreographed feel, especially when they take place among young, middle class white people: we move between the conversational tropes of fatalism (gentrification is unstoppable), shame (we're part of the problem, and no matter how much "good" work we do, we contribute), and blame (in which everyone points the accusatory finger at someone else, aiming their frustrations at particular groups of people who are wealthier, or newer to arrive, or don't "get it"). For some time, I have wanted to do better. This thesis is for those of us working for economic, social, and racial justice in Hudson and elsewhere to better understand what we're fighting, to dig deeper, to critically unpack the ways that we all produce geographies of inequity, and to engage in imaginative and transformative resistance.

"Every city is many places,"[5] writes Rebecca Solnit, and in writing about one particular city, but really about all cities, she once wrote: "Much of what you can say about this place you can also contradict."[6] My favorite writing about places always hints at their inexhaustibility, and suggests that place is never a thing that we can just point to, or contain in an authoritative, well-written summary. Places are collective and political products, always in the making, always a constant negotiation of simultaneous versions, of contradictory visions of what a place should be, of certain voices heard above the others.[7] The city is experienced so differently across culture, geography, gender, race, sexuality, age — and peoples' disparate realities determine not only how this place is experienced, but also how it is understood and practiced in turn. In social science terms we might say, place is not a set of coordinates on a map, but a social construct. In simpler terms we might say, there's more than one side to every story, and always other ways of telling.

[5] Solnit and Shapiro, *Nonstop Metropolis,* 2.
[6] Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker, *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013), 4.
[7] Doreen Massey, "Places and their Pasts," *History Workshop Journal* 39, no. 1 (1995): 182-192.

When I tell people about Hudson, I tend to talk about scale. The city is just 2.2 square miles, the core of which is built atop a compact grid of streets, five streets wide and nine streets long — a historic grid pattern originally laid out in 1785, and remarkably intact today. Surrounded by the neighboring town of Greenport and bordered by the Hudson River, Hudson is enclosed in its smallness, contained to its intimately human scale. But unlike most other similarly-sized towns in rural areas like ours, Hudson also has the diversity and complexity of a more urban place: it has public housing "projects," home to most of the area's Black residents, who make up about 25% of Hudson's population.[8] The city is also home to immigrants from Bangladesh and Jamaica, from Yemen and Mexico.

Zoom out and Hudson is a small, diverse pocket in a mostly-white part of New York state: the 2010 census lists Columbia County, the county in which Hudson sits, as 90.6% white.[9] This means that county and city services and institutions — like the Department of Social Services or county courts, or law enforcement — have primarily (or entirely) white personnel, though the people moving through these systems include a disproportionate number of people of color.[10] Columbia County's rural roads are dotted with small towns and hamlets; with large farms and newer, small, organic farms; with homes of working class families, and trailer parks, and peoples' second homes too, which sit large and empty throughout the week. In recent decades the county has exploded in popularity for weekenders and tourists. As the county's biggest town, Hudson's main street (called Warren Street) is lined with dozens of antique stores and other mostly upscale shops and restaurants, serving visitors and weekenders from New York City and elsewhere.

Like so many cities throughout North America, Hudson has seen dramatic change in recent decades: once a center for manufacturing and industrial activity, the city was home to ironworks, brickworks, knitting mills, cement plants, pocketbook and furniture factories. But industry left

[8] U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, 2010 Census, "Hudson, NY: Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010," generated October 10, 2016.
[9] U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 2010 Census, "Columbia County, NY: Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010," generated October 10, 2016.
[10] In 2014, I was on the Disproportionate Minority Representation (DMR) Committee of the Columbia County Department of Social Services — a committee that brought together social service agencies and community groups to address racial disparities in the child welfare system. We were tasked with addressing the significant over-representation of African American and Biracial children in the Columbia County child welfare system, particularly in detention and residential displacement. A key issue that came up in our work to address this disproportionality was the dire need to build a more racially and ethnically diverse staff; this was true not only in the child welfare system, but across systems and agencies in the county.

Hudson like it left other cities, and Hudson has since become the site of a major arts and culture "boom". Depending on who you talk to, you may hear that Hudson is an exemplar of what success, driven by the culture economy, can look like in post-industrial cities — that the city has been saved. Someone else might tell you that the fabric of community that once defined this place has been destroyed, that New Yorkers (like me) have taken over, that the city is over. Someone might tell you Hudson is a place where you can be anything, as evidenced by its notably high population of self-employed people, artists, and freelancers; another person might tell you the city is a dead-end. Each telling is, of course, partial. To tell the story of any place is to make choices about what perspectives and histories are (and aren't) significant, to claim coherence in what is necessarily multiple, infinite, and unfolding within a context of power.[11]

The story that I tell, then, is of course shaped by the particular Hudson that I live in. My Hudson is a place of activism: where I have encountered a small, tight-knit, and mixed community of people of all ages filled with love for this place and rage at its injustices. My Hudson is also a place of privilege and possibility. In 1987, the year I was born, my parents bought a country house in Gallatin, about fifteen minutes from Hudson. I grew up in lower Manhattan, but I spent my weekends and summer days in Columbia County, and in 2010, after I graduated from college, I moved here full time. Since then I have been intimately involved in local organizing and in a number of projects: I helped to build a community radio station, an alternative learning space for kids and teens, an oral history project, a social justice center. I have made a constant and concerted effort to meet my neighbors, to encounter and learn from the worlds that exist within Hudson alongside my own. In a way I think Hudson, its complexity and its multiplicity, has raised me — I feel like a product of this place, and I feel unmoored when I leave. And yet, I confront the limits of my own partial perspective nearly every day that I'm here.

Still, even for newcomers there's a certain obviousness to the challenges facing the city. At first glance Hudson is so clearly fragmented, what Mindy Thompson Fullilove calls "sorted out" by race and class.[12] To walk from neighborhood to neighborhood — from ward to ward — is to bear witness to a landscape of asymmetry: with plenty of exceptions, south of Warren Street is

[11] See Doreen Massey, "Places and their Pasts"; and Rebecca Solnit's atlas series: Rebecca Solnit, *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas,*" (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012); Solnit and Jelly-Shapiro, *Nonstop Metropolis*; Solnit and Snedeker, *Unfathomable City.*

[12] Mindy T. Fullilove, *Urban Alchemy: Restoring Joy in America's Sorted-Out Cities* (New York: New Village Press, 2013). See also: Mindy T. Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 2004).

wealthier, and whiter; north of Warren Street is poorer, and home to most of the county's Section 8 and low-income housing and the majority of Hudson's Black and Bangladeshi residents; north-east of Warren Street is the city's more sprawling, suburban neighborhood, mostly white, middle-class, and more conservative. Like so many places in this country, Hudson is a pocket of isolated pockets, a city made of racial divides, of extreme poverty and extreme wealth, characterized by the utter disconnect between the two. We know this story well; but here, this uneven social and racial geography has unfolded in such extraordinarily close quarters. A single block can transport you from one world to another. Hudson, if anything, is a city of proximity.

So let's begin again at the corner of 4th Street and Warren Street — right in the center, geographically-speaking. When we stand on this corner, we glimpse the city as it was imagined in 1783, when the "proprietors," — wealthy seafarers and whalers from the southeastern part of New England, looking for a safe harbor — arrived in Hudson.[13] If they developed Warren Street to be Hudson's main commercial street, 4th Street was conceived as its principal axis. And you can tell: the county courthouse looms big and regal at the southern-most end of 4th Street, facing a large stone building that was originally an almshouse at the street's northern-most end. 4th street is lined with public buildings: the post-office, a church, an old school building. And Warren street, of course, is lined with storefronts. Where 4th and Warren St meet sits a red, two-story building, set back from the sidewalk; it was built in 1785 to be Hudson's jail.

Stand on this corner and you can get a distant sense of the early spatial imaginary that shaped the city of Hudson as we know it, the formality and aesthetic with which the city's grid was first drawn, its buildings and institutions laid out. Stand on this same corner on a late summer day in 2013, nearly two centuries later, and we glimpse the city as it continues to be imagined, contested, and produced today. In August of that year, the building at 364 Warren Street — once Hudson's jail — was the site of heated controversy. Hudson's Common Council, our governing body, had just learned that the school district was planning to re-open its "alternative learning program," called The Bridge, at this location. The site had been offered to the school by the building's owner, the Galvan Foundation — a contentious local property

[13] Stephen B. Miller, *Historical Sketches of Hudson* (Hudson, NY: Bryan & Webb Printers, 1862).

owner, real estate developer, and philanthropist organization.[14] The Bridge would serve high school students most "at risk" of dropping out; the school was set to open in September.

364 Warren Street, 2014.[15]

The proposed location of the Bridge, and this late-notice announcement, caused a stir; Hudson residents and business owners immediately splintered into different positions for and against the plan. With only weeks before the school was set to open, Planning Commission and Council meetings drew standing crowds. Neighboring businesses were outraged that a building "in the middle of Hudson's revitalized district" would house a school for failing teenagers,

[14] The Galvan Foundation could be the subject of its own thesis.
[15] "The Bridge Opens its Doors: New Initiative Helps Teens Succeed in School," February 6, 2014, Accessed October 1, 2016. http://www.berkshirefarm.org/news_and_events/_The_Bridge_opens_its_doors_72.htm

worried that it would have a "ripple effect up and down the street".[16] One city official explained it this way: “We have a particular brand, a particular character, to this business district that should be recognized.”[17] In response, a lawyer representing the building owner suggested that the students would arrive on only two buses every morning, and leave on two buses each evening; no students would be walking to or from school, even if they lived within walking distance. There would be "minimum use outside the building," and instruction would take place "behind closed doors".[18]

At meetings, in conversations, and on local blogs, people expressed their concerns about whether the building was an appropriate site for a school environment, about the real intentions of the building’s controversial owner, about why the school district’s plans hadn’t been communicated sooner. But while nearly all dissenting comments began with an expression of abstract support for the alternative learning program, the strong thread among the opposition was clear: 4th and Warren was an inappropriate location for this program. *Hudson’s revitalized main street was no place for a school for “at risk” teenagers.*

The controversy over the Bridge moving to this location was at the forefront of local discourse for a few months in the fall of 2013, before disappearing, just as quickly, into recent memory. The program did eventually move into the contentious building site, without incident. A year later the program moved again to an entirely different location further down on Warren Street. And though the storm of that moment has passed, I continue to think about it: I am reminded of it almost daily in conversations about youth and education in Hudson. The backlash against the Bridge made visible a set of unexamined assumptions that underlie some of the most common arguments about development in Hudson. Unpacking the story of the Bridge opens up a space to think about what we mean when we talk about revitalization, what we mean when we talk about at risk youth, and about who belongs where. Peeling back the layers of this story can

[16] Carole Osterink, “Torn Between Two Meetings,” *Gossips of Rivertown*, August 12, 2013, www.gossipsofrivertown.blogspot.ca/2013/08/torn-between-two-meetings_12.html
[17] Interview by Tom Depietro, *@Issue: The Columbia-Greene Partnership Academy,*, WGXC: 90.7-FM, August 7, 2013, http://wgxc.org/archives/6756
[18] Carole Osterink, “No Time for Public Comment,” *Gossips of Rivertown* (blog)*,* August 9, 2013, http://gossipsofrivertown.blogspot.com/2013/08/no-time-for-public-comment.html.

do something that I think the cardboard city did, too: surface some of our most fundamental assumptions about what a city should be — what, and who, a city is for.[19]

To begin to understand this moment on 4th and Warren street, we have to dive into the particular context of Hudson, but we have to venture outward, too: to New York City, only two hours away, the global capital of capital; to cities and neighborhoods around the world that have passed from being centers of industrial production into spaces of art, consumption and leisure. It requires peeling back the layers of history that continue to shape this place and each of our senses of place within it. It means gleaning relevant scholarship from critical geographers and political economists, from feminist, anti-racist and Indigenous scholars and activists, and from progressive planners and urbanists. It means asking critical, honest, and unsettling questions about what forces have shaped each of our own political and spatial imaginaries. More than anything, it means listening to the people around us, to long-time residents and newcomers, to public housing residents and shop owners, to children and teenagers and parents, listening to what lies inside and underneath our arguments. Nearly everyone in the city has an opinion about how it's changing, informed by their own lives, their own hopes or fears for the future; as Matt Hern writes, "usually you have to go to the streets to get the most sophisticated analyses."[20]

With 4th and Warren Street as my point of departure, I aim to trace some of the logics embedded in two stories I hear told about the city of Hudson, both key to arguments against the Bridge's move: the story of Hudson's *revitalization*, and the story of *at risk youth.* In thinking about revitalization and risk — where these concepts come from, and what work they do — I hope to unsettle some of the stories that have invisibly shaped my own relationship to the place that I live.

II. The story of revitalization

The battle over who owns Hudson is waged daily in town meetings, newspaper editorials, in the comment sections of local blogs, on street corners — over whose city this is, who came first, who belongs, who stole it from who. Of course it is as much a battle of ownership over property as it is over meaning and representation. Some stories dominate. In the world that I

[19] Matt Hern, *What a City is For: Remaking the Politics of Displacement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).
[20] Ibid., 13.

come from — progressive, white, cosmopolitan, middle- and upper-class — the story of Hudson's revitalization is so commonly told that is has become a kind of common sense narrative.[21] It goes like this:

In the 1970s and 80s, the city of Hudson was mostly boarded-up; it was a small city in decline. "It was kind of dire here, at the time," says one Hudson resident, who opened a restaurant on Warren Street in 1999, and was interviewed in 2015.[22] "There were drug dealers and prostitutes and noise and shootings and — the first time I slept in this building, there was a gunshot down the street or something. And I thought, what am I doing here?" "We were pioneers," she says. Nicole Vidor, a local real estate agent who moved to the city in 2002 tells a similar tale about her arrival: "I can remember a bunch of us, we would drive up from Rhinebeck… We'd be in the car, and we'd park across the street, and we'd be like, ready? You ready? OK, let's go! And then we'd jump out of the car and run across the street because everybody was so afraid of Hudson. Because it was pretty wild, in those days. There were still places that were boarded up, and there was a lot of crime, and prostitution…. It was like a real down and dirty city."[23]

The story of revitalization begins, then, with Hudson's blight and decline; and shifts towards the urban "pioneers," who discover the city, its potential, its historic architecture in decay, its real estate cheap. Those moving to Hudson in these years were primarily antique shop owners, mostly white, mostly male, and mostly gay. "It's not like we kicked people out," explains a local bed & breakfast owner. "No one wanted to be here." Vidor describes moving to Hudson and finding everybody covered in plaster dust: "Everybody talked about what wall they'd knocked down that day, or what sink they found… They were all pioneers in these nasty old houses that, you know, nobody would consider buying. But we all bought them."[24] Many of those moving to Hudson invested their own resources and sweat equity, rescuing historic buildings that were in significant disrepair.

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[21] My thinking about "common sense" has been influenced by Gramsci's theory of the construction of hegemony. For more on this, see: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).
[22] Alana Hauptmann, interviewed by Kate Radcliffe as part of the Oral History Summer School 2015. June 15, 2015. *Hudson Oral History Archive*, Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.
[23] Nicole Vidor, interviewed by Hannah Shepard as part of the Oral History Summer School 2015. June 17, 2015. *Hudson Oral History Archive*, Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.
[24] Vidor, interview

Carole Clark, who opened a restaurant in Hudson in 1987, describes the small and close-knit community of newcomers, many of whom began organizing to bring economic development to the city, to make the place more progressive, to "change everybody's mind about Hudson, basically."[25] She says, "There are a lot of people who have lived in Hudson, who were part of the very beginning of this Hudson renaissance, who worked very hard — you know, went to Common Council meetings every week, stood up and spoke up… That all happened as a result of the work of these different individuals. So as a result of our effort, there has been what we would call enlightenment. We have been able to elicit change."[26]

"But the important thing to know," she continues, "is that all of the development was due to the work, and money, of individuals; not in any way was the government… helping business, retail, or urban revitalization." In the story of revitalization, long-term white residents of the city and county are described primarily as barriers to the city's progress. According to this narrative, Hudson's conservatives, and especially the "old boys network" who held political power, fought change every step of the way: resistant to new residents moving in, and tethered to a hopeless and backwards vision of industry returning to the city instead. Residents who moved to Hudson in the 1980s and '90s tell stories of the rampant homophobia they experienced, of a corrupt and cronyistic government opposed to any progressive change. Clark describes "the days when we would come to the Common Council meetings, and speak, and people would stare at us like, *who are these people? What are they saying*? Or else, when they knew what we were saying, they used to just roll their eyes."

"New Hudson breathed life into a town that needed it," explains Tiffany Martin-Hamilton, who was born and raised in Hudson and recorded this interview before she was elected Mayor in 2015.[27] "This town was falling apart in the late 80s and early 90s. The buildings were dilapidated. I wish I had bought five of them then, when they were 30,000 a piece. But they were falling down. People saw the potential in Hudson, they came, and they lovingly restored these buildings, and really brought Hudson back on track. We'd lost our way, in some ways. And all of the things, or many of the things that make our town so cool, or unique, were being disregarded.

[25] Carole Clarke, interviewed by Lucy Segar as part of the Oral History Summer School 2015. June 15, 2015. *Hudson Oral History Archive*, Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Tiffany Martin Hamilton, interviewed by Kieran Cannistra as part of the Oral History Summer School 2014. June 16, 2014. *Hudson Oral History Archive*, Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.

And they were crumbling. So, for me, I see the new wave of folks that came in, as, in a lot of ways, saving the town, and bringing it in the direction of progress."

Their efforts worked. In 1998, Sam Pratt published an article in *New York Magazine*, saying: "Hudson is suddenly in everybody's sights… Not surprisingly, real-estate values have shot up as fast as the poison ivy that grows in vines up the garages in picturesque alleys like Partition Street."[28] In 2002, freelance lifestyle journalist Kathryn Matthews published an article in the *New York Times'* Travel section, which opened with the lines: "Hudson is a diamond in the rough that's midway through polishing."[29]

Since then, Hudson's transformation from city-in-decline to city-reborn has been regularly chronicled in the *New York Times* and other national outlets. Christopher Pekanas, in an article in *Architectural Digest* published in 2013, told its own version of the story: "In the early 1980s Hudson," he wrote, "with its boarded-up storefronts and shadowy side streets, was nowhere you wanted to be after dark. Fast-forward 30 years and the town… now gentrified in the best sense of the word, is all but unrecognizable..."[30] Or from Peter Applebome, in 2011: "Not long ago, Hudson was notorious for drugs, prostitution and post-industrial torpor. Now, Warren Street… is a vision of the Hudson Valley reborn."[31] Shaped by the "creative capital that has been pouring in over the last few years,"[32] the city is now portrayed as "a vibrant town bubbling with hungry, young doers and creative types making Hudson happen."[33] Hudson has seen "an artistic renaissance," and an "ongoing regeneration, reflecting the taste and sensibilities of its new residents, a cross section of the members of the creative class."[34] "Call it the Brooklynization of the Hudson Valley."[35]

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[28] Sam Pratt, "New York Magazine: 1998," *SamPratt.com* (blog), June 5, 2010, www.sampratt.com/sam/2010/06/new-york-magazine-1998.html.com

[29] Kathryn Matthews, "Hudson, N.Y." *New York Times*, November 1, 2002, www.nytimes.com/2002/11/01/travel/havens-weekender-hudson-ny.html.

[30] Christopher Petkanas, "Hudson, New York's Best Boutiques, Restaurants, Hotels and Historic Sights," *Architectural Digest*, November 2013, www.architecturaldigest.com/ad/travel/2013/hudson-new-york-guide-hotels-restaurants-shops-article

[31] Peter Applebome, "Williamsburg on the Hudson," *New York Times,* August 5, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/08/07/nyregion/hudson-river-valley-draws-brooklynites.html

[32] Penelope Green, "Cultivating Hudson: Enter the Tastemakers," *New York Times,* January 15, 2014, www..nytimes.com/2014/01/16/garden/cultivating-hudson-enter-the-tastemakers.html

[33] Ann Marie Gardner, "Essential Hudson," *Ralph Lauren Magazine*, Spring 2015, www.global.ralphlauren.com/en-us/rlmagazine/editorial/spring15/Pages/essential-hudson.aspx?featured=true

[34] Green, "Cultivating Hudson*"*.

[35] Applebome, "Williamsburg on the Hudson".

To call this a story is not to say it is untrue. It is to say that, when any one of us describes a place, we are never just reflecting it as-it-is; we are constructing it, piecing together a narrative built of inclusions and exclusions, nostalgias and boundaries and assumptions. It is to say that we are always making choices about what histories are (and aren't) significant, claiming coherence and continuity in what is necessarily multiple, infinite, and unfolding within a context of power. That we always have to ask: what do our stories obscure, what do they forget? What knowledge is produced about place, community, and people through the story of revitalization? What lives does this story make possible?[36]

When Ed Cross, a local reverend and the first Black member of the county Board of Supervisors was interviewed in 2015, he told Hudson's story differently. His story of Hudson's transformation was tinged with worry. Cross was born in 1949, on Front Street:

> I've lived in Hudson for 60 years. And the farthest upstreet I've lived is 5th street, and that was only for about 2 years…. Our neighborhoods, when I was growing up, they were close. Families were very close, and it was a very close-knit neighborhood. Most of the people in your neighborhood, even though they weren't blood, you called them aunt or uncle. And we're losing that now… And it's very scary, for me.[37]

Cross' telling, too, is a familiar one — it's a nostalgic tale of a community that used to be, a social fabric destroyed by time. I hear it in interview after interview, as people mourn the loss of the city that was. A 51-year old firefighter, white, born in Hudson's 5th Ward, misses restaurants downtown that whole families could afford to eat at. A 41-year old Black man, a radio host and father, misses the city that took better care of its kids, when the Boys' Club had better programs and hosted sleepovers. A 101-year old woman, Italian, who grew up on Front street, misses the days when everyone in her family had work. A 66-year old woman, born in Grenada, misses the vibrant, Black middle class, and the social clubs she encountered when she arrived in the 70s.

Tiffany Martin-Hamilton describes a perspective of what she calls "Old Hudson": "People have a vision of what Hudson was," she says. "Oh, bring Hudson back to the good old days, when we had big parades with marching bands, and everybody had a job because industry was

[36] Cameron, *Far Off Metal River,* 12.
[37] Edward Cross, interviewed by Scott M. Gyenes as part of the Oral History Summer School 2015. June 15, 2015. *Hudson Oral History Archive*, Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.

here. And then they came in, and they bought everything up, and now it's this completely different place. It's not our town anymore, it's their town. They want to turn it into something else. And we can't afford to shop here. There are elements of truth in it."

Every generation, it seems, witnesses the destruction of a kind of community it once knew — everyone, in some way, reaching backwards to try to keep the past from slipping away, fixing on the past a certain meaning. Listening to interviews, it is hard to ignore what Svetlana Blom has called the "epidemic of nostalgia": a pervasive longing for community in an increasingly fragmented and fast-changing world.[38] Those of us concerned about gentrification can have a particular tendency to slip into a defense of what was, or what has been, however flawed and unjust, in the fight against what is to come. We can shift so quickly from nuanced understandings of a city's layered past and present into overly simplified versions and justifications of what histories we choose to remember, who can speak for a place, and who can lay claim to its future. In conversations about gentrification, we can be especially blind to the settler colonial histories and present of the land we're on, completely decontextualizing contemporary struggles over land and belonging.

I do hold the belief that people who have lived in a neighborhood for a long time — like Ed Cross, whose claims come from an entire life of service to this tiny city — have a more embedded network of relationships, a deeper-held kind of accountability, and arguably more at stake in its future. I also believe in permeability: that a big part of what makes a place great is the migration that brings new people with different cultures, the flow of strangers.[39] The problem with nostalgic remembrance is that it can become so quickly an argument for the city to be stilled, to be fixed in historical space. And when, in these stories, do our histories begin?

But there's so much more than stillness contained in nostalgia. To recognize that people have experienced loss in the city is not to say that all was equitable, communal, glorious amidst the massive job loss, depopulation, disinvestment and commercial decline that Hudson residents experienced. Ed Cross' interview represents a profoundly different assessment of the present than is offered by the story of revitalization that I'm so used to hearing. I hear in his interview a challenge posed to the relentlessly-optimistic telling of Hudson's transformation, and the economic logic that underlies it: success, *for who*? I hear a call to remember what else was here.

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[38] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiv
[39] Hern, *What A City is For*, 16.

Just as there are valuable theoretical lessons to be learned from critical studies of urban development, so there are from accounts of love, and of loss. In his interview, Cross tells a story of refusing, once, to talk to a newspaper journalist: “But I had to apologize to him,” he says, “because even though I don’t like being in the paper, somebody needs to tell the story. Somebody needs to let my grandchildren know. My mother did something. My grandmother did something. My wife’s mother and grandparents did something, and their parents did something.”[40] I hear in Cross’ interview a call for a deeper examination of Hudson's change over time, one that goes beyond the framing of Hudson in the 1970s and 80s as purely dangerous, boarded up, and empty, and instead interrogates *why*.

When Sasha Frere-Jones, a music critic for *The New Yorker* came to Hudson for a music festival in 2013, he took a walk around the city, and stumbled on a block party north of Warren street. Later describing the city, he wrote, "Hudson is still a heterogeneous, racially-mixed town… Every block or so there was another abandoned, sometimes slumping house, with a building permit in the window."[41] Like Frere-Jones, the journalists who cover Hudson's hip transformation do sometimes walk off Warren Street, though not always. When they do they include a paragraph, usually towards the end of their article, about venturing into the city's lower-income pockets. In paragraph twenty-seven of his *New York Times* article on Hudson, Peter Applebome writes of the "housing projects and poor neighborhoods just off Warren Street, strangers in the new landscape.” He describes meeting a 63-year old resident, who explains that "the revival on Warren Street… didn't offer much for him or for young people growing up in a town whose population is almost a third Black and Latino, and in which one in five residents is living below the poverty level."[42]

Still, Applebome ends the article on a high note: "But optimism is one thing you find in the Hudson Valley, to an extent not seen elsewhere. It is true that, even here, it takes more than art, farm stands, and caffeine to make an economy work… But in a culture sometimes whipsawed between a desire to be in the middle of the storm and to be a million miles away, the Hudson Valley offers the promise of both.” This is the optimism that runs through all of these articles.

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[40] Cross, interview.
[41] Sasha Frere-Jones, “Take Them to Church,” *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2013, www.newyorker.com/culture/sasha-frere-jones/take-them-to-church
[42] Applebome, “Williamsburg on the Hudson”.

The journalists who venture into the "underdeveloped" parts of Hudson, those who attempt a more critical gaze, tend to raise the question: “How do you spread regeneration north of Warren Street?”[43]

This, then, is the question that gets asked — can development include rather than exclude and displace poor residents? But this question frames Hudson’s brand of “revitalization” — and the dominant notions of success embedded in it — as a natural, desired outcome. Framed out of supposed concern for Hudson’s vulnerable residents, it presumes that everybody wants to live in a gentrified landscape. It assumes that *of course* everyone ascribes to a shared set of dreams and shared notions of prosperity, and of course it is our job to think about solutions for how to bring people there. This is, essentially, a comfortable place to be: we can drink lattes, express our concerns about inequity, and strategize about the non-profits we might start to address the problem. But the story of revitalization doesn't give us the tools to interrogate how Hudson’s revitalization is inextricably bound with the deepening inequalities we see around us. It doesn’t help us to ask why.

Instead, our emerging urban glossary — made up of words like renewal, revitalization, renaissance, Brooklynization, Williamsburgification —chooses to celebrate a particular kind of transformation happening in cities around the world. These words tell the story of places that have passed from being centers of industrial production and blue-collar labor, or sites of racialized disinvestment and decline, into spaces now dotted with upscale cafés, galleries, and restaurants. The story of revitalization is the story of the salvation of the deindustrialized city. But others call it by its more slippery and politically-loaded term, gentrification. I choose to use the word gentrification because of the explicit class connotations at its core: I subscribe to Tom Slater's argument that "it is only a slight exaggeration to say that the difference between 'regeneration' and 'gentrification' is akin to the gap between 'terrorist' and 'freedom fighter'." Language matters. Though I think the story of gentrification, too, falls short -- it can also obscure the real structural and historical conditions shaping our cities, leaving us in the same, looping conversations, with fingers pointed.

In writing about the city of Detroit, Thomas Sugrue writes, "it has become commonplace today to gauge the health or success of a city on its visible gentrification, even if there is little evidence that these islands of prosperity do much to transform the urban economy or benefit the

[43] Green, “Cultivating Hudson”.

majority of the city's population."[44] Detroit is an utterly different city with different circumstances, but it too has seen, in recent years, the emergence of a thriving arts and cultural scene, the conversion of long-abandoned buildings, and the arrival of mostly-white new residents attracted to the affordability and creative opportunities created by the city's decline.[45] In describing visible gentrification in Detroit, Sugrue illustrates how the discourse of urban revitalization defines "success" in narrow, economic terms, celebrating newness and growth, and ignoring — while actively producing — vast and growing inequities along race and class. The story of revitalization, in his telling of Detroit and in the one I've heard of Hudson, explicitly places white, middle/upper class, urban culture at the finish line of urban development, rarely questioning the cultural criteria behind its definition of success. It positions whiteness as natural, necessary, and inevitable — and makes class-based racial segregation seem unfortunate, but perhaps unavoidable. It places the "acquisitive consumer at the center of the social world," and posits gentrification as the positive result of a healthy real estate market, in which the market is understood as the solution, not the problem.[46]

This trend has been most popularly articulated by Richard Florida, an urbanist who made his reputation arguing that the key to urban development today is a city's ability to attract and retain a "creative class".[47] Florida argued that the nation's economy had shifted away from industrial centers, and towards new centers of creativity and innovation; that to succeed in today's economy, cities should become havens for artists, cultural producers, and hipsters. It's an argument that frames urban "creatives" as the role model and potential savior for struggling cities, while simultaneously avoiding any explicit discussion of race, or class, or power. Over the past couple of decades, this argument has had significant ideological impact in the urban policy world; increasingly, cities have implemented urban revitalization policies that overtly prioritize the goal of attracting creative professionals into disinvested neighborhoods, supporting the development of commercial and cultural amenities for the middle class, and employing public/private partnerships as strategies to promote gentrification.[48]

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[44] Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* xxiv
[45] Ibid., xxiii.
[46] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 13.
[47] Loretta Lees, Tom Slater and Elvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 107-108.
[48] Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as a Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34*,* no. 3 (2002): 443-446.

The rise of this version of the revitalized city, built around consumption and the "creative class," is emblematic of the wider, neoliberal logic shaping today's political economy. Academic researchers have been relentless in documenting the rise, over the last few decades, of the *neoliberal city*: an entrepreneurial city driven by market ideologies. In the story told by critical geographers and urbanists, urban development has long been instrumentalized by capital -- places have always gone through successions of development, underdevelopment, and redevelopment as capital jumps from one place to another, always needing to accumulate and grow.[49] Gentrification as we know it, in other words, is not an accident, or an anomaly, but the very calculus of capital — and gentrification itself has become a pivotal economic sector and source of revenue for cities.[50] And in the 21st century, things have shifted even more sharply towards the market, as the ideology and policies of neoliberalism have become increasingly dominant.

I use the term neoliberalism to refer to the political, social, and ideological project that defines social issues as fundamentally economic problems, with economic solutions.[51] Neoliberalism sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relationships, and maintains that "the market" deliver benefits that could never be achieved by planning. Although traditional capitalism has long subjected society to the laws of the free market, a set of regulatory, protectionist, and distributive measures — what we call the welfare state -- was once in place to mitigate the market's harsher inequities (though these measures were always discriminatory and uneven in implementation).[52] Neoliberalism emerged as a project to dismantle these regulations and protections, and to justify their unraveling. It has thus produced an ensemble of policies characterized, broadly speaking, by the shift from public to private, and by the downsizing of government programs that aim to help those marginalized by market processes, as if the market is blind to social difference, blind to race.[53] But neoliberalism is also an ideology: a way of thinking that prioritizes individual self-interest and a faith in the free market. It is, perhaps most dangerously, a privatization of the imagination — limiting what we

[49] Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
[50] Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race and the Right to the City (*New York: Routledge, 2011), 25.
[51] Ibid., 6-8.
[52] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[53] Dana Ain Davis, "Narrating the Mute: Racializing and Racism in a Neoliberal Moment," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society* 9, no. 4 (2007): 364-360.

imagine to be possible, encapsulated in Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase, "There Is No Alternative."[54]

It's important to name because neoliberalism has been likened to the water we swim in, the unnamed logic that ensnares our political system, disguising itself as what we call rational thinking. Neoliberal common sense tells us that economic development is an unwavering good — as opposed to, and often at the direct expense of, principles of social welfare, equity, or justice. And it tells us that we're unrealistic, or idealistic, to question the values that underlie it.

Theory becomes clearer for me when we can see it unfolding around us, especially because structuralist analyses can be hard to apply when trying to make sense of the complexity of our own neighborhoods, and especially the complexity of the people involved. In thinking about the neoliberal city and its regime of rationality, I think about the Hudson Development Corporation (HDC), a non-profit, local development corporation (LDC) in Hudson. It's a public-private partnership, made up of a small staff and a Board of Directors, including two *ex officio* elected officials (Hudson's Mayor and Common Council President), the rest residents and business owners. On their website, the HDC describes LDCs as "quasi-public entities undertaking activities in areas of public concern," and as an "important tool in local economic development." In Hudson this means that the HDC primarily receives property acquired by the City of Hudson, to market and sell. They meet monthly, on Tuesdays, at noon; technically open to the public, one or two onlookers might show up each month, if any. While the HDC plays a significant role in shaping the development of major sites in Hudson, its activities are relatively concealed.

The HDC is a reflection of the proliferation of similar public-private partnerships in cities — most often local development corporations or business improvement districts — generally made of business owners, tasked with the economic development of publicly-owned properties. The public-private space they occupy is a fuzzy one: the current head of HDC's board is fond of reminding the board that they aren't, in fact, accountable to the public — here, public ownership is paired with private management and control. The HDC and other organizations like it are reflections of what Sharon Zukin describes as "the private sector's growing role as a moral and practical authority, which many people believe to be more effective than government in every way."[55] Inherent to this logic is that solutions to our social problems can be found on the binary

[54] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* 40.
[55] Sharon Zukin, *Naked City* (Oxford University Press, New York: 2000), 145.

spectrum of either big, involved, local/state/national government on the one side, and the private sector on the other: that we can have either slow, inefficient, corrupt government, or instead the efficient, rational and innovative market. Bodies like the HDC address this problem, in theory, by supporting governments to operate more like businesses.

But what concerns me about the HDC is not only its lack of public accountability, but its narrow interpretation of economic development, in the name of the public good. Its mission reveals the resolute assumption that traditionally-defined economic growth is good for all the people of Hudson, and that it is in the public interest to focus on developing Hudson as a destination for weekenders and tourists. This assumption allows the HDC to insist that their work is essentially non-political: "By mobilizing technical knowledge on the one hand, and common sense economic reasoning on the other, private development [is] given the appearance of being an impersonal and non-political choice in urban transformation."[56] The HDC's decisions are thus framed as technical ones, merely employing the obvious economic logics of the market. By defining their role as more bureaucratic than democratic, the HDC justifies their total lack of public participation and transparency, relying instead on so-called professional expertise.[57] We can also assume that this framing favors the economic self-interest of HDC board members, the majority of whom have a clear stake in promoting Hudson as a tourist destination.

While the "public" is most often used to describe the abstract whole of a society, the HDC, and the logic of revitalization that underpins their approach to economic development, mobilizes a particular definition and understanding of "public".[58] Their market rationale places the middle-class at the center of politics, in a "hierarchy of community";[59] belonging, in this case, is determined primarily by property rights and ownership.[60] Middle-class interests, it is assumed, constitute the highest and best use of urban space.

This stands in stark contrast to the public imagined by Ed Cross, in his interview: Cross is primarily concerned with the city's long-time residents, and especially those most vulnerable to displacement. In his telling, Hudson's revitalization is squarely political, and is part of a continuous struggle for the right to the city. Rather than beginning from the position of property,

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[56] Susan Pell, "Mobilizing Urban Publics, Imagining Democratic Possibilities: Reading the Politics of Urban Redevelopment in Discourses of Gentrification and Revitalization," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2012): 11- 12.
[57] Ibid., 12.
[58] Ibid., 8-11.
[59] Leslie Kern, *Sex and the Revitalized City* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 3.
[60] Ibid., 12.

Cross defines belonging in terms of those who have historically lived in the area, and those with the least financial power. Property is much more than a financial asset; it is *home,* the place we belong to, and the place which belongs to us — with a use value that far outweighs its market value. In other words, underpinning our stories are fundamentally different political, social, economic, and cultural logics about what we mean by development. Embedded in conversations at HDC meetings is the notion that our primary challenge as a city is an economic one, and that the locus of concern is property, rather than people. And as a result, their solutions — what they define as economic development — look utterly different from those of us who define the problems facing our city as fundamentally social and political, and place our concern not with property, but with people. One can imagine that the economic reasoning employed by the HDC does not have room for teenagers who are failing out of high school hanging out on a central corner.

Nicole Vidor, who moved to Hudson in the early 2000s and recently began working as a real estate agent, describes her own wrestling with these logics. She tells a story about a course she took to get her brokers license in Albany, during which she brought up some of her concerns about working in real estate amidst growing inequality. "I have a real challenge," she describes telling her class. "I live in a very diverse community, and that's why I moved there, because I love the diversity. And I am experiencing day by day that diversity changing, because of real estate. My neighbor, who's lived here for 30 years, or 40 years, or my neighbor down the street who was born in her house, could very well end up not being able to live here." Vidor tells how the rest of the class, "like a chorus, all said, 'What, are you crazy? You're in a really strong market.'"[61]

Vidor's concern about the loss of Hudson's diversity reflects a common thread of liberal urbanist thinking, most famous in Jane Jacobs' prescriptions for the diversity that once animated New York City's neighborhoods — a celebration of mixed, human-scale urban communities, and urban "authenticity".[62] But under neoliberal capitalism, as we continue to strip away the public while celebrating the ingenuity of the market, poor folks will only continue to be pushed out, while those of us with class and race privilege concerned with injustice will continue to find

[61] Vidor, interview.
[62] Zukin, *Naked City,* 11-13. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

ourselves part of the problem. These structural conditions leave all of us maneuvering to protect our own interests, even while we bemoan the consequences. As anti-racist activists have articulated so elegantly for so long, unjust systems harm all of us, even those of us who are positioned to benefit, materially, from them; we too are robbed of the possibility of living in a dignified, democratic society.[63] The liberal fantasy of diversity, without actually engaging in the work of interrogating and dismantling economic and political structures of power, is reduced to "one more accoutrement of privilege," to be commodified, marketed and sold.[64]

The challenge is, revitalization articulates itself as the only option — evidenced by Vidor's classmates, and their response to her concerns: "What, are you crazy?" Tom Slater has called this narrow logic *false choice urbanism*: that prevailing notion that prosperity (expressed as gentrification) is better than the alternative, i.e., the boarded up, empty city (disinvestment).[65] Gentrification is treated as the only conceivable remedy for struggling urban neighborhoods — and to seek solutions to social problems outside of this framework is to be unrealistic. A sister argument to Margaret Thatcher's "There Is No Alternative," it's manifested in the questionable logic that, given the ineffectiveness of government, gentrification is actually the solution for postindustrial cities experiencing high unemployment, extreme segregation, and inequity. That somewhere there is a sweet spot we must find between too-gentrified and not-too-gentrified-yet — but that ultimately there is no way to resist. It's a logic that renders entire communities within the city disposable, irrelevant to the success stories told.

More than anything, by pitting them as false choices on either side of a spectrum, this logic obscures how gentrification and disinvestment are actually fundamentally intertwined. Slater writes, "No viable alternatives to class segregation and poverty will be found unless we ask why there are neighborhoods of astounding affluence and of grinding poverty, why there are 'new arrivals' and an 'old guard,' why there are renovations and evictions; in short, why there is inequality."[66] The idea that tourist-centered, consumption-based economic development might be the solution for our cities, as long as we figure out how to do it without displacement, ignores the fact that growth as we know it is necessarily shaped by other, destructive forces for poor and working class people. This concept is commonly referred to by geographers as "accumulation by

[63] Lipsitz, *How Racism Works,* 123.
[64] Hern, *What a City is For,* 67.
[65] Tom Slater, "Unraveling False Choice Urbanism," *City* 18, no. 4-5 (2014).
[66] Ibid. 519.

dispossession."[67] Uncritical celebration of growth and reinvestment represents the same kind of logic that produced the destructive financial crisis of 2008, and that has us barreling towards ecological disaster — we have no choice but to seek other ways forward, regardless of how "irrational" they may seem.

I agree with Slater when he argues that false choice urbanism is, more than anything, an example of the *poverty of the imagination*.[68] "For an ideology to be hegemonic," he writes, "it is not necessary that it be loved. It is merely necessary that it have no serious rival."[69] If Hudson's creative cool is a sign that our city is "doing it right," then what we need is a radical new imaginary for what a city is and could be: one that actually engages critically and practically, with past, present and future geographies of power and inequality; one that takes a hard look at what we consider to be inevitable, who we consider expert, and what voices might guide the way.

III. A politics of forgetting

At one point in his interview, Ed Cross reflects on Hudson's transformation, and how perceptions of the city are changing:

> There's really a change now. You know, all of a sudden people see 3rd Street down to Front as a beautiful avenue to the river, to the railroad… I have said this many times, but it kind of scares me. Because of the fact that, I don't know where the poor folk are gonna go. We were put down here, past 3rd street. That's where our home was. But now it seems that, there's a lot of moving in of money, which is forcing a lot of us out. And I don't know where we're gonna go.[70]

I hear something similar from Jacinta Keith, who moved to Hudson in the late 1970s. Jacinta says, "We had what they call a redline district in Hudson. Blacks were not allowed to own anything past 3rd street." She says: "Believe it or not, a lot of minorities owned homes. But

[67] David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 52 (2008): 34.
[68] Slater, "Unraveling False Choice Urbanism," 523.
[69] Colin Leys, "Still a Question of Hegemony, *New Left Review* 181 (1990): 127, quoted in Tom Slater, "From 'Criminality' to Marginality: Rioting Against a Broken State," *Human Geography* 4, no. 3 (2011): 10.
[70] Cross, interview.

they couldn't go beyond 3rd Street. A lot of Black folks owned homes, from that point [3rd street] over… Back then it was, oh, put them down there."[71]

Jacinta remembers housing discrimination coming from multiple directions; she remembers white folks burning a cross in front of a lawn, when a Black family moved onto Washington Street. She remembers white neighbors petitioning because they didn't want a Black family living next to them. Phil Gellert, a long-time local landlord, recalls: "I remember I bought a building, which I still own, on 449/451 State Street. Bought it in 1968, when it was next to a bar — Charlie's bar. About 6 years after I bought it, I rented to an African American girl. Right away the bartender came out and said, I'm ruining the neighborhood. We don't want any African Americans in this part of town."[72]

I am ashamed to say that when I hear these interviews, I am surprised. I have read about housing discrimination and redlining in other cities: the systems of finance, real estate and insurance that systematically shut Black families out of the private real estate market; the notorious reluctance of banks and mortgage firms to invest in older neighborhoods with Black populations; the federal housing appraisal practices that ruled Black neighborhoods to be dangerous risks for mortgage subsidies and home loans. So many of the cities we know today were shaped by maps of risk and worthiness that marked some bodies, some families, some neighborhoods as deserving investment, and others as disposable.[73] And extreme resistance came from white people who fought, often with violence, to protect the value of their homes, and to preserve the all-white spaces they knew. The shameful history of white violence in defense of white neighborhoods in cities like Hudson remains untold in our popular historical narratives.[74]

I hadn't ever heard the term redlining in Hudson, until now. Why is that? In Hudson, Jacinta tells me, the city's Black residents were restrained from leaving the part of the city with some of the worst housing stock, in most need of ongoing maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation. In many cities where similar processes took place, the resulting deterioration of

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[71] Jacinta Keith, interviewed by Meral Agish as part of the Oral History Summer School 2013. June 8, 2013. *Hudson Oral History Archive,* Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.
[72] Ibid.
[73] For a recent and popularly accessible analysis of residential discrimination, see Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic,* June 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/. See also: Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis;* Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," *American Panorama,* ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed April 25, 2017, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining.
[74] Lipsitz, *How Racism Works,* 27.

these neighborhoods served as proof to bankers that people of color were indeed a poor credit risk, and justified continued disinvestment. It's no surprise then that in the 1970s, during the peak of the urban renewal period when the city was looking to bulldoze the "worst housing stock in the state," the area below 3rd and north of Warren was destroyed to pave way for the public housing that so characterizes the Hudson we know today.[75] Before urban renewal the neighborhood was home to Black families, and to poor Polish, Ukrainian, and Italian families. In 1970 the Bureau of Urban Affairs of the NY State Division of Housing and Community Renewal found the area "badly deteriorated in a physical, social and economic sense," and found it "the most deteriorated, obsolete and dangerous section of the City."[76]

Urban renewal policies, funded by federal money, destroyed the neighborhood that had been marked as worth destroying, building public housing atop: the low-rise buildings that today line the once-industrial waterfront, and Bliss Towers, a high rise housing project which looms large over Hudson at nine stories. These housing projects were emblematic of similar urban renewal development projects happening in cities elsewhere, in which the federal government developed large housing projects within existing poor neighborhoods, taking "an active hand not merely in reinforcing prevailing patterns of segregation, but in lending them a permanence never seen before."[77]

I am reminded of how Vern Cross, now 47, describes the boundaries that shaped his own childhood in the 1970s and 80s in Hudson. Vern grew up in Bliss Towers, and remembers:

> Where we lived at, we lived on a block where most of the houses on that block were owned by Black people. Things were different back then. I mean, you weren't allowed to go to 4th street… On the corner there, Steiner's and the Boys' Club — that's probably as far as you could go. Your parents wouldn't let you come up here. More white people up here, meaner. The police station was up here. There really wasn't anything for Black kids to do up here. So we kinda maintained, like 3rd and below, that's what they called it, 3rd and below.[78]

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[75] Hudson Urban Renewal Agency, "The Urban Renewal Area… Before Development," 1970, Hudson Area Library,
[76] Ibid.
[77] Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 252-54, quoted in Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denoton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 57. See also: Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: New Village Press, 2016), 65.
[78] Vern Cross, interviewed by Zoe Dutka as part of the Oral History Summer School 2014. June 15, 2015. *Hudson Oral History Archive,* Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.

Vern and Jacinta's interviews are small glimpses into how housing discrimination in Hudson left an indelible mark on the city's racial and economic geography. For me, they are reminders of the largely hidden histories of actions by realtors and banks, policymakers at every level, by businesses and ordinary citizens that created and reinforced race and class inequalities, mapping the city as we know it — and most importantly, *creating the context* for today's revitalization.[79] If the story of Hudson's revitalization begins with foreboding tales of the city in decline — with Warren Street boarded up, drugs and crime rampant, historic architecture needing rescue, and real estate cheap — then we need to remember also the structural factors that made it so: deindustrialization and the flight of jobs, the intractable racial segregation in housing, the war on drugs. It is no wonder that Vern takes offense to the opposition against The Bridge, and the implication that youth of color shouldn't be hanging out on the corner of Warren and 4th — he has heard this his whole life. It has history.

Today, Warren street below 3rd St. is branded as *BeLo3rd* — now an "emerging" and trendy business district.[80] Since 2009 the shops, galleries, restaurants and businesses that line this part of Warren Street have marketed the city below 3rd as the new place to be. Their effort follows the lead of similar place-marketing efforts elsewhere: the branding and promoting of different neighborhoods — or, the creation of new neighborhoods — in an effort to compete as cultural and consumer destinations. David Harvey points to this pattern across cities, documenting the "shift towards entrepreneurialism" as part of growing "inter-urban competition". He has documented the ways that cities, in the face of economic restructuring, have had to be more innovative and entrepreneurial — focused on producing an *image* of the city, rather than addressing the "substance of economic and social problems".[81] In doing so, existing neighborhood reputations are replaced with images that attract more ideal, middle class consumers.[82]

Ed Cross, in his interview, tells us that the overly-simple story of revitalization, and the new image of Belo3rd, *forgets.* It forgets that in change, there is always also loss — loss that

[79] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis,* xxxvi.
[80] Carrie Nieman Culpepper, "The Five-Point Weekend Escape Plan: Meet Hudson's Emerging Artists and Photographers," *New York Magazine*, June 3, 2010.
[81] David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance," *Geografiska Annaler Series B Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (January 2002): 16.
[82] Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 2000), 21.

needs remembering, honoring, and telling. Cross reminds us that contained in loss, within it and beyond it, is joy, love, community, hope, complexity. Larissa Parks describes spending time as a child at the CC Club, the Black social club that once served as a community center on 3rd and Columbia Streets, where her grandfather was the bartender. "I remember the soap in the bathroom," she says. It wasn't just a building, she explains; it was the soul and spirit of families, and a sense of community. In neighborhoods that have been tagged for development, places depicted as singularly crime-ridden or as boarded-up, there are always other stories to tell. The interviews I've listened to are filled with them.

The story of revitalization tells us about neighborhoods that have been discovered and saved. The more interviews I hear, the more incomplete and deterministic the story sounds.[83] I think, for example, of stories told about Bliss Towers, Hudson's high rise. Sometimes, the building is told as an illustration of the consequences of disinvestment and disrepair, corruption and mismanagement, segregation and poverty concentration:

> Sometimes the elevators won't work. And the doors don't even open. We have emergency exits, but when you get downstairs, the emergency door is locked. So the only way you can open it is unless you pull the fire alarm… They've got camera in the building, cameras everywhere. It feels like a prison, in a way.[84]

The same building can be told as the site of powerful community, increasingly rare in the age of neoliberalism and its accompanying ideologies of individualism and isolation: the building represents a dense network of familial ties, of social connection, a place where neighbors know one another, take care of each other: "The building, it's like its own little world. It's like a city within the city. It's like a real community." [85] Both descriptions are true, true at different moments, true in their contradictions. But how will history remember Bliss Towers, and what might the story of revitalization teach us about it? The story of revitalization forgets the infinite alternative geographies of place, the value that people have built in those same places devalued by the economy and by discriminatory housing policies. As Mindy Thompson Fullilove recently said, during a talk about Black neighborhoods that were once targeted for urban renewal, and

[83] Eve Tuck, Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 416.
[84] Ifetayo Cobbins, interviewed by Josephine Shokrian as part of the Oral History Summer School 2012. July 16, 2012. *Hudson Oral History Archive,* Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.
[85] Ibid.

flattened: entire neighborhoods were written off, she argues, because “people couldn’t see the love. And they still don’t see the love.”[86]

And because the story forgets, it obscures. This is the real danger of forgetting. It tells us that Hudson's revitalization is the work of individual pioneers with creativity and foresight, who moved to the city and turned it around. It tells us that Hudson's revitalization is primarily a story of people making choices: the arrival of Hudson’s first antique shops and artists, the restaurants and galleries that followed, the younger artists and freelancers and do-gooders that followed them, and now the uber-fancy people and shops that we see rolling in. It invites us to see these as the natural expression of changing preference and time, instead of a product of decades of racialized public policy and disinvestment.[87] In doing so, it obscures the structural conditions that created the macro- and micro-conditions for revitalization, which subsidized the choices of some while actively, sometimes violently, limiting the choices of others. The story ignores recent histories of discrimination, particularly in the housing market. It deliberately lacks context, while at the same time suggesting that neighborhood configurations were shaped by the ingenuity and foresight of the individuals who moved here. The story forgets to tell us that revitalization is always built on dispossession.

A-historicity has long been a capitalist strategy: “constantly wiping the slates clean so that each successive person, family, and neighborhood can claim ignorance and/or non-responsibility for what happened previously, even if it was very recent and right under our feet"[88]. History, in this worldview, is also a product subject to market rules; and if you are dominant in the marketplace, you can write the story. Eve Tuck writes: ”The opposite of dispossession is not possession. It is not accumulation. It is unforgetting. It is mattering."[89]

I am interested in what happens to our conversations when we situate the question of whether the Bridge should move to 4th and Warren street within the context of Hudson's recent history of housing discrimination and redlining. I am interested in what happens when we approach this controversy through the lens of settler colonialism, which reminds us that Hudson's current revitalization isn't "an isolated rupture," but instead an extension of deeply embedded,

[86] Mindy T. Fullilove, “From Redlining to Gentrification,” Presentation, *Reviewing Renewal* panel by the University of Orange at the Queens Museum, New York, February 8, 2015.
[87] Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”.
[88] Hern, *What A City is For,* 35.
[89] Morrill, Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective, “Before Dispossession,” 1.

current, continuing, colonial logics.[90] Logics that remain, intractable, thread throughout how we talk about place: our earliest conceptualizations of land as property, of bodies as disposable, of "the fantasy of discovery."

Because of course, every city in our country is built on layers of displacement and dispossessions — housing discrimination is predicated on the deeper history of the transatlantic slave trade, and even that history is predicated on the colonization and domination of Indigenous nations. In Hudson, we sit on Mohican land; and though in many parts of North America it's becoming increasingly common for people to recognize the names of the first inhabitants of the land, in Hudson I've never heard it, once. Our settler colonial history is not only history: it is our present — a structure, and not (just) an event.[91] What possibilities for the future might open if we analyze this current moment with the knowledge that the development of our city has *always* required the displacement and placelessness of some for the benefit of others, always in the name of economic development, always in the name of an imagined, constructed, "public"?

When I try to imagine a more just vision of urban development in Hudson, this is where I land: in real questions about the ground we stand on, and what I have and haven't been taught about it. We must begin, at the very least, by listening, and by remembering. This means telling more honest and complex stories about how our communities came to be — hearing the often-conflicting stories that make up this place's history, with nuance and compassion, and an unrelenting attention to power.

It is our job to peel back the layers: to tell stories that go deeper, that call to account the colonial accumulation our cities are constructed on, and the kinds of labor that built them; to build a relationship to the places we live based on this tension, not on its erasure.[92] Until we develop a more genuine understanding of what we're building on, until we actually engage with the real antagonisms of power, our optimism about Hudson as a site of possibility and regeneration will continue to be superficial, hollow, and destructive. Our city will continue to develop as a neoliberal playground for privilege, unless we recognize that it is our collective task to open our minds (and hearts) to understanding the multiple and complex histories we are living, re-living and perpetuating.

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[90] Hern, *What A City is For,* 71.
[91] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2007): 387-409, quoted in Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 5.
[92] Glen Coulthard, "Urbs Nullius: Gentrification, Settler Coloniality and Indigenous Sovereignty in the City," (paper at the Native American & Indigenous Studies Association annual conference, Saskatoon, SK, June 14, 2013).

Chapter 2: The Story of Risk

"This is my town. Don't treat me like I'm a problem. I'm not."
- Ifetayo Cobbins, Hudson resident[1]

I. Who's at risk?[2]

In the spring of 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published a widely-publicized report called *A Nation at Risk*. Written as both a report to the Secretary of Education under President Reagan and as an "open letter to the American People,"[3] the report was written as a wake-up call: "America," it told its public, "is at risk."[4] The commission argued that the country's once-great public school system was now failing, badly. And as a result, the country was facing grave economic risk: since public schools were failing to meet the national need for a competitive workforce, the country's "once unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation [was] being overtaken by competitors throughout the world."[5]

A Nation at Risk is often cited as what Pauline Lipman has described as the "opening salvo of the neoliberal education agenda."[6] The report framed the purpose of schooling in clear economic terms, with global competition and "human capital development" as its central goal.[7] The commission made several strong recommendations: that public schools across the country be held accountable to a far more rigorous standard of "excellence," and that they be "brought under the control of experts who — unlike educators and parents — understood the new demands of our economy".[8] Fast forward to the accountability-regime and privatization that now dominates education policy in the US, which has imposed an intensive system of rewards and penalties when public schools, and individual kids within them, fail to meet standards as measured by

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[1] Cobbins, interview.
[2] Michelle Fine, "Making Controversy: Who's At Risk?" in *Children At Risk in America: History, Concepts, and Public Policy,* ed. Roberta Wollons (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).
[3] National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983.
[4] Ibid., 14.
[5] Ibid., 5.
[6] Lipman, *Political Economy of Urban Education,* 46.
[7] Ibid., 14.
[8] Deborah Meier, "Educating a Democracy: Standards and the Future of Public Education," *The Boston Review* 24, no. 6 (February/March 2000), http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR24.6/meier.html

tests. As Lipman explains, "Thus unfolded two decades of restructuring public education through new forms of top-down, punitive accountability and prescriptive standards".[9]

I begin here because when I first read the *Nation at Risk* report, it took my breath away. In my work and in my research, in imagining what liberatory futures look like for both the children and teens that I work with and for the city we live in, I've become increasingly interested in how discourses around *youth* interweave with the economic, political, and ideological processes shaping our cities. In this chapter, I'm interested in how the story of revitalization has been made possible, sensible, and legible by other stories we tell: in this case, in representations of risk. The *Nation at Risk* report made no secret of the dual humanistic and economic intentions that shape education policy, and that continue to frame how we both *imagine* and *manage* young people growing up in our communities.[10] The report didn't only help to launch neoliberal education policies of accountability and privatization — it also introduced the story of *risk* into educational parlance, both a term and a conceptual lens I've heard braided throughout the story of revitalization.

In the spring of 1983, the term "at risk" was used to describe how the public school system was placing the nation's prosperity at risk — it positioned young people as in danger of a failing system, and therefore as a danger to our economy. But the phrase has since taken on a life of its own. Today "at risk" has become one of the more common terms for those of us working with children and teenagers, messily articulating the politics of what we aim to do, and the types of young people we sometimes work with. "At risk youth" has entered that always-changing landscape of terminology to talk about kids from poor families, kids of color, kids for whom English isn't a first language, kids who aren't going to school, kids who are failing, or kids who don't fit. The term has joined the ranks of words like *urban*, *marginalized*, *dropouts* — words that each gesture towards a particular historical, institutional, geographic or economic arrangement, each uttered with its own tangle of intentions and assumptions.

In focusing on the construction of at risk youth, it isn't my goal to merely problematize language; I suspect we could pretty fiercely tear apart nearly all of the words we use if we wanted, especially the ones we use to talk about people, because language is always fixed, and the world it describes isn't. But we do rely on our imperfect tools to identify and name groups of

[9] Lipman, *Political Economy of Urban Education,* 46.
[10] Peter Kelly, "The Dangerousness of Youth-At-Risk," *Journal of Adolescence* 23 (2000): 464.

people within webs of power, just as we rely on one another to hold each other accountable in using our language critically. And to be clear, I use the term “at risk” in my own work, often. But I also recognize that our language can be a powerful, relational force in the production of both race and space. Here I'm interested in using the term "at risk" as an organizing focus, as a tool to think about how young people are seen, and how geographies of race are mapped and maintained in Hudson.

In the first chapter, I discussed how the celebratory story of Hudson’s revitalization articulates a specific vision of development built on the erasure and exclusion of many of its residents. I also looked at some of the policies and ideologies that constitute the neoliberal city. This chapter seeks to highlight and explore the ways that revitalization relies on representations of risk in order to conceal and legitimate the contradictions at its core. It’s my hope that by revealing some of the assumptions implicit in discourses around youth, educators like myself can better move towards the dismantling — rather than the perpetuation — of structures of injustice, and be (actually) accountable to the young people we work with. So I return to the corner of Warren and 4th street in the late summer of 2013, when the Bridge was preparing to open its doors amidst opposition from local business owners and neighbors — to look at this same moment through the lens of risk.

When Hudson residents and the city's Common Council and Planning Commission learned for the first time that the Bridge program was planning to open at 364 Warren Street, the school was set to open in only a month. This meant that the Planning Commission's review of the project needed to be expedited, without time for public input. Immediately public meetings drew standing crowds as residents, primarily business owners on Warren Street, raised questions and concerns about the alternative learning program's proposed location, "at the heart of the city's commercial thoroughfare."[11]

At the time, little was known about the program, and public meetings focused on the school's location and structure rather than its educational pedagogy or approach. Where would buses park? How might the location of this school impact the city's economic development?[12]

[11] Carole Osterink, “Ear to the Ground,” *Gossips of Rivertown* (blog), July 21, 2013, http://gossipsofrivertown.blogspot.ca/2013/07/ear-to-ground_8931.html

[12] These conversations are chronicled, and also unfolded, on the *Gossips of Rivertown*, a local blog written by Carole Osterink: www.gossipsofrivertown.blogspot.com. See: “Ear to the Ground,” July 21, 2013; “Issues Raise at Legal

Who would the students be? Here's what we did know: the Bridge was formed as a partnership between three school districts: the Hudson City School District; Catskill, a neighboring school district; and a special school district in the region that had been created to serve students in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.[13] The school at 364 Warren Street would house two adjacent programs: one that would serve "day students" from the special school district, and another that would serve "at risk" students from Hudson and Catskill.[14] The latter students would be identified by guidance counselors and teachers in these districts, and if interested, they would leave their school to instead attend the Bridge. In the words of Bruce Potter, superintendent of the special school district, students might be deemed at risk for a range of reasons: "it could be truancy, it could be poor attendance for other reasons, it could be school-phobia, it could be just, some students do not function well in a larger school environment with hundreds of kids walking around."[15]

In the midst of the backlash to the school's proposed location, superintendent Potter was interviewed on Hudson's community radio station in an attempt to clear up misinformation and settle peoples' concerns. His interviewer asked a series of questions to determine more information about who the students might be, and how students would be selected to attend:

> *Interviewer:* And just for the sake of people who might be concerned about this locally, what is the ethnic make-up of the current twelve (students)?
>
> *Superintendent Potter:* I'm pretty sure the minority population is in the minority.
>
> *Interviewer:* So, to translate that, you mean it's not primarily Black students or ethnic students of any kind? Just because, I know that's going to be one of the big, unspoken issues involved here in Hudson, about the population who will be attending this program… Because there is a lot of concern about the students being on Warren Street, in a very, in sort of the center of the business district."[16]

Committee Meeting," July 25, 2013; "A Month Before the School Year Begins," August 2, 2013; "No Time for Public Comment," August 9, 2013.

[13] The school is called the Columbia-Greene Partnership Academy, and also goes by the name "The Bridge". It is also referred to as an "Alternative Transition Program (ATP). I refer to the program as "The Bridge" throughout for consistency.

[14] Bruce Potter, interview by Tom Depietro, *@Issue: The Columbia-Greene Partnership Academy,* WGXC: 90.7-FM, August 7, 2013, https://wavefarm.org/archive/6hky1d.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

Public meetings — especially in small communities, like Hudson — tend to both reveal and produce a certain kind of moral vocabulary. That is to say, there is rarely just a single building or issue at stake in our local conflicts; often we are really negotiating the boundaries of right and wrong, struggling to reconcile competing logics over the terms of belonging, or community, or democracy itself. Perhaps this explains why the meetings that took place about the Bridge, also referred to as the "alternative learning program," had so little to do with learning or education, why nobody asked about the program's pedagogy, or considered the perspectives of the program's students. In this case, in the flurry of meetings, blog posts, and articles that constituted the backlash against the Bridge's opening on Warren Street, the program's prospective students were not seen or heard, but imagined; and they were imagined not only as at risk of failing school, but as themselves risks to the city's economic development. They were framed as both in danger of dropping out, and as a danger to the neighborhood.

According to critical youth scholars and geographers, this is familiar terrain: in towns and cities across the country, similar disputes have unfolded concerning the place of teenagers.[17] Echoing the fear that more lucrative tourists and consumers might avoid Warren Street if the streets were filled with teenagers, youth are increasingly framed as impediments to commercial development — as potential disorders to the "moral code of well ordered consumption" that now defines so many public spaces.[18] The problem is that teenagers tend to hang out and loiter, instead of shopping or moving smoothly through streets — they don't follow adult, middle-class behavioral norms. "A major problem for young people today," writes Peter Kelly, "is that they increasingly cause adults anxiety… These imaginings reflect and constitute a range of anxieties about the dangers posed by some young people, or to some young people, and how these risks might be economically and prudently managed."[19] In one of the more bizarre responses to the apparent problem of teenage bodies, a device has been marketed to retail outlets to keep youth

[17] Jennifer Tilton, *Dangerous or Endangered? Race and the Politics of Youth in Urban America* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); Loretta Lees, "The Ambivalence of Diversity and the Politics of Urban Renaissance: The Case of Youth in Downtown Portland Maine," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 3 (2003): 613-35; Gill Valentine, "Children Should be Seen and Not Heard: The Production and Transgression of Adults' Public Space," *Urban Geography* 17, no. 2 (1996): 205-220.
[18] Tilton, *Dangerous or Endangered?,* 171.
[19] Peter Kelly, "Growing Up as Risky Business? Risks, Surveillance, and the Institutionalized Mistrust of Youth," *Journal of Youth Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 165.

from congregating nearby: called "Mosquito," it emits a high-pitched noise that only young people (under the age of 25) can hear.[20]

Jennifer Tilton, in her book *Dangerous or Endangered?,* chronicles and unpacks a similar conflict that unfolded in the city of Oakland about whether, and where, teenagers belong. In the story Tilton tells, parents, activists, business owners and policy-makers are all engaged in a series of community debates about the presence of young people on the street. Business owners see the presence of youth as an impediment to economic development. Neighbors are nostalgic about how times have changed, fearful for today's kids, and mournful about the loss of a more respectful and disciplined childhood that once existed. Even parents and activists, wanting to save their own children who have been deemed at risk, argue that young people should either stay at home or be in supervised after-school programs, and that the streets, essentially, should be cleared of youth.[21] Tilton argues that the resulting exclusion and displacement of youth from Oakland's revitalized urban landscape has both alienated and demonized teenagers — the city's young Black men, in particular — and in doing so, has also increased the demand and justification for an expanded punitive state.

In describing these conversations, Tilton notices the extent to which the landscape of middle-class urban life has become so characterized by private space (like backyards), private transportation (cars), and private spaces of leisure and supervised youth programs, which often cost — streets in this landscape are a way to get from one place to another, not a destination.[22] Young people are not meant to linger. "These new gated childhoods have changed the meaning of kids in the street," she writes, so that now "the very presence of unsupervised young people hanging out on the streets raises questions about their class status, and defines them as potentially dangerous."[23] Across the country poor youth and youth of color on the streets have become a potent symbol of youth at risk: seen as potential gangsters without the necessary structure and supervision. "The corner" and "the streets" have become metaphors for the dangerous potential that looms on the path to adulthood — the always-present danger of falling in with the wrong crowd.[24] Youth on the street become symbols, too, of a neighborhood's status: because while Hudson and Oakland are both touted for their diversity, only some young people

[20] Tilton, *Dangerous or Endangered?,* 171.
[21] Ibid., 159 - 189.
[22] Ibid., 176-183.
[23] Ibid., 177.
[24] Ibid., 160.

embody the marketable ideal of diversity. Others — i.e., unsupervised crowds of predominantly Black and Brown youth — are read instead as signs of disorder.

For years activists and critical geographers have asked, “Who has the right to the city and its public spaces?"[25] "And to what degree are we willing to shrink public space in an ongoing effort to control 'undesirables'?"[26] In Tilton's telling of the politics of youth in Oakland, clear lines are drawn between where young people belong — home, school, supervised after school programs — and the spaces where they don't — streets and corners. The street is a place where young people are defined as "out of place".[27]

The Hudson City School District's superintendent, Maria Suttmeier, was shocked by the outrage that the Bridge's opening on Warren street caused. She admitted she should have revealed the plan to the city earlier, but said she hadn't expected it to create such controversy. According to our local paper, she thought the location was perfect for the program.[28] Her concerns were different.

A year earlier, in September 2012, Suttmeier had announced that the school district had been designated a "Focus District" by the New York State Education Department — which identified the district as needing either improvement, which would be monitored by NYSED's "Integrated Intervention Team" of outside experts, or corrective action.[29] At the time, only 63.3 percent of students who had entered Hudson High School as ninth graders were graduating on time; of the school's African American students, the graduation rate was down to 38%. In September 2013, just as the Bridge program was set to re-open, Suttmeier announced the launch of the district-wide initiative called *Destination Graduation* — a branding of the school's effort to increase the graduation rate by 15 percent over three years.[30] In the context of *Destination Graduation*, the Bridge program was conceived in part as a way to improve the district's graduation rates, "giving students that had fallen behind another chance to succeed."[31]

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[25] David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review* 53 (September-October 2008): 23-40; Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003).
[26] Don Mitchell, *Right to the City,* 4.
[27] Tilton, *Dangerous or Endangered?*, 178.
[28] Arthur Cusano, “Hudson-Catskill alternative education program to be housed on Warren Street,” *The Register Star,* August 2, 2013.
[29] Billy Shannon, "HCSD labeled focus district,” *The Register Star,* September 12, 2012; Lynn Slonneker, "State ID's Hudson as 'Focus District’,” *Unmuffled* (blog)*,* August 31, 2012.
[30] Maria Suttmeier, 'The Goal — Destination Graduation,” *The Register Star,* September 10, 2013.
[31] Cusano, “Hudson-Catskill alternative”.

These students were not only identified as at risk of failing or dropping out, but more specifically, at risk of not meeting state standards, placing the school itself "at risk". The Bridge, then, represented a strategy — part-pedagogical, but best understood in the game of numbers, as the school has had to focus more and more on meeting accountability targets.[32] A former principal of the Bridge program, Thomas Gavin, has argued that the Bridge was a strategy for the school district to get its "generally disruptive and failing" students out of the school's classrooms, and off its graduation rolls.[33] Gavin's argument echoes that of critical education scholars who have raised similar concerns about the proliferation of "alternative" schools for at risk youth, designed to support students but which often serve, in part, to rid schools of their most challenging and non-conforming students.

Concerns raised about alternative schools like the Bridge speak to profound, and complicated, tensions at the heart of the story of risk: the desire to take care of those students with apparent needs, and the simultaneous desire to clear our schools and streets of students who themselves pose a risk — to remove the problem, rather than looking to its more systemic source. These contradictory motives intersect, and over time, they have begun to resemble one another; they beg us to ask: Who are our accountability politics accountable to, really?[34] "For whom are our suspensions and expulsion policies, increased special education labeling, and alternative disciplinary school placements being designed?"[35] Who benefits from the construction of 'at risk youth'?"[36]

What's clear is that the construction of "at risk youth" is often tinged with both a fear *for* young people, but also a fear *of* young people, closely linked — that it represents an "elision between the agendas of care and control."[37] Increasingly, concerns about whether or not our institutions are adequately caring for our youth have been hijacked by more disciplinary logics, by an agenda of control. In the process, the designation of "at risk" has come to represent not only those at risk of experiencing harm, but those in danger of presenting a risk to others, and

[32] Lipman, *Political Economy of Urban Education,* 15.
[33] Thomas Gavin, "Truth in Numbers," letter to the editor, *The Register Star,* July 14 2015.
[34] Eve Tuck, *Urban Youth and School Pushout*, 22.
[35] Michelle Fine, "Who's At Risk?", 98.
[36] Michelle Fine, "The Politics of Who's 'At Risk,'" 88.
[37] Elaine Sharland, "Young People, Risk Taking and Risk Making: Some Thoughts for Social Work," *The British Journal of Social Work* 36 no. 2 (2006): 251.

also posing a risk to what we consider to be their "preferred futures".[38] Representations of at risk youth are constituted by this tangle of fears, both personal and institutional, real and imagined: fear that our children won't grow up to live meaningful lives; fear that our Black and Brown children will end up behind bars; fear that our neoliberal government will continue dismantling and privatizing our publics; fear that the home we know is changing, disappearing; fear that if we imagine alternatives, try something new, we might risk it all. "At risk" is an empty signifier: it subsumes these fears, wears them all.

This, perhaps, is the genius of the term. Are students failing school, or are our institutions failing our students? "At risk" can be read in either direction. In recent years, a growing movement of educators and scholars have pushed to reframe the problem of school *dropouts* instead as a problem of student *pushout*, turning the critical and scientific gaze away from individual students and instead towards the school environments and harsh disciplinary policies that compel students to leave.[39] Many of these same scholars have raised concerns that the "at risk" designation does similar work to the term "dropout": responsibilizing youth for their own risky behavior, marking Black, Latino, immigrant and poor students instead as the problem to be solved.[40] The story of risk, they argue, is really a set of racialized ideologies about merit, deservingness, and blame, in which some bodies, from the start, are tagged as damaged.[41]

In its most promiscuous usage, the term "at risk" is used to identify entire populations of students who are, statistically, least likely to graduate — students from poor families, students from single-parent households, students with an incarcerated parent, students of color, Indigenous students, students whose families have immigrated from poorer countries, students for whom English is a second language. In this usage, risk is posited not as a loaded term but as simple calculus, a way to measure and manage likelihoods. But the term can be sticky, difficult to shake once applied; the boundaries become blurred between the prediction of failure, and the

[38] Peter Kelly, "The Entrepreneurial Self and 'Youth At-Risk': Exploring the Horizons of Identity in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Youth Studies* 9, no. 1 (February 2006): 25-26.
[39] Michelle Fine, *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban High School* (New York: SUNY Press, 1991); Eve Tuck, "Humiliating Ironies and Dangerous Dignities: A Dialectic of School Pushout," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 24, no. 7 (2011): 817-827.
[40] Peter Kelly, "Youth At Risk: Processes of Responsibilization and Individualization in the Risk Society," *Discourse* 22, no. 1 (2001): 23-34.
[41] Michelle Fine and Jessica Ruglis, "Circuits and Consequences of Dispossession: The Racialized Realignment of the Public Sphere for U.S. Youth," *Transforming Anthropology* 17, no. 1 (April 2009): 21.

production of it. The representation becomes fixed.[42] To invest in our kids becomes a calculated risk, and to disinvest proves the point. In other words, "at risk" has also become another way for us to talk about race without talking about race, in an era of colorblindness — a gift of seemingly race-neutral shorthand for those uncomfortable about naming blackness or brownness, reticent to talk about the entanglements of race, class and power.[43]

In public meetings about the Bridge opening on Warren Street, adults argued over whether the bodies of their younger neighbors belonged on the corner or didn't — but the ideas, the educations, the experiences and critiques of those being discussed were notably absent.[44] Theirs was a present absence; the students were imagined. They were imagined to be Black and Brown, imagined to be "too loud, too violent, too 'urban,' too pregnant, too apathetic, irresponsible, risky, and ignorant."[45] These imaginings are tinged heavily with the rhetoric of personal responsibility, focused less on the unequal distribution of power and privilege than on interventions that might "fix" a child or a teenager at risk of falling through the cracks. Fine writes, "As a culture we are fed by these images as we turn our attention away from history, and political economy, policies and institutions, over-testing and over-policing that have birthed this object of scorn, concern, derision, repulsion, and even hope."[46]

When we responsibilize youth, we individualize the problem; and when we stop listening to youth and listen instead to our fears, we let the representation of risk legitimize increasingly heightened control over young people. We play into what Lisa Arrastía has called the contemporary education economy, "an economic method and discursive system of management, regulation, and surveillance in the built environment and education used to develop youth differentially by race and wealth into rational, compliant citizens." [47] The sequel to risk is risk management, and risk management is especially dangerous in an era of neoliberal education reform and mass incarceration. By imagining youth in terms of deficit, the story of risk provokes and enables increasingly interventionist regimes of supposed repair, salvation or containment.

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[42] Michelle Fine and Madeline Fox, "Our Troubling Fix on Urban Adolescents: A New York Story," in *A Critical Youth Studies for the 21st Century,* ed. Peter Kelly and Annelies Kamp (Boston: Brill, 2004).
[43] The term "urban," the predecessor of "at risk," has become increasingly dated in the era of gentrification.
[44] Fine, "Who's At Risk?", 78.
[45] Fine and Fox, "Our Troubling Fix," 383.
[46] Ibid., 279.
[47] Lisa Arrastía, "Capital's Daisy Chain: Exposing Chicago's Corporate Coalition," *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007): 122.

A good local example is the PINS system — a NY State policy that places children designated as "Persons in Need of Supervision" under the supervision of the Department of Probation and Family Court. A parent or guardian, school district, or social service agency can file a PINS petition for a child alleged to be misbehaving, or acting out in school — they might be skipping class, arriving late, talking back, or wearing clothes that fall outside the dress code. For years, parents in Hudson have been told that filing a petition to place their children on the program would allow them to access social services, and could be a solution if concerned their kids were at risk. But once placed on PINS, (or once ”PINSed," as people say), students were assigned probation officers in the school, and placed under supervision by the court. Small infractions would then invite escalating punitive measures: and once a student finds themselves reporting to a probation officer instead of being sent to the principals' office, the stakes are raised for getting in trouble. For years, minor, non-violent disciplinary infractions led kids in Hudson directly from the education system into residential group homes and court rooms — into the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems.[48]

The PINS system in Hudson came under the spotlight in April 2013, when a group of parents and activists organized a series of community conversations to bring the hyper-punitive PINS system to light. The series, led by a new grassroots Black-led organization in Hudson called the SBK Social Justice Center, brought together members of the school board and school administration, a Family Court judge, the head of the Department of Probation, students who had been placed on PINS and spent time behind bars, and formerly-incarcerated activists to discuss, with the intention to dismantle, the use of PINS in the Hudson City School District. Ultimately, they succeeded in lowering the number of PINS petitions, but the PINS policy was only one part of the problem. It is representative of a larger and growing trend of similar punitive policies and conditions in Hudson as well as in schools around the country, like increased police presence in schools, the use of suspension and expulsion as the primary disciplinary tool for school administrators, and the increased use of the juvenile justice system to deal with infractions that wouldn't, in the past, have been considered crimes.

Like public meetings surrounding the Bridge, community conversations surrounding the PINS system made visible the increasingly punitive logics that have come to underscore our

[48] Mikayla Consalvo, "Support with a Catch: New York's Persons in Need of Supervision and Parental Rights," *New York University Law Review* 90, no. 5 (November 2015): 1688-1821.

popular understandings of what children and teenagers need to thrive. In these conversations, the somewhat abstract concept of the school-to-prison pipeline entered the room in the form of real people, positioned in institutions, making life-altering decisions about real young people and their needs. Not surprisingly, everyone in the room — the head of the Department of Probation, the judge, parents who had filed PINS petitions for their children, members of the school board and school administration — claimed to have the best interest of kids in mind. It was an illustration of how good intentions had been molded by the racialized, punitive implications of risk — a discourse that builds on our fears for, and fears of, young people; that interprets care as control; and that ultimately takes the form of punishment or removal as the default solution to larger social, political, and economic problems.

The neoliberal turn in our cities and in our schools has created this context in which schools and school administrators, social service agencies and service providers, non-profit and youth development organizations, not to mention law enforcement, are deemed successful by hiding or removing the problem, rather than engaging the structures and contexts of power that create inequality. Our economic development strategies prioritize making our cities feel safe to businesses, to middle class residents, and to tourists — by removing anyone who puts this image at risk — this can include criminalizing public displays of poverty, and making it a crime to loiter, to sleep in a public space, or sometimes, even, to give food to the homeless.[49] Similarly, our accountability strategies in education push out and punish those schools and kids who are deemed to be failing. We are standing witness as our government and institutions walk away from the social obligation to provide any net of safety to hold and grow our youth, and as our resources are moved away from youth development and instead towards criminalization — in the name, ironically, of accountability.

II. Risk and the racial imaginary

A Nation at Risk was written to be deliberately alarmist. It was meant to ignite fear and insecurity: the kind of moral panic that characterizes what has been called our "risk society" — a

[49] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016), 124. See also Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City.*

society defined by the always-potential of catastrophe amidst economic insecurity.[50] The report set into motion the racially-coded language of risk: because in a risk society, we are always on the brink of chaos, and looking to place the blame. Now risk is constructed, constantly, in the media; it is produced and sold for profit; it is mobilized by politicians. It's a discourse that has taught us to be afraid for our own kids, and deeply fearful of other people's children.[51] But our fears tend to tell us more about ourselves than the feared, and it's always worth asking: Who do I perceive as dangerous? What neighborhoods do I perceive as safe? In what spaces am I comfortable, and in what spaces am I afraid? And most critically: *why?*

When we talk about race and place, we tend to think about those most visible and obvious manifestations of racialized space: the Black "inner city," the Indigenous reservation, Chinatown, the Latino barrio, the border.[52] But we live, in the words of Toni Morrison, in a "wholly racialized world": and geographies of race include Hudson's revitalized Warren Street, or the all-white workplace, meetings of the Hudson Development Corporation at the city's Chamber of Commerce, the faculty lounge, the suburban subdivision where Trayvon Martin walked, "and — perhaps especially — *home*".[53] When race is positioned "out there," whiteness is placed, and upheld, as the default, the norm around which belonging is constructed. This is, in part, how racism does its deadly work, seeming natural while quietly making "the lives and property of some people worth more than the lives and property of others."[54]

Consider what George Lipsitz has called the *white spatial imaginary,* a term he uses to describe a system and standard of value that has shaped unequal urban and suburban development in the U.S. To put it (very) briefly: for centuries, white households have received wealth-building opportunities that were systematically denied to people of color; from slavery to segregation to redlining, and through public policies that supported the development of a middle class, largely excluding whoever wasn't considered white. Today, these inequities are carried forward and handed down across generations, reinforced by ostensibly "color-blind" practices and policies. While it's common today for people to espouse color blindness, to a large extent race continues to determine where we live, what schools we send our kids to, how much money

[50] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society,* (London: Sage Publications, 1992).
[51] Tilton, *Dangerous or Endangered?*
[52] David Delaney, "The Space that Race Makes," *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (February 2002): 6-7; George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place,* 52.
[53] Delaney, *Space that Race Makes*, 6-7.
[54] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place,* 41.

we make, how much wealth we can accumulate, who we hire and promote at work. Decisions that we consider to be simply rational, or again, "economic common sense" — (borrowing money from our parents to purchase property, say, or trying to get our kids into the best schools) — are ways that we also collaborate with, and benefit from, social and economic structures that privilege whiteness.[55] We have, as Lipsitz argues, a largely unacknowledged "possessive investment in whiteness".[56]

Lipsitz's concept of the "white spatial imaginary" thus illustrates how "seemingly race neutral urban sites" (like Warren Street) "are deeply embedded with racial assumptions and imperatives."[57] He calls it an *imaginary*, a noun that speaks to a social, shared, political imagination, to refer to the truly systemic way that race works: the values, institutions, symbols, meanings, and logics that uphold the production of inequity. The white spatial imaginary consists of both the policies and a way of thinking that understands space, primarily, as a "locus for the generation of exchange value," rather than use value.[58] That is, property is conceived as a private good, the main goal of which is not necessarily the provision of a basic need (housing), but the collection of profit or revenue. Urban development in the U.S. has thus centered on a land use philosophy and ownership culture that promotes the security of private property, regardless of the costs to society.[59]

This is the basis of the ubiquitously-invoked mantra of "highest and best use," the doctrine of planning and development — which essentially describes the market potential of a site, or its highest potential for profit.[60] "Highest and best use" is a prescription for urban development, both a necessary expectation but also spoken as a moral imperative: according to highest and *best* use, "urban land is expected to undergo sequential 'improvement,' premised on private ownership, in which rents are maximised."[61] In this arrangement, homeowners and renters are positioned to have distinct and opposing interests, set up to be rivals rather than neighbors.[62]

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[55] Ibid., 1-51.
[56] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple Unviersity Press, 1998).
[57] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place,* 13.
[58] Ibid., 30.
[59] Ibid., 28-29
[60] Nicholas Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 84-85.
[61] Ibid., 84
[62] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place,* 31

Homes, according to this logic, are seen as investments that appreciate in value over time. Assets are accumulated, and passed down across generations.

To walk down the mile-long, sloping Warren Street, a street lined with shops selling luxury items and upscale food available only to those with privilege, is perhaps to enter the heart of the white spatial imaginary. One of my students, a Black teenager and a current senior at Hudson High School, describes Warren Street this way: "It's hideous," he says. "All Warren Street has is antique shops. You walk around and you know you can't afford anything in the stores. So why walk on the street where you feel like you're a lower class than everybody that walks in the stores, and walks out with stuff? Everything looks real bad."[63] But to others, Warren Street is the epitome of value: preserved historic buildings, walkable streets, "creative city" residents and shops, and its own cultural cachet — a particular rural-urban charm. These are all, of course, capitalizable assets. Because it's not only property that gets sold, but the produced image and meaning of our city, and even the qualities that we do value — difference, encounter, creativity, uniqueness.[64] These too become part of the economic logic, as capital values these qualities as commodities but casts people as mere extras in the show.

Lipsitz has argued that the white spatial imaginary has served not only to maintain and consolidate wealth, but as a major resource in the production and maintenance of white privilege. Of course, as Lipsitz makes clear, "Not all whites endorse the white spatial imaginary," and many non-white people "embrace it and profit from it." Hudson's revitalization does not benefit only white people, nor does it benefit *all* white people. In Hudson, the growing inequality inherent in the city's revitalization comes at the expense of poor, low-income, and working class people across race, not just people of color. White and non-white families in Hudson —including Italian, Polish and Ukrainian families, many of whom lived below 3rd street, and who weren't always included in the category of "white"— were hit hard by de-industrialization. In the wake of factories closing, employment in Hudson has been dominated by public sector jobs: city and county government positions, schools, the hospital, and local prisons; and by low-wage service jobs, often part-time and with limited benefits. For many families, nothing has come to replace the industry jobs that once provided both employment and often a sense of identity and place.

[63] Anonymous interview with teenager, July 1st, 2016. *Hudson Oral History Archive,* Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.
[64] David Harvey, "The Art of Rent: Globalization, Monopoly, and the Commodification of Culture," *Socialist Register* (2002): 93-100.

Between 1950 and 1980, the city's population declined significantly, as people left to find work. For those who stayed, Hudson's revitalization has pushed out long-term renters, and positioned many homeowners, facing increased property taxes and values, to sell.

Though there are as many perspectives about Hudson's transformation as there are people, it is not uncommon to hear long-term white residents describe the city as being "stolen" and "taken over" by New Yorkers. For many families who have lived in Hudson for generations, the city's recent transformation represents what Peter Marcuse calls the "pressure of displacement": the experience of witnessing their surrounding neighborhood change dramatically, as friends leave, as stores are replaced by far more expensive options, as the area becomes less affordable and relevant to their lives.[65] If Hudson's longer-term white families have lost the city center to new residents, their power remains in part in the network of generations-old relationships that still dominate institutions throughout the county: the police department, the schools, the social service agencies, the courtrooms, and until recently, local government.

But it's clear to these residents that the story of revitalization in Hudson has articulated a specific city-dweller as the protagonist of its vision for Hudson's future: he is bourgeois; he has liberal, middle class, cosmopolitan values and norms; he is likely white. He is a particular kind of consumer, too: he builds his lifestyle through particular consumer choices, each purchase — a mid-century modern cabinet, a perfectly-fitted flannel jacket —a reflection of the kind of person he is.[66] Perhaps he is an artist, but he can still afford the rent, as it edges towards New York City prices. He represents a moral category, too: he is fused with neoliberal notions of ownership, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance.

Embedded and expressed in this story is a dense network of racialized and classed meanings: this idealized subject is built in relation to various "others," who don't fit the bill, who are excluded from this redefined right to the city. Poor and working class Black and Brown residents are imagined in opposition to this vision, associated instead with crime, with the failure of public housing, with need. Poor and working class white residents who criticize Hudson's transformation are imagined as the primary barriers to change, limited by their backwards (racist, homophobic) views and their narrow-minded attachment to a version of development that might include a return to industry. They, too, are disposable to the project of revitalization.

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[65] Peter Marcuse, "Gentrification, Abandonment, and Displacement: Connections, Causes, and Policy Responses in New York City," *Journal of Urban and Contemporary Law* 28 (1985): 206-207.
[66] Kern, *Sex and the Revitalized City,* 70-71.

To make sense of the changing racial and economic geography of Hudson, we have to account for this complex cast of characters, and the ways in which the twin engines of economic inequality and racial oppression have simultaneously operated along separate and sometimes overlapping tracks, intersecting, "bumping up against each other and creating divergent cross-cutting forms of inequality".[67] And we have to account for the ideologies, meanings, and representations that uphold these inequities — who is framed as the problem, who is imagined as the solution, who is pitted against who. Because if the drive for capitalist growth has always protected the wealth of the few at the expense of poor and working class people, than it has also always relied on political, social, and ideological tools to divide people — the primary example of which is how wealth inequality has consistently relied on the discursive production of the racialized "other".[68] As Lipsitz argues, "racism takes place in the United States not because of the irredeemably racist character of whites as individuals, but because the racial project of whiteness is so useful to elites as a mechanism for preserving hierarchy, exploitation, and inequality in society at large"[69].

Enter, then, the story of risk: the production of at risk youth, imagined to be Black and Brown, said to be putting our schools and the city's economic development at risk. The story of Hudson's revitalization, and the broader move that it represents to restore American cities to places of "safety" and "progress," relies on narratives that produce fear, and that make inequity seem inevitable, or necessary. I have argued that the narrative of at risk youth, when mobilized against the opening of the Bridge program, did several things: it asked us to imagine the Bridge students as dangerous, justifying their public abandonment, and it asked us to imagine property as priority instead. I have argued that the narrative is built of racially-coded language, and reveals increasingly punitive trends in how we both imagine and manage young people growing up in our cities. On the one hand, this representation of risk enables white conservatives in Hudson to index a nostalgia predicated in part on the racialized other, paving the way for the everyday surveillance, criminalization, and policing of youth of color. The story, at the same time, enables white liberals to celebrate the city's revitalization while expressing a tangled agenda of paternalistic care and racialized fear: simultaneously attempting to help those not

[67] Christine J. Walley, *Exit Zero* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 139.
[68] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *#BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, 206.
[69] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place,* 42-43.

included in the city's development, while actively underwriting their erasure. It allows those of us who have more recently moved to Hudson to feel like the city's "good" white people, while at the same time perpetuating the city's gross inequities; the story of risk is an example of how even our best intentions can fall into the pitfalls of white supremacy.

The story of risk, and the racialized "other" it produces, is not new; it is part of a larger genealogy of racialized discourse, part of a history of stories that have long justified the always-moving frontier of revitalization. A discourse that has, at various moments across space and time, operated to frame certain places and their residents as outsiders, as "disposable, as embodying danger, worthy of dispossession or in need of containment".[70] Essential to the theft of Indigenous lands were the settler frontier ideologies of empty, unoccupied space. The ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples and their land relies on the construction of Native peoples in the U.S. as either completely disappeared or as never having existed. The white spatial imaginary enacted and rationalized the transatlantic slave trade, just as it enabled the policies of Jim Crow segregation, of redlining and housing discrimination, and the stop-and-frisk and anti-immigrant policies that continue to rely on images of Black and Brown people as disposable.[71] These histories of racialized dispossession have always mobilized particular ideological and representational projects to justify the violence, to make it seem sensible, to obscure the presence of, and the potential for, resistance.

It's such an old strategy, really: re-writing the history of a place, equating people or areas with disorder, to justify a new future in which they are no longer present, and calling it development. Melissa Wright calls it a "politics of forgetting," built on the discursive production of subjects "not worth remembering".[72] This politics of forgetting has been powerfully documented by a collective of youth researchers in New York City called the Fed Up Honeys, who studied gentrification in their own neighborhood. Their study focused on how stereotypes of young women of color — as at risk, promiscuous, and delinquent — were "critical in securing the consent of members of the public," who could then celebrate the neighborhood's transformation, accepting "the 'social costs' of gentrification as inevitable and even as a sign of

[70] Fine and Ruglis, "Circuits and Consequences," 31.
[71] Wendy Cheng and Rashad Shabazz, "Introduction: Race, Space, and Scale in the Twenty-First Century," *Occasion* 8 (August 31, 2015): 1-7; See also McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds.*
[72] Melissa Wright, "Gentrification, Assassination, and Forgetting in Mexico: A Feminist Marxist Tale," *Gender Place and Culture* 21, no. 1 (2014): 9, 11.

progress."[73] If gentrification is first made possible by disinvestment in real estate, they argued, representations of young working class women as "risk" served to create value, too.[74]

But in their research the Fed Up Honeys flip the script; drawing on Richard Wright, who once stated that "there was never a Negro problem, only a white problem," the Fed Up Honeys turn their attention away from their own supposed deficits, and look at how structural racism and poverty maintain white privilege and property.[75] Theirs is a critical reminder that racialized displacement and dispossession isn't merely an unfortunate consequence of market-driven development, but an integral force in the production of both race and space as we know it.[76] Race is not stable; it is always in process, collective, cumulative, constantly being enacted by us, renewed and revised in our everyday language. By suggesting that Hudson's "at risk" youth, imagined to be Black and Brown, don't belong in the center of the city, we participate in the very act of racial formation, the historical act of marking certain bodies as not belonging.[77]

And yet, despite its historical roots, the white spatial imaginary pretends amnesia: it teaches us to accept relative white privilege as a legitimate baseline reality, perhaps unfortunate, but inevitable, or worse, natural.[78] The particular geographies of race and class in cities like Hudson have become so obvious to us that we can sometimes fail to see them: they have produced a kind of commonsense equation that relegates people of different races to different kinds of neighborhoods, and links certain neighborhoods to crime, danger, or worth. This is the equation that signals a group of Black and Brown teenagers on the corner of 4th and Warren street as out of place. In starkly segregated cities like Hudson, this kind of naturalization means that most of us end up more numbed to inequity than disturbed — and unable to see our own role in its reproduction.

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[73] Caitlin Cahill, "'At Risk'? The Fed Up Honeys Re-present the Gentrification of the Lower East Side," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2006): 346.
[74] Ibid., 347.
[75] Ibid., 336.
[76] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography, *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 15-24; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds.*
[77] Wendy Cheng, "Theorizing Regional Racial Formation" in *The Changs Next Door to the Dazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Rachel Brahinsky, Jade Sasser, and Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, "Race, Space and Nature: An Introduction and Critique," *Antipode* 46, no. 5 (2014): 1135-1152.
[78] Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, n. 8 (1993): 1714.

In 2011, poet, writer, and artist Claudia Rankine launched a project called *The Racial Imaginary,* in which she compiled letters from writers exploring race and the creative imagination. In the book's foreword, Rankine and her co-author Beth Loffreda write about some of the recurring lines they encountered from white writers over the course of the project: primarily, the idea that "the imagination is a free space, and I have the right to imagine from the point of view of anyone I want" — and that "it is against the nature of art itself to place limits on who or what I can imagine."[79] As if the imagination, somehow, might transcend us — as if our imaginations aren't "created by the same web and matrix of history and culture that made 'me'."[80] Rankine and Loffreda are actively uninterested in the question of who has the "right" to write about characters — instead, they argue, "what white artists might do is not imaginatively inhabit the other because that is their *right* as artists, but instead embody and examine the interior landscape that *wishes to speak of rights*, that wishes to move freely and unbounded across time, space, and lines of power."[81]

To examine the interior landscape: to examine the stories that make us comfortable or uncomfortable in our own skin, the stories that shape what we see in our neighborhoods as either progress or as loss. Our racial imaginaries were both conceived long before we came into being, and are also "deeply lodged" in our own minds — the "disentangling and harnessing of these things" is lifelong work, unfinishable, and imperative.[82] In February 2012, just months before the Bridge moved to Warren street, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by a neighborhood watch-volunteer in a Florida subdivision because he seemed a threat; because his blackness didn't seem, to his shooter, to belong in the predominantly white neighborhood where he was walking. The idea that Black people entering white neighborhoods constitutes a criminal transgression looms large in the racial imaginary.[83] In July 2016, Charles Kinsey, a Black therapist who was taking care of an autistic patient in Miami, Florida, was shot by a police officer; Kinsey asked the officer, "Why did you shoot me?" And the officer responded, "I don't know."[84] "Many of them," says Claudia Rankine, referring to police officers involved in the shooting of unarmed

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[79] Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda, "Introduction," *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind* (Albany, NY: Fence Books, 2015): 15.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 17. Emphasis mine.
[82] Ibid., 21.
[83] Lipsitz, *How Racism Works,* 27.
[84] Associated Press, "Unarmed man shot by Miami Police asks: 'Why?' says officer replied: 'I don't know'," CBC News, July 21, 2016. http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/man-shot-police-miami-charles-kinsey-1.3688753.

Black people, "say 'I don't know.'"[85] That is to say, our imaginations are riddled with stories of risk and belonging that white supremacy built.

I have argued that the white spatial imaginary does not require us to be intentionally, or interpersonally, "racist;" that it is built instead into the structures and policies that advantage us, disguising itself as economic rationality, filtering into how we see and interpret the world. It is our work to uncover these histories that have shaped our lives, to unravel the ties that bind us to them, and to structure new ways of being, seeing, relating. To study social life," writes Avery Gordon, "one must confront the ghostly aspects of it."[86] It is our task, she says, "to be haunted, and to write from that location."[87] Race was never discussed, aloud, during the series of public meetings that took place about whether the Bridge should move to 4th and Warren Street. But whiteness is indicated less by prejudice than by the fact that it ignores, and even denies, racist indications. And yet, the stories of revitalization and risk speak race, perhaps most strongly in the absence of its name. Revitalization becomes a proxy for middle class whiteness, risk a stand-in for anything that doesn't fit.

III. And why isn't it for you?

In his 1963 *A Talk to Teachers,* James Baldwin describes leaving his neighborhood, Harlem, and seeing downtown New York City for the first time. He was a child. "It is rich," he writes, "or at least it looks rich. It is clean — because they collect garbage downtown. There are doormen. People walk about as though they owned where they are — and indeed they do. And it's a great shock. It's very hard to relate yourself to this. You don't know what this means." He continues, "You know — you know instinctively — that none of this is for you. You know this before you are told. And who is it for and who is paying for it? And why isn't it for you?"[88]

"Hudson is a middle class town," explains Ifetayo Cobbins, who grew up in Hudson. "It's a poor, middle class town — a city, if you want to call it. And they have all these antique stores,

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[85] In writing and speaking about the Racial Imaginary, Claudia Rankine discusses this. See: Lauretta Charlton, "Claudia Rankine's Home for the Racial Imaginary," *The New Yorker,* January 19, 2017, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/claudia-rankines-home-for-the-racial-imaginary.
[86] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7.
[87] Ibid., 22.
[88] James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers," in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 325.

art galleries, these new food places — I call them million dollar stores. Nobody in Hudson has a million dollars, unless they're tourists. Hudson is catering more to tourists than to the people that live here. That's what I see."[89]

Who is a city for? Today, Baldwin's question — *And why isn't it for you?* — reverberates along Warren Street. Youth, especially young kids, tend to ask these kinds of questions without fear, looking straight into the face of injustice, asking why. At some point, it seems, adults stop asking; at another point, maybe, we stop seeing. In delving into scholarship on education, on gentrification, and on race, I am struck by just how much of our theory and analysis young people already know. Children and teenagers have such a visceral understanding of the contradictions of the institutions they're in, are particularly skilled at noticing when people aren't saying what they mean. Many of the educators and researchers that I'm most inspired by know this well, and teach/research not merely to tell young people about the world they experience, but to learn, also, from their experience of the world: to build on the scars, passion and joy that young people bring to the table, to be a part of supporting experience as expertise, risk as wisdom.

Youth are especially attuned to the gaps between what institutions, people, and governments say they do, and what they actually do. Eve Tuck, in writing about a study she conducted in collaboration with a group of youth co-researchers called the Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire, notes how "youth in our study… were acutely aware of the ironies of schooling — often gaps between expressed aims and values of the school, and the realities of schooling encounters." [90]

Our neoliberal urban and education policies are particularly riddled with contradictory promises and problems: the emergence of "colorblind" public policies that both exacerbate and produce race disparities; the pervasive idea operating in our institutions that hiding or containing social problems is somehow the same as solving them; the belief that unleashing privatism will ultimately produce public gain; the contradictory experience youth of color have of both hypervisibility (i.e., being watched when they enter a store), and the simultaneous invisibility of their needs and desires. Built on this foundation of contradictions, the stories of risk and revitalization have been constructed to conceal these illogics, while positioning those of us who

[89] Cobbins, interview.
[90] Eve Tuck, *Urban Youth and School Pushout,* 70. For more on their findings, read Tuck's chapter, "Humiliating Ironies and Dangerous Dignities," about how youth experience the dialectic of school pushout.

are comfortable as essentially outside of the problem. This cloud of denial surrounds us in the schools and neighborhoods that our kids spend their days in — it constitutes our betrayal. "It is the innocence," James Baldwin wrote, "which constitutes the crime."[91]

A key part of the problem, I have argued, is that the story of revitalization positions an idealized, white, middle class citizen-consumer as a standard, and thus sees the structural benefits of whiteness as a public good that should, ideally, be expanded to everyone.[92] In this framing, our approaches to equity are described in terms of *gaps* — i.e., closing the wealth gap, or the education and achievement gaps— and *inclusivity* — i.e., making urban revitalization more *inclusive* of the city's poor and racialized communities. This utilizes the same logic as most dominant approaches to international development: the idea that for poor places to become prosperous, they have to adhere to the logics and structures that characterize wealthier pockets of the world. But this logic denies that the inequities we seek to address are woven into the foundations of our institutions — and that as long as we place our focus on including more people in essentially unjust structures and institutions, our solutions will continue to reproduce the injustice we seek to eradicate. They will continue to turn our gaze away from the structural and economic roots of inequity, and instead towards "the individual child, to his or her family, and to those small-scale interventions that would 'fix' the child *as though her or his life were fully separable from ours."*[93]

A more transformative framework, by contrast, challenges the paradigms of development and inclusivity, looks towards the histories and roots of inequity, and places ourselves in the frame, with an unrelenting gaze on the inequitable relations that we have inherited and are accountable to. "By refusing notions of gaps in achievement and opportunity," we can instead "work to uncover debts: the actively accumulating cost of colonialism that accrues to racially Othered bodies in order to produce (settler) white wealth and privilege."[94]

In unpacking the stories of revitalization and risk, I hope to show that by examining the stories we collectively tell, we can excavate some of the critical and least visible ways that we

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[91] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963): 6.
[92] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education: Series Prospectus," published online, 2015, http://www.evetuck.com/series/.
[93] Michelle Fine, "Making Controversy: Who's At Risk?" in Roberta Wollons, Ed., *Children At Risk in America: History, Concepts, and Public Policy*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): 105. Emphasis mine.
[94] Tuck and Yang, "Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies," referencing Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in US Schools," *Educational Researcher* 35, no. 7 (2006): 3-12.

enact, daily, the unjust structures we have inherited in the places we live. By shifting our focus away from gaps and instead towards our collective debt, our stories might invite us to unravel the tangles of complicity, the ways in which privilege and oppression are necessarily braided.[95] Our stories might help to clarify the structural and ideological roots of the problems we face, the racial imaginaries that haunt our cities, the contradictory logics that uphold our institutions, and the agencies that exist both within and in spite of these structures. They might help us to make sense of how it is that our governments and our institutions can abandon poor and racialized youth, and call it accountability. Or how when a city becomes increasingly two-tiered, more and more unequal, we can call it success. By shifting our focus away from the risky behaviors of youth or the risks they pose to our cities, our stories might instead engage the countless ways that young people, despite relentless betrayals from the institutions that surround them, are creating their own spaces of education, dignity and imagination.

[95] Madeline Fox and Michelle Fine, "Accountable to Whom? A Critical Science Counter-story about a City that Stopped Caring for its Young," *Children & Society* 27 (2013): 330.

Chapter 3: Pedagogies for a More Just City

"The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights." - David Harvey[1]

I. Desire

Jass Wise and I are driving along Harry Howard Avenue, winding slowly past the high school, towards Shoprite. It's August in 2015. I have to listen over my engine to hear what she is saying because Jass is soft-spoken, and because sometimes she speaks with a chill that can mask an angst that is bubbling beneath: the angst of adolescence, of big transitions, of asking reasonable questions about frustratingly unreasonable circumstances. She's saying, "It's stupid. We spend the summer doing all these things, and then it's over. And then we're back to this."

Jass and I have spent the past five weeks together somewhat intensively, with twenty other teens and seven other adults, as part of a program called the Social Justice Leadership Academy. This particular summer, Jass was on fire: she had worked with a local photographer to produce a powerful multi-media project called *Are you intimidated by strong, independent black women?,* which raised questions about both sexual violence and state violence against Black women. She had collaborated to write and record two songs, both of which had become hits for our summer crew. And she had helped to facilitate conversations with the other teens about gender and sexuality, as one of two openly queer students in the group. At our final event Jass had performed one of her songs live in front of 150 people; now, she was being invited to exhibit her photography at a local gallery.

Jass is articulating something that I've been struggling with, too. She's pissed about the disconnect between what the summer felt like, and how she feels now. For five weeks we had been in this powerful collective experience, the kind that you can't quite put into words, but know your bones will remember. It wasn't, of course, uncomplicated or perfect — like all things collaborative, this program was turbulent and messy. Like all spaces that seek to interrogate (and dismantle) power and oppression, ours was laden with profound challenges and internal contradictions. And still, we were emerging from an experience in which we had felt that ecstasy

[1] Harvey, "Right to the City," 24.

of being a part of something larger than ourselves, something collective, rooted in a sense of radical agency and possibility.

A year later, Jass says she remembers our conversation on the way to Shoprite, too. She says: "I was going back into a depressed mood. Feeling kinda… yeah, depressed. Sometimes I feel like Hudson is a depression-type place."[2] Jass has dreams of doing something creative for work — something that builds on her skills as an artist and creative thinker. She wonders if maybe she could be a graphic designer or an interior designer; maybe she could draw cartoons, or design video games; maybe she could be a stylist or a fashion designer. "But then again," she says laughing, "I always kind of wanted to be a special victims unit detective." For now, she is at Columbia Greene Community College, and she's working part-time at Shoprite. She's nineteen.

Jass spent only two years at Hudson High School. She had to re-do 9th grade after moving and switching school districts, but says she never received a thoughtful explanation about why; it felt disrespectful. After that, she was labeled "bad": "I did skip school a couple times," she says, "but they wouldn't ever even look deep into it. They would just be like, oh, she's bad. They wasn't looking into why I was skipping class." In 11th grade, Jass switched into The Bridge, the high school's alternative that had just opened at 4th and Warren Street. She explains, "Most of us weren't in there because we were bad. We were there because the high school felt like we didn't belong in the high school, because of little things we did." But she found the Bridge distracting as a learning environment. "The aids, the people that aren't the teachers. They would like — well, none of them ever touched me, but they would restrain certain students if they were getting out of hand. I feel like sometimes it wasn't even necessary, like they didn't even have to do what they did. They would body slam kids, and it was just crazy. I guess I don't feel like anybody could really learn from that school. There were so many distractions." Jass researched how to get her High School Equivalency Diploma, and graduated a year early.

She's since been juggling part-time work and college, appreciating the independence but struggling to make both work. The biggest challenge is that she's constantly dealing with transportation barriers: Hudson doesn't have sufficient public transportation, and without a car, she always has to ask for rides to get to both work and school. Most weeks, she spends significant percentages of her earnings on cab rides. When she can't find a ride or pay for a cab, she has to miss class; recently, she missed a math test. "It's hard," she says. "I'm trying to stay in

[2] Jasmine Wise, interview conducted by the author, October 2016.

school and do the right thing, but it's like…," and she trails off. "I mean, I know it's worth it, but…," and she trails off again. "I guess it's like, is it worth it? Is it not? I don't know. It's hard." She says, "Especially in a community like this, where you don't really have a lot of help."

For the past several years, I have been working as the co-director of a small youth organization in Hudson called Kite's Nest. This means, in one sense, that I have spent the past several years listening to and learning from young people growing up in the area.[3] Our classes are built on the idea that we all learn best when our curriculum speaks to our interests and experiences — and so a great deal of our work, as educators, is based on listening. I have participated in many hours of conversations with kids and teenagers in Hudson, listened to hours of youth-produced interviews and radio pieces, tried hard to not only teach ways of seeing the world, but to learn to see the world through theirs.

This chapter comes out of our work and learning together. While the writing is mine and I own its gaps, the genesis of these ideas are impossible to trace, born out of countless conversations and a dense web of relationships and collaborations. I have written it while simultaneously working as a co-director of the organization, squeezing paragraphs in between meetings, often coming home to erase and re-write a paragraph after a conversation with a teacher or a student. This chapter is my attempt to wrestle into words some of the questions that I see us asking, consciously and not, every day: What does it mean to work with children and teenagers growing up in a gentrifying city, characterized increasingly by inequality — i.e., in the context of revitalization? What does it mean to work with youth in an era of accountability schooling and mass incarceration — i.e., in the context of risk? This chapter is an effort to both reflect on the work we're doing, and also to raise some pedagogical possibilities: to consider the role that educators can play in not only creating transformative experiences for our students, but also the places we live. Mostly this chapter is written in response to Jass, driving with me to work after a summer of possibility, confronting the contradictions around us.

[3] Throughout this chapter I use the terms "young people," "youth," "children," "kids," and "teenagers". Although these terms have specific definitions and delineations in particular contexts, my usage is based on my work at Kite's Nest: "youth" and "young people," and "kids," I refer to children and teenagers between the ages of 6 and 19. When I say "teenagers," I mean people between the ages of 13 and 19.

II. Our nest

When I give someone directions to Kite's Nest, at some point I say something like, "You might feel like you're heading in the wrong direction, but keep going." Though Hudson is so tiny, a surprising number of kids and adults have never been to this corner of the city; you have to cross the train tracks to get there. I tell people to look for the Basilica, a 19th century factory building (once a forge and foundry for steel railway wheels, later a glue factory, now a hip cultural venue) that looms big at 18,000 square feet. Since 2012 we've been nestled in their small annex building in this industrial corner of the city, running programs throughout the year.

Kite's Nest, as kids we work with say, is "not school" — that is, it's a learning environment that's radically different from what most kids encounter in school. After several years of trying to land on a descriptor, we've started to call ourselves a "center for liberatory education".[4] Our classroom is based on the idea that kids of all ages can have agency in their own educational paths, and learn best when they're able to collaborate in what, and how, they're learning. Classes range in theme: music production and song-writing, boat-building, journalism, math for explorers, herbalism, the history of social movements, community gardening, science fiction and future worlds, myth, culinary arts, the science of sound, the geographies of stuff. The ongoing joke is that adults want to sign up for our offerings, but that's exactly the point — why should classes be assumed to be dreadfully boring, until you're old enough to choose? We try to hold each other to the simple notion that learning can be compelling, relevant, inspiring — and worth it. Our days at Kite's Nest are planned and structured, but our curriculum is always responsive to the interests in the room, always changing. And we know that whatever content we're focused on, more important is that other, parallel curriculum woven into every classroom experience: how we talk to one another, how we collaborate, how we negotiate conflict, how we engage power and difference.

Kite's Nest is a combination of day-time classes, after school programs, school break camps and summer camps. Some kids, legally home-schooled, come to Kite's Nest a few days a week. They are between the ages of 8 and 14, and while their families have taken them out of school for a variety of reasons (bullying, religion, politics), they are mostly (but not only) white,

[4] Kite's Nest draws from many theories, practices and movements, including self-directed education, unschooling, free schools, social justice schools, and too many brilliant educators and theorists to name here.

and working- or middle-class. In our after school and summer programs, most of the children and teens come from poor and working class families, many are Black or mixed race, and many live in Hudson's public housing; most of them attend the Hudson City School District. It's our intention to bring together young people who experience racial and economic privilege, young people of color, and young people from poor and working class families — so that we can learn and unlearn from each other, use the layers of experience within our own group as resources for understanding the broader world. Kite's Nest classes cost money for families who can pay, and don't cost when families can't; some families pay a tuition, others pay on a sliding scale or do work-trade, and others pay nothing at all.

Of course, I'm writing in broad strokes; these are the nuts and bolts, and the broad principles that guide our work. I sometimes think of teaching as a fantastic collision: when your ideals, all the beautiful pedagogy and brilliant curriculum you've prepared, first encounters a real cohort of kids in a classroom, in all their developmental reality. The collision can be disheartening, and is always messy. But what emerges out of the actual, collaborative classroom is also always, always more beautiful than what you could have imagined on your own. Kite's Nest, in its everyday form, is built of these collisions and inconsistencies, the constant negotiations between the real and the imagined. (Enter, also, the constant scramble for funding.)

And besides, educating for liberation is a twisted, complicated pursuit; we live and we teach in a web of contradictions, and they reveal themselves constantly. Often I find myself sleepless with the questions that plague our work. How can our classrooms produce freedom? How can we teach when we are simultaneously trying to unlearn so much of what we have been taught ourselves? Should social movements fight for schools, or work to unschool society?[5] Should our curricula teach students to deconstruct the world around them, or instead give them the tools necessary to navigate it?[6] Can we do both, simultaneously?

It's with more questions than answers that we've created this Nest, two small classrooms, a woodshop, and a kitchen; a safe space for children and teenagers to think, and to question, and together to "wrestle with the complexities of self, other, and difference.[7]" We are driven by the

[5] K. Wayne Yang, "For and Against: The School-Education Dialectic in Social Justice," in *Handbook of Social Justice Education,* ed. William Ayers, Therese Quinn, and David Stovall (New York: Routledge, 2008), 455.
[6] Ibid., 455.
[7] Lisa Arrastia, "The Ed Factory," https://theedfactory.org/who-we-are/

idea that at its best a classroom can be a place of hope, where teachers and students might not only glimpse a different kind of society, but together develop the tools to make it a reality.

If I tend to describe Hudson in terms of its rapid change, I've noticed that teenagers tend to talk about the city instead in terms of its stagnancy. Lule, who's seventeen, explained in an interview: "I feel like it isn't changing… It's been four years since I've been here, and there hasn't really been nothing yet. So it's probably just gonna stay the way it is now."[8] And Cinnamon, in an interview in 2015: "It's Hudson. You can't change nothing in Hudson."[9] I heard something similar while sitting around a campfire with teens last summer, on an overnight trip to a nearby farm. We were sharing our biggest fears, and Jass shared hers: that she wouldn't be successful. She said, "I just don't want to still be stuck where I am."

It may be obvious that it should cause us a certain discord to know that a small city gaining traction as a destination for both tourists and the "creative class" can be perceived, simultaneously, as so static, and as such a dead-end by people growing up there. The most common narrative we hear from kids and teenagers is that there's *nothing to do* in Hudson, and *nowhere to go* — that it is boring, at best, but dangerously lacking in opportunities at worse. If privilege is articulated as power that is mobile — coming into the city and buying property, with a social network that exists outside of and beyond the city — then the opposite is articulated by a strange contradiction: fighting for the right to stay put, and also for the opportunity to leave. In this context, the classic success story told about youth is an escape narrative, which equates leaving the neighborhood/city as success, making it, and describes staying in the city as a kind of failure.[10] The other classic success story is about someone who grows up in the city, leaves, but returns to give back: it involves a commitment to stay in the city, in order to transform it. Within both of these narratives is that desire that Jass speaks: to be self-determining, to *choose* whether to stay or to leave.

But the language of choice has become co-opted, now a staple of dominant color-blind educational vocabulary, used in fact to deny the structural factors that limit the choices of so

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[8] Anonymous interview with teenager, July 1st, 2016. *Hudson Oral History Archive,* Hudson Area Library, Hudson, NY.
[9] Claire Cousin, "School to Prison Pipeline," *Justice Speaks: A Youth-Powered Radio Production* (radio documentary), Social Justice Leadership Academy, August 2014, www.kitesnest.org/sjla-radio
[10] Caitlin Cahill, "Negotiating Grit and Glamour: Young Women of Color and the Gentrification of the Lower East Side," *City and Society* 19, no. 2 (2007): 215.

many. Teenagers in Hudson have to navigate this unkind discursive terrain of risk, filled with dizzying contradiction: they are told that anything is possible, to play by the rules, to follow their dreams, but also that they're each alone responsible for their own future, to stay in school no matter the cost, to work twice as hard, that the stakes are high and there isn't room for mistakes. Jass speaks to the experience of knowing that her school and her city is not intended for her; she describes being asked to learn in a context of disrespect. In her telling, she moves between both a deep sense of structural outrage and also a language of personal responsibility, between blaming herself and knowing her own power and creativity, between her reality and her dreams.[11] Jass' story, like all of our stories, is that struggle to make sense of ourselves within the stunted discourses available, weaving between our collective narratives, and what our imaginations reach towards — and it's a story of the chasm that can exist between the two.[12]

Education scholar Shawn Ginwright also speaks to this disconnect: What happens when we, as students and teachers, are being transformed — but nothing changes around us?[13] Much of Ginwright's work focuses on the idea of hope, not as an individual or psychological phenomenon, but as a function of our environments. "Hope," he writes, "must be understood as situated within opportunities and constraints found in schools, neighborhoods, and relationship."[14] Ginwright's writing comes from his own experience as the founder of a youth organization in Oakland, California, called Leadership Excellence. Ginwright's youth organization, like Kite's Nest, was focused in part on "social emotional learning": the idea that social and emotional skills — like the ability to understand our own emotions, to feel and show empathy, to communicate, to build healthy relationships, to develop resilience — are as important as learning, say, math, or history. By prioritizing social and emotional learning in the classroom, educators focus less on content-specific learning goals, and more on supporting our students to have positive experiences, to build confidence, to feel seen, heard, valued.

But Ginwright raises concerns about education thinkers who overstate the potential transformative impact of social emotional learning: "I have seen the limitations of arguments that singularly attribute learning and development to what boils down to 'individual' efforts despite the magnitude, complexity, and scope of the challenges many working poor people face," he

[11] Fine and Ruglis, "Circuits and Consequences," 20.
[12] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters,* 4.
[13] Shawn Ginwright, *Hope and Healing in Urban Education* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 17.
[14] Ibid., 21.

writes. “Rather than identifying how to transform the root causes of stress from underfunded schools, violence, and joblessness, these writers… overly rely on individual character development and social emotional learning as the antidote to building healthy, strong young people."[15] He asks: "How much grit [a feature of social emotional learning] actually makes a difference when nothing changes around you?"[16]

Ginwright argues that social conditions — like poverty, violence, stress, racism and homophobia — are significant threats to the social emotional health of young people, especially in racialized neighborhoods that have experienced years of disinvestment, gross investments in incarceration and punishment, and the emergence of accountability schooling. Without a lens that considers the structural and historical conditions that threaten healthy development in the first place, even the most safe and thoughtful classrooms — even the most beautiful nests — will fall short. Ginwright is interested in challenging schools, educators, activists and community organizations like ours to ask: "In what ways do communities transform the structural conditions in their neighborhoods?"[17] "What are the ingredients to transformative school and community change?"[18] And: "How might schools serve as incubators of political possibilities for young people?”[19]

It matters that we create learning environments that are "soft spaces for youth to land" — learning environments that are at once joyful, inspiring, supportive, rigorous and critical.[20] But in doing so, Ginwright reminds us, we must also acknowledge and address the conditions shaping, in real and material ways, young peoples' lives. In this way it’s our job, as a learning community, to ask: what are the conditions necessary for us to thrive? How might we, as a community of children and teenagers and adults, disrupt the story of Hudson's revitalization, and re-write the story of at risk youth on our own terms?

Kite's Nest has raised uneasy questions for us from the start. Early on after opening our doors in 2012, we began receiving visits from local real estate agents, touring interested buyers from New York City. Because of Hudson's struggling school district, brokers could point to

[15] Ibid., 16
[16] Ibid., 17.
[17] Ibid., 17.
[18] Ibid., 4.
[19] Ibid., 17.
[20] Tuck, *Urban Youth and School Pushout*, 161.

Kite's Nest as a potential future school to families who were considering moving to Hudson. Our nest was used as evidence of the city's revitalization, as proof that the city was as cool, as safe, as cleaned up as the *New York Times* had said. This is, of course, also a story we know well — people come together to make neighborhoods safer for their communities, or fight to improve housing conditions, and realize at some point that their efforts have simultaneously contributed to rising costs. But what might our *responsibility* be, as a youth organization and as educators, in grappling with unjust development in our city?

And while I can't say that we don't continue to contribute to Hudson's gentrification — in fact, it's pretty clear that we do, based on the number of emails we get from parents moving to Hudson from Brooklyn — these early visits from real estate agents served as a kind of wake-up call. They prompted us, as an organization, to take on an explicitly political role: to commit to fighting for a city that would continue to house, and better serve, the kids growing up here. Our organizational mission expanded to recognize that we couldn't possibly provide the context for something like "liberatory learning" without taking an active stand against the forces making the conditions for liberation impossible. We began to locate our work within, and in support of, overlapping and interwoven struggles: for economic and racial justice in our city, for food security, for immigrant rights, for equity in the child welfare system and the court systems, and for a multi-racial, multigenerational resistance movement. We've organized actions and protests in the city; we've partnered with the Department of Social Services to organize race equity trainings for caseworkers; we've shown up at public meetings, brought the Black Lives Matter contingent to local parades. We've fought for restorative justice in the school systems, helped to build an advocacy program in our local court system, supported a movement for sanctuary cities. When a young person is charged with a crime, we are in the courtroom; when a police officer abuses their power, we are in the streets.

I say this all to illustrate how, since we first opened our doors and invited young people in, our work has seeped beyond the walls of the classroom. And it's had to, because to spend time with young people as they make their awkward moves from childhood into adolescence and adulthood, is to remember that problems in school are always also folded into problems at home, or with housing, or the criminal justice system, or health.[21] Structures crisscross in the ways they show up in our lives, intersecting as they move through our communities and our places of

[21] Fox and Fine, "Accountable to Whom?" 324.

learning, as they shape the contours of what's possible.[22] To follow the non-linear path of any person is to acknowledge that issues often treated separately are so utterly entangled, and that so too must be our own lines of inquiry and action. If it is our mission to support young people in our city to grow up to be themselves, with lives full of meaning and self-determination, which barriers are ours to address? Where do we draw that line, when we know that lines show up in peoples' lives as never linear, always interwoven?

That is to say, Kite's Nest has been in this constant dance: on the one hand, looking inward, working to co-create safe, embracing learning environments for our students — but turning outwards too, listening and responding to context, shifting, evolving, grounded always in relationship and moving with intention, but not staying still long. Perhaps not surprisingly, as we've shifted to respond to our constantly-changing context, we've found ourselves sometimes spread thin. And we've created a certain fog of confusion about what it is that we do. What recognizable category does Kite's Nest fit in, what noun could we use? But it's through this dance that a certain clarity has emerged, too. We've landed in a place of intersection between organizing and education, turning the classroom itself inside out and outside in. I think the dance has been our embodied process of asking, without knowing the answer, *Where does the classroom begin, and where does it end?*

But the better question might be: *What is a classroom? And what else could it be?*

III. Inside out

Picture, for example: a small urban garden. Follow kids on skateboards and bicycles, careening down the hill on North Front street to get there. Colorful signs greet you at the gate; garden beds sit in angled rows, some full and tall with trellised bitter melon, some overgrown, others neat with tidy rows. The land where the garden sits used to be home to a large complex of factory buildings that once made up the Hudson River Knitting Mill. The land is bordered to the east by railway tracks, which make themselves known every hour as Amtrak trains pass noisily south to New York or north to Montreal. Beyond the tracks sits the Hudson River and its large passing barges, an island not far offshore. To the north the garden is bordered by a dirt road that leads

[22] Lois Weis and Michelle Fine, "Critical Bifocality and Circuits of Privilege: Expanding Critical Ethnographic Theory and Design," *Harvard Educational Review* 82, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 174.

you to the North Bay wetland; look north from the garden and you can still see seventeen small shacks at the mouth of the North Bay, famed for the squatting fishing community they once held, the eviction that took place a few years ago, and the arguments for and against the shacks' demolition that have raged since. And to the west, a hill, which kids charge down with senseless abandon; a wastewater treatment plant, a wholesale food supplier, a small plastics factory, public housing nearby.

Entrance to the River City Garden in Hudson, NY.

In collaboration with several other organizations, Kite's Nest launched this garden in 2014. Today twenty-five families, most of whom live in public housing just up the hill, have plots. Some of the bigger raised beds are reserved for kids, who come down in big, multi-age numbers when we host our drop-in garden club on Fridays: some focused on learning to grow, others more focused on the hose, or on snack, or hula hoops if they're around.

I am wary when community gardens are described too purely as beacons of hope or utopias of collectivity. If the River City Garden is any indicator, community gardens are as laden with idealism as they are with the petty dramas and conflict of any truly shared space. But this is exactly the point: the River City Garden is a complicated, beautiful classroom. It's a place for families and for growers, but it's also a place for kids. It's an inside-out classroom — a place

where youth are learning both in and with the world, steeped in its socio-political and ecological complexity, rather than studying it in abstraction. Children here are workers, neighbors, and participants in a real community of practice; their learning at the garden comes less from "lessons" as it does from their sense of belonging in an environment that is neither school nor home, witnessing and interacting with people of different ages and races. It is learning in the context of a shared community space. I like the River City Garden as an example of an inside-out classroom because it is, literally, outside; but also because it's a classroom made of an intergenerational community of neighbors, not only for the purpose of learning, but in the context of doing, of action.

Our curriculum here surrounds us. Kids at the garden, their hands in the soil, are asking: How does food grow? But they're also asking: Why do some people have access to healthy food, and not others? What is healthy food? Why isn't there a grocery store in Hudson? And they're asking these questions with their hands dirty, with their feet on the ground of one small solution. Kids in our classes are turning their audio recorders on, interviewing their neighbors about where they come from, about how they got here. In another class they're researching what kind of factories used to be on the site, and when the factories closed, where they went. In another class we once looked north to the fishing shacks, and asked: Who has been on this land before us? Who kicked them off? And who was here before them? In the words of Indigenous scholar Leanne Simpson, our *context is the curriculum* — and land, the context.[23] Our questions are not designed to be political, but to engage critically and curiously with our surroundings is to arrive quickly at the heart of things: to uncover the histories of stolen land and labor that we stand on, layers of life and love and loss, of both violence and resistance.[24] And it's to encounter yourself: how do I fit in the story?

Because good curriculum is everywhere when what we're really teaching is to ask questions about the world that we see, learning to ask *why*. And in a city like Hudson — a place filled with so much possibility, and so much visible contradiction — these are the questions young people are asking already, if you tune in. Why are things the way they are? How else could they be? And what's possible for me in this place?

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[23] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 10.

[24] Mishuana Goeman, "From Place to Territories and Back Again: Centering Storied Land in the Discussion of Indigenous Nation-building," *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008).

Another classroom, inside out: a hot day in the summer Social Justice Leadership Academy.[25] Twenty-six teens and seven adults are sitting on chairs, slouching on couches, trying not to look at their phones (some failing). The teens in the room are between the ages of 12-19; they are basketball stars, genderqueer musicians, gamers, artists, prom kings; their parents are undocumented, their parents are in prison, their parents are elected officials; they are Black, Latinx, Bangladeshi, white, mixed race. The adults in the room are also a multi-racial group of seven educators: we are directors of local organizations, volunteers working for Americorps, educators and activists. The walls are covered in the evidence of our time together so far: colorful sticky dots cover one wall, mappings of a conversation we had about which aspects of our identities make us feel safe, marginalized, or powerful. Another wall is covered in collaborative poems students have written, another lays out the definition of *youth organizing.*

But today we are passing out audio recorders and headphones; the plan is to head out in groups of three, into Hudson, to ask questions to our neighbors in short, on-the-street interviews. Everyone has broken out into small groups to come up with good questions for their interviews. A good question isn't closed or leading, or designed to make anyone feel stupid. A good question actually interests us, and might teach us something: in past classes, students have asked questions they have about the world like, "What is your opinion on artificial intelligence?" or, "What's the craziest thing you've ever seen a goat eat?" Today one group is asking, "If you could see anything change in Hudson, what would you want to see?" And another, "What does freedom mean to you?"

When we leave the nest, the on-the-street exchanges students have are ranging. We already know that young people growing up in Hudson are told, directly and indirectly, that they do not belong on Hudson's Warren Street: and so we go out walking there, recorders in hand. Some kids who come from privilege have been told, directly or indirectly, that they shouldn't hang out around public housing complexes. And so we go out walking there, too. Our interviewees are at different moments friendly, rude, surprising, predictable, embarrassed, unabashed. People are pissed off at having to pause and answer to a teenager with a recorder while on their way to the DMV, or they are impressed, curious, and want to ask questions in return.

[25] The Social Justice Leadership Academy is a program run in partnership with the SBK Social Justice Center. http://www.sbksocialjustice.org/

A few hours later, when it's time to head back inside, the teens return with a lot to say; some are angry, others feel inspired. An elected official has told one group that, because she's also a real estate agent, she can't answer any questions about inequality in the city, and her interviewers are furious. An older white couple has told another group that they don't see race. A group of young Black men, hanging out on the steps of the terraces, talked about the lack of jobs in the city. We unpack it all. And often, our own conversations become heated, too, and this is the most important part of the day: because if we are asking real questions about our surroundings, then we are necessarily asking questions about ourselves, too. And because power doesn't just exist *out there*: the circuits of dispossession and privilege course through our classrooms, always.[26]

As teachers, we must know that most of our education institutions and learning spaces actively reproduce relations of domination — most of the time students are learning, in some kind of way, either inferiority or superiority. Injustice distorts our relationships within the classroom, and creeps into our curriculum and communication, no matter how committed a teacher might be to something like social justice.[27] Because as teachers we, too, have grown up within cultures of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism — we too have to unlearn our own internalized classism, racism, sexism and so on. So it is key to our work that we not only think of *equity* as a broad pursuit or end goal, but as itself an object of inquiry: to actively engage questions of power and privilege within our own spaces, to situate ourselves in relationship to place, to history, and to one another.

This means creating spaces in which we're not only teaching *about* power, but learning about it from each others' lives. This means inviting everyone in the room to examine and grapple with their own tangles of privilege and oppression, how we are positioned in relation to systems, our own struggles and also our strengths. No teacher can ever easily name what is or isn't working, but I can tell you what our goal is: it is to push ourselves, constantly, away from that pervasive notion that it is anyone's job to "save" "at risk youth". As a white teacher working along multiple axes of privilege, instead I bring my own story and position into our web: I engage with the ways that I'm implicated in the very structures that we are trying to change. With other white educators and students, I explore what it looks like to be simultaneously

[26] Fine and Ruglis. "Accountable to Whom?" 332.
[27] Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't it Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review* 59, no. 3 (1989).

accountable for privilege, and also oppositional to it. I follow the lead of my collaborating educators, who often bring experiences I don't, and a depth of understanding that I can't.

Our goal is a sustained encounter with our "shared fates, braided lives, and our collective debt to one another" — an engagement with the ways we are differently implicated and invested, and differently marked, by structures of power.[28] The deeper agenda here is one of alliance, towards a transformative solidarity, or what activists call collective liberation: in which we see one another as mutually responsible, and powerfully interconnected, in the work of both dismantling power structures and building something radically different.[29] This inside-out classroom is a rejection of decontextualized knowledge. It is instead an effort to examine, and to honor, and to build webs of interdependent relationships, which provide both the content and the context for our teaching and learning.[30]

To really acknowledge structural barriers will require "a new strategy in schools and community organizations," writes Shawn Ginwright. It requires a strategy of what he calls "social change from the inside out," in which we both scale up our efforts to address the root causes of unjust neighborhood conditions, but we also turn inward, with a focus on self-transformation, on healing trauma, on caring for each others' well-being, and building community health.[31] The inside-out classroom is made of walls that are both porous and protective, walls that keep us safe while we simultaneously question what it is that we call "safe," and why. It is a constant and critical engagement with our surroundings, in which the city itself becomes our source of curriculum. But this engagement speaks back, reminding us to always ask questions about ourselves, how we got here, and the implications of our positions. It represents a simultaneous move both inwards and outwards, as we come together to "critique what is, shelter ourselves from what has been, redesign what might be, and/or imagine what could be."[32]

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[28] Fox and Fine, "Accountable to Whom?" 330.
[29] My favorite definition of "collective liberation" was written by a twelve-year old, Jaquan, during the first year of our Social Justice Leadership Academy. He wrote, "collective liberation is when a group of people come together in order to effect change and to free themselves and each other."
[30] Leanne Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy," 7, 10.
[31] Ginwright, *Hope and Healing,* 9-10.
[32] Michelle Fine et al, "Educating Beyond the Borders of Schooling," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2000): 133.

Sometimes the classroom becomes a media production center: a radio station, a recording room, a film studio. Students are making films about zombies, writing poetry about romance, taking portraits of their neighbors, recording audio stories that chronicle their experiences of discipline, resistance, choice, coercion, frustration, self-determination. And then they're broadcasting this work on the radio, or sharing it in speeches to their communities, through public murals and exhibitions. They are constructing new narratives: telling public stories about their lives that both resist and refuse the ways they are diminished and disappeared in our narratives about Hudson.

The stories of revitalization and risk, as I have described them, are what Eve Tuck calls "damage-centered".[33] These stories imagine teenagers, and especially youth of color and of poverty, to live inherently risky lives: as young people unlikely to escape the immense and totalizing power of systemic oppression, and therefore bound to disappointing outcomes.[34] Claire Cousin, a youth advocate and educator in Hudson, spoke to the experience of being trapped in this damage narrative in a spoken word piece she produced during our first summer of the Social Justice Leadership Academy: "I am the failing system, there's no way to avoid the truth/ I dropped out of school, worked my way through the courts and on welfare/ Who was right? You!"[35]

There's no doubt, writes education scholar Michelle Fine, that "it is relatively easy, and profitable, to tell an evidence-based version of the dominant story. If you promise to study dreadful outcomes, particularly in low-income communities, the data will, no doubt, confirm that lives of oppression produce damage (if you are left-leaning), or bad choices produce bad outcomes (if you are right-leaning)."[36] Damage narratives are ubiquitous, perhaps especially in our conversations about poor and racialized children and teenagers: young people don't care; their parents don't care; they need to be fixed, or rescued from their communities. I hear well-meaning youth workers, educators, and social workers talk about their students in terms of damage daily. In the grant applications we write for Kite's Nest, we are always asked first to describe the *need* that exists in our communities, to point to the problem: we can get funding if we can convince the funder of how bad things are. Social science researchers, too, are in the

[33] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage".
[34] Ibid., 419.
[35] Claire Cousin, "School to Prison Pipeline."
[36] Fine and Fox, "Our Troubling Fix," 391.

business of documenting damage: illustrating and proving the harms caused by systemic oppression. As bell hooks once wrote, "I am invited to speak, but only when I speak my pain."[37]

Eve Tuck has called for a moratorium on damage narratives, on characterizations that frame communities as primarily sites of disinvestment and dispossession. The danger, she has warned us, is that narratives of damage are a "pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community."[38] But she has also raised concerns about another tendency of both education practitioners and scholars, in which those of us looking to disrupt damage narratives instead adopt a narrow storyline of resistance, arguing that marginalized peoples can be defined instead by "the radical power of the human spirit and human agency".[39] At risk youth, in this counter-version, don't embody risk, but instead hope and resistance: we engage in what Soo Ah Kwon calls the "wholesale promotion" of marginalized youth as "vanguards of social change".[40] But this framing, too, can be essentializing and one-dimensional; neither affords young people the right to be complicated, the right to be neither, both, and.[41]

Patricia Williams once wrote, "That life is complicated is a fact of great analytic importance.[42]" Reflecting on this sentence several years later, Avery Gordon wrote, "That life is complicated may seem a banal expression of the obvious, but it is nonetheless a profound theoretical statement… It has always baffled me," she continues, "why those most interested in understanding and changing barbaric domination… often — not always — withhold from the very people they are most concerned with the right to complex personhood."[43] Young people, and especially poor youth and youth of color, are consistently denied this right to "complex personhood" by so many of the adults who claim to be their advocates: we have stripped kids and teenagers of the fundamental right to be complicated.[44] That is, youth are not allowed to be people who sometimes remember and sometimes forget, who contain both damage and resilience and everything in between, who "at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are

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[37] bell hooks, "Marginality as a Site of Resistance," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), quoted in Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage," 413.
[38] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage," 412-413.
[39] Ibid., 419.
[40] Soo Ah Kwon, *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Govermentality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 7.
[41] Tuck, "Suspending Damage*,"* 419-420.
[42] Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 10.
[43] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters,* 4.
[44] Eve Tuck, *Suspending Damage,* 420-421.

complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures."[45] In the context of risk in a neoliberal city, to be a racialized young person and to be angry at times, or to try one way of being on and then another, can have harsh consequences. If complexity and desire "is what we know about ourselves," Tuck writes, "damage is what is attributed to us by those who wish to contain us."[46]

In Claire Cousin's 2014 spoken word piece, she says, in a clear voice: "I am my education. I own it in every way/ I know that being Brown without one will haunt me every day." Claire dropped out of Hudson High School a few years ago, and instead got her GED. Now that she's a prominent youth advocate in Hudson, when Claire is featured in our local newspaper, she's often mistakenly referred to as a "graduate of Hudson High," which always makes her mad. And in her work with children and teens, she's been encouraged by an employer to not share her story of choosing to leave school. When educators talk about amplifying or empowering "youth voices," often that means we're choosing only to listen to the stories we'd like to hear. What passes as "youth voice" often coincides with sounding like good citizens, or acting like mini-adults. Claire's piece complicates the story. She rejects the notion that young people are disengaged or apathetic, and she places the onus instead on the institution of schooling: "But I am my education, and I got that my own way/ I've learned that the system is flawed, and we're all pushed along, until we're ready to quit and get slayed." Later in the piece, she articulates an alternative vision for schooling: "School could be beautiful if lessons were equally taught/ and if the content meant something to us/ And if it was still a place that the mind could thrive/ and if there's no police presence hovering inside."

Claire's spoken word piece responds to those who have misrepresented and de-valued her choice to leave school, and who can't see the relationship between her decision to leave and the work she does now as a youth mentor and organizer. It disbelieves the logic that her "dropout" status is a sign of her own failure. But it speaks, too, to the irony of leaving: of being set up to fail, and then following the script. Claire's story narrates critique, ambition, and desire.[47]

[45] Tuck, *Suspending Damage,* 420.
[46] Eve Tuck, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography,* ed. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (New York: Routledge, 2016), 647.
[47] Tuck, *Urban Youth and School Pushout*.

Youth are so often researched, analyzed, problematized, and discussed without "their consent, wisdom, outrage" considered, and with no attention to their own "right to re-present"[48]. To support young people in representing themselves is to support them in speaking back, and to become producers of their own, strategic public texts: to exercise their right to tell, rather than to be told. These productions directly contradict narratives that frame youth as one-dimensional caricatures, as being defined as either "failing," or "good," or "bad". We broadcast them in direct response to the social workers and probation officers and business owners along Warren Street who talk about "at risk" youth like they're the problem. We broadcast them to call attention to the complex lived lives and diverse perspectives of young people, of all ages, not as future-adults, becoming, but as now-people – who can and should be engaged as "theorists on their own lives and the world around them."[49]

But to call these counter-stories is to miss the point, too: counter-stories do not represent the full scope of youth experience. There is a distinction between counter-storying — that is, responding directly to dominant stories of damage — and actually nourishing practices of respect for young people as complex, self-determining people, who are both experts of their own lives, and also embedded in their own social worlds and communities.[50] These narratives and practices exist *beyond* risk. The idea is not that our neighbors in Hudson will hear youth stories and suddenly, in a moment of realization, change their ways or offer reparation.[51] Our stories are tools for trying on selves, asking questions, speaking to one another. Stories can be healing: they are a method through which we can transform shame into knowledge; reframe experience as expertise; declare that what we call risk, in fact, holds a kind of wisdom. It is not about the uncritical celebration of the voices of young people, but about working together to be, and to become, critical authors of our worlds.

When we listen, we'll hear that young people are already resisting injustice in their lives, though we might not know to call it that. Every day youth are asserting their dignity in situations they find demeaning, they're talking back to curriculum they find irrelevant, they're negotiating, challenging, queering, and rejecting that which they feel to be unjust. Youth resist in multiple, "sometimes self-injuring, sometimes triumphant ways," though often their expressions of

[48] Fox and Fine, "Accountable to Whom?*"* 321.
[49] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, eds., *Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 179.
[50] Cameron, *Far Off Metal River,* 27.
[51] Tuck, "Suspending Damage," 413-414.

resistance are not easy to characterize as positive.[52] We punish the consequences, rather than attending to the conviction and intentionality that might lie beneath their actions, rather than listening for the complex and embodied ways that young people might understand the systems which are oppressing them. Young people may make dangerous decisions with significant economic, educational, and psychological consequences, but we'll fail if we can't engage the outrage, or the disappointment, or the hopelessness that drives their actions. It's our call to listen perhaps *especially* when youth agency doesn't do what we want — "to not only pay attention to the good stories."[53]

When this is realized collectively — that is, when we go beyond analyzing the consequences of our own individual choices, and instead we think together about how youth lives unfold in our community — we can begin to transform these individual acts of resistance into collective power. The point is not to domesticate youth resistance into more acceptable forms of political participation, nor to amplify youth voices and call it empowerment, without ever challenging relations of power.[54] When we bring our stories into conversation, transcending narratives of individual "success stories" or "bad choices," youth can reject and refuse the doctrines of personal responsibility and failure, and instead see patterns.[55] Youth can move from asking "Who am I? What are my experiences?" to "Who are we? And how do our experiences connect, overlap, and inform each other?" And also, "Who are my people? And what knowledge do they bring to the table?" Youth can make links between and across their stories, connect the dots between their lives and the structural conditions of privilege and oppression. In doing so we not only construct more liberatory images of ourselves and of the future we want to inhabit, but we can begin working together to bring that future into being, here and now.

Classrooms, in other words, can be sites for fostering collectivity and solidarity — for building movements. They can serve as "ethical, pedagogical, and political nests" where people engage together in both critical inquiry and collective action, asking: how can we transform the conditions around us?[56] At Kite's Nest, for example, youth are strategizing about how to address

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[52] Tuck and Yang, *Youth Resistance Research,* 2.
[53] Ibid., 12.
[54] Ibid., 8-9.
[55] Caitlin Cahill, Indra Rios-Moore, and Tiffany Threatts, "Different Eyes/Open Eyes: Community-Based Participatory Action Research," in *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion,* ed. Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine (New York: Routledge, 2008), 95.
[56] Michelle Fine with Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "An Intimate Memoir of Resistance Theory," in *Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change*, ed. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (New York: Routledge, 2014), 54.

the transportation issue that's keeping Jass from class, we're organizing to bring restorative justice into our schools. We can't build hope with only analysis and critique; hope is born when we ground our vision "in a project that has some hold on the present".[57] Henry Giroux calls this "educated hope": hope that makes the link, however transient or small, between *critique* and *possibility* — between understanding what must be changed, but also developing the tools to make change, and connecting to the concrete struggles through which change happens.[58] This, as educators, is our biggest and most important challenge: to foster educated, concrete, material, audacious hope.

"It is important to say what hope is not," writes Rebecca Solnit. "It is not the belief that everything was, is or will be fine… The hope I am interested in is about broad perspectives with specific possibilities, ones that invite or demand that we act."[59] We can't build hope in our classrooms by denying realities, or shielding our students from them: instead we have to directly engage the conditions around us, not only with critical analysis but through collective action. Hope in this framing is a pedagogical practice: it is the result of learning environments that support young people in believing that their participation in the world matters, that they have voices that count, that they too can make history.

These can be tricky lines for educators to walk: developing a language of structural critique, without sinking a classroom of young people into hopelessness; teaching histories of resistance, without glossing over the real obstacles people face; speaking of hope when the evidence around us tells us something different. Can a classroom cultivate a sense of both outrage and realistic hope? Can we both rigorously engage the present, while also dreaming new futures? In describing snapshots from Kite's Nest classrooms, I don't mean to suggest that we have mastered any methodology of pedagogy, or that we've got answers to share: these questions both guide and haunt us every day. I think often of my car ride with Jass, both of us wrestling with the daunting scope of the challenges facing young people in Hudson. I think about the failure of our institutions to provide our kids with the prospects for a just future, and about the failure of our city to care. I think about the inadequacy of a great youth summer program, and the limits of making good choices or developing confidence in the face of adversity: I think about

[57] Henry A. Giroux, "When Hope is Subversive," *Tikkun* 19, no. 6 (November/December 2004): 39. (38-39)
[58] Ibid., 38; Henry A Giroux, "Public Pedagogy, and the Politics of Neoliberalism: Making the Political More Pedagogical, *Policy Futures in Education* 3 (2004): 500. (494-651.)
[59] Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities,* 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016), xiii.

the need for economic, racial, gender, immigrant, youth justice. I think also about all the brilliant young people I know whose lives are steeped in imagination and self-education, and I think we're at least asking the right questions.

Henry Giroux has long argued that teachers have a *specific* responsibility to open pedagogical spaces that link critical thinking, political agency, and action or struggle.[60] Social movements do not materialize overnight, he says: individual and collective resistance is born out of pedagogical conditions that provide a discourse of critique and inquiry on the one hand, and a vocabulary of action and hope on the other.[61] We know we need to build a generation of people who are at once loving, creative, self-determining, and interdependent, who are critical-thinking and community-minded, and capable of actualizing the transformation we need.[62] "This is not a prescription for political indoctrination," Giroux writes. "Rather, it is a project that gives education its most valued purpose and meaning."[63] And of course, the classroom is already a space of politics, already a space that presupposes particular visions of the future, whether we admit it or not. "While no pedagogical intervention should fall to the level of propaganda, a pedagogy that attempts to empower critical citizens cannot and should not avoid politics."[64] Instead, Giroux argues, teachers should refuse to decouple politics from pedagogy; we should recognize pedagogy as a political force; we should consistently and imaginatively foreground the question of justice; and we should always cultivate openness, debate, and a culture of questioning.[65] This is the possibility of the classroom: to create the conditions now that can point the way towards a more just future.

Recently Juan, who is fifteen years old, drew a map of Hudson. His map pointed to each of the stairways and rails that he skateboards: the 6-stair jump at the courthouse, the 2-stair-ledge, where the owner gets mad. Juan lives just a block from me, but the Hudson he knows is one I don't. His Hudson is a place where a first kiss happened on one corner, and a fight went down on another. For really young kids Hudson might be mapped as a landscape of playgrounds, hiding

[60] Henry A. Giroux, *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability?* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009), xii.
[61] Ibid., 25; Henry A. Giroux, "Militant Hope in the Age of the Politics of the Disconnect," *CounterPunch,* December 23, 2016.
[62] Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy," 7.
[63] Giroux, *Youth in a Suspect Society,* 131.
[64] Giroux, "Public Pedagogy," 501.
[65] Ibid., 500; Giroux, *Youth in a Suspect Society,* 131.

spaces, puddles, tall counters. It's obvious to point out that different people have radically distinct ways of navigating the city, of valuing its parts, and of dreaming of its future. But our development logics don't take into account the way that young people take and make space; how they imagine, maneuver within, and transform it.[66]

The question is: What might a vision for Hudson look like if it took seriously the needs, aspirations, insights, and resistance of its youth? What might the future of Hudson look like if young people weren't pushed to the margins, but invited into the center? What might a city look like if it were shaped by an ethic of responsibility — of genuine accountability — to its kids? If it learned to listen? These questions seem benign, but I believe they pose a foundational challenge to the dominant logics of revitalization and risk. Because when we look at Hudson through the eyes of its most marginalized kids and teenagers, what we see is a city upside down, forgetting its most crucial resource, its future. When we "think with youth," we have to imagine what the city might look like if it was built for people who didn't come here to shop, and don't even carry wallets. Or what "economic development" might look like if it was centered around job training and local employment — if it required a different metric of success. Thinking with youth can provide a powerful touchstone about the long-term consequences of neoliberal policies, about what kinds of futures we imagine, and that always-essential question: *for who?*[67]

Another snapshot, in the classroom: this one a class called *Future Worlds*.[68] Kids ages 9-14 are reading science fiction — *Parable of the Sower*, by Octavia Butler; *Tanglewreck*, by Jeanette Winterson. And as they're reading, they're thinking about how narratives of science fiction literature might help us to imagine beyond the world we know, to try on new ways of understanding ourselves, the world around us, and all the selves and worlds that could be. The kids are discussing the books in small groups; diving into research about the real sciences and technologies woven into their plots; dreaming up their own utopias, dystopias, and everything in between. On a snowy day in December, the students of *Future Worlds* invite the public into the classroom, which has been transformed to evoke an alternative universe: we, parents and neighbors and friends, are asked too to imagine how things might otherwise be.

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[66] Ward, *Child in the City.*
[67] Giroux, *Youth in a Suspect Society,* 21.
[68] Class by Nicole LoBue and Lucy Segar. kitesnest.org/future-worlds

Those of us engaged in struggles for justice envision future worlds all the time: worlds without war, without exploitation, without racism.[69] But the logics of revitalization and risk can have such a stranglehold on our urban imaginations: I worry often that I don't know how to imagine development beyond gentrification. I worry that at some point I might start believing that more just alternatives are irrational or unrealistic. Why is it so hard to think outside the ownership model of property? Why is it so much easier to imagine the *end of the world*, than to envision reparations, or a world without prisons?[70] We so desperately need to move forward our collective imagination capacities. And shouldn't that be the purpose of education and schooling, really? As educators, it is our task to carve out nests for imagining, telling, and then creating new ways of being — where we both dream future worlds, and also put our dreams into action. And as activists and movement-builders, or as parents, or as neighbors, this is a call too to engage youth as our critical partners in the collective work of building cities for all.

In 1978, the anarchist writer Colin Ward tried to imagine a city designed and shaped with the needs of children and youth in mind. In imagining a city with a child at the center, he considers, for a moment, a *childhood city,* made entirely for kids — but he stops himself. He stops himself because "the very concept of a city for children suggests in our day a kind of Disney fantasy, and its built form would be Disneyland. The real world would be somewhere else." But, he says, "I don't want a Childhood City. I want a city where children live in the same world as I do."[71] I want to live in that city, too. A city in which every store and every street is seen as a classroom, and every one of us (of all ages) a teacher and a learner. I want to live in a place where children and teenagers are understood to be – and engaged as – thinkers, builders, cartographers, critics, leaders and problem-solvers – not just potential ones, but here and now, participating in fundamental ways in shaping their city, and in doing so, in shaping their lives.

[69] Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown, *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Movements* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015).
[70] William Ayers, *Demand the Impossible! A Radical Manifesto* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016), 14.
[71] Ward, *Child in the City*, 179.

Conclusion: Other Ways of Telling

"Is this neoliberal, gentrified, overpriced, under-resourced society the best our species can create?" - Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor[1]

I've heard it said that cities lay bare our contradictions: they are sites of difference, characterized by worlds both isolated and overlapping, by both possibility and boundary, where poverty and prosperity collide. In Hudson I am struck, every day, by the visibility, the humanness, the proximity of it all. It is my hope that thinking with and about Hudson is a call for others, too, to do the "difficult intellectual, social, and moral work of recognizing how contradictions writ large in society are writ small in our everyday lives."[2] I have tried to make clear that these contradictions — framed, throughout this thesis, in terms of *revitalization* and *risk* — are neither accident nor anomaly. That is, that Hudson's inequities are not an unfortunate consequence of urban development, but central to its logic: the city is told as a story of success because it looks, in fact, exactly like the ideal neoliberal city is meant to look.[3]

But the neoliberal city is a "vampiric city," always sucking the life out of its neighborhoods, homogenizing and destroying the very aspects of a place that made it distinctive, and keeping the residents who are often most invested in its future precarious.[4] Some of us stand to benefit when the development of our cities is geared towards this kind of bourgeois consumption and the so-called "creative class," especially those of us who can afford to stay. And in all honesty, I probably wouldn't have ended up in Hudson if it wasn't for the "revitalization" that was underway when I arrived. But I also do believe that ultimately, the intertwined structures of white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism that create the conditions for revitalization hurt all of us, even those of us who benefit materially from their injustice: because they distort our ability to see and name what's happening around us, teach us to speak in contradictions, have us misremember our own pasts, and prohibit us from relating to one another and to the places we live with dignity. We are all divided and damaged by the individualism at the core of this spatial imaginary, which tells us that we each have to fight for our own self-interest, driving us away from mutuality and instead towards isolation and fear. To hold each

[1] Taylor, *#BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, 217.
[2] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place,* 127.
[3] Matt Hern, *Common Ground in a Liquid City* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010), 207.
[4] Matt Hern, *What a City is For*, 228.

other accountable for inequity, then — to take responsibility for the rationalities that keep us feeling free from culpability, and to step instead into relationships of mutual responsibility — is not a burden: it is a move towards freedom. It's just that, as Jeff Chang writes, "not all of us have the best vantage point to see our way out of the fog… Some of us can't even see each other fully."[5].

What might development in Hudson look like if it wasn't centered around the interests of those with the most wealth? What is a radical and realistic vision of a liberatory city — a true city of sanctuary? And how do we get there? I pose these questions not because I have clear answers to them, but because I think it is our collective task to ask them, and together to wonder, explore, experiment, organize, disagree, make mistakes, and keep trying in our efforts to dream up, construct, and find answers. Because, of course, these are open questions, to which there are many answers — answers that must be given again and again, every day, in the choices we make and the actions we take.

This morning, I read two articles about Hudson: the first article reported that, according to the Bloomberg Index of Affluent Micro Areas, Hudson has been ranked as the 15th wealthiest small town in the United States.[6] The second article reported on a meeting of the Hudson Housing Authority, which manages one of the city's main public housing projects, called Bliss Towers. During the meeting, seventy tenants of the building were threatened with eviction for owing backpay. [7]This is the twin story of revitalization and risk, which expresses itself every day in the growing wealth of the wealthy and the criminalization of the poor, in the separate worlds that live right beside each other in isolated, but deeply entangled, realities. These are the conditions that made it possible for Hudson City police officers to enter the hallways of our High School last week, dressed in riot gear, afraid of the students they had been called in to contain; these are the conditions that allowed them to handcuff and arrest two students of color in the hallway, and to suspend another nine, for engaging in a verbal and non-violent dispute. What I mean to say is that these questions are not merely theoretical; they are urgent and necessary. Our survival depends on our willingness to ask them, and our ability to work together to bring our answers to life.

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[5] Jeff Chang, *We Gon' Be Alright: Notes on Race and Resegregation* (New York, NY: Picador, 2016), 8.
[6] Wei Lu and Vincent Del Giudice, "These are the Wealthiest Small Towns in America," *Bloomberg.com,* March 29, 2017.
[7] Rosa Acheson, "Bliss Towers pursue evictions," *Register Star,* April 14, 2017.

I also believe that our neighborhoods and our cities might be uniquely constituted to meet the challenge: they are, after all, the ground we stand on (and for). If urban development plays such a key role in the production and maintenance of privilege and difference, as I have argued, then our cities are a key locus for opposing its logics.[8] If we can do it strategically, then to fight with and for the residents of Bliss Tower is to defend public housing, and even more, it is to be part of a movement that declares that all people have the right to a home, that poverty isn't an excuse for eviction, and that housing should ultimately be democratized and decommodified. To fight with and for the students now navigating an unjust court system is to be part of the larger struggle against the school-to-prison pipeline, and to fight for the dignity and self-determination of all of our kids. Our small-scale demands can be transformative if they build our oppositional capacity, clarify the structural and ideological roots of inequity, and if they embody and articulate aspects of the world we dream of.[9] We have to connect the dots between our struggles and across scales, and let a thousand tactics bloom: in Hudson this means taking the streets, organizing campaigns for better policies, putting property into community land trust, intervening in ICE raids, building radical classrooms, advocating for alternatives to incarceration, growing community gardens. It is in the struggle that we learn what a city looks like when it is defined not by the vastness of its inequity, but instead by the depth of our mutuality, solidarity, respect, and joy.[10]

I have tried in my thesis to argue that, if anything, the work of building a more just city is a profoundly educative project. It requires, first, that we learn to *disbelieve* the neoliberal and racialized logics of revitalization and risk, discovering instead that there are other frameworks and axes of thought that can guide us.[11] This is both a personal and political task: all of us, coming from different places, have to untangle in different ways the knots of capitalism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and empire that have structured our own relationships to the world around us. Those of us coming from privilege have to be especially committed to naming and undoing the refusals, denials, and justifications that we have been trained to employ when we sense the structures that uphold our privilege are being threatened, and instead learn to make

[8] Pauline Lipman, *Political Economy of Urban Education,* 160.
[9] David Madden and Peter Marcuse, *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2016), 199-200.
[10] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, M.A.: Beacon Books, 2002), 11.
[11] Eve Tuck, *Urban Youth and School Pushout,* 153.

room for those who are the most marginalized to guide the way forward.[12] We have to do this while always pushing ourselves and each other into movement, into meaningful, reflective, and concrete action.

Because remaking our cities means remaking ourselves, and this, of course, we cannot do alone. It asks that we turn our communities — our homes and corner stores and city halls — into classrooms in which we are asking critical questions of one another, forging unexpected solidarities, and exploring alternative paradigms. It means learning from our Indigenous, trans, queer, Black, Brown, immigrant, Muslim, disabled, poor, working class and youth neighbors, and from the science fiction dreamers, the visionary activists, and the critical theorists to break down the binaries that we cling to, to see value beyond money, to see land beyond property, to see wisdom in risk -- learning together to learn to do what K. Wayne Yang describes as "matrix-seeing and freedom-dreaming all at once".[13] I am especially interested in working to shift the focus away from being "good" people in the face of oppression, so that we desire instead to be always learning — that is, willing to be wrong, and able to recognize that solutions aren't always ours to spearhead, reconciliations not always ours to claim. Learning, in the most fundamental sense, begins with listening.

If you have the chance, I recommend going to the Hudson Area Library, which sits in the old armory building on 5th Street. You'll have to go on a Saturday, when the local history room is open, and you'll have to talk to the volunteer who spends his every Saturday waiting to greet you. This is where the archive lives, a collection of stories recorded about the lives of people who have lived here, and about all the places that Hudson is and used to be in peoples' memories and imaginations.[14] Dive in, listen, and maybe you will hear some of the threads that I heard, maybe you will chart a path similar to the one that I did in this thesis — but more likely you will hear something that I didn't at all. You will notice, certainly, that the archive is not a place of clear happy endings or heroes: that our stories are rarely neat, especially when they are listened to alongside each other. If you aren't in Hudson, then you can instead step outside wherever you are, ask an open-ended question, and listen. You will hear, I hope, that the world you know is not the only one: that there are always other ways of telling. That our own narratives are riddled with

[12] Cheng, *We Gon' Be Alright,* 164.
[13] La Paperson, "The Postcolonial Ghetto: Seeing Her Shape and His Hand," *Berkeley Review of Education* 1, no. 1 (2010): 28.
[14] www.oralhistorysummerschool.com

lives forgotten and histories obscured, shaped by that persistent urge to keep ourselves innocent. That our own imaginations have been plowed, privatized, bordered, and gentrified. And yet our stories remind us too that we resist, in all of the ways: we make connections, we break down walls, we strive for meaning, we remember, and we dream. Different stories can unleash radically different pasts, and orient us towards radically different futures.[15] I invite you to listen for this — for all the different paths forward, for "the world not yet born".[16]

[15] Emilie Cameron, *Far Off Metal River,* 26.
[16] Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 10.

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