

**Imagining the Tech City:
Tech Futurities, Whiteness, and Gentrification in Philadelphia and Montreal**

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A Thesis
In the Department
Of
Geography, Planning, and Environment

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Geography, Urban and Environmental Studies
at Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

December 2025

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Geography, Planning, and Environment)

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Abstract

Imagining the Tech City: Tech Futurities, Whiteness, and Gentrification in Philadelphia and Montreal

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By clustering in cities, tech industries have catalyzed gentrification, reshaping local economies, communities, and social relations, eventually reinforcing spatial inequality. While prior research emphasizes capital and class, recent studies highlight the deep entanglement of tech-led gentrification, and more broadly tech urbanism, with race and whiteness. Indeed, within racial capitalist logics, tech urbanism frames marginalized neighborhoods as neglected, mobilizing “innovation” and utopian tech imaginaries to rationalize racialized dispossession. Yet, despite growing fascination with tech urbanism, its temporal politics remain underexplored; particularly how race shapes perceptions of who belongs in the city’s future. By situating whiteness at the core of tech-led urban transformations, my dissertation addresses this critical gap, illuminating how future-focused discourses of “progress” operate as mechanisms of racialized urban control in the present. Using a whiteness-as-futurity framework, it compares Philadelphia’s University City and Montreal’s Parc Extension to illustrate how tech-led gentrification unfolds along racialized temporal logics. The first manuscript conceptually examines tech futurities as expressions of whiteness, showing how “future city” narratives drive tech-led gentrification and marginalize longstanding, Black and Brown residents. The second situates gentrification within a state-university-tech nexus, demonstrating how institutional actors cast racialized communities as deficient while positioning the white, educated tech class as stewards of urban change. The third draws on interviews with 33 tech workers and entrepreneurs, revealing narratives that legitimize exclusion and erase non-white, working-class histories. Against the backdrop of technocapitalist growth and racialized redevelopment, this research ultimately conceptualizes tech-led gentrification as a racial-temporal process, demonstrating how visions of tech-driven “modernity” uphold white supremacy in contemporary cities.

Acknowledgments

The completion of this doctoral journey has been a profound and transformative experience, and I owe it to many people who have supported me along the way.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Ted Rutland, for his invaluable guidance, patience, and unwavering encouragement throughout my doctoral studies. Your insight, dedication, and generosity have profoundly shaped not only this research but also my growth as a scholar and a human being. Serving as your first doctoral student has been an honor and I could not have wished for a more inspiring mentor on this demanding journey.

I am deeply grateful to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Loretta Lees and Dr. Margaret M. Ramírez, for their constructive feedback and thoughtful engagement with my work. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Alessandra Renzi and Dr. Chris Hurl for generously serving on my committee, and to Dr. Manissa Maharawal and Dr. Harold Forsythe for their support and the many insightful conversations we have shared over the years.

To my colleagues and comrades in the Geography Department, I am grateful for the safe space you have provided, as well as for the help and companionship that made the challenges of research far more manageable and enjoyable.

I would like to thank Jennifer Srey for her kindness and dedicated assistance with the administrative and immigration processes throughout the years.

To my cherished parents, Sylvie and Eric, my sisters from another mother, Samya and Isabelle, my godparents, Florence and Tata, my brother Cebrià, my niece Maïa, my nephew Pio, my sister-in-law Aurélie, and all my dear family and friends across the globe, thank you for quietly enduring my long absences, my frustrations, my periods of personal crisis, and unrelenting devotion to research. Your support is woven into every page of this thesis. Without your love and patience, this work could never have come to life.

Reaching the end of my PhD fills me with a complex mix of emotions: joy, relief, and deep reflection on the years that have shaped this work. Many cautioned me that the path to a PhD would be arduous, but nothing could have prepared me for the physical, emotional, and intellectual demands of this endeavor. The past five years have tested me in every possible way. Like many researchers, the pursuit of knowledge and excellence has come at a cost: periods of depression, isolation, and struggles with mental health. This work is dedicated to all PhD students, and especially to immigrant students, who courageously persist through exhaustion, loneliness, and self-doubt with quiet determination. May you draw strength in knowing that your perseverance, resilience, and dedication are recognized, valued, and shared. You are not alone.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to the displaced people of Montreal, Philadelphia, and beyond, with the hope that it contributes, in some measure, to the pursuit of justice.

Positionality Statement

Linking individual identities to knowledge production, anti-racist research emphasizes that our histories, education, and personal experiences shape our interpretations of the world. Knowledge is not produced in a vacuum, and the ways we understand, interpret, and analyze social phenomena are inevitably influenced by the positions we occupy within society. It is therefore crucial, particularly in research that engages with questions of race and social justice, to explicitly reflect on one's own positionality.

Before introducing my work, and in the spirit of self-reflexivity and accountability, I must situate myself within social relations of race and coloniality – and, by extension, gender and class – as a white, educated, French ciswoman engaging in research on the unceded lands of the Lenni-Lenape people in Philadelphia and the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. This socially, economically, and racially privileged standpoint has shaped the lens through which I view the world, the questions I find meaningful, and the ways I interpret the data. My personal resources, educational background, and lived experiences have been essential tools in navigating and making sense of the literature and my findings, yet they have also framed the assumptions and perspectives I bring to this work.

To acknowledge my positionality is not simply to list my privileges, but to confront how they operate within enduring structures of racial, colonial, and economic power – structures that produce tangible material consequences and inevitably shape how knowledge is created. I hope this work contributes to ongoing critical conversations on white supremacy and promote greater self-awareness and sustained engagement in the quest for collective liberation – particularly as we bear witness, in outrage and grief, to the livestreamed, state-sanctioned brutalization, disappearance, and annihilation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous bodies in Palestine, Congo, Sudan, the Americas, France, and beyond, all carried out with enraging impunity.

*If I must die, you must live
to tell my story, to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth and some strings,
make it white with a long tail,
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza,
while looking heaven in the eye, awaiting his dad who left in a blaze
and bid no one farewell, not even to his flesh, not even to himself
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die,
let it bring hope,
let it be a tale.*

Refaat Alareer (1979-2023)

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CBAR	Parc Extension Community-Based Action Research and Network
OCPM	Montreal's Public Consultation Office
PDUES	Urban, Economic, and Social Development Plan
PECARN	Parc Extension Community-Based Action Research and Network
Penn	University of Pennsylvania
UCD	University City District
UdeM	University of Montreal
WPC	West Philadelphia Corporation

Introduction: Tech-led Gentrification, White Futurity, and Urban Futures

Over the past decades, the expansion of digital technologies has positioned tech companies as central actors in the restructuring of urban life, landscapes, and imaginaries. By discursively framing themselves at the forefront of a so-called “socio-economic revolution” (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018, p. 3358), these industries have promoted visions of an idealized urban future. Through intensive lobbying, they have also influenced urban governance and local policy (Zukin, 2020, 2022). Simultaneously, the 2008 economic crisis and growing interurban competition (Smith, 2002) pushed city governments to pursue new strategies to attract capital. Over the past decade, financially distressed cities (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Harvey, 1989; Smith, 1979) have increasingly embraced tech urbanism as a strategy for economic recovery and long-term stability. With the active support of local authorities, tech industries have succeeded in reshaping urban neighborhoods according to their interests, leaving a visible political, socioeconomic, cultural, and symbolic imprint worldwide (Birhane, 2023; Datta, 2019; Gupta, 2019; Kwet, 2019).

The impact of tech companies on urban neighborhoods has become a growing focus of scholarship. As tech corporations concentrate in cities, researchers have emphasized their role in transforming urbanism. Turning cities into “tech hubs” to attract tech capital has become a central priority for municipal governments (Galès, 2022; Zukin, 2020). In the post-recession years, cities have increasingly functioned as “incubator spaces” for tech firms (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017, p. 1000). The tech industry has introduced new visions of urban growth (Hutton, 2006; Moio & Rossi, 2020; Zukin, 2020, 2022), positioning cities as “privileged sites for technology-intensive interactive economies” (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017, p. 1000). As urban reliance on tech

grows, corporations have become highly effective lobbyists (Leszczynski, 2020), leveraging government regulations as tools of corporate urban governance (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018) and reshaping cities in ways that frequently catalyze gentrification (Ash et al., 2018; Opillard, 2015).

While much research on tech urbanism has focused on capital, class, and urban redevelopment, an emerging body of work emphasizes its deep entanglement with race, whiteness, and futurity. Scholars have explored the relationship between technology and race from multiple angles – including workforce diversity and representation (Daniels, 2015; Hashimoto, 2021; Leslie & Catungal, 2012), algorithmic bias (Benjamin, 2019; Brock, 2009), and the ways digital infrastructures reproduce systemic inequality (Crawford, 2022). Building on this work, recent research demonstrates that tech urbanism itself intensifies racialized dynamics of gentrification by erasing, pathologizing, and criminalizing non-white urban spaces (Leszczynski, 2016; McElroy, 2018).

This growing literature reflects recognition that technological urbanism operates within and reproduces racial capitalist structures. Studies show that tech development perpetuates historical forms of dispossession, often described as “tech colonialism” (Maharawal, 2022). Through neocolonial savior narratives and “white technologies” that cast racialized neighborhoods as deficient or in need of improvement, tech urbanism rearticulates whiteness as both a spatial and moral order (Cave et al., 2024; Mitchell, 2010). Erin McElroy (2019, 2024) conceptualizes Silicon Valley as a global techno-imperial center, demonstrating how property, data, and digital infrastructures function as racial technologies that extend surveillance and exclusion. Scholars further note that tech urbanism depends on white spatial imaginaries that depict marginalized areas as “up-and-coming,” legitimizing displacement under the rhetoric of innovation and progress (Tarvainen, 2022). Yet despite these advances, limited attention has

been paid to the temporal dimensions of these processes; specifically, how whiteness operates through visions of the future to determine who is imagined as belonging to the city. This thesis addresses that gap by examining how tech futurities reproduce racialized urban hierarchies through both spatial and temporal logics.

Indeed, whiteness operates not only spatially but also temporally (Anderson, 2010; Anderson & Adey, 2012; Baldwin, 2012), shaping ways of thinking about time and the future by colonizing collective imaginaries of what lies ahead (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021). In this dissertation, whiteness is approached not merely as a demographic category or racial identity, but as a governing logic that structures value, belonging, and visions of the future. It shapes norms for inhabiting space, imagining urban futures, and defining who counts as a legitimate city dweller, while marginalizing working-class, racialized communities as out of place and out of time. Whiteness thus acts as a political and temporal framework, continuously shaping and reinforcing social hierarchies changing historical contexts. Considering the interrelations between whiteness as futurity and gentrification opens new avenues for examining tech urbanism and tech-led gentrification. Specifically, it urges us to ask how tech workers and neighborhoods are imagined within racialized temporal frameworks that privilege white futures, and how these imaginaries materialize materially and symbolically to the detriment of Black and Brown residents. This perspective challenges dominant narratives of tech urbanism by revealing that visions of progress and innovation are themselves racialized projects; ones that define who, and what forms of urban life, are imagined as belonging to the future city.

My dissertation examines how tech-led gentrification is configured by whiteness, and particularly white futurity. It asks how tech urban spaces and communities are imagined and how these narratives perpetuate the erasure of working-class, racialized urban presence. I explore

these questions by conducting a comparative study between two neighborhoods: Parc Extension in Montreal (Quebec, Canada) and University City in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.). As I will explain below, these neighborhoods represent two poignant cases in regard to their exposure to tech urbanism and their racial composition. A substantial body of scholarship has already demonstrated that gentrification is deeply racialized, showing how displacement, reinvestment, and urban change follow entrenched racial hierarchies. This dissertation builds on that work but advances a more specific intervention by centering whiteness, not simply race, as a structuring force of urban redevelopment. By focusing on whiteness, the project shifts attention to how dominant norms, values, and claims to space are produced and normalized, and how futurity, progress, and belonging are racialized in ways that sustain unequal urban futures. This dissertation also documents a specific historical moment in the political culture of the tech industry. It examines the late-2010s/early-2020s period of tech liberalism, marked by widespread faith in innovation as a social good and by the institutional embrace of liberal diversity, equity, and inclusion frameworks. Following #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, my research captures a specific moment in which technocapitalism presented itself as progressive, inclusive, and future-oriented, even as it reproduced racialized urban inequality.

The following lays out my doctoral research. It begins with a literature review to conceptualize the interrelations between whiteness, tech urbanism, and gentrification in North American cities. First, I will examine the impact of tech industries on cities and gentrification. Next, I will outline the interrelations between race, racialization, and the urban, before examining how whiteness as futurity shapes tech urbanism and the processes of tech-led gentrification. Following the literature review, I present my research questions and methodology, then provide an overview of the three journal articles that form the core of this thesis. The

articles offer complementary perspectives on tech-led gentrification. The first develops a theoretical framework, showing how whiteness and futurity shape urban change under technocapitalism. The second applies this framework comparatively to Montreal and Philadelphia, revealing how tech narratives and policies produce racialized and temporal inclusion and exclusion. The third examines tech workers' everyday imaginaries, showing how their visions of innovation reproduce whiteness and legitimize displacement at the neighborhood level. Collectively, these articles demonstrate how tech-led gentrification produces and reproduces racialized hierarchies by embedding whiteness into visions of innovation, progress, and the urban future.

Chapter 1: Framing the Study of Tech-led Gentrification and the Temporalities of Whiteness in Philadelphia and Montreal

Literature Review

Gentrification, Tech Urbanism, and Tech-led Gentrification

Theorized in 1964 by British sociologist Ruth Glass, gentrification is broadly defined as the process by which a marginalized or vacant neighborhood becomes home to more affluent residents, businesses, and amenities, eventually leading to the exclusion and displacement of lower-income and vulnerable communities. There is much debate in earlier literature about the origins and determinants of gentrification, long considered a “chaotic” concept (Rose, 1984). Glass’ original theorization of gentrification and some of the most prominent subsequent work (Smith, 1979, 1982, 1987) focused mostly on socio-economic markers (income, housing, capital). Rather concerned with the cultural dimensions of gentrification than its strict economic determinants, other researchers stressed how gentrification has (re)configured relations of production and reproduction (Rose, 1984) through the emergence of a “new cultural class” (Ley, 1994). Consisting of university-educated professionals (such as teachers, academics, journalists, or artists), with high levels of cultural and social capital (Brown-Saracino, 2009; Tissot, 2014; Zukin, 2012), this new middle class – although socio-economically and politically heterogeneous – contrasted with the traditional suburban middle class in terms of politics, lifestyles, and consumption habits.

But gentrification is more than a process induced by capital and/or people: local, municipal, state, and federal actors play a leading role too (Harvey, 1989). More recently, various authors have argued that gentrification has turned into a global urban strategy deployed

by city governments in competition with one another to attract capital (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Lees, 2003; Sigler & Wachsmuth, 2020; Slater, 2004). Relying on private property and state donations, gentrification now acts as the ultimate materialization of (state-sponsored) “neoliberal urbanism” (Smith, 2002, p. 446). In the context of a highly competitive interurban economy, several scholars argue that the deployment and politicization of “urban regeneration” narratives have helped to sugarcoat and normalize the gentrification process (Hackworth, 2019). Neil Smith (2002) contends that the success of such language in “anesthetizing” our critical understanding of gentrification represents a major ideological victory for neoliberal – and racially informed – visions of the city.

Over the past decades, the expanding influence of tech corporations has also largely contributed to the processes of gentrification. In a narrow sense, a technology company is one that primarily conceives and manufactures technologies, although this line is becoming increasingly blurred. Indeed, the growing use of digital technologies and digitized processes by almost every sector over the past decades has deeply reshaped both business processes and models (Schiller, 2000). Luis Suarez-Villa (2001) conceptualizes technocapitalism as a contemporary phase of capitalism structured around technological innovation and the commodification of knowledge. While technology has long been central to capitalist development, what sets technocapitalism apart is that technology itself becomes the primary product rather than merely a means of production. Its expansion relies on the accumulation of inventions and the construction of knowledge-intensive infrastructures – such as communication systems and educational institutions – often financed through public investment (Suarez-Villa, 2001, 2012). At its core, this model hinges on the diffusion and commodification of knowledge, enabled not only by material infrastructures but also by dynamic, relational networks of

professionals and researchers. In the mid-2000s, the emergence and expansion of social media and platform businesses – where firms interact directly with their producers and their users/consumers, ultimately creating value through these interactions – have drastically amplified the power and influence of tech industries (Langley & Leyshon, 2017; Leszczynski, 2020), over the urban particularly.

Witnessing the increasing concentration of tech corporations in Western cities (Nathan & Vandore, 2014; Zukin, 2020), many scholars have emphasized the impact of tech industries on the housing market and the evolution of urbanism (Akers & Rousseau, 2020; Chapple & Jeon, 2021). To understand this shift, we first need to discuss these new economic sectors and their connection to urban governance and then examine how they are linked to gentrification. While tech social imaginaries have historically been anchored in the suburban landscape of Silicon Valley (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995), the 2008 economic crisis and intensifying interurban competition pushed city governments to seek new strategies for capital attraction. With the rise of technocapitalism, tech urbanism emerged as a new “promised land of socio-economic prosperity” (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017, p. 1000) for policymakers across the Western world. Since 2010, the transformation of major cities into “tech hubs” – through the attraction of affluent tech workers, venture capital, platforms, and Big Tech corporations – has become a central priority for both local and national governments as well as business elites (Zukin, 2020). Following on the work of Manuel Castells (1991, 2010), Sharon Zukin (2020) contends that the tech industry functions not only as “a set of relationships that are socially and culturally embedded in a locality,” but also, and more fundamentally, as “a business that wants cheap labor, few government restrictions, and access to investment capital” (p. 946).

Tech sectors have increasingly reconfigured how urban spaces are governed. By adopting an entrepreneurial orientation in response to economic disinvestment, fiscal stress, and increasing popular defiance (Zukin, 2020), city governments have turned to tech corporations and industries as the way forward to their economic recovery. Scholars argue that the rise of high-tech economies in cities has been closely linked to the “strategic urbanization of the entrepreneurial state,” in which the state actively transforms the urban commons into private, technology-driven start-up economies (Moisio & Rossi, 2020, p. 547). Through the commodification of urban life, national and local governments have strategically positioned cities – understood as “socially rich and economically productive space[s] within which the potential of life can be harnessed to economic purposes” (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017, p. 536) – at the center of their economic growth agendas (Elrick, 2020; Foord, 2013).

Examining technology and gentrification benefits from differentiating between its various dimensions. Scholars highlight how platforms – from Airbnb (Rozena & Lees, 2021; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018) to real estate technologies (Fields & Rogers, 2021; McElroy, 2020, 2024) – extend gentrification globally, reproducing structural exclusion, dispossession, and displacement of low-income and racialized communities (Dal Maso et al., 2021; Zeiderman & Dawson, 2022). Yet tech industries shape urban space far beyond digital liberalization: the influx of tech workers and state-led strategies for knowledge economies have transformed city landscapes and social fabrics. In San Francisco, McElroy (2018) shows the “Dot-Com invasion” of largely white, upper-class “tech bros” reinforced gentrification and racialized real estate geographies as state policies transformed cities into platforms for experimental governance and tech-driven economic activity (Moisio & Rossi, 2020). Building on this work, McElroy (2019) frames Silicon Valley as a global “tech imperial” center, where predominantly white, middle-class nomadic tech class

exploits global labor hierarchies and extends Silicon Valley's influence across local and global spaces. Far from being disruptive, tech urbanism, and the gentrification it drives, help reproduce historical racialized and classed urban inequalities (McMillan Cottom, 2020).

Central to my research is the question of tech imaginaries – how tech firms, workers, and spaces are imagined. There are a few studies that examine how, beyond its economic and political impact, tech urbanism has also reshaped urban imaginaries. It is useful to distinguish here between imaginaries of tech firms and workers, on the one hand, and tech neighborhoods, on the other. Tech urbanism has given rise to what Evan Getzoff (2020) terms the “start-up society,” where the ideal citizen-as-entrepreneur thrives in a hyper-stimulating, innovation-driven urban environment designed to foster interaction and knowledge exchange. Ugo Rossi and Arturo Di Bella (2017) note that cities are increasingly imagined as dynamic ecosystems of creativity, knowledge, and diverse “communities of practice” that cultivate individuals as entrepreneurs of the self. Framing themselves as leaders of an urban “revolution” (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018), tech firms appropriate and commodify local environments and lifestyles within capitalist circuits of wealth accumulation (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017).

These imaginaries, however, remain profoundly racialized and gendered. Narratives of tech “heroes” center on Eurocentric, masculine, and white identities (Benjamin, 2019; Dickel & Schrape, 2017b). Entrepreneurs are portrayed as “utopian market heroes” (Luri et al., 2023), linking whiteness, masculinity, and able-bodiedness to creativity, rationality, and the power to shape the future (McElroy, 2019; Tarvainen, 2022). Even racialized entrepreneurs often reinforce rather than challenge whiteness (Hashimoto, 2022; Irani, 2018), while the broader tech world continues to function as a conservative and exclusionary “white boys’ club” (Walker, 2018).

The ascent of the tech class, central to tech futurity, reframes prior analyses of the gentrifying class. As Yui Hashimoto (2021) shows, Richard Florida’s “creative class” thesis (2006) reconceptualizes class around value-added creativity and consumptive power rather than production. In tech urbanism, this logic crystallizes in the figure of the tech worker: raceless, genderless, mobile, and “no-collar” in theory (Florida, 2006), yet overwhelmingly white and male in practice (McElroy, 2018). Tech workers are positioned as engines of urban revitalization, imagined as cosmopolitan subjects whose presence signals openness, tolerance, and future-oriented dynamism (Hashimoto, 2021). Their spatial preferences for “cool” and “edgy” neighborhoods – coffee shops, coworking spaces, and start-up incubators – translate into municipal strategies for urban development, legitimizing gentrification as innovation. Like tech entrepreneurs, Black and Latinx workers remain persistently underrepresented, while Asian tech workers are incorporated through “model minority” dynamics that uphold, rather than contest, the dominance of whiteness (Irani, 2018; Chow, 2023). I examine these dynamics in greater depth in my third manuscript, which investigates how tech subjectivities perpetuate inequality and consolidate whiteness as a spatial and temporal structure of dominance.

Second, on tech spaces, economic geographers have illustrated how space is (re)imagined within economic discourses as an input or lever for tech firms, ultimately centering the role of space within tech economies. Echoing earlier research on the gentrifying class (Ley, 1994; Rose, 1984), several scholars argue that urban environments play a pivotal role in producing a new class of “innovative” tech entrepreneurs (Peck, 2005; Rossi & Di Bella, 2017). Indeed, in the tech economy, the urban acts as “a socially rich and economically productive space” (Moisio & Rossi, 2020, p. 536) where demographic density and physical proximity facilitate and encourage face-to-face interactions while blurring the boundaries between the workplace and the place of

living. As cities are reshaped into state-driven platforms for governance experimentation and hubs of creative economic development (Moisio & Rossi, 2020), the tech class seeks “tolerant, diverse, and amenity-rich communities” (Peck, 2005, p. 745) that support a precarious work-life balance. Acting as a “vast open-plan office” (Moisio & Rossi, 2020, p. 537), the urban thus must be both modern/tech-friendly and (socially, architecturally, and culturally) “authentic” (Tissot, 2014). In these tech urban spaces constructed upon “the normalcy of city life” (Moisio & Rossi, 2020, p. 536), tech entrepreneurs and workers can be involved in daily collaborative (capitalist) activities (both inside and outside the workplace), create economic value through these interactions while enjoying (commodified and de-politized) local urban cultures (McElroy, 2019; Peck, 2005). These ideas about innovative spaces have shaped the making of neighborhoods on the ground. Embracing an entrepreneurial stance in response to economic disinvestment and fiscal stress (Harvey, 1989), city governments have turned to tech corporations as the way forward to their economic recovery (Opillard, 2015). Over the last decades, tech industries – through the implantation of platforms targeting urbanites (Leszczynski, 2016), the development of “tech hubs” in former industrial areas (Zukin, 2020), or the influx of wealthy tech workers in inner cities (McElroy, 2018) – have profoundly reshaped the ways cities – and henceforth their inhabitants – are governed and imagined. Through the commodification and appropriation of urban life and cultures, tech industries have acted as a major driving force behind gentrification.

As Antti Tarvainen (2022) observes, the innovation economy thrives on the global appeal of the “new,” mobilizing promises of radical temporal ruptures through narratives of “new beginnings” and “disruptions” led by startup “heroes” and their allegedly world-changing technologies. These fantasies – whether embodied in the figure of the “messianic” tech entrepreneur (Gill & Larson, 2014; Tutton, 2021) or in the visions projected by “smart” city

initiatives (Sadowski & Bendor, 2019) – sustain a powerful global imaginary of future urban life (Datta, 2019). Yet, as scholars of race and urban development argue, these imaginaries are not neutral: they align with whiteness as a temporal and spatial project, casting racialized communities as remnants of an outdated past and positioning the tech class as legitimate inheritors of the future (Tarvainen, 2022). In the context of urban change, this temporal framing manifests in gentrification processes: new labs, startups, and research hubs are celebrated as engines of civic progress, while long-standing, working-class, and racialized residents are recast as impediments to innovation and modernity. I engage this literature in greater depth in my second manuscript. Ultimately, tech-led gentrification can be seen as an extension and intensification of state-led and university-led urban redevelopment rather than a wholly new process. It builds on existing frameworks shaped by municipal policies, institutional expansion, and public-private partnerships. While it adapts to local geographies and housing markets, it also introduces the distinct logics of technocapitalism, including future-oriented, innovation-driven imaginaries. In doing so, tech-led gentrification intersects with other forms of urban restructuring while reinforcing social, spatial, and racial hierarchies that perpetuate exclusion and dispossession over time.

Building on the literature on tech imaginaries, my research looks more closely at how tech firms, workers, and spaces are imagined in Montreal and Philadelphia, how these imaginaries fuel the gentrifying process, and how these narratives ultimately perpetuate white supremacy. Across the three manuscripts, I engage these debates by showing how discourses of innovation and futurity – mobilized by firms, policymakers, and urban elites – frame tech-led development as both inevitable and desirable, thereby legitimizing racialized displacement and exclusion. I demonstrate that tech firms and workers are not merely participants in urban change

but key agents in scripting who belongs to the city's future, enacting whiteness as a temporal project that defines progress through exclusion. The literature on racial capitalism and the racialization of urban spaces, as we will see, offers additional ways to understand these processes.

Race, the Temporalities of Whiteness, and the Production of Urban Spaces

The relationship between race, urban governance, and gentrification has received increasing scholarly attention (Hwang, 2016, 2020; Lees, 2016; Sutton, 2020; Wyly & Hammel, 2004; Zimmer, 2020). Scholars have argued that capital accumulation depends on the extraction of value from both people and places, highlighting the intertwined dynamics of capital, race, and urbanism (Fields & Raymond, 2021; Kelley, 2017). Racial capitalism has proven quite useful in analyzing these interconnections (Gibbons, 2016; Taylor, 2019). Coined by Cedric Robinson (2000[1983]), racial capitalism argues that racism is not coincident with capitalism but precedes it. By highlighting the “symbiotic relationship” (Gonzalez, 2021, p. 114) between race and capitalism, the concept of racial capitalism reveals how racism continues to shape capitalist systems today, challenging conventional Marxist analyses (Fluri et al., 2020). Originating from European racialist feudalism, Robinson claims that racial capitalism establishes racism (or “racialism”) as the structuring logic of capitalism. By bringing various forms of colonialism together into a “relational ‘global history of colonial modernity’ organized around racial hierarchies” (McClintock, 2018, p. 3), racial capitalism allows us to apprehend the historical and ongoing interdependences of various forms of racialized global violence. Through colonization, settler colonialism, trans-Atlantic slave trade, and imperialism, capitalism expanded racial hierarchies into a global – economic, political, social – system that turned local, spatial, and

cultural differences into racialized forms of dominance (Gonzalez, 2021; Kelley, 2017; Rodríguez, 2020; Sweeney, 2020). As Robinson (2000[1983]) notes, European capitalism did not aim to create uniformity but rather to intensify and codify regional, cultural, and linguistic distinctions, transforming them into “racial” categories (p. 26). Built on the exploitation of racialized human and geographical differences, racial capitalism ultimately reveals how imperialism, colonization, settler colonialism, and white supremacy concomitantly operate as part of a united global system of wealth and power accumulation.

Recent scholarship has increasingly turned to the concept of racial capitalism to analyze urban governance, gentrification, and broader processes of urban transformation. Rooted in the exploitation of racialized human and geographic differences, racial capitalism provides a critical framework for understanding how the founding and governance of cities – conceived as a historicized imperial/colonial project – are intertwined with corporate and state strategies aimed at erasing non-white presence (Bhambra, 2020; Dorries et al., 2019; Gibbons, 2016). For example, Ida Danewid (2020) shows how urban planning has long served to control and subjugate negatively racialized communities, with practices like segregation and urban renewal first tested in colonial cities before being applied in imperial centers. This colonial genealogy reveals how racial hierarchies are embedded in urban space. Likewise, Laura Pulido (2016) illustrates how environmental racism and racial capitalism shaped the Flint water crisis, while Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2019) highlights how racial discrimination is structurally embedded in the real estate system, privileging white spaces.

When gentrification was first introduced into the terminology of academic literature, it was portrayed as an alteration in the class structure of a neighborhood (Harvey, 1989; Ley, 1994; Rose, 1984; Smith, 1979). Yet, more recent research has increasingly focused on the racial

dynamics of gentrification (Danewid, 2020; Lees & Hubbard, 2021; Maharawal, 2017; Ramírez, 2020; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2021; Somashekhar, 2020), highlighting how this process – understood as a manifestation of racial capitalism – has been historically informed by racism and henceforth whiteness. Given the historical and deliberate state-led concentration of negatively racialized communities in financially distressed neighborhoods – areas especially vulnerable to expropriation and restructuring –, gentrification cannot be understood solely through economic lenses. Research indeed demonstrates that racial discrimination and hierarchization are deeply embedded in the very structure of the real estate industry and housing policies in North America (Harris, 1993; Haynes, 2020; Goetz et al., 2020; Seamster, 2015; Shaw, 2006; Taylor, 2019). Various scholars claim that housing dispossession, spatial exclusion, and forced displacement – some of the most brutal and perceptible consequences of gentrification – are part of a “white supremacist, settler socio-spatial dialectic” (Bonds & Inwood, 2016, p. 720) to make land “profitable” by adding value to white spaces (Embrick et al., 2022). As Nancy Raquel Mirabal (2009) notes, “urban renewal and the politics of space are connected to the preservation of whiteness” (p. 17).

In a similar vein, racial capitalism also encourages us to rethink both Smith’s (1979) and Harvey’s (1989) seminal work on gentrification. Through this lens, it is possible to appreciate the historical racialized character of (urban) land (de)valuation processes, understood as a continuum of structural and institutional violence targeting Black, Brown, and Indigenous presence (Ramírez, 2020). Considering racial ideologies as key in both the production of land value and the perpetuation of a housing market that strengthens white privilege (Ali & Whitman, 2021; Bandhar, 2018; Chari, 2021; Dorries, 2019; Fluri et al., 2020; Gibbons, 2016; Taylor, 2019), racial capitalism helps reveal the inherently racialized nature of gentrification. Indeed, various

scholars claim class alone isn't sufficient to explain how, when, and where gentrification unfolds (Ramírez, 2020; Zimmer, 2020). According to Zawadi Rucks-Ahidiana (2021), racial capitalism thus helps explain “the uneven processes of gentrification by explicitly acknowledging that the racialization of a neighborhood influences how it is valued as a potential site of gentrification” (p. 13). Building on Harvey’s notion of the “spatial fix” (1978), Prentiss A. Dantzler (2021) argues that urban processes are fundamentally racialized, emphasizing that the built environment is shaped by racialization processes that structure and restructure people and places through imposed valuations. While the 20th-century suburbanization functioned as a (racialized) “spatial fix” for the white communities leaving Black/Brown urban spaces, urban gentrification – through the return of white families and the growing implementation of racial capitalist corporations in inner-city spaces – perpetuates colonial, racially-based processes of expropriation and dispossession (Dantzler, 2021). As such, gentrification is not “a new colonialism but an old one” (Danewid, 2020, p. 302).

By attributing economic and symbolic value to racially exclusive white spaces, various scholars claim that racism and racial discrimination are constitutive of urban processes, including gentrification (Zimmer, 2020). Through the implementation of (re)development projects that exploit local (racial) characteristics, the gentrifying process allows capital accumulation in low-income, marginalized neighborhoods (Lees, 2016). As Rucks-Ahidiana (2021) points out, race – and henceforth whiteness – inform “not only the demographics of gentrifying neighborhoods, but gentrifying neighborhoods’ prior exposure to (dis)investment and contemporary experiences with power dynamics among gentrification stakeholders” (p. 3). The racial dynamics of gentrification also unfold through temporal processes. Indeed, recent scholarship has drawn attention to the temporal dimensions of gentrification (Bodnar, 2022; Degen, 2016; Kern, 2016;

Lanari, 2019; Sakizlioglu, 2014; Yilmaz & Zafer Kurt, 2022), arguing that it reshapes neighborhood temporalities by producing new rhythms while erasing others. Lesly Kern (2022) terms this process “temporal displacement,” through which gentrification marginalizes long-term residents and reconfigures local geographies of inclusion and exclusion. In doing so, it facilitates the erasure and “whitewashing” of local histories and spaces (Lanari, 2019, p. 377; see also Knierbein & Wall, 2022). Ultimately, gentrification functions as a form of “chronopolitics” (Esposito & Becker, 2023), producing the temporal and spatial disappearance of particular communities.

To better appreciate the ways race shapes the urban and its future, we can turn to the growing literature on whiteness and white spatio-temporalities before delving more deeply into the links between whiteness, futurity, and gentrification. Geographers have long analyzed how whiteness shapes both space and people’s spatiality. Conceptualized by W.E.B. Du Bois (1920, 1935), whiteness is broadly apprehended as a location of racial privilege, a perspective from which white people analyze themselves, others, and society at large, and an array of socio-cultural practices that usually goes unnoticed (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000). The concept of whiteness, of course, is not always understood in the same way (Huddleston, 2021). It is useful, then, to briefly review how geographers and other scholars have approached whiteness and the related phenomenon of white futurity. Intersecting with class, sexuality, and gender, research shows that whiteness is multifaceted and relational, constantly operating on a multitude of levels (Alcoff, 2006, 2015). Grounded in people’s corporeality, mobility, and sense of spatiality, Sara Ahmed (2007) argues that whiteness works as “an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space” (p. 150). As such, it operates as a “form of inheritance” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 160; Lipsitz, 1995) that precedes the

(white) body and directs the (racially privileged) ways (white) people inhabit the world. Because whiteness is both normalized and hegemonic (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Dyer, 2008; Feagin, 2020[2009]; Mills, 2004), several authors contend it is mostly invisible to the ones who inhabit (and benefit from) it (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Yancy, 2008), although white people can showcase, on specific occasions, a strong collective racial consciousness (Baldwin, 2016, 2017; Lewis, 2004).

While some scholars point out that whiteness is contextualized, diverse, and “fragmented” (Alcoff, 2006), others emphasize its normative character, arguing that whiteness acts as a “universal signifier” (Winnubst, 2006, p. 88), the norm against which other racial identities and realities are apprehended (Ahmed, 2007; Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006; Frankenberg, 1993; Mills, 2004; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). In a similar vein, several authors argue that whiteness acts as a global phenomenon, materializing a symbol of success and a desirable identity in the capitalistic global economy. As Riyad A. Shahjahan and Kirsten T. Edwards (2021) point out, “to pursue capitalist gain, safety, or global mobility is to pursue whiteness” (p. 3). Beyond individuals’ identity and experience, whiteness is also related to social hierarchies, including white supremacy and capitalism. Understood as a racially oppressive superstructure (Hage, 2012), white supremacy normalizes white power and privilege through the subordination and dehumanization of Black, Indigenous, and other non-white communities. Anne Bonds and Joshua Inwood (2016) argue that white supremacy is a foundational logic of modern capitalism, materially sustaining white power and warranting central attention in any analysis of whiteness.

Like any racial category, the ongoing production of whiteness is entwined with spatial processes. The literature on geographies of whiteness (Baldwin, 2012; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Seamster, 2015) illuminates the ways diverse spatial dynamics participate in the exaltation

of whiteness and perpetuate the structural oppression and objectification of the non-white, racially marked body. Historically, whiteness has acted as an analog to propriety, perpetuating the systematic expropriation, displacement, and exploitation of Indigenous and negatively racialized populations worldwide (Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Harris, 1993). Considering whiteness as the location of structural racial privileges in a whitened global economy, geographies of whiteness expose the socio-spatial production of race within spatial hierarchies that order bodies (Pulido, 2002). As whiteness continues to be celebrated while racially marked bodies are “economically cheapened” (Schurr, 2017, p. 245), these geographies demonstrate the inherently racialized dimension of geographical dynamics of power and wealth accumulation.

Building on this foundation, some scholars have examined the central role of whiteness in gentrification. Aj Golio (2023) makes a significant contribution by conceptualizing gentrification as both “an appropriative process of racialized cultural consumption” and a phenomenon shaped by the economic logics of racial capitalism and racialized organizational structures (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2021). He argues that gentrification actively produces and reinforces white identity, with neighborhoods functioning as “borderlands” (Ramírez, 2020) where surface-level cross-racial interactions generate discourses on difference, and visible economic inequalities justify and normalize white dominance. In this sense, gentrification does not merely reflect whiteness; it (re)produces it. Empirical studies thus reveal a “dialectical process that solidifies white dominance and reifies whiteness itself via racialized discourse around differences in how people occupy and capitalize upon space,” Golio claims, “this is what makes gentrification white” (p.18).

While the spatial operationalizations of whiteness have been documented, its temporality – although “a fundamental vector of social power” (Winnubst, 2006, p. 151) – has only begun to

be explored. Indeed, acting as “a central organizing principle of modernity” (Goldberg, 1993), race is defined by its temporality. Operating as “an imagined time that is yet-to-come” (Baldwin, 2012, p. 173), the concept of futurity materializes the imaginaries, strategies, narratives, and practices through which the future is supposedly made knowable and predictable. Many scholars argue that futurity – both racialized and gendered – shapes contemporary politics and society (Dinshaw et al., 2007; Edelman, 2004; MacLeavy et al., 2021; Oswin, 2012; Shakhsari, 2014; Jeffrey & Dyson, 2020). Some research links futurity to settler colonialism and white supremacy, showing how these structures are maintained over time (Baldwin, 2016, 2017; Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Erickson, 2020; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Scholars further note that xenophobic discourses dehumanize Indigenous, Black, Brown, and poor immigrant populations, securing the dominance of whiteness across both space and time (Baldwin, 2016, 2017; Olson, 2015; Oswin, 2012; Schultz, 2019; Shakhsari, 2014). A focus on the temporalities of race/whiteness thus allows us to see how political discourses center futurity in the white individual (and more broadly in the white race) by denying full humanity to negatively racialized bodies (Dinshaw et al., 2007; Schultz, 2019; Smith & Vasudevan, 2017).

Through the investigation of the temporalities of whiteness, we can appreciate the ways geographic expressions of whiteness and white supremacy – beyond their spatiality – are inherently contingent on the future (Olund, 2017). By nurturing utilitarian and capitalistic conceptions of the future (Winnbust, 2006), various authors contend that the permanence of white spatial and economic dominance has rested on the systematic elimination of Black and Brown – physical, spatial, and symbolic – presence, continually relegated to the past (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). The (spatio-temporal) value of

whiteness is thus secured by (racial capitalist) spatial politics in which “the future is priced into white real-estate values” (Baldwin, 2012, p. 178).

Research shows that innovation narratives have shaped urban neighborhoods, as city governments increasingly rely on tech corporations to drive economic recovery amid fiscal stress (Harvey, 1989; Opillard, 2015). Through platforms, tech hubs, and the influx of affluent workers, tech industries reshape city governance and imagination, fueling processes of gentrification (Maharawal, 2022; McElroy, 2018; Zukin, 2020). At the same time, scholars emphasize that whiteness operates temporally as well as spatially: spatial and economic white dominance is maintained through the systematic marginalization of Black and Brown communities, whose presence – physical, spatial, and symbolic – is relegated to the past (Baldwin, 2012; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

By bridging these two literatures, my dissertation examines how tech-led gentrification is structured by white futurity, asking how tech urban spaces and communities are imagined and how these visions erase working-class and racialized populations. It opens a terrain of inquiry into how visions of the future are mobilized across multiple scales and actors to shape urban transformation. I analyze how tech firms, city governments, and other institutional actors deploy narratives of innovation and progress to justify redevelopment, attract investment, and legitimize spatial and social exclusion. At the same time, I investigate how these imaginaries intersect with race, shaping which communities are valorized, which are marginalized, and how whiteness is inscribed as both a spatial and temporal structure of power. This approach also considers the role of tech workers in reproducing, negotiating, or contesting these racialized futurities within the workplace and the neighborhoods they inhabit. While existing research has powerfully documented the racialized impacts of gentrification, it has paid less attention to how whiteness

itself operates as an organizing logic, shaping urban imaginaries, development priorities, and claims to the future. By foregrounding whiteness-as-futurity, this project extends racialized analyses of gentrification into the temporal and ideological dimensions of urban change under technocapitalism.

Through this inquiry, the thesis demonstrates how tech-led gentrification reproduces whiteness and ultimately reimagines urban life. Under late-2010s/early-2020s tech liberalism, whiteness operates primarily through narratives of inclusion, diversity, and innovation. It presents itself as progressive and benevolent, reproducing racial hierarchies not through overt exclusion but via futurist imaginaries that define who is “forward-looking,” “talented,” and “innovative,” while positioning racialized working-class communities as behind, deficient, or in need of incorporation. In this mode, whiteness maintains dominance by promising inclusion while materially organizing displacement and erasure.

In my first manuscript, introducing the case study of the gentrifying neighborhood of Parc Extension in Montreal, I argue that analyzing narratives surrounding cities’ tech-oriented “futures” offers critical insight into how urban innovation discourses reproduce white futurity through redevelopment and spatial displacement. The second manuscript examines the racialized dynamics of tech-led gentrification in Parc Extension and Philadelphia’s University City, demonstrating that these processes reproduce whiteness not only through material displacement but also through symbolic acts of temporal erasure, as state-supported tech futurities remain inseparable from the production and maintenance of white futurity. In the third manuscript, I explore how tech workers’ racialized subjectivities sustain whiteness as both a spatial and temporal structure of power. The next section outlines the framework for this inquiry.

Research Outline

Investigating how tech urban spaces and communities are imagined – and how these narratives perpetuate the exclusion of racialized, working-class populations – this research builds on scholarship on whiteness as futurity, gentrification, and tech urbanism. As discussed, tech industries have profoundly reshaped urban landscapes over recent decades, while race – and specifically whiteness – has historically informed urban processes, including gentrification. Whereas prior studies have emphasized the historical role of race in city-building, attending to the temporal dimensions of whiteness provides new insights, especially given the growing influence of technology on urban spaces. By emphasizing whiteness as a temporal and future-oriented framework, we can better understand how tech imaginaries and gentrification narratives position the white individual and white spaces at the center of urban futurity.

Drawing upon critical whiteness studies, tech, and gentrification literature, my research focuses on two neighborhoods: Philadelphia’s University City and Montreal’s Parc Extension. By exploring the narratives deployed by the gentrification stakeholders – local governments, universities, and the tech sector – between 2010 and 2024, it examines how these areas’ redevelopment went hand in hand with the conception and dissemination of future-oriented urban imaginaries responsible for erasing – symbolically and physically – non-white presence.

Aiming to understand how tech-led gentrification perpetuates symbolically and materially geographies of whiteness as futurity in the North American context, my study explored three main research questions:

- How do stakeholders of tech-led gentrification envision the present and future of *tech neighborhoods* and the *tech class*, and to what extent do these imaginaries reflect an ostensibly “better,” predominantly white urban future?

- To what extent do tech workers themselves adopt, enact, and reproduce these narratives?

- How are Black and South Asian residents represented – or omitted – in tech narratives of neighborhood change?

Case Studies

To explore the impact of tech futurities on urban landscapes, I conducted a comparative study between two gentrifying neighborhoods: Parc Extension and University City. These neighborhoods represent two poignant cases in regard to both their racial composition and exposure to gentrification and tech urbanism. Montreal and Philadelphia are both medium-sized cities, home to respectively 1.6 million and 2 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020; Ville de Montréal, 2021). Their neighborhoods of focus house 55,953 people in University City (UCD, 2024, p. 9) and 28,775 in Parc Extension (CBAR, 2022, p. 13). Despite their distinct histories, the implementation of significant research and tech urban hubs – initiated and supported by higher education institutions, namely the University of Pennsylvania and Université de Montréal (University of Montreal – UdeM) – has acted as a major gentrifying force in both areas, prompting the exclusion and displacement of low-income, negatively racialized, and vulnerable communities.

Philadelphia's University City



Figure 1. Map of University City, Philadelphia (Google Maps)

Situated across the Schuylkill River from Center City, University City in West Philadelphia has undergone extensive redevelopment over the past two centuries. Once the predominantly African American neighborhood known as the Black Bottom, the area was largely destroyed through 19th- and 20th-century urban renewal, including streetcar expansions, bridges, and tunnels (Ehlentz, 2016). The relocation of the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and the creation of the West Philadelphia Corporation in 1959, in partnership with Drexel, the University of the Sciences, and Presbyterian Hospital, drove large-scale redevelopment, including the University City Science Center, displacing over 4,400 Black residents (Wolf-Powers, 2022). More recently, the University City District (UCD), established in 1997 by Penn and other local institutions, has fostered a tech and research hub, attracting over 52,000 students and catalyzing 85,000 jobs in technology, biotech, higher education, medicine, and research (UCD, 2024).



Figure 2. University of Pennsylvania Campus Map, Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania website)

Today, University City is majority white (38.5%) and Black (37.2%), with growing Asian (15.2%) populations and Hispanic (7.7%) communities (US Census, 2020). Penn now owns 1,000 acres valued at \$3.2 billion (UCD, 2024), reflecting centuries of land accumulation and displacement. University City provides a clear case for examining how tech industries, workers, and urban imaginaries are intertwined with gentrification and the erasure of working-class and racialized residents.



Figure 3. Photography of University City, Philadelphia (UCD website)

Montreal's Parc Extension

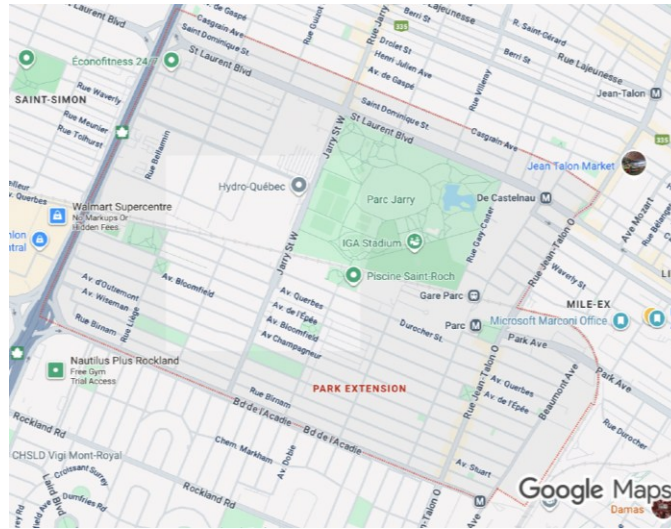


Figure 4. Map of Parc Extension, Montreal (Google Maps)

Like Philadelphia's former Black Bottom, Parc Extension has recently experienced intense gentrification, driven by the arrival of the University of Montreal (Université de Montréal or UdeM) (Beck et al., 2019). Established in 1910 on formerly rural land, the neighborhood is highly diverse, with 57% immigrants and 69% of residents not speaking French or English as a first language (CBAR, 2022). Its demographic history includes Jewish residents in the 1950s, followed by Italian and Greek immigrants in the 1960s–1980s, and, over the past 40 years, South Asian communities now comprise 64% of the local immigrant population. Most current residents (81%) are renters, many of whom arrived on precarious or temporary statuses, contributing to integration challenges (Halais, 2019). With nearly 29,000 residents, Parc Extension has the highest population density in Montréal at over 17,600 people per square kilometer (CBAR, 2022).

Until recently, the neighborhood had not been shaped by a major university. In 2019, UdeM opened Campus MIL on its southern edge, near the AI research hub Mila, with funding from municipal, provincial, and federal governments totaling over C\$439 million (Halais, 2019; Sprague & Rantisi, 2019). Mirroring the “Penetration” of West Philadelphia, Campus MIL has been linked to rising rents, evictions, and displacement, privileging students, faculty, and staff over long-term residents (Parc Extension Anti-eviction Mapping Project, 2020). Parc Extension thus provides a key case for examining how tech imaginaries, institutions, and workers shape racialized urban change.

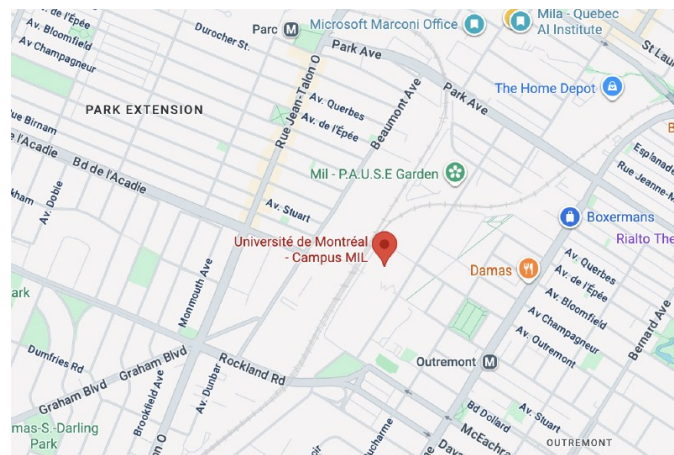


Figure 5. Map of Campus MIL, Montreal (Google Maps)



Figure 6. Photography of Campus MIL, Montreal (University of Montreal website)

Tech-led gentrification in both Philadelphia and Montreal can be understood as a continuation and intensification of state-led gentrification, rather than an entirely new phenomenon. In both cities, municipal policies, university expansion, and public-private partnerships have historically shaped urban redevelopment, and the arrival of tech industries builds upon these pre-existing frameworks. In Philadelphia, tech-led gentrification generally involves a mix of renovating older housing stock and constructing new developments, layering contemporary tech investment onto a long history of municipal redevelopment and urban “renewal” efforts prompted by local universities. This combination reflects the city’s ongoing engagement with state-led gentrification and illustrates how tech-driven initiatives adapt to pre-existing urban infrastructures and housing markets. In contrast, Montreal’s tech-led gentrification is more strongly associated with new-build projects, particularly in areas adjacent to Campus MIL, reflecting the province’s planning priorities and strategic focus on attracting world-class researchers, students, and global talent.

These differences highlight the versatility and context-specific nature of tech-led gentrification, which engages with local histories, policies, and institutional frameworks and consistently reproduces social, spatial, and racial hierarchies. In both cities, it adapts to local geographies, housing markets, and historical trajectories and incorporates the distinct logics of technocapitalism. This adaptability enables tech-led gentrification to overlap with other forms of urban restructuring (state-led redevelopment, university expansion, and real estate speculation) while simultaneously deepening existing inequalities. By combining renovation and new construction, leveraging institutional actors, and framing urban space through narratives of innovation and progress, tech-led gentrification perpetuates patterns of exclusion, dispossession, and temporal erasure that have long characterized state-led urban transformation.

Methodology

Geographers have long analyzed how race impacts the production of space. By comparing these two neighborhoods, my goal is to grasp how tech imaginaries and narratives around the tech-friendly, “next-generation city” have reshaped the urban, ultimately nurturing geographies of whiteness as futurity (Baldwin, 2012). To appreciate these dynamics in Parc Extension and University City, I use document analysis (corporate, institutional, and media communications) and semi-directed interviews to understand how various actors seize upon opportunities and seek to shape urban processes to their benefit.

The State. In response to the 2008 economic crisis and growing competition between cities, municipal governments have increasingly turned to the development of “tech hubs” as a strategy to attract investment, talent, and economic growth (Zukin, 2020). In both Philadelphia and Montréal, city planners and elected officials have played central roles in facilitating tech-led gentrification, implementing policies, infrastructure projects, and redevelopment strategies that support the influx of high-income residents and businesses while reshaping urban space (Stein, 2019).

The tech sector. The expansion of technocapitalism has transformed cities into social and cultural centers of innovation, positioning tech industries as a primary driver of urban change and gentrification (Zukin, 2020; Opillard, 2015). Tech companies curate relationships between markets, civil society, and government, shaping urban governance and the built environment (Leszczynski, 2020). In Montréal’s Marconi Alexandra (“Mile Ex”), for example, municipal incentives, zoning revisions, and redevelopment projects have converted a formerly affordable manufacturing district into an exclusive hub targeting tech workers and affluent residents (CBAR, 2022; Sprague & Rantisi, 2019). Similarly, the influx of tech workers in West

Philadelphia, facilitated by universities and research centers, has reinforced gentrification and transformed the social fabric of the neighborhood (UCD, 2024).

Universities. Higher education institutions now play a pivotal role in shaping urban development, investing in infrastructure, influencing local policy, and lobbying for redevelopment projects (Bunnell & Lawson, 2006; Goddard & Vallance, 2013; Parc Extension Anti-eviction Mapping Project, 2020). Universities compete for corporate partnerships and affluent residents, positioning themselves as key actors in city-led redevelopment strategies. Campuses such as UdeM's Campus MIL and Penn's University City District have served as catalysts for neighborhood transformation, attracting investment while displacing long-term residents and reinforcing racialized inequities in housing and access to urban resources (Bromley, 2006; Perry & Wiewel, 2015; Wiewel & Perri, 2008).

To understand the roles of city administrators, universities, and the tech sector in contemporary urban redevelopment, I employed two complementary methods. First, I conducted a discourse analysis of public and media texts from the past 18 years to examine how University City and Parc Extension have been represented in Philadelphia and Montreal's collective memory. I focused on 2007 as a starting point, the year Montreal's Public Consultation Office (OCPM) published its first report on the planned Campus MIL (Parc Extension Anti-eviction Mapping Project, 2020). Using Atlas.ti, I coded over 200 sources, including media articles, interviews, and institutional communications such as UCD's annual reports (from 2010 onward) and Campus MIL/UdeM websites. This analysis allowed me to investigate: (1) how institutional and corporate narratives frame each area's present in relation to its past, (2) how tech workers and tech milieus are depicted within these narratives, and (3) the extent to which longstanding, working-class residents are included or omitted.

Second, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 33 tech workers: 17 in Philadelphia and 16 in Montréal. Participants included 17 women (“she/her”) and 16 men (“he/him”), with the majority identifying as white; eight participants were racialized, including African American, Afro-Latina, South Asian, Mexican, Japanese, Black Cameroonian, and Arab individuals. Interviews lasted 30-45 minutes, and “tech worker” was broadly defined to include employees across the sector, though most held senior roles (e.g., directors, project managers, engineers, and senior researchers). Recruitment leveraged existing tech spaces – a biotech co-working space in Philadelphia (Fall 2023) and a coffee shop near Mila in Montreal (Winter 2024) – with snowball sampling supplementing outreach. Interviews explored participants’ perspectives on the tech sector, their workplaces, and the neighborhoods they inhabit. All names and companies were anonymized. Data were analyzed inductively and manually coded around themes of race, diversity, the tech sector, and neighborhood change (Alegria, 2019). This approach allowed me to examine how individual narratives intersect with broader media and public discourses, particularly in how racialized bodies and communities are positioned in relation to urban futures.

Overview of the Dissertation Manuscripts

Using the lens of whiteness as futurity (Baldwin, 2012), I interrogate tech imaginaries and extend existing research on tech-led gentrification and the tech class (Moisio & Rossi, 2020; Peck, 2005; Rossi & Di Bella, 2017; Zukin, 2020). I show how future-oriented narratives entrench whiteness as both a spatial and temporal structure of power across three manuscripts.

The first paper, now under review at *City: Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action*, develops a research agenda by integrating literatures on tech urbanism, gentrification, whiteness, and futurity, showing that analyzing narratives of cities’ tech-oriented “futures” illuminates how

urban innovation discourses reproduce white futurity through redevelopment and spatial displacement. It argues that attending to futurity reveals how racialized and gendered visions of the tech future actively shape urban change. Building on recent critical geography scholarship on tech capital and urbanism, the paper demonstrates that tech-led gentrification is shaped not only by capital and class but also by imaginaries of the future. While primarily focused on tracing connections between these literatures, the manuscript also illustrates their intersection through a brief case study of Montreal's Parc Extension. The case study, which is presented more fully in the second and third manuscripts, demonstrates how tech-oriented visions of the "future" actively shape gentrification processes, providing new ways to understand the temporal and racial dynamics of urban transformation. By highlighting how imaginaries of the future are racialized and gendered, this manuscript contributes to ongoing discussions of gentrification, urban inequality, and the reproduction of whiteness, showing that visions of urban progress are neither neutral nor universally beneficial.

The second paper, currently under review at *Urban Geography*, examines how institutional actors deploy visions of the future to shape urban development and reinforce social hierarchies. Focusing on Parc Extension and Philadelphia's University City, where collaborations between the tech sector, the state, and universities (the state-university-tech nexus) drive urban transformation, the paper shows how these actors advance futurist imaginaries that marginalize racialized communities while positioning the (white) tech sector as the legitimate steward of urban futures. By emphasizing temporality, it demonstrates that tech-led gentrification reproduces whiteness not only through material displacement but also through symbolic erasure, linking state-supported tech futurities to the broader reproduction of white futurity and supremacy. This article contributes to the growing body of literature on tech

urbanism, race, and gentrification by examining how state-sponsored tech futurities are bound up with whiteness and the production and maintenance of white futurity. In doing so, it connects imaginaries of the tech-driven future to both urban spatial transformation and the temporal structuring of racial hierarchies, highlighting how narratives of innovation and progress function as instruments of racialized power.

Finally, the third paper, submitted to *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, explores the narratives and lived experiences of tech workers, examining how their racialized subjectivities both sustain and, in some cases, contest whiteness as a spatial and temporal structure of power within workplaces and the surrounding urban environment. Drawing on interviews with 33 tech workers and entrepreneurs in University City and Parc Extension, it demonstrates how the predominantly white, middle-class tech class projects aspirational visions of neighborhood change that position themselves as agents of progress and innovation. These imaginaries function as a form of racialized governance, shaping who is imagined as part of the city's future and reinforcing the tech class's entitlement to urban space. By integrating scholarship on whiteness, racialized futurity, and tech urbanism with empirical observation, the paper demonstrates that tech-led gentrification is not merely an economic or policy process but also a racial and sociocultural one. While narratives vary across participants, most converge in reinforcing a shared vision of "modernity" grounded in whiteness. Ultimately, this paper shows that tech subjectivities and aspirations actively reproduce urban inequality, consolidating white spatial, temporal, and economic dominance. By highlighting how the everyday practices, aspirations, and imaginaries of tech workers sustain racial hierarchies, it contributes to the broader literature on race and tech, demonstrating that whiteness operates not only structurally but also through the micro-level enactments and negotiations of urban actors.

Collectively, the three manuscripts offer new ways to understand gentrification by highlighting the temporal and racial dimensions of tech-led urban transformation. While analyses of the past remain central to understanding urban change (Baldwin, 2012), attending to futurity illuminates how gentrification is structured not only spatially and economically but also temporally: visions of the future actively shape the present, determining which communities are included in urban development and which are systematically marginalized. In particular, tech-led gentrification is deeply intertwined with white futurity, as the predominantly white, upper-middle-class tech class projects aspirational narratives of innovation and progress that normalize their entitlement to urban space while relegating Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities to the past. By examining these intersections, this study extends prior scholarship on tech urban development (Maharawal, 2022; McElroy, 2019; Tarvainen, 2022), showing that futurity – through imaginaries, narratives, and practices – plays a critical role in reproducing racial hierarchies. Tech imaginaries, urban planning discourses, and state-supported innovation initiatives collectively script who is imagined as belonging to the city’s future and who is excluded, embedding whiteness as both a spatial and temporal structure of power. Understanding these temporal and cultural dimensions is crucial for unpacking the ways in which gentrification, urban transformation, and technological imaginaries reinforce existing systems of oppression, even in cities that publicly celebrate diversity, inclusion, and innovation (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995; Florida, 2006). By integrating analyses of futurity into studies of tech-led urban change, this research demonstrates that gentrification, and tech-led gentrification in particular, is not merely a consequence of economic or policy interventions, but also a racialized and temporal process, sustained through imaginaries, aspirations, and practices that actively shape the social and material landscape of contemporary cities.

Chapter 2: Tech-led Gentrification as Futurity

Recent research in critical geography has explored how tech capital has reshaped urban processes, constituting a new form of “tech urbanism” and new processes of tech-led gentrification. One way to build on this work, I argue, is to examine how these processes are tied to futurity. As various scholars claim, futurity is politically constructed and materializes the imaginaries, narratives, strategies, and practices through which the future is supposedly made knowable and predictable. Research shows that futurity – both racialized and gendered – has a tangible impact on the making of geographies in the present. In the context of tech industries’ increasing influence over urban imaginaries and governance, this paper argues that futurity provides new ways to problematize tech-led gentrification. Drawing upon the case study of the gentrifying neighborhood of Parc Extension in Montreal, this article claims that analyzing narratives surrounding cities’ tech-oriented “future” can offer important insights into the ways in which gentrification is configured in the present.

Keywords: Gentrification, Futurity, Whiteness, Technology, Montreal

[Manuscript submitted to *City: Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action*]

Introduction

The significance of technology capital for urban processes and politics is the subject of a growing scholarly literature. As Sharon Zukin (2020) shows, tech corporations are increasingly concentrated in cities, and city governments are increasingly seeking to create “tech hubs” to attract tech capital. The arrival of the tech industry has created new visions of growth for cities (Moisio & Rossi, 2020; Zukin, 2020, 2022), now seen as “privileged sites for technology-intensive interactive economies” (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017, p. 1000). As cities have been progressively relying on tech, tech corporations have turned into incredibly efficient lobbyists (Leszczynski, 2020). By converting governmental regulations into a tool of corporate urban governance (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018), research shows tech industries have managed to reshape cities and urban governance. While tech corporations and tech hubs continue to be established in suburban and exurban locations (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995), both city governments and tech

firms have targeted gentrifying, urban locations as well. One of the consequences of tech urbanism, then, is to provide another material and discursive impetus for gentrification, which some scholars have sought to understand through the study of tech-led gentrification (Maharawal, 2022; McElroy, 2018; Tarvainen, 2022).

One way to enrich the studies of tech-led gentrification, I contend, is to engage with the concept of futurity. For Andrew Baldwin (2012), futurity refers to “an imagined time that is yet to come” (p. 173). The future, here, is indeterminate. Representations of the future are “social constructs” (Grunwald, 2014, p. 283) created in a more or less complex manner by specific actors to reach specific goals. A social construct, futurity nevertheless shapes the world in the present. In this sense, futurity can be defined as the imaginaries, narratives, strategies, and practices through which the future is supposedly made knowable and predictable in the present (Anderson, 2010). Various authors have explored how futurity intersects with technology. Armin Grunwald (2014) conceptualizes techno-futures as representing “the futures of humans and society” (p. 283) in relation to technological development. These futures are often shaped through corporate and state discourses, which construct plausible, tech-driven “horizons of hope” (McBeath & Webb, 2000) that influence current social expectations and political decision-making (Robinson et al., 2021). In this way, techno-futures establish a dynamic link between a fantasized, technologically enhanced future and a present imagined merely as “a transitional turning point” (Dickel & Schrape, 2017b, p. 290). Sheila Jasanoff (2015) demonstrates how such technological utopias serve as “visions of desirable futures” (p. 4), and Richard Tutton (2021) adds that investments in these technologies are often underpinned by “positive visions of social progress” (p. 419). Research also shows that concepts of futurity are both racialized and gendered (Grove et al., 2022), and several scholars have explored how raced-gendered futurities

produced material effects in today's politics and societies (Anderson & Adey, 2012). Indeed, some of the most important work has used the concept of futurity to extend and enrich studies of whiteness (Baldwin, 2012, 2016, 2017).

For scholars interested in tech-led gentrification, the concept of futurity offers a productive analytical lens. Various scholars have examined the intersections of futurity, technology, and space (McElroy, 2018, 2019, 2020; Tarvairen, 2023; Tutton, 2021) and there are now avenues to explore. First, more attention could be paid to the figure of the tech entrepreneur and their role in shaping speculative futures. Second, further work could explore how pre-tech neighborhoods are discursively and materially reimagined in relation to the “future” that technology is presumed to bring. Finally, it is crucial to examine how both tech subjects and spaces are constructed in relation to whiteness and white futurity. One of the key contributions of linking studies of tech-led gentrification with studies of futurity, then, is the critical lens it offers on how whiteness and white supremacy are reproduced through the discourses and practices deployed by the state and other actors to attract tech capital and promote tech-driven urban development and prompt displacement.

This article seeks to enrich discussions of tech-led gentrification by mobilizing the concept of futurity. I develop this argument in four parts. First, I review the emergence of tech urbanism and its impact on gentrification processes. Next, I examine how the concept of futurity is mobilized in studies of tech industries and tech urbanism. As I show, the concept of tech futurity provides a way of analyzing gentrification and futurity in contexts where tech industries are important to the latter. Then, I analyze the literature on white futurity and consider how this work might help us to recognize the racialization of the imagined subjects of tech-led gentrification – the “new residents.” In the final section, I briefly analyze the ongoing tech-led

gentrification of the neighborhood of Parc Extension in Montreal (Quebec, Canada) to demonstrate to what extent these concepts can provide new insights into the gentrifying process. I conclude by arguing that analyzing narratives around cities' "future" can offer important insights into the ways in which tech-led gentrification is configured in the present.

Tech Urbanism and Tech-led Gentrification

An emerging literature has examined how tech capital has reshaped urban processes. One aim of this literature is to document the growing significance of tech capital to urban economies. While Silicon Valley has historically been central to tech urban imaginaries and narratives (Zukin, 2020), new research has brought attention to tech capital in cities like San Francisco (McElroy, 2018; McNeill, 2016), New York (Zukin, 2020), Los Angeles (Noble & Roberts, 2019), or Philadelphia (Wiig, 2016). Over the last decade, tech industries have expanded their presence in cities in various ways, including the implementation of platforms targeting urbanites (Lees & Hubbard, 2021; Leszczynski, 2016; McElroy, 2020; Rozena & Lees, 2021), the development of "tech hubs" in former industrial areas (Nathan & Vandore, 2014), and the establishment of offices in cities in order to better attract tech workers (McElroy, 2018, 2019). By positioning themselves at the forefront of a so-called "socio-economic revolution" (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018), tech corporations have appropriated and incorporated urban environments and lifestyles within capitalist circuits of wealth accumulation and valorization (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017).

This literature has also shown how tech capital has reshaped urban strategies. One example of this is the promotion of smart city strategies (Caprotti, 2019; White, 2016). More broadly, Sharon Zukin argues that the global expansion of tech has produced a new social

imaginary positioning the city as “the center of modern technology” (2020, p. 942). Undertaken by the urbanized entrepreneurial state for branding and financial purposes (Hollands, 2015), smart city initiatives materialize the impact of tech futurities over space. Relying on alarmist narratives around urban and social crises (Sadowski & Bendor, 2019, p. 540), the smart city, as “a dynamic future-in-the-making” (Sadowski & Bendor, 2019, p. 557), illustrates how corporations and State actors actively and concomitantly shape sociotechnical imaginaries. As Sheila Jasanoff (2015) states, “sociotechnical imaginaries are not limited to nation-states as implied in our original formulation but can be articulated and propagated by other organized groups, such as corporations, social movements, and professional societies” (p.11).

This literature has also explored how urban spaces are reimagined and redesigned to accommodate and attract tech companies and workers. As cities are turned into “state-orchestrated platforms for experimental governance and creative business activity” (Moisio & Rossi, 2020, p. 535), the new creative/virtual class is craving for “tolerant, diverse and open communities” (Peck, 2005, p. 745) rich of urban facilities where they can gather, interact, and do business (Castells, 1991, 2010). Acting as a “vast open-plan office” (Moisio & Rossi, 2020, p. 537), the urban must be both modern/tech-friendly (Caprotti, 2019) and socially, architecturally, and culturally “authentic.” In these tech urban spaces constructed upon “the normalcy of city life” (Moisio & Rossi, 2020, p. 536), tech communities can be involved in daily collaborative (capitalist) activities (both inside and outside the workplace), create economic value through these interactions (Castells, 2010; Moisio & Rossi, 2020) while enjoying (commodified and depoliticized) local urban cultures (Peck, 2005). As Manuel Castells (1991) notes, tech elites/communities are inseparable from their “social innovative milieus.”

Tech urbanism has significantly reshaped gentrification processes. Gentrification is broadly defined as the transformation of a marginalized or previously disinvested neighborhood into one inhabited by more affluent residents, businesses, and amenities – often resulting in the displacement of lower-income and vulnerable communities (Harvey, 1989; Smith, 1979). Prior research has also highlighted the temporal aspects of this process (Bodnar, 2022; Degen, 2016; Kern, 2016; Lanari, 2019; Sakizlioglu, 2014; Yılmaz & Zafer Kurt, 2022). Most of this work argues that the process prompts a change in the temporal landscape of neighborhoods by creating new temporalities whilst suppressing others (Knierbein & Wall, 2022). Coining the concept of “temporal displacement,” Lesly Kern claims that gentrification nurtures a new temporal landscape responsible for new geographies of marginalization, exclusion, and inclusion. Through the “temporal displacement” of long-term residents (Kern, 2022), gentrification eventually facilitates erasure and “whitewashing” (Lanari, 2019, p. 377) of local histories and spaces (Knierbein & Wall, 2022). Gentrification thus functions as a form of “chronopolitics” (Esposito & Becker, 2023; Lanari, 2019) responsible for the temporal and spatial disappearance of certain spaces and communities.

The gentrification literature has long explored how specific industries and labor markets drive these transformations (see Ley, 1994). Over the past four decades, scholars have emphasized the formation of new gentrifying classes, particularly the emergence of the “creative class” (Rose, 1984). While the creative and tech classes are characterized by high levels of education and urban orientation, tech workers typically command significantly higher incomes, have stronger ties to global capital, and are more directly embedded in speculative and extractive forms of urban development. Unlike the creative class, which was often associated with cultural production and symbolic capital, tech workers are closely aligned with financialized, venture-

backed industries whose spatial demands and corporate cultures can accelerate gentrification more rapidly and destructively by reterritorializing urban space along sharply racialized and classed lines. For instance, Erin McElroy (2018) describes the “Dot-Com invasion” of downtown San Francisco – largely driven by young, affluent, white “tech bros” – as a phenomenon that is not only classed but also deeply racialized. This influx accelerates the transformation of historically racialized neighborhoods into predominantly white, upper-middle-class spaces (Walker, 2018; Mirabal, 2009), often at the expense of Black and Latino communities (Maharawal, 2017).

Theorizing “tech imperialism,” McElroy (2019) explores how Silicon Valley operates as a global techno-imperial center, driving processes of racial dispossession both within and beyond its geographic bounds. Their work situates digital nomadism within these dynamics, framing digital nomads as a form of “lifestyle migrants” – typically middle-class and wealthy Westerners who benefit from geoarbitrage, or the exploitation of uneven global labor divisions (McElroy, 2019, p. 217). While often portrayed as cosmopolitan and flexible, digital nomads remain embedded in enduring colonial allegories and racial hierarchies (McElroy, 2019). McElroy also foregrounds the anti-Blackness of Tech 2.0 urbanism, arguing that contemporary configurations of race, space, and capital are shaped by earlier anti-Black geographies (McElroy, 2020, p. 114). They conceptualize property as a racial technology, where innovation in platform real estate and “proptech” – including smart buildings, automated tenant screening, and predictive analytics – deepens racialized surveillance and exclusion (McElroy, 2020, p. 122; 2024). These systems deploy AI, the Internet of Things, and predictive policing tools, extending carceral logics into domestic spaces through mechanisms like “broken windows” policing and stop-and-frisk, which disproportionately target Black residents in gentrifying neighborhoods (McElroy, 2020, p. 122).

In this way, tech-led urbanism intensifies the racialized dispossession of Black communities by fusing imperial, technological, and property regimes.

As the literature on tech urbanism shows, the tech sector is deeply entangled with race, space, and time, raising pressing questions about the racial dynamics of tech-led gentrification: How can futurity illuminate these processes? By examining the intersections of futurity, technology, and whiteness, the following sections demonstrate how future-oriented tech narratives shape the contours of gentrification in the present, determining who counts as tech subjects and which urban spaces are deemed valuable.

Technology and Futurity

The links between technology and futurity are the subject of a rich and growing literature. With the never-ending expansion of technology across all spheres of our lives, tech innovation has emerged as capitalism's latest representation of utopia and the future (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995; Tarvainen, 2022). Various scholars have shown that tech sectors come with distinct visions of the future. Like the broader literature on futurities, the literature on future-oriented tech imaginaries is fundamentally concerned with the ways the images of the future frame political action in the present. The importance of tech futurity, then, lies more in its performative, regulatory power in the present (Jasanoff, 2015) than in its actual potential to create utopist, alternative futures (Dickel & Schrape, 2017a, p. 56). Images of the future are central to the power of tech capital in the present. In a broad sense, these images contribute to simplifying and decontextualizing complex social, environmental, and technological issues (Dickel & Schrape, 2017a; Wiig, 2016). Formed through corporate and state discursive practices, they are exploited to construct plausible tech-driven "horizons of hope" (McBeath & Webb, 2000) that shape

current social expectations and political actions (Robinson et al., 2021). Acting as a force of “re-enchantment” in a world in crisis (Dickel & Schrape, 2017b, p. 289), tech future-oriented imaginaries emerge through a new social concept of time, “a paradigm of an open future” which can be “shaped by human agency” (Dickel & Schrape, 2017b, p. 289).

Understandings of tech futurities can be refined by looking at the particular actors or figures who populate tech narratives. With the surge of tech capitalism, the most significant figure is a new “tech entrepreneur.” Thanks to their considerable symbolic, economic, and political influence, tech entrepreneurs play a leading role in the constitution and dissemination of tech futurities. For the past few decades, this small, elitist group of capitalist innovators has personified and driven a hyper-centralized, hierarchical technology industry toward their visions and objectives (Luri et al., 2023). Distancing themselves from the rest of (supposedly ignorant and backward) society, these high-profile “visionary agents of sociotechnical change” position themselves as superior “public intellectuals” (Dickel & Schrape, 2017b, p. 290) who possess seemingly crucial (yet somehow under-explored) insights for the future. In a time of growing collective uncertainties and social anxieties, tech entrepreneurs promise better futures to a variety of audiences, from venture capitalists and policymakers to the public, who are then expected to act upon them (Robinson et al., 2021, p. 814). The “making the world a better place” narrative (Luri et al., 2023, p. 102) has thus become inseparable from the tech entrepreneur figure itself, pictured as a sort of “messianic savior” of a world in disarray (Tarvainen, 2022). Space X CEO, Elon Musk, is a preminent example of such “promise entrepreneurs” (Tutton, 2021). It is through these imaginary visions of an idealized techno-future that tech entrepreneurs are able to attain “their heroic status” (Luri et al., 2023, p. 105). These narratives contribute to the power and influence of tech entrepreneurs. They provide them with “a license to spin a good futuristic

tale” (Geiger, 2020 in Luri et al., 2023, p. 103) without being liable to prove neither its scientific veracity nor its material feasibility. Under the neoliberal logic of market-mediated social progress, governments at levels are incited, for electoral and budgetary reasons, to invest in the idealized futures promised by technology innovators/saviors (Harvey, 1989; Slater, 2004). Tech futurities are hyper-capitalist futurities, with governments tying their own successes to those of “visionary” tech entrepreneurs.

Tech futurities are also about space. Echoing the US ongoing history of colonization and imperialism (Tarvainen, 2022), Elon Musk’s so-called “mission” to conquer Mars – a fantasized, virgin “New World” – is a prime example of such plausible yet unreachable techno-futures that help perpetuate tech entrepreneurs’ significance in today’s world. Closer to the ground, economists and economic geographers have illustrated how office space is (re)imagined within economic discourses as a lever for tech firms, ultimately centering the role of space within technology economies. Echoing Damaris Rose’s (1984) and David Ley’s (1994) work, various authors argue that urban environments are viewed by tech firms and government as crucial in the production of the virtual class of “innovative” tech entrepreneurs/workers (Peck, 2005; Rossi & Di Bella, 2017). In the tech economy, the urban acts as “a socially rich and economically productive space” (Moisio & Rossi, 2020, p. 536) where demographic density and physical proximity facilitate and encourage face-to-face interactions while blurring the boundaries between the workplace and the place of living. As I’ll discuss below, similar connections between tech futurities and geography can be observed in processes of gentrification.

Technology, Whiteness, and Futurity

Another important sub-literature examines the links between futurity and race, and particularly whiteness. Recent work within and outside geography has begun to explore how whiteness is not only tied to space but also to time. Whiteness, here, refers not to an ostensibly scientific or extra-discursive category (“white people”), but to a privileged social position, an array of sociocultural practices that reproduce this position, and the ways of knowing, seeing, and inhabiting the world associated with this position (see Ahmed, 2007; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Frankenburg, 1993; Yancy, 2008). The links between whiteness and geography are a longstanding subject of inquiry (Goetz et al., 2020); its relationship to futurity is a more recent focus. Indeed, while the spatial operationalizations of whiteness have been documented, its temporality – although “a fundamental vector of social power” (Winnubst, 2006, p. 151) – has long been disregarded (Baldwin, 2012). Yet, acting as “a central organizing principle of modernity” (Goldberg, 1993 in Baldwin, 2016, p. 84), racial categories are defined by their temporality.

Scholars analyzing the intersections of settler colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy with futurity have shown how whiteness is often imagined as the future, while Indigeneity and Blackness are positioned as the past (Baldwin, 2016, 2017; Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Erickson, 2020; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021). Rooted in utilitarian conceptions of the future (Winnubst, 2006), the endurance of white dominance has relied on the systematic elimination of Indigenous presence – physically, spatially, and symbolically – continually relegating Indigenous peoples to a pre-modern, vanished past (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). In a similar vein, scholars have explored how the proliferation of xenophobic discourse across the Western world serves to secure the spatial and temporal dominance of whiteness by

dehumanizing poor, racialized immigrant populations (Baldwin, 2016, 2017; Olson, 2015; Oswin, 2012; Schultz, 2019; Shakhsari, 2014). These narratives frame the racialized Global South as desperate, backward, and ultimately disposable, while idealizing the supposedly whiteness of the West as the embodiment of progress and global desirability. Finally, research on technology and race highlights how whiteness operates as a socio-cultural representation of innovation and modernity. Stephen Cave and Kanta Dihal (2020), focusing on the racialization of artificial intelligence (AI), argue that our dominant representations of intelligent machines – and the futures they “embody” – are overwhelmingly shaped by a white racial frame (Feagin, 2020[2009]). By projecting both real and imagined AI as white, high technology becomes what Joel Dinerstein (2006) calls a “white mythology.” This framing erases racially marked bodies from the imagined technological future, rendering them trivial, disposable, or entirely absent (Mitchell, 2010). Through the global diffusion of Eurocentric values, narratives, and norms, white futurity ultimately colonizes individual, collective, and institutional imaginaries (Baldwin, 2012, 2016; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Shakhsari, 2014).

Given the relationship between futurity and both technology and whiteness, there is an opportunity to examine the intersection of all three. A few scholars, notably, have examined how conceptions of tech futurities are fundamentally racialized. These imaginaries, some scholars have shown, perpetuate Western, neocolonial narratives that fetishize “innovation” and “discovery” through the erasure of Indigenous, Black, and Brown histories. Antti Tarvainen (2022) notes that modern visions of “progress” rely upon “a culture of amnesia” that appropriates the pasts of the (racially marked) oppressed while turning the (white) oppressors’ histories into “universal destinies” (p. 1). In practice, this reinforces the current neo-colonial arrangement of the world. Indeed, many scholars argue that the so-called “neutrality” of technology promotes

the conformability of techno-centric narratives (Dickel & Schrape, 2017a) to sociohistorical dynamics of racial oppression (Tutton, 2021; Tarvainen, 2022). Thus, through the promotion of racialized, classed, and gendered “cleaner, lighter utopias” (McElroy, 2018, p. 7) by tech firms and governments alike, the innovation tech economy’s “path” toward the future (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995) eventually leads back to a colonial, Eurocentric past (Tarvainen, 2022). The links between tech futurities and race are particularly evident in (neo-)colonial contexts. Coining the concept of “tech colonialism,” Manissa Maharawal (2022) states that tech industries are responsible for the brutal, historicized dispossession of racialized spaces. She claims, “tech-colonialism is a formation in which racialized histories of violence and dispossession are reproduced through social and spatial relations of power” (p. 795). Enacting socio-political and cultural representations of urban modernity and tech-led “progress” (Datta, 2019), a focus on tech geographies henceforth can offer new understandings of gentrification as a future-oriented, racialized process that perpetuates “colonial and Eurocentric images of time” (Tarvainen, 2022, p. 5) through the diffusion of civilizing, “neocolonial savior narratives” (Maharawal, 2022, p.798).

Like tech futurities in general, there are racial dynamics to the narratives of tech entrepreneurs. Various authors claim that discourses about (technology) heroes centralize Eurocentric, masculine, white identities (Benjamin, 2019; Dickel & Schrape, 2017b). By portraying tech entrepreneurs as “utopian market heroes” (Luri et al., 2023), technosocial, future-oriented imaginaries uphold racial capitalism through the association of particular bodies – seen as white, hyper-masculine (McElroy, 2018, 2020), penetrative, body-abled, and thus productive – with “reason, creativity, and future-making capacity” (Tarvainen, 2022, p. 9). As Irani (2018) points out, when racialized tech entrepreneurs are celebrated and recruited within the circuits of

the tech economy, they often contribute to sustaining a system of whiteness (Fanon, 1952).

While tech elites tend to portray themselves as progressive on social issues such as sexism and racism, research shows that the “tech world” they have created constitutes, in fact, a conservative and highly exclusive “white boys club” (Walker, 2018). Indeed, Latinos and Black entrepreneurs remain virtually absent among tech executives. For instance, in 2022, only 3 percent of the members of tech corporate boards of directors were Black (JFF Labs, 2022). The main exception is Eastern and Southern Asian entrepreneurs who constitute a “regular” (yet minority) presence (Walker, 2018) among the upper crust of tech. Nevertheless, the Asian (often male) presence in the upper tier of managerial and executive tech staff remains marginal and intimately conditioned by whiteness. Indeed, research shows that this presence contributes to perpetuating detrimental “minority model” stereotypes (Chow, 2023; Zhou, 2004). The representation of Asian entrepreneurs among tech elites ultimately contributes to nurturing neoliberal myths of meritocracy that mask the historical hostility of the tech sector toward racialized communities (Alfrey, 2022).

The race-future link structures other levels of the tech hierarchy as well. Despite the deployment of progressive, supposedly tolerant narratives by tech elites (Alfrey, 2022), various authors claim that the virtual class, notwithstanding its prestigious social stature, remains deeply unequal (Walker, 2018). As McElroy (2019) points out, while tech companies continue to hire white, young male “tech bros” and “tech geeks” for leadership positions, “exploitative labor” keeps expanding within the tech sector. Countering tech corporations’ “diversity” discourses, recent research reveals how racialized and gendered labor divisions remain inseparable from the tech industries’ ideology and modes of functioning. Focusing on the experience of Black and Asian tech workers, various scholars show how the tech-led division of labor relies on racial

capitalist visions that assign creative, managerial capacities to white bodies (Chow, 2023; Irani, 2018; Twine, 2018). Research on the tech class – structured to the advantage of whiteness – thus helps to complexify earlier work on the “creative class” (Peck, 2005). Through the invisibilization and erasure of negatively racialized bodies and identities, the conceptualization of future-oriented, homogenizing narratives around technology and tech communities normalizes the dominance of white futurity (Baldwin 2012) over the tech sector.

There are links between tech, race, and geography as well. Indeed, considering the ways tech futurity nurtures white privilege raises important questions regarding space and people’s spatiality. For instance, previous research shows that the “future-colonizing logic” (Tarvainen, 2022, p.3) of the tech sector is responsible for the systematic, historicized dispossession of racialized lands and bodies (Irani, 2018). As whiteness allows individuals to project themselves into space and time (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021), tech workers’ mobility and spatiality are tied to their racial status and privileges. At the urban scale, as Ugo Rossi and Arturo Di Bella point out, “the city is seen as an ‘ecosystem,’ comprising knowledge, creativity and a variety of communities of practice, enabling the individual to become an ‘entrepreneur of himself’” (2017, p. 1001). Ultimately, tech capitalism – boosted by the generalization of neoliberal and entrepreneurial ideologies – has succeeded in forming a “start-up society” (Getzoff, 2020) where the fantasized citizen-as-entrepreneur thrives thanks to a stimulating and innovative over-caffeinated tech urban environment that promotes interactions and knowledge-sharing. The technology economy is thus defined by a racialized division of labor that is simultaneously spatialized and temporalized (McElroy, 2019) between high-tech elites who project themselves into an idealized techno-future (Luri et al., 2023); a highly unequal and divided virtual class (Irani, 2018) localized in the futuristic, exclusive “Silicon Valleys of the world” (Castells, 1991);

and an exploited, invisibilized, and racialized, “disposable” (Mitchell, 2010) labor force employed in factories across the “underdeveloped,” “backward” Global South (Shakhsari, 2014).

This extensive literature ultimately helps us reconceptualize tech-led gentrification by offering distinct ways to think about both individuals and spaces. It invites us to consider two important dimensions. On the one hand, gentrification and time: how does futurity structure tech-led gentrification and, more broadly, the gentrifying process? Tech imaginaries often situate pre-gentrified neighborhoods and their existing residents as relics of the past – backward, underdeveloped, and disposable – while projecting whiteness as modern, innovative, and emblematic of the future. On the other hand, gentrification and race: how is tech-led gentrification structured through whiteness? These processes highlight the central role whiteness plays not only in shaping the identity of gentrifiers but also in defining which urban spaces are considered valuable, investable, and worth “futuring.” As seen in Montreal’s neighborhood of Parc Extension, tech-led gentrification ultimately reproduces and reinforces the racialized logics of urban space.

Tech-led Gentrification as Futurity in Montreal’s Parc Extension

The neighborhood of Parc Extension is in the midst of a tech-led gentrification and constitutes a prime site in which to view the mobilization of racialized discourses about tech futurity. Parc Extension is situated in the borough of Villeray–Saint-Michel–Parc Extension, in the Northern part of Montreal. With 57% of its population composed of immigrants and 69% of its residents who do not speak French or English as their first language, Parc Extension is one of the most culturally diverse neighborhoods in Canada (Parc Extension Community-Based Action Research & Network – PECARN, 2022, p. 13). For the past 40 years or so, South Asian

communities (from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan) have increasingly populated the area making up 64% of today's local immigrant population (Parc Extension Community-Based Action Research and Network, 2022, p. 13). 81% of today's residents are renters (PECARN, 2022) and many residents are employed as temporary workers and/or lack citizenship status (Halais, 2019). With a population of almost 29,000, Parc Extension has the highest population density in the Montreal area with more than 17,600 residents per square kilometer (PECARN, 2022, p. 13).

After a long period of downgrading and marginalization in the 1980-1990s (Jolivet et al., 2022), Parc Extension has recently been the subject of intense gentrification prompted by the arrival of a new campus of the University of Montréal (UdeM). In 2019, UdeM opened Campus MIL, a multi-million-dollar development project on the south edge of the neighborhood. Located close to the university's AI research center Mila (in the nearby Marconi-Alexandra area), Campus MIL is intended to bolster Montreal's reputation as a hub for high-tech research (Halais, 2019; Jolivet et al., 2022). Both the city and province of Quebec have provided substantial funding for the new campus with the city investing C\$210 million in decontamination and infrastructure work while the province granted C\$145 million (Sprague & Rantisi, 2019). The federal government has also invested C\$84 million into the project, praised by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as "a way of boosting Montreal's intellectual capital as a cornerstone of economic growth" (Halais, 2019). In Montreal's gentrified Marconi Alexandra (a neighborhood adjacent to Parc Extension, now commonly referred to "Mile Ex"), for instance, research shows that the municipal government has encouraged gentrification – through tax incentives, zoning revisions, and redevelopment projects – turning this formerly affordable manufacturing district into an exclusive tech hub with single occupancy condominiums targeting wealthy residents (Sprague &

Rantisi, 2019; PECARN, 2022). Promoted and implemented by three gentrification stakeholders – namely the entrepreneurial state, the tech sector, and universities or the so-called “Triple Helix” (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995) –, Campus MIL has ultimately drawn the in-migration of new, predominantly white residents, students, and tech workers recruited by tech companies localized in nearby Mile Ex (Jolivet et al., 2022, p. 2).

As universities have turned into lucrative “partners” of localities in their economic transition toward innovation economies, urban campuses now represent a specific case of structural investment (Jolivet et al., 2022) with dramatic consequences for local communities. For the past years, long-term residents and grassroots organizations have accused UdeM of worsening the housing conditions in Parc Extension by facilitating the increase in rent hikes and evictions (Projet de cartographie anti-éviction de Parc-Extension, 2020, p. 9). Such impact has remained largely absent from both corporate and political narratives. During the inauguration of Campus MIL in September 2019, Valérie Plante, Mayor of Montréal, claimed: “Rarely do we have the chance to inaugurate *a brand-new neighborhood* [...] we can now celebrate one of the largest transformation projects in Montréal” (QMI, 2019, my emphasis). Francois Legault, Premier of Quebec, praised the provincial government’s financial support of a “superb, *modern*, and attractive” project (QMI, 2019, my emphasis). In a similar vein, the development director of Montoni group – a redevelopment company responsible for the demolition of local businesses in the area – argued that “the greatest needs in Parc Extension” were “for families and students who will arrive with the *new campus*” (Jolivet et al., 2022, p. 16, my emphasis).

While the old-timers remain absent, these narratives – deployed by elected officials and private actors alike – support earlier research that has shown how gentrification contributes to symbolically and temporally erasing local communities (Kern, 2016). Indeed, Parc Extension

and its surroundings are anything but a “new” neighborhood. Yet, as developers, along with the federal, provincial, and city governments, praise the implementation of “modern” Campus MIL, they ultimately invisibilize and relegate immigrant, negatively racialized communities to the margins. Parc Extension’s fantasized, tech-driven future is thus tied to specific bodies – the white, affluent “creative” newcomers – and spaces – Campus MIL’s exclusive, futuristic, knowledge-intensive tech-urban environment that gathers students, tech corporations, and AI research centers. These examples also display the capitalistic visions of the city shared by both the State (local, provincial, and federal) and the private sector. By picturing cities as the “fault lines of digital technology” and the “promise of economic growth” (Zukin, 2020, p. 959), tech-led gentrification prompts the collusion of business interests with political ones to the detriment of working-class, racialized communities. Far from being neutral or innocent, such discourses ultimately push long-term residents to the temporal margins of their neighborhood transformation.

This brief look at tech-led gentrification in Parc Extension highlights the value of analyzing the process through the lens of futurity. Tech/white futurities shape who counts as legitimate tech subjects and which spaces are deemed valuable. Long-standing residents are marginalized, excluded from the optimistic, political discourses and ultimately from the area’s imagined future. These processes reveal how whiteness sets the criteria for investable and “future-ready” urban spaces. The creation of a “brand new” neighborhood links Parc Extension’s tech-driven future to specific bodies – white, affluent “creative” newcomers – and exclusive spaces like Campus MIL, a knowledge-intensive hub of students, tech firms, and AI research centers. Parc Extension thus demonstrates how tech-led gentrification secures whiteness as the city’s future: not only through spatial displacement of racialized communities but also via

temporal imaginaries that erase their presence, relegate them to the past, and position white bodies and spaces as the only legitimate urban futures.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate how tech-led gentrification – as a racial capitalist urban process (Bhambra, 2021; Danewid, 2020; Dantzler, 2021; Dorries et al., 2019; Gibbons, 2016; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2021; Somashekhar, 2020; Zimmer, 2020) – is deeply shaped by the future. Future-oriented, tech-driven urban initiatives – supported by the urbanized, entrepreneurial state – contribute to enforcing the inherent, material “anti-Black geographies of techno-capitalism” (McElroy, 2019, p. 113). They ultimately perpetuate gentrification-induced, racialized forms of expropriation and (physical/cultural) displacement (Lees & Hubbard, 2020; Ramírez, 2020), nurturing the supremacy of whiteness over the urban. As Tarvainen (2022) points out, “what we are witnessing is not just blatant ‘gentrification’ but an intensifying recolonization of urban land under the futuristic visions of tech” (p. 14). In this regard, the case of Parc Extension provides critical insights into these processes.

While the past remains key to understanding how gentrification unfolds, my argument is that we can learn much about tech-led gentrification and its reifications by paying special attention to the ways in which this urban process is constituted by futurity. Considering the intimate interrelations between white futurity and tech futurity ultimately raises new and pressing questions about gentrification.

Chapter 3: Tech Futures, White Futures: Tech-led Gentrification in Philadelphia’s University City and Montreal’s Parc Extension

This article examines the racialized dynamics of tech-led gentrification in Philadelphia’s University City and Montreal’s Parc Extension. While gentrification has often been analyzed as a class process, recent scholarship emphasizes its roots in racial capitalism, showing how urban transformation profits from racialized bodies and spaces while reproducing colonial logics. Building on this work, I argue that tech urbanism intensifies these dynamics. Under technocapitalism, cities are remade through a state-university-tech nexus that functions as the infrastructure of gentrification, reshaping urban life not only spatially but temporally. Futurist imaginaries promoted by this nexus cast long-standing racialized communities as “under-skilled,” while white, educated tech workers are positioned as the inheritors of urban futures. By foregrounding temporality, I show that tech-led gentrification reproduces whiteness not only through material displacement but also through symbolic acts of temporal erasure. The article highlights how state-supported tech futurities are inseparable from the production and maintenance of white futurity itself.

Keywords: Gentrification, Futurity, Whiteness, Technocapitalism

[Manuscript submitted to *Urban Geography*]

Introduction

In the last four decades, gentrification has long been examined through a class-based lens. More recently, however, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the racial dimensions of gentrification (Danewid, 2020; Lees & Hubbard, 2021; Maharawal, 2017; Ramírez, 2020; Somashekhar, 2020; Zimmer, 2020). This body of work extends earlier analyses of class dynamics by examining how class and capital are constituted through race within the broader structure of racial capitalism (Robinson, 2000[1983]). From this perspective, gentrification is a class process grounded in profiting from racialized bodies and spaces, shaping the very foundations of urban governance and spatial transformation (Bhambra, 2021; Dorries et al., 2019; Gibbons, 2016). As Zawadi Rucks-Ahidiana (2021, p. 13) argues, this framework helps explain “the uneven processes of gentrification” by demonstrating how a neighborhood’s

racialization affects its perceived potential for reinvestment (see also Dantzler, 2021).

Gentrification, in this sense, emerges not as a new form of colonialism but as a “racialized process of class change” (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2021), the continuation of enduring colonial logics (Danewid, 2020).

Building on this foundation, some scholars have examined the central role of whiteness in gentrification. In an important contribution, Aj Golio (2023) describes gentrification as both “an appropriative process of racialized cultural consumption” (p.3) and one driven by the economic logics of racial capitalism and racialized organizational structures. He contends that gentrification functions as a racializing process in which white identity is actively produced and reinforced. Gentrifying neighborhoods, he argues, function as “borderlands” (Ramírez, 2020), where surface-level encounters across racial lines generate discourses on racial difference, while the visibility of economic inequality produces narratives that justify and normalize white dominance. In this way, gentrification does not merely reflect whiteness; it actively reproduces it. “What we observe in so much empirical work on gentrification is a dialectical process that solidifies white dominance and reifies whiteness itself via racialized discourse around differences in how people occupy and capitalize upon space,” Golio writes, “this is what makes gentrification white” (2023, p. 18). This work is significant both in demonstrating how whiteness and gentrification are linked and laying out a framework for further investigation: a framework that approaches whiteness as a product of socio-spatial struggle.

One way that the production of whiteness can be examined, I want to suggest, is by looking closely at so-called tech-led gentrification. As a growing body of literature has shown, tech’s expanding role in urban governance and development has reconfigured the processes of gentrification. With the rise of technocapitalism (Suarez-Villa, 2001) or techno-racial capitalism

(Hampton, 2023), tech urbanism has emerged as both a governance model and a survival strategy for financially distressed cities (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Harvey, 1989; Smith, 1979). Tech companies have restructured urban life, space, and imaginaries, positioning themselves as leaders of a “socio-economic revolution” (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018, p. 3358), while lobbying extensively to shape local governance to their advantage (Leszczynski, 2020; Zukin, 2020). Increasingly framed as “privileged sites for technology-intensive interactive economies” (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017, p. 1000), cities have adopted tech-led growth strategies (Moisio & Rossi, 2020; Zukin, 2020, 2022), often in partnership with private industry and under the influence of corporate urban governance models, thereby accelerating new forms of tech-driven gentrification (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018). Importantly, some scholars have shown that tech urbanism not only reshapes space; it also reorganizes time, operating through futurist imaginaries that designate certain neighborhoods – and the people within them – as either aligned with innovation or obstacles to progress (Baldwin, 2012). Recognizing this construction of temporality suggests an affinity with a compelling literature on whiteness as futurity (Baldwin, 2016, 2017; Grove et al., 2022; Olund, 2017; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) and encourages us to ask: How does tech-led gentrification mobilize visions of the future to legitimize urban transformation in the present? Which bodies are imagined as belonging to that future, and which ones are relegated to the past?

This article draws together literature on tech-led gentrification and whiteness to develop further insights on the links between gentrification and race. I begin with a review of this literature, paying special attention to Andrew Baldwin’s concept of *whiteness as futurity* (2012), which I argue offers a compelling lens through which to examine the temporal dimensions of gentrification, particularly in tech-driven contexts. I then conduct a comparative case study of

tech-led gentrification in two gentrifying neighborhoods: University City in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.) and Parc Extension in Montreal (Quebec, Canada). Ultimately, I argue that gentrification studies have much to gain from engaging with temporality studies. The concept of futurity, in particular, offers powerful insights into the racial dynamics of gentrification, especially in its tech-led forms. University City and Parc Extension provide compelling empirical cases, revealing how race is reconfigured through temporal logics embedded in tech-oriented urban imaginaries. In these contexts, gentrification is not only a matter of spatial and socio-demographic restructuring but also a temporal project. Future-oriented tech narratives ultimately sustain the hegemony of whiteness by displacing Black and Brown working-class communities – both materially and symbolically – across space and across time.

Literature Review

The emergence of technocapitalism has prompted many scholars to examine gentrification through a new perspective. Theorized by Luis Suarez-Villa (2001), technocapitalism represents a contemporary iteration of capitalism, driven by technological innovation and the commodification of knowledge. Technology and technological innovation, of course, have always played a role in capitalism. What distinguishes technocapitalism from earlier iterations of capitalism, for Suarez-Villa, is the focus on particular kinds of technology as the product (rather than solely a means of production). Technocapitalism's expansion has relied on the accumulation of inventions and the growth of knowledge-sensitive infrastructures, such as communication and educational systems, largely sustained by public investment (Suarez-Villa, 2001, 2012). Central to this model are the processes of knowledge diffusion and

commodification, enabled by both physical infrastructures and more dynamic, relational ones such as professional networks (Suarez-Vila, 2001).

Recent scholarship has illuminated the racialized foundations of technocapitalism. Stephen Cave et al. (2024) describe the “original entanglement of whiteness and technology” (p. 3), where technological progress both enabled and justified European colonialism, producing racial hierarchies from the 17th century onward. In this framework, technological advancement is closely linked to whiteness, with traits like intelligence and innovation cast as racially exclusive (Cave et al., 2024, p. 5). Technology, as Joel Dinerstein (2006, p. 570) argues, thus functions as a “white mythology”—a secular religion that frames history and futurity through the lens of white inventors and their machines, erasing racialized contributions. Building on this, Lelia Marie Hampton (2023) theorizes “techno-racial capitalism” as a system rooted in colonial logics. Technology, Hampton argues, is not neutral, but a tool for extracting and commodifying racialized bodies and knowledges in service of capital and white supremacy. Historically, it facilitated colonial and imperialist expropriation; today, AI systems, Big Data, and platforms treat oppressed populations as raw data “resources” while expanding exploitative tech markets through surveillance and data extraction (Hampton, 2023, pp. 119-120; see also Birhane, 2023; Kwet, 2019). Hampton’s reading of the slave ship as an early “racial capitalist technology” (2023, p. 124) underscores the long-standing role of tech infrastructures in racialized systems of accumulation and control. These evolutions have direct implications for how urban space is produced and governed.

The link between technocapitalism, race, and gentrification is most clearly articulated through the framework of tech urbanism, a mode of city-making oriented around the needs and logics of the tech sector (see McElroy, 2018). While technocapitalism began to consolidate over

the latter half of the 20th century (Suarez-Villa, 2001), the emergence of digital platforms and the so-called “sharing economy” in the mid-2000s marked a turning point. These developments catalyzed a shift toward tech urbanism, imagined by policymakers as a new horizon of progress and prosperity (Leszczynski, 2020). This transformation was not purely technological; it was deeply tied to the rise of a neoliberal governmentality that positions the entrepreneurialization of society as central to knowledge-based capitalism (Harvey, 1989; Rossi & Di Bella, 2017). In this configuration, urban space is reimagined as a strategic asset. Politico-economic elites increasingly view cities as key infrastructures of technology-intensive global capitalism and work to shape them accordingly to attract high-skilled talent and tech capital (Moisio & Rossi, 2020; Wiig, 2016). Although the discourse surrounding tech innovation frequently emphasizes its “organic” or bottom-up nature, local governments remain deeply involved through various policy mechanisms – such as workforce development programs and targeted infrastructure investments – that support the emergence of tech-centered urban economies (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017; Zukin, 2020).

This transition was further accelerated by the 2008 financial crisis and the intensification of interurban competition, prompting municipal governments to adopt new strategies to attract capital. Since 2010, transforming global cities into “tech hubs” by courting Big Tech firms and startups has become a central objective for local and national governments, as well as real estate developers. As Sharon Zukin (2020, p. 942) notes, this newly produced social imaginary has recast cities as the social and cultural epicenters of digital innovation, spaces where technological progress not only enhances interurban competitiveness but also signals urban modernity (Sadowski & Bendor, 2019). Such imaginaries had profound spatial implications. Designed to foster digital and creative economies, “innovation districts” emerged as compact urban zones

that cluster research labs, startup incubators, coworking spaces, and corporate offices (Zukin, 2020, p. 949). These districts typically arise through partnerships between universities, private tech firms, and municipal authorities, reflecting the enduring influence of the “Triple Helix” model (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995) – linking academia, industry, and government – that originally underpinned the development of Silicon Valley (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995; Harris, 2022).

The expansion of tech urbanism has thus relied heavily on public investment, often funneled through educational infrastructure. While universities have long influenced urban development and governance (Perry & Wiewel, 2015), in the era of technocapitalism, they are increasingly mobilized as strategic marketing tools by city officials and developers seeking to attract new businesses and affluent populations (Bromley, 2006). They function simultaneously as static and dynamic technocapitalist infrastructures, in Suarez-Villa’s terms (2001): physically, they contribute to the material reconfiguration of the urban landscape; relationally, they serve as sites of intellectual and creative exchange where knowledge is produced and subsequently commodified by private corporations. Their close relationships with local and federal authorities further position them at the forefront of gentrification processes (Bunnell & Lawson, 2006). Through investments in city redevelopment, consultancy on local issues, and the influence they wield in policymaking – often through research and lobbying (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009; Goddard & Vallance, 2013; Gertler et al., 2022) –, academic institutions have become key actors in shaping tech-oriented urban futures. Specifically, the creation of so-called “tech districts” and research-driven urban hubs – often initiated and spearheaded by higher education institutions – has emerged as a powerful gentrifying force, responsible for the displacement of low-income, racialized populations (Huffman, 2009). This article will explore universities’ role as active

agents in tech-led gentrification, building on this literature while bringing closer attention to how whiteness is implicated in the resulting processes of urban change.

A small but growing body of literature explores the intersections of tech urbanism, race, and gentrification. As discussed earlier, gentrification operates as a mechanism of racial subjugation by reorganizing urban space to sustain white dominance (Golio, 2023; Ramírez, 2020; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2021). Simultaneously, emerging research shows how tech and tech urbanism reinforce this dominance by erasing, pathologizing, and criminalizing non-white urban spaces (Leszczynski, 2016; McElroy, 2018). As Abeba Birhane (2023) and Michael Kwet (2019) argue, tech giants like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and Meta now function as instruments of “digital colonialism,” a new phase of U.S. empire rooted in technological monopolization. These dynamics are also visible at the urban scale. Analyzing the tech-led gentrification of San Francisco, Manissa Maharawal (2022) introduces the concept of “tech-colonialism” to describe how tech industries reproduce racialized histories of violence and dispossession through “neocolonial savior narratives.” Within this framework, white technologies operate by framing non-white neighborhoods as inherently deficient, coding them as preordained failures – spaces imagined failing in advance – in which Black life is rendered expendable (Mitchell, 2010)

Further insights on the relationship between tech urbanism and race, I have suggested, can be gleaned by considering how tech involves particular visions of the future – visions that are implicitly or explicitly racialized. A few scholars, notably, have highlighted the importance of futurities to techno-capitalism. Scholars observing the sweeping impacts of technocapitalism on urban landscapes, for example, have noted how it generates alternative imaginaries of urban life, neighborhoods, and residents – imaginaries grounded in racialized and capitalist ideals of innovation, modernity, and progress. As Antti Tarvainen (2022) notes, the innovation economy

depends on the global fetishization of the “new,” producing narratives of rupture and reinvention that glorify startup “heroes” and their purportedly revolutionary technologies. These fantasies – centered around so-called “messianic” tech entrepreneurs (Tutton, 2021) or the visions embedded in supposedly groundbreaking “smart” city initiatives (Sadowski & Bendor, 2019) – collectively contribute to a global imaginary of future urban life (Datta, 2019).

This article examines the extent to which tech futurities are bound up with whiteness and, more specifically, with the production and maintenance of white futurity. As previously mentioned, a partial answer to this question is provided by Dinerstein (2006), who argues that technology functions as a “white mythology” – an abstract cultural and ideological framework central to Euro-American modernity (p. 570). This mythology sustains a broader techno-cultural matrix that fuses whiteness, masculinity, modernity, and the future, relegating non-Western societies to static, regressive, or obsolete positions (Dinerstein, 2006, p. 571). Within this framework, technologies – both historical (Hampton, 2023) and contemporary (Kwet, 2019) – reproduce Euro-American myths of progress and racial superiority, shaping who is imagined to belong to the future and who is confined to the past (Dinerstein, 2006, p. 572). Dinerstein’s framework thus compels us to see contemporary tech futurities not as neutral or universal visions of progress, but as deeply racialized projects of white futurity, illuminating how technocapitalism continues to reproduce and normalize whiteness as the fantasized horizon of urban futures.

Further insights on tech futurity can be gleaned by engaging with critical studies of futurity in geography, especially the work of Baldwin (2012). Baldwin defines futurity as “an imagined time that is yet to come” (p. 173). It serves, he argues, as a framework through which the future is allegedly made intelligible and governable. In essence, it entails the strategic deployment of imaginaries to justify and legitimize control over the present (Datta, 2019). Yet,

Baldwin (2012) underscores that futurity is neither neutral nor inclusive; rather, it is deeply racialized, gendered, and embedded within existing structures of power. Other scholars have built on this framework. Susanne Schultz (2019), analyzing German policy debates, helpfully demonstrates how future-oriented demographic reasoning acts as a form of racist exclusion, framing parts of the global population as dangerous or disposable. Similarly, Natalie Oswin (2012) describes how Singapore's future-oriented development policies criminalize and expel racialized migrant workers to secure a fantasy of a (racially) homogenous, "advanced" society. Framed as progress or public safety (Grove et al., 2022), white futurity thus reinforces dominant socio-racial, neocolonial hierarchies, ultimately sustaining a system of whiteness. This is achieved by relegating Indigenous, Black, and Brown histories and bodies to a fixed, underdeveloped past, thereby securing a white present and future (Olund, 2017; Smith & Vasudevan, 2017; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

These insights on tech-led gentrification and white futurities provide a critical lens for examining race and gentrification in the contemporary city. If tech urbanism involves images of the future, we might ask how these images are racialized and how tech urbanism might serve to normalize whiteness and displace racialized communities. This article pursued this question by exploring how tech futurities underpin not only the racialization of urban space but also its temporalization, ultimately nurturing and legitimizing the hegemony of whiteness. Indeed, the political production of urban modernity and narratives of tech-driven urban "progress" (Datta, 2019) has tangible consequences on current urban governance and processes. Tech futurities not only underscore gentrification as a racialized process but also as a temporalized one. Prompting the "temporal displacement" (Kern, 2016) of marginalized communities, tech-led gentrification enables the erasure and "whitewashing" of local, racialized histories and geographies (Knierbein

& Wall, 2022; Lanari, 2019, p. 377). In this sense, technocapitalist urbanism does not simply imagine futures for the racially privileged; it actively forecloses them for the marginalized. Seen through the lens of futurity, technocapitalist urban development is not a revolutionary trajectory of innovation but the continuation of a historically white temporal regime.

In what follows, I engage these literatures to examine tech-led gentrification in University City and Parc Extension. Both neighborhoods exemplify the entanglement of racialization, gentrification, and tech urbanism in the Western context, shaped by distinct local histories yet similarly impacted by the expansion of research and tech hubs driven by higher education institutions – namely, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Montreal (Université de Montréal – UdeM). Philadelphia and Montreal are medium-sized cities, with populations of 1.6 million and 2 million, respectively (US Census Bureau, 2020; Ville de Montréal, 2021). Their neighborhoods of focus house 55,953 people in University City (UCD, 2024, p. 9) and 28,775 in Parc Extension (CBAR, 2022, p. 13). In both cases, tech-led urban development has contributed to the displacement of low-income, racialized, and otherwise marginalized communities. This research is grounded in fieldwork conducted in Philadelphia (Fall 2023) and Montreal (Winter 2024). To trace the futurity embedded in tech-led gentrification, I analyze the public communications – including grey literature, reports, and interviews – of the primary institutional actors shaping urban transformation in each city. These include the City of Philadelphia, University City District, and the Science Center in Philadelphia; and the Quebec government, Université de Montréal, and the AI research center, Mila, in Montreal. As I hope to show, University City and Parc Extension offer compelling empirical cases of how race is reconfigured through temporal logics in tech-oriented urban imaginaries.

Philadelphia's University City

Philadelphia's University City is situated across the Schuylkill River from Center City, in the eastern part of West Philadelphia. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, West Philadelphia emerged as a desirable suburban area for affluent white families (Allen-Handy et al., 2024, p. 3). Yet, during the Great Migration of the 1930s, Black families began relocating to the area in search of better economic prospects and improved housing opportunities (Allen-Handy et al., 2024, p. 3). It was soon named "Black Bottom," referring both to the predominantly Black community and its location at the lower elevation near the Schuylkill River. As Black families moved to West Philadelphia after World War II, rapid demographic shifts sparked white homeowners' racist fears over property values and social changes. Exploiting these fears, real estate agents and government agencies used tactics like blockbusting and redlining to drive white flight and disinvestment (Wolf-Powers, 2024).

The latter half of the 20th century brought significant change to West Philadelphia, driven by aggressive urban renewal efforts targeting so-called "blighted" areas for clearance and "revitalization" (Allen-Handy et al., 2024; Wolf-Powers, 2024). A central actor in this transformation was the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), which relocated to West Philadelphia in 1872 in response to rising enrollment and an evolving curriculum. In 1959, Penn partnered with Drexel University, the University of the Sciences, and Presbyterian Hospital to form the West Philadelphia Corporation (WPC), a coalition designed to attract investment and steer redevelopment. Together with city officials, the WPC spearheaded a rebranding effort in the late 1950s, renaming the eastern section of West Philadelphia "University City" – a common gentrification tactic aimed at shedding negative associations and appealing to white, affluent newcomers (Allen-Handy et al., 2024). Through urban renewal legislation, Penn and its partners

razed the neighborhood they labeled “slum,” replacing it with projects like the University City Science Center in 1963, the nation’s first urban research park. This effort displaced more than 4,400 Black residents from the historically Black Bottom (Puckett & Lloyd, 2015). Penn’s West Philadelphia Initiatives, launched in 1996, and the founding of University City District (UCD) in 1997, deepened institutional involvement in reshaping the area under the banner of so-called “revitalization” (Wolf-Powers, 2022).

UCD has emerged over the past several decades as a key agent in the redevelopment of West Philadelphia. Presenting its mission as enhancing “economic vitality and [residents’] quality of life” (UCD, 2024), it has pursued strategies – closely aligned with city officials – designed to attract capital, businesses, and affluent residents and rebrand the area as a hub of innovation. Reinforcing this vision, the Science Center has served as a critical link between universities and the tech sector. By offering space, resources, and entrepreneurial networks to technocapitalist actors, it functions as both a static and dynamic technocapitalist infrastructure (Suarez-Villa, 2012). Together, UCD and the Science Center foster a technocapitalist ecosystem that privileges economic growth while sidelining structural racial and economic inequalities. With over 1,5 million square feet of real estate development underway and more than 85,000 jobs (UCD, 2025), UCD describes itself as “the nerve center of Philadelphia’s technology and biotech scene” (UCD, 2022, p. 10). Ultimately, although tech corporations remain key drivers of gentrification in West Philadelphia, research suggests that the most effective enablers of this transformation have been the City of Philadelphia, UCD, and the Science Center (Wolf-Powers, 2022). Through strong public-private partnerships (Harvey, 1989), they have promoted a shared vision for West Philadelphia’s future – one centered on attracting tech capital, high-skilled talent, and private investment.

Supporting the tech sector is a key objective of UCD. Indeed, the body frames neighborhood transformation through the lens of talent attraction, positioning the area as a magnet for skilled tech workers and entrepreneurs regarded as pivotal decision-makers in the global economy. UCD's reports consistently underscore University City's attractiveness to these so-called "visionary" actors, reinforcing a development narrative grounded in innovation and global market competitiveness (UCD, 2018). This discourse is echoed by the Science Center, whose CEO, Tiffany Wilson, emphasizes the importance of "uplifting the work of innovators," further legitimizing a tech-centered urban agenda (Wilson, 2023). Both institutions claim their strategies benefit the city at large: by "commercializing technologies, cultivating talent, and convening people," the Science Center argues it strengthens Philadelphia's global competitiveness (Science Center, 2020). UCD promotes a comprehensive revitalization model centered on safety, public space improvements, and job creation (UCD, 2024, 2025). The city of Philadelphia has materially supported UCD's development through land transfers and access to public property, aligning with UCD's tech-centered vision. "Tech startups have a nearly 5x multiplier effect, every job created by a startup has the potential to generate five additional jobs," former Mayor Kenney (Kenney Administration, 2017) said, echoing a common political belief that tech is the city's economic lifeline (McElroy, 2018). University City is thus aligned with a particular vision of the future. It is presented as the future economic engine of Philadelphia, casting West Philadelphia as a showcase for urban innovation. Programs such as the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative – launched in 2011 – embody this vision by providing cohort-based training that connects local job seekers with major employers. These efforts aim to bridge the divide between long-term residents and the city's fast-growing tech economy (Skills Initiative website).

The economic vision advanced by UCD and municipal authorities aligns with broader narratives of tech urbanism, in which “innovation” and “creativity” replace labor and raw materials as the primary engines of growth (Zimmerman, 2008). Within this framework, tech entrepreneurs – often depicted as white, hypermasculine figures – are positioned as visionary “doers,” imagined as “saviors” capable of restoring order to a disordered world (Luri et al., 2023; Tarvainen, 2022). Whiteness here denotes not only racial identity but also a socio-economic positionality vis-à-vis the existing residents of the neighbourhood, who are mostly Black and working-class. These narratives seldom recognize existing residents at all. Their function, then, is primarily to facilitate the erasure of local histories and the dispossession of long-standing Black residents. This aligns with Baldwin’s (2012, p. 174) analysis, where he argues that whiteness operates as the epistemic norm through which all other identities are rendered “different.”

Racialized tech entrepreneurs do appear at times in narratives about University City. In November 2020, for example, the City of Philadelphia’s Department of Commerce launched PHL: Most Diverse Tech Hub, an initiative designed to expand the tech talent pipeline by targeting Black Philadelphians pursuing technology careers (Wink & Quinn, 2023). More recently, in September 2024, veteran entrepreneur Jamal Carter founded LaunchCode Collective, a West Philadelphia-based incubator offering mentorship, resources, and startup capital to young Black innovators (Team TLC, 2025). While such initiatives mark important interventions, they also underscore how “diversity” is typically framed as the integration of racialized communities into existing tech logics rather than a transformation of those logics. Even racialized tech leaders, when celebrated and incorporated into the circuits of the tech economy, may end up reinforcing the very structures they seek to challenge. Indeed, as Lilly Irani (2018) observes, the inclusion of

racialized actors often legitimates rather than disrupts the racial status quo, sustaining what Safiya Umoja Noble and Sarah T. Roberts (2019) identify as the whiteness embedded in tech. Cast as disruptors and engines of economic growth, these actors carry significant symbolic and political weight, yet their success is frequently mobilized to bolster the future-oriented narratives of the city, UCD, and the Science Center that privilege tech-led expansion while sidestepping the systemic harms it reproduces.

These narratives, while centering tech companies and entrepreneurs, also present a vision of the present and future neighbourhood. Over the past three decades, UCD has played a central role in promoting University City as an innovation district and using this image to attract tech capital, affluent residents, and university students. These efforts envision the neighbourhood as a new space – not an extension of West Philadelphia, but as a forward-looking, high-tech enclave distinct from the surrounding, historically Black and working-class neighborhoods. The City of Philadelphia and UCD share a coherent and forward-facing agenda: to reimagine West Philadelphia as a prosperous, tech-oriented district. As one UCD report proclaims, “University City is setting the standard as the center of innovation in the region, both now and into the future” (UCD, 2014, p. 41). When the wider neighbourhood is mentioned at all, it is framed by UCD as a landscape in need of “rescue” and renewal. Located close to Penn campus, Clark Park, for example, is described as “a victim of neglect and vandalism” (UCD, 2012, p. 3). The aim for UCD is to transform this area through tech into a thriving, vibrant public space. These narratives cast UCD’s interventions, along with the influx of a wealthier, educated class, as the solution to racialized urban poverty and disorder. UCD positions itself as both a catalyst and a replicable model of urban revitalization, promoting a “virtuous cycle” of new amenities, enhanced safety,

and innovation-driven economic growth (UCD, 2012, p. 2; 2018, p. 74). West Philadelphia is the past with no future – outside its incorporation into a white tech future.

These narratives have material effects on the ground. While the material landscape of West Philadelphia is celebrated as a valuable asset, its long-term residents are simultaneously devalued, revealing a stark contradiction at the heart of the city’s redevelopment narrative. On the one hand, West Philadelphia’s historical architecture and cultural amenities are leveraged to attract outsiders – corporations and individuals alike. These elements are marketed as embodying a sense of “authenticity” and contributing to creating a visually appealing, “good-looking” neighborhood (Tissot, 2014). The aesthetic positioning is key in marketing West Philadelphia as desirable and ripe for tech investment, ultimately legitimizing the narrative of urban revitalization while sidelining the existing community’s needs and contributions. On the other hand, the description of the area as a formerly “wasted” and “unproductive” space justifies the necessity for more “rational,” “productive” (white) management (Smith, 1979), erasing historical Black presence from dominant narratives (Quizar, 2019). Such political discourses, which cast the past as a period of violence and abandonment, provide the rationale for embedding tech corporations within the present urban fabric, aligning their presence with progress, renewal, and ultimately the future. In contrast, historical Black presence is ignored and left in the past. As Elisa Lanari (2019) points out, such “de-historicizing ‘gaze from above’” – which embodies the normalized subject position of a white middle-class homeowner – ultimately “absorbs all of the different social times and rhythms of everyday life that populated this neighborhood within a single, future-oriented narrative of progress” (p. 379). Tech-led gentrification prompts both the temporal and spatial displacement of Black and Brown bodies (Marahawal, 2022).

UCD cannot, of course, fully erase or disregard the presence of the neighborhood's racialized residents. The Black Lives Matter movement, both locally and globally, has compelled institutions to at least gesture toward racial justice and inclusion, even if primarily at the rhetorical level. Likewise, local resistance – most visibly through the Save the UC Townhomes campaign, which has staged encampments and protests to defend low-income housing in West Philadelphia – has forced gentrification stakeholders to present themselves as responsive and racially conscious. Yet these pressures have not fundamentally altered development trajectories. Instead, they have been absorbed into a broader institutional shift toward addressing race through the sanitized and depoliticized language of “diversity.” This rhetoric celebrates the sector's attraction of a diverse, highly educated tech workforce from around the world. Former Mayor Kenney claimed, “Immigrant entrepreneurs have driven the vast majority of our small business growth – adding resources, jobs, and vibrancy to our neighborhood commercial corridors” (Buchanan, 2019). This narrative performs two key moves: it uses “diversity” as a branding strategy and frames racialized immigrants as symbols of economic vitality. Yet, critics argue that this discourse functions more as a distraction than a tangible solution to structural racial inequality (Bell, 2003). Indeed, in liberal democracies, direct discussions of race often clash with dominant ideals of colorblindness and equality. Instead, race is coded through abstract terms like “diversity,” particularly in tech and immigration contexts, further eliding systemic racism (Li, 2001). Ultimately, racial difference is commodified, celebrated for its economic utility rather than addressed through substantive equity efforts (Rajasekar et al., 2022; Luhr, 2023). In this logic, racial difference becomes an asset, “good for learning, good for the bottom line, [even] good for white people” (Berrey, 2015). Diversity, then, is turned into symbolic capital: a

resource used to attract highly skilled workers, tech firms, and investment from *outside* West Philadelphia.

Another key term, “inclusion,” performs a different function in UCD. It is through this term that the long-term Black communities of the neighborhood are addressed, appearing in tech narratives as an untapped “talent pool” in need of training. “As our city’s life science scene grows,” Phil Brooks, Director of STEM Outreach at the Science Center, said, “so too do opportunities for residents who may not have been plugged into the sciences in school” (Press, 2021). Programs like the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, SmartPHL, UCD’s Founders Fellowship, and the Science Center’s OnRamp attempt to integrate these residents into the innovation economy, but often sidestep the structural causes of exclusion, such as systemic racism and racialized disinvestment. These diversity narratives have two major effects. First, they prioritize highly educated, racialized immigrants over local Black communities, who are depicted as disconnected or underqualified. Neoliberal multicultural frameworks – such as Richard Florida’s “creative class” (2006) – recast race as culture (Melamed, 2006) and valorize “model minorities” (Hashimoto, 2021), allowing race to be discussed in depoliticized terms, detached from structural inequality (Luhr, 2023). Second, they obscure the ongoing symbolic and physical displacement of working-class Black communities. Diversity, in this context, functions as “official anti-racism” (Hashimoto, 2021): it acknowledges inequality rhetorically while advancing market-based solutions that fail to address root causes. Ultimately, tech urban discourse renders long-term residents peripheral by positioning them outside the aspirational vision of a diverse, innovative urban future.

One of the clearest illustrations is the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, a job recruitment and training program run by UCD. Launched in 2011 as a small neighborhood-based

effort, it has since grown into a major workforce pipeline: by 2023, it was running 19 programs and had placed 1,775 participants in stable jobs. More than 85 percent of applicants are Black (Duchene, 2024), underscoring both the program's focus on historically excluded populations and the assumption that Black Philadelphians must first be trained to participate in the city's growth sectors. In February 2024, the program received a \$4 million grant from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott, the former wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. The connection is striking: capital amassed through one of the most powerful technology corporations is now funding efforts to integrate Black residents into the very industries reshaping, and displacing, their communities. The Skills Initiative captures the paradox of tech-led urban development. On the one hand, it is celebrated as a model of inclusive growth; on the other, it relies on racialized logics that position Black residents not as civic actors or urban decision-makers but as a workforce to be molded for industry needs. This tension is thus especially pronounced in West Philadelphia, described as home to one of the world's most culturally significant Black populations, yet where the tech workforce is less diverse than the national average (Wink & Quinn, 2023, p. 9). With tech's origins in white, male-dominated networks of "friends helping friends," exclusionary pipelines persist. As a result, even progressive initiatives end up treating racial diversity as an input to be engineered, rather than a foundation for reimagining more equitable urban futures.

As the case of University City demonstrates, tech-led gentrification entails more than spatial or socio-demographic change; it is deeply bound up with temporality and futurity. Future-oriented aspirations and imaginaries enable institutions and workers to present innovation as inherently progressive, while materially and symbolically displacing Black working-class communities across both space and time. This dynamic resonates with scholarship that shows

how technological modernity reproduces colonial hierarchies, wherein claims of advancement served to legitimize domination (Dinerstein, 2006). Birhane (2023) and Hampton (2023) extend this critique by demonstrating how saviorist and futurist discourses frame racialized dispossession as a necessary condition for innovation and prosperity. Similarly, Yui Hashimoto (2021) shows how Florida’s “creative city” thesis casts diversity as an economic resource, naturalizing redevelopment while concealing its uneven social costs. The University City case contributes to these debates by showing that temporality itself operates as a racializing technology: by projecting aspirational futures of innovation, institutions render the racialized present disposable. In this sense, white futurity does more than orient development narratives; it reconfigures belonging and exclusion simultaneously. It secures dominant racial and neocolonial hierarchies by relegating Indigenous, Black, and Brown histories and bodies to a fixed, underdeveloped past, thereby guaranteeing a white present and future (Olund, 2017; Smith & Vasudevan, 2017; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Similarly, the case of Parc Extension offers a compelling illustration of the interconnections between technology, gentrification, futurity, and race, underscoring how urban development driven by innovation imperatives reinforces racialized, spatial, and temporal exclusions.

Montreal’s Parc Extension

Like West Philadelphia, Montreal’s Parc Extension has been the site of intense gentrification in the last two decades. Located northeast of the city centre, Parc Extension was established in 1910 after plots of land were annexed in 1907 to “extend” Park Avenue, creating the Park Avenue Extension subdivision. Historically, the Jewish community grew extensively in the 1950s before Italian and Greek immigrants arrived in the 1960s-1980s. For the past 40 years,

South Asian communities (from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan) have increasingly populated the area, making up 64% of today's local immigrant population (CBAR, 2022, p.13). While older generations of immigrants were homeowners, 81% of today's residents are renters (CBAR, 2022), as many of the newcomers – who arrived in Canada on a precarious status as temporary workers, undocumented migrants, or refugees – face greater barriers to economic integration (Halais, 2019). With 57% of its population composed of immigrants and 69% of its residents having a language other than English or French as their mother tongue, Parc Extension is one of the most culturally diverse neighborhoods in Canada (CBAR, 2022, p.13). Unlike UCD, however, Parc Extension has only recently been affected by a major university. In 2019, the University of Montreal (UdeM) opened Campus MIL, a multi-million-dollar new development on the south edge of the neighborhood. Both the city and province of Quebec provided substantial funding for the new campus, with the city investing C\$210 million in decontamination and infrastructure work while the province granted C\$145 million (Rantisi et al., 2019). The federal government also invested C\$84 million in the project, with former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau framing it as a way to enhance Montreal's intellectual capital and position it as a driver of economic growth (Halais, 2019). To some extent, this vision simply expresses the general neoliberal commitment to subsidizing economic growth and capital accumulation through university education and research. However, a key component of the new campus was Mila, the university's AI research center.

Mila stands for the Montreal Institute for Learning Algorithms. While the institution was renamed the Quebec Artificial Intelligence Institute in 2017, the acronym continues to be used. In the last 15 years, Mila has emerged as a central actor in Quebec's tech strategy, receiving sustained institutional support for its role in the positioning of the province in the global AI

landscape. Mila specializes in academic research, high-level training, and technology transfer and welcomes thousands of students and researchers from UdeM every year. Its founder and Scientific Director, Yoshua Bengio, holds a professorship in the Department of Computer Science at UdeM and occupies multiple leadership roles within Canada's AI ecosystem: he's the Scientific Director of IVADO, the Co-Director of the CIFAR Machine Learning Program, and the co-founder of Element AI and Imagia, two prominent companies within Montreal's AI sector (Mila, 2019, p. 19). Mila's tight institutional relationship with UdeM reinforces both organizations' prominence in shaping Quebec's tech ecosystem and highlights the university's involvement in the province's broader tech agenda. Together, UdeM, Mila, and the Quebec government have become the key drivers of technocapitalism in Montreal and, as we will see, the gentrification of Parc Extension.

Consistent with research on tech futurities, the development of the tech sector is described in terms of the future it will bring to Parc Extension and Montreal in general. In recent years, intensive local policy efforts have been instrumental in positioning Quebec, and Montreal in particular, as a node of global tech capital. Branding Canada as an "AI start-up nation" (Deloitte on behalf of CIFAR, Amii, Mila, & the Vector Institute, 2023, p. 14), local stakeholders emphasize Montreal's attractiveness as a location of tech capital investment. Consistent with tech strategies elsewhere, this has involved emphasizing the city's existing "ecosystem" of tech companies, as well as its highly educated and cosmopolitical population. Tech investment, in this vision, creates the conditions for further tech investment, in a potentially never-ending upward spiral. By attracting new partner companies, Mila (2019) asserts: "[Our] ecosystem gets even bigger and helps create a real AI district in Montreal" (p. 42). Echoing this discourse, UdeM rector Daniel Jutras has argued that "Quebec needs entrepreneurial spirit and

scientific innovation to face the challenges of the present and future, to create wealth, and especially to ensure its financial, material, and social autonomy” (Quebecor Media, 2022). In this vision, similar to UCD’s, tech entrepreneurs and AI innovators are cast as central to the province’s economic growth and independence. Such statements reflect broader strategies in which the university is not merely an educational institution but a driver of regional economic development, what Lukas Huffman (2009, p. 9) refers to as the “integration” of the university into the “urban fabric.”

Like the tech sector, tech entrepreneurs and other high-level tech workers were articulated in relation to the future. Indeed, the development strategy was largely premised on attracting elite researchers, top-tier students, and entrepreneurial talent to seed the growth of high-tech industries and, ultimately, to secure Montreal’s economic future (Bromley, 2006). Consistent with the neoliberal ideal of the entrepreneur-as-citizen (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017), the city is imagined not as a site of social responsibility but as a self-regulating market of individual talent, where knowledge, creativity, and tech culture drive economic growth. This rationality – pursuing a vision of a global “enterprise society” through the entrepreneurialization of the self – is underpinned by discourses of self-organization, cooperation, and innovation (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017). As the Artificial Intelligence Cluster Steering Committee (2018) notes: “Attracting highly qualified researchers in AI and its applications will further enhance the reputation of Montreal and Quebec as a whole and attract more local and foreign students.” While framed as progress, this vision selectively produces beneficiaries: highly skilled, often mobile, and predominantly white, globally privileged workers and students, while marginalizing existing racialized and working-class communities.

Narratives of fantasized technological futurity have been central to guiding the redevelopment trajectory of Parc Extension. Unlike West Philadelphia, formerly portrayed through narratives of violence that had served to justify urban reinvestment, Parc Extension is depicted as an underutilized, unproductive space in need of modernization and reinvention, a so-called “no man’s land” (Collard, 2021). During the inauguration of Campus MIL in 2019, Valérie Plante, Mayor of Montreal, claimed: “Rarely do we have the chance to inaugurate a *brand-new neighborhood* [...] we can now celebrate one of the largest transformation projects in Montréal” (QMI, 2019, my translation, emphasis added). François Legault, Premier of Quebec, praised the provincial government’s financial support of a “superb, *modern*, and attractive” project (QMI, 2019, my translation, emphasis added). More recently, Rachel Bendayan, the local representative for the federal Liberal Party, stated: “I’m delighted to see how quickly the neighborhood is transforming, gaining energy, and undergoing revitalization” (Carrier, 2022, my translation). By depicting the past as an era of neglect, these discourses justify the integration of the tech sector into the contemporary urban landscape, framing its presence as a symbol of progress and revitalization. Jutras, UdeM rector, articulated the objective to “transform the urban area [Parc Extension] into a living laboratory where the results of applied research can be tested” (Jutras & Fortier, 2020). As Alain Boilard, UdeM Director of Development, stated: “This [Campus MIL] is going to be the heart of the whole *new neighbourhood*” (Magder, 2018, my translation, emphasis added). Here, Parc Extension becomes a technoscientific playground, an experimental zone where tech entrepreneurs and AI researchers can trial innovations, reducing residents and their everyday spaces to experimental subjects.

Although Parc Extension is not directly pathologized or stigmatized in these narratives, its existing residents are scarcely discussed at all, and the neighbourhood is pictured as a means

to an end, a terrain available for transformation in service of global tech competitiveness. Mila Chair of the Board, Pierre Boivin, echoes Jutras' technocratic aspiration, emphasizing his ambition "to build a global hub of AI development in Montreal" (Mila, 2020, p.7). This framing aligns with Harvey's (1989) notion of the "speculative construction of place," where cities increasingly rebrand urban space to attract capital investment (Zimmerman, 2008, p. 231). Efforts to craft sanitized urban environments – so-called "clean, safe, and welcoming" places to "live, work, and play" (Ward, 2007, p. 785) – reflect the neoliberal, racially exclusive, future-oriented vision driving the development of tech spaces (Rottinghaus, 2021). Redevelopment operates as a form of chronopolitics, rewriting and erasing local histories to recast urban landscapes as clean slates for capitalist intervention, while the "emotional economy" of urban branding constructs curated neighborhood "personalities" through symbolic and temporal erasure (Lanari, 2019, p. 377; Ward, 2007, p. 794). From a material standpoint, Parc Extension – unlike West Philadelphia, where historical architecture is mobilized as a cultural asset – lacks significant architectural heritage, with most of its building stock dating to the latter half of the 20th century. This absence of a celebrated built environment further enables its portrayal as a *tabula rasa* – a space without a past and, by extension, without a legitimate claim to its future – rendering it particularly vulnerable to tech redevelopment and the imposition of technocratic visions of so-called progress and modernity.

The relatively recent settlement of racialized and immigrant communities in the late 20th century enables the State, Mila, and UdeM to portray Parc Extension as both historically insignificant and socially malleable. As in Philadelphia's University City, stakeholder reports and public communications in Montreal rarely mention race or racism explicitly. Instead, racism manifests through the erasure of the neighborhood's racialized population. Like their

Philadelphian counterparts, gentrification actors strategically deploy the language of diversity, framing Montreal as a progressive, inclusive city and equating “diversity” with the arrival of an international, highly educated tech workforce. Indeed, as Mila’s Impact Report states: “Mila takes pride in *its* vibrant and diverse community and strives to foster a human-centered, purpose-driven environment” (2024, emphasis added). Consistent with research on tech urbanism (Maharawal, 2022; Rossi & Di Bella, 2017), diversity is reframed through the lens of skilled foreign workers in the tech sector, described as “an essential component of digital creativity” (Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal, 2020, p. 29, my translation). Although the State momentarily celebrates Parc Extension’s diversity as “one of its greatest assets” (PDUES, 2013, p. 7, my translation), such recognition serves primarily instrumental purposes, surfacing primarily in the context of workforce development initiatives – specifically, programs aimed at “bringing STEM access to under-represented groups” (Deloitte on behalf of CIFAR, Amii, Mila, & the Vector Institute, 2023, p. 26). Similarly, Jutras stated: “We are building a university-focused neighborhood, at the cutting edge of sustainable development, a neighborhood that is also, and this is very important, civic. A meeting place, a place to live, *a space of social diversity*” (Carrier, 2022, my translation, emphasis added). In line with gentrification scholarship, Parc Extension – acting as a “*hub of creation*” (PDUES, 2013, p. 1, my translation, emphasis added) – is depicted not as a neighborhood with a rich social and cultural history, but as a disposable space open to speculative redevelopment for a tech-oriented future.

We observe two central parallels between University City and Parc Extension that highlight the racialized temporalities of tech-led gentrification. First, in both contexts, race is abstracted and rearticulated through ostensibly inclusive yet depoliticized terms such as “diversity.” This vocabulary, while outwardly progressive, operates as a temporal strategy: it

projects an imagined, future-oriented urban order where multiculturalism is commodified to attract global talent and capital, while simultaneously erasing the historical and ongoing racial struggles of existing communities. Second, when long-standing residents are acknowledged, they are rarely positioned as legitimate agents in shaping the innovation economy. Instead, they are cast as temporally “behind,” as under-skilled “talent pools” in need of training and assimilation into a preconfigured, future-facing model of tech-driven, urban development. This framing reduces racialized communities to raw material for future growth while erasing their histories and lived claims to space. In both cases, tech futurities sustain the hegemony of whiteness by privileging those imagined to “belong” to the future – educated, mobile, cosmopolitan elites – while relegating Black and South Asian working-class populations to the past, as obstacles to progress or subjects of benevolent incorporation.

This general relationship, as we should expect, plays out differently in different contexts. It is worth noting that while both Montreal and Philadelphia invoke diversity to frame their tech economies, the politics of race within each context differ strongly. In Philadelphia, critiques of institutional racism – particularly in relation to Black communities – are at least acknowledged, though often in limited and problematic ways (Wolf-Powers, 2022). In contrast, Quebec’s color-blind, republican model of citizenship tends to suppress public discourse around race and racism altogether (Austin, 2010; Bilge, 2012, 2013; Mahrouse, 2010, 2018; Scott, 2016). Moreover, unlike West Philadelphia, which has been home to working-class Black communities for centuries, Parc Extension is primarily home to more recent immigrant populations (CBAR, 2022). The subsequent invisibility of South Asian working-class residents within Montreal’s future-oriented, tech development discourse underscores the highly selective nature of diversity rhetoric and its role in normalizing urban transformation projects that further exclude racialized

communities both spatially and temporally. In both cases, diversity is framed not as a tool for fighting structural urban inequalities, but rather as a depoliticized resource in service of so-called technological, future-oriented innovation and ultimately the spatial and temporal hegemony of whiteness.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in University City and Parc Extension, tech-led gentrification involves more than spatial and socio-demographic restructuring: it is deeply bound up with temporality and futurity. Future-oriented tech imaginaries and discourses sustain the hegemony of whiteness by materially and symbolically displacing Black and South Asian working-class communities across both space and time. Racialized, low-income populations are positioned as remnants of the past, while the future is projected onto sanitized, securitized tech spaces and the highly educated, predominantly white tech class (McElroy, 2018). Despite their distinct histories, both cases highlight the central role of universities as key enablers of gentrification, operating in concert with the state and technology sector to construct urban futures in which whiteness is normalized and embedded. Moreover, while the social contexts of these neighborhoods differ, both rely on superficial invocations of “diversity” to address race. Longstanding racialized communities, when acknowledged at all, are often framed as needing to be “upskilled” or trained to fit within the dominant narrative of a tech-centric future. While my findings align with prior research identifying tech as the racialized, imagined future of urban development (Maharawal, 2022; McElroy, 2019; Tarvainen, 2022), they push this conversation further by underscoring the importance of futurity as a critical lens for understanding gentrification as both a racialized and temporal process. Existing scholarship has primarily emphasized the spatial and socio-economic

dimensions of gentrification, but my analysis shows that whiteness also operates through futurity: scripting who is imagined as belonging to the city's future and who is relegated to its past.

This entanglement of race, futurity, and urban development resonates with Alberto Toscano's (2023) theorization of "late fascism." While often misread as backward-looking, Toscano argues that fascism – unlike mere conservatism – projects itself as a world-making force, oriented toward the creation of a radically new order. In this light, the futurisms of Silicon Valley "tech bros" and wealthy tech entrepreneurs align disturbingly with fascist imaginaries: both promise new worlds, purified of "disorder," where immigrant and racialized working-class others are cast as remnants of an unfit past. Moreover, the current political climate makes this alignment more explicit than ever. Under Trump's second presidency, leading figures like Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, and Marc Andreessen have edged closer to openly fascist politics, endorsing authoritarian order, celebrating "Western civilization" as a racialized category, and promoting visions of techno-authoritarian futures that dovetail with the logics of tech-led gentrification. By attending to the intersection of race and temporality, this article shows how tech-led gentrification reproduces the hegemony of whiteness not only through material exclusion but also through symbolic acts of temporal erasure. Situating these urban transformations within the broader horizon of technocapitalist futurity underscores how the racialized politics of urban development are now entangled with authoritarian visions of technological progress.

Chapter 4: Technology as a Force for Good? The Tech Class, Whiteness, and Urban Futures in Philadelphia’s University City and Montreal’s Parc Extension

Drawing on interviews with 33 tech workers and entrepreneurs in University City (Philadelphia) and Parc Extension (Montreal), this article examines how tech actors imagine urban futures, analyzing these imaginaries through the dual lens of race and temporality. It investigates how futurities projected by the tech class sustain systems of whiteness; not only spatially, through displacement, but also temporally, by determining who is imagined as belonging to the city’s future and who is excluded. The study shows how the tech class – historically white, male, and upper-middle-class – articulates aspirational visions of neighborhood change that position technology as an agent of progress and innovation while minimizing its social and spatial harms. These narratives sustain racialized forms of urban control, legitimizing the tech sector’s future-oriented claim to space while erasing nonwhite, working class historical presence under the guise of “revitalization” and “progress.” Integrating scholarship on whiteness, futurity, and tech urbanism, the article demonstrates how tech subjectivities perpetuate inequality and consolidate white spatial and temporal dominance by naturalizing racialized forms of displacement, portraying technology as the emblem of the city’s “future.”

Keywords: Tech class, whiteness, futurity, gentrification

[Manuscript submitted to *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*]

Introduction

The significance of technology capital for urban processes and politics is the subject of a growing scholarly literature. As Sharon Zukin (2020) shows, tech corporations are increasingly concentrated in cities, while municipal governments actively seek to create “tech hubs” to attract tech capital. The arrival of the tech industry has generated new visions of urban growth (Moisio & Rossi, 2020; Zukin, 2022), with cities reimagined as prime sites for tech-focused, interactive economic development (Rossi & Di Bella, 2017). As cities become more reliant on tech, corporations have also emerged as powerful urban lobbyists (Leszczynski, 2020), converting governmental regulations into tools of corporate urban governance (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018). One

consequence of this rise of tech urbanism is the production of new material and discursive impulses for gentrification (Maharawal, 2022; McElroy, 2018). Within this framework, urban space itself is recast as a strategic asset, and cities are reimaged as infrastructures for technology-intensive global capitalism tasked with attracting high-skilled labor and capital (Moisio & Rossi, 2020). While gentrification is a longstanding urban process driven by capital accumulation and class restructuring, scholars argue that tech urbanism reconfigures its pace, scale, and justification, introducing a logic anchored in innovation discourse, venture capital, and digital labor (Caprotti, 2019; Hollands, 2015; McNeill, 2016; White, 2016; Wiig, 2016).

A growing body of scholarship examines the intersections of tech urbanism, race, and gentrification. Gentrification more broadly functions as a mechanism of racial subjugation, reorganizing urban space to uphold white dominance (Golio, 2023; Ramírez, 2020; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2021). Recent research suggests that tech urbanism amplifies these dynamics by erasing, pathologizing, and criminalizing non-white urban spaces under the rhetoric of innovation and progress (Leszczynski, 2016; McElroy, 2018). In a key contribution to the literature, Manissa Maharawal (2022) conceptualizes San Francisco's tech-led gentrification as "tech colonialism," a process through which tech industries reproduce racialized histories of dispossession under "neocolonial savior narratives." Other scholars have explored how "white technologies" (Cave et al., 2024) cast non-white neighborhoods as deficient and render Black life disposable (Mitchell, 2010). In a similar vein, Erin McElroy (2018) demonstrates that tech-led urbanism operates as both a classed and racialized project. The "Dot-Com invasion" of San Francisco, driven by young, affluent, white "tech bros," transformed historically racialized neighborhoods into predominantly white, upper-middle-class enclaves. Extending this analysis in a later article, McElroy (2019) theorizes how "tech imperialism" positions the Silicon Valley as a

global techno-imperial center that drives racial dispossession while enabling the “nomadic” tech class to exploit global labor hierarchies within enduring colonial frameworks. This nascent literature on race, tech urbanism, and gentrification demonstrates how tech-driven urban change is structured by white spatial projections that frame certain neighborhoods as “improvable,” “up-and-coming,” or “terra nullius” awaiting transformation and modernization (Tarvainen, 2022).

One way to generate new insights into these processes is to examine how tech actors imagine the future. The innovation economy thrives on the allure of the “new,” portraying startup founders and smart city initiatives as agents of disruption and progress. These narratives of technological messianism shape a global urban imaginary, presenting cities as sites of continual reinvention and future-oriented socio-economic transformation (Datta, 2019; Sadowski & Bendor, 2019; Tarvainen, 2022; Tutton, 2021). These insights suggest an opening toward the broad literature on race and futurity. As Ben Anderson (2010) has shown, the strategies, narratives, and practices through which the future is rendered knowable and predictable are far from neutral. Futurities remain deeply gendered and racialized (Baldwin, 2012; Gupta, 2019), with tangible consequences in the present. Indeed, various scholars claim that “white futurity” does more than orient development narratives; it simultaneously structures inclusion and exclusion, securing dominant racial and neocolonial hierarchies by relegating Indigenous, Black, and Brown histories and bodies to a stagnant, undeveloped past, thereby guaranteeing a white present and future (Olund, 2017; Smith & Vasudevan, 2017; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). If tech produces visions of the future and whiteness carries a particular temporal logic, then examining how tech futurities intersect with white futurities can reveal the temporal and racial dynamics driving tech-led gentrification and shaping the discourses and perceptions of the tech class.

This article seeks to build on emerging insights on tech urbanism, gentrification, and race by analyzing how tech actors imagine the future. I approach these imaginings, in other words, through the dual lens of race and temporality. My research asks how futurities projected by tech actors sustain a system of whiteness, not only spatially through processes of displacement but also temporally by defining who belongs to the future city and who does not. In what follows, I first engage with the gentrification literature to show how spatial and temporal imaginaries shape processes of urban transformation and how tech futurities, in particular, reconfigure the urban present. I then turn to the lived experiences of tech workers, connecting them to scholarship on whiteness, futurity, and tech subjectivities to reveal the temporal dimensions of tech-led gentrification in two settings: University City in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.) and Parc Extension in Montreal (Quebec, Canada). As this paper contends, examining tech subjectivities exposes how the tech class – historically white, middle-class, and male – envisions urban futures that both normalize displacement and valorize whiteness, casting technologies as the legitimate bearers of progress, innovation, and modernity (Baldwin, 2012; Cave et al., 2024; Tutton, 2021).

Literature Review

The starting point for this article is the relationship between technology and the future – the subject of a significant and diverse literature. Research shows that the tech sector promotes futurities, but their importance lies less in realizing alternative futures than in shaping political action in the present (Baldwin, 2012; Grove et al., 2022). Futurity, here, functions as a regulatory tool, simplifying complex issues (Dickel & Schrape, 2017a; Wiig, 2016) and constructing tech-driven “horizons of hope” (McBeath & Webb, 2000) that guide present expectations and decisions (Robinson et al., 2021). These techno-futures establish a dynamic link between a

fantasized, technologically enhanced tomorrow and a present imagined merely as a transitional stage (Dickel & Schrape, 2017b). Sheila Jasanoff (2015) describes these utopias as “visions of desirable futures” (p. 4), while Richard Tutton (2021) emphasizes how they are underpinned by “positive visions of social progress” (p. 419). This relationship between technology and the future ultimately shapes processes of tech-led gentrification. As a few scholars have shown, tech-led gentrification functions not only as a spatial project of displacement but also as a temporal one: a reordering of urban life that casts racialized communities as incompatible with the “future city” (Tarvainen, 2022). Through the imaginaries and practices of tech firms and the tech class, technology takes hold of the city both materially – through urban redevelopment – and symbolically – through claims on futurity.

The relationship between technology and the future is entangled with race at various scales. At the scale of the globe, tech futurities shape the relationship between metropole and colony, Global North and Global South. Visions of progress reproduce Western, neocolonial narratives that fetishize “innovation” and “discovery” while erasing Indigenous, Black, and Brown histories. Antti Tarvainen (2022) describes this as a “culture of amnesia” that appropriates the pasts of the oppressed while recasting the oppressors’ histories as universal. The supposed neutrality of technology allows these narratives to align with racial oppression (Dickel & Schrape, 2017a; Tutton, 2021). Whiteness lies at the core of technocapitalism: within the “white racial frame” (Feagin, 2020[2009]), progress is imagined as inherently white, embodied in intelligence, rationality, and inventiveness denied to others (Carson, 2006; Cave & Dihal, 2020; Cave et al., 2024). Technology thus functions as a “white mythology” (Dinerstein, 2006), naturalizing Western superiority and casting nonwhite societies as static or backward. This techno-cultural nexus – progress, modernity, masculinity, futurity – reproduces racial hierarchies

that privilege white bodies and perspectives (Cave et al., 2024). By equating innovation with futurity, techno-racial capitalism (Hampton, 2023) positions whiteness as the rightful inheritor of progress and legitimates racialized dispossession in the present.

At the urban scale, conceptions of tech futurities uphold the influence of tech firms over urban policy and urban development. Tech urbanism, in other words, is shaped not only by urban transformation but also by the cultural and symbolic authority of tech entrepreneurs to light the way to a brighter future. Ignacio Luri et al. (2023) describe these innovators as a small, elitist group driving a hyper-centralized industry according to their own visions. Through media visibility, venture capital networks, and political alliances, they position themselves as heroic public intellectuals, promising to “make the world a better place” (Luri et al., 2023, p. 102) and transforming market projects into moral missions. Neoliberal logics normalize these narratives, allowing governments to reframe collective social problems as technological ones and accept entrepreneurial solutions in place of political action (Harvey, 1989; Slater, 2004). As Sasha Dickel and Jan-Felix Schrape (2017a, 2017b) note, such discourses divide society into visionary agents of change versus everyone else, thereby legitimizing the existing order. These narratives have concrete spatial consequences: by framing tech as the driver of the “city of the future,” they legitimize urban projects that prioritize tech firms’ interests, often reshaping neighborhoods to attract talent, capital, and innovation. Gentrification becomes an extension of this vision, as long-term residents and existing social infrastructures are sidelined or displaced in the service of tech-led redevelopment. In this sense, tech futurities are not merely rhetorical: they actively restructure urban space, privileging the needs, aesthetics, and imaginaries of a highly mobile, elite workforce while rendering other communities peripheral to the city’s imagined trajectory.

Tech futurities intersect with race, finally, at the scale of the firm or workplace. At the top of the hierarchy, the valorized figure of the tech entrepreneur is imagined as white, masculine, able-bodied, and rational. This idealized identity shapes the visions that firms pursue, linking technological innovation to cultural authority and moral legitimacy. The tech entrepreneur embodies Eurocentric, capitalistic traits of combativeness, individualism, and control over the future (Benjamin, 2019; Luri et al., 2023; Ogbor, 2000; Tarvainen, 2022). Tarvainen (2022, p. 12) thus situates the tech entrepreneur figure in a “pantheon of colonial expansion,” where the entrepreneur mirrors the so-called “hero” of discovery tasked with taming both nature and the racialized “others” tied to it. Elon Musk’s SpaceX exemplifies this dynamic, mobilizing a colonial imaginary of Mars as a “New World” that reinforces promise entrepreneurship and Western-centric futurity (Tutton, 2021). The tech sector, of course, is not homogeneous – even at the upper levels. There are many Asian tech entrepreneurs. And yet, even when visible, these entrepreneurs are positioned within “model minority” frameworks and cultural fit norms that reinforce whiteness rather than destabilize it (Chow, 2023; Irani, 2018; Noble & Roberts, 2019). Ultimately, through these racialized hero narratives, tech elites acquire symbolic legitimacy to reorder urban space. Their entrepreneurial imaginaries justify displacement and gentrification by recasting exclusionary market projects as inevitable progress, embedding racial capitalism and colonial tropes into the very fabric of urban futures (Luri et al., 2023; Robinson, 1983[2000]). By positioning technology and its creators as the arbiters of the “future city,” these narratives justify the social and spatial marginalization of existing communities and embed racialized hierarchies into urban planning and investment decisions (Dickel & Schrape, 2017a, 2017b; Harvey, 1989; Luri et al., 2023). In this way, the figure of the tech entrepreneur operates as both a symbolic and material driver of tech urbanism and

gentrification, translating elite visions of innovation into concrete urban transformations that reinforce racial and class inequalities. These racialized and gendered imaginings of tech futurity not only shape the cities that firms pursue but also establish hierarchical dynamics within the firm itself, positioning glorified tech elites and entrepreneurs as the ultimate arbiters of value and innovation and setting the terms for how other employees are expected to align with – or defer to – their vision (Molinari, 2020).

The relationship between technology, futurity, and race may be more complicated at lower levels of the hierarchy – that is, among tech workers. Despite their prestige, the tech workforce (or tech class) is deeply unequal along racial, gendered, and geographic lines. White, male “tech bros” dominate leadership roles (McNeill, 2016; McElroy, 2019), while Black and Latinx workers remain marginalized. Like Asian entrepreneurs, Asian tech workers occupy a conditional “white-adjacent” status, simultaneously visible yet reinforcing neoliberal myths of meritocracy (Chow, 2023; Chun et al., 2024; Zhou, 2004). Racialized hierarchies are embedded in innovation narratives and labor practices, producing “habits of whiteness” that consolidate power while masking inequality (Walton, 2021). Framed as successors to Richard Florida’s (2006) “creative class,” the tech class fuels tech-led gentrification. Affluent, predominantly white tech workers displace historically racialized communities, while narratives of mobility, diversity, and futurity legitimize urban redevelopment (McElroy, 2019; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Tarvainen, 2022). The tech class exemplifies how whiteness operates as both input and output of tech futurity, shaping workforce hierarchies and racialized urban transformation. These patterns reveal complex dynamics at the intersection of race, technology, and urban change, highlighting rich empirical and theoretical insights and underscoring the need for further research to fully understand how tech futurities reproduce and reshape inequality. These insights on technology,

futurity, gentrification, and race provide the foundation for the analysis that follows. While attentive to these broad structural dynamics, this project focuses specifically on how tech workers, in the North American context, navigate race – both within their workplaces and in the surrounding neighborhoods – and how these negotiations are shaped by racialized futurities that inform their imaginaries, aspirations, and practices in urban space.

Before proceeding, it is helpful to demonstrate how whiteness and futurity are theorized in the broader literature. For instance, Natalie Oswin (2012) demonstrates how Singapore’s development policies criminalize racialized migrant workers to maintain a vision of a racially “advanced” society, while Susanne Schultz (2019) shows how future-oriented demographic reasoning in contemporary Germany excludes immigrant populations as dangerous or disposable. In a similar vein, Kevin Grove et al. (2022) argue that pandemic responses in Australia and the U.S. reveal the racially uneven distribution of futurity that sustains both the political economy of capital circulation in the Anthropocene and the “libidinal economy of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence” (p.15) underpinning white privilege. Framed as progress or public safety, white futurity ultimately sustains socio-racial, neocolonial hierarchies by relegating Indigenous, Black, and Brown histories and bodies to a fixed, underdeveloped past, securing a white present and future (Olund, 2017; Smith & Vasudevan, 2017; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). A key assumption in this broader literature is that whiteness is not a biological or extra-discursive category (“white people”), but a privileged social position sustained through practices, institutional arrangements, and epistemologies that shape how the world is perceived and inhabited (Ahmed, 2007; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Frankenberg, 1993; Yancy, 2008). White futurity, as Andrew Baldwin (2012) defines it, is an aspect of this socially produced way of seeing and experiencing. White futurity, for Baldwin, refers to “an imagined

time that is yet to come” (p. 173). It is socially and racially constructed, produced by specific actors in specific contexts toward specific goals (Grunwald, 2014). These constructions exert real effects in the present, shaping imaginaries, strategies, and practices that render the future knowable and predictable (Anderson, 2010). Race – and hence whiteness – are defined by their temporality, acting as “a central organizing principle of modernity” (Goldberg, 1993, as cited in Baldwin, 2016, p. 84). If whiteness is an orientation (see Ahmed, 2007), it is a future-facing one.

Focusing on the temporalities of race and whiteness reveals how political discourses center futurity in the white individual (and, more broadly, the white race) by denying full humanity to negatively racialized bodies (Dinshaw et al., 2007; Smith & Vasudevan, 2017; Schultz, 2019). As Eric Olund (2017) argues, “the valuation of non-white lives is dependent upon their relation to white futures” (p. 294). By nurturing utilitarian and capitalistic conceptions of the future (Winnubst, 2006), whiteness sustains its spatial and economic dominance through the systematic erasure of Black, Brown, and Indigenous – physical, spatial, and symbolic – presence (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). In this sense, futurity tethered to whiteness does not signify openness but the continual reproduction of racial hierarchies: a temporal orientation that secures white life as the rightful inheritor of progress while relegating racialized others to erasure, containment, and displacement (Tutton, 2021). Whiteness thus consolidates its power not only spatially but temporally, by claiming ownership over what counts as the future and, by extension, who belongs in it. These insights are particularly significant for understanding tech-led gentrification, as they reveal how the aspirations, imaginaries, and practices of the tech sector actively shape urban transformation while reinforcing racial hierarchies and exclusion.

Methodology

Both University City in Philadelphia and Parc Extension in Montreal illustrate the entanglement of racialization, gentrification, and tech urbanism in the Western context, shaped by distinct local histories yet similarly affected by the expansion of research and tech hubs anchored by major universities – namely, the University of Pennsylvania and the Université de Montréal. Philadelphia and Montreal are medium-sized cities, with populations of 1.6 million and 2 million, respectively (US Census Bureau, 2020; Ville de Montréal, 2021). The neighborhoods under study house 55,953 residents in University City (UCD, 2024, p. 9) and 28,775 in Parc Extension (CBAR, 2022, p. 13). In both cases, tech-led urban development has contributed to the displacement of low-income, racialized, and otherwise marginalized communities.

A total of 33 individuals participated in this study: 17 in Philadelphia and 16 in Montreal. Seventeen participants used the pronouns “she/her,” and 16 used “he/him.” The majority identified as white, with eight participants identifying as racialized: in Philadelphia, two African-American women, one Afro-Latina woman, one woman from India, one man of Mexican descent, and one man from Japan; in Montreal, one man from Cameroon and one Arab man. Most interviews lasted around 40 minutes. I adopted a broad definition of “tech worker,” including all individuals employed within the tech sector, regardless of specific roles; however, most participants occupied high-level positions (e.g., directors, project managers, senior researchers, and engineers). Given the difficulty of recruiting within tech companies (Twine, 2018), recruitment took place in spaces where tech workers spend time daily. In Philadelphia, this occurred in Fall 2023 at a co-working space housing several biotech start-ups and located in the same building as UCD’s Science Center, where I held a one-month membership. Participants

were approached in common areas, such as the cafeteria or during weekly coworking events. In Montreal, recruitment occurred in Winter 2024, primarily at a public coffee shop close to Mila's building. Snowball sampling was also employed in both cities to recruit additional participants. Interviews focused on three main topics: participants' perspectives on the tech sector, their employers, and the neighborhoods in which they work. All participants' and companies' names have been changed to ensure confidentiality. Findings were analyzed inductively and manually coded around participants' perspectives on race and diversity, the tech sector, and the neighborhood (Alegria, 2019).

Findings

Negotiating Race

Research has long shown that the technology sector portrays itself as diverse, tolerant, and progressive (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995; Benjamins, 2016, 2019; Daniels, 2015). Yet respondents' accounts reveal stark contradictions between this rhetoric and lived experience. Many respondents stressed that positions of authority remain concentrated in the hands of white cisgender men, and that people of color, particularly women, face barriers that cannot be explained away by individual merit (Pitcan et al., 2018). These dynamics were discussed by many of the respondents but tended to be addressed differently by BIPOC and white workers, respectively. Anna, a Black executive director, a West Philadelphia native, who has witnessed the neighborhood's social and economic transformation, described the exclusionary culture of tech: "Tech is majority white male, sprinkles of white women, and 3% people of color. They [BIPOC] struggle with imposter syndrome. They struggle with feeling like they belong. They struggle with finding their way through the social norms of specific organizations in their

culture. They struggle with folks who feel like they shouldn't be in the room or at the table.” Her statement highlights both the industry's lack of diversity and the emotional and cognitive burden that this imbalance imposes. For BIPOC professionals, especially young people entering the field, the sense of constantly being out of place is not an occasional inconvenience but a defining feature of their working lives. What is described as “imposter syndrome” is less an individual failing than a structural condition produced by organizations.

Sofia, a Philadelphia-based Afro-Latina biotech engineer, added another dimension to this reality when she reflected on both the joy and the burden of representation: “It's a good feeling when I can see other people in my position, like Latinas or Black women, kind of killing it. [...] [But] I have to work twice as hard sometimes.” Her reflection captures the double bind facing women of color in tech. On the one hand, seeing others succeed is motivating, acting as a reminder that presence is possible in spaces where they are otherwise rare (Twine, 2018). On the other hand, the very scarcity of representation magnifies the pressure to succeed. The idea of working “twice as hard” resonates with a longstanding theme in scholarship on race and work, where marginalized groups are compelled to perform above and beyond to be seen as legitimate (Alegria, 2019, 2020; Alfrey & Twine, 2017; Nakamura, 2020; Nicole et al., 2025; Wright, 2005). These accounts underscore how race and gender shape not only opportunities for advancement but also the affective and embodied experience of labor in the sector. As Sharla Alegria (2019) argues, work is a crucial site where gendered and racial identities are produced and social distinctions reproduced.

The impact of immigration status also emerged as a central theme. Johanne, an immigrant from India working as an IT operator in University City, underscored the structural asymmetries produced by immigration and racial status. She reflected: “My perspective is from an immigrant.

There is one other immigrant person in the entirety of the service, and that also means that our employer is sponsoring our visa. So, there is a power differential there, who I speak to, how I speak, what I get to say no to, which I am always cognizant and aware of... It's a structural pain." Her account illustrates how visa sponsorship functions as a disciplinary mechanism, regulating not only employment conditions but also modes of speech, dissent, and self-presentation. The employer's dual role as economic patron and legal guarantor produces what she terms a "structural pain," an ongoing negotiation of belonging that exceeds, once again, individual agency. Her experience aligns with Alegria's (2020) argument that work visa holders constitute a racialized minority workforce within the tech sector. Indeed, as Sharmila Rudrappa (2009) demonstrates, the H-1B visa program functions as a racialized guest worker system, producing compliance through the precarity it institutionalizes. The increasing predominance of Indian workers – rising from 43% of H-1B recipients in 2004 to 76% in 2017 – illustrates how labor practices and visa regimes operate as racial projects, rendering these workers simultaneously indispensable and structurally constrained. Rudrappa (2009) refers to them as "techno-braceros," invoking the mid-twentieth-century Bracero Program, in which U.S. farmers employed temporary Mexican labor under similarly disposable conditions.

White workers, particularly white women, also acknowledged the structural dimensions of racism, displaying what Ruth Frankenberg (1993) terms a measure of "race-cognizance." Emma, a white CEO of a tech startup who relocated her headquarters to Parc Extension, openly reflected on her workplace's homogeneity: "We are moderately diverse, not as diverse as we could or maybe should be. Everyone is Caucasian." Similarly, Becky, a white queer director of development for a Philadelphia-based startup, offered a more pointed critique: "All institutional structures are homophobic and white supremacist and sexist by nature, by design. I think we've

only scratched the surface of the work towards an equitable industry.” Unlike perspectives that frame inequality as incidental, her account situates racism as structural and inseparable from organizational life. Yet, as Frankenberg (1993) notes, such race-cognizance is seldom “power-strategic” as recognition of racism does not automatically translate into practices that challenge white privilege. Kathleen Donnelly (2018) similarly observes that white women often articulate aspirations for a post-racist society without the political repertoire to realize systemic change. Nonetheless, this awareness is notable, particularly compared with some white male counterparts who minimized or ignored the impact of racism, framing white workers as a numerical minority. Olivier, the white vice president of a Montreal-based tech company, exemplifies this perspective. He downplayed the significance of race, asserting, “Even though we’re in Quebec, there are actually fewer white people. [...] White people, and especially Québécois, in Quebec, in Machine Learning, are a minority. [...] The diversity of races and ethnicities [in the tech sector] is really good.” By framing whiteness as numerically marginal, Olivier deflects attention from structural dominance, demonstrating how diversity discourse can obscure racial hierarchies while leaving disproportionate concentrations of power unexamined (Bell, 2003).

These testimonies suggest a contradiction between the image of the tech sector and the experience of its workers. The literature shows that tech companies often deploy “diversity” as a branding strategy to signal inclusivity (Benjamin, 2019; Eubanks, 2018), yet workers’ perceptions of these efforts are varied and sometimes ambivalent. In Philadelphia, respondents were more likely to explicitly address racial inequities. Sarah, a white senior biotech scientist, observed: “I’m not gonna lie, our company’s pretty driven by males, white males.” In Montreal, discussions were more often framed through “inclusion” or “multiculturalism,” reflecting Quebec’s political culture and a tendency to avoid direct reference to race (Benhadjoudja, 2017;

Bilge, 2012, 2013; Mahrouse, 2010; Makropoulos, 2004; Taylor, 1992). Liam, a white research assistant in Montreal's AI sector, noted: "There are more international people. So, I'd say there's some diversity among the employees, in terms of nationality, at least." Across both contexts, however, diversity frequently functioned less as a practice than as what Sigrid Luhr (2023) describes as "a way of talking about race without identifying specific groups or inequalities" (p.4). Several participants framed their companies as "better than most," a comparative rhetorical strategy identified by Luhr (2023). Workers justified this assessment in two ways: by citing their companies' investments in diversity initiatives and by deploying expansive definitions of diversity that stretched beyond race to include gender, nationality, or even professional background. This elasticity made it easier to claim progress, but it also diluted the meaning of racial equity, transforming diversity into a catch-all metric of difference.

Tech workers thus often frame the future as something they are actively shaping, emphasizing aspirational narratives of innovation, progress, and diversity. Arnold, a Mexican-American IT director in West Philadelphia, emphasized transparency in corporate practices: "We do a quarterly report on how we're doing in terms of diversity and inclusion...we also do a monthly employee survey...[and] we are very transparent about how bonuses are calculated and the metrics that go into those calculations." Similarly, Becky highlighted aspirational change: "If [wealth and resources] can be used creatively and in support of good and serving the community, I think there's...real incremental change." Respondents recognized that diversity and inclusion initiatives often function as strategies to attract talent. Emma explained, "To attract diverse candidates, they [tech companies] need to find a way to make the environment comfortable for those people. There's a big focus on it." Margot, a white project manager in Montreal's gaming industry, similarly noted, "They really want to attract the best employees... they implement

inclusion and diversity policies... So, I appreciate that they make this effort.” At the same time, some tech workers perceived these programs differently. Tom, a white AI researcher in Montreal, remarked, “Diversity, unfortunately, there’s a kind of hysteria around it.” His comment illustrates how whiteness can frame inclusion initiatives not as potential efforts toward equity, but as threats to the status quo, revealing a tension between DEI as a talent-driven strategy and DEI as a perceived challenge to established hierarchies (Cave et al., 2024).

These accounts reveal a contradiction within the tech sector: while some workers demonstrate a measure of race-cognizance (Donnelly, 2018; Frankenberg, 1993), the broader culture often normalizes whiteness, frames diversity as a branding or talent-attraction tool and minimizes structural inequities. For workers of color, notably Black and Latina women (Alfrey & Twine, 2017), diversity discourse thus produces uneven and precarious outcomes. While it offers white employees symbolic reassurance, it imposes conditional belonging on racialized women, who described overperformance, imposter syndrome, and doubts about whether their value extended beyond token representation. Their inclusion is framed as proof of change, even as the burdens of representation persist. At a broader level, diversity discourse functions as a powerful ideological tool. It enables the tech industry to present itself as progressive and innovative while protecting white employees and institutions from addressing structural racism. As Sarah Mayorga-Gallo (2019) notes, such discourses protect whiteness by translating inequality into symbolic performances of tolerance. Within tech, this logic enables both workers and firms to construct positive identities – as inclusive, forward-thinking, and meritocratic – while sustaining the racial hierarchies that undergird the industry itself. Respondents echoed industry claims that more diverse teams fuel innovation and problem-solving, a perspective that positions diversity as instrumental to growth rather than intrinsically valuable (Luhr, 2023).

While this framing allows diversity to be aligned with the entrepreneurial ethos of tech, it also re-centers organizational benefit over equity, reducing inclusion to a means of improving productivity. In this context, diversity operates less as structural change than as a brand asset, a marker of modernity and competitiveness (Hashimoto, 2021). For liberal or progressive white workers, this framing reinforces a self-image of tolerance and open-mindedness, sustaining what Jessie Daniels (2015) terms “white racial innocence,” even as racialized exclusion endures. These engagements with race and diversity would also find expression in discussions of tech firms and urban futures.

Contributing to the Urban Future

Even as respondents acknowledged persistent structural inequalities, workers in both Philadelphia and Montreal consistently cast technology as a force for good. Across biotech, AI, and gaming, participants emphasized the tech sector’s capacity to improve lives. Johanne described its “techno-solutionist and techno-optimistic perspective on the future,” noting that such views are especially influential among those with decision-making power. Marie, a Black cell engineer in Philadelphia, stressed that “the biotech sector is very innovative, and it does have the potential to really help [sick] people.” Similarly, Charlotte, a white senior project manager in Montreal, argued that “AI can also be part of the solution for the environment, how we design cities, and how we can be better.” Anna also highlights the sector’s capacity to reduce racialized poverty: “Tech provides a great opportunity for people to innovate, create and access high-growth opportunities as far as wages [...] You can make multi six figures in tech and so for Black people and Brown people, it's an opportunity to close the wage gap.” Alex, an Arab male researcher in the Montreal gaming industry, emphasized the strong sense of commitment within the field: “People really care about the industry, about what they’re doing.” Finally, Camille, a

white accountant at a Montreal tech lab, underscored the ethical dimension of her work: “[What I like] is the human aspect... making decisions on projects that put ethics at the center, and not just focus on money.” This optimism reflects broader scholarship identifying tech workers as “techno-optimists,” convinced their innovations are reshaping society for the better (Tutton, 2021). Corporate discourses reinforce this ethos, framing tech products as tools to “make the world a better place” while marketing the industry as inherently democratic and progressive (Alfrey & Twine, 2017).

One of the most frequently cited benefits of tech was its perceived capacity to transform neighborhoods. Respondents – white and BIPOC alike – often framed the arrival of tech companies as a revitalizing force, associated with investment, job creation, and visible improvements to the urban environment. Anna emphasized the cultural dimension: “There’s a new energy, so many different people from different backgrounds. You know, it just creates that energy that is necessary for a thriving community.” Alissia, a white biotech scientist in Philadelphia, connected tech’s growth to both employment and urban improvement: “It has provided a lot of employment opportunities, and I think any traffic to a neighborhood, especially traffic of higher-income folks, ultimately does kind of clean up an area; there’s a lot less litter and increased safety measures.” Similarly, Arnold underscored changes to public space, noting: “The neighborhood gets more cleaned up, better taken care of.” For some, the expansion of biotech in West Philadelphia was viewed as a corrective to earlier geographic inequities. Henry, a white tech consultant, explained: “Most of the biotech and tech have been way out in the suburbs, inaccessible for people who live in the city. I don’t think it creates the kind of innovation environment that’s helpful. [...] In the last decade, we’ve seen a significant expansion of the tech sector here [in West Philadelphia], which I think is very helpful for our region, very

helpful for the city.” Collectively, these perspectives cast tech as a civic benefactor, a sector capable of cleaning, revitalizing, and ultimately saving neighborhoods. This resonates with research on smart cities, where the promise of technological innovation is less about improving the lives of residents than about branding the city as a hub of growth and attracting capital. As Alan Wiig (2016) observes in Philadelphia, adopting a smart city project was “a way to attain economic prominence and attract new enterprise from within and beyond the region” (p. 536), with the discursive power of “innovation” mattering more than addressing inequality. In this sense, tech futurity at the neighborhood scale legitimates urban transformation by projecting a future in which technology ensures prosperity, while obscuring the dispossession and displacement underpinning such change.

Most respondents expressed enthusiasm about neighborhood transformation, framing the arrival of new businesses as a sign of vitality. Josh, a white tech entrepreneur, proudly asserted: “The epicenter of the biotech scene is right here, in West Philly,” aligning his perspective with broader political aspirations of positioning Philadelphia as a competitive hub alongside Boston or San Francisco. Arnold celebrated the everyday amenities that accompanied this growth: “I’ve loved all the various cafes in University City.” Parallel dynamics were described in Montreal, where respondents connected the presence of major firms to neighborhood revitalization. Alex highlighted Ubisoft’s influence in reshaping the nearby neighborhood of Mile End into “a cool area to live in,” explaining that “when there’s an area with big companies and young people with disposable income, there’s cool stuff built around it. This trend is just going to make Parc Extension a more interesting place to live.” Margot emphasized the aesthetic appeal of this transformation: “It [Parc Extension] is a somewhat industrial neighborhood now... having the small microbrewery, the little café, the small restaurant, but all of that with a sort of warehouse-

like atmosphere... I think there's a whole aesthetic behind this neighborhood that I personally really like." Similarly, Camille underscored the neighborhood's accessibility and cultural vibrancy: "There are a few restaurants, I think, that still represent [Montreal's culture] well. It's not just a residential neighborhood." Collectively, these accounts cast tech as a catalyst for urban vitality, associating corporate presence with cultural amenities, leisure, and cosmopolitan appeal.

While respondents appreciated the amenities around their workplaces – bars, cafés, and restaurants – most chose not to live in these neighborhoods. Some voiced explicitly negative views. John, a white engineer, dismissed University City as “a pretty boring place,” while others preferred to reside in South Philadelphia, Fishtown, or farther west, commuting into University City solely for work. Several participants critiqued what they saw as the lack of authenticity in these tech-oriented districts. Becky asked: “I see a lot of chains in West Philly and a lot of corporate food and shopping entities. And I wonder, why can't we have local establishments? Why can't we have mom and pop shops?” Similarly, Johanne contrasted the “chain restaurants” of University City, shaped by Penn and Drexel University's expansion, with the “incredible multicultural food” found deeper into West Philadelphia. Anna, reflecting on the area's architecture, emphasized: “You know, you go this way [further west], the neighborhood looks different, the houses and the architecture are absolutely beautiful.” These perspectives diverge sharply from boosterist corporate narratives that promote tech districts as attractive, livable hubs for creative-class professionals. In practice, many workers resist residing in these master-planned spaces, seeing them as culturally thin or overly commercialized. Others articulated concerns about erasure. In Montreal, Margot noted: “I would like this neighborhood life to be preserved, and for a sense of community to be created.” Such comments echo Japonica Brown-Saracino's

(2009) account of “social preservationists”: gentrifiers who seek to retain neighborhood authenticity even as their presence contributes to processes of symbolic displacement.

Taken together, these narratives reveal a paradox. Many tech workers’ refusal to live in revitalized neighborhoods complicates the “creative city” (Florida, 2006) narrative, highlighting a gap between imagined benefits, promoted by corporations and localities alike, and lived realities: University City is dismissed as “boring” whilst West Philadelphia is valorized as more “real,” and Parc Extension is celebrated for its cultural character even as tech capital reshapes social fabrics. At the same time, participants acknowledge the transformative potential of their industries but often interpret these changes through a moralizing lens that obscures their own complicity (Rabii, 2021). Enthusiasm for growth, employment, and “cleaner” streets intersects with what Maharawal (2022) calls the “tech-savior industrial complex,” where neighborhood revitalization is framed as benevolent yet remains deeply racialized and classed. Corporate presence is cast as socially and economically beneficial even as it entails cultural erasure, social control, and the reproduction of privilege. As Deborah Leslie and John Paul Catungal (2012) note, this framework naturalizes displacement by reframing gentrification as creativity and progress. For tech workers, this creates the illusion of vibrant, multicultural ecosystems; for long-term residents, it brings rising rents, exclusion, and community erasure. Joel Dinerstein (2006) and McElroy (2018, 2019) show that racialized narratives of technological “progress” (Tarvainen, 2022) historically justified interventions in non-white neighborhoods, functioning as a “white mythology” that projects a utopian future while leaving inequalities intact. Ultimately, tech workers’ optimism thus coexists with, and often obscures, the persistence of structural inequality. The limitations of these perspectives would be even more pronounced when tech workers discussed the existing residents of these neighborhoods.

Framing Local Communities in Tech Narratives

Although many participants reported frequenting local bars, restaurants, and other amenities, their interactions with long-term residents were limited and largely superficial. As Emily, a Montreal-based white data analyst, puts it: “We often go to this bar, but we don’t interact [with the locals].” Similarly, Marc, a white research director in Montreal, noted: “Other than chatting when I buy things, I don’t really talk to them. I know the names of some people, but it remains very superficial.” For many respondents, neighborhoods such as Parc Extension or West Philadelphia were valued less as communities with histories and struggles than as consumable cultural resources. Charlotte described Parc Extension as “more local... more family, community oriented... more *exotic*” (my emphasis), while Olivier celebrated its “culture” and “diversity” as markers of desirability: “What I like is that there are so many multicultural things! Greek, Indian, Italian restaurants... Overall, I think it’s the best neighborhood because of the culture and the diversity,” he said. Such statements exemplify what Mayorga-Gallo (2019) terms the commodification of diversity, whereby racialized difference is appreciated as an aesthetic or cultural asset newcomers can consume but detached from the lived experiences of marginalized residents (Hashimoto, 2021). This logic facilitates a liberal self-image for newcomers, who can claim progressive values through consumption of “diverse” spaces without engaging structural inequalities.

A minority of participants attempted to frame their presence in more ethical terms, emphasizing the importance of “giving back.” For instance, Johanne reflected: “We need to give back... We have a very extractive relationship [with local, disadvantaged communities] because of the power differentials.” Her acknowledgment underscores how even well-intentioned practices remain entangled in asymmetrical relations of power, where tech professionals – often

“transplants,” as she noted – benefit disproportionately from urban change. As Leslie and Catungal (2012) remind us, the neoliberal discourse of the multicultural city rests on the fallacy of harmony and equality, even as racialized residents bear the costs of displacement and exclusion. Diversity here becomes less a political project of justice than a consumable commodity, a resource through which privileged newcomers construct positive identities while reinforcing structural hierarchies (Tissot, 2014).

All participants demonstrated at least some awareness of the negative effects of the tech sector on long-standing, marginalized communities, most often invoking “gentrification” or “displacement.” Yet the way these terms were mobilized frequently diluted or redirected responsibility. For example, John reflected: “University City was probably a neighborhood that was bulldozed at some point. There are a lot of these areas in Philly that have been sort of gentrified and turned into a new *tech utopia*” (my emphasis). His phrasing situates gentrification as a diffuse, almost inevitable urban process rather than a set of concrete practices in which tech investment plays a central role. Others erased long-term residents altogether, reframing their own arrival as the true measure of neighborhood vitality. Emma explained that she chose to locate her company in Parc Extension to take advantage of Montreal’s ‘innovation ecosystem’: “We really fell in love with the innovation ecosystem in Montreal, Parc Ex *felt like home* to us because of that, even though we didn’t speak any French at all. We decided to stay because we liked being able to interact with so many other creative, innovative folks, and it seemed there was a heavy concentration of those people around here” (my emphasis). While she explicitly acknowledged the risks of gentrification, her concern was not for displaced racialized tenants but for whether “creative types” would still be able to afford to remain: “The danger [of rising housing costs] is probably that it becomes so gentrified that, you know, a lot of the creative types can’t then afford

to live here anymore.” Similarly, Emily emphasized the influx of tech firms as bringing “more neighborhood life connected to the company,” recasting Parc Extension’s social vibrancy as synonymous with tech presence.

These accounts reflect what Kathleen Donnelly (2018) terms the counter-narrative of gentrification: rather than acknowledging displacement and dispossession, newcomers frame their presence as contributing to economic and cultural growth. Diversity, in this context, is celebrated as a consumer good – through local food, aesthetics, and atmosphere – rather than as a political demand for equity (Benjamin, 2019). As Mayorga-Gallo (2019) observes, this commodification of otherness allows professionals to construct progressive self-identities while benefiting from structural inequalities. Importantly, the erasure of long-term residents is not merely discursive but embedded in broader urban restructuring. Irani (2015) shows that co-working spaces and innovation hubs operate by appropriating and displacing existing forms of labor, while McElroy (2019) traces how tech workers and “digital nomads” circulate through racialized, fetishized “exotic” neighborhoods, remapping them as playgrounds for mobile elites. Extending this critique, Tarvainen (2022) argues that technocapitalism perpetuates settler-colonial logics: the disavowal of Indigenous and Black claims to land is rearticulated through tech-led “revitalization,” amounting to a recolonization of urban space under the guise of futurity. In this context, respondents’ casual displacement of long-term residents from their narratives is symptomatic of a broader ideological formation. As Ruha Benjamin (2019) insists, diversity in tech is too often reduced to “feel-good differences” that obscure the reproduction of structural inequalities. What is celebrated as innovation and “vitality” is thus inseparable from processes of exclusion, dispossession, and racialized urban restructuring.

Locals remain largely absent from participants' narratives; when they do appear, they are cast either as embodiments of "diversity" to be consumed or as an underutilized "talent pool" for the tech economy. Becky reframed residents in instrumental terms: "There are tons of residents in this neighborhood who could be trained in six weeks and be extremely qualified for the job requirement, and they're being overlooked." In both cases, local people are not recognized as agents with histories and struggles of their own but as cultural or economic resources, valued insofar as they can fuel the "innovation ecosystem." Consistent with what I previously discussed, participants often turned to technology itself as the solution – not only to urban challenges, but to longstanding inequalities. For Anna, the promise was sweeping: "If we're creating tech with diverse perspectives around the table, *we can change the world*" (my emphasis). Others echoed a similar techno-utopian faith: "I'm being optimistic. Things are gonna improve a lot ... they're trying to improve their community without losing their identity" (Olivia, a Philadelphia-based biotech scientist); "There's still a lot of space to grow. I'm just excited to see how this changes" (Tania, a tech consultant in Philadelphia). This discourse resonates with what Abeba Birhane (2023) describes as the "evangelical" promotion of technology: an almost religious belief in innovation as the universal fix, paired with little critical attention to the structural inequities it depends on and intensifies.

Such narratives dovetail with what Yui Hashimoto (2021) identifies as the racialized tropes underpinning creative-class redevelopment: Black and working-class residents are implicitly positioned as "lacking" skills, work ethic, or adaptability, while tech is imagined as the bridge to uplift them. This logic naturalizes inequality, reproducing a neoliberal "official anti-racism" (Melamed, 2011) in which diversity is recognized rhetorically yet mobilized as a resource for economic growth. In this sense, white saviorism and colorblind meritocracy

converge: with the “correct” training, locals can be folded into the economy, while those who remain poor are recast as undeserving or expendable (Quizar, 2019). The result is a striking spatial, temporal, and symbolic erasure. As Birhane (2020) and Lelia Marie Hampton (2023) note, tech’s savior complex mirrors colonial, white supremacist logics, recoding inequality as an opportunity for entrepreneurial intervention while erasing the histories of exploitation that produced it. For participants, “diversity” and “local communities” appeared primarily as symbolic markers or reservoirs of potential, rarely as subjects with political voice or ownership of place. What emerges is a narrative in which technology is not simply a sector but a civilizing, forward-looking force, one that promises inclusion while rearticulating racialized exclusion.

As scholars have shown, tech-led gentrification is driven by multiple forces, including speculative capital, government policy, and global urban competition (Leszczynski, 2020; Moio & Rossi, 2020; Zukin, 2020). Tech discourses intertwine with vast flows of investment and state incentives to reshape neighborhoods through property speculation, infrastructure development, and entrepreneurial urban governance (McElroy, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2024). The analysis presented here contributes to this picture by focusing on tech subjectivities and their narratives of place. By examining how tech workers imagine themselves as revitalizers, innovators, and civic benefactors, I show how everyday imaginaries of belonging and contribution function as discursive infrastructures of tech-led gentrification. These narratives work to normalize displacement and recast working-class and racialized communities as out of sync with the future, thereby reproducing what Baldwin (2012) identifies as the temporalities of whiteness. In this sense, tech workers’ visions of neighborhood change do not simply complement capital flows and state policies but actively reinforce whiteness as both spatial and temporal dominance. They cast the tech class – still overwhelmingly white, upper-middle-class,

and male – as the rightful inheritors of urban futures, while relegating racialized populations to erasure, containment, or displacement. Taken together, this analysis demonstrates that tech-led gentrification is not only an economic or policy-driven process but also a racial and cultural one, sustained through the futurities projected and lived by the tech class (Cave et al., 2024).

Conclusion

As this paper has shown, examining tech subjectivities reveals how the tech class envisions urban futures that normalize displacement, uphold whiteness, and position technology as the embodiment of the city’s guiding force (Baldwin, 2012; Cave et al., 2024; Tutton, 2021). Even where structural inequalities were acknowledged, respondents in both neighborhoods largely depicted technology as an inherently positive and benevolent force. Across biotech, AI, and gaming, participants emphasized tech’s capacity to “improve lives,” revealing how the moral power of progress often eclipses the realities of inequality. Corporate expansion is celebrated as socially and economically beneficial, even as it produces cultural erasure, social control, and the reproduction of privilege; a logic that naturalizes displacement by reframing tech-led gentrification as creativity and progress.

Although workers of color and women have denounced the tech sector’s persistent lack of diversity, these narratives give most participants the impression of vibrant, multicultural ecosystems, while for long-term residents they result in exclusion, rising rents, and the erosion of community. Racialized difference is appreciated as an aesthetic or cultural resource that newcomers can consume but remains detached from the lived experiences of marginalized communities (Hashimoto, 2021). Rather than acknowledging dispossession, most participants frame their presence as a contribution to economic and cultural vitality (Donnelly, 2018).

Diversity, in this context, is celebrated as a consumer good – embodied in local food, design, and atmosphere – rather than as a political demand for justice (Mayorga-Gallo, 2019; Melamed, 2006). This commodification of otherness allows tech professionals to sustain liberal, positive self-identities while materially benefiting from structural inequalities. Ultimately, technology is imagined not merely as an industry but as a civilizing, future-oriented force that promises inclusion while rearticulating racialized exclusion.

Consistent with prior research (Golio, 2023), tech-led gentrification thus emerges as a site where whiteness is continuously reconstituted through everyday practices of aspiration, belonging, and innovation, linking individual imaginaries to broader processes of racial capitalism and neo-colonial urban transformation (Cave et al., 2024; Maharawal, 2022; Tarvainen, 2022). Understanding how tech workers negotiate race – often by disavowing it – reveals the affective and ideological labor through which cities reproduce whiteness under the banner of diversity, tech-led “progress,” and futurity (Barbrook & Cameron, 1995; McElroy, 2018). The interviews analyzed here should be understood as an archive of tech liberalism at its peak. Participants’ emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and technology as a benevolent force reflects a historically specific political imaginary in which technocapitalism positioned itself as socially progressive and morally neutral. These narratives show how liberal DEI discourse functioned as a central cultural infrastructure in the post-#MeToo and Black Lives Matter era, providing justification for and normalizing tech-led gentrification.

Although this study was completed in 2023, prior to Donald Trump’s re-election, the authoritarian turn among tech elites warrants renewed scrutiny. Once aligned with neoliberal centrism, many now promote exclusionary worldviews that link innovation to class, race, and gender hierarchies (Acheson, 2025; Tarnoff, 2020). The rise of AI has intensified this shift,

enabling the deskilling of labor and the justification of widening inequality (Blix & Glimmer, 2025; Farkas & Mondon, 2025). Figures such as venture capitalist Marc Andreessen – who predicts “human wages crashing from AI” (Blix & Glimmer, 2025) – embody how the rhetoric of innovation now legitimizes blatant oppression. Growing worker disillusionment exposes deep ideological fractures within the tech class (Molinari, 2020). Further research should examine how race and whiteness structure these imaginaries amid the ongoing reconfiguration of tech work and henceforth urban life (Saito & Sasaki, 2025), particularly in the wake of Amazon’s layoff of 14,000 corporate workers following major AI investments (MacLain, 2025).

Conclusion: Envisioning Plural, Just, and Collective Futures Beyond Gentrification

Drawing on critical whiteness studies and scholarship on tech and gentrification, this research examined two neighborhoods: University City in Philadelphia and Parc Extension in Montreal. By analyzing the narratives deployed by the gentrification stakeholders – namely, the state, universities, and the tech sector or “Triple Helix” (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995) –, this work explored how neighborhood redevelopment has been intertwined with future-oriented urban imaginaries that symbolically and materially erase non-white presence. As this study focused on the ways tech-led gentrification reproduces whiteness as futurity, it addressed three core questions: How do stakeholders envision the present and future of neighborhoods, and to what extent do these imaginaries promote a predominantly white urban future? To what extent do tech workers themselves adopt, enact, or reproduce these narratives? And how are longstanding, working-class, Black and South Asian residents represented – or omitted – within these visions?

The findings show that future-oriented narratives both legitimize tech-led redevelopment and reinforce – materially and symbolically – the supremacy of whiteness, underscoring the inherent racialized dynamics of tech urbanism, and tech-led gentrification in particular, in Philadelphia and Montreal. Both racialized and gendered, futurity is politically constructed, manifesting through imaginaries, narratives, strategies, and practices that render the future knowable and predictable while shaping the production of geographies in the present (Baldwin, 2012). In the context of tech industries’ growing influence over urban imaginaries and governance, this dissertation argues that the concept of futurity offers new ways to apprehend and problematize tech-led gentrification.

Under technocapitalism, cities are remade through a state-university-tech nexus that reshapes urban life both spatially and temporally. The first manuscript, introducing Parc Extension as a case study, argues that examining narratives of cities' tech-oriented futures can provide crucial insight into how gentrification is shaped in the present. Building on institutional stakeholders' discourses, the second manuscript demonstrates how futurist imaginaries cast longstanding racialized communities as "under-skilled" while positioning white, educated tech workers as the rightful inheritors of urban futures. By emphasizing temporality, it stresses that tech-led gentrification reproduces whiteness not only through material displacement but also through symbolic temporal erasure, highlighting the inseparability of state-supported tech futurities and the maintenance of whiteness. The third manuscript, drawing on interviews with 33 tech workers and entrepreneurs, showcases how the predominantly white tech class projects aspirational visions of neighborhood change that position the tech sector as an agent of progress and innovation. These narratives reveal how tech futurities function as racialized governance, determining who is projected as part of the city's future and reinforcing the tech class's entitlement to urban space. While individual narratives vary, most coalesce around a common vision of modernity structured by whiteness, actively reproducing urban inequality and consolidating white spatial, temporal, and economic dominance. This dissertation contributes not only to the extensive scholarship on race and gentrification, but more specifically to the study of gentrification and whiteness, showing how whiteness is reproduced not only through displacement and policy, but also through futurist imaginaries, liberal inclusion frameworks, and everyday narratives of progress that normalize unequal urban change.

This research represents an initial step toward understanding tech-led urban change and gentrification through the lens of temporality and racialized futurity. Future studies should

further integrate the temporal dimensions of tech and whiteness to illuminate how gentrification unfolds over time and how imaginaries of the future shape present urban realities. Beyond the scope of this thesis, it is crucial to investigate how local, racialized communities experience these processes, how they interpret the encroachment of tech-led development, and the strategies they employ to resist displacement and reclaim authority over urban space, memory, and history. Such work would further illuminate the social, cultural, and political implications of tech urbanism and its unequal impacts.

The urgency of this research is heightened by the rapid convergence of authoritarian politics, technocapitalist expansion, and racialized urban redevelopment. In retrospect, this project captures the close of a political moment defined by liberal, diversity-branded tech futurities. As technocapitalism increasingly aligns with reactionary and exclusionary movements, these narratives appear less as enduring ideals than as a transitional ideological phase. This shift highlights the importance of examining how tech-led urbanism, whether framed through liberal inclusion or overt authoritarianism, continues to reorganize cities through racialized, imperial, and temporal hierarchies, especially amid the consolidation of Big Tech power and the rise of reactionary politics. As Michel Valentin (2025) observes, a new technofascism is emerging from the alliance of “Big Power, Big Money, and Big Tech.” With figures such as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Sam Altman, and Mark Zuckerberg, this so-called “Tech Broliarchy” (Acheson, 2025), representing just 0.1% of the U.S. population, controls 14% of national wealth and funds political movements aimed at deregulation and privatization. While the actions of U.S. President Donald Trump and reactionary tech oligarchs may seem extreme, they should not be treated as exceptional. As scholars emphasize (Harris, 2022; McElroy, 2018), Silicon Valley’s ideas are not confined to Palo Alto; they are embedded in the broader authoritarian structures of capitalist and

neoliberal power. Similarly, Johan Farkas and Aurelien Mondon (2025) argue that the U.S. tech industry has long been intertwined with elitist and exclusionary notions of progress, where utopian narratives of digital liberation coexist with militarism, misogyny, racism, and anti-democratic impulses. Calls to “colonize Mars” (Tutton, 2021) are thus not simply eccentric fantasies; they reflect a broader project to reinforce white, patriarchal control over the future. These developments show that tech-led urbanism cannot be separated from the racial, political, and ideological frameworks that sustain it.

In this dissertation, whiteness is understood not simply as a sociodemographic category and lived identity but as a governing logic that organizes value, belonging, and futurity. It operates by naturalizing particular ways of inhabiting space, imagining the future, and defining legitimate urban subjects, while rendering racialized, working-class communities out of place and out of time. Under tech liberalism, this regime is articulated through narratives of diversity, innovation, and inclusion that promise progress while reproducing displacement and erasure. Under emergent tech-fascist formations, whiteness manifests through more explicit logics of exclusion, security, and civilizational defense, promoting a defensive “in-group” that is perceived as under threat despite remaining structurally dominant. In both cases, whiteness functions as a political and temporal regime, continuously producing hierarchies of belonging under changing historical conditions. Driven by utopian visions of the tech-friendly, “next-generation city” that are both political and racialized, tech-led gentrification ultimately positions whiteness as the standard for urban life while marginalizing collective and equitable alternatives.

To conclude, beyond grassroots organizing and resistance – both essential to challenging tech-led gentrification – this moment demands bold, critical research and collaborative alliances across academia, grassroots organizations, and civil society. Those with privileged access to

public discourse have a responsibility to confront and expose the ideological forces that sustain racial capitalism and technological authoritarianism (Farkas & Mondon, 2025). For academics, this means critically examining epistemologies of white ignorance (Mills, 2015) and white-dominated approaches (Dei, 2005) and methods (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), while committing to research that is both rigorous and accountable, grounded in solidarity with communities most impacted by displacement and exclusion (Pulido, 2002). Geographers, in particular, must recognize their responsibility to expand the discipline's boundaries by adopting self-reflexive analytical lenses that directly engage with race. As Pulido (2002) notes, the discipline of geography has long been shaped by whiteness, influencing the questions asked, the methods employed, and the perspectives that are prioritized. Addressing this reality calls for transformation, not guilt, in how we study, interpret, and communicate urban change and justice.

The stakes could not be higher. As this research demonstrates, tech-led gentrification is not simply a matter of real estate or urban design but a project of racialized futurity; one that shapes whose lives, histories, and aspirations are imagined as part of the city's future and deemed "legitimate" within it. To confront these processes requires reimagining knowledge production itself: working across disciplinary and geographical boundaries, building coalitions between scholars and activists, and ultimately reclaiming our capacity to imagine futures that are plural, just, and collective.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guide

Presentation

This project is a study aimed at analyzing local tech workers' experience working in University City/Parc Extension. Your participation is key to this project.

This meeting will last about 40 minutes. If you agree, I would like to audio-record this interview. This interview will remain strictly confidential. The tape will just help me analyzing your answers afterwards. All your answers will remain strictly confidential. No name will be released. Upon your approval, I would like to cite you in my final project but without identifying you.

Main questions	Secondary questions
Part 1: Personal trajectory and background	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which pronouns do you use? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How old are you? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are you from? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your nationality? • How long have you been living/working in Philadelphia/Montreal?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you go to college? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, which university did you go to? • What was your major? • What is your highest degree?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your job? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which company do you work for? • What is its size? • Where is it located? • Where did you work prior to working here?

Part 2: Experience in/perception of the neighborhood	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do you live? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[If University City/Parc Extension]</i> Why did you move here? • Do you live by yourself (family? Relationship status?)? • Do you have relatives in the area? • <i>[If University City/Parc Extension]</i> Which school do your kids go to?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been working in the area? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you go to the office every day? • Do you go out in the neighborhood? If yes, where? Why?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of relationships do you have with long-term residents/locals?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like the most about University City/Parc Extension? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has University City/Parc Extension changed since your arrival? • Do you feel safe in University City/Parc Extension? • What makes University City/Parc Extension a thriving area? • What should be improved in the area?

Part 3: Experience in/perceptions of their workplace and the tech sector	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you define the workforce at your company? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it diverse? • Are there any Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies in place? If yes, what are they? • What kind of relationships do you have with your coworkers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does your workplace look like? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of amenities does it provide? • What would you change?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like/dislike about the tech sector? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity? Innovation? • Diversity?

Conclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before concluding this meeting, would you like to add something to your testimonial? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any comments? 	

Thank you so much for participating in my study!

Appendix B. Sample Coding Framework

This coding framework supports the analysis across the manuscripts of this dissertation. It was developed through an iterative process combining inductive and deductive coding applied to interviews, policy documents, reports, public communications, and other materials.

The framework is organized around four overarching themes that reflect the study’s research questions: the role of the tech sector, neighborhood dynamics, whiteness and race, and gentrification. Within each theme, subcodes highlight detailed or nuanced patterns, including how actors perceive past legacies, present conditions, and future trajectories. This focus on temporality and futurity allows the framework to illuminate both ongoing transformations and imagined or anticipated changes, enabling systematic comparison across cases while maintaining links to the broader theoretical and empirical concerns of the dissertation. All excerpts included in the framework are anonymized to protect participants’ confidentiality.

Theme / Code	Focus	Subcodes / Notes	Excerpts
1. Tech Sector	References to the tech industry, companies, and innovation discourse	<p>1.1. Limits / Challenges Critiques, negative impacts, shortcomings of tech.</p> <p>1.2. Benefits / Opportunities Positive contributions, promises, or advantages of tech for the city, residents, or economy.</p> <p>1.3. Link to Neighborhood How tech activities intersect with specific urban spaces.</p>	<p>“There’s still room for improvement in gender and racial equity. In both academia and industry, it’s common to see a ‘funneling’ effect; there tends to be a highly diverse population at entry-level positions, but as you move up the hierarchy, representation drops off sharply across the board.”</p> <p>“I guess that kind of gets back to the complications and nuance of gentrification, but I do feel the development of these startups in the area have provided a lot more employment.”</p>
2. Neighborhood	Mentions of local community, urban context, and social dynamics	<p>2.1. History / Legacy Historical background, prior community structures, cultural and economic legacies.</p> <p>2.2. Future / Aspirations Expectations, concerns, or visions about upcoming urban change.</p> <p>2.3. Relations with Local Communities References to interactions, collaborations, conflicts, or tensions between tech actors,</p>	<p>“West Philly was a Black neighborhood, and then there was, like, a big gentrification with a lot of white folks who moved in.”</p> <p>“I come here for that, to be a part of this: the academic and entrepreneurial buzz.”</p> <p>“It would be useful as well to engage more with local</p>

		new residents, and long-term community members.	communities... It feels like we act as outsiders over here. We work, we spend some time here, and then we go home."
3. Whiteness and Race	References to racial, class, and gender dynamics embedded in the tech sector and urban change	<p>3.1. Privilege / Inclusion Instances where whiteness or social privilege shapes access, decision-making, or participation</p> <p>3.2. Exclusion / Marginalization Evidence of racialized or gendered exclusion.</p> <p>3.3. Diversity Perceptions and appreciation of diversity within the neighborhood, tech sector, and workplace.</p>	<p>"I am still working for a predominantly white institution, in a predominantly white service, in a predominantly white team."</p> <p>"There's a dominance of white cismen in the industry. This pattern extends to who we serve and our corporate partners... we're mostly working with a lot of white cis men."</p> <p>"Both of the small companies I've worked for in the past three years are extremely diverse, very diversity- and equity-conscious, not just internally but also in the services they offer. I think that mindset is becoming ingrained in the culture of these new startup companies."</p>
4. Gentrification	References to the experiences and interpretations of neighborhood change.	<p>4.1. Economic Pressures Rising rents, property pressures, business closures.</p> <p>4.2. Cultural / Social Changes Perceptions of how neighborhood changes affect existing social networks, local traditions, and cultural landmarks.</p>	<p>"I don't want to settle in the area, just... well, I've seen the prices, which, by the way, is a good problem to have!"</p> <p>"I've also definitely seen it gentrify more. For example, there's this yoga studio that I really like on 47th and, like... I would have never ventured that far west when I first moved to West Philly!"</p>