THE CREATIVE

Youth, Race, and the Gentrifying City

UNDERCLASS

TYLER DENMEAD

THE CREATIVE UNDERCLASS

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and the
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To Katherine, Virginia, and Elliott
And in memory of Nancy Abelmann

Contents

Acknowledgments

ity of Maria Gillombardo, who would sit with me for hours and talk through different ideas for this book. She provided comment after comment on early drafts that were crucial to bringing the arc of this book into formation. Nancy Abelmann envisioned me writing this book before I did. If it were not for her, I would not have written it. She will never see this book published. Her spirit of generosity lives on with so many scholars around the world, including me, who were touched by her intellectual force and her grace.

My participation in the IPRH Faculty and Graduate Student Fellowship Program during the 2016–17 academic year was crucial to the development of this book. Antoinette Burton's intellectual stewardship of that fellowship was remarkable. I cherished the critical feedback and endless encouragement of the IPRH fellows. I would also like to thank Jillian Hernandez, Ashon Crawley, Ruth Nicole Brown, and Lisa Yun Lee for their participation in the 2017 symposium "Public Spaces: The Art and Sound of Displacement," which was sponsored by IPRH. Their contributions to that symposium forced me to think through the social, cultural, and political significance of joy and pleasure, love and laughter, which helped me in revision. I am also grateful for the opportunity to have participated in several reading groups, which helped me wrestle with the interdisciplinary nature of this project, including Youth in the Creative City and the Cities, Communities, and Social Justice reading groups at the University of Illinois, as well as the Race, Empire, and Education Collective at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. Thank you to its participants.

I am also thankful for feedback on early drafts of chapters by Bremen Donovan, Peter Hocking, and Rebekah Modrak. Amelia Kraehe and Tyson Lewis pushed my thinking through their editing of a special issue on creative cities and education. I would like to thank Elizabeth Moje and her colleagues at the University of Michigan for inviting me to present on this book. I would also like to extend my thanks to Karen Hutzel at the Ohio State University for doing the same. The feedback that I received after these two talks was generative for me. Thank you. Thank you to Dan McGowan of WPRI-TV who helped me fact-check Providence property development policy and practice.

Christine Bryant Cohen provided invaluable editorial support as I developed this book. She always made the next iteration of drafts possible. She pushed me forward, and this book would not be in the world without her. I am deeply grateful for the editorial support of Duke University Press, and in particular Courtney Berger, for always pushing me to keep youth at the center of this multilayered analysis. The two peer reviewers pushed this book in such positive directions. It is so much better for it.

My deepest appreciation goes to the youth participants, artist-mentors, and staff at New Urban Arts. Thank you for letting me back into the studio five years after I stepped down as director. Thank you for sharing your lives and your magic, for participating in interview after interview, and for allowing me to make some art alongside you. I have always considered you to be partners in life, and I hope this book reads foremost as a testament to your humanity. Please know that this analysis was never intended to be critical of individual people or programs. Instead, this book is a critique of the social conditions and ideas that were swirling about in one particular creative city, which recruited me and others to perform particular kinds of subjectivities that have been entangled in the reproduction of racial and economic inequality. Your ideas and your practices have been central to that criticism and offer so many contributions to youth activism. Daniel Schleifer, the executive director of New Urban Arts, spent so much time reading and commenting on early drafts, and his analysis contributed greater complexity and more nuance to this book. New Urban Arts is in great hands.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Katherine, and our two children, Virginia and Elliott. In the final month of this project, after four years of collecting and analyzing data, and writing and revising draft after draft, they each took turns surprising me by leaving notes and chocolates at my various workspaces. My seven-year-old son, for example, wrote, "You can do it. You just have to do it!" He included a drawing of me flexing my bicep. And my twelve-year-old daughter wrote, "Today, I want you to edit, then edit some more, then edit again, then edit some more, then edit again, then edit another thing, then edit a bit more, then edit, then edit again, then edit one last time. Then STOP! No actually, STOP. Take a break." What writerly wisdom! Katherine Denmead started this journey with me by pushing me to volunteer in the Providence Public Schools when I was a sophomore at Brown University in 1995. Throughout the repeated challenges of founding and leading New Urban Arts, as well as while I worked on this project, she provided endless love and support, particularly when I struggled most. I am so thankful to have the three of you in my life, together.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Introduction

In this book, I reckon with my tenure as a nonprofit leader in the youth arts and humanities field in Providence, Rhode Island (USA). This period of my life began in 1997 when I founded New Urban Arts, a free storefront arts and humanities studio primarily for young people of color from working-class and low-income backgrounds (see figures I.1, I.2). My leadership in Providence was a contradiction. On the one hand, I helped create the pedagogic conditions for young people to develop and to theorize creative cultural practices that have troubled their subjectification as culturally deprived members of an underclass. On the other hand, I was a "gentrifying force," as one former youth participant put it, who helped reconfigure Providence at the expense of these youth participants. This irreconcilable record unfolded as the city transformed itself, through the discourses of youth and creativity, from a depressed postindustrial city into a young and hip, affluent and white lifestyle destination.

My educational leadership was a contradiction because this conjuncture in Providence, branded the "Creative Capital," presented claims and intentions that were never compatible. Chief among them was that programs such as New Urban Arts could and should transform its "troubled youth," as Providence's cultural plan put it, into "creative youth."[1] That is to say, the state was invested in a new kind of citizen-subject, what I am calling a "creative underclass." The "creative underclass" is my term for minoritized and marginalized young people who have grown up in cities before they were branded creative but are summoned to en-

Figure I.1   Storefront of New Urban Arts, 2017. Permission New Urban Arts.

act cultural performances that become legible within the context of creative-led urban renewal as creative. These performances become enmeshed in the reproduction of their subordinate class futures and the reconfiguration of urban space for the economic and cultural benefit of whiteness. The discursive formation of a creative underclass is an intention at odds with creative-led urban renewal. This new urban discourse professes social inclusion and economic mobility for young people ("troubled youth"), while at the same time remaining invested in the cultural and economic dominance of young, educationally credentialed, politically liberal, relatively affluent, and often white people ("creative youth"). This contradiction was easy for me to ignore because I profited from this new urban vision as one of the good white creatives who transformed "troubled youth," enabling their cultural labor to become stitched to this new subjectivity, the creative underclass.

In the first half of this book, I focus on the more positive yet still complex and contradictory aspects of my educational leadership. I describe and

Figure I.2 Interior of New Urban Arts, 2017. Permission New Urban Arts.

interpret three symbolic cultural practices created and interpreted by youth participants in and through New Urban Arts. This thick descriptive account is based on ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in the studio during the 2012–13 academic year. The first practice, *troublemaking*, is one in which young people *undermine* degrading and dehumanizing representations of their social identities, particularly in relation to race and class. The second practice, *the hot mess*, is one in which young people *conform to and exceed* these racist and classist representations for the sake of their pleasure and possibility, and indeed, their survival. The third practice, *chillaxing,* is one in which young people *refuse* treatments designed to cure them of their supposed cultural deprivation, including strategies designed to "transform" them into creative youth. Through this ethnographic account, I argue that spaces for such practices need to be supported so that young people can continue to find mutual respect and refuge through their creative innovations, which are rational responses to the indignities and injustices they face. These practices provide

them basic dignity, strengthen social bonds, and improve their chances of living. In the conclusion of this book, I illustrate how these symbolic cultural practices can complement youth activism in opposition to gentrification in the name of creativity.[2]

In the second half of the book, I critique the contradictory ways in which I became "entangled" in reconfiguring the city at the expense of these youth participants and for the benefit of white and economically privileged creatives such as myself.[3] This analysis is driven by the perspectives of some young people who participated in New Urban Arts and critiqued the Creative Capital, my leadership, and the sociopolitical position I represent and embody. I show how the promise of creativity as a means to upward mobility is a false one because the model of production in the creative industries reproduces social inequalities rather than redresses them. Moreover, I show how the pedagogic conditions that I helped to establish played a key role in transforming some "troubled youth" so that they could participate in the city's high-status cultural underground scene as creatives. But this performative transformation also entailed "choosing" to reject the possibility of getting a "real job" (even though that choice was never really alive for them in the first place). This insight shows that a creative underclass—that is, "troubled youth" transformed into "creative youth"—is a political subjectivity that the Creative Capital cannot refuse. A creative underclass does not demand economic mobility *and* at the same time contributes to the street-level cultural scene that is so key to the city's new gentrifying-enabling brand, the Creative Capital.

This creative underclass is valuable to the Creative Capital because it signifies that this new urban vision is inclusive when it is not. The dominant, white, and affluent-centered commitments of the Creative Capital are at odds with the futures of this creative underclass. The Creative Capital is invested in the cultural and economic interests of young graduates who remain in the city after graduation from its elite colleges (I am but one of many examples) while also driving real estate speculation and encouraging new consumer patterns that privilege whiteness and the property rights of white people. These commitments produce "collateral," as one youth participant put it, for low-income and working-class communities, and communities of color, including displacement and cultural hegemony. Through an autoethnographic portrait of my white educational leadership at New Urban Arts, I show how I facilitated young people's cultural production in ways that produced these negative effects, thus supporting young people's claims that I was indeed a "gentrifying force" in the Creative Capital.

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These contradictions mean, at a minimum, that supporting young people and their creative cultural practices must be intertwined with dismantling notions of urban renewal that are foremost invested in white profitability. Some of this work must be cultural, including challenging the commonsense connections among whiteness, creativity, and urban progress. This fight for creative youth justice must also be economic. The new creative economy in Providence has reasserted the advantage of those who are already in an economic position to launch freelance careers as creatives, while rendering invisible the intense and growing competition for low-wage jobs in the service industries, as well as the need for affordable housing among young people who are attempting to live in the city as it becomes more upmarket and expensive. This unequal opportunity has only been exacerbated by the state, which has eroded welfare support and suppressed the minimum wage in startling ways since I founded New Urban Arts in 1997. Moreover, I show how the state redistributed economic opportunities upward toward landowners and property developers through tax breaks and the marketing muscle needed to support their speculative real estate investments. Thus, economic policies are needed to redress these past injustices while also ensuring that young creatives who participate in places such as New Urban Arts have access to their fair share of creative jobs and educational places, as well as secure housing and a living wage that is necessary for them to both work in the service industries and be creatives. In the conclusion, I propose political strategies complemented by the creative cultural practices of youth at New Urban Arts to fight for creative youth justice in the Creative Capital.

MY POSITIONALITY AND THE CIRCULARITY OF WHITE REFLEXIVITY

I wrote this book in the critical ethnographic and autoethnographic tradition. I presumed that ethnographic representation always hinges upon the position and power of the ethnographer.[4] To shed light on the contradictions facing me and those involved in New Urban Arts in the Creative Capital, I have moved back and forth between biography and ethnography, from the personal and the political to the historical, cultural, and economic. These representational moves not only illuminate the creative cultural practices of young people at New Urban Arts and their relationship to the cultural political economy of Providence but also my own complex and contradictory role in shaping them and being shaped by them.

This methodological approach was not my plan. I began this research project in 2012 through a postdoctoral fellowship at the Center for Public Hu-

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manities at Brown University, five years after I stepped down as New Urban Arts' director in 2007. At first, I intended to use a participatory approach in which young people from New Urban Arts were coresearchers with me, and together, we would study the "magic" of New Urban Arts, as several youth participants put it. During the academic year of 2012–13, I spent at least two afternoons a week in the storefront studio, participating alongside young people in the program and interviewing current participants and alumni. But the nonlinear and nonhierarchical nature of New Urban Arts, as well as my one-year timeline for the bulk of the fieldwork, made a participatory approach to research difficult to execute. So I turned to more traditional forms of participant observation and interviews while also reflecting back on my own experiences as the director of New Urban Arts from 1997 to 2007.

At first, I was skeptical that I could access or fairly represent thick data from young people about their participation in the studio (and beyond) due to my position within the organization, and more broadly, within society. Most young people in the studio during the 2012–13 academic year knew me only as the "founder" of New Urban Arts. Frequently, young people approached me to thank me for establishing an organization that, in their words, had changed their lives, kept them off the streets, and helped them transition out of the juvenile justice system. One mother approached me to thank me because she believed that her son would have committed suicide without New Urban Arts. I never doubted the sincerity of these young people and their parents. But I also wondered whether they were sharing insights with me based only on what they thought that I wanted to hear about New Urban Arts. Moreover, if I simply put forward these perspectives in this book, then I risked putting forward a representation that valorized my role and repathologized youth as "troubled," rather than troubling the unequal and unjust material and symbolic conditions in Providence that have produced the trouble that they have experienced. I feared representing myself as a white savior attempting to resolve my complex emotional experiences as a white and economically privileged person who has struggled with my own "investments" in the dynamic social relations that shore up the power and profitability of white-identified people (i.e., whiteness).[5]

Some young people suggested that I could not represent—or should not even attempt to represent—the cultural viewpoints of young people in the studio due to my position as a straight and cis-gendered white man. This possibility became apparent during a conversation with one gender nonconforming young person of color. This conversation took place on my first day back in the studio while I was attempting to help this student, Lunisol,[6] write her artist statement for an upcoming exhibition at New Urban Arts:

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Lunisol: Why did you come back to the studio?

Tyler: This place fascinates me. I'm still trying to understand it.

Lunisol: I don't like adults who try to understand this place. I am here. I understand it because I experience it.

Tyler: I think people want to understand those experiences. Aren't they worth sharing?

Lunisol: Who do you mean by "people"?

Tyler: Good question. I don't know. Let's get back to your artist statement.

Lunisol: Don't tell me what we are going to talk about next. Young people run this place.

Tyler: This is a tough conversation. Why is this so hard?

Lunisol: I'm just trying to understand why people adore you.

Tyler: Yeah . . . I'm trying to understand that too.

Lunisol: "You're the founder. . . . Oooh . . ." (mockingly)

Tyler: Yeah man. I agree.

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Lunisol: Why did you say, "Yeah man"? That hurts me.

Tyler: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.

Lunisol: I'm not a man.

Tyler: Right. I'm sorry. I'll try not to do that again. But yeah, I get it. I've had a lot of people come up and thank me. It's weird.

Lunisol: You're right. That is weird.

Tyler: I have been afraid to write this story, you know. . . . I don't want to glamorize myself, that young people need to thank me, worship me. . . . I'm not interested in that.

Lunisol: I don't like white men who try to help people of color. People of color should help themselves.

Tyler: I think there are good reasons to not trust white men who do this kind of work. I have a hard time trusting myself.

Lunisol: I agree. I don't like white men. Straight white men particularly suck. Do you know why I hate straight white men?

Tyler: Because we've got it easy and we don't know how easy we've got it?

Lunisol: Yup.

Tyler: Are we going to get past this?

Lunisol: Past what?

Tyler: This. Why are we doing this?

Lunisol: I don't know. I don't understand why everyone here likes you.
I want to understand.

As I reflected on this difficult conversation on my first day back in the studio as the "founder," as a straight, cis-gendered white man who did "suck" by exacting symbolic violence on a young person in the studio, I became wary of my capacity to represent these young people in ways that were not exploitative and that honored their interests and experiences. I turned to countless readers, including young people who participated in this research, to help me see my blind spots, while never assuming that my hard work and my deep concern could compensate for the blindness inherent in my privileged positions (or my deeply entrenched investments in that blindness).

Through seeking feedback from youth participants in particular, I started to fear positioning youth and other stakeholders of New Urban Arts as cogs in the Creative Capital machine who needed my enlightened criticism for their liberation. These young people from New Urban Arts did not need me to educate them on the obvious, on what they already knew—that their city has exploited their cultural labor while privileging the cultural labor and economic interests of young white creatives such as myself. They already knew what public intellectuals of color have been saying for decades about urban renewal projects. In the 1990s, for example, bell hooks described urban renewal projects as "state-orchestrated, racialized class warfare (which) is taking place all around the United States."[7] And James Baldwin described urban renewal in 1960s San Francisco as another name for "negro removal."[8] I was arriving late at this understanding of urban renewal as a racist and classist project. Of course, that willful ignorance is one racist way in which white and economically privileged people attempt to protect their own interests.

Despite my obvious limitations, I also came to appreciate through this process of reflection, and with the help of others, how my position is useful analytically because I have been interpellated as a member of the privileged creative class who did precisely what the Creative Capital wanted me to do—move into a low-income and working-class neighborhood of color and attempt to kick-start that neighborhood through my creative and cultural innovations. This performative tale of white creativity needs to be dissected and

deconstructed, disseminated and debated, if progress is to be made with respect to justice for creative young people who lived in cities before their cities were branded creative.

So, in this book, I have tried to shed light on how the logic of creative urban renewal has possessed productive power in my professional life as a source of white profitability, for better and for worse. In adopting this reflexive approach, I still recognize the circular trap that faces white people who commit to racial and economic justice after an awakening of sorts. I am at risk of representing myself in the form of a self-pardon, acknowledging the pain that I have caused, while seeking forgiveness. And yet, in so doing, I reassert my supremacy through a veneer of race and class consciousness, performing what is now construed as the correct brand of white liberal politics. This identity performance has been referred to dismissively as "performative wokeness" and "virtue signalling."[9] These terms point to the circularity of contemporary white antiracism, which has a productive purchase on how white liberals in dominant social positions act and manage impressions. This iteration of contemporary whiteness is entirely aware of its totalizing effects, and yet, this awareness has become key to buttressing the power of whiteness through representational investments in its own benevolence and capacity for self-reflection.

In this vein, I could be positioning myself as a reformed white and male liberal in this societal moment of white patriarchal regret, spurred by the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter.[10] The centering of my regret would simply fit into the pattern of white men keeping intact the social order that benefits them by showing that they are enlightened enough to be aware of their privilege and their sins (and believing that such awareness is antiracist or antipatriarchal enough). This performative wokeness can be as troubling, if not more troubling, than the in-your-face, unapologetic brand of white supremacy that "recruited" me during my adolescence and informed my actions as a student in an elite, and largely white, prep school in Columbus, Ohio, and later, at an Ivy League institution.[11] While unforgivable and pathetic, that brand of classist racism is not self-deceiving.

So I recognize that the circularity of white reflexivity is highly problematic in this contemporary moment. To deal with this problem, I have attempted to engage in a "double-lensed act" of looking at myself look at myself,[12] trying to pay attention to the ways in which I have represented myself in ways that shore up whiteness. I have held on to the idea that there is analytic potential in that process with specific reference to disinvesting whiteness of its power and profitability in relation to state-orchestrated, creative-led urban

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renewal. My hope is that the "people" who read this book—students, creative practitioners, urban and youth policymakers, nonprofit leaders, and scholars of youth arts and humanities programs and the cultural political economy of cities—find this analysis useful in advancing that project.

THE PERFORMATIVITY OF YOUTH IN CREATIVE CITY POLITICS

In this book, I am less interested in creativity as a skill or practice that can be taught and learned by young people in an educational setting—a pedagogic perspective that interested me most when I started New Urban Arts and led it during its first decade. In this book, I am invested theoretically in the performativity of creativity and its relationship to youth, race, and class. This perspective does not presume that young people have an authentic self or voice that is waiting to be empowered or expressed through developing a creative practice, a viewpoint that shaped how I understood New Urban Arts when I started it in 1997. This viewpoint is common in what is now called the field of creative youth development.[13]

Instead, I am approaching youth and creativity as discourses, as systems of meaning, that recruit young people to perform particular kinds of subjectivities. These repeated and embodied lifestyle choices are always already entangled in the reproduction of social inequality.[14] This poststructural orientation is key to deconstructing how and why it has become common sense for a city such as Providence to invest in transforming "troubled youth" into "creative youth." This system of meaning racializes "troubled youth" as deviant threats to urban progress while propping up "creatives" as the most desirable kind of urban youth. This embodied expression of creativity tends to be associated with lifestyle choices made by young white people from more economically privileged backgrounds.

This performative subjectivity is signified by various lifestyle choices, including dress, speech patterns, and residential choices, as well as unauthorized local knowledge about what distinguishes a local creative scene. One does not have to identify as white to perform this kind of creative citizen-subject. But the cultural markers of creativity in Providence and other cities in 2012— tattoos, black skinny jeans, piercings, fixed-gear bicycles, flat-brimmed hats, dyed hair, living in undeveloped loft spaces in low-income neighborhoods, knowing where the cool creative sites are, and so on—has been constructed as the property of white people. Indeed, Arlene Dávila has argued that urban progress is now associated with the presence of "the highly educated, white, liberal, Brooklynite independent writer."[15] I am but one example of a young person of my generation who has been recruited to live my life in that image.

Moreover, minoritized youth who perform these new cultural norms of creativity are constructed as "transformed" from "troubled youth" into "creative youth." For them, "choosing" to live in an undeveloped industrial loft space, embarking on a career marked by precarious or low-wage employment, becomes curiously coded as a bohemian middle-class and white choice within this particular script for urban renewal. The urban discourse of creativity thus transforms class refusal associated with middle-class bohemianism into a complex and potentially desirable option for minoritized youth. This finding contradicts the commonsense belief that creativity is a twenty-first century skill that "troubled youth" must develop to experience upward mobility in the knowledge economy. The prized creative skill that I encountered in my research was the performative ease needed to navigate and transform the city's high-status creative underground scene. While this "choice" is certainly not economically determined, it is a facile socio-economic solution for a city that has failed to provide decent paying creative jobs that would guarantee economic security for many, some, or even only a few members of the creative underclass.

Simultaneously, creative-led urban renewal is invested in the idea of white creativity as a profitable resource for the city. Its image and identity, its look and feel, its very presence generates buzz that is so useful to disinvested cities as they seek to transform themselves into consumer lifestyle destinations. In so doing, this discourse provides a return on investment for white people who are legible as creative, as well as those who engage in real estate speculation or consumer patterns based on this image of white creativity.

Creativity is useful to this state-orchestrated, racialized class warfare precisely because it is a positive and ambiguous rhetorical concept. Our emotional attachments to creativity shape our understanding, making it hard to argue against a city becoming more creative. Who would argue against creativity, against more creative citizens, against a more creative city? It is easier to argue against racist classism, is it not? Moreover, creativity appears colorblind because people now tend to think that anyone can be creative. By that logic, every person should have equal chance to succeed in the creative city. But this color blindness of creativity camouflages the ways in which the creative city reproduces racial and class inequality.

It is important to recognize however that creativity is not color-blind when it comes to urban planning. No city government in the United States, as far as I am aware, has launched a state-sanctioned project to market itself, for example, based on cultural innovations mostly associated with communities of color. Such innovations, often in music, have been a key feature of urban

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life for decades, long before Richard Florida discovered that cities became creative when racially and class privileged youth such as me decide to live and work in them. But the creativity of people of color has never been constructed as a valuable catalyst in relation to urban redevelopment. As a result, creative communities of color have never had the chance to profit from state efforts to rebrand cities in their image. So the creative city discourse presumes that the desirable form of urban creativity is primarily located in and on the bodies of young white people. It makes it seem natural or truthful that these people are creative urban redeemers and that young people of color are displaceable barriers to urban progress. And yet, the whiteness of creativity is so often left unsaid to obscure the racial and class antagonism of creative city politics.

From this critical race perspective, the discourse of creativity thus protects and expands white property rights and profitability.[16] Young white people, through their phenotypes and their politics of style, are rewarded. We are lifted by symbolic groundwork that enhances our status as creatives. We are presumed to possess the right kind of skills and dispositions that are necessary to compete in a symbolic economy that prizes creative thought and self-expression over mindless manual labor. I now know that I never would have received support to start a youth arts and humanities organization as a senior in college with little arts or education background without this presumption of white and male creativity. As we will see, the discourse of creativity has tended to promote the viewpoint that it is acceptable, if not desirable, for young white creatives such as me to move into lower-income nonwhite neighborhoods because profits from real estate speculation will be enhanced as these creatives move in. Moreover, the cultural consumer landscape of the creative city is one that celebrates white people moving in and through the city with little surveillance and relative impunity from the state. This right to enjoyment in urban space, and indeed, the right to life, has never been afforded to its residents of color.

Youth is also useful in relation to the discourse of creativity because it is an ambiguous and elastic category, one that can engender both anxiety and hope for the future. That is to say, I am not approaching youth as a biological life stage between, say, the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. Instead, I am approaching youth as a social construct and as an image, one that is always implicated in plans for the organization of social life. For example, youthful cities can be seen as both terrifying and backward or hip and modern. To do this semantic lifting for urban space, youth must be linked in a signifying chain to race and class, among other social categories. To put it bluntly, youthful white cities are seen as good and modern, and young black cities are seen as bad and

backward. Crucially, the differences in those two imagined cities can be explained with the social categories of race and class even if those categories are unspoken.

I began to turn to this critical and poststructural theoretical orientation after conducting initial fieldwork for this project in 2012. During that fieldwork, I constructed a timeline that implicated my educational leadership in the displacement of a youth participant and her family from their home (chapter 5). This discovery shook me. After reflecting on this chronology and its implications, I returned to Providence in 2015 for one summer to do additional interviews with ten young people who participated in the previous phase of research. I sampled these ten young people, including Lunisol, based on my hunch that they would provide illuminating and varying perspectives on the city and their formation as creatives. These participants had graduated from high school before this second phase of research, and most of them were in college or taking a break from college while they tried to sort out their finances. Of these ten youth, six graduated from a selective admissions college preparatory public high school in Providence, two graduated from a charter high school, one graduated from a traditional comprehensive public high school, and one graduated from an alternative GED program. Most of these participants mentioned the financial challenges of their upbringings, and nine of the ten students identified as young people of color. Seven of them traced their common cultural heritage, or ethnicity, to countries in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Two identified as African American and one identified as white. Several of them self-affirmed as lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and/or queer.

The demographic profile of these select participants featured more prominently in this book is representative of young people who tended to participate in New Urban Arts in 2012. However, the aspirations of these sampled participants were not. Many of these select participants intended to go to art school after high school. That aspiration was uncommon among the New Urban Arts' youth population when I conducted most of my fieldwork, and it remains the case as I finish this book several years later. But I sampled these youth participants precisely because I thought that their experiences and perspectives were symbolically and materially significant within the particular context of this discourse of creative-led urban renewal. As young people of color from low-income and working-class backgrounds who saw arts and creativity playing a key role in their lives during and after high school, they fit this representation of "troubled youth" becoming "creative youth." Moreover, they tended to be aware of the problematic nature of this representation, with

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great insights into creative cultural strategies that they used through New Urban Arts to trouble their subjectification as "troubled youth." My interest then was working with critical and poststructural theoretical perspectives as I interpreted their insights toward the development of political strategies to fight for creative youth justice in the gentrifying city.

PROVIDENCE, THE CREATIVE CAPITAL

When I arrived in Providence in 1994, I entered into discursive and material conditions that were not of my choosing, circumstances that made the subjectivity of the "creative" possible for me. Tracing Providence's history is useful in understanding how this subjectivity emerged as a desirable form of human life in Providence at that time, and why it is necessary to consider how the "creative" is inflected with social dimensions such as race, class, and gender.

Located in the northeastern United States between Boston and New York City, Providence is the capital city of Rhode Island, the smallest state in the United States. Roger Williams established Providence in 1636 as a "lively experiment" committed to religious freedom after he was excommunicated from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Narragansett Indians were one of the prominent tribes in the area at that time.[17] The settler colonialists who followed Williams dispossessed the Narragansetts of their land through violence, debt, slavery, land grabs, and state denial of tribal authority.[18] Slavery of Africans arrived in Rhode Island as early as 1652. Newport and Bristol, which are located to the south of Providence, were the major slave markets in New England. By the mid-eighteenth century, the ratio of black slaves to free white people in Rhode Island was the highest of any colony in the North.[19] Rhode Island merchants controlled between 60 and 90 percent of the American trade in African slaves after the American Revolution.[20] With this control of the slave trade, Providence began to amass families with fortunes. My alma mater in Providence, Brown University, is named after one such family, which ran one of the largest slave-trading businesses in the United States.[21]

In the nineteenth century, the descendants of colonial settlers in Providence, known colloquially as the "Yankees," needed to innovate, as profiteering from the slave trade was no longer legal in Rhode Island.[22] Their land provided a competitive advantage. Several rivers converge in Providence and open into the Narragansett Bay and then the Atlantic Ocean. These fast-moving rivers descend quickly from higher ground inland so that they neither freeze nor go dry. These topographical features supported the young nation's first mills powered by water.[23] The Yankees had capital to invest in these mills because they had amassed fortunes through the triangular trade

of slaves, sugar, rum, and cotton. They also had access to knowledge about industrial innovations in Europe through those trading relationships. Providence thus grew rapidly in population and became one of the leading manufacturing cities in the nineteenth century. The city was home to the country's largest textile manufacturer, Fruit of the Loom, and the largest silverware factory, Gorham. The city also led the industrializing country in the production of precision tools, steam engines, screws, and files.

With this growth, the Yankees saw themselves as racially superior for their inventiveness, work ethic, self-sufficiency, and technical skill.[24] They believed that they were naturally predisposed for the complexities of advancing science, business, and entrepreneurship. With God on their side, they continued to construct and reconstruct racial hierarchies through this self-ascribed superiority, which in turn legitimized the exploitation of successive waves of desperate and disenfranchised labor immigrating to Providence.[25] These immigrants included Irish, French Canadians, and Italians for the most part, but also included Russians (mostly Jews), Scandinavians, Portuguese, Germans, Polish, and Armenians.[26] The Yankees who controlled the means of production relied upon these waves of immigrants, as well as women and children, to populate a cheap and exploitable labor force in the mills.[27]

To protect their economic interests, Yankees controlled the political machinery in Rhode Island as the immigrant population swelled and the Yankees became outnumbered. The fact that naturalized citizens did not gain full political equality in Rhode Island until 1928 is a historical product of the Yankees' multicentury project to protect their political and economic power.[28] At different moments in Rhode Island's history, its people have been denied the right to vote based on age, skin color, gender, place of origin, property ownership, or the ability to pay a voter registration fee. Until 1935, Rhode Island had a disproportioned state senate, which gave small Yankee Republican dominated towns with 475 people the same political representation as the city of Providence with 275,000 people.[29] This political disenfranchisement prevented popular majorities, always composed of recent immigrants, from threatening the Yankees' economic interests. In addition, the state of Rhode Island stopped recognizing Narragansett Indians as a tribe in the 1880s based on the premise that this racial group had been eliminated through intermixing, disappearance, and death. The tribe did not regain state recognition until 1983.

Following the Second World War, Providence endured decades of industrial disinvestment. Capital moved factories south and then offshore in search of cheaper labor. The city was vulnerable to offshoring because its

manufacturing industries were relatively low-skilled. People of color migrated to the city and were segregated within it through racist real estate practices such as redlining. And white people isolated themselves in particular Providence neighborhoods and fled to the surrounding suburbs. In 1950, the city was more than 95 percent white. Today, Latinx communities comprise more than 40 percent of the overall population (180,000 in the 2010 census), as well as a majority of the public school population. These residents are often first and second-generation immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, and Columbia. In the 2010 census, these ethnic communities were more concentrated in the West End and Elmwood neighborhoods, as well as Upper and Lower South Providence. The African American population, which comprised 16 percent of the city's population in the 2010 census, has tended to concentrate in the Mount Hope and South Providence neighborhoods. Much of my analysis will focus on young people who live in these neighborhoods, as well as the downtown core and the West End neighborhood near where New Urban Arts is based.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the city was suffering from difficult economic conditions that perhaps affected vulnerable children and young people the most. The city held the unenviable position of having the third-highest rate of childhood poverty in American cities with more than 100,000 people.[30] The city was also being held back by decades of political corruption. The city's longest-serving mayor, Vincent "Buddy" Cianci (1975–84, 1991–2002), resigned from his office *twice* as a result of felony charges. One of these charges was for an altercation with the alleged lover of his estranged wife, and the other for a racketeering conspiracy.

Despite his shortcomings, Cianci is often celebrated as an early adopter of using arts and public infrastructure projects as a means to attract inward capital investment to the city's economically struggling downtown core. In the mid-1990s, he spearheaded a major public works project that established a riverside park in the downtown area—a park with panoramic views of the city's skyline. With this park, the skyline steadily became reshaped by surrounding development, including a new shopping mall, hotels, and corporate headquarters.[31] Cianci also established a downtown district that provided tax subsidies for the production and sales of art.[32] With these changes, Cianci branded Providence the "Renaissance City," thus becoming one of the first mayors in the country to use arts and culture to attempt to alter the image of his poor, racially segregated, disinvested, and politically corrupt city.[33]

After growing up in Columbus, Ohio, I arrived in Providence in 1994 as a freshman at Brown University, an elite private Ivy League institution. I

came to the city as a student just as Waterplace Park was being completed and Cianci was launching the downtown arts and entertainment district. As an eighteen-year-old undergraduate, I started to volunteer in the city's public schools as a mentor, and I began to ponder Cianci's vision for the city. I began to imagine what it would be like for me to contribute to this project of urban renewal as an educator. Then, four years later, I led a few peers from Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) to start New Urban Arts in the loft of a church located in Cianci's arts and entertainment district through the support of Brown University's public service center, and, later, a fellowship in social entrepreneurship awarded by the Echoing Green Foundation.

Today, New Urban Arts is a tuition-free storefront studio located near the West End. In 1998, I moved the studio to this new location in Providence so that the studio was more accessible to students at four nearby high schools. Youth participants are typically between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, and hundreds of young people now choose to participate in New Urban Arts after school and during the summer each academic year. Youth participants at New Urban Arts also interview and select a corps of fifteen to twenty-five artist-mentors who work in the studio two days per week. These artist-mentors collaborate with young people as they work on their arts and humanities projects. Artist-mentors also offer friendship and support.

The application process for becoming an artist-mentor is competitive. In 2015, New Urban Arts received forty-nine applications for thirteen open positions, while welcoming back seven artist-mentors who returned from the previous year. Throughout New Urban Arts' history, artist-mentors have tended to be between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. The majority of artist-mentors in the organization's first two decades have been students, graduates, or employees of Brown University and RISD—a model that I established in 1997. Historically, the majority of these artist-mentors have also been white. It is important to note that some artist-mentors are former youth participants. In 2015, seven of the twenty artist-mentors were youth alumni. As we will see, this arts mentoring model established a meeting point in the city that traverses the cultural divide between young creatives from Brown and RISD and those from the local public schools, making it an interesting case to study given the swirling discourses of youth and creativity.

In 2002, five years after I launched New Urban Arts, Buddy Cianci went to jail and the city was desperate for a more redeeming image.[34] The next elected mayor of Providence, David Cicilline, continued Cianci's vision for using arts and culture as a means to drive urban redevelopment. Creativ-

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ity became the keyword. Richard Florida, the urban theorist who coined the term "creative class," visited the city in 2003 and celebrated the city's future as a creative hub.[35] In 2009, Cicilline unveiled his creative city plan titled *Creative Providence*.[36] With this new plan, Cicilline rebranded Providence from the "Renaissance City" to the "Creative Capital." Given that two Providence mayors have tried to revitalize the city through arts, culture, and creativity since the 1990s, the material and symbolic effects of these state-sanctioned efforts are now observable.

Providence is also useful as a case study because other cities throughout the world have adopted this same approach to urban renewal during the past two decades.[37] This approach has been referred to as "the conventional creative city script."[38] This phrase points to a paradox: cities become "conventional" when they brand themselves "creative."[39] This script for urban renewal is associated with Florida, who now recognizes that this script has only exacerbated urban inequalities.[40] This script in Providence and elsewhere includes

- a marketing and public relations campaign to rebrand the city's image;
- supporting and promoting existing cultural assets including arts organizations, festivals, and events;
- investing in public infrastructure such as bike paths and riverfront parks; and
- providing tax incentives to redevelop property that is deemed to have historical, aesthetic, geographic, and economic value.[41]

These strategies are designed to attract young creatives who will then spur the city's cultural and economic development.[42]

There was a clear rationale for adopting this script in Providence. The city already attracts young people to the city who fit the image of these young creatives. These creatives come to Providence each year in droves to attend Brown and RISD. Both of these elite schools are located on College Hill, a neighborhood that overlooks downtown Providence. These schools are known for attracting and cultivating youth who fit the mold of Richard Florida's creative class—the highly educated, white, liberal, Brooklynite independent writer comes to mind. There are also bohemian creatives from these two institutions in Providence who participate in the city's underground punk scene and volunteer at places such as New Urban Arts.

During the past two decades, many of these college students, like me, chose to remain in Providence after graduating from these schools, as the creative city script asked us to do. *Creative Providence* celebrated us for "[driv-

ing] redevelopment in neighborhoods and city streets . . . [breathing] life into our aging industrial infrastructure and [for being] the catalysts for civic engagement."[43] Like me, many artist-mentors at New Urban Arts fit this creative profile. They have kick-started their own design firms, lived in collectives with other artists, run underground galleries, invested their time and energy in launching their own community-based initiatives, and volunteered and worked at New Urban Arts alongside high school students.

To Cicilline's credit, however, young people from Brown University and RISD were not the only youth who figured prominently in his plan for *Creative Providence.* One of the plan's goals was to "educate and inspire the next generation of creative thinkers."[44] This "next generation" referred to young people growing up in the city, most of them low-income and working-class youth of color. In particular, *Creative Providence* envisioned arts education as a mechanism to ensure that these young people could have the chance to participate in the city's creative economy. *Creative Providence* stated that one of its aims was to develop a creative industry workforce by not only investing in Providence's existing creative workers, and recruiting new creative workers, but also preparing this next generation of creative thinkers.[45]

So New Urban Arts is a compelling site to study in this history of the creative city precisely because two of its key citizen-subjects collide there: youth who are expected to transform the city, and youth who are expected to be transformed. That said, New Urban Arts has never stated its mission in terms of creative workforce development. The mission of New Urban Arts, which I wrote in 2003, is "to empower young people to develop creative practices that they can sustain throughout their lives." Nonetheless, posing creativity as a strategy for workforce development has been a theory that leaders of youth arts and humanities programs in Providence have had to negotiate as they have pressed for public support. It is difficult to imagine these programs thriving in Providence without this rationale, and this rationale inevitably shapes public understanding of the value of these programs. When Cianci coined the term "Renaissance City" and I started New Urban Arts, the storefront studio became entangled in the formation of different kinds of youth as creative citizen-subjects.

New Urban Arts is not alone here. The city is home to several programs that have earned national and international recognition for innovative work in arts and creativity. For example, Sebastian Ruth won a MacArthur Genius Award for establishing Community MusicWorks, a classical music program for youth, that is located just up the street from New Urban Arts.[46] Like me and others, Ruth attended Brown in the 1990s, participated in the Swearer

Center, and remained in Providence after graduating. As of 2018, five youth arts and humanities programs in Providence were recognized by the White House for their important work, including New Urban Arts. [47] That accomplishment is unprecedented for a city as small as Providence, and, I believe, reflects the ways in which young, white, and male elites from Brown and RISD have been identified and valorized as the right kind of creative.

Lynne McCormack, the former director of the Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, played a key role in shepherding the *Creative Providence* planning process in ways that focused on youth in the creative city. She is trained as an artist and as an art educator, and she had a long history of supporting young people, arts education, and social equality in Providence. The emphasis on education in *Creative Providence* reflects her recognition that the city's turn to creativity could be leveraged to support arts education inside and outside schools. There were several ways that *Creative Providence* benefited New Urban Arts under McCormack's leadership. For example, Providence's Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, the municipal agency responsible for designing and implementing *Creative Providence*, received a $300,000 grant from the 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.[48] This grant supported three hundred youth summer jobs in arts, culture, and environmental organizations, including at New Urban Arts. In 2014, Rhode Island voters approved a "Creative and Cultural Economy Bond," which established a $6.9 million fund for competitive matching grants from the state of Rhode Island for capital improvement projects undertaken by arts organizations who owned or controlled their spaces.[49] McCormack and *Creative Providence* contributed to this outcome by raising the profile of arts and humanities organizations in the public sphere. In 2014, New Urban Arts added nearly four thousand square feet of program space through taxpayer approval of this bond and its own fundraising efforts. Since I left New Urban Arts in 2007, annual participation has doubled to over four hundred new registrants each year. This publicly supported studio expansion supported that program growth.

However, public support leveraged through *Creative Providence* was not evenly distributed among arts and humanities organizations in the city. Support for youth arts and humanities programs was minute in comparison to those arts organizations with a more obvious connection to white audiences and the economic development of the downtown core. For example, according to the 2014 annual newsletter of the Trinity Repertory Company, the city of Providence supported this downtown theater company with a donation between $15,000 and $25,000.[50] New Urban Arts received a $1,000 unre-

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stricted social service grant from the city that year. This data point is consistent with historically sustained inequalities in cultural funding that privilege elite art institutions and tourism magnets in cities.[51] These organizations are privileged in part based on a white Eurocentric framework, which assumes that these elite arts organizations produce artistic value that is superior precisely because their artistic content has tended to be devoid of nonwhite associations.[52]

In another example, according to the "2013 Annual Report" of the Providence Downtown Improvement District Commission, the quasi-public Providence Redevelopment Agency commissioned a downtown arts organization, AS220, to create a "colorful storefront-level mural" in a "derelict" downtown building as a means of "highlighting attractions within the downtown district."[53] At the time, the Providence Redevelopment Agency was preparing to sell the building to a private developer. This example shows how the cultural labor of this arts organization was valued because this project might support a real estate transaction. It is important to note that AS220 also provides crucial arts education programs to youth transitioning out of the juvenile justice system. Yet, arts and humanities programs whose sole mission is to serve young people of color, such as New Urban Arts, are not as well poised to compete for such commissions because they are more likely to be positioned as social service ventures, not arts-based ones.[54] So support from the city to "transform" troubled youth through programs such as New Urban Arts has been rhetorical more than material, and yet, as we will see, this rhetoric has had material effects.

Arts education inside Providence's public schools has also suffered even as the city turned to creativity. When I returned to Providence in 2012 to begin this research project, I worked closely with Lynne McCormack, the director of the Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, to host a public symposium to call attention to this fact. In this symposium, "Now's the Time," we shared our disturbing finding that the number of art and music teachers in the Providence public schools had decreased by eighty-three positions, or by 54 percent, between 2002 and 2012.[55] This decline of art and music education in the Providence public schools reflects a national pattern in the United States that has disproportionately affected public schools with higher proportions of students of color and schools with high-poverty rates.[56]

The elimination of arts, music, sciences, and other subjects in US public schools has been a rational but troubling response, as David Berliner put it, to the ever-increasing influence of high-stakes testing that measures school efficacy through students' test performance on reading, writing, and arithme-

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tic.[57] Indeed, Rhode Island was one of the winners of the US Department of Education's Race to the Top competition in 2010.[58] This competition awarded funding based on Rhode Island's commitment to enact reforms that emphasize standardized curricula, teaching to high-stakes tests, low-risk and depoliticized teaching, and the use of corporate management strategies, including auditing, as a means of regulating performance.[59]

In other words, as the city government in Providence was touting creative learning in its plan for urban renewal in 2009, state government in Rhode Island was working with municipal school districts, including the Providence public schools, to adopt educational practices pushed by national policy that were inconsistent with developing young people's creative practices. At the precise moment that local urban policy expected primarily young people of color to develop their creative practices through exposure to arts education (assuming that arts education does indeed promote creativity), state and national educational policy dictated to the city that these same young people become increasingly subjected to practices in school that value convergence of thought and conformity. This same paradox has been noted in other contexts, including in the United Kingdom and Australia.[60] What is specific to the American example is that this pattern fits a long and troubled history of gross educational disparities along racial and economic lines. One could argue that the rise of programs such as New Urban Arts has enabled this shift in the Providence public schools because the city preserves the appearance of a well-rounded education for all of its children and youth, when, in fact, that is simply no longer the case. I have regularly heard this important criticism of programs such as New Urban Arts from art and music teachers over the years. Successive waves of leaders at New Urban Arts have tried to address this real problem by forming more strategic and mutually beneficial partnerships with the local public schools.

Despite this decline of arts education inside schools, publicly touting creative learning outside of the public schools was tethered to the city's plans for urban renewal. The city of Providence used creative learning as a key component in its messaging strategy to build support for its urban vision based on real estate speculation. But the city government never committed any substantial resources to that education project. Moreover, due to the nature of municipal revenue in the United States, which is dependent upon local property taxes, consecutive mayors attempted to drive real estate speculation to expand the property tax base to fund local public schools. This development strategy is incompatible with creating neighborhoods and schools for communities of color that lived in the city prior to its new urban brand. These

are the contradictory conditions for youth with respect to arts, creativity, and education in the gentrifying city.

Despite these contradictions, numerous people from the arts education communities participated in the *Creative Providence* planning process to advocate for better outcomes for youth.[61] These people came together to discuss the role of the arts, humanities, and education in the future of the city precisely because they saw *Creative Providence* as a moment to leverage support for their interests and the interests of young people. I had stepped down as the director of New Urban Arts, and moved away from Providence for the first time, when this planning process was under way in 2008. However, if I had been working in Providence at that time as the director of New Urban Arts, I would have participated in this planning process because I would have thought that it would be beneficial for New Urban Arts and for me if I did so. In his book *The Creative Capital of Cities* (2011), Stefan Krätke explained why the artistic community has participated in creative city planning initiatives: "The potential for positive identification is further extended to include artists, a group whose role in social and economic development has been neglected for a long time. With reference to the creative class concept, the artistic community can improve its public legitimacy and attain a better bargaining position in the struggle for public support."[62] Obviously, artists have tended to think that they would benefit from this new vision for creative cities. The same logic extends to those invested in arts and humanities education. Once social entrepreneurs and educators in the arts and humanities are recognized as a force in supporting the creative development of youth, then they logically expect a better bargaining position in their struggle for public support. Given diminished public support for arts and humanities education in Providence, educators in the creative sector were pleased to be valued for once in city planning efforts.

As much as their participation yielded some positive outcomes for arts and humanities education in Providence, positioning education programs as a mechanism to develop the next generation of creatives in Providence has posed several risks to this community and to its youth constituents. One risk was that the participation of the arts education community in this planning process appeared to signal their consent for this new vision in the city, a vision that produced "collateral" that included gentrifying the city at the expense of the young people that these programs serve. Indeed, when I was leader of New Urban Arts from 1997 to 2007, I remember employing the language and the logic of this creativity city discourse without critiquing its damaging side effects. In meetings with philanthropists and policymakers, I co-opted the lan-

guage of creative urban renewal as I emphasized the fact that New Urban Arts was a positive force in rejuvenating the West End neighborhood.

At the time, I did not entertain the negative potential consequences for youth participants. I failed to see how this script for urban renewal expanded their opportunities for creative learning at the same that that it might displace them from their neighborhoods. I failed to see how this script for urban renewal reproduced the same brand of "racial capitalism," as Cedric Robinson coined it,[63] that has been endemic to Providence since its founding. In retrospect, I can now see that my own ignorance toward this negative aspect of the Creative Capital was willful—an epistemology of white ignorance, as Charles Mills might put it[64]—because, as one of the good white creatives from Brown University, I stood to profit personally from this script if it worked. And now, as an academic in the arts and education at an elite institution, I clearly have. As a result, my capacity to critique this vision for the city, to see its contradictions and my own complicity, was compromised. Writing this book has been an attempt to reclaim this critical capacity and reeducate myself, assuming that that project is neither never too late nor complete. Hopefully, this reflection has some bearing on how and why members of the arts and education communities participate in urban planning processes in the future.

The second and related risk concerns the subtle ways in which creative arts programs become entangled in the exercise of state power in cultivating particular forms of human life—in this case, the creative kind. I cannot imagine having started New Urban Arts in 1997 if it were not for Buddy Cianci's proclamation that Providence was a "Renaissance City." I cannot imagine starting New Urban Arts if it were not for the newfound appreciation for social entrepreneurs from elite colleges and universities. From the moment I founded it, New Urban Arts was entangled performatively in this vision for the city that viewed arts and culture as a means to drive upmarket property development, a vision that valorized the role of young white and male youth in urban life. As such, I was performing a role that was already anticipated for me. From the Renaissance City to the Creative Capital, I became what the performative discourse of creativity had already named.[65] I was the young male white wunderkind rejuvenating the postindustrial city through his commitments to creativity and the common good.

Press coverage of my role at New Urban Arts and in Providence illuminates the productive power of white creativity in my early professional life. In the August 2003 issue of *Rhode Island Monthly,* the editors named me Rhode Island's "Best Role Model" because, they wrote, "Tyler Denmead is still in his

twenties and has already found his passion."[66] After a summer culinary apprenticeship in France following my sophomore year in college, the magazine noted that I had reconsidered my future in medicine "for more creative ventures."[67] In the November 2004 issue of the *Providence Monthly*, I was named one of the city's "10 People You Don't Know about but Soon Will" because I discovered my "more intuitive calling" to "empower" youth in "finding their creative voice."[68] And when I stepped down as director of New Urban Arts in 2007, the editorial board of the local newspaper, the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, wrote that I was an "unlikely" kind of urban hero, one who had "uplifted" the city. The editors suggested that I return to the city after graduate school to run for mayor.[69] This press coverage points to the ways in which this new cultural political economy in Providence prized racially and class privileged creatives such as myself who sacrificed traditional career pathways set out for them (e.g., becoming a doctor). These representations of me were at work, producing my own identity in ways that expanded public support for New Urban Arts while also calling others to dedicate themselves to renew the city through their cultural innovations.

In other words, this new urban discourse of creativity established an epistemic horizon for how I understood the symbolic and political potential of my life. In being summoned to live my life as a creative, I established a youth arts and humanities program designed to cultivate the creative practices of youth. In so doing, I mobilized a discourse in which all young people in the city had to measure the value of their own lives in relation to an expression of life prized most by the state and by capital, that is young creatives from Brown and RISD, including myself, who were creating street-level culture that could be capitalized. This expression of life was and remains articulated to a signifying chain of educational privilege, affluence, maleness, countercultural style, whiteness, unthreatening liberal politics, and so forth. That investment, and therefore my life, is already at odds with serving the young people from New Urban Arts despite my best intentions.

Creative Providence did contain some ominous language that signals the biopolitical aspects of creative-led urban renewal for young people of color who participated in local youth arts and humanities programs. As I have stated, the plan wrote that "the local creative sector also nurtures society's young leaders [and] *transforms* some of our most *troubled youth*."[70] This passage is saturated with the racist and classist ideology of the conventional creative city script. Youth of color growing up in the city are read as troubled, in need of life transformation, in need of being fixed and cured. By contrast, the

local creative sector, often composed of white imports from elsewhere, are to be read as redeemers, as white saviors, who can lift up troubled youth through exposing them to their creative ways.

In some ways, I performed this logic through the vocabulary that I established for New Urban Arts (or that was established through me). One example is arts mentoring. "Arts mentoring" refers to the relationship in the studio between students and artists. (I am using the term "artists" loosely to refer to visual artists, poets, fashion designers, textile artists, musicians, and so forth who participate in New Urban Arts as artist-mentors.) Arts mentoring suggests a dyadic partnership between an artist-mentor and a high school student. Through mentoring, the former is a knowledgeable other in Vygotskian terms who scaffolds the development of her youth apprentice.[71] In the past, the knowledgeable other has historically been young people associated with Brown or RISD even as the composition of artist-mentors has changed over the years to include more former youth participants.

To some extent, the vocabulary of arts mentoring has never really been an accurate reflection of what actually happens in the studio of New Urban Arts. For the most part, high school students and artist-mentors engage collectively in their creative practices in the studio. Some high school students participate in New Urban Arts without much interaction with artist-mentors at all. Most artist-mentors interact with multiple youth, sometimes the same ones. Nonetheless, the vocabulary of arts mentoring does fit comfortably within the logic of "good creatives" transforming "troubled youth." As such, arts mentoring possesses its own productive power, providing the terms through which people both within and beyond New Urban Arts can make sense of what happens and how they should act, or not, in the storefront studio.

Curiously, Providence never had to commit significant financial resources to realign arts and humanities programs in the city toward this biopolitical aim of transforming "troubled" youth. As I have pointed out, public financial commitments to youth programs were thin. Instead, the city upheld race- and class-privileged creativity as a desirable expression of human life. As a result, New Urban Arts and other youth arts and humanities programs have had to negotiate their role in transforming "troubled youth" into "creative youth" precisely because these programs are desperate for funding and their students cannot pay tuition. Thus, these programs are forced to sacrifice some autonomy from the state and must reckon with its discursive power. This power shapes the priorities of private philanthropy, which then expects programs such as New Urban Arts to produce the creatives that capital and

the city desire. As a result, programs such as New Urban Arts are forced to govern themselves to conform to this logic so that they are in a better bargaining position to support their youth participants, even if tangible public support from the city never materializes in any substantive way.

To describe this complex biopolitical dynamic, Soo Ah Kwon introduced the term "affirmative governmentality" as she analyzed the social distribution of power through youth civic education and political activism.[72] Kwon theorized this biopolitical mode of governance in which youth programs and their leaders become entangled in state efforts to cultivate particular subjectivities among youth that serve dominant social and economic interests.[73] Kwon was principally concerned with political organizing programs for youth, but her poststructural critique is relevant to youth arts and humanities programs in cities motivated by creativity as a means of urban renewal. Kwon wrote,

> My phrasing of affirmative governmentality articulates the explicit set of rhetorics and practices aimed at affirming youth of color—not only as actors in their own lives, but also as community leaders—in their quest to become better democratic subjects. Specifically, I am concerned with youth organizing as a technology of affirmative governmentality exercised on youth of color at the site of nonprofit organizations. When youth organizing came into vogue among a select group of private foundations in the 1990s, it was posed as an ingenious strategy in providing potentially "at-risk" youth of color with community involvement opportunities that would lead not only to self-esteem and empowerment, but also to community responsibility. . . . "Empowerment" operates here as a strategy of self-governance to make the powerless and politically apathetic act on their own behalf, but not necessarily to oppose the relations of power that made them powerless.[74]

Kwon argued that the political opposition of one youth program in Oakland was supported by the state and private foundations so long as this work was redirected away from confronting structures of power that produce youth injustice, such as racism. Through subtle strategies of self-management, program leaders are steered toward the cultivation of youth who see themselves as ultimately responsible for their own futures and for their own neighborhoods. This subtle shift foists a particular subjectivity on youth, one that embraces market-oriented values of self-responsibility and self-blame, not collective-oriented strategies of structural critique and transformation.

Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock have made a similar critique

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in their observation of the rise of youth development programs in the 1990s.[75] They argued that the popularity of youth development programs such as New Urban Arts among funders since the 1990s stems precisely from the fact that these programs were, and continue to be, saturated in market-oriented vocabularies, which affect how people think about and enact these programs. Private foundations and donors have supported youth development projects precisely because these programs are expected to depoliticize youth work, infusing the education of young people with rhetoric and practices that appeal to those who want to "shift attention away from structural inequalities and injustices to center attention on the responsibilities of individuals, families, and local communities for enabling children and youth to get ahead on an individual basis."[76] In the field of youth development, youth, for example, are represented as if they possessed "assets" such as resiliency that require "investment" so that young people will transition successfully into adulthood.[77]

This market-oriented vocabulary and practice has been a strong feature of successful youth development programs in the arts and humanities. For example, one organization, Artists for Humanity in Boston, has been celebrated for its entrepreneurial model in which young people sell artwork that both supports their organizations and provides them with stipends. Staff at New Urban Arts have told me that there has been some pushback in the youth arts and humanities field in recent years against this entrepreneurial model precisely because young people's cultural labor is paying the salaries of the predominantly white administrators who lead these organizations. Nonetheless, New Urban Arts came into being in the 1990s only because private philanthropy and the state recognized that youth programs were a site where they could exercise some control over the expressions of human life being "developed" there. The philanthropic focus has always been on transforming "troubled youth," not the uneven and unjust distribution of power and resources based on social categories that include race, gender, and class. As a result, New Urban Arts has never operated outside this logic of cultivating self-responsible and creative youth.

But my ethnographic research did not find alumni from New Urban Arts who internalized self-blame and shifted their attention away from structural inequalities and injustices. Indeed, the structural criticisms of Providence presented in this book are theirs. Moreover, all of the young people who participated in this research reported to me that they cherished New Urban Arts because it takes a *collective* approach to cultivating their creative practices, not an individualized one. Yet I show how the studio at New Urban Arts can *still* operate as a site where some "troubled youth" become trans-

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figured into creative sources of speculative profitability for the city in ways that unevenly reward whiteness and reproduce class injustices. New Urban Arts can operate as an affirmative site where some young people learn creative lifestyles, becoming recognizable as legitimate members of Providence's high-status creative underground scene through adopting signifying markers that have already been ascribed to white creativity. The Creative Capital needs only a few young people from New Urban Arts and other programs to be "transformed" in this way for the city to market its status as both inclusive and trendy, even if the evidence suggests that youth do not experience much socioeconomic mobility, if any, by choosing creativity.

At the same time, New Urban Arts remains a powerful place where young people are developing cultural practices that can inspire and complement social justice movements that hold racial capitalism accountable, rendering the need for its replacement while inspiring people to behave more ethically toward one another. In the first half of this book I describe and interpret the cultural political strategies developed by young people at New Urban Arts. This ethnographic account, I hope, will come in handy as we work toward an effective political response to the ways in which creativity reproduces social inequality through gentrifying cities.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 Dreeszen and Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, *Creative Providence*, 4.

2 I am thankful in particular for the work of Julie Bettie, who has helped me see more clearly how an ethnographic book on the cultural practices of youth might inform their activism. See Bettie, *Women without Class.*

3 By "entanglement," I am seeking to avoid the reductionist argument that the economic conditions of Providence determined this reconfiguration of the city for the benefit of upwardly mobile and white people. Moreover, I am seeking to avoid the foundationalist presumption that I am now standing outside that logic as a spectator subject, able to critique those conditions based on a correct representation of reality. "Entanglement" is a concept developed by feminist new materialist scholars such as Karen Barad who argue that the material worlds we represent are dynamic, producing us as much as we produce them. See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway.* At the same time, this new materialist orientation seeks to avoid a relativist and nominalist viewpoint that presumes all knowledge claims are language games. In other words, I was, and I continue to be, imbricated in the material and discursive realities of Providence that I am seeking to represent. I am grateful for a paper by Jerry Rosiek on this epistemological and ontological perspective that has helped me understand the implications of this theoretical orientation more clearly. See Rosiek, "Art, Agency, and Inquiry."

4 Denzin, "Performing [Auto] Ethnography Politically."

5 Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness.*

6 All names have been changed.

7 hooks, *Where We Stand*, 137.

8 In a television interview by Kenneth Clarke, Baldwin describes urban renewal in San Francisco and other American cities as "negro removal." You can watch the relevant clip of the interview in Vince Graham, *Urban Renewal. Means Negro Removal. ~ James Baldwin (1963).*

9　The term "performative wokeness" suggests that symbolic gestures of solidarity by people in positions of power have become performative. That is to say, the subject position of a "woke" individual, or one who is conscious of injustice, is now playing a productive role in shaping how people in positions of power act. They perform symbolic gestures, such as putting rainbows on their Facebook avatar or wearing safety pins, that comfort themselves and enhance their status by signaling their virtue, while perhaps doing little to change conditions that produce injustice.

10　See Runciman, "Too Few to Mention."

11　In her book *Women without Class*, Julie Bettie describes how her book is "not meant to be critical of individual people, but of the social systems, processes, and ideologies present in our culture that recruit individual actors and inform their actions." This way of describing poststructurally informed ethnographic analysis was highly influential in shaping my understanding of how I have been "recruited" by various discourses as well as entangled in the "recruitment" of youth as members of a creative underclass. See Bettie, *Women without Class*, x.

12　I am drawing on Bryant Alexander's interpretation of Victor Turner's concept of "performance reflexivity." See Alexander, "Critically Analyzing," 43.

13　See Montgomery, "Rise of Creative Youth Development."

14　There are a variety of youth scholars who have informed my poststructural orientation to creativity. Two influential texts for me include Bettie, *Women without Class*; and Kwon, *Uncivil Youth*.

15　Dávila, *Culture Works*, 73.

16　These white property rights include the right to disposition, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to reputation and status, and the right to exclude. See Harris, "Whiteness as Property."

17　It is important to note that I have omitted the perspectives, experiences, and cultural practices of one important group of youth in this research. I did not meet people who self-identified as indigenous youth in the studio at New Urban Arts. Their omission from this book is noteworthy because Providence is an ongoing settler colonial occupation, and creative city politics involves struggles over rights to land. More than 2 percent of the population of Providence are members of the Narragansett tribe. Educationalists such as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang might quite rightly point out that the youth identities and creative cultural strategies presented here do not account for indigenous politics, educational concerns, or epistemologies. This omission points to an area of further research concerning indigenous youth, creativity, and urban life. See Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor."

18　Murphy, "No Beggars amongst Them."

19　Harper, "Slavery in Rhode Island."

20　Harper, "Slavery in Rhode Island."

21　Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, "Slavery and Justice."

22　McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 110.

23 McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 115–16.

24 McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 109–47.

25 McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 109–47.

26 McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 156–57.

27 McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 118, 121.

28 McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 136.

29 Stanton, *Prince of Providence*, 125.

30 Rhode Island Kids Count, "Child Poverty in Rhode Island."

31 Leazes and Motte, *Providence, The Renaissance City.*

32 Americans for the Arts, "Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr. (D-Providence, RI)." Retrieved January 30, 2017, from http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program /promotion-and-recognition/awards-for-arts-achievement/annual-awards /public-leadership-in-the-arts/mayor-vincent-a-cianci-jr-d-providence-ri.

33 Leazes and Motte, *Providence, the Renaissance City.*

34 See Stanton, *Prince of Providence.*

35 Catalytix and Richard Florida Creativity Group, "Providence."

36 Dreeszen and Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, *Creative Providence.*

37 Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class."

38 Waitt and Gibson, "Creative Small Cities," 1230.

39 Waitt and Gibson, "Creative Small Cities," 1230.

40 Florida, *New Urban Crisis.*

41 Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class."

42 Florida, "Cities and the Creative Class."

43 Dreeszen and Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, *Creative Providence*, 4.

44 Dreeszen and Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, *Creative Providence*, 2.

45 Dreeszen and Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, *Creative Providence*, 11.

46 "Community MusicWorks."

47 "National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards."

48 Nicodemus, "Cultural Plan."

49 Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, "Program Guidelines."

50 Trinity Repertory Company, "Lie of the Mind."

51 Dávila, *Culture Works*, 82–92.

52 Dávila, *Culture Works*, 87.

53 Providence Downtown Improvement District, "2013 Annual Report," 10.

54 Dávila, *Culture Works*, 87.

55 "Now's the Time."

56 Berliner, "Rational Responses."

57 Berliner, "Rational Responses."

58 Rhode Island Department of Education, "Race to the Top."

59 Au, "Teaching under the New Taylorism."

60 For a discussion of this paradox in other educational contexts and countries, see Burnard and White, "Creativity and Performativity."

61 Dreeszen and Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, *Creative Providence*, 37–41.

62 Krätke, *Creative Capital of Cities*, 91.

63 Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

64 Mills, "White Ignorance."

65 On "performativity," see Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

66 Moan et al., "Role Model," 122.

67 Moan et al., "Role Model," 122.

68 Conti, "Tyler Denmeade>>Arts," 19.

69 Editorial Board, "Denmead's Urban Uplift."

70 Dreeszen and Associates, New Commons, and City of Providence Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, *Creative Providence*, 4; italics mine.

71 See Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*.

72 Kwon, *Uncivil Youth*.

73 Kwon, *Uncivil Youth*.

74 Kwon, *Uncivil Youth*, 10–11.

75. Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, 17–24.

76 Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising?*, 23.

77 See YouthPower, "Positive Youth Development."

CHAPTER 1. TROUBLEMAKING

1 Names have been changed.

2 Americans for the Arts, "Brief Conversation."

3 Anyon, "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work."

4 Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!*, 18.

5 See Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

6 See Weissmann, "Newt Gingrich."

7 Szasz, "Sane Slave."

8 Quoted from Fallace, "Savage Origins," 95.

9 Quoted from Fallace, "Savage Origins," 95.

10 Fallace, "Savage Origins," 95.

11 Fallace, "Savage Origins," 95.

12 Quoted from Fallace, "Savage Origins," 95.

13 Fallace, "Savage Origins," 95.

14 Quoted from Fallace, "Savage Origins," 95.

15 Weissmann, "Newt Gingrich."

16 Ayers, Ayers, and Dohrn, *Zero Tolerance*.

17 Neuman, "Violence in Schools."

18 Petteruti, "Education Under Arrest."

19 Heitzeg, "Education or Incarceration."

20 Goodman, "Charter Management Organizations," 89.

21 Goodman, "Charter Management Organizations."