

The Right to the City and to the University: Forging Solidarity Beyond the Town/Gown Divide

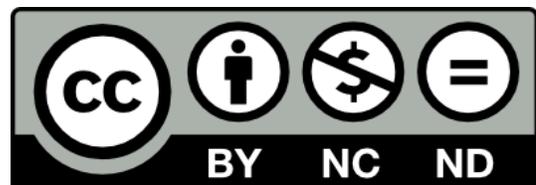
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Abstract

Over the last fifty years, institutions of higher education have served as anchor institutions in cities' broader neoliberal efforts to generate new economic sectors, attract the creative class, and build amenities that stimulate market-oriented redevelopment. These activities, combined with universities' own neoliberal restructuring, including diminishing housing support for students and staff, have contributed to gentrification and displacement in neighborhoods surrounding universities, creating the context for interrelated struggles for the right to the city and the right to the university. Using Temple University in Philadelphia, and University of California Santa Cruz as case studies we examine how students, faculty, and other university actors are joining with organizations and movements in surrounding communities to resist restructuring and displacement. In doing so, these emerging coalitions are transcending the more divisive town/gown narrative, forging new solidarities that are reimagining more just and equitable futures for both the city and the university.

Keywords: neoliberalism, higher education, gentrification, action research

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Universities play key roles in our nation’s social, civic, political, and economic development, generating knowledge, culture, jobs, and innovation. They are also place-based institutions that have become uniquely implicated in the neoliberal¹ turn in urban and regional policy and political economy, serving as both subject and object of these transformations. Consequently, they have long and complicated histories with their surrounding communities. Alongside other creative and knowledge-sector industries, they have become “anchor institutions” in cities’ broader efforts over the last fifty years to generate “new economy” sectors, attract the “creative class,” and stimulate the market-oriented redevelopment of neighborhoods, cities, and regions (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007; Florida et al., 2006; Harris & Holley, 2016).

With their capacity to add value to surrounding real estate and businesses, as well as to develop high-end housing and amenities of their own, university-driven entrepreneurial activities have—intentionally or not—contributed to gentrification and housing unaffordability, increased policing and surveillance, and the displacement of low-income communities and communities of color (Baldwin, 2017; Florida, 2018). In turn, these impacts have exacerbated historically complex, often conflictual relations between universities and their local communities, known as the “town/gown” divide.² Yet driving their new entrepreneurial role is the fact that universities too have been on the receiving end of neoliberal restructuring, experiencing successive rounds of budget cuts and privatization since the 1970s (e.g., Newfield, 2016). This has led to the imposition of austerity—including shrinking pensions, layoffs, and deep cuts in state support for tuition and on-campus food and housing. Low-income and first-generation students have been particularly hard hit by these changes. Thus, universities are in a complex and contradictory position: *simultaneously contributing to and suffering from the crises of neoliberal restructuring, both on campus and off.*

With these contradictions, however, we also see new potential for solidarity and political alliance between university and community members, both of whom are impacted by market-oriented restructuring and its attendant forms of displacement and disruption. Focusing on Temple University in Philadelphia (Temple) and the University of California at Santa Cruz

¹ Neoliberalism is a philosophy whose main tenets include limited government; privatization of public services; deregulation of business and financial markets; elimination of labor unions; and strong emphasis on individualism.

² As urban historian Thomas Bender notes (1998), colloquial use of “town and gown” is rooted in centuries of “ambivalent” relations between semi-autonomous universities and their surrounding cities, from which either party at times benefited and at time suffered. Since the social unrest of the 1960s and economic restructuring of the 1970s, this relationship has grown increasingly conflictual and been framed as a “divide”.

(UCSC) we explore how university actors have begun working with surrounding communities to analyze and resist this restructuring through both collaborative research projects and coordinated political action.³

While the two universities are located in distinct economic and demographic regions, from the so-called “rustbelt” to “sunbelt,” the neoliberal turn of the 70s and 80s narrowed these regional differences, particularly regarding housing unaffordability, economic precarity, and displacement. Meanwhile, the two universities played significant if different roles in driving these neoliberal shifts, even while their students and employees suffered from them. In response, both locales are witnessing pitched battles over both the “right to the city,” and the right to the university.⁴ Sometimes these are parallel struggles, sometimes they are aligned. In all cases they have the potential to replace older, divisive town/gown narratives with new solidarities that help us reimagine the futures of both the city and the university. In the next section we provide a brief overview of the neoliberal restructuring of cities and universities, showing how both disproportionately impact People of Color and low-income people. That is followed by a discussion of our methods, the two cases, and our findings.

Universities, Neoliberalism, and The Right to the City

The role of universities in neighborhood change is not new. As college enrollments skyrocketed with the GI Bill and subsequent federal and state support for students after World War II, many existing universities, especially those in rustbelt city regions, outgrew their campuses, while new ones, especially in sunbelt city regions, were built to accommodate increased demand. Founded in 1884 with a handful of students, Temple University had grown to over 26,000 students by 1965 while the UC Santa Cruz campus just opened, along with many other campuses across the country. Accompanying this expansion and construction was the growing economic and political role of universities in the neighborhoods and cities around them (Heller, 2016). This role became regionally uneven in the 1960s and 70s, when urban and fiscal crises in rustbelt cities caused some campuses to move to suburbs or, if they stayed, to become fortresses within increasingly poor and disinvested neighborhoods.

In the 1980s, differences between sunbelt and rustbelt cities narrowed as deindustrialization, globalization, and federal retrenchment led local and state governments to embrace neoliberal policy frameworks that elevated the role of markets while delegitimizing the public sector. These governments rolled-back public sector gains of the previous decades via austerity measures, deregulation, and attacks on unions, while promoting new market-oriented practices and ideologies, including privatization and entrepreneurialism (Brenner & Theodore,

³ The authors are based at these universities, have been involved in activities discussed here, and thus chose these as our cases. We note however that private universities are equally implicated in local displacement, often on a larger scale.

⁴ The “right to the city” is a concept coined by French spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre in association with the urban uprisings of 1968 (Lefebvre, 1996, chapters 2-17). It refers to the collective rights to the city of groups that had been marginalized (e.g., working class, poor, People of Color, immigrants, youth) by market-centric development policies.

2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Pressures intensified as Sunbelt-inspired “tax revolts” of the 1970s-80s spread nationally, further depleting revenues for states and localities. Racial animus triggered these anti-tax movements. California’s efforts to expand free public education was viewed by many older, white, suburban middle-class residents as providing undeserved social mobility for an increasingly non-white, working class (Newfield, 2011). The anti-tax movement prompted California’s Proposition 13, a 1979 voter referendum that severely limited the state’s ability to increase residential or corporate taxes to cover needed improvements or investment in public education and the public sector generally. Similar measures were passed nationwide, including the Reagan tax cuts of the 1980s.

Taken together, these shifts had transformational impacts on rustbelt and sunbelt cities alike as tax cuts decreased services for communities of color and low-income residents in general, while the corporate sector and more affluent, disproportionately white residents benefited from decreased taxes. As cities and regions became more entrepreneurial, their dependence on the knowledge sector increased as did their reliance on universities as economic drivers. Thus, universities came to play a major role in economic development, job creation, and neighborhood revitalization—as well as the gentrification and displacement such development entailed.

Displacement on Campus and in the Community

The neoliberal turn reshaped universities in ways similar to, and interacting with, the cities and regions in which they were located. Disinvestment disproportionately impacted lower socioeconomic status (SES) students and students of color, while encouraging universities to operate as entrepreneurial entities. Austerity budgets ushered in major funding cuts for higher education at the state and federal level (Adams, 2003), with public institutions bearing the brunt of these cuts. In 2010, for example, 65% of Temple’s budget came from the state; in 2017, it was 10% (Bowen, 2018). The University of California system saw a more gradual if equally drastic decline in state funding, as measured in state funding per student. In 1990, the state contributed 78% of the total cost; by 2015-2016 this had declined to 41% (UC Office of the President, 2017).

Like most universities, Temple and the University of California system responded with a two-pronged approach: raising tuition and pursuing entrepreneurial strategies. Temple’s tuition increased by 31% from 2007 to 2017 (Bowen, 2018) while UCSC’s tuition increased by 46% over the same period (Jang, 2016). Meanwhile, both placed greater emphasis on income-generating ventures like grantsmanship, local technology transfer, and real estate development (Heller, 2016; Newfield, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). Collectively, these forms of disruption and displacement reinforce the primacy of economic over educational and social considerations in university policy and indicate a shift away from the public mission of the university.

This shift impacts conditions both on campus and off. Higher tuition and tuition-based funding models lead to increased competition for wealthier students able to pay the full amount,

or “full freight.”⁵ If successful, this strategy yields decreases in local students, lower SES students, and students of color, and increases in students from affluent families (Jaquette, Curs, & Posselt, 2016). The latter pay top dollar both as consumers and renters on campus and in the surrounding community, displacing both lower-income students and local renters. Moreover, in competing for these students, universities race to develop amenities, including luxury dorms, entertainment centers, stadia, and the like. This inspires private developers to build more upscale housing, further increasing area property values and rents. Meanwhile, as scholars at Temple have explored through annual, nationwide surveys, increased college tuition is accompanied by cuts in student aid for housing, meal plans, and other basic needs, leading to increasing rates of housing and food insecurity for low- and moderate-income students and mounting post-graduation debt (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2017). Low-income students turn to overcrowded and/or unsafe housing, while, again, potentially displacing local low to moderate income renters. Thus, the decline in material support alongside the use of high-priced amenities to attract affluent students potentially exacerbates the likelihood of “town/gown” divisions, even while these shifts create challenges for both low-income students and surrounding communities.

In sum, when we think of university-generated gentrification and displacement, we need to consider how neoliberal logics have reshaped both universities and cities, and of the interaction between these processes. Cities and their universities co-produce—and suffer from—the major problems faced by students, university staff, and urban residents in terms of escalating costs of living and inequality. At the same time, these interactions have created the potential for new solidarities and forms of resistance, both on campuses and in communities. On the one hand, a wide range of anti-gentrification and “right to the city” struggles have arisen in the past two decades—including against university expansion plans. These seek an equal voice in urban development for all residents, greater access to and control over the urban commons, and housing affordability and tenant protections—with this all understood as essential to broader environmental, racial, and spatial justice (Cohen, 2018; Greenberg & Lewis, 2017; Harvey, 2008; Mitchell, 2003; Soja 2010). On the other hand, simultaneous movements have arisen amongst student, staff, and faculty against the “corporate university.” These seek greater collective bargaining rights and access to university resources, alleviation of debt-burden via more affordable tuition, housing and other basic needs; and “reclaiming the university” in terms of its public mission (Bottrell & Manathunga 2019b; Newfield, 2016; Noble & Ross, 2019). The potential now arises for these movements to come together and recognize relationships between their struggles.

A key question in anti-gentrification struggles has been: who is the city for? For those fighting the neoliberalization of academia the question has been: who is the university for? Emergent university-community coalitions, recognizing the role of universities in gentrification, and of neoliberal cities and universities in the lives of students, staff, and neighbors, increasingly ask how these two questions might be raised together. In doing so, they challenge old, starkly

⁵ In part, universities also see this as a way of subsidizing lower-income students. See Lieber, 2019.

divisive town/gown narratives, as well as tenets of neoliberal practice, with vibrant and potentially powerful new local movements.

Methods

Both the Philadelphia and Santa Cruz cases are based largely on participatory observation, with an emphasis on community collaboration and coalition-building. Between 2016 and 2019, the authors participated in anti-displacement efforts at their respective universities. At UC Santa Cruz, this entailed a Community Initiated Student Engaged Research (CISER) project (discussed in more detail below) on the local affordable housing crisis, and subsequent political efforts advancing rent control and increased funding for affordable housing both on campus and off. In the case of Temple University, campus community alliances were formed in opposition to a large stadium project in the neighborhood surrounding the campus, with participation taking more of a direct-action focus. We picked these cases because they are very recent and illustrate in distinct ways the emergence of new coalitions, forms of resistance, and ways in which university actors can support community resistance efforts and jointly reimagine the city and the university. Participant observation was supplemented by documentary analysis and examinations of media coverage.

Temple University and Philadelphia

Temple University is in Philadelphia, an older rustbelt city where housing might be considered relatively inexpensive. Of the ten most populous U.S. cities, Philadelphia has the lowest median home values, while rents are also comparatively affordable (Zillow, July 2019)⁶ A consequence of these price differentials, however, has been an influx of residents from higher-priced nearby cities like New York and Washington DC (Pressler, 2005), leading to gentrification. Given the low median income of many current residents, housing has become increasingly unaffordable for many. Additionally, since the in-movers are disproportionately white and those displaced are disproportionately black and brown, gentrification is often seen and experienced through a racial as well as economic justice lens, as the stadium controversy will demonstrate.

This increasing displacement has exacerbated Temple's long history of acrimonious town/gown relations. Sizable increases in its student body from the 1950s on, and its subsequent transformation from a commuter school to a residential campus in the 1990s, resulted in significant displacement as houses, businesses, and community institutions, including religious ones, were demolished to accommodate this expansion. Located in North Philadelphia, which had become increasingly poor and predominantly black, and only 1.5 miles from downtown Philadelphia, Temple was seen as a major driver of economic revitalization for North

⁶ The ten cities, listed in order of size of population are: New York (\$671,700); Los Angeles (\$689, 700); Chicago (\$226, 500); Houston (\$188,700); Philadelphia (\$156,100); Phoenix (\$242,400); San Antonio (\$178,000); San Diego (\$634,600); Dallas (\$213,300); and San Jose (\$991,200) Values are for the 2019. Source: Zillow.com accessed: 10 July 2019.

Philadelphia, leveraging city and state support in terms of permits, zoning variances, and money. Operating as an “island,” and encouraging students not to venture out into the surrounding neighborhood, Temple, like many universities, reinforced the town/gown phenomenon.⁷ However, the introduction of plans for a football stadium altered the dynamics of that narrative and, with it, the implications for organizing citywide. Rather than continue renting space from the Philadelphia Eagles, which they had done since 2003, the board and administration decided that Temple should have its own stadium. These plans also came in an era of shrinking state aid for Temple accompanied by rising tuition and housing costs and increasing student debt.

In 2015, Temple University announced plans to build a 35,000-seat football stadium in a residential neighborhood adjacent to the campus. This announcement inspired immediate organizing as residents, students, and recent graduates joined to form Stadium Stompers, a “movement of North Philly community members, students, and workers coming together to stop Temple's proposed football stadium and build power” (Stadium Stompers Facebook page, 2015). Residents were angered by Temple’s continued encroachment in the community and the consequent increase in housing costs, displacement, and quality of life issues caused by housing construction, traffic disruption, street closings, and the massive student presence. Students and alums were upset for some of the same reasons plus the potential impact that stadium costs could have on tuition rates. Additionally, some faculty joined in these efforts to protest the costs of the stadium, money they believed should be spent on the university’s academic mission. Meeting bi-weekly since their formation, Stadium Stompers engaged in direct action, research, meetings with elected officials, and coalition building efforts. As a result, their member base, visibility, focus, and agenda have grown.

Figure 1

Stadium Stomper Canvassing Community Members During a Protest March



Note. Photo by Jennie Shanker. All rights reserved.

⁷ During freshman orientation, new students are often advised not to go into the surrounding neighborhoods.

From the beginning, Stadium Stompers sought to broaden their base, reaching out to the Philadelphia National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Black Clergy, the Temple Association of University Professionals (TAUP, the faculty union), and Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower, and Reflect (POWER, a coalition of Philadelphia area faith-based organizations), all of whom sent members to rallies, signed petitions, contacted elected officials, and hosted anti-stadium meetings. The Stompers canvassed the neighborhood to increase awareness, get residents out to protests and meetings, and collect survey data demonstrating their opposition. Similar surveys were conducted among Temple faculty, showing that 75% of the faculty who responded were against the stadium (TAUP, 2017).

Temple's faculty senate convened a special meeting to vote on the proposed stadium; the result was overwhelmingly against construction. The major reasons cited included that money should be spent on education related priorities (70.9%) and that a stadium would further damage relations with the surrounding neighborhood (66.2%). In written comments, faculty expressed objections to the university's move towards a "corporate model," suggesting that it was deviating from its mission as a public institution, and that money should be spent on things like "classroom space," better pay for adjunct faculty, and student aid (TAUP, 2017). Former Temple students conducted a "Not One Penny More" campaign among fellow alumni, encouraging them to sign petitions that they would not donate to the University if they built the stadium.

Research conducted by Stadium Stomper members and Temple faculty focused on Temple's past developments in the community and their impacts, property acquisitions, housing costs, costs of the stadium, financial returns of college stadiums elsewhere in the country, and health issues related to repeated head trauma. Activists used this research when they testified at city council hearings and in meetings with reporters and city and state representatives. Collectively, these activities created an "inside-outside" approach whereby faculty and students created dissent within the university while neighborhood activists mobilized the community and targeted elected officials.

Among the more visible activities were protest marches around the campus, to City Hall, and outside University board meetings as well as town hall meetings, one of which attracted more than 400 people. Although invited to the meetings, Temple administrators and board members did not attend. Activists used empty chairs to illustrate the University's disinterest in meeting with the community.

Figure 2

Community and Temple Activists March to City Hall with Stadium Stompers



Note. Photo by Jennie Shanker. All rights reserved.

Responding to public criticism over their absence, the University convened its own town hall meeting on March 6, 2018. The meeting was shut down after a loud protest by Stadium Stompers, in concert with education, union, and other activists, prompting the City Council President, whose district includes the areas around Temple, to publicly acknowledge the neighborhood’s resistance. Because the stadium would require zoning variances and since Philadelphia practices councilmanic prerogative⁸, his is the vote that would count—and it did. Prior to this event, his public comments were vague and guarded. As one of the leaders in Stadium Stompers commented, “after more than two years of struggle and this month’s mass meeting against the stadium, we are glad that Council President Clarke has finally been moved to speak against Temple’s disastrous plan” (McGoldrick, 2018). Hence, this event represented a turning point in the controversy.

Figures 3 and 4

Protesters Prepare to Enter Temple’s Town Hall Meeting



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⁸ On neighborhood land use matters, council members defer to the person who represents the district in question.

In June of 2018, the University delayed submission of its plans to the City Planning Commission (Bleier, 2018) and then, on February 10, 2020, they signed a five-year lease extension to continue playing at the Eagles' Stadium, thereby ending the debate, at least for now (Tannenbaum, 2020). A scandal in Fall 2018 involving Temple's business school stimulated a major state audit of the university, including its plans for financing the stadium. While it is hard to determine which factors led to the final decision to halt the stadium, we believe that the collective actions of Stadium Stompers and their allies made a difference, especially in terms of Councilman Clarke's about-face. Stadium Stompers sent a powerful message to the administration and City Council President that they will vigorously pursue multiple avenues of resistance and that they have strong allies beyond the local community.

The work of the Stompers has not ended. As noted in an article from the Socialist Alternative, which is a strong ally of Stadium Stompers:

We have succeeded in shifting the narrative on the stadium question for the time being, but Temple is a fierce, well-funded opponent. Now is the time to use this victory to propel the movement forward... There is an opportunity to push beyond a defensive fight toward a dynamic campaign made up of community residents, students, and Temple workers calling on Darrell Clarke and the rest of City Council to **stop legislating gentrification through policies like the 10 year tax abatement, to fight back against Temple University tuition hikes, and for living wage union jobs for all Temple employees including subcontractors.** (Socialist Alternative Philly, 2018; bolded in original article)

Stompers has continued to train residents in power analyses, political mapping, canvassing, and electoral work while also becoming part of a growing citywide activist infrastructure that is challenging many of Philadelphia's—and Temple's—market-oriented policies.

Over the last decade, teacher, student and parent activists formed organizations to challenge K-12 school closures and budget cuts, while neighborhood residents and other activists began organizing against Philadelphia's 10-year tax abatement program that helped gentrify formerly low-income neighborhoods while also decreasing revenue for public education. The connections between city policy, gentrification, and education on the one hand, and wealth disparities on the other, encouraged these groups to work together. While many groups are working on specific issues, they have realized the need to form broader coalitions. Stadium Stompers has gone beyond the immediate issues of gentrification in North Philadelphia to embrace the larger tax abatement fight, the push for rent control, the educational justice battle, and the fight for fair wages, among others, and they have entered the electoral fray, identifying candidates for various positions in city government. The elections of a progressive District Attorney in 2017 (Larry Krasner) and several progressive city council persons between 2015 and 2019, including one from the Working Families Party, have energized this course of activities.

The relationships that developed between the Stompers and Temple faculty have continued; the Stompers, along with several Philadelphia unions, publicly supported TAUP (the faculty union) in its contract negotiations with the administration by attending rallies and signing petitions. As more faculty and students see allies in the community and as the community sees faculty and students as allies, the town/gown dynamic has become more nuanced. Temple is not a monolithic entity, but rather, a very strong institution whose policies generate both internal and external opposition.

UC Santa Cruz

The population of the Santa Cruz metropolitan region is considerably smaller and more affluent than Philadelphia. Yet the region generates outsized housing costs relative to income, leading to an affordability crisis on a scale that makes for a meaningful comparison. With a median monthly rent for a two-bedroom unit at \$2,618 and the median sale price of a home over \$922,000 (HUD, 2019; Zillow.com, July 2019), the City of Santa Cruz has emerged as one of the least affordable places to live in the U.S., and even the world (Cox & Pavletich, 2018). When poverty rates are adjusted for housing costs, Santa Cruz is tied for the poorest county in California, itself the poorest state in the U.S.⁹ (Bohn, Danielson, & Thorman, 2019). Renters here are particularly vulnerable, lacking any meaningful tenant protections and facing extreme rent burdens, subpar living conditions, and levels of displacement and homelessness amongst the worst in the U.S. (No Place Like Home, 2018).

Locals typically understand the crisis as a result of the influx of highly paid Silicon Valley workers from “over the hill,” since Santa Cruz is still cheaper than this neighboring region, and/or of UCSC students, 45% of whom the university is unable to house and who therefore move into surrounding communities, constituting one third of all Santa Cruz city renters. Thus, many local politicians, neighborhood organizations, and landlords frame the roots of the crisis as exogenous, an “invading species” of students and tech-workers. There is truth in this: the University needs to affordably house more students, and Silicon Valley’s own housing crisis is having spillover effects throughout the Greater Bay Area. Yet this framing also obscures the role of local housing politics, especially the region’s 50-year history of “NIMBY”-ism¹⁰ including exclusionary zoning and staunch opposition to tenant protections.¹¹

⁹ California is the poorest state when poverty rates are adjusted for housing costs.

¹⁰ The term NIMBY stands for “not in my backyard,” as espoused by residents opposing local development deemed bad for quality of life and/or property values. In the U.S., NIMBY’s typically block multi-family zoning and pro-tenant policies that would enable housing affordability and inclusion of lower income and non-white residents.

¹¹ For more on the political roots of the housing crisis in Santa Cruz, see *No Place Like Home* website. <http://noplacelikehomeucsc.org/>.

Figure 5

Undergraduate Students Conducting Field Surveys



Note. Photo by Steve McKay. All rights reserved.

With housing affordability issues paramount in Santa Cruz, university-based researchers partnered with local labor, housing, and social service organizations to conduct a major study on the issue. Bypassing conventional approaches, they developed a modified community-based participatory research (CBPR) model called Community Initiated Student Engaged Research or CISER (Greenberg, London, & McKay, 2019; Minkler et al., 2008). First, university-based researchers invited leading community organizations to brainstorming meetings held on- and off-campus. Participants included the county's two largest anti-poverty and social service non-profit organizations, the leading public interest law organization, and a local union representing public and non-profit sector workers, all of whom identified the affordable housing crisis as their most relevant and actionable research need. These groups also noted that the dearth of data on local vulnerable populations had resulted in their being poorly served, overlooked, and under-funded.

From these meetings, university researchers and community partners jointly developed the research questions. University researchers then crafted an analytical and methodological framework around these questions, mobilizing and training undergraduate and graduate students to conduct the research. Before and during the data collection phase, community partner organizations hosted student researchers, providing a contextual introduction to the community, an off-campus space to gather, and outreach and resource materials on housing issues and services. Students collected baseline survey data on rent costs and living conditions from vulnerable, hard-to-reach populations often missed on standard surveys (i.e., renters and homeless persons as well as the Latinx community), conducted outreach to low-wage renters about available services and housing rights, and helped craft public-facing media illustrating and humanizing the housing issue. In all, 250 students collected more than 1,984 surveys and 80 in-depth interviews.

Figure 6

Undergraduate Students with Local Union Partners



Note. Photo by Steve McKay. All rights reserved.

Once initial data analysis was conducted, collaborative briefings were held with community partner organizations to assess and discuss preliminary findings as well as dissemination strategies. The central research product was the bilingual *No Place Like Home* website (<http://noplacelikehomeucsc.org/>), which served as a public-facing and internal coalition platform. The platform showcased the survey data, narratives, and images of county tenants, and provided resources for community members, organizations, scholars and policymakers on issues facing low-income renters. Faculty, students, and community partners also organized three large bilingual public research presentations and art exhibits during Affordable Housing Week in Santa Cruz County in 2016, 2017, and 2018. The events drew crowds of 450-600 attendees, gained co-sponsorship by the City of Santa Cruz, and involved over 25 community housing organizations tabling at the events.

Figure 7

Students Begin Renter Organizing and Coalition Building



Note. Photo by Steve McKay. All rights reserved.

While the *No Place Like Home* project was bringing together the city’s affordable housing, tenant, and anti-poverty organizations, grassroots political organizing groups seized on affordable housing as a unifying issue. Critically, students who had participated in the project and were facing their own housing challenges began organizing too, launching two new independent organizations: Students United with Renters (SUR) and Student Union Housing Working Group (SUHWG). These organizations mobilized and engaged students, making visible the housing issue both on and off-campus. They also met with university administrators and city council members to share their plight. Faced with inaction by both, these groups confronted campus leadership about student housing, publicly issuing demands to administrators regarding a fair housing contract, housing guarantees, budget transparency, cost controls, and democratizing the planning process for new student housing development and long-term campus growth (SUHWG 2017). SUR also took direct public actions against off-campus landlords, protesting one landlord who distributed racist anti-tenant flyers, and another who made tenants bid against each other for rental units.

In 2017, SUR and SUHWG joined the countywide Movement for Housing Justice (MHJ) under the umbrella of the new Progressive Coalition (PC), together focusing on grassroots organizing and changing local housing policy. They successfully gathered 10,000 signatures to put “Measure M: Rent Control Charter Amendment” for rent control and just cause eviction on the citywide November 2018 ballot—the first time in 35 years tenant advocates were successful in getting the issue before voters. The campaign drew strong opposition from local and corporate landlords and local, state, and even national real estate associations, who together raised more than \$1,000,000 to influence this small local election. In contrast, the MHJ raised just \$50,000, mostly from local small donations. Nevertheless, the PC’s organizing model emphasized door-knocking, one-on-ones, neighborhood meetings, large-scale volunteer mobilization, and accessible policy research to educate the public about rent control/just cause eviction and combat the anti-rent control media blitz. They also connected with two progressive candidates for city council who, in a field of seven, were the only ones to publicly support rent control/just cause eviction. The on- and off-campus organizations focused their grassroots organizing on getting out the vote to support Measure M, the two progressive city council candidates, and several county and statewide initiatives to expand rent control and funding for affordable housing.

Figure 8

Local Mobilization for Rent Control and Just Cause Eviction



Note. Photo by Steve McKay. All rights reserved.

Election results were mixed: having been outspent 20-to-1, the ballot measure was defeated. However, organizers mobilized a groundswell of new voters, particularly students and young renters, on the issue of housing and renter protection. These voters in turn helped elect the two progressive city council candidates, who joined two sitting progressives, creating a pro-tenant majority on the seven-person city council for the first time in forty years.

Student and university researchers also collaborated with local organizations to develop new affordable housing. They began working with the union representing city and county workers as well as county planning officials to identify suitable county owned land for new affordable employee housing. They are also working with MHJ, the local teachers' union, and the local school district to convert a vacant site on school district land into affordable teacher housing, and with a local church, non-profit affordable housing developer, and local government to create 40 units of affordable senior housing on the church-donated land. Several student and community housing organizers also created a community land trust, the Coastal Commons Land Trust, to help spearhead similar efforts throughout the region.

Additionally, faculty and students continue to work with the university to house more students. Drawing from the wider struggle for rent control, they now use the framework of *affordable student housing* in their demands. Rejecting the idea of unaffordable luxury dorms, they want the university to provide housing for working class students with rents that do not exceed 30% of their income. Most recently, this framework influenced an eight-month long wildcat strike by UCSC graduate students, which spread to eight other UC campuses via the system-wide graduate student union. Strikers demanded a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in their contracts to afford rent in the local market, adding their degree of rent burden, and linking to the No Place Like Home project, at the end of all email communication (PayusmoreUCSC, 2020; UAW2865, 2020). This latter effort has been endorsed by other campus unions, who hope it might set a precedent for university contracts, and pro-affordable housing progressives on the City Council as well, bringing joint action between the community and university full circle.

Thus, a wide array of efforts to solve the housing crisis have coalesced, focusing on increased production of affordable housing, de-commodification of land, broader tenant protections, and the pegging of university wages to cost of living. This more holistic approach, transcending old town/gown divides, has been enabled by community-initiated university research as well as emerging solidarities and coalitions among students and tenants throughout the city and county.

Contextualizing the Politics of Development and Resistance

The different geographies, demographics, and histories of Philadelphia and Santa Cruz offer up varying challenges and opportunities related to the restructuring of cities and universities. In rustbelt Philadelphia, many Temple students have access via the mass transit system to a range of relatively affordable housing possibilities away from campus, while those who are low-income struggle with food and housing insecurity and mounting debt. The

university continues to invest in amenities while relying on an increasing pool of low paid adjuncts and nontenure faculty to teach the majority of its classes.¹² Meanwhile, the poor and working class African American community surrounding the campus has been historically disenfranchised and subject to the development decisions of powerful institutions and employers, including Temple. In this context, Temple students and staff may join Stadium Stompers partly due to personal material concerns, since building a stadium and luxury dorms will further increase tuition and cost-burdens. They may also be concerned about the potentially devastating impact of this development on their neighbors.

In “sunbelt” Santa Cruz, on the other hand, housing is among the least affordable in the country, rental supply and commuting options are limited, and the community immediately surrounding the campus is relatively affluent, white, and living in single-family homes. For UCSC, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) where more than 40% of the student body is first generation, students’ demographics and housing experiences are more aligned with that of the city and county’s low-income renter population beyond the neighborhood where the campus is based. As the *No Place Like Home* project revealed, both students and renters are affected by local housing politics dominated by NIMBY-ism and anti-rent control animus. Thus, in Santa Cruz, students and faculty doing community-engaged research and involved in new coalitions may be less concerned about the role of the university in the community—and critical of the reductive “town/gown” narrative often used to describe this role, and more inclined to build solidarity between student and non-student renters.

The different challenges confronting Temple and UCSC also shaped the overall goals of the campaigns. In the case of Philadelphia, the main goal of Stadium Stompers has been to stop displacement resulting from Temple University’s development priorities and to build power in North Philadelphia. As a longer-term goal, student and faculty members in the coalition also hope to shift priorities back towards the basic needs of students and the educational mission of the university. In the Santa Cruz case, the main goal of coalitions like MHJ and SUR has been instituting protections for tenants through legal aid, rent control, and community ownership of land. More recent demands by graduate student employees have targeted the university for cost-of-living adjustments and affordable student housing. While motivations for involvement and specific goals of the activism vary, the two cases reveal common movement beyond the divisive town/gown narrative, fueled by a recognition that targeting the corporate university will be to the benefit of right to the city struggles, and vice versa.

The Changing Face of Resistance: Reframing Narratives, Coalition Building, and Collaborative Research

While local context is important, there are several critical findings uniting the two cases. In both cities, we saw concerted efforts to reframe narratives in ways that inspired broad based coalition building; the emergence of new solidarities as activists bridged various policy areas

¹² Between 1999 and 2018, the number of nontenure track faculty increased by 374% while the number of tenure track faculty increased by 13.8% (TAUP, 2019)

such as housing, education, and taxes; strong collaboration and coalition building between university and community actors around research and political actions; and a collective reimagining of what the city and university could and should be.

Reframing Narratives

A major challenge faced by grassroots groups is framing the target of their resistance. With extremely limited resources, small local groups often operate in response to the latest threat, be it rent hikes or a proposed football stadium. While they win some fights, the larger battle against market-oriented approaches in education and urbanization remains. However, our cases demonstrate how the negative impacts of these approaches for residents, students, and faculty helped them see wider relationships, reframe the narrative to encompass these relationships, and thus be more strategic and impactful in their resistance.

In the case of the Stadium Stompers, community and university members no longer treated Temple's expansion as an isolated phenomenon impacting one small slice of the city. Rather, it was seen as part of a larger strategy to gentrify as much of the city as possible at the expense of public institutions and the individuals they serve. Philadelphia's tax abatement policy and the resulting loss of funds for K-12 education made that link abundantly clear, while the "whitening" of Temple's student body extended the racial and class dynamic to another broad constituent group: college students. The potential for a further hemorrhaging of academic resources from the proposed stadium was a lightning rod for many faculty, enabling them to see the broader relevance of this local development issue, and motivating them to join forces with their neighbors.¹³

Similarly, Santa Cruz's town/gown narrative initially narrowed the housing debate, positioning student and non-student renters against one another, with residents blaming students and the university writ large for the crisis. However, the research uncovered multiple roots of the affordability crisis and similar impacts for students and low-income renters generally, helping to reframe the narrative. Student researchers also had a larger frame in which to situate their individual predicaments. Recognizing that on and off campus affordability issues were due to the deregulated and privatized housing approaches of both the university and landlords in town, and that renters across the board were being exploited, student- and non-student renters came together through Students United with Renters and Mobilization for Housing Justice. Under the shared banner of "tenant," SUR argued that they all were people without control of their own access to housing and were precariously housed or unhoused, and that only by building collective tenant power could that political position be changed.¹⁴ The old town/gown division was transformed into "tenant solidarity" between student and non-student renters. Indeed, in 2019 SUR and local tenant organizers formed a new joint organization, Santa Cruz Tenant Power (Santa Cruz Tenant Power, 2019).

¹³ The university claimed the money would not come from tuition dollars, but many faculty, as well as Stadium Stompers, drew on national research and were not persuaded.

¹⁴ SURs use of "tenant" was drawn from LA Tenants Union's definition. See Rosenthal, 2019.

Broad Based Coalition Building and New Solidarities

As those impacted by neoliberal policy agendas connect the dots and reframe limited and divisive narratives, they can create new solidarities and broader, more powerful coalitions (Greenberg & Lewis, 2018). While Philadelphia always had a robust community organizing sector, market oriented reforms in K-12 education beginning in the 1990s helped to shape a strong ecosystem of social justice organizations (Ferman, 2017).¹⁵ Comprising unions, racial and economic justice organizations, educators, and student organizing groups, this ecosystem provides support for public actions, research, critical analysis, policy development, and, more recently, electoral activities such as candidate forums and fielding candidates. Stadium Stompers, along with other anti-gentrification groups, found a welcoming home within this ecosystem which they are now helping to strengthen.

Research that is collaborative can augment the coalition building process. Santa Cruz's public scholarship project brought together faculty and student researchers, tenant organizations, and labor, housing, and social service organizations. Door-to-door data collection helped to organize typically hard to reach low-income renters, thus broadening the coalition even further. Presenting the research in well attended public venues brought more community organizations into the fold as they participated in tabling at these events. Students, motivated by their research and personal experiences, formed SUR and MHJ, two broad based housing movements focused on organizing and policy issues, eventually merging into Santa Cruz Tenant Power. As in Philadelphia, these organizing activities spilled over into electioneering as the coalitions campaigned for ballot measures and progressive candidates. While single issue organizing is still important, these coalitions moved beyond this strategy to forge larger political infrastructures aiming to combat neoliberal policies within the city and the university.

Research that is Collaborative and Empowering

Collaborative, action-oriented research not only contributes new knowledge on public concerns, but also strengthens the capacities of community organizations and coalitions to realize social change. One key to effective collaboration between campus and community actors is the central tenet of CBPR: that the partners contribute "unique strengths and shared responsibilities" (Minkler et al., 2008, p. 48-9). Here, university actors can leverage their access to resources and experience conducting rigorous research to help the broader coalition gather data to inform public debate. Meanwhile community actors, with deep ties to a range of local publics, can draw on their networks, knowledge, and experience to build community trust; strengthen the quality of the research; help conduct education and outreach regarding research results and services; and organize and mobilize community members to use the research in public debates about local policy solutions.

¹⁵ We use "ecosystem" and "activist infrastructure" interchangeably.

In the case of Stadium Stompers, Temple researchers in the coalition were able to poll public opinion and provide comparative data on the costs and financial feasibility of university sports stadiums, while residents, local churches, and education, union, and other activists could link the stadium case to related struggles, bringing masses of people to public events. Similarly, Santa Cruz's CISER model ensured that the research would be relevant to community partners and involve community organizations and students in the entire process. These practices helped to build trust between university researchers and the community, mobilize more people and organizations, and contribute to broad coalition building efforts that had electoral successes. Such collaborative action research, forged through equitable campus and community partnerships, can help achieve both a university's research *and* public missions, producing knowledge for scholarly debate as well as public good. While beyond the scope of this article, there are similar efforts at the national scale—such as the American Sociological Association's new Solidarity Action Network—in which community organizations can initiate contact and link up with researchers in their own area to develop similar, CISER-like projects (see <https://www.asanet.org/asa-communities/sociology-action-network>).

Reimagining Cities, Universities, and the Development Process

In both the Santa Cruz and Philadelphia cases we saw resistance efforts evolve from challenging the issues at hand (stadium construction; unaffordable housing)—which was more reminiscent of the older town/gown divide—to re-conceptualizing the overall process of urban development and the universities' role in that process. In an era of heightened competition and entrepreneurialism, this process is one in which city economic development agencies and university development offices both work—separately and together—to enhance profits and generate revenue on a local scale. Universities facing budget cuts and growing competition from their peers use top shelf amenities to attract higher-income students who can pay “full freight.” Cash-strapped cities seeking to expand their tax-base woo higher-income residents who can afford luxury housing, while offering tax-breaks to developers to build that housing and preventing regulation of the landlords who rent it out. Both processes result in ever-escalating cost burdens for local residents as well as students, faculty, and staff, particularly those who are low-income and non-white.

The cases show how coalitions and collaborative research projects can help us rethink the market-oriented approach to development for both cities and universities. On the one hand, they highlight the scale and complexity of the issue, and the need for broader systemic change, including the need for public universities and cities to get more state and federal support and to generate more revenue from taxing wealth. On the other hand, they show how much more we as university researchers can do locally within community-university collaborations and coalitions, and that larger-scale demands emerge from these local interventions.

Changing development priorities and logics will require creating public fora and research sites where tenants, workers, and community stakeholders have a voice and, ultimately, can influence decision-making. This in turn requires a fundamental reconceptualization of who and

what both cities and universities are for—shifting from an approach emphasizing marketability and exchange value to one centered on equity, inclusivity, and use value. In short, in an age in which neoliberal cities align with universities to advance market-oriented development, activists and engaged scholars on campuses and in communities might forge their own alliances to resist this development. In doing so they can begin to consider the interconnectedness of their demands for the “right to the city” and the “right to the university,” and to reimagine their shared future.

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Appendix

Video Links

The two links below are segments from POPPYN's documentary on gentrification in Philadelphia. *Temple University and Displacement in North Philadelphia* focuses on the stadium controversy. *Philly organizers demand development -- without displacement* features organizations that are fighting displacement.

Temple University and Displacement in North Philadelphia:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DhXI2fWzV4> | #NorthPhilly [#gentrification](#)

Philly organizers demand development -- without displacement:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMmMdXLwMxk>

The full documentary, *Housing, Neighborhoods, and Gentrification*, is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NbjENcMous&t=274s>

POPPYN (Presenting Our Perspective on Philly Youth News), is an award-winning youth produced TV News Show in Philadelphia that airs on Public Access TV and that is available on YouTube. It is part of the University Community Collaborative, a media-based social justice initiative that provides leadership training for high school students. The Collaborative was founded by Barbara Ferman in 1997. She continues to serve as Executive Director.

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