

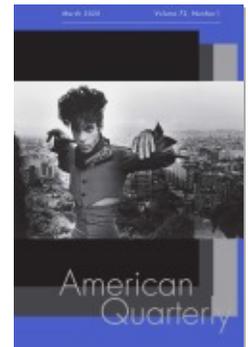


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Fire

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The University Fix and John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*

Andy Hines

John Edgar Wideman's novel *Philadelphia Fire* (1990) reconstructs the 1985 MOVE bombing, which left eleven people dead (including five children) and sixty-one homes destroyed.¹ In the novel, Cudjoe, one of three black protagonists, returns to West Philadelphia from self-imposed exile abroad to find a missing boy who fled the bombing. Soon Cudjoe's inquiry expands to the underlying political, economic, and social forces that led the Philadelphia police to drop a satchel charge from a helicopter onto the compound that housed the liberation group. Cudjoe's quest to find meaning in MOVE's destruction swerves away from the archives of public documents or the public airing of grief and responsibility brought before the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission. Instead, he looks to "grasp the pattern" of the city by coming to terms with what shaped him and his time in West Philadelphia.²

Cudjoe identifies this pattern in Philadelphia's geography, its planned and plotted spatial arrangements, which carry an extended history of violence, dis-possession, and exploitation. The novel's epigraph from William Penn's original plan for the city reflects this diagnosis for the MOVE catastrophe: "Let every house be placed, if the Person pleases, in the middle of its platt . . . so there may be ground on each side, for Gardens or Orchards or fields, that it may be a greene Country Towne, w^{ch} will never be burnt, and always be wholesome" ([vii]). Penn invokes the white settler imperative of improvement and liberal order guided by a pursuit of mastery over nature. That Philadelphia "will never be burnt" suggests that the incursions and burns necessary to clear the land for rational development are left for the surround, the area outside the settler's fortifications.³ This deliberate bracketing of the burn's violence allows the city to appear as "wholesome" for those with the capacity to own a plot. Indeed, as Katherine McKittrick argues, "prevailing spatial organization gives a coherency and rationality to uneven geographic processes and arrangements: a city plan, for example, can (and often does) reiterate social class distinctions, race and gender segregation, and (in)accessibility to and from specific districts; the flows of money, spaces, infrastructure and people are uneven, in that the built

environment privileges and therefore mirrors, white heterosexual, capitalist, and patriarchal geopolitical needs.”⁴ William Penn’s plan for Philadelphia—and the political, economic, and social grammars of settler colonialism and slavery that make it possible ideologically and materially—structures the city’s ongoing development, rather than marking a singular founding event.⁵

While Philadelphia’s late seventeenth-century plan haunts its ongoing development, Wideman identifies a contemporary agent for that plan’s execution: the University of Pennsylvania. *Philadelphia Fire* depicts the University of Pennsylvania as a key actor in perpetuating the uneven development of Philadelphia both through the university’s urban renewal and gentrification activities and by its production of a class to manage the extraction of surplus from nonwhite racialized populations. The management of surplus extraction extends both to labor power and to the territory that these populations precariously inhabit. On the terms of William Penn’s plan, higher education institutions channel the necessary social forces to structure urban geography. When referring to Penn’s plan for Philadelphia, we might think of its dual valence—it is the plan of the university for its city, as well as the plan of the settler city’s founder—as highlighting the continuity between the university’s spatial will and the spatial arrangement, development, and improvement that occurs with Philadelphia’s settlement.

In suggesting that the university plays a crucial role in creating, managing, and policing surplus extractions from nonwhite people, as well as providing a spatial fix to idle urban land use, *Philadelphia Fire* anticipates a recent turn in scholarly inquiries to the contemporary and historical function of the American university.⁶ That turn can be understood as an exploration of how “all of higher education benefits from inequality in some way,” as Tressie McMillan Cottom has put it.⁷ Some of these benefits include the exploitation of adjunct faculty, service workers, and custodial personnel, many of whom are only employed by the university via private contractors; revenue gleaned from a pool of students who rely on the credentialing provided by the university in an unstable and flexible economy, not to mention growing amounts of debt students take on to finance their educations; and the financial returns wrought by massive investments in stock markets, real estate holdings, and debt. Conventional wisdom based in a nostalgia for the mid-twentieth century public investment in the university system suggests that many of the above extractive aspects of the academy are tied to its privatization. Yet, as Craig Steven Wilder argues, since their start in the seventeenth century, “American colleges were not innocent or passive beneficiaries of conquest and colonial slavery.”⁸ American universities have padded endowments with proceeds from the sale of enslaved

people and with scrip from lands plundered from Native Americans; they have also been the intellectual engine of the military-industrial complex of the mid-twentieth century that allowed the US to exercise its imperial will.⁹ Higher education has long perpetuated the logics of slavery and settler colonialism to accumulate capital. That is, universities and the public good they purport to produce have always been limited by a “racialized conception of property implemented by force and ratified by law,” what Cheryl Harris has termed “whiteness as property.”¹⁰

In this essay, I read *Philadelphia Fire* alongside a growing body of scholarship that investigates the history of the university's role in reinforcing, perpetuating, enacting, and benefiting from whiteness as property. With my reading, which fuses interpretive insights from fiction with analysis of Penn's material activities in West Philadelphia, I add to critical ethnic studies analyses of the university an account of how the university in the twenty-first century is entangled in the violence of dispossession and extraction that has long marked urban geographies built on and for the logics of slavery and conquest. I focus on how the expansion of the university's physical plant relies on “the seizure and appropriation of land” that is sustained by the tendency to see its management of difference as a public good rather than what it is: “the seizure and appropriation of labor.”¹¹ My argument sheds light on the national trend of elite and flagship university expansion, and explains how this trend continues, even during a time of crisis for the funding of education and the subsequent restructuring of academic labor within the academy.

While universities are still important for credentialing and creating a class of workers to manage capital's idle surpluses, that role is arguably growing secondary to its capacity to accumulate land by dispossession and to accumulate capital by exploiting workers and students. The growth of universities as “anchor institutions” for urban economic development highlights that these functions are central to the contemporary expression of racial capitalism and to the organization of urban space in the last several decades. In 1999 the Brookings Institution reported that “in every one of the twenty largest cities in the United States an institution of higher education or an academic medical center is among the top ten private employers, despite differences among these cities in age, region, and development pattern.”¹² Engaging the massive expansion of a different privatizing public institution, Ruth Wilson Gilmore has argued that in California the solution to idle mid-twentieth century surpluses of population, land, finance capital, and state capacities was the construction, financing, and filling of prisons, a solution she calls the “prison fix.”¹³ Universities are not the same as prisons, though Stefano Harney and Fred Moten provocatively suggest

that in their neglect of sociality, the university makes a commitment to the same underlying principles that undergird incarceration in the United States.¹⁴ While Harney and Moten's philosophical and theoretical intervention deserves lengthier consideration, my interest here is in how the university provides an institution for capital (more so recently) and (less so) for the state to solve political economic crises. As I show, universities mobilize and manage idle surpluses by expanding their plant, fortifying their boundaries with security, and becoming a locus for the reproduction of a shifting racialization scheme in the era of diversity and inclusion. Because the university embeds capital in its arrangement and reconfiguration of urban space to ensure the further accumulation of surplus, after Gilmore, I posit a "university fix."

The university's role in restructuring urban space and managing the extraction of surplus from land and populations is not unique to Philadelphia; rather, it is a national trend among elite private as well as public flagship universities. Though I focus on the University of Pennsylvania in this essay, it is easy to find examples of university-led spatial development, accumulation by dispossession, or predatory policing at similar institutions across the country. (Anecdotally, I could cite efforts in the three different cities I have lived while writing this essay—by Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Indiana University and the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville, and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore—as examples.) To put this differently, my claims about Penn in this essay can be extended to other American urban universities, though particular stories would necessarily require an attention to their local contexts. Indeed, activists have recently drawn attention to Howard University's role in policing and developing LeDroit-Shaw in Washington, DC, Johns Hopkins University's reconfiguration of Baltimore's Middle East to Eager Park, Columbia University's expansion to Manhattanville, and the University of Chicago's policing practices on the South Side.

At the same time, an increase in uprisings on college campuses related to the conditions of students, faculty, and workers of color within university "communities" highlights that there is mounting resistance to diversity and inclusion regimes, which are official antiracisms that make few attempts to correct the material inequities of the racial state.¹⁵ In fact, many argue that these programs actually perpetuate the very conditions they are rhetorically positioned against. As Nancy Leong suggests, a "superficial view of diversity consequently leads white individuals and predominantly white institutions to treat nonwhiteness as a prized commodity."¹⁶ To successfully manage minority difference in the terms of state-sanctioned antiracisms is to acquire a sort of capital that can then be leveraged for gentrification, the outsourcing of service and security

labor, and the restructuring of academic labor forces. For Gilmore, writing about the university, these diversity activities can be described as what Antonio Gramsci termed a passive revolution, the purpose of which is to “restore . . . the fundamental social relations of productions on a more stable basis for the future.”¹⁷ Recent uprisings have shown that the university is a contemporary point of convergence for the extraction of value from nonwhite people through diversity and inclusion regimes and the always violent accumulation of territory necessary for the continued accumulation of capital.

With one hand, the university seeks to address the harms of inequality through an administrative diversity framework; with the other, it enacts those same harms and intensifies inequality through debt regimes, exploitative labor practices, a prestige economy, and its spatial expansion. *Philadelphia Fire* provides an occasion to see how those hands work together as it considers at length how the management of minority difference on campus is entangled with the uneven development of geography and capital enacted by university building projects and by campus police.¹⁸ Wideman had a firsthand perspective on the University of Pennsylvania's invention of University City through urban renewal, gentrification, and the capitalization of an inclusion regime. His career as a student, basketball star, and later faculty member at Penn from 1959 to 1973 is contiguous both with the university's urban renewal activities in West Philadelphia and with its development of strategies to incorporate and manage minority difference. In 1959, when Wideman enrolled as an undergraduate student, Penn spearheaded the formation of the West Philadelphia Corporation (WPC), a trans-institutional entity built to organize urban renewal activities, akin to University of Chicago's Hyde Park and Columbia's Morning-side Heights organizations. Wideman was Penn's second black tenured faculty member; in 1970 he started the campus's Afro-American Studies Program. By the time Wideman left Penn in 1973, the WPC had changed an area of West Philadelphia called Black Bottom into University City, a neighborhood organized around the University City Science Center, just north of Penn's campus.

Both in *Philadelphia Fire* and in public statements, Wideman situates his experience at Penn within the colonial dimensions of its plan. In a 2002 interview, he says Penn was a “little island of white folk in the middle of a huge, black residential community. Kids from West Philadelphia did not attend the University of Pennsylvania, so we lived in a kind of walled city.”¹⁹ This language of fortification and the threatening surround echoes Penn's own logic for its intervention into West Philadelphia. In 1956 Martin Meyerson, associate professor of city and regional planning at the time and later Penn's president from 1970 to 1981, stated that redeveloping West Philadelphia was necessary

to prevent the neighborhood “from becoming a sea of residential slums and commercial and institutional islands.”²⁰

Wideman takes up the island and walled city metaphors in his novel through an extended textual interplay with Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, an important play for decolonial writers. In Wideman’s reading, *The Tempest*—via Prospero’s preoccupation with books and the role they play in his enslavement and territorial dispossession of Caliban—presents a template for the university’s joint role in the white, Western project of racial capitalism: liberal education becomes a way to manage difference and its profit, all while the institution that supports such an education shapes the environment to maximize the value it can accumulate from difference.

If invoking *The Tempest* is one way that Wideman considers how the university appropriates land and labor, then tracking the emergent antagonism between black professionals and black people on the streets provides another means.²¹ MOVE, a group that shunned the trappings and subjectivity of whiteness as property, becomes a proxy for discussions about how middle-class education fractures black racial solidarity. For instance, Cudjoe consorts with his friend Timbo, a fellow black Penn alumnus who works for the city’s black mayor, and the two come to an impasse over how the city should have dealt with the mostly black MOVE organization. The novel’s third part follows J.B., a black homeless man who also attended Penn. When Wideman’s own voice interrupts the text reflecting on his son, who has been incarcerated since 1986, the novel provokes questions about whether the trappings afforded to black people through middle-class and institutional prestige really ever create a buffer against the carceral antiblack violence of the state.

The book’s narrative challenge is to disentangle a liberal embrace of objectivity and rationality promoted, portrayed, and spatially enacted by the university and its well-educated subjects. MOVE, while important to the novel’s pursuit of these questions, serves as the horizon for the violence that must unfold when strategies of slavery and conquest are articulated in terms synonymous with the public good or with the economic stability of US urban centers. *Philadelphia Fire* is crucial to my analysis of the university fix because it attempts to generate a narrative form that works against the clarity of the objective and rational procedures that it otherwise indicts. The novel investigates an event—the MOVE bombing—and finds that it is the result of immediate political and economic factors as well as vibrations that have been churning within the colonial city since its founding. It also shows how the university does what it can to suppress its role in upheaval and violence that supports the ongoing construction of a clean, quiet space of intellectual reflection.

In the first part of the essay, I provide an account of the history of the University of Pennsylvania as it relates to the employment and perpetuation of the logics of whiteness as property. While there have been accounts of Penn's activities in West Philadelphia, as well as accounts of the university's early historical ties to slavery, there has been less attention to the continuity of these logics from the university's founding to the near present. In addition to outlining the conditions that led to the "university fix," this context proves essential to my reading of Wideman's novel in the second part of the essay. That section analyzes *Philadelphia Fire* to show why the university's capacity to manage minority difference has been crucial to the university's spatial expansion. The essay's final section engages the novel's attention to narrative form as an instrument by which the university's spatial expansion is justified through settler logics and how a reconfiguration of that form can be employed to potentially resist such territorializations.

The Urban Frontier and the University

In a 1953 Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority report, a woman who moved to an urban renewal zone in the northern part of the city exclaimed that "we're carving out a brand new community here. We like to think of ourselves as modern-day pioneers."²² This person's statement embraces a metaphor that sees the American city as a frontier. As a number of critical urban geographers have pointed out, the invocation of frontier rhetoric to describe both suburbanization and urban renewal draws on the American framework of settler expansion, which was most clearly articulated in Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 "Frontier Thesis."²³ Neil Smith suggests that "the 20th-century American city came to be seen by the white middle class as an urban wilderness; it was, and for many still is, the habitat of disease and crime, danger and disorder. Indeed, these were the central fears expressed throughout the 1950s and 1960s by urban theorists who focused on urban 'blight' and 'decline,' 'social malaise' in the inner city, the 'pathology' of urban life."²⁴ In this framework, Martin Meyerson's 1956 invocation of Penn being surrounded by residential slums highlights the racialized and territorial opportunities presented by figuring urban space as "wilderness" or a "jungle."²⁵

In this section, I provide a thumbnail sketch of how the University of Pennsylvania relied on "the seizure and appropriation of land," aligning it with the land accumulation tactics of whiteness as property. While the university's early history merely reflects the white settler tendency toward the appropriation of the frontier figured as *terra nullius*, its activities beginning in the second half

of the twentieth century illustrate how the university comes to take on a new relationship to the state's efforts to support, manage, and enable the circulation and accumulation of a number of surpluses. (Later, the university will join the transnational entities that transcend state power in pursuit of shaping the globe in capital's image.) Beyond the intensification of academe's reliance on federal funding for basic and applied research, as well as an influx in student population due to the GI Bill, the university began to be seen as an ally and an agent in exercising the spatial will of the state through urban renewal. At the same time, universities developed a new interest in shaping government policy on matters beyond education and in gaining access to the state's monopoly over violence via the professionalization and formalization of university police forces.

Penn's midcentury concern about the slums that surrounded campus was not the first time the institution expressed anxiety about its greater setting. The university has an extended history of seeking new territory to escape what it perceived as challenges to its terms of order. The University of Pennsylvania was originally situated in what is now Center City Philadelphia, first at Fourth Street and Arch in 1749 and then at Ninth and Chestnut Streets in 1801. After the Civil War, the university made a move west across the Schuylkill River, citing the fact that its neighborhood was "vile" and "growing viler every day."²⁶ One factor that led campus leaders to see the neighborhood as increasingly vile was that Penn's campus was adjacent to the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia, the area of the city with the highest concentration of African American residents. This border was a flashpoint for antiblack antagonism throughout the first half of the nineteenth century; organized and systemic violence toward black people and the destruction of property occurred just six blocks from the campus on Lombard Street in 1830 and again in 1842.²⁷ Given prevailing anti-urban attitudes as well as ideas about the negative influence of urban space on intellectual work, Penn's transit away from the industrial heart of Philadelphia mirrored that of other universities, such as Columbia in New York, Washington University in St. Louis, and the University of Pittsburgh.²⁸ To leave a place that threatened the previously ordered site of learning, to "remove" elsewhere, is to invoke a settler tradition both in macro and micro scales.²⁹

Soon the city that Penn sought to escape grew closer to its West Philadelphia campus, and the university considered fleeing its neighborhood yet again. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the university's administration weighed a move to lands it held in Valley Forge. These discussions intensified as the neighborhood surrounding the university went from being predominantly white and working class in 1940 to being two-thirds black by 1960, due to deindustrialization and white flight in Philadelphia. The potential

move seventeen miles to the northwest was motivated both by the changing racial and economic makeup of Penn's surroundings and, according to Margaret Pugh O'Mara, by a desire to exclude women and immigrant students, who likely did not have the resources to relocate temporarily to habitations outside the city.³⁰

Nevertheless, Penn held significant physical assets at its West Philadelphia campus, making it difficult to abandon its sunk capital at depreciated rates. By the time Meyerson expressed his worry about the sea of residential slums in 1956, Penn's administration had seemingly calculated that the institution could benefit from developing the area that surrounded it, rather than abandoning it. That is, from the institution's perspective, there was something to be gained this time by staying in place. This led to a different strategy toward university expansion than had previously been endeavored.

The university's urban renewal strategy in this era highlights that by the mid- to late 1950s urban geographies were perceived to be valuable if black and poor residents could be displaced.³¹ This strategy was possible because the neighborhood surrounding Penn's campus had come to be seen as a zone of violence; a major newspaper called the perpetrators of a violent crime in the area "cowardly savages" and that they were merely representative of the broader population who were "uncivilized and bound to be a menace to society."³² To the black residents who lived between Thirty-Fourth and Fortieth Streets and from Powelton and Lancaster Avenues to Chestnut Street, the neighborhood was simply called Black Bottom. Yet the WPC's study of the neighborhood stated that the area "never had any identification."³³ With this assessment, the WPC erased the presence of black social life there; it deemed the neighborhood "Area #3." University historians and leaders insisted—and still insist—that the area had only been predominantly black for twenty years, a temporal span that did not meet their criteria for a legitimate community.

In their use of arbitrary criteria for group legitimacy, the university and its development corporation generated favorable conditions to create public good from the questioned areas by making them more valuable. The land in West Philadelphia had become idle. A fix was in order to realize its relatively high unrealized value. Such a fix was only possible because the land's current inhabitants were black, a racial formation in which those marked as such are always "out of place" and thus vulnerable to forced placement and displacement.³⁴ Growing unemployment among the neighborhood's black residents due to discriminatory hiring practices, and the movement of industrial manufacturing to suburban locations, left the residents of Black Bottom vulnerable to "the repertoire of strategies . . . whereby [settlers] have also dealt with the

native surplus.”³⁵ In other words, as a reserve labor force, a surplus, the black residents of Black Bottom were subject to what Patrick Wolfe calls “the logic of elimination,” which includes strategies of spatial sequestration, renaming for the purpose of effacement of existing presence (soon, Black Bottom and other areas near Penn and Drexel would come to be called University City by real estate officials), forced movement, and even assimilation. In short, this was an opportunity for growth in plant and reputation for a campus that wanted to launch itself on the national stage, all at the expense of an existing predominantly black community, variously made surplus. These institutional aspirations were supported by city, state, and federal agencies hoping to lure business and white middle-class residents back to the city.

Penn and the newly formed WPC worked to gain support from city, state, and federal agencies. With fourteen other universities, the WPC lobbied Congress for Section 112 of the US Housing Act of 1959, which put forth an extra two to three dollars in federal funding for every dollar spent on urban renewal projects by colleges and universities. Universities began to leverage both the criminalization and the movability of black people and tropes of *terra nullius* to make possible their capital growth. For instance, in a hearing about Section 112 before Congress, Charles Farnsley, general counsel of the University of Louisville and former mayor of Louisville, claimed that the university could “fill that vacuum in cities,” the supposedly empty spaces that were left after white people fled to the suburbs.³⁶ Section 112 became law, in part, on the tendency of university representatives to portray the university as a solution for criminal populations and for devalued neighborhoods. Universities could, as Farnsley put it, “bring back the middle class” to the city.³⁷

In particular, as Catherine Pugh O’Mara has outlined in detail, Penn and the WPC used Section 112 to expand its interest in applied science, what Vannevar Bush was then calling the “endless frontier.” For the WPC, this meant a massive physical and capital outlay for a for-profit science and technology center modeled after Stanford’s complex in Silicon Valley. Beyond the fact that a for-profit science center could capitalize on the growing knowledge economy, the formation of University City Science Center allowed those currently affiliated with nonprofit institutions to otherwise profit from their research and to conduct experiments that might generate controversy or conflict with a university’s mission. Not only did the Science Center require a massive displacement, destruction, and construction project in Black Bottom; it also created more jobs for an ostensibly white and professional workforce.³⁸

Despite the forced eviction of residents and the construction of new facilities, the Science Center was largely unsuccessful, especially compared to similar

institutions in Silicon Valley or the Route 128 corridor outside Boston. In their history of Penn's growth since World War II, John L. Puckett and Mark Frazier Lloyd state with emphasis that the science center *did not* "realize the stated mission that justified its creation."³⁹ In fact, the Science Center became more of a liability for Penn than anything else. Upon learning that Dow Chemical was developing Agent Orange in the complex, Penn students occupied College Hall, the main administration building, and demanded that the university stop producing weapons of war and take a more community-based approach to its expansion. As a result of the student uprising, the Quadripartite Commission was formed, which, at least in name, sought the perspective of community stakeholders in development in West Philadelphia.

The student protest had other unintended effects. First, in line with many campuses facing student protest, in reaction, Penn bolstered the size and capacity of its police force. As John J. Sloan argues, in the years after 1968, the roles of campus cops shifted from protecting physical plant to the typical duties of sworn police officers. This professionalization of the campus police largely occurred because of the concerns of campus administrators in letting city police operate on campus.⁴⁰ In the early 1970s, the Penn campus guard separated from the Department of Buildings and Grounds to form its own department; grew to fifty-five armed officers, more than doubling its size from the 1950s; and received new uniforms and more mobile, though still outdated, patrol vehicles. During the same period, the university added sixty new spotlights on campus, provided buses for university personnel traveling as far west as Forty-Seventh Street and into Powelton Village, and installed safety phones at key sites on campus.

Second, despite the growth of the campus police force, student concern about campus development was just one of several factors that led to a slowdown in the university's spatial expansion. Another was the fact that, like much of the country, Penn faced a financial crisis in the early 1970s, which limited the power of the West Philadelphia Corporation until the 1990s. As a result, urban renewal activities were put on pause, much to the detriment of the now-fractured communities surrounding the universities. Neil Smith supplies an explanation of why ceasing urban renewal was at times more detrimental than continuing it: "Regardless of how *socially* destructive urban renewal was—and it was socially destructive—it was actually very successful *economically* in laying the foundation for the phase of redevelopment, rehabilitation, land use conversion, and ultimately private-market gentrification that would follow."⁴¹ The pause in the 1970s and 1980s would create favorable conditions for the university's later economic development activities in

the neighborhood. Increased violent crime, declining property values, and growing unemployment all became elements of the university's case to spur additional economic development activities. In her book about her work on Penn's "revitalization" efforts in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, former Penn president Judith Rodin counts idle capacities and a deteriorating social situation in the neighborhood among the reasons for the university's intervention: "The facts spoke for themselves: crime was rampant, the public schools were failing, and housing prices were stagnant. It had become clear to the trustees that if Penn did not intercede, the community's problems would ultimately become the University's problems."⁴² The university fix is a solution to a problem the university itself created.

Philadelphia Fire primarily takes place during the late 1980s, when Penn continued to secure its borders but remained cautious with capital investments in West Philadelphia. On the one hand, this approach may have appeared to heed the mistakes the institution had made in ignoring the residents of its surrounding neighborhoods in the earlier decades. On the other hand, a passive approach heightened the uneven development of the city that the university eventually capitalized on in the mid-1990s. One of the novel's narrators and protagonists, Cudjoe, describes how the police enforced uneven development in Philadelphia via racial hierarchies embedded in citizenship and economic potential:

Everybody had zones. Addicts, prostitutes, porn merchants, derelicts. Even people who were black and poor had a zone. Everybody granted the right to lie in the bed they'd made for themselves. As long as they didn't contaminate good citizens who disapproved. As long as the beds available to good citizens who wished to profit or climb in occasionally. As long as everybody knew they had to give up their zone, scurry down off the hill, no questions asked, when the cops blew the whistle. (45)

Cudjoe's commentary on zones highlights the fact that citizenship, particularly "good" citizenship, is the precondition to a right to the city. That right includes the ability to direct the resources of the state's monopoly on violence and, ultimately, to reconfigure unilaterally the spatial arrangement of those zones if such an arrangement is economically advantageous. The campus police play an important role, too. They enforce the emergent and shifting boundaries of the university zone rather than that of existing, private plant. Penn's status as a good citizen and an advocate for good citizenship—recall midcentury arguments about the university as crucial to bringing the white middle class back to the city—put the institution in a unique position to marshal these forces on a massive scale.⁴³

The reconfiguration of the relationship between university and government prompts grave concern from Cudjoe. Upon learning that the university was closing the only academic unit doing material work to prevent the further deterioration of West Philadelphia communities, Cudjoe wonders aloud about the ways that Penn had taken on the role of government, but with an even tighter delimitation of its constituency. “Whose University is it, after all?” he asks. “Whom is it meant to serve? Which constituencies laying claims on its resources were qualified petitioners? Who could the university afford to ignore?” (113). The process of governing in terms of its interest—governance that seems to invoke the biopolitical imperative to “let die”—occurs via rational and apparently democratic and objective processes. Committees, fact-finding efforts, and democratic impulses provide “clean means that can be trotted out to accomplish the most vicious ends” (113).

These vicious ends stemmed from the university’s exercise of its spatial will in West Philadelphia. Margaret Jones, a character in Wideman’s novel modeled after Ramona Africa, the survivor of the MOVE atrocity, complains to Cudjoe about the strategic policing in the neighborhoods adjacent to Penn’s campus. “You think police do anything about [drug deals]” near Clark Park, located several blocks away from campus and inside the university’s police jurisdiction: “Hell no. Not till one of these little white chicks slinking around here ODs and turns up dead, then they’ll come down the corner like gangbusters” (32). Margaret’s comment highlights how certain bodies are criminalized and others are vulnerable, feminized, and dehumanized (“little white chicks”), meaning that they are in need of protection from the patriarchal racial state or, in this case, the university.⁴⁴ The scholar la paperson suggests that technologies of antiblackness generate “criminal presence” and argues that such ontological impositions on the person can be combined with technologies that create the “spatial and fleshly immediacy of settler colonialism.”⁴⁵ The combination of these technologies explains the ways that criminal presence has a negative impact on property value. Invoked by Rodin, broken windows theory, which correlates petty crimes and property damage to neighborhood safety, highlights a particular expression of a collapse of the labor value of a black body with the potential surplus value of land. Policing and the related production of criminality are strategically deployed to manipulate the perceived need for land acquisition and the production of a space of security.

In addition to installing more lighting and other safety features, Penn’s physical expansion included the creation of superblocks, where existing streets were closed to facilitate large high-rise towers. In the novel, a victim of this reconfiguration was the “trifling little corner joint,” a bar called “The Carousel,” where student and neighborhood residents would imbibe together.

As Timbo drives Cudjoe past where The Carousel used to sit, Cudjoe thinks, “By then most the shit around it torn down, too. They were building those high-rise dorms across on Chestnut and everything north was being urban-removed” (85). Timbo, a black city employee and Cudjoe’s Penn classmate, was already wishing he could profit from the uneven development of urban space at the university’s behest. Property owners win both from the rising price of real estate and from the related short supply of affordable housing: “They cramming three four families in one-family houses. Hell. If I owned a house in West Philly I’d rent it and move down here. A damned good investment. . . . Three families each paying to rent your old crib so you can meet your condo note and your loan note” (78–79). Timbo makes explicit how property owners can accumulate via dispossession while living elsewhere in glimmering neighborhoods with a view.⁴⁶

After the 1978 conflict with Philadelphia police, which left one officer dead and nine MOVE members with one-hundred-year prison sentences, the city offered MOVE land outside Philadelphia to support the organization’s living practices, which included adhering to a raw diet and eschewing plumbing and trash disposal. MOVE turned down the offer and relocated to Osage Avenue, a working- and middle-class black neighborhood. MOVE stayed in Philadelphia, because it hoped to deconstruct modernity through reterritorializing the city. Unlike Penn, MOVE did not have the state on its side in its own territorializing efforts, precisely because the organization’s rejection of practices that bolster the possessive individual preferred by capital and the state, including cleanliness, safety, and domesticity. In *Philadelphia Fire*, Timbo describes MOVE as a brake on the city’s continued improvement at the hands of its black mayor, and because of this, “them and their dreadlocks had to go” (81). Timbo’s comment, as well as his fear that MOVE wanted to bring “their block [on Osage] to the jungle,” highlights the reactionary and violent administrative posture toward a territorial claim by those with no claim to property and person because of their racialization.

Because of its constituency—a vulnerable, feminized, white middle-class body—the university became a crucial institution for the marshaling of resources toward the continued uneven development of urban space. Indeed, Penn continued to garner state resources and de facto governance powers even when its urban renewal efforts arguably “failed” by certain measures. Penn reproduced fundamental notions of propriety and social belonging by making individuated subjects with the capacity to own. (MOVE did not.) That project of social reproduction allowed the university to exercise its will in producing space in Philadelphia.

The Profit of the University's Diversity Rationale

According to Jodi Melamed, universities are “central institutions for recalibrating the state, capital, and the citizenry for post-Keynesian times.”⁴⁷ This calibration necessarily involves a new racialization configuration that includes the incorporation of some racialized persons for the purpose of managing surplus populations, as well as novel forms of hierarchized difference. In *Philadelphia Fire*, the university produces the diverse managerial class at the same time as it generates a racialized class of underpaid, underemployed, and unhoused people via its spatial activities, exploitative labor practices, and student debt regimes. In this section, I show how the university's diversity rationale provides necessary support for the accumulation and movement of land and labor exercised in the university fix.

Wideman recalls that when he was a student at Penn, he felt like a “kind of test case” because “the only other black faces were people dishing out food in the cafeteria or cleaning up the place or people out on the street.”⁴⁸ In *Philadelphia Fire*, Cudjoe, who is described as the “airy other” of Wideman when Wideman himself enters the narrative, tends to describe his education as a way to evade the otherwise physical barriers of the city's racialized geography (122). While playing basketball in Clark Park, just blocks from Penn's campus, Cudjoe looks at the fencing encircling the courts and imagines that looking through it is to glimpse “how things might look from the steel-meshed window of a prison cell. Inside looking out or outside looking in” (31). The fence Cudjoe describes was built just as WPC began work on the University Science Center in the 1960s and highlights the creation of a physical barrier and a carceral logic that separates those in the university from those outside it. In this passage, Cudjoe seems to experience the material instantiation of W. E. B. Du Bois's “color-line,” which Katherine McKittrick reminds us is always “manifested by and produced in relation to the physical environment, particular and thematic racial materialities.”⁴⁹

The rhetoric of experimentation suggests ties to the scientific frontier, as well as midcentury developments in the social sciences about the so-called pathology of race. The former suggests a form of profit generated from the expanded federal funding landscape for scientific research and the creation of for-profit research centers tangentially connected to nonprofit universities. The latter—and of immediate interest here—subtends the racial liberal effort to assimilate a leadership class of African Americans, a project that justified the inclusion of black people within the university.

In the novel, recalling the “test case” rhetoric, Timbo describes his time at Penn as a vast social experiment in putting black people where they had “never been before”:

Academic welfare. Way I look at it now they was testing us. Put a handful of niggers in this test tube and shook it up and watched it bubble. Was we gon blow up or blow up the school or die or was some weird green shit gon start to foaming in the tube? Or maybe the whole idea was to see if we’d come out white. Nobody really knew the answer so they decided to experiment. We were guinea pigs. (76)

The university’s incorporation of black students seemed like a threat, but given the weapons-grade rhetoric, such an incorporation could prove as profitable as forays into the military-industrial complex. Found in Timbo’s comments are the fits and starts of capital’s global restructuring after World War II, a restructuring that necessitated a reconfiguration of racial formations to ensure capital’s further expansion and accumulation. That process required chemical weaponry in addition to new assimilative regimes. The university could provide both and thus through its diversity rationale could, in Nancy Leong’s phrasing, give “white people and predominantly white institutions the *power* to determine the value of nonwhiteness.”⁵⁰

In the 1960s this determination of value was extended only to an exclusive and exceptional group of black people. For Timbo and Cudjoe, Penn in the early 1960s existed as a site to bestow the rights and privileges pertaining thereto the language and property of whiteness on a black managerial class. This class would be subject to the penalties of racism at the same time as it could control and inflict oppression on poor black people because of its apparent transcendence of racist barriers. The presence of Timbo, Cudjoe, or even Wideman was not a fundamental interruption of the university’s task of reproducing the social order. Instead, their presence engendered an “academic welfare” designed to favor and to generate individual exceptions, rather than to extend broad social protections.

Philadelphia Fire suggests that “academic welfare” fostered by universities actually creates additional opportunities for managing and profiting from minority difference. That is, ideas about black exceptionalism and racial pathology that served as racial liberalism’s condition of possibility also justified state and capital intervention into nonwhite communities. The university has long served as a hub in producing, promoting, and circulating the questionable racial science that supported state programs of conquest, dispossession, disinvestment, segregation, and incarceration.⁵¹ Cold War welfare programs had the effect of exacerbating material inequalities in nonwhite urban areas

and increased the criminalization of these communities, a set of conditions that would lead to the move toward mass incarceration.⁵² Craig Willse argues that “the state-building project of welfare policy and administration was simultaneously a race hierarchy-building project. While subjects of the metropole were organized as national citizens, whose health became an object of state concern, colonized populations were fixed in a subordinate status as a source for extraction, not as a site of investment.”⁵³ This tension between welfare as concern and welfare as a way to generate further extraction and criminalization comes to define what the novel declares as its “central event”: Cudjoe’s attempt to stage an outdoor performance of *The Tempest* in Clark Park (132).

The performance signifies the uplifting potential of Cudjoe’s education, and, at the same time, the novel deflates that narrative. (The play is never performed due to rain.) The play, perhaps because of its decolonial history, provides a material threat to Philadelphia’s social order while justifying an intensification of the spatial and military intervention in West Philadelphia. Conveniently, this serves as the novel’s reading of *The Tempest’s* plot. The play takes place on an “uninhabited island,” which was actually inhabited before it was colonized by Prospero. For Caliban, a person Prospero keeps as a slave, Prospero seems to garner power through books and language. Indeed, throughout the play, learning—education—is understood to be the means by which profit and accumulation are made possible. At one point, speaking to his daughter, Prospero asks, “Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit than other princes can?” (I.ii.172–73). Yet the profit of education also can be used against Prospero. Caliban’s acquisition of Prospero’s language becomes his own “profit,” a way he can “curse” Prospero and his acts. Despite this threat, Caliban does not manage to unleash his revolutionary potential; Prospero’s language is the instrument that deprives Caliban of his territory. As Cudjoe puts it, “Play got to end the way it always does. Prospero still the boss” (144).

When Cudjoe works with black children to put on *The Tempest* in Philadelphia, the effort does not yield a displacement of existing hierarchies of race and class. Many years after the play, Cudjoe discovers a gang of kids who tag walls throughout the city with the letters “MPT,” money power things, a clear appropriation of the settler state’s language of profit.⁵⁴ The gang’s name, Kaliban Kiddie Korps, implies that the group is a counterforce to the aims of the Ku Klux Klan. At the same time, by its reference to the “kiddie corps” of the federal Head Start program and the enslaved subject in Shakespeare’s play, the name suggests that its revolutionary aims are a result of racial liberalism gone amok. The group’s tags were, in Cudjoe’s view, a “transforming presence,” but the implication that they are at the same time a sort of “tribal

art” seemingly justifies the fact that their expression required new means of militarized management (88). He learns about the group from Timbo, who has acquired intelligence on them through “the undercover dudes from the Civil Disobedience Unit” (89). Carrying his own credential from a system of education—his profit—Timbo acknowledges the city’s role in intervening in this situation, but also implies that such problems can be solved only with intervention from private entities, like universities. Indeed, as Willse argues, after the collapse of Keynesianism, “social programs serve the economy directly as *part of the economy*, as a social welfare industry,” that accumulates capital via the established material inequalities of society.⁵⁵

The diversity rationale that allows for continued capital accumulation via the material inequities of society is also the very thing that continues to produce racialized populations in need of management and policing. As one man puts it in the novel, the city’s black mayor had been elected for one purpose: “Nigger control” (42). Throughout the book, impoverished black West Philadelphians in the late 1980s recognize their position within the valuation nexus of racial capitalism. Margaret Jones tells Cudjoe that the only lessons black students learn in school is that “all they pay you is nigger wages, enough to keep you guessing, keep you hungry, keep you scared, keep you coming back” to work (14–15). From a young age, black children in West Philadelphia are taught that they will be and will remain labor, members of the grand surplus reserve army necessary for the movement of capital, but little else; the growth of this army will soon be managed not by the neighborhood’s chain link fence but by the razor wire of the prison.

Wideman’s novel shows the university producing and endorsing a racialization regime that places certain exceptional black students in an antagonistic class relation to black workers and other black people. Timbo, the Penn-educated cultural ambassador for the City of Philadelphia, provides an example for how the university’s education of black people reinforced the extant racial order, rather than disrupted it. Indeed, Timbo’s movement in the novel from Penn to the City of Philadelphia suggests how these solidarity-breaking antagonisms move from campus to government. The black Philadelphia mayor during the MOVE bombing, Wilson Goode, for example, earned his master’s in public administration from Penn in 1971, and Ed Rendell, the white district attorney who filed a warrant for the arrest of MOVE members in 1985, graduated from Penn with a BA in 1965. The university serves as a site for the generation of new island and prison logics in a racial capitalist regime, a site further bolstered by shifts in capacities in the US economy, shifts difficult to glimpse because of the widespread liberal belief in upward mobility and success fostered by higher

education. Arguably, the production of these logics is made visible by Wideman's insistence on a narrative form that undermines certain liberal distinctions between fiction and history and past and present. Wideman makes this form, which in Kathryn Hume's terms "layers" *The Tempest*, William Penn's city plan, his own son's incarceration, and the MOVE bombing to see surplus, as well as the life of the surplus, differently.⁵⁶

The Grammar of the University Fix

At the beginning of this essay, I suggested that Cudjoe's goal in *Philadelphia Fire* is to "grasp the pattern" of the city. The pattern has been one of the university fix, in which a higher education institution becomes the instrument that mobilizes idle urban capacities in land, labor, administration, and finance. As capital restructured after World War II, university credentialing extended the privileges of whiteness as property to small portions of groups racialized as nonwhite. While this process allowed universities to accumulate capital through their management of minority difference, it also had a territorial expression, as described in *Philadelphia Fire*. That spatial intervention came in terms of walls, professionalized police, and other efforts to secure urban space for white, middle-class domesticity. Importantly, the university fix did not invent these tactics on its own. While these were new developments in one sense, they were also adaptations and reproductions of the means of accumulating land and labor during the years of settler colonialism and slavery. That is, the university of Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire* is haunted by its past entanglements in slavery and settler colonialism at the same time as it exercises those tactics in new forms in the present.⁵⁷

Wideman's novel frequently violates the lines between fact and fiction while pressing on genre norms. What it offers is an alternative definition of literary realism that circumvents the faculty office and the university campus for authorization and endorsement. I read this critical view of the university as the novel's larger attempt to expose the fact that the criminalization of blackness and the settler projection of *terra nullius* are the unmasked processes by which the university presents itself as a good citizen and, thus, an appropriate steward for reconfiguring urban space in the interest of the broader community. *Philadelphia Fire's* formal intervention suggests an analytic framework that can dissemble the university's reproduction of the logics of what Hortense Spillers calls the American grammar book, or the figuration of death where there is social life. Spillers describes the reduction of the black body to flesh as a violent affair, "that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment

under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography.”⁵⁸ Yet, for Spillers, because flesh provides the cornerstone for the American grammar, those who are determined by its intersection with the body hold a revolutionary capacity like no other. If there is a place where the university fix does not cohere—and where it may be subject to challenge—it is in the tension and blur around the university’s discursive renderings of race and gender.⁵⁹ *Philadelphia Fire* shows the ways that conversations about the university’s political economy led by minorities studies perspectives are transmogrified to be about the university—or, the humanities—in crisis.

Philadelphia Fire offers a particular warning to university faculty, who often fail to see the forest for the trees when it comes to the university’s material operations. That is, outsized attention to the crisis in the humanities—real declines in resources and majors—consumes attention and distracts from the activities occurring in administrative departments within the same institution. J.B., the homeless graduate of Penn, finds that these distractions occur because of what he terms as realism. He suggests that “what we need is realism, the naturalistic panorama of a cityscape unfolding, Demographics, statistics, objectivity. Perhaps a view of the city from on high, the fish-eye lens watching everything within its distortion, skyscraper heads together, rising like sucked up through a straw” (157). The site of realism’s production is a faculty office, where a professor seeks to “achieve academic prominence” by her or his ability to parse this massive influx of data. Yet that objective eye of Enlightenment bends through a “fish-eye lens” that earlier in the novel Cudjoe connects to the imperial project of the English (127); the pulled edges of the fish-eye lens are what enable Caliban’s island to appear uninhabited and later for Black Bottom to appear as empty space. There is something dangerous and tendentious in the realist project that seeks “to track the birth of the first city,” because to track it in terms of objectivity is in J.B.’s imagination “to keep the blessed event happening, Mama’s baby, Daddy’s maybe” (169). As J.B. describes it, the realist mode is a narrative form that carries forth the proprietary assumptions that support the racialized, possessive individual. The possessive individual is both pursued and reproduced in the objective insistence on measuring the city’s inevitable improvement, a measure that requires the university’s self-styled realism.

Here, J.B.’s citation of Spillers’s “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” supplies the answer to the realist professor’s question while suggesting a radical realism, differently attentive to the university’s material processes. Most relevant to J.B.’s passing mention of the essay, the making of body into flesh occurs through the quantification logics of the slave ship. “Gender,” for instance, takes on an immediate materiality—mass and volume—

rather than a figurative connotation, such as a relation to domesticity. Paired with race, these signs become necessary for the justification of state-sanctioned violence and social death essential to the project of Man; this grammar can “kill” in a way that sticks might not on their own.⁶⁰ The spatial arrangements of black subjection and exploitation emerge from these grammars, including the hold of the slave ship, which denies the figurative and material possibility of domesticity to the black people forced inside it. In other words, spatial and infrastructural (re)arrangements are essential to enforcing and producing the figuration of racist ideas at the same time as they are essential to racist material practice.

The reference to Spillers is important for two reasons. First, it suggests that the flesh-making logics of the American grammar book are ever present in the university-generated history of the city and in the development wrought to shape urban space into the university's physical plant. This is the idea that settler colonialism and slavery were not one event in the history of American universities but an ongoing structure that these institutions reproduce; it is, in J.B.'s phrasing, “to keep the blessed event happening.” Second, by invoking Spillers, J.B. recalls the revolutionary capacity of the position of the flesh. While not a black woman, J.B., who is homeless, is stripped of a relation to domesticity, registering the fact that there remains black life when the university fix creates social and civic death in its wake. With J.B.'s redefinition of realism come connections between the university-fueled invention of University City, the criminalization of a people without place, and the persistent social life that tags university property with a redesign of the extant social order, a call to dismantle the property regime of money, power, things.

MOVE threatened to do just that in 1985, violating norms of property upkeep and civility. Yet because of the differential enforcement of urban zones, the situation on Osage Avenue escalated beyond the city's capacity for de-escalation. The commission charged by the City of Philadelphia to investigate the event closed its report by writing:

The Commission believes that the decisions of various city officials to permit construction of the bunker, to allow the use of high explosives, and in a 90-minute period, the firing of at least 10,000 rounds of ammunition at the house, to sanction the dropping of a bomb on an occupied row house, and to let a fire burn in a row house occupied by children, would not likely have been made had the MOVE house and its occupants been situated in a comparable white neighborhood.⁶¹

There was little question that in addition to the wood and bricks that housed the black working and middle class, what fueled the fire was spatially enforced

antiblack racism. Wideman's novel suggests that this investigative concession is limited by the realist data it takes in. More simply, the commission's conclusion is inevitably limited, as the MOVE bombing is a spectacular example of what J.B. identifies as the everyday, "blessed event" of the city's relentless spatial development. Wideman's novel asserts that black imaginaries, that black social life, can animate this accounting beyond its limited parameters. When they do, the university fix snaps into view as part of the history of antiblack racism and conquest in American cities.

Notes

1. The MOVE name refers to the fact that "everything that's alive moves" and is not an acronym. Like Wideman's novel, the present essay is structured around the MOVE bombing but does not address it fully or directly. For those seeking a fuller account of MOVE and the 1985 bombing, see *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*, directed by Louis Massiah and written by Toni Cade Bambara (WHYY, 1986); Robin Erica Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia versus MOVE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); *Let the Fire Burn*, directed by Jason Osder (Independent Lens, 2014); and the forthcoming work by Heather Ann Thompson, *Bullet and Burn: The MOVE Bombing of 1985 and Law and Order in America*.
2. John Edgar Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 44; hereafter cited in the text. Susan Pearsall has also questioned "whether the subject of *Philadelphia Fire* is 'really' the tragic 1985 fire or the fictional return of Cudjoe/Wideman from island sanctuary to his former neighborhood on Osage Avenue." My essay pursues the latter to show how these seemingly disjunct subjects are provocatively sutured together by Wideman's novel. See Pearsall, "Narratives of Self" and the Abdication of Authority in Wideman's 'Philadelphia Fire,'" *MELUS* 26.2 (2001): 15–46.
3. For more on the fort and the surround, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, UK: Minor Compositions, 2013), 17–20.
4. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 6.
5. That settler colonialism is a structure rather than an event is a reference to Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (2006): 388.
6. David Harvey defines "spatial fix" as "geographical expansion to resolve problems of overaccumulation," which means, for example, "fixing investments spatially, embedding them in the land, to create an entirely new landscape for capital accumulation ("Globalization and the 'Spatial Fix,'" *Geographische Revue* 2 [2001]: 28). For a discussion of the potentially totalizing limitations of Harvey's thinking in regard to minority difference, see Jodi A. Byrd et al., "Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities," *Social Text*, no. 135 (2018): 1–18.
7. Tressie McMillan Cottom, *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy* (New York: New Press, 2017), 21. For more on scholarship working to examine higher education's structural reliance on inequality, see Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell, "Critical University Studies and the Crisis Consensus," *Feminist Studies* 44.2 (2018): 432–63. Boggs and Mitchell identify an emerging separation between work beneath the flag of critical university studies and work on the university pursued in a critical ethnic studies context. My essay leans toward the latter approach because the former assumes "the university's goodness as an analytical a priori," an assumption that is difficult to square with the American university's entanglement with slavery and settler colonialism (436).
8. Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 11. In his 2014 ASA presidential address, Curtis Marez cites Wilder for establishing that "higher education was built on a foundation of settler colonialism and slavery that

- continues to serve [for Marez] . . . part of the sedimented conditions of possibility for contemporary universities" ("Seeing in the Red: Looking at Student Debt," *American Quarterly* 66.2 [2014]: 275).
9. Henry A. Giroux, *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2007); see also Long T. Bui, "A Better Life? Asian Americans and the Necropolitics of Higher Education," in *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader*, ed. Critical Ethnic Studies Collective (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 161–74.
 10. Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106.8 (1993): 1715–16. For more on the university, the public good, and the settler colonial structure of both, see Sharon Stein, "A Colonial History of the Higher Education Present: Rethinking Land-Grant Institutions through Processes of Accumulation and Relations of Conquest," *Critical Studies in Education* (2017): 1–17.
 11. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1715.
 12. This quotation is from former Penn president Judith Rodin, *The University and Urban Revival: Out of the Ivory Tower and into the Streets* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 14. Rodin draws on the Brookings study "Eds and Meds: Cities' Hidden Assets," by Ira Harkavy and Harmon Zuckerman, both of whom worked in Penn's Center for Community Partnerships when the report was published.
 13. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 86.
 14. Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 40.
 15. For more on the university's role in the shifting form of official antiracisms, see Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
 16. Nancy Leong, "Racial Capitalism," *Harvard Law Review* 126.8 (2013): 2155. For more on the valuable incorporation and management of minority difference, see Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
 17. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Decorative Beasts: Dogging the Academy in the Late Twentieth Century," *California Sociologist* 14.1–2 (1991): 128.
 18. James Kyung-Jin Lee has suggested that Wideman's novel enters into a 1970s and 1980s context in which communities of color must be "managed, monitored, and, in some cases, criminalized," a political economic development that has attendant material shifts in the organization of urban space. See Lee, "Where the Talented Tenth Meets the Model Minority: The Price of Privilege in Wideman's 'Philadelphia Fire' and Lee's 'Native Speaker,'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 35.2–3 (2002): 231–57.
 19. Steven Beeber, "John Edgar Wideman, The Art of Fiction No. 171," *Paris Review*, Spring 2002, www.theparisreview.org/interviews/422/the-art-of-fiction-no-171-john-edgar-wideman.
 20. Quoted in Steven J. Diner, *Universities and Their Cities: Urban Higher Education in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 55.
 21. Madhu Dubey argues that the binary animating Wideman's novel is that of the academy and the street in that they invoke both a "contemporary crisis in black urban community and a concomitant crisis of literary representation" ("Literature and Urban Crisis: John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*," *African American Review* 32.4 [1998]: 579–95).
 22. Quoted in Margaret Pugh O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 168.
 23. Throughout this essay I suggest that a settler colonial framework is more apt for understanding uneven development in the US than other models such as "internal colonialism." See Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 117–46.
 24. Neil Smith, "Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space," in *Gentrification of the City*, ed. Neil Smith and Peter Williams (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 15–16. For more on frontier rhetoric as a way to organize gentrification, see Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996); Nicholas K. Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Lorenzo Veracini, "Suburbia, Settler Colonialism, and the World Turned Inside Out," *Housing, Theory and Society* 29.4 (2012): 339–57; Amber Dean, "Space, Temporality, History: Encountering Hauntings in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside," in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, ed. Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna (Edmonton, AB: AU Press, 2010), 113–32.

25. See John D. Márquez, "The Black Mohicans: Representations of Everyday Violence in Postracial Urban America," *American Quarterly* 64.3 (2012): 634.
26. Quoted in John L. Puckett and Mark Frazier Lloyd, *Becoming Penn: The Pragmatic American University, 1950–2000* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 3.
27. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 25–31.
28. Diner, *Universities and Their Cities*, 4–7.
29. Veracini, "Suburbia," 342–45.
30. O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge*, 154.
31. Even before this recognition of the speculative value of certain urban land, the city had already necessarily been perceived as what Glen Coulthard has termed *urbs nullius*, "urban space void of Indigenous sovereign presence." Coulthard suggests in his formulation that Smith, Blomley, and Dean merely repeat the "Lockean rationale" of "seeing urban space through a colonial lens." Arguably, *Philadelphia Fire* could be the target of a similar critique, considering that the only mention of Indigenous presence in Philadelphia is via a haunting, implying an Indigenous absence. See Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 176. For other recent inquiries into the settler colonial city, see Libby Porter and Oren Yiftachel, "Urbanizing Settler-Colonial Studies: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Settler Colonial Studies* 9.2 (2019): 177–86; David Hugill, "What Is a Settler-Colonial City?," *Geography Compass* 11.5 (2017): e12315; William Jamal Richardson, "Understanding the City as a Settler Colonial Structure," *Decolonial Black* (blog), June 27, 2017, decolonialblack.com/2017/06/27/understanding-the-city-as-a-settler-colonial-structure/.
32. Quoted in Puckett and Lloyd, *Becoming Penn*, 92. Violent crime has often been the tipping point in Penn's neighborhood interventions. For instance, several accounts of Penn's urban development activities at the turn of the century point to the stabbing death of a Penn researcher in 1996. See Rodin, *University and Urban Revival*, ix; Harley F. Etienne, *Pushing Back the Gates: Neighborhood Perspectives on University-Driven Revitalization in West Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 13.
33. Quoted in Puckett and Lloyd, *Becoming Penn*, 105.
34. la paperson, *A Third University Is Possible* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 8; see also McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 12.
35. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 404.
36. *Housing Act of 1959: Hearings before . . . , Eighty-Sixth Congress, First Session, on Various Bills to Amend the Federal Housing Laws, January 22, 23, 26, 27, and 28, 1959. 1959* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1959), 521.
37. *Housing Act of 1959*.
38. O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge*, 167.
39. Puckett and Lloyd, *Becoming Penn*, 136.
40. John J. Sloan, "The Modern Campus Police: An Analysis of Their Evolution, Structure, and Function," *American Journal of Police* 11 (1992): 87.
41. Smith, *New Urban Frontier*, 87.
42. Rodin, *University and Urban Revival*, 89.
43. Just as *Philadelphia Fire* was put to press, Penn provided the City of Philadelphia a ten million dollar cash advance of its wage taxes to keep the city afloat when bankruptcy threatened its ledgers. In other words, as the 1990s encroached, the university could stand in economically for the city during an economic crisis.
44. For more on the gendering and racialization of space and the use of campus security to enforce it, see Jennifer Doyle, *Campus Sex, Campus Security* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2015).
45. la paperson, *Third University Is Possible*, 12, 7.
46. This process also unfolds on a larger scale. One example from outside the novel: Penn shuttered several local businesses to make way for modernist-style towers and a graduate student center. The demolition occurred before the university secured its final funding, leaving the destroyed businesses and land to stand as a parking lot for nearly twenty years. See Puckett and Lloyd, *Becoming Penn*, 85.
47. Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 31.

48. Beeber, "John Edgar Wideman, The Art of Fiction No. 171." Wideman's sense that black students were part of an experiment was expressed by a number of black students integrating other predominantly white universities, including Harvard and Wesleyan. See Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 14–22.
49. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 22.
50. Leong, "Racial Capitalism," 2171.
51. See Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy*; Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, "The Imperial University: Race, War, and the Nation-State," in *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, ed. Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 1–52.
52. See Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
53. Craig Willse, *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 38.
54. After the play's performance is called off, Cudjoe anticipates the revolutionary capacity of the Kaliban Kiddie Korps when he reflects that when spoken by young black West Philadelphians, Shakespeare's language "scared the shit out of some people" (149).
55. Willse, *Value of Homelessness*, 46; see also Cottom's discussion of "negative social insurance programs," which position "private-sector goods to profit from predictable systemic social inequalities, ostensibly for the public good" (*Lower Ed*, 174).
56. Kathryn Hume, "'Dimensions' and John Edgar Wideman's Mental Cosmology," *Contemporary Literature* 44.4 (2003): 699.
57. For more on haunting in relation to urban geography, see Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17.3 (2013): 1–15; Dean, "Space, Temporality, History."
58. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 206.
59. Wideman's novel examines how gender factors into institutional concerns about protecting "the vulnerable" by largely repeating and reinforcing this perspective and rhetoric from the male gaze of its protagonists. To read the novel along with Spillers is to challenge the role of this figuration of gender in holding up the very phenomenon the novel is otherwise working to critique.
60. Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 209.
61. *The Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations of the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission*, March 6, 1986, 27, www.scribd.com/doc/264903487/The-findings-conclusions-and-recommendations-of-the-Philadelphia-Special-Investigation-Commission.