

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Selling Safety:
anti-abolitionist visualities, abolitionist guerilla-visualities, and the fight
over the University of Chicago's expansion project

By

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I want to recognize that although I can't list any names beside my own on the title page, I do not ascribe to the myth of sole authorship. This thesis exists because what I have learned from and discussed with the people in my community, and this is as much their creation as it is mine. I feel incredibly lucky to be surrounded by so many incredible human beings, and I apologize in advance to the ones I don't name explicitly — the original list was getting a little too long but will exist forever in my notebook. Thank you first and foremost to my friends and co-conspirators in organizing: Abigail, Alicia, Corinne, Emma, Jacob, Rina, Samhitha, and Sophia Abuabara. I'd also like to thank Josh (my academic twin!) and Sophia Rhee who edited early versions of this project, and who have given me much appreciated (and needed) life advice. I'd also like to thank the many professors and instructors who helped me along the way: my advisors, Professor Sophia Azeb¹ and Dr. Tori Gross, for the guidance and support they've provided, and for reading my drafts even when I pre-labelled them as "Bad;" Professor Eve L. Ewing for teaching a class that blew my mind first year and for guiding me all the way through the end of undergrad; Professors Susan Gal and Tulio Bermúdez, who edited the first iteration of what would become my thesis; and Professors Natacha Nsabimana, Kathryn Takabvirwa, and Costas Nakassis, whose suggestions helped me get through to the finishline.

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I. Introduction

The University of Chicago’s 122 page brand identity guidelines opens with a letter from the Vice President for Communications, Paul M. Rand (fig. 1). He writes that “the value of [the University’s] global brand is immeasurable. Which is why we need to take the utmost care in protecting it. These guidelines were created to help you communicate our brand in a consistent manner that makes sure it endures” (UChicago Creative 2021, 2). But what exactly is enduring alongside the University brand? When the University’s visual aesthetics are protected, what else is protected? The

University’s latest ad campaign, the “Always Think Safety” campaign, began following the murder of Shaoxiong “Dennis” Zheng in November of 2022, and consists of 5 posters that were printed and hung across campus. One of the posters (fig. 2) recommends that students “always keep valuables hidden,” and shows a laptop being put away, framed by a simple white circle, and a person sitting outside in two ways: literally outside, as indexed by the greenery behind the person, as well as outside of the symbol of the circle. If thinking safety means hiding valuables, then the inside of the circle can be understood to symbolize “safety” while being outside the circle a site where one must take extra measures to protect themselves.

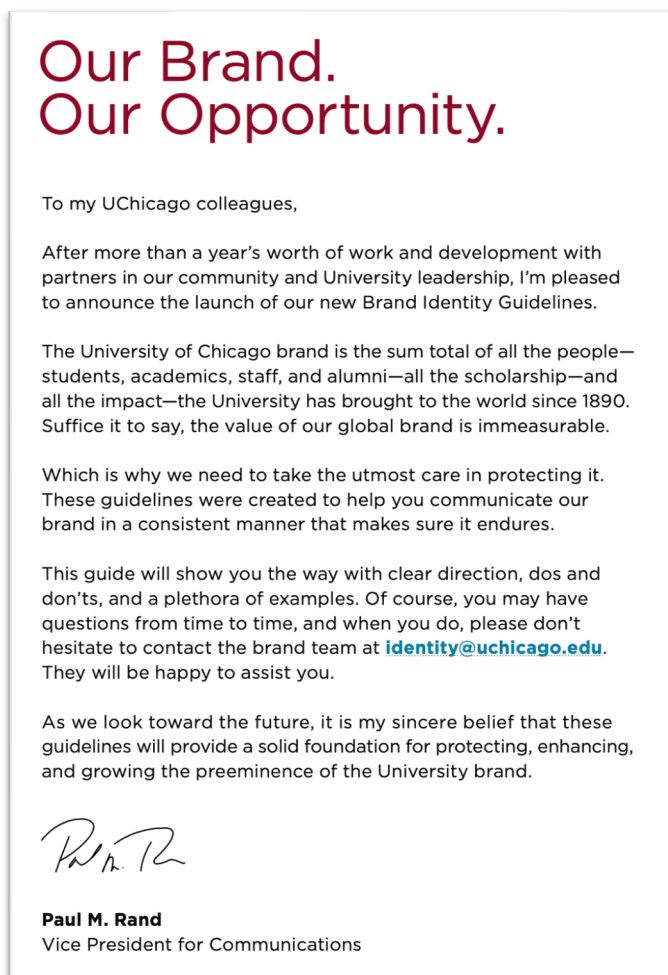


Figure 1: UChicago Creative 2021.



Figure 2: Safety and Security 2022.

Though this may seem an innocuous illustration, it takes on a new meaning when we consider the ways in which the University is often visualized as a bubble: *The Maroon*, the University’s independent student newspaper, has published numerous articles discussing what is referred to as the “Hyde Park” Bubble, the “Campus” Bubble, the “UChicago” Bubble, and even “the white island” interchangeably (eg. Fratar 2008; Harris 2017; Perlmutter 2018). In creating a visual representation of the imagined bubble around the Hyde Park campus, the University reinforces the imagined borders between a mostly-white campus and the mostly-Black neighborhoods around it. More importantly, this creates a means by which the University can justify the extension of those borders, and consequently allows for the furthering of the University’s expansion project — which may be what makes the University’s “global brand” so immeasurably valuable. This ad campaign is an example of one of the strategies the University

uses to brand itself;² that is, shaping what the University “looks” like through a visual aesthetic. This aesthetic can then be used to justify many of the University’s actions, including the existence and continual expansion of its campus and its private police force (the University of Chicago Police Department, or UCPD).

Despite the growing breadth of scholarship that exists on how police are justified to the public, many instances of this work (eg. Wilson 2000; LaChance & Kaplan 2019) have been confined to studies on how police depictions in popular media are used as “copaganda,” or “media efforts to flatter police officers and spare them from skeptical coverage” (Charity 2018). By expanding on Davarian Baldwin’s work on “UniverCities” — in which the “growing influence of [urban institutes of higher education] on entire cities solidifies their political authority over housing costs, labor conditions, and policing practices for everyone living in urban America” (2021, 17) — I will examine how these universities similarly create a visual aesthetic to justify the use of private campus police forces.

I am most interested in understanding the ways in which anti-abolitionist language ideologies are developed in pro-police environments and the strategies that are employed by pro-police organizations in order to defend the supposed necessity of police departments. I intentionally choose to frame the University’s register as anti-abolitionist as opposed to pro-policing because I will be demonstrating that the University’s register is necessarily dependent on the discourse created by the existence of an “opposite” abolitionist register. For my definition of register, I draw from the work of Judith Irvine who defines register as a cultural model of manners of speaking that are enactable in speech with particular kinds of indexicalities (1990).

² Here I have “the University” stand in for the administrators and trustees who make the decisions for the University. I choose not to specify them into individuals because ultimately although the individuals may shift, the goals of the University remain the same: expansion and profit.

Register becomes a way of understanding how language actively indexes, or points to, a non-referential meaning. That is to say, a register goes beyond the actual content of the speech to signal something about who the speaker is – or at the very least, what persona the speaker is enacting. Moreover, because abolitionist and anti-abolitionist registers are co-constitutive, they share many lexical features which are then given different visuals depending on which paradigm they are a part of: safety, community, inclusion, and so on. Because of the constraints on this project, I limit my scope to exploring the aesthetics of safety specifically, with the knowledge that a future project would compare lexical similarities more broadly.

This thesis aims to answer the following questions: how is history used as a means of legitimizing social hierarchies? How is history visualized by anti-abolitionists and abolitionists in and around the University of Chicago? How are these aesthetics used to justify or reject the existence and expansion of the UCPD? And how are these aesthetics co-constitutive of each other? Using an interdisciplinary framework that draws from linguistic anthropology, cinema and media studies, history, and the knowledge produced by Chicago organizers, I will analyze abolitionist and anti-abolitionist visual media as means of researching how an anti-abolitionist register is legitimized, and the importance of temporal grounding in creating a language paradigm for discussing issues of racial justice. More specifically, I argue that the University's anti-abolitionist visuality must necessarily become allochronistic (Fabian 1983) to justify the University's expansion project. However, the University's allochronism and anti-abolitionist as register (opposed to pro-police) creates a space within which organizers like those of CareNotCops can create an abolitionist guerilla-visibility that re-imagines safety.

II. Anti-Blackness and Policing, from “Neighborhood Redemption” to “Student Care”

Although the Illinois Freedom of Information Act requires that public police forces make their records available to the public, because UCPD is a *private* police force they have no such obligation to share their records. Any potentially sensitive data on UCPD’s policing can be made difficult or impossible to access—thereby evading scrutiny that may damage the reputation of the University. The records of the UCPD that do exist are limited to what the University voluntarily shares with the public and what can be found in archived reports, newspaper articles, scholarly articles, and the work of organizers (i.e. statements, social media posts, and art). Additionally, the University works to erase much of its history, as for example with Stephen Douglas and the Trauma Center campaign.

Prior to the University of Chicago’s “founding” in 1890, there existed another university in Chicago, one with the same trustees, faculty members, donor networks, library books, and even the same name: the University of Chicago (Boyer 2016). However, the present-day University is adamant that the pre-1890 University of Chicago is a different entity altogether, a university they name the “Old University.” The “Old University” was founded by Stephen Douglas, who profits from his Mississippi plantation, and the Black people enslaved there to open the original Bronzeville campus (Jordan and Mount 2017). In 2020, then-president Robert Zimmer removed two on-campus tributes to Douglas (a plaque and a stone from the Old University) in the name of providing a “positive and sustainable change on issues of racial bias and inequities,” adding, however, that Douglas had no connection to the post-1890 university and should not be honored on campus. Rather than changing the lived realities of Black South Siders as Zimmer claimed, the removal of these visual representations of the connection between

the Old and New University of Chicago serves to mask the University's direct connection to American slavery.

The history of the Trauma Center campaign, and of the work of organizers generally is also erased in an effort to frame the University in a more positive light. The University closed its hospital's adult trauma center in 1988, after losing millions of dollars treating uninsured patients (Moore 2018). In 2010, following the shooting and death of Damian Turner, a Black 18-year old living on the South Side, organizers began fighting for a new trauma center to be opened at the University hospital. Turner was shot just blocks away from the University of Chicago hospital, but because they didn't have a trauma center, he had to be driven nine miles away to Northwestern University hospital, where he died from his wounds. Dr. Marie Crandall (a professor of surgery and trauma care at Northwestern), analyzed 11,744 gunshot patients from 1999-2009 and found that "If you are shot more than five miles from a trauma center in Chicago, your likelihood of dying is 21 percent greater," and that most of the patients who died more than five miles away from trauma center were "disproportionately black and less likely to be insured" (Moore 2013, 2018). Turner, an organizer with Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP), was a founding member of STOP's first youth program, Fearless Leading by the Youth (FLY) in 2007. After Turner was killed, it was FLY youth organizers who were the first to take up the fight for a new trauma center. When in 2015, the University made a bid for the Obama Presidential Center, protesters made national news when they refused to support the bid with the slogan "No trauma, no 'bama." Following these protests, the University announced that they would re-open a trauma center on the South Side but erased the role of organizers in making the decision:

In an interview with Crain's [Chicago Business Magazine], U of C Medicine officials downplay the effect the organizers had on the institution's decision. "This isn't an issue that can be looked at in a silo," says Cristal Thomas, the community liaison for the health system. "We are engaged with our community, we assess their health needs, we listen to what they want and need from our hospital. We heard the voice of the trauma coalition; we heard the voice of many of our stakeholders." (Bushey 2016)

Moreover, the aforementioned erasures are examples of rare failures to erase a history completely. That these histories were recorded at all is a matter of luck, and much of the University does not exist beyond what's passed down between South Side residents and community organizers orally. As a result of the partial and complete erasures of University history, the following timeline of the University and its police force is incomplete and pulled together from a myriad of sources, very few of which come from the institution itself.

In 1952 the wife of a faculty member was robbed and assaulted on the Midway Plaisance, and there was an uproar from University staff who "demanded that something be done. Either move the University out of this horrible area or do something to clean [it] up" (Larson 2012). In response, then-Chancellor Lawrence Kimpton established the Southeast Chicago Commission (SECC) "to protect the University's interest, reduce crime and address housing stock" (SECC 2021), justifying its creation and the subsequent expansion of private police using the "specter of Black crime" that emerged from the influx of Black residents during the Great Migration (Larson 2012). During this time, the SECC's "community redemption project" spent \$120 million demolishing 106 acres of property, displacing over 4,371 families, and constructing 2,100

buildings on the land these families left behind (Eldred 2017). This amounted to the forced displacement of 86,000 residents, of which two-thirds were Black (Cole 2021).

When in 1960, then-police commissioner Orlando W. Wilson decreased the number of Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers in Hyde Park, the University felt that it had “to replace patrols that [the CPD superintendent] withdrew” (Hyde Park Herald 1960), and so the University’s police force expanded both in size and in geography, with its patrols bleeding into Kenwood, Bronzeville, and Woodlawn for the first time (Eldred 2017).

Just a few years later, in 1968, the University (under President Edward Levi) formally established what would come to be known as the UCPD. Following multiple cases of sexual assault on campus in 1972 and 1973, the UCPD increased for the first time, going from eleven patrol cars and 75 emergency phones to 13 cars, 107 emergency phones, and over a hundred officers from 1972 to 1980 (Kartik-Narayan 2018). UCPD continued (and continues) to expand and is in present day a department of 140 officers with full police powers,³ and the on-going expansion of UCPD’s jurisdiction on the South Side most recently added an additional six blocks south and eighteen blocks north to its original patrol area (Larson 2012). In total, UCPD’s jurisdiction officially stretches approximately 16 blocks from the west’s Cottage Grove Avenue to the east’s Lake Park Avenue, and 30 blocks from the north’s 37th street to the south’s 64th

³ “the powers of municipal peace officers and county sheriffs, including the power to make arrests under the circumstances prescribed in Section 107-2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1963, as amended, for violations of state statutes or municipal or county ordinances, including the ability to regulate and control traffic on the public way contiguous to the college or university property, for the protection of students, employees, visitors and their property, and the property branches, and interests of the college or university, in the county where the college or university is located.” (“Private College Campus Police Act,” 110 Illinois Compiled Statutes 1020/1.)

street, growing alongside the University (which continues to buy land and property across the South Side).⁴

Over 40 years later, in the fall of 2021, the University increased UCPD’s surveillance capabilities in response to the shooting of University alumnus Shaoxiong “Dennis” Zheng on November 9, increasing foot and vehicle patrols “on and near campus,” Police Observation Device (POD) camera technology, and use of security cameras and license plate readers “in nearby neighborhoods” (Department of Safety and Security 2021).

Although the present-day University of Chicago is no longer explicitly displacing primarily Black residents of Hyde Park, the expansion of UCPD and CPD has led residents of this demographic to feel that they are unwelcome in the area regardless. For example, Black residents of Hyde Park and the surrounding neighborhoods — Woodlawn, Bronzeville, and Kenwood, which fall under UCPD’s extended patrol area — interviewed by *South Side Weekly* felt that “the University has created a divide between its campus and the local community, with the University of Chicago Police and CPD patrolling the campus perimeter ... [and they] often view the University of Chicago as a bubble that insulates itself and has caused others to feel alienated and targeted” (Ikoro 2021). And the statistics provided by the Illinois Department of Transportation and compiled by CareNotCops substantiate these feelings of unwelcomeness: of the 23 pedestrian stops in 2020, 22 were of Black people (IDOT 2020).⁵ From 2018 to 2020,

⁴ Here I say “officially” because in my four years living in Hyde Park I have, on multiple occasions, seen UCPD go beyond even its own jurisdiction. I was unable to find a policy or statement as to why this might be.

⁵ Some of my early readers have asked me to specify the gender of the people being stopped, but unfortunately I could find no data on the gender distribution of pedestrian stops. I would posit that the majority of the Black people stopped are male, based on national statistics, but this is data that the University has not made public. Sorry, professors!

96% of UCPD's traffic stops were of Black people, and of the people stopped for looking "suspicious," 99% were Black (CareNotCops 2020 [a]).

In addition, despite UCPD being branded as the best means of keeping students safe, students have repeatedly experienced violence at the hands of UCPD officers. In 2010, Mauricece Dawson, a Black student enrolled at the University, was put in a chokehold, arrested, and charged with criminal trespass and resisting arrest for studying in the Regenstein Library (Klein 2010). In 2018, UCPD officer Nicholas Twardak shot then-student Charles "Soji" Thomas—who is Black—as he was in the midst of a mental health crisis (Lee and Grieve 2018). In 2021, Cassidy Wilson, an Asian-American student, was involuntarily hospitalized by UCPD after calling student counseling services during a mental health crisis despite explicitly expressing that she was not in imminent danger (Wilson 2021). All three serve as case studies of Jennifer Doyle's conception of "risk management:" "Risk management, on a campus, has a double life—one grounded in a pragmatic approach to the possibilities of harm (and so a campus's insurance rates go up with every gun campus police officers carry), and another that governs the campus's psychic life" (Doyle 2015). In other words, police are imagined as a means of preventing harm, but in practice re-create harm by attempting to govern mental health and race through violence.

Organizers challenge the University's right to govern through police, and consequently organizers are often at the receiving end of UCPD's violence. In 2013, Trauma Center Campaign protesters from the South Side community and from the University were pushed, beaten, and forced to the ground by UCPD as they peacefully protested the lack of an adult trauma care facility at the UChicago Medical center (Srikantha 2013). In June of 2020, student protesters occupied UCPD headquarters for over 24 hours, during which UCPD denied them access to restrooms, food, medications, and water (CareNotCops 2020 [b]). A few months later, student

protesters occupying the street in front of Provost Ka Yee Lee's home were repeatedly threatened with arrest and had their encampment raided late at night as they were sleeping (CareNotCops 2020 [c]).

Many of these protesters were a part of the on-campus organizing group, CareNotCops, but all of them are a part of a much longer history of student organizing at the University. CareNotCops' forebears emerged in 2013 with the Campaign for Equitable Policing (CEP). CEP began as a response to UCPD's harassment of community members and Black students, organizing a "Speak Out" to create space for people to share their concerns and experiences with UCPD (Kartik-Narayan 2018). They organized a Halloween march to Levi Hall - the building wherein the "offices for the president and other institutional managers" reside (UChicago Architecture 2022 [a]) - to call then-president Robert Zimmer to meet their demands (CEP 2014 [a]); a "Die-in" protesting the police murders of Eric Garner and Mike Brown that shut down 55th street (CEP 2014 [b])^{6,7}; a demonstration interrupting an UCPD's open forum (Manhardt 2014), and a number of teach-ins aimed at educating students on campus to fight against UCPD. However, despite these actions and CEP's active partnerships with abolitionist groups like Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation (SOUL) and the We Charge Genocide Coalition, CEP was itself not abolitionist. The organizers chose instead to aim for reform out of fear of an abolitionist stance guaranteeing the failure of their campaign (Kartik-Narayan 2018). Despite this, the University declined to meet CEP's demands, reformist or otherwise. CEP did succeed in getting the University to release its traffic stop data voluntarily and establish a policy that for

⁶ 55th street is the only street in Hyde Park that is a two-way and goes from the western border of Hyde Park (Cottage Grove Ave) to the eastern border (South Shore Drive) without interruption. Disrupting 55th street means disrupting one of the busiest streets in the entire neighborhood

⁷ A die-in is a tactic of protest where protesters occupy a space by laying down pretending to be dead that was popularized in the 1970s most famously with "a 1972 Philadelphia protest in which 420 people simulated death to protest nuclear weapons testing" (Ross 2015)

someone to be stopped for a traffic violation, the violation must create a safety or security risk (Newman 2015). Following 2015, CEP lost much of its traction, and was absorbed into a number of student organizing groups until it found its final home in UChicago Student Action (UCSA) in 2016. Between 2016 and 2018, UCSA did not actively organize against UCPD, choosing instead to focus energy on addressing larger national concerns that arose in the first 2 years of President Donald Trump's presidency.

It was not until 2018 that students began organizing against UCPD again. Following the shooting of Soji Thomas, an emergency response team was formed to protest his shooting, and to protest the felonies Thomas was charged with in 2018 (Briscoe and Cherney 2018). This team became CareNotCops in the fall of 2018 and was the first iteration of student organizers to be explicitly abolitionist, fighting not for reforms but for “what the community needs immediately” (Kartik-Narayan 2018). One of three campaigns of the student activist umbrella of UChicago United — which had been formed the previous year in response to numerous racist incidents on campus (UChicago United) — CareNotCops' current demands are that the university cease and reverse the recent expansion of UCPD, support community-led responses to gun violence, disarm officers, cut UCPD's budget by 50%, and disband the department by 2023 (CareNotCops 2021 [a]). Like CEP, CareNotCops has cultivated active partnerships with community organizers, including (but not limited to) GoodKids MadCity, a Black and Brown youth organizing coalition that “develops young leaders to advocate for resources that will allow them to create sustainable, livable community conditions as well as provide tools to address both mental and physical trauma” (GoodKids MadCity 2022); Assata's Daughters, “an abolitionist organization led by Black women using a Black queer feminist lens and relationship-based tactics to organize” (Assata's Daughters 2022) and the #LetUsBreathe Collective, an alliance of artists and

organizers “organizing through a creative lens to imagine a world without prisons and police” (#LetUsBreathe 2022). CareNotCops has also repurposed many of the strategies used by CEP, such as occupations, teach-ins, and rallies outside of Levi Hall.

III. Modes of Visualizing Language and History

Though traditional understandings of pragmatic paradigms (Silverstein 2014) focus on analyses of *linguistic* terms, my analysis will include *paralinguistic* features as essential components of creating a paradigm that stands in mimetic opposition to an abolitionist paradigm. I contend that the “UChicago” brand in and of itself *is* a paradigm, and I will demonstrate that although the linguistic terms of the University’s register are reflective of the terms of an abolitionist register, the visual aesthetics of the University’s anti-abolitionist paradigm employ those terms to justify policing the South Side. In particular, I will look to conflicts between definitions of safety, though there also exist conflicts between lexical terms such as community and inclusion.

Jacques Rancière writes that politics is the struggle for unrecognized social groups to receive equal representation within the hierarchy of power. Aesthetics then become a part of the struggle because the question of representation is in reality a question of society’s image and what is allowed to be said and shown (2006). As such, the aesthetics of history (or how history is “seen”) become a mode by which the social order is created. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote in *Silencing the Past*, the production of what history is made visible is not evenly distributed: “the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production” (1995, xxiii).

Consequently, the act of looking, or, to borrow bell hooks' term, the "gaze," is politicized (hooks 1992). Hooks understands the gaze to be the right to look, a right that has historically been denied to Black people. Black female spectators in particular have been placed in positions of observation rather engagement, and from this position have subsequently lost agency over their own narratives. Rebellious acts of looking became a means by which Black women could reclaim social, political, and racial agency. Much of what has been written about the role of the gaze has been in relation to Black film and its role in Black liberation (hooks 1992; Hall 1989), however, this paper will contend that the gaze, albeit paralinguistic, is also a fundamental part of the building of language paradigms as well. I will argue that ultimately "looking" becomes another means of "listening." For an example, I look to the Hiroshima memorials in Japan and Korea wherein proposals to change how the memorials were seen sparked public debates about Japanese colonialism, Korean ethnicity, and meaning (Yoneyama 1999). In these debates, the gaze became a defining factor in the resulting language paradigm.

In her book *Vicarious Language* (2006), Inoue Miyako uses Michael Silverstein's definition of an "indexical" -- the dynamic semiotic process through which signs constitute meaning based on different contexts (Silverstein 2014) -- to expand upon Charles L. Briggs and Richard Bauman's theory of intertextuality (1992). Using Japanese women's language as an example, she demonstrates that writing becomes a way of controlling alterity because authors can separate alterity narratives from the narratives' original history, and in doing so rewrite the reality of how the "other" is remembered by society as a whole. This process, which she calls indexical inversion, co-opts the narratives of the oppressed into justifying the systems of their oppression. More generally, an indexical inversion is the process by which indexical and sociocultural factors are used to promote certain language ideologies (Bucholtz 2009). I

understand indexical inversions to be one form in which the malleability of history can be utilized, and as such, my research will seek to apply indexical inversions to visual language as a means of understanding how the University uses gaze as a means of producing their own indexical order.

I contend that in creating a register to justify the intrusion of the University into Hyde Park and surrounding neighborhoods, including the justification for the increasing presence of UCPD, the University itself must necessarily seize control of the gaze by seizing control of temporality and historicity. History is then seized by placing time “out of joint” (Derrida 1995). This out-of-jointness prevents time and the events it is made up of from being “situated, dated, determined, and objectified” (ibid., 18). History is made malleable, and as such can be twisted and erased to legitimize the University’s anti-abolitionist paradigm. I understand an out-of-joint history to work as an application of Johannes Fabian’s concept of “allochronism,” a critique of anthropology as a discipline that argues that anthropologists have a tendency to lean into a “denial of coevalness,” wherein a temporal distance between the observer (i.e. “the West”) and the observed (i.e. “the rest”) (1983). Allochronism then goes beyond being a problem of anthropology, and becomes a symptom of imperialism, because the distance between the “modernity” of the West, and the “stagnancy” of the rest then allows Western colonizers — which include anthropologists — to justify their own intrusions on the lands of the rest as necessary in order to spread modernity to the so-called savages. For example, Hegel used his interpretation of Africa as forever out of touch with modernity to argue that freedom can exist only in classical, Christian, and modern Europe, and that as such non-Europeans can only access freedom through colonization (1965). Although allochronism and Derrida’s conception of out-of-jointedness are speaking to the same theories, I choose to use the term “out-of-joint” as

opposed to “allochronistic” because it creates a more visual description of the ways in which the University is participating in Fabian’s processes of allochronism.

To understand the visual aesthetics of these out-of-joint histories, I turn to Nicholas Mirzoeff’s theories of visuality in *The Right to Look* (2011). He defines visuality as the authority to decide what can be looked at. Mirzoeff roots the origins of visuality as politics in “the legally regulated, visually controlled, hyper violent condition of forced labor in Atlantic world cash-crop plantations” and in doing so connects visuality with the historical invention of race during the era of the Transatlantic slave trade (ibid., 48). Visuality therefore was and is a manifestation of the politics of representation (Rancière 2006).

IV. Institutional Visualities and Guerrilla Counter-Visualities

In my specific case study of the University of Chicago, I describe the key features of the University’s anti-abolitionist visuality by analyzing the University’s “UChicago” brand, as portrayed by the University’s email communications and webinars, advertisement campaigns, and architecture. This visuality is marked by institutionalization (i.e. that the visuality is uniform across the campus context, and supported by the social weight and power of a research university), the entextualization of policing to safety, the erasure of Black South Side residents, and symbolically and physically hostile architecture that together provide justification for the University’s expansion project.

By entextualization I mean the process by which discourse is removed from its original context in order to re-contextualize within a different paradigm (Bauman and Briggs 1990).

Entextualization, like visuality, is a process that creates power and authority and “always serves

political goals” (Bucholtz, Sung-Yul Park and Sarangi 2009, 486), as in this example from *Text & Talk: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language*:

in decontextualizing and recontextualizing discourse, institutions may present subjects as making illegitimate claims that stand in contrast to the authority of the institution, or alternatively, they may infuse the original discourse with the viewpoint of the institution so that this perspective is constructed as inevitable and natural. (ibid.)

Entextualization then is a means by which indexical inversions (Miyako 2006) can be created. In the context of the University of Chicago, I argue that the processes by which entextualization and inversions occur within the conflicts of visualities on campus.

However, in rooting the politics of representation in out-of-joint histories, history is made malleable for everyone, not just those with the greatest access to the production of history, like the University. As a result, organizers can create what Mirzoeff refers to as a “counter-visuality,” or the claim to the right to look by those who had been denied the authority to do so (2011, 24-25). Given that hooks explains that the right to look is synonymous with her conception of the gaze (1992), a counter-visuality can also be defined as a claim to the gaze. Saidiya Hartman argues that “the hope for social transformation” lies within the shifting of the narrative of how anti-Black violence is represented (1997, 14), and this hope is taken up by organizers’ abolitionist counter-visualities.

On and around campus, one key feature of organizers’ abolitionist counter-visualities is that they are plural. Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes abolition as “a constant becoming” (2020), and because of the constant entropy that is the backbone of abolitionist organizing, abolitionist counter-visualities are context-dependent and flexible — not grounded in concrete

institutionalized guidebook as anti-abolitionist visualities are. I describe the key features of South Side organizers' counter-visualities by analyzing zines, speeches, protested posters, and the ways in which abolition is lived practically rather than practiced theoretically. Abolitionist counter-visualities are marked by untraditional forms of knowledge production; the de-entextualization of policing to safety; the centering of Black South Side residents, and the use of multiple simultaneous temporalities which together both challenge the University's justifications for its expansion project and provide "paths forward in the eradication of infrastructures of harm and building and maintaining of infrastructures of care" (Snider 2022). My understanding of these features is in part informed by the strategies that Nicole R. Fleetwood identifies and explores in her monograph on art that challenges the aesthetics of mass incarceration, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration*, namely the use of public programming, and community and collective efforts (2020, xviii).

Community efforts are of particular interest to my research because one of the uses of untraditional forms of knowledge production in abolitionist counter-visualities is collective work. Whereas the University's visibility is institutionalized facelessly and individually through the University's webinars, architecture, and advertisement campaigns, abolitionist counter-visuals are rooted in the knowledge and resources of the communities around them. I term the resulting visual aesthetic abolitionist "guerrilla"-visualities. That is to say that the University, as a world-renowned research institution, is a producer of traditional forms of knowledge — i.e. academic papers, dissertations, books. These are forms of knowledge that carry social weight and power and are generally accepted to be credible. Subsequently, when the University presents its visibility its malleable history can borrow from the credibility its garnered as a research institution. Alternatively, CareNotCops, and many other abolitionist organizations across the

country, have no such access to credibility and must unsettle this definition of knowledge, creating their guerrilla-visualities not just from knowledge produced by an institution but from knowledge produced by the communities most directly affected by over-policing and capitalist exploitation. These guerrilla-visualities are a part of a longer history of “rebellious acts of looking” (hooks 1992) and can be traced back to the “do-it-yourself” style of 1970s British Punk zines (Duncombe 1997). Zines are a popular strategy among abolitionist organizers, and within CareNotCops especially, because although the modes of creation may have changed, the reasons for creating zines have not:

While other media are produced for money or prestige or public approval, zines are done — as *Factsheet Five*'s [a magazine of zines] founding editor Mike Gunderloy is for of pointing out — for *love*: love of expression, love of sharing, love of communication. And in protest against a culture and society that offers little reward for such acts of love, zines are also created out of *rage*. (ibid., 18)

Abolition, like zines, is practiced from a place of love, and Duncombe's description is reminiscent of a chant used at many abolitionist protests: “we keep us safe.” As *Abolition: How We Keep Us Safe*, a zine by Abolition Action, explains: “Abolition is not creating new authorities in place of the cops, but building the relationships, skills, and trust necessary to take care of one another” (2020, 15).

In trying to care for each other, abolitionist organizers on the South Side come into conflict with the University's anti-abolitionist visuality. Therefore, they challenge the University's visuality and twisting of history, abolitionist organizers attempt to ground the University's visuality within a different twisting of history such that the basis for a guerrilla-visuality that addresses the temporal context for violence on the South Side can be created.

Organizers then depend upon strategies like the appropriation of an anti-abolitionist visuality, dual temporality, and practiced visualities to direct and encourage the gaze towards a guerrilla-visuality of safety.

V. Anti-abolitionists Visualities as Justification for the “UChicago” Expansion Project

In 2015, the University submitted and won its bid to open the Obama Presidential Library on the South Side. Jackson Park, a historically Black, low-income neighborhood, saw its property values shoot up at some of the highest rates in the country following the announcement that the Obama Presidential Center would open in the area (Baldwin 2021, 200). Even before the Center was built and Jackson Park was made into a tourist destination, Jackson Park’s eviction rates became some of the highest in the city (ibid.). Even before ground was broken for the Center, Jackson Park’s majority Black, low-income families were being displaced.⁸ On the abolitionist podcast *AirGo*, hosted by Damon Williams and Daniel Kisslinger,⁹ Jawanza Malone — an organizer working to pass a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) that puts “protections in place so people don’t get displaced” by the forthcoming Obama Presidential Center (Malone 2020, 1:06:34) — notes:

Jawanza Malone: But, you know, we have to think about why the University of Chicago, wrote the bid, and talked about the opportunity that the Presidential Center would bring by placing it in Jackson Park. I mean, in the bid document itself, is is is an opportunity to bring new people to Woodlawn. What is it? Right?

⁸ I mention class here because while racially-biased policing does not necessarily distinguish low-income and middle- or upper-income Black people, the risk of displacement is class-informed. People who are already struggling to pay rent are always the first to be evicted when housing prices rise.

⁹ Kisslinger is a Chicago-based host and producer, and Williams is an artist, organizer, educator, and the co-director of the #LetUsBreathe Collective.

Damon Williams: Why is that your desire?

...

Jawanza Malone: What was their motivation? And as part of why they threw the rock in is now hiding their hand, right? You don't hear them [the University] talking about the Presidential Center? (ibid., 1:09:28-1:10:33)

I argue that the University's obfuscation of its role in the displacement of low-income South Side residents is rooted in the University's goal of economic growth. Baldwin writes that urban development is higher education's most recent economic growth strategy because "Campus-expansion projects meet the increased demands for upscale housing, high-tech laboratories, and plentiful retail options that will attract world-class students, faculty, and researchers" (2021, 17). As a result, poorer neighborhoods are pushed further away, both literally (geographically) and figuratively (access to prosperity) as universities become "city managers that... imagine the world beyond the campus walls as either prime real estate or a dangerous threat to the brand" (ibid. 21, 26). Given that the University of Chicago has a 122 page brand identity guidelines (UChicago Creative 2021) and one of the largest private police forces in the world, we might understand this to be true of the University as well. Moreover Baldwin writes: "policing serves as simply the most visible—and violent— expression of the university's new desire to incorporate greater swaths of the city into its development ambitions" (Baldwin 2021, 167). As the University continues to its efforts to curate the geography of the South Side, UCPD expands as a means of protecting the University from the violence that threatens the institutions ability to control more land (ibid., 169).

The continued expansion of the University therefore necessitates that UCPD continues to grow and that the University maintains its anti-abolitionist brand. When I write about the

University of Chicago’s brand, I am referring to two things: the public-facing University brand (otherwise known as the “UChicago” brand), and the anti-abolitionist visuality laced implicitly throughout UChicago. The UChicago brand is the guidelines used to present the University to the public and how it manifests across the visuals of advertisements, architecture, and language. In turn, University’s anti-abolitionist visuality is the perception of these manifestations, or how the brand is seen by the people of Hyde Park. The University self-describes as several things, namely: innovative, driven by intellectual debate, civic-minded, diverse and inclusive (UChicago 2022 [a]). Consequently, “UChicago” stands in opposition to the University of Chicago as a sort of idealized institution. In the context of temporal grounding, it is the University’s branding as a safe campus that most clearly highlights the role of an out-of-joint history in sustaining social hierarchies — namely, sustaining the University’s political authority over the South Side at the cost of the working-class Black people in the neighborhoods around campus.

When discussing the University’s visuality, it is important also to note that the effect of the brand is, like all registers, determined by the listener more so than the speaker. Registers are rooted in personas and stereotypes, or models of how certain people are expected to act, and these expectations are determined outside of the direct control of the speakers themselves (Gal 2006). Individual speakers, or in this case, organizations then align or misalign with these stereotypes of identity (or alterity) depending on their goals. Additionally, the organizations also create (to some extent) the very discourses that create the personae – that is to say, an anti-abolitionist register cannot exist without the discourse of an abolitionist register.

Given that the goal of the University is to sustain its political and spatial authority over the South Side, who then is the brand meant to be seen by? College real estate is a multi-million-dollar market (Whitford 2022), and it can be inferred that if the University seeks to maintain its

authority over the South Side (Baldwin 2021), then the University's project would benefit from having the funds to participate in such a market. I argue that the brand is therefore for the benefit of the people who provide these funds: the trustees, the donors, and the present-day & future students - and their families - who pay tuition. The low levels of turn out at CareNotCops rallies, the numerous Twitter thread critiques of organizers by students whose activism is confined to social media, and the negative comments left on CareNotCops' op-eds including "It's Time to Dismantle the UCPD" (2020a) suggest that this an audience that is not abolitionist — albeit not necessarily anti-abolitionist in the way the University is. What this means is that this is an audience that is positioned to view police as a means of guaranteeing safety. Since I understand visualities to be a part of the process in which registers are created, the same can be said to be true of visualities: the University brand is not meant to convince an abolitionist audience to become pro-police, but rather to prevent abolition from being visualized.

The tragic shooting and murder of Shaoxiong "Dennis" Zheng in the fall of 2021, as well as the murders by gun violence of Max Lewis in July and Yiran Fan in January of the same year sparked campus-wide conversations about what safety looks like on campus. A letter signed by almost 400 faculty members demanded that the University increase the number of off-campus security guards, the number of surveillance and monitoring systems, and the routes and frequencies of University shuttles, because "Criminals need to be identified, arrested and sentenced -- this is essential to rebuild public trust" (select University of Chicago Faculty 2021). The emphasis on public trust makes being seen as "safe" a means of ensuring that the University retains the interest of potential applicants and donors, and especially the interest of people from outside the United States like Zheng and Fan.

The University took up these demands on a myriad of platforms in the weeks following Zheng's death, claiming across safety webinars and emails that safety was a top priority for the University. In an email sent out to current students and parents on November 12, 2021, Dean John Boyer wrote: "Please know that we care deeply about the welfare of each of our students and that we will do all that is in our power—and more—to ensure a safe and secure urban milieu in which they can learn and fully prosper."

Boyer explicitly entextualizes care through the language of University-provided safety precisely through the slippage from "caring about student welfare" to "ensuring a safe and secure urban milieu," dually framing the University as being an institution that serves students and as a protector of the surrounding communities. In writing "we will do all that is in our power—**and more**" [bolding is my own], Boyer can be understood to be suggesting that ensuring campus safety requires going beyond what the University can do under normal circumstances. The day before the email went out, the University announced that it would go beyond its typical safety measures by increasing the number of CPD officers and surveillance technologies in Hyde Park in a so-called 'safety webinar.' Eric Heath, the University's Associate Vice President for Safety & Security, listed some of the strategies that the administration claimed would lead to an increase in safety:

To enhance public safety, we need to work together ... Our strategy is twofold: Beginning Tuesday afternoon we increased police activity on and near campus. The additional patrols are continuing. In addition to the continued daily collaboration between the UCPD and the Chicago police department, additional officers are working with CPD officers completing foot and vehicle control around Hyde Park ... They [CPD] will temporarily be adding additional police

observation device or pod camera technology to the Hyde Park area. These are remote cameras that are monitored by CPD officers that aid in making arrests (Heath 2021).

Boyer's email explains the justification for an increase in CPD officers, and Heath and, by extension, the University entextualize care to safety and safety to policing and surveillance. These definitions are then further emphasized by the University's "UChicago **Safe App**" [bolding is my own], which can be used by students to send their location to UCPD directly in the case of an emergency.

However, note that the initial email from Boyer offers care only to students, and through entextualization offers safety only to students. Though administrators frequently claim that "community members" support the expansion of UCPD and its surveillance technology, when Heath talks about *public* safety, he is only able to do so because of the erasure of the Black people most often targeted by the UCPD. In other words, the University — as well as the faculty who wrote the aforementioned letter, and the students who rallied together to call for more policing¹⁰ and surveillance — are only able to justify the entextualization of safety into policing by placing safety out-of-joint (Derrida 1995) from the historical roots of gun violence: concentrated poverty and racial segregation stemming from "decades of explicitly racist housing and lending policy in both the government and private sectors, economic restructuring and deindustrialization (which had a disparate impact on Black people), and white flight and outmigration" (Cotter 2020). Moreover, the University's anti-abolitionist paradigm is further

¹⁰ These (mostly international) students were explicitly anti-abolitionist, and co-opted abolitionist syntax to rally for justice for Zheng and safety for the students who remain. There's another paper to be written here about the role of out-of-joint temporality and the appropriation of abolitionists' work, but this is not that paper.

justified by placing safety out-of-joint from the history of racialized police violence and UCPD’s history of the self-same racialized violence.

In the aftermath of Zheng’s murder, the University launched the “Always Think Safety” campaign as a means of highlighting “the many programs, and resources available at the University to help keep each of us [undefined] safe both on and off campus” (Safety and Security 2022). During a linguistic anthropology class taught by Professor Susan Gal, *Language and Culture II*, my peers and I were asked to analyze one of the University’s posters from the campaign (fig. 3). During our discussion, anthropology Ph.D. student, Caressa Franklin pointed

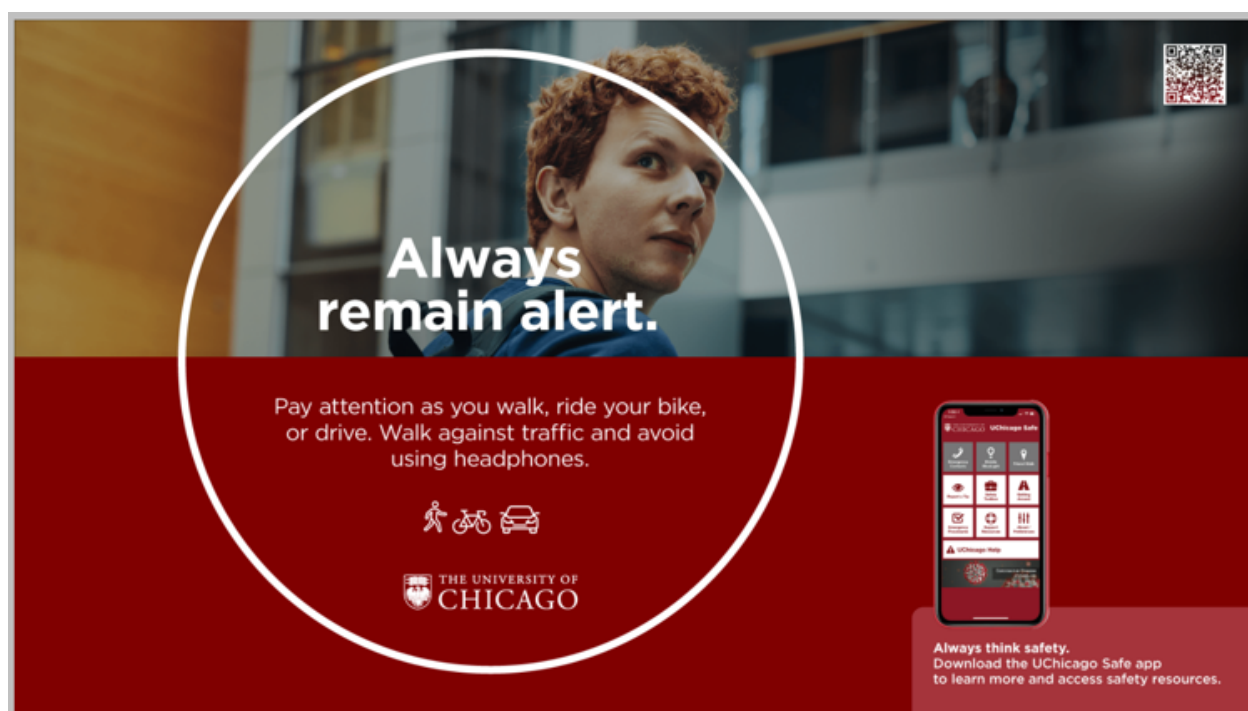


Figure 3: Safety & Security 2022.

out that the circle in the middle of the poster could be interpreted as visually indexing the campus “bubble” discussed in the historical context section of this paper (Franklin et al 2022).¹¹ Franklin cited an illustration from a South Side Weekly article, which represents the University

¹¹ Franklin is cited here with her express permission. Additionally, she does not claim sole ownership of this idea, but rather suggested that this theory was co-created by the article she cited and by the discussion we had with our classmates, who are included in the bibliography below (see: Abdul Azeez 2022).

as a circular seal surrounded by barbed wire (fig. 4) It was with this framework in mind that I examined the other posters from the campaign.

In the “Always keep valuables hidden” poster pictured in the introduction (fig. 2), the laptop is framed within the circle, whereas the student is just outside of it. If safety can be understood to be hiding valuables, then the inside of the circle can be indexed as “safe” by the

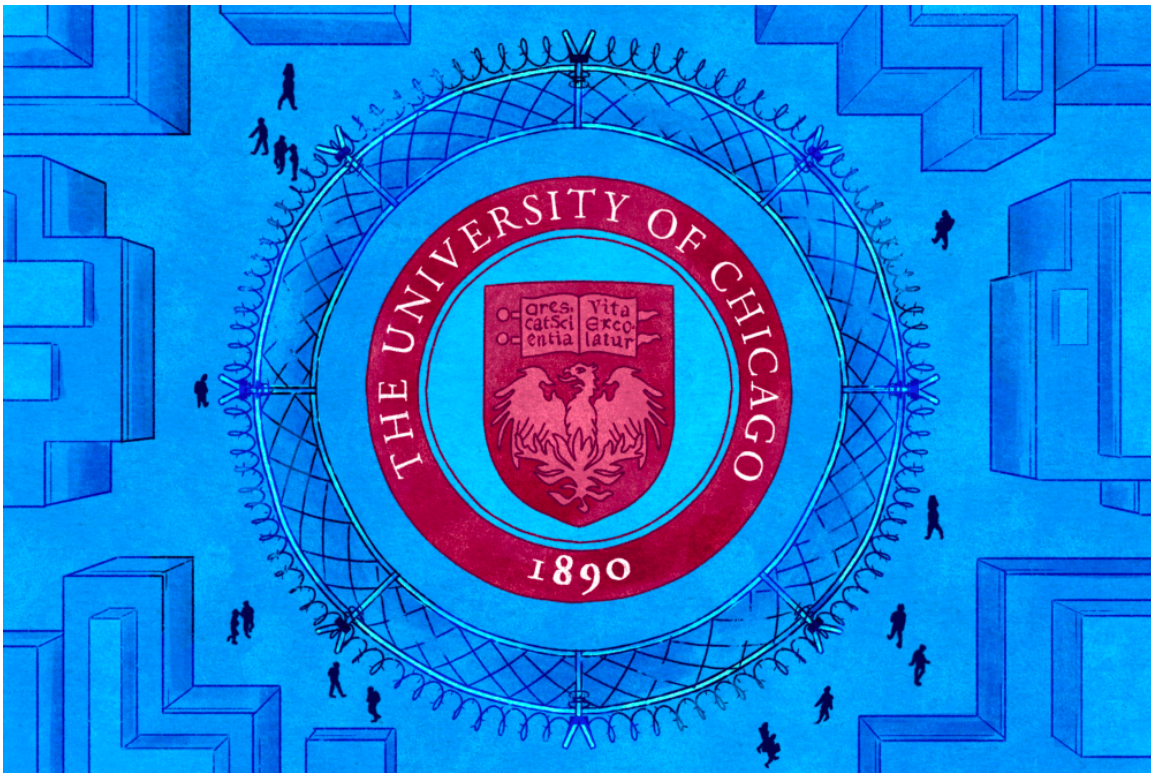


Figure 4: Tolentino 2021.

viewer. Using these same logics, the “Always prioritize safety” poster (fig. 5) indexes the inside of the circle as safe. This time the student is inside the circle, and a policeman stands just outside, a visual barrier between the world outside the “bubble” and the student. Implicitly, the

outside of the bubble is understood to be dangerous, and therefore the policeman can be indexed to safety.

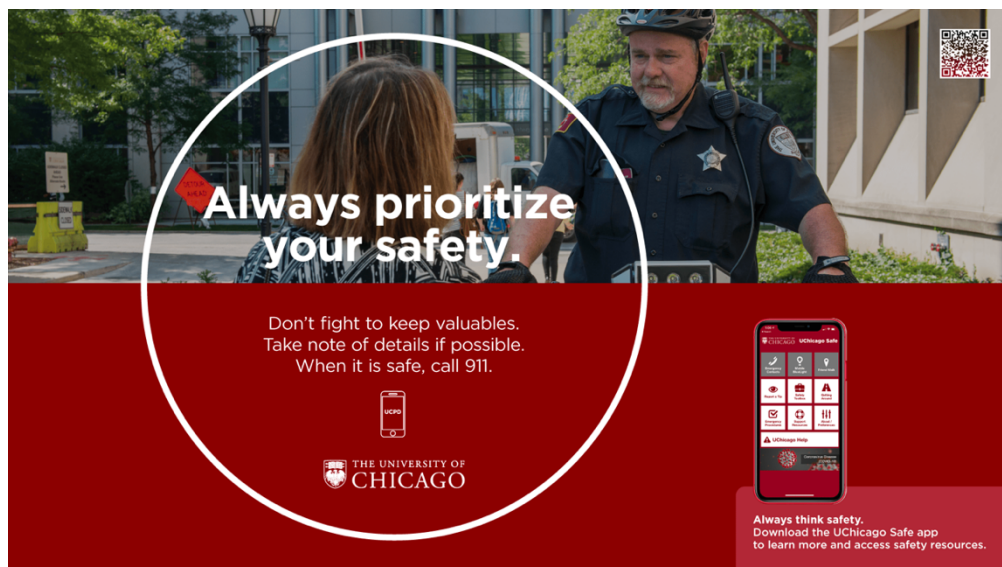


Figure 5: Safety and Security 2022.

On campus, this is visualized further by the layout of the University's buildings and emergency phones (colloquially known as "blue lights" because of the bright blue light at the top of each phone). 56th Street to 55th street and 60th street to 61st Street are the de-facto boundaries of campus to the north and south respectively, and both areas have a similar geography: residential areas that are not very well-lit due to a lack of streetlamps. Despite the similarities, however, blue lights are much more closely clustered together and concentrated between 60th and 61st Street than between 56th and 55th Street (fig. 6). For students who understand police as safety, the ring of blue lights around campus represents the outer edge of the protective bubble of the University.

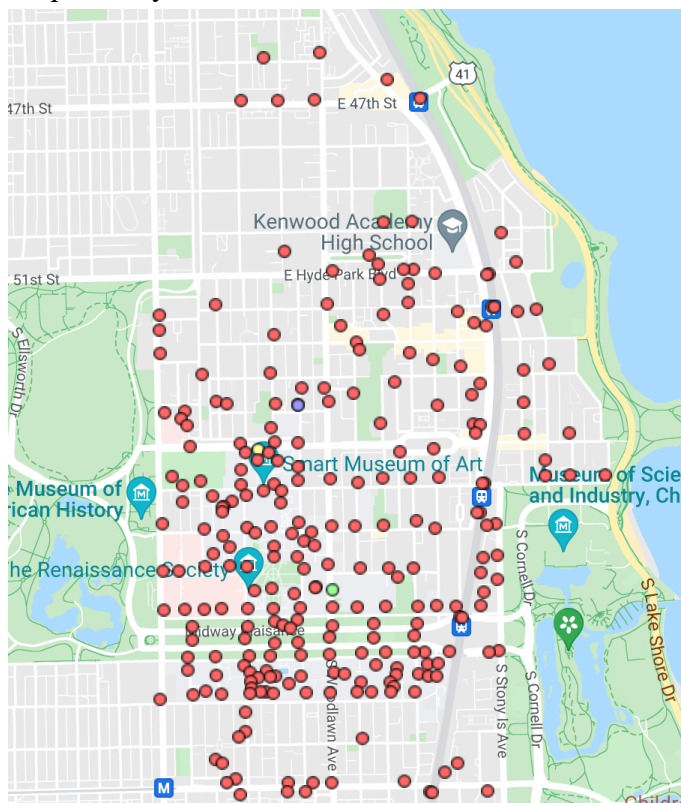


Figure 6: Safety and Security 2021.

Campus architecture itself is a bubble, with the Collegiate Gothic (Meyer 2013) heart of campus being surrounded by a circle of more contemporary buildings. In particular, the buildings along 60th Street are some of the most contemporary on campus and are unique in that there are almost no entrances on the southern sides of the buildings. The exception, the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, advertises that it “features both north and south entrances, welcoming individuals from all parts of the community” (UChicago Architecture 2022 [b]).¹² If the implication is that having a southern entrance makes a building welcoming to people from “all parts of the community,” then not having a southern entrance would imply the opposite — that is that not all parts of the community belong on campus. For the potential audience of the University’s brand the uptake of someone does not belong can be entextualized to mean someone the University must be protected from, furthering the justification that there should be a police force in place to protect the southern border of campus. The question then becomes: who does not belong at the University of Chicago? Given the aforementioned traffic stop data (IDOT 2020, CareNotCops 2020 [a]), as well as UCPD’s treatment of Black students on campus (Klein 2010; Lee and Grieve 2018), it may be inferred that it is Black people who do not belong.

Such an inference is further supported by the ways in which the University visualizes — or fails to visualize — “community.” The University’s visuality can be said to feature two main communities: the visualized University community and the invisible South Side community. Like safety, these communities are not clearly defined, and shift so often as to even overlap on occasion. Though there could be clear visualizations of what community is — students and

¹² Technically the Law Library also has a southern entrance, but it’s kept under constant surveillance and so is inaccessible as to sometimes not even open to the law students themselves who try to tap into the building. For example, in the summer of 2021, my friend (a law student) and I attempted to enter the building to print flyers and were denied entrance by both the keypad and a man who opened the door to ask us what we were doing...only to slam the door closed in our faces when we couldn’t explain why the keypad wouldn’t unlock the door for my friend.

faculty, working class neighbors, administrators — the University chooses not to visualize “community.” In doing so, the gaze is directed away from the tangible people impacted by the history of the South Side (University-affiliated and otherwise), and it becomes more difficult to ground history in a specific temporality. Keeping the University’s visuality ungrounded temporally protects the University from challenges to the indexical inversion (Miyako 2006) it uses to recursively erase the harm police have caused to Black people in the areas around campus (ex. Kartik-Narayan 2018).

That is to say that removing community members from visibility allows the University to obfuscate that an increase in policing would only mean safety for a select population on campus. It cannot be denied that the years of segregation and poverty concentration have increased rates of gun violence and violence generally on the South Side (Cotter 2020). However, in conversations with my peers, and in looking at the most frequently asked questions about the University on Quora and Reddit I found that many students (prospective and admitted) are warned about the dangers of going south of 61st Street in a way that goes beyond structural realities and moves into racial stereotyping.¹³ The neighborhood beyond the southern limits of campus is imagined as a symbol of danger, and though the entextualization of danger to the South Side is one not created solely by the University, that the surrounding area is seen as dangerous threatens the University’s depiction of a “safe campus.” To prevent the very real dangers of gun violence of from being seen and consequently threatening the University’s expansion project, the danger has to be disguised. In other words, the University’s claim that “Among the Top 10 Best Colleges in America, the University of Chicago’s campus is one of the

¹³ What University of Chicago student hasn’t heard the South Side described as a “ghetto,” a word that has been increasingly racialized since the 1970s (Clemens 2005)?

https://blackcommentator.com/132/132_guest_ghetto.html

safest” (Safety and Security 2021) is threatened by the proximity of the “dangers” of the South Side and as a result the University renders the nearby violence invisible within the context of its brand by means of the active erasure of the city south of 61st Street.

In describing the allure of the Hyde Park neighborhood on its website, the University describes the beautiful view of the downtown skyline and the accessibility of public transit from Hyde Park to downtown, but the rest of the neighborhood is generalized and reduced into a “progressive and multicultural community” (UChicago 2022 [b]). The most recent addition to the University of Chicago’s campus buildings similarly erases the Black people living next door to the University. The 10-story David Rubenstein Forum, which boasts all manner of amenities, has a room named the City View Room on the top floor. The room, which is advertised as having panoramic views, faces north and has an expansive view of campus and the Chicago skyline behind it. From this vantage point, the South Side is rendered invisible, however. The Forum’s official website claims that the room “offers a strong visual connection between the university and the city” (David Rubenstein Forum 2022). Just down the street, the David and Reva Logan Center has a terrace facing the opposite direction towards the South Side on the 8th floor, but the Logan Center draws no such “visual connection” between the University and the city. As such, the naming of Rubenstein Forum’s visual connection to the skyline that makes up the Loop -- Chicago’s downtown area -- and the Logan Center’s unacknowledged visual connection to the South Side brands the University as explicitly connected to the commercial center of the city and implicitly divided from the South Side and its pre-supposed dangers.

The University community is further distanced from the South Side through the discourse of the safety webinars of the fall of 2021. During the webinars, administrators repeatedly claimed that the increase in police and surveillance is supported by “community members” but the

University never names or reveals who these community members, effectively rendering “the community” invisible and intangible to listeners (Health 2021). The University’s framing of community consequently erases the possibility of hearing any voices from the South Side at all. In addition, because the webinar invitations were sent out over email, most of the people in attendance virtually were students and parents of students — the majority of whom are not from the South Side — and as such may only have access to the University’s visuality of what safety ought to look like. The invisibility of “the community” occurred again in the winter of 2022, when on January 18th, UCPD Officer Nicholas Twardak shot and critically wounded Rhysheen Wilson, a Black Hyde Park resident who was waving a gun as he was in the midst of a mental health crisis. Following the shooting, the University announced a new violence prevention fund, but “University spokesperson Gerald McSwiggan did not respond to Block Club’s [a Chicago news organization] question about who — aside from university officials — were involved in those conversations” (Evans 2022, bracketed comments are my own). Again, the community is rendered invisible and, in the space, left behind the University can mold safety to what it needs to justify the existence of the UCPD. Organizers like CareNotCops and their supporters are a minority on campus, and there are many who only ever see the University’s visuality. As such, if the listener has nothing but an erased community to look at, then UChicago’s vision of safety cannot be challenged.

But the University is also visible to the people within the Black South Side community that the University tries so hard to erase. As a consequence of the University’s encroachment onto the South Side, the University’s visuality is seen not just by the sources of the University’s profits but by the communities it displaces as well. It is only by considering “other” gazes that we can understand the means by which the University maintains social hierarchies. That is to say

that in order to further justify the University's hold over the South Side, the University pushes away the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods with a visuality that is seen as unwelcoming and even dangerous by some residents.

From the summer of 2019 to the summer of 2020, I served as the assistant director and then director of the StoryArts summer camp, a camp which (under non-pandemic circumstances) is an arts camp hosted at the Logan Center for mid-South Side middle schoolers. The vast majority of these students are Black, and nearly every camper has a scholarship to attend the camp for free. When I was researching the University's architecture and read the Logan Center's claim to being welcoming to "all parts of the community" (UChicago Architecture 2022 [b]) I was incredulous. Although the Logan Center is technically open to the public, my students were repeatedly asked what they were doing in the building, and one Logan staffer went so far as to threaten calling the police when the children were playing a little too loudly in the hallway outside of the camp art room.

As a result, I understand that although the visuality of campus buildings are branded as inclusive and safe to the University audience, the image of safety is ultimately preserved by creating an unwelcoming visuality for Black residents of the South Side. For example, on the other side of campus, the North Residential Dorm is branded as "The full-block site is designed as a new portal to campus, opening up the University to the greater Hyde Park community, while also encouraging interactions and exchange among students of different ages and backgrounds" (Studio Gang Architects 2018). The dark tunnel that serves as the "portal" is a wind tunnel that pushes against people who attempt to cross it, and one South Side resident remarked that the physical hostility of the comparative narrowness of a tunnel versus the open space that had existed prior to 2016 had made them feel that campus was becoming more closed off rather than

more accessible to their community. In an interview with WBEZ Maurice Washington, graduate student, and born-and-raised resident of Englewood, commented on the shiny, contemporary buildings of 60th Street saying that:

“This, to me, symbolizes the division between the haves and the have-nots, the privileged and the underprivileged,” Washington said, looking west from the corner, just a block from the university’s glimmering Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts building (Yoon-Ji Kang 2020).

The buildings visualized as centers of collaboration by the university instead are visualized as borders and barriers by residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. The aforementioned blue lights reinforce the visual borders by being a symbol not of the outer edge of the “protective bubble” of the University, but of the ever-present surveillance of the UCPD. The Black people most often targeted by UCPD are made aware of the constant dangers of existing near campus and this visibility pushes residents further and further away from campus, making space for the University to continue its project of expansion.

VI. Guerrilla-Visualities: Safety as Seen from Outside the Institution

The displacement of Black people on the South Side does not occur unchallenged, however. Using. Organizers on and off campus build a guerrilla-visibility as a means of redefining safety and pushing back against the University’s expansion project through the featuring of untraditional forms of knowledge production; the de-entextualization of policing to safety; the centering of Black South Side residents; and the use of multiple simultaneous temporalities. More generally, organizers fight back by creating a guerrilla-visibility that acts as a mimetic opposite to the University’s anti-abolitionist visibility.

The most direct strategy for challenging the University’s visuality is the re-entextualization of anti-abolitionist aesthetics into temporally grounded, abolitionist guerrilla-visualities. On campus every year, organizers from a myriad of student organizing groups come together to create UChicago United’s *Dis-Orientation guide* (“Dis-O”). *Dis-O* is handed out to first years as a means of countering what organizers with UChicago United refers to as

“UChicago propaganda”

through re-entextualization.¹⁴

Take for example, the

University’s claim that “the

vitality of the South Side is

fundamentally linked with that

of the University” (fig. 7).

CareNotCops lays out a clear

timeline of the University’s

expansion project in *Dis-O*,

which then emphasizes the

harm that gentrification has caused to South Side residents (see fig. 8 for an excerpt from *Dis-*

O’s section on gentrification). By grounding the University’s claims temporarily, the

University’s obfuscation of harm is exposed to readers of the guide and the indexical inversion

(Miyako 2006) that creates a justification for gentrification is unraveled. In addition, the theme

of *Dis-O* every year is chosen based on what is “trending” at the time, allowing organizers to

draw in students who haven’t necessarily encountered abolition below. Though the use of visuals

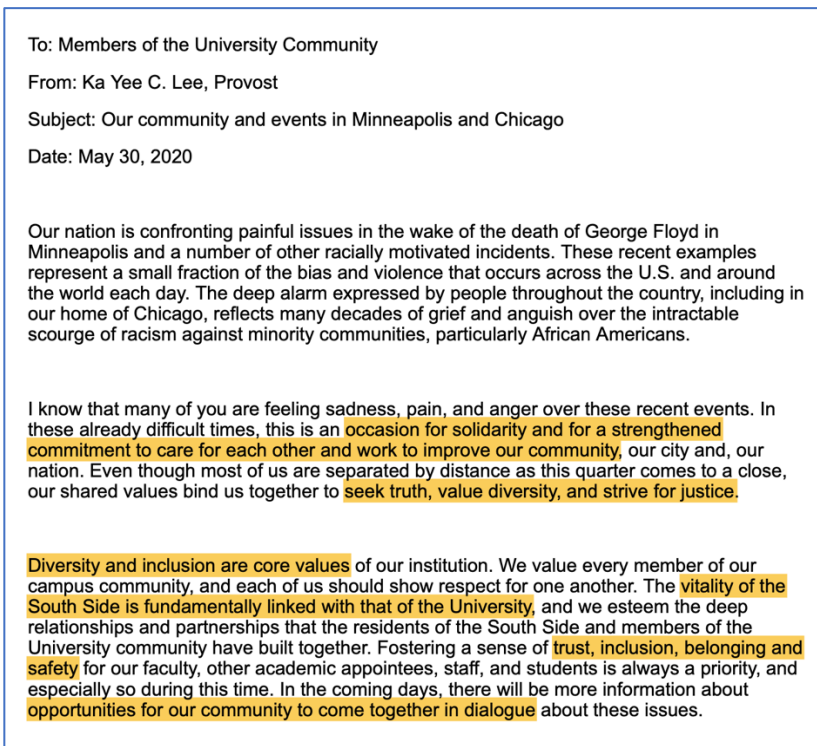


Figure 7: email from Ka Yee C. Lee, Provost [highlighting is my own]

¹⁴ I understand UChicago propaganda to be another way of saying UChicago brand, so I’ll make no distinctions.

from *Animal Crossing*, a video game series developed by Nintendo, may seem light-hearted, it is a means of making an abolitionist guerrilla-visibility more accessible. For example, Tom Nook (the character pictured in the excerpt from *Dis-O*) went viral in 2020, in memes that portrayed the character as a money-hungry loan shark (fig. 9). Visualizing the University's expansion project with a character known for being a crook creates an immediate guerrilla-visibility for readers in the know. Moreover, the accessibility of pop culture symbols emphasizes the importance of the gaze (hook 1992) over "listening" in guerrilla-visualities. A concept that would otherwise take long explanations in text or speech can be communicated much more quickly and clearly visually.

Not all re-entextualization requires familiarity with pop culture, however. South Side organizers'

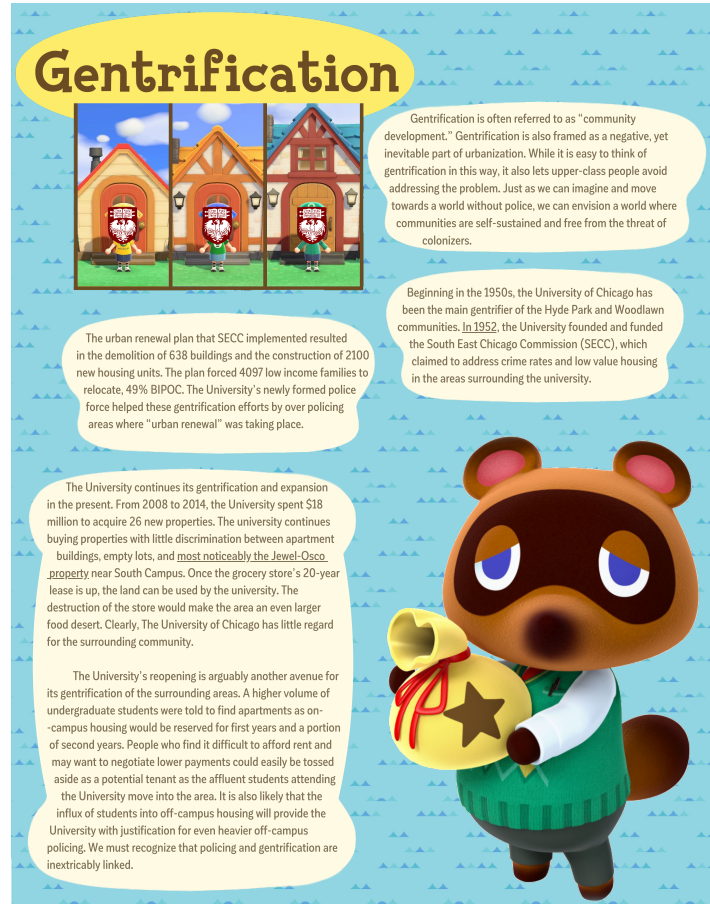


Figure 8: UChicago United 2020



Figure 9: KnowYourMeme 2022

abolitionist guerrilla-visualities also have strategies for engaging directly with people who have only ever seen the University's anti-abolitionist visuality, and who are not necessarily well-versed in the memes and trends of youth culture. At CareNotCops' "We Need Safety for All" Rally, Vee Morris-Moore, an organizer with Assata's Daughters, challenged the idea that more police officers mean more safety:

The messaging that came out of the webinar, that the president and the Chicago Police Superintendent hold is dangerous, not only to this area, but also when we are talking about a city that is already in question around its contract with ShotSpotter, which is a company that already has gunshot detection technology in this neighborhood. There's already technology in this neighborhood. That does not work. Because police do not work. There are two major police departments in this neighborhood already. And if they work, we would not be mourning young people every single week in this neighborhood, whether it's on this campus, or three blocks south. The students of this campus have a responsibility to not just this campus, but the community. And if y'all want safety, like we want safety, you must push back against the University of Chicago's agenda to bring more police and more surveillance into this neighborhood. It will lead to more black death, and it will not keep you safe (Morris-Moore 2021).

Although most of the rally attendees were already either in CareNotCops or supporting, CareNotCops recorded their speech with Morris-Moore's permission, CareNotCops video recorded their speech and were able to play it back for the people who participated in CareNotCops' Reimagining Safety Teach-In.¹⁵

¹⁵ A transcript of the speech Vee gave can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3G9wrod>.

The guerrilla-visibility in this example is two-fold. Morris-Moore’s initial push-back against the University’s vision of safety posits that for Black South Side residents UChicago safety means death. Additionally, the recording of the speech — which was shown to a group where the majority were University students who do not organize and therefore may not have seen the impacts of policing on the South Side — re-entextualizes the faceless “community” that the University’s visibility erases into neighbors made up of real people who face real danger with increases in policing. To describe it more generally, an abolitionist guerrilla-visibility stands in opposition from an anti-abolitionist visibility by undoing the anti-abolitionist erasure of Black South Side residents through the returning of the gaze towards those erased from the picture: the Black residents of Hyde Park and the surrounding neighborhoods most directly impacted by systems of policing and surveillance.

On the one year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd, abolitionist organizations Defund CPD, Dissenters, and CareNotCops hosted an art build and action centered around the slogan “honor the dead, fight like hell for the living” (fig. 10). The poster used to advertise the event features two protesters in the middle of the page, one looking back at five victims of



Figure 10: Qi 2021

police brutality (Laquan McDonald, Bettie Jones, Latanya Haggerty, RonnieMan, Roshao McIntosh) and the other protester looking forward towards the crossed-out words “~~eops~~” and “~~prisons~~.” There are two temporalities depicted in the poster: the history of police violence in the past, and the hope for abolition in the future. The visualization of abolition as being both historically grounded and future-oriented stands in direct contrast with the University’s out-of-joint anti-abolitionist visuality. In creating a guerrilla-visuality to see safety within its historical context and with its potential for change, organizers challenge the University by re-entextualizing policing with violence, and safety with alternative forms of protection.

For the 2020 National Week of Mourning, artist and organizer Monica Trinidad “collaborated with 5 artists and 5 organizations to curate a series of posters answering the question of what it means to ‘keep each other safe’ in the streets” (Trinidad 2020). Like the “honor the dead, fight like hell for the living” poster, many of the posters in the series play with out-of-joint temporalities (Derrida 1995). Trinidad’s contribution (fig. 11) to the series explicitly entextualizes safety to wearing a mask in the street. Behind the foregrounded figure, protesters carrying posters tie Trinidad’s work to the past with the



Figure 11: Trinidad 2020

poster “Fight like Ida B. and Marsha P”¹⁶ and to a potential future with the posters demanding “police free schools” and “defund the police.”

A common indexical inversion (Miyako 2006) in abolitionist/anti-abolitionist discourse is the use of language that entextualizes abolition to newness, as explained by Professor Garrett Felber from Yale University: “Both critics of abolition and recent converts often frame it as a radical new concept. This can have the effect, intended or not, of making it seem idealistic, naïve, or undertheorized” (Felber 2020). In highlighting the long history of abolition, Trinidad challenges the presupposition that there is no historical grounding for abolition and illustrates that there has been an alternative to police as safety for generations. Abolition is visualized as rooted in tangible, historical possibility, and by placing concrete demands for the future alongside the history, abolitionist organizers’ demands shift idealistic to realistic and inevitable.

Another strategy of visualizing the realism of abolition (and a strategy of abolitionist guerrilla-visualities generally) is visualizing by means of “practicing” abolition. Whereas the University can realize policing as safety within such sites as architecture, organizers realize their visions of safety on the streets and collectively. To put it another way, one means by which organizers build their guerrilla-visibility is by practicing it in their day-to-day lives and becoming counter-visuals themselves. As opposed to the University’s closed-door, depersonalized visibility, an abolitionist guerrilla-visibility is alive and able to use the past as a means of making sense of the present. CareNotCops is an abolitionist organization not just because they organize against UCPD, but because they take steps to live the version of safety that they hope will replace systems of police and surveillance. Every year on Halloween, UCPD and CPD post extra officers along 53rd Street in order to police the teens who go out to celebrate. 53rd is one of only

¹⁶ A reference to the work of civil rights leader Ida B Wells and trans activist Marsha P. Johnson. “Fight like Ida B. and Marsha P.” is also song by Chicago rapper and organizer Ric Wilson.

two commercial corridors in Hyde Park (the other being the significantly smaller and quieter 57th Street), and the increase in policing leads to more interactions between Black youth and cops, and consequently leads to more instances of police violence. In response, for the past two years CareNotCops' organizers have partnered with organizers from GoodKids MadCity to run a "Peace Pop Out" over the course of the night. The Peace Pop Out is a means of providing a space for Black South Side residents to celebrate Halloween. In this space, safety looks like cop-watching, or the practice of surveilling police in public spaces so as to de-escalate or deter an escalation of law enforcement violence (CareNotCops 2021 [a]). It also looks like having trained members of GoodKids MadCity on hand to de-escalate conflicts between youth, circumventing the need to call the police. In 2021, GoodKids MadCity successfully de-escalated three such conflicts without police intervention, and in doing so justify claims that there are alternatives to police as safety. As a result, the indexical inversion that frames abolition as idealistic comes apart.

It is from this idea of lived abolition that CareNotCops' "People's University" retreat came to be in the spring of 2021. One of CareNotCops' demands for the University calls for a People's University, writing that "the Administration consistently chooses to meet the needs of the market over the needs of our communities. The only way to end this is to take power from the neoliberal, racial capitalist administration and give it to the people" (CareNotCops 2021 [b]). One question that arises from such a demand is: what does power look like in the hands of the people? CareNotCops answered this question by structuring the retreat around what one potential People's University may look like. The retreat lasted from 1:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m., during which

organizers ran two mutual aid donation sites, ran workshops on subjects such as “History of the UCPD” and “Alternatives to Police,” and created art together (fig. 12).

CareNotCops’ practice of abolition at the retreat used temporality in the same way as

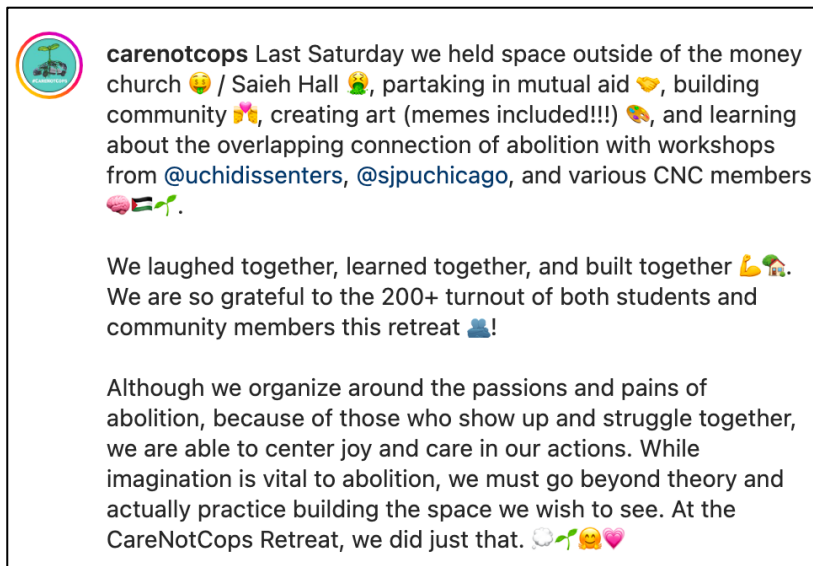


Figure 12: CareNotCops 2021 [c]

described within the aforementioned strategy of an abolitionist visuality. Multiple temporalities again came together, with the “History of the UCPD” workshop visualizing a past that challenges the University’s claims to the effectiveness of the UCPD, and with a discussion of how Mariame Kaba’s short story, “Justice,” can be used as a framework for imagining abolitionist futures. Like the re-entextualization of abolition from idealistic to realistic in Trinidad’s poster, the retreat re-entextualizes abolition from a dream to a goal. That the retreat and by extension, the Peace Pop Out are realizations of abolition in the world in which UCPD exists — as opposed to the post-police world imagined inside of Trinidad’s poster — lends additional justification and credibility to the gaze of abolitionist guerrilla-visualities.

Conclusion

As I expand this project, I will work with the organizers who I’ve learned so much from to intervene in the conflict between abolitionist and anti-abolitionist visualities by working together to re-draw the University’s “Always Think Safety” ad campaign. In doing so I hope to

understand both what it means to visualize abolition, and how the visual aesthetics shape the future of the South Side. The question of how the University, its affiliates, and South Side community members move forward from the historic and continued acts of violence then remains in flux. The University's conflation of safety with police and various conflicts of visuality stand in opposition to abolitionist organizers like CareNotCops' challenges of what safety did, can, and could look like. The two groups have fundamentally different goals for what comes next for the South Side and the community members who call the South Side home. How each organization visualizes anti-abolition and abolition determines the type of future-building work they will do: whereas the University is invested in maintaining its current role policing and gentrifying the South Side, CareNotCops and the community organizers it works with advocate and fight for alternative futures for all South Siders. Moreover, analyzing the University's anti-abolitionist visuality in contrast with organizers' counter-visibility raises the importance of temporal grounding while thinking through questions racial justice.

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