

Speculative Criminality at Home: Bypassing Tenant Rights Through Police Surveillance in Detroit's Rental Housing

Rae Baker 

Education and Community Action Research, University of Cincinnati, USA

Correspondence: Rae Baker (rae.baker@uc.edu)

Submitted: 30 April 2024 **Accepted:** 10 September 2024 **Published:** 21 January 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue “AI for and in Urban Planning” edited by Tong Wang (TU Delft) and Neil Yorke-Smith (TU Delft), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i388>

Abstract

In 2016, Detroit, Michigan's police department piloted a city-wide public-private-community video surveillance program called Project Green Light (PGL). Businesses that host the service, typically gas stations and convenience stores, receive priority response times for emergency dispatch calls, artificially decreasing 911 response times in a city with historically low emergency response capacity. This has led to many senior care homes with medically vulnerable residents to subscribe to PGL, as well as landlords of residential apartment buildings. While the program has been identified as a marker of gentrification by housing and anti-surveillance activists and residents, it has also raised concern about perpetuating the criminalization of Black Detroiters, specifically those living in rental housing that hosts the technology. In a city that is rapidly evolving through private, institutional, and public partnership developments while elected officials espouse to maintain racial and economic equity as core values of Detroit's upcoming master planning process, the lack of foresight of the impact of surveillance tech is striking. The article's focus is on surveillance technology as a defining element of contemporary urban development which enacts both a forbearance and expansion of rights through the application of technology to property relations. Relying on the automation of policing and racially biased artificial intelligence perpetuates criminality based on race, class, and perceived gender while additionally tying those experiences to the bundle of rights associated with the ownership of property.

Keywords

criminalization; forbearance of rights; policing; surveillance; tenant–landlord relations

1. Introduction

The year 2024 marked 10 years since Judge Steven W. Rhodes confirmed the plan of financial adjustment that led to Detroit “exiting” municipal bankruptcy, the largest filing of its kind in US history (Barnes et al., 2021). A foundational feature of the city's bankruptcy proceedings was the state appointment of emergency

financial manager, Kevyn Orr from 2013–2014. Orr’s oversight removed legislative authority from the majority Black elected representatives of Detroit’s City Council, and effectively ceased democratic decision-making power in the nation’s largest majority Black city (Breznau & Kirkpatrick, 2018). Hours before Orr’s time as emergency manager ended in December 2014, Chief of Police James Craig, hired under the authority of Orr, requested approval for access to \$7.5 million, which was granted. These funds established the city’s Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) and procured \$6.1 million worth of police surveillance equipment (Baker et al., 2022). The infrastructure of what would become an expansive network of interconnected surveillance apparatus was procured and installation began. This marked a new era of policing, governance, and financial transition under the eye of the nation to demonstrate that Detroit—a city that had been racistly characterized for decades as ungovernable, vacant, and dangerous (Boyle, 2001; Chanan & Steinmetz, 2005)—could be responsibly governed.

Detroit has continued to be expected to prove itself as a city of law and order, rule and effective governance over its citizens since its establishment as a colonial outpost on Anishnaabe land in 1701, and contemporarily during the neighborhood uprisings of 1967. Detroit’s July 1967 uprisings, catalyzed by police brutality and the criminalization of Black life and culture, has been deservedly archived and analyzed, and recently revisited by cultural workers and activists to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the ’67 rebellion and its lasting influence on Detroiters’ history of resisting and persisting through ongoing state violence, economic crisis, and ongoing police brutality. The civil rights era of resisting police oppression amid the continuous rollout of urban disinvestment and growing white suburbanization and its impacts on policy and urban development initiatives has been thoughtfully detailed in Thomas Sugrue’s *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, William Bunge’s *Fitzgerald*, and Amy Maria Kenyon’s *Dreaming Suburbia*, to name a few. The influence of Detroit’s summer of 1967 on the collective memory of residence and the city’s landscape is lasting, and the events hold their rightful place within US urban and civil rights histories. However, the rebellion is often selectively remembered by public-facing elected officials in the city today.

2. Policing in Detroit

On the precipice of political change in Detroit following the July 1967 uprisings, residents elected Roman Gribbs who served as Detroit’s last Caucasian mayor for over four decades, from 1970 to 1974. Gribbs vowed to take decisive action to decrease crime during his time in office. He served as an architect, alongside police chief John Nicols of Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS), a neighborhood policing unit that functioned between 1971 to 1973 and was known by community members as the “killer squad” of police (Farley, 2015). STRESS officers murdered 22 Detroiters in the unit’s short period of operation (Boyd et al., 1981; Sugrue, 1996). The unit was understood to be a response to tensions that remained between police and community members as a consequence of the police murder of 38 civilians during the ’67 rebellion, as well as the arrest of more than 7,000 Detroiters over the course the four days in July ’67. The unit willfully relied on racial profiling as well as decoy and diversion tactics to coax Black bystanders into illegal situations that led to arrests (McCoy, 2021). Though anti-STRESS organizing and coalitions were able to pressure elected officials into dismantling the unit, violent police–community relations have remained a fixture in the city’s landscape more than half a century later.

Mayor Mike Dugan was elected into office in 2013, and like Gribbs, the last Caucasian mayor before him, his mayoral administration has invested heavily in the armament of police, increased police hiring, and procured

the largest expansion of the city's police surveillance infrastructure. In July of 2024, in response to gun violence fatalities at a Detroit block party following multiple unresponsive calls to the Detroit Police Department (DPD) from residents (Barrett, 2024), the Duggan administration and the Detroit chief of police announced the immediate creation of a new STRESS-like unit that would specifically patrol neighborhoods for "illegal" parties. The creation of this new unit is illustrative of how lessons that could have been learned from such violent police-community relations that catalyzed the 1967 uprisings have gone unacknowledged, brutally and fatally by the DPD. On July 12 2024, Detroit resident Sherman Lee Butler was tasered, shot, and killed by a court bailiff and Detroit Police while being evicted from his apartment unit in a building undergoing mass renovictions. Weeks later, on the 57th anniversary of the 1967 uprisings, Detroit's mayor unveiled a plaque at the Algiers Motel, commemorating the lives of three Black teenagers who were murdered by police at the motel during the uprising in 1967.

From excessively high unresolved civilian complaints against police officers in 2024 (Herberg, 2024) to growing unaffordability and gentrification across the city's neighborhoods, and increasing oversight of once normal activities like barbeques and block parties, Detroiters remain under heavy police watch alongside growing unaffordability and deeply uneven development that are increasingly untenable. Residents have labeled the new STRESS-like police unit as part of the "New Detroit," an era marked by the professionalization of labor, financialization of municipal assets and housing, and the municipally facilitated open season investment opportunities for billionaire and small business owners alike and the ensuing gentrification that has followed (Marotta, 2021; Peck & Whiteside, 2016). The business-focused, entrepreneurial, and exclusionary culture of New Detroit has been decried by residents as causing deeper racial and economic disparities, and the erasure of a city that lifelong Detroiters have called home (Cummins, 2016).

3. Surveilling "New Detroit"

In 2015, the Detroit Police partnered with General Motors, the business ventures of the Gilbert and Illitch Families (of Little Caesar's Pizza and Quicken Loans wealth, respectively), and a Southeast Michigan utilities provider to expand surveillance technologies throughout Detroit's downtown business district to fill in the holes left by capacity issues within the police department (Bernd, 2015). Among Gilbert's metastasizing 100 plus heavily tax abated investment properties that have solidified a gentrified consumer and entertainment focused stronghold throughout downtown and the recently rebranded Midtown in Detroit's Cass Corridor neighborhood, more than 500 surveillance cameras and a private 24/7 security force monitor the areas surrounding Gilbert's properties (Anderson, 2016; Biles & Rose, 2021). In addition to the influence of the "Gilbertville" surveillance network, Detroit's post-bankruptcy planning regime has included the expansion of surveillance technologies, marking a speculative harbinger of business investments yet to come. Where there is potential for a business district to grow, existing business owners are solicited to host Project Green Light (PGL) to attract further business development. PGL corridors, where multiple lights and cameras are installed to serve adjacent and neighboring businesses within a multi-block radius continue to be established throughout the city. As of January of 2024, Detroit's collection of surveillance infrastructure includes gunshot detection technology, cellular phone readers, automated license plate readers, mobile fingerprint readers, and an expansive closed-circuit camera network. The DPD is one of several public agencies that utilize surveillance technology, in addition to the Detroit Fire Department, the departments of Public Works, Parks and Recreation, and Housing and Revitalization. These technologies, some of which utilize artificial

intelligence (AI) and facial recognition technology, have been approved through procurement requests made to the city's Public Health and Safety Committee and City Council. Although the protocol for preparing and submitting a procurement request is clearly outlined in the city's Community Input Over Government Surveillance Ordinance, which became active legislation in 2021, DPD and other government agencies regularly ignore procurement requirements that the ordinance defines as transparency measures for surveillance related spending, resulting in at least one procurement focused lawsuit against the city (Rahal, 2022).

In Detroit and in many US cities, surveillance data is processed at centralized police data hubs that are a byproduct of the 2001 PATRIOT Act (Vasi & Strang, 2009). Surveillance data in Detroit is funneled directly to Detroit's RTCC, modeled after the post-9/11 Department of Homeland Security Fusion Centers that were designed to gather, analyze, and share information related to threats to homeland security (Przeszlowski et al., 2023). Due to Detroit's proximity to the US-Canada border, memorandums of understanding across enforcement agencies require data collected for law enforcement purposes by DPD to be shared with Michigan State Police, county police, and US Customs and Border Protection.

PGL was the first of the post-bankruptcy technology procurements to draw oppositional public attention. The private-public-community surveillance program was piloted in 2016 when eight gas stations installed CCTV video cameras monitored by the DPD. Cameras and the live video streams they captured were accompanied by flashing green signal lights to indicate to passersby the location was under police surveillance. These lights freckle the city's landscape, particularly in commercial corridors. Since 2016, more than 1,000 additional locations have joined the program, each with a minimum of three cameras ("Detroit Police Department celebrates 1K Project Green Light partners," 2024). In the program's brief operation, three Black Detroiters have been wrongfully identified and arrested by DPD (Hill, 2024). These misidentifications are the result of PGL utilizing AI facial recognition software that routinely misidentifies the faces of Black people upwards of 96% of the time (Benedict, 2022). The assumed objectivity of surveillance technology ignores that automated anti-Blackness is a form of racism perpetuated by biases that are engineered directly into technology through machine learning processes (Nkonde, 2019). In 2022, PGL was graded by the National Institute of Justice as a program with "no effect," meaning "implementing the program is unlikely to result in the intended outcome(s) and may result in a negative outcome(s)" (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

Recent uprisings opposing police brutality, from localized responses in Ferguson, Missouri following the police murder of Michael Brown, and the global responses following the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd by police make clear that ongoing police antagonism against Black communities through acts of state sanctioned brutality do not go unopposed. However, mechanisms of "proactive" policing such as surveillance technologies that become embedded within urban infrastructure are constant and passive, and receive much less attention and public concern despite their pervasive nature of "the gaze without eyes" (Koskela, 2000) that is deployed into neighborhoods as regular features of rising business districts and housing developments. Detroiters on the other hand have been collectively opposing the pervasive expansion of surveillance technology through city-wide coalitions, not dissimilar from those that formed against the aggressive expansion of policing in Detroit during the operation of STRESS in the 1970s. Recent Detroit-based coalitions have opposed police surveillance by giving presentations during meetings of City Council and the Board of Police Commissioners, holding educational discussions among community

members, art activism, street level protests, and pressuring city government to pass the 2021 Community Input Over Government Surveillance Ordinance which was deeply supported by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). In 2016, the ACLU launched the national Community Control Over Police Surveillance initiative with the intention to support the development of legislation mandating that local communities be provided a meaningful opportunity to review, comment on, and participate in all decisions concerning the procurement and use of surveillance technologies used by public agencies in their cities (Southerland, 2023). This community opportunity for oversight is a mode of resistance against the normalization of technologies that speculatively criminalize all residents—particularly residents of color—through constant monitoring of their everyday activities.

There is too often an unexamined acceptance within the academic disciplines of planning, geography, criminology, and among professional urban planners about how surveillance has always been part of urban life (Fussey & Coaffee, 2012). The current era of surveillance urbanism, in which surveillance technology connecting apparatus on the ground, in the air, and perched upon points of elevation across the urban landscape to endlessly collect data for law enforcement agencies from nonconsenting passersby are relatively normal if not unconscious components of urban life. Surveillance urbanism manifests in the socio-economic logic of governmental and judicial entitlement to personal information collected through architectures of mediated computational inputs, and networked data sharing of the top-down technocratic digitization of urban life (Bibri et al., 2022). Fussey and Coaffee (2012, p. 201) describe surveillance in cities as a constant and defining component of urbanism:

Surveillance has always been a part of urban life. Yet despite such antecedents, stretching back to antiquity, a number of changes in both city life and the means of observing it have animated significant changes in the scope and techniques of urban surveillance.

In no insignificant way have the professions of urban planning and policing contributed to cultures of surveillance, often through authoritative powers of regulating spaces, hostile anti-homeless architecture and criminalization of homelessness, and encouraging self-disciplining and stigmatization of behavior through bylaws and fines (Harris, 2011). In this acceptance of cities as normalized spaces of surveillance, surveillance culture continues to grow, often without clear focus from urban planners about how surveillance further entrenches racial inequality into the urban landscape, creates disproportionate outcomes for resident wellbeing, and literally seeks to embody criminalization through (mis)identification of specifically Black and brown residents. In this way, planners demonstrate ambivalence and benevolence toward some measures of “safety” within cities while claiming responsibility for others, justified through claims of professional jurisdiction.

Though the 1980s was the last decade when the occurrence of crime in US cities was actually on the rise, CCTV systems use among city policing agencies grew throughout the 1990s into the 2010s, often thought of as a response to reports about increasing crime (Barker, 2010; Tcherni-Buzzeo, 2019). What has drawn public support and municipal buy-in of CCTV technology is the misinformation that crime rates continue to rise, fear of crime, and “the coalescence of video surveillance into existing dominant administrative discourses of crime control” that influenced the popularity of CCTV within policy circles (Fussey & Coaffee, 2012, p. 202). CCTV technology has evolved since the 1990s and now often utilizes AI to analyze data, such as facial recognition technology. Its use in public space may afford passersby with a sense of security,

though these systems were initially thought of as anti-terrorist technologies rather than tools for local crime reduction in the post 9/11 era (Graham, 2009). The continuous growth of smart city AI technologies employed by municipal agencies via corporate third-party vendors has rightfully raised questions concerning privacy and data ownership and retention from immigrant rights organizations, legal practitioners, activists, and community members (Goodman & Powles, 2019). Though the effects of AI continue to prove to be antithetical to the goals of urban planning, to increase quality of life and equity of urban living indiscriminately for city residents, urban planning practitioners seem absent or at best passive in conversations about the impact of the increasing use of surveillance across cities (Batty, 2018). If anything, projects like Sidewalk Toronto indicate that planners are willing to uncritically hurl the profession and practice of urban planning into the AI unknown (Lorinc, 2019).

The increasing use of AI technologies, from public works and planning departments to police services, requires mass amounts of data to train “intelligence” models, and even more data for analysis and “intelligence” decision making to train predictive functions. Elected officials and civil servants’ willingness and acceptance to utilize AI software, often despite uninformed decision making about product function, facilitates the expansion and reliance on AI as an increasingly normative suite of apparatus that confuses surveillance with intelligence through governmental-corporate and judicial-corporate partnerships that are central to the function of civic and social institutions. Whereas property has been a primary category for scholars concerned with race-making (Blomley, 2016; Bonds, 2019), the effects and impact of surveillance and AI present an additional category of race-making that forefronts criminality and property relations, just as the lantern laws that regulated the nighttime movement of Black and indigenous slaves in New York state in the 18th century (Browne, 2015), so too do the green lights marking the landscape in Detroit. PGL’s use of facial recognition technology that compares collected imagery to the state of Michigan’s mugshot database indicates that speculative criminality that perpetuates the criminalization of Black residents by design is a core organizing principal in the city’s current era of redevelopment.

Surveillance technologies that collect biometric data create particularly uneven experiences of criminalization and punishment for women of color and the trans community. While urban space in essence is always gendered (Koskela, 2000), and always designed with dominant binary genders in mind, the uneven gendered experience of urban living is reaffirmed through such practices as members of the trans community being targeted by police for *existing* in public spaces and being more likely to live in areas where police surveillance and specifically facial recognition technology is in use (Daum, 2015). While richly melanated skin tones are frequently misidentified by AI-modeled facial recognition software (Lohr, 2022), the people responsible for engineering binary and bias gendered analysis into FRT trained such software utilizing the images of white cis gender men (Buolamwini & Gebu, 2018), engineering even greater risk of criminalization and arrest onto the lives of cis women, the trans community, and people of color at large. While many criticisms of the use of AI in policing are focused specifically on the failings and inequalities perpetuated by the technologies themselves, such as race and gender bias being engineered into their analysis models (Herruzo, 2021; Khan et al., 2022), the use of AI technologies in policing also changes the behavior of police and policing as an institution (Joh, 2022), which requires critical thinking on the part of planners as to how the evolution of policing necessitates a re-evaluation of planner’s conceptualization of building safe and liveable cities.

Importantly, as Lois Wacquant (2009) describes in *Punishing the Poor*, there have been countless efforts by the primary targets of policing and penalization to resist, divest, and divert the effect of the penal state on

their communities. Including movements of resistance from the streets and the grassroots in theoretical analysis of urban change is critical in understanding the broad perspectives, direct actions, and coalitions that shape the urban sphere, as is understanding the role of policing, police powers over property, and the effects of the expanding militarization of the cities we live in. Green Light Black Futures (GLBF, 2019–2021) was a coalition of local and national partners who opposed the expansion of surveillance technology in Detroit, in which the author of this article was a member of the coalition’s research team. The coalition hosted political education workshops, conflict mediation trainings and community safety events to build capacity across Detroit for conflict mediation and harm reduction strategies without relying on policing or carceral forms of punishment. The coalition designed and distributed a city-wide community safety survey that asked Detroiters their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of safety in their neighborhoods, and sought opinions about DPD’s recent implementation of a variety of surveillance technologies. The coalition’s research team’s analysis of survey responses found that Detroiters identify safety as the result of investments in their neighborly relationships, pro-social amenities and resources such as parks, health care, and access to affordable housing and food (Baker et al., 2022). Analysis also found Detroiters hold a general distrust in the police. If a city is an ecosystem of governing agencies, interpersonal and spatial relations, and economic and ecological flows, how safety is conceptualized necessitates addressing the totality of that ecosystem. Safety is cultivated through public health initiatives, city building departments, the affordability and habitability standards of rental housing, road infrastructure, food accessibility (Calise et al., 2019), the quality and accessibility of public transit, and access to free recreational spaces (Wood et al., 2017). By understanding and accepting that safety is made and cultivated beyond policing, which social movements against police brutality have relentlessly demonstrated time and again, the monopoly policing agencies are granted to serve and protect becomes easier to look beyond, to build community safety that does not have the capacity to shoot and kill residents.

The timing of the GLBF survey’s distribution enabled some multi-scope organizing to take place that served the interests of the coalition and met urgent community needs during the initial twenty-four months of the COVID-19 pandemic. One such need was to address looming housing insecurity among tenants who had lost their employment because of pandemic “shelter in place” orders. Through coordinated outreach among tenant organizers, tenants were engaged with the safety survey as well as know-your-rights educational materials through door knocking and community outreach. Through additional landlord research, it was found that less than 5% of all apartment buildings that host PGL, of which there were 40 in 2021, followed the city’s rental ordinance and were illegally operating as residential units, while simultaneously providing surveillance data 24/7 to the city’s RTCC. The City of Detroit rental ordinance states that landlords must register their rental property in the city’s rental registry, and obtain a certificate of compliance from the Building, Safety, Environmental and Engineering Department that indicates their property meets required structural and habitability standards. If both requirements are not met, the ordinance states that the collection of rents is prohibited. The illegality of landlord operations at PGL host residential buildings was brought to the attention of the city’s building department as well as the Housing and Revitalization Department by the GLBF research team and tenant organizers. However, city agencies took no issue with this lack of compliance and landlords continued to be allowed to surveil tenants and passers-by while collecting rents.

Though fourth amendment rights have been a focal point of critical inquiry among surveillance scholars (Gray, 2017), PGL presents a set of circumstances in which tenants’ rights to privacy are undercut by

landlords' rights to the security of their property, despite the extra-legal operations of nearly all apartment buildings hosting PGL. Rather than approach this circumstance with the legal method of balancing costs and benefits for all parties (Aleinikoff, 1986), the prioritization of property ownership and landlord retention supersedes fourth amendment rights, demonstrating that property ownership endows greater rights to one's privacy, security from unreasonable searches, and the requirement of probable cause. While the right to privacy is superficially universal according to the US constitution, the collusion of landlords and police to allow for the surveillance of illegally operated rental units indicates an extension of the right to privacy afforded to those who hold claim to the bundle of rights property owners are entitled to, to criminalize and wield authority over people who rent their housing.

A tendency among urban planners in the US and Canada is their willingness to bend toward pro-growth and smart growth interest groups (Hawkins, 2014), and to welcome the influence of real estate developers into policy development and decisions of local governments, while simultaneously approaching genuine community concerns about equity and displacement as a balancing act against market possibilities, developer interests, and private-public partnerships. The common trope among planning practitioners is that residents lack understanding of the complex relationships between developers and financiers in planning projects, which results in planners deeply managing public engagement by presenting community members with pre-determined outcomes of proposed planning initiatives that undercut the democratic potential of engagement to begin with (Coleman & Firmstone, 2014). Rather than holding a holistic perspective of the impacts and possibilities of planning, governing authorities within a city government are taxonomized through the division of departments and mandating of responsibilities that create deficit gaps in how the work of planning, to create livable and functional cities, is carried out. This departmentalization of responsibilities artificially limits the capacity of planners to engage in a broader scope of thinking and influence about wellbeing, safety, and how to reconcile the quality of life of the residents impacted by their work and that of fellow city agencies, including the police.

The last tumultuous decade and a half of increasing financialization of housing following the Great Recession has produced cascading crises, including record breaking years of tax foreclosures in the US, the threat of evictions during a pandemic, and now a growing affordability crisis in its wake (Coquelin et al., 2022). Landlord-tenant relations have deteriorated toward the emboldening of landlord authority through increasing use of tenant screening practices, the adoption of landlord technologies that build surveillance practices into tenants' rental terms, conditions, and surroundings (Fields, 2022) employing dispossessive tech-based practices (McElroy & Vergerio, 2022), restrictions on household pets and number of allowable tenants, and denying tenant applications from people perceived to have high water bills, to name a few (Grief, 2018). Though urban planners have little input over landlord-tenant relations, rental housing ordinances and building departments can provide standardization and some oversight over the conditions tenants are legally or illegally subject to when renting or defending their right to stay housed. What limits the impact of these tools is enforcement. Tenant activists are responding accordingly through self-organization, political education, and direct action against these forms of landlord pressure and property negligence (Baker & Ferrer, in press) though existing legislation that could prohibit landlord negligence often continued to be unenforced.

4. Motor City Surveillance

In response to the uprisings that followed the police murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in 2020, the US Department of Justice expanded Operation Legend to Cleveland, Detroit, and Milwaukee on June 29th, to coordinate federal law enforcement with local state and municipal agencies to “fight violent crime” (US Department of Justice, 2020). Operation Legend triggered the deployment of 42 agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to Detroit. Eleven new permanent ATF and FBI agents assigned to Detroit were tasked with addressing gun violence, violent crime, and gang activity. The city had not experienced such a rapid influx of federal and state law enforcement agents since the summer of 1967. Not coincidentally, by June 29th, 2020, activists opposing anti-Black police brutality in Detroit were on their 34th consecutive day of widely attended organized street demonstrations that included democratically and collaboratively authored demands issued to the City of Detroit and the DPD to disciplinarily address police misconduct and acts of brutality against Detroiters. Activists became targets of further police violence throughout the summer of 2020 while demonstrating against police brutality, and eventually filed and won a suite that found the city and the police department had violated the constitutional rights of protestors (National Lawyers Guild, 2022).

The highly racialized relations of policing in the US became even more amplified during this time, as were social and radical representations of space commanded through street protest, congregating to discuss political values and ideas, and creating moments of powerful self-representation of people united to build Black liberation in the face of state-sanctioned political violence perpetrated by police. Eugene McCann (1999) notes the important task of proper theoretical translation of Lefebvre’s understanding of representation and space within US urban contexts, and urges that spatial thinkers and practitioners adequately contextualize the sociospatial processes of race relations to develop fulsome understandings of contemporary urban processes. In increasingly militarized urban centers where racial injustice is opposed through collective direct action via street protests and demonstrations, and disciplined through state sanctioned violence and pervasive surveillance, what is represented is a confluence of resistance and defense; defense of the racial project of American cities by state agencies, and disruptive resistance against that project continuing by people who believe in urban futures free from myriad manifestations of white supremacy.

As of 2021, PGL was installed at 40 residential apartment buildings throughout the city; though far more residential units host this technology when long term care homes are accounted for. To support tenant organizing efforts in the city as renters faced COVID-era evictions, each of the PGL residential host sites was searched in the Building, Safety, Environment and Engineering Department’s (BSEED) violations case history database for outstanding building code violations. This data reflecting landlord fines for non-compliance with the city’s rental ordinance and BSEED habitability requirements exceeded \$100,000 at PGL apartments in 2021. Cross referencing BSEED data with court records indicated that failure to attend landlord property negligence hearings by BSEED inspectors repeatedly resulted in fines being waived, and landlords or their representative property managers or attorneys leaving court hearings without financial penalty. Of the 40 apartments hosting PGL in 2020, all but one were in violation of the city’s residential rental property ordinance. Through tenant organizing efforts and advocacy, this information was brought to the attention of the BSEED, the Board of Police Commissioners, and members of city council. When

presented with the information that PGL was overwhelmingly deployed at residential apartment buildings that were actively in violation of a city ordinance in addition to building code violations, the agencies responded by taking no action. When the issue was brought to the attention of a member of city council and a state senator who represented a large number of tenants in their shared district being effected by an extralegal eviction during the federal COVID-19 eviction moratorium, in addition to being subject to surveillance at a non-code compliant PGL apartment building, the landlord of the building was contacted and the extralegal eviction was temporarily stalled. However, these representatives took no initiative to proactively prevent future similar emergencies. In response, a policy revision to the city rental ordinance was written by tenant organizers including the author of this article, introducing a provision that no landlord who was non-compliant with the rental ordinance would be eligible to evict tenants. Met with the inopportune barrier of delayed response times by the city's legislative and policy division to expedite the revision for discussion among City Council, tenant organizers submitted the amendment directly to the 36th district court judge. Though the judge was amenable to instituting the order, the State Supreme Court's administrative office determined the order would likely produce an equal protection filing at the circuit court level, given that the compliance scheduling for the city's rental ordinance did not equally apply to all zip codes across the city, with some zip codes having been required to comply by 2018 and others not yet required to comply at the time these events took place in 2020.

PGL does not fit neatly within the definition of being a "landlord technology" because landlords do not have access to the data collected or control over the technology. Tenants have and continue to resist being subject to PGL, just as tenants elsewhere organize against landlord technologies that are not necessarily connected to law enforcement but do require tenants to be subject to forms of surveillance and data collection that involve their finances, freedom of movement, and the collection of biometric data (McElroy & Vergerio, 2022). Buildings where PGL is installed gain priority response times when 911 is called, which is of particular benefit to landlords in cases of fire and arson to protect their property. This is a feature of PGL that business owners highlight when rationalizing their decision to subscribe to the service. In 2013, Detroit EMS response times ranged from 39.8 to 58 minutes (Bialik, 2013; Eisinger, 2014), with an improvement to 30 minutes in 2019 (Jones, 2019). Through conversations with property managers of PGL apartments in 2021, it was found that PGL is used both as a deterrent for some tenants and a magnet for others, highly determined by the neighborhood and income of the target tenant population and landlord intentions. Landlords of buildings with mostly low waged renters discussed PGL as a security measure to ensure tenants are not conducting illegal activity, whereas landlords attempting to attract tenants in market rate buildings near the Detroit Medical Center and Wayne State University tout PGL as a luxury feature that protects the safety of tenants and their possessions through priority 911 response.

Perpetuating the perceived criminality of low-income and majority Black tenants is not unique to Detroit and does not require AI-based technologies. In 1988, the Chicago Police Department carried out "Operation Clean Sweep" in which police officers barricaded the entrances and exits of a Chicago Public Housing apartment building, staging an unannounced and warrantless search of each apartment unit, searching for weapons and drugs and illegal residents (Yarosh, 1993). Through Clean Sweep, the Chicago Public Housing Authority (CPHA) became the first in the county to utilize warrantless and non-consenting home searches (Yarosh, 1993). Immediately following the sweeps, the ACLU filed a class action suit that outlined how the searches constituted a violation of the fourth amendment rights of public housing tenants (Hellman, 1995). In 1995, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Justice (DOJ)

attempted to address perceived high rates of criminal activity within public housing units in Chicago by attempting to incorporate a lease consent plan. This plan would have required tenants to sign leases allowing blanket consent for police searches throughout Chicago public housing units. This program was proposed in response to a federal judge invalidating police sweeps that took place without warrants in Chicago, citing violation of tenants' fourth amendment rights. The CPHA sweeps and searches as well as the HUD and DOJ proposal to incorporate mandatory consent agreements for police sweeps into the leases of public housing tenants is another example of the racialized and classed expansion of the bundle of rights of property owners over those of people who rent their housing, even when the property owner is a state agency providing the public good of affordable housing. Such an agency may have the capacity to recognize that public housing will increase the wellbeing and livability of a place, but lack the foresight and interest to ensure long-term wellness of tenants, or to be proactive in preventing the criminalization of those tenants. Similar to respondents of the GLBF safety survey, CPHA tenants who were interviewed about the sweeps overwhelmingly reported that police tactics would not be necessary if tenants had access to higher wages, places for children to play, adequate transportation, and jobs. This particular case as well as that of PGL apartments suggests that the bundle of rights property owners assume includes criminalizing majority Black, brown, and low-waged populations as proactive protection of that bundle of rights, as though the violation of fourth amendment rights and the dehumanizing act of racialized and classed unconstitutional searches is an unwritten component of that bundle of rights. Building a culture of community safety beyond reliance on surveillance technology and violent policing requires expanding the scope of resources and services that affect community health and wellbeing that planners interface with, and a willingness of planners to take a bold position against police violence and technologies that criminalize and surveil residents.

5. Closing Thoughts

The use of PGL CCTV surveillance data collection at rental apartment buildings in Detroit, where landlords have failed to uphold their responsibility to maintain habitable, safe, and legally registered rental units, presents an important question about what kinds of safety holds value, and that not all forms of safety are valued equally. As of July of 2024, 10% of residential rental units in Detroit comply with the rental property ordinance (Rahman, 2024). When a majority Black population is subject to potentially hazardous structural and faulty infrastructural living conditions and surveillance that claims to increase safety, a lesson is presented about property relations that is shaped by the contemporary moment of policing, rentiership, and race-capital relations that is made possible through urban planning and governance. The forbearance of enforcement of structural safety standards granted to landlords can be thought of as an exchange of rights and responsibilities that further embeds the property relations emblematic of white supremacy into a majority Black cityscape in which the physical safety of Black people who do not own their housing is less important than the ability for landlords to surveil these tenants under the guise of the right to protect one's property and fight crime. What emerges through the forbearance of rights to privacy for Black renters and the privileging of the right for landlords to protect one's property is not a set of competing values but sets of rights whose value is clearly demonstrated through enforcement, both through permissible non-compliance of life saving habitability standards of rental properties, and the anticipated criminality of majority Black renters whose physical safety holds no value in comparison. What is needed is a multi-agency approach to addressing safety and wellbeing that is unafraid to criticize, and transform the function of city agencies to broaden planning practice to holistically address livability and resident wellbeing that values Black lives by decreasing exposure to policing.

While professional planners have tended to uphold departmental silos of urban governance, each seen as responsible for their own contribution to the operations of a city, this mode of operating has willfully distanced planners from a confluent approach to urban form, function, and outcomes for residents. While this may serve the interests of de jure urban development that so often deepens racial and economic disparities despite community engagement and best intentions, such an approach unquestionably leaves matters of safety in the hands of police, or at best as a consideration among transportation planners concerned with pedestrian and vehicular safety. Access to structurally sound and legally habitable housing is a matter of quality of life and life itself, particularly among populations who are systematically criminalized by police and AI technologies. Bundling the right to criminalize with property rights through AI surveillance reinforces deeply uneven relations to property along race and class lines that hold the potential to lead to death. Planners have an opportunity and responsibility to be transformative in their work and take up the mission of “livability” in serious terms.

Acknowledgments

Gratitude is extended to fellow organizers and coalition members of Green Light Black Futures, as well as everyone challenging the pervasive use of surveillance technologies who are building safety through transformative and restorative means.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Property negligence fines issued to landlords analyzed for this research can be found on the City of Detroit Department of Administrative Hearings Violation Case History website.

References

- Aleinikoff, T. A. (1986). Constitutional law in the age of balancing. *Yale Law Journal*, 96, 943–1005.
- Anderson, M. W. (2016). Needing and fearing billionaires in cities abandoned by wealth. *Yale Law & Policy Review*, 35(1), 235–256.
- Baker, R., Blackmer, P., Lu, A., & Smith, R. (2022). *We want safety, not surveillance: What safety means and what residents want*. Urban Praxis. <https://urbanpraxis.org/green-light-black-futures-community-safety-survey-report-and-booklet>
- Baker, R., & Ferrer, A. (Eds.). (in press). *Dispatches from the threshold: Tenant power in times of crisis*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Barker, V. (2010). Explaining the great American crime decline: A review of Blumstein and Wallman, Goldberger and Rosenfeld, and Zimring. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 35(2), 489–516.
- Barnes, T., Roose, J. M., & Turner, B. S. (2021). Detroit five years after bankruptcy: From coercion to consent. *Urban Studies*, 58(10), 2139–2156.
- Barrett, M. (2024). *Detroiters seek solutions and love after mass shooting rocks east side*. Bridge Detroit. <https://www.bridgedetroit.com/detroiters-seek-solutions-and-love-after-mass-shooting-rocks-east-side>
- Batty, M. (2018). Artificial intelligence and smart cities. *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*, 45(1), 3–6.
- Benedict, T. J. (2022). The computer got it wrong: Facial recognition technology and establishing probable cause to arrest. *Washington and Lee Law Review*, 79(2), 849–898.

- Bernd, C. (2015). *The rise of privatized policing: How crisis capitalism created crisis cops*. Truthout. <https://truthout.org/articles/the-rise-of-privatized-policing-in-the-us-how-crisis-capitalism-created-crisis-cops>
- Bialik, C. (2013, August 2). Detroit police response times no guide to effectiveness. *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323997004578642250518125898>
- Bibri, S. E., Allam, Z., & Krogstie, J. (2022). The Metaverse as a virtual form of data-driven smart urbanism: Platformization and its underlying processes, institutional dimensions, and disruptive impacts. *Computational Urban Science*, 2, Article 24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43762-022-00051-0>
- Biles, R., & Rose, M. (2021). "Gilbertville," "Ilitchville," and the redevelopment of Detroit. *Journal of Planning History*, 20(1), 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538513219866139>
- Blomley, N. (2016). The territory of property. *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(5), 593–609.
- Bonds, A. (2019). Race and ethnicity I: Property, race, and the carceral state. *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(3), 574–583.
- Boyd, H., Payton, B., Ya Salaam, K., & Damu, J. (1981). The Black Scholar Forum on repression. *The Black Scholar*, 12(1), 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.1981.11414157>
- Boyle, K. (2001). The ruins of Detroit: Exploring the urban crisis in the motor city. *The Michigan Historical Review*, 27(1), 109–127.
- Breznau, N., & Kirkpatrick, L. O. (2018). Urban fiscal crisis and local emergency management: Tracking the color line in Michigan. *Issues in Race and Society: An Interdisciplinary Global Journal*, 11(1), 9–47.
- Browne, S. (2015). *Dark matters: On the surveillance of blackness*. Duke University Press.
- Buolamwini, J., & Gebru, T. (2018). Gender shades: Intersectional accuracy disparities in commercial gender classification. *Proceedings of Machine Learning Research*, 81(1), 77–91.
- Calise, T. V., Chow, W., Ryder, A., & Wingerter, C. (2019). Food access and its relationship to perceived walkability, safety, and social cohesion. *Health Promotion Practice*, 20(6), 858–867.
- Chanan, M., & Steinmetz, G. (Directors). (2005). *Detroit: Ruin of a city* [Film]. Contemporary Arts Media.
- Coleman, S., & Firmstone, J. (2014). Contested meanings of public engagement: Exploring discourse and practice within a British city council. *Media, Culture & Society*, 36(6), 826–844.
- Coquelin, S., Kusiak, J., Palomera, J., Stein, S., Baker, R., Belotti, E., Can, A., & Noterman, E. (2022). Housing justice, mobilization, and financialization: A conversation from the Antipode Institute for Geographies of Justice. *Radical Housing Journal*, 4(2).
- Cummins, E. R. (2016). *Planning uncertain futures: Contesting home and city in the "New Detroit."* Northeastern University. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20214152>
- Daum, C. W. (2015). The war on solicitation and intersectional subjection: Quality-of-life policing as a tool to control transgender populations. *New Political Science*, 37(4), 562–581.
- Detroit Police Department celebrates 1K Project Green Light partners. (2024, August 27). *Click on Detroit*. <https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/local/2024/08/28/detroit-police-department-celebrates-1k-project-green-light-partners>
- Eisinger, P. (2014). Is Detroit dead? *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 36(1), 1–12.
- Farley, R. (2015). The bankruptcy of Detroit: What role did race play? *City & Community*, 14(2), 118–137.
- Fields, D. (2022). Automated landlord: Digital technologies and post-crisis financial accumulation. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 54(1), 160–181.
- Fussey, P., & Coaffee, J. (2012). Urban spaces of surveillance. In K. Ball, K. Haggerty, & D. Lyon (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of surveillance studies* (pp. 201–208). Routledge.
- Goodman, E. P., & Powles, J. (2019). Urbanism under Google: Lessons from sidewalk Toronto. *Fordham Law Review*, 88.

- Graham, S. (2009). Cities as battlespace: The new military urbanism. *City*, 13(4), 384–402.
- Gray, D. (2017). *The fourth amendment in an age of surveillance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grief, M. (2018). Regulating landlords: Unintended consequences for poor tenants. *City & Community*, 17(3), 658–674.
- Harris, N. (2011). Discipline, surveillance, control: A Foucauldian perspective on the enforcement of planning regulations. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 12(1), 57–76.
- Hawkins, C. V. (2014). Planning and competing interests: Testing the mediating influence of planning capacity on smart growth policy adoption. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 57(11), 1683–1703.
- Hellman, C. (1995). Secure in their houses: Fourth amendment rights at public housing projects. *New York Law School Review*, 40.
- Herberg, L. (2024). *BOPC Watch: A new report on improperly closed complains and a better process going forward*. Outlier Media. <https://outliermedia.org/detroit-police-citizen-complaint-backlog-investigation-office-inspector-general>
- Herruzo, A. (2021). Interactive media in public spaces: Ethics of surveillance, privacy and bias. In *International Conference on Computer-Aided Architectural Design Futures* (pp. 135–150). Springer.
- Hill, K. (2024, June 29). Facial recognition led to wrongful arrests. So Detroit is making changes. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/29/technology/detroit-facial-recognition-false-arrests.html>
- Joh, E. E. (2022). The unexpected consequences of automation in policing. *SMU Law Review*, 75, 507–534.
- Jones, R. (2019, June 20). Life, death & 911: Thousands in crisis left waiting for Detroit police. *WXYZ Detroit*. <https://www.wxyz.com/news/local-news/investigations/detroit-911-thousands-in-crisis-left-waiting-for-detroit-police>
- Khan, S., Can, N. A., Machado, H., & Monteiro, A. (2022). *Racism and racial surveillance*. Routledge.
- Koskela, H. (2000). “The gaze without eyes”: Video-surveillance and the changing nature of urban space. *Progress in Human Geography*, 24(2), 243–265.
- Lohr, S. (2022). Facial recognition is accurate, if you’re a white guy. In K. Martin (Ed.), *Ethics of data and analytics* (pp. 143–147). Auerbach Publications.
- Lorinc, J. (2019). A mess on the sidewalk. *The Baffler*, 44, 6–16.
- Marotta, S. (2021). Old Detroit, New Detroit: “Makers” and the impasse of place change. *Cultural Geographies*, 28(2), 377–391.
- McCann, E. J. (1999). Race, protest, and public space: Contextualizing Lefebvre in the US city. *Antipode*, 31(2), 163–184.
- McCoy, A. (2021). “Detroit under STRESS”: The campaign to stop police killings and the criminal state in Detroit. *Journal of Civil and Human Rights*, 7(1), 1–34.
- McElroy, E., & Vergerio, M. (2022). Automating gentrification: Landlord technologies and housing justice organizing in New York City homes. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 40(4), 607–626.
- National Institute of Justice. (2022). *Program profile: Project Green Light Detroit*. <https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/ratedprograms/project-green-light-detroit>
- National Lawyers Guild. (2022). *Victory in Detroit will breathe lawsuit against the City of Detroit, October 2022*. <https://www.michigannlg.org/detroit-will-breathe-vs-city-of-detroit>
- Nkonde, M. (2019). Automated anti-blackness: Facial recognition in Brooklyn, New York. *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, 20, 30–36.
- Peck, J., & Whiteside, H. (2016). Financializing Detroit. *Economic Geography*, 92(3), 235–268.
- Przeszlowski, K., Guerette, R. T., Lee-Silcox, J., Rodriguez, J., Ramirez, J., & Gutierrez, A. (2023). The centralization and rapid deployment of police agency information technologies: An appraisal of real-time crime centers in the U.S. *The Police Journal*, 96(4), 553–572.

- Rahal, S. (2022, November 30). Lawsuit filed against Detroit's ShotSpotter contracts. *The Detroit News*. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2022/11/30/detroit-justice-center-files-lawsuit-against-shotspotter-expansion/69689968007>
- Rahman, N. (2024, July 17). Detroit wants to change its rental ordinance: What to know. *Detroit Free Press*. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2024/07/17/detroit-wants-to-change-its-rental-ordinance-what-to-know/74415413007>
- Southerland, V. M. (2023). The master's tool and a mission: Using community control and oversight laws to resist and abolish police surveillance technologies. *UCLA Law Review*, 70.
- Sugrue, T. J. (1996). *The origins of the urban crisis: Race and inequality in postwar Detroit*. Updated edition (Vol. 195). Princeton University Press.
- Tcherni-Buzzeo, M. (2019). The "great American crime decline": Possible explanations. In M. D. Krohn, N. Hendrix, G. Penly Hall, & A. J. Lizotte (Eds.), *Handbook on crime and deviance* (2nd ed., pp. 309–335). Springer.
- US Department of Justice. (2020). *Operation Legend expanded to Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee*. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/operation-legend-expanded-cleveland-detroit-and-milwaukee>
- Vasi, I. B., & Strang, D. (2009). Civil liberty in America: The diffusion of municipal bill of rights resolutions after the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(6), 1716–1764.
- Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing the poor*. Duke University Press.
- Wood, L., Hooper, P., Foster, S., & Bull, F. (2017). Public green spaces and positive mental health: Investigating the relationship between access, quantity and types of parks and mental wellbeing. *Health & Place*, 48, 63–71.
- Yarosh, S. (1993). Operation Clean Sweep: Is the Chicago Housing Authority "sweeping" away the fourth amendment? *Northwestern University Law Review*, 86.

About the Author



Rae Baker is a geographer, policy practitioner, and housing justice activist who works at the University of Cincinnati as an assistant professor in the Education and Community Action Research doctoral program.