

Abolition Geographies and the Making of Liberatory Geographies in Aurora, Colorado

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Defended April 08, 2025

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Abstract

This undergraduate thesis explores how police violence is spatialized and why it matters, centering on the city of Aurora, Colorado as a case study. Aurora has a long history of racial violence perpetrated by its police force, with high-profile incidents in recent years. Despite promises for reform, police violence persists seemingly unchanged. Understanding this spatialized state sanctioned violence through the theoretical framework of racial capitalism, the author explores how processes of difference and racialization connect to police violence as a piece of a larger carceral apparatus. In conversation with abolition geographies and Black geographic scholarship this case study demonstrates the realities for Black and brown bodies in Aurora, a refusal of the naturalization of this violence. The thesis uses a multi-method analysis producing the counter-cartographies of police violence and local resistance in Aurora, synthesizing traditional GIS mapping with photographs and artistic interpretations of space. The mapping is informed by participant interviews with local community members and activists who want to see change for the sake of a better Aurora. The paper concludes by exploring how local counter-imaginaries for space are contributing to place-making, freedom struggle, and the (re)imaging of policing. (Re)imagining the values and realities of our spaces towards a more just future and how community-based approaches can aid in the realization of this future.

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IRB Approval

This research was approved by the IRB submitted under Protocol # **24-0676**. The protocol was submitted for and approved as Exempt, under Primary Investigator Isaac Rivera, with Wesley Thomson as a co-investigator. Materials were reviewed by the IRB and approved on the 13th of December 2024.

Type of Submission:	Initial Application
Review Category:	Exempt - Category 2 -
Risk Level:	Minimal
Title:	Abolition Geographies and the Making of Liberatory Geographies in Aurora, Colorado
Investigator:	Rivera, Isaac
Protocol #:	24-0676
Funding:	None
Documents Approved:	24-0676 In person Consent Apprv 12.13.24.docx; 24-0676 Protocol Apprv 12.13.24.docx; 24-0676 Interview Questions Apprv 12.13.24; 24-0676 Remote Consent Apprv 12.13.24.docx; 24-0676 Recruitment Handout Apprv 12.13.24; Apprv 12.13.24;
Documents Reviewed:	CITI Certification; RiveraCV; CITI Certification; HRP-211: FORM - Initial Application v18;

Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to many. I carry far too much gratitude and cannot express it all here, regardless I would like to thank a few of the many. Firstly, my academic inspirations and guides: Isaac Rivera, Jennifer Fluri, Jessica Finlay, Taneesha Mohan and Hillary Potter. My friends who have shown me undying support: Jaikar Rajkitkul, Julia Toussaint, Parinoz Abdulloeva, Akala Aiken, Kaya Leslie, Shirley Feng, Jose Angel Guereca and many more. The people of my community and my city that bring joy with your presence, particularly: MiDian Shofner, Candice Bailey, Casey Childers, Jason McBride, Lindsay, Mexican Long Hair, and DJ Kdot. Along with a special thank you to Casey Childers for sharing your photos with me and enabling my artistic desires for this project. Lastly, those with my blood flowing through their veins who have somehow not given up on me yet: my younger sisters Channing and Avery, my older sister Sarah, my father Scott, and most importantly my mom Carolyn who has molded my view of the world and the shape of my heart.

Chapter I: Situating Aurora, Colorado

June 27th, 2020

On a calm Summer evening amidst the chaotic restructuring of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the community planned a gathering at City Center Park in Aurora, Colorado. A vigil to honor, celebrate, and mourn the life of Elijah McClain, a young Black man who was killed by the Aurora Police Department (APD) in late 2019 (Niles, 2020). The APD used excessive force in his detainment through a chokehold and the paramedics responding to the scene injected him with ketamine, both actions contributing to his heart attack in the back of the ambulance. Days later, he would pass in the hospital (Tompkins, 2020). The vigil called for violinists to play together in improvised harmony, an act of collective grieving. To play the violin for Elijah, as he once had for others. Violinists, local residents, and activists sought to bring together the forces of art and community solidarity to move unified, towards healing and justice. The crowd patiently awaited the commencement of the vigil with candle wax, rose petals and tears mixing with the dirt of City Center Park. In the face of a racist, violent police system - the community holds strong and moves forward together.

The APD marched in, descending upon the crowd: armed with riot helmets, assault rifles, tear gas launchers, and batons. Cries from those gathered expressing desires for peace were met with demands to disperse (Evelyn, 2020; Hayes, 2020; Niles, 2020). The crowd proceeded to link arms creating a physical barrier between the antagonistic force and the music they gathered to hear.

The violinists continued to play amidst the harsh display of power difference, refusing to let violent repression dictate the scene, while the crowd chanted, “Why are you in riot gear? I

don't see no riot here!" As the dust settled, the APD arrested three of the attendees, and they injured many more as they continued to leave a trail of blood in their wake (Hayes, 2020).

Through the APD's killing of Elijah McClain, Black lives were considered inconsequential, and with the violent repression of his vigil, the mourning and celebration of Black life was too.

In the eyes of the state, solidarity is unacceptable. The police force dispels solidarity within the community and maintains differentiation along racial lines. The state is invested in a production of racialization, as the exploitation of difference is necessary for the expansion and maintenance of capitalism. However, this vigil shows much more than the state's investment in producing difference. The continued resistance by the community in the face of repression demonstrates an insistence on justice, honor, and on refusals. Insisting on refusing the logics of the racist carceral state as natural, while simultaneously refusing to accept premature death.

Racial Capitalism in the Production of Space & the Carceral State

This thesis is about the distinct racialization and spatialization of state-sanctioned violence and community resistances to the control, brutalization, and premature deaths of Black and brown individuals in Aurora, Colorado. Aiming to address two key questions: (1) Where is violence concentrated in Aurora, Colorado, and (2) what do community counter-imaginaries for change look like? By answering these two questions this thesis also traces the role of racial capitalism and liberation struggles in the context of spatial violence. This thesis situates itself in both the conversation of policing but also in the greater scheme of the carceral state. As the geography of police violence makes visible the operations of a carceral state. Thus making possible identification and discussion of spaces most affected by policing and the reactions of populations that live there. Through the resistances of these communities, present abolitionist horizons are realized.

Racial capitalism is a theory that can be traced back to W. E. B. Du Bois (1952) and Cedric Robinson (2000) - The theory posits that racialization and the production of difference in populations is essential to the establishment, maintenance, and expansion of capitalism. Racialization is not a product of capitalism but rather flourished alongside its emergence in Europe, and its mass expansion in the Americas. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) defines racism as the, “state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.” An understanding of racism through this lens sees the state as a primary actor in enforcing capitalist imaginaries, exploiting the racialized subject and producing the conditions for shortening the lifespans of the racialized. In the United States, the the carceral system and its police force relies and exploits this racial differentiation shortening the lifespans of criminalized Black and brown individuals (Gilmore, 2007; Jefferson, 2020). Through the production of nonwhiteness, working class whites are encouraged to blame racialized subjects for the downfalls of capitalism (Du Bois, 1952). Capitalism also relies on racialization for economic domination and exploitation of racialized populations for cheap labor (Robinson, 2000). Black geographic scholarship discusses many different axes of these power interactions under racial capitalism, such as: the spatial control of urban housing projects, the centrality of race in the carceral state, and Black grassroot activisms (Derickson, 2017; Hawthorne & Lewis, 2023; Jefferson, 2020; McKittrick & Woods, 2007).

Space as a concept is not merely present for human activity to exist within, rather space is produced through power interactions. Spaces exist as sites produced by power negotiations and the establishment of power hierarchies (Hawthorne, 2024). McKittrick and Woods (2007) argue that essentialist views of Blackness in space position Black subjects at the margins of space, obscuring the struggles and place-making of Blackness. This perspective situates race as

essential to the production and perception of space rather than nonwhites being “simply subjugated”, “ungeographic” or existing solely at the margins.

Building upon scholars such as Gilmore, McKittrick, and others, I will argue that space plays a distinct role in the patterns and practices of policing. I argue that through racial capitalism, race is central to the production of space, and the role of police within these racialized spaces in Aurora, is one of racial control, bodily regulation, and violence - not limited to direct police-civilian interactions, but also understanding the police as the arm of enforcement for the entire carceral apparatus. I argue that as funding for police departments continues to increase nationally, and as the carceral state continues to expand and flourish under racial capitalism, radical change is needed now. Change that illuminates Black presence, liberation struggle, and community-based approaches.

What are police supposed to do? Enforce laws? Protect and serve? Deter crime? In 2023, there were 13 days when the police did not kill someone in the United States (Sinyangwe, 2024). Jordan Camp (2016) illuminates the role of the police in criminalizing protesters and resistance movements, and rather than addressing the root causes of the dissent, the resistance itself is treated as the problem and they are framed as threats to stability and order. The ones in society that are standing up to authority and leading these resistance movements are those who are oppressed under our current systems, racial-ethnic minorities, gender minorities, and those ‘othered’ by the ruling class. Thus, the criminalization of dissent and resistance movements directly leads to the incarceration of the marginalized in our society.

Camp (2016) also recognizes the expansion of surveillance, carceral systems, and the militarization of policing that follows social uprisings - the state, treating this carceral expansion as the solution to social, political, and economic problems. Specifically, this expansion of

surveillance further exacerbates the racialization of policing. Jefferson (2020) argues that GIS systems and the reliance on ‘data driven policing’ reinforces the racialization of criminalization, especially through facial recognition and predictive policing. Facial recognition treats racialized subjects as criminals, prior to any crime being committed and predictive policing algorithms that are built off of already racialized policing data, further entrenching the ties between race and criminalization. With resistance against the racist carceral apparatus, the state answers with increased incarceration against those that are resisting, and increased surveillance to widen the breadth of carceral reach. Through both of these state reactions, race and incarceration are further intertwined, with those resisting being those who are oppressed already under the policing systems, becoming targeted for incarceration while simultaneously leading to greater criminalization of their communities through GIS data driven policing practices.

In 2020, all throughout the country, Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements contested the logics of the carceral system. They were met with continued and increasing violence from the state, using the police forces around the country to suppress dissent, as evident in the repression of Elijah McClain’s vigil by the APD. The United States has long utilized the police force to suppress social movements, relying on the mechanisms of the carceral state as a violent solution to these problems in the country (Camp, 2016; Gilmore, 2007). As Camp (2016) & Jefferson (2020) show, this repression only further racializes the processes of criminalization.

Gilmore (2007) explains the expansion of the carceral system in California as a story surplus: surplus land, capital, labor, and state capacity. Revisiting her definition of racism as the, “state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death,” she positions mass incarceration as a primary actor of racial capitalism acting through surplus and disproportionately affecting Black, Latinx and poor communities.

Gilmore traces the economic geographies of prison expansion with carceral constructions being concentrated in rural areas to address economic decline, while urban communities suffer from disinvestment and criminalization.

Alexander (2012) dubs this era of mass incarceration the New Jim Crow, where the legal discrimination and marginalization of Black subjects persist under the guise of colorblind policies. Camp (2016) connects the New Jim Crow's emergence as a means to contain social and economic crises stemming from struggles for freedom, labor rights, and racial justice. He also tracks the emergence of neoliberal policies in response to these uprisings. Through the 'colorblind' neoliberal capitalist policies and repression of freedom struggles the mechanisms of racial capitalism are reinforced.

In this era of the New Jim Crow, police act as the strong arm of the carceral state. A carceral state whose role is to manage the political economy of surplus, suppress social uprisings, and maintain the production of difference under racial capitalism (Alexander, 2012; Camp, 2016; Gilmore, 2007; Jefferson, 2020). In order to fulfil this role the police must fill prisons. Their job is not to enforce laws. Their job is not to serve and protect. Their job is not to deter crime. Their role in the carceral state is to fill every single cell block, while simultaneously producing and exploiting group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death. In the instance of police killings, they are fulfilling this role demanded of them under our current systems of operations.

This crisis of injustice calls for alternative imaginings to the current systems in place. In what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022) calls abolition geographies, spatial (re)imaginings towards liberatory place-making and the dismantling of oppressive power structures presents a path towards freedom. Abolition of the carceral state and the policing apparatus that fills it is necessary in the pursuit of radically transforming spaces in the pursuit of joy and insisting the

material needs and desires of communities are honored. A radical transformation that continues the long line of reconfiguring social and economic orders in the Black radical tradition. From the struggle to end slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, or decolonization the material realities of Black livingness are centered (Robinson, 2000). Aurora, Colorado is one place among many that liberatory practices are changing how place is perceived and the logics of our realities are being (re)imagined.

Aurora, Policing & the Production of Difference

The story of Elijah McClain's killing, and the repression of the vigil held in his honor, continues a long history of racialized violence against Black and brown bodies in the city of Aurora, with each of the following names representing a story not all that different from Elijah's: Kilyn Lewis, Kory Dillard, Jor'Dell Richardson, David Baker, and Naeshylus Carter-Vinzant (Mason, 2024; May, 2024; Phillips, 2017; Prentzel & Paul, 2023; Schmelzer, 2020). Each of these killings by the APD demonstrates the devaluation of Black life at the hands of the state.

Directly in response to Elijah's killing, the Colorado Attorney General, headed by Phil Weiser, conducted an investigation of the APD and Aurora Fire Rescue. The report identified four major findings: (1) the APD has a pattern and practice of racially biased policing against POC as a whole and Black people in particular, (2) the APD has a pattern and practice of using force excessively, (3) the APD has a pattern and practice of failing to document stops as required by law, and (4) Aurora Fire Rescue has a pattern and practice of administering ketamine illegally (Weiser, 2021). Three of these findings had directly contributed to Elijah's killing, and through Weiser's report, they were publicly acknowledged as commonplace in the APD's policing practices. This report brought to light the truth that members of the community were already acutely aware of, that Black individuals in Aurora are 2.5x more likely to be arrested and 3.9x

more likely to be killed by police than a White person (Sinyangwe 2024; Weiser, 2021). This racial unevenness in policing practices is representative of the systematic processes underlying this New Jim Crow: systematic racialization, criminalization, and incarceration.

Protesters and community organizations currently oppose the appointment of the new chief of police in Aurora, Todd Chamberlain, who was sworn in on September 9th, 2024, without any input from the community (Cruse & Alonso Galva, 2024; Gorman, 2024). This lack of input on the decision continues the history of disconnect between the police force and the local populations, a major point of contention for community members who desperately desire change. On November 22, 2021, the City of Aurora entered a mutual consent decree with the Colorado Attorney General, outlining a path of reform in response to the Attorney General's findings (The City of Aurora, 2021). The appointment of Chamberlain without community approval or input, has dampened hopes of reform, and community resistance has continued to grow. Franklin Williams echoed the desires of the community as a whole for mass mobilization,

“This shouldn't be a moment, this should be a movement.”

(Tabachnik & Kohler, 2020)

Anti-blackness and anti-immigrant sentiments have been growing nationwide, with Aurora as a focal point after claims of Venezuelan gangs taking over apartment complexes in the city, in October of 2024. Claims that have lacked foundational backing, yet have been pushed by Republican presidential elect, Donald Trump (Ferris, 2024; Slevin & Hanson, 2024). This rhetoric reinforces white supremacist and settler colonial realities while producing difference among axes of identity. These productions of difference carry violent consequences through police violence and incarceration. Black freedom struggle in Aurora intersects with resistances to

the vilification of immigrants. These intersections are exemplified in a letter from Kilyn Lewis' mother that calls for unification in demanding better from the city of Aurora – particularly for Black and Venezuelan communities, demanding that the city take responsibility for the violence that they allow to continue (Justice for Kilyn E. Lewis, 2024).

Why Abolition?

“Use of force is going to happen, and I'm sorry. But, that's the unfortunate reality of what life is in law enforcement.”

- Todd Chamberlain, Chief of the APD (Gorman, 2024).

Reform is ineffective. The continued killings of Black and brown individuals in Aurora despite mass reform, re-education, and monitoring under the consent decree formed in 2020, demonstrates this ineffectiveness. Reformation of the system simply rearranges pre-existing pieces atop the same foundation of oppression, violence, and white supremacy. Violence that will remain as long as the system exists, a sentiment echoed in Todd Chamberlain's words.

Abolition of the carceral state includes the prison system, the police that enforce that system, immigrant detention sites, and even ‘viral abolition’ of the technologies used and produced for the carceral state (Goldstein, 2023; Jefferson, 2020; Ybarra, 2021). Abolitionist geographies mean place-making that rejects the naturalization of carceral space and the presence of the prison industrial complex as a solution to social, political, and economic problems present in society (Gilmore et al, 2022).

The emergence of neoliberal policies in the post-World War II United States led to the privatization of healthcare, education, and reductions in social welfare. These privatizations created the conditions for carceral expansion and the furthering of inequality. By privatizing

healthcare, lower quality and less access became available to poor communities and disproportionately communities of color, while those incarcerated (also disproportionately from these same communities) were often denied access to quality care needed (Gilmore, 2007). Divestment in public education, particularly in low-income areas and areas of color, has left schools in these communities facing underfunding, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of resources, while increasing the likelihood of incarceration (Gilmore, 2007). Each of these aspects directly affects the livelihood and lifespans of communities of color, connecting directly to Gilmore's definition of racism as bringing "premature death".

Gilmore (2007) traces the creation of an economic crisis due to neoliberal economic policies and the expansion of prisons as a solution to unemployment and rural economic collapse. This makes the story of prisons as much economic stories as they are social stories. To contest the prison system is to then contest the neoliberal economic policies of privatization and reduction in social welfare that created the conditions for carceral expansion in the United States. Abolition of the carceral state then sees the replacing of prisons, police, and the economics that organize them with a new system that focuses on addressing the material needs of communities by funding healthcare, education and public sectors that directly benefit the day to day lives of communities while simultaneously reducing the necessity of prisons in the first place (Gilmore, 2007; Gilmore et al, 2022).

Frameworks for abolition are already present in our current imaginings. Winston (2023) emphasizes that Black communities have long created alternative modes of safety and community well-being without reliance on police, through *marronage*. She argues that abolition exists in recognizing and expanding the community structures that already foster safety, rather than depending on violent, state-imposed systems. This thesis seeks to bring the

counter-imaginings of abolition and alternative modes of safety, already present in Aurora, to light. Also, contributing to abolition geographies by exploring how rehearsals of liberation are already being enacted.

The Design of This Thesis

This thesis explores how police violence is spatialized and why it matters, centering on the city of Aurora, Colorado as a case study. Aurora has a long history of racial violence perpetrated by its police force, with high-profile incidents in recent years. Despite promises for reform, police violence persists seemingly unchanged. Understanding this spatialized, state-sanctioned violence through the theoretical framework of racial capitalism, this thesis explores how processes of difference and racialization connect to police violence and the carceral state. In conversation with abolition geographies and Black geographic scholarship, this case study demonstrates the realities for Black and brown bodies in Aurora: spatial regulation, control, and violence.

Following the above contextualization of this thesis in current conversations in literature on policing, the carceral state, Black geographies, and abolition geographies in Chapter I, Chapter II discusses the methods, ethics, and expectations of the project. This chapter conceptualizes counter-cartographic imaginings and their importance in denaturalizing the racialization of space. Chapter III explores the geography of police violence in Aurora, through a counter-cartographic synthesis of traditional GIS mapping with photographs and artistic representation. Chapter IV concludes this thesis by discussing how local counter-imaginaries for space are contributing to radical place-making, Black freedom struggle, and the rehearsal of liberation. Developing, through the mapping of these counter-processes, a cartography of Black presence.

Chapter II: Collecting Counter-Imaginarities and Producing Counter-Cartographies

Writing on this topic is deeply personal and complex for me. I grew up in the city of Aurora, living in the southeastern part of the city for most of my life, until I moved to the northern city center. I witnessed firsthand the violence and racism prevalent throughout the police force in the city. Coming from Aurora, I approach this topic as an insider with my own real world experiences contextualizing the questions this thesis seeks to explore. Although I am an insider in the city, the identities I hold have significantly impacted my experiences in Aurora and my interactions with the police. As a cisgender White male from the affluent suburbs, I was seldom antagonized by the APD, while I would see them target persons of color around me. Witnessing these injustices firsthand compelled me to take action and join in the struggle against police brutality through researching its association with mass incarceration in support of the abolition movement. My realization that change is necessary is foundational to this thesis.

As I began to write this section, I was talking to my childhood friend about the project and what I envisioned for it, asking her what she thought about the topic. She responded with, “I am tired of this narrative that Black people are inevitably fated to being victims of violence. Especially by police. This is not a demise we [Black people] are destined with. But instead, something that has been imposed on us, and needs to be righted by the individuals who perpetuate it.” Her view of the depiction of Blackness within media, society, and the academy are not hers alone. The focus of many stories about Black struggle lies solely on death, dispossession, and injustice, refusing to acknowledge Black presence and resistance. This refusal to acknowledge presence also refuses to acknowledge the role of white supremacy in the creation

of these conditions, and the need for white communities to counteract the violence they perpetrate. This thesis seeks to counter the practice by social scientists whom Woods (2002) deems ‘academic coroners’. Woods describes this phenomena as the treatment of communities as ‘dying’, and the people within them as ‘already dead’ by social scientists. Avoiding this wrongful representation while also ensuring that the research does not reinforce ‘normative visions’ of raced bodies or dictate acceptable ways to interpret them, as much geographic research, by primarily white researchers, in the past and present have done are primary values that underlie this thesis (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). The countering of these practices requires the illumination of Black life, presence, and resistance in the city of Aurora, rather than creating an obituary of the dead.

To foreground the experiences of the research community, subjective truths are the main focus. As each individual’s experiences are informed by their own identities and positions in society. The goal of this thesis is to bring these subjectivities to light and move towards a collective liberation in Aurora, that honors the desires of each subjectivity. I join the struggle for collective liberation and abolition under the belief that no one is free until we all are. At the same time, I see all liberation being inherently interconnected due to racial capitalism’s production of difference in our society. Given this commitment to collective struggle, it is not my role to act as a liberator, but as an actor in the rehearsal of liberation within my community.

Counter-cartographies lie at a unique intersection that provides a potential bridge between the above values backgrounding this thesis. By moving away from traditional mapping practices, mapping Blackness no longer becomes about enumerating the dead or quantifying difference, but rather about abstracting subjective experiences to illuminate Black presence and experience over space. Counter-cartographies pay extra attention to power laden processes that produce and space

as well as maps themselves, it is through the recognition of these power interactions that mapping with care can truly be accomplished.

The Design of the Interviews

In order to build this thesis from the perspective of the community, I interviewed seven local activists. The participants are from organizations such as the Denver Justice Project (DJP), Epitome of Black Excellence and Partnership, Standing Against Violence Everyday (SAVE), McBride Impact, Black Lives Matter (prior and current), as well as local cop-watchers and activists. It is through the collaboration of these community members that this thesis was made possible. Each interviewee was asked ten questions in a semi-structured interview format. The first half of the questions pertained to concentrations of violence in the city and the role that the APD plays in that violence, while the second half focused on community-imaginaries for change and how the community members each envision a better future. Five of the seven interviews took place remotely via Zoom, while two took place in-person. Recruitment for the study relied on snowball recruitment from the initial participants who were reached out to via their affiliated organizations. Interview questions, recruitment methods, and all interview processes were submitted and approved to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure privacy and ethical requirements were met. I ensured confidentiality for each interviewee, while providing them with the option to share their identities. Of the seven interviews six requested to use their full names and affiliations, while one opted for only their name to be used.

The Importance of Counter-Cartographies

Mapping is a primary tool within a geographers' toolkit. It has many uses such as identifying borders, population distributions, and migratory patterns. However, the practice has

deep roots as a tool for enforcing settler imaginaries, controlling of the oppressed, and naturalizing the racialization of space (Hawthorne, 2024; Jefferson, 2020; McKittrick & Woods, 2007). Hawthorne (2024) describes the difficulties of mapping Blackness – often done under the guise of ‘making the invisible, visible’ Blackness is rather made hyper visible in space and maps can reinforce these visibilities, bringing them to be seen as ‘natural’. McKittrick (2011, p. 955) claims that “we can never contribute to the repair of the plight of others if the knowledge we produce about them renders them less than human.” Counter-cartographies serve as a repurposing of mapping towards repair in a way that centers the humanness of the ‘mapped’, a fact that traditional cartography fails to recognize. Understanding of the power relations within mapmaking and the potential impacts of the map itself are essential in producing counter-cartographies and in using maps to empower marginalized communities (Alderman et al, 2024; Hawthorne, 2024). *The Black Geographic*, edited by Hawthorne & Lewis (2023) demonstrates the many possibilities within counter-mapping. All of these counter-mapping representations and primarily the weaving of artistic mediums by Sharita Towne (2023) into alternative spatial abstractions inspired me greatly throughout the counter-mapping process. The maps produced for this thesis arise from the material needs and desires of the community. The map here is instead used as a tool of empowerment, counteracting the dominant narrative of settler maps and their representation of violence, resistance, and futurity.

Doing Ethical Research

This thesis and methods of data collection were submitted to and approved by the IRB, however the ethics of research go far beyond passing an institutional review. The methods for this thesis were chosen out of care for the community I grew up in and the people that inhabit the city. Care in research can be seen through reciprocity and the rejection of extractive top-down

research that permeates academia. Two core values informed the development of the research questions, methods, processes, and writing: *reflexivity and radical vulnerability*. Kim England (1994) describes reflexivity as an understanding of the researcher that an impossible objectivity is unattainable. Personal biases, social contexts, and power dynamics within the researcher and the research community all play a role in the production of knowledge. Constant questioning of one's own positionality and the potential impacts on research results is necessary in order to produce research that is respectful to the communities that participate. Throughout this project I practiced constant reflexivity when attempting to abstract the ideas conveyed to me in interviews into counter-mapping imaginaries.

Nagar and Shirazi's (2019) idea of radical vulnerability was essential in building rapport and establishing a respect between myself and individuals participating in the interviews. Under radical vulnerability the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched must be broken down. Rather than positioning the researcher as the "knower", the knowledge held by research participants demands equal respect. By rejecting extractive research practices, co-authorship and the integration of community voices become essential to the ways of knowing. Through the interviews I attempted to break down the walls between myself and the person sitting across from me by opening each interview with a personal statement of who I was and why exactly I care. The first step towards this vulnerability is the creation of an openness and understanding that provides the space for reciprocity to flourish. Nagar and Shirazi also point out the backwardness within academic research that prioritizes individual achievement of the researcher, as they advocate for research that is accountable and relational to communities.

Limitations

As this project is unfunded and operated on a limited timeframe as an undergraduate thesis, recruitment and scope were limited. The original goal was to complete ten interviews and to also amplify the voices of youth growing up in the city. I attempted to set up some interviews with younger activists in Aurora, but was unable to do so. This gap leaves space for the inclusion of these younger voices in future projects and research, to further explore the ideas of police violence and abolition through their eyes to deepen the already present robust reflexive analysis completed for this project.

Chapter III: “A Diseased Tree that Needs to be Eradicated”



Figure 1 (Photo by Casey Childers, Director of Operations with the Denver Justice Project)

*“Oftentimes there will be narratives of bad apples and I think the Aurora Police it actually embodies the entire parable that bad apples spoil a bunch. We're not talking about bad apples. **We're talking about the Aurora Police. We're talking about a diseased tree that needs to be eradicated.**”*

(MiDian Shofner, CEO Epitome of Black Excellence and Partnership)

What Exactly is Violence & Where is it?

Violence is not a tangible, one-time event. There are instances of violent acts, such as a police officer shooting a civilian in the streets, but these acute events exist under the systems and geopolitical contexts surrounding them. How then do we map violence if it is not a single point on a map? How can we approach these complicated contexts in which violence situates itself? The first step to understanding how violence is spatialized relies on answering these questions. When asking interviewees, “Where is violence in Aurora?” I never got the same answer twice. In this massive diversity of perspectives, the realities of violence in the city make themselves clear by their interconnectedness within the carceral system - built by, and flourishing under racial capitalism.

MiDian Shofner, the CEO of Epitome of Black Excellence and Partnership and avid local activist responded to my question with, “I would say that poverty is the issue. I would say that just the gentrification, the push out [and displacement], all of that to me is violence.”¹ Poverty, gentrification, and displacement are especially prevalent in Black and brown communities where historic disenfranchisement has worked against communities to keep them poor and maintain white supremacist hierarchy. Jason McBride, a local activist and founder of McBride Impact told me about this disenfranchisement in Aurora, “speaking just for the Black community, we don't own restaurant chains or a lot of land anywhere in this country, we've been devalued in those things... the disenfranchisement that exists in Black communities does play a big role in creating these social conditions.”² The disenfranchisement Jason describes has perpetuated cycles of poverty and created the conditions for gentrification to displace those most vulnerable.

Concentrations of oppression lead to spatial inequities that disproportionately affect

¹ MiDian Shofner, 2025, *Interview*

² Jason McBride, 2025, *Interview*

impoverished neighborhoods and communities of color, thus, spatially concentrating violence within certain communities and neighborhoods. Capitalism itself plays a major role in exploiting these inequities to concentrate wealth in White communities, while communities of color are continuously disenfranchised. Here the community recognizes racial capitalism at work through the housing market, denial of generational wealth, and neoliberal state policies that have privatized poverty reduction.

These forces of racial capitalism are not limited to the past and the present, but also the future of communities through the education system. A local BLM activist Lindsay, talked at lengths about the role of the carceral state in criminalizing the youth, as kids are criminalized in schools, being given charges for fights or minor wrongdoings and funneled directly from the school system into prisons. She detailed how this was especially prevalent among children of color, “and to criminalize children of color. That's been weaponized. And so I think that that's an instructional, institutional arm of violence that's been subjected to the people.”³ The prominence of this youth criminalization in communities of color in Aurora carries with it disproportionate punishments and increases the likelihood of similar treatment in the future, as Lindsay says,

Kids in urban areas get subjected to this and it's violent to them because then they get put in situations where they're held without bond or they're held differently and then violent things happen and violence begets violence, you know?⁴

Kids are exposed to the carceral state through school resource officers and overpoliced communities, and where active intervention and preventative measures could protect and provide for these kids, they are instead indoctrinated into a violent system. A system that can lead “to

³ Lindsay, 2025, *Interview*

⁴ Lindsay, 2025, *Interview*

[people] treat[ing] you differently because you might have done something as a kid as opposed to a kid that flew under the radar and never had a history.”⁵ This continued feeding into the system rather than implementation of protections, “speaks to the long arm of the prison industrial complex.”⁶ With the far reaches of this violent system, the past, present, and future of communities rely on contesting it.

Even in a peaceful interaction with the police, violence is perpetuated through the officer’s role as the first point of contact between the criminalized and the carceral state (Jefferson, 2020). This point of contact begins cycles of violence that the entire carceral system participates in, inciting more systemic violence upon the criminalized over time. Candice called the system itself, “police brutality”, and claims that “the goal of that system is to incriminate” and “profit”⁷, and that system is functioning as intended. This understanding of a complete system working as intended aligns with Gilmore’s (2022) idea of abolition geographies as the recognition of the necessity for the dismantling of the entire system of violence. Mexican Long Hair (MLH), local Aurora activist and cop-watcher, describes the ways in which the DA’s office and other pieces of the carceral apparatus incite violence,

If you don't have the money, you get assigned a shitty prosecuting attorney that works real closely with the DA simply to get a deal with them and stuff of that nature. I was just at the courthouse in Arapahoe County and there was literally 30 people sitting just waiting to make a deal with the DA.⁸

Mexican Long Hair explains that attorneys, judges, the DA and the processes of conviction are all a part of this systemic violence. With this understanding that each step through the carceral

⁵ Lindsay, 2025, *Interview*

⁶ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

⁷ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

⁸ Mexican Long Hair, 2025, *Interview*

system is violent, policing becomes all the more important as police officers are the ones entrusted by the system to fill its empty cells.

The violence is getting worse. In our current era of outright rising facism, white supremacy, and racial injustice the APD is seeking retribution. Candice Bailey said to me,

It's retribution for all of the Black Lives Matter, all of the social justice movements that were happening. They were highly humiliated across the globe. And so now it's like this restoration of the good old boys network as we talk about things like Operation Aurora.⁹

As Jordan Camp (2016), illuminates the instrumental role the police play for the state as the strong arm of repression used to punish social movements, the inability of the policing system to dispel the BLM movement has resulted in aggression, and increasing agitation in the community. The importance of the present moment makes the pursuit of abolition all the more important. The police are not the only target of abolition. The mechanisms of racial capitalism that continue cycles of poverty, displacement, and divestment in poor communities and the entirety of the carceral structures from the DA's office to the prisons must all be dismantled to escape this system that is operating as it was designed.

Violent Histories and the Failures of Reform

The BLM movement in Aurora in 2020 reached national headlines, and the city has become highly associated with its collective mobilization in response to the outright injustices committed by the APD. This however, is not the beginning of violence in the city. 'Actionist'

⁹ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

Candice Bailey, who grew up in the city explained how this is simply a continuation of the violence that has existed since Aurora's inception. She said,

Aurora has always had a history of violence in policing, racism. There used to be a joke when I grew up in Southeast Aurora, very young in the 90s. Come on vacation, leave on probation, likely incarceration. That story has not changed and it was really circulating throughout the Black community deeply.¹⁰

The culture of policing in the city has always been racial and the system's goal has always been incarceration of the racialized subject. The effects of this system concentrate themselves within the Black communities. The continuous systemic violence maintains the produced difference across artificial racialized boundaries. MiDian described the role of Blackness within the state apparatus itself, "Anti-Blackness is the lubricant of the systems that we have in this country. The system succeeding is predicated on the oppression of Black people."¹¹ Under racial capitalism racial difference is necessary for the production, maintenance, and expansion of the neoliberal state that relies on the capitalistic enterprise of the private sector. Prisons and policing are the primary actors of the state in suppressing dissent that threatens neoliberal imaginaries and private equity.

If this problem has been so continuous, why have reforms not fixed the problem? Jason McBride explained the reinforcement the APD has received for the violent repression being granted, "a million dollars [by the federal government]," for their "handling of gang issues,"¹² in the 90s. This he deems a pivotal point in the growing disconnect between the APD and the community, as violence is directly rewarded monetarily. Despite the rewards for violence, the

¹⁰ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

¹¹ MiDian Shofner, 2025, *Interview*

¹² Jason McBride, 2025, *Interview*

city entered a consent decree with independent organization IntegrAssure, in order to address the concerns of the community and combat the issues plaguing the department, following the APD's killing of Elijah McClain. Throughout the interviews, it was detailed over and over, the failures of this consent decree to make any meaningful change.

We walked up to the city hall to conduct an interview in what was a meaningful location, as it was the first time DJ Kdot had returned since being wrongfully trespassed and put on trial by the APD. As a cop-watcher and activist he had his fair share of run-ins with the APD and spoke candidly about his wrongful detainment. When I asked him about reform and the consent decree he told me, “did they form some new policies? Sure, but did they? I mean, my cousin [Kilyn Lewis] died within that consent decree.”¹³ This is the reality of reform, a new policy or two may be implemented or ‘monitored’, but the system continues to collect bodies and kill members of the community, permanently affecting their families, friends and the community as a whole. The decree has resulted in a report on the APD, “but the report is just more evidence of how nothing has changed,”¹⁴ as Casey Childers told me. The interim police chief Vanessa Wilson was attempting to make structural changes within the department, working alongside Candice Bailey who saw firsthand the reaction of the system to these pressures stating,

So when 2020 rolls around and Vanessa Wilson starts making actual changes.

There was a huge pushback. I actually was sitting in an office in Aurora when there was an email that was sent that said “that ‘*female dog*’ cannot run the Aurora Police Department...” it was by some detectives and some officers out of APD, to the entire city staff.¹⁵

¹³ DJ Kdot, 2025, *Interview*

¹⁴ Casey Childers, 2025, *Interview*

¹⁵ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

Vanessa was pushed out of leadership and any attempt at reform was stopped by those that benefit directly from the system and its sexist, white supremacist foundations. Reform has failed continuously in the city, bodies are piling up and the community is hurting as a result of these failures. However, the effects of this systemic violence and failed reform are not felt evenly throughout the city.

The Geographic Unevenness of Violence

The retributions of the APD in reaction to the BLM movement that Candice mentioned prior, carry with it uneven implications of violence. As she told me,

[In 2020 they] made a decision that they would stop coming into these wards that were socioeconomically disenfranchised. And so what once was a place where there was this heavy saturation of gang unit, ATF, DEA... [The City had said] Screw you. We're not coming to your neighborhood since you don't like our work.¹⁶

The communities that were once considered 'so dangerous' that they required the most police presence became police deserts where no emergency responders would go. This combined with the over policing of the same communities with, "Things like shot spotters. So many of a number of things. Foot patrols that were going out into these communities on foot. A higher concentration of police,"¹⁷ creates multifaceted layers of violence through too much and too little police presence, with all scenarios resulting in violence concentrated spatially in the socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in Aurora. Shot spotters themselves represent what Jefferson (2020) identifies as policing technologies that contribute to racialization, often

¹⁶ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

¹⁷ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

sending false alarms in communities of color increasing police presence and arrests in the same areas. These communities are also where the majority of the BLM movements took place, making the expansion of carceral systems in these neighborhoods as a direct response to social unrest as the primary solution decided upon by the city of Aurora.

The class divides of the city are made starkly clear as MLH calls attention to a ‘class warfare’ differentiation experienced spatially within the city, “There's violence in central Aurora... Not so much southeast, but more posh neighborhoods and stuff like that. And I think there's also, we talked about class warfare.”¹⁸ This represents a class divide that Candice says directs police activity, “from Ward 1 to Ward 5, There is about an \$80,000 a year socioeconomic gap And that's huge. And so historically, if you look at socioeconomics. It directs policing.”¹⁹ Massive wealth differences concentrate inequality through services, safety, and policing within neighborhoods that have been historically disenfranchised and most severely affected by neoliberal state policies. Policing under racial capitalism is crucial in maintaining this economic and racial differentiation between parts of the city. MiDian recognizes the APD’s differential treatment along class lines saying, “the Aurora Police is very intentional in making sure that the caste system in our society is upheld.”²⁰ The over and under policing of poor neighborhoods mentioned previously is essential in maintaining this hierarchy of power, that keeps the wealthy and the white on top of this caste system. Through economic segregation policing is concentrated in communities of color, and difference is maintained not only along racial boundaries, but along the logics of class under racial capitalism as well.

¹⁸ Mexican Long Hair, 2025, *Interview*

¹⁹ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

²⁰ MiDian Shofner, 2025, *Interview*

Beyond over and under policing, there are massive response time differences between socioeconomically different areas of the city. Candice noted the, “ten minute response time,”²¹ disparity that followed class lines and socioeconomics in the city. While a ten minute disparity is common, the APD often won’t respond until the next day when called as DJ Kdot told me,

The earliest they can get there is maybe 45 minutes, um, an hour, two hours, three hours, sometimes not even at all. They get a text message and say, we’ll be there in the morning. Wow. Literally a good friend of mine’s house, brand new house got shot up and this person could still be out there and the police didn’t show up until the next morning.²²

Here further entrenchment of class and spatial unevenness of policing is made visible. Those that are in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas see slower response times, over policing, and underpolicing creating a matrix of violence that is felt unevenly throughout the city, concentrating itself in wards with the most vulnerable populations as well as the marginalized.

²¹ Candice Bailey, 2025, *Interview*

²² DJ Kdot, 2025, *Interview*

A Counter-Cartography of Aurora

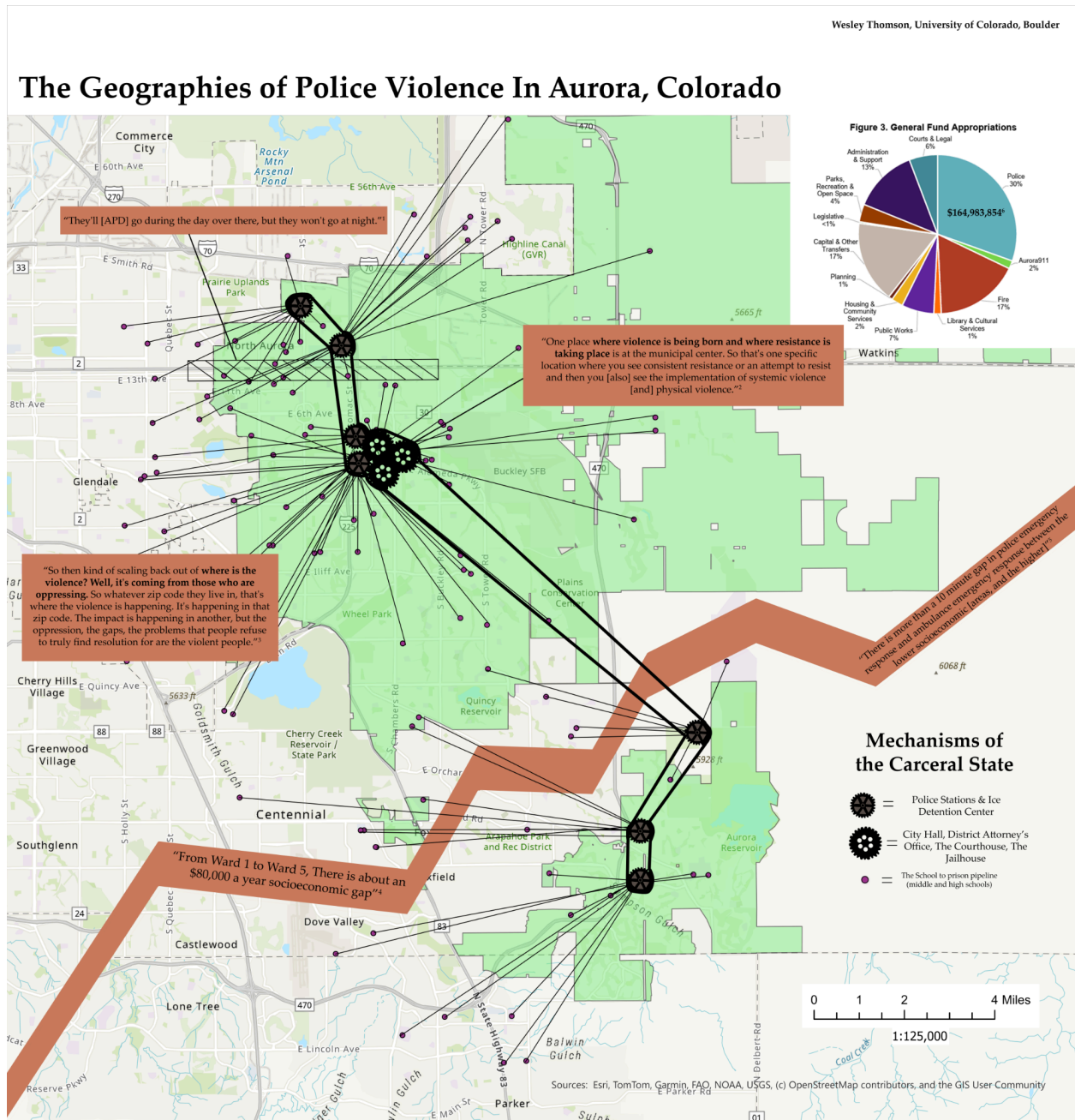


Figure 2 (1: Mexican Long Hair, Interview; 2: Casey Childers, Interview; 3: MiDian Shofner, Interview; 4: Candice Bailey, Interview; 5: Candice Bailey, Interview; 6: (City of Aurora, 2025))

‘The Geographies of Police Violence in Aurora, Colorado’ represents the main counter-cartographic imagining developed through my interviews and conversations with community members for this thesis. Figure 2, abstracts the felt realities of systemic violence that permeates the city of Aurora. The physical structures of the carceral state become cogs in a dehumanized machine, interconnected and feeding into each other, even crossing over the bloody rift in the city. The rift itself is symbolic of two major aspects of violence in the city. First, the stark segregation among class, race and ethnicity that further exacerbates the felt effects of the carceral system among socioeconomically disadvantaged parts of the city. A segregation produced by racial capitalism’s logics, and a differentiation that it continues to exploit. Second, the differential treatment among parts of the city by the police, which manifests materially in response time disparities and over or underpolicing. The black hatched section in north Aurora demonstrates a specific location of neglect among the police force, an area that is actively avoided at night by the APD. This differential treatment among different neighborhoods and parts of the city, demonstrate this geographic unevenness of policing, and violence.

The city center stands as the focal point of the map. At city hall, the cries of the community for accountability are actively ignored. At the DAs office, the city preys on those that are uninformed of their rights to a trial and siphons money out of already economically disadvantaged areas. At the courthouse, the fate of the criminalized is determined and it serves as the entrance into the carceral system. Casey Childers describes the city center as the birthplace of violence, but also of resistance, serving as a major gathering ground for demonstrations against the city. The pie chart makes clear the priorities of the city of Aurora with over \$164,000,000 allocated to the 2025 APD budget (City of Aurora, 2025). This priority represents the systemic violence of underfunding and divestment that many parts of the city face. An issue that the

members of the community seek to contest as they demand defunding of the militarized police force. The smaller dots represent all of the middle school and high schools in Aurora, with some outside the bounds of the city as the realities of life are not dictated by manufactured city borders. Their connections to the carceral state represent repression of the future through criminalization of youth, the school to prison pipeline and underfunded classrooms while the majority of the city's funding is funneled into policing. Lastly, the quote from MiDian Shofner that best answers the question, "Where is violence concentrated in Aurora?"

So then kind of scaling back out to where is the violence? Well, it's coming from those who are oppressing. So whatever zip code they live in, that's where the violence is happening. It's happening in that zip code. The impact is happening in another, but the oppression, the gaps, the problems that people refuse to truly find resolution for are the violent people.²³

This quote demonstrates the reality of violence in the city. Our city is not violent. Our people are not violent. The oppressive systems of racial capitalism and the oppressors that maintain them are violent, and this violence belongs to them, not us. Thus, solutions that seek to address this violence must target the owners of the violence, the oppressors and their oppressive systems and capitalism itself. These solutions then are inherently abolitionist, as Gilmore's (2022) liberatory placemaking is one that focuses on the dismantling of oppressive structures, and the responsibility of the community to build spaces of liberation in their wake.

My use of counter-mapping techniques that stray away from cartographic tradition serves the purpose of making visible the shape of carceral violence in Aurora, while seeking to avoid the naturalization of the violence or the mapping of 'difference' by mapping racial and economic


²³ MiDian Shofner, 2025, *Interview*

disparities (Hawthorne, 2024). Through this counter-map I argue for a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of police violence. One that takes into context each and every aspect of the carceral apparatus that policing sends the community into. I argue for the necessity in an understanding that recognizes the material realities of the carceral system that racial capitalism creates: division and violence based on the very difference that it produces. I argue that police brutality does not end at the killing of innocents and excessive use of force, instead these are starting points.

Pursuits of Accountability and Community Refusals

the day over there, but they won't go at night."

June 24th, 2024: The halls of the city council are packed yet again. The same demands as before, for the city and the APD to take accountability for the killing of Kilyn Lewis. We are here again and we will be heard again. Our presence will not be ignored, nor our voices silenced. The city's reschedules, avoidance and arrests are "indicative that the resistance is in fact working."¹



"Aurora resists every day... The courage of the human beings who live here to live out loud and wear their colors and cook their food and wear their hair and speak their language, that is resistance at its finest."²

The people of Aurora have shown constant refusal. Refusal to accept violence, racism, and the mechanisms of the carceral state as acceptable. A refusal to simply live as the 'oppressed' and refusing to accept police violence. Amidst this refusal the people of Aurora committ to a continuous pursuit of joy and the improvement of the material conditions of day-to-day life.



"I don't live as an oppressed Black man. I don't do that. Even though there are oppressive scenarios around me."³



Acts of Refusal

Photos provided by
Casey Childers, Director of Operations with the Denver Justice Project
Mapping by Wesley Thomson

Figure 3 (1: MiDian Shofner, Interview; 2: Candice Bailey, Interview; 3: DJ Kdot, Interview; Photos provided by Casey Childers, Director of Operations with the Denver Justice Project)

“In the short-term, we want accountability, in the long term we want liberation”²⁴. Among the outright acts of police brutality in Aurora, those that hold the power have continuously refused demands for accountability from the community. As MLH said to me, “the cops who murdered Elijah McClain were let go scot free.”²⁵ The cops who killed Kilyn Lewis have yet to face accountability. The system itself at every turn denies responsibility to and the dignity of those whom they harm. The city council, the APD, the independent investigators under the consent decree, the city manager, and the chief of police all stand silent in wake of these demands from the community.

Regardless of this fact, the people of Aurora are consistently refusing the state of operations. Figure 3, ‘Acts of Refusal’, highlights a specific instance of resistance among many. The snapshot shows ties between the daily acts of resistance in maintaining the city’s strength, diversity, and presence with their active demands of the state for accountability. As figure 2 illustrates the shape of racial capitalism’s violence in the city, figure 3 demonstrates the active refusals of this system and the insistence of the community in being heard and respected. This resistance is (re)born every council meeting that takes place at the mechanical heart of Aurora’s carceral system, but is not limited to this single geographical point. As Candice Bailey and DJ Kdot identify in figure 3, the people of Aurora resist through their everyday existence. An existence that refuses to live as ‘oppressed’ and that insists on the “courage of the human beings who live here to live out loud.”

²⁴ Casey Childers, 2025, *Interview*

²⁵ Mexican Long Hair, 2025, *Interview*

Chapter IV: (Re)imagining the Future of Policing in Aurora

What is to be Done?

This is a system that has to ultimately be completely destroyed. But at the end of the day, when we talk about the dismantling and the destruction of a system, therein lies the community's responsibility to stick around, not only to burn it down, but to build it back up.

- MiDian Shofner, CEO Epitome of Black Excellence and Partnership

It is a choice, abolition or carceral segregation. Acceptance of carceral segregation means continuing to answer political, social and economic problems with more cops and more cells. This is the answer of liberalism, the answer of racial capitalism, and the answer of the neoliberal state. To choose abolition is to refuse premature death. To choose abolition is to insist that the material needs and desires of the community are honored. No one person can make this choice for the community, it is one we must make together, tying our fates to one another. If Aurora were to choose abolition, what could it look like?

Gilmore (et al, 2022) outlines abolition geographies as a complete (re)imagining of societal structures to shift values away from profit and towards human welfare. These (re)imaginings are already taking place in Aurora, and they lie at the heart of the community's desires as one that wants to improve the material realities of life while fostering an environment of safety. The answer to my interview question, "What change would you like to see regarding the APD and policing?" received passionate responses that illuminate what the realities of abolition could look like in Aurora. The community's desires demand (1) agency for the community over how we are policed and how the police are held accountable, (2) a change in the

fundamental values upon which policing is carried out, (3) a defunding of policing and funding of community instead, (4) the creation of a policing system that is representative of the community and from the community, (5) and a relationship of reciprocity between the community and the police. DJ Kdot expressed his desire for agency, “We need a community oversight board immediately. [One] without the involvement or the dictatorship of the police chief [and] this oversight board needs to also be in charge of discipline.”²⁶ Giving the community power over discipline and the staffing of the police is the first step towards meeting the people’s desires for agency and accountability.

The current policing system is built upon the values of repression, force, control, and violence. The community desires values of trust, responsibility to the people, conflict resolution over agitation, with emphasis on public safety rather than enforcement. “I would love to see Aurora police go away, honestly and rebranded, they need to be called public safety officers. Enforcement, all that stuff needs to come out of their language. They need to have community involvement, [and] public safety because it puts the public first.”²⁷ Centering these values as a foundation to build a new policing system breaks down the hierarchy of occupation that currently exists under the APD.

Casey Childers stated, “We just wanna defund the police and fund the community. We know that the biggest deterrent or the factor that makes neighborhoods safest is investing in resources, investing resources in education and healthcare and making sure people have access to food and grocery stores. So we do that by defunding the police and investing in healthy alternatives.”²⁸ This alternative imagining for funding attempts to address root problems of safety

²⁶ DJ Kdot, 2025, *Interview*

²⁷ DJ Kdot, 2025, *Interview*

²⁸ Casey Childers, 2025, *Interview*

by tackling poverty, food insecurity, public health, and education rather than accepting a cop and a cell as the only solution. Jason McBride echoed this failure of the city to provide for its most vulnerable, “we're not providing enough resources to people who are finding themselves financially scrapped in this economy and trying to pay rent.”²⁹ The community sees being housed, fed and healthy as more important than, “all of these sophisticated war vehicles.”³⁰

Lindsay responded, “I would like for the police department to reflect the people.”³¹ The community wants those that police the community to be from the community, to live here, and to reflect the values the community holds. MLH voiced the importance of changing the policing force as, “there's a good contingency of white supremacists that pepper our police forces. That needs to be rooted out.”³² The community believes that this change will encourage community involvement and foster a relationship with the police that can be sustained on alternative foundational values.

According to Lindsay, a community-police relationship built upon reciprocity means a police force that, “goes in and teaches the community and reacts with the community and so the community can also teach them. Because if you don't know how I want to be policed, you can't police me if you don't know what I think is fair and just, then you can't be fair and just to me. And if you don't know me or anything about me. Then you can't help me.”³³ A mutual learning relationship where the community and police learn from each other, in day to day life and throughout officer training are the building blocks of reciprocity that the community desires.

²⁹ Jason McBride, 2025, *Interview*

³⁰ Lindsay, 2025, *Interview*

³¹ Lindsay, 2025, *Interview*

³² Mexican Long Hair, 2025, *Interview*

³³ Lindsay, 2025, *Interview*

Radical placemaking is already occurring amidst these desires for change. As Gilmore (et al, 2022) says, “Liberation is a place.” It is a place that can be made by the communities of Aurora through the dismantling of racial capitalism and its carceral structures, and with the rebuilding of an alternative future that reflects these material desires of the community. The radical placemaking of an alternative future’s roots lie in the present soil.

Next Steps

As this thesis concludes, I must note that this does not end at extractive conclusions. Taking inspiration from Nagar and Shirazi’s (2019) radical vulnerability and the importance of reciprocity in research, giving back to the research community becomes my primary task upon completion. The final question I asked in each interview was, “What can people in the community do to help make this desired change reality?” The answer was almost universal - bring these conversations to the community, get more people involved and to care, and speak up as part of the community for what you desire. Lawson (2008) outlines the importance of care ethics in geography; she recognizes the social responsibility of the researcher in creating networks of care, “Our responsibility is to attend to grounded lives, politics, and specific interrelations rather than abstract notions of our responsibilities to ‘others’.” The spatialities of our lives, our work, and the lives of our fellow persons are intrinsically tied to one another. Through care ethics in geographical research we can connect them deeply with interdependence and mutuality. What this looks like for me is holding community panels, talks, showing up to speak at city council meetings, and continuing to write and expand on the ideas presented throughout this thesis.

Conclusions

The geographies of police violence are the operations of the carceral state under racial capitalism. The conditions of violence that are created by disenfranchisement, the production of difference, mass incarceration, and racialized criminalization all play a role in police violence. Violence in the city of Aurora is concentrated within this carceral apparatus that seeks to criminalize the racialized subject. The violence belongs to the system, therefore confronting it requires confronting the system itself with anticapitalist and antiracist imaginaries to directly dismantle racial capitalism. An understanding of police violence that takes into account these racial capitalist productions is necessary for pursuing life affirming change through liberatory placemaking and abolition. Counter-cartographies play a key role in making visible the operations of the carceral state in Aurora, through the eyes of the community that experiences it. Counter-mapping's visibilities can then aid in visualizing the possibilities of liberatory change by illuminating these interconnected systems of violence.

Aurora is a place of refusals. Refusal to accept oppression, state-sanctioned violence, and racial capitalism's productions as natural. Alongside this refusal is an insistence on Black presence being recognized, honored and respected. Community desires for change in Aurora lie within abolitionist horizons. A new policing system is necessary that acknowledges and honors the community's imaginaries and exists outside the bounds of the neoliberal state. The community's desires recognize this necessity and now turn to face the choice of abolition, as communities within Aurora are already enacting 'liberation as a place' (Gilmore et al, 2022) through the pursuit of their desires and their everyday resistances.

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