



Silencing, Urban Growth Machines, and the Obama Presidential Center on Chicago's South Side

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Recent research on growth machines, in a prominent theme, has focused on how mobilized discourses promote urban redevelopment projects. Pushed to the margins, in this work, has been the issue of how alternative growth visions and voices are silenced or muffled. This article examines the notion of “silencing” in urban growth discourses. Silencing, it is argued, should not be understood as censorship but rather as attempts by growth machines to relativize the importance of critical and dissent voices in redevelopment projects. We believe that to understand how redevelopment projects operate and transform (urban) spaces, such rhetorical peripheralization is as important as pro-growth discourses. In developing this argument, the article focuses on the case study of the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) on Chicago's Southeast Side. An OPC growth machine consisting of the Obama Foundation, the city mayor, the University of Chicago, and a coalition of local business and community organizations practices this simultaneity of offering their voice and undercutting alternative voices in adroit ways. Race, it is argued, is at the center of this systematic suppression. The OPC development provides an important example of how current redevelopment in cities across the global west currently proceeds.

Keywords: urban growth machines, silencing, discursive practice, Chicago, Obama Presidential Center

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of “silencing” remains under-explored in research on how urban growth machines operate to transform cities. For over 40 years, critical urbanists have demonstrated how coalitions of city authorities, local media, private developers, real-estate speculators, and business entrepreneurs promote growth as universally beneficial to city users and inhabitants across the United States (Mollenkopf, 1975; Molotch, 1976, 1993; Jonas and Wilson, 1999; Vitale, 2015)¹. Yet, the promotion of city growth and redevelopment is not without conflicts. Infrastructural investment and redevelopment projects are often met with opposition and resistance by residents who fear that land development will increase taxes and rents and promote gentrification and displacement. In managing such opposition, growth machines exhibit a repertoire of strategies that are both obvious and not obvious. As we will reveal in this article, growth machines also mobilize complicated silencing strategies to manage meaningful resistance to their growth designs.

¹Recent work suggests that this newest production of silencing may be symptomatic of the rise of a post-political mode of governance in Chicago and beyond that refines anti-democratic growth tactics (Swyngedouw, 2018). There is conflicting work on the validity of this thesis; given our data base in this study, we believe that it is too soon to make this judgement about the thesis and its relation to current Chicago.

We seek to deepen understanding of how silencing forms part of urban growth discourses in managing political opposition and resistance to urban redevelopment². We offer a nuanced conceptualization of silencing that moves beyond a narrow understanding of silencing as forceful repression through censorship. Silencing in growth discourse, we suggest, should not be confused with censorial intervention in the media by totalitarian regimes (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Instead, following Thiesmeyer (2003: 1–2), “[s]ilencing takes place where there is discourse. It is most effective when another discourse is used to designate and enforce the area of silenced material and eventually to fill it in.” Silencing in growth discourse does not seek to eradicate opposition and resistance, but rather seeks to *manage* these through discursive practices that portray critical voices as “anti-progress”, “insignificant” and, as in our case study of Chicago’s South Side, as “racist.”

In our analysis, we will focus on the growth machine that has been behind the ongoing development of the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) in Jackson Park on Chicago’s South Side. The OPC comprises the latest moment in a political project to transform Chicago’s South Side into an investment space for global capital and the generation of exchange value (Boyd, 2008; Hyra, 2008; Wilson, 2018). As a quintessential American city, Chicago tells critical urbanists a lot about city development and the political, socio-economic, and cultural forces at play. In particular, the forces of racism have long been studied in Chicago’s urban development (Massey and Denton, 1993), and we argue that the latest round of urban redevelopment on the city’s South Side sheds further light on how race and racism continue to shape development in diverse and adroit ways.

We develop two major points on silencing in growth machine redevelopment. First, silencing involves the deploying of language, both directly and indirectly, as a mechanism to limit, remove or undermine the legitimacy of other languages that propose alternative kinds of redevelopment. Directly, straightforward articulations demonize the ideas and meanings that subalterns use to contest growth machine redevelopment. But typically, this is not the only trope used. Indirectly, “truths” presented in language shoot out constellations of signifiers and meanings that perform the same task. This double-barreled, quiet assault ultimately undermines the “infrastructure” of dissent, i.e., its standing as a possible legitimate perspective.

Second, a prominent strategy is used to facilitate this silencing: situating opponents and dissenters as being outside the community. This attack, on a supposed misguided ignorant politics, is also an attack on a matrix of culture, morals, and traditions. Marked with a stamp of unbelonging, dissent voices are supposedly less concerned about the community than those behind growth machine redevelopment efforts, and they are accused of acting out of community-destructive and irrational

impulses. Ultimately, the push is to silence dissenting voices by denying them the authority and legitimacy to speak.

Adding specificity to this point, this constructing of the illegitimate voice involves two tropes. First, racialization of African-American voices and communities is actively used as a source of denigrating the black identity and the black voice. Such voices, made carriers of “ghetto space,” the streets,” and “the culturally downtrodden black family,” become cast as enemies to a community’s and city’s civility. Such analytic units, to be both taken for granted and objects of unending concern, purportedly embody the deformed, the unduly angry and discordant, and the heart of poverty politics that civil society must confront and resist. Race and poverty, as an incendiary mix, supposedly spawn a political response to best redevelopment that stands poised to subvert best city planning.

The second trope in this constructing takes the form of kind of subtle co-option of the discursive as growth machines wield blackness in another way to do their bidding. Here, we recognize that growth machines operatives deploy blackness in two contradictory ways: as a social and cultural referent of “black voices” whose politics and agendas cannot be trusted and assume a place in the political mainstream and as an appealing exotic set of social realities that can fruitfully be cultivated to aid ongoing redevelopment. It is in the latter—the exoticization of blackness as a commodifiable product (e.g., building “black restaurants;” cultivating working-class “black street edginess”)—that the dissident voice is cast as doing the voicing of misguided, outside-the-realm-of normalcy politics. “Blackness-guided redevelopment” becomes strategically situated as irresponsible and misguided in its failure to recognize how blackness is to be properly included in redevelopment.

These discursive practices of silencing have emerged over time, responding to changing patterns, processes and trajectories of bringing the OPC to the area. Silence processes therefore mutate during a redevelopment effort, showing their unstable and ever improvisational nature. For example, we will demonstrate that silencing through the socio-spatial exclusion of critical voices from community spaces amplified when resistance to the OPC project by historic preservationists continued despite Federal and city-level approval to use a historic landmark park as the site for the project. Thus, silencing practices are not static and constant in their configuration but are the result of historical processes and moments in time.

To date, no work has systematically excavated the nuances of how silencing proceeds in a politics fostered by growth machines. This article seeks to offer a first corrective to this lacuna. Methodologically, it builds on qualitative research conducted in communities adjacent to the OPC development, including face-to-face and online interviews with community organizers, residents, and stakeholders invested in the OPC project which were conducted between 2017 and 2021. Interviews focused on how members of community organizations and from adjacent communities experienced their ability to politically participate in the decision to build the OPC in Jackson Park. Questions during the interviews centered around descriptions of how community participation was sought by growth machine actors and how community participation was possible through, for

²We recognize that any redevelopment narrative involves some form of silencing practices, including those by grassroots actors who mobilize silencing practices to resist machine actors’ hegemonic visions for urban growth. Thus, silencing cannot be conceptualized as unidirectional. Yet, our focus here is on discursive practices of silencing which are strategically mobilized by growth machine actors to realize urban growth visions and conceptions of urban space.

example, outreach meetings organized by the Obama Foundation and the city of Chicago. Illuminating how residents and community organizers experienced such outreach events and the inclusion of community voices into the planning process were the focus of these interviews. Conversations centered particularly around participants' (in)ability to make their voices recognized in the planning and development process of the OPC. We identified that challenges to political participation can be conceptualized through the notion of "silencing" as we will elaborate below. Analyses of newspapers, press statements, and speeches by representatives of the Obama Foundation and other machine actors provided insights into how growth narratives and discourses promoting the OPC in Jackson Park have unfolded in this development project. In the pages that follow, we seek to decipher the centrality of silencing in growth projects.

SILENCING AS A DISCURSIVE PRACTICE IN GROWTH MACHINE RHETORIC

What do we currently know about this silencing process which guides us in our analysis? First, that silencing has a dominant strategy: A two-step rhetoric serves up warm and fuzzy lucidness in goal and intent with a clear gradation of a best growth vision. In the process, machine actors practice what we term "discursive disambiguation," a linguistic process of clarification and resolution of ambiguities through which one vision of growth is declared as necessary to follow. Discursive disambiguation silences critical and dissent voices as machine actors do not allow any alternative representations of urban redevelopment to find similar consideration and appeal in public discourses. In other words, language of urban growth is used to deny the language of opposition and resistance to urban redevelopment. "The goal of using discourse to silence other discourse," Thiesmeyer (2003: 9) contends, "is to remove the potential for an audience to obtain the unacceptable discourse. That is, the audience will be rendered incapable of hearing or noticing the existence of certain discourses because they differ too much from those normally used within the daily life of the community."

Such silencing of critical and dissenting voices deploys the strategic binary of common sense vs. aberrant and politicized visions of redevelopment and growth rhetoric to make its case. This trope, following Bourdieu (1991: 76), depends on "the linguistic competence of the person who utters it." In his theorization of censorship, which resembles our understanding of silencing, Bourdieu (1991) contends that censorship depends on the access to expression within a specific social field. Censorship, for Bourdieu (1991: 138), "is exercised through the medium of the sanctions of the field, functioning as a market on which the prices of different kinds of expression are formed." Access to discourse and language is determined by the positionality of the speaker. Machine actors, who tend to be in a position of authority as city officials, private developers, or in the case of the OPC as a former President, are able to promote their discourse of growth and economic development through their authoritative position, whereas those voices critical of machine-driven growth rhetoric are silenced as they do not have the same

access to political power and the space occupied by machine actors (Butler, 1998). Levinson (1998: 196, original emphasis) writes in the context of state authority and political discourse that "[t]he state may benefit from having more economic resources to devote to articulating its position than do its opponents, but one should be aware that an important resource that is also and uniquely available to the state is its ability to *legitimate* certain arguments merely by virtue of state endorsement." Growth machines, too, possess the political and economic resources to devote to the promotion of their growth agenda. State actors, such as city authorities, which also form part of growth machines, provide official authority and legitimacy to growth machines' claims and agendas.

Second, growth machines deploy their power to speak on behalf of communities and people affected by urban redevelopment and thereby to actively and deliberately disparage critical voices. Logan and Molotch (2007: 61–62) chronicle that growth machines "encourage activities that will connect feelings of community ["we feelings" (McKenzie, 1922)] to the goal of local growth." In this context, the goal is "to deemphasize the connection between growth and exchange values and to reinforce the link between growth goals and better lives for the majority." Machine actors thus mobilize a pro-growth discourse which attempts to install and reinforce a collective identity among those who will, according to the growth machine, benefit from their redevelopment. By framing their pro-growth rhetoric as representative of a community's best economic interests, machine actors discursively declare themselves to be benevolent technocratic operatives intent on advancing the public interest.

Here, the symbolic power of discourses that seeks to exclude people, following Bourdieu (1991: 138), is one of the most effective ways to silence and censor. This silencing practice allows growth machines to determine the inclusiveness of their development project by strategically asking the question "are you one of us?" (Dalal, 2009: 74). Machine actors welcome allegiance to growth projects as such support advances the overall claim of local growth as universally beneficial and a betterment of lives for the majority. If the project is resisted and criticized, exclusionary discursive practices allow growth machines to problematize critics, representing them as "not speaking for the community." In this way, silencing comprises "a performative category of language" (Thiesmeyer, 2003: 3) with immediate discursive and social consequences for those opposing machine visions of best economic development, such as their stigmatization as well as perverse political affiliation.

Third, there is some recognition that race is strategically mobilized to propel growth (Hackworth, 2007, 2019; Wilson, 2007, 2018; Anderson and Sternberg, 2012; Seamster, 2015). Wilson and Heil (2020: 6) argue that "the growth machine concept needs to more meaningfully engage race, particularly as a discursive creation." For them, race is a "city building resource" where questions of urban growth and redevelopment are intrinsically connected to racialization processes across U.S. cities. Similarly, Mele (2017: 157) identifies that "[r]ace is immensely practical to the politics of urban development," so much so that race has always been at the heart of city growth and development.

That race and racialization processes are important for understanding silencing in growth discourses references a deep history. For decades, the fear of black urban spaces as drivers of criminal violence and community disintegration have resulted in widespread territorial stigmatization (Luger and Schwarze, 2021; Schwarze, 2021), accompanied by decades of disinvestment, economic neglect and punishment of African-American communities (Pulido, 2016). But in the present, as chronicled, all is not so simple. On the one hand, blackness is worked through as the unspoken curse to best redevelopment. Here, blackness is a form of residency, kind of neighborhood, and a set of activity spaces that are best peripheralized. On the other hand, race serves city developers as opportunities to rhetorically frame African-American communities as exciting new spaces for experiencing authentic Black culture with the goal to attract national and international investors. In this rhetoric, race and the cultural history of African-American life are strategically mobilized to attract visitors to downtowns and nearby neighborhoods. This “new urban renewal” (Boyd, 2008; Hyra, 2008) and “land grabbing” (Williams, 2021) by city authorities, entrepreneurs and private developers promotes real-estate capital’s deepest desires: to valorize land and promote gentrification.

As we now chronicle, discursive practices of silencing are crucial to understanding growth machine operations as a core resource in their arsenal. In our empirical focus, the silencing of dissent involving opposition to siting the Obama Presidential Center on Chicago’s South Side has been nuanced and relentless. The OPC project is an urban redevelopment endeavor that, since its onset, has been met with fierce resistance and opposition from community groups and stakeholders which, we chronicle in the next section, needed to be managed and ultimately silenced to realize machine actors’ visions of economic development.

SILENCING IN ACTION: THE OBAMA PRESIDENTIAL CENTER ON CHICAGO’S SOUTH SIDE

In 2016, the Obama Foundation, accompanied by an entourage of city representatives and community organizers, announced that it would build the OPC in Jackson Park; a historic landmark park on the city’s South Side, designed by the renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted in 1871. Celebrated as an opportunity for economic development and growth in a part of the city that continues to be territorially stigmatized (Schwarze, 2021), the OPC growth machine mobilizes a spirit of optimism for South Siders that better times and more economic opportunities are on the horizon. Initially promoted as a Presidential library and archive to store documents and artifacts associated with Obama’s presidency, the OPC has since developed into a 19-acre infrastructural mega-complex, now encompassing a 235-foot Museum tower, a forum, and several park and garden facilities³.

³For a virtual tour of the yet-to-be-built Center, see <https://www.obama.org/the-center/> (last accessed October 21, 2021).

With an estimated cost of \$800 million, the OPC is framed by machine actors as a long-awaited economic investment into Chicago’s South Side, with anticipated economic spillover effects into adjacent communities through the creation of new cafés, restaurants, and shops (Obama Foundation, 2017). Support among African-American community residents for the OPC shortly followed the official announcement in 2016. Pride to host the first African-American presidential center meshed with the hope that the promise of economic revitalization will, indeed, be realized. Echoing this support, one residents from the South Shore community reflected to us: “It’s gonna provide a lot of opportunity, jobs, a safe space. ... People are gonna feel connected just because Obama’s name is attached to it. ... It’s gonna bring change. It’s an upgrade” (Personal interview, November 2017).

Yet, ever since the announcement to build the OPC in Jackson Park, the project has generated a lively and, at times, heated public debate over its design, impact on surrounding communities, and the politics of bringing the Center to this part of the city (Caine, 2020; Hudson, 2020). First, a coalition of concerned residents and historic preservation organizations have criticized the decision to locate the OPC into a historic and protected park. They oppose the irrevocable destruction of Jackson Park’s design that would be the inevitable result of the OPC development, as well as the commodification and privatization of public park space in pursuit of generating exchange value over the park’s use value (Cox and Mair, 1989; Logan and Molotch, 2007). This coalition has fought a years-long fight with the city of Chicago and the Obama Foundation to relocate the OPC elsewhere on the South Side, including several lawsuits against the city of Chicago and the Obama Foundation (Briscoe, 2018; Chicago Tribune, 2021). Despite Federal approval to build the OPC into a park protected by the National Register of Historic Places, this coalition continues to fight the Center in Jackson Park. As one representative of a South Side-based historic preservation organization stated: “One of the reasons that we’re fighting so hard for this particular park is because ... it helps to establish a cultural value just like the Empire State Building or Versailles. It was built! People built it, and people intended to be what it is” (Personal interview, December 2020).

A second moment of resistance and opposition to the proposed OPC development came from a coalition of mostly African-American community organizations concerned with the impact of the Center on housing affordability in surrounding communities. Fear of gentrification and displacement of low-income residents in the surrounding African-American communities has become a critical issue for collective mobilization. As a result, the *Coalition for a Community Benefit Agreement* (CBA Coalition)⁴ formed to demand a Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) with the Obama Foundation and the city of Chicago. As a legally binding contract between developers and a representative coalition of community organizations (Gross, 2007), CBAs are intended to ensure that community interests, from affordable housing, economic development to environmental protection, are

⁴<http://www.obamacba.org/> (last accessed October 22, 2021).

considered in a development project. After years of political protests by the CBA Coalition, both on Chicago's streets, in front of city hall, as well as online *via* social media, the city agreed in September 2020 to sign an Affordable Housing Ordinance for the Woodlawn community (Evans, 2020, 2022)⁵. However, other adjacent communities, such as Washington Park and South Shore have yet to receive such an ordinance to protect residents. Although CBA are meant as contracts between private developers and communities, the Obama Foundation has refused to sign such a legally binding agreement and left it up to the city of Chicago to deal with people's concerns with gentrification and displacement (see below).

Instead of finding a common ground on how urban redevelopment in Jackson Park can be realized through democratic participation and consideration of these critical voices, the OPC growth machine has aggressively pushed its growth imaginaries and visions for the OPC. Throughout, its core, from the Obama Foundation, the mayor, private developers, to prominent realtors, strategically mobilized silencing practices to manage opposition and critique with the goal to realize economic development and their visions for urban space on Chicago's South Side.

GROWTH HEGEMONY—MUFFLING DISSENT VOICES

Growth, the machine's mantra, has dominated the promotion of the OPC on Chicago's South Side since the Obama Foundation first announced the project in 2016. Obama and machine actors, through articulations that mix personal biography, anecdotes of past experiences of being a community organizer on the South Side, and a rhetoric of hope and opportunity, have asserted that the OPC will generate growth for communities nearby. As stated by President Obama during the ceremony for the groundbreaking of the OPC (September 26, 2021):

I got my first job in public service and community organizer on the South Side of Chicago. I was elected to my first office on the South Side and became President because of the South Side of Chicago. If we're building a world class institution, this could anchor transformation of the South Side to create more jobs, more business opportunities, more hope. It would send a message to young people on the South Side that you count, that you matter. That's why we wanted it here on the South Side.

Obama frames growth as something the South Side urgently needs and which can be generated through the OPC. From Michele Obama, who speaks of the OPC as a "substantial investment in the South Side" to make it "a destination for the entire world," Governor J.B. Pritzker, who envisions Jackson Park

⁵This Ordinance includes that the development of vacant, city-owned lots into apartment buildings needs to reserve at least thirty percent for new affordable apartments for low-income households; financial support from the City to help owners refinance their property and to the Home Improvement Grant Program; financial support to low- and middle-income residents to buy property in the community; and a new provision that allows renter a "right of first refusal" if landlords decide to sell their properties (Evans, 2020).

"as an incubator for hope," to city mayor, Lori Lightfoot, who speaks of the OPC as a "commitment to empowering Chicago's residents ... [which would] allow them to showcase the rich history and culture for visitors from nearby and far away⁶," machine actors mobilize a growth rhetoric that seeks to build community identity and support behind the OPC. In this context, critical and dissent voices struggle to formulate alternative visions and be meaningfully heard which we now excavate.

Belongingness—"Are You One of Us?"

The OPC has been framed as a quintessential South Side institution by machine actors, celebrating the long history of African-American political and civic activism, life, and culture. As such, the OPC is inextricably linked to Chicago's South Side and discursively declared as a beacon to celebrate African-American life and history on Chicago South Side. Machine actors like former mayor Rahm Emanuel, who is often remembered in the African-American community as the mayor who covered up the police shooting of 17-year-old African-American Laquan McDonald in 2014 (Harcourt, 2015), joined the canon of enthusiastic voices in how the OPC will transform the South Side: the OPC, for him,

will have a place for children to ... be able to walk the halls and see the exhibits and be inspired to embark on their own journey in the same place that President Obama embarked on his journey. ... It will bring countless visitors from around the country and around the globe to see the most American of American cities and the possibility and the audacity of hope⁷.

The OPC growth machine produces a community identity built around the legacy of Obama's Presidency, his history with Chicago's South Side, and the close association of the South Side as a center of African-American life and culture. Cox (1999: 31) writes in this respect that "[i]t is through these systems of meaning that people acquire a sense of identity, an identity that is threatened by those who are outside the normative structure in question." The construction of community identity around the generation of local growth (Logan and Molotch, 2007: 61–62) is threatened by dissent voices opposing the OPC on grounds of its destructive intervention into park space as well as its anticipated impact on housing markets in adjacent communities. These oppositional voices disturb efforts by machine actors to unite adjacent communities and local supporters behind the identity of growth as beneficial to the South Side, and therefore they need to be silenced.

In an op-ed for the *Chicago Tribune* on July 16, 2021; Jarrett (2021), president of the Obama Foundation, tried to revive local identification with and support for the OPC in Jackson Park. Besides reiterating the anticipated positive economic impact of the OPC, Jarrett also recognized that the OPC has been met with resistance and opposition from historic preservation organizations as well as community groups concerned about

⁶All these statements can be found here: <https://twitter.com/ObamaFoundation/status/1443952369641918468> (last accessed, November 03, 2021).

⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55X0in2kDyA&ab_channel=TheUniversityofChicago (accessed 26 November 2020).

gentrification. Yet instead of embracing those critical of the OPC and viewing their opposition as an opportunity for constructive and democratic dialogue about how urban redevelopment on Chicago's South Side can be shaped together, Jarrett (2021) lashed out at the opposition, writing that

Unfortunately, a few voices outside of the community are trying to stand in the way of something that will genuinely transform the South Side and the people who live there today. This group believes their individual opinions should matter more than those of everyone who supported the Obama Presidential Center. Those supporters include the representatives elected by Chicagoans to run the city, the federal agencies who approved the project, and the vast majority of South Side and Chicago residents who see the Obama Presidential Center as a symbol of what we collectively accomplished when we elected the first Black president.

This moment of discursive intervention by Jarrett needs to be contextualized in the historical trajectories of the year-long and ongoing resistance from historic preservation groups who have opposed the idea to use Jackson Park as the location for the OPC since the onset of its development and who continue to oppose it despite Federal approval of this redevelopment project. Their relentless attempts to resist and oppose the OPC in Jackson Park cumulated in Jarrett's exclusionary discursive intervention which, in turn, foregrounds that silencing practices are always also the result of specific political and historical circumstances and trajectories.

The silencing of critical and dissent voices in this excerpt works in powerful ways. First, reinvigorating the shared identification with the OPC by the "majority of South Side and Chicago residents" comprises a discursive practice to declare and claim that, indeed, the majority of people support the OPC and that the Obama Foundation has the right to speak on their behalf. Here, critical voices are reduced to merely representing "individual opinions," whereas the OPC is supported by "everyone" on the South Side and the city more generally. Through such discursive practices, Jarrett (2021) manages to erect a hierarchy between supporters and critiques of the OPC, with the first being framed as progressive and interested in the common good for the South Side, whereas the latter are degraded to the rank of destructive troublemakers who only act out of self-righteous motivations. This "move to hierarchy," perhaps not surprisingly, has been bolstered by the systematic patronizing approach and the systematic bypassing of black identifying community organizations as consulted voices in the OPC siting. Notable South Side institutions that could conceivably messy this supposed democratic debate and have a history of complicating local redevelopment projects—Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), Imagine Englewood, South Side Community Federal Trade Union—have been cast into oblivion and erased as legitimate voices.

Second, critical and dissent voices are actively positioned outside community spaces, marked with a stamp of unbelonging. The aim of this intervention is to take away their authority and legitimacy to speak about the OPC. Through its authoritative position as the principal behind the OPC as well as the bullhorn

for former President Obama, the Obama Foundation declares critical and dissent voices as "suitable target for externalization" (Volkan, 2009: 8) for those who support the OPC. As a result, critical and dissent voices find themselves in a precarious position. They are now also under pressure to justify and explain why they have criticized the OPC development in the first place since they are, according to the authority behind the OPC development, outsiders to the community and therefore without a genuine interest in this project.

As stated above, Jarrett's (2021) piece was intended to silence a vocal group of particularly white historic preservationists who oppose the OPC on grounds of its destructiveness to historic, public park space. Reflecting on Jarrett's (2021) piece, one local resident involved in legal opposition to the OPC stated to us: "It's a lie. To start with the plain truth, it is a lie, and she knows it. ... I'm a user of the park and so have a personal interest" (Personal interview, October 2021). Jarrett's (2021) intervention seeks to create an inside/outside dichotomy between African-American communities in support of the OPC and white historic preservationists who are, according to Jarrett and other supporters of the OPC (see Glanton, 2015), outsiders to Chicago's South Side.

Historically, historic preservation organizations have indeed played a dubious role in community redevelopment where the preservation of communities has contributed to increasing housing costs, gentrification, and displacement (Smith, 1998; Wilson, 2004). Yet, when talking to those voices opposing the OPC on grounds of preserving Jackson Park and public park space, it became apparent that their resistance was purely on grounds of protecting public park that has historic and cultural significance to Chicago's South Side as well as maintaining and securing public park space. In conversations, historic preservationists stated that they want the OPC to be on Chicago's South Side and that they have suggested alternative locations in vacant land in a nearby community, Washington Park, but that none of their suggestions have seriously been considered by the Obama Foundation and other machine actors. Thus, the socio-spatial exclusion of dissent voices through discursive interventions like the one by Jarrett (2021) seeks to silence historic preservationists by taking away their agency and legitimacy to publicly and openly criticize the OPC development.

Silencing through socio-spatial exclusion has, however, not only been mobilized by machine actors toward historic preservationists but has also been used to manage opposition from African-American community groups who continue to express concerns about housing speculation and gentrification. As briefly noted before, opposition to the OPC organized around demands for a CBA with the Obama Foundation; a demand that was never met or seriously considered by the Obama Foundation. Responding to the demands for a CBA, Obama stated during a public talk in 2017 at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, Chicago, that "the concern I have with respect to a Community Benefits Agreement in this situation is that it's not inclusive enough because what particular organizations would end up speaking for everybody in that community?" Obama acknowledged that residents understandably get nervous about gentrification, but that

It is not my experience . . . that the big problem on the South Side has been too much development, too much economic activity, too many people being displaced because all these folks from Lincoln Park are filling into the South Side. That's not what's happening. . . . We have such a long way to go before you will start seeing the prospect of gentrification.

Besides his misrepresentation that gentrification in African-American communities has exclusively been the result of white residents moving in (Moore, 2009), as well as ignoring that housing prices in the Woodlawn community had started to increase shortly after the announcement to build the OPC (Nathalie P. Voorhees Center, 2019), Obama's refusal to talk to community groups demanding a CBA on the grounds of their alleged inability to speak *for* the community follows similar patterns of silencing through socio-spatial exclusion. In this discursive intervention, Obama excludes a coalition of 20 local community organizations⁸ demanding a CBA from expressing their voice in the process of bringing the OPC to the South Side. Thus, already early in the planning process of the OPC (in 2017), machine actors mobilized silencing practices to manage resistance from African-American communities, and they have not changed their position in this regard since then.

Bourdieu (1991: 138) writes in this respect that “[a]mong the most effective and best concealed censorships are all those which consist in excluding certain agents from communication by excluding them from the groups which speak or the places which allow one to speak with authority.” Such exclusion on grounds of place belongingness is a powerful tool to silence opposition where the refusal by a celebrated political figure like Obama, who continues to enjoy political support across Chicago and the Democratic machinery which has led the city for decades, achieves a lot for machine actors' visions of urban redevelopment. By denying a coalition of concerned African-American residents the ability to negotiate with the OPC growth machine over questions of spatial justice and their right to stay in the community, Obama confirms the agenda of his OPC growth machine to forcefully push through its hegemonic visions for space production in Jackson Park no matter political opposition and dissent voices.

Silencing Through Racialization

Machine actors racialize this managing of political opposition and dissent voices. Here, race becomes an “ontological powerhouse” (Wilson and Heil, 2020) and space-producing resource, with oppositional voices from historic preservation groups accused of embodying racist motivations to deny African-American communities their longed for economic development. Yet machine actors deliberately bypass and ignore African-American residents and their concerns about gentrification and displacement, too, despite claiming that the OPC is an inclusive project where every concerned resident can make their voices heard.

Political dynamics in community outreach meetings poignantly reflect this. Organized by the Obama Foundation

or by concerned residents who were dissatisfied with the ways official outreach meetings were conducted, historic preservation organizations and their members (predominantly white) have frequently been accused by African-American residents as acting out of racist motivations to favor the preservation of historic park space over economically developing deprived Black communities. A notion that “you are not the community” undergirded these accusations. Thus, during a public symposium at the University of Chicago in March 2018, one African-American resident stated toward a white representative from a historic preservation organization based in Washington D.C. that

our communities are what is sacred. Our families are what are sacred. Parks are not sacred, unless you are channeling Olmsted as a saint, you don't know what he wants for this community now. What this community needs now is the investment brought to the South Side. That's our last best chance for it, . . . not only in Jackson Park, South Shore, Woodlawn, but also in Washington Park where *our* museum is located, the DuSable Museum of African-American history. . . . So, folks who wanna talk about what you gonna come in and do for our community, go back because it's very disingenuous. You don't know us⁹.

What is suggested here is a binary between “white outsiders,” personified in historic preservation organizations, and “Black South Siders” who unanimously support the OPC development in Jackson Park. However, such a simple binary misrepresents the complexities of communities on Chicago's South Side and the opposition to the OPC. As reflected by one local resident from the Hyde Park community north of Jackson Park who has also been become a plaintiff in several lawsuits against the OPC: “it is really unproductive to talk about black Chicago as being monolithic. These communities are as diverse and balkanize as any communities. So, the notion that there is just a ‘black stance’ and ‘white stance’ about this is way off the mark” (Personal interview, September 2021; see also Pattillo, 2007). Yet, this simple binary has become a powerful opportunity for machine actors to distinguish supporters and opponents of the OPC, as well as silencing those voices opposing the OPC (Jarrett, 2021).

Reflecting on how the accusation of racism has worked in silencing opposition, one white member of a coalition of historic preservationists that filed several lawsuits against the OPC in Jackson Park stated to us:

When the city wants something, they won't stop at any way to get even. Part of it was slander. They were spreading messages that I represent a group of ‘whites’ who were trying to discriminate against the African-American community and they said that I had no interest in the public park, I was just trying to be an elitist telling other people how they should live their lives (Personal interview, September 2021).

The accusation of being racist, he continued, “was not only to silence me but to intimidate anybody who would dare to support

⁸<http://www.obamacba.org/coalition.html> (last accessed November 17, 2021).

⁹A recording of this meeting is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8VAi360xh0&ab_channel=CANTV (last accessed, November 22, 2021).

our position. In many respects, their thinking was accurate, that a lot of people were, in fact, intimidated and more afraid to say or do anything.”

The fear of being labeled racist when speaking out against the OPC deterred, according to several of our respondents, other white residents of the South Side to speak up and raise their concerns about the OPC in Jackson Park. As stated by one community organizer from the Hyde Park neighborhood: “I think it’s mostly taken the form of an anxiety on the part of white South Siders, white Chicagoans to be outspoken about this for fear of being portrayed as racially insensitive” (Personal interview, September 2021). The fact that the name Obama is attached to the OPC has, according to our respondent, contributed to the hesitation to speak openly about the development, since Obama continues to be remembered as a historical figure whose political career began on Chicago’s South Side.

But silencing through racialization has also been mobilized by machine actors toward African-Americans critical of the OPC development. Again, community outreach meetings to discuss the plans for the OPC became the scenery where these moments of racialization surfaced. Reflecting on his experiences with how machine actors promoted the OPC during these meetings, Jawanza Malone, Executive Director of the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, a grassroots organization focusing on African-American leadership on Chicago’s South Side, stated during the public symposium at the University of Chicago that “they [the Obama Foundation] invited people into a meeting [and] said ‘hey, this is what we’re gonna do, you can share what you have to say about it, but it’s done. So, you can say we brought you into a meeting. We share what we’re going to do. Not that it changes anything, but we did it.’”

Echoing this observation, a community organizer, who told us that he attended most of the public outreach meetings held by the Obama Foundation and the city of Chicago, reflected on his experience with how concerns about gentrification and displacement by African-American residents were handled by machine actors:

To the African-American community which was, again, mainly concerned about Community Benefits Agreements: “what assurance are you going to give us that we will not be driven out by this? You keep saying that it will bring money.” Their [the Obama Foundation] official line was: ‘we don’t want to sign a Community Benefits Agreement because that will tie our hands in community red tape. Therefore, we will do better than any Community Benefits Agreements.’ That was the official line. ‘We promise to do better.’ ... I think they [African-Americans] were brushed off. Understandably it was effective: ‘trust us. These are the Obamas. You can trust us. We have your interest at heart. We wouldn’t do something that you won’t like’. It was always on the premise of ‘you will love it after it’s done. It will be so magnificent that it will- you’ll be delighted. Trust us.’ That was the message (Personal interview, August 2021).

Here, community participation and input have turned into *pro forma* exercises for machine actors to uphold the image of being inclusive and democratic in their redevelopment efforts.

Silencing works here in powerful ways by reassuring residents that their interests and concerns are always at the heart of redevelopment efforts, whilst, simultaneously, refusing to act on this promise such as signing a Community Benefits Agreement. The goal of such discursive practices merely serves to placate and mollify concerned residents into believing that the OPC development is, indeed, meant as an economic opportunity even for those who fear that increasing housing costs will displace them in the future. The ills of poverty politics, which, for decades, have cruelly worked on undeserved, poor African-American communities, vividly surface in these reflections by participants. In a patronizing way, machine actors push dissent and critical voices into a highly precarious position where their public questioning of the project is acknowledged, even supported, by machine actors whilst simultaneously being unmistakably told that their critique and opposition to the hegemonic spatial imaginaries will not significantly be able to change the trajectories of redevelopment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We have chronicled the role of silencing in urban growth machines by focusing on one of the latest development projects in transforming Chicago’s South Side into a novel investment space for global tourism. Our analysis has uncovered how silencing in growth discourses works in complex and powerful ways to manage opposition and resistance to urban growth and economic development. Silencing, we suggest, plays as much a role in urban redevelopment projects as rhetoric that extols the universal benefits of growth. It is a tool strategically mobilized by machine actors to manage and marginalize voices that do not follow their hegemonic growth imaginaries. Silencing, we have theorized, does not mean censorship, but rather comprises another form of discourse where language is used to obfuscate other language (Thiesmeyer, 2003). Silencing, in other words, is just another order of discourse (Post, 1998) through which power is exercised on the human body. This power, Butler (1998: 247) theorizes, “is usually presumed to be wielded by a subject who speaks and who declares that another shall not speak or that another’s speech is not to qualify as ‘speech’ in a restricted sense.”

It follows from our thesis that urbanists need to be aware of silencing practices that operate alongside hegemonic growth discourses and imaginaries. Without the management of critical and dissent voices, growth machines would have a hard time realizing their visions for redevelopment. Mega-infrastructure development projects like the OPC will inevitably raise questions about housing affordability and the right of residents to stay put (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2012) which, in turn, require elaborate strategies from machine actors to manage such contestations and critique. Capitalism’s inherent drive toward uneven geographical and gentrification-centered development (Smith, 1982, 2010) will not make an exception in the case of the OPC despite passionate claims to the opposite by President Obama who says residents on Chicago’s South Side will not experience gentrification and displacement. Such bold statements should

not surprise, however, as such voices do the bidding of growth machine desires and aspiration.

From this, we conclude the following. First, growth machines can fruitfully be conceptualized as “silencing machines” which creatively find ways to muffle and marginalize dissenting voices. Opposition to growth machines poses a threat to their realization of exchange value and therefore must be silenced (Logan and Molotch, 2007). Second, that processes of racialization play a critical role in these silencing practices. Machine actors frame the OPC as an opportunity for economic development in deprived South Side communities, arguing that the Center will provide long longed investment as they mobilize elaborately choreographed Black identities (Anderson and Sternberg, 2012: 439) to legitimize OPC’s location in a predominantly African-American community. Yet, at the same time, the OPC risks alienating those community members as such investment could displace many low-income residents unable to afford already increasing housing costs in the area. Thus, the OPC becomes inserted into a broader picture of a profound and ongoing racialization of redevelopment in Chicago where state spatial strategies and neoliberal market forces are working powerfully to further deprive and racially segregate African-American communities. The OPC comprises another moment in the racialization of redevelopment and urban segregation where communities adjacent to the OPC could develop into exclusive and exclusionary spaces merely affordable to (upper-) middle class residents, whilst low-income residents are pushed further to the city’s margins.

In the final analysis, the OPC risks following and contributing to existing racist state spatial strategies (Brenner, 2004) in Chicago which have, for decades, transformed African-American communities into economically deprived and marginalized spaces (Shabazz, 2015; Wilson, 2018). Ongoing racialization therefore not only afflicts cities through public housing concentration (Shabazz, 2015), racist municipal redistricting (Vargas et al., 2021), and redlining (Rothstein, 2017), but as a city-building resource (Wilson, 2009; Anderson and Sternberg, 2012; Mele, 2019). The OPC, we have chronicled, comprises such

a city-building moment where race is strategically mobilized to achieve urban growth that a strategic silencing facilitates.

We believe that these findings shed important light on how growth machines today operate. Although we focused only on one growth machine, the notion of silencing, we surmise, may mark many such institutional formations across current America. Our study, then, is simply a beginning point to understand this strategic silencing. It is clear that there is much more work on this topic to be done, and our goal in this piece has been to initiate critical debates on the complicated process of silencing in urban redevelopment.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC), University of St Andrews. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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