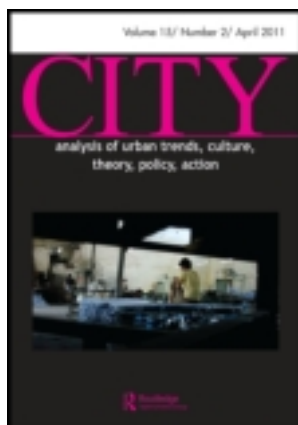


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Publisher: Routledge

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## City

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccit20>

## The war on teenage terrorists

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Available online: 07 Nov 2011

To cite this article: Vanessa A. Massaro & Emma Gaalaas Mullaney (2011): The war on teenage terrorists, *City*, 15:5, 591-604

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2011.630856>

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# The war on teenage terrorists

## Philly's 'Flash Mob Riots' and the banality of post-9/11 securitization

Vanessa A. Massaro and Emma Gaalaas Mullaney

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*This paper interprets a recent, aggressive state crackdown on public gatherings of African American youth in the streets of Philadelphia's commercial districts against the backdrop of historical geographies of race and disinvestment. Drawing on news accounts and government publications, and deploying theories of securitization and space, it joins those who argue that the performance of security in everyday spaces works to conceal the social relations undergirding the post-9/11 security state. We consider how city officials and others have constructed the collective figure of the 'flash mob' as a perpetrator of urban terrorism and the subject of state intervention. We trace the application of this subjectivity to individual bodies marked by age, race and class, thereby revealing how the latest strategic move in a historic reinforcement of the US ghetto sustains and feeds off of newly heightened and intertwined anxieties about the sources of criminality, violence and terror. If the venal urban geopolitics of Philadelphia reproduces long-standing spatial segregation and social inequality, it does so by exploiting newly emerged nationalist identities and under the auspices of antiterrorist legislation. More broadly, then, this paper argues for closer attention to the social warrant of racialized space and of banal terrorism in the constitution of state power.*

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**Key words:** urban geopolitics, post-9/11, youth geographies, banality, securitization, race

### Preface

**T**his is urban terrorism', declared Philadelphia Councilman Jim Kenney in a statement to the Philadelphia press in February 2010. Kenney joined other Councilmen and local law enforcement in supporting emergency security measures to confront what they describe as the escalating threat of disruptive youth in public space. Since that winter, Philadelphia officials have adopted a series of aggressive preemptive and punitive measures as part of a citywide reaction

to occasional gatherings of young people. These range from an expansion of 'curfew zones' for anyone under the age of 18, FBI monitoring of student cell phones and social networking websites, rapid-response police 'strike forces', teams of undercover officers where gatherings are anticipated, felony convictions for juvenile participants and court action against their parents (Brennan, 2010; Loviglio, 2010; Urbina, 2010; Miller, 2011a). Councilman Kenney's declaration of 'urban terrorism' was prompted by a group of 100 or so teenagers who gathered after school at a

Center City shopping mall one Tuesday afternoon, in response to a local student dance troupe's Myspace page announcement of a promotional video shoot in the Gallery. The group moved through the mall, shepherded by security guards, where some began tossing shoes and clothes back and forth, and ended up a few blocks down the street throwing snowballs at one another. Twenty-nine youth, ranging in age from 14 to 17, were arrested at the gathering and subsequently charged with felony rioting and conspiracy. Kevin Dougherty, head judge of Philadelphia's juvenile and family courts, handled each case personally and took a pointed stand against the offending youth before him: 'Citizens are afraid to go downtown "because Philadelphia children are terrorizing them"', Dougherty said (quoted in Graham, 2010a, p. B01), warning the juveniles 'if I find any of you get arrested for crossing the street the wrong way, I'm removing you from civilized society' (quoted in Graham, 2010b, p. B07). Over the past two years, public consensus has solidified against these gatherings, made up largely of African American youth, which has bolstered the 'zero tolerance' approach to disorder that has become a central feature of Philadelphia Mayor Nutter's Administration. In a speech delivered in front of a West Philadelphia Baptist congregation this August, Nutter addressed an imaginary group of disorderly young people, condemning them for casting their entire community in a negative light: 'quite honestly, you've damaged your own race' (Mayes, 2011, p. 1A).

## Introduction

Groups of young people, predominantly African American teenagers coordinating through use of social networking websites and cell phones, gather by the dozens, hundreds, sometimes thousands, in parts of University City, Center City and on South Street. They have done so six times between the winters of 2009 and 2010, on each occasion displaying no signs, voicing no

chants and staging no discernable demonstration of particular demands. The primary activity of these groups each time has been to move along the street until dispersed by the police forces that invariably arrive. Instances of violence and property damage have been rare, and copious news reporting demonstrates no pattern of any criminal behavior. Though the coordinated appearance of these teens is markedly unusual, their presence in these spaces and at these times (often after school or on a Saturday evening) is not. Both neighborhoods and the broad avenue that connects them are popular tourist attractions and commercial districts where businesses are precisely targeting the consumer demographics in which these young people are included. It is seemingly their non-consumerist behavior that marks these gatherings as out-of-place in a city structured and protected as a node of capitalist development. In order to parse the contradictions of these capitalist urban spaces, we need to unpack them and the social relations that produce them.

Our interest in this case study developed as we encountered in it a series of empirical conundrums. First, sporadic gatherings of young people are, since December 2009, being classified as 'flash mobs' by Philadelphia news media and city officials, though they exhibit neither the organizational coherence nor the intentionality that defines flash mob behavior. Second, the city is mobilizing extraordinary resources to preempt and punish participants in so-called 'flash mobs', though, as mentioned before, there is often no evidenced pattern of violence or even criminal conduct. Third, this discourse of a terrorizing flash mob has not encountered any organized civil opposition, even as it is used to justify blanket surveillance and curtailment of civil rights, in a city where the history of local resistance is just as long and continuous as that of the racist police force and legal system. These contradictions offer an opening for inquiry; they serve as a starting point from which to trace the discourses surrounding recent disruptive behavior and

better understand the implications of the disciplinary measures currently taking place in the securitized spaces of Philadelphia.

The remainder of this paper proceeds in three sections and a brief conclusion. The first section, 'Gateway to the Citadel', surveys the geography of this war against an abstract enemy, drawing continuities in anti-terrorism efforts and newer forms of divisive urban geopolitics. Of great utility here is Marcuse's concept of citadelization (1997, 2003). This framework helps to illuminate how, since September 11, 2001, the security state is able to mobilize public anxieties about terrorism and an ever-present sense of insecurity to justify the aggressive policing of spatial and social boundaries, while simultaneously concealing and mystifying the social relations that undergird these processes.

Building on this spatial understanding, the second section, 'Configuring the Terrorist', focuses on the discursive construction of the flash mob itself. Using Puar's theory of market citizenship (2007), we argue that the figure of the Flash Mob Riot—evoked, in this case, as a perversion of the 'good' flash mob—is configured in relation to the broader contemporary forces of securitization, antiterrorism and nationalism that shape urban spaces. The Philadelphia Flash Mob is thus revealed as a fiction, a fetishism in the Marxist sense, which works to obscure spatial exclusions of neoliberalization and to discipline those who do not, or cannot, fully participate in the capitalist economy of consumption.

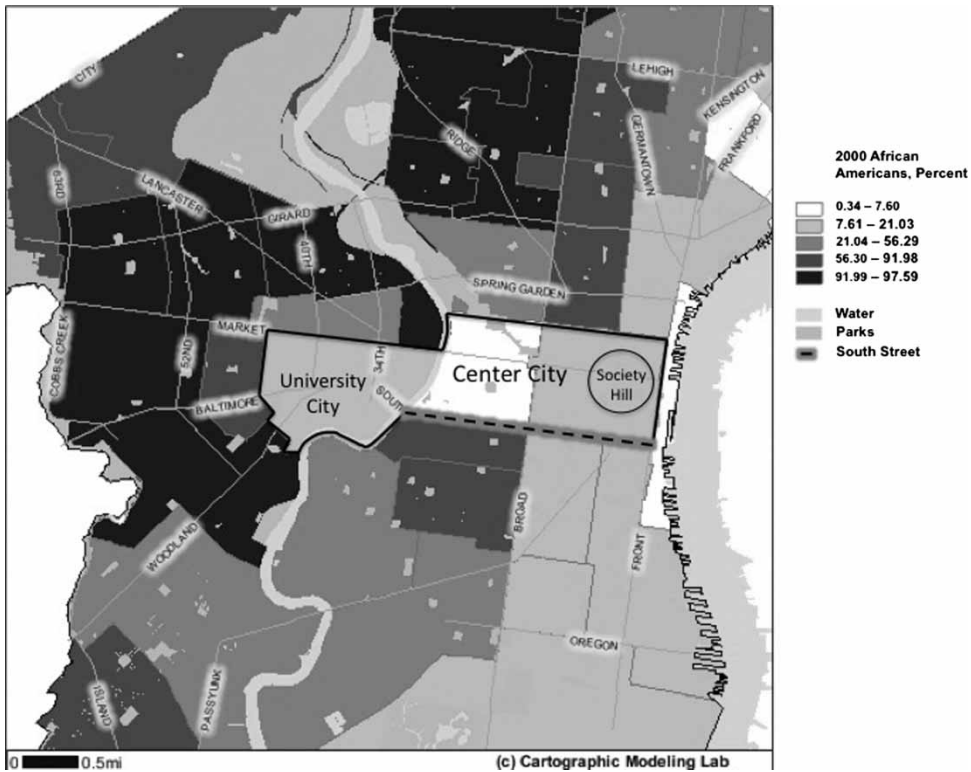
The third section, 'Flash Mob Fetishisms', explores the prevalence and divisiveness of this process of fetishization. Recent news media and government publications are thick with it, and further analysis highlights the Flash Mob Riot as an implement of state power capable of leveraging binary conceptions of flash-mob-cum-terrorist vs. proper economic citizen. Increasingly severe measures of anticipatory policing and the curtailment of civil rights, sanctioned by the effects of banal terrorism, serve to buttress

the urban citadel and mobilize Philadelphia's black communities on behalf of their own subjugation.

### Gateway to the citadel

The construction of these flash mobs and the consequences borne by teens implicated therein are underpinned by a complex geography of revanchist redevelopment (Smith, 1996) and organized racial resistance (King, 2004; Tyner, 2006). It is not a coincidence that the urban spaces in which African American teens are so clearly troubling to city officials are also spaces of successful gentrification and citadelization (see Figure 1). South Street, the site of many youth gatherings during 2010 and a common hangout for young people, serves as a physical corridor along the southern borders of University City and Center City, and also marks a symbolic boundary between what Marcuse (1997) terms the citadel and the outcast ghetto. The citadel, according to Marcuse's definition, is created by a dominant group to protect and enhance its superior position. Today's outcast ghetto is home to those who have been exceded by the mainstream economy. Since Center City and University City comprise the sites of virtually all of the 'flash mobs' and are major sites of citadelization, we find it useful to contextualize the youth gatherings within ongoing processes of urban fortressing.

In this section, we unpack the capitalist urban spaces where youth gatherings are taking place, and examine the connections between the aggressive state responses and broader processes of securitization and anti-terrorism. Through describing the constitution of citadels and ghettos, we demonstrate the implicit boundaries of consumption and production these youth have transgressed to threaten the very fabric of the neoliberal city (Hackworth, 2006). Finally, we contend that antiterrorism is currently working to support the militarized enforcement of spatial segregation for urban profit



**Figure 1** Map showing the city's main sites of urban gentrification—University City, Center City and Society Hill. Society Hill, a neighborhood within Center City, was the center of revitalization in the 1950s. These areas are primarily Caucasian and a variety of efforts are made to shield these areas from the primarily African American neighborhoods ranging from gated housing complexes to large, private security patrols. Map created by the authors using Philadelphia NIS neighborhoodBase (<http://cml.upenn.edu/nbase/>).

schemes, a process of exclusion that has long featured in Philadelphia's history. In this way, September 11 and its consequential 'war on terror' mark, not a paradigmatic shift, but rather nuanced alterations in pre-existing geopolitics. The post-9/11 security city does not arise organically out of the wreckage of the 2001 attacks, but rather operates in support of ongoing processes of urban citadelization (Graham, 2004; Marcuse, 2003). While dealing with African American organizations as terrorists is a long tradition for city officials, this rendition of antiterrorism discourse marks a dramatic shift in the broadening of the definition of an internal enemy to the state.

Divisions between African American and white communities are prominent in Philadelphia; one of the most highly segregated cities in the USA (Logan and Stults, 2011) and the

racialization of space is stark. The role of the state is to enforce this process of segregation, to promote and protect the citadel while keeping the ghetto under control, and race has long served as a particularly potent tool of governance in such efforts. Prevailing cultural norms and assumptions, what George Lipsitz calls 'the dominant warrant of the white spatial imaginary', function to make the racialization of space 'ideologically legitimate and politically impregnable' (2011, p. 54). These racial divisions work to conceal and support the process of citadelization, which, along with its co-constitutive process of ghettoization, is a defining feature of contemporary globalization (Marcuse, 1997).

The process of citadelization is closely tied to the neoliberalization of the city, the process by which the city seeks to run itself

as an efficient business (Hackworth, 2006). According to a neoliberal ideology, urban regeneration serves the greater good of the city because of its ability to garner a tax base and to attract tourist dollars and white-collar businesses (Jessop, 2002). As a result, it becomes the responsibility of a neoliberal city government to protect and promote the citadels as the most profitable and capital-conducive places in the city. Since Society Hill, a historic district in Center City, was first secured for gentrification, Philadelphia's city government has become more dependent upon such schemes (Smith, 1996). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Philadelphia, like many 'rust belt' cities, attempted to brand itself as a site of tourism and business through a demonstrated toughness on crime and ability to keep city spaces under control.

Decades before neoliberal gentrification, outcast ghettos were targets of "tough on crime" legislation and extreme forms of policing (Daughen and Binzen, 1977). There is a tension, within this policing of the ghetto, between the city's need to maintain it as a central component of urban rent schemes (Harvey, 1973) and the need to keep oppositional ghetto populations under control. This contradiction undergirds the youth gatherings in question: if University City and Center City are fortified citadels—their protection performed by ubiquitous gates and 'unwaved flags' of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995)—then South Street is the citadel's southern frontier, buffering these sites of privilege and civilization from the ghettoized neighborhoods that surround them (see Figure 2). Ghettoized populations are to be kept out of sight and 'warehoused (to say nothing of imprisoned); these populations would only disturb those in the citadels, their presence potentially reminding the privileged or just barely still-integrated of the social costs of their protection and potential vulnerability' (Katz, 2007, p. 354). In Philadelphia, South Street marks a symbolic gateway between these two territories.

As part of escalating performances of being 'tough on crime', urban police forces across

the United States became increasingly militarized. This militarization and capitalist fortressing of urban space is intimately tied to the quelling of racially-marked resistance movements emerging from outcast ghettos. In 1985, Philadelphia's first black mayor supervised the bombing of the headquarters of MOVE, a militant black organization, which killed 11 MOVE members and burned an entire city block of middle-class African American-owned housing to the ground. Although MOVE was not uniformly appreciated by its neighbors (Harry 1987), the extreme use of state-sanctioned violence in response to relatively minor violations of city code was met with widespread criticism and confusion ('Interactive Feature: MOVE! 25 Years Later', 2010).

The underpinnings of urban fortressing are evident in this instance; Harry (1987) argues that the rent gap dynamic and other economic pressures to disinvest in the area just outside University City played a role in the state's decision not to put out the fire that destroyed an entire city block. This bombing exemplifies the geopolitical dynamics that play out in relation to protecting the city's citadels. Furthermore, the MOVE bombing demonstrates that antiterrorism as state strategy was not inaugurated by September 11, 2001. In 1987, the MOVE bombing was regarded as the "first fruits" of a domestic military program that has been years in the making' (Harry, 1987, p. 163), one that was justified by broader anti-terrorism goals.

'In testifying before Congress about the CIA's "counter-terror squads", ... [one government expert] insisted on the need for violent "preemptive strikes" against opponents of the U.S, even if there are incidental "civilian casualties", and he then added that this was true "whether you are talking about Lebanon or Philadelphia".'

(quoted in Harry, 1987, p. 164)

Internal counterinsurgency can be 'traced to the late 1960s, when officials fretted over the inability of police departments to handle



**Figure 2** Gated architecture in the blocks just north of South Street. Clockwise from top left: balcony architecture along South Street; a gated public park at 11th and Lombard; a walled apartment complex at Lombard and 16th Street; and a gated apartment complex at 9th and South Street. Photographs by the authors.

the antiwar demonstrations and ghetto rebellions' (Harry, 1987, p. 164). One common thread between the MOVE bombings and today's preemptive strikes against African American teenagers is an obfuscation of the realities of the aforementioned uneven development. This is accomplished through a variety of discursive maneuverings: a denial of racism, a denial of class, a neoliberal ideological stance and, most recently, banal terrorism (Katz, 2007). The events of September 11, 2001, have provided fresh political cover for a pre-existing agenda of antiterrorism in name of re-making urban space on behalf of globalized capitalism (Marcuse, 2003).

While it is true urban securitization discourses have long appropriated war logics in aspects of enforcement as mundane as graffiti, encouraging a blurring of the line between policing and warfare, this has broadened substantially since the declaration of the 'war on

terror' immediately after September 11, 2001 (Iveson, 2010). This justifies diminished access to public space, restriction on movement within and to cities, and a decline in public participation in planning and decision-making (Marcuse, 2004). These post-9/11 shifts in governance have successfully upended 'the boundaries between dissent or even crimes of property and what the state defines as acts of terrorism, particularly when these involve progressive movements' (Wekerle and Jackson, 2005, p. 33). What is notable in the current renditions of an ongoing urban geopolitical battle is the way the city has been able to extend the reach of such urban security measures and the increasing banality of terror. We are no longer dealing with the labeling of organizations as terrorist. Rather, the security state apparatus, which previously focused on discrete leftist organizations, hails as threatening whole cross sections of the ghettoized urban

public, who find themselves slipping precariously between being the objects of state protection or the target of its war.

### Configuring the terrorist

This section traces the discursive construction of the flash mob as it becomes the target of Philadelphia's most recent antiterrorism campaign and, in doing so, harnesses new levels of anxieties about terrorism and old anxieties about the sources of disorder, danger and criminality. The term 'flash mob' first appears in Philadelphia newspapers in June 2009, after an estimated 8000–10,000 young people gathered at the intersections of South Street and Broad Street, on the edge of Center City (DiFilippo, 2009). 'Flash mob' is a shorthand reference to the gathering's use of social media and seemingly spontaneous appearance, but the article's appropriation of the term is immediately qualified: 'the mob that menaced South Philadelphia' is not like the 'normal' flash mobs in New York City that would be more inclined to 'have a pillow fight; applaud heartily for no reason; break out in a disco dance' (DiFilippo, 2009, p. 03). Since this article, the flash mob proliferated as a classification for any and all young people out of place in Philadelphia. It carries with it strong connotations of a riot or a violent mob that invades what would otherwise be safe space. It is this move, in which the flash mob label assigns responsibility for incidents of violence, which is most sinister. This collective identity, which can be pinned to any person of a youthful age and prone to text-messaging, becomes a presumption of guilt when affixed to those of a certain color and class position.

Such profiling comes at a horrible cost to the individual suspects, many of whom are innocent of any serious crime (detailed in the following section), and it also serves, unconscionably, to obfuscate very real threats to public safety in a city where they are a daily lived reality.<sup>1</sup> For example, in the 2009 gathering mentioned above, there was one confirmed incident of assault in which a

woman was 'yanked from a car' (DiFilippo, 2009, p. 03). Here we have an actual public problem, but any hope of adjudicating the incident slips away as it is attributed to a solid, enigmatic mass of 'rampaging teens who rioted' by the thousands upon thousands. According to the flash mob discourse, it is the same group of people, a singular entity referred to as 'these kids' and 'the mob', appearing suddenly and unexpectedly in different locations. As a result, a given incident of violence is submerged in a sea of non-criminal behavior and, in this case, conflated with an earlier gathering of approximately 300 that bore no signs of aggression at all (DiFilippo, 2009, p. 3). The presiding Police Superintendent at the latter event, asked to comment on 'the mob', articulates a symbolic danger that belies the group's actual conduct: 'that number of young people walking back and forth certainly is threatening', though he goes on to say that 'at this point, we've had no major problems ... at this point in time, we're in the vigilant stage' (DiFilippo, 2009, p. 03). Since invoked in this 2009 news article, the flash mob discourse has gained strength and momentum, becoming a ubiquitous product of banal terrorism.

Puar's theories of market citizenship help to explain how the construct of the flash mob functions as an apparatus of state power. Through a discursive process, symbolic restraints are appended to bodies marked not only by race, but also age and class. The notion that young people cannot think clearly, are rash and thus dangerous continually presents itself in the discourse (in contradiction to parallel discourses of accountability that justify trying them as adults for felony offences). As important as their age and race are, it is their lower class status that ultimately bars their entry to citizenship of the urban shopping area. They are not able to participate in the economy for which these spaces (i.e. South Street, the Gallery) are designated. In this city-nation, the 'good ethnic' is distinguished from the 'bad ethnic' through patterns of consumption



and appropriate spatial occupation. Fear becomes part of an economic process of control and subjugation:

‘the materialization of the feared body occurs through a visual racial regime as well as the impossibility of containment of feared bodies. The anxiety of this impossibility of containment subtends the relegation of fear to a distinct object, producing the falsity of a feared object.’ (Puar, 2007, p. 184)

It is not the African American per se that becomes the object of fear, but rather the unpredictable, violent, dangerous terrorist who does not participate in capitalism, a figure which then maps itself back onto lower-class African Americans in a circuit of fear.

The performance of a city fighting an abstract terrorist serves to solidify an urban nation of sorts. Through a process of ‘market driven ethnicity’ (Puar, 2007, p. 25), some members of the ethnic group are able to access citizenship while others are not. As nebulous groups of youth become constructed as the enemy of the city, normative behavior that is non-ethnic, non-deviant is demarcated and citizenship is mediated not just through race, but through the market (Puar, 2007, p. 26). Outsiders are constructed for the purposes of social control for the entire population:

‘The factioning, fractioning and fractalizing of identity is a prime activity for societies of control, whereby subjects (the ethnic, the homonormative) orient themselves as subjects through their disassociation or disidentification from others disenfranchised in similar ways in favor of consolidations with axes of privilege.’ (Puar, 2007, p. 28)

The enemy figure, once constructed, ‘sticks’ (Puar, 2007) to some bodies more readily than others, and the patterns by which it does so highlight the lines of class along which citizens are disciplined according to their own embodied markings of difference.

Not all flash mobs are constructed equal, or equally dangerous. Compare, for instance, the descriptions of gatherings of wealthy youth in

Philadelphia. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* draws a dramatic contrast between a ‘real flash mob’—featuring ‘young white women in high heels, holding cell phones’—and what is described as ‘a very different sort of gathering’ on 20 March (Lubrano, 2010, p. A01). A bystander is quoted in the article, stating, “About 100 people were stampeding at me, screaming, sounding happy, holding cell phones, [...] I was scared to death” (Lubrano, 2010, p. A01). This gathering, comprising predominantly African American teenagers, is further described in a *Philadelphia Daily News* article as a ‘mindless mob of miscreants’ (Campisi and Gambacorta, 2010, p. 9). Drawing a similar comparison, another article on flash mobs ran in *The Philadelphia Daily News* on 2 April under the headline ‘This Version of a Flash Mob was Rated G’ (Russ, 2010, p. 10). The members of this ‘G-rated’ flash mob are described as ‘well-behaved’ youth. Coming from a local private school, their compatibility with these spaces contrasts with those described as members of ‘recent flash mob riots’ (Lubrano, 2010, p. A01). The latter were, as is implied, made up of teenagers from lower income and predominantly African American neighborhoods. In another instance of contrasting flash mobs, a nostalgic *Philadelphia Inquirer* journalist laments that ‘flash mobs used to be for hipsters, for geeks—and they were supposed to be fun. Now, [...] the flash mob has devolved into this kind of monstrosity’ (Bunch, 2010). Other news articles describing the same event use similarly lurid language: ‘a swarm’ (Osborne and Woodall, 2010, p. B01), ‘a tsunami of kids’ (Urbina, 2010, p. A1), a ‘flood of teens’ (Osborne and Woodall, 2010, p. B01) and a ‘repeated spectacle of [...] young people running amok, lighted cell phones in hand, looking like contemporary rabble brandishing torches and terrorizing the countryside’ (Lubrano, 2010, p. A01).

The securitization of the citadel as an ‘anti-flash mob zone’ (Miller, 2011b) involves increasingly severe measures to discipline spatial practices, and masks the social relations that undergird this process. The

discourse of flash mobs and the undercurrent of fear it cultivates rely fundamentally on race as a politically effective set of power-laden social relationships, and yet, at the same time, the process of mystifying racialized objects of fear accomplishes an elision of race from the discursive process. When asked by a CNN reporter whether flash mobs made up of white students would prompt a similar ‘uproar’, Mayor Nutter declared with seeming impunity that ‘there is no racial component to stupidity’ (Candiotti, 2010). The ‘terrorists’ are the young people who are not participating (or not able to participate) in capitalist consumption. It is not simply about black kids, it is about their impacts on business.

By addressing the ease with which these young people are identified as terrorists, we lend transparency to the process by which city officials parse one group of African Americans from another to justify severe repression while maintaining that race has nothing to do with it. State power has, in part through this process of obfuscation, managed to mobilize deep-seated racial anxieties while simultaneously eluding organized opposition to its racist practices. The construction of flash mobs as a public threat demonstrates how antiterrorism has offered new discursive strategies for urban dynamics that are ongoing. Fundamentally, a defense of spaces for capitalist development and consumption is at stake in this battle as with many others in Philadelphia’s long-standing class–race war. Now, youth generally, rather than militant organizations, have become an enemy of the state through the discursively constructed flash mob. As illustrated above, through this process, economic subjects are disciplined and ghettos and citadels are secured on behalf of globalized capital.

### Flash mob fetishisms

Ongoing debates over whether flash mobs are a type of performative resistance to capitalist space (Walker, 2011) or a harmless hipster

pastime (Johnson, 2003; Fletcher, 2009) are beside the point of this particular paper. Essentialist questions about whether flash mobs are truly radical or what constitutes a real flash mob do not help us in our effort to analyze the state responses to a given group of Philadelphia youth. Indeed, we watch with concern as public discourse is increasingly distracted by questions of the causes of flash mobs. We can only assume that the youth gatherings form out of heterogeneous and dynamic motivations, given that we are not privy to the perspectives of a definitive sample of participants. (Neither, we might add, are the government officials who nonetheless mete out disciplinary measures based on assumptions of criminal intent.) Our interest here is to better understand how discursive constructions of flash mobs and the performances of security that accompany them create and reproduce a banal form of securitization while at the same time masking and mystifying the repressive social relations that undergird the security state. In this effort, we turn to Cindi Katz who, in her analysis of banal terrorism (2007), addresses the fetishisms implicated therein. Drawing on her approach, we want to elucidate what we see as a fetishization, in the Marxian sense of the term, of the Philadelphia flash mob in order to identify both what is concealed by its appearance and what is accomplished by its evocation.

This section addresses the implications of the flash mob as a fetishism of securitization and banal terrorism for users (and would-be users) of urban public space. Flash mob fetishism is ammunition in Philadelphia’s war machine, ready to be turned on any misbehaving interloper in the fortified citadels of the city. This discursive construction shapes the urban spaces in which it takes place, drawing battle lines along circuits of fear, such that the citadels of University City and Center City have been further demarcated as ‘anti-flash mob zones’ (Miller, 2011b). These ‘targeted enforcement areas’, to borrow Mayor Nutter’s choice of phrase, are now the official sites for the performance of antiterrorism. It is in these strictly bounded territories (see

Figure 1) where curfews are strictly enforced, security patrols are prolific and threats to public safety will not be tolerated.

Philadelphia news media, as an apparatus of the citadel, for the citadel, by the citadel, vividly illustrate these spatial relations in their coverage of ongoing performances of security. The flash mob is understood to be an enemy of the state, such that an August 2011 article illustrates its review of Philadelphia's youth curfew regulations by juxtaposing a photo of a group of teenagers with one of Mayor Nutter backed by a group of uniformed lawyers and police officers, both crowds captured striding through the street like opposing armies preparing for a clash (see Figure 3). This juxtaposition appears as a photo editor's natural choice, when it in fact required a great deal of discursive work, as discussed in the above section.

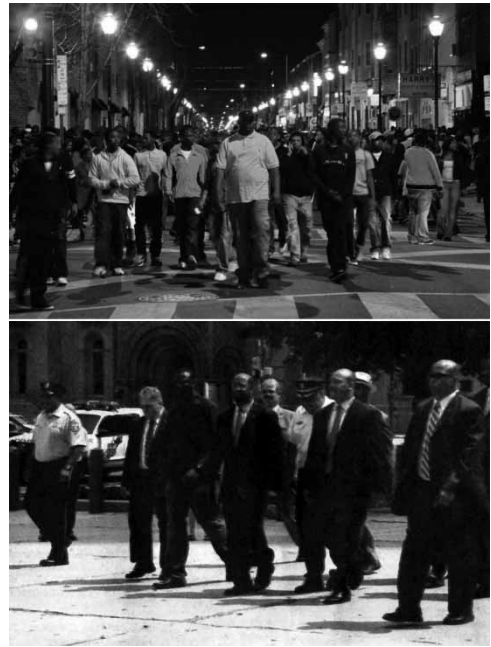
Over time, as the construction of flash-mob-cum-terrorist becomes routine, less and less work is required. Early analyses take pains to articulate what precisely is so scary about the youth gatherings in question, as in this March 2010 *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial entitled 'Terror in a Flash':

'A series of flash mob incidents have already left the city with a public relations black eye that it can't afford. If more is not done to combat the problem, it may be just a matter of time before someone is killed or seriously injured.

But in many respects the damage is already done.

Visitors from the suburbs will surely think twice before coming into Philadelphia for dinner, to shop, spend the night in a hotel, visit a museum, or attend a live show. The same goes for tourists from other states making travel plans this spring or summer. Not to mention organizations planning conventions.

There is a lot of competition for every person's entertainment dollars. With so many other entertainment options available, it is



**Figure 3** Photographs as featured in *Philadelphia Tribune* article from August 16, 2011 (Miller 2011b). Top: youth gathering at Broad and South Street, March 20, 2010. Photo: Laurence Kesterson/*Philadelphia Inquirer*; Bottom: Mayor Nutter, other legislators, and police officers conducting a "safety walk" on South Street, August 8, 2011. Photo: Abdul Sulayman/*Philadelphia Tribune*.

easy to avoid Philadelphia if the streets are thought to be dangerous or even out of control. The lost business will impact shop owners and city coffers.' ('Editorial: Terror in a Flash', 2010, p. A14)

As the discourse surrounding youth gatherings in Philadelphia has proliferated over the past two years, the fetishization effect of banal terrorism has become a routinized component, reinforcing the conceptual linkages between flash mobbers and terrorists. An editorial published in September 2011, in a paper from Delaware County, PA, adjacent to Philadelphia, takes these linkages for granted:

'The 9/11 attacks fundamentally changed America. We have learned to deal with an

increase in security, as well as giving up some personal freedoms in the name of keeping Americans safe.

It should be noted that in the decade since that fateful day, there have been no other terrorist attacks on the United States.

Which is not to say terrorism does not exist. It just depends on your definition of terrorism  
...

Consider if you will what happened over the weekend in the city of Philadelphia.  
(‘Editorial: It’s Time to Unite to Fight Urban Terrorism’, 2011)

The authors of this editorial can rely on its readers, those from Pennsylvania and from other states where multiple reprints appeared, to know exactly what they mean. The fetishism of the flash mob is familiar enough that it takes very little rhetorical labor to connect these unspecified happenings in Philadelphia to the events of September 11, 2001. The editorial goes on to assert that ‘you don’t necessarily have to fly a jet into a building to deliver a sense of terror’, and concludes as follows: ‘The nation united to fight terrorism. Maybe it’s time to do the same for urban terrorism’ (‘Editorial: It’s Time to Unite to Fight Urban Terrorism’, 2011).

Those who embody what the bourgeoisie fear can now be hailed as a ‘Flash Mob’, which the ‘common (non)sense’ of banal terrorism (Katz, 2007, p. 350) equates with urban terrorism. Indeed, public discourse seems to slide so casually between reference to the ‘flash mob’, ‘flash mob riots’ and ‘urban terrorism’, as to equate the concepts. Sentences for those convicted of participating in a flash mob increased dramatically from 2009 to 2010; juveniles arrested in May and December 2009 were charged with misdemeanors, while almost all of those arrested in February and March 2010 were charged with felonies (Graham, 2010a). Philadelphia journalists are now quick to associate any incident or arrest involving a juvenile with what is framed as an escalating trend of

‘flash mob riots’ (Russ, 2010; Dean, 2010; Schultheis, 2010). Articles reporting on the convictions of those arrested on the site of a gathering will often list other arrests and convictions, sometimes of children as young as 11 years old, for unspecified charges of ‘involvement’ in ‘flash-mob incidents’ (Clark, 2010, p. B07; see also Graham, 2010a; Dean, 2010).

Katz argues that ‘if terrorism is part of the landscape (and the effects of banal terrorism make that so), then all means to ward it off are sanctioned’ (2007, p. 356). In Philadelphia, we can witness a corollary to Katz’s statement: if terrorism is part of the errant subject (and the effects of banal terrorism make that so), then all means of disciplining that subject are sanctioned. Once the violent category of the Philadelphia flash mob is established and normalized, it is easily filled by bodies of actual African Americans. Those suspected of crimes are no longer seen as individuals, but as members of an elusive and coordinated threat that legitimates preemptive state intervention. Now a flash mob does not actually need to happen, because the potential for it to occur at any time has been established. Anticipatory policing, sanctioned by banal terrorism and by antiterrorism surveillance legislation,<sup>2</sup> has gone so far as to close Love Park, a public plaza in Center City, after an apparent reference to a potential youth gathering on monitored online communications. News headlines proclaim ‘LOVE Park Shut Down by Threat of Flash Mob’ (Lucas, 2011), adding that ‘social networking helped the Police Department shut down criminal activity near the park before it had a chance to begin’ (Lucas, 2011). A Lieutenant involved explained to news reporters that ‘we [Philadelphia police] keep tabs on Internet chatter—especially these social networking sites—and we received credible information that flash mob activity was going to form here’. A fellow police officer chimed in: ‘they want to gather in LOVE Park—we won’t let them. We’re trying to protect the public’ (Lucas, 2011). The

officer has no need to clarify who ‘they’ are; ‘they’ constitute a threat to ‘us’, the public. To protect ‘us’ from ‘them’ requires the sacrifice of ‘our’ public space and ‘our’ civil liberties as a matter of common sense. It also requires that ‘we’ be prepared to sacrifice one another since, in this case, ‘they’ are ‘our’ children.

### Conclusion

This examination of Philadelphia’s reactions to African American youth makes clear post-9/11 antiterrorism happens within the city in ways that entrench historic policies of aggressive repression that are both geopolitical and geoeconomic. While the city government’s antiterrorism efforts are premised on already-present anxieties about race and class, the terrain of conflict in Philadelphia has shifted since September 11, 2001. This shift occurs by way of banal terrorism, the demarcation of good and bad urban citizens, fracturing of the African American communities and broadening the scope of antiterrorism to include amorphous groups of citizens.

It is clear the reaction to these gatherings of teens by both tourists and city government is complex, and our exploration of flash mob discourses seeks to make the geography of the reactions more legible. The case of Philadelphia’s ‘flash mobs’ demonstrates how logics of banal terrorism have played a substantial part in defining Philadelphia’s internal geopolitical dynamics. Circuits of fear borne from a broader ‘war on terror’ have proven useful to secure the US neighborhood, demonstrating the multi-scaled possibility of both geopolitics and spatial fetishism (Graham, 2004; Dowler and Sharp, 2001). Fetishisms that operate at the scale of the body, urban space and international geopolitics work to obscure long and painful histories of a political–economic terrain hewn by race and class. By ‘peering sideways’ (Puar, 2007, p. 120) at the flash mobs, this paper reveals what lies behind the fetishism.

It traces the racialized process by which the state portrays and subsequently disciplines young citizens as criminals while abdicating responsibility for the structural violence they face. Youth themselves are offered up as targets for public outrage, distracting from the progressive elimination of government services for young people ranging from education and food to public transportation and recreational activities. Virtually no efforts exist to understand teenage social behavior or take a communal responsibility for these children. They are the enemy from which the city and its good economic citizens must be defended.

While the teens’ behavior certainly poses risk and determining ways to keep children in the city safe is a valid endeavor, it is one which must deal with their lives and the violence they face in all of the spaces they occupy (i.e. school, home, their neighborhoods and shopping centers). However, the city government’s actions make clear that it prioritizes economic interests over citizens’ welfare. Through making this geography legible, this paper reveals the state logic and leaves open for further discussion the possibilities for change. It is necessary to now consider how young people can express themselves to broader society in spite of the ‘war on terror’ discourses and legislations being wielded to preempt their public appeals. As scholars, we must work to document, theorize, and clarify the new means and modes of expression in the post-9/11 city as physical space becomes less accessible and youth occupy both virtual spaces and public spaces. This paper has developed the internal operations of the post-9/11 city and its intensified security and repression, yet there is much investigation to be done not only in this case, but in other US cities. The experiences of social organizing in the post-9/11 city and the barriers to expression have not been extricated; it is necessary to begin to discuss what ways teens may be able to fight oppression, organize with one another and thrive at home in these post-9/11 cities.

## Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful for the generous editorial support of Bob Catterall and Kurt Iveson. Melissa Wright, Lorraine Dowler, Deb Cowen, and two anonymous reviewers offered valuable comments on earlier drafts. Very special thanks goes to Nicole Laliberte, Megan Mullaney and our talented writing workshop team, Maureen Biermann, Jenna Christian, Dana Cuomo, Arielle Hesse, and Jenn Titanski-Hooper, whose feedback made all the difference. The authors are solely responsible for any errors. We dedicate this article to Destiney and Madison, and to the fearless adults they are becoming.

## Notes

- 1 To name just two examples: (1) an average of 1.7 incidents of aggravated assault occur in Philadelphia schools every school day (CrimeBase, 2006; Academic Calendar, 2006) and (2) in 2010, 306 people were murdered, and of that total, 79.1% were African American. African Americans represent 42.7% of the city's total population (PPD, 2010).
- 2 Antiterrorism legislation designed to foster extensive surveillance and preemptive monitoring without probable cause begins with the Patriot Act, established promptly after September 11, 2001 (Scheffey, 2011) and re-emerged with recent federal requests to gather intelligence on private Facebook, Twitter and Skype user accounts (Martel, 2010).

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