INTRODUCTION

Vehicle for a New City

In the heart of San Francisco's historically Latino Mission District, just off the neighborhood's central axis of Twenty-fourth Street, lies Balmy Alley, the city's longest-running and most iconic mural alley. Balmy Alley's internationally recognized murals depict the history and politics of the Mission. Alongside murals commemorating the United Farm Workers' struggles and denouncing the "dirty war" in El Salvador in the 1980s are several that center on the politics of urban development. One of the most recent murals in this genre, *Mission Makeover*, captures a new common sense about what bicycles mean in today's city. Painted by young artist Lucia Ippolito and her father, Tirso Araiza, *Mission Makeover* juxtaposes parallel scenes of a neighborhood in the throes of advanced gentrification. On the left, icons of the Mission that Ippolito and her father knew: low-rider cars, a Muni bus, and the heavy hand of the police visited on two youths of color who are posing with a pit bull. On the right, parallel, exaggerated vignettes of gentrification: moving vans unloading furniture into renovated Victorian houses; a policeman sharing a Starbucks latte with a rich woman and her show dog; and perhaps most notably, white hipster youths on bicycles and hanging out on stoops, their eyes and ears glued to smartphones (Figure 1). These two scenes depict the same geographical space but reveal starkly different social worlds, worlds separated by race, class, gender, age—and mobility.

On two afternoons in the summer of 2012, I dropped by while the mural was still in progress and volunteered to help Lucia paint—with marginal success—while we chatted about how the Mission has changed. I was especially interested in the bikes in the mural and what she envisioned by including them. It wasn't the bicycles that were new, she said—her father and his friends, longtime Latino residents of the Mission, also

Figure 1. Detail of the "new" Mission from *Mission Makeover* mural (in progress) by Lucia Ippolito and Tirso Araiza, 2012. Photograph by the author.

ride bikes. But their meaning was different. She recounted a debate with her father:

> When I was actually painting the hipsters on the wall, I made one of them Black. And my dad . . . was like, "You need to make the guy white," and I was like, "Why?" And he said, "Because they *are* white."[1]

She noted that she could have included Latino youth on lowrider bicycles to represent the "authentic" neighborhood as well. But in the stark dichotomy between the two sides, the bicycle functions as what Melody Hoffmann calls a "rolling signifier," symbolizing an urban space where race, class, and social life are in flux.[2]

For many bicycle advocates and enthusiasts, this would seem counterintuitive for a number of reasons. Bicycles are the cheapest and most accessible form of mobility, and poor people should stand to benefit the most from being freed from the burdens of car ownership. Improvements in bicycle infrastructure are formally public, and in principle shared by all

residents, regardless of race or income. People of color have absorbed the majority of the harms of the automobile era, from the highway construction that destroyed their houses to the exhaust that promotes their asthma; rolling back the effects of automobility should be a matter of justice.[3] These arguments are true, and yet they fail to grapple with *how* bicycling has been incorporated into highly unequal processes of urban growth now flourishing in the United States.

The Changing Meanings of Urban Bicycling

Not long ago, riding a bicycle in the city meant some kind of lack: of class or caste status, manhood, or a driver's license. Now it symbolizes progress itself (Figure 2). In the 1990s, caricatures of urban bicycle riders included hippies, broke college students, drug dealers, and the homeless. Today, one could add hipster, yuppie, or "techie" to the list. A beat-up bicycle laid on its side in front of a liquor store used to symbolize gritty urban life, perhaps a seedy corner, while today bikeshare stations in front of new condos now convey an altogether changed city. What material forces underpin this rapid shift in the "chain of equivalences" the humble bicycle calls forth?[4]

Figure 2. Absolut Vodka billboard in the upscale Condesa neighborhood of Mexico City, March 2018. Photograph by the author.

This book offers one explanation. It traces the shifts in the significance of bicycling from a critique of car-dominated American culture to a medium of urban economic competitiveness, environmental politics, and intercity policy circulation. The incorporation of bicycle infrastructure into the production of urban space has not occurred simply because of a commonsense idea that cycling is an environmental or social good to be encouraged. Instead, advocates have worked tirelessly over the past twenty years to get cycling taken seriously as a mode of transportation, a positive contribution to public life, and a way to reduce carbon emissions. Over the same period, city leaders have searched for a new framework for economic growth that is less vulnerable to globalization, less carbon-intensive, and (it is hoped) less alienating. These sets of actors have found each other in the street and its remaking.

In this way, the bicycle links everyday practices and broad structural changes together at what Neil Smith called the "new urban frontier."[5] Smith used this term to trace the discourses of Manifest Destiny elites invoked to justify the often-violent gentrification of New York City's Lower East Side in the 1980s and 1990s. Narratives of recapturing the city today are more likely to express a no-less-colonial tone that treats the frontier as a laboratory for making better places. In these laboratories, the struggle for hegemony is waged in part through mobility practices and the infrastructures that support them, and these struggles remake urban space itself. In this sense, *mobility* is, to borrow from Stuart Hall, a modality through which differences such as race, class, gender, and the division of labor are lived, and a medium through which the "social tectonics" of gentrifying space become visible.[6]

In this book, I show how bicycling and other low-carbon, "human-scale" mobilities have become symbols and vectors of the urban "renaissance" that has in many ways hardened these differences.[7] I also show, however, that the bicycle can bridge potential antagonisms, allowing people whose daily lives are extraordinarily different to commune over a shared way of moving through space. I celebrate these moments, even as I recognize that they are for the most part fleeting. They are fleeting because the story I am telling involves the reconquering of central cities by the wealthy as places of home, work, and cultural life. The emergence of divergent mobility regimes—one pertaining to the livable, decarbonizing urban core, the other to car-dependent edges and interstices—raises both environmental and ethical questions about the future of the sustainable city.

Although cycling remains marginal overall in American urban life, it looms large in certain imaginaries of the urban future. This is because the promotion of livability and sustainable development, handily symbolized

by the bicycle, gets things done. Cities in search of economic growth now invest in bicycle infrastructure in order to trade directly on this image, hoping to attract members of the elusive "creative class," the firms they start, and the salaries they spend, with livable streets as part of the allure.[8] Bicycles get things done *materially* as well—they help people move flexibly in urban space without creating car traffic, adding to transit burdens, or requiring much in the way of services. Like contingent and flexible work, contingent and flexible mobilities like bicycling have always been a necessity for poor people, but they now contribute to the "buzz" of the creative city as well.[9] As bicycle infrastructure becomes another valuable amenity in the urban portfolio, however, the bicycle fails to meet what many justifiably see as its emancipatory potential.

The bicycle activists, livability advocates, mayors, planners, and everyday cyclists I discuss in the following chapters are all guided by a sense that a two-wheeled city should be a dignified and inclusive place for all. They are not blind to the problems cities face, most of which dwarf bike lanes. But in pursuit of what Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin call "the integrated ideal," they also work in the context of pervasive "capitalist realism," in which private profit not only disciplines planning efforts but also furnishes their most powerful justification.[10] Moreover, advocates working on sustainable mobility improvements tend to focus on small-scale, quickly achievable interventions in "placemaking."[11] While this focus is pragmatic, it nonetheless reinscribes local and regional patterns of uneven development. The argument of this book is that this actually works against the broader goal of building livable and sustainable cities for all and betrays the limits of the current mainstream political imagination.

Vehicle for a New City

The current wave of enthusiasm for bicycling in the United States, which began in the 1990s, has significant parallels with the far larger "bike boom" of the 1970s. Rooted in a similar moment of environmental awareness and social radicalism, the ideological roots of today's bike culture depicted cycling as a daily act combating ecological degradation, suburban alienation, and geopolitical conflict over oil. Critical Mass, an anarchic carnival against the car-dominated world, epitomized this tendency with the rallying cry of "One Less Car." Originating in San Francisco in 1992, Critical Mass would go on to spread virally across the world.[12] A more normative but equally powerful vision can be found in a 1989 UN paper that hailed the bicycle as a "vehicle for a small planet."[13] Such enthusiasm within development discourse for the democratization of mobility

fueled the spread of global NGOs like Bicycles for Humanity and World Bicycle Relief throughout the 2000s. However, distinct from the 1970s boom, the bike culture that emerged in this period was fundamentally *urban*. Today's bicycle advocates frame cycling as a way to transform the city, rather than escape it.[14] This urban focus is critical to how advocates came to engage with remaking city streets themselves and win a seat at the planning table. Ironically, what looked in the 1990s like an "anti-systemic" movement would in the space of two decades claim its crucial role in improving the functioning of the capitalist city.[15]

Part of what made the difference was investment, as the official completion of the interstate highway system in the early 1990s created new funding sources for bicycle infrastructure. In 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act devolved power over nonmotorized transportation to the local level and launched an unprecedented increase in federal bicycle and pedestrian spending on projects like bike lanes, greenways, pedestrian crossings, and so on.[16] Though bicycle and pedestrian funds remain only roughly 1 percent of total highway spending, annual obligations, channeled through states, counties, and localities, rose more than twentyfold in real terms, from $22.9 million in 1992 ($39.2 million in 2017 dollars) to over $970 million in 2017. Total spending over this span of years exceeds $13 billion (in 2017 dollars) on over 36,000 individual projects.[17] Furthermore, these programs required participation from local bicycle advocates in project planning and implementation, leading to the formation of advisory committees that directly linked grassroots activists to the official mechanisms of city building.[18]

The results appear to support the "build it and they will come" approach now favored by leading bicycle advocates and researchers.[19] Between 2000 and 2015, seventy major U.S. cities saw an aggregate rise in bicycle ridership of over 75 percent.[20] Cycling's profile in cultural life has also risen dramatically: bicycle clubs, organized rides, and informal gatherings; bike shops, "bike kitchens," and bike-oriented businesses; and bicycling's presence in media and advertising have all flourished. On Bike to Work Day, which has dominated the bicycle advocacy calendar since 1994, mayors and other political leaders can be found in photo-ops astride bicycles, and some routinely cycle to work throughout the year as well. They celebrate cycling not just for its environmental benefits but with the hard-nosed rhetoric of economic development. As Chicago mayor Rahm Emmanuel put it, "You cannot be for a start-up, high-tech economy and not be pro-bike."[21] Bicycle infrastructure even played a rhetorical role in the fierce competition for the second headquarters of Amazon, the second-largest firm in the United States.[22]

Neither the burgeoning "bike culture" nor the modest realignment of federal transportation spending priorities can explain this growth in cyclists' numbers and status, however. Rather, the explanation lies in how these factors became entwined with dynamics of uneven development, particularly the reconcentration of economic and cultural centers of gravity into a small number of key city-regions. In other words, it concerns how bicycle activism and federal spending *took place* in very specific ways in certain cities. Bicycle enthusiasts and advocates have framed the city as their natural home, and for the first time taken on a decisive role in reshaping it. By doing so, they are crafting a persuasive vision for the American future at a time when the urban core has become the dominant horizon of urbanization and capital accumulation.[23] In other words, the bicycle has become a motif of the gentrifying city not by *fiat*, but because self-styled progressives participated in making it so. What is today sometimes called corporate "bikewashing," therefore, has many authors.[24]

The ascent of bicycling is not the simple struggle of popular activity against the automobile behemoth, though many see it that way. The politicization of cycling articulates with existing forms of social power, namely race, class, gender, and cultural capital, through which advocates gain entry into the rising bloc organized around more compact, multimodal, sustainable development. The relationships that grant advocates access to growth coalitions are politically contingent, however, and are constantly made and remade. They mobilize the practices of daily life itself as techniques for reshaping the city.

Why the Bicycle?

A guiding premise of this book is that the material and discursive space of the bicycle—what I call the "cyclescape"—is a field of struggle over what cities will become in the twenty-first century.[25] Following Doreen Massey, the cyclescape is a place "constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together" in a spatial lattice that is constantly evolving.[26] The cyclescape is not simply defined by the spatial extent of bicycle usage or infrastructure, therefore, but a social practice as well, in the sense outlined by Henri Lefebvre: it unites places, representations, actions, and spaces that are both trivial and monumental.[27] To paraphrase Marx, people produce and shape space in practice, but never under conditions of their own choosing, and with varying degrees of expertise, political power, and control over resources. The production of space cuts in multiple directions, stabilizing the volatility of capitalist society as well as nurturing the potential for different forms of urban habitation.[28]

Hence, the bicycle is more than just an idea whose time has come but less of a revolution in mobility than its mythology holds. It is a vector along which new practices of mobility are developed and institutionalized even as they reinscribe well-worn forms of social division. The cyclescape is thus a "dense transfer point," in Michel Foucault's terms: a site of normative struggle as well as a motif of resistance (see Figure 3).[29]

With this guiding orientation, I open outward onto processes beyond bicycling and mobility that are fundamental to understanding contemporary forms of producing capitalist urban sustainability. First, the mandate to attract capital—both "human" and economic—pushes cities to compete with one another on the basis of an ever-changing inventory of amenities. Bicycle infrastructures, especially bicycle-sharing facilities, have become a new arena of such interurban competition, woven into the "interreferencing" of environmental governance strategies.[30] Second, contemporary ideas of "human capital" valorize a culture of flexibility, and bicycling enhances such flexible mobility within centrally located areas of the city without requiring large investments in mass transit.[31] Bicycle infrastructure has thus become a way for city leaders to support economic

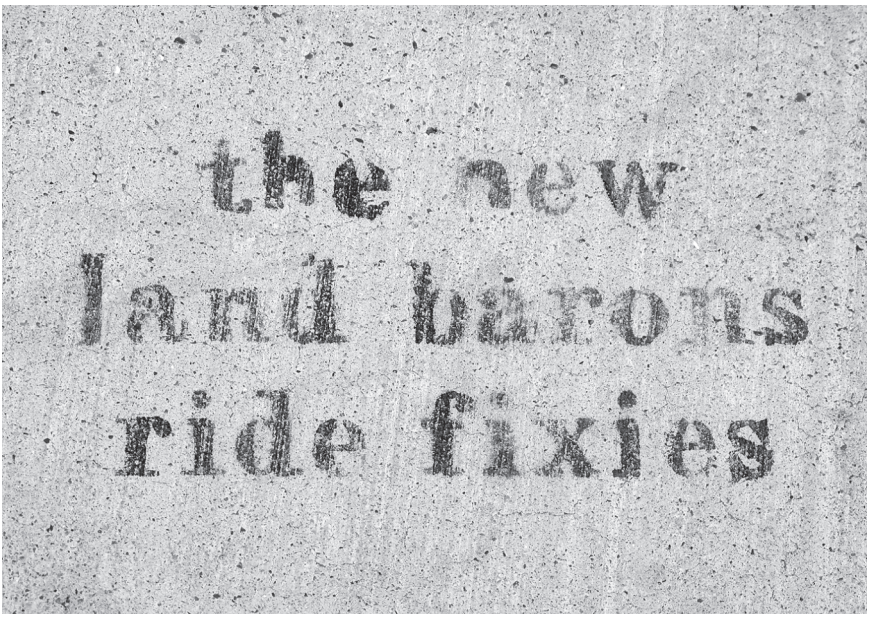

Figure 3. Sidewalk graffiti in the Mission District, 2009. Photograph by Scott Beale/Laughing Squid. https://www.flickr.com/photos/laughingsquid/5283461938/ (accessed May 21, 2018).

development without increasing the carbon footprint or investing in expensive, debt-financed, and politically costly infrastructures. Lastly, competitive strategies on this basis focus investment strategically in key areas within the broader urban fabric, drawing political participation toward the submunicipal scale. A focus on neighborhood- or corridor-level "green" amenities meshes with this form of governance more generally and encourages intensified nodes of investment rather than broader redistribution—what Graham and Marvin call "splintering urbanism."[32]

No amount of individual or cultural drive to make environmentalism a part of daily life through bicycling would have resulted in the changes now underway without the political opening created by racialized disinvestment and subsequent gentrification.[33] Nor, however, is bicycling simply an expression of capital's long march "back to the city."[34] It is a practice that both addresses and reinscribes the contradictions of contemporary American urbanism. In this sense, much of the growing bike culture is an attempt to practice an emancipatory relationship with technology and place that is also entangled with capitalist efforts to remake the urban space economy. In what follows, these moments will be held in tension conceptually just as they are materially in daily practice. In many ways, therefore, in the words of disgraced American cycling star Lance Armstrong, "It's not about the bike."

Sites and Positionality

This book draws most directly on research conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as in Detroit, Portland, and Philadelphia, between 2011 and 2018. But it also invokes questions that interested me long before the research for this book began.

I was introduced to tinkering with bikes in 2002 by friends loosely involved in anarchism and the anti-globalization movement. They lived in collective houses packed with underemployed, mostly white youth in the majority–African American city of Richmond, Virginia, and cycling was a practical extension of a general anti-corporate politics. Like many in my generation of so-called millennials now known for their urbanophilia, after graduating from college in 2004 I moved to an older, disinvested, but "up-and-coming" neighborhood: the largely African American streetcar suburbs of West Philadelphia. There, ramshackle Victorian houses rented cheaply, there was a strong do-it-yourself vitality among a mostly white sub-/counterculture, and bicycles were ubiquitous. Though I owned a car, I used a bike for almost all tasks from commuting to grocery shopping, and almost every person in my group of friends did the same. Many of us

also would likely not have lived in this area popularly considered "dangerous," at the edge of the university district, were it not for our bicycles, which allowed us to cover a lot of ground without depending on cars, transit schedules, or walking home late. Our mutual visibility contributed to a countercultural camaraderie in these spaces, while bicycles doubtlessly also made us more visible as *new* to mostly Black longtime residents.[35]

The whiteness of this social world ran counter to my experiences at work, as a mechanic at Via Bicycle, the longest-running bike shop in central Philadelphia. By the early 2000s, the nearby historic Italian Market neighborhood was a hub of immigration from Mexico and Central America. Largely by word of mouth, our shop had become the go-to location for Spanish-speaking cyclists who worked at local restaurants and job sites. Due to theft, damage, and cost concerns, they often used inexpensive bicycles from Walmart and Target that needed near-constant repair and were quite distant from the urban cool of the "fixie" trend. We also served longtime low-income residents of downtown Philadelphia, many of them Black, as well as white, middle-class residents who arrived in the area's first burst of gentrification in the 1980s. A growing clientele, however, were young white students, artists, and service workers, the storied "hipsters" who were flocking to gentrifying, cosmopolitan neighborhoods in urban cores throughout the country.[36] In other words, the shop was not a reflection of a unified bike culture but a hub of multiple cycling practices and social realities.

When I moved to Oakland in 2008, I found myself in familiar circumstances. The places I visited and the people I interacted with on bicycles were new to me (and the weather was more conducive to year-round cycling), but I intuitively understood the *how* of being a new resident and moving through space by bicycle. I was not alone in this. Few of the many punk, outsider, artist, student, and/or nonprofit workers I met who rode bikes had grown up in the city of Oakland. For these friends and acquaintances—most of them also white—from nearby suburban cities like Santa Rosa or Walnut Creek, as well as cities and suburbs in the Houston, Philadelphia, Boston, or New York metropolitan areas, bicycles were simply how one moved through the city. It was the unquestioned tool of our urban environment, suiting a way of life cultivated in gentrifying spaces as well as signifying a broader opposition to the car.

The growing visibility of bicycling in gentrifying areas supports an emerging commonsense notion that it is a white, bourgeois activity.[37] Yet this claim ignores the countless people of color continuing to use bicycles on a daily basis, for a variety of livelihoods that sustain the urban social and

material fabric. Who are the food deliverers, day laborers, dishwashers, and recycling collectors, disproportionately people of color commuting and working by bicycle, if not cyclists? Who are the veteran bicycle messengers, many of them people of color, whose aesthetic roots lie with West Indian immigrants in 1980s New York, if not cyclists? Who are the middle-class people of color and working-class whites alike who ride bikes, if not cyclists? In other words, how could a practice so manifestly diverse be understood in such a limited way? I argue that this is more than just an ideological trick but is rooted in geographical political economy.

In taking on these questions, I situate myself *within*, not outside, the process of racialized gentrification itself, a position true of many gentrification researchers.[38] While I interrogate cycling as a new mode of urban whiteness, I also take seriously the line between analyzing and reifying.[39] I argue that the narrative of bicycling's whiteness is constructed in support of an economic narrative that flies in the face of abundant evidence to the contrary. At the same time, while cycling has increased substantially among people of color over the past two decades, this growth is often framed a-spatially, as though mobility practices are only selected ideologically rather than shaped geographically.[40] In the face of these erasures, bicyclists of color have claimed their own visibility.[41] But these groups, with some exceptions, have tended not to be included in the ascendant political bloc of bicycle advocates. My goal in raising these critiques is not to damn today's bicycle movement but to splash my own eyes, and those of my fellow cyclist-advocates, with cold water, in hopes of lowering the bicycle from its pedestal and setting it "back on the ground."[42]

Map of the Argument

Chapter 1 introduces the conceptual framework that guides the book. It focuses on the intersection between processes of gentrification, the infrastructural basis of urban mobility, and dynamics of neoliberal regional restructuring. The transformation of streets, as a way of reshaping mobility patterns at the submunicipal scale, has only recently become a key dimension of the gentrification process. As the middle and upper classes take over the urban cores of metropolitan areas across the country, providing nonautomobile infrastructure is increasingly critical to avoiding traffic congestion and a rising ecological footprint. This has brought mobility change to the center of environmental governance in cities across the United States, with strategies ranging from bike lanes and greenways to bus rapid transit, light rail, and transit-oriented development, and supported

by federal grants, local bond measures, cap and trade funding (in California's case), and carbon offsets.[43] Bicycle infrastructure is a particularly inexpensive—and thus attractive—element of this broader strategy.[44]

In the second chapter, I outline the basic contours of the last thirty years of urban restructuring in the San Francisco Bay Area, where I did the majority of my qualitative research, as well as Philadelphia and Detroit. First, I argue that the regional reorganization of race, class, and the division of labor has in many cities fueled the growth of an increasingly white and affluent population in the areas now seeing the greatest investment in bicycle infrastructure. These populations also form the political constituency for bicycle infrastructure, in part because the proximity of live, work, and play—for well-paid white-collar workers—renders cycling a logical mobility choice. Central cities have become hubs of face-to-face, "creative" economic activity, prompting commentators and consultants to link the urban ecology of innovation to changing mobilities in particular.[45] These dynamics have cascaded "down" the urban hierarchy, such that even less affluent cities experience affordability crises and outward pressure on working-class populations, particularly those of color. In short, the growing popularity of bicycling among the "new middle class" reflects what we might call the "Europeanization" of America's race–class geography, with suburbanization increasingly working class and the central city rapidly gentrifying.[46] Second, I outline a planning initiative in each city that reflects the new urban innovation paradigm to demonstrate the centrality of bicycling to the institutions organizing the production of space. The following chapters then step backward and trace how this state of affairs came about.

The third chapter examines bicycling as an urban spatial practice. It explores the politicization of mass bicycling as a tool to remake the city, as well as the "infrapolitics" of daily cycling in a city built for cars. The roots of contemporary bicycle politics lie in Critical Mass, an anarchic "organized coincidence" of bicycle activists disrupting commute traffic that has spread throughout the world as a technique of protest.[47] This chapter contextualizes the Critical Mass phenomenon, and its many offshoots, as part of the wider spatial practices of cycling in gentrifying space, drawing on evidence from San Francisco, Oakland, and Detroit. The rhythms of these practices play a key role in shaping the spatial patterns and aesthetics of contemporary gentrification, as well as the experience of urbanity itself.

The fourth and fifth chapters examine the shift in bicycle politics toward increasing involvement in the planning and implementation of physical infrastructure. This involves the formation of bicycle-oriented "infrastructural publics" and their imbrication with the institutions (both official and

unofficial) of the municipal state.[48] They reveal moments of struggle over what streets—and by extension the city—will become, and bicycle advocates have waged these battles with increasing sophistication by promoting the economic value of bicycle infrastructure. Chapter 4 shows how grassroots activists in San Francisco's Mission District, a rapidly gentrifying working-class Latino neighborhood, in the mid-1990s forged the case for the economic value of bicycle infrastructure initially as realpolitik rather than ideology. They quickly made influential allies within San Francisco's growth machine, which has championed placemaking as a growth paradigm in the decades since and shaped national institutions that reinforced this common sense. This narrative, now preeminent in advocacy, erases the ways that some forms of development now celebrated actively harm the urban poor and working class, many of them bicycle users.

The fifth chapter traces the contemporary influence of this narrative on bicycle planning and civic leadership in Oakland. The now widely accepted idea that bicycle infrastructure promotes economic growth lubricates the machinery of official planning, activates translocal expert networks among planners, and enjoys broad support in rapidly gentrifying areas. But the rollout of this planning paradigm in Oakland reveals some of the political contradictions of the bike movement as well. For instance, in rapidly gentrifying North Oakland, bicycle infrastructure plans generate vocal opposition. This opposition often comes not from the residents most threatened by gentrification, however, but from business interests and residents concerned about parking and traffic. Fights over the street become fights over the balance of forces between factions of the middle class with distinct and often mutually conflicting infrastructural dependencies. At the same time, in neighborhoods of color beyond the gentrification "frontier," bicycle infrastructure projects lack a local support base, resulting in contests between community interests and the municipal state.

The sixth chapter examines the phenomenon of bikeshare, which scales up some of the contradictions detailed in previous chapters. Bikeshare systems—public-private partnerships that provide fleets of bicycles organized in a network of digitally connected docking stations and rented on a short-term basis—have spread from Europe to cities across the United States and the world. These systems are spearheaded by powerful networks of policy transfer, particularly between mayors and planning departments in transnational alliances, and are implemented as part of "innovation"- and sustainability-oriented growth strategies. While publicly available, they are subjected to the discipline of financial sustainability, which sharply limits their extent and reinforces the uneven development of mobility. I focus on the San Francisco Bay Area, Detroit, and Philadelphia and explore

the ways that advocates have attempted to steer bikeshare planning toward more equitable outcomes, often with quite remarkable success. However, in the long term, without dedicated resources and a more muscular role for the public sector, such systems will tend to trace and amplify existing patterns of gentrification.

Although this book is not directly oriented toward policy intervention, the conclusion offers some normative claims regarding the present and future of bicycle advocacy. It first traces three potential trajectories evident in contemporary bicycle politics. The first is the appropriation of practices of mass bicycle riding by young Black and Brown "wheelie" crews in cities like Philadelphia and Oakland, which shapes a new generation of bicycle riders in a way quite distinct from Critical Mass. The second is the shift in bicycle advocacy toward more general road-safety initiatives coalescing around Vision Zero, a zero traffic deaths paradigm that has become the newest "fast policy."[49] This welcome decentering of bicycling, however, comes with an increased dependence on racialized policing techniques, potentially exposing people of color to increased danger in the name of safety. The last is the phenomenon of GPS-based, venture capital–funded "dockless" bike and scooter sharing systems that "disrupt" the traditional dock-based networks by promising increased flexibility at a lower cost. These are part of a shift toward mobility as a service and the urbanization of broader trends in platform capitalism.[50]

The lifestyle-oriented and business-friendly framing of cycling has led bicycle advocates away from the urban progressive Left. While some bicycle advocates have made common cause with racial- and economic-justice organizations working on affordable housing, ending racist policing, and community-based economic development, these alliances have been both minimal and long overdue. More critically, they occur in a context in which uneven development steadily erodes potentials for greater racial and class diversity in cycling. Thus, in what follows I use the bicycle as a lens with which to apprehend some key aspects of the massive shifts at work in today's American city. I also hope to show that we may equally have to zoom back out from the bike lane to the metropolis in order to confront its contradictions.