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Urban parks, the growth machine, and the media: An analysis of press coverage of the high line, klyde warren park, and the rail park

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ABSTRACT
News media have the power to influence public opinion and economic growth. News coverage of landmark urban parks may influence public support of such parks, potentially increasing economic growth. However, some landmark urban parks have been associated with gentrification and displacement. News media may implicitly support local economic growth to the detriment of vulnerable residents through uncritical, positive coverage of park projects. However, the nature of press coverage of landmark urban parks has been scantily studied. This study analyzed news coverage of three landmark urban parks to understand how news media portray such parks and the voices they represent, using comparative thematic analysis. We found both broad support of parks, contributing to a societal master narrative of parks as a universal good, and some critique. Altogether, positive press coverage outweighed criticism. Uncritical promotion of parks could result in continued creation of landmark parks that threaten to facilitate gentrification and displacement.

Introduction
Urban planning initiatives, including for new parks, require media coverage for promotion. The more positive press these investments receive, the more funds they can raise, and the more tourists and new businesses they can draw in (Reichl 2016). It is therefore in the best economic interest of a city to solicit positive press coverage of their investments. Likewise, news outlets seeking to increase readership and maximize profit ally with city officials and other local elites, giving urban development positive coverage (Rodgers 2013). The more closely tied the media is to people in power, the less likely they are to print opposing views or actions that disrupt the status quo. Due to the partnership between the media and certain city elites, resistance to urban park development can struggle to gain traction (Gin and Taylor 2010; Roth and Vander Haar 2006). While the media’s role in promoting urban growth has been studied, the role of media coverage in promoting new urban parks has been seldom studied (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf 2011; Rodgers 2013). This study examines how news media portray landmark urban park projects, to understand their role in shaping discourse surrounding park construction.

Study problem and purpose
Understanding the role of the media in promoting urban growth from park development is a crucial contribution to ongoing work to reverse and prevent environmental injustices related to urban parks (Rigolon et al. 2020). Existing disparities in access to parks (Rigolon & Nemeth, in press), inclusion in park decision-making (Rigolon and Németh 2018), and recognition of local residents’ needs in park development (Kronenberg et al. 2020) can be perpetuated or worsened by promoting parks as benevolent contributors to economic growth. The more growth-oriented the discourse about park development, and the more tied to city elites that a park project is, the greater the risk of environmental injustice. Further, the less press coverage of these aspects, the more harm can be done. The role of park development in perpetuating environmental injustice has been discussed in other papers (see, for example, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012; Millington 2015; Quastel 2009). This study extends existing research by investigating the role of news media in supporting green growth machine park projects – highly visible and lauded park development – that has potential to perpetuate environmental injustice.

This study investigates the role print media plays in furthering discourse surrounding landmark park construction. We do this by examining how the media perpetuates discourse, how differing constellations of interests (pro- and anti-construction) are reflected in that discourse, and which actors align with those interests. Involvement by the media in discourse would show their involvement in the growth machine as well. Green growth machine theory suggests that media amplifies the interests of developers at the
expense of non-powerful residents, leading to further exacerbation of environmental injustices. This study investigates this claim by examining the extent to which print media amplifies messages related to economic gains and minimizes other interests, in the case of specific high-profile urban park developments.

To that end, the research questions of this study were:

1. How are landmark park projects portrayed by the media (including support or criticism)?
2. Whose voices are given a platform by the media?
3. Did this coverage change over the course of park construction (in reaction to events or stages of construction) or differ between park projects (in reaction to growing public consciousness)?

Empirical findings indicate that media portrayal is largely reflective of positive outcomes and broad-scale support for park development, though a portion of the media coverage describes concerns related to aesthetics, crowding, and tourism (RQ 1). The interests represented in the media heavily favors voices supportive of development, such as developers, city elites, and celebrities (RQ 2). The comparison across different parks and over time indicates slightly more negative coverage over time, as more negative impacts are uncovered, and some slight differences between cities (RQ 3). Based on this analysis, we argue that print media engages in boosterism of urban parks as indicated by green growth machine theory, through a concept we call 'generalization of the park'. Generalization of the park is a concept describing the cultural master narrative of parks as a universal good, despite their role in gentrification and other injustices. The concept shows how a discourse of economic growth for all ignores the environmental injustices created through these processes, akin to Freudenburg’s double diversion theory (Freudenburg 2005). The remainder of the paper describes our theoretical framework, methods – including data sources, park context, and data analysis – results, and a discussion of findings addressing each research question.

**Role of news media in urban growth**

Historically, newspapers had connections to powerful, influential city leaders, and the most well-known, influential newspapers were tied to the highest levels of the corporate and political elite (Dreier 1982, 2005). Newspapers play a role in urban growth as boosters – promoting growth interests by voicing their support (Farrell and Lee 2018; Hindman 1996; Molotch 1993). Growth is then viewed as good and necessary because it goes unquestioned by media (Dreier 2005).

News media sensationalize stories, as a way to increase readership, and in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, framing certain issues as ‘urban decay’ was likely a way to accomplish this (Gamson et al. 1992). During this time, news outlets pushed a ‘discourse of decline’ which influenced how the general public viewed inner cities – largely as high-crime (Rodgers 2013, 58). The media played up stories of urban decline and cherry-picked stories on corruption, crime, and homelessness. This assisted in the subsequent waves of urban renewal that erased many marginalized communities (Dreier 2005). Framing urban areas as declining makes renewal and revitalization more palatable to readers and shrinks the platform for dissent (Anderson and Sternberg 2013; Wilson 2004). Recently, journalism has contributed to the ‘comeback’ of cities. Newspapers use discursive strategies to promote tourism and local economic enterprises in cities experiencing population increases, which help cities rebrand (Strom and Kerstein 2017). Reporters ‘assemble cities as consumption spaces, increasingly for middle-class niche markets’ and cities actively market themselves toward middle-class consumption-oriented tourism in response (Rodgers 2013, 59).

As newspaper ownership consolidates into a few national and international conglomerates, newspaper owners become distanced from the city they represent (Rodgers 2013). Protests, and other resistance against development, are therefore subject to being ignored by the media, whose owners may not have vested interest in local residents’ lives, limiting resisters’ ability to gain social support (Gin and Taylor 2010). As dissenting voices of development often lack sufficient resources and platform to effectively oppose the forces of urban growth, it appears that there is little antagonism to development (Logan, Whaley, and Crowder 1997). Contemporary globalized media therefore

**Literature Review**

The three streams of literature guiding this study include: (1) the city as a growth machine, (2) the role of the media in urban growth, and (3) green growth machine. All three of these literatures describe the consequences of perpetually seeking economic and physical growth, for society and for natural resources. The essence of the idea of the ‘city as a growth machine’ is that, as cities seek ever more growth to sustain capitalism and promote the interests of city elites, collectively known as growth coalitions, vulnerable and marginalized individuals suffer (Logan and Molotch 1987; Molotch 1976). Growth coalitions, comprising political groups, governmental institutions, neighborhood groups, or business groups, acquire scarce public resources to increase their own financial status and political power.
Contribute to inequality by lifting up city growth agendas and overlooking challengers (Dreier 1982; Gin and Taylor 2010).

Newspapers are not uniform, however, and the portrayal of some issues, such as gentrification, vary across reporters, editors, and publishers (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf 2011). Some stories portray gentrification, for example, as a solution to ‘urban decay,’ and others are vehement critics, implying that some in the media favor gentrification and others oppose it (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf 2011). The conditions under which newspapers act as growth machine boosters remain somewhat unclear – when do newspapers promote investments as economic development opportunities, and when do they not?

Large, citywide investments made to boost economic and physical growth are often growth machine projects. An illustrative example is the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet (MRGO), which was a canal built in a fragile wetland ecosystem in New Orleans to increase trade by expanding transportation of goods from inland to the ocean (Freudenburg et al. 2009). The economic benefits – at great environmental cost – of MRGO were written about in newspapers ahead of its construction (Freudenburg et al. 2009). Despite its eventual negative consequences, MRGO’s ability to engender economic growth and prosperity was never questioned, even by some who normally oppose such projects, such as print media (Freudenburg et al. 2009). Destination parks may be another such example, potentially illustrating the power of the green growth machine. Resistance to urban park development may therefore get limited coverage from print media, and consciously or not, newspapers may endorse growth tactics by portraying the benevolence of park projects – by ignoring gentrifying effects or by promoting them as economic drivers (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf 2011).

**Green growth machine**

The green growth machine is focused on building green spaces, parks, and other sustainability-oriented infrastructure to encourage economic growth under the guise of environmental protection (Gould and Lewis 2017; Lang and Rothenberg 2017). The social group benefiting from the green growth machine has ‘environmental privilege,’ which affords them ‘privileged access’ to environmental goods built for them, such as parks, trails, greenways, and waterfronts, as well as avoidance of environmental ‘bads,’ such as air and water pollution, landfills, and brownfields (Freudenburg 2005; Gould and Lewis 2017). At the same time, cities hide how such investments marginalize those without privilege, and environmental destruction continues alongside construction of sustainability infrastructure (Freudenburg 2005; Gould and Lewis 2017).

Competition between cities to attract those with environmental privilege – the ‘sustainability class’ – fosters the development of green growth coalitions, as cities seek to turn underused spaces into consumptive amenities (Curran and Hamilton 2018; Gould and Lewis 2017). Equipped with disposable income, the sustainability class can afford higher rents (which convert to higher property taxes paid to cities), while those who cannot afford them are displaced (Farrell and Lee 2018; Gould and Lewis 2018; Jamal 2018). Those who can afford to stay experience cultural marginalization (Gould and Lewis 2017; Valli 2015). Creating spaces for the sustainability class out of places previously occupied by marginalized groups perpetuates social divides between races and classes (Gould and Lewis 2017; Loughran 2014). However, this literature has not determined whether the media play the same role in the green growth machine, a gap which this study seeks to fill.

This study’s focus is on urban parks built by repurposing public and private assets, such as formerly industrial infrastructure. In-fill urban parks are typically characterized by their political and celebrity donors and supporters, their well-known design firms, their significant cost, and marketing and branding to the sustainability class (Lang and Rothenberg 2017). These ‘landmark’ urban parks can lead to gentrification, as property taxes and rents rise, displacing vulnerable residents (Rigolon and Németh 2018; Roth and Vander Haar 2006). Landmark parks are resources fixed in space, where their value is tied to the land and the location, and thus play a role in local economic growth, with local leaders interested in maximizing revenue from parks. Some prominent examples include the BeltLine in Atlanta, Gas Works Park in Seattle, and the ‘606’ in Chicago (Immergluck and Balan 2018; Rigolon and Németh 2018).

Media likely play a prominent role in both promoting development (as a booster, as in traditional growth machines) and limiting the reach of dissenting voices in the public discourse of urban parks – but the full extent of this remains unknown, prompting the present study. Given the media’s historical role in perpetuating growth, this paper examines the media’s role in green growth machine park projects. Because landmark parks show similar processes seen in other green growth machine cases, this paper examines whether the media is pushing a discourse of parks’ benevolence, despite potentially unjust ramifications.

**Methods and study context**

This study examined print media coverage of the development of New York City’s High Line, Dallas’ Klyde Warren Park, and Philadelphia’s Rail Park. These three parks were compared because they are all in-fill
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>High Line Phase 1</th>
<th>Klyde Warren Park</th>
<th>High Line Final Phase</th>
<th>Rail Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Summer 2009</td>
<td>Late 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhoods</td>
<td>Chelsea &amp; Meatpacking District</td>
<td>Uptown &amp; Downtown</td>
<td></td>
<td>Callowhill &amp; Chinatown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Elevated 1.5-mile linear park built on former railroad line. Cost: approx. $153 M (phases 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>Downtown multi-use park with café, dog park, physical activity facilities, sculptures, and event space. Cost: approx. $110 M</td>
<td>Cost: approx. $76 M</td>
<td>0.25-mile linear park built on a former railroad line. Cost (phase 1): approx. $11 M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘landmark’ parks (see Table 1 which outlines park construction timelines). The High Line received media attention worldwide, prompting questions of whether the other two projects were portrayed similarly or differently from the High Line, given that they are members of the High Line Network.1

Setting and history of parks
Each park has unique history and context, as briefly described below. Summary demographic information from each neighborhood is available in Table 2. Because the neighborhoods surrounding the parks comprise several Census tracts (from which the demographic information came), the aggregated data in Table 2 does not show differences between the tracts—which are especially stark among some tracts. Breakdowns of demographics for each tract in each city are available in the Supplementary materials.

Setting and history of the High Line
The High Line is an elevated, 1.5-mile linear park converted from a railroad line in lower Manhattan, New York City. Located in a former industrial meatpacking district of the Chelsea neighborhood, the rail line was nearly torn down. Two longtime Chelsea residents, Robert Hammond and Joshua David, formed the group Friends of the High Line (FHL) to preserve the historic structure and advocated to turn the High Line into a park. FHL fundraised for the park’s construction, led community meetings, and lobbied for support from prominent individuals in New York. Since its opening in 2009, the High Line has been praised by the architecture community for its architectural design and criticized by urbanists and researchers for leading to neighborhood gentrification and exacerbating inequality in access to green space (Lang and Rothenberg 2017; Loughran 2014).

FHL solicited input from Chelsea residents in the planning process, but those consulted were primarily white, highly educated, and upper class. As a result the park was designed primarily for the elite (Loughran 2014; Reichl 2016). Users of the High Line are not representative of the historical profile of Chelsea residents, nor of the approximately 5,000 public housing residents who live in the neighborhood (Reichl 2016). The percentage of white residents in Chelsea was about 65% in 2017, though an observed 83% of visitors to the High Line were white (Reichl 2016).

Even before the High Line opened, speculation began (Reichl 2016); once opened, the increased attention, new businesses, and commercial expansion grew (Loughran 2014). By 2011, private investment in the neighborhoods surrounding the High Line had nearly totaled 2 USD billion (McGeehan 2011). As a result, the neighborhood experienced increased cost of renting and owning property, luxury commercial activity, and turnover of residents and businesses (Lang and Rothenberg 2017; Loughran 2014). These changes were especially difficult for longtime residents, many of whom were pushed out by rising rents; apartment values rose to 2.000 USD per square foot, a relative doubling from before the High Line opened (McGeehan 2011; Loughran 2014; Reichl 2016). Resident demographic change has included a rise in incomes of 100% or more in nearly all block groups in Chelsea.

The influence of the High Line has reached far beyond Manhattan, as cities globally model their own parks by converting dilapidated infrastructure (Taylor 2010). FHL founders created the High Line Network (HLN) – of which the Rail Park and Klyde Warren Park are both members – to allow cities to learn lessons from the High Line, and maximize the benefits of transformed infrastructure. HLN is a resource diffusion network created so that green infrastructure projects in other cities could learn lessons from their process, and maximize the benefits of transformed infrastructure. Although this network may benefit other cities, the network is invite-only, and makes little of their work publicly available. What lessons they provide for other cities therefore remain unclear.

Setting and history of Klyde Warren Park
Klyde Warren Park is one of several new and impeding ‘freeway cap’ parks that are becoming more popular in cities across the country (Houston and Zuñiga 2019). It is a 5.2-acre park in Dallas, Texas built over a freeway underpass and connects uptown to the city’s arts district downtown. The park opened in 2012 after 3 years of construction. Named for the son of an oil magnate, Klyde Warren Park contains walking trails, a dog park, a children’s park, and programming and event space. It is a public park managed privately by the Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation.

A public-private partnership and a 3 USD million grant in 2004 from the Dallas Real Estate Council, the

Table 2. Neighborhood demographics around parks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>% white</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% Asian</th>
<th>% Other race</th>
<th>% Two or more races</th>
<th>% Hispanic or Latinx</th>
<th>% Bachelor’s degree or higher</th>
<th>Median income</th>
<th>% Below poverty line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York*</td>
<td>34,192</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>$38,108</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas†</td>
<td>10,041</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>$68,350</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia‡</td>
<td>9,807</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>$26,206</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Texas Capital Bank, and the president of Texas Capital Bank initiated the park’s development. With a goal to spur economic development, the park received 110 USD million from the city of Dallas, the Texas Department of Transportation, the federal government, and Kelcy Warren, for naming rights (Perez 2015).

External analysis indicated that adjacent properties increased in economic value after the park opened and has since created more than 2 USD billion in economic growth and property value (Ozönil, Modî, and Stewart 2014). In 2018, the Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation announced plans to expand the park an additional 1.2 acres, with an event center, more green space, and public gathering spots, currently scheduled to open in 2022.

**Setting and history of the Rail Park**
The Rail Park is located near Center City, the wealthy downtown core of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in a neighborhood called Callowhill, which is known for its artist community. The Rail Park also abuts Chinatown, a historic neighborhood known for its continued high occupancy of Asians and Asian-Americans. The Rail Park is a quarter-mile long linear park built on a former railroad line. The park was designed to highlight the industrial past of the railroad while providing walking space, seating areas, and greenery. It opened in June 2018 after an 18-month construction period, though plans for the Rail Park began much earlier. Residents of Callowhill, beginning in the 1990’s, had called on the city to convert the out-of-commission railroad line into a public space. Two neighborhood groups, who later merged to form Friends of the Rail Park, worked with the city, developers, and foundations to develop park plans.

The Rail Park has a history of community conflict, with differing visions for use of the space. The contentious social environment of the two neighborhoods surrounding the park provide important context for studying discourse around the Rail Park, given their competing visions for what the abandoned rail line should have turned into (Pearsall 2018). Residents of Chinatown asked that the viaduct be torn down and replaced with housing or commercial space. However, early engagement with the community to understand needs and desires excluded (intentionally or not) some residents of Chinatown from discussions about the park, and their concerns about the need for housing in the neighborhood did not make its way into the broader area master plan (PCDC, 2017).

**Data sources**
We considered print media coverage – i.e., newspaper articles, op-eds – as a distinct and influential actor in a larger social discourse and thus as the subject of our study. Data sources therefore included text (not audio or visual) stories from local and national newspapers and other press outlets. Using the NewsBank and ProQuest databases, data were found through a database search using keywords and filters by year. For the High Line, years were restricted to 2008, 2009, and 2014, corresponding to the year leading up to the first section opening, the year the first section opened, and the year the final section opened (see Table 1). Klyde Warren Park sources were restricted to 2011, 2012, and 2013, which correspond to the year before the park opened, the year it opened, and the year after it opened. Klyde Warren Park opened in late 2012, so the search included 2013 to capture grand opening coverage that occurred shortly after. Rail Park sources were restricted to 2016, 2017 and 2018, the years of construction and the year of the opening. This search resulted in 222 usable data sources.

**Data analysis**
Analysis followed guidelines from the literature on comparative thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012; Riggs, Bartholomaeus, and Due 2016). Comparative analysis was chosen to deepen the analysis, as context, city leadership, or local opposition may differ between cities. Differences may indicate reactions to increasing social awareness of green gentrification, or the scale of the media’s connections to local elites. First, all sources were read to gain an initial impression of the data. One park at a time, the first author conducted two rounds of coding on each piece, using inductive open coding methods (Braun and Clarke 2006). Codes were based on the content of text and the appraisal (support or criticism) of the park (RQ1), as well as the speaker (RQ2). Then, the first author grouped codes by patterns in subject area, to match up findings with research questions – i.e., support of the parks, critiques of the parks, and voices being featured. Additionally, we analyzed points of comparison between parks, per comparative thematic analytical procedure (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012).

A second person coded a subset of the data as a reliability check. The second coder read 5% of sources from each park, amounting to six articles about the High Line, four articles about Klyde Warren Park, and two articles about the Rail Park. The second person coded the articles twice according to the same codebook. Differences were discussed and led to further refinement of the codebook and definitions.

**Findings**
Our empirical findings pertain to how parks were portrayed, – supportive, critical, and combinations of both – whose voices were featured, and to what extent coverage of the parks changed over time or across
Table 3. Number of articles and sources for each park.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High Line</th>
<th>Klyde Warren Park</th>
<th>Rail Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent from local news sources</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

parks. Table 3 summarizes the number of articles per park and their sources.

**RQ1: How are landmark park projects portrayed by the media (including support or criticism)?**

Most news sources in this study promoted the parks, celebrating what cities had to overcome to create them. Although there is evidence of this master narrative, we did find some competing voices on the parks. Some reporters discussed downsides to the parks, including that they were funded, planned, and designed in ways that negatively affected surrounding neighborhoods over time (Houston and Zuñiga 2019; Pearsall 2018; Reichl 2016).

In their coverage of the parks, reporters gave construction updates, fundraising event information, cost and planning logistics, and described challenges overcome in building the parks. All these details worked into narrative storytelling, with the parks as the protagonist (Bird and Dardenne 2009). Park histories were often portrayed in detailed, narrative storytelling, as demonstrated in the quote below:

“The first [High Line] train ran in 1934, running from 34th Street to St. John's Park Terminal, at Spring Street. . . . Over time, with the growth of interstate trucking, the need for railways dropped significantly, and the High Line was used less and less. The last train that ever ran on the High Line was in 1980. Left abandoned for years, it wasn't until 1999, under the threat of demolition, that the Friends of the High Line, a community-based nonprofit group, formed in partnership with the City of New York, to preserve and maintain the line as an elevated public park.” – *New York Examiner*

Authors often ended their stories of the High Line’s history with FHL embarking on a ‘journey’ to make the High Line into a park. Klyde Warren Park reporters gave backstory on the highway, previous plans for covering the highway, divisions between Uptown and Downtown, and the purpose of the park to connect the two. Rail Park history was similar to the High Line, regarding the railroad infrastructure, though Rail Park backstory contained more contextual information about Chinatown and Callowhill contention.

Other positive press described the parks’ reputations. The High Line was famous before it even opened, and the press lauded the designers for their creative reuse of defunct urban infrastructure. For instance, one of the founders described the park’s immediate notoriety: “Every week, noted David, the organization gets calls from municipalities, countries, states, park organizations, civic organizations and real estate developers’ *(Chelsea Now)*. Klyde Warren Park was among the first parks to be built over a freeway, and thus media gave it high praise for its feat of engineering, as the following quote states: ‘Other cities, including Los Angeles, are already inquiring about the way Klyde Warren Park was built and financed’ *(Dallas Morning News)*.

Journalists also described negative effects of the parks, conflicts associated with the parks’ development, and critiques of their design. Reporters described how gentrification and development have affected long-term businesses and residents reflecting concerns about gentrification. This was particularly the case for the Rail Park:

“While it’s only natural that builders would want to build near such an attractive feature as the High Line . . . it’s somewhat disconcerting that they all seem to be high end. No one wants to go back to the days when Chelsea was characterized by factories, warehouses and rundown tenements. But . . . the local community lost battle after battle about inclusion of more affordable housing, building heights and density . . . . The High Line indeed is a welcome addition to the city, but it’s unfortunate that it had to come into being as a gentrification accelerator.” – *Brooklyn Eagle*

“I think there’s no question that public space is hugely needed in Chinatown,’ Sarah Yeung, PCDC’s former director of planning, said. But that’s not to say that the construction of the Rail Park is the right fit. This is taking place in a land market where the environment around real estate and wealth is changing the neighborhood.” – *The Philadelphia Tribune*

Reporters covering the High Line described how the neighborhood changed over time, starting with being a meatpacking district, then moving through several stages of advancement into late-stage gentrification. Initially, the press discussed development less negatively, but turned more negative, especially in 2014 when the final section opened and several years of gentrification had occurred. Below is an exemplary quote on gentrification from the High Line.

“In its old incarnation, the High Line was considered a deterrent to development; now, it’s a stimulant. The surrounding skyline is animated by construction elevators and 30-story cranes. The chic Standard Hotel . . . turns this stretch of the promenade into a shady breezeway. The promenade’s views to the east, along Washington Street, are a window into the gentrification of the Meatpacking District. Down below, women in high heels mince across the cobblestone streets where old slaughterhouses are becoming boutiques and sidewalk cafés.” – *The Bergen Record*
Stories about possible gentrification near the Rail Park focused on history of Callowhill as an artist enclave and of neighboring Chinatown being cut off from the city by construction of an expressway. Because of its similarity to the High Line, Rail Park sources centered their discussions of development on neighborhood change and displacement, although some Rail Park sources portrayed development in a positive way.

Reporters also described conflicts that plagued the parks, such as when a city council member in New York was critiqued for donating large sums of money to the High Line in exchange for campaign support from the High Line founders, as shown in the following quote:

“More than half of the 19 board members of Friends of the High Line made contributions to Quinn … City records show Friends of the High Line got 290,000 USD from the Council for ‘borough needs’ in 2005 and 2006.” – New York Daily News

Similarly, a Klyde Warren Park source discussed the unpopular proposed tax district to pay for the park, as shown in the quote below:

“Klyde Warren Park’s board of directors proposed assessing a small tax on surrounding businesses to maintain the park … three months after Klyde Warren Park and Dallas Arts District higher-ups waged a heated public war over the park’s plans to tax surrounding property owners to pay for operations and maintenance.” – Dallas Morning News

**RQ2: Whose voices are given a platform by the media?**

The voices given a platform can be categorized in 4 groups: (1) park leaders, (2) residents and business owners, (3) city and state officials, and (4) tourists. The first group was given the most press coverage. The largest share of voices showcased by news outlets were intimately familiar with the parks’ planning. Residents and business owners were featured the second-most often, followed by city and state officials, and tourists. Park leaders and city and state officials were more likely to be boosters, as shown in positive statements about the parks, and residents and business owners were more likely to be critics, as shown in their complaints about the design, the commercial activity, and the tourists.

In this analysis, we examined articles in relation to descriptions of who participated in park planning and to whom the print media gave a platform – and therefore discursive space and power. The importance of a certain person’s involvement was inferred by how often the press quoted them, such as park designers and prominent donors. We quantitatively tracked how often the press gave various voices a platform, reflecting the influence and importance that reporters ascribed to certain voices and their influence in discourse (see Table 4).

As you can see in Table 4, across all three parks news articles featured park leaders more than any other type of stakeholder (n = 62). This was followed by residents (n = 40) and business owners (n = 30), city and state officials (n = 22), and tourists (n = 14). In New York, the vast majority of quotes that the press featured were from the two founders, Robert Hammond and Joshua David. The press’ emphasis on these voices limits their ability to cover counter-voices and counter-perspectives that might be opposed to the parks, thereby limiting their discursive power.

Wealthy donors and members of the park board of Klyde Warren Park gave quotes the most often of any type of stakeholder in Dallas. News media featured nine different stakeholder types for Klyde Warren Park, compared to seven stakeholder types for the High Line. In Philadelphia, reporters quoted the director of the downtown business improvement district the most of any stakeholder type, which showed the desire of the wealthy downtown district to directly influence Callowhill’s development (Pearssall 2018). News media featured 11 different stakeholders for the Rail Park, the widest variety of voices of all three parks. An example of how the press featured diverse stakeholders is shown in the following quotes from the High Line and the Rail Park, respectively:

“Designed by Diller Scofidio+Renfro and James Corner Field Operations, the High Line’s success has ushered in a new wave of park design that either reuse neglected trails and bridges or create new ones for the same effect.” – CityLab

“Studio Bryan Hanes … led the park’s design and its planners went out of their way to ensure that the park featured accessibility and historical touchstones while keeping the ‘green’ in green space.” – Tribune-Review

Listing names brings attention to the actors involved in the development process. The fact that each of the three parks in this study had celebrity endorsements and wealthy donors shows the type of elite boosters involved in the parks:

“Dallas native Owen Wilson … is the event’s honorary chairman and is expected to be on-site for the Oct. 27 evening concert and Oct. 28 screening of his Oscar-nominated film Midnight in Paris.” – Dallas Morning News

“The High Line in Chelsea will host a big opening party to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the structure and the 10th anniversary of the city’s efforts to revive it. It will honor benefactors like actor Edward Norton; IAC chairman Barry Diller and his wife, designer Diane von Furstenberg; and hedge fund director Philip Falcone and wife Lisa Marie.” – New York Observer

“The Bacon Brothers band, made up, of course, of Kevin Bacon and his brother Michael, play a benefit concert for the first phase of construction of the Viaduct Rail Park.” – Metro Philadelphia
Table 4. People featured and frequency of appearance, by park.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of stakeholder</th>
<th>Total N of articles featuring each speaker</th>
<th>High Line</th>
<th>Klyde Warren Park</th>
<th>Rail Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Park founders, board members, and managers&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Robert Hammond and Joshua David (founders)</td>
<td>Grant family (founders), landscape architect, parks director, park president, Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation board</td>
<td>Director of downtown business improvement district, Friends of the Rail Park members, city parks commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business owners&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (e.g., city and state officials)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mayors, city council members, city planning commissioner, US House Representative, president of art society</td>
<td>Dallas Real Estate Council</td>
<td>City officials, Pennsylvania governor, secretary of Department of Community and Economic Development, the mayor, a developer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Tended to speak positively about the parks. <sup>b</sup>Some spoke positively, some negatively.
Park founders, officials, and other supporters spoke about multiple topics, such as construction updates, their history with the infrastructure, and their journey through the planning process, and generally spoke positively about the parks (see Table 4). An example quote from a park founder is shown below, from an article on the grand opening of the High Line.

“The event evoked a more emotional response from Hammond, who said he’s recently been driven to tears witnessing the fruits of his labor. ‘I’ve been crying a lot,’ he said. ‘My dad always said the best response to joy is tears, and that’s definitely been happening.’ For David … actually seeing the public take to the park has been his greatest reward. ‘It isn’t really complete until today, when the doors open and people come into it,’ he said. ‘It’s just so exciting to see people walking up the stairs and looking around and beginning to use this park. It’s magical.’” – Chelsea Now

The involvement of certain people in the park’s planning carried weight, and the media prioritized voices of decision-makers, endorsers, and city officials, which is evident in the amount the press featured their voices. Reporters preceded or followed direct quotes from such voices with affirmation of the parks’ benefits, such as the following quotes:

“Turning an eyesore into a productive space that adds social, economic, and environmental value to the neighborhood is no simple feat” – Billy Penn

“For boosters like Paul Levy, president and CEO of the Center City District instrumental in realizing this first phase, the Rail Park is part of a growth strategy for an already-diverse neighborhood just north of Center City’s core” – Philadelphia Tribune

Although not every reporter was so positive, it was more common than not to showcase voices that spoke positively of the parks (see Table 4).

The press also described other voices – people not necessarily involved in planning or building of the park – which provides an important contrast to those involved in the planning. Residents offered differing criticism and praise. An example of a positive resident quote states, ‘Kayah Franklin is amazed how serene a park sitting on a freeway can be. “To share your art, like dance, in the midst of everything it’s amazing,” Franklin said.’ (WFAA, Dallas). An example of a negative resident quote states, “the neighborhood is so gross now,” Melva says. “It’s all tourists coming for the High Line” (Metro New York).

Another noteworthy finding pertains to what the media left out of their coverage: public participation, which is an important component of procedural justice and necessary to avoid gentrification and other injustices (Rigolon and Németh 2018). Therefore, excluding the process of park planning – including the extent to which community stakeholders were involved (if at all) – is a noted absence. Leaving out resident experiences in planning is equivalent to only telling part of the story.

**RQ3: Did this coverage change over the course of park construction (in reaction to events or stages of construction), or differ between park projects (in reaction to growing public consciousness)?**

Coverage of the High Line did change over time, possibly in reaction to changes in the neighborhood. The press gave the High Line a lot of attention, helping make known its role in rapid and steep gentrification (Loughran 2014). Based on changes in coverage from 2008 to 2014, the High Line was recognized as harming people who used to live and own businesses in Chelsea. By 2014 gentrification in Chelsea was fairly advanced, as one local writer remarked, ‘the western edge of Chelsea has been completely transformed’ (Our Town Downtown). Consequently, the press discussed gentrification almost twice as much in 2014. Even FHL admitted to the High Line’s partial role in the neighborhood’s rapid gentrification. The press thus published more stories with mixed feelings about the park, and more quotes from residents, in 2014 than in 2009.

Conversely, quotes from the park’s founders declined over time. News sources gave FHL founders disproportionately more discursive space than residents and business owners in 2008 and 2009, but about the same as residents and business owners in 2014. Substantively, effects on business were discussed more often in 2014, as time allowed for more effects to happen. Nevertheless, over time the press repeated the park’s story of two men doing the work and gave little attention to other aspects of planning, like public participation. Selected differences in High Line reporting over time are displayed in Figure 1, which tracks the use of codes across time.

The main difference across parks relates to who the press credited. A small number of early champions came up with the ideas for each park and pushed for their development. However, reporters quoted the High Line founders the most often, and prominently displayed their role. The founders of Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation provided quotes, though not as often as the park president. Of the various people involved in the Rail Park, local grassroots founders provided the fewest quotes, and the point person for the downtown business improvement district provided the most (see Table 5). Because the founders were given an inordinate amount of space in press coverage, we quantified their appearance in discourse, to visualize their influence in how the story of the parks is told.

**Discussion**

In this study we determined that the media enhanced the parks’ influence in their respective city’s growth, through their overtly positive coverage. Our findings
show that the media’s uncritical, positive discussion of the parks (see RQ 1), suggest a master narrative of parks in society as a universal good – a ‘generalization of the park’ – thereby contributing to the green growth machine. Even media coverage that featured negative voices stopped short of critiquing the process or the actors involved, including the counter narrative containing critical coverage of the High Line over time.

The frequency with which the print news media featured certain stakeholders illustrates the extent to which they value their perspectives, and partly determines the extent of the speakers’ power to shape and promote discourse. The relative appearance of booster stakeholders versus critical stakeholders – i.e., that boosters were featured more often – displays the tendency of newspapers to promote growth machine ideals, even if some articles provided more balanced views and some provided criticism. Furthermore, by taking the space to mention celebrity endorsements, the press show that these parks are supported by elites.

News reporting that relies primarily on one side advances economic growth through its mostly homogenous coverage of a subject. Print news media are showing their preference for views that perpetuate the green growth machine by way of featuring more boosters than critics and actively encouraging the parks’ development as is. In favoring certain voices, the media are deciding whose perspectives are important. Broader, public discourse is likely shaped by the way the press chooses to report on such parks, which influences the extent to which such projects are supported by city residents, championed by city officials, and associated with economic growth, gentrification, and inequality (Farrell and Lee 2018; Van Dijk 2009). Finding additional alternative views may balance out the overtly uncritical press with more critical voices.

Even as more voices rose to prominence in the media’s coverage of the High Line over time, the two founders remained the most quoted. Similarly, the lack of coverage of grassroots activism in Philadelphia may show the relative unimportance ascribed to their voices by the media. This choice may either reflect the downtown business improvement district taking over planning and funding the park from the early grassroots activists, or that more actors were needed in building the Rail Park, thereby diluting the press attention across all such actors (Pearsall 2018).

The mixture of positive and negative press is in step with other studies that have found that not all reporters are growth machine boosters (Cottle 1993; Roth and Vander Haar 2006; Thomas 1994). Critical views are

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**Table 5. Coverage of founders in each park.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Number of sources where quotes appear</th>
<th>Number of quotes</th>
<th>Percent across all coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Line</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klyde Warren Park</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rail Park</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Figure 1. Example code frequency changes over time.**
thus important to highlight here; negative perceptions of the parks serve as counter-voices providing needed pushback against the uncritical portrayal of parks that prop up capitalist park development. If more media sources expressed discomfort or antipathy toward parks developed without community buy-in, this would show that capitalist interests are not unopposed.

Because a majority of press coverage of these three landmark parks was positive, we ask, what is the future of counter-narratives? News outlets independent from local elites could provide a platform for marginalized voices to share their experiences. Additionally, future research should investigate a broader scope of public opinion on urban environmental development, outside of traditional media sources, including the role of newer media (e.g., social media) in forming and disseminating societal counter-narratives.

**Generalization of the market/generalization of the park**

**Growth machine.** By providing auxiliary support of local economic development, through positive press coverage, newspapers have historically inflated the value of local economic enterprises (Farrell and Lee 2018). Our findings illustrate a new role of print media in contemporary society in creating positive narratives of large-scale public projects. International news media giving attention to Klyde Warren Park and the High Line illustrates how the press increases the global influence of landmark urban parks and the global reach of the green growth machine. We assert that the print news media build a ‘generalization of the park’ cultural master narrative, in which large-scale parks are presented as universally beneficial amenities, despite their consistent role in gentrification and other environmental injustices.

**Generalization of the park.** As reflected by our findings, the societal treatment of landmark parks bears a resemblance to the concept ‘generalization of the market,’ which is the culturally embedded notion that economic growth should be continually pursued because it universally benefits all social groups (Bell, 1998, 68). In general, people are not inclined to question economic growth – even people who would normally reject private control of public goods – because it is believed to be a universal good. Belief in the generalization of the market has led to political pursuit of projects in the name of economic growth, which has increased inequality and led to environmental harm (Bell, 1998; Freudenburg et al. 2009). As discussed earlier in this paper, an exemplar of this phenomenon is New Orleans’ notorious canal, the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, which was never called into question, despite exacerbating effects of Hurricane Katrina, because it was thought to be an ‘economic necessity’ (Freudenberg et al., 2009, p. 138). An exemplar of the generalization of the park arises from press treatment of the three landmark park projects in this study.

We argue there is a ‘generalization of the park,’ in which our societal conceptions of parks are assumed to be beneficial for everyone no matter how or where they are built. People do not often question park development, just as economic growth is rarely questioned (Loughran 2014). A master narrative about parks in society (e.g., an abundance of uncritical praise and exclusion of public participation or backlash) may push the ‘generalization of the park.’ An unquestioning of growth machine pet projects, such as large-scale elite parks, by the media, through the generalization of the park, would perpetuate the green growth machine. Marginalized and vulnerable populations would suffer as a result.

**Conclusion**

Regardless of appraisal, the press coverage showed the magnitude of the projects – their ability to shape the city in multiple ways – and public optimism that they will bring benefits to their cities. Therefore, what are we losing out on by overemphasizing the benefits of landmark urban parks and assuming there is a ‘generalization of the park’? Perhaps opportunities to build more inclusive, equitable park systems, or illuminating the connection between economic interests, political interests, and environmental injustice – and therefore learning how to prevent injustices. Despite the changing landscape of media and news, powerful entities will still try to direct how current events are portrayed. Therefore, it is important to learn how to support the voices that are not participating in the ‘generalization of the park’ narrative.

**Note**


**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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