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# Introduction

SETHA LOW

Visitors to Jones Beach, a majestic state park on Long Island, New York, talk about how important it is that the beach is public because there is always a place for them. They reflect on how being together on the sand or boardwalk and in the water creates a sense of solidarity, cohesion, and belonging.<sup>1</sup> That is what a beach can offer if it is public.

The intention of this book is to provide evidence of what happens when the beach is not public and launch an inquiry into why the public is losing access to and control of public beaches and their valuable common resources. The contributors were asked to draw from their research experience to produce case studies that uncover and illuminate the political goals, social relationships, and economic intentions whenever beaches are lost, redeveloped, or restricted. The explicit goal is to generate a body of empirical evidence on the politics of these disputes and encounters.

Beaches—from seashores to lakesides and riverfronts—are a unique form of public space valued for their environmental, social, cultural, aesthetic, spiritual, and affective resources and meanings. They are places where water and land come together creating shorelines of opportunities for working, playing, relaxing, strolling, socializing, picnicking, and living—in scenic seaside homes that range from self-built shelters to multimillion-dollar mansions. Beaches are so precious they become contested terrains where people fight to control their assets and capitalize on their economic potential rather than retain them for public use. Ecologically fragile because of constant change due to tides, storms, and ocean warming adds a geophysical dimension to the already complex interactions of the beach's multilayered dynamics. Coastal deterioration and intensifying storms, especially hurricanes and flooding, appear in these chapters, but geomorphology is secondary to an emphasis on politiciza-

tion, racialization, and commodification. Nevertheless, the study of beach politics provides clues to the critical need for climate change adaptation.

In this volume, we approach the beach as not just “a depiction of a sandy and tropical strip of nature next to blue waves,” but a social construct and category of social experience, a place of everyday life and difference, a contested commons, and a collective imaginary.<sup>2</sup> It provides a staging ground and temporal-spatial edge that illuminates community solidarity and protest in the face of property loss, racial erasure, class conflict, and spatial governmentality. Materially, the beach is an ever-shifting geomorphological formation, an unsettled borderland between land and water, and for many, a beloved strip of sand. As an ethnographic and historical place, it becomes a landscape and moral terrain on which struggles for control, ownership, and rights are enacted daily—a “contact zone” where race, class, gender, age, ability, and identity encounters are on display. Community battles against developers and the often-ambivalent role of governments with different jurisdictional responsibilities become visible through the mediation and negotiation of beach access and use rights. Hidden stories, forgotten memories, illegal actions, and exclusionary legislation transform a “strip of nature” into a palimpsest of greed, racism, ecological disregard, and socioeconomic discrimination.

Personally, as I recount in the preface, I am concerned with the illegal and illiberal ways that beaches are restricted in the places I have lived. Theoretically, the book is guided by previous publications on the politics of public space and the production of security spaces that reveal the entanglement of histories, infrastructures, socio-spatial relations, and affects that shape urban places.<sup>3</sup> For instance, multiple mechanisms of securitization—spatial governance through enclosure and surveillance; political governance through laws, regulations, and policing; economic and financial control through security capitalism; and affective atmospheres of fear and anxiety—are necessary to produce “securityscapes.”<sup>4</sup> Beaches are similarly embedded in a tight knot of spatial governmentality (enclosure), political regulation (legislation, access rules, and monitoring), economic control (property ownership and land development), and affective attachments (memories, social relations, and everyday activities). Beaches are also governed by environmental and ecological processes and a distinctive moral order based on dress and demeanor.

What do confrontations over beach use—the various restrictions, justifications, and access conflicts—tell us about contemporary politics? They remind us that coastlines—especially their most coveted parts, sandy beaches—are a reflection, and refraction, of contemporary political and economic struggles.<sup>5</sup> In the most general terms, this book focuses on these struggles especially as they are grounded in a particular time and space—that is, beach “politics.”

Politics, at a conceptual level, are what anthropologists Nancy Postero and Eli Elinoff call the “practices of world-making that proceed through the formulation of constellations of critique, disagreement, difference, and conflict” and are a part of a struggle to live “otherwise.”<sup>6</sup> In their theoretical analysis, everyday politics are embedded in the phenomenology of place-making and embodied space and encourage a lived-experience lens be applied to those who are seeking to remake their worlds.<sup>7</sup> Some contributors employ an embodied and experiential framing through vignettes and interviews with people who talk about why they are involved in fighting for (or against) a beach intervention. These renderings offer a glimpse of the world-making and collective imagining that is part of ongoing beach politics.

French philosopher Jacques Rancière, in contrast, theorizes politics as an emergent process that occurs as actors reconstitute the political community by asserting their claims as legitimate political beings.<sup>8</sup> He argues that “politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted” and notes that this occurs especially when the argument is about the distribution of common lots or communal shares such as the use of a beach.<sup>9</sup> “Politics” according to Rancière is a rupture in the normal distribution of those who exercise power and those who are subject to it.<sup>10</sup> If the principal function of politics is to disclose the world and its subjects as made manifest through dissent, then beach conflicts are indeed “politics” in that they reveal social inequalities at play.<sup>11</sup> Both of these theoretical framings are useful for thinking about beaches as the basis of political transformation, confrontation, and democratic change.

One other theoretical approach to politics is American pragmatist John Dewey’s concern with the dynamics of publicization and his admonition that publicity (making something public) requires an inquiry into an unsettled or disturbed situation.<sup>12</sup> Sociologist Cédric Terzi and environmental psychologist Stéphane Tonnelat take Dewey’s ideas and

apply them to the study of public space, arguing that for a space to become truly public it must be “troubled” to draw attention as a problem to be solved. A problem must be seen to be addressed, or in their terms, “publicized,” and it is through this publicization that a politics of public space emerges.<sup>13</sup> This framing seems particularly useful to the beach conflicts and disputes presented. Although not explicitly referred to in any of the studies, the unsettled shores of beaches offer the visibility and troubles suggested by this theoretical framing.

Over the past fifty years, the privatization and development of public beaches has accelerated with the help of local elites, governmental interventions, and international corporations. Despite this, beaches have not been a focus of study from a public space perspective. What we do know is that when disputes arise, the powers that be often side with private interests and wealthy community members.

As a result, only small portions of the shoreline are available to the public regardless of their legal designation.<sup>14</sup> In most of the United States, for example, the Public Trust Doctrine, a property law from Roman times that became English and colonial US common law, ensures that all tidelands and lands under navigable waters are owned by the state for the benefit of all citizens with certain rights of usage. Private owners are also under an obligation to protect the public interest and not interfere with the public’s rights.<sup>15</sup> But every state has its own history of defining what constitutes the “tidelands,” resulting in a patchwork of regulations for what “holding in trust for the enjoyment of public rights” means. The National Open Beaches Act of 1969 was intended to outlaw “any obstruction, barrier, or restraint of any nature which interferes with the free and unrestricted right of the public . . . to enter, leave, cross or use as a common the public beaches.” But it never passed in US Congress due to arguments that it would lead to overuse—the “tragedy of the commons” argument of the ecologist Garrett Hardin.<sup>16</sup> Hardin argued that if a valuable resource, like a beach, was left for people to use freely it would be overused and its value destroyed.<sup>17</sup>

The Public Trust Doctrine—and its evolution and defense—is only one facet of beach dispossession and exclusion in the United States. To understand the significance of local conflicts requires a broader investigation into the circumstances in which use rights and ownership are contested. In the United States, racial and class dynamics come into play, as

it is often white, wealthy property owners who disregard the law and restrict access to waterfront property regardless of public legal protections.

Similar kinds of duplicity and corruption that disregard national and state laws guaranteeing public access exist globally albeit in other forms and guises. Neoliberal strategies that commodify beach property are employed by private companies and the state in Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. To outline the contours of beach politics more broadly, then, the chapters document a variety of national and state contexts, from Brazil and Argentina in Latin America; Puerto Rico in the Caribbean; South Africa in Africa; Greece, Austria, France, Ireland, and Germany in Europe; Lebanon in the Middle East; and Australia. Within the United States, case studies from California, Connecticut, and New York are included with an emphasis on New York City and Long Island cases.

The contributors to this book, known for their work on public space and social justice, showcase how public beaches are inextricably bound with spatial segregation and enclosure of the commons. As this cross-cultural comparison makes clear, even when shorelines and coastal areas are legally accessible, there remain ways in which people are excluded, dislocated, or dispossessed. Whether vendors in beach towns in Argentina; Black residents in Salvador, Brazil; beach goers in Sydney, Australia; or lake swimmers in the mountains of Northern Austria, there are multiple and widespread barriers to accessibility of the shoreline for all.

Scholars in the humanities, social sciences, and design and planning professions come together in this volume to produce significant resonances and creative synergies that enhance the breadth of the project. Social scientists offer a range of methodologies including long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil, Argentina, and Puerto Rico; auto-ethnography and activist ethnography in New York City; rapid ethnographic assessment procedures (REAP) in Fire Island, Long Island; and multisited ethnography in Mexico and California. Historians utilize archival materials, legislative records, oral histories, expert interviews, and media sources to reconstruct beach use in Connecticut and Dublin. Forgotten photographs and museum exhibitions visually recreate a lakeshore in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Socio-spatial planning analyses in Beirut and mixed methods in Australia, Greece, and Austria document land use and institutional changes. The studies reveal interconnections

in their findings and interpretations despite differing epistemological assumptions. The range of disciplines and methods adds to the book's usefulness and methodological richness.

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This book examines beach politics at two levels: (1) specific beach conflicts occurring at distinct times and places, and (2) more general explorations of the underlying social structures and political institutions. It queries the processes and practices involved in the public's loss of the beach—especially for marginalized peoples. What are the circumstances that allow the enclosure of the beach and restriction of access to what was once a commons? Where and in what situations do these exclusionary strategies occur? How is the denial of public rights justified and rationalized—morally and legally? Contributors address these questions by uncovering contested claims and inequalities that exist in each cultural setting. By examining challenges to existing power structures, they reveal solidarities that resist, repair, and restructure injustice.<sup>18</sup>

The chapters are organized in four parts that correspond to the most frequent strategies and rationales used to deter public beach use in the case studies: (1) governing the beach, (2) shoring up the coastline, (3) racializing the beach, and (4) developing the beach. Each part places a selection of cross-cultural case studies in conversation with one another within the four overarching domains. While these domains overlap and are not mutually exclusive—indeed, many of them are referenced in the same chapter—they provide a useful framework to organize the dialogue and critique.

Part I highlights how policies, laws, regulations, and formal and informal governance systems restrict beach rights often resulting in protest and activism. Part II demonstrates how hardening or changing the water's edge limits public beach and water access leading to various forms of resistance. Part III focuses on visual representations, discourses, imaginaries, and policing of racialized bodies to maintain the beach as a white public space. Part IV characterizes how tourist development restructures who can use the beach, and how commodification takes beaches into the city center where they take on new meanings.

## Part I. Governing the Beach: Policies and Protest

Beaches that were initially considered a commons that everyone could use, or an ignored backwater where poor people lived, changed dramatically in the United States beginning in the 1840s and 1850s, rapidly becoming vacation spots and valuable property throughout the twentieth century. With this increase in economic value, public beach lands were parceled and sold by developers especially along the shoreline of the northeastern United States. In the southern United States, many beach communities were made up of African Americans and Indigenous peoples who moved to what were vacant and marginal coastlands to farm, collect, or fish and build modest homesteads. Their lands were taken—often illegally—with little to no compensation to be used by the state or sold for private development.<sup>19</sup> A case in point is Bruce's Beach, owned by an African American couple who built a beach resort in Manhattan Beach, California. Their property was seized by eminent domain in 1924, and finally returned to the Bruce family ninety-five years later.<sup>20</sup> The extensive privatization and enclosure of beach land was facilitated by inventive legal instruments and collective ownership regimes that circumvented the rights and public claims laid out in the Public Trust Doctrine.

In European, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries, where democratic governments ensure the public's right of beach access, other governance strategies such as master plans and zoning controls, development projects on beaches as amenities for high-end housing, and publicly owned management agencies empowered to sell shoreline property limit public use. In some cases, informal governance negotiations based on visibility, moral values, and social sanctions achieve economic and political goals. In the following cases, attempts at governing the beach sparked demonstrations, unexpected solidarities, and ongoing protests to stop the interventions—sometimes succeeding.

The historian Andrew Kahrl opens with a discussion of the US state institutions and legal mechanisms that enabled white homeowners along the Connecticut shoreline to privatize the beachfront.<sup>21</sup> His history of beach associations in the northeastern United States illuminates how homeowners' demands for exclusivity evolved from deed restrictions against selling to Jewish or Black people and from zoning require-

ments that concealed their underlying political and racist motives.<sup>22</sup> Beach association charters contained prohibitions against “nuisances,” including the presence of nonmembers on land held in common, and the beach. Restricting who could buy property expanded to who could access, swim, walk, or relax there. Residents-only beaches were bolstered by racial discrimination in housing sales and by real estate agents, who refused to show homes to Black buyers. Ultimately the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that towns could not bar access, but other modes of social ordering continue to control public beach use today.<sup>23</sup>

Contemporary disputes over governance also highlight the beach as a politicized terrain where constituencies with diverse interests come together. Anthropologist Matilde Córdoba Azcárate suggests identifying the cultural, scientific, and Indigenous repertoires used to justify rights to access, belonging, mobility, or environmental protection to show how disparate communities can become politically aligned. She focuses on protests generated by a 2018 attempt to fence part of the railroad tracks that give residents illegal access to the beach in Del Mar, Southern California. The transit district was under an obligation to protect the public from high-speed trains that run along the shore, but wealthy residents, environmental conservationists, social justice activists, as well as the California Coastal Commission, and other nonprofit and volunteer associations joined together to contest this infrastructural change.

The seafront spaces in Beirut, Lebanon, are experiencing pressures from tourism and gentrification but also from increasing pollution and loss of heritage in the face of ongoing civil war, governmental collapse, protest, and disorder. Nadine Khayat and Clare Rishbeth, a landscape planner and a landscape architect, respectively, address the increasing fragmentation of access to the beach, one of the few places that older residents and Palestinian and Syrian refugees traditionally use for leisure time and recreation. Based on the voices of users from diverse backgrounds and a range of stakeholder insights, they characterize the governance mechanisms used to gentrify adjoining neighborhoods and beachfront and at the same time abandon the remaining public beach that provoked local demonstrations and protests.

Anthropologist Mariano Perelman examines informal forms of governance on the coast of Argentina by interviewing vendors who strive to self-govern and escape “mafia” control and by following a conflict over

two female beach goers' right to be topless. He employs these divergent ethnographic cases to argue that a particular kind of spatial-temporal configuration emerges in coastal towns during the summer season. This "beach time" is characterized by changes in the moral order and politically amplified by the visibility of bodies—of workers in the first case and topless sunbathers in the second. While the vendors informally manage their self-presentation through spatial restrictions and negotiations to make a living, the topless sunbathing conflict escalated through media attention and became a national protest for gender entitlement and political equity.

Urban studies scholar Sabine Knierbein and architect and urban planner Charis Christodoulou draw on two cases to take a more theoretical approach. Privatization of public beaches and lakeshores is an issue in the Mediterranean (Greece) and in Central Europe (Austria) even though the right to public waters is part of European Union (EU) policy. They view this transformation from a post-political perspective based on the increasingly difficult public access and wider depoliticization of basic rights to enjoy nature. In these EU states, economic development is enabled through EU and national policies and through depoliticized governance arrangements to develop and exploit the beach. The Greek and Austrian cases illustrate how common imaginaries have been appropriated by capitalist interests, facilitated through a post-political condition undermining basic public access rights to enjoy the beach as a public good. This is a defining characteristic of the post-political beach.

## Part II. Shoring up the Coastline: Protection and Resistance

With global warming and climate change, there are devastating storms and the ever-present danger of rising water and loss of land. Especially on beaches made by dredging and shoring up the shoreline with sand, the impending threat of their disappearing completely over the next few decades is conceivable. Risk assessments and cost analyses of the vulnerability of beaches and housing located adjacent to inundation areas are increasing at such a rate that many homeowners and communities can no longer obtain flood or storm insurance. Protecting the shoreline and its adjacent parks, houses, beaches, and other amenities from water damage and flooding is often the rationale for governmental

and private decisions about hardening or building bulwarks based on the economic value and private property rights to be defended. Even while one might agree with the good intentions of protecting a valuable beach front, restoring a boardwalk, or building a jetty or wall to protect and retain the sand, the impact of saving a residence or protecting the shoreline often results in privileging those who own the land and not those who have the right to use the beach. The public loses their rights of access and ability to determine future use because “experts,” often backed by private funding, determine how the environment should be protected.

Geographers Kurt Iveson and Ana Vila-Concejo examine the impact of the 2016 storm that eroded Collaroy-Narrabeen, the most capitalized beachfront in Sydney, Australia, damaging ten homes and collapsing a swimming pool. They address whether the protection of the public beach or of beachfront property should be the goal of public policy as such storms become more frequent in a changing climate. What is unusual about the Sydney case is that historically the local government had gradually begun to buy back at-risk private properties so that they could be removed and sand dunes restored. But Collaroy-Narrabeen property owners successfully pushed for a different resolution, one that involved the construction of a privately funded, state-approved seven-meter-tall seawall. The publicness of the beach was compromised by this deferential treatment of private property in the city’s environmental adaptation strategies.

On Long Island, New York, tensions over how to protect a fragile ecology and the eighteen seasonal beach communities at Fire Island National Seashore plague the National Park Service (NPS) administration and local rangers. Protecting the shoreline with its sand migration, dune erosion, and breaches due to storms in a manner that serves summer residents’ requirements of stable ground and property lines is antithetical to the NPS mission. The National Seashore’s mandate to maintain and interpret the natural cycles of the barrier island system comes into direct conflict with residents and property owners who want to stabilize these forces. Environmental psychologist Dana Taplin provides a unique glimpse into the backstory of this contested space through ethnographic interviews with NPS employees who try to fulfill their institutional goals, even taking on their own environmental campaigns, and

with residents who tell stories of the old days and believe they know what is best for the island.

After Superstorm Sandy, New York City opened a competition to redesign East River Park to withstand rising sea levels due to climate change. Lower East Side community gardeners, public space supporters, artists, designers, academics, environmental scientists, and some twenty-six community groups came together to initiate a dialogue. The result was the creation of a “consensus plan” that would preserve the park and prepare for flooding. Late in the process, the city rejected the consensus plan and favored a 2.4-mile seawall that would raise the park and pave it with artificial turf for ballfields, removing the trees and community space. Social worker Benjamin Heim Shepard’s recounting of the grassroots fight to retain the consensus plan illustrates how the imposition of environmental engineering strategies to protect the Lower East Side excluded current users and local community participation and concerns.

### Part III. Racializing the Beach: Inequality and Erasure

Racialization of the beach occurs through forced removal, discursive strategies, collective property regimes, and representational erasure. Unlike environmental or economic justifications, defending whiteness is only acceptable when cloaked in layers of obfuscation, disbelief, and misdirection. It is hard to characterize the beach politics of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil without discussing the racism that underlies whatever strategy is used to restrict entry, ownership, or use. The privileging of whiteness and the erasure of Black bodies is particularly salient for understanding how racialization is produced but also struggled against by grassroots activists and home communities.

The impact of Hurricane Sandy in 2012 generated a cascade of procedures to protect local beaches, but these strategies of storm mitigation and beach redevelopment also reinforced a “racial coastal formation.” Drawing upon long-term research on Rockaway, Queens, environmental psychologist Bryce DuBois and urban planner Lee Graham reveal how the post-Sandy Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency (SIRR) continued the displacement of predominantly Black residents that began in the 1950s–1960s due to urban renewal. The SIRR emphasized getting New Yorkers back to the beach as a symbol of the city bouncing

back and focused on rebuilding the boardwalk. These benefits did not extend eastward, where Black residents suffered from the inundation from Jamaica Bay that filled basements with water, damaged housing, and produced disease-causing mold and contamination. The emphasis on the boardwalk ignored the damaged living spaces of Black residents in the adjacent low-income and public housing.

Geographer Natasha Howard explores another avenue for understanding how recreational space was racialized and white privilege preserved in Albuquerque, New Mexico. By analyzing photographs of Tingley Beach, a human-made lake popular from the 1930s through the 1950s, she uncovers the formation of a white spatial imagery present in a contemporary museum exhibit, the city's website, and the Albuquerque Museum photo archive. She argues that the photographs are a socially constructed history that memorializes a singularly white representation of the beach. The rich archive of photos, film, and other ephemera offer no documentation of Black visitors, even though there was a Black community not far from the beach. Howard theorizes that claims to representation are spatial claims to belonging. Not acknowledging the ways whiteness shaped the spatial history of the beach is the work of racial erasure, another kind of dispossession based on representational amnesia and collective memory distortions.

Social psychologist Kevin Durrheim traces the history of white South African beach goers through four stages of defending settler whiteness in Durban, South Africa. He argues that whiteness is strongly tied to privilege that bestows advantages on white-classified people. As beaches became spaces of vacationing and leisure, they also became an important symbolic anchor for white entitlement. With the end of apartheid, the racial hegemony and segregation of the beach crumbled, challenging white people's sense of worthiness and eliciting rage and shame. Durrheim studies this historical transition through the discursive strategies employed to express and defend white superiority and political subjectivity.

Anthropologist Keisha-Khan Perry's ethnography of the dispossession of Black coastal communities in Salvador, Brazil, pivots between the terror of forcible removal of beachside communities to make way for luxury apartments and restaurants and the solidarity of Gamboa activists fighting to retain their homes. She uncovers discursive strategies in

this struggle, observing that initially, Gamboa de Baixo families did not know that they lived in “a coveted paradise” on the coastlands of the Bay of All Saints. Once the beach lands became valuable, residents began to take their “paradise” more seriously, battling developers and police to resist displacement. A similar “right to paradise” struggle is underway along the Garifuna coast in Honduras, where claims of Indigenous Blackness are the basis of defending land and autonomy.<sup>24</sup>

#### Part IV. Developing the Beach: Tourism, Activism, and Regulation

Promoting urban development and tourism through the commodification of beach land to increase its economic value for national and global projects is a central theme of the beach literature. Matilde Córdoba Azcárate’s ethnography, *Stuck with Tourism*, Waleed Hazbun’s account, *Beaches, Ruins, and Resorts*, as well as Sarah Stodola’s personal chronicle, *The Last Resort*, document the social and ecological devastation of beach development on local cultures and peoples.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary studies of the private takeover of local beaches for tourism in Puerto Rico; sporting activities such as golf courses, rifle ranges, horse races, and hunting in Dublin, Ireland; and the production of artificial beaches across Europe emphasize the solidarities and growing political awareness occasioned by these development activities with differing outcomes.

Anthropologist Katherine McCaffrey focuses on sovereignty and opposition to unchecked development in her study of beach conflicts and protests in Puerto Rico. She draws on her previous research on Vieques Island’s gentrification and military displacement to focus on the relentless transformation of the beachfront into exclusive hotels and tourist destinations.<sup>26</sup> The dream of living along the shore, collecting seashells, and fishing, is replaced with a multipronged fight for self-governance and a sustainable future. McCaffrey ends her story by highlighting twenty-five years of confrontations between environmental activists, politicians, and various hospitality companies including Marriott, the Normandie Hotel, and the Paseo Caribe over the development rights to coastal beach lands.

Historian Paul Rouse writes that Dollymount Strand and Bull Island on Dublin Bay historically offered urban dwellers a place of leisure and recreation because of their proximity to the city center. The unique location

and habitat were initially used for sea swimming and as a seaside resort but later became a place for organized sports. With the establishment of golf as a sporting world, wealthy landowners bought existing royal land to construct two golf courses in the dunes, altering the physical landscape and installing fencing that marked it as private property. With Bull Island's designation as a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 1981, the tension between its ecological and leisure uses generated enough public protest that in 1994 the Dublin City Council declared that no development of any significance could be undertaken without permission except for the two privately deeded golf courses. But even with this protection, there remains tension between the beach publics—nature lovers, sports enthusiasts, and pleasure seekers—who continue to have conflicts about appropriate beach use today.

The value of beaches has not gone unnoticed by governments and private entrepreneurs who see the benefit of having beaches available in cities as an alternative form of recreational and consumption space. Urban designer Quentin Stevens describes an array of artificial beaches in Germany and France and examines how they are developed, their problems and politics, and whether they offer the various kinds of rights that define spatial control. Stevens points out that the flexibility, limited time frame, and ease of mobility of artificial beaches means they can occupy urban edges and leftover or deteriorating spaces that otherwise would be overlooked, adding value where there was none. But at the same time, artificial beaches can be used to loosen planning controls or become part of a waterfront redevelopment strategy for upmarket housing to spur further gentrification. Waterfront parks and beaches in the United States such as at Hudson River Park in Manhattan, Brooklyn Bridge Park in Brooklyn, and the just-opened riverfront park in Memphis, Tennessee, are examples of this shoreline development strategy.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

Beaches and other waterfronts are beloved by people for their recreational, environmental, and work opportunities. Indeed, hanging out, fishing, and collecting along the shore of a body of water are some of the most ubiquitous human activities. Yet, as this volume documents, in communities across the United States and around the world, there is

an alarming trend of restricting access to public sections of the beach to ensure that waterfront property owners or tourists are the only ones able to access the shoreline.

Several cross-cutting themes emerge from the collective research findings.<sup>28</sup>

1. Community conflicts and interventions are often the result of coastal engineering and urban development that reshape the social relationships of key actors and the socio-racialized space of beaches.
2. Emergent moral economies and moral orders are created through beach conflicts and disputes co-opting the existing system and reframing it in such a way that beach exclusivity and exclusion are deemed acceptable and socially just.
3. Collective memories are represented and retained differentially depending on discursive, visual, and symbolic practices. When collective memories are repressed or erased, it reduces a sense of place attachment or belonging, enabling beach loss—both materially and metaphorically.
4. Law and policy play a critical role in the structuring of what is perceived as crime and the process of criminalization. The illegal activities of those in power are hidden or abetted by the legal and regulation system while protest activities and public use are criminalized.
5. Political action and discourse function in relation to existing laws and policies. Individuals, companies, and governments tactically implement, fail to implement, or break existing laws and policies by exploiting jurisdictional ambiguities.
6. The geophysical and material environment is a sociopolitical stage for the enactment of beach struggles but is also an actor to the degree to which the beach becomes valuable as an economic resource.
7. The transition of the beach from use value to exchange value within capitalist economies is a major factor in the transformation of the beach from a public space to a commodity and coveted property. In this transition, the beach is reconstituted from its origins as a commons with public rights to a regulated territory (property) with limited rights of use and access.

These themes suggest new research directions, theoretical perspectives, and focused publications. The hope is they provoke lively discussion and political action to save our beaches—and understand why they must be saved—for the future.

## NOTES

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- 17 The “overuse of the commons” argument is less frequently employed today, and private property claims have become more salient and important.
- 18 Twenty years ago, I found the rationalizations of why people live in gated communities helpful in uncovering the fear, racism, financial insecurity, and economic incentives behind their decisions.
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- 23 Adam Keul, “The Fantasy of Access: Neoliberal Ordering of a Public Beach,” *Political Geography* 48 (2015): 49–59.
- 24 Christopher A. Loperena, *The Ends of Paradise: Race, Extraction, and the Struggle for Black Life in Honduras* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023). See also Ulrich Oslender, *The Geographies of Social Movements: Afro-Colombian Mobilization and the Aquatic Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
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- 28 I would like to thank the manuscript reviewer for the insights discussed in the conclusion.

