

Yipster Gentrification of Weird, White *Portlandia*

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Abstract

Advertised locally by a citywide mantra of “Keep Portland Weird” and reinforced nationally by the *Portlandia* television series, Portland, Oregon, is touted as a hip and creative metropolis. Although the city may feature artistic diversity, actual demographics of Portland highlight a stark deficiency in ethno-racial diversity: Portland is among the United States’ whitest cities. Within this context, gentrification that began in the 1990s has led to the displacement of an African American population from its historic roots in Northeast Portland—the site, not uncoincidentally, of many of the Fred Armisen- and Carrie Brownstein-led comedy skits. Taking *Portlandia* as a work that shapes meanings toward social/racial justice issues like gentrification in its onscreen representation of Portland, we argue in this paper that the show, in bolstering Portland’s national reputation for whiteness/weirdness, contributes to the marginalization of a nonwhite gentrified populace by normalizing, yea valorizing, decidedly privileged white patterns of consumption.

Introduction: “Keep Portland Weird”

PORTLAND, OREGON, IS widely recognized for not only its livability, but also its progressive politics, socially responsible business practices, and environmentally sustainable policies. Reinforced by the nationally televised comedy program *Portlandia*, the city is touted as “hip and creative” (Moon 2013, 1), its populace defined by an affinity for “all things independent” and driven by the mantra “Keep Portland Weird” (Turnquist 2010, 1). Amid the putative tolerance and creative diversity lacing the cool cultural confines of Portland, demographics indicate a striking deficiency in ethno-racial diversity. With the 2010 census reporting the city population as 76.1 percent white and 6.3 percent black or African American, Portland is “America’s ultimate white city” (Renn 2009). In a context of Portland’s overall whiteness, gentrification—a varied set of processes that modify a neighborhood’s character and composition, culminating in the “direct and indirect displacement of lower income households with higher income households” (Papachristos et al. 2011, 216)—has contributed to the displacement of an already small African

American population from its historic roots in neighborhoods dotting the city's North/Northeast side, where the share of black Portlanders dropped from 31 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2010. The ousting of a marginalized group, at least partially undermining Portland's pretensions to be a bastion of social/racial justice, provides a foundation for the following preliminary, foundational assertion: *Portlandia*, the television comedy series set and filmed in its namesake metropolis, provides a lens through which varied dynamics associated with gentrification within Northeast Portland can be interrogated and better understood.

In *Portlandia*'s inaugural episode, its cast hails the city as a place where “young people go to retire.” Indeed, the displacement of African Americans from NE Portland, where a significant portion of the show's skits take place, has been accompanied by increased percentages of eighteen- to thirty-four-year-olds. The young, white gentrifiers form the face of Portland *hipsterism*—connoting a subculture group linked to fetishization of “scarcity, uniqueness, authenticity, and individualism” alongside non-conformist consumption sensibilities—as well as *yuppiedom*—connoting young, upwardly mobile professionals who are comparatively wealthy, predominantly white, educated, and materialistic in consumer spending (Eriksson 2006, 9; Portland Development Commission 2001). We henceforth refer to this gentrifying “creative class” (Florida 2002; 2012), to the extent that it combines traits of yuppies and hipsters, as *yipsters*.

Through an investigation of *Portlandia*'s portrayal of yipster lifestyles, we show how “reel” urban representations are imbricated with a “real” Portland (Aitken and Dixon 2006, 327). The reel refers to the “cinematic city” of the show's onscreen images of Portland. The real, in contrast, appertains to the real-life “concrete city” upon which *Portlandia* is based (Da Costa 2003, 192). With the reel-real relationship in mind, an aim of this paper is to provide insight into how *Portlandia*'s depictions of yipsterism, whiteness, and weirdness help to crystallize dominant meanings toward gentrified spaces and their predominant present (younger whites) and past (older nonwhites) occupants. More specifically, we investigate how *Portlandia*'s representations of whiteness and weirdness (e.g., creativity, coolness, artisanship, anti-establishment attitudes, etc.) serve to bolster—and to hide—processes of gentrification in NE Portland. Drawing on traditions in radical and filmic geography,¹ we employ textual analysis to show that *Portlandia* plays an important role in constructing Portland's reputation as a weird and white place; and in the process of glorifying yipster lifestyles and consumption habits, the comedy series actively contributes to further socio-spatial mar-

ginalization of nonwhites by normalizing NE Portland as a “white space” at the expense of the neighborhood's nonwhite legacy and remaining black residents, and enforcing the “white ideal” of consumer capitalism (Atkinson 2011, 112; Burnett and Bush 1986).

Portlandia's filmic landscapes, broadcast to nearly 70 million homes in the United States (TV by the Numbers 2013), are not innocent, objective reflections of some quirky, hip place. No, they form a *work*—a product of “human labor that encapsulates the dreams, desires, the locations of the people and social systems that make it” (Aitken and Dixon 2006, 330)—that *does work*—acts as a “social agent in the further development of a place” (Ibid.)—by conveying an aspirational, yuppie-hipster lifestyle. In spotlighting whiteness as a module of the yipster lifestyle symbolically tied to the pleasures of a consumption-laden identity, *Portlandia* is an ideologically charged social agent that does work to shape meanings and consequences—pointedly unshown in the show—that gentrification holds for a gentrified populace of working-class nonwhites in NE Portland.

Representation, Cinema, and the City

The concept of representation figures in the most powerful engagements in filmic geography studies of the relationship between the cinematic city and concrete city (i.e., *Portlandia* vs. Portland) (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2011). Understood as a description or portrayal of someone or something as being of a specific nature, representation is at the core of scientific practice, intrinsic to geographic research, and is even seen as a summarization of the “whole process of knowledge production” itself (Söderström 2011, 11). The field of geography is inherently involved in the act of representation (Gren 1994). In effect, the discipline bears the world as it is experienced or understood and proceeds to represent this world as images defined within the interweaving categories of written, oral, and/or visual mediums (Gomez 2010; Gren 1994). Film content such as *Portlandia*, comprising text that can be read, combines visual and oral aspects through both moving images and sound film/audio.

In looking at *Portlandia*'s portrayal of whiteness, weirdness, and yipsterism, our examination of representation first draws on literature concerned with “alternative representations of the city” that emerged in the 1970s with radical geography (Söderström 2011, 13). Amid a broader “crisis of representation” in the 1960s and 1970s, when the notion of knowledge as the “assemblage of accurate representation” came under attack, the seminal works of Harvey (1973) and Bunge (1971) revealed how geographical representations carry with them a distinctly ideological character. In this paper, we show that

Portlandia, though positioned as an innocuous (if ironic) comedy series, is steeped in a white consumer-capitalist ideology that contributes to further socio-spatial marginalization of nonwhites.

The insight that representations are ideology-laden brings up the question of power. Söderström (2011) asserts that spatial representations are often privileged in that they are primarily representative of the interests of the powerful, of upper-class elites. Turning here to our case study, at least three pertinent questions arise: First, who in *Portlandia* has the power to produce representations of Portland? Second, who and what are being represented? And third, who is denied representation in the show? Regarding the former two inquiries, *Portlandia*'s economically elite producers represent objects (the "what") and subjects (the "who") of (1) gentrified spaces and their newly acquired establishments (e.g., quirky coffee shops, artisan knot stores) and (2) the gentrifying group (though not identified as such in the show)—in the case of Northeast Portland: the yipsters. To address the latter query, *Portlandia*, especially in its earliest seasons, ignores a gentrified populace of NE Portland, namely African American and other nonwhites who are almost completely unrepresented in what until relatively recently was viewed in the real city as a black space. This denial in representation is tantamount to whitewashing, erasing a geographically specific nonwhite history. Portland is normalized as a white space, reinforcing dominant ideals of consumer capitalism through a glorification of privileged yipster consumption habits. *Portlandia*'s representations serve a dual purpose of ignoring the gentrified and glorifying the gentrifiers, which contributes to marginalizing effects of the neighborhood-changing processes of gentrification in NE Portland.

Much like early radical geographers Bunge (1971) and Harvey (1973) explored urban realities not yet represented by mainstream cultural geography as lenses to understand representations of social and racial justice (e.g., Bunge's examination of the ideologies of spaces of death and power-driven machines in Fitzgerald, a small, integrated neighborhood in 1960s Detroit), *Portlandia* herein is used to understand the relationship between a national television series and social/racial justice issues regarding NE Portland's quarter century of gentrification. Critically reading *Portlandia*'s representations of gentrified spaces, whiteness, and weirdness as facets intrinsic to yipster consumption, we analyze how the ideological character and social/cultural embeddedness of this TV series' works—its filmic landscapes and depicted characters (i.e., yipsters)—act as social agents which do work through value-loaded meaning creation per NE Portland (Aitken and Dixon 2006).

Yuppiedom + Hipsterism = Yipstersim

The term *yipster*, a neologism blending *yuppie* and *hipster*, characterizes much of Northeast Portland's gentrifying class. *Yuppies*—young, upwardly mobile professionals—refers to a predominantly white, college-educated demographic defined by materialist consumption patterns directly allowed for by their generally high-earning jobs (Belk 1983; Burnett and Bush 1986; Guthman 2003; Hammond 1986). And hipsters, the other half of the composition, refers to a marketable contemporary subculture that Kiran (2013, 1) defines as "young, semi-affluent, semi-artsy, semi-ironic, and often white, though it is by no means confined to white people" with attitudes, tastes, and values driven by a fetishization of the "authentic" (Lorentzen 2007). Chief actors in the gentrification of Northeast Portland—which, again, goes unaddressed in the show—yipsters account for most every human representation of any significance in *Portlandia*; by comparison, the gentrified populace of working-class nonwhites is, for all intents and purposes, invisible.

Burnett and Bush (1986, 27–35) assign yuppies six behavioral/personality traits: concern for personal health; use of convenience products and services; confidence, optimism, and unemotionality; travel and relocation; positive attitudes toward advertising; and concern for achieving success and acquiring material possessions. The latter of these traits—concern for material wealth—is particularly pertinent here. Yuppiedom is the yipsterism facet most exemplified in the group's propensity to indulge in luxury items (e.g., organic food, conscious clothing, paintings, cars, etc.), which Guthman (2003) notes are beyond both the "economic and cultural" reach of price-conscious non-yuppies such as the gentrified populace of working-class nonwhites. In an examination of the growth in the organic food ("yuppie chow") industry within both geographic and historical contexts, Guthman further suggests that the success of the organic food industry is wrapped up with gentrification—yuppies, she contends, drive organic food consumption by maintaining "a keener interest in the constituent ingredients of food" as they gentrify neighborhoods in cities such as San Francisco (2003, 54). Therefore, highlighting a class divide in consumption habits—yuppies vs. non-yuppies (likened to *Portlandia*'s gentrifying yipsters vs. gentrified non-yipsters)—yuppies acquire, in a seemingly endless manner, material possessions and luxury items as status symbols, with little regard for price (Burnett and Bush 1986; Guthman 2003).

The yipster combines traditional yuppiedom with the attitudes, tastes, and values of hipsters, who are described by Eriksson and Grétarsdóttir in their study of hipster consumption as a subculture group linked with "bohemian-

ism and postmodern lifestyle” (2006, 4). Hipsters are often associated with indie/alternative music, progressive and/or independent political views, alternative lifestyles, and non-mainstream consumption sensibilities that ostensibly counter norms of conformity (Eriksson and Grétarsdóttir 2006; Herbert 2013; Kellogg 2013). Central to the hipster subculture is self-representation that invokes calculated consumption of fashion, media, and food that “fetishizes the authentic” (Eriksson and Grétarsdóttir 2006, 9; see also Lorentzen 2007; Perry 2013). Evocative of yuppie materialism as class status (Burnett and Bush 1986), hipsterism likewise emphasizes consumerism but with an eye trained on “scarcity, uniqueness, authenticity, and individualism” (Eriksson and Grétarsdóttir 2006, 4).

The Real City: Gentrification in Northeast Portland

Gentrification, which has transformed Northeast Portland—the city’s historically black area—since the 1990s, is defined by Papachristos et al. as a set of processes that alter the “character and composition” of a neighborhood, resulting in the “direct and indirect displacement of lower income households with higher income households” (2011, 216). The processes of gentrification are associated with sharply increased median household incomes, spiking property values, and newfound “presence of lifestyle amenities” that appeal to the tastes of wealthier residents (Papachristos et al. 2011, 216–219).

The Oregonian, Portland’s foremost newspaper, has highlighted the uptick of gentrifying amenity establishments that have changed the face of Northeast Portland. A 2016 piece stated that NE neighborhoods along North Williams/North Vancouver avenues, “once home to black businesses and clubs, are now the site of construction cranes and trendy restaurants” (Theen 2016). Another article characterized the 2013 opening of New Seasons (a natural foodstuffs grocer depicted in season one, episode three of *Portlandia*) on Williams Avenue, and the arrival of Salt & Straw on Alberta Street in 2011, as factors contributing to the “transformation of North and Northeast Portland” (Suo 2014). An upscale ice-cream shop hawking artisan “farm-to-cone” ice cream with unorthodox flavors (e.g., bone marrow, foie gras, oatmeal raisin cream pie, etc.), Salt & Straw purportedly “reeks of Portland” and, as such, is tailored to the yipster gentrifier’s consumption palette, exemplifying a class of amenity businesses that have remade the city’s northeast (Salt & Straw 2018). Against this backdrop, as we explore below, *Portlandia* is populated by representations of other such lifestyle amenities that cater to yipsters in its depiction of businesses such as gourmet grocery markets, specialty art/craft supply stores, and coffeeshops.

The booming artisan economy, fueled by amenity and luxury item-oriented consumption values associated with yipster gentrifiers, takes place alongside the disappearance of local manufacturing industries employing a predominantly nonwhite working class (Drew 2012). As such, gentrified spaces in cities like Portland have become increasingly governed by an urban neighborhood culture that Lloyd (2002) calls “neo-bohemia,” wherein culture, likened to a latte purchased from a coffeeshop, is available to be “consumed” as if a commodity. Scrutinizing cultural production and consumption in the context of NE Portland’s gentrifying Alberta Street commercial district, Shaw (2005) found that residents participate in the neo-bohemian culture in varying manners. Particularly pertinent to arguments presented in this research, specifically that *Portlandia* acts to normalize a consumerist culture of a particular inflection, analysis of Shaw’s interview data revealed that long-time black residents interpreted the arriviste neo-bohemian culture as both racialized and productive of decidedly white cultural space (2005, 75–86).

To frame the historic and geographic setting of the NE Portland neighborhoods impacted by the processes of gentrification, Figure 1 displays the Willamette River’s division of the city into neighborhood quintants: North, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, and Northwest. NE Portland—the city’s historic African American community center since the 1930s (Moreland 1993; Moreland 2013)—has experienced gentrification that, beginning in

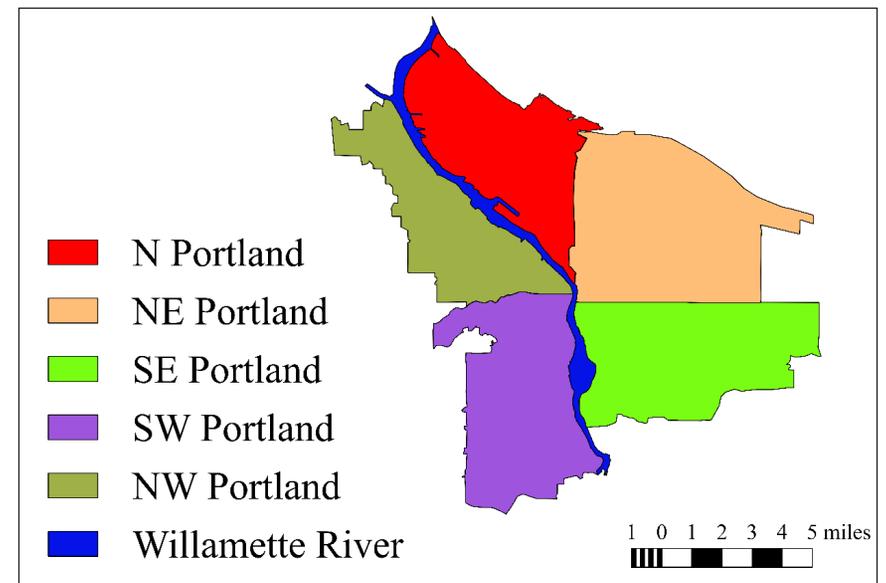


Figure 1.—Neighborhood quintants of Portland. (Eric Fowler map)

the 1990s, has fundamentally changed its character and composition by shifting the area's demographics from predominantly older black/working class residents to younger white/middle- and upper-class residents, i.e., yipsters (Coffman et al. 2007).

A dramatic shift in race demographics is illustrated in the series of maps displayed in Figure 2 that are based on 1990, 2000, and 2010 US Census data for inner North/Northeast tracts bounded by North Greeley Avenue, North Dwight Avenue, North and Northeast Columbia Boulevard, Northeast 33rd Avenue, and Interstate 84. Even a cursory perusal of the maps reveals a steady retreat in the black share of the area. In 1990, African Americans accounted for 50 to 80 percent of Albina's residents, and from nearly one-third to one-half of the population in neighboring areas. By 2000, though its overall complexion had noticeably lightened, NE Portland retained a significant degree of its historical black identity. This was true especially in Albina, a central NE neighborhood that was home to "17 percent of Portland's total population but 39 percent of the total people of color in the city," and most of the people of color were African Americans (Coffman et al. 2007, 7). But the pressures of rising rents and skyrocketing properties were palpable; the average home value in the area surrounding Martin Luther King Avenue (a prominent Albina street) rose "approximately 161 percent between 1993 and 2003, compared to a Portland citywide increase of 105 percent" (Coffman et al. 2007, 27). With these forces of gentrification, the African American population in the thirteen census tracts surrounding MLK Avenue dropped from 45 percent to 36 percent of the total population between 1990 and 2000 (Coffman et al. 2007).

By 2010, after nearly two decades of gentrification, N/NE Portland had become dominated by whites. And not just any. It had become dominated by young whites (see Table 1). The yipsters had arrived, displacing the older, the nonwhite, the unfortunately unhip. Observers have characterized the gentrification of NE Portland as harrowing, unjust, and even cruel (see, e.g., Bodenner 2016; Savitch-Lew 2016; Semuels 2016). However, the makers of the best-known representation of the city, *Portlandia*, assist in normalizing and thereby exacerbating the impacts of NE Portland's gentrification through glorification of decidedly white yipster consumer lifestyles and consumer spaces.

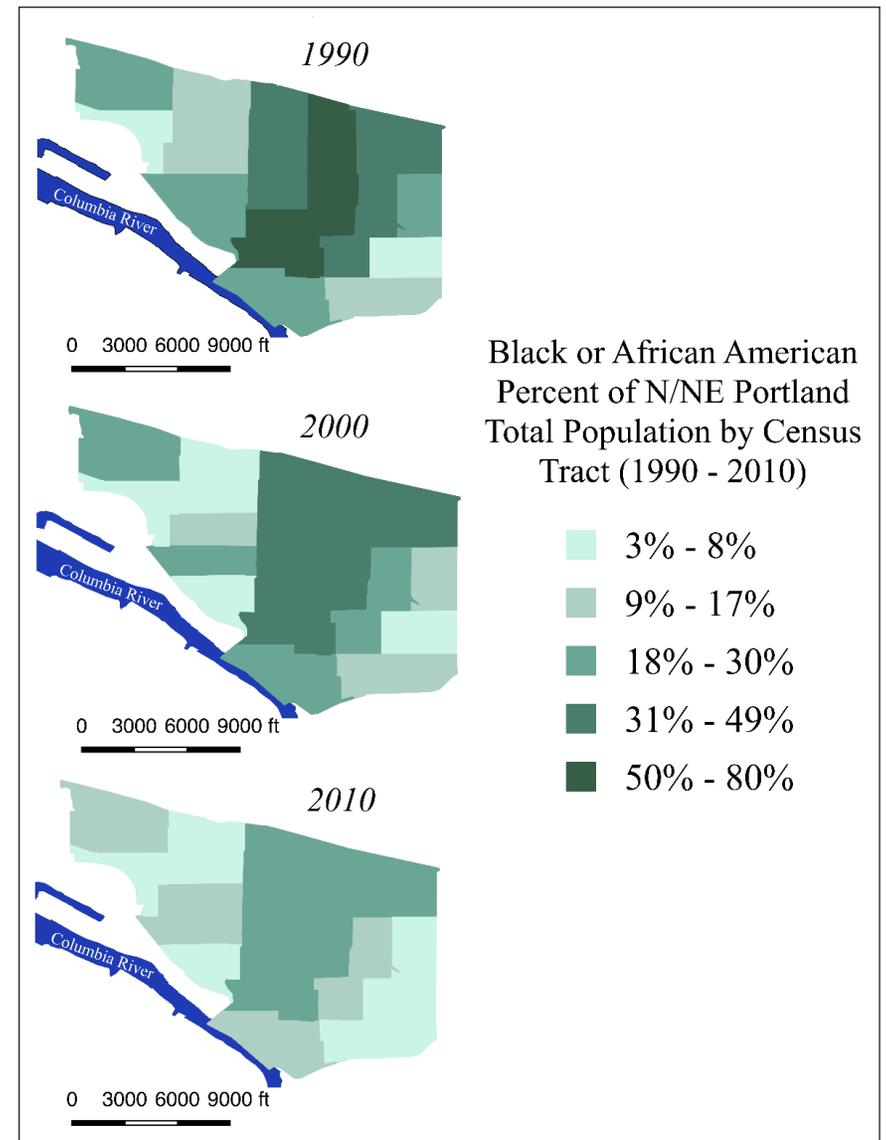


Figure 2.—Shifting race demographics associated with gentrification in N/NE Portland census tracts for 1990, 2000, and 2010. (Eric Fowler maps; data by Portland Housing Bureau 2014)

Table 1.—Changes in black or African American population, percentage of 18- to 34-year-olds in N/NE Portland, 1990, 2000, and 2010. (Portland Development Commission 2001; Portland Housing Bureau 2014)

Year	Percentage of blacks or African Americans in N/NE Portland	Percentage of population of 18- to 34-year-olds in N/NE Portland
1990	31%	27.6%
2000	25%	29.2%
2010	15%	33%

The Reel City: Representing Yipster Consumption

In the face of the gentrification described above, nonwhite residents in North/Northeast Portland neighborhoods like Albina have been increasingly ousted by influxes of gentrifying yipsters. Yet the area clingingly remains home to relatively high numbers (for Portland) of black residents, retaining at least a modicum of its distinctly nonwhite cultural legacy. One would not know it watching *Portlandia*. Fred Armisen (of *Saturday Night Live* fame) and Carrie Brownstein (of the cult rock band Sleater-Kinney), the series' lead actors and writers, star in comedy skits that playfully mock a range of Portland archetypes, the city-defining characters identifiable by the would-be weirdness and palpable whiteness of their activities.

Let's take examples from *Portlandia*'s opening season. There's the annoyingly earnest yuppie couple who, dining at a yipster restaurant (winkingly named Gilt), are so concerned about the ethics of the poultry's upbringing that they, prior to ordering said chicken, insist on personally visiting the source farm, where, upon their arrival, they fall under the spell of boho-hunk farmer (played by guest star Jason Sudeikis) and subsequently become members of his sex cult. Then there are the passive-aggressive feminists who operate Women & Women First Bookstore (see Figure 3), exhibiting little interest in hawking their wares and instead intent on expressing opposition to all things patriarchy. There are the cloying crafters who, driven by the dictum to "put a bird on it," claim to transform everyday objects into urban folk art (see Figure 4). And there are the young professionals who, posturing rebellion against mainstream consumption patterns, prepare meals and attire themselves with the spoils—the gourmet throwaways you'd of course find in a progressive Portland dustbin—of dumpster diving.

And so on in this vein. You get the picture: quirkiness the target, privilege the arrow.



Figure 3.—Screenshot from "Women & Women First" skit (season one, episode six), *Portlandia*.



Figure 4.—Screenshot from "Put a Bird on It!" skit (season one, episode two), *Portlandia*.

Conspicuous—despite the carefully crafted ironic distance—consumption of the type described in a preceding section (re: yipster-oriented lifestyle amenities, i.e., superfluous) is a common denominator that undergirds the wannabe-weirdness enacted on *Portlandia*. The show's skit-based hijinks are also held together by a second common denominator: whiteness. If the inherent racialization of the action depicted in *Portlandia* were not obvious enough, we invite the viewer to peruse the pale countenances. Returning

to season one, Brownstein and Armisen are joined by a supporting cast (featuring a lineup deep in yipster-darling—vaguely edgy, well-known to a certain audience, but, of course, not *too* big—guest stars) that is glaringly white. Based on our viewing, the sole clearly nonwhite character permitted voice in the first season of *Portlandia* is the cellular phone sales associate (played by guest star Kumail Nanjiani) who, in episode four, overwhelms Fred and Carrie with calling-plan options and *gratis* ironic sunglasses.

Even though a preponderance of skits is set in Northeast Portland, again, home to the city's historic black neighborhoods, not a single black character is given a voice on season one of *Portlandia*. The circumstances under which black faces are represented—during the first season occurring in only two skits—are telling. Black Portlanders first appear when, in episode four, the off-kilter-of-course mayor (played in a reoccurring role by guest star Kyle MacLachlan) mysteriously goes missing. Carrie and Fred scour the city in search of the leader. When finally finding the mayor, in a neighborhood bar in Northwest Portland, they discover his “dark secret”: He moonlights as a soul patch-wearing bass player in an otherwise all-African American “real roots reggae” band (see Figure 5). Scandal ensues, and the mayor comes out as “openly reggae.” The gag is decidedly not intended to bring some focus to a place's black heritage, set as it is in Northwest rather than Northeast Portland and depriving all nonwhites of any voice. Rather, the point here is to elevate the political figurehead's quirkiness through the posited ran-



Figure 5.—Screenshot from “Mayor is Missing” skit (season one, episode four), *Portlandia*.

domness (re: nonwhite) of his secret act. Portland's weirdness is bolstered in the process of underlining the mayor's whiteness.

(By the way, the only other skit in season one of *Portlandia* to feature a black Portlander occurs in the sixth and final episode, when Fred and Carrie are charged by the mayor to field a professional baseball team. The sole African American recruit appears briefly and, like the reggae musicians before him, is denied voice.)

Portlandia's representations of what fundamentally are patterns of yipster consumption, as we've intimated, take place against a variegated local geography. Each skit generally is introduced with locational information, usually including the city quintant and sometimes the street(s) where the action takes place (see Figure 6). The purpose here for the makers of the series is to establish *bona fides*, an aura of authenticity. This device, however, is but an illusion of urban intimacy, one that lacks any real sense of social-spatial history. Gauging *Portlandia* as a work in its portrayal of Portland's people/places/spaces (Aitken and Dixon 2006, 330), the sample of skit locations presented in Figure 7 outlines a section of the geographic distribution of the show's cinematic landscapes located specifically within the Northeast neighborhood quintant of Portland. The aim of this graphic is to frame the geographic realism of *Portlandia*.² Given the range of NE Portland spaces depicted in this program over its first three seasons, a purposive sampling method guided the selection of in-show locations set in this area because



Figure 6.—Screenshot from skit opening (season one, episode two), *Portlandia*, with locational information.

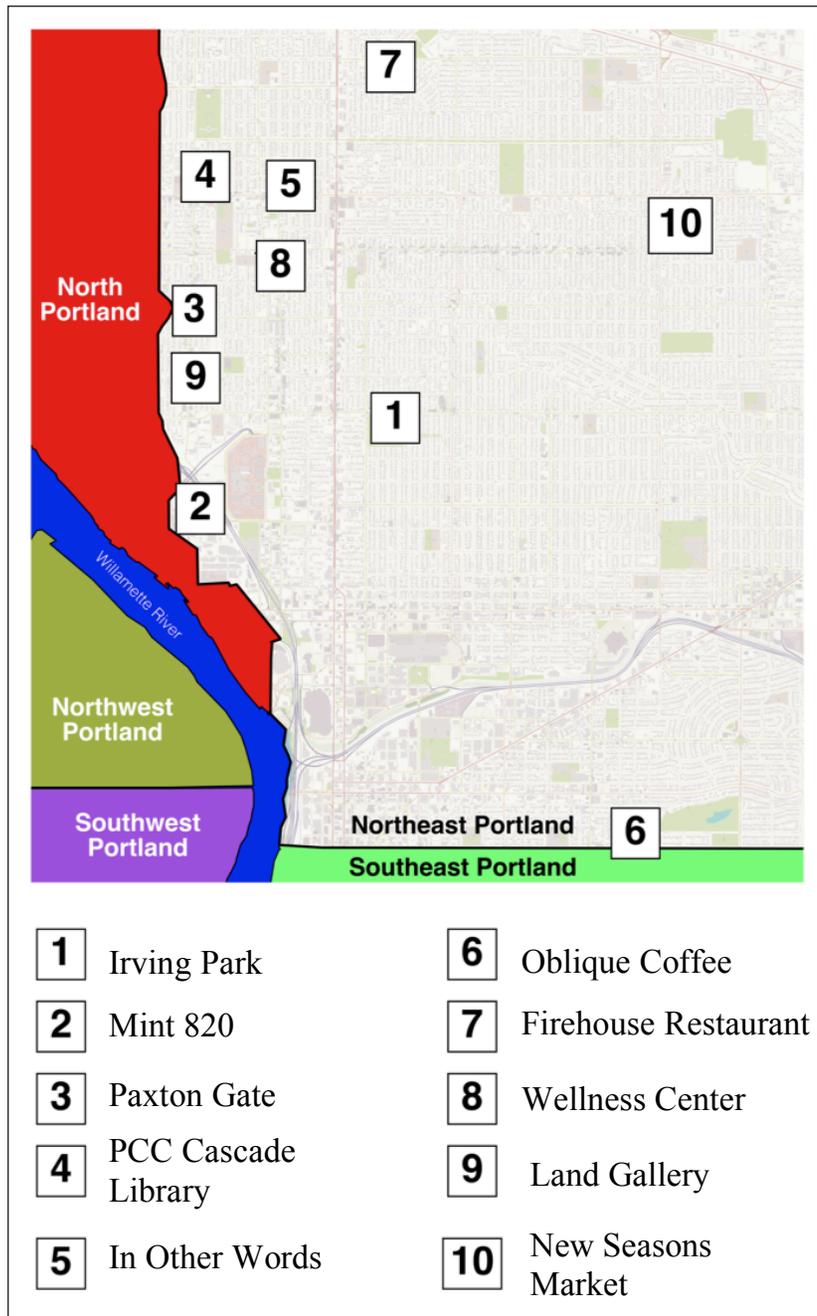


Figure 7.—Geographic distribution of ten NE Portland locales depicted in *Portlandia*. (Eric Fowler map)

this method is suited particularly well for interpretive qualitative research (e.g., filmic geography, textual analysis) and befits finding a “closely defined group for whom the research question(s) will be significant” (Smith 2007, 56). Our purposeful sample was therefore chosen because of how its included locales’ onscreen representations are seen to be collectively focused toward emphasizing the weirdness, whiteness, and yipsterism of Portland’s nationally perceived image.

Appealing to a customer base of high-income urban elites, amenity establishments (e.g., artisan ice-cream shops, boutiques, upscale bars, restaurants, coffeehouses, “yuppie chow” eateries, and natural food stores) began to rapidly open for business in NE Portland in the early 1990s and have continued this artisan economy-bolstering momentum into the present day (Coffman et al. 2007; Shaw 2005). Characterized in both their ability to afford increased commercial rent in gentrifying neighborhoods and their costly range of products and services, amenity businesses contribute to the displacing effects of gentrification by further increasing the appeal of gentrified areas to wealthy in-migrants and decreasing accessibility of these areas to the working class (Reid and Adelman 2003). With sites ranging from the Mint 820 Pan American Bistro and the Firehouse Restaurant, to New Seasons Market, the North Portland Wellness Center, and the fictional Artisan Knots store,³ an initial examination of the sample of cinematic spaces displayed in Figure 7 first articulates that the series’ depictions of NE Portland largely revolve around amenity businesses.

In outlining the precise years that these establishments opened within NE Portland, Table 2 bolsters an assertion that *Portlandia* singularly represents amenity businesses in its portrayal of the “concrete city.” Data within this chart’s Opening Year column indicates that all these depicted businesses emerged amidst the span of gentrification (1990-present) that has occurred in the Northeast quintant area. That said, *Portlandia*’s representation of the varied placemarks, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 7, act to valorize the weirdness, whiteness, and yipsterism of this gentrifying NE Portland area in its seeming devotion to primarily depicting establishments that contribute to the city’s artisan economy. In denying representation to such thriving and popular businesses within NE Portland’s expansive Albina district that have historical claim to the NE quintant as Clyde’s Bar (a famed jazz venue) or Billy Webb’s Lodge (which served the African American community as a YWCA, a United Service Organization club, and temporary refuge for those fleeing North Portland’s infamous 1940 Vanport flood), *Portlandia* presents an oh-so-narrow viewpoint of NE Portland that focuses primarily on the

area's yipster-centric amenity businesses or "consumption amenities" that have proliferated as a means as well as outcome of gentrification in divested areas (Papachristos et al. 2011, 218).

Table 2: The table shows when the amenity establishments depicted in Figure 7 were opened in NE Portland, a period coinciding with the area's gentrification.

Placemark on map	Northeast Portland amenity business	Opening year
3	Paxton Gate (setting for Artisan Knots store)	2006
4	Mint 820 Pan American Bistro	2003
5	In Other Words (setting for Women & Women First feminist bookstore)	1993
6	Oblique Coffee Roasters	2007
7	Firehouse Restaurant	2008
8	North Portland Wellness Center	2007
9	Land Gallery (setting for "Put a bird on it!" store)	2009
10	New Seasons Market	1999

Given *Portlandia's* power and far reach as a national television series, its narrow portrayal of Northeast Portland's locales can be seen to normalize the existence and cultural role of amenity businesses in the popular imagination as a neo-bohemian playfield of consumer capitalism—wherein consumption of cutely odd products and services and oddly cute antics unrelentingly unfold. In this context of *Portlandia's* representations of NE Portland amenity businesses, textual analysis indicates that the series does work in abetting the marginalizing effects of gentrification in its (1) near-complete denial of onscreen representation for the gentrified populace (i.e., black Portlanders) and (2) its parallel over-emphasis on the relationships, consumption habits, desires, anxieties, and activities of yipster (i.e., white) gentrifiers. This renders *Portlandia* to be not only a purveyor, but also a glorifier of a specifically market-based "Keep Portland Weird" quirkiness that is, amid the yipsters' calculated consumption of luxury items like organic food from Zupan's Market (season two, episode three) and New Seasons Market (season one, episode three) or artisan knots from—of course, where else?—the Artisan Knots store (season two, episode eight), all but stringent upon an amenity economy.

Conclusion: Weirdness and Whitewash

Like the Willamette River on the muddied heels of a rainstorm, unquietly flows the slogan: "Keep Portland Weird." Go there, witness yourself a case of place-branding that, if only for its ubiquity on the cityscape, seemingly should somehow be off-putting in an urban environment of such purported progressiveness: "Keep Portland Weird." It is this dictum whence *Portlandia* sucks in creating its namesake "reel city." Quirkiness, oddballery, etc. The imagined burg-defining weirdness plays out on a yipster-oriented adult playground specially designed, as addressed in the foregoing section, to valorize amenity-based cultural consumption. The would-be archetypal onscreen Portlanders share a whiteness that is undersigned by a certain privileged sincerity, laced with willful naiveté and passive aggression. This is where the makers of *Portlandia*—along with, we would contend, their audience—presume themselves to diverge from the yipsters created on-screen. Though doubtlessly affectionate toward the show's well-intentioned, privileged characters—and of course toward Portland itself—Armisen, Brownstein, and colleagues conform to prototypical yipster posturing in that they are way too in-the-know for full-on sincerity: They are semi-sincere, but more so semi-ironic.

The equation somehow all adds up for them, allowing a moral distance whence to launch their guffaws. The folks behind *Portlandia* (and, again, those viewing it) can, through their ironic distancing act, laugh guilt-free while preference is given—on the screen, on the ground—to *their* claims to Portland. And preference to *their* claims to Seattle. And to San Francisco. And to Boston. And to New York. And to Washington, D.C. And so on (see Cheney-Rice 2014).

Their moral distance might go unremarked were it *just* necessity in service of hilarity. After all, it's *just* innocent skit-based comedy, right? Perhaps. If, drawing on the characterization of whiteness being "on a toggle switch between 'bland nothingness' and 'racist hatred'" (Painter 2015), we could accept the proposition that *Portlandia* is more unambiguously tethered to the innocuousness of the former than disturbingly trending toward the violence implicated in the latter. This is the sort of proposition that the show's creators might have you believe. But *Portlandia* cannot be separated from the "real city." And those with any historical knowledge of Portland (and Brownstein and Armisen certainly stand among their numbers) are cognizant that although, yes, the city is very, very white, its whiteness is geographically uneven and de-centered in significant, if spatially limited, pockets—North/Northeast pronounced among them. They are also

cognizant that Northeast has been ground zero for a quarter century of gentrification that has resulted in the replacement of black Portlanders by a new, white population. As examined above, Northeast figures prominently, explicitly in *Portlandia*, yet viewers are given no hint of its historical and enduring, though increasingly marginalized, blackness. All we are permitted is onscreen representations of gentrification's white artifacts: the new places of yipster amenity consumption.

In hiding—whitewashing—the processes of gentrification, *Portlandia* is a work that does work; it is an active agent in that selfsame gentrification, tilting, in spite of itself, away from bland nothingness or innocuousness toward the other side of the whiteness spectrum.

Notes

1 Filmic geography refers to a “theoretically informed, practice-led” subfield of the geography discipline which sees film as a “research method and publication” that relates geographic concepts (Jacobs 2013, 715).

2 For purposes of this investigation, “geographic realism” refers to a consideration of which real-life Portland locations are presented. Identifying these existent locations within *Portlandia* content confirms, to a degree, the realism or accuracy of the series' representation of Portland.

3 The Artisan Knots store is based in reference to Portland's real-life Paxton Gate, a self-described eccentric gardening store that sells an array of “treasures and oddities inspired by the garden and natural sciences” (Paxton Gate 2018). Indeed, Paxton Gate now boasts on its website that “the hit television show *Portlandia* filmed a particularly memorable episode” (Ibid.) in their establishment, thereby invoking the show's popularity to leverage the marketability of weirdness.

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