Jane Jacobs famously wrote that city parks are often “volatile places.” This presentation suggests that conflict over how urban green spaces are used offers a window on a crucial issue facing cities today: the potential for public spaces to remain inclusive, democratic places where all residents can realize the “right to the city”. I draw from an ethnographic case study of a recently built park in one of Paris’s predominately West African and Maghrebi districts. The study demonstrates that parks can have “built-in” political subjectivities included in their designs that make controlling the social composition of public space a civic responsibility for neighborhood association members. This idea of “vigilant citizenship” is comparable in some ways to other forms of neoliberal enclosure such as video surveillance and the legal redefinition of public space, but it seeks to co-opt a radical tradition of street democracy held by neighborhood associations. In Paris, such vigilance is fueled by anxieties over the presence of immigrant-origin youth in public spaces. Residents, however, do not passively adopt this role: they negotiate a delicate balancing act as gatekeepers, weighing inclusion against expectations to maintain a “successful” park that conforms to exclusionary definitions of public space.

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