“Land of Opportunity”:
Neoliberal Development and Resistance
in Response to Crisis in Detroit

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Abstract

This ethnographic paper examines the manifestations of neoliberalism in Detroit as the city responds to crisis. Grounded within the historical context of decades of divestment, and examined through a primarily critical human geography theorization, this research explores uneven development as one of the ways in which neoliberal restructuring processes are being articulated currently within the context of Detroit. Furthermore, this study considers the role of the news media in the elaboration and propagation of a narrative of inevitability that supports the status quo of neoliberal development. Challenging the supposedly progressive nature of redevelopment and the binary logic of “revitalization or ruin”, this study presents accounts of the displacement and marginalization of longtime Detroit residents as well as ways in which they are resisting and creating alternatives to the hegemonic neoliberal development paradigm.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Having grown up as a in the Detroit suburb of Lake Orion, I can recall visits to the city always being met with shock and forewarnings like “don’t get shot,” and “don’t forget to lock your car doors”. For the past several decades, Detroit has been painted by the news media and understood by many white suburbanites as the epitome “ghost town,” with pathologizing language referring to the city as a place of crime, “decay,” “plague” and “apocalypse”. Recently, however, that narrative has taken a qualitative turn, with noticeable increased national attention directed at Detroit as a “comeback city,” a newfound “place of opportunity” experiencing “rebirth” and “revitalization” (Gregory 2012). While varying degrees of racially coded fears and skepticism linger, for many, Detroit is turning into the “place to be”. The same former-classmates who warned me of Detroit’s supposed danger just a couple of years ago are now moving into renovated lofts in midtown, downtown, and Corktown, attending warehouse shows, rocking “Detroit Hustles Harder” paraphernalia and promoting the burgeoning potential of the “new Detroit”.

Even in the midst of state-imposed Emergency Financial Management and federal bankruptcy proceedings, a narrative has emerged about the city’s new dawn — having hit rock bottom, it has “nowhere to go but up” (Alford 2013; Conlin 2014). While this “revival” master narrative, propagated by the mainstream media, political leadership and corporate stakeholders alike, unequivocally presents these changes as “positive,” I simultaneously began to come across stories of mass evictions in downtown Detroit (D’Artagnan 2013; “Video: The Griswold Building is back: The Albert” 2014). I began to question the legitimacy of the dominant narrative of
"revitalization", and started to wonder about an alternative account. Presented as a natural solution to the crises of the post-industrial city, a sign of “progress” after stagnation, I began to question: what forces are propelling this change? How is it that these transformations are taking place? Whom does this new development benefit and how does it affect the longtime residents of Detroit? Furthermore, I became interested in the hegemony of the narrative that is constructed around this development, and sought to understand the power relations and potential social impacts that it entails. After preliminary research revealed some of the ways in which neoliberal ideology has infused Detroit politics, I wanted to understand how the neoliberal project permeates redevelopment efforts in the Motor City. Skeptical of the dynamics I observed, I wondered, too, how Detroiter were resisting, and how this development model was being challenged through alternative, more grassroots and community-based development paradigms.

Emerging from this series of interconnected questions, the thrust of this ethnographic research is to understand the conditions and implications of the current development paradigm in Detroit. Furthermore, it intends to uplift the experiences of those displaced or marginalized by it, and to explore ways in which Detroiter are already engaging in resistance and alternative forms of development that challenge the dominance of the neoliberal development paradigm by re-centering values on community, sustainability and self-determination. Accordingly, the central question of this research is: how is gentrification emerging out of global neoliberal trends and articulating itself in the context of the particular history and current conditions of Detroit? Moreover, it investigates: how are Detroiter
elaborating means by which to challenge the dominance of the prevailing paradigm and cultivating alternative development strategies?

The urban environment since its creation has been a locale of complex negotiations. As such, the city functions as a channel of flows of people, capital and culture, constantly evolving as social, economic and political conditions change. As a social and material phenomenon, the urbanization process in the United States is intricately tied to the interdependent histories of racism and capitalist industrial development and decline. This legacy is made acutely visible in the city of Detroit, which, home to the automotive industry, has seen its population blossom at its mid-century boom to nearly two million people, and thereafter wane to under 700,000 as its economic stronghold declined (United States Census Bureau). As vast numbers of white residents took advantage of federal incentive programs and fled the city following a trend of capital investment in the newly sprawling suburbs, the metropolitan Detroit landscape experienced a remarkable differentiation process. In the years following World War II, concerted efforts of uneven development assured that the suburban environment would be elevated in value as it received considerable private and public investment, while the urban space was strategically devaluated, taking on decisively raced and classed characteristics. As these trends are understood within a Marxian critical geography analysis, land values of the contending spaces were elevated and depreciated, respectively, not as the result of isolated, neutral processes, but as the product of strategic and intentional actors who serve as agents in the reproduction of inherently unequal social and economic systems (Harvey 1985, 1989, 2001, 2006; Smith 1982, 1984, 1986, 1996).
Considering the historical legacy of the manipulation of land use and value for the purposes of increased capital accumulation, the contemporary impulse of Detroit's "revitalization" efforts must be recognized as a continuation of those same historical processes.

Informed by the likes of critical urban geography theorists David Harvey and Neil Smith, this research is founded upon an understanding of contemporary urban processes as operational within the neoliberal paradigm which, at its heart, functions as to facilitate the mobility of capital to the uppermost strata of society (Harvey 2006). For the purposes of this study, gentrification, then, is conceptualized as an apparatus that is employed as a single facet of the multidimensional operations of neoliberalism in urban space (Harvey 2006; Slater 2006).

Beginning with an overview of the theoretical and conceptual foundations of this research, Chapter Three provides a basic context of urban theory, with an emphasis on space not as a neutral and ahistorical entity, but rather as a tangible product of a particular historic trajectory and as situated within a complex web of social, political and economic relations. Specifically, the literature guides a conceptualization of the city within a capitalist context as a venue by which increased capital accumulation can be achieved (Smith 1982, 1984, 1986, 1996). Grounded within the context of Detroit's particular history, I present uneven development as a fundamental current of Detroit's development patterns, manifest in the current gentrification of the formerly devalued city space (Sugrue 1996; Smith 1978, 1982, 1991). Appreciating this process as an expression of larger processes of neoliberalization, this section frames the changing urban landscape as a global trend in which cities are become
“corporate entities” wherein neoliberal ideology and policy inform the reshaping of the urban built environment (Cullen & Knox 1982). Predicated upon the management and manipulation of crisis (Harvey 1989, 2006) and the erasure of underlying social relations and dynamics of power (Ross & Mitchell 2004), gentrification employs a colonial logic as it settles the “new frontier” (Blomley 2004; Smith 1996), emerging as a logical result and dominant solution to urban crisis within a global urban neoliberal strategy (Smith 1979, 2002; Davidson 2007). As such, gentrification is employed as a consequence of neoliberal development as to reproduce within the dimension of geography a system of raced and classed social and incongruences.

Rooted in this theoretical foundation, Chapter Four hones in on the specific operationalization of strategies of management and manipulation of crisis within the context of Detroit. In this chapter I review the rhetorical and actual construction of crisis in Detroit, examining the historical and continuous narrative which serves to rationalize and reproduce the system while simultaneously justifying the subsequent restructuring measures. Citing the Reports from the Workers Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit as well as mainstream news media coverage of the bankruptcy and emergency management, this chapter provides a context in which to understand the rationalization and inevitablization of the subsequently promoted resolutions, namely being the redevelopment and consequential gentrification of the city space.

Critical to understanding the city’s current social, political, economic and geographic landscape, an overview of the history of the strategic devaluation of
Detroit's land is necessary. To this end, Chapter Five situates Detroit's current crisis within an overview of the manipulation of land, investment and movements of people throughout the last half-century. Furthermore, I present an analysis of the ideological role of this manipulation in the compulsion of a crisis-driven development model. This chapter, ultimately, provides the basic context for which the current gentrification of Detroit will be framed, allowing for a richer analysis of these historically rooted and globally expansive tendencies as they are expressed through the lived experiences of Detroiter's today. Through the framing of the current conditions within a context of the racialized policies and practices that drove the devaluation of the urban landscape over the past several decades, the current commodification and capitalization of Detroit's land can be located as a part of a continued legacy of intentional efforts. Additionally, this section examines the reemployment of a settler colonial narrative and ideology which often accompanies development rhetoric and practice in Detroit today. This analysis serves to orient the study to the strategic work of the neoliberal apparatus as it affects a dramatic restructuring of Detroit's landscape.

Chapter Six addresses the effects of uneven development in an examination of the differentiations palpable on social as well as geographic dimensions. Largely emerging from the interview results, this section emphasizes the reinforcement and intensification of social disparities, which correspond with the reshaping of the urban space within the neoliberal development paradigm. I analyze the impacts of the Detroit Future City plan, the New International Trade Crossing development, and the "Opportunity Detroit" campaign, as well as the racial makeup of
beneficiaries of various "revitalization" efforts in the city. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates the racialized and classed nature of the socio-spatial reformation of Detroit's landscape as the dominant development paradigm propels an inequitable distribution of resources and unequal access to the benefits of redevelopment.

Chapter Seven examines the way in which neoliberal trends are coming to saturate development in Detroit, articulated in the dominant ideology which elevates economic growth above consideration for human cost. Specifically, I observe the rhetoric of opportunity and the fallacy of this narrative as evidenced by the emergent data. Additionally, this chapter addresses the pervasive binary logic that constructs gentrification as an inevitable consequence of a necessary development strategy that will purportedly alleviate Detroit of its crisis state. Thus, a narrative of "progress" is constructed which supports the hegemony of the dominant neoliberal development model, overwriting the considerable displacement it entails, and foreclosing on alternative possibilities to address the city's challenges.

As a challenge to this dominant script, Chapter Eight presents case studies of the work of significant actors currently engaging in various forms of resistance and creation of alternatives to the neoliberal development paradigm. This chapter begins with a presentation of various projects which intersect art and activism as communities challenge the cultural and literal displacement brought on by gentrification. Next, I turn to the important role of the urban agricultural movement in Detroit, specifically looking at the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network as a model of alternative forms of development which challenges dominant
structures by re-centering their efforts on values of sustainability, community, and self-determination. Finally, I consider Restoring the Neighbor Back to the ‘Hood as an example of community-based development founded not on capital interest but on the values of love, compassion, and relationships. In the exploration of these projects, this section identifies the fallacy of the binary logic which presents the false choice of ruin or neoliberal development in Detroit, demonstrating that alternatives paradigms are, in fact, not only possible, but currently underway.

All together, this study addresses the issue of neoliberal urban restructuring as exemplified in the contemporary case of Detroit. In framing the current conditions within a historical context, with particular attention attuned to the roles of state and private agents, this investigation challenges the inevitability logic by exposing the strategic manipulations undergirding the current crisis. Furthermore, this study’s analysis of the exploitation of crisis entails significant implications for other cities who may face similar futures. As these processes are transpiring so contemporarily in the context of Detroit, the data captured in this study provides insight into the way in which people are experiencing, interpreting, reinforcing and resisting these global systemic trends as they are played out on the local urban scale. In conclusion, this investigation of the infusion of neoliberalism in Detroit’s crisis-driven development processes, as well as the presentation of ways in which residents are responding to the crisis through alternative, community-driven means, provides a relevant study for other communities around the world facing similar crises.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The City: Conceptualized

The city, as a conceptual matter and as a material and social reality, has always been a contested terrain, both on the ground and in its study. Scholarship of the city has historically focused its study on the processes by which populations concentrate themselves in urban localities over time, and on the social, political, cultural and economic dynamics of city spaces (Castells 1977, 1978; Cullen & Knox 1982; Harvey 1973, 1985, 1989, 2001, 2007; Lawrence & Low 1990; Lefebvre 1974; Park et al 1925; Smith 1982, 1984, 1986, 1996). David Harvey (2001) signals the importance of context, noting that the meanings of 'city' inevitably change depending on the specific time and place within which we find them. Therefore, the differing material and social conditions of urban spaces over time dictate that their meanings cannot safely be universalized. Though urban scholars in the humanities, sociology and geography often seek to answer similar questions, there exists in the literature widespread disagreement as to the city's social sources, meanings, purposes and consequences, largely debating the interplay between social, environmental and structural factors.

Theoreticians such as Marx, Durkheim and Weber have influenced subsequent urban study through their introduction of instrumental theorization of the economic, social and cultural processes of urbanization, as well as its effects on social alienation, class formation, and the production or destruction of collective and individual identities (Cullen & Knox 1982). In response to such conceptualizations of urban space and processes, sociological scholarship of the modern American city
can be traced to Park, Burgess and McKenzie's seminal 1925 study, *The City*, addressing Chicago's rapid and unprecedented urbanization (Park et al 1925). Their investigations presented an ecological determination argument, explaining social behavior as a product of environmental factors. Their work laid the foundation for subsequent urban theory, reigning largely uncontested until the early 1970s (May et. al. 2005). However, as it has developed over the past several decades, urban theoretical discourse has polemically expressed divergent thought, with broiling debates emerging out of the contradictory empires categorized within the Chicago School and Marxian thought. Despite their divergent framings of the urban, at their cores, each orientation begs the fundamental questions of the relationship between human behavior and material or social condition within an urban context.

The Chicago School, as established by the likes of Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925) explain the concept of the city as a context within which a distinctive urban culture develops in response to the immediate social and economic environment, focusing their analysis on an ecological notion of human behavior as largely influenced by social, environmental structures, rather than by genetic or personal characteristics (May et. al. 2005). This ecological approach articulates a parallel between development in the natural world and human development within the context of culture, emphasizing the importance of the external social stimuli on the development of urban populations and cultures (Park, et. al: 1925). The Chicago school, though significant in the development of urban sociology, tends to characterize the city as a culture existing in a vacuum, largely
ignoring the significance of social conflict, historically embedded power relations and political structures and their influence on urban life.

Marxian urban theory, on the other hand, seeks to understand the social meaning of the material, thus beginning with the physical relic that is understood as the city and extending into an exploration of the interconnecting and historically rooted social and power relations, interactions and conflicts which lead to the creation of the physical urban landscape itself (Harvey 2010). The “built environment” then emerges as an abstract concept employed by social scientists to describe the material products of human building activity (Lawrence & Low 1990). Within urban studies scholarship, the concept of the built environment serves different functions; across the divergent models, scholars debate the city as a site of environmental, and cultural determinism (as within the Chicago School of Sociology) versus the idea that the built environment represents a material manifestation of power relations, as within the Marxian analysis of urban space.

Crucial to the understanding of Marxist urban theory is a consideration of space not as a neutral and ahistorical entity but rather as a tangible product of a particular historic trajectory and set of power relations. Accordingly, places do not just exist but are always and continually being socially constructed by powerful institutional forces in society (Harvey 1996). Within this context, the city connotes a dialectical relationship between the material and the social, wherein negotiations are continually taking place (Harvey 1973; Lefebvre 1974; Soja 1980). As such, city space is both productive of and shaped by social life within it. According to classical Marxism, the city exists to facilitate the generation of capital and to sustain the class
structure, which is necessary to the reproduction of the modes of production (Cullen & Knox 1982). Furthermore, Cullen and Knox (1982) identify the role of the city within a capitalist economy as a means of containing and defusing class conflict, wherein urbanites are 'privatized' through the organization of isolating urban space, serving to tame working-class radicalism and facilitate capitalist production. Complicating this production-based explanation of urbanization, neo-Marxist urban scholar Castells (1977, 1978) points to the social inequality that is reified in urban spaces and emphasizes the collective exploitation as seen in the conditions of public housing and other forms in which urban workers are exploited not just as producers but as consumers.

Adding a crucial interpretation to the study of urban space, David Harvey, as one of the most influential voices in the critical study of the modern city, is concerned with the use and value of land. More specifically, Harvey maintains a Marxist perspective in his analysis of the ways in which social actors, such as real estate agents, bankers and developers, exploit and manipulate the value of urban space through strategic allocation of capital investment in the built environment (1985, 1989, 2001, 2006). Similarly, Neil Smith understands the city as a space that the capitalist system objectifies, appropriates and exploits as a means of survival by way of continued capital accumulation (Smith 1982, 1984, 1986, 1996). Thus, while the conceptualization of the determinists (such as Park) is that the city is a passive backdrop to the development of a distinct urban culture, the Marxist geographer understands the city as a strategic arm of capitalism, operating within a web of history and power.
Development and decline of industry in the Motor City

To ground this study's theorization of the city, it is helpful to offer a brief overview of the development of the city not only as a conceptual entity but also as a social and geographic phenomenon. Here, a review of the growth and decline of the industrial city helps to root the theoretical framework and subsequent research findings within a context of actual historical processes. Given this study's particular interest in Detroit, Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis* serves as an exemplary resource through which to understand 19th century industrial transitions as manifested within the context of Detroit. For the purposes of this analysis, a timeline can be established beginning with the development of the modern industrial city in America. Late-nineteenth century America saw rapid transformations in its cultural, economic and political realities. In large part due to the revolutionization of industrial manufacturing, the nineteenth century culminated in a swift impulse of movement to concentrated industrializing urban centers. The profound societal changes were noted in the early works of Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925) who note 'social and spatial relations in flux' as one of the fundamental features of the turn-of-the-century American city. As industrialization is so closely tied to the growth of the modern city, it is important to consider the historical role of cities as the space designated for workers and immigrants, the city accordingly functioning as a port of entry to absorb newcomers and as a warehouse for the labor that would propel the industrializing capitalist economy (Goheen 1974; Manheim 1960; Harvey 1985).
In cities like Detroit, the unprecedented expansion of production, such as with the automotive industry, catapulted the city into national prominence, with its total population quadrupling from 465 thousand to 1.6 million between the years of 1910 and 1940 (Sugrue 1996, 23). Northern U.S. cities were also the recipients of vast waves of African Americans who migrated from the South of the country in search of factory employment and what they hoped would be a more racially tolerant social reality. What they found, however, was a society still thoroughly invested in maintaining racial segregation and inequality, reinforced through dramatically exclusionary housing, redlining and zoning policies (Sugrue 1996). Such policies served to embed in the built environment the profound racial and economic inequality present in mid-twentieth-century American society.

The city of Detroit soon became a prime example of both the possibility of industrial prowess and then of the crisis of its demise. Sugrue maintains that Detroit's post-World War II crisis "emerged as the consequence of two of the most important, interrelated, and unresolved problems in American history: that capitalism generates economic inequality and that African Americans have disproportionately borne the impact of that inequality" (1996, 5). In examining the spatiality of that economic inequality, one can identify the distinct segregation and isolation based on race and class, generated in the period from the 1940s to the 1960s, as demonstrative of the realities of uneven development and subsequent racial and financial differentiation between the urban core and the sprawling suburbs. Buttressed by government policy, corporate interests altered the shape of Detroit in the boom years through the allocation of resources to the suburbs and
through the shaping of racialized attitudes and policies surrounding housing and labor (Sugrue 1996). As discriminatory housing and hiring practices continued to pervade in the postwar era, "blackness and whiteness assumed a spatial definition" in which African Americans became "confined to racially isolated, deteriorating, inner-city neighborhoods" (Sugrue 1996, 9). As capital continued to be divested from the inner city, discriminatory housing subsidies bankrolled suburbanization, perpetuating racial divisions and enforcing the differentiation of the urban and suburban landscapes. Consequently, Detroit, as an exaggerated example of similar processes taking place in other post-industrial U.S. cities, witnessed dramatic economic decentralization, chronic racial and class segregation, regional political fragmentation as what scholars consider a logical result of escalating post-World War II era trends (Darden, et al. 1990; Sugrue 1996).

Continuing over the next several decades, all of the above conditions operating in concert have left Detroit in a situation wherein its economic circumstances are such that, despite popular opposition, the Michigan Governor Snyder has stripped Detroiter of their democratic rights with the state-imposition of an emergency financial manager. Just months after his appointment, Emergency Financial Manager Kevyn Orr, with state, federal and corporate (but not popular) endorsement, in December of 2013, led Detroit to become the largest municipality to be declared bankrupt in U.S. history (Socialist Equality Party 2014). Perhaps one of the most striking examples of urban crisis in this country, Detroit is now experiencing many of the hallmark transformations of neoliberalism. The post-crisis restructuring patterns can be traced in close sync with other urban realities in the U.S. and around
the world, with noteworthy parallels in (i.e. deregulation, attacks on labor, privatization of public assets, etc.) seen in Chile, Iraq, Mexico, New York and New Orleans (Harvey 2006, 2007; Johnson 2011). Within the context of neoliberal globalization, the city becomes a corporate entity, becoming restructured and controlled in alignment with a ‘managerialist ethic’ closely attuned to capitalist ideology (Cullen & Knox 1982). As such, the urban center becomes operational in relative correspondence with the political economic life of the nation and interlocking global dynamics and financial markets (Goheen 1974; Amin & Graham 1997). While neoliberal urbanism encompasses a wide range of social, economic, and geographical shifts, gentrification has become a logical result and dominant solution to urban crisis within a global urban neoliberal strategy (Smith 1979, 2002; Davidson 2007).

**Neoliberalism**

Essential to a rounded understanding of the functioning of today’s city is an examination of neoliberalism. The term ‘neoliberal’ is used to describe a doctrine of radical economic liberalism that has emerged in late-stage capitalism; it is both a body of economic theory and a policy stance, grounded in a doctrine of ‘free market’ enterprise (Kotz 2002). Thus, neoliberal ideology at its most basic level proposes that markets, when freed from external ‘interferences’, most notably in the forms of the state and regulative measures, are the most moral and the most efficient means for producing and distributing goods and services (Harvey 2006; Smith 1982). Marxian theorists, on the other hand, reveal the mythology of that narrative, and emphasize neoliberalism is compelled by class conflict and class interests, arguing
that the focus upon free markets obscures the dominance of capital, and its role in the transformation of state-economy relationships and the strategic upward mobility of capital during the past three decades (Kotz 2002).

Crucial to the understanding of neoliberalism is the fact that the stability and survival of the capitalist apparatus depends on its ability to find creative avenues for the reproduction and growth of the system through continuous capital accumulation. Within this context, neoliberal policies were originally tested in what Harvey refers to as the “first great experiment with neoliberal state formation” and what became the model upon which subsequent restructurings were formulated (Harvey 2006, 12-13). Orchestrated by Western financial interests (namely the IMF and World Bank) neoliberal policies were first operationalized within Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet’s reforms, implemented after the U.S.-backed coup ousted democratically elected president Salvador Allende in 1973 (Harvey 2006). As Harvey states, “There was a completely neoliberal regime implemented in Chile in 1975, which was absolutely identical to the one the US imposed upon Iraq in 2003” (Harvey, 2007). These restructuring implementations, like successive efforts, were carried out in accordance with laissez-faire free-market ideals, through the privatization of public assets, the opening up of natural resources to private exploitation, and the facilitation of foreign direct investment and free-trade; scholars note that the neoliberal project was from its inception a project to achieve the restoration of class power to the richest strata of the population (Harvey 2006). Such neoliberal reforms have subsequently been imposed throughout the world,
changing the social, political and economic contexts from Chile to Mexico to Iraq to Detroit.

Thusly, neoliberal restructurings are being applied at various scales, whether the international or the local, the national or the urban. Grounded in a global understanding of these political and economic makeovers, David Harvey's crucial analysis identifies the following characteristics as the four essential elements of neoliberalism: 1) Privatization, 2) Financialization, 3) Management and Manipulation of Crisis, and 4) State Redistributions (2006, pp. 44-50). Privatization refers to the increased collaboration of state and private agents, articulated most noticeably in the transfer of services distributions (such as water, sanitation, and so forth) from the state to the private sector. In this scenario, the public sector bears all the risk while the corporate arbiters reap all the profit. Financialization is marked by the wave of speculative, predatory and fraudulent activity in the financial sector, which has been lubricated by the movements toward deregulation within the past several decades. Management and manipulation of crisis is one of the key ways in which neoliberal systems deliberately redistribute wealth from the poor to the rich. By employing manipulative financial tactics, politicians and financial powers (such as the IMF) orchestrate and manage debt crises for the joint purposes of rationalizing the system and perpetuate the upward mobility of capital. State redistributions simply means the role that the neoliberalized state takes on in facilitating the flow of wealth to the richest strata of society, operationalized through a vast array of subsidies and tax breaks to corporations, cut-backs in state expenditures and social programs, and repressive policing and social control as to
eliminate the potential insurgence of oppositional movements. While much urban theory is considered within a global context, many of these patterns become articulated and propelled at various scales, including the local urban. Within the context of Detroit, many of these patterns are being employed as state and corporate actors push forward a multidimensional plan of neoliberalization.

The neoliberal apparatus, however organized, entails serious fundamental contradictions. Knox (2002) identifies that neoliberalism calls for the free movement of goods, services, capital, and money, but not of people. Accordingly, corporate interests should be allowed to move and acquire capital and property freely across borders but individuals are not allowed the same mobility. This paradox is fundamental to the contradictions of the neoliberal canon, particularly with respect to the displacement of vulnerable populations, whether the dispossession of land and natural resources of indigenous peoples of Latin America or the displacement of black urban poor of American cities as neoliberal development policies prioritize profitability over human wellbeing. In a neoliberal state, strategic capital movement and investment trumps all social concerns. The state becomes a “consummate agent”, rather than a regulator of, the market; Smith refers to the new “revanchist” urbanism of the advanced capitalist world as increasingly expressing the imperatives of capitalist production rather than that of social reproduction and wellbeing (Smith 1979, 1996, 2002). As such, state and private capital interests become so deeply intertwined that their missions become unified and the social interests of the general population become subsumed by the hegemony of the profit motive.
Within this neoliberal paradigm, the concomitant dominance of the "public-private partnership" and the management and manipulation of crisis creates a scenario in which crises perpetually emerge and solutions are always necessitated. As such, the neoliberal capitalist system reproduces itself, triangulating between the public and private powers and the crisis-driven need for "quick-fix" solutions. Consequently, the urban poor and populations of color are exploited in the scheme to reproduce the disparate class structure and, ultimately, the survival of the capitalist system. Here, gentrification emerges as one of those "solutions", through, among other things, providing the state an increased tax base and offering private developers the opportunity to capitalize on the previously devalued urban environment.

**Gentrification**

Throughout the course of the past several decades, urban studies research has debated the definition and application of the term "gentrification" (Bridge 2001; Davidson 2005, 2007; Davidson & Lees 2005; Ley 1980, 1994, 1996; Newman & Wyley 2006; Smith 1979; Zukin 1987). Originally conceived as a process of social upgrading and social displacement, referring to the eviction of working-class residents in neighborhoods in which home renovations elevated property values, the term at its inception alluded to the changing social condition of gentrifying neighborhoods (Davidson & Lees 2005). Specific attention has been drawn to the classed character of gentrification (Bridge 1995; Ley 1996) as Smith (1996) acknowledges the existence of cultural motivations as an element of gentrification but argues for its analysis within a context of the raced and classed structures of
power which drive its reproduction. Generally, it can be agreed that gentrification is at once an economic, social and cultural phenomenon (Hamnett 1991).

**Definitions**

Originating in British sociologist Ruth Glass’s 1964 analysis of renovations of London’s Victorian-style houses, the term “gentrification” was coined in reference to the process in which members of the middle class migrate into a previously working class area, renovate the modest homes, and cause appreciation of property valued, thus propelling the displacement of the original working-class occupants as well as the transformation of the social character of the district (Davidson & Lees 2005). In reference to this emergence of the new middle-class residents, the term gentrification refers etymologically to the “gentry”, or, in broad terms, those who come from a noble, aristocratic class. Ley (1996), utilizes the same comparison in his class analysis, calling gentrification the “embourgeoisment” of urban landscapes. Nascent definitions of gentrification traced it as a process of neighborhood change and emphasized the changing social landscape and the displacement of original residents as key definitional elements of gentrification.

Smith (1987) identifies that gentrification entails not only a transformation of social characteristics but also a physical change to the built environment on the neighborhood scale and an economic change in the land and housing markets. Hamnett (1991) argues that an adequate explanation of gentrification must encompass the changes that occur within the social and material realms.

While early conceptualizations identified individual home occupants as the drivers of gentrification by way of their renovation of previously devalued
properties, it has been recognized that gentrification can also be affected by new
development projects which change the landscape of city spaces and displace
original residents. To this end, Davidson (2007) calls for a broadened application of
the term to reflect the way in which gentrification functions within the twenty-first
century context. He identifies how despite the changing of gentrification's face and
the involvement of different actors and contrasting socio-spatial dynamics in
operation, fundamental elements remain. Responding to the arguments that
gentrification is a process of social reformation of space, driven by changing cultural
aesthetic tastes within the interpersonal sphere (Ley 1980; 1994), Davidson (2005;
2007) contends that a consideration must extend to include larger-scale actors, such
as developers and urban planners, as they collude in the reshaping of urban spaces,
causing the displacement of original residents. With regard to whether developer-
led, or “new-build”, gentrification projects can be encompassed within the existing
realm of gentrification theory, Davidson (2005; 2007) points to the ways in which
these novel twenty-first century forms of development fit within the parameters of
basic gentrification conceptualization. He suggests that a holistic definition of
gentrification that can be applicable and relevant within varying and evolving
contexts should include the following characteristics:

- upgrade the social composition of the neighborhood via the arrival
  of high-income people,
- result in a significant landscape change, which itself is motivated by a demonstration of incomers’ cultural
  identity,
- involves a significant reinvestment of capital into previously devalorized space, and
- generates processes of replacement and displacement, which are often indirect (Davidson
Through an understanding of these key hallmarks of gentrification, the research can begin to venture into an exploration of what the face of this maturing process looks like within the varied economic, cultural, social and political environments within which it operates today.

**Causality Arguments**

In order to grasp the operations and implications of gentrification within a current context, it is important first to explore the theory around its causes. Beyond the debates around the variation and expansiveness of gentrification's definition, there exists among urban studies scholars a fundamental debate about the origin or causal factors of the phenomenon. Fundamentally, this debate entails a schism among scholars who variably argue supply versus demand, consumption versus production or individual versus structural explanations. David Ley (1980, 1994) signals the importance of political values and lifestyle choices, pointing to changing preferences and cultural and political values among the group he refers to as the “new middle class”. This argument implies that gentrification is a demand-based phenomenon, driven by shifts in preferences, lifestyles and needs of households. Zukin (1987) points to the ways in which gentrification is both a means of capital accumulation and a means of social reproduction for part of the highly educated middle class. Bridge (2001) engages and challenges Bourdieu’s notion of class habitus to illuminate the dynamics of class reproduction within the processes of spatial and social differentiation involved in gentrification. He argues that a conscious rational action (as opposed to structural and socialized notions of behavior) should play a more significant role in class analysis and the
understanding of gentrification. This set of theory posits that gentrification is the result of a demand-based phenomenon as changing cultural tastes dictate the social and physical transformation of spaces.

Others argue that gentrification is a result of changes in supply factors, wherein developers and/or state agents remake neighborhoods for the purpose of capitalizing on previously undervalued property. To this end, Neil Smith (1982; 2002) argues that gentrification is the product of cycles of investment and divestment of capital into the built environment, as explained in his rent gap theory. Smith’s rent gap theory demonstrates that as the “rent gap between actual and potential ground rent becomes sufficiently large, redevelopment and rehabilitation into new land uses becomes a profitable prospect, and capital begins to flow back into the inner city market” (Smith 1982, 149). As this occurs, the potential for profitable investment in the redevelopment of the urban core catalyzes gentrification. He contends that through the post-industrial devalorization of the urban space and the complimentary valorization of and investment in the suburban built environment, the property values of the respective spaces become varied from one other, creating what Smith refers to as the “land value valley”. These capital investment patterns, in turn, become reified and reproduced in what Smith calls the “ground rent system”, or the actual rent captured with the present land use. The resulting “rent gaps” between urban and suburban properties create conditions in which “the ground rent capitalized under current land uses is substantially lower than the ground rent that could potentially be capitalized if the land use were changed” (Smith 1982, 149). In cities around the world, these conditions are created
by strategic investment patterns that ultimately allow city governments to collaborate with private capital in the process of gentrification.

Scholars and cultural critics alike have come to understand gentrification within a historical and global trajectory of imperialist settler colonialism. In February of 2014, filmmaker Spike Lee gave a lecture at the Pratt Institute in which he passionately decried gentrification in Brooklyn relating it to historical imperial processes around the world: "Then comes the motherf***n’ Christopher Columbus Syndrome. You can’t discover this! We been here” (Coscarelli 2014). While some received Lee’s comments with shock, his analysis was not beyond the scope of urban scholars who likewise understand gentrification as a neocolonial exploit of a new frontier. Referring to the current impulse of gentrification as “the new urban colonialism” (Atkinson et. al. 2005) and as being a process of colonizing “the new urban frontier” (Smith 1996), scholars in urban studies have been identifying the ways in which gentrification mirrors previous strategies and narratives of colonial processes. Blomley (2004) recognizes the ways in which gentrification echoes colonial narratives, with attitudes of entitlement to expropriate and develop a previously supposed empty, unpeopled, wasteland. Within an understanding of colonialism as a continuous project and how the capitalist system requires continuous creation of possibilities for capital accumulation, the urban environment has become the new frontier of this capitalization. Through the framing of the scholarly conversation regarding the various historical, social, and ideological forces contributing to the process of gentrification, the study is positioned to better ground the analysis of the current developments and consequences of gentrification.
Consequence Arguments

While the causality debates have faded somewhat from the current literature, questions about the impacts of gentrification have taken the forefront of more recent gentrification study. This conversation can be characterized by a divergence of arguments around the consequences of gentrification as either fundamentally damaging in its driving of displacement, or, conversely, as something which should be welcomed as a rational solution to the crisis of urban poverty. Freeman (2009) discredits the exclusionary nature of gentrification and the evidence that gentrification increases racial segregation causing displacement, and instead proposes that there are instances where gentrification in fact reduces income segregation. Identifying gentrification as a potentially positive phenomenon, the “concentrated poverty” (Reese, et. al. 2010) literature proposes that it can be seen as a mutually beneficial solution to the crisis of urban decay. Blomley (2004) highlights how “morally persuasive” the concept and narrative of ‘social mix’ can be, but in fact how limiting such policies are in the face of addressing long-term disinvestment and poverty. He argues that the promise of equality in the face of social hierarchy is problematic in a) its one-sidedness (promoting the movement of wealthy people to inner-city “ghettos”) and b) the empirical evidence that suggests that ‘social mix’ often fails to improve social and economic conditions for renters and can reinforce exclusion and isolation (Blomley 2004, 99). Blomley (2004) also notes that ‘social mix’ arguments for gentrification, it can be argued, are at times used to justify a conscious residential purification. Moving beyond the physical characteristics of residential change, Smith (1979, 1982) presents a structural
argument contending that gentrification is a mechanism by which capital accumulation is accrued, furthering social stratification and class differentiation of the urban landscape. While gentrification continues to be a contentious issue, development frameworks contemporarily tend to incorporate strategies that support a ‘social mix’ logic. Within the current context of neoliberal urbanization, such policies often emerge as collaborative efforts between civic and business entities; as such, it is necessary here to analyze the role of public-private partnership in the catalyzation of gentrification.

Public-Private Partnership and Gentrification in Policy

Gentrification scholarship acknowledges the phenomenon as a socio-spatial one as well as a political one. David Harvey (2006) identifies gentrification as a logical companion to the neoliberal covenant, as shifts in power, restructuring, and public-private partnership has facilitated the increasing prevalence of such “development” projects. Slater (2006) points to the way in which the state and local level government imperative to increase its tax base as well as the neoliberal shift of funding toward the local level, creates a political economy in which such ‘social mixing’ policies converge with the neoliberal imperative, which in effect produces state-sponsored, developer-designed gentrification. To this end, Reese et. al (2010) document the increased collaboration between governments, business and development interests as well as certain non-profit agencies in the process of the poverty deconcentration project. They also identify ways in which such ‘deconcentration’ or ‘social-mixing’ policies in fact displace and diminish affordable housing access and criminalize low-income residents.
David Harvey (1989; 2006) offers a context to understand these processes as they operate within a framework of the role of governments within neoliberal capitalism and the way in which human welfare is said to be maximized when the allowance of free market is supported. Within this understanding, it is evident how the rationalization of the logic of gentrification is supported within the current political context. These ideas are explored as Newman and Wyly (2006) challenge the Freemanian position with a critique of his methods and the assertion that an orientation to the market is driving the social policy around mixed-income housing. Newman and Wyly (2006) crucially identify the ways in which market interventions against gentrification-induced displacement of the poor (public housing and rent regulation) are being challenged by advocates of gentrification and dismantled by policy-makers in the process of launching these ‘social-mixing’ projects.

**Alternatives**

As so much of the current policy is pushing for these ‘social mixing’ approaches, there remains a lack of popular consideration of research on alternative models of urban development. Such concepts include the “Right to the City” (Lefebvre 1996 & Mitchell 2003) literature and notions of 'public citizenship’ in the context of urban crisis and post-industrial urban change. Some scholars are attempting to address the exclusionary nature of contemporary urban restructuring, calling for a new commitment to consider the ‘Right to the City’ and the right to urban citizenship within a consideration of urban evolution (Plysushteva 2009). The author notes the way in which these processes of citizenship and claims to space can operate as catalysts for collective efforts toward social justice within the evolving
urban context. Martinez (2010) also contributes the potentiality of urban gardening within the context of Puerto Rican Neighborhoods in New York City as an important way to maintain community in the face of physical and cultural displacement. In the Bay Area, Causa Justa: Just Cause recently published a report entitled *Development Without Displacement: Resisting Gentrification in the Bay*, which shares findings on the impacts of gentrification on the Bay area as well as crucial ways in which communities are resisting and finding ways to remain and thrive. Others, such as Jung and Newman (2014) address specific ways—such as food politics—in which people are reconsidering development strategies in Detroit.

Within the existing literature, there exists little research that applies the Marxian critiques of neoliberal urbanization to the current context of crisis, “revitalization” and gentrification in Detroit. Because these processes are evolving so currently in Detroit, my research contributes to the literature a consideration of the way in which these global trends are being expressed in Detroit as captured in the lived experiences of my interviewees. Crucially, this research addresses within the context of Detroit both the history of urban crisis, the specific shape of neoliberal restructuring there, as well as the multitudinous ways in which people in Detroit are resisting and imagining alternative solutions. Furthermore, the operationalization of neoliberal restructuring in Detroit entails considerable implications for the futures of other US cities. Likewise, the mechanisms by which Detroiterds are responding to the crisis in ways that don’t reproduce destruction but are in fact creative, grass-roots and collectively oriented, offer a model for other communities around the world facing similar crises. As such, this study provides
further theorization and insight into the manifestations of these global trends within an acutely poignant local urban context, contributing to the literature a particularly relevant case of neoliberal development and the social consequences thereof, as well as the emergence of community-based initiatives that both resist global power structures while re-envisioning and enacting alternative models of development.

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

**Research Goal**

For the purposes of this study I chose to examine within the context of Detroit the nature of development within the neoliberal paradigm and, specifically, the extent to which this development and displacement are relational. Understanding gentrification of the urban landscape as an expression of a larger system of global neoliberal processes, the research places emphasis on land as a critical locus of consideration. Furthermore, the research explores the ideological and material implications of the dominant narrative that privileges certain forms of development while sidelining alternative models. As such, my principle research question is: how is the current processes of gentrification in Detroit situated within its historical, political, and geographic contexts, and in what ways are Detroiter challenging, resisting and demonstrating alternatives to the neoliberal development paradigm?

Additionally, I determined a series of sub-questions as to guide a deeper understanding of the relevant themes: 1) What institutional and human actors are propelling the redevelopment efforts in Detroit? 2) What role does the media play in
the construction of a narrative around development in Detroit? 3) Whom does this new development benefit and how does it impact longtime residents?

In order to obtain as much data as possible, I utilized three primary research techniques: semi-structured interviews, field observations, and news media analysis. I chose to employ several methods of data collection as to obtain both breadth and depth in the data and to generate a holistic and diverse set of results which would more fully ground my exploration of the manifestation of neoliberal development in Detroit.

**Interviews**

The population represented in my data is vast, comprising of an array of experiences with and relationships to the redevelopment currently taking place in Detroit. Included in my data are people from a variety of racial, ethnic, gender, age, class, educational, professional, and geographic backgrounds. However, the scope of my research insisted that all subjects were Detroit residents at the time of the data collection. Though a completely thorough sample is impossible, a diverse sample population was achieved. Based on the geographically grounded nature of the research question, all Detroiter’s experiences were relevant: nonetheless, given the scope of the project, I attempted to select interview subjects with particular care to issues of development, housing, and community-based initiatives. As such, the selection of interview subjects was somewhat conceptually driven.

Given the scope of the project, a representative sample was impossible to attain. Rather, I gathered interview subjects through the strategy of convenience sampling. To this end, I recruited my subjects in various settings: at a conference, at
community gatherings such as potlucks and block parties, at meetings, and other public and private social settings. Others, I recruited based on relevant prior relationships, while others I contacted specifically over social media. For the most part people were recruited based on participants' relevance to development in Detroit, and as such were conceptually selected; however, my ability to interview some stakeholders was constrained by the bounds of convenience.

Ultimately, I conducted 17 semi-formal interviews over the span of 11 weeks during the summer of 2014. All interview respondents were guaranteed confidentiality except for the three for whom the nature of their interviews would make it impossible to not derive a clear association: these interviewees are the respondents whose work is used as case studies in Chapter Eight's exploration alternative development models. Aside from these exceptions, the promise of confidentiality was made as to facilitate a comfortable environment in which subjects could share candidly and openly without fear of consequence.

The majority of the interviews were informal and semi-structured, while some were unstructured. For example, two interviews were somewhat spontaneous and so I wasn't prepared with interview guides. In such situations, I asked questions as pertained to my interview question and as they emerged organically in conversation, but also allowed subjects to respond more freely. Generally, interview guides maintained some regularity but contained variations depending on my knowledge of the respondent's relationship to the themes I was investigating and depending on the direction of the interview conversation. While many interviews diverged to some degree from the interview guide, interviewees generally
responded to questions about their own residential backgrounds, changes they may have observed/experienced in their neighborhoods, reasons for moving, relationships with neighbors, perceptions about changes in Detroit, relationships to development, and involvement in community-based projects. With all subjects, I deliberately strived for a consistent quality of open-ended, non-leading questions.

The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two hours, with the average time being about an hour. The interviews were conducted in a variety of spaces, largely dependent on convenience for the interviewee and with concern for quietness and confidentiality. All respondents were fully informed about the nature of the research, were given a chance to ask questions and provided their written consent prior to completing the interview. Each interviewee also filled out a supplemental form with demographic information.

All interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder, and were saved on my laptop computer and on a flash drive. Each interview was assigned a number according to the order in which I completed them; no names were associated with the files as to maintain confidentiality. Each interview was carefully transcribed verbatim and the transcript files remain only accessible to me.

After transcribing, I produced a list of emergent themes, and from there created a code list. Each interview was then coded using Microsoft Word “review”, utilizing a code list which was both theoretically and conceptually driven. With respect to my particular research questions, my code list originally attended to issues related to the social and geographic landscapes of development, neighborhood change, displacement, access and resistance. As I coded, I allowed
more codes to emerge from the data, with additional consideration of locally relevant expressions of the larger themes of interest, ultimately leaving me with a complete list of 41 codes. Once the interviews were thoroughly coded, I was able to examine trends and themes emergent in the data.

**Field Observations**

During the entire 11-week data collection period I was living in Southwest Detroit, and as such had enormous opportunity for field observations. Therefore, innumerable experiences over this period and the field notes I have derived, constitute a vast field experience and data set. Throughout the data collection process I kept a notebook in which I tracked field notes, observations, questions, quotes, descriptions of relevant interactions, settings, findings, and reflections. This provides an accurate, candid, written account of my progress. Some of the field observations were non-participant, meaning that I did not actively engage with individuals or activities around me, such as sitting in a café and observing/listening to conversations. Other field observation experiences were more participatory, wherein I actively engaged in activities and conversation with others, such as going to an art exhibit or other social gathering setting. This method of data acquisition allowed for a more holistic conceptualization of and familiarity with the dynamics of interest for this study.

Furthermore, the informal nature of field data collection was helpful because participants could be more candid than in the setting of a one-on-one, recorded, semi-structured interview. The observations and participant observations are also important because they allowed me to observe patterns and social norms as they
are played out in informal social interaction. The casual setting facilitated comfort and candid conversation, which can be compared to the semi-structured interviews and media, allowing for a triangulation of the data and thus providing for a deeper analysis of the material.

**Media**

Another key component of the data informing this study is media sources. Given this study's emphasis on questions around a dominant narrative, as well as the ideological and rhetorical implications of neoliberal development, media materials served as an essential locus of analysis for this research.

This media data was gathered in a variety of ways—some articles emerged through social media venues and online subscriptions to various news outlets. Other materials I came across in printed news sources, while others were either sent to me by people who thought I might be interested, or I was able to find them through intentional online searches using specific keywords such as "revitalization", "bankruptcy" and so forth. Media was found in sources both mainstream (such as the *Detroit Free Press*, *The Detroit News*, *The New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *The Atlantic*), and otherwise (*The Michigan Citizen* and the *World Socialist Website*, to name a few). As I proceeded with the data collection process, I stored relevant articles in a "Google drive" folder with typed brief descriptions of their relevant themes. As such, I was able to return to the media materials as I later synthesized the other components of my data as to derive crucial insights into the study's pertinent questions. Ultimately, the use of media provided a fundamental source of data relative to the question of contemporary manifestations of neoliberal processes.
in Detroit as well as the ideological and rhetorical vehicles with which they are carried out.

*Role of the Researcher*

Within any ethnographic study it is important to consider the role of the researcher with respect to elements of reflexivity within the data collection and analysis processes. It is crucial to consider the inevitable ways in which my own subjectivity, preconceptions and experiences certainly influence how I conduct the research and understand the data. One of the most salient examples is the fact that I was born and raised in the suburbs of Detroit, and so I have a somewhat familiar relationship with the city. Furthermore, I have participated in internships and political action in the city and have built some relationships with individuals with whom I interviewed; while this dynamic can serve as a predisposition for my research, it can also be a strength as it enabled me to have a more familiar understanding of social settings and dynamics as they relate to my research questions.

Particular to my positionality, as a young, white, college student not from the city of Detroit, there exist certain dynamics that may have subtly played into the data acquisition process. Furthermore, I entered into the research process already critical of the power dynamics, racial crescendos, and elements of “outsiderness”, etc. that surround the gentrification process in Detroit. Similarly, the bounds of convenience entailed that my research was in some ways shaped by the social circles I inhabited, which tended to be shaped somewhat politically toward a
critique of gentrification. I did, however, take steps to mitigate these influences and to seek an array of diverse orientations.

Ultimately, the data procured in this study represents a depth and breadth of voices, experiences and narratives regarding the current conditions of neoliberalization, development and resistance in Detroit. Through a variety of data acquisition methods, I was able to collect a holistic sample, which allows for an in-depth examination of the relevant research questions, contributing a further analysis and theorization to the study of the pertinent themes.

Chapter Four: Management and Manipulation of Crisis

"Capitalism will steal everything and tell you it's a bargain"

– Wayne Curtis, co-founder, Freedom Freedom Growers

Fundamental to the implementation of a neoliberal restructuring scheme, the management and manipulation of crisis has emerged across the globe as a strategy employed by an elite class of corporate and political actors. Exemplified in cases from Chile, Mexico and Iraq, to New York, New Orleans and Detroit, the orchestration and management of crises has been instrumentalized as to serve the combined purposes of rationalizing the system and perpetuating the upward mobility of capital (Harvey 1989, 2006). Furthermore, neoliberal regimes gain power in enacting this agenda as they weaken labor, reform pension structures, privatize public assets and infrastructure, provide tax abatements to corporations and push forward deregulatory policies. At the urban scale, recent proceedings in Detroit — from the state imposition of Emergency Financial Manager, Kevin Orr, in March of 2013, to the initiation of municipal bankruptcy proceedings in October of
that year, to the vast restructuring via austerity and privatization measures — entail an acute culmination of neoliberalization processes that have already been underway for some time. Central to Detroit’s restructuring process is the orchestration and management of the city’s debt crisis. In this chapter, I contend that Detroit’s recent renewal efforts, which contribute to the gentrification of the city and the continued upward mobility of capital, rest on the ideological and material implications of the neoliberal orchestration and manipulation of crisis.

As a foundational work in the study of post-industrial crisis in Detroit, Thomas Sugrue’s seminal book, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, challenges the commonplace incrimination of the uprising of 1967 and alleged misrule of Detroit’s black leadership in the following decades as the sources of the city’s current crisis. In *Origins*, Sugrue historicizes Detroit’s challenges, pointing to systemic conditions of inequality — racial segregation and class disparity — and postwar deindustrialization as key factors in the creation of the circumstances of the city’s crisis today. His social and political analysis of Detroit history argues, “the fate of the city is the consequence of the unequal distribution of power and resources” (Sugrue 1996, 14). While his work serves to historicize the current crisis, the task of this chapter is to build upon that background while moving to situate the current redevelopment efforts within a context of crisis.

Though the language of failure has permeated the dominant discourse on the city of Detroit for the past several decades (Gregory 2012), the current crisis must be understood not as an ahistorical given, but as a predictable product of the dialectical operations of power structures and human agents. As a city whose
economy and very identity emerged in tandem with the burgeoning of the automotive industry, the postwar deindustrialization process hurt Detroit, with the black population bearing the brunt of the damage. The combination of continued racist housing and employment policy and plant relocations severely limited the economic opportunities of Detroit's blacks; due to residential segregation and lack of resources, few had the option to follow the exodus of employment and became trapped in the inner city (Sugrue 1996). In 1950, "nearly one in five of all Detroit adults did not work at all or worked in the informal economy" (Sugrue 1996, 262). The number grew steadily in the next decades and by 1980, "nearly half of the adult male population had only tenuous connections to the city's formal labor market" (Sugrue 1996, 262). The industrial divestment of the city produced a new phenomenon in which the urban poor became deproletarianized; they could no longer rely on factory jobs, and came to exist on the economic margins.

As the concurrent processes of industrial decline and white flight impacted the city's political and economic landscapes in the 1960s and '70s, Detroit became home to a growing black political power. Ranging from reformers to radicals, Detroit's black communities organized around a variety of social, political and economic issues, forming strong coalitions, organizations and political platforms. Responding to the economic and racial injustices that faced Detroit's black community, July of 1967 saw the culmination of brewing frustrations as crowds of mostly black young men took to the streets in rebellion. While whites had been moving to the suburbs in large numbers since the 1950s, after the rebellion, whites continued to flee. Carrying with them the racial and economic tensions that had
divided Detroit in previous years, as well as the political muscle of unionized labor, white working class politics remained strong as these populations established themselves in the inner ring suburbs (Sugrue 1996). As the suburbs strengthened, so too did Detroit's black leadership, with the election of the city's first black mayor, Coleman Young, in 1974. Sugrue identifies this racialized political division process as the foundational basis for the current crisis faced by the city of Detroit:

"The most enduring legacy of the postwar racial struggles in Detroit has been the growing marginalization of the city in local, state, and national politics. Elected officials in Lansing and Washington, beholden to a vocal, well-organized, and defensive white suburban constituency, have reduced funding for urban education, antipoverty, and development programs. At the same time, Detroit...grapples with a declining tax base and increasingly expensive social, economic, and infrastructural problems" (268).

The commonplace narrative blames black Detroit for its own destruction, centering the decline of the city on the riots of 1967 and the subsequent years of black political leadership. As the narrative goes, the riots were what caused whites to flee the city, further reinforcing the notion of black self-destruction and the correlation of whiteness and value.

As such, "'white flight" has become somewhat of a catchall expression, frequently used to answer the question of why the city of Detroit looks and operates the way it does....this kind of language reinforces a narrative that when whites leave cities or neighborhoods they somehow "fall apart" and that "rebirth" and "renewal" are dependent on whites returning" (Gregory 2012, 217). By focusing on individual lifestyle choices and the simplified scapegoating of Detroit as a proxy for black failure, institutions are absolved. By precluding the systemic issues of inadequate finances, intentional deindustrialization and depopulation draining the city of
resources necessary to maintain infrastructure, and drastic cuts in federal urban spending, the crisis of Detroit becomes a naturally local, self-imposed "black" problem.

This pervasive belief has been damaging to Detroit in numerous ways, but none so much as in the presumption that Detroit must be "saved" from itself by outside actors. The ideological work of that framing has created the rationalization of the appointment of an Emergency Financial Manager who has rendered Detroit citizens voiceless in his project to restructure the city. As he moves to line the coffers of the corporate elite while sidelining the interests of public pensioners, the poor, the elderly, the poor, communities of color, and all who stand to be marginalized by the privatization and gentrification of the city, EMF Kevin Orr, and his law firm, Jones Day, walk away with one hundred million of the city's dollars and a resume built on their ability to bankrupt Detroit and make a global example of the job. As Shae Howell, Detroit activist and scholar, writes of the Emergency Financial Manager and the city's bankruptcy, "Across the globe, in the halls of corporate power and financial manipulation, the Detroit case is being considered as an important example of the kind of legal framework needed to force deep austerity plans on people in the name of restructuring debt. Key to that legal framework is the elimination of public, democratic decision-making" (Howell 2014). In February of 2014, the Socialist Equality Party published a collection of reports from the Workers Inquiry into the Bankruptcy of Detroit and the Attack on the DIA and Pensions. The Workers Inquiry consisted of a gathering of workers and youth from throughout Detroit, across the U.S. and internationally, and provides what they call a "detailed
exposure of the political conspiracy involving both major political parties, the courts and the mass media."

The collection of reports, entitled *The Truth Behind the Bankruptcy of Detroit*, provides a context and a timeline of events leading up to the appointment of Kevin Orr as the EMF, and the initiation of the bankruptcy negotiations. The document demonstrates the collusion between Michigan’s governor, Rick Snyder, former Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, private corporations and the private law firm Jones Day and their associate, Kevin Orr, in the neoliberal profiteering scheme by way of bankrupting the city. Tom Carter, the Legal Correspondent for the World Socialist Web Site says in the report, “The Detroit bankruptcy is essentially a political-financial conspiracy to raid the city (2014, 31). He goes on to explain the application of bankruptcy in the municipal sector of a tool that has “long been used...in the private sector for stripping workers of benefits, contracts and rights....now, bankruptcy is considered a legitimate, even lucrative business opportunity” (31-32). Carter identifies the process taking place in Detroit as a part of a global process in which the raiding that has been happening in the private sector is now being tried in the public sector where bigger fortunes stand to be made.

Bankruptcy and renewal are unlikely bedfellows. Nonetheless, the two are intricately linked in the media rhetoric around the two processes. Often, the appeal to private investors is lauded, emphasizing the role of the neoliberal state as facilitator in the creation of a business-friendly environment. In the *Detroit Free Press* article, “Detroit After Bankruptcy”, Tom Walsh pronounces that Mayor Duggan “won’t have enough money left in the kitty” once the bankruptcy is complete, and
thus calls for a fully privatized “revival” of Detroit (2014). Similarly, the New York Times wrote of “How Detroit is Coming Back”:

“Seven months after filing for bankruptcy, Detroit’s leaders unveiled detailed plans for the city’s recovery, which laid out a blueprint for future spending and ways the city could pay back its creditors. The plans look optimistically toward a Detroit with renewed city services — a draw for developers and new businesses — but with continued costs. And business leaders, corporations and foundations are committing funds to help revitalization” (Austen 2014).

While the mainstream media represents this dynamic as a hopeful one, I contend that the emphasis on private capital investment in Detroit’s “revitalization” efforts demonstrates the way in which the Emergency Financial Management and bankruptcy proceedings have not only stripped Detroiters of their electoral and constitutional rights, it has created the conditions in which private investors are able to continue to exploit Detroiters as the city is restructured in the interest of capital.

Throughout the bankruptcy court proceedings, the connection between bankruptcy and private capital interest became exceedingly evident. Within its blueprint, a wholesale privatization of the city is undertaken,

“with the full backing of a federal court acting on behalf of powerful corporate and financial interests, a cabal of capitalist politicians and legal and financial bagmen are looting virtually all of Detroit’s basic public infrastructure—including street lights, garbage collection, the water and sewerage department, as well as the city’s world class art museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA)” (Gaist 2014).

Gaist writes that Roger Penske, another billionaire lauded as a Detroit “booster” on account of his promotion of corporate-funded development in the city, gave testimony in bankruptcy court. A clearly interested party, Penske contributed millions of his own funds to the bankruptcy plan, including $10 million to the “grand
bargain," "Penske gave his full support to the bankruptcy plan, saying that through 
the bankruptcy "a cleansing effect can take place" (Gaist 2014). Similarly, 
Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr proclaimed in his testimony that the bankruptcy 
plan constitutes "yet another renaissance" for Detroit (Gaist 2014). While the 
bankruptcy has skirted constitutional obligations, leaving pensioners with a fraction 
of what they've earned, privatized city assets and catalyzed the gentrification of the 
city, it becomes clear that private capital interests are the winners of the "grand 
bargain." As the legal, economic and media agents continue to conclude that 
"private sector investment" is the "key to the renewal of Detroit" (Walsh 2014), the 
connection between private capital and renewal become solidified. As such, the 
manipulation of the crisis of Detroit provides the rhetorical, ideological and material 
basis for the "revitalization" thrust now dominating development discourse and 
material reality in Detroit.

Chapter Five: New venues for accumulation

"Detroit is shaping up to be a destination, a good investment and a growth opportunity 
in the eyes of the world." – Alisa Priddle, "Detroit emerging as investment and 
destination gem after bankruptcy", Detroit Free Press, November 9, 2014

As Ross and Mitchell write in "Neoliberal Landscapes of Deception," neoliberal 
development "relies on...discrepancies between image and materiality going 
unremarked," and, to this end, tends to create a "façade" which serves to uphold the 
ideological hegemony of the system (2004, 689). The neoliberal system depends on 
a conceptual apparatus that serves to "conceal labor histories and geographies" and 
the vast array of social and political relationships upon which the development rests
In Detroit, this dynamic is evident as the rhetoric of the city as a “blank slate” (Gregory 2012) facilitates the rationalization of a crisis-driven development project that embodies a settler colonial ethic, erasing histories and communities as spaces are gentrified. Thus, given the way in which the discursive manipulation of the current crisis in Detroit and the subsequent redevelopment project rely on an erasure of history and a negation of the relationship between the local conditions and larger processes of global capital, it is necessary here to provide some historical and global context. In this chapter, I situate Detroit’s current crisis within an overview of the manipulation of land, investment and movements of people throughout the last half-century. Furthermore, I will present an analysis of the ideological role of this manipulation in the compulsion of a crisis-driven development model. This chapter, ultimately, will provide the basic context for which the current gentrification of Detroit will be framed, providing for a richer analysis of these historical and global tendencies as they are expressed through the lived experiences of Detroiter’s today.

**Land and the “urban frontier”**

In 1848, before Henry Ford or the Wright brothers were even born, Karl Marx wrote of the expansive nature of capitalism, as it seeks constantly for new venues in which to penetrate. He also highlighted the connection between the expansion of markets and the movements and flows of groups of people. In *The Communist Manifesto*, he wrote: “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe” (Marx 1848). Though Marx’s writings certainly emerged from a particular historical moment, the
ideas remain applicable today as we seek to understand the nature of the
relationship between capital, development and the movements of populations.
Marx’s writings spoke to a specific era in industrial capitalist development; since
that time, the capitalism system has morphed considerably, and, accordingly, flows
of investment and the mechanisms by which profit is accrued have evolved. David
Harvey identifies that “there has been an underlying problem of what [he] would
call ‘over-accumulation’ for a considerable time now... and in part, the movement
into investing in asset values rather than production is a consequence of that.”
(Choonara 2009). One such example of investment in asset values is the real estate
industrial complex. In analyzing the nature of patterns of investment and
divestment in land, a richer understanding of gentrification can be derived.

Critical geography theory understands the relationship between capitalism
and land as one in which actors manipulate the value of the built environment as to
pursue an agenda of continued capital accumulation. Pivotal theorists such as David
Harvey and Neil Smith articulate the crucial role of social actors, such as real estate
agents, bankers and developers, as they exploit and manipulate the value of urban
space through strategic allocation of capital investment in the built environment
understands the city as a space that the capitalist system commoditizes,
appropriates and exploits as a means of survival by way of continued capital
political economy framing of the restructuring city as a “growth machine”, as land is
commoditized in the search of ever-increasing growth, wealth and power (1976). By
evolving land into property, it becomes an asset which can be manipulated and profited upon within the capitalist system. Within this context, Smith explains gentrification not as a naturally occurring product of changing cultural tastes but as "a structural product of the land and housing markets" (1979, 546). Understanding the structural forces at play within the realm of land, and the valuation and development thereof, gentrification can be situated within a web of the historical, economic and social processes which have strategically created the conditions in which it is employed contemporarily.

As a pivotal component of the devaluation of Detroit's landscape over the past half-century, an understanding of the suburbanization process, particularly in a city such as Detroit, is crucial to the situation of the city's "renewal" efforts as they take place today. Neil Smith's "rent gap" theory, as outlined in the literature section, provides a helpful basis for the analysis of the profitability of Detroit's land made possible today. Relative to this historical process, Smith writes that "Suburbanization and gentrification are certainly interconnected. The dramatic suburbanization of the urban landscape in the last century or more provided an alternative geographical locus for capital accumulation and thereby encouraged a comparative disinvestment at the center—most intensely so in the US" (Smith 1996, 37). Thusly, the imperative of increased accumulation drove capital investment into the suburban built environment, depleting the city space of value. In connecting the underdevelopment of the urban landscape in Detroit with the concurrent suburbanization process, as well as historicizing the current condition as a product of a cyclical process of land value manipulation, gentrification in Detroit becomes
indicative of larger processes than are acknowledged within the dominant
development narrative.

Within the context of Detroit, a city that carries an acutely potent racial
legacy, the history of racist housing policy and discriminatory labor and housing
practices is of particular importance when considering the cyclical valuation and
devaluation of land. The dominant discourse tends to elude this historical vantage
point, furthermore naturalizing the logic of a narrow development blueprint that
focuses more on enterprise than on the condition of the city’s native residents. In a
city where historical discriminatory housing policy literally charted neighborhood
valuation based on racial and ethnic makeup, the current revaluation of Detroit’s
built environment must account for this history.

As a key component of the matrix of policies and practices that contributed
to the racialization of Detroit’s geography is a federally funded program called the
Home Owners Loan Corporation. Established as a part of Roosevelt’s New Deal in
1933, the HOLC Act was a liberalized lending policy, which served the goal of
allowing the opportunity to purchase a home without a down payment. Within this
federal policy, qualifying individuals were provided a privately financed low-
interest loan guaranteed against default — a promise secured by the banks (Sugrue
1996, 60). The HOLC created a rating system in which maps called “residential
security maps” represented neighborhoods based on an A-through-D grade, based
explicitly on racial and ethnic makeup. An “A”-rated neighborhood was considered a
safe investment per elevated property values, with value attributed due to the
sophisticated “homogeneity” — read as coded for whiteness—of the neighborhood. On
the other end of the rating system, a "D"-grade neighborhood "sheltered even a few black families" and as such was made nearly impossible to attain a loan within its bounds. This program is accredited with the founding of the practice of redlining, in which the "residential security maps" literally created a geographic demarcation as to where one could receive a home loan based on racial makeup of the neighborhood. Within the language and execution of this policy, both at the national scale as well as within the city of Detroit, race and property values became intrinsically linked.

The qualitative nexus of land value and race codified within the Home Owners Loan Corporation policy not only reinforced a strict racial segregation of neighborhoods, but it served as the basis for further manipulation of housing and land in Detroit's post-war period. Preying on white racism, real estate agencies began a practice known as "block busting" in which real estate brokers and speculators played an important role in swiftly changing the racial makeup of a neighborhood. Manipulating white prejudicial fears of blacks "taking over" their neighborhoods, brokers intentionally played on these racialized notions, sometimes even using conniving techniques such as hiring a black woman to walk through a white neighborhood for the sake of scaring whites into selling their homes quickly (Sugrue 1996, 195). Describing his memory of this history of "block busting" in the 1960s in northwest Detroit, one interviewee, a 56-year-old white Detroiter, recalled getting a post card in the mail

"saying we've sold a house on your block... and everybody knows whose house that is and ah if you're interested you know...it's built on racism...it's making money on racism". Within this schema, not only did real estate agencies benefit from the rapid liquidation of white-owned Detroit homes,
but they also profited on the receiving end of that racial fleet as they developed the newly sprawling suburbs."

As demonstrated in this man's recollection, the underdevelopment of Detroit's landscape was the result of deliberate and calculated divestment efforts by which financial stakeholders and white metro-Detroiters benefited while the city center's increasingly black and increasingly poor residents suffered the consequences.

Another pivotal example which contributed to the strategic devaluation of Detroit's built environment and acting as a catalyst of white suburbanization, was the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known commonly as the GI Bill. While on paper this legislation made no reference to race or racially coded categorizations, in its written provisions and in its effect, the bill served to further reinforce discriminatory housing policy and the race and class differentiation between urban and suburban geographies (Kaplan & Valls 2007; Massey 1990; Sugrue 1996). The G.I. Bill maintained the practices of previous FHA housing policy in establishing criteria for which neighborhoods would qualify for loans, prioritizing suburban investment and effectively excluding most black veterans from the post-World War II benefits offered to their white counterparts (Kaplan & Valls 2007). By essentially excluding black neighborhoods from eligibility for government subsidized loans, this policy served to sponsor the suburbanization process while relegating blacks to the confines of a divested urban core. In analyzing these processes as a product of concerted efforts on the part of the real estate industry and the collaborating federal and local branches of government, it is evident the way in which the collusion between private practice and government service enabled the exodus of whites from the urban core while siphoning profits toward the beneficiaries of the real
estate industry. Simultaneously, this historical process of devaluing the urban built environment and perpetuating racial divisions composed a "land value valley" which proposed the possibility of future cycles of manipulation and capitalization off of the commoditized landscape.

While the processes of "block busting" and the white flight from Detroit's urban center were expedient, with neighborhoods changing seemingly "overnight", the life cycles of investment patterns and movements of people revolve at a much more gradual rate. After decades of divestment from the city, contributed to through the interplay of a variety of factors including the dramatic decentralization of the automobile industry, as well as subsidized housing policy and racial tensions, Detroit's post-war boom period was bookended by a dramatic waning in population, jobs, revenue and political clout and, crucially, land value. In addition to the fabricated depreciation of Detroit's property values, collaboration with real estate agencies such as Century 21 and banks such as Morgan Stanley managed to further exploit Detroit's black homeowners through the deceptive use of subprime loans. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a landmark federal lawsuit in 2012 charging a violation of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The lawsuit uncovers the reality of racial discrimination in the targeted sale of fraudulent mortgage-backed securities, effecting as many as 6,000 black homeowners in the Detroit area (aclu.org 2012). This lawsuit not only illuminates the continued legacy of racist housing policy in the Detroit area, but it serves to explain an important contributing factor to the current crisis faced by the city. While black Detroiters are often stigmatized and criminalized for the disrepair of the city's housing stock, the
unearthing of such discriminatory practices elucidate the agency of banks and the real estate industry in the fabrication of a blighted Detroit landscape.

Even as Detroit's mayor Mike Duggan advocates a platform of increased population density within the city, naming as a priority the reversal of the city's trend of population exodus (Dolan 2014), it is reported that one fifth of Detroiter stand lose their homes to foreclosure due to inability to pay their property taxes (Hackman 2014). The city’s Land Bank Authority expresses a dual mandate, prioritizing the attraction of a new desirable class of residents to the city and eradicating all blight in Detroit within the next five years (Hackman 2014). While pointing to blight elimination as a “most pressing need”, the city continues to evict poor families at exponential rates, with another 115,000 residents slated to lose their homes next year (Hackman 2014). In a city with a dwindling population just under 700,000, in which 83% of the population is black and 38% of its population lives below the poverty line, the city is focusing on attracting new residents to the city instead of supporting the existing ones (US Census 2010). As the removal of original residents continues, “blight” becomes commoditized as the city profits on mass sales; in October, an undisclosed bidder on an online auction became the owner of more than 6,3000 properties, a sale which was promoted as a “blight bundle” (Abbey-Lambertz 2014). While subsidized housing options such as the “Live Downtown” campaign allure young professionals to the developing downtown areas, the surrounding neighborhoods are being gutted so that the city can attain the land, sell it quickly on the online auction and redevelop it to serve the needs and aesthetic desires of a newcomer mostly white young professional class. As such, the
cycles of land value manipulation continue to allocate profit in the hands of the corporate and political elite while the city’s poor and black residents are exploited and dispossessed.

The significant profitability of land value manipulation within the neoliberal paradigm is no more clear than in Detroit today as billionaire Mike Illich is sold for $1 the land upon which he will build a new arena for his hockey team, the Detroit Red Wings. Not only has the historical intentional devaluation of the central city land positioned its practical giveaway, but it allows the neoliberal ideology of trickledown urbanism to locate the corporate class, such as Illich, as the drivers of development, justifying the 58% public revenue he will receive to complete the project (Guillen & Reindl 2014). Furthermore, as the neoliberal paradigm vests confidence in the private sector, with the role of corporate actors superseding that of public entities, Illich’s development agreement with the city entails that his company will no longer have to pay percentages of profits to the city, estimated at a loss of 7 million in annual revenue to the city (Guillen & Reindl 2014). While Michigan’s governor, Rick Snyder touts the subsidy as a “part of investing in Detroit’s future,” it becomes clear that the facilitation of a city welcoming to business is the future of Detroit that is desired by him and others in power: “As we stabilize the city government’s finances, as we address those issues and improve services, Detroit moves from a place where people might have had a negative impression...to being a place that will be recognized across the world as a place of great value and a place to invest” (Zirin 2013). Meanwhile, the human cost is invisibilized as politicians and business leaders speak about creating a better future
for Detroit even as people are priced out and evicted en mass in the surrounding neighborhoods to make way for the wave of redevelopment now overwhelming the area (Collier 2013; Porter 2013).

As members of a coalition called Detroit Eviction Defense met this summer to support each other as homeowners and tenants who have been subject to predatory lending, unfair terminations of lease and evictions, I observed the impact of these patterns of land manipulation and exploitation of Detroit’s residents. Telling of experiences with unethical banking practices and unfair tenant treatment, members of the group shared outrage and concern as well as an analysis of the motives: “they want the land – and now they’re coming after the water. It’s time to roll our sleeves up”, one member commented after someone shared about her eminent threat of foreclosure. Remarking on Mayor Duggan’s hypocritical role in the dispossession of Detroit’s longtime residents, a meeting member said, “He wants ‘em out of the city, that’s the bottom line…it’s gentrification…we saw this coming.” In this analysis, the DED member critically synthesizes the interconnected roles of the city government and the banking institutions in the current onslaught of evictions, foreclosures and the city’s water shutoff crisis and the ultimate gentrification of Detroit. In manipulating the flows of populations and investment in the assets of the built environment, agents acting in the interest of public and private capital collaborate in the timed production of conditions that make capital revaluation a rational market response, leading to gentrification and continued capital accumulation (Smith 1979, 1-42).
Establishing in this study’s analysis a baseline context of the historical manipulation of land values and the movements of populations as to construct a classed and racially differentiated geography is crucial to a critical analysis of gentrification today. As such, it is useful to frame gentrification as a “structural product of the land and housing markets” and not as a chance occurrence but an expected outcome of a cycle of “concerted disinvestment...and a long period of deterioration and a lack of new capital investment in the inner city” which creates the conditions in which reinvestment becomes a logical investment endeavor (Smith 1979, 542-46). This market condition is noted not only in critical geography theory but in the mainstream media as well. While the perspective of the New York Times article was much less critical, the underlying acknowledgment remains that the underdevelopment of Detroit has created an “environment that allows for cheap real estate and easy accessibility.” (Austen 2014) Within this context, billionaire moguls such as Dan Gilbert and Mike Illich can purchase large swaths of city real estate at exceedingly low premiums. Not only are tycoons benefitting from the devaluation of the city landscape, but middle-class young professionals and artists alike are able to access the land through a variety of programs that catalyze this settlement and redevelopment of the city landscape.

**Reemployment of a Settler Colonial Narrative**

The precision with which the divestment of Detroit’s built environment was orchestrated after World War II is not a thing of the past. Investors, entrepreneurs, CEOs and politicians today continue to enact a pointed agenda, manipulating land use for the purpose of capitalist development, thereby displacing the most
vulnerable populations. In a 2008 email memo, Phil Cooley, the owner of Slowe’s Barbeque, a “trendy” destination restaurant established in Corktown in 2005, addressed a group called the “Conquistadors” outlining a four-point project list in which the group would develop the Corktown area directly adjacent to downtown. One outlined goal was to target the local Bagley Market by “organizing complaints against [the market] as well as rogue acts of bad will.” The memo further explained, “We hope to make their operation as difficult as possible until the day when we can afford to swoop in and buy them out to open our own specialty grocery store.”

Evidenced in this memo is the strategic attack on local life and business that is the exacting arm of contemporary development in Detroit.

As real estate agents in the post-war years manipulated local residents into selling their homes as they “block busted” entire neighborhoods, developers today use calculated strategies to reshape the physical and cultural nature of neighborhoods, expanding their commercial endeavors while displacing local businesses and residents. Predicated upon the divestment of the city space in previous decades, conditions now exist in which newcomers, such as Cooley, can profit by reinvesting in the previously divested land. The following point on the email goes further into explaining the ways in which already vulnerable local populations are degraded by the revaluation process that seeks to reshape the urban landscape. The note highlights a plan to approach the Manna Meal soup kitchen at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church on the corner of Michigan and Trumbull and urge them to “stop the free handouts in our neighborhood that facilitate the drugs, crime and general malcontent that thrives from St Peters to the Train Station to the
Mission on Michigan.” The strategy involved in this plan is evidenced as the group sought to redevelop the Corktown neighborhood within the interest of their entrepreneurial entitlement to the space and a specific raced (white) and classed (middle-class) aesthetic. Gregory writes of the deeply engrained biases of race and class as they influence the construction of renewal programs: the language which often paints people within places slated for renewal as “out of place” effectively “metaphorically places the people who reside in these areas in socio-spatial isolation, demeaning them symbolically and socially, and positioning them as outside of the process or “path” of redevelopment” (2012, 221). The symbolic work of the memo in the construction of a justifiable removal of unwanted residents embodies this logic, and is visible in similar ways in other critical examples.

While Phil Cooley’s recent endeavors in the Corktown district demonstrate a marked embodiment of the reasoning required to carry out the brand of development to which he aspires, this project is not limited to the language in his memo. Hartigan’s *Racial Situations* captures an interview in which Phil describes the process of buying a Corktown house for $10,000 and reselling it for over $80,000 a decade later. As described in Cooley’s account, the procedure involved evicting a family living in the home at the time:

“The people in there were squatters, basically...they were a pretty rough crowd. The mother was the worst but the daughter was turning tricks and the son was selling drugs” (Hartigan: 1999, 173). Because he was able to construct the residents as “out of place,” Cooley was able to rationalize his actions: “I didn’t feel guilty like I was some gentrifier. I mean these people were criminals and they were squatting on the
property, and they were white..., y’know, frankly just...well...well, y’know... [long pause]. Anyways...they were just bad actors” (Hartigan 1999, 174). The project of redevelopment, as typified in the “Conquistadors” memo as well as Cooley’s account of the prior residents of his renovation project, is hinged upon a framing of the current residents as pathological transgressors; in using the language of “drugs, crime and general malcontent,” and “criminals” and “squatters,” Cooley paints them as “out of place,” thus rationalizing their removal and the project of redevelopment.

Within the language of the memo and the Hartigan interview, from calling themselves “conquistadors”, to the stated intention of “swooping in” to develop and improve the area, to the stigmatization of the prior residents, is an imbedded settler mentality. Within the context of a city in which policies of Eminent Domain have historically displaced communities of color and racial tensions and discriminatory policies have long relegated poor communities of color to the most undesired of areas while investment patterns and housing policy have facilitated whites’ requisition of quality land and housing stock, the current wave of redevelopment must be understood as a continuation of a long historical legacy. Neil Smith writes of the deployment of the settler colonial project in the contemporary urban landscape as it employs similar mechanisms of erasure of existing communities in the justification of a claim to the desired land:

“It is often true that very vital working-class communities are culturally devitalized through gentrification as the new middle class scorns the streets in favor of the dining room and bedroom. The idea of “urban pioneers” is as insulting applied to contemporary cities as the original idea of “pioneers” in the US West. Now, as then, it implies that no one lives in the areas being pioneered—no one worthy of notice, at least” (Smith 1996, 30).
The settler rhetoric and ideology is ubiquitous, permeating the language and outlooks of individual agents and media sources alike. One clear example is seen in a New York Times Magazine reference to the apparent effect of Cooley’s restaurant:

“As Slow’s turned into a destination, its success drawing a second wave of settlement, Cooley looked into other local economic development” (Austen: 2014; emphasis added). And, just as the settler colonial project was hinged to a missionary Salvationist ethic in the years of its original employment, the drivers of Detroit’s gentrification today are lauded as saviors: In the New York Times article, “A Missionary’s Quest to Remake Motor City,” Segal writes of Dan Gilbert’s Opportunity Detroit initiative as “one of the most ambitious privately financed urban reclamation projects in American history,” calling it “both a rescue mission and a business venture that, if successful, will yield him a fortune” (Segal 2013). This notion of “entrepreneur as Pioneer” is “critical to a changing landscape and is recognized as being entitled to the space, resources, and identity of that landscape” (Gregory 2012, 223). Furthermore, in addition to the settler colonial valuation of the exceptional businessman, the notion of “entrepreneur as Salvationist” metaphorically positions Detroit as a victim needing to be saved by a business-savvy outsider, a logic which serves to “negate the value of your average Detroit resident who may not have the means, the time, or the interest in opening businesses or restoring infrastructure. Simply put...the exceptional-izing of the entrepreneur as Salvationist for the city challenges the value, and in some cases the identity, of many Detroiters” (Gregory 2012, 225). The rhetorical and material stakes of this conceptual labor are deeply rooted in colonial and racist relations of power. The geographical and social reality
of redevelopment efforts today are borne of the interconnecting operations of structural, cultural and rhetorical enactments of a historically entrenched neoliberal project.

People I interviewed demonstrated an understanding of the colonial dynamic as it embeds itself in the redevelopment project in Detroit today. One subject, in particular, a black 40-year-old man living in a neighborhood just west of midtown, expressed the parallels of gentrification and settler colonialism:

"Gentrification is just a new...a new sophisticated, modern word for uh...land grab, for manifest destiny...you know, the wild wild west, basically...sticking...just going over there, you stick your flag and I want it...that's basically what's taking place...but also, um, it is, it is a more systematic and sophisticated plan of colonization, it's a policy of colonization...so we the so-called natives fool ourselves cuz in reality...we don't own anything...so it further shows the power...the power of those who are in power and in relationship to imperialism...and capitalism which...capitalism fuels itself off of imperialism...stripping the land of its resources...so...we as human beings...and particularly in Detroit...are finding...continue to find ourselves on the outside lookin' in because...you know...we don't own anything."

Demonstrating the interpersonal enactments of a settler colonial development mechanism, the sentiment of dispossession and occupation expressed in the statement above are matched by the entitlement mentality of newcomers. In the portion below, a 34-year-old middle-class white man who moved from out of state to the suburbs and then from the suburbs to Detroit about five years ago, describes his reason for moving to the city:

"When I moved to Detroit one of the reasons why I did so is because I heard you can't get a DUI... I think a lot of the sort of hipsters I know think of themselves as not gentrifying, cuz they don't work at Quicken Loans or things like that...I think a lot of us came down here because we were like, well we're not gonna get fuckin' harassed, we can smoke weed on the porch...we can drive drunk and not get ah not get in trouble...and so that's what it is that I like to do, I like to, you know, play in bands and drink and um hang out and
that was like it seemed perfect it was like cool, aright, I don’t have to worry about anything, plus...and because of that then there was all this stuff going on down here that catered to that, shows and things like that cuz other people who wanted to drink and drive and um hang out you know? It was here and it was cheap..”

Captured in this quote is the fundamental embodiment of race and class privilege which underpins the sense of entitlement to the free access of space in Detroit.

While 150 mostly black juveniles were detained1, by police2 to clean up the image of downtown on the night of the 2014 fourth of July fireworks, middle-class white men like the one interviewed above, feel free to engage in unlawful behavior without fear of ramification. This dynamic speaks to the reproduction of social disparity and continuation of race and class stratification that gentrification, as a part of neoliberalization, entails.

Further articulated in the above quote, and operationalized through market, police, and media forces, as well as in interpersonal enactments of power, is the way in which movements of populations, as well as capital, serve to modify the cultural nature of a given area. Such social modifications can extend to the point that the landscape is altered to “cater” to a specific raced and classed newcomer’s aesthetic and lifestyle tastes, further allowing the isolation of newcomers and the original

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1 They were detained under the pretext of a curfew which allowed police to profile and detain youth based on racialized markers such as “baggy pants” (Detroit News “Police Detain 150 Juveniles for Breaking Detroit Fireworks Curfew” June 25, 2014). The night of the fireworks was described by some as a “police state” as U.S. Border Patrol, Michigan State police and city police “began a coordinated plan to limit access to Detroit’s fireworks” (“Two Detroits” 2014).

2 Also noteworthy here is the fact that Dan Gilbert, who owns 30 buildings in downtown Detroit, accounting for 7.6 million square feet of property (Maynard 2013), has a stake in the policing of the downtown area as his private Rock Ventures security force patrols the city center 24 hours a day, monitoring 300 surveillance cameras from a control center (Austen 2014).
residents. To this end, one interview respondent, a 22-year-old art student who had moved to the city from the suburbs, represented a lack of knowledge and interaction with her Southwest Detroit community: “I didn’t really even know it was Mexican town when I moved here, I just was like oh this house is old, that’s cool, I wanna live in an old house, that was about it. And the rent was cheap.” For her, the aesthetic character of the “cool” “old house”, with a secondary consideration for affordability, were the motivations to move to the neighborhood; knowledge and consideration for the cultural and personal character of her community weren’t relevant. When asked about her interaction with people in her neighborhood, she responded, “I don’t really see that many people to talk to...um, there’s not, I don’t stay here too much in my like leisure time so...” As she has access to leisure activities outside of her community, and lacks a historical and cultural connection to the people of the neighborhood, their presence, for her, can be practically erased. While the above comment negates the presence of people, citing their perceived absence as the reason for her lack of interaction with community members, at another point in her interview, she admits to cultural differences as being fundamental to the isolation existing between her and her neighbors:

“I get the feeling that it’s like it is a community and people do know each other, but I don’t really know anyone here...I don’t speak Spanish, I don’t know anything about like their culture so I just, I’m just like here, but not a part of it. But I definitely hear stuff going on...I hear music...I also though see a lot of litter and just people not taking care of the things around them...”

As seen in previous examples, her description of her neighbors relies not only on an explicitly cultural distinction, but also on a subtly raced and classed description; noting “litter” and “people not taking care of things around them”, the subject
engages in a nuanced demotion and “othering” which justifies her lack of interaction with the existing community. The interviewee’s comments represent a conceptual move that serves to rationalize the gentrification process. Associating the community with the litter and failure to “take care” of things, the people become as “out of place” as the litter, and thus their conceptual and eventual physical removal becomes justified.

As Smith significantly notes, the cultural analysis of gentrification must be contextualized within an explanation of the violence of gentrification (1996, 48). As such, the cultural and micro level dynamics of newcomers’ social interactions in Detroit’s urban space, must be situated within an understanding of the dialectical relationship between individual actors and structural forces. In the analysis of the rationales of individual new Detroit residents, connections can be drawn to larger structural forces which interact with individual agents in the development and subsequent restructuring of Detroit’s landscape.

Chapter Six: “Winners and Losers”

“Detroit is my generation’s city”
- young white woman speaking in promotional video for new luxury apartments in the redeveloped downtown building, The Albert (Welcome to the Albert).

“We’re afraid of being homeless”
- elderly black woman, one of over a hundred low-income senior citizens who were evicted from the building to make room for market-rate renters (Video: The Griswold Building is back: The Albert)

As a result of the inequitable distribution of resources and unequal access to the benefits of development, a distinctive set of differentiations are taking place in Detroit. While many of the interview subjects highlighted the geographic nature of
these differentiations, their evaluations also carry an understanding of the racialized and classed nature of that sociospatial reformation of city space. Malik Yakini, 58, instrumental in the food justice movement in Detroit as founder of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (see Chapter Eight), illustrated the landscape of uneven development in Detroit today:

"You have two Detroits developing. You have downtown, midtown, north Corktown, which are areas that increasing are becoming gentrified, are increasingly becoming white, are increasingly becoming areas where there is capital infused in [and?] development happening and in many cases have amenities that the rest of the city doesn’t have, like bike paths...quicker police response time...and then you have the rest of the city, the neighborhoods where the majority of the people live, which isn’t experiencing any kind of this development. So that’s what’s disturbing, the inequity in that is very disturbing."

As in previous decades, the valuation of certain spaces rests on the undervaluing of others. In the realm of the “new Detroit” that is currently being created, investment patterns, though promising for some, offer little in the way of support for communities that fall outside of the parameters of a select few central districts. As one interviewee put it, “There’s neighborhoods, like contemporarily, neighborhoods are being chosen winners and losers.” As evidenced in this research, uneven development connotes social as well as geographical differentiations, charting onto Detroit’s landscape the social stratification imperative to the neoliberal project.

Speaking specifically about the public subsidization of Illich’s new Red Wings arena and the way in which these policies reproduce social stratification based on race and class, Malik Yakini said:

"The idea seems to be that if we let rich people obtain these things that they’ll develop things that will generate capital and somehow that will trickle down to the rest of the people. I’ve seen absolutely no evidence that that happens like that. And so what it creates is a further class divide where you have the
ones who already have more and then pass it down to their children
and the ones who don’t have have less and have nothing to pass on to their
children so you have these huge divides based on class, and class and race
intersect in this society, so largely the ones who are the have-nots in Detroit
are black and largely the ones who are the haves are white. And that’s not to
say all whites are in the haves, cuz there’s many poor whites as well, working
class and unemployed whites who are oppressed by society as well, but most
of the people who are in the class of people who have, and who have capital,
and who have access, are white.”

Yakini’s analysis captures the way in which trickle-down urbanism, as a neoliberal
policy and an ideological system, not only fails to, in fact, trickle down to those of
lesser means, but, in reality, serves to reinforce and intensify social disparities. To
this end, in an interview with Detroit Free Press writer, John Gallagher, Thomas
Sugrue attested that, despite claims that gentrification and investment in downtown
Detroit will bring benefits to the majority of the city’s population, in reality, its
advantages and amenities only remain accessible to a small fraction of the
population (Gallagher 2014).

In the discussion of Detroit’s neighborhoods being chosen as “winners and
losers” the Detroit Future City (DFC) document emerged as an important factor in
the consideration of the changing landscapes of Detroit and the differential impacts
of those changes on communities. Though not a formal city planning document, as it
has not been voted on by the City Council, the plan emerged out of former Mayor
Dave Bing’s 2010 “rightsizing” effort, seeking to reconcile the expansive territory of
the city with its waning population and limited resources. Similar to its predecessor,
the Detroit Future City plan targets certain outer ring neighborhoods where
population density is relatively low, mapping a blueprint which slates the future of
many of those areas as green space, wetlands, or industrial use (2012 Detroit Strategic Framework).

In a city where urban renewal initiatives have historically employed eminent domain powers to devastate entire neighborhoods, disproportionately effecting poor communities and communities of color, there exists for many Detroiter a justified distrust of government initiatives which seek to “repurpose” land. While the DFC plan purports to include the interests of all Detroiter in the city’s “revitalization” efforts, many residents are skeptical, remembering a time when “the city used eminent domain powers to seize and raze whole blocks of houses and storefronts, then sold the cleared land to developers at low prices” (Reindl 2013).

The Detroit Future City plan has been considered by some a “softer approach to urban renewal” because its language doesn’t imply condemnation and the forced removal of communities (Reindl 2013). Many Detroiter, however, understand the project differently. The pragmatism of the plan reads differently for those who have connections with those communities programmed for resettlement. Southwest Detroit is of particular interest with regard to the ways in which some areas are being heavily gentrified while others are set to be razed. One interviewee, born and raised in Southwest Detroit, explained the extent of the negative impact of the DFC plan in various Southwest Detroit neighborhoods:

“Springwells Village and Mexican town are the winners, the rest of Southwest Detroit is a loser, Delray is gonna be hyperindustrialized, um, all the people are gonna get kicked out of their homes there, um, the bridge project should take out half of Delray the other half I think they’ll try and uh leave to and kick out through attrition.”
Citing the Detroit Future City plan, the “bridge project”— referring to the New International Trade Crossing (NITC) which will provide a third crossing between Detroit and Canada — and “attrition”, —signifying the way sustained attacks and pressures can gradually weaken a community—the subject points to some of the various mechanisms by which people are being displaced in Detroit. With the DFC’s long-term strategy laying out a “strategic renewal” map, “residents who live within the dozens of square miles classified as “maintain only” or “replace, repurpose or decommission,” would see the quality of their city services diminish over time” (Reindl 2013). With the massive shutoffs of water service that brought international attention to human rights violations over the summer of 2014, in conjunction with the sustained divestment of public education and other city services, Detroiter in effected communities are already feeling the effects of these measures.

While proponents of the bridge project, such as Michigan’s governor Rick Snyder, advertise the bridge as something that “will energize the turnaround of Detroit and our entire state” (Michigan.gov), interviewees see the imminent threat it poses for the community of Delray. One woman, an organizer with Congress of Communities, a grassroots organization in Southwest Detroit, spoke to the ways in which the negative effects of the development projects like the NITC seek to invisibilize the damage they pose to communities in their wake: “the whole thing with the bridge, now what people don’t know that it’s effecting almost 3000 people, 2,700 people.” She went on to explain the way in which the neoliberal development paradigm erases the human impact of such development as the facilitation of trade and enterprise takes precedent:
"Southwestern High School stands right in the way where the second bridge is goin' to be and just like how Marathon [Petroleum Company] was told by the federal government that you can not turn a fracking machine on until you clear out the whole community a mile around, it's the same methodology with Delray and it's that...whole area is green space...and parking stuff for the trucks, there's no humans there, there's no houses, there's no homes or anything like that, and so they're talking about new development as if people don't exist, ....[that's] what happens when you um not even evacuate, when you eliminate a whole just you know like people and there's no markers, historical markers, there's nothing to say that these people were ever there...so, if you don't see it it doesn't exist, that's how humanly we think, right?"

This interview perfectly highlights how the purported practicality of projects like DFC or the NITC fail to account for the cost of communities who stand to be displaced by the very projects that promise “progress” to the city. As articulated in the findings, the redevelopment of Detroit entails the employment of various mechanisms that threaten communities in which longtime Detroiters are being or stand to be displaced.

Citing the DFC plan, the same interview subject who spoke of “winners and losers” sees the future of Detroit as one of dramatic differentiation, based on which communities are deemed worthy of investment and which are deemed disposable. He sees the plan as a blueprint for a divided city, mapping “what is a viable community and funding that and supporting that and defunding the other communities, um, the cantonization of Detroit is where I see it going, it's what's in the Detroit Future City plan.” Demonstrated in his analysis and projection, the current wave of investment in Detroit remains concentrated in targeted sections of the city, (re)producing deeply rooted geographic, social, and economic disparities.

Many interview subjects shared sentiments around Detroit's current state as one embroiled in geographic and social conflict and negotiation. In discussing
development and gentrification in Detroit, they said things like: “We’re talkin’ about a city that’s genuinely divided within itself, like if Detroit was a person you would, Detroit wouldn’t know whether he was comin’ or goin’ because it’s always two different philosophies at war,” and, “I just don’t know who’s gonna win, what’s gonna win.” While Detroiters understand the differentiation of the city as a process taking form geographically, it is also evident that such mapping also connotes a social reality which privileges some and leaves others on the sidelines.

Emblematic of this dynamic are the connotations of the images of Dan Gilbert’s “Opportunity Detroit” campaign, emblazoned on windows, posters and minivans in the downtown district of the city. While the initiative’s mission is to “showcase Detroit’s exciting present and promising future by creating an urban environment that attracts businesses, residents and visitors while promoting Detroit in a positive light inside and outside the city,” the “live, work and play” opportunities sponsored by this program appeal to a limited demographic, failing to incorporate the needs, experiences and aspirations of many original Detroiter.

While not a direct recipient of its subsidies, one twenty-four-year-old middle-class white male law student demonstrated the success of the targeted rhetorical appeal to a certain demographic as he spoke of his attraction to the city, saying, “I find like the idea of Detroit very romantic.” In talking about his future aspirations as a developer, he told me that “Detroit is an opportunity, and I want to be a part of it.” For him, the appeal of Detroit, and the prospect of the “opportunity” narrative, appeals to him and matches his entitled sense of access to this bright future. For many longtime Detroiter, however, this rhetoric falls short of bridging the vast
inequalities that continue to bar many from participation in this “revitalized” version of Detroit.

One interviewee spoke of the way in which this promise of opportunity does not extend to most longtime residents of the city: “I think the opportunities for real...for Detroiters who have been here, have declined drastically in the past 25 years without a doubt.....which stands in stark contrast to the uh images of opportunity Detroit that you see coming from the gentrifiers.” The impressions of his statement are not abstract, and are in fact supported by a recent report which demonstrates the one-sided racial division of Detroit’s “revitalization.” Statistics show that “the surge in investment in this majority black city is not going to black residents,” with projects like Detroit Venture Partners employing 86% whites and less than 5% blacks, Challenge Detroit offering fellowships to 69.2% whites and 23.1% blacks, and 64% white Detroit Revitalization Fellows versus 34% black recipients (Hill 2014). In a city with a population that remains 82.7% black or African American, the general populace is not even close to being represented in these “revitalization” efforts.

Chapter Seven: Development and Neoliberalism in Detroit

“The municipal government was no longer about benefiting the population, the municipal government had to address creating a good business climate. If there’s a conflict between creating a good business climate and the wellbeing of a certain segment of the population, to hell with that segment of the population” - David Harvey, “Neoliberalism and the City” Lecture at City University of New York, 2007
Within the accelerated late-stage capitalist paradigm of neoliberalism, the profit motive guides all development. In order to enact this agenda, the neoliberal paradigm tends to “mask the histories and geographies of a vast array of social relations” (Ross & Mitchell 2004, 686). The logic of the neoliberal doctrine compels the interacting realms of the political, the economic and the social to foreclose on human concern and instead justify a project of increased capital accumulation despite consequential human cost (Harvey 2007). In the name of economic growth, facilitation of free trade eclipses the rights of communities which stand to be exploited by its continuation. In his analysis of the effects of capitalism, Karl Marx maintains, “It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade” (Marx 1848). Thus, the logic of capitalism, catalyzed by neoliberal values and policy, obliges a program of brazen economic liberalism wherein human suffering is justified in the name of economic progress.

Within the postindustrial context of Detroit, in which economic crisis has dominated the city for several decades (Bomey & Gallagher 2013; Sugrue 1996), the prospect of economic refurbishment is attractive. It is of no immediately apparent consequence that city officials seek a program by which financial stability could be achieved. It is crucial to note, however, the hegemonic notion that this development will necessarily be projected through a neoliberal framework of market fundamentalism. Verbalizing the powerful narrative that supporters of this doctrine espouse, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once famously proclaimed, “there is no alternative”. Mirroring this rhetoric, Laura Bartell, a law professor at
Wayne State University said, "Fast tracking this bankruptcy has been a brilliant strategy....It creates a sense of inevitability that works to the city's favor" (Helms 2014). This logic, constructing a sense of inevitability around urban (neoliberal) restructuring, is pervasive in Detroit's local political and economic rhetoric and policy.

It has been established that the logic of neoliberal development lends itself to a promotion of development that concerns itself solely with the interests of capital and not those of the community. Among Detroit's local political and economic elite, this value system is evidenced as redevelopment projects promise gains for financial stakeholders while others are dispossessed through the gentrification process.

Exemplary of this inevitability logic, George Jackson, president and CEO of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, a partner of the city which prides itself as being the "primary economic development agency for Detroit", announced in May of 2013 that gentrification is simply "one of the costs of progress." Jackson went on to explain, "When I look at this city's tax base, I say bring on more gentrification," he told the audience. "I'm sorry, but, I mean, bring it on. We can't just be a poor city and prosper" (Neavling 2013). Embedded in this argument, and the campaigns and policies that surround it, is a logic that the financial potential of development trumps human concern for those who are displaced by it. Furthermore, it normalizes the damage of gentrification, a result of neoliberal development, assuming that such consequences are mere collateral damage in the wake of the prosperity offered by development. Jackson's statement moreover marries the ideas
of development and gentrification, obscuring alternative possibilities for development without displacement.

The binary reasoning underpinning Jackson’s argument is an essential prop of neoliberal hegemony, and is pervasive within the dominant development narrative in Detroit. Such narratives “tell dualistic stories of transition that focus on discontinuity in ways that present us with blockbuster binary oppositions between the pre-global and the new and supposedly inevitable or alarming or just ever so exciting global age” (Sparke 2006). Smith illustrates the sociopolitical consequences of this dichotomous logic in his analysis of the ideological linkages between the temporalized inevitability of “progress” and the master narrative surrounding contemporary urban development and gentrification: “To the extent that “gentrification” is generalized to stand for the “eternal” inevitability of modern renewal, the renovation of the past, the sharply contested class and race politics of contemporary gentrification are dulled. Opposition to gentrification here and now can too quickly be dismissed as a hunter-gatherer rejection of “progress”” (Smith 1996, 32).

One extremely salient example of the dynamic framed above is seen in a news media article entitled “Revitalization or Ruin: What Does Detroit’s Future Look Like?” which examines the concentrated reinvestment efforts in downtown Detroit in light of the “horror of [the] current condition” of the surrounding neighborhoods (Schmid 2013). While the author rightly identifies the intensely localized nature and unequal distribution of Detroit’s redevelopment efforts — asking, “How will we decide what course the city should take when it seems like Detroit is actually two
separate cities?"— the assumptions involved in the presented conclusion are highly reductive. Proposing a dichotomy of Detroit as either "doomed" or conversely as an optimistic "revitalization" mecca, the latter option shows the lauding of the "pair of sprawling initiatives" launched in 2013: Detroit Future City and Opportunity Detroit. The article describes the Opportunity Detroit campaign, spearheaded by Dan Gilbert's Rock Ventures, the Downtown Detroit Partnership, and the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, as a "visionary placemaking and retail plan for Detroit's urban core." Though the author acknowledges the plight of the city's surrounding neighborhoods, she continues to uplift the dominant development narrative, which sees the concentrated development not as a result of the surrounding underdevelopment but rather as an alternative which will somehow trickle down to benefit Detroit as a whole. Furthering the binary construction, the author minimizes Detroit's future to either one of "ruin" or a limited scope of development, beseeching the reader to consider Detroit's future: "Whether you are an optimist or a pessimist..." Here, the proposition is that either you support the limited brand of corporate-sponsored revitalization of a small fraction of Detroit, or you're a pessimist and Detroit will remain an abandoned disgrace of poverty, crime and depravity.

The rationale of top-down economic development saturates not only Detroit's media and local political and economic drivers, but it is at the forefront of the reasoning of metro-Detroit residents with regard to development in Detroit. In conversation about gentrification in Detroit, one middle-aged white woman from the suburb of Lake Orion commented, "It's a good thing though, it's needed for

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commerce...to bring back commerce to the city.” This argument underpins the ubiquity of the capitalist logic, in which the logic of economic growth overshadows consideration for social factors. Furthermore, the idea that gentrification is “needed for commerce” demonstrates a neoliberal logic which hinders the imagination of a world beyond the one that’s already being created. Similarly, one interviewee, a 24-year-old white male law student who had recently moved to downtown Detroit, provided, “I don’t have a problem with people being priced out of areas, generally...I think that that’s just a normal function of the market and I don’t think that that’s inherently bad.” Another subject, a 26-year-old white male who had recently moved to Midtown to work in real estate, said of gentrification that it is “sort of a necessary evil.” Evident in these statements is the pervasive nature of the neoliberal paradigm, in which economic growth and the facilitation of the free market become internalized at the individual as well as structural levels of society and rationalized as the naturalized, logical rationale guiding value judgments and decision-making processes. The fundamental basis of such a value system is financial capital (and the increased accumulation thereof), and the human cost is relegated to a space of negligible consideration.

While city officials, developers and many foundations in Detroit wish to promote the “revitalization” of the city’s economic base as a solution to the current challenges, many residents understand that this rationale does not serve to benefit everyone. Nonetheless, the dominant narrative supported by the media invests all confidence in the private market. In the lengthy *New York Times Magazine* article “the Post-Post-Apocalyptic Detroit”, showcasing Detroit’s “revitalization” process,
the author speaks to this dynamic: “There are no real assurances that gains will be spread democratically across the city, or that city planning and public resources will serve the needs of everyday Detroiters. But the hope is that private individuals will keep the greater good in mind” (Austen 2014). Ironically, the author points to the fact that despite evidence that the capitalist economy does not distribute its benefits equally and rather reproduces inequality, the pervasive neoliberal ideology continues to elevate the role of private actors and capital investment in the responsibility for social wellbeing. Similarly, Midtown Development, Inc., a foundation that propels considerable development in the Midtown area of Detroit, captures this notion that economic growth will benefit all, claiming that “future development...will be a catalyst in additional investment and economic growth improving the quality of life for everyone” (midtowninc.org).

Equating development and economic growth with universally improved quality of life, such arguments differ greatly from the reported experiences of many Detroiters. One interview subject, a 26-year-old African American man who was born and raised in Detroit, noted the disconnect between the rhetoric of economic development and the lived experiences of the residents of Detroit’s neighborhoods:

“[Development] has to be as much focused on community as it is commerce...you can’t just say that this is good for the community because it’s good for commerce...there are issues that have to be addressed commercially and there are issues that have to be addressed communally, and as long as both of those things are doin’ their part then I feel like that provides an appropriate solution, but as long as it’s lopsided, then we’re always gonna be at a disadvantage.”

This commentary speaks to the ways in which development patterns within the neoliberal paradigm privilege the strength of market forces over that of community
life, marginalizing the needs of those individuals and communities left outside of the
scope of that development.

Speaking to the ways in which the master narrative promotes the supposed
"progress" of development in Detroit, the same interviewee went on to comment on
the ways in which that rhetoric stands in contrast to the reality of his experience
and the experience of "[his] community":

"People think that, you know, building a Whole Foods is progressive or, you
know, redoing all the façades up Woodward and puttin’ in the light rail...and it
is progressive to an extent, but what’s gonna happen to sustain and then
what you put in place to sustain it, is that gonna be an impediment to my
community and the people that already live there? Is that gonna displace
them? Is it gonna put them at even more of a disadvantage because we’re
trying to make Detroit more profitable, or are we trying to build a better
infrastructure that we can take pride in and take part in supporting, so that’s
the crossroad for me."

Here, the equation of development and progress are troubled. In illuminating the
displacement and marginalization that the current development paradigm creates,
this subject exposes the fallacy of the argument that this development is what is
good for Detroit. In asking "Is it gonna put them at even more of a disadvantage
because we’re trying to make Detroit more profitable," the interviewee recognizes
the way in which the capitalist profit motive in its employment coincides with the
displacement of poor communities and communities of color as it seeks to expand
its avenues for accumulation. Many Detroiters recognize that the reinvestment and
redevelopment of the city as it is currently taking place does not promise to benefit
them, but rather to undermine and marginalize their place in the remaking of the
city.
Expressing the impact of gentrification in her Midtown neighborhood, a forty-year-old Afro-Puerto Rican woman spoke of being the last person of color on her block and her fears of being priced out of her longtime home: “It’s very, um, emotionally painful for me because I love this city. I love it. And I don’t care what happens, what happened to it whatever, I will love it. But why should I be punished for that? And why somebody that come in who don’t give two shits [laughs] and it’s just an economic thing for them...get preference...” For this woman, the space she occupies is connected to her culture and identity, and she feels a strongly emotional sense of belonging to it. While for speculators and developers, Midtown is a new investment opportunity upon which to capitalize, for this interviewee and others like her, the place is not a commodity but a community. The hegemonic narrative which seeks to promote development as a solution to Detroit’s current crisis sidelines the experiences of those who stand to be displaced.

One interviewee in particular, a 26-year old Detroit activist and artist who identifies as Afro Xicano-Taino Rican, captured the fallacy of the dominant development narrative. Speaking of the way in which gentrification is normalized within an inevitability logic, he explains:

“This result [gentrification] seems to coincide with development and development is a good thing, that’s what they’re tryna say, um, but I think there’s, it’s not like development is this one ah you know, creature that this is the only way to do it and this is the way it has to be, you know, and I think people need to understand that, there’s ways to do this, it’s not black and white, it’s, um, it’s not gentrification or no development, you know, it’s, there is development without gentrification, there is development that takes into account the people in that community, there is development that helps lift all boats, you know, lift all tides, and I don’t think we’re seeing that in too many places in Detroit, um, especially not downtown, definitely not downtown.”
As articulated in his analysis, the master narrative of neoliberal development invokes a binary inevitability logic that dismisses the gravity of the consequences of gentrification as it elevates the supposed “progress” that neoliberal development promotes. The findings of this research, however, demonstrate the extent to which the trickle-down model of development presents a false sense of opportunity for longtime Detroiters who remain on the margins of the city’s refurbishment efforts. Exemplifying the inequity of this saturated development in central districts of Detroit, one interviewee stated:

“yeah it’s out of my reach, it is out of my reach cuz i don’t live downtown...gentrification puts in your mind that you don’t have enough, like that’s what it is, it’s a psychology behind the whole thing, so they dangle shiny shit in your face and you’re like oh this is gonna be great it’s like Christmas and then you open it up and it’s an empty box.”

Addressing what he saw as the mirage of Detroit’s redevelopment, the same 26-year-old black man posed the following rhetorical questions: “Who is it really gonna benefit? Is it designed to benefit me? Am I on the fringe or is it really equal opportunity?” While campaigns such as Dan Gilbert’s “Opportunity Detroit”, as well as news media coverage and political rhetoric continue to propagate this notion of Detroit as a “land of opportunity” (Le Tellier 2013), for many Detroiters, this promise does not extend to them.

When Detroit’s automotive industry was being mechanized in the 1950s, Henry Ford II is famous for stating that “obsolescence is the very hallmark of progress” (Sugrue 1996, 125). As technological development was the marker of progress for that era, today, too, the “revitalization” efforts are rendering some Detroiters obsolete as economic development continues to shift capital upward.
while displacing poor communities and communities of color. As plant automation rendered human labor obsolete in the postwar period, the economic development of Detroit today does not create room for all Detroiter’s, and thus renders those outside of its scope obsolete. Articulated in an article for Bridge, Aaron Foley recently wrote: “When “new” is basically used as code for “white” in a city where “old is “black,” it can drive someone like me [a black person in Detroit] to think they’re obsolete” (Foley 2014). This rhetorical displacement is critical when it implies real implication in the material conditions of the lived experience of Detroit residents. The discursive juncture of “new” and “white” entail not only a linguistic interface but a connotation mirrored by the material and social reality of a whitening city whose “revitalization” entails the extensive displacement and wholesale marginalization of poor communities and communities of color.

Chapter Eight: Alternatives and Resistance to Neoliberal Development

“A crisis is both a danger and an opportunity” – Grace Lee Boggs, Detroit activist, philosopher, author

As the “New Detroit” continues to emerge, and as the neoliberal paradigm asserts its hegemony in the narrative that economic development is the only way to a “revitalized” city, Detroiter’s are resisting and challenging the dominance of that master narrative with a markedly divergent conceptual orientation to development and the actual elaboration of alternative, community-based development paradigms. People I interviewed demonstrated the importance of shifting away from an economic-focused, profit-driven development model and instead emphasized the need to re-center the narrative of change and improvement around a value system
that supports communities, sustainability, and self-determination. This chapter intends to examine the principles and efforts of various individuals and groups that serve to challenge the dominance of the neoliberal development paradigm in their presentation of viable, community-centered alternatives. Furthermore, these examples demonstrate that displacement does not necessarily have to be the “cost of progress,” that Detroit doesn’t need to be “saved” by outsiders and capital investment, and that a future that values all Detroiters is possible. Through the various mechanisms of community gardening, popular education and art, and the building of community spaces, Detroiters are engaging in a profound reimagination of relationships with land, community, development and each other. Through the intentional embodiment of such values, Detroiters are actively resisting the hegemony of neoliberal ideology and policy by subverting the dominant narrative of progress and reorienting change to the level of human interaction, community production, and self-determination.

Whether Detroiters are actively engaging in community-based initiatives or are simply effected by the displacement caused by neoliberal development, there exists an understanding that the status quo is not working for everyone and that it does not have to remain as such. The Afro Puerto-Rican woman who spoke to me of being the last person of color on her Midtown block and who is currently facing skyrocketing rents, spoke to the way in which Detroit must go beyond an orientation toward development that focuses on land as simply a profitable commodity and move toward a future in which all Detroiters are represented and valued. She posits,
"What is the attraction for the city...because you can buy some land really cheap? Because the bank crap happened and we got these people out of here and then all these other little stuff? So, you know, it goes back down to a human factor...and I feel like as a city we at a perfect position to recreate ourselves in a healthy sense that can satisfy everyone's needs...this place is too big...can fit three major um cities within Detroit alone... and you mean to tell me that you can't come to a consensus where everyone is winning and no one gets hurt, no one gets pushed out and everyone feels of value?"

Her comments speak to the dominant logic of neoliberal development by revealing the fallacy of the argument that displacement is the necessary cost of progress. Furthermore, her insight poses a challenge to the inevitability logic of the current development paradigm by proposing a fundamental expansion of the way in which development is imagined. In line with Grace Lee Boggs' notions of crisis as both crisis and opportunity, the respondent further expressed the transformative potential of the current condition in which the city finds itself: "There's still power within those changing landscapes and that's where I feel as citizens that we have to sit down and say ok, where's that niche, and work the hell outta that niche." Others expressed similar sentiments with regard for the need to expand our understandings of development. One respondent spoke to the fallacy of the inevitability logic that surrounds the dominant discourse around gentrification and development: "There are alternatives and development is not one thing, there's lots of ways communities can be developed...and I would say gentrification is a symptom it's not like the thing...it's a result, it's a symptom of bad development." As evidenced in the preceding body of research, many Detroiters understand this to be the case — the current model of development, which focuses on a notion of progress that promotes an agenda of capital accumulation, does not serve the citizenry of Detroit and, furthermore, alternative paradigms must be developed.
**Critical Art and Resistance to Displacement: Enclave, The Raiz Up, ROCC, and Delray Mural Project**

One significant component of resistance in Detroit arises through the use of art as an avenue to subvert the dominant narrative, expressly challenge oppressive structures of power and generate strong mechanisms of resistance and endurance through the fostering of relationships and community. Antonio Cosme, 26, of Southwest Detroit, speaks of the way in which art acts as a vehicle for resistance when it emerges from the lived experiences of people from the community: “our art is gonna be used for resistance, our art is gonna be used to, you know, define the cultural character of this neighborhood and reflect the community whereas like the artists, the art and artists who move in this area have no interest in that.” Critically aware of the impacts of gentrification, Cosme and other artists and activists have banded together to create change. One such effort, emerging from what he describes as an ad hoc committee, Enclave (Engaging Community Lifting Voices), seeks to address the rebranding the Springwells community. Cosme identifies the rebranding process as “an important part of gentrification um, rebranding a community, renaming it and hoping it to attract villagers...instead of residents of southwest Detroit.” The work of Enclave, then, is to “help develop some resistance against it and start changing and influencing people's thoughts in regards to development in the area.”

As another effort to engage the community around critical issues affecting them, Cosme and other artists have formed The Raiz Up Collective, bringing people together to address gentrification through community dialogue and music.
Collaborating with other organizations and community resistance efforts in Southwest Detroit, the Raiz Up engages the community through a popular education model, activating conversations, concerts, open mics, cyphers, movie nights, and through music, mural and media creation. As an offshoot of The Raiz Up, Cosme started a program called ROCC, or Restoring Our Community Through Creation. To simultaneously address blight in the community and the erasure of cultural history, Cosme organized youth in the community to

“find out what their histories are, what their backgrounds are, what their stories are and then they'd research it and then we'd clean up an abandoned property with the neighbors and board up the house and put art that reflects those histories and those stories on the buildings... the idea is that if people can see themselves in these abandoned structures and see their stories and see their histories celebrated and uplifted they'll have a greater chance and desire to protect that property to take care of that property and to, you know, help hold it down, um and ah I think that's, that's happened in a couple of the spots that we did.”

Further employing mural art as a form of resistance against displacement, Cosme is also leading a project in the Delray community. Given that Delray is slated for removal in the Detroit Future City plan, the project aims to engage indigenous youth to facilitate a community art project largely around “Native American burial mounds in the community as well as just like the whole history of Delray in its many changes and fluctuations... we're really trying to remember that history, celebrate that history and do it through mural art.”

Whereas gentrification seeks to alter the cultural character of neighborhoods, burying the identities, histories and experiences of the original residents, the projects highlighted here function as to preserve those very legacies, inscribing them with artistic imagery on the neighborhood’s public landscape.
Although neoliberal development silences the voices of those individuals and communities it dispossesses, communities continue to demonstrate that they refuse to be erased. Furthermore, the process by which these projects are enacted involves a great deal of collective engagement, therefore building a cohesive force of resistance in the communities whose survival is threatened by the advance of neoliberal urbanization.

*Urban Agriculture: Detroit Black Community Food Security Network*

The urban agriculture movement in Detroit is a prime example of a paradigm shift as it demonstrates the possibilities of reimagining crisis (in this scenario, severe lack of food access and a surplus of vacant land) as possibility, and the creation of a viable alternative, community-based form of development. While urban gardens in Detroit are as variable as the hands that tend them, the food justice work of Malik Yakini provide an example of the valuable potential that this work holds for Detroit communities. Yakini described his involvement in food security work as being deeply grounded in an analytical framing of history and systems of oppression, specifically white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy. The multipronged undertaking, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), is politically as well as ancestrally and culturally rooted in its understanding of black community empowerment: “we’re very much rooted within the history and culture of African people...so that we contextualize this work differently.” He spoke of this grounding as a way in which those involved in these efforts, mostly being black people from Detroit, link themselves to the historical struggle for black community self-determination:
“the dominant trend in our history has been one of both resistance to oppression but also resisting that oppression through self-determination, through working together, through learning to do for our self, as opposed to appealing to the larger society to do something for us or to treat us better, that through our own efforts that we should improve our lot in life.”

Another key component of the grounding of the DBCFSN is the restoration of historical memory and the revival of collective black agrarian power as a means of resistance, survival and development:

“many black people in the south understood that ownership of land, and that the ability to create vibrant agricultural systems had everything to do with our communities being able to survive, thrive and develop....and so we still have that understanding, that cultural understanding, and we’re really, in a sense, reviving that aspect of our culture which has laid dormant to some extent, in cities in particular.”

Grounded in the systemic analysis of white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy and rooted within the black cultural and historical legacy Yakini describes, the work of the DBCFSN resists historical and cultural erasure while creating a paradigmatic alternative to the current development status quo.

The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, founded in 2006, entails a series of undertakings to address food insecurity in Detroit: the primary and most intensive component, D-Town Farms; the Food Security Policy Council; the Ujamaa Food Co-op Buying Club; Food Warriors Youth Development Program; and the What’s for Dinner Lecture Series. The scope of the organization illustrates the capacity of community efforts to comprehensively address a complex issue. Whereas neoliberal development seeks to provide “quick-fix” solutions to ahistoricized crises, the work of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network grounds itself in the historical context of the current challenges, providing
an analysis through which to address the underlying and interconnected structural
factors which serve to reproduce the issue at hand.

Understanding that land as an entity that is often manipulated, commoditized
and exploited by the drivers of neoliberal development, the ideology and
programming of the urban agriculture movement provides an example of an
alternative relationship to land. The orientation of the organization is of land not as
a venue for private capital accumulation but as an aspect of the interlocking web of
the survival of all beings on the planet.

"Much of that division [caused by capitalism] is created by who has so-called
“ownership” of land, and who has access to land, because it’s from land that
wealth is generated...it’s from land that resources are extracted...and so
those who so-called “own” the land can generate tremendous profits while
those who are landless are subject to the whims of those who so-called “own”
the land. So that’s part of our analysis as well... the bottom line is we don’t
think it’s a good system for human beings, we don’t think it’s a good system
for the plants and animals with which we share the planet, or for the planet
itself."

This analysis is present in the work of the organization: while about one third of the
footprint of the city is vacant land, as Yakini put it,

"the general approach of the city leadership seems to be to sell it to the
highest bidder ...in some cases they’re damn near giving land away like to
Mike Illich to build his sports complex...the idea seems to be that if we let
rich people obtain these things that they’ll develop things that will generate
capital and somehow that will trickle down to the rest of the people. I’ve seen
absolutely no evidence that that happens like that."

In contrast to this neoliberal vision of development, the DBCFSN seeks to facilitate
increased access to land by those who are not traditionally given access; the two-
acre garden, D-Town Farm, allows people in the community to have access to the
land, and the Policy Council of the organization seeks to generate increased land and
water access on a structural level.
The Detroit Black Food Security Network also crucially engages an alternative economic model. Contrary to the neoliberal motive which seeks to siphon capital to the upper echelon of society, Malik Yakini explained the importance of creating an economic apparatus by which the community can resist capitalist exploitation and become more autonomous:

"Because we realize that it’s not only a question of having access to healthy food but we’re concerned about how that food is provided to our community and we’re concerned about the economics of that kind of providing food...who profits from it? And so we’re totally dedicated to creating mechanisms to circulate the wealth that’s generated from the money, the tremendous amounts of money that’s spent on food in Detroit, circulating that money within the city, and within African American communities in particular, so that we can provide for community empowerment.”

Diverging from the individualism and competition inherent in the neoliberal capitalist paradigm, the Ujamaa Food Co-op Buying Club is a means by which the community is able to galvanize collective efforts to address food insecurity, challenge the exploitation of the white supremacist capitalist system, while demonstrating their collective economic power.

Grounded in the history of black community self-determination, such forms of community empowerment currently underway in Detroit serve to undermine the narrative which positions Detroiters as being in need of a white outsider savior, and that commercial growth and development are necessarily linked. Furthermore, it demonstrates that not only is the potential scope of development in Detroit vast, but that it necessarily must come from those communities impacted as to truly effect positive change for longtime Detroiters. The urban agriculture movement alone is an extraordinary example of the potential of a changing development paradigm. A Michigan State University study estimated that “with the use of hoop houses, trained
farmers, proper storage and bio-intensive techniques, just 570 of Detroit's vacant 5,000 acres of city land could produce 70% of the city's vegetables and 40% of its fruit" (Ladner 2011, 22). The work of the DBCFSN and the thousands of other community gardeners in the city who make Detroit the urban agriculture capitol of the world, are proving the potential of a changing food system based on a development model driven by concern for ecological, social and economic sustainability. While within the neoliberal paradigm, the narrative of progress comes to dominate the rhetoric and policy around development, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, by relating back to the land, nurturing community empowerment and self-determination, and engaging cooperative mechanisms, challenges that narrative and demonstrates the capacity of an alternative orientation to development.

Restoring the Neighbor Back to the 'Hood

For Yusef Shakur, the man behind Restoring the Neighbor Back to the 'Hood, relationships and community rootedness are of utmost importance. As someone who was transformed by his relationship with his father whom he met for the first time in prison, he seeks to create community support spaces, mentorship and training opportunities and programs that support the community in which he was born and raised but which has seen significant decline in the past several decades. Based on his personal experience, Shakur emphasizes the importance of creating alternatives for street activity; "having a center...an institution that fosters that...that folks can come in, sit on the couch...um...get computer lessons, get free food, uh...discuss things, you know, again, things that they might not get in the home or
get in church this is a place to fill those voids, not...no longer will the streets be that only option..” To this end, he is rehabbing an abandoned house in his community and turning it into a community center that fosters relationships, education and skills. Remembering learning from “our elders, my parents, teaching us about what white supremacy and racism is, what it meant to be black, um..how to interact with each other, not just out of sake for survival but out of sake for survival for everybody, not just for the individual,” Shakur centers his work around returning to a value of community and relationships after the damage wrought by drugs and gangs:

“Those things began to evaporate, that mechanism of teaching and loving, you know, you had a new mechanism of...drugs was poured in our community, guns was poured in our community, um as a result you had um drug wars, you had gang wars, all those things began to come as a forefront to my community and as they came [to the] forefront of the community we no longer saw ourselves as neighborhoods, who operate in a neighborly fashion, but in a hood...so the concept of Restoring the Neighbor Back to the ‘Hood is get back to us, honoring, loving, caring for ourselves, and not saying like we won’t have problems, but our problems will not be something that we take pride in, we will take pride in fighting against our problems.”

Like Malik Yakini, Shakur describes his work as being grounded in a historical analysis of capitalism, imperialism and white supremacy, as well as within the tradition of black community empowerment and resistance.

“It’s building relationships, it’s doing the work, but it’s also having a historical analysis...of what this work is about...lotta...lotta time we just wanna go out and fix things but we don’t know what we’re fixing so we’re actually doing more harm...so but I respect and appreciate the effort...but are we trying to put a bandaid on a gunshot wound...so, developing a political overstanding of history, and historically analyzing things...the current conditions is about restoring the neighbor back to the hood, um, you know...when you looked at when the black panther party organized, they was organizin’ against police brutality, they was organizing feedin’ the people...so that tells me...or dictated that we need a creative atmosphere...us being able to be up in the community ...so it a continuation of the Black Panther Party but being
current...what the conditions are now, so...the Black Panther Party in my opinion was...the work they was doing was restoring the neighbor back to the hood, so...there is no Black Panther Party but there is a Yusef...and I just...started doing this work.”

As an expression of the communal environment his work fosters, and the history of community provision that guides his strategy and philosophy, Shakur organizes an annual block party and backpack giveaway. This summer, the new center was open, with an exhibit, “We Don’t Want Them Here,” about the history of forced land dispossession of black communities in Detroit. The street was closed off and children played basketball and hopscotch, and everyone took advantage of the free food and live music. Community members were encouraged to visit the exhibit and then share their stories on the stage, connecting to the history commemorated in the exhibit. After the storytelling session, standing on a red, black and green painted stage that he and community members built and painted themselves, Yusef Shakur spoke to an audience of members of his community about the values guiding this work: “it’s not about backpacks, it’s about better human beings...this was not put on by a foundation, a corporation, or a pastor...it was put on by love....you don’t need a GED, a PhD, you need a heart. There is no greater budget than hope and love.” He continued to allude to the political nature of the current condition and the need to think critically and organize as a community: “be smart, be critical, overstand it’s a plan...you have to be politically aware, our lives are political every day...what you see is a result of racism, imperialism.” He continued, “you may not have money but you still have value, because you’re a human being. That’s power, when we come together that’s powerful. Revolution is love!”
This speech is a part of Shakur's mission to “change the landscape psychologically” to work toward liberation through “changing how we look at each other, not through the eyes of oppression but through the eyes of liberation.”

Challenging the narrative propagated by “politicians, preachers... “we want peace..we want better communities” you know, all this blah blah blah stuff but not demonstrating what peace looks like, not demonstrating what community looks like...” Restoring the Neighbor Back to the ‘Hood not only resists the notion of top-down development, but it demonstrates the possibility of a community development paradigm that centers not on an elevation of capital but on the values of love, compassion, and relationships. In this way, the binary logic which presents the false choice between ruin and neoliberal development in Detroit is exposed as fallacy, as an alternative paradigm is imagined, embodied and carried out.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion


Emerging originally out of a concern for the promotion of redevelopment as a response to Detroit’s economic crisis, this study considers the implementation of neoliberal strategies in the restructuring of the city. Given Detroit’s particularly robust industrial history, it is fruitful to analyze the current situation within a historically rooted and globally connected framework of capitalist development and decline. Grounding the current crisis within a historical context and an analysis of the public and private actors as well as the institutions that motored the historical investment/divestment patterns, this investigation challenges the narrative of
inevitability by exposing the strategic manipulations upon which the current crisis is predicated. Furthermore, the use of a critical human geography theoretical framework allows for the consideration of the systemic and hegemonic processes of global neoliberal development as they are revealed within the dialectically related spaces of land and social life. In Detroit, these dynamics are made visible as concentrated “revitalization” efforts invest in select areas, displacing original residents and excluding in large part the majority black native Detroit population from the benefits of the development. As such, the geographic landscapes of the city become dramatically differentiated, mirroring the social stratification intrinsically tied to the neoliberal project.

As these processes of neoliberalization are evolving so currently in the context of Detroit, the data derived from this research provides insight into the ways in which people are experiencing, interpreting, reinforcing and resisting these global systemic trends as they are expressed presently on the local urban scale. Examining the structures and ideological rationale at the root of the entangled current conditions of neoliberal restructuring, development and displacement, as well as its impact along the interconnected social and geographic dimensions, this study complicates the self-rationalization and assumed natural perpetuation of the neoliberal paradigm while resisting the “progress” narrative by exposing the markedly unequal social impacts of these processes. As such, in the theoretical critique and in the elevation of the voices and experiences of those displaced, marginalized and threatened by its impact, this body of data ultimately presents a challenge to the dominant neoliberal narrative.
Furthermore, this study’s analysis of the management and manipulation of—and response to—crisis within the context of Detroit entails significant implications for other cities that may face fates similar to that of Detroit. As evidence of the relevance of this projection is the recent report that Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr has been traveling around the world promoting his feats in Detroit; as the bankruptcy proceedings came to a close in early November, he was in Italy sharing his story of Detroit’s success at a Global Restructuring Conference (Howell 2014). What is more, the conference organizers spoke of the significance of the Detroit case, saying that, “While Detroit is not a sovereign, its largely consensual reorganization stands as evidence that politically charged government workouts can be achieved if procedures exist to foster a negotiation” (Howell 2014).

Demonstrated here, the forces of neoliberal restructuring are coordinated on a national and international level, and they are positioning Detroit as a precedent for future efforts. As such, this study holds weighty and global relevance.

The international interconnectedness of the power structures at hand dictate that the strength of social movements must also rely on a coordinated resistance effort. As seen in the resistance work emerging in Detroit’s communities, there exist viable models, centering around values of sustainability, community and self-determination, through which scholars and activists can continue to challenge the dominance of neoliberal restructuring and development, and the displacement that it produces. Even as neoliberal development seeks to reify social divisions, communities are galvanizing their energies—building alternative paradigms through the creation of community support spaces, popular art and education, and
urban agriculture—to challenge and resist these macro systems of oppression while recreating avenues toward the creation of a city in which all Detroiters are valued.

The voices and experiences presented in this study, as well as the application of the theory to the operationalization of neoliberal urbanization in the Detroit context, propose new ways to better understand the manners in which these structural forces are interacting, expressing and being responded to at various levels of social life. Future research might investigate to a further extent the specific details of the Emergency Management and the bankruptcy proceedings as to better understand the implications that these efforts hold in the context of other urban U.S. municipalities.
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