

The Construction of Emptiness and the Re- Colonisation of Detroit

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree
of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Once a city of two million people, and the centre of US car manufacture, Detroit's fortunes have been in steady decline since the mid twentieth century, when the industry that built it began to downsize and relocate production away from the United States. Decades of disinvestment and racial division left a city with central neighbourhoods sparsely populated and crumbling, while resources and services were concentrated in wealthier suburbs. In recent years, the city's landscape has come to be emblematic of post-industrial decline, urban blight and civic abandonment. My research adopts a mixed-methods ethnographic approach to argue that this framing of the city is in fact a deeply ideological one, with constructions of Detroit as empty and chaotic serving to lay the groundwork for a large-scale project of re-colonisation, which draws simultaneously on discourses of greening and redemption. Narratives of abandonment and the re-emergence of urban 'nature' work together to reclaim the city in the interests of a mobile elite whose 'white flight', widely cited as the source of Detroit's problems, never flew much further than the suburbs. Drawing on news media, documentary film, television, photography, semi-structured interviews and extended periods of participant observation in Detroit between 2012 and 2014, I show how constructions of emptiness, a wilful fictionalisation of Detroit's recent history, narratives of greening and a pervasive investment in structures of white supremacy serve to create a Detroit in which wholesale gentrification may be put forward as a social good.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

I began this research in 2013, looking to understand practices of urban agriculture and struggles over space and power in a rust-belt city. It was a place both abandoned by industry, and the focus of increasing attention from a national and global press fascinated by images of crumbling twentieth century ruins and nature reclaiming the city streets. In 2018 the press are still fascinated, but the story has changed; Detroit is now ground zero for millennial gentrification, and a land of opportunity for those looking to make a difference somewhere *'big enough to matter to the world, and small enough that you can matter in it'*. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that these narratives, far from oppositional, are part of a far longer ideological project, deeply colonial in nature, and with material consequences for the city and its residents.

Once a city of 2 million people, and the centre of US car manufacture, Detroit's fortunes have been in steady decline since the mid twentieth century, when the industry that built it began to downsize and relocate production away from the United States. Decades of disinvestment and racial division left a city with central neighbourhoods sparsely populated and crumbling, while resources and services were concentrated in wealthier suburbs. The city's landscape came to be emblematic of post-industrial decline, urban blight and civic abandonment; for many a stark visual reminder of the material and social fallout of late capitalism. While commentators compete to lay the blame for its demise upon the decline of the auto industry, racial conflicts, welfarism, or market forces respectively, Detroit's status cannot be comprehended without an understanding of the ways in which these various forces have worked together throughout the city's history.

Of particular importance to my research are the relationships between race, class, and property ownership. In Detroit (as elsewhere in the United States) mid twentieth century redlining allowed homeowner neglect to be presented as a social pathology of uneducated poor southern blacks, rather than the result of racism and property speculation; as overworked African-Americans struggled to pay off grossly inflated mortgages (Satter 2009), leaving little time for property upkeep. Contemporary patterns of property ownership in many ways mirror these inequalities, as inconsistent access to credit and to city services allow wealthy speculators to make potentially huge profits, buying up vacant land and buildings at rock bottom prices. Many of these properties are subsequently, and strategically, left to decay by absentee owners and, eventually foreclosed upon, enter the cycle once more. Similarly, what appears to be a wholesale abandonment of the city might more accurately be framed as

a spatial polarisation; the concentration of wealth and whiteness in the suburban ring, removing material and social capital from the city through both the loss of tax base, and the symbolic violence of its association as a predominantly black inner city with darkness, social breakdown and neglect.

These images are powerful, and contribute a great deal to the ways in which the city's history is understood; whether as a social problem, or a space for opportunity. Prevailing images of Detroit in the popular press depict a 'post-apocalyptic' cityscape, abandoned and taken back by nature, an image often employed to critique contemporary American culture and warn of where it may lead. The production and dissemination of these images came eventually to resemble an industry in itself - termed, in a phrase coined by *VICE* magazine in 2010, 'ruin porn' (Morton 2010). The physical signs of decay, particularly of once grand buildings, is essential in the construction of this particular cultural trope, but so is the jarring presence of 'nature' out of place; trees growing through collapsed roofs, prairie grasses overtaking sidewalks from empty lots.

Not unconnected to neoliberal discourses around the 'out of control' ghetto, the idea of the wilderness relocated to the inner city is a powerful image and seems often to bring discussions of Detroit into distinctly neo-colonial territory; as remaining populations become associated with nature and chaos, and land is framed as barren, wasted and unproductive. This discursive work lays the foundations for more recent constructions of the city as a blank canvas, home of the fabled \$100 house, where artists, urban farmers and canny 'innovators' can test out ideas impossible in the high rent, high density spaces of other American cities.

Detroit's visually arresting landscape serves as physical evidence of its complex history; but as an image of emptiness it both justifies and masks a great deal of social and economic activity already occurring. Building on Smith's work on gentrification's 'urban frontier', as well as scholarship on wilderness and the frontier as foundational US cultural tropes, I suggest that we are witnessing in contemporary Detroit a reimagining of the city as 'wild west' frontier environment. Moving beyond Smith's more metaphorical ideas around 'urban pioneers' (Smith 1996), I argue that the volume of purchaseable space - and new technologies by which affluent would-be 'investors' may access it - combined with a history of civic corruption, ideas of the city as lawless and uncivilised, as well as emerging ideas of Detroit as a repository of specific resources; all combine to create a political environment that, while borrowing heavily from various reference points in US history and culture, represents a distinct moment in itself. While this colonial framework is in fact fairly widely accepted in local critical discourse, with the exception of Safransky (2014), it is yet to be engaged with by academics.

My research takes a mixed-methods ethnographic approach, drawing on three fieldwork trips to the city of Detroit in 2013 and 2014. On those visits, I lived and conducted participant observation in two very different neighbourhoods - Woodbridge, a gentrifying enclave in the greater downtown area, and Brightmoor, a neighbourhood of high vacancy in the city's far north west with a distinct concentration of urban agricultural projects (see map below)

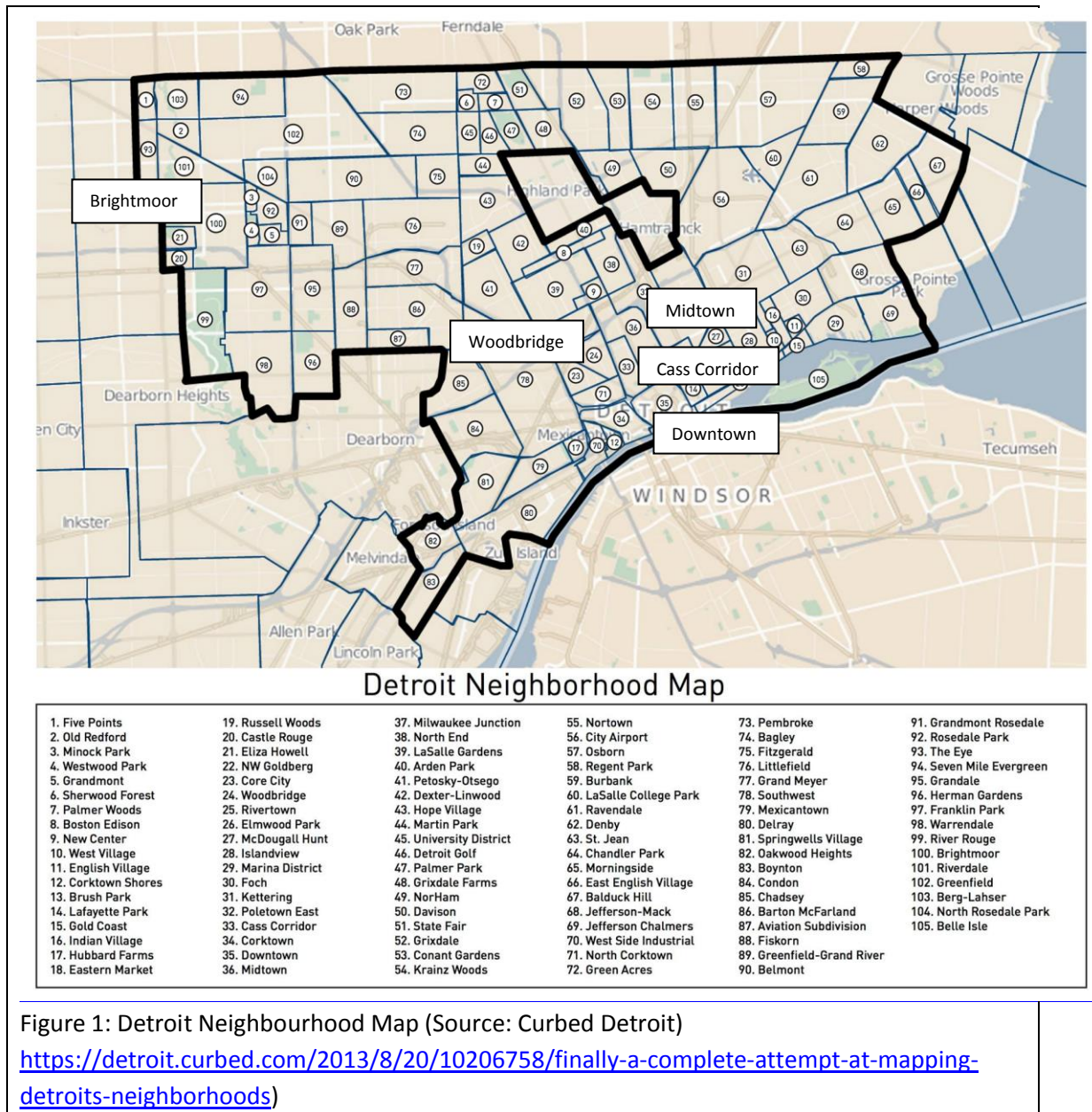


Figure 1: Detroit Neighbourhood Map (Source: Curbed Detroit)

<https://detroit.curbed.com/2013/8/20/10206758/finally-a-complete-attempt-at-mapping-detroits-neighborhoods>

Several other neighbourhoods were key to my research too; Downtown, Corktown and Midtown all form part of the '7.2', a recently defined version of greater downtown which was identified by a 2014 report as being worthy of investment (Ali et al 2013), and the locus of much of Detroit's recent gentrification. But there are other, less geographical 'sites', actors, and events structuring this research, too. Dan Gilbert for instance, Detroit's 'superhero'

(Alberta 2014; Segal 2013) and CEO, owner, or public face of online mortgage broker *Quicken Loans*, *Rock Financial Ventures*, the *Cleveland Cavaliers*, and *Bedrock Real Estate*, is via these companies' de-facto owner of upwards of 100 buildings in Downtown Detroit. Alongside Gilbert, John Hantz's 2013 purchase of 1500 lots on the city's East Side for use as a tree farm; *The New York Times*' enduring fascination with Detroit; the movement of the city's tax foreclosed property auction online in 2010; and the existence of a mobile, young, college educated, affluent American elite looking for a place to make their mark, all provide not just context but a medium through which the re-colonisation of the city's space is articulated.

Chapter two's literature review begins with gentrification. Looking at work within geography and the social sciences more broadly, I consider the possibilities for developing Smith's (1996) idea of the 'urban frontier' in a place such as Detroit, where discussions around regeneration draw not only on a frontier metaphor, but the material conditions of a re-imagined American frontier landscape. I then turn to Florida's Creative Class thesis (Florida 2003), not as a theory to inform my own work, but as a construct that has entered popular discourse around the regeneration of struggling cities and which appears particularly prevalent in more recent constructions of Detroit. I situate my research within the wider gentrification literature, as work which - while building on data about a particular middle-class consumer experience - seeks not so much to understand what gentrifiers *want*, but how these wants, and the narratives that support them, actively work to dispossess existing residents from both land and civic power. I also situate my research within the wealth of scholarship on the neoliberal city and the idea of urban crisis. Work drawing on Agamben to understand Detroit as 'the *homo sacer* of American cities' (Draus et al 2010:668) is particularly useful here, as is Peck's tracing of the origins of narratives of urban crisis to discourse produced by right wing think tanks (Peck 2006); and I look to Wacquant (2004,2007) for an understanding of the relationships between blackness, stigma, and the withdrawal of material resources.

I then turn to scholarship on ruins, a cross disciplinary field emerging from work in art, architecture and anthropology. Beginning with Doron's analysis of the 'dead zone' (Doron 2000), an urban planning term for derelict and supposedly empty spaces which he argues are in fact host to a range of human and other activity, I move on to Edensor, and a consideration of ruins as sites of meaning and potential, even in their derelict status (Edensor 2005). I critique Woodward's (2004;2012) work, demonstrating the processes of fictionalisation inherent in ruin appreciation, and look to Masco and Yablon to understand the centrality of images of the ruined, 'post-apocalyptic' city to the US cultural imaginary (Masco 2008; Yablon 2004).

Alongside the post-apocalyptic, work on the significance of ideas of both wilderness and the frontier in US nation building is central to my theoretical framework, looking at the ways in which the particular landscape of the United States has historically been mobilised to political ends (Cronon 1996; Light 1995; Nash 2001; Short 1991; Smith 2010; White 1996). I relate older classical and romantic framings of 'wilderness' (Cronon 1996; Short 1991; Smith 2010) to more recent media coverage of Detroit, which frames the city variously as a space of brutality and chaos, or a literal 'new frontier' (Bjerga 2013; Renn 2011; Ryzik 2010). Drawing on Merchant (1996) and Jarosz (1992), I consider how these ideas about the natural world relate to biblical narratives, as well as processes of colonisation - both historical and contemporary. Finally I turn to recent scholarship on urban and community gardens, considering questions of productivity and ownership, who gets to define 'community', and the role of community gardens in processes of gentrification.

In **chapter three** I consider the boundaries and limitations of ethnography, situating my research within debates about the politics of representation and the tensions between the personal and the scientific. Describing an early change of direction in my research design, I question the naturalised position of poor and brown people as objects of ethnographic study, and discuss the potential for 'studying up' as a form of resistance and challenge to structural oppression. I describe in detail the mixed-methods, ethnographic approach I took to my research, listing the varied sources of my data, and discussing the *experience* of doing research in Detroit.

Chapter four opens with a description of a guided tour I took in Detroit in the summer of 2014, which serves to highlight the system of erasures at work within narratives of the city's 'regeneration'. I then go on to trace the city's history via the popular stopping points that structure the tour: Detroit's founding by the French 'adventurer' Cadillac; the rise of the auto industry; the waves of migration that swelled the city's twentieth century population; racial segregation; and a history of fires and riots culminating with the big one in 1967; white flight, black leadership, and finally the city's 2013 bankruptcy. Providing reference points through which the city's story can be told, this structure also enables the establishment of certain, highly value-laden 'truths': that Detroit is somewhere 'things are made' - built by white (French) men, with labour provided by 'unskilled' black migrants; an unstable and chaotic place defined by fire and riot and the unsustainable dream of a middle class standard of living for all. This story both informs media reporting on the city and sets the frameworks through which its current problems and their possible solutions are articulated, and so before moving to the main body of my empirical work I use the remaining parts of chapter four to begin to unsettle this narrative.

In **chapter five** I draw on photography, documentary film, and news media sources to trace narratives of Detroit as abandoned, empty, and a place of chaos and disorder. Focusing largely on media produced since 2010, I show how the publication and dissemination of ruin photography from two particular sources - the work of US based Andrew Moore, and French duo Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre - have intersected with the production of several very similar documentaries; resulting in an amplification of a particular kind of imagery around the city, and solidifying a picture of Detroit as a dangerous wasteland, 'The Badlands' of the chapter's title. I trace two distinct narratives emerging from this body of work and its coverage. First, the construction of emptiness and the city as a 'blank slate'; a vast expanse that is somehow at once abandoned and populated. Second, the equally fictionalised versions of Detroit as post-apocalyptic landscape and reimagined 'wild west' frontier.

Moving from the chaos of the *Badlands* to the pastoral landscape of the *Prairie*, **chapter six** turns to narratives of greening and redemption. Drawing on interview material and participant observation data gathered in 2013-2014, as well as media coverage of the city's urban agriculture movement, I examine the profound racialisation of Detroit's farming landscape as presented in the popular press, and the ways in which particular narratives which leave established notions of the city as backward and derelict unchallenged are favoured over those which might provide a more radical stance.

Much like the Badlands, this imagined Prairie is also populated with its own, quite particular, cast of characters, of which I focus on two - the Pioneer, and the Missionary. While allusions to the figure of the pioneer are a standard trope in gentrification narratives more generally, the fact that many of the pioneers in this chapter aspire to a lifestyle of quite literal 'homesteading' - based on small farming and food production - lends further weight to this imagery. Material here comes chiefly from interviews with recent transplants to the city, who were either working on urban agriculture projects, or in the process of establishing their own. While interviewees were based throughout the city I focus particularly on Brightmoor, a north west Detroit neighbourhood with a high level of urban farming activity, and where I also worked as a farm volunteer in 2014. The focus remains on Brightmoor for the next section, where I draw on participant observation I undertook there with Christian missionary summer camps, to argue that the saviour narratives expressed so explicitly by mission-oriented volunteers in fact reflect a much broader tendency for white, affluent newcomers and visitors to the city to assume positions of moral and organisational authority.

Chapter seven picks up this thread of assumed leadership, putting forward a loose, working definition of the group I refer to as Detroit's 'Creative Managerial' (CM) class. Drawing on

media coverage of Detroit's post-bankruptcy 'resurgence', as well as interviews with research participants working in the 'creative' industries, tech sector and local non-profits, I describe some of the common narratives expressed by this group - mostly white and well-connected, and often relatively recent arrivals to the city. I focus on the processes by which certain key terms and concepts are being redefined to fit the interests of this group; among them 'work', 'subsidy', 'corruption' and 'diversity'. Finally, I turn to the very real gentrification now taking place in Detroit, discussing the ways in which narratives of emptiness and recolonization described in chapters four, five and six have laid the groundwork for what otherwise appears as a quite sudden and 'miraculous' wave of economic activity, but also dispossession.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Conceptions of Detroit as a neo-colonial landscape, and critiques of its conception as a 'blank slate', are by no means my own invention. Detroiters have been talking in these terms for some time (See Hood 2016; Wylie-Kellerman 2017). For example, Cass Corridor gallery owner George N'Namdi has spoken about what he calls 'psychological gentrification' happening in Detroit's re-colonisation (DeVito 2014). Conversations with Detroiters, particularly Dan Aldridge, who I was lucky enough to meet at Source Booksellers during the summer of 2014, as well as Hanifa Adjuman- Education and Outreach director for the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network- did a great deal to shape my theoretical frameworks. However, as none of these conversations were with published academics, I am unable within the requirements of a PhD thesis to give their theoretical contributions the weight they deserve. This particular intersection of scholarship, however - between discourses of ruination and the 'return' of urban land to productivity; of urban crisis and the 'blank slate', and the ways in which each of these feed into processes of gentrification - is not one which I have found to exist in a discrete field in academia. This literature review, therefore, is rather clumsily broken up into separate spheres of scholarship, moving awkwardly between disciplines. The structure I use here approximates that of the empirical chapters which follow; beginning with the gentrification of the present day, I then work 'backwards' to the literatures on urban crisis and ruination, and finish by looking at urban agriculture, nature, colonialism, and the American landscape.

Gentrification

The most useful work for considering the intersections between gentrification, nature, and settler colonialism is of course that of Neil Smith. Writing in 1986, Smith's description of gentrification as the 'frontier on which fortunes are made' still holds relevance today, with this frontier/settler imagery proving particularly useful when trying to understand the neo-colonial dimensions of land and property politics in Detroit. While many have taken up Smith's framework to analyse processes of gentrification elsewhere, most have responded to this frontier imagery as a metaphor, stopping short of investigating gentrification and urban dispossession as a literal neo-colonial form. But Smith's words, written in the context of his work in New York City, take on a new significance in light of more recent conceptions of Detroit as 'urban wilderness'; not just in its association with poverty and lawlessness, but literally, as a crumbling city reclaimed by nature.

'During the latter part of the twentieth century the image of wilderness and frontier has been applied less to the plains, mountains and forests of the West- now handsomely civilised- and more to US cities back East. As part of the experience of postwar suburbanization, the US city came to be seen as an 'urban wilderness'; it was, and for many it still is, the habitat of disease and disorder, crime and corruption, drugs and danger (Warner 1972). Indeed these were the central fears expressed throughout the 1950s and 1960s by urban theorists who focused on 'blight' and 'decline'...' (Smith 1996:xiiv)

Similarly, Smith's theory of the 'Rent Gap' is crucial to my research here. Arguing against the idea that gentrification's origin story may be found in its most visible expression- that of the changing preferences of a mobile middle class- Smith asks us to look beyond the symptoms of gentrification, and to the economic and social conditions which allow these to occur; processes begun decades before the emergence of hip coffee bars or yuppie renovators. Outlining the cycles of construction, investment and disinvestment as familiar to residents of contemporary Detroit as they would have been to those of the 1970s East coast cities he based his work upon, Smith shows how disinvestment in an area is not simply a reflection of disinterest, but a process which actively works in the favour of those with resources and power; decay, decline and the suffering they cause do not just happen, they are actively produced (Slater 2015:119).

Smith uses language intended to disrupt everyday assumptions about the nature of value; employing the term 'ground rent'- a measure we may understand as varying according to structural and economic conditions, and crucially, having both a present value, and a *potential* one. "Ground rent", he writes, "is a claim made by landowners on users of their land; it represents a reduction from the surplus value created over and above cost-price by producers on the site" (Smith 1979:543). A condition produced by forces of capital depreciation, urban expansion, and state supported processes of redlining and disinvestment; the Rent Gap is simply the difference between the capitalised ground rent currently realised by a landowner (usually in the form of rental or sale profit), and the *potential* ground rent they could benefit from after rehabilitating or redeveloping a site. When the Rent Gap eventually widens to a point whereby developers may make a significant return on run-down properties purchased at rock bottom prices, we begin to see gentrification.

In the thirty-plus years since its original publication, Smith's theory of the rent gap has unsurprisingly been subject to extensive critique, not least for its apparent over reliance on economic rationality, and lack of attention to consumer choice and the complex motivations of individual actors (Butler 2003; Hamnett 1991; Ley 1986; see also Slater 2006 for an argument that distinctions between 'production led' and 'consumption led' explanations of gentrification

have been overblown, at the cost of more critical studies of its effects) . Taken too straightforwardly it would appear to imply that gentrifiers 'behave first and foremost as ruthless capital accumulators' (Lees et al 2008:74), and the issue of who gentrifiers actually are - where they come from, and what their motivations might be - is an important question. Tempting as it may be, reducing gentrification to the work of self-interested capitalists would be a mistake, writing over an often highly ambivalent experience. Caulfield (1989), for example, argues that gentrification represents a particular form of middle class resistance to domination; an attempt to escape from the oppressive politics of the suburbs. Others have pointed to the relatively 'marginal' position, and left-liberal politics, of many gentrifiers (Rose 1984; Ley 1990, Lees et al 2008:90). However, while taking on board such criticisms of Smith's early work, the theoretical premise of the Rent Gap- as fundamental in creating the *conditions* by which gentrification may occur- remains a valid point of departure for my research.

While his work can be considered controversial at best (and at worst, critically dismissed) in academic circles, there is no doubt that Richard Florida's 'Creative Class thesis' represents a significant contribution to popular understandings of gentrification. Florida (2003) argues that the key to regional economic growth rests upon the presence of a new 'creative class', representing roughly 30% of the US population. These individuals may be further divided into two groups. A 'super creative core' is comprised of scientists, 'professors', poets, artists, actors and architects, as well as 'the thought leadership of modern society' (Florida 2003:8); non-fiction writers, cultural figures, and think tank researchers, amongst others. Beyond this central group, the creative class also includes 'creative professionals' working in a 'wide range of knowledge-based occupations in high-tech sectors, financial services, the legal and healthcare professions, and business management'. These people 'engage in creative problem solving, drawing on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems' (Florida 2003:8)

According to Florida, the success of an urban region depends upon its ability to attract these new elites, providing services they value and creating environments in which 'creativity' can thrive. Florida dedicates himself to understanding what it is that makes for these kinds of cities and neighbourhoods. Using various census based 'indexes' to compare cities, he concludes that the most economically successful display urban environments characterised by the three T's; technology, talent, and tolerance (Florida 2003:10). Talent (or creative capital) is here defined as a bachelor's degree or above; and it is these people who are attracted to areas that display high levels of 'diversity', measured by Florida's 'gay index' and 'bohemian index'.

Perhaps the best (and certainly most entertaining) critique of Florida's methodologically, theoretically and politically dubious work is offered by Jamie Peck, who argues that far from a

progressive and meritocratic solution to the problems of urban decline, the creative class thesis represents little more than a crude repackaging of neoliberal ideals and a valorisation of urban gentrification, celebrating elite 'self-actualisation' as a social good, and warning of dire consequences for cities that just 'don't get it' (Peck 2005). 'Rather than 'civilizing' urban economic development by 'bringing in culture'' he argues, 'creativity strategies do the opposite: they commodify the arts and cultural resources, even social tolerance itself, suturing them as putative economic assets to evolving regimes of urban competition.' (Peck 2005:763).

There is little doubt that the creative class thesis has proved popular with certain urban elites and city governments and, operating as something of a brand, Florida's ideas have been franchised out to struggling cities. The cult of Florida is particularly saleable precisely because the strategies it promotes are so modest, offering little challenge to prevailing neoliberal ideologies, and replacing concern for social welfare with more pressing concerns to cultivate 'cool'. Peck suggests that perhaps this is the most important question raised by Florida's work; where did the audience for Florida's arguments come from? (Peck 2005:742). It is precisely this popularity that makes an understanding of the creative class thesis central to my research in Detroit; not as a theoretical lens, but to investigate its role in contemporary conceptions of the city and its potential for transformation. Particularly important in this context is Peck's observation that 'for all the talk of local 'authenticity'; [creativity strategies] re-constitute urban-elitist 'leadership' models of city governance, despite their ritual invocation of grassroots efforts...' (Peck 2005:767).

I would, however, diverge from Peck's reading on two counts. First, Peck argues that social inclusion is irrelevant to, or at best plays only a bit part in, the US version of the creative class script (Peck 2005:759). Second, he is concerned that the kind of urban solutions taken up by city governments under creative class thinking are short term, concrete projects, rather than 'progressive and programmatic goals (such as poverty alleviation or environmental sustainability)' (Peck 2005:764). While the basic sentiment remains the same, I would argue that in the case of Detroit at least, the rhetoric of both social inclusion and environmental sustainability have been fully incorporated into discourses on Detroit's creative renaissance. While proffered solutions may well remain shallow and short term, they now routinely (and repetitively) employ language that emphasises their 'community building' and 'green' credentials. While some such projects are perhaps undeserving of such a cynical interpretation, others are clearly marked out by their masking of deeper structural inequalities with easy, feel good solutions that emphasise consumption choices over all else.

In his seminal account of the creative class (Florida 2003) Florida himself relegates Detroit to an undesirable and outdated *Organisational Age*, noting its working class heavy demographic, and apparent lack of diversity and innovation. As I will show, however, more recent commentary on Detroit very clearly draws upon creative class discourse, whether intentionally referencing Florida's work or not. Indeed by 2012, in a *CityLab* series written and recorded in his capacity as senior editor at *The Atlantic* (Florida 2012b) Florida was riding the 'Detroit Rising' wave. There, while he situates the city's creative power in a history much longer than the latest wave of newcomers, the five videos in which he profiles Detroit's 'rebirth' are telling. Florida visits the fashionable neighbourhoods of Corktown, Eastern Market, and Lafayette Park, tours food businesses and speaks with the owner of a printing press. While touting the city's diversity and tolerance as key to its new success, he tells us that 'Detroit is a place where anything goes. Where anyone can come, black, white, Asian, young, old, Whatever. It's a place that's open to people' (Florida 2012b). Over the course of nine minutes and numerous location shots, we see only one black face, briefly glimpsed in the crowd at Eastern Market.

Blomley (2005) argues that to understand processes of gentrification we also need to look to property rights; 're-appropriating' what has traditionally been a concern of the right, and opening up definitions of property in the service of critical gentrification studies (Blomley 2005:154). A sole focus upon the 'ownership model' of property rights precludes recognition of alternative possibilities for city space, as well as peoples existing relationships to housing and land. We must recognise the importance of not only private and state property, but also claims to property that fall outside of these categories-collective entitlements of poor renters to inner city space, for instance, or of indigenous people to urban land. As we see in the following chapters, these ideas become particularly salient in the context of gentrifying Detroit, where not only are long term tenants being evicted to make way for the city's 'revitalisation', but a particularly convoluted tax foreclosure and auction system allows for multi-generational homeowners to lose ownership rights to their homes over an unpaid water or tax bill; the property sold on to out of state bidders for a fraction of the debt.

Yet when rights to remain in an area against prevailing forces of gentrification are articulated in terms of long term or historical claims, these may be too easily destabilised. Much of the now in-demand housing in Detroit comprises 'historic neighbourhoods'; grand homes built for the rich at the beginning of the twentieth century, and soon after subdivided into apartments and rooming houses. Narratives of redemption, in which these structures are brought back to their former glory and intended use, draw on appeals to a longer history in order to nullify a more recent one. Many small-time developers and young gentrifiers trace their own histories back to the city, before their parents and grandparents moved out to the suburbs as part of a

large scale white flight; with this family history too used to justify contemporary processes of dispossession.

Blomley's work, based on his fieldwork in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, is useful for its attempts to situate contemporary displacement within a continuum of land grabs and dispossession, beginning with European colonisation. He also makes a distinction between *dispossession* and *displacement*; the former referring to the processes of legal and material acquisition of land, and the latter to the *conceptual* removal of previous occupants from city land, and the 'emplacement' of, in this case, white settlers (Blomley 2005:109). While he uses these terms to refer specifically to the appropriation of aboriginal land by European (and later Canadian) settlers, I argue that these ideas can be used in a contemporary context, particularly regarding the situation in Detroit. In many places, this conceptual removal is an incomplete one, with the bodies of a displaced group removed, even whilst cherry-picked images of their respective cultures and histories are commodified to provide 'authenticity' to a gentrifying neighbourhood. As I will show in the final chapter, *Detroit 3.0*, upper middle-class newcomers are in this way able to display their liberal left credentials; paying homage to an area's historic usage without having to encounter its reality on any significant scale.

In fact, this is a process familiar to gentrification more widely; from the restored early twentieth century shop signs in London's Spitalfields, to the proliferation of curated 'street art' in urban locations where broken windows policing has all but wiped out graffiti culture. Burnett (2014) has written on the commodification of poverty itself in Vancouver, while the cleaning and repackaging of Detroit's industrial heritage is echoed in Matthews and Picton's (2014) work on gentrification via craft beer in Toronto. Butler (2002) also offers some useful examples of this conceptual removal in his study of gentrification in Islington, North London in which he reports 'the formation of a metropolitan habitus in which values such as diversity, social inclusion and social integration form an important element of the narrative of settlement but which, in its practice, is one of social exclusivity' (Butler 2003:2471), a way of being that '[v]alues the presence of others... but chooses not to interact with them... a kind of social wallpaper' (Butler 2003:2484). Referring to what he calls 're-gentrification', a corrective of Lees' 'super gentrification' (Butler 2003:2476; Lees 2000), Butler argues that a 'once coherent narrative of a mixed community settlement (white working class natives, liberal middle class incomers) is now being fractured by the presence of incomers who neither belong to nor understand this history' (Butler 2003:2476).

While these insights are helpful, Butler's work is problematic in a number of ways. Putting aside for a moment the rather significant issues raised in referring to 'the' white working class

as 'natives', his closing statement is indicative of a more general problem with recent research on gentrification. Referring to the middle-class residents he studies as 'embattled settlers', he explains that;

'Thus a group that has transformed an inner-city working class district into one of the iconic sites of middle class living nevertheless still often attributes 'authenticity' to a largely non-existent native working class. Gentrification has not so much displaced the working class as simply blanked out those who are not like themselves...' (Butler 2003:2484)

While this process of editing, surrounding oneself with 'people like us' is no doubt a characteristic of gentrifying neighbourhoods, and one worthy of study, it is highly problematic to leap from this to an assertion that actually nobody is being displaced; particularly when the object of research has only been this 'middle class urban habitus'. This represents a wider trend that privileges research on the cultures and motivations of gentrifiers over an analysis of displacement, argues Slater (2006:743); if Others are mentioned, it is only in terms of how the middle classes feel about them (see also Butler and Robson 2003; Hamnett 2003).

Part of my work here has been to gather data on a specific middle-class consumer experience, but I do so from an explicitly political position that understands gentrification to be an essentially destructive force; a position that is rooted in an analysis of structural oppression. The data I have gathered in Detroit, relating to individual behaviour, preferences and self-talk of contemporary gentrifiers and others, is fundamentally implicated in the formation and reproduction of a neo-colonial narrative, and my aim here is to delineate the processes by which socially liberal, self-declared 'non-racist', elite consumers are able to justify and carry out the large-scale dispossession of a majority black US city.

Blomley reminds us of the importance of naming as a process of defining what does and does not happen in a particular place. 'The power to define a place can often mean the power to decide the destiny of that place. Precisely because of the ascription of otherness to Japantown and its occupants, it was possible to imagine the erasure of this place from the map' (Blomley 2005:147). This is particularly relevant to Detroit. The terms in which the city is discussed have become so solidified in popular imagination that it is difficult for outsiders to understand it as anything but 'broken'. But what does it mean to call a place broken? While many commentators would understand these words as merely descriptive, they continue to have consequences for the city. And what exactly is broken? Houses, infrastructure, social fabric? Things that are broken must be fixed. Detroit is in crisis. Detroit must be 'saved', but from what? From itself, from its circumstances? From its substandard people?

Urban crisis

Critical urban scholarship within and outside of geography has, for some years now, taken as a primary focus the workings of the neoliberal city, specifically its spatial dimensions. While neoliberalism as a political philosophy is a much older term, the idea of the neoliberal city refers more directly to a specific late twentieth century time period, characterised by a wholesale redefinition of social and economic priorities with regard to urban governance. Supply side economics, anti-welfarism, 'broken windows' or zero tolerance policing, privatisation of city services, and the re-designation of public space in the interests of a gentrifying population all coalesce to form a distinct urban agenda, and to shape American cities at the close of the last century and into this one.

This is a broad literature and one which has been debated extensively; here I am concerned only with a brief overview, and the drawing out of themes directly relevant to my research in Detroit. Referring technically to a pre-financial crisis period during which these urban restructuring programs were at their height, there is also debate as to whether it is still useful or relevant to discuss 'the neoliberal city', or neoliberalism at all (Barnett 2005; Collier 2012). These questions, of course, form part of wider debates which pit Marxist, economic readings of urban crisis and reorganisation against post-structuralist approaches attempting to account for diversity of experience and human motivation; an opposition which, as others have pointed out, has itself also been rather overstated. I am more interested here in the feminist critique of scholarship on the neoliberal city, pointing out the dangers of reification 'when the very attention focused on neoliberalism as a hegemonic project can help to further its growth and expansion; when the assumption of centrality and the anticipation of neoliberal outcomes can make what is contingent and perhaps quite transient seem necessary and unstoppable' (Mitchell 2006:723).

But even if the moment of neoliberal urbanism is one we now speak about in the past tense, these issues remain relevant for Detroit (and other cities) in the form of what Klein calls 'disaster capitalism' (Klein 2005). Detroit's derelict landscape may indeed be markedly different to that of 1980s New York City, and the scope for creative class led rust belt gentrification may turn out to be limited. But what late twentieth century NYC, post-Katrina New Orleans and contemporary Detroit all share is the precondition of crisis, and its role in justifying large scale and violent economic, social, and spatial restructuring.

Agamben's work in both *State of Exception*, and *Homo Sacer* (Agamben 1998;2005) offers a useful way in to analyses of the mechanics of these narratives of crisis. Draus et al draw on Agamben's theoretical frameworks to argue that the sustained ideological and material devaluation of Detroit creates the city as a 'zone of indistinction', a space '*not recognised by political institutions as a constituency, but rather seen as a kind of deficit or problem to be controlled, managed, or corrected*' (Draus et al 2010:668). Using the category of *homo sacer* to talk about the marginalised and stigmatised life experiences of heroin addicts in Detroit - individuals who, like Agamben's concentration camp prisoners are 'at once both within and outside of a society, nakedly vulnerable to its power, but with no right to protection' (ibid) - the authors extend this lens to the city itself, calling Detroit 'the *homo sacer* of American cities' (Draus et al 2010:668).

Peck meanwhile shows how narratives of crisis produced by right wing think tanks and honed in post-1975 New York City are deployed once again as ideological weapons in the post-Katrina 'reconstruction' of New Orleans. '[A]dvocating what amounts to a shock-therapy program of moral reconstruction, social control, and economic discipline', organisations like the Manhattan Institute were able to frame dominant discourses on the city's problems and possible solutions, and advance 'a program of contracted out urban structural adjustment designed in Washington and New York' (Peck 2006:705-706). That the city of Detroit, on the eve of its 2013 bankruptcy, paid The Manhattan Institute \$600,000 for its help in implementing the police department's broken windows strategy is no coincidence. In this story, the suffering of New Orleans both pre and post-Katrina, just as that of Detroit since the 1970s, is understood as inevitable, 'a predestined outcome of the orgy of welfare dependency, crime, family breakdown, and corruption that preceded the storm, conditions that rendered the city socially, economically, and morally defenceless- and then both 'nature and human nature ran amok' (Peck 2006:705). The parallels with Detroit are clear, but while Peck's focus is on the production and dissemination of such narratives in policy circles, my research focuses on their movement into the spheres of popular media, everyday interaction, and received wisdom.

In seeking to understand the creation of the post-1960s US black ghetto, Wacquant describes the interconnected processes of 'de-civilizing' and 'demonization', a 'structural-cum-discursive couplet in which each element reinforces the other and both serve in tandem to legitimize the state policy of urban abandonment and punitive containment' (Wacquant 2004:95). The first, brought about not - as the policy makers of Peck's study would have it- by a culture of poverty and welfare dependence, but by the intentional withdrawal of state services and resulting disintegration of public space and social relations, is supported and justified through the

symbolic demonizing of a black 'sub-proletariat', and through the 'scholarly myth' of the underclass and its tropes of 'gang banger' and 'welfare mother' (Wacquant 2004:95).

Building on Goffman's work on stigma (1963), Wacquant compares the idea of 'territorial infamy' to Goffman's 'marks of race, nation and religion', able as it is to be transmitted generationally (Wacquant 2007:67). While Wacquant's work on territorial stigma and advanced marginality refers in the main to 'ghetto' neighbourhoods *within* cities, it can be argued that these frameworks may equally be applied to the city of Detroit as a whole- at least in terms of their potential for analysis of place image, rather than universal experience of residents. Advanced marginality, he argues, is concentrated in highly stigmatised places, isolated, bounded, 'leprous badlands in the heart of the postindustrial metropolis where only the refuse of society would accept to dwell' (Wacquant 2007:67). While this description of Detroit is one that many residents, both long-term and new, would whole-heartedly reject, this narrative is a key building block in the *ideological* demonization of the city, as I will show in chapter four. Its labelling as lawless zone, a place of crisis and chaos; a space of exception- this is a key mechanism by which a suspension of 'normal' rules may be justified; be it the subversion of democratic representation by emergency management, denial of access to basic resources like water and lighting, or police violence. The city's particular stigma cannot be separated from the fact that its population is over 80% black, and as Draus et al note, "Detroit' itself is often employed as a kind of code word for 'poor, black, inner city' or 'ghetto', and the city's economic decline is symbolically equated with its dramatic demographic shift from majority white to majority black' (Draus et al 2010:666). Detroit, they argue, functions as an 'internal Other', and as a 'source of distinction, reminding middle class white Americans of their own status and superiority, of that which they are not and do not wish to become' (Draus et al 2010:664).

Ruin

Googling the term 'ruin porn' in 2013, I was presented with 6,880,000 results, ranging from photo blogs dedicated to the appreciation of landscapes of abandonment and the personal experiences of urban explorers, to more critical, journalistic accounts lambasting the recent fashion for 'staring at abandoned buildings', and the absence of political analysis it allegedly stands for (Binelli 2012). The term is used largely pejoratively in the latter; a label to apply to art or film that designates is inauthentic and exploitative (Piiparinen 2012, Johnson 2012). At the less professionalised end of the spectrum, where tumblr accounts, personal photography,

and urban exploration blogs did use the term they appeared to embrace it as referring to a guilty pleasure, a fascination with something illicit and hidden. Indeed, as Johnson (2012) notes, attaching the word 'porn' to the end of a noun has become both a way for commentators to condemn particular kinds of photography as fetishizing, and as a way for fans to refer to the visual enjoyment of any 'guilty' pleasure, from food to architecture, and even crochet (Johnson 2012).

The idea of 'ruin porn' was noticeably absent from academic analysis however, possibly because this ubiquity was a relatively recent phenomenon. A number of journalistic sources cited a 2009 *VICE Magazine* article on Detroit as originating the term (Johnson 2012, Binelli 2012), and on (admittedly unscientific) research it does appear to be the earliest use (Morton 2009). Internet and news media discussions seemed to approach the issue with a number of concerns in common, and Detroit was at least referred to, if not focused on, in the vast majority. In all cases I encountered, the term 'ruin porn' applied specifically to the appreciation of modern ruins, particularly industrial and institutional architecture, but also abandoned theme parks, transport infrastructure, and domestic structures. Several made use of frontier imagery, particularly in reference to Detroit, describing a 'gold-rush mentality' (Morton 2009), or a 'bacchanal spirit' in the city's 'nothing left to lose Frontier' (Binelli 2012).

These accounts invariably shared a running theme of competition for authenticity, and the various routes through which such claims are asserted; opposing art and political engagement, and variously positioning urban explorers, photographers, 'locals' and political activists in a moral continuum that shifts according to the particular point being made (Greco 2012, Binelli 2012, Mullins 2012, Piiparinen 2012). Such writing also continues to participate, to various degrees, in the construction of Detroit and other post-industrial landscapes as empty and even 'post-apocalyptic' (Morton 2009, Mullins 2012)- places where tourists and photographers come to witness 'the end of the world' (Binelli 2012). Many link the aesthetic appreciation of contemporary landscapes of decay with a wider history of ruin contemplation, referencing nineteenth century artistic preoccupations with ancient Greek and Roman Ruins (Binelli 2012, Greco 2012), in one case alongside practices of slum tourism (Mullins 2012).

Dereliction, 'ruin porn', and disaster zones as spaces of interest and creativity is a significant and emerging field within art and architecture. For the purposes of this review however, I limit my discussion to studies that are directly relevant to either the neo-colonial dimensions of the production of urban emptiness, or the specifics of Detroit's landscape.

Gil Doron's work is concerned with the idea of the 'dead zone'; a standard term in urban planning, and used to refer to spaces understood as empty, derelict, or awaiting development

(Doron 2000). Based on personal experiences on a tour of cities in Europe, America and Israel, Doron seeks to illustrate the wealth of human and natural activity occurring in these areas, even as they are designated on official maps as empty space. These 'dead zones' he argues, are created not by acts of destruction, but by the suspension of new plans; their transgressive potential resting upon the fact that they are fundamentally temporal spaces. To illustrate this point, Doron reminds us (in 2000) that 'The centre of Detroit has been abandoned for the last 30 years or so, and still does not have an overall new plan' (Doron 2000:260)

Indeed, despite an enthusiastic focus upon the many practical uses these areas are put to by various human actors elsewhere, when it comes to Detroit, Doron's focus sharply turns to 'nature', (which alongside 'marginal communities', is listed as an actor in the 'dead zone')-echoing a common refrain amongst commentators on the city's physical landscape; the abandoned metropolis, slowly and quietly reclaimed by nature. This is particularly significant given that Doron is actually describing the very human interventions of art and community gardening. 'This *unpopulated landscape*' he says, 'does not look 'natural'- it is an eccentric and charming entertaining combination of a ruined or deserted city and wild nature. It is a space that opened in the dichotomy of what we perceive as city and nature' (Doron 2000:255, italics mine). One could easily get the impression from this article that there is nobody left in central Detroit at all, apart from the plants and some brave, visionary artists.

But Doron is not alone in his difficulty of moving away from this apparently inescapable framework of lack. 'In the publication 'Concurring the Void' he explains, 'the author Hans Van Dijk declares that voids do not exist in reality and have always been a colonialist fabrication to justify the brutal act. He continues that colonization is part of what architecture does, and the imagery of the void was invented for this reason, instead this time it is not far continents that are occupied but the back yard. Still, ignoring his own findings, he continued to attach this imagery to real places in the Netherlands.' (van Dijk 1996, cited in Doron 2000:249).

Picking up from Doron's work, Tim Edensor maintains that wasteland and spaces of ruin are indeed created by the suspension of re/development and mapping of areas as blank, 'an impossible designation of space as terra nullius, which suggests they are spaces of and for nothing' (Edensor 2005:8). This blankness, this indeterminate categorisation of space, in fact opens up possibilities for alternative, non-entrepreneurial uses in what often becomes a significant period of time between abandonment and demolition or redevelopment. In this however, Edensor's work sets up such spaces as by their nature impermanent; artistic interventions, experiential uses that may challenge established ideas and norms, but do little to offer practical or lasting alternatives to urban landscapes understood as 'thriving' or in

decline. Thinking of Detroit, the specification that these uses must be 'non-entrepreneurial' may also prove problematic. How, for instance, can we understand a community farm, operating semi-legally on vacant city land, and trading produce at farmers' markets?

Despite these reservations, Edensor's approach remains valuable. First for its weight in countering the widely held idea that 'ruins are spaces of waste, that contain nothing, or nothing of value, and that they are saturated with negativity as spaces of danger, delinquency, ugliness and disorder' (Edensor 2005:7). His work is also based in an understanding of the processes of 'dynamic colonisation of space by capital' (Edensor 2005:8), taking an interest not only in the material and psychological experience of ruins, but what they might tell us more broadly about social and cultural processes across urban space (Edensor 2005:15). His concise description of a standard Victorian ruin picturesque - representing melancholia, a loss of places in wake of industrialisation, the demise of empires, and more generalised existential concerns of inevitable decay and obsolescence (Edensor 2005:11) - leads us consider how we might define the equivalent aesthetic standard for contemporary industrial ruins (*modern gothic*; *post-industrial nostalgia*? Edensor 2005:13) - a major theme in cultural production from and about Detroit.

While Edensor acknowledges his positionality with regards to ease of access to ruins, and the luxury of seeing them as beautiful, distant objects rather than an immediate, neighbourhood danger (Edensor 2005:17), he does sometimes tend towards a romanticisation of buildings and landscapes themselves at the expense of both present and past human occupants. For example, describing with regret the hastened material decline of abandoned structures, he remarks that '[t]he extent to which such damage is perpetrated depends upon the accessibility to those who would pluck its saleable or useful contents and destroy its fixtures' (Edensor 2005:5). Absent here is a consideration of the economic factors that might motivate people to mine local ruins for their assets, a huge historical issue in Detroit. In this, Edensor unwittingly feeds into dominant discourses that paint local strategies for coping with huge unemployment and material need, as the actions of 'barbarians', destroying beautiful ruins instead of leaving them to rot prettily.

There is some interesting work on ruins in archaeology and anthropology too; with studies considering the materiality and ruins of the recent past, capitalism and creative destruction (Gonzalez-Ruibal 2008), and the role of apocalyptic imagery in US nation building (Masco 2008, Yablon 2004). And a significant body of work on ruins (and their appreciation) exists in the humanities, particularly in the work of literary scholars concerned with the relationships between ancient Greek and Roman ruins and 18th/19th century poetry, art, and nation building

(Goldstein 1977, Janowitz 1990, Springer 1987, Woodward 2001). While most of this work revolves around the travels and cultural production of European elites, McNutt (2006) offers a comparable study of the role of American ruins during this period (Dawdy 2010), with particularly interesting work on the 'Indian as ruin'. Writers on modern ruins also make frequent reference to the historic uses of Greek and Roman sites, attempting to contextualise this longstanding Euro-American preoccupation (Dawdy 2010, Woodward 2012, Merewether 1997). Indeed, Woodward argues that contemporary art 'is more powerfully inspired by ruin than at any time since the eighteenth century', a situation brought about, he says, by the ubiquitous presence of decaying post-industrial landscapes (Woodward 2012:30). For Woodward, at a time when environmental awareness has become a key public concern, ruins become a powerful metaphor for our relationship with nature.

The feelings experienced by these earlier ruin explorers, this 'lofty, ecstatic, drowsiness' (Woodward 2001:4) are not dissimilar to those described by contemporary enthusiasts; the awe of such grand projects in picturesque decay allows us to contemplate our own mortality, constructing imaginary versions of the past, present and future (Woodward in Drooker 2007:18) to fill the gaps left by the absence of obvious human activity (Woodward 2012:17-18). Of course, this kind of appreciation relies on a heavy editing process, whereby evidence of the continuation of contemporary and everyday life is removed in order to maintain a spectacle of timelessness and desolation. Nineteenth century romantics lamented the incursion of tourists and souvenir stands into the Colosseum, just as one of Kevin Lynch's 1980s focus group participants observed that "the Parthenon would not be impressive if next to it there were another one still functioning" (Lynch 1990:219). 'Ruins are often activated in a culture to perform certain social, political, or aesthetic functions' writes Roth, 'but they can never belong fully to the present without losing their status as ruins' (Roth 1997:xi).

This is a particularly interesting issue for discussions of Detroit's 'ruin porn' industry. One of the most famous photographs of this genre, a haunting shot of an abandoned high school science classroom (see fig 1 below) taken by French photographers Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, is well known in the city as an example of the artificiality of this editing process. At the time it was taken, a brand new high school had just been built across the street from the old building, and was the reason for its 'abandonment'. The photograph, however, enjoyed enormous popularity amongst newspaper editors and readers either unaware or indifferent to its context (see Hall 2013; Lala 2011; Olah 2012).



Fig 1. Biology Classroom, Marchand and Meffre 2008

Woodward's own 2012 essay on Detroit's ruins displays a similar pattern. A photograph, taken by the author in 2006 and entitled 'abandoned mansions in Brush Park, Detroit', shows two crumbling red brick structures in the foreground, adding weight to Woodward's rather hyperbolic assertion that 'no city has depopulated so quickly during peacetime since Rome in the century and a half subsequent to its capture by the Goths' (Woodward 2012:19). Relying upon the city's dramatic visual landscape rather than any actual population statistics, Woodward's position is undermined by a closer examination of the photo, which appears to show two or three other row houses in the process of restoration, complete with fashionable muted paintwork. An old-fashioned street lamp in the picture's foreground seems to be in suspiciously pristine condition, and the grass strip running along the sidewalk, notoriously neglected by city services, appears to be carefully maintained. On my visit in 2012, the Brush Park neighbourhood, while certainly home to some spectacularly ruined red brick mansions, also displayed clear signs of a fairly co-ordinated gentrification effort.

With this in mind, it is useful to consider more carefully calls for the 'desublimation' of modern ruins (Gonzalez-Ruibal 2008:260) in favour of approaching them as evidence of the destructive and violent nature of global capitalism. Masco's work draws on Benjamin to critique the 'aestheticized politics that enable increasing militarization and that allow citizens to experience their own destruction as an "aesthetic pleasure of the first order"' (Masco 2008:363, citing Benjamin 1969:242). But in defining this in such oppositional terms - sublime, romantic appreciation of the aesthetics of ruins versus a politically engaged approach - we are left with an analytical framework unable to counter the symbolic violence done to places by work like

Woodward's, which uses the image of abject landscape to argue a well-meaning political point but one that ultimately serves to reinforce dominant and stigmatised meanings.

Images of the ruined city, and post-apocalyptic urbanism more broadly, may also be seen as an integral part of the US cultural imaginary. 'It took American ingenuity to transform ruination into a form of nation building' writes Masco (2008:361), noting that '[n]uclear ruins are never the end of the story in the United States but, rather, always offer a new beginning' (Masco 2008:363). The imagined post-apocalyptic landscape of popular culture, while certainly a shorthand for ecological disaster, the perils of environmental excess and international aggressions, is more often than not also a landscape of reinvention; demonstrating the fortitude of the American character in the face of disaster, or offering space for the enactment of utopias. Post-apocalyptic landscapes, contrary to the probable reality of nuclear holocaust, usually seem to have *people* in them, surviving in a new kind of wilderness. This future wilderness, much like that which formed the backdrop for the nation building of early European settlers, serves as a mirror for dominant social concerns.

Yablon's work examines the role of skyscrapers in early twentieth century US culture, looking at images of New York's Metropolitan Life Insurance building in contemporary science fiction narratives, and their relation to prevailing anxieties over financial speculation and the planned obsolescence of ever grander buildings on Manhattan's rapidly changing skyline:

'Transformed into an archaic ruin, the skyscraper thus embodied a certain doubleness: its tragic relegation to the status of disposable commodity and yet its ironic triumph in outlasting and thereby memorializing the era of capitalist modernity. At the same time that it resonated with Henry James's critique of the destructive upheavals wrought by the real estate market, it also betrayed a fascination with how such commercial structures might in fact survive as monuments, with all that they might reveal to future generations about the culture and economy that had built them' (Yablon 2004:339).

This tension between planned obsolescence - the replacing of new buildings with newer, and more impressive ones, often built in architectural styles directly inspired by ancient monuments (the art deco ancient Egypt of Detroit's Guardian building, the solid white marble and columns of not just civic architecture but banks and insurance headquarters in cities across the US) but presumably, never expected to last longer than the next big development in engineering, or mass employment project - lies at the heart of the way we read images of Detroit's contemporary devastation. Dawdy and Woodward both point out the role ancient Roman ruins played in Nazi civic planning policy, with Hitler instructing architect Albert Speer to use marble and brick over more modern building materials in order to leave imposing ruins,

an appropriate and lasting monument after the inevitable epochal fall of his expected 1000 year Reich (Dawdy 2010:771; Woodward 2001:29). Rather than inevitable upgrading and replacement, the future destruction imagined for these buildings was in their continued life as monuments.

Of course, only some of Detroit's ruins meet these visual criteria; and it is important to differentiate between the architecture of skyscrapers and buildings like Michigan Central, and the more fragile industrial structures that provide equal draw for ruin appreciation. But the questions raised here about the assumed hubris of the city's architects and planners remain important. The twin ideas of Detroit's decaying architectural wonders as evidence of the folly of excess, and its industrial relics as demonstrating the fickle nature of late capitalism, are key components of the city's contemporary mythology. In interrogating the re-settling of Detroit, it is important to unsettle such universally accepted understandings of how it came to be. The Metropolitan Life Building, like other New York skyscrapers, turned minimal profit, (Yablon 2004:317); the upper floors of Detroit's iconic Michigan Central were even in the city's heyday, never fully occupied. But whereas stories about Detroit frame this as a tragic case of building for a future that never came, Manhattan's very different fate allows us to understand the same situation as part of a pattern of real estate speculation and planned obsolescence to characterise American cities in the early 20th century. As I will show, this is a pattern which continues in various forms in the apparently desolate landscape of 21st century Detroit.

While an essential focal point for discussions of the city's material and social landscape, the moral authority of Detroit's 'ruin pornographers' and their critics is not the most important issue here. The ruined city, the frontier, and the wilderness are American cultural tropes (among many others) that inform and serve as foundation for the experience of space and landscape for Detroit residents as much as 'outsiders'. Finding beauty in the uncanny and using ruined landscapes to think through these issues are not in themselves bad things. But as with all conceptual framing, there is a purposeful and consequential editing process that must take place. The particular editing process we see here has resulted in the visual appearance of Detroit- a city that despite its decline remains home to hundreds of thousands of people- coming to stand for emptiness and desolation at the expense of all else.

Morgan makes an important point in his 2009 *VICE* article; Michigan central is not owned by the city, as implied by standard 'ruin porn' narratives of civic disinvestment and decay. It belongs to a billionaire who also owns the ambassador bridge, connecting the city to Windsor, Canada. What seem like pictures of disinterest and neglect, images that naturally call for someone (saviours, investors, social projects) to take an interest, take a gamble, save the city,

are actually the physical evidence of land speculation and the continued concentration of wealth. It is not lack of interest, but a particular kind of interest that creates the landscape of Detroit. As Gonzalez-Ruibal reminds us, '[I]ack of politics is always conservative politics: the worrying impression that we can learn more, in a profound sense, about the dramatic twentieth century from a photograph by Mikael Levin or Camilo Jose Vergara than from archaeological research on the recent past' (Gonzalez-Ruibal:261).

More recently, academic interest in Detroit's ruins has begun to catch up with popular media attention, although much of this scholarship is located in art and photography related fields. Gansky writes about Andrew Moore's Detroit photography, its reception amongst a white middle class audience, and the ways in which the images may be used to think through a cultural moment (Gansky 2014). Speaking more generally, Strangleman locates current fashions for coffee table books of industrial ruins in Cowie and Heathcott's idea of "smokestack nostalgia"; a sentimentalising and aestheticising of the industrial past which ignores its lived realities (Strangleman 2013). Sperb notes the role played by nostalgia in the construction of meaning in images of ruins in Detroit; 'a mythic depiction of the past that leaves out far more than it includes, and filters history through the kind of rose-colored glasses which serve the interests of present hegemonic ideologies' (Sperb 2016:213). Arnold meanwhile, uses the photographs of Marchand and Meffre to show how images of ruin are able to 'produce an identity of the place that becomes more widely believed or experienced than the social reality of Detroit itself' (Arnold 2015: 328). 'The apocalyptic imagination', she argues, 'is concerned with aestheticizing and romanticizing the impression of disaster and sudden ruination, even if this is not part of the photographed object's history. In such photographs, an individual site or building bears the weight of the decline of capitalist empires, the failure of industry, and of the end of modernity.' (Arnold 2015:334). In chapter five I will build on this notion, showing that visions of an imagined 'apocalypse' are a key trope in images of contemporary Detroit, extending far beyond ruin photography.

Nature, colonialism, and the American landscape

The presence of 'nature' appears central to the enjoyment of both ancient and modern ruins, from the sublime and peaceful landscapes of Woodward's nineteenth century Coliseum, before tourist industry demands removed the weeds from its stones (Woodward 2001:23), to the spectacle of reeds growing in accidental lakes atop Michigan Central, and trees pushing their way out from inside ruined Detroit mansions. 'Nature is inexorable. As things fall apart,

out of their remains emerge new forms of growth. These are signs both of human decay and of reintegration into the natural world' (Roth et al 1997:2). But nature alone is not enough. While much discourse on Detroit, its past and potential futures, focuses on its emptiness, lack, the sheer amount of available space, the shape that space takes is also fundamental to the way in which it is understood and imagined. The city's ruins are essential to its present and future, whether as persistent structures or simply as ideas of its past.

In 1984, Kevin Lynch speculated about the possible uses defunct infrastructure could be put to, imagining intensive farming in parking garages, new uses from old strip malls. But when it came to skyscrapers and the inner city, he wrote 'my speculations are strained. Their most likely reuse is their original use: offices or apartments, which require the retention of all their complex utilities and lifting devices. Mostly then, we must take them down' (Lynch 1990:177). It seems odd that at a time right after New York's fiscal crisis, when huge areas of Manhattan and the Bronx stood derelict, and when Detroit's landscape was well on its way to being what it is today, that he would find it so hard to imagine inner city dereliction as a long-term condition in the same way as other post-industrial landscapes. Vergara, whose famous photographs of Detroit, Gary, Indiana and other rust belt towns could be seen as foundational to contemporary 'ruin porn', had no such trouble imagining the people out of downtown. He suggested in 1995 that a section of Downtown Detroit be dedicated as a 'grand historic park'- the prairie could be allowed to invade, and animals make homes in empty sky scrapers. Ruins, argues Woodward, following Vergara, are integral to the story of US, and should be seen as national heritage (Woodward 2012:20). This is a particularly interesting position given the colonial history of national parks and wilderness preservation in nation building, and its role in removing undesirable bodies from the landscape.

Wilderness, as many have shown, is a profoundly human creation, culturally and historically specific (Cronon 1996; Light 1995; Short 1991). The separation of wilderness and civilisation marks out who 'we' are, and who we are not; it is a concept with a long history, playing a significant role in US culture since before its formation as a nation state. More recent discursive constructions of 'urban wilderness' may be understood as a continuation of these ideas, 'the legacy of an older conception of wilderness that is now in retreat: the description of wild nature' (Light 1995:195). Evoking a timelessness that situates such spaces as outside of history, the idea of a pristine nature, untouched by human interference, is a powerful image within Euro-American culture, and one that serves to obscure its own history (Cronon 1996:79). Much has been written on the role of wilderness in creating what Short calls a 'national environmental ideology', that is, the 'myths mobilised in the course of state formation and nation building' (Short 1991:xxii).

The frontier and what lay beyond it; the movement westward and the taming of the wilderness, these ideas remain building blocks of American culture and national self-conception (Nash 2001, Short 1991, Smith 2010, Cronon 1996). Later on, this same ideology was employed in different ways in the formation of the country's national parks; 'wilderness' preserved as recreational space to ensure the reproduction of a rugged, individualist, *American* masculinity deemed under threat by urbanisation. 'But the trouble with wilderness', argues Cronon, is that it in fact continues to express and reproduce 'the very values its devotees seek to reject' (Cronon 1996:80). National parks cleared of people (and certainly with no signs of the land's original inhabitants) are manufactured for and by the city, a place outside of work, or production or necessity, where elites may temporarily retreat from 'modern life' and re-affirm imagined frontier values through bodily engagement with the landscape, playing at survivalism. 'It is no accident', writes Richard White, 'that the play we feel brings us closest to nature is play that mimics work' (White 1996:174).

The kind of 'nature' we see in Detroit is clearly not the same as that which marks out national parks and wilderness preserves across the country; yet some of the analysis scholars have applied to the construction of wilderness (both material and discursive) is useful here too. While the city's distinctive landscape is deeply embedded in, and a constant visual reminder of its industrial and post-industrial history, powerful narratives abound surrounding nature's potential to erase and start again, to reclaim the city and return it to prairie. Making good the environmental and social damage wreaked by decades of industrial pollution and decline, and constructing Detroit as empty, a blank canvas and testing ground for the reinvention of contemporary cities; these ideas require close examination.

Writers on wilderness have tended to distinguish between its classical and romantic conceptions, although most acknowledge that there is considerable overlap between the two, particularly in terms of ideological dominance at any given time period. Classical wilderness is an older framing, where wild nature is a place of darkness and danger, an 'unproductive' waste. Reproduced in later colonial discourse as justification for the domination and subduing of wild, uncivilised territory, the frontier here represents the dividing line between civilisation and 'barbarism' (Short 1991:92). A significant body of literature to consider then, given both Detroit's framing as a lawless, barbaric place; as well as more recent discourse painting the city a literally a 'new frontier' (Bjerga 2013; Renn 2011; Ryzik 2010;).

The romantic position begins to take over (in Euro-American culture) around 200 years ago, and views external nature as sacred, a place of harmony unsullied by the defiling touch of 'human' culture and vice (Cronon 1996:76). The barbarian is replaced by Rousseau's noble

savage (Short 1991:22) - still a deeply primitivist objectification of the cultures and bodies of indigenous inhabitants, but one that uses their image to critique the dominant culture rather than simply to elevate it. The Romantic approach to wilderness characteristic of nineteenth century American culture may be seen as a 'direct response to the successful objectification of nature in the labour process' (Smith 2010:25). Firstly, as Smith puts it, 'one does not pet a rattlesnake until it has been defanged'; secondly, this transition was ideologically essential to US nation building, as [t]he most utilitarian conquest known to history had somehow to be viewed not as inspired by a calculus of rising land values and investments but (despite the orgies of speculation) as an immense exertion of the spirit' (Smith 2010:26).

As Cronon explains, during the process of conquest and settlement, the Romantic notion of the sublime - as expressed through dramatic and beautiful natural landscapes that emphasise our 'insignificance' - and the particularly American construction of the frontier, 'converged to remake wilderness in their own image, freighting it with moral values and cultural symbols that it carries to this day' (Cronon 1996:72). Those places which inspired such awe and wonder were to become the country's first national parks; expressions of a particular kind of external nature worth preserving. It is significant that other kinds of natural landscapes took much longer to be appreciated as sites for preservation; the Everglades, Cronon points out, were not designated as such until the 1940s (Cronon 1996:73); the grasslands of the Midwest waited even longer.

The sublime is an interesting concept to consider with regards to Detroit's own striking landscape. The much-photographed spectacle of nature reclaiming the city is often discussed in remarkably similar terms; huge rotting buildings cathedrals to a dead economic system, the failure of grand human projects and the persistence of nature. The plants - deciduous trees and prairie grasses - may not be in themselves remarkable, but the image of their growing inside and over the formerly opulent buildings of the post-industrial city seem to evoke feelings of human impermanence and wonder more commonly associated with the traditional subjects of landscape painting.

As mentioned above, frontier imagery has its own relevance to considerations of Detroit. A necessarily nostalgic position, as Cronon again points out, '[b]uilt into the frontier myth from its very beginning was the notion that this crucible of American identity was temporary and would pass away. Those who have celebrated the frontier have almost always looked backward as they did so, mourning the older, simpler, truer world that is about to disappear forever' (Cronon 1996:76). Even when parts of the country were still in the process of European settlement, ideas of the frontier were predicated upon a nostalgia for this invented

past, mediated through cultural production in novels, art, and the late nineteenth century phenomenon of the travelling 'wild west show' (Warren 2005). In Detroit it is important to look at industrial nostalgia- the framing of the city in terms of its industrial past; an imagined heyday when employment was plentiful and life was good for all, before the auto industry abandoned American workers and middle class whites abandoned the declining city. These myths belie the rather more complicated history of a city whose grand and decaying skyscrapers were in fact often never full, and whose current racial segregation is a result of much more than the absence of frightened white people. There is an additional layer of nostalgia emerging too; that of the disappearance of ruins, as various attempts at regeneration close off public and potential space in the interests of private companies.

'An important belief in the USA' writes Short, 'is that Americans are truly American when they (re)create the frontier condition. An incantation of the frontier and the frontier spirit is used to create social cohesion.' (Short 1991:94). It is possible to view the depression era therefore, as a 'problem of a frontierless democracy', the success of colonisation and the closing of the frontier as a removal of the 'safety valve' of available land allowing more power to big corporations, 'crushing the little man' (Short 1991:93). It is useful to consider how this frontier attitude, apparently so central to American national identity, relates to the re-colonisation of Detroit- providing, quite literally, new ground to break.

Even given the city's 'ruralising' landscape, it is important not to lose sight of its continued status as a fundamentally 'urban problem'; an image of chaos and decline, of high crime and unemployment, and a space inhabited by marginalised, dangerous, and significantly, non-white populations. Far from disappearing to give way to Romantic conceptions, the Classical idea of wilderness, that 'unknown evil at the edge of civilisation' (Light 1995:196), may be understood as having relocated to the inner city (Short 1991:25-26; Light 1995:200), a place which now, in the words of Mike Davis, represents a 'Darwinian or Hobbesian wilderness' (Davis 1993:28). Upton Sinclair's turn of the century expose of the injustices of the Chicago meatpacking industry, 'The Jungle' (1906) is an oft quoted example of this quite literal projection of images of wild nature onto the city and its inhabitants. While Sinclair's work had the specific goal of social and labour rights reform- positing marginalised city dwellers not as savages but as humans at the mercy of a savage environment- Light points out, once this 'fervour of social reform has passed' the metaphor remains attached to this abject place, and by extension, those who dwell there (Light 1995:203).

The opposing conceptions of Classical and Romantic Nature may also be mapped onto the various biblical narratives that have inspired, motivated and legitimated American colonisation

and settlement, and in various ways, continue to be relevant to many of those 'resettling' Detroit. Civilising narratives represent another telling of Classical nature, in which settlers seek to re-create the garden through the control and domestication of savage nature. Edenic narratives meanwhile, align with the Romantic - the wilderness (particularly that of the 'New World') representing the pristine nature of the garden of Eden, from which human beings were cast. Merchant argues that these two distinct approaches have their roots in the two versions of the Genesis story, emphasising domination and stewardship of nature respectively (Merchant 1996:134). Merchant defines this overarching 'recovery plot' as the 'long, slow process of returning humans to the Garden of Eden through labour in the earth. Three subplots organise its argument: Christian religion, modern science, and capitalism. The Genesis story of the fall provides the beginning; science and capitalism, the middle; recovery of the garden, the end' (Merchant 1996:133).

The notion of the origin story itself is also important here- whether the national origin myth of the frontier, the biblical fall from the garden, or the constantly repeated terms of Detroit's industrial origins and relation to US car culture. 'The origin story of capitalism', says Merchant, 'is a movement from desert back to garden through the transformation of undeveloped nature into a state of civility and order' (Merchant 1996:136); the establishment of Detroit as a wild and savage place then, is an essential precondition for the establishment of contemporary narratives of progress and rationality.

'The notion of an elect group of people doing God's work in a 'new' land has a deep hold in the intellectual and political life of the USA... In few other countries of the world has the possibility of the creation of the garden been so widely accepted.' (Short 1991:13). Contemporary sustainability discourse argues Merchant, offers yet another reimagining of the recovered garden, in which humanity lives in harmony with nature (Merchant 1996:156). But in the rhetoric of early Christian settlers, engaged in this work of transformation, the wilderness also represented a repository of commodities, 'an economic resource as well as a test of man's devotion' (Short 1991:92). As I will show in chapter 6, many of these values re-emerge in greening discourse in contemporary Detroit.

A discussion of the biblical narratives of colonisation would not be complete without some consideration of the myth of the Dark Continent. While American and African colonisation certainly represent two distinct historical processes, such powerful cultural images have a life much larger and longer than the specific time and place of their inception and explicit use. Given the racial dimensions of Detroit's specific social history, and the reality that a large proportion of the city's majority African American population may trace their own origins to

enslaved and transported Africans, analyses of the ideological processes of African colonialism remain relevant. Biblical in orientation but also pointedly 'scientific', the myth of the Dark Continent posits Christianity and rational government as forces of light, driving away the darkensses of superstition, ignorance and chaos, and subduing wild nature, in all its forms (Jarosz 1992:107).

The everyday religious situation in contemporary Detroit is of course, rather more complex than this analysis of Christian myth-making. Christian churches play a crucial role in African American communities across the US, often forming a fundamental part of grassroots poverty alleviation efforts in situations of government abandonment. But Victorian colonialists did not view this bringing of light purely as religious salvation; the revelations they offered the Dark Continent were also technological, commercial and scientific (Jarosz 1992:107). It is in this that current discourses around experimental farming in Detroit may find uneasy relation. When Jarosz writes that the use of the Dark Continent myth 'buttresses the assumptions of the superiority of western science and technology in the face of a hostile environment' (Jarosz 1992:105), it is easy to see how this could be applied to conversations on the future of Detroit's landscape and economy; premised more often than not upon the ideological opposition of a supposedly hostile and stagnant environment, and the potential of a dynamic, creative, and sustainable future as a hub for green (and other) technologies.

It should be noted too, that harmful ideological frameworks do not by necessity come from positions of intentional domination or harm. As Bratlinger points out, the idea of the Dark Continent was created, at least in part, through the discourse of abolitionists eager to expose the horrors Africans were subject to under slavery (Bratlinger 1985:189). As with Sinclair, discussed above, there are important comparisons to make here with the work of social reformers, journalists and other commentators on Detroit, who, despite perhaps noble intentions, nevertheless contribute to a particular abject image of the city that has now become internationally recognisable. The power of this image makes it difficult to see much of anything else in the city, and in turn, for cultural and artistic production to offer opposing views. As Davis says of the New York we know through Hollywood movies, 'The city was too familiar, in an imagined sense, for film to wander very far from literary geography' (Davis 2002:130). Much in the same way that nineteenth century explorers and missionaries served as the 'principal producers of Africa for European imaginations' (Pratt 1985:141), we should be asking whether there is a particular group, class or political position/s that has come to dominate cultural production from and about Detroit.

An essential precondition for colonisation in both Africa and America was the construction of the land as empty of people. One strategy for this was the discursive removal of people through flat, naturalistic descriptions of terrain and the conventions of landscape painting (Pratt 1985:141-145). Wilson's description of the Epcot theme park exhibit 'The Land' highlights how these same devices are replicated to re-narrate the development of US agriculture with efficient, people-free landscape, and industrial farming free from visible labour (Wilson 1992:157-190). Whether the agricultural fictions of the exhibit's sponsor, Kraft, or the violent and more literal removals legitimised by both large industrial land ownership and the formation of national parks, the disappearance of people from landscapes shares a common root with the violence of colonial settlement. As Cronon reminds us, 'the removal of Indians to create 'uninhabited wilderness' - uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place- reminds us just how invented, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is' (Cronon 1996:79).

Straightforward erasure however, is rather difficult on such a grand scale. A far more common strategy has been in the association of savages, be they indigenous Americans, Africans, the slum-poor of Victorian London and New York or the late twentieth century inhabitants of Detroit, with nature and chaos (Davis 2002:128). Whether in terms of the Noble Savage of the abolitionists' discourse, or the cannibals of early explorers' tales; '[t]he wilderness and the savage were as one; they were obstacles to be overcome in the march of progress and civilization' (Smith 2010:20). As Light writes, '[t]he savage is supposedly subject to his passions and is in fact driven by them to the point where he *may not escape the wilderness*' (Light 1995:196) (italics mine). In strong support of his argument that the Classical idea of wild nature has indeed been displaced onto the contemporary 'inner city', this could easily be a description of concerned liberal discourse, with its analysis of 'social problems' poisoning communities, and lamentations over people unable to escape their circumstances due to the reproduction of 'substandard' cultures.

It is important to remember that this ideological disappearance of people from, or association of them with the natural landscape, had and continues to have a very practical and material purpose. By conflating people with wild nature, they too become legitimate objects not just for control but for exploitation (Di Chiro 1996:302); what's more, this is framed as positive intervention. The bringing of jobs to the city is almost universally framed as something that should inspire gratitude. The recognisable cultivation of land and the visibility of productive labour are key factors in the articulation of both property rights and social legitimacy. As Short reminds us, 'Locke could argue for the displacement of Indians in the New World because, since they did not cultivate the ground and simply gathered the fruits of the earth, they had no

rights to the land. The very use of the term 'wilderness' in these cases was part of an attack on the inhabitants, their culture and rights' (Short 1991:22). Efforts by larger scale farms to frame community gardens and small private farms as unproductive inefficient uses of the land are a crucial aspect of contestations over the messy structures of land ownership and rights in Detroit, as I will show in chapter 6. At the same time, urban farmers, aware in various direct and indirect ways of discourses on property following Locke, articulate their own property claims through their physical labour and maintenance of 'vacant' land in the absence of city services.

During interviews I conducted with large scale, corporate stakeholders in Detroit's urban farming community, the idea of the city's 'natural' commodities or resources was one that came up repeatedly; mostly in reference to the amount of empty space available, but also with regards to water and labour. 'From the raw materials of the physical wilderness', writes Nash, 'Americans built a civilisation' (Nash 2001:xi). Is it possible that this national self-conception is being replicated in the 'wilderness' of post-industrial Detroit? Wilderness has been seen, since colonial times, as repository of commodities to be exploited; 'an economic resource as well as a test of man's devotion' (Short 1991:92). Other writers have explored the idea of nature itself as an accumulation strategy, an investment in the future; the security of which requires the privatisation and commodification of nature at all scales (Katz 1998:48). The public relations rhetoric employed by Hantz farms in Detroit in particular seems to draw on this idea, planting trees without immediate commercial reward, an abstract investment in the 'cleaning up' of the city that has the added bonus of privatising large swathes of city land and stockpiling tradable lumber. As Katz reminds us, '[e]nvironmentalism is now a pillar of establishment orthodoxy, its own cash cow.... In a parallel shift, large corporations have discovered the currency of environmentalism' (Katz 1998:51).

From wilderness as commodity store to farming as active mobilisation of those commodities- while we are thinking about productivity, perhaps it is also useful to look more closely at the idea of waste - both of land and of people. For while '[t]he cowboy might be the hero of the west... the real bearer of virtue was the small farmer... family, freedom, the work ethic and moral goodness' (Short 1991:103). As I began my research, farming tended to dominate discussions of Detroit's landscape, and was offered as the solution to any and all problems; from unemployment to urban blight, food deserts to crime, community breakdown to drug addiction. Evoking a central theme of American national identity, as Short suggests above, agricultural work is seen as a fundamentally virtuous and therapeutic experience. While nature is a complex and varied image in a city like Detroit, it is important at a broader level to distinguish between ideas of wilderness and of cultivation, and to identify the places where

they meet, overlap, and compete. Discourse around wasted and empty land is not far ideologically from discourse around wasted and empty lives; it is significant that redemption from both here seems to be offered in the form of agriculture- a pursuit many Southern blacks migrated to Detroit to escape from.

A descriptive device that has become something of a go-to in contemporary framings of Detroit's landscape is that of the 'post-apocalyptic'; the 'ultimate wilderness' (Short 1991:27) where no birds sing, and no human life is found. Such descriptions are at odds with what is, in reality, a very living landscape. In chapter 5 I will look more closely at the construction of the post-apocalyptic, in popular culture and in more specific discourse around Detroit. If wilderness was indeed an invention of the city, and if nostalgia for the frontier may be seen as an expression of bourgeois anti-modernism by those who have benefited most from the industrial capitalism they (aesthetically) reject (Cronon 1996:78); then whose vision is 'Detroit, Ville Sauvage'¹, and what ideological purpose does it serve? The city's desolate, post-industrial landscape, high crime rate and population loss are self-evident; but so was the existence of pristine wilderness. The spectacle of a ruined, post-apocalyptic city may indeed inspire creativity and create space for the living out of social, economic and technological alternatives. But in its eye-catching enormity, it also serves to obscure the smaller, less spectacular alternatives already taking place; practices, institutions, communities and spaces whose relative invisibility and construction as part of a wider vision of deficit and despair may work to justify their destruction.

Gardens

The practice of urban farming, in terms of academic literature, intersects with a variety of areas of concern - notably food systems research, the alternative food movement/s, environmental justice, and the politics of public space. It is a large field, and although a significant part of my own ethnographic research took place on and around urban agriculture in Detroit, my research aims diverge significantly from a majority of the existing scholarship. A distinct body of work in the field comprises commissioned reports and comprehensive overviews of urban agriculture, its practice and potential (see Brown 2003, Kaufman and Bailkey 2000, UNDP 1996, Van Veenhuizen 2006). A much larger area of research concerns specific urban agricultural projects, their social circumstances and practical outputs, most of

¹ Detroit, Ville Sauvage, (Eng- Detroit, Wild City) is a French documentary framing the city as industrial wasteland, reclaimed by nature. As such, it may be seen as part of a growing genre, which I will return to in chapter 5

which may be broadly described as ethnographic work (see Corrigan 2011, Baker 2004, Airries and Clawson 1994, Andreatta 2006, Barraclough 2009, Porcella 2012, Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004, Smith and Kurtz 2003 among others). A smaller subsection of urban agriculture scholarship employs more quantitative methods, and is concerned with the assessment of particular cities' capacity of agricultural production (Kremer and Deliberty 2011, Metcalf and Widener 2011) and with broad based surveys of garden logistics, demographics and output (Armstrong 2000).

Academic writing on specific urban farming projects expresses a range of justifications for research into this area, all of which serve as useful insight into the conversations going on between various stakeholders (academics, activists, non-profits, participants) about what urban farming is and means, and how cities are understood. For the most part, the urban farms in these studies are located in 'low income' areas, populated by largely non-white people. A dominant discourse throughout the literature then, and in wider (media) representations of urban agriculture, is the empowerment and/or education of low income people of colour (see Andreatta 2006, Baker 2004 Airries and Clawson 1994, Corrigan 2011, Macias 2008). A considerable number of accounts invoke the idea of the food desert, and an obesity crisis disproportionately affecting low income communities of colour by their association with 'obesogenic environments' (Macias 2008, McClintock 2008, Corrigan 2011). A solution to these structural inequalities, the narrative follows, may be found in the power of urban community gardening to create and develop 'community' (Macias 2008, Andreatta 2006, Ohmer et al 2009), and it is to this end that a majority of urban farming projects dedicate themselves. While my own work shares some of these areas of focus, my participants were, for the most part, not those expected to 'benefit' from such projects. Instead I am interested in the construction and dissemination of this particular redemption narrative, and the ways in which a new elite class in Detroit mobilise it to their own advantage.

While in its broader criticism of food injustice, earlier scholarship in this field perhaps neglected a critical approach to the above, more recent work seeks to problematize the idea of 'community' invoked in urban agriculture discourse. Kato uses her ethnographic research at Hollygrove Market and Farm in New Orleans to analyse competing understandings of what is meant by 'the community' amongst local residents, gardeners, market volunteers and shoppers, and critiques the assumption that physical proximity in an urban farming context necessarily creates social connections (Kato 2014). In his reflections on the contribution urban farms are making to processes of gentrification in Miami, Hall considers the lessons food activists could learn from the environmental justice movement, its basis in grassroots community organising around race and environmental discrimination having much to teach

the considerably whiter alternative food movement (Hall 2011). Porcella, meanwhile, points out the assumptions inherent in understandings of 'community' as purely benevolent, formed as it is through continual processes of both inclusion and exclusion (Porcella 2012:144).

An interesting and largely under theorised issue throughout the literature is that of who can be said to own the produce of community gardens. Unlike commercial urban farms, which do exist and are covered to a lesser degree (see Macias 2008), community gardens often exist on borrowed, squatted or short leased land, employ mostly volunteer labour, and maintain a complex relationship with the local 'community' in that they are (and endeavour to be) seen as a common space. Andreatta's work, reflecting on a period working as a project manager for an urban farm project in Greensboro, North Carolina, represents a fairly prevalent approach. Run by a local university, the City, and a non-profit organisation, the farm in question was set up in a 'low income' area of the city, to provide local residents with the opportunity to grow vegetables for their own consumption and to sell at farmers markets (Andreatta 2006). But reading between the lines a little, it seems that project organisers in fact succeeded in creating a situation of racial tension and animosity within the neighbourhood. Locating the farm site in a predominantly African American area where immediate residents did not, for a range of reasons, wish to devote their time and labour to the organisation's specific ideas of self-improvement in the garden, organisers therefore provided (intermittent) transportation to support the participation of a group of Montagnard refugee farmers living slightly further afield. Andreatta describes, in distinctly moralising tones, the 'theft' of garden produce by local residents who had declined to participate, and the resulting alienation of Montagnard gardeners from fellow low-income residents, even as they became more visible/accepted in the wider (read: middle class, white) Greensboro community through their participation at the farmers' market.

Corrigan meanwhile, describes a very different political and organisational situation in which the same activity- taking produce from the garden- may be understood on very different terms (Corrigan 2011). The community garden described here, also operating in a 'low income, community of colour', was set up by a local men's association with the aim of cleaning up neglected lots. Later given support by the City, the project nevertheless remains a grassroots endeavour, maintained by local gardeners who share their excess produce with neighbours, not merely on a charitable basis, but one that emphasises proximity, solidarity, and common access. Crops are planted so that neighbours may harvest them through the fence, and children often come in to the garden to take fruit (Corrigan 2011:1239).

A related theme is that of community gardens as public space, with writers concerned with the ways in which urban farms relate to broader issues around the policing of city space, the kinds of activities permitted in designated 'public' space', and the rights of gardens to exist when the land they are built on re-enters the market (Francis 1989, Smith and Kurtz 2003, Staeheli et al 2002). Many of these accounts are based on gardens in New York City, established during the 1970s and 80s on land left vacant after the fiscal crisis, and later forming the backdrop for fierce contestations over property rights under the Giuliani administration attempts to 'clean up' the city.

After conducting a review of the academic literature on urban farming in the United States, as well as coverage from other sources, three distinct historical stages appear to emerge. Firstly, there are the forms of urban agriculture that characterise the early twentieth century- those private and community gardens set up with government encouragement, to supplement inner city diets during periods of economic depression and to support patriotic efforts in the second world war; and those practices more informally engaged in by southern migrants new to northern industrial cities. A second wave of urban agriculture was more political in intention, often emerging from neighbourhood efforts from the 1970s and onwards to rehabilitate city lots left vacant and dangerous by defaulted landlords and indifferent urban policy. Connected both to squatting movements happening at the same time, and to the continuation of Latino and African American culinary and medicinal traditions (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004), these were small scale, DIY solutions to specific neighbourhood issues, albeit situated within a broader political consciousness.

While many such projects continue all over Detroit, a newer movement dominates in terms of media attention, grant funding and, often, access to land through the city. Taking inspiration from the successes of these earlier projects, these new farms are often led by non-profit organisations or well-meaning outsiders who seek to replicate the 'community building' of earlier efforts, 'empower' and educate low income residents and people of colour by starting a project *for* them, 'engaging' the local community instead of offering support to what they might already be doing.

Sara Safransky brings together themes of urban agriculture, sustainability discourse, land rights and settler colonialism in her work on planning and community struggles over Hantz Woodlands, a large scale 'tree farm' which broke ground in Detroit in 2012, and whose CEO I also spoke with during my own fieldwork (Safransky 2014). Touching on many of the themes I will revisit in chapters five and six, Safransky's work represents the emergence of a new and distinct body of scholarship on the colonial structures at work in contemporary Detroit, one

where I situate my own research. Locating the green gentrification of post-industrial landscapes as part of a much longer history of racialised dispossession, Safransky calls for a deeper understanding of how 'colonial logics shape contemporary market-based green redevelopment and animate current urban debates', and argues, as I will, that discursive framings of the city's land as 'vacant' in both media and urban planning directly facilitate a large scale land-grab that is fundamentally colonial in nature (Safransky 2014:238). In the next chapter I discuss my methodology, which in part arose from a growing need to understand this profoundly colonial logic; one I argue permeates not just media and urban planning discourse, but everyday conversation and common sense narratives amongst many of Detroit's more recent arrivals.

While Safransky's work draws effectively on insights from post-colonial scholarship, it will be noted that I have not chosen to do so to the same extent. At a basic level, I follow Fanon (1986) in understanding colonialism as a fundamentally destructive relation. As I will show in chapter four, I see an understanding of Detroit's colonial past (and the ways in which it is remembered) as fundamental to any grasp of the city's present. And of course Said's work on Orientalism (2006) provides the foundation for my understanding of Othering across racial and special boundaries as much as de Beauvoir's (1997) work does for the gendered concept of the Other.

Important work continues to emerge from the intersections of post-colonial and urban theory, particularly with regard to a critique of the established models of urban scholarship generated from twentieth century research in Chicago and Los Angeles; frameworks increasingly recognised as unable to see cities which fall outside of their paradigm as representing anything other than anomaly or failure (Peck 2015; Robinson 2002, 2003; Roy 2009, Parnell and Robinson 2012). 'First world' cities are places where theory and policy is made, with 'third world' cities- exhibiting different spatial or economic formations- becoming problems to diagnose and treat (Roy 2009:820). This critique is particularly useful when thinking about Detroit, where the constant question from visitors and national press seems to be 'why does this place not look like a city?'.

"It is not enough simply to study the cities of the global South as interesting, anomalous, different, and esoteric empirical cases.", writes Roy, "...such forms of benign difference making keep alive the neo-orientalist tendencies that interpret Third World cities as the heart of darkness, the Other. It is argued that the centre of theory making must move to the global South; that there has to be a recalibration of the geographies of authoritative knowledge" (Roy 2009:820). Developing theory which can understand Detroit not as a failure or aberration, but

as absolutely situated in the contemporary US economic, spatial and racial landscape as a city like New York or Chicago, is clearly a goal for my own research. However, I do not imagine that attempting to base any kind of grand or replicable theory on Detroit would do anything to de-stigmatise the place, or work against its Othering. Even in postcolonialism's critique of urban theory, there persists a preference towards the production of abstract and calculable models, and discussions of how we should or should not define a city and its borders. While this is no doubt valuable work, my own research is not concerned with producing more accurate models as much as it is in interrogating the power of those in existence; I have no interest in replacing them.

The concept of 'subaltern urbanism' also offers promise, in its attempt to write "*against apocalyptic and dystopian narratives of the slum*", instead understanding it as "*as a terrain of habitation, livelihood and politics*" (Roy 2011:224). Intended to re-frame the slum of the 'third world megacity' as a place of value and productivity, this position draws a large part of its justification from the perceived 'entrepreneurism' of a given site. While useful in its attempts to place value on economic activities otherwise either unseen or dismissed, in a location like Detroit- where it is precisely this 'entrepreneurial spirit' which is being capitalised upon in order to dispossess a 'subaltern' population from their land and city, I find this approach something of a dead end.

Schindler (2014) explores Roy's four-part framework of subaltern urbanism (2011) with regard to practices of land banking in Flint, a Michigan city not far from Detroit and with a similar economic and racial history. While Schindler's work represents an interesting experiment, his extremely small sample size and rather exoticising tone are unfortunate limitations. Indeed, this highlights a particular problem with many academics' use of the subaltern. In defining subaltern urban space as that which is illegible to academia, what should be a project of decolonisation becomes in practice simply a retrenchment of the academic view of the world as 'our' view, with the Other naturalised as object of study, legible or not. A continued focus on debating the *concept* of the subaltern seems often to come at the expense of amplifying voices of or redistributing resources towards the actual people who are designated under such categories.

Finally, there is the more basic issue that much post-colonial theory was developed in order to understand and articulate moves to nationhood in formerly colonised places; post-colonial scholarship may be concerned with the continuation of colonial forms, but it understands them as occurring in a place *after* its colonial period. In this, I have found post-colonial theory to be less applicable to my research than I had initially imagined; it is not a framework

designed to account for *re*-colonisation of a different form (or of a different population) to that represented by a place's earlier colonial moment.

Following Veracini, it is perhaps more accurate to understand power dynamics in contemporary Detroit as 'settler-colonial' (Veracini 2011; Porter and Yiftachel 2018), rather than simply colonial. But even here, there are problems. Mobilising concepts of settler colonial urban theory, Ugarte et al (2018) write about Mapuche people in Chile dealing with western supremacy and *terra nullius*, strikingly similar themes to those encountered in Detroit. Dafnos (2018) explores the links between state systems of emergency management, and colonial martial law. But as I shall show in chapter four, questions of indigeneity are much more complicated in the case of contemporary Detroit, and appeals to land rights based on indigenous status is not necessarily helpful to the majority of those facing dispossession right now. Indeed, much of the interesting work emerging from scholars of settler-colonial studies presents the same problem when applied to Detroit- how do we articulate what is so clearly a colonial pattern of dispossession and injustice, while also accounting for *prior* claims on city space by those doing the colonising.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This is an ethnography of a city, but it is not 'urban ethnography' in the style of Duneier (1999), Anderson (1990) or Wacquant (2008). I did not aim to study a distinct social group, but rather the formation and journey of a particular narrative, about a particular place, at a particular moment. *Detroit is empty and abandoned; Detroit is being reclaimed by nature: Detroit is a place where you can do anything*: I wanted to understand how this story came to be, what it is doing to the real place it describes, and ultimately, who it serves. Ironically, through this process I did in fact come to study a distinct social group, albeit one with shifting and uncertain boundaries; the gentrifiers I describe in chapter seven.

Ethnography is necessarily incomplete, a snapshot, a set of mixed methods mobilised in an attempt to get at an ultimately unattainable holistic view; for me this is where its value lies. At its best it is probably the most readable, accessible form of social research; it has the power to change opinions, challenge hegemonies, and admit to the centrality of the fundamentally subjective ethnographic *encounter*. Katz argues that despite (or perhaps because of) this subjectivity and fundamental incompleteness, ethnography in fact holds the potential to simultaneously describe structure and agency, production and reproduction, the global and the local:

'I would like to suggest that a re-visioned ethnography offers the possibility for traveling intellectually and strategically between the macrological structures of power—that is, the global processes of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy—and the micrological textures of power played out in the material social practices of everyday life.' (Katz 1992:500)

My own mixed methods ethnographic approach used online and news media research, analysis of visual and literary texts and planning documents, city-wide property ownership data, semi-structured interviews, and an ongoing mapping process. Its central methodology, however, and key to the ethnographic process, was of course participant observation. I built relationships in the city and made connections - with residents, neighbourhood groups, journalists, city employees, start-up CEOs, urban farmers and activists; as a researcher I placed myself within the social world I studied. 'All ethnographic writing', writes Michael Keith, is 'in part, an act of betrayal' (Keith 1992:554), information often gained under an 'unspoken contract of friendship' (Keith 1992:555), and ultimately used to further the career of the researcher. While there are those I met in Detroit who I hope will approve of the way I have attempted to lay bare the power relations at the heart of Detroit's post-bankruptcy 'renaissance', there are certainly others who will find my portraits of them unflattering, and

my analysis of their actions and motives unfair. In placing myself within the social world of gentrifying Detroit, I also necessarily participated in that gentrification; in talking with landlords and property developers about their plans and motivations, I effectively co-signed on some intensely oppressive power relations, and failed to challenge everyday racism to the extent that I would have 'outside' of the field.

Fairly early on in my fieldwork, this growing sense of responsibility and unease caused me to change the direction of my research. If all ethnography is betrayal, then a fundamental choice to make is *who* to betray. My initial research design had sought to investigate the possibilities for urban agriculture to address issues of poverty, food access and land ownership in Detroit, and had included long-term participant observation with community food growing projects in several areas in the city. While some of this remains in the finished text, particularly material gained working with volunteers in Brightmoor (chapter six), the focus is quite different. There are thriving community gardens across Detroit, some successfully feeding lots of people, some not; some connected to churches, block clubs, or grassroots community projects, some supported by corporate grants, others entirely independent of outside funding. The politics surrounding their leadership, land status, food production and connections to one another are fascinating. But in the context of what amounts to a large scale land grab and re-colonisation of the city via narratives which often draw on the very images, specific practices and operations of community gardeners in Detroit, community gardeners themselves are not my priority to interrogate, and I don't believe I am the appropriate person to write their stories.

As Bourgois writes (and goes on to ignore), paraphrasing Nader; 'don't study the poor and powerless, because everything you say about them will be used against them' (Bourgois 1995:18). Studying 'the ghetto' is not the only - or even the best - way to understand the workings of the structural oppression which produces and stigmatises it; we might more productively and with less risk of damage to those who live there, argues Nader, study instead the landlord class that profits from and constrains such places, or the systems of dispossession that work in the interests of capital to produce them (Nader 1972). Despite Nader's call nearly 50 years ago to 'study up', and much work produced by others doing just that in the intervening years (Gilderbloom 1985; Ley 1996; Martin 1987; Mills 1988), poor people and people of colour remain naturalised objects of study for social researchers across disciplines; positioning 'marginalised communities' themselves as problems to be solved. In dealing with the unquestionably colonial roots of ethnography, it became important to me that I not produce work which perpetuates this idea; attempting instead to unsettle assumptions about the natural subjects, audience, and authority of social research. As Grimshaw and Hart write;

'Anthropologists... ..have always derived their intellectual authority from direct experience of social life. Their claim to special expertise traditionally rested on reporting unknown peoples to both lay and academic audiences at home. That is, they knew the exotic Other and their readers did not. Within that framework of bridging the gap between civilised and primitive, they emphasised the salience of the everyday, the ordinary.' (Grimshaw and Hart 1994:47-48)

In writing about the everyday lives of urban farmers in Detroit, as I had intended to, I saw myself reproducing this fundamentally oppressive and colonial relationship; one I was simultaneously attempting to critique in my examination of the re-colonisation of the landscape. If we are to keep ethnography as part of an accountable and anti-oppressive research toolkit, then our confrontation with its imperialist origins has to be meaningful and it has to be ongoing. For me, that meant recognising that as a white person of relative privilege, the best use of my research skills was not to become an 'expert' on everyday life in a majority black American city. Neither was it to document the struggles of black farmers and activists, or measure the effects of community gardening. These things are already being done by residents themselves, and excellent work on these experiences already exists, produced by researchers far better placed than me to represent the experiences of black Detroiters; Monica White's work with the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) stands out particularly well in this regard (White 2010; 2011). While I cite, credit and direct readers to these efforts, to position myself as 'giving voice' to these already fully formed voices would be to adopt a position of white academic authority. Having arrived in Detroit to look at urban farms and ruins, and finding myself doing so in the company of a noticeable wave of other young white people, the more pertinent question became *what are we all doing here?* Why are we all here, now, and what is this doing to the city?

While situating my work within geography, anthropology, and their related disciplines, I have also tried, as far as possible, to draw on writing outside of academia. 'There is a real need for refereeing and proper criticism' writes Short, 'but it has now reached the level of ancestor-worship where anything significant in the text needs the authority of others. The system downgrades the authenticity of our own experience' (Short 1989:85). I would also add to this that an over-reliance on the established 'big names' of academic theory in fact works to discredit and play down the role of non-academic writers and thinkers in the development of theoretical frameworks, a problem heightened by the lengthy timescales for the publication of academic work. Discussions around gentrification and race no longer find their cutting edge in academia (if they ever did), and I have tried to engage with this in my own writing.

'Theory of all types is often presented as being so abstract that it can be appreciated only by a select few. Though often highly satisfying to academics, this definition excludes those who do

not speak the language of elites and thus reinforces social relations of domination. Educated elites typically claim that only they are qualified to produce theory and believe that only they can interpret not only their own but everyone else's experiences. Moreover, educated elites often use this belief to uphold their own privilege.' (Hill-Collins 2000:viii)

While I certainly view ethnography as a form of creative literature (Behar 2007), I have also tried in my writing to respond to Patricia Hill-Collins' critique above; avoiding over-complicating theoretical frameworks and writing in such a way as to be accessible to a non-academic audience. 'Although postmodern ethnographers often claim to be subversive', argues Bourgois, 'their contestation of authority focuses on hyperliterate critiques of form through evocative vocabularies, playful syntaxes, and polyphonous voices, rather than engaging with tangible daily struggles' (Bourgois 1995:13-14). I agree wholeheartedly with this critique of the post-modern literary turn, but am of course grateful to these writers for putting forward the then revolutionary notion that ethnographic text has both strategy and an author (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988). I have tried to make clear my own role in both the research process and the text I have produced, in terms of being honest about my own positionality, but also my own strength of feeling. Finding it impossible – and, indeed, undesirable - to write about processes of displacement without expressing anger at both the structures that allow it and the individuals who benefit from it, I am reminded of Keith again, and hope that twenty-five years on his words are finally out of date:

'Under conventional rules it would appear that anger as an emotional feature of the everyday world can surface in academic texts only as a dessicated anecdote, an object of scrutiny that is a proclivity of the 'Other' that is studied, but not of the disciplined self that presents the truth. Anger can only ever be the object of the academic gaze, never the legitimate subject of academic style.' (Keith 1992:561)

Interviewing

A large part of my data comes from 39 semi-structured interviews conducted over my two fieldwork trips, each lasting 45 minutes to three hours, and all but three of them recorded and transcribed. Each interview was based around a very basic interview schedule, beginning by asking a respondent to introduce themselves, and in some cases their project or business too. This initial stage served to establish an openness to the interview, signalling to the participant my interest in them as expert on their own experience. In many interviews it also allowed me to hear their 'pitch'; describing a neighbourhood project, property renovation or start-up in

the terms they would use to frame it to funders or journalists. Each interview contained further questions, tailored according to information I already had about participants - often following up on conversations we had had in less formal settings. All interviews, however - whether with property developers, urban farmers, tech workers or neighbourhood residents - contained a core set of questions. I asked everyone to describe both Detroit and their own neighbourhoods within it, as if to someone who had never visited. When participants had moved to the city from elsewhere, I also asked them to describe that place. I asked them if they owned any property in the city, if they had any experience of the city's property auction and land bank, and what other neighbourhoods they would consider living in. We talked about their favourite places in the city, and where they might send a friend looking for restaurant or bar recommendations. I asked them what they thought was the best thing and the worst thing about Detroit, how they saw the city in one, five, and ten years' time, and where they imagined themselves in those timescales. I asked them what they thought of the media comparing Detroit to the 'wild west', and about their own experiences with journalists and press coverage.

I initially approached the research with several clearly defined categories of people I wanted to interview. I was interested in people involved in urban farming at various scales, those involved in property purchase and speculation, individuals representing the city's 'creative regeneration' in the form of new hipster-oriented businesses and the tech sector, and those whose interest in the city had a Christian missionary focus. I also intended to carry out neighbourhood specific studies in Woodbridge, a gentrifying area adjacent to 'Midtown', and Brightmoor, a neighbourhood in the far north-west of the city, with high levels of vacancy and a concentration of urban agriculture. However, while my data is indeed concentrated in these thematic and geographical areas, maintaining such discrete boundaries proved in practice to be unrealistic and ultimately unhelpful. I found that urban farming in Brightmoor was in fact heavily supported (and shaped) by volunteer labour from Christian missionary summer camps, greening elsewhere had deep links to corporate re-branding efforts, and most people I spoke with had a story about either using the property auction, or being impacted by property speculation. Participants in Woodbridge worked in brew pubs in 'Midtown', or in tech start-ups Downtown, but were also involved to varying degrees in urban agriculture. And while I approached many participants directly, via an interest in their project or business, this intersected with my 'snowball' method elsewhere as much of the time it would emerge that they already knew (or knew of) my other participants and social contacts in the city.

These interviews can also be grouped in several different ways then, with a large amount of crossover. Eleven interviewees have some connection to Woodbridge; as either residents,

property owners or both. Another eleven are connected to Brightmoor. Sixteen are involved with farming or agriculture, from community level up to city planning and large-scale agriculture ventures. Sixteen participants were involved with new creative business in the city, and of those, eight worked in the burgeoning tech industry. Three had a direct connection to the city government (two in planning and one in finance), and sixteen had experience of the city's annual foreclosed property auction. Ten spoke of explicitly religious motivations for moving to Detroit, or for the work they carried out while here. All but one of these was Christian. Of these 39 interviews, nine respondents were African-American, one was Latino, one was Japanese, and nineteen were white. This unrepresentative racial balance reflects the power dynamic in the 'new' Detroit, but also my own position as a relatively young, white incomer. It was fairly easy to connect informally with networks of young, mostly white, and largely (although not exclusively) upper middle-class people, involved in arts and music scenes, working in tech, or running small farms or food businesses. These were my flatmates, friends of friends, people I ran into at bars and events; people who easily viewed me as a peer. The ease with which I was able to fit into this scene also undoubtedly affected the often enthusiastic responses I received when blind contacting participants. Approaching the property management wing of Dan Gilbert's downtown empire, I was treated to a guided tour of the company's spaces by an employee whose job it was to encourage people like me to move to Detroit.

I chose to transcribe the interviews myself, finding as I went on that there were significant moments where non-verbal communication changed the meaning of the words being spoken. While listening back to one particular interview I remembered that the respondent, who tends to sound fairly deadpan, had been smiling or suppressing a laugh at the time; at others her facial expressions had provided additional meaning to her words. In other interviews, participants' accents or style of speech caused me to have to listen to the same piece of audio several times to accurately get down what they were saying; I felt that if sent to a transcribing service, these details would be passed over by someone paid by the minute, or simply unfamiliar with Midwestern or African-American speech.

I also found it useful to be able to revisit my own feelings during an interview. Remembering where conversation became uncomfortable, or where moments of particular connection occurred, was useful both in terms of understanding social norms and taboos, and also looking reflexively at my own skills (or lack) as an interviewer. Transcribing as I went during my first fieldwork period, I was able to take a step back and analyse my own speech, looking at the ways I made interviewees comfortable or uncomfortable. I noticed early on that I had a tendency to talk too much during interviews, trying to fill silences or attempt to clarify

questions, without actually being prompted to do so. Over the course of my research I learned how to perform ease and informality; to talk less and allow interviewees time to gather their thoughts; to communicate reassurance or interest with non-verbal cues rather than bluster.

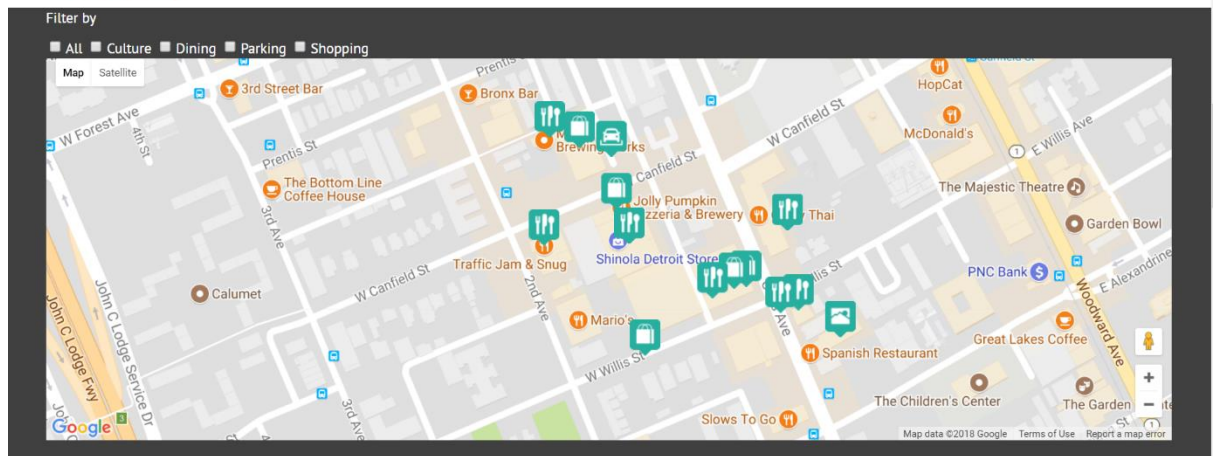
I have already written about the potentially exploitative and objectifying nature of ethnographies written by people with more social power and privilege than those they are writing about, as this is a large part of my reasons for changing direction and choosing to study 'up'. Alongside this, however, was a developing interest in the ways people create narratives to justify and to feel comfortable with being part of economic changes they know to be unjust. I would often have conversations with people in social settings, about class and race, and about the apparent inescapability of gentrification. Many of the people who appeared to be 'doing' this gentrifying were uncomfortable to varying degrees about their roles in this system, yet it continues seemingly unabated. I became more interested in how this could happen; how people politically opposed to, and with a fairly good working knowledge of ideas like structural racism and gentrification, reconcile their participation in these same systems of oppression. This was a process I too was implicated in; renting a room in a gentrifying neighbourhood, spending money in the city's new downtown economy, and literally whitening the landscape with my presence. But it is also one I was implicated in at home in London; consistently displaced by rising rents, my presence consistently gentrifying the cheaper neighbourhoods I moved to in turn.

The majority of my interviews are anonymised, using a system of initials to identify interviews, alongside some basic demographic data on each participant. In two cases, when a participant was easily identified by a particular business they discussed and was concerned that their account might be recognisable to their former employer, I have combined their account with that of another interviewee so as to prevent their identification. There are however, some exceptions to this anonymisation. Several of my interviewees were semi-public figures, whose accounts of their projects or businesses are already a matter of public record. In contextualising my interviews with them I have also drawn upon media coverage of their work, thus negating the possibility of anonymity. Each of these participants were happy for their names to appear in my research. These were Riet Schumack, of community organisation Neighbours Building Brightmoor, Mike Score of Hantz Farms, Leonard Pollara of Idyll Farms, and Alex Pereira of Secure Realty. Excerpts of conversations I had with Hanifa Adjuman and Dan Aldridge are also under their real names, as they requested this.

Participant observation

While interviews form the bulk of my more easily quantifiable data, an equally significant proportion of my research comes from participant observation in a number of settings, formal and informal. For four weeks I stayed in Brightmoor, and for the other 17 weeks of my fieldwork I lived in Woodbridge. While the period in Brightmoor was shorter, it was also far more intense, as I lived, worked and socialised alongside the people I studied. After moving to Woodbridge I also continued my involvement in Brightmoor, returning to participate in neighbourhood activities. While the city's bus services do extend into this corner of North West Detroit, they are as unreliable as elsewhere in the city, and to get downtown (a 20-minute drive) would take at least two buses and nearly two hours. While in Brightmoor I attended neighbourhood meetings and potlucks, worked two days a week in the Youth Garden, shadowed a group of journalists and public policymakers from across the country as they toured the neighbourhood, and helped to run large volunteer groups. Two of these groups; a Catholic Work Camp and a Baptist organisation, stayed to work for a week each, and while I chose not to formally interview any of the teenaged volunteers due to ethical considerations, I kept a detailed fieldwork diary where I recorded thoughts and impressions from our many conversations and from my interactions with the supervising adults. Much of this material forms the basis for the second part of chapter six.

In Woodbridge the set-up was a little different. Adjacent to the Cass Corridor/Midtown, I was able to operate far more independently here. I bought a bike, and with just 15 minutes cycling distance to downtown, was able to travel to appointments in a more intentional and structured way. Nevertheless, I still participated more informally in a number of environments pertinent to my research; events connected to the local art scene, talking to people at new restaurants and other commercial ventures - particularly the businesses surrounding the intersection of Cass and Canfield, where the Shinola showroom is located. This particular area has since been rebranded as 'North Cass' by business association Midtown Inc; the screenshot below is taken from the organisation's website and shows the concentration of new businesses, with the Shinola store framed centre:



'North Cass District' map, from <http://shopdinemidtown.com/cass-canfield/>. Accompanying text describes the area as: *'A hot spot for dining and shopping located just south of Wayne State University. Boutique shopping experiences in this district range from unique Detroit-made housewares, to hand-selected non-fiction books, and luxury lifestyle clothing. This district features a variety of restaurants from a locally owned bakery to fresh craft beers and one-of-a-kind dining experiences.'*

I also conducted participant observation downtown during sports games, weekends and regular work days, observing dramatic changes in the crowd and demographic. On special occasions, downtown Detroit flooded with white suburbanites, filling the streets with noise and traffic, and in the case of sports games, often leaving mountains of trash in their wake. But there were smaller changes too; sitting in the window of a coffee shop opposite the Opera House, I watched the demographic shift momentarily as a matinee of *The Book of Mormon* finished, and well-dressed white people spilled into the street before hurrying into restaurants and taxis. I sat on benches in Grand Circus Park and watched as security guards haphazardly enforced the extensive list of public order offenses posted on the recently refurbished street furniture. I went on guided tours aimed at tourists and newcomers to the city and took part in garden tours aimed at connecting community gardeners with one another; ate at community meals and hung out in bookstores, bars and cafes. I took buses around the city with an almost exclusively African-American ridership; I waited for hours in the snow or walked when those same buses didn't show up, and on more than one occasion had white male drivers stop to tell me I shouldn't. I exchanged greetings with other walkers with a frequency I have witnessed only in rural communities and the majority black neighbourhoods of New Orleans, soon learning what one of my participants called 'Detroit manners' - eye contact and a "how you

doing”, every time. I took shuttle buses from Corktown bars to sports games with an almost exclusively white ridership, learning that for the purposes of Hockey and Baseball, the boundaries of ‘Detroit’ shift to encompass suburban Canton and Bloomfield Hills.

Focus groups

During my stay in Brightmoor, a team from the University of Michigan’s Environment and Planning department approached the neighbourhood organisation about participating in a Photo Voice project, aimed at investigating residents’ understandings of ‘care’ in terms of neighbourhood conditions. Participants received \$50 and a digital camera, and attended a series of focus groups, each discussing photos they had taken during the preceding week. Focus groups had not been part of my own research design, but I approached the organisers about the possibility of observing these groups, with a view to rounding out my Brightmoor data. As a temporary resident I was invited instead to join as a participant, taking my own photos to share. The sessions were informal, organised around sharing food in the basement of a local church, and later in participants’ homes, while we talked as a group. After establishing consent, my own recording device was placed alongside that of the organisers’, each of us leaving with the same data. The subject of their research speaks to a much longer involvement in Brightmoor by various departments of the University of Michigan. A graduate student from the same institution was also working as an intern with community association Neighbours Building Brightmoor; residents had regularly taken part in research (or had macro level data about them used) to produce reports about the neighbourhood and its problems. But while neighbourhood leaders often expressed doubt (borne of experience) that this continual measurement would produce any tangible outcomes for the residents themselves, several of the residents participating in the focus groups had approached the exercise as a way to ‘get something done’ about particular issues, and were disappointed and confused about the purpose of the research when it emerged that this would not happen.

Racially and generationally mixed, the dynamics of the focus group shifted with the growing familiarity between participants and offered a valuable insight into the politics of the neighbourhood. There were nine other participants; five older women who had lived in the area for multiple decades (four black, one white), three younger white recent transplants from the suburbs (two women, one man), and one Colombian man recently moved from Texas. Of the facilitators one was white, the other bi-racial, both were younger women. At our first meeting, participants who mostly had arrived as strangers, seemed to organise themselves around the table into black side and a white side. The white and Latino participants displayed

confidence speaking to the group as a whole, and tended towards positive, almost 'promotional' descriptions of the neighbourhood, while the older black women spoke more about their fears in the present and hopes for the future. While these conversations were often at odds, they never presented as any kind of conflict, and participants developed cross racial and generational friendships which continued after the end of the sessions.

Mapping

I often used maps in my research - not so much as a cohesive methodology of any kind, but as a way to think spatially, and to try and impose some order on what felt at many points like a particularly chaotic web of various data and connections. I mapped data from interviews and participant observation, noting the locations mentioned by participants and in what terms; I used this alongside online research to inform plans for further participant observation. The process of learning how to navigate the city over the course of several trips was valuable data in itself, particularly attempting this as a non-driver. Mobility in winter was severely constrained; relying on erratic public transport, learning which routes would be lit after the sun went down earlier and earlier; and later in the season, which roads would become impassable with snow and ice. In summer I developed a very different mental map of the city, travelling far further by bike, able to ride through areas previously inaccessible to me through being too far to walk, away from major bus routes. I learned which streets had the least obstructed riding surface, which streets were abruptly cut off by freeways, and which would allow me to cross to the next neighbourhood.

Why Don't We Own This (WDWOT), a website set up in 2011 to track and map data of the city's foreclosure auction, was a key data source in my research². Developed by Detroit based start-up *Loveland Technologies*, the site compiled data on tax and ownership to map the status of every lot in the city, in the interests of making the tax foreclosure and auction process clearer and more accessible. While the site's initial push was framed as an effort to engage Detroiters in mobilising against large scale property speculation, its usage was rather more complicated; along with the movement of the city's property auction online in 2010, *WDWOT* provided a technology by which smaller scale speculators could investigate and purchase property without having to visit Detroit (McKenzie 2017). Macro level property data was also shared with me by Christine Macdonald, an investigative reporter with the *Detroit News*, researching property speculation in the city. Local news from *The Detroit News* and *The Detroit*

² *Why Don't We Own This* has since expanded to cover the wider United States, and can be found at: <https://makeloveland.com/>

Free Press, alongside the real estate and regeneration focused *Curbed Detroit*, *Model D Media*, and *Crains Detroit Business* also provided data and leads on property ownership and the movement of real estate in the city, both during my fieldwork trips and remotely.

Visual media

The ruin photography of Yves Marchand and Roland Meffre, as well as that of Andrew Moore, dominated coverage of Detroit around 2010. Chapter five takes a closer look at these images, alongside a handful of documentaries released around the same time. I began with a longer list of documentaries and fiction film, and considering their distribution and reach, as well as shared themes, before narrowing down a core list of key works for analysis. These were documentaries *Requiem for Detroit* (Temple 2010), *Detropia* (Ewing and Grady 2012), *Detroit Ville Sauvage* (Tillon 2010), *Burn* (Sanchez and Putnam 2012), *Detroit Lives!* (Mavros 2010), and Anthony Bourdain's *Parts Unknown: Detroit* (Steed 2013). I watched and transcribed each of these films, producing data which could then be coded alongside interview transcripts, my fieldwork diary, and the results of my news media searches. As well as coding these thematically, I was also interested in the narrative structures presented by way of explaining Detroit's situation, the locations chosen, the visual quality of the films - including colour, camerawork, editing and framing. As research went on, it was ever more important to pay attention to inter-textuality and the recurring use of particular points of cultural reference (Da Costa 2003:194-200).

News media analysis

A significant amount of my data came from an analysis of Detroit's treatment in the national and international press, between 2008 and 2014. Noticing something of an explosion in the volume of coverage around 2010, and again in 2013 around the city's bankruptcy, I chose to focus my analysis on this date range in the hopes of tracing the emergence of this particular moment - from the 'ruin porn' photography which abounded in 2010, to the Detroit boosters of the post-bankruptcy period. I began with broad date range searches of US and UK publications, using the Lexis Nexis database. Noticing a preponderance of articles from *The New York Times*, I also made a particular study of that newspaper's apparent fascination with Detroit. While the period from 2008 to 2014 formed the basis for my analysis and coding design, I also continued to monitor news coverage from 2014 onwards, albeit in a less methodical fashion, and following my by now existing codes. In addition to this media analysis, I also drew on two

bestselling non-fiction books, both by white journalists with family connections to Detroit; Mark Binelli's (2012) *Detroit City Is the Place To Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis*, and Charlie LeDuff's (2013) *Detroit: An American Autopsy*. Released to widespread acclaim between Marchand and Meffre's photos in 2010 and the city's bankruptcy in 2013, the two books appealed to a growing market for popular literature on Detroit.

Planning and promotional documents

A further category of texts may be broadly described as 'planning and promotional documents', both those commissioned by the city government, and by corporate interests. I began with *Detroit Future City (DFC)*, a 2012 strategic plan produced as part of the *Detroit Works Project*, an initiative begun in 2010 under Mayor Dave Bing, but crucially operating as a 'collaboration' between the city and philanthropic, academic, and corporate partners. The 187 page document was the end result of a two year process of research and 'community consultation', and puts forward a number of strategies for 'rightsizing' the city; essentially managed decline for some neighbourhoods, and a concentration of investment in others (Safransky 2014). I also looked at *7.2 SQ MI* (Ali et al 2013), a report jointly authored by *The Hudson-Webber Foundation*, the *Detroit Economic Growth Corporation*, the *Downtown Detroit Partnership*, *Midtown Detroit, Inc.*, *Invest Detroit* and *Data Driven Detroit*. The report outlined the boundaries of a newly defined 'Greater Downtown' measuring 7.2 square miles, and encompassing areas considered strong candidates for regeneration by the report's author organisations; those neighbourhoods now known as Downtown, Midtown, Woodbridge, Eastern Market, Lafayette Park, Rivertown and Corktown. While the *DFC* plan initially came to my attention via media sources, 'the 7.2' had by the time of my final research trip in 2014 entered the cultural lexicon to the point where interviewees involved in property development would use the term in ordinary conversation, without reference to the report itself. During a tour of Bedrock's downtown offices, I was given a copy of the 2014 edition *ISMs In Action*, a colourful 140 page handbook published yearly and distributed to all employees at *Quicken Loans*, as well as each of the 72 companies in the Quicken 'family'. This joined other ephemera such as mission statements, advertising, and promotional materials relating to new Downtown and Midtown businesses.

Coding

Using grounded theory (Glaeser 1992), I attempted to develop a coding strategy which would bring together data gathered via these very different methods and sources, and which could also evolve and change as I gathered new data. I coded for mentions of particular projects, actors, sites and neighbourhoods, as well as thematically. I looked particularly at visual description (and in the case of film and photography, the visuals themselves), to build a sense of the stories about Detroit being told in the city, and on a wider stage. Taking a Foucauldian approach, I paid attention the ways in which ideas of emptiness, of danger, redemption and of the American frontier are constructed through and between these texts (Graham 2005). A large part of this work was interpretive rather than systematic, and I have no doubt that another researcher given the same data would produce entirely different work. Following Behar (2007), I understand ethnography as essentially a form of creative writing. While the sources of my data may be concrete and measurable, the story I tell with it is entirely subjective, and any judgement and interpretation my own.

Chapter 4 History

The tour

The downtown walking tour starts at D:Hive, the shiny hip Monroe Avenue welcome centre. Our tour guide Steve is an enthusiastic white guy in his late 30s - family from Detroit, lives in the suburbs but just loves the city. Downtown, Steve takes care to tell us at the beginning of the tour, is actually very safe. Unlike the rest of the city, crime here is only a third the national average, and Dan Gilbert's buildings all have cameras. *"In the 70s it was like the Wild West, but things have changed since then!"* he laughs. And besides, we'll be fine- as we all know, violent crime is usually between people who know each other. Everyone agrees. We start on Woodward, the major artery that bisects the city, running from Campus Martius downtown, all the way north to 8 Mile, and beyond through the northern suburbs to Pontiac. After a brief history of the military origins of Campus Martius itself we walk at a brisk clip, taking in the sights - the Compuware building, Dan Gilbert's first acquisition, and the site which marked the turning point in the story in 2010 when he took the bold step of relocating 1700 Quicken Loans employees to this, then empty downtown.

We stop to look at the Spirit of Detroit, the monument outside the Coleman Young Municipal Center on Woodward Avenue, and Steve brings our attention to the motto written on the city seal above: *Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus*- 'we hope for better things, it will rise from the ashes'. Detroit is a city of constant reinvention, he tells us, from hunting and fur, to industry, and now the "whole next thing", with tech start-ups and young people coming back to the city. Close to the river now, Steve mentions another monument that sits just out of sight on Hart Plaza - 'Gateway to Freedom', built to commemorate Detroit's role in the Underground Railroad. It's great, he recommends we check it out - but unfortunately there's no time for it on this tour. We move on, making sure to take in Bedrock's 'placemaking'; public pianos and giant, colourful chairs, where office workers and homeless men sit in the sun to eat lunch.



Figure 2: Dan Gilbert (left) poses for a promotional shot with student Nick Jones at one of the installations donated by his companies to 'activate' the downtown area. Photo credit: Andrew Moore for The New York Times

Next is the Renaissance Centre - GM headquarters and monument to 1970s paranoid urban architecture, its' now dated glass towers connected by covered walkways, preventing fearful white-collar employees from ever having to set foot on the dangerous city streets. Later, our tour passes by the neo-classical facades of the Ford and Chrysler buildings on Griswold Street, and the deco frontage of the neighbouring Penobscot building; skyscrapers that speak to the city's industrial golden age of the early twentieth century. Across the street, inside the breathtaking golden lobby of the Guardian building we discuss early innovations in sound reducing architecture (horsehair!), and take a look at the *Pure Detroit* store, where we can purchase t-shirts that read: 'Detroit Soul' and 'Imported from Detroit'. Detroit, our guide reminds us, is "*big enough that it matters to the world, but small enough that one person can matter to it*".

At Capitol Park, Steve points out the Albert - another beautiful Albert Kahn building, renamed for the iconic architect himself and being redeveloped independently. It's very exciting, he tells us- space here is leasing at the magic number of \$2 a square foot, which will help redevelopment happen much more quickly. At this point a tour guest asks a question about the recent eviction of the building's previous tenants - a community of low income seniors. Our tour guide's response is smooth - talking about the inevitable "benefits and consequences" of gentrification. He tells us how the other building across the street, inhabited by artists and musicians was occupied cheaply because it was unsafe, and not up to code. A fire waiting to happen. When Dan Gilbert acquired the building he really had no choice but to clear them out,

it was just too dangerous. Back at D:Hive, at the end of the tour, another guest asks Steve why he thinks this renaissance is going to work, where previous attempts at regenerating the city have gone nowhere. There are three reasons, he answers. Good billionaires, who want to be part of the solution. The "just do it" generation- young people who aren't afraid to give things a try. And public private partnerships.

I use this anecdote to illustrate the subtle, everyday erasures that are fundamental to the apparent success of the new Detroit. Gilbert's growing property portfolio is indeed the dominant factor in downtown's new chapter, and the history of the city's built environment is both fascinating and continues to be relevant. History is by its nature a partial account, but the choices made as to whose history is told are not made by accident. It is significant that we have time on our tour to list the names of dead white men who lend their names to the city's main streets and to marvel at the artistry of the stylised art deco 'Native American' faces peering out from the stone cornices of the Penobscot building, but not to talk about those streets' origin as trails connecting the early settlement to the network of existing trade routes and first nations villages which sustained it. Or to note that our starting point, and Detroit's 'main street', Woodward Avenue, follows the route of the earlier Saginaw trail, or that Woodward's much vaunted 'spoke' street plan is in fact widely accepted to be based on earlier trails leading away from the settlement (see image below). That while its existence was mentioned in passing, we did not cross the street to look at the bronze faces of the statues that make up Ed Dwight's sculpture *Gateway to Freedom*, a group of nineteenth century African Americans gazing across the river to Canada, installed in 2001 to commemorate Detroit's role in the Underground Railroad. Or indeed, that we had no time to visit any of the other nearby sites relating to such a pivotal movement in US history - the historic marker for Finney Barn at State and Griswold streets, or the Second Baptist Church, all of two blocks away from D:Hive on Monroe Avenue, whose basement served as the famous Croghan Street Station, the last stop before the freedom of the Canadian border.



Image showing the Detroit metro area overlaid with earlier trails, originally published in Hinsdale, W. B. (1931) Archaeological atlas of Michigan, is borrowed from Paul Sewick's blog, <http://detroiturbanism.blogspot.co.uk> He writes: "The most fascinating thing to me about Native American trails isn't just that Detroit was a hub in a continent-wide network of footpaths worn into the earth centuries before Cadillac or Columbus--it's that some of these paths have been preserved as modern roads and highways, and today we can still walk in the footsteps of the civilizations that came before us."

Every story about 'how Detroit got this way' begins with a potted history of the city, no less edited and ideologically bound than the tour described above. Two 'biographies' of the city, Mark Binelli's *Detroit City Is the Place To Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis*, and Charlie LeDuff's *Detroit: An American Autopsy* are longer-form examples of the same kind of storytelling noticeable across media formats. Both written by white journalists with family connections to the city and published in 2012 and 2013 respectively to widespread critical acclaim, the two books appealed to a growing market for zeitgeist hitting Detroit primers. While LeDuff's book might be described as gritty, gonzo journalism; Binelli's takes a more positive bent. Both, however, position Detroit as a place *after death*- in LeDuff's version the city lies on the autopsy slab, in Binelli's the 'afterlife' is a place of post-industrial resurgence.

As I will show in chapter 7, current gentrification in Detroit is profoundly historically fixated, drawing on aesthetic tropes of working class masculinity, industry, and entrepreneurship to tell stories about the city's past and put forward possibilities for its future. Like all narratives, these stories form a partial, edited, ideologically motivated version of events; one written to lionise the city's new, white 'pioneers', and re-inscribe the framing of blackness and African American culture, politics and economics as fundamentally deficient. It is a need to know the workings of this symbolic violence - and its altogether less symbolic consequences - that forms the central premise of this thesis. Certain common-sense truths structure the Detroit history reproduced in the mainstream press, providing reference points through which individuals, businesses and interest groups can claim local identity and heritage, and promote corporate interests with apparently reasonable arguments about learning from the past. Henry Ford as founding father, Detroit as somewhere 'things are 'made'. Black workers migrating from the South, chasing Ford's promised riches of the \$5 day; the unsustainability of a middle-class quality of life for workers. The 1967 riots as the beginning of the decline. In the chapter which follows, I will attempt my own history of Detroit. Not to provide a version any less partial than these others, but in order to unsettle these accounts; to follow the structure of those provided by the mainstream media and authors like Binelli and LeDuff and consider what is being systematically erased.

The story

Early history

The story of Detroit, as most accounts would have it, begins in 1701 with Antoine De la Mothe Cadillac's founding of the settlement, initially named Fort Ponchartrain de Troit for the then Chancellor of France. The naming of the city (De Troit, for 'the straits', referring to its point in the river), the legacy of French street names, the early ribbon farms and first families, are all traced back to this point. This, chronologically, is where Mark Binelli's book begins, with Cadillac a 'forty-three year old hustler' who 'envisioned the beginnings of a colony, a real beach-head in what was, by any other measure, untamed land' (Binelli 2012:40-41). Charlie LeDuff's Cadillac is also a hustler, as well as being 'Detroit's first dope dealer', having traded liquor with 'the natives', and spent a short time in prison (LeDuff 2014:168). Cadillac, whose name neatly flags both the settlement's French origins and the auto industry that came to

dominate some two centuries later, becomes our localised Columbus; bold explorer, significant white man, founding father. Hustler, (anti) hero, visionary. Cadillac's strategic genius and foresight in the siting and management of early Detroit, we are told, laid the foundations for the great city it would become. Cadillac's Detroit was a strategic outpost, necessary to protect the territorial interests of New France against the incursions of their English competitors - both in terms of access to the fur trade, and relationships with First Nations peoples that made this lucrative industry possible. The area around the fort was territory contested but *unsettled*.

However, writing in 1881, Chicago based map publisher Blanchard describes events in 1669 which call this accepted history into question, with mention of an 'old Indian village, called Teuchsa Grondie' having previously stood on the site (Blanchard 1881:56)³. Blanchard also describes an incident the following year, when two French priests were said to have discovered there 'a barbarous piece of stone sculpture in the human form', which they proceeded to destroy and throw into the river, offended as they were by its 'impiety' (Blanchard 1881:57)⁴. So, not only was Cadillac not the first French man to make use of the area, it seems to have been common knowledge at the time that the site had indeed been previously settled. Farmer's 1884 encyclopaedia of Detroit also mentions several previous names:

"In the old traditions of the Algonquin Indians, it was known by the name of Yon-do-ti-ga, or Yon-doti-a, A Great Village; its first name was thus prophetic of its future. It was also called Wa-we-atun-ong, Circuitous Approach, on account of its location at the bend of the river. The Wyandotts called the site of Detroit Togsaghrondie, or Tyschsarondia, which name, variously spelled, will be found in the old Colonial Documents, published by the State of New York; it has been modernized into Teuscha Grondie, and has reference to the course of the river. The Huron Indians called the place Ka-ron-ta-en, The Coast of the Strait." (Farmer 1884:3)

³ "In the autumn of 1669, at the Indian village of Ganastogue, at the western extremity of Lake Ontario, two distinguished explorers, La Salle and Joliet, met by chance. Joliet was on his return from a trip to the Upper Lake, as Lake Superior was then called, for the purpose of discovering the copper mines. In reaching this place from Lake Superior, he must have passed down the river, then without a name, now called Detroit river, and first called by the French " The Detroit" (The Straits). **It is a matter of record that an old Indian village, called Teuchsa Grondie, stood originally there, but no mention is made of it by Joliet"** (Blanchard 1881:56)

⁴ "The next spring, 1670, two priests, Galinee and Dablon, on their way from Canada to the mission of Sainte Marie, which had been established at the Sault the previous year, landed at or near the present site of Detroit. The first object of interest they beheld was **a barbarous piece of stone sculpture in the human form**. This was quite sufficient to unbalance the equilibrium of the two fathers, whose zeal had been whetted into an extravagant pitch by the hardships they had encountered on their way. **With pious indignation they fell upon the "impious device " with their hatchets, broke it in pieces, and hurled the fragments into the river**. The place would have been brought to light long before but for the Iroquois, who guarded the passage of the lower lakes with bull-dog tenacity, to preserve their own nation and protect their fur trade." (Blanchard 1881:57)

We might question too, the idea that Detroit was ever really a 'French' settlement, taking into account the actual demographic of its inhabitants. Certainly the governor, when he was present, was French; the frameworks of authority and land claim were based in French colonial law. Following the standard colonial protocol of New France, Cadillac ensured that many allied First Nations tribes settled in the area surrounding the new fort. In Farmer's words; "*[the fort] was intended to concentrate the French soldiers, traders, and friendly Indians at one place, and thus establish a permanent post*" (Farmer 1884:220). Each of these groups were fundamental to the success of the settlement, with the 'Indians' serving a key defence, diplomacy and trade role (Farmer 1884:322; Blanchard 1881:59-60).

Vincens, in a biography of 17th century French- Algonquin interpreter and diplomat Isabelle Montour, notes that by 1703 - just two years after its foundation, the fort was 'beginning to resemble a multicultural settlement of some consequence' (Vincens 2011:148). By 1705, about 'two hundred Indians had been persuaded by Cadillac to settle in the vicinity...' writes Farmer '... In 1736 there were five hundred Indian warriors at Detroit— two hundred each from the Huron and Ottawa tribes and one hundred from the Potawatamies.' (Farmer 1884:322). The French population at the time of the 1763 siege 'occupied about 100 houses in the town and 50 farm-houses along the river, above or below it. ...The Ottawas, Wyandots, and Pottowattomies, had villages close by, which, with the French population, gave to the place a metropolitan character, to which no other spot in the whole country could be compared' (Blanchard 1881: 107)

But beyond this traffic between the fort and the villages, the French colonial culture of early Detroit cannot be easily separated from the multiple other cultures surrounding it. While fort dwelling, male 'heads of household' may have been largely French by birth, their wives and children were not necessarily so. Cadillac encouraged marriages between French men and native women as a way of further ensuring protection for the settlement, and as a result says Farmer, children of mixed heritage "soon formed the larger per cent of the population" (Farmer 1884:340)⁵.

⁵ . Because of the colonial bias in contemporary accounts from which this kind of material can be gleaned, it can be of course hard to differentiate between historical record and racist fearmongering. Farmer, again, tells us that:

"Many of the earlier colonists mingled freely with the Indians, and adopted so many of their habits that they became more like Indians than white men, for, as Cadillac says in one of his letters, " With wolves one learns to howl." The coureurs de bois in their habits resembled the wildest and worst of the men in the lumber-camps of to-day, and the rioting and squandering of the lumbermen, on their return from the woods, is paralleled by the doings of these wild and reckless men of the olden time."(Farmer 1884:337)

The next landmark in the story, as it was on our tour, tends to be the fire of 1805 and the coining of that famous motto; *Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus*- 'we hope for better things, it will rise from the ashes'. Much is made of the city's motto, by Detroiters and other commentators alike, seeming as it does to capture a spirit of persistence in the face of repeated disasters. Then, via a brief stop at Woodward's iconic radial street plan, our tour moved quickly on to the turn of the twentieth century- wasting no time in inevitably arriving at Henry Ford: the great white father whose life story, entrepreneurial genius, motivations and foibles are habitually afforded far more attention than the lives and motivations of those who provided essential labour to his factories and without whom his empire could never have been built. As with Cadillac two hundred years earlier, the story of the city's twentieth century success is framed as one of individual (white) genius, and a crudely differentiated mass of workers, for whom occupation and support is generously provided. White/black, male/female, both skilled and 'unskilled' - that artful word that seems in reality to communicate far less about the actual skills a person might possess than it does about the degree of control they are able to exert over the conditions of their employment.

While the connections between Detroit's role in the development of the US car industry, and the city's fate once these big companies passed their American heyday may be obvious, it is no less important to pay attention to the ways in which this part of the city's story is told. Ford's \$5 day, mentioned regularly, often without much context (see Cwiek 2014, New York Times 2015) was certainly a major step for both the US industry and workers in Detroit. But as Beth Tompkins Bates shows, far from representing a simple pay rise, the application of the 'Five Dollar Day Ford Profit Sharing Plan' was in practice rather more complicated. Workers, in line with others in the industry, were paid \$2.34 a day for a nine-hour shift. With the introduction of the profit sharing plan this was raised to \$2.34 a day for an eight-hour shift, with an extra \$2.66 per day dependent on employees' successful transformation of themselves and their families into 'worthy profit sharers', a process involving intense surveillance by investigators from Ford's Sociological Department, who took several months to decide whether workers and their families were sufficiently 'Americanized' (Bates 2012:23). And while Detroit's mid twentieth century middle class lifestyle aspirations of home and car ownership and steady employment reflected a significant development in the expectations of the average American family; Ford's motivation in paying higher wages was not in fact the creation of a new consumer class, but an attempt to break unions and deal with staff turnover.

Maloney and Wattley's (1995) work challenges the assumption that the production line's use of 'unskilled' labour brought in a less responsible workforce, with higher rates of absenteeism -

a problem the \$5 day is credited as an attempt to address (see Cwiek 2014 again). They find that not only were Ford workers' educational levels on a par with workers elsewhere, but that Ford had a particularly high concentration of married black men who, they argue, had to accept the harsher conditions at Ford in exchange for the family wage white workers were able to access at other plants: 'Ford's willingness to hire black Detroiters enabled the company to benefit from the discrimination practiced elsewhere in Detroit in the form of a large and stable work force of married black men who had no choice but to make the extra effort that Ford required of them...' (Maloney and Watley 1995:490).

Indeed, the idea that these were great jobs, overpaid and allowing 'unskilled' workers to get ideas above their station, seems to prevail in much of the discourse around Detroit's decline. The quote below, from an interview with a residential landlord in 2013, is typical:

"the problem with Detroit I think is, it was a place that attracted people that could make a... could make money with unskilled work. And, and that was like a dream you know, that a not skilled person could have a very good standard of living here by working in factories.and it used to be just like dominated so much by the factory mentality." (Interview with LJ 2013)

But the labour required in exchange for these apparent riches was no easy task, classed as 'unskilled' though it may have been. Writing about his experience in pre-1950s Detroit Charles Denby called Ford a 'man-killing place', recalling workers falling asleep on the way home from shifts and having to be helped up steps by their wives (Denby 1989:35-36; Bates 2012:62-63; Maloney and Wattley 1995:472). 'The companies called their methods automation'; black workers in Detroit called them niggermation', write Georgakas and Surkin (1998:85) talking not about Ford this time, but the city's auto factories in general, and conditions at Chrysler in particular. As accounts of greedy unions' role in the city's demise abound surrounding Detroit's bankruptcy (McIntyre 2013; Smith 2013) it is worth bearing in mind that workers at auto plants in the 1970s were regularly dying on the job due to overwork and unsafe equipment (Georgakas and Surkin 2012:85-106).

Migrations

Like any large American city of the twentieth century, migration proved as key to Detroit's boom years as it had to the town's initial successes. A census for 1880 shows thirty different

countries of birth for the city's inhabitants. But migration from other states and territories of North America accounted for over half of the population at this point, with Farmer noting that at the time of that census, Montana was the only member of the union not to have contributed migrants to Detroit (Farmer 1884:336). While the city's older French, Irish, Polish, and German, as well as more recent Mexican and Bangladeshi arrivals, have certainly left their marks on Detroit's cultural and social life, the most significant movement of people came from the Southern states - as black sharecroppers, industrial workers, and white Appalachians alike left the South in search of a better life in the rust belt's growing northern cities (Wilkerson 2010).

A standard narrative - not present in our downtown tour, but certainly ubiquitous in conversations I had with many Metro Detroiters, tells us that the racism of the Jim Crow South pushed poor black migrants north to rust belt cities like Detroit, where they were attracted by the aforementioned riches of Ford's \$5 a day jobs and the promise of a middle-class standard of living. When these hopeful pilgrims arrived, they found that Jim Crow had followed them, in the form of white migrants seeking those same opportunities. Racial tensions persisted and came to a head in explosive race riots in 1967, resulting in widespread property damage and beginning a process of white flight that would see the city's population and tax base plummet, leaving chaos and poverty in its wake. The quote below from a 2013 New York Times shares similar themes with my conversation with residential landlord LJ above, illustrating the result of this storytelling on common sense ideas about Detroit's problems:

'The reason so many manufacturing-sector workers in the United States received such high pay at that time was not that they had exceptional skills or had received superior training; it was that the corporations for which they worked were unsurpassed in their dominance and generated huge revenues. But that dominance was, to a considerable degree, a momentary quirk of history: the absence, in the wake of World War II, of any real competition from other nations. For the United States, the day of reckoning came as other nations recovered from the war...In that moment, American companies, communities and employees should have started taking the competition seriously. That did not happen. Companies like General Motors continued to shower blue-collar workers with handsome pay and benefits.' (Richter 2013)

The careful selection and placement of historical facts as part of a particular dominant narrative frames the story as one of job *creation*, with employment and opportunity as something *gifted* to the working class. We have already seen how hard Ford's employees had to work for every penny of their wage; it is perhaps more useful to raise the question of that

labour's role in building the wealth and power of the auto giants who were later to take these resources elsewhere. The story also rests on the notion that racial tensions were both inevitable, and imported from the South - and indeed, on the breaking down of racial categories into a simple black and white. In doing so, it sets up what we think Detroit's problems are, and how they might be fixed. We see a helpless and childlike African American population, lost without the benevolent direction and largesse of Ford. And we locate racism in the personal prejudices of poor whites, rather than a system of economic and social domination as foundational to the Northern states as it is to the South.

While the great migrations of the twentieth century are a fundamental piece of the city's history, black Detroit did not begin here. As Bates writes;

'Detroit had been on the short list of desired destinations for black southerners since long before the Civil War. The city's proximity to Canada made it an attractive place for slaves escaping from bondage in the American South. African Americans in antebellum Detroit and the sizeable black communities that developed across the river in Windsor and Chatham, Canada, often collaborated in the anti-slavery crusade.... John Brown met with his co-conspirators in Detroit and Chatham to plot the final stages of the armed insurrection he carried out in October 1859 against the United States Arsenal at Harper's Ferry.' (Bates 2012:20)

To look to the city's earlier history counters the prevailing idea of Detroit's blackness as something imported when needed by big industry, and instead establishes African Americans, both enslaved and free, as early settlers and citizens with a crucial role in building the city. This speaks directly to the minimising of Detroit's connections with the Underground Railroad, witnessed on our tour. Herb Boyd's work is a helpful corrective to these omissions, chronicling Detroit's early black history in painstaking detail; looking more broadly, Bontemps and Conroy's much earlier work excavates the stories of black Americans' role in the westward expansion, and the early colonial history of the Midwest (Boyd 2017; Bontemps and Conroy 1945)

Returning to the great migrations of the twentieth century, Wilkerson paints a rather different picture to that of the abject masses, duped into promises of milk and honey in the North, and importing the social problems of poverty and illiteracy with them;

Throughout the Migration, social scientists all but concluded that... the Migration had led to the troubles of the urban North and West, most scholars blaming the dysfunction of the inner cities on the migrants themselves. The migrants were cast as poor illiterates who imported out-of-wedlock births, joblessness, and welfare dependency wherever they went...

...Newly available census records suggest the opposite to be true. According to a growing body of research, the migrants were, it turns out, better educated than those they left behind in the South and, on the whole, had nearly as many years of schooling as those they encountered in the North. Compared to northern blacks already there, the migrants were more likely to be married and remain married, more likely to raise their children in two-parent households, and more likely to be employed. The migrants as a group, managed to earn higher incomes than northern-born blacks even though they were relegated to the lowest-paying positions. They were less likely to be on welfare than the blacks they encountered in the North, partly because they had come so far, had experienced such hard times, that they were willing to work longer hours or second jobs in positions that few northern blacks, or hardly anyone else for that matter, wanted...' (Wilkerson 2010:528)

As for the location of racism as an import by poor whites from the Jim Crow South, Forester Washington's 1920 report on conditions for 'the negro in Detroit', evidences a distinct preference by the city's industrialists for racially segregated facilities in the workplace, and widespread discrimination against black workers' access to company social activities (Washington 1920; Bates 2012:32; Zunz 1982:322;). While the everyday racism of poor white workers of course travelled with them, the structures to support segregation were already very much present in Detroit, embedded in the northern industrial workplace and its white leadership. And for the presumed inevitability of conflict arising from racial difference, we might look to Jaqueline Jones' work on America's historical 'underclass':

'For both black sharecroppers and white farm folk from the mountains... the journey north actually originated in the late nineteenth century, when their bid for economic self-sufficiency, through land ownership, failed. Set adrift in the Cotton South, moving from one plantation to another, or drawn into coal and lumber camps, they began to realize that they would never again see the day when a patch of land alone would provide the kind of life they or their children wanted or deserved. And so, thwarted in their desire for a homeplace in the country, they ventured northward' (Jones 1992:231-232).

While Jones goes on to make a clear distinction between the struggles faced by African American migrants and their white counterparts, this moment of comparison is important,

situating both migrations within a history of dispossession and disappointment, as the working classes of the old south found the equality of opportunity promised them to be a lie. The idea of property ownership, and of a 'homeplace' was central to these migrants' sense of independence and personal pride. Not because of some ill-considered and aspirational drive toward the trappings of a middle class American lifestyle; but through bitter, generational experience of living under system in which they had been compelled to sell their labour and sacrifice their autonomy to those who controlled land, resources, and markets for both (see Boggs 1970; Denby 1989; hooks 1990).

In fact, the assumed deep divisions between black and poor white southerners have never been quite as clear and unchanging as it served the white elite to believe - and certainly not without a little assistance. For as many scholars have shown, Jim Crow as a comprehensive system emerged not immediately with the end of slavery but slightly later, as part of a reactionary move on the part of conservative elites fearful of a growing 'multiracial alliance of poor people' (Alexander 2012:34, see also Woodward 1955). The institution of US slavery as it came to be - a seemingly inescapable and all-encompassing system based entirely on racial distinctions, also finds its origins in the response to a cross-racial class-based alliance, following Bacon's rebellion in 1676 (Alexander 2012:35; Coates 2014a). A similar process, argues Alexander, took place during and after the mid twentieth century civil rights movement, whereby 'proponents of racial hierarchy found they could install a new racial caste system, without violating the law or the new limits of acceptable political discourse, by demanding "law and order" rather than "segregation forever"' (Alexander 2012:40). My intention here is not to absolve working-class whites of the south of the racist violence they have historically both perpetrated and benefited from, but rather to destabilise the idea that the institution of racism in Detroit and elsewhere is somehow timeless and inevitable, and to understand its ultimate origins in elite pursuit of power and resources, rather than a natural opposition between differently melanised populations, and a vague and nebulous 'fear of difference'.

In fact, in mid twentieth century Detroit 'hillbillies' served as a convenient sink for the overt racism of the wider white population. In popular accounts of both the 1943 and 1967 riots, white violence was largely attributed to white incomers from the South (see Hartigan 2000:146; Kornhauser 1952:45-48); however, work on the 1943 disturbance show these assumptions as entirely inaccurate (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991). John Hartigan's ethnography of the largely southern white neighbourhood of Briggs (now known in gentrifying Detroit as 'North Corktown'), finds that whites there tended to live in close proximity to black residents with comparatively little conflict (Hartigan 2000). Residents in neighbourhoods like Briggs were

also far less likely to form the kinds of civic and political organisations that white populations elsewhere in the city used to maintain the racial homogeneity of their neighbourhoods (Sugrue 2005:212). While there was undoubtedly racism amongst Detroit's white southern migrants, as there was amongst the city's general white population, the city's destructive racial politics was, as Sugrue puts it, 'entirely homegrown' (Sugrue 2005:212).

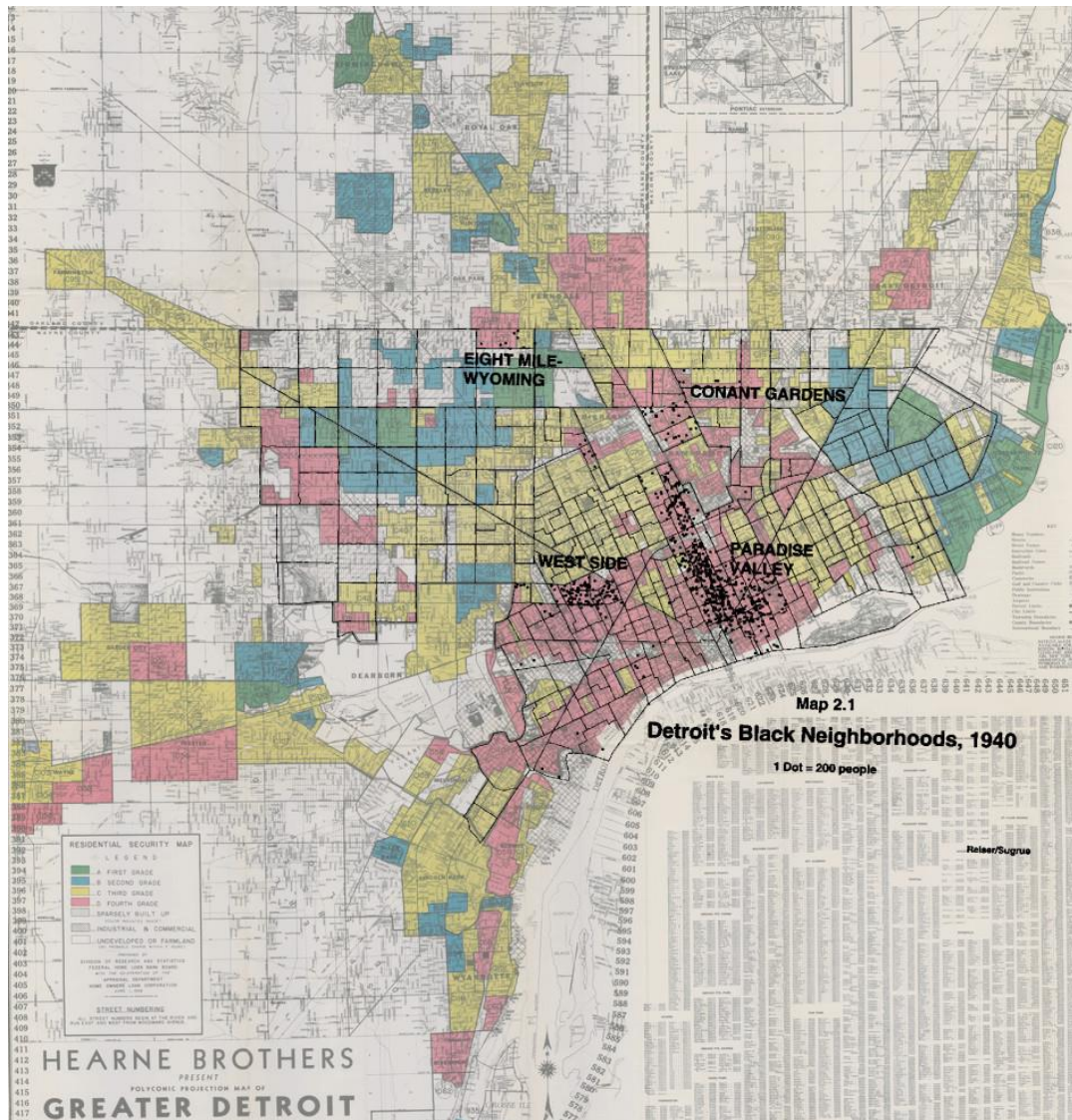
In my own data collection, the perceived backwardness and racism of 'hill people' was a recurrent theme amongst self-declared upper middle class young whites, many of whom had moved to the city from their Detroit-born parents' homes in the wealthy suburbs and considered themselves to be actively anti-racist. 'Hillbillies', even in twenty-first century Detroit, retained their Kentucky speech patterns and insularity, providing a population of poor whites that otherwise self-consciously politically correct liberals were happy to stigmatise. Hartigan argues that the fact that this distinct population remains in Detroit when so many whites left the city, and that it remains distinct, can be explained by this stigmatised identity and resulting outsider status. This, he posits, in fact left them with far more in common with their black neighbours than with the middle-class whites who left for the suburbs (Hartigan 2000:144). White southerners - those who did not blend into the mainstream white population - represented a direct challenge to the colour line that was so diligently maintained in mid twentieth century Detroit.

Property, land, segregation

A glaring omission from our tourist friendly downtown tour is the story of how housing and economic discrimination created not only the cultural climate, but the physical shape of the contemporary city. As the population rapidly swelled at the beginning of the twentieth century with migrants from the South and elsewhere, housing shortages and the resultant overcrowding, competition and ever rising rents put pressure on existing tensions amongst both the city's new arrivals and its older populations. Crowded into crumbling apartments with numerous other families, home ownership represented independence and personal success; not just to the former sharecroppers of the South, but to all those who laboured alongside them in pursuit of what had become the American dream. A house, some land, a place that "nobody can move you off" (See Sugrue 2005:34), the centrality of this cultural value cannot be overestimated, nor dismissed as an irrational fixation or unrealistic aspiration. The kind of right wing commentary around the 2008 financial crisis which sought to lay the blame upon 'minority and risky' borrowers and the idea that home ownership should be accessible to

working class people (see Holden 2008; Krauthammer 2008; Gross 2008), was reflected in many conversations I had with landlords and property developers in Detroit in 2013 and 2014; property ownership was a great aspiration, but some poor folks were just not up to the job. But property ownership remains a central badge of adulthood and full citizenship in US culture, one upon which the right to participate in a democracy has historically been based, and against which commitment to a country, city, or neighbourhood has been measured.

In 1934, assistance towards this goal was provided to households nationwide by the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), a government body that insured private mortgages. Interest rates fell, and the proportional down-payment needed to buy a house dropped significantly. A central technology of this federal drive to support home ownership were the maps put together by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), another New Deal intervention established the year before. Categorising neighbourhoods by relative investment risk and perceived stability, the HOLC maps were a key source of information for FHA officials, and thus formed a basis for individual mortgage decisions. The maps colour coded areas from A, the most desirable, stable and investment-worthy, marked in green; to D, the red areas, for which individual home-buyers and investors alike were unlikely to receive mortgage funding. These categorisations - arrived at in consultation with the local real estate industry - took note of the average age and condition of housing stock, and of local amenities and infrastructure; most importantly however, ratings depended upon the social makeup of the neighbourhood. Racial and economic homogeneity was rewarded, while the presence of change, or of 'a lower class' population, brought an area's rating down. In Detroit, every single neighbourhood with even a small proportion of black residents was coloured red (Sugrue 2005:44).



This map, taken from the excellent online repository of Detroit maps, *Detroitography*, shows the 1939 *Home Owners' Loan Corporation* map of the city, overlaid with Sugrue's outline map of black neighbourhoods in 1940 (<http://detroitography.com/2014/12/10/detroit-redlining-map-1939/>)

While the city's African American population was for the most part restricted to a small number of areas, these neighbourhoods were by no means uniform. Far away from the overcrowding and dilapidation of Paradise Valley, many of the ministers, business leaders and professionals of the early twentieth century black elite could be found in the city's 'Black West Side', a neighbourhood adjacent to the intersection of Tireman and West Grand Boulevard. HOLC officials certainly noted the 'better class of negro' (Sugrue 2005:38) found in this area of large homes and well-kept lawns; but this didn't stop them categorising it red, alongside all of the other black neighbourhoods found in the D category. Sugrue also notes that the 'FHA regularly refused loans to black homebuilders while underwriting the construction of homes by whites of a similar economic status a few blocks away' (Sugrue 2005:44).

While the obvious solution for an upwardly mobile African American family in mid twentieth century Detroit might have been to look to neighbourhoods outside of the ghetto for housing - as indeed, many did - this move proved virtually impossible. Restrictive covenants - clauses written into property deeds prohibiting activities and alterations that might reduce desirability of a neighbourhood - frequently specified that a house could be neither sold nor leased to anyone not 'of the Caucasian race' (Vose 1967; Sugrue 2005:181). Vose reproduces a typical statement from a neighbourhood association, given with regards to the case of the McGees, an African American couple who sought to purchase their house in 1945:

'The restricted character of Seebaldt Avenue, and particularly the block where the defendants' property is located, as an exclusively white residential neighborhood, has been uniformly observed since the property was subdivided and the continued violation of said restriction will cause irreparable injury to these plaintiffs and all other owners in the vicinity by greatly reducing the desirability and value of their properties.' (Statement by Northwest Civic Association regarding the occupation of 4626 Seebaldt Ave by Orsel and Minnie McGee, 1945; Vose 1967:127)

Significantly, as with the statement above, these frameworks of legal segregation frequently drew on rationalist discourses of property values and the preservation of neighbourhood order, rather than explicitly alluding to the fear of miscegenation that characterised Southern segregation. The ubiquity of such clauses only grew as the twentieth century progressed - while unheard of in areas developed pre-1910, every new neighbourhood built between 1940 and 1947 included racially restrictive covenants in the deeds to its properties (Sugrue 2005:44). Through this combination of redlining and neighbourhood restrictions, the housing stock available to the growing African American population was squeezed ever tighter, and the movement of black citizens around the city painfully constrained. As Sugrue shows, of the 186,000 single family homes built in the 1940s only 1500 were available to black Detroit residents, and even as late as 1951 only 1.15 percent of new homes constructed in metro Detroit were open to black purchase or rental occupancy (Sugrue 2005:43). As political commentator Ta'Nehisi Coates describes in a powerful 2014 piece arguing for reparations;

'The American real-estate industry believed segregation to be a moral principle. As late as 1950, the National Association of Real Estate Boards' code of ethics warned that "a Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood ... any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values." A 1943 brochure specified that such potential undesirables might include madams, bootleggers, gangsters—and

“a colored man of means who was giving his children a college education and thought they were entitled to live among whites.” (Coates 2014a)

In an ongoing blurring of the public and private sectors, the real estate industry was indeed a major actor in the creation and perpetuation of a legal and institutionalised racist logic that underpinned the building of Detroit and other cities. The HOLC made a point of awarding higher security ratings to neighbourhoods which featured restrictive covenants (Sugrue 2005:44). In turn, developers themselves encouraged the formation of neighbourhood improvement associations; groups of civic minded neighbours who came together to ensure the upkeep - both material and social - of their immediate vicinity (Sugrue 2005:45). While blacks were certainly not the only category of ‘undesirables’ residents’ groups watched out for, the neighbourhood associations formed between 1943 and 1965 - specifically in the interests of preserving segregation - seem to have been firmly based on an idea of shared whiteness. Concerned residents disregarded their own ethnic and religious differences in favour of a simple positioning as oppositional to ‘coloured’ people, ‘Asians’ and occasionally Jews (Sugrue 2005:212).

When legal means failed, white homeowners also had no compunction in resorting to alternative means to preserve the “character” of their neighbourhoods. Sugrue describes in harrowing detail the experiences of one black family who attempted in 1955 to move into what their new neighbours saw as a white neighbourhood (Sugrue 2005:231-233). After enduring break-ins, vandalism, rocks through windows, constant threatening phone calls and a chanting picket on their front lawn, the Wilsons finally gave up and left their new home on the recommendation of a psychologist when their traumatised five year old son began waking in the night, hallucinating ants crawling over his body. The Wilsons’ experience was by no means remarkable, and news of this siege and others successfully prevented more black families from attempting to cross the colour line.

Shut out of the mainstream mortgage market, African Americans in Detroit - as elsewhere in the country - made easy targets for financial exploitation in the form of ‘contract mortgages’ and scams offered by unscrupulous middlemen (Coates 2014, Satter 2009). Paying inflated prices for homes often recently bought by white investors for much lower sums, African Americans were forced to enter into financial agreements that left them with all the responsibilities of home ownership, but none of the rights of a home owner. Repayments were often set impossibly high, and if they fell behind by even a month, they stood to lose not only the house, but all payments made towards it. Indeed Satter (2009), writing about Chicago,

documents cases of landlords repeatedly using the same properties to extract the life savings of a succession of families.

If it seems this kind of exploitation would be confined to the pre-civil rights era of legalised segregation, we only have to look to the more recent subprime mortgage crisis to see similar conditions played out in Detroit and across the US. Existing patterns of residential segregation set the groundwork for the marketing of particularly risky subprime mortgages to 'minority' clients as a distinct group. "Simply put," write Rugh and Massey in 2010, "the greater the degree of Hispanic and especially black segregation a metropolitan area exhibits, the higher the number and rate of foreclosures it experiences." (Rugh and Massey 2010:644). What hope then, for majority black Detroit in coming out of the 2008 foreclosure crisis without significant damage? Coates again, on the racial intentionality of these schemes;

'Plunder in the past made plunder in the present efficient. The banks of America understood this. In 2005, Wells Fargo promoted a series of Wealth Building Strategies seminars. Dubbing itself "the nation's leading originator of home loans to ethnic minority customers," the bank enrolled black public figures in an ostensible effort to educate blacks on building "generational wealth." But the "wealth building" seminars were a front for wealth theft. In 2010, the Justice Department filed a discrimination suit against Wells Fargo alleging that the bank had shunted blacks into predatory loans regardless of their creditworthiness.... According to The New York Times, affidavits found loan officers referring to their black customers as "mud people" and to their subprime products as "ghetto loans."' (Coates 2014a)

Processes of redlining and restrictive covenants were by no means limited to Detroit, occurring, as Coates shows, across the destinations of African Americans who had followed the great migrations from the South. This is not a story of Detroit's exceptionalism, it is a foundational part of the building of American cities, and the continued impoverishing and disenfranchisement of the country's black population. It is also one which highlights the role of generational wealth in the transmission of resources and rights, as well as white supremacy's explicit role in ensuring black Americans are continually blocked from the avenues of social mobility available to whites.

Riots

While many have shown that Detroit's decline and population loss can be traced to long before the 1967 'race riot' often credited with kicking off the period of white flight (Sugrue 2005; Darden et al 1987), an analysis of the role that riots have played in the social and symbolic history of the city is relevant nevertheless. For 'riot', in the racial shorthand of the contemporary US, usually means 'black unruliness'. At best, the cry of the unheard, and at worst, the mindless violence of an underclass bent on destroying their own neighbourhoods and the property of others, the riot is an important trope in the telling of Detroit's history. From 1967, back to earlier disturbances in 1943, 1863 and 1833, images of racial violence and property destruction are in many ways foundational to the way we understand the city today, and no potted history is complete without a reference to 1967. But while riots themselves have undoubtedly been pivotal moments for Detroit, it is less often noted that up until 1967 all of these occurrences centred around white violence, and white attacks on black life and property.

In 1833 Thornton and Ruthie Blackburn, residents of the city for two years, were kidnapped by Kentucky bounty hunters and held in the city jail on suspicion of being fugitive slaves. Members of Detroit's black community gathered outside of the jail to protest, and the Blackburns were successfully rescued by this 'mob'. First Ruth, by a visitor with whom she swapped clothes and walked free; and later her husband, by a crowd on the docks as he was about to be loaded into a steamboat bound for the South (Boyd 2017; Farmer 1884:346; Frost 2007). A sheriff was injured and a number of the rescue party arrested; this successful insurrection and escape of a couple about to be sent back to slavery, a co-ordinated campaign in defence of the freedom and rights of the black citizens of Detroit, was the city's first recorded 'riot'.

If we follow the city's historians in skipping over such apparently commonplace incidents as the 1857 torching of female-owned brothels by a mob of concerned citizens (Farmer 1884:202), then Detroit's next riot concerned the 1863 violence enacted by a white mob upon Thomas Faulkner, accused of molesting two young girls, one of whom was white. That Faulkner himself 'was to all intents a white man' (Anon 1863), seems to have mattered neither to the courts, who given his 'swarthy appearance' tried him as a black man; nor to the white mob, who visited violent revenge upon the homes and businesses of his black neighbours, burning down buildings, killing one man and injuring many other men, women and children in

the process (Smith 1999:29; Anon 1863, Farmer 1884:202). Only when the damage spread to white-owned homes and businesses were the military called in to patrol the city's streets. It was this event that is generally credited with bringing about the establishment of the first permanent police force in Detroit (Smith 1999)

The 1943 riot was Detroit's particular iteration of a racial violence occurring across the US, expressions of wartime racial tensions and ever-increasing competition for jobs, housing and public space (Sugrue 2005:260). An altercation between groups of black and white youth on the bridge to Belle Isle, and unfounded rumours of violence on both sides, proved the catalyst for three days of violent conflict, with people pulled from streetcars and beaten, businesses looted and burned, 34 killed and 675 wounded, and 1,893 arrests (Fine 1989:1). Both black and white citizens suffered injury and loss of life, but the racist brutality and open allegiance of many city police with the white rioters meant that all seventeen of the individuals shot to death by the police were black, as were a majority of those wounded (Sugrue 2005:29, Capeci and Wilkerson 1991). While participants in the rioting were in fact of a fairly even racial mix (Sugrue 2005:260) and as likely to be native Detroiters as anyone else (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991), this was a fact that the white mainstream found difficult to countenance. "Hooligans and bums, said news columnist Kelsey, "ignorant negroes and southern whites", remarked the east-side mayor' (Capeci and Wilkerson 1991:31); press photographs and even official studies confirmed in the minds of the white public that 'black ruffians' and Southern whites were the source of the disorder, and not their own friends and neighbours.

Detroit's best-known riot of course - and arguably the most devastating - was the uprising of 1967. The choice of words used to refer to this are a profoundly political one; while mainstream accounts frame it as a race riot, Black radical histories see the events of the summer of 1967 as an organised insurrection of an oppressed population against the institutions and symbols of white supremacy (Boggs 2011; Kurashige 2017). While white police violence was the catalyst for the city-wide disturbances, this was also the first of Detroit's 'riots' in which a majority of non-military participants were black. This is hardly surprising, points out Sugrue, given that the city was by this time at least a third black, and that due to persistent patterns of segregation few whites were to be found living in the neighbourhoods in which much of the activity took place.

If the riot of 1943 was about competition for housing and jobs, then 1967 expressed a desperation on the part of the city's 'second class citizens', as 'discrimination and deindustrialization had ensured that blacks had lost the competition' (Sugrue 2005:260).

However, easy as it might be to view 1967 as a black riot - in contrast to 1943's two-sided conflict - this would be a mistake. In 1967 the police force were *active* combatants, conducting attacks on black businesses and citizens. During one incident, Detroit police officers firebombed and vandalised the *Forum 66* bookstore, a significant black cultural centre on Dexter Avenue. While the police later defended their actions - claiming they believed guns were being stored inside - witnesses maintained that the attack was a political attack and hate crime, with photographs and paintings slashed, and taps turned on to flood the store and destroy the books inside (Watkins 1967:4; Fine 1989:244; Smith 1999:197)

Like 1943 however, the events of 1967 also spoke to a larger, national moment as similar disturbances erupted across the United States in what James Boggs referred to as a 'civil war between black power and white power' (1970:41). The riot may indeed, in Dr King's continually quoted words, express the 'language of the unheard' (see Rothman 2015); but the civil unrest of the late 1960s represented much more than black hopelessness and frustration. This was also a time of intense radical activity, intellectual output and revolutionary creativity for black activists and their allies; Detroit representing a locus and an incubator for black radical and leftist movements, not least of which was the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, later becoming the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (Smith 1999; Georgakis and Surkin 2012). And in 1963 it was activists in Detroit who founded the Freedom Now Party - the first all-black political party in the US (Smith 1999:10-11) Drawing on a long history of progressive political activism and both labour and race based struggles in the city, as well as a specifically African American history of mutual aid and church-based organising, Detroiters (and those drawn to the city to join them) played a fundamental role in the social and intellectual developments of the 1960s (Dillard 2007; Nembhard 2014: 29-33; Thompson 2001:11-12). In an article examining the role of Detroit activists in shaping Malcolm X's later political journey, Young argues that in fact;

'Detroit can be viewed as the birthplace of three significant movements of the twentieth century: the Union of Auto Workers (UAW), the Muslim movement headed by the Nation of Islam, and the Black Power movement - all with a distinct working class character. Black radicals in Detroit not only challenged the structures of society but also engaged in a struggle to change, reshape, reinvent and re-create the very structures of American institutions. Black radicals understood the importance of the auto industry to the American economy, and Black autoworkers were in a favorable position to make political demands.' (Young 2010:19)

And it was not just the radical left who struggled and flourished in mid twentieth century Detroit. Talk of the pre-1967 city is so often dominated by explanations for the destruction that followed, that it is easy to be distracted from the huge achievements made by the city's African Americans during that period. In the face of racist housing policies, employment discrimination, and police brutality, black communities worked to build lives, businesses and social frameworks that might insulate them from this structural racism and carve out a place for their families in the metropolis of the twentieth century (Bontemps 1945; Boyd 2017; Boyle; Jolly 2013; Thomas 1992). For example, Detroit boasted a consistent record of robust legal and social resistance to segregation and discrimination, in the form of local branches of established national civil rights organisations like the NAACP and the Urban League; and professional associations like the Booker T. Washington Trade Association, one of the largest chapters of the National Negro Business League (Smith 1999:10). In 1971, Representatives Charles Diggs and John Conyers were founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus⁶.

Cultural and artistic production in early and mid-twentieth century Detroit was also deeply linked to the radical and liberationist politics of the city, and Detroiters both born and adopted were no less prolific in this area. So-called 'father of the new Black poetry movement' Dudley Randall established The Broadside Press here in 1965, one of the first black owned publishing houses in the country (Smith 1999:10). The first African American theatre company in the urban North (Concept East Theater), and the first black owned and operated radio station (WCHB) were both founded in the city (Smith 1999:10-11). The Forum 66 bookstore, mentioned above for its vandalism by city police during the 1967 uprising, was one of the first of its kind in the country (Smith 1999:10).

In 1953 the largest concentration of independently owned black businesses of any city in the United States could be found in Detroit (Sugrue 2005:189), and while a majority of these necessarily filled the gaps in service provision left by formal and informal segregation and the productive priorities of a white overculture, others found national markets; the most notable of these being, of course, Motown Records. The company's musical output becoming synonymous with both the city of Detroit and the auto industry boom from which both took the name; Motown's ability to appeal to both black and white consumers nationally and internationally created both a brand and a legacy that continued to last long after the company itself relocated to Los Angeles. And while Berry Gordy's 'production line' business model was by no means radical or democratic; in a long history of black creativity

⁶ See <https://cbc.house.gov/history/>

appropriated, bought and mined for white profit and pleasure, Motown's black ownership was a first, and remains a milestone (Sugrue 2005:189; Smith 1999:5). Smith argues in fact, that Motown should be regarded as a political movement and institution, whether or not the company's owners, artists or consumers ever intended or perceived it to be, emerging as it did 'from a city that was known not for racial harmony and civic peace but rather for chronic patterns of racial discrimination that often led to violent civil disorder. In response to such persistent patterns of discrimination, the city's black community forged a place for itself using every means possible' (Smith 1999:10-11). If Detroit experienced a heyday, it was not as popular histories often imagine it, with high wages and the middle-class dream for all. Rather, Detroit's 'golden age' was one born of struggle, not a lack of it.

Black rule

The next chapter in our grand narrative begins with the 1974 election of Coleman Young, the city's first black mayor. Depending again on the storyteller's position, this marked either the beginning of the end - mismanagement, cod socialism, cronyism and corruption (Kersey 2012; McGregor 2013; Okrent 2009); or a long-awaited period of black leadership - feared, attacked, and ultimately destroyed by the white supremacist state and federal governments and a racist media (see Rich 1989; Young and Wheeler 1994). Elected on promises to address race relations and police brutality, Young's early initiatives were radical and direct, diversifying the city's police force, and promising desegregation in education and housing. Pledging to fight both crime and police corruption, he famously told the audience at his inauguration speech;

"I issue an open warning to all dope pushers, to all rip-off artists, to all muggers. It is time to leave Detroit. Hit Eight Mile Road. And I don't give a damn if they are black or white, if they wear Superfly suits or blue uniforms with silver badges. Hit the road." (Stuart 1979)

While black voters and white liberals alike applauded this bold statement, conservative whites interpreted his words as a personal threat, invoking as it did the unofficial boundary between the city and its white suburbs. This ease with confrontation and refusal to pander to the egos of white racists is perhaps what has kept Young in his position as public enemy number one to Detroit's right-wing commentators, long after his own political shift away from his leftist origins and towards more traditionally capitalist modes of urban regeneration. For it was Young who spearheaded the dystopian, hermetic 'streets in the sky' of the Renaissance Centre

development at the end of the 1970s, and Young who pushed forward with the demolition of the East Side neighbourhood of Poletown in favour of the construction of the new General Motors assembly plant in 1981 (Rich 1989).

As with the civil unrest of the 1960s Young's rise to power can also be seen as part of a nationwide moment, as Americans attempted to deal with the cultural and economic legacies of slavery and segregation. Part of a generation of black city mayors in the North who had been directly or through their parents' part of the Great Migrations of the earlier part of the twentieth century, Young's 1974 election came on the heels of Tom Bradley in Los Angeles the previous year and Carl Stokes in Cleveland in 1967. Harold Washington followed as the first black mayor of Chicago in 1983, and Wilson Goode of Philadelphia in 1984 (Wilkerson 2010:529). A migration of class as well as race, union organiser Coleman Young and his contemporaries were for the most part not the sons of the small northern black elite, but of southern sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Often serving both multiple and controversial terms in office, they faced the huge challenge of translating a radical politics of hope and racial equity into the existing political and economic structures of late capitalism, with mixed results. Promises were broken and compromises made, but as Thompson argues, far from representing the death knell of sixties liberal optimism black political power in the cities of the North was as fundamental to the development of late twentieth century America as was the movement of conservative white power to the suburbs (Thompson 2001:219). Calling into question the idea that Detroit's black middle class were an artificial and temporary creation of unrealistically well paid auto industry jobs, she points out that the black liberal-led cities of the 1980s provided, in the face of an increasingly inhospitable and reactionary national political context, a home for both the continuation of *Head Start* programs and other civic institutions of the civil rights movement, and to the 'largest, most economically secure, and most influential black middle class ever before in existence in the United States' (Thompson 2001:219-220). That this period is so often framed solely as one of failure and chaos says much about the creeping dominance of right wing economic logic in what we now understand to be the mainstream liberal left in the United States.

After twenty years in office, Young declined to run again on the grounds of ill health, and was succeeded in 1994 by supreme court judge Dennis Archer. In 2001, after two terms, Archer was replaced by 'hip-hop mayor' Kwame Kilpatrick, whose 2008 corruption scandal and later prison sentence has made his name synonymous with Detroit's downfall (See Erb 2013; Yaccino 2013). Standing in briefly after Kilpatrick's resignation, Kenneth Cockerel Jr gave way in 2009 to former basketball star and auto manufacturer Dave Bing, who served as mayor of

Detroit until 2013 and the election of Mike Duggan, the city's first white mayor since the 1970s. The 1980s and 1990s in Detroit, as in other urban centres in the US, were a very visual economic and social 'rock bottom' and continue to serve as a reference point for the recovery and re-colonisation efforts of the present. Unemployment, disinvestment, crime and blight; graffiti, crack cocaine and gangs form a cultural lexicon for 1980s New York City as much as they do Detroit in the same period. But alongside the symbolic redemption brought about by New York's much earlier gentrification, Detroit is set apart by a powerful symbolic conflation of this period of widespread economic suffering, with the idea of 'black rule'.

The period stretching from Young's election in 1974 to Duggan's in 2014 is perhaps most often employed in narratives to justify the taking back of the city from a leadership judged to be incompetent, corrupt, and largely responsible for the decay of both Detroit's physical fabric and in many ways its 'moral character' (Chafets 1990; Kersey 2012). Sub-standard schools, no jobs, a wholesale loss of hope - these are cast as the fault of a diseased and defective city management who spent time feathering their own nests instead of working out how to adapt to the new post-industrial economy and provide jobs for the city's population. Of course, claims of political corruption are not without their basis in truth. Coleman Young undoubtedly used city contracts to reward loyalty, and gave jobs to his friends and associates, much as his white predecessors had done for centuries (Sugrue 2005:269). Kilpatrick's 28-year prison sentence may indeed be excessive for non-violent convictions, but his implication in a host of other scandals is hard to ignore - from extramarital affairs with his staff and the misuse of expense accounts, to murder and extortion. However, the question of 'whether Kwame did it' is perhaps less important than that of whether 'it' is remotely unusual behaviour for a US politician.

Compare the cases of Detroit's black mayors, perhaps, to that of Rob Ford, (white) mayor of Toronto who between 2012 and 2014 was filmed smoking crack, admitted to violence towards his own staff and to taking heroin, was implicated in a shooting, and shown to have links with a narcotics distribution gang. It was not until a further video emerged in 2014, again of Ford smoking crack, followed swiftly by audio recording of Ford making what seemed to be homophobic comments, that he took a leave of absence. After two months in rehab, Ford returned to office (Kassam 2016; McArthur 2013). Or the track record of Buddy Cianci (also white), twice elected Mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, and one of the longest serving big city mayors in US history. Cianci was first forced to step down after kidnapping and torturing a city contractor he believed was having an affair with his wife; the second time in 2001 when he was indicted on charges of racketeering, conspiracy, extortion, witness tampering, and mail

fraud. He was acquitted of all but a single charge of racketeering conspiracy (running a corrupt criminal enterprise) and sentenced to 5 years in jail. After his release in 2007, Cianci has continued to work as a radio host and political commentator (Baker 2016). Corruption, cronyism and the abuse of power are entrenched in the structures of US government. But, as with terrorists and school shooters, the sins of white men point our attention to individual pain, perversion and poor choices; the sins of black men stick to the African American population as a whole, acting as confirmation for a historical sense of racial superiority that never really went away. And in Detroit's case, by extension to the city itself - a mismanaged resource, a victim of tyrannical rule, a place crying out to be saved from itself and its leadership.

The grubbier and more rabid corners of the right-wing internet are, unsurprisingly, teeming with accounts of Detroit as racial object lesson – with headlines like:

'Four Decades of Black Rule: Clearing Out Detroit's Destroyed Buildings to Cost \$1.9 Billion' (The Daily Stormer, May 9th 2014)

'In 83% Black Detroit, Black Contractors Sought to Remove the Blight Black People Caused' (The Daily Stormer, April 13th 2016)

And: *'Life in 2016 Detroit, an 83 % Black City: Black Activist Group Confirms Every Negative Stereotype of Black People is True'*⁷ (The Daily Stormer, April 23rd 2016), which opens with: *As the civilization white people built – then abandoned when black crime made living in the city intolerable – crumbles courtesy of the new racial demographic in control of the city (blacks), a most revealing "code" has been issued to hopefully influence proper behavior in 83 percent black Detroit. [New Era Detroit community activist group releases 'Street Code', Fox 2 Detroit, April 21, 2016]:*

However, such tropes are by no means absent from mainstream news sources and popular comment. After a 2013 CBS special on the city, *60 Minutes* host Bob Simon compared Detroit to Mogadishu, war torn capital of Somalia (Reindl 2013). A quick Amazon search for 'Detroit' in 2016 brought up a mixture of photo tributes to the city's ruins, academic analyses of its

⁷ These quotes come from neo-nazi hate rag The Daily Stormer, the top hit in a google search for 'black rule Detroit' on 3/5/16. The Southern Poverty Law Center confirms that the Daily Stormer has overtaken Stormfront, the web's oldest and largest white supremacist site, in terms of both reach and page views, see <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2015/03/11/blog-wars-daily-stormer-and-its-racist-frenemies>

failures and potential, and a stable of post 2014 publications aimed at the emerging hipster demographic. But in amongst these I also found older works like Ze'ev Chafet's *Devil's Night*, for all whose attempts at empathy and realism, explicitly positions 1990s Detroit as 'America's first third world city' (Chafets 1990). And Paul Kersey's self-published but nonetheless well distributed 2012 racist diatribe *Escape from Detroit: The Collapse of America's Black Metropolis*, which includes such chapter headings as '*Is Detroit too Black for Civilization?*', and '*Life After White People: Detroit, a Glimpse of how Civilization Dies*' (Kersey 2012). As this category of Detroit literature becomes dated and no longer saleable, it is crucial to understand how its earlier prevalence both laid the groundwork for what came later, and established a framework through which more mainstream commentators can articulate similar sentiments without having to trouble themselves with such explicit racism. In a particularly memorable 2009 TV spot, Fox News' Bill O'Reilly drew on these themes to argue against a proposed aid package for the beleaguered Detroit public school system;

"Obama wants to fix the schools in Motown, the feds have to run the system. The feds have to take it over. Cause the locals obviously can't be trusted with the money Mr President! Clear, are we clear? Now it's easy for Barack Obama and any other politician to say he wants to help the kids learn. But it's hard to tell the truth about why they're not learning! Detroit Public Schools are chaotic, violent, and many of the kids there are unsupervised at home, and have no learning curve at all. Money isn't gonna solve that problem. Discipline and honesty might mitigate it. But with derelict parents it's just about impossible to impose academic skills. President Obama continues to simply throw money at complicated problems. He will bankrupt the USA. And we will all suffer greatly. Honesty and accountability is required, not rampant government spending." (Talking Points with Bill O'Reilly, Fox News 2009)

An anecdotally correct but geographically inaccurate focus on 'white flight' as cause of Detroit's woes often inadvertently serves to reinforce this story - an unskilled, helpless population abandoned by their more educated, more affluent masters. The civilising influence of whiteness taken away, a descent into savagery inevitably follows. If this seems like hyperbole (and of course, it is), a quick google can find these sentiments freely expressed. And while liberal whites are keen to distance themselves from the overt racism of *The Daily Stormer* and their slightly more respectable colleagues on *Fox News*, its more palatable form can be glimpsed between the lines of the most 'neutral' accounts, as I will show in the following chapters. Because let us be clear: affluent whites never left Detroit. They simply moved themselves and their economic, social and cultural capital to the edges of the city and fortified those enclaves against the people who remained in the centre. Through land

ownership, zoning, tax laws and the everyday operation of late capitalism, they plundered the city's resources, money and labour. They defined the efforts of the city's inhabitants to survive under these conditions as criminal and degenerate, and their own practices of exploitation and resource hoarding as reasonable, intelligent, and even heroic.

Emergency management

In March 2011 amid public protests, Michigan state governor Rick Snyder signed into law Public Act 4, which re-defined the role of an emergency financial manager appointed to struggling cities and school districts. Handing over significant powers from local elected leaders, this would now include the ability to break union contracts, raise property taxes, and with the governor's approval, dissolve a municipal government. The Act was repealed by state-wide referendum in November 2012, after opponents collected over 200,000 voter signatures to support a public vote. Just a month later Snyder's office had returned with a new version in Public Act 436, which was signed into law in March 2013, and included a proviso that the public could not repeal it (Tabb 2015:5). That same month, Snyder appointed lawyer Kevyn Orr as Emergency Manager for Detroit for an 18 month term. In July of 2013, on the recommendation of both Orr and Snyder, the city of Detroit filed for chapter 9 bankruptcy, the largest US city to do so by measures of both debt and population. Representing the city in this were Orr's previous employer, law firm Jones Day, whose client roster also included some of the city's creditors (see Associated Press 2011; Hakala 2016; Savage 2012; State of Michigan 2013).

Talking about the imposition of an Emergency Manager in 2013, one residential landlord told me; *"he's the grownup in the room, you know. We've been ruled by children for 60 years here"*. A white law school graduate and owner of some 30 multi-apartment properties, he spoke the language of multiculturalism, but was well known in the neighbourhood for renting his properties only to educated, white tenants, justifying his choice by reference to what he saw as African Americans' *"tribal mentality"*. More broadly insidious is the repeated conflation of a black majority with issues of high unemployment, poverty and decline. The fact that these problems are, for reasons of structural racism and centuries of white supremacist rule, often the *fate* of African American communities in the United States, becomes through constant repetition the widely understood *outcome* of the presence of a black majority in and of itself. As an article on urban farming from the Observer in 2010 tells us in one breath that Detroit, 'a

once-wealthy, ethnically mixed city is now more than 80% black, with an unemployment rate believed to be as high as 50%' (Harris 2010).

And while explicit racial parameters are absent from the state of Michigan's *Public Act 436* and earlier laws allowing the state governor to appoint Emergency Financial Managers and suspend the powers of elected local government, the fact that these measures have been applied overwhelmingly to majority African American cities is significant. Lee et al show that in fact, between 2008 and 2013, 51% of African Americans in Michigan had lived in cities under emergency management; the equivalent figure for the state's white population was 2.4% (Lee et al 2016). In Detroit, it would seem that through both a particular framing of the city's period of 'black rule', and the establishment of neoliberal urban economics as inevitable truth, the idea that city government should reflect and represent a city's population - and be elected by that population to do so - has transformed from a fundamental and wholly American expectation to a controversial and subversive suggestion.

In the next chapter I turn to an examination of the discourses of emptiness and chaos which have defined much US and international talk around Detroit in the past decades. Focusing on a short period just before the city's emergency management and subsequent bankruptcy in 2013, I show how carefully constructed images of ruins and blight- as disseminated in the popular press and documentary film- have reinforced this framing of Detroit, declaring the city dead and empty, and laying the groundwork for dispossession and recolonization.

Chapter 5 The Badlands

“They litter the landscape, thousands and thousands of abandoned homes. And just like these buildings, Detroit is a shell of its former self. One third of the people here live in poverty. Almost half the adults are illiterate, and about 75 percent of kids drop out of school. I could be describing some ravaged foreign nation, but this is the middle of America. I grew up in the Detroit area, and just like the people who live here, I’ve often wondered how can this city be saved? It starts with the people on the front lines.”

Chris Hansen, Dateline (2010) Detroit Special “America Now: City of Heartbreak and Hope”

When I began my research in 2012, Detroit was in the midst of something of a cultural moment. Not so much the excitable regeneration talk that characterises the city’s international buzz in 2018; this slightly earlier period is perhaps best understood by looking at a handful of documentaries and photographic works released in the space of a few years, and which taken together form a distinct body of work. Beginning with British director Julien Temple’s *Requiem for Detroit?* in 2010, through cult French film *Detroit Ville Sauvage* (Tillon 2011), portrait of the Detroit fire service *Burn* (Putnam and Sanchez 2012), *Detropia* (Ewing and Grady 2012), as well as an episode of macho TV chef Anthony Bourdain’s travel series *Parts Unknown* in 2013; the documentaries, while each with their own particular focus, are in many places almost dizzyingly similar - from lighting and music choices, to the ubiquitous driving shots used to demonstrate the vastness of the city’s blighted landscape. In terms of photographic work, the similarities are particularly striking. While certainly not the first to make art from Detroit’s picturesque ruins, the work of Andrew Moore, and French photographers Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre came to dominate the genre and set the visual tone for countless others; with their iconic shots of the city’s former train station, previously opulent hotels, and disused industrial architecture.

As these artworks found enormous favour in the glossy pages of the higher brow press in the UK and US (see Brubach 2010; Davies 2010; O’Hagan 2011; Rubin 2011; TIME 2011), Detroit stories continued to pop up in the news pages here and elsewhere, with a momentum that seemed to build rapidly as attention on the city intensified after the auto bailout and in the lead-up to the municipal bankruptcy in 2013. In this chapter I will refer to my analysis of these media outputs in order to trace the development and solidification of what I will call Detroit’s ‘Badlands’ narrative; framing the city as a dead place of chaos and decay and constructing a story of emptiness that is very much a pre-requisite to the gentrification the city is currently

undergoing only a handful of years later. While this framing of Detroit has, as we saw in the previous chapter, a much longer history; I argue here that the period around this rush of publications represents a distinct 'pre-gentrification' moment for the city.

During this period, whenever someone would hear that my research involved Detroit, they would invariably go on to tell me about either Temple's film, which had recently been broadcast by the BBC, or Marchand and Meffre's photographs, which they'd seen in the Observer Sunday supplement (O'Hagan 2011). But while we can certainly look at these now iconic media products as almost a genre of their own, it is important too to understand them within the context of wider reporting on Detroit - the nightly news items, popular film and fiction, and the everyday talk about the city - often, occurring between people with limited or no first-hand experience of the place itself. The quote above opens a 2010 Dateline special on Detroit, broadcast on NBC and reaching audiences across the US. With language that evokes images of dirt and abandonment, poverty and societal breakdown, as well as a sense of distinctly 'third world' foreignness; it typifies a mainstream media approach to representing Detroit - setting up images of chaos, violence, and disinterest, amongst which lone heroes can stand in relief as potential saviours of the city.

Alongside the more recent Detroit documentaries and photographic works listed above then, this chapter will also draw upon US and UK news media output, fiction film, and a handful of contemporary non-fiction bestsellers, which taken together build a distinct picture of the city as somehow both empty and chaotic; dangerous, violent and full of a lawless sense of possibility - "The Badlands" of the chapter's title. This now common-sense framing, I argue, has been a fundamental ideological prerequisite to the property speculation, continued public de-funding, and violent gentrification currently taking place in the city of Detroit. I will look at several strategies that are deployed in the construction of this picture, across media formats. While one or more (often conflicting) narrative may be found in any particular film or article, when viewed holistically these may be broadly divided into two approaches.

The first is what I term the *construction of emptiness* - establishing not only that there is a wealth of space in the city, but that it is untended, uncared for, and forgotten. The idea of abandonment takes some rather strange twists and contortions here, with accounts of Detroit's visual devastation and emptiness liberally peppered with descriptions of its remaining inhabitants; in some cases, almost, it seems, as window dressing - their presence in a scene intended to emphasise its desolation rather than question the idea that it is one of emptiness and lack. The second is the elaborate *fictionalising* of Detroit's reality, through the use of several narrative tropes - among them the (post)apocalypse, the idea of the still living city as some kind of dead monument to its own hubris, mobilised through comparisons of the city's

streets with a nuclear wasteland or post-war disasterscape; as well as the colonial frontier, with its images of third world dictatorships, wild west anti-heroes, and violent, risk-taking masculinity. Both strategies draw on ideas of elemental, or chaotic nature, with recurring images of darkness and light, dirt, death, fire, and wild animals. There is also often a dual focus on the city and the body - in terms of both the anthropomorphising of the city as a (diseased) body, and the dehumanising of its people as alternatively animals, zombies, children, or in some other way less than human. And finally, both approaches share a focus on violence - in both crime and vigilantism - alongside overt and coded references to race, and specifically to images of blackness and black culture as deficient and criminal.

Emptiness

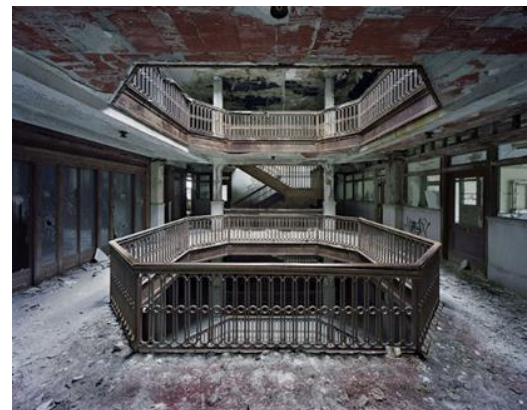
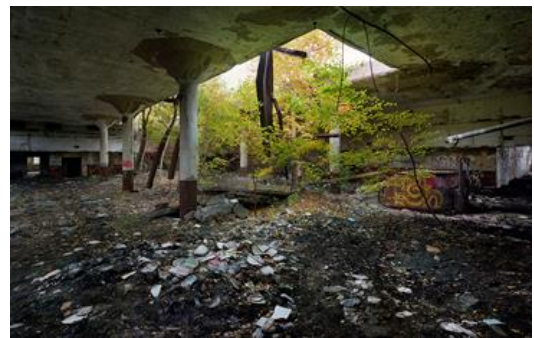
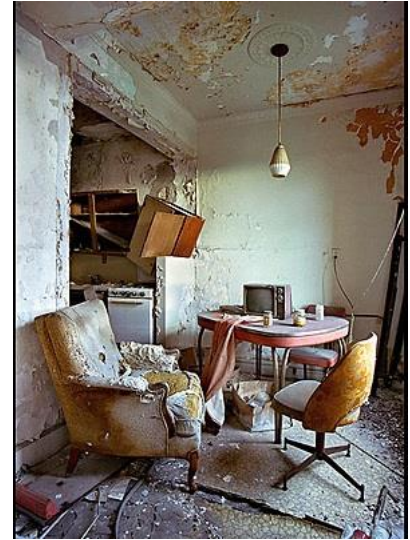


Figure 3: Emptiness - Clockwise from top left: Fisher Body Plant 21 (Andrew Moore), Room at Lee Plaza (Marchand and Meffre), Birches growing through books (Moore), Farwell Building (Marchand and Meffre), Michigan Theater (Bob Jagendorf), Lee Plaza ballroom (Marchand and Meffre)

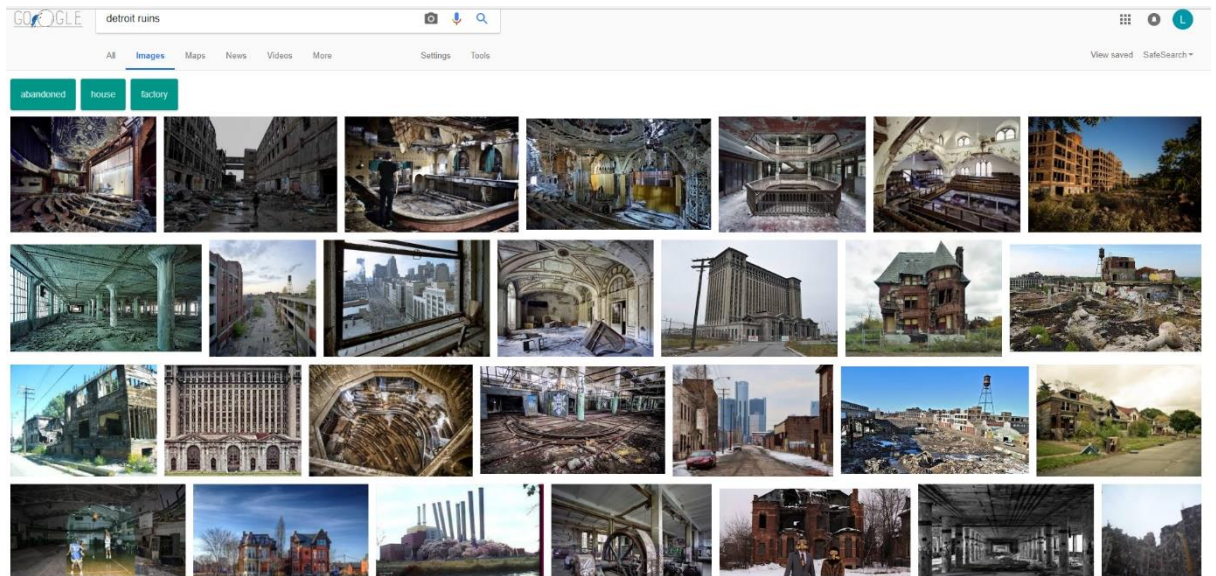
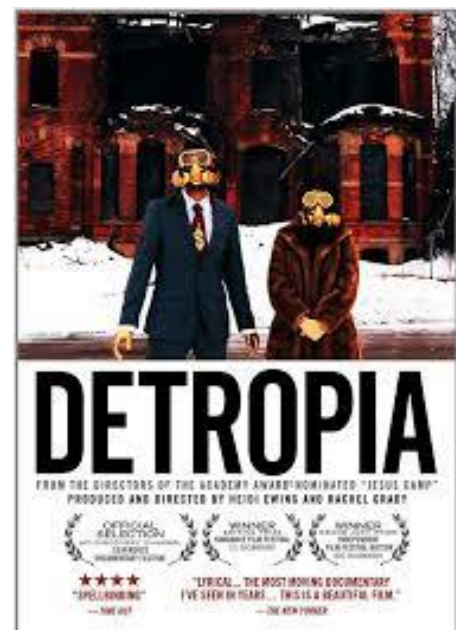
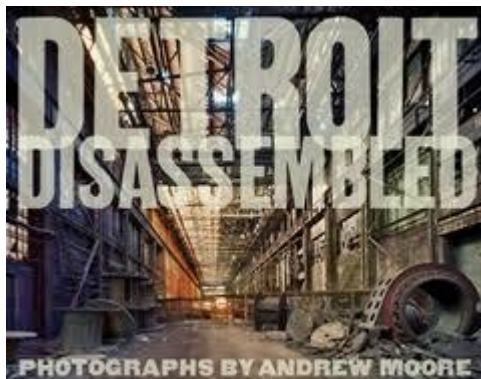


Figure 4: Detroit ruins – above, a google image search in 2018 for ‘Detroit Ruins’. Below, covers for books by Moore and Marchand and Meffre; a *TIME* magazine cover from October 2009, and the promotional poster for Ewing and Grady’s *Detropia*.



Whether illustrating a news story (related or not), forming the basis for a glossy photo special, or bound in heavy and expensive coffee table tomes, the sheer ubiquity of Detroit ruin photography can be overwhelming. The level of blight in Detroit is huge, certainly - rapid population decline, government disinvestment, and the simple fact that it is easier and cheaper to leave a building to be slowly destroyed than to pay for its demolition, has left a landscape visually dominated by blighted structures. But across the vast majority of the city's footprint, this abandonment is comprised of one and two storey single family homes and grassed or wooded lots where such structures previously stood; amongst which sit the many well-kept and fiercely defended homes of those 700,000 residents who remain in the city. What seems, from the large body of art photography continually disseminated in the press, to be a vast industrial ruinscape, on closer inspection emerges as a distinct circuit, a collection of photogenic structures that speak pointedly to the city's industrial and decadent past (Gansky 2014; Millington 2013:282; Strangleman 2013). If we look long enough, similarities in the framing of shots also become clear - that particular angle that captures the Fisher Body Plant stalactites and the enormity of the space; the iconic abandoned grand piano in the dusty ballroom of the Lee Plaza Hotel; the light visible through the glassless windows of Michigan Central station, long prairie grass growing in the foreground.

Dominating this body of work are photographers Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre; and Andrew Moore, whose collections both debuted in 2009-2010, with a rash of articles (Brubach 2010; Davies 2010; O'Hagan 2011; Okrent 2009; Olah 2012; Rubin 2011; TIME 2011). Marchand and Meffre's book is a huge coffee table tome that continues to retail for £65 and up, and features nuanced and thoughtful essays from Thomas Sugrue, author of *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, and acclaimed landscape photographer Robert Polidori. From its very title however, the artists' intended framing of the city becomes quite clear - '*The Ruins of Detroit*' are our focus here, not their inhabitants. Looking at the photographs together, the sheer volume of images creates a sense of sameness, timelessness, and interchangeability. Time is compressed, photos are presented in thematic sets rather than chronological ones, and while pictures were in fact taken over a number of years, and at the time of publication several of the buildings photographed had been demolished or restored, the collection presents an idea of how Detroit is *now*; a mausoleum, abandoned, devoid of people, a monument to memory and forgetting. Small, printed captions provide this information for some sites, but this of course does not follow the images in their wider dissemination.

If Marchand and Meffre's downtown and factory shots are about interchangeable vistas of faded grandeur and industrial decline, their images of Cass Technical High School (alongside those of Andrew Moore) represent something slightly different - specificity, the banal made

extraordinary by the passage of time, and the detritus left behind by an apparent culture of disposability. Where have the children gone, the inhabitants of these vast public buildings? The swimming pool is dry and dusty, an old-fashioned auditorium waits for students who are never coming back; the wooden cabinets of a biology classroom are littered with smashed test tubes. Where they have gone of course, is next door, to the building's state of the art replacement (Arnold 2015:328). Cass Tech, the first high school to be built in the city of Detroit, remains in the top 5% in the state of Michigan, and students in the city vie for places at the exam-entry, college prep high school. While the authors make mention of the fact that the institution has moved rather than simply faded away, this seems to be of little note, referred to in passing, and easily missed in favour of the spectacle of decay presented in the following pages. As before, this information is forgotten as soon as the photographs leave the pages of the book for mass media circulation. And it should be noted too, that academics are certainly not above these kinds of erasures. Despite communicating on the subject with Moore himself, Gansky discusses in some detail the significance of an image of a melted clock at the 'abandoned' and 'failed' Cass Tech, without any reference at all to the school's continued existence next door (Gansky 2014:125-128).

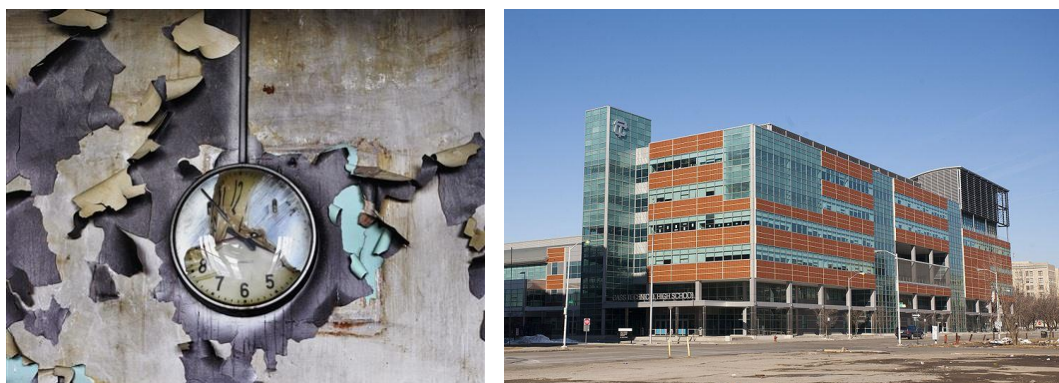


Figure 5: Cass Technical High School - The image to the left, shot by Marchand and Meffre, shows a melted clock at the 'abandoned' Cass Technical High School. The image to the right, taken from the school's website, shows the new premises - adjacent to the old building.

If the photographers had wanted to look at the real, living, and ongoing tragedy of Detroit's public school system they would have had plenty of - perhaps less photogenic - material to choose from. Under emergency financial management since 2009 (four years before the city itself entered a similar arrangement), decades of state de-funding, takeover, reorganisation and a not so secret push towards privatisation; a steady decline in teachers' pay and conditions, with many buying their own basic supplies, students in Detroit have some of the lowest literacy rates in the US, and are often expected to learn in unsafe and insanitary buildings, and without enough books, pens, or in some cases toilet paper (see Brand-Williams 2009; Al Hajal 2016). In 2016, the *Detroit News* reported that students suing the state of

Michigan over the poor quality of their education had been told by the attorneys for the Governor's office that literacy was not a legal right (Chambers 2016). Offering one of the few chances at a decent high school education remaining in the city, Cass Tech itself is possibly the least representative example of a ruined public school to be found in Detroit.

Andrew Moore's photographs - many taken with Marchand and Meffre, and of the same ruin sites in the city - focus far more on texture; canvases of colour and shape that are so vast they lose meaning; machinery, peeling paint, industrial archaeology. In both bodies of work, the almost complete absence of living humans from the landscape serves to frame the objects left behind with a particular poignancy and sense of loss. But in Moore's work, aptly titled *Detroit Disassembled*, we lose some of the monumentalism and pathos of the French photographers' fixation with empty rooms. An industrial machine broken down into its parts, converted to other uses. Decaying books fertilizing birch trees in the Detroit Public Schools Book Depository, or vivid green moss overtaking a carpet at the former Ford HQ in Highland Park; the blocks of compressed metal manufactured from scrapped cars at the (still working) River Rouge complex; socks drying over an open fire in someone's makeshift home inside a warehouse; fresh and colourful graffiti at Fisher Body 21.

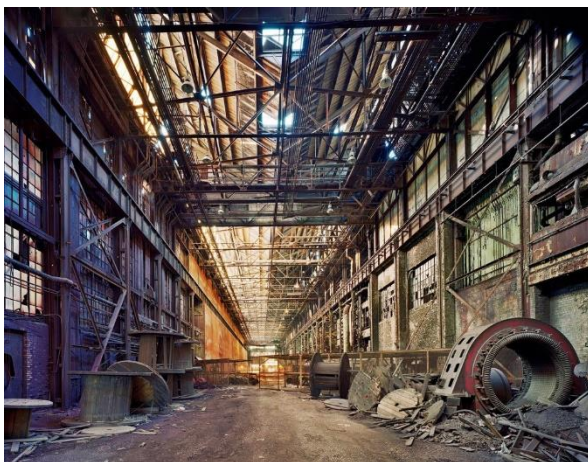


Figure 6: Andrew Moore's Detroit images

This is not necessarily just about decay, neglect and abandonment. People, while only ever a tiny part of the composition where they do appear, are often named. Some of Moore's photography even features children - posing for the camera, or playing in carless streets – though these photos only seem to have made it as far as the exhibition catalogue. Moore's colour saturated photos rarely provide the cold, ghostliness of Marchand and Meffre's work. Yet there is a feeling that what we are viewing are things and spaces, not places; archetypes, painstaking compositions. Like an anatomist, Moore's objectifying gaze sets us up for this clinical, mechanical, removed view of the city.

Ultimately, of course, whatever nuance was the photographers' intention, however thoughtful an expensive art book's foreword, or accurate a photograph's caption, matters little when considering an image's reach. Most people who encounter these photographs do not see them as a whole set, a collection of large images in a gallery space as Moore intended them to be viewed. His book itself is actually the exhibition catalogue, a coffee-table format object that while not quite reaching the level of Marchand and Meffre's book, remains prohibitively expensive for both individuals and libraries to purchase. Indeed, I was only able to view a copy by making an appointment with the Tate Britain. But Moore's work, like Marchand and Meffre's, is ubiquitous. Reviewed and selectively reproduced in newspapers, top line in a google images search for 'Detroit'; these images are a major part of received knowledge about Detroit. They are beautiful, and memorable, and invariably presented out of their artistic context. They are not misunderstood because the general public can't understand art; the very nature of their dissemination transforms their meaning. They become conveyors of political and social information, shorthand for what we think we know about the city.

Arnold, writing on Detroit's 'urban decay' photography in 2015, draws on Jerry Herron's work to map this process of abstraction that seems to be a central part of the production and dissemination of these images:

'...photo-books such as this enact a process of mystification, whereby the artistic treatment of actual places and buildings renders them unreal. The viewer of such images is exempt from any social responsibility when aesthetic practice overshadows documentary or social action. The context of such photographs is mystified for the viewer, who considers the photographs as art or museum pieces more than real places.' (Arnold 2015:336)

Yet Herron himself in many ways reproduces this relation, describing his own relationship with Detroit's ruins in terms which, while they might at points appear to critically interrogate the gaze of the affluent white outsider, do little to actually destabilise it; painting a picture of a city

at once historical and out of time, where ‘nobody seems bothered’ about the things the rest of us find meaning in:

‘I can think of no other American city that feels at once familiar historically, and also alien. Familiar because this is the place where the life we all live — cars, strip malls, shopping centers, freeways, exurbia — was invented; alien because nobody here seems bothered that so many recognizable signs of wealth and culture — things that really matter elsewhere — have been so thoroughly abandoned, as if they had suddenly lost all meaning.’ (Herron 2012)

In a rather crude demonstration of the compression of time and recycling of iconic images inherent in the ruin porn ‘circuit’, a Marchand and Meffre photo of the William Livingstone House in Brush Park illustrates a 2014 *Guardian* article on the current state of the city (Hackman 2014). “Slumpy”, as the building was known to local architectural history fans, while certainly an abandoned mansion in the sense that it was no longer officially occupied, in fact got its crumbling appearance following a move a block west, by preservationists keen to save the structure from being demolished to make way for a proposed new development. Despite their best efforts, the historic structure was eventually demolished in 2007 - seven years before the *Guardian* article’s publication. Below is a screenshot, showing the image’s placement and captioning in the article:

So far, demolitions are happening at a speed of at least 200 houses a week. Even at that pace, it’s a crawl. There are over 40,000 houses and buildings that qualify for immediate blight removal.



▲ William Livingstone House, Brush Park, Photograph: Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

Figure 7: William Livingstone House

This idea that Detroit is not only empty, but also neglected, uncared for and forgotten, is central to the Badlands narrative - in many instances leading to what seems like wilful ignorance or misinterpretation of evidence to the contrary. "People don't care how they live or what they do in the community" the voice of an unidentified woman tells us in a 2010 NBC Dateline special⁸, "They just feel hopeless. When they don't care, this is what happens." It is necessary in setting the backdrop, as I will show in the following chapter, for the conditions in which pioneers and saviours can congratulate themselves on bringing hope to the hopeless, in whatever form this takes. As a New York Times review of the NBC segment informs us:

'There's a war going on in Detroit, but not the one that immediately comes to mind, between drug dealers and the police, or corrupt politicians and prosecutors. This war is more abstract than those very real battles and more David-and-Goliath. At issue is whether seemingly overwhelming sociological and economic forces of decay can be reversed by a few individuals determined to fight the good fight, no matter how quixotic their efforts seem.' (Genzlinger 2010)

In a scene from documentary *Requiem for Detroit*, 'Detroit Historian' Bradley McCallum leads us on a tour from the suburbs and across Eight Mile. While McCallum doesn't directly mention race, the scene follows directly on the heels of another white interviewee telling us: "if I had to try and simplify the difference between the city of Detroit versus the suburbs, it is as clearly different as black and white". The demonstration here is not only about the difference between the resources of suburban and city administrations, it is clearly intended to speak to the difference between the white suburbs and the black city. The tour begins with McCallum driving down a sunny suburban street: "this neighbourhood here is perfectly safe. Police patrol, grass is cut, there's flowers planted, the street is clean. ...when you cross the Eight Mile road bridge, you come into another world altogether". Rap music begins (an Eminem song), and we cut quickly from a grey skied shot of the Eight Mile road sign, to burned out houses, tall trees - it seems like there are no signs of life here at all. "On this side of Eight Mile road", McCallum continues, "you have a neighbourhood where most of the houses are gone. You'll see that there's a lot of houses where people just walked away from." McCallum slows his car as he passes a pile of what looks like demolition or building remains. "Burned out structures...garbage in the streets. And we have the worst murder rate in the nation. This is one of the worst neighbourhoods in Detroit, crime wise. Despite being 2000 feet from the suburbs."

⁸ 'Detroit: City of Heartbreak and Hope', video online at: <http://www.nbcnews.com/video/dateline/36569879>



Figure 8: Still from *Requiem for Detroit*, showing Bradley McCallum driving around Eight Mile

There is no doubt that these images are 'real' - there really are burned out structures in the area around Eight Mile, and residents suffer with high levels of crime and appalling police response times. But it is significant that McCallum happens to drive past some young black men standing outside a liquor store just as his voice track mentions crime and the murder rate; it is significant that our evaluation of the neighbourhood's worth comes entirely through visual signifiers of cleanliness and order as we drive by looking through the windows of our guide's car. The idea that people 'just walked away from' their homes and neighbourhoods seems almost reasonable, plausible when we see such visual devastation. As if that is how people behave in this kind of environment; losing interest in their living conditions and the homes they have worked for. Yet from my own experience working on community organised neighbourhood clean-ups in Detroit during my fieldwork, I am almost certain that the pile of garbage McCallum laments in the image above has in fact been neatly stacked for collection after a structure has been demolished or a lot cleaned up. Surrounded by trimmed grass and visible sidewalks in a city where such municipal services rarely reach the outer neighbourhoods; stacked in a pile adjacent to the kerb for ease of collection by city services or a private contractor- this is not what careless and haphazard fly-tipping looks like, this is evidence of work and of care.

As with the photographic works discussed above, the idea of *vastness* - of a huge, sparsely populated, and undifferentiated landscape - permeates news coverage, with articles invariably featuring some kind of unimaginable spatial measure; the city's footprint or vacancy rate, or how many other cities could fit within its borders. A *Bloomberg* article describes the city's police force as 'a shrunken department that patrols 139 square miles (360 square kilometers)

scarred by blight and poverty with decade-old cruisers' (Christoff 2014). A *Guardian* report on the 2013 bankruptcy explains that:

'The scale of Detroit's decline is dizzying. The city's population has dropped from 2 million in 1950 to 700,000 today, as Detroiters have become fed up with decades of mismanagement and rising crime and poverty. Detroit's murder rate is at a 40-year high, only a third of its ambulances are in working order, and nearly half its streetlights are broken. Citizens wait 58 minutes for the police to respond to calls, compared to a national average of 11 minutes. There are 78,000 abandoned buildings in a sprawling city of 139 sq miles.' (Rushe 2013)

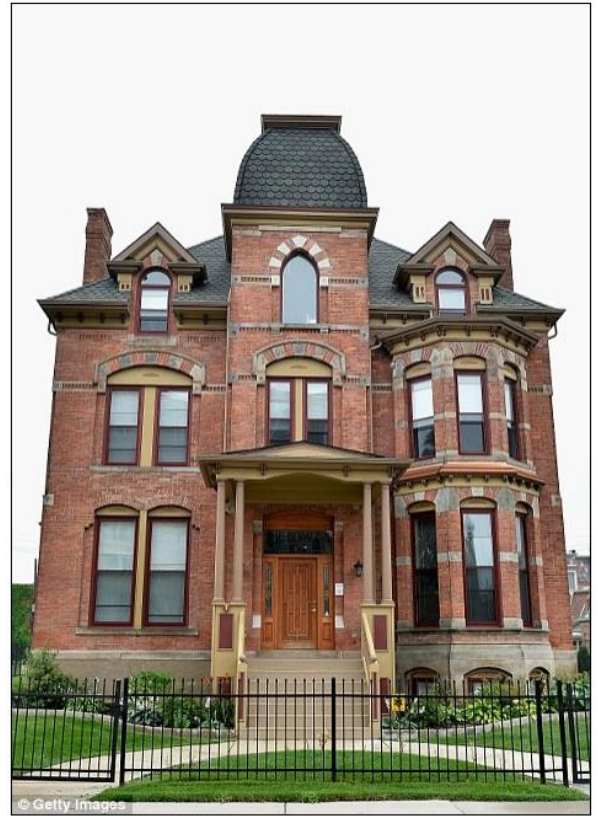
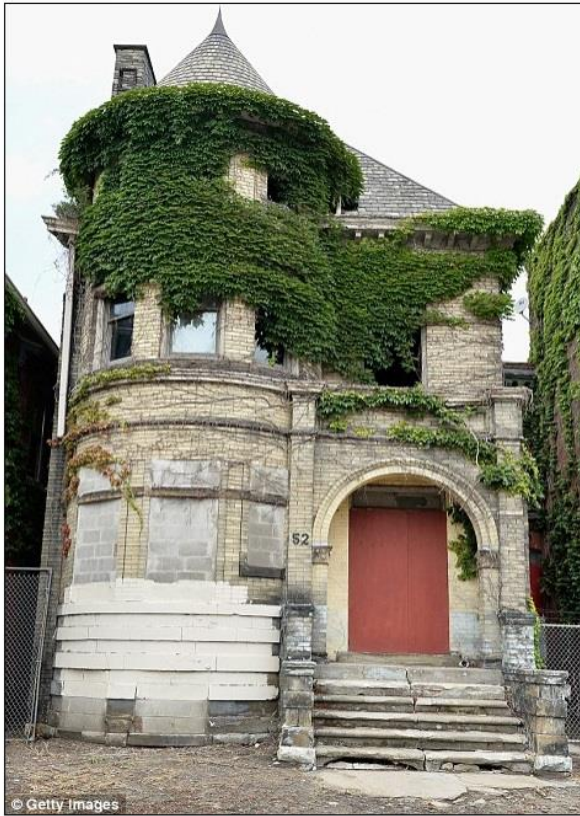
A 2015 *Telegraph* piece titled *'Detroit: an empty city from the air'* features a slideshow of aerial photographs of the city and its suburbs, for comparison (Maclean 2015). 'Once I crossed into the city limits' writes photographer Alex Maclean, 'the urban fabric of Detroit looked like a moth-eaten blanket. Vast depopulated areas were filled with vacant lots and blocks of boarded-up and burned-out homes. This type of blight is visible in other American cities but few compare to the emptiness that surrounds Detroit's downtown'. The aerial photos themselves are a little more interesting and varied than their title and description would imply however, showing, *amongst* the dilapidated buildings; farms, woodlands, parking lots, manicured lawns, neat homes and grand restored mansions.



[Overleaf] Figure 9: Some of Maclean's (2015) aerial shots of Detroit. Clockwise from top left: urban farm in Brush Park; industrial buildings and commissioned graffiti near Eastern Market; a home with pool in suburban Bloomfield Hills; mansions in Brush Park historic district

Convenient mis-titling and inaccurate use of images is often a key strategy in reports on the city's blight - whether cynically deployed, or the easy mistakes of harried researchers relying on stock images and a non-local audience. A *Guardian* article (Wolff 2013) leads with a photo of the decaying and iconic Packard Plant, captioned '*Downtown Detroit is now a shadow of its former self*'. But the industrial complex, as anyone in the city would know, is a four-mile drive from downtown. A *Daily Mail* article (Finnis 2014) reporting on the city's vacancy rate and bankruptcy features a large picture of the side of a graffitied building downtown, gloomily captioned: '*This building is now covered with graffitied words, including 'care' in huge stencilled lettering, 'September 11' and also 'justice' and 'the local police'*'. The graffiti - or more accurately, the mural, created a few years previously as the backdrop for a Kid Rock video, also features a few other words the report chooses not to highlight - such as 'disability rights', 'the working class', 'compassion', 'a good coat for winter', and 'being able to retire at a reasonable age' - painted on the wall by the Detroiters who appeared as extras in the video, when asked to write what they cared about the most.

The same article follows this with photographs of more and more 'abandoned' buildings, mostly unidentified by name or location - including the pair in the image overleaf. A minimal amount of investigation reveals that at the time of the article's publication, the suspiciously well kept 'former home' on the right was already renovated and renting apartments at \$1000 to \$2,500 a month. As I wrote this, two years later, the house - located at 104 Edmund Place in the sought after neighbourhood of Brush Park, was on the market for \$3,300,000, with all nine of its apartments occupied (Reindl, 2016).



There are thousands of houses left empty, including this pair of beautiful former homes, one of which has been bricked up and is being invaded by ivy

Figure 10: 'Empty' homes

The connections between what we expect to see in Detroit and how we interpret its landscape have power in other ways too. Because the image of Detroit does not map onto the collectively understood image of an American city; because there is less density than expected, more trees (or trees in the wrong places), less traffic, the 'wrong' kinds of businesses - it can be all too easy to read for absence, rather than difference. The passage below, taken from Marc Binelli's 2012 bestseller *Detroit City is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis*, illustrates this point particularly well;

'Most of these neighborhoods, you can't even call them neighborhoods anymore - they're 'areas', Allen said. "Okay, count these houses with me. One, two, three, four. Five over here. Six, seven over there. That's ten blocks, seven structures. Two of them definitely vacant. Look! Over there. That's literally a tar-roofed shack". A couple of men stared at us from their front porch. "We've just gone fourteen blocks and we could not count fifteen structures. I can't make this up".' (Binelli 2012:61)

Of course, this exercise only makes sense if we expect to find ourselves in a city; it wouldn't have anything like the same impact in a semi-rural area. "This cottage is 100m away from the

next, that one over there looks pretty run down, there are a few more houses down the lane there, some people are sitting out on their porch, enjoying the sun". This is not a landscape we would read as empty, as unused or abandoned - to do so would be considered disrespectful, not to mention incorrect. The idea of abandonment - as we see from this and the visual examples above - is a particularly subjective one, and can shift repeatedly depending upon who is speaking, and who is being spoken about. I spent a particularly illuminating day shadowing a part time property developer (JB) in the late autumn of 2013, as he cleared out recently acquired houses, checked on others that were mid renovation, and spoke with me about his work and his plans for the future. As we drove to another site, I asked him whether he thought people were moving to Detroit, as well as leaving. "Absolutely", he told me, "specifically to the downtown neighbourhoods- Corktown, Midtown, Woodbridge..." He didn't have to advertise his rentals, as he easily filled vacancies through personal networks or by people who call him because they've heard he's a landlord in the area. He continued:

"So, there are people moving in, and they are white- not just white, people of all different races, creative, educated, people of means. But it's not gentrification. People throw that word around because it's easy, because they are uncomfortable about what is happening and they don't like change, and it's the closest word for what is happening. But it isn't gentrification in the classic sense. Gentrification is where black people are getting pushed out, and nobody's being pushed out here. All the rehab work is happening to abandoned property, people are cleaning up blight and creating new housing for these newcomers to move into". (Interview with JB)

Later, as we explored a dilapidated and rather unstable looking house he had just bought in the city's property auction, I noticed two beautiful old leather and brocade couches in the living room - the only furniture in the building. As we shifted them outside to the kerb to be collected by the city's newly functioning bulk waste service, I asked JB where they came from. A "sixteen-year-old black kid" was squatting in the house, he told me. "Saw my guys working on the place and asked if I bought it. I said yeah, you're gonna have to get out, man. I was scared he might get violent, but he left the next day." My white property developer was certain the kid was dealing drugs from the house, although it's unclear on what evidence. As we worked throughout the day, I tried to steer the conversation towards the practicalities of finding and acquiring property. JB told me that he buys abandoned properties, but sometimes people are still living in them - either squatters or the old owners who don't want to leave after their home has been repossessed and sold on. Usually he pays them to go away, \$100, \$200 and they're gone without much trouble. One man, he regretfully had to evict: "the guy

had mental problems, kept his dog in the basement, the place was filled with dog shit. It's classic poverty, people don't have the money to take care of their properties, the roof falls in, hundred year old electrical systems are overloaded and start fires. People don't want to leave because they won't let go of owning somewhere." (Interview with JB)

JB talked about this in a fairly nuanced, sympathetic way; he seemed to feel like he understood where 'they' are coming from. He doesn't hate the people he evicts, he seems to feel compassion for them, to understand that they are often in impossible situations not of their own making. But at no point did he consider there to be any kind of logical conflict between the idea that a building is abandoned, and the fact that it has people living in it. This is a strange understanding of the word 'abandonment', but in Detroit it seems to be a fairly common one, particularly among white newcomers, property developers, and journalists who write captions for international newspapers. Abandonment by legal owner, not 'out of use'. People behind on their taxes, people whose homes are foreclosed upon, people who are not paying rent, or not paying *market* rent; these become non-people somehow, invisible, impermanent, transient, and easily moved on. The colonial echoes in this are hard to ignore; the creation of Terra Nullius from the homes of those categorised as slightly less than humans, not-quite citizens. Claims to property, land, space, survival - only valid when made through capitalist channels.

Fictions

'Imagine for a moment that every single person living in the city of San Jose, plus another 150,000 or so, just up and left. Vanished. Poof. Gone. Leaving their homes, business buildings and factories behind. That is, in effect, what has happened to the city of Detroit, according to 2010 U.S. Census data released this week. The city that boasted 1.8 million residents in 1950, and was the nation's economic engine for most of the 20th century, now is home to 714,000 people, a population loss of some 1.1 million — with a 25% drop in the last decade alone.'
(Martelle 2011)



Figure 11: Still from *Requiem for Detroit*

"so much of it, so many areas that look like a war zone. It would seem as though at some point there was a mass exodus. As if a phone call was made... (shot of broken plastic phone on floor filled with plaster debris, sound of old fashioned phone ringing in background, then changes to dead tone, screams)... a warning was thrown out, and everyone left what they were doing that moment and walked away for good." Voice track and accompanying visuals, above, *Requiem for Detroit* (Temple 2010)

A recurring trend in documentaries, photography, and personal accounts of Detroit is what I refer to as the *Marie Celeste* trope. The haunting image of a dusty table set for dinner to which no-one will return; a fridge full of mould and 80s ketchup bottles; school certificates and family photographs still on the walls of houses long abandoned; the Highland Park Police station with evidence and files strewn all over the floor. There are scenes to be found in Detroit which

suggest that people did indeed just get up one day and walk out, never to return. An alien invasion, a nuclear catastrophe - something terrible and unexplained has happened here, and we, the survivors, are picking through the wreckage. Except, we know very well, it didn't. There was no nuclear holocaust. Aliens (as far as we know) have not landed on the streets of Detroit. People, in general, do not 'just vanish'. To engage with this narrative then, to revel in it, to make up stories about what 'might have' happened here to explain such scenes, is an active choice to pursue a fiction - one more enjoyable, more fulfilling, one ultimately about ourselves, and not the people whose discarded belongings act as prop to such imaginings.

There are many reasons people might choose or be compelled to leave behind treasured possessions, and I don't aim to fully account for the phenomena here. An anecdote from my fieldwork illustrates just one instance. In an interview with some tenants of a large landlord in Woodbridge, a gentrifying, residential area just west of the Cass Corridor, I asked my respondents about their neighbours. They told me about an elderly African American woman who had lived in the apartment downstairs with her two grandchildren, one in his twenties and the other around eight. She had been renting from their landlord for some years; a white man from the affluent eastern suburb of Grosse Pointe, who owns a large amount of the Woodbridge neighbourhood.

"We found out that she passed away because they had a get together after the funeral here, and there was a bunch of dressed up family on the front porch and we were like "wow everybody's dressed up, that's weird". And then another neighbour told us that Miss Jackson died. And then there was a, they had a garage sale to sell a bunch of her stuff, and then they moved out, the remaining family members, the grandson who was an adult who lived with her... and then the place was gutted, and I, we were surprised when they gutted the place, that there was so much stuff, like furniture and stuff left inside, they threw away. And... that didn't seem right, because the family members who had been around, like doing the yard sale and stuff, seemed like they were pretty on top of things, so it seemed weird that it would be one of those "oh, the landlord has to go in and clean up somebody's mess" kind of situations, it didn't, it didn't seem right. And we found out recently that it's because the landlord refused to transfer the lease to the grandson, and gave them two weeks to get out. Yeah. Which is illegal, but either they didn't know that or they just didn't, in their state of grief, have the energy to push back... so they got kicked out in two weeks. The place was gutted, and the price doubled."
(Interview with LD)



Figure 12: Offices of Highland Park police station (Marchand and Meffre)

The visually arresting images of the Highland Park Police Station tell yet another story which, like Miss Jackson's, has rather more to do with structures of power than ghostly disappearances. When the administration of the city of Highland Park was taken over by Wayne County in 2001, the contents of the police station - including case files containing the personal details, social security numbers, names and addresses of thousands of victims of crime, witnesses and suspects - were left in the unguarded building. State and federal law make failure to properly secure confidential information a crime punishable by up to three months in prison, but with no city employees left to be held responsible, this seems to have been deemed irrelevant by the county authorities. Open to vandalism, looting and the possibility of identity theft - putting victims and witnesses in danger of retaliation - the records were unsecured not because those in charge had vanished, but because a decision was made somewhere along the line that these records were not worth the cost of protecting. Is it perhaps not such a stretch to imagine after all then, how in a city with minimal social services and low life expectancy for its 700,000 majority poor, majority African American residents, a fridge full of aging condiments and an apartment full of fading certificates and family photos might well sit untouched after the death, imprisonment, or forcible eviction of its inhabitants?

The prodigious fictionalisation of Detroit, I argue, works to dehumanise, decontextualize, and make into entertainment the struggles of the city's population (Arnold 2015; Herron 2012; Fraser 2017). As Noreen Malone argues in a 2011 piece for *New Republic* magazine, 'we have begun to see Detroit as a still life' (Malone 2011). She goes on;

'Pictures are naturally more memorable than a well written, even handed magazine story about the scope and tragedy of Detroit's economic woes could ever be. But that's precisely the problem. These indelible pictures present an un-nuanced and static vision of Detroit. They might serve to raise awareness of the Rust Belt's blight, but raising awareness is only useful if it provokes a next step, a move toward trying to fix a problem. By presenting Detroit, and other hurting cities like it, as places beyond repair, they in fact quash any such instinct. Looked at as a piece of art, they're arresting, compelling, haunting... but not galvanising. Our brains mentally file these scenes next to Pompeii rather than a thriving metropolis such as Chicago, say, or even Columbus.... ...A museum introduction to the photographer Andrew Moore (Detroit Disassembled) places him grandiosely within a larger tradition, and, like Vergara's proposal, hints that Detroit is now about an idea, not the day to day business of living.' (Malone 2011)

Malone's reference to Pompeii is no exaggeration - allusions to vanished ancient civilisations abound in coverage of Detroit, and the city is frequently compared to Rome burning, the abandoned temples of pre-Colombian societies, or the more contemporary ruins of Chernobyl (see Briscoe 2013; Cornwell 2011; DeVito 2015; Fechter 2015; Woodward 2012). Perhaps the most prominent trope operating pre-2013 is that of the post-apocalyptic. Empty streets, weeds growing through broken buildings, comparisons to a nuclear wasteland, or the ruins of ancient and long-vanished civilisations. Journalists love it, film-makers can't get enough of it: Detroit as a tantalising glimpse into humanity's dystopian future!

'Detroit is a graveyard of the mass production capitalism which once sustained the United States and Europe. It is a city in the process of ceasing to be a city, its services run down, its ambulances limping forlornly forth from ageing hospitals, its police and firemen barely able to cope. Those broken and windowless buildings loom out frighteningly at us, the residents of more fortunate places, from the television screen or the pages of colour supplements. Parts seem as deserted as Chernobyl or as blasted as Stalingrad in the aftermath of battle. If sheep are not yet grazing in the forum, they soon could be.' (The Guardian, Editorial 2013)

'The city, what's left of it, burns night after night. Nature - in the form of pheasants, hawks, foxes, coyotes and wild dogs - had stepped in to fill the vacuum, reclaiming a little more of the landscape each day. The streets were empty and cratered. The skyscrapers were holograms. I stood and admired a cottonwood sapling growing out of the roof of the Lafayette building. This was like living in Pompeii, except the people weren't covered in ash. We were alive.' (LeDuff 2013:175)

Before around 2009 or 2010, 'Detroit' in non-local news usually meant 'the big 3', or the US auto industry in general. An article search from this time will bring up reports from the

business pages on the economic woes of US car manufacturers, speculating on future directions and reviewing new models. But even here, I found apocalyptic imagery. A 2003 article from *Forbes* magazine, reporting on the declining fortunes and poor sales figures for GM, Ford and Chrysler leads with the title 'Apocalypse Now? Detroit can't halt the slide' (Muller 2003). While the article itself is a short, rather dry piece looking at financial projections and the new cars on sale that year, the continued association of Detroit with the apocalyptic (and post-apocalyptic) does its work on the public psyche here as elsewhere. Later on, and perhaps not coincidentally emerging with the dissemination of Marchand and Meffre's photographs, we begin to see florid descriptions of Detroit's post-apocalyptic streets to rival the most creative science fiction. The city is 'disappearing from the face of the earth' (Temple 2010), the 'unfathomable dissolution of a built landscape... like the fallout from an alien invasion' (Austen 2014). Simultaneously empty and populated by glazed eyed 'street zombies' (Temple 2010); buildings loom menacingly at passers-by or are 'laid low like the massacred in a killing field' (Austen 2014), apparently credited with more agency than the imagined walking dead of the human population. Trees grow from the tops of skyscrapers as the city is 'reclaimed by nature' (Temple 2010). 'It's hard not to see this place as an archaeologist might, gazing at the once-great civilization that flourished here. Now it's gone' (Carr 2013).

"When you're riding down a big wide city boulevard and you're the only thing on it", explains local writer Toby Barlow in Vice documentary *Detroit Lives*, "you feel a little like the Omega man. You know, it's like I'm here! you know, this is my city!". This feeling, perhaps, is what lies at the heart of the enduring fascination with the (post) apocalypse; not only a fear of destruction, but a fantasy of adventure and of wish fulfilment - what Claire Curtis calls 'the voyeuristic satisfaction of terrible violence and the Robinson Crusoe excitement of starting over again.' (Curtis 2010:6). The Omega man, the lone (clever, white, male) survivor; to be him means victory, survival against the odds, and requires - as Curtis, discussing the genre of postapocalyptic fiction, goes on to argue, a necessary Other- "the groups of people who do not react so well to the cataclysm. These people, who seem to band up far more easily than our survivors, are bent on continued destruction (despite the total irrationality of this)" (Curtis 2010:7-8). Failure to thrive in this environment then, is indicative of a lack of moral fibre, intelligence, and rationality. The (white) self is centred as inherently more capable, more civilised, ultimately more human. The numerous conversations I had with people in Detroit about the city's post-apocalyptic 'vibe' were invariably initiated by people with homes and families to go back to somewhere else; the disaster that happened here, real rather than imagined this time, was not something they personally survived or suffered through. This

represents then, a colonisation not only of the landscape's meaning, but of somebody else's struggle, in order to achieve the imagined status of resilient, risk-taking pioneer.

Another important element to the post-apocalyptic trope of course, is the monumentalising or memorialising of a city declared finished. Buildings as mausoleums, burned out storefronts 'like funeral pyres left untouched as a monument to the dead' (Binelli 2012:90); crumbling monuments to the failure of capitalism, of Fordism, of unions or black rule depending on your political bent - the overwhelming picture here is one of hubris, decadence and excess punished by assured failure and destruction. "Comparisons to Angkor Wat, Macchu Picchu, Ancient Rome, are inevitable," explains TV chef Anthony Bourdain; "magnificent structures representing the boundless dreams of the dead, left to rot. And yet unlike Angkor, and Leptis Magna, people still live here. We forget that" (Bourdain, *Parts Unknown*, 2013) The "we" who forget here is perhaps not so much a thoughtful reminder as a clear indication of who these images are produced by and for - certainly not the people who are apparently so easily forgotten. This strange disconnect continues in the narrative of hubris and punishment - the 'we' who ignored the warnings and thought ourselves invincible, who wryly look upon the ruined landscape and wax poetic in documentary after documentary - are rarely actually those who have to live in the city. The 'sinners' in this story have of course long died, or moved to suburbs or other cities from which to shake their head sadly - but with some small degree of self-satisfaction - at being able to see through the sham that is consumer capitalism. Visuals of the fates' punishment in this scenario never contain the suffering of this 'we', but instead the proxy of black bodies; interchangeable, un-named, and usually filmed through the window of a moving car.

The very structure of Julien Temple's documentary *Requiem for Detroit?* seems intended to communicate such a warning. The film opens with promotional footage of 1960s city Mayor Jerome Cavanagh speaking on Detroit's "finest hour", projected at night onto today's derelict factories. "Look on my works ye mighty and despair", quotes Temple's narration, as we see a low angled, overwhelmingly grey shot of Michigan Central station. Later on, over images of shining space age fantasy automobiles we hear how "Detroit fell in love with the wealth produced by this single industry, a seemingly inexhaustible golden goose, which determined the Motor City's explosive growth.". "In the 1920s Detroit was fabulously wealthy" local artist Lowell Boileau's voiceover explains, "not only for the auto wealth, but 75 percent of the illegal liquor was coming from Canada through Detroit, so we had it all back then". Black and white images of 1920s decadence - comedically overpacked cars of champagne swilling (white) flappers give way to depression era newsreels and the sounds of cars crashing, interspersed

with contemporary shots of haggard looking (black) people sitting on overgrown streets. The film's closing scene is a Blade Runner-esque continuous shot taken from the People Mover as it passes through downtown. Coloured in otherworldly grey and purple tones, the people-free visuals are accompanied by haunting electronic music and Temple's stagey reading of a translation of tenth century poem 'The Ruin':

"wondrous is this wall-stead. Weird made it. Fate broke it. Battlements broken, giants work shattered. Rooves are in ruin, towers destroyed. Broken the barred gate, frost on the concrete; walls gape, destroyed, torn up, consumed by age. Earth grip holds the proud builders, departed, long lost in the hard grasp of the grave until a hundred generations of people have passed, often this wall outlasting."

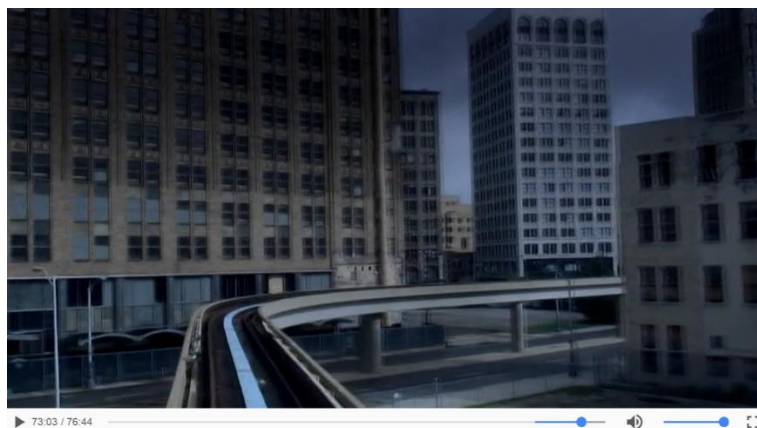
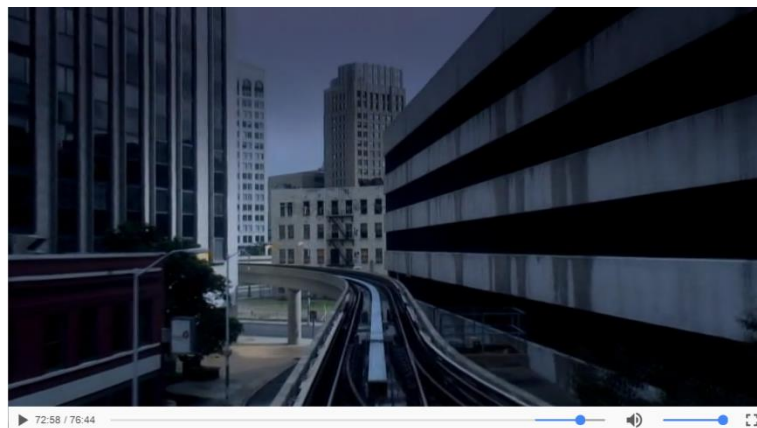


Figure 13: Stills from the final scene, Julien Temple's *Requiem for Detroit* (2010)

'I pulled into the station, needle riding on "E". It was a mistake. In Detroit, if possible, you don't get your gas on the east side, not even at high noon. Because the east side of Motown is Dodge City – semi lawless and crazy. Many times citizens don't bother phoning the cops. And as if to return the favour, many times cops don't bother to come.' (LeDuff 2013:11)

If the post-apocalyptic trope looks toward an imagined future of humanity's destruction, its twin narrative is firmly fixed upon an equally fictionalised American past - the lawless frontier that borrows as much from the Hollywood western as the post-apocalyptic does from science fiction. Detroit as the Wild West, Detroit as outlaw city; empty, dangerous, and ripe for colonisation by those with enough 'frontier spirit' to ignore the warnings of the folks back home. 'The Motor City has become the testing ground for an updated American dream', writes Austen, of the 'new Detroit'; 'privateers finding the raw material for new enterprise in the wreckage of the Rust Belt' (Austen 2014). But this construction - like that of the apocalypse - provides a limited set of roles for the city's residents. Corrupt lawman, bandit, Indian, homesteader; playing cowboys calls for a cast of extras, willing or not. It perhaps didn't help that Detroit's own one-time chief of police Warren Evans famously told media that the city was like "the wild, wild west" (Associated Press 2009; Binelli 2012:82). Evans, previously with the Wayne County Sherriff's department, made the remarks as part of an attention-grabbing pledge to 'tame the streets' of the notoriously violent city. The elderly motorcycle-riding, horse-owning ex-cattle rancher lasted just over a year in the job, before he was asked by Mayor Dave Bing to step down; reportedly at least partly due to the chief's particularly enthusiastic relationship with the media, and his intention to become a reality TV star. But the wild west motif has a much longer history than Evans' own fixation; in 2014 L Brooks Patterson, the County Executive of the adjacent suburb of Oakland gleefully repeated his own suggestion, apparently first put forward in the 1970s, that we: "turn Detroit into an Indian reservation, where we herd all the Indians into the city, build a fence around it, and then throw in the blankets and corn" (Williams 2014).

The crime statistics, while often contested, are not necessarily out of the ballpark - Detroit is a dangerous place to live, particularly for those already vulnerable to violence. Emergency service response times are far longer than national averages; in 2013 the city had only ten working ambulances, and the highest category of medical emergency would expect to wait 20 minutes or more for an EMS response (Turner et al 2017). Many people live in fear of violent crime and act accordingly. But there is more to the wild west trope than a metaphor for violence and self-defence. There is often a distinct element of thrill - of revelling in the perceived chaos, and allusions to a certain kind of rugged masculinity - at least for those with

the social and economic power to turn this situation to their advantage, and the ability to leave if it doesn't work out. In a piece for *The Guardian* about his experience filming *Requiem for Detroit*, director Julien Temple writes that he and his producer:

'drove around recce-ing our film, getting out of the car and photographing extraordinary places to film with mad-dog enthusiasm – everywhere demands to be filmed – but were greeted with appalled concern by Bradley, our friendly manager, on our return to the hotel. "Never get out of the car in that area – people have been car-jacked and shot."' (Temple 2010)

This is a familiar story - a landscape 'asking' to be consumed, a titillating, inadvertent brush with (potential) danger, the authenticity of interaction with local 'experts' and allies. In another framing of the scene, a white man spent an afternoon driving around the city in his rental car taking pictures of other people's houses, not staying anywhere long enough to speak to anyone except the manager at his hotel (The Westin Book Cadillac), then wrote about his feelings for *The Guardian*. As Binelli notes however, it's not just aspiring reality tv stars and British documentary makers who seem to be so enamoured of Detroit as wild west fantasy:

'After I moved back to the city, people I met in dozens of different contexts described Detroit as "the Wild West". Meaning, it's basically lawless. Meaning, land is plentiful and cheap. Meaning, now, as the frontier quite literally returns to the city - trees growing out of the tops of abandoned buildings! Wild pheasants circling the empty lots! - so too, has the metaphorical frontier, along with the notion of "frontier spirit". All possibly offensive notions to the people who'd never left, for reasons of choice or circumstance. But it's undeniable that Detroit feels like an extraordinary place, and at the same time, just as Greenland might be called ground zero of the broader climate crisis, Detroit feels like ground zero for... what, exactly? The end of the American way of life? Or the beginning of something else? Either way, that is why so many divergent interests are converging here right now. Who doesn't want to see the future?' (Binelli 2012:16)

And during my fieldwork, this is the context in which I most often heard the analogy: - you can do anything here, there is freedom if you are brave, resilient, and creative enough to take the risks. 'It's the wild west, you can do what you want', one white residential landlord told me. A black, Detroit born financial advisor used the same language to talk about property speculation, and being able to recognise Detroiters from newcomers:

"You see the frontier, you see the wild west, and you see from a born and raised Detroiter perspective. I can instantly tell who is the native and who is the Wild West frontier. And you see

it everywhere. People are, you know, beginning to be so into what is this exploration of Detroit. I cannot tell you how many times I ride around the west area Downtown, so around the Ambassador Bridge area, and headed back toward downtown. And in the New Center, in the Cass Corridor, in the Midtown area. And you clearly see the people that are speculating. Either they're photographers and they just, you know, oh wow, look at this - but you kinda know the difference between - these are just tourists, versus these, this is pure... the wild west frontier in person." (Interview with DA)

The owner of a pub in a gentrifying historic neighbourhood, who critiqued the newcomers who believe the city to be the wild west, himself went on to talk about 'circling the wagons' as a defensive strategy, and his neighbourhood fighting in the face of a common enemy. He continued;

"we're all kind of together with our backs against the wall, trying to hold off people from robbing our houses and stealing our cars, and you know, holding us up at the gas station. And then there's, you know, the city that doesn't do anything or care about our neighbourhood. And then there's outsiders who wanna talk bad about us and the place we live - and so we kind of all have a common foe" (Interview with DH)

While never overtly racist, and certainly proud of his neighbourhood's 'diversity', his security strategy - described to me in some detail - seemed to revolve almost entirely around identifying suspicious characters by their appearance, speech, or non-participation in the specific (overwhelmingly white) social world of his bar, and calling the police to move them on. In this instance, the frontier metaphor seems to legitimate a kind of pre-emptive neighbourhood defence - the circling wagons imagery creating something heroic from what might otherwise be understood as paranoid and discriminatory. The residential landlord mentioned earlier on the other hand - operating in the same neighbourhood - had no such qualms about appearing to be racist. The owner of the apartment building from which the elderly Miss Jackson was evicted, as discussed above, L told me that he preferred not to rent to blacks, due to their "*tribal outlook*", and large extended families. It was disconcerting, he said, "*when you rent to a grandmother, but there are 15 of them on the porch*".

The idea of 'tribal cultures' of course, could just as easily appeal to frontier metaphors as it could to the idea of Detroit as a non-American, 'third world' nation - another trope that occurs with marked frequency. Still a frontier in a sense, the opposition here is not based on time but on distance and 'standards': America vs the developing world; modern civilization vs a failed state. The comparison is most often employed to highlight below standard living conditions or

municipal failure and abandonment by federal government. “If we saw a nation similarly situated with a piss-poor school system like the Detroit public school system, where crime is running amok,” argues the voiceover on the NBC Dateline Detroit special, quoted at the beginning of this chapter; “if we saw that in another nation we’d be giving them foreign aid” (NBC 2010). Mark Binelli compares the city’s streets to ‘Humvee footage from the early days of the invasion of Baghdad’ (Binelli 2013:96). Charlie LeDuff tells us he’d seen ‘better government buildings in the slums of Tijuana’ than he found in the buildings used by Detroit’s beleaguered fire service, where conditions were ‘worse than the Baghdad fire department, which actually got more than \$150 million from the United States government, while Detroit got zero.’ (LeDuff 2013:194). But amongst the concern over these very real failures, there are also connotations of cultural deficiency which take a distinctly racial tone. Detroit’s reputation for ‘insular, slow moving cultures’ (LeDuff 2013:145), the lazy, unresponsive industrial giant as oppositional to smart, creative, and fast paced New York and Europe. A backward, postcolonial government to be inevitably replaced by a dynamic, young, ‘post racial’ influx. ‘In most parts of town, most of the time,’ writes Ze’ev Chafets, ‘Detroit is as black as Nairobi’ (Chafets 1990:24).

This association of Detroit with foreignness, with backwardness, slowness - and ultimately with blackness, comes out in other ways too, some more subtle than others. L, the landlord concerned about black tenants’ ‘tribal outlook’, was not the only person I spoke to who had a fascination for what others do on their porches. S, a young, white, highly paid tech worker, told me he felt there was something romantic about blue collar work, and its lack of certainty. A 40oz bottle of Colt 45 beer symbolised the antithesis to his boring, bourgeois, and financially secure life - *“it just means chilling on a porch, the simple life”*. During the same conversation, he also talked about the inertia he felt characterised Detroit:

“initially I just liked Detroit because like it was really chill, and... I felt very comfortable, and everyone was really nice, and then after a while it was like... almost feels like too chill, like lots of people are just like doing nothing. And they’re just hanging out. And...”

I: people... like your friends you mean?

S: *no not my friends, more of like, just like, the people that have just like been here and just kind of like... maybe it’s just like the diff, you’re different cultures, you’re not like... educated as much or something, and you’re just like, posted up on the porch sipping a 40.”* (Interview with DC)

Trying to explain the neighbourhood boundaries, he also told me that:

"I used to go for runs, I'd go that way, and you just like hit the ghetto real fast. Um, but even there, people I mean, they're just like sitting on a porch or just like posted up at the liquor store, and they're generally pretty nice still. Some people like wave and say hi, some people are upset that like white boy is running through the neighbourhood" (Interview with DC)

The porch here, is quite clearly associated with blackness, as well as with the idea of 'doing nothing'; simultaneously aspired to and sanctioned. Other such coded references to race abound elsewhere - particularly in descriptions of the city's apparently devastated streetscapes. Describing the border between Detroit and Highland Park, Binelli lists the businesses he passes driving along Woodward Avenue:

'There was occasionally talk of Detroit absorbing Highland Park, but that was just wishful thinking, Detroit at this point having zero interest in adding more crime, blight, and desperately poor people to its own mean buffet of urban pathologies. Today, driving north on Woodward Avenue, you'd never notice having crossed from one city to the other. You pass a combination fish market and takeout restaurant ("U Buy, We Fry"), and the Gold Nugget Pawn Shop, and Mo'Money Tax Returns, and a Babes N Braids, and a place called Cherokee's Hot Spot where you can get your ears or nose pierced or pick up some exotic dancewear ("Plus Sizes Available", notes a sign in the window), alongside numerous other long-shuttered apartment complexes, municipal buildings, and storefronts (including the rubble of a florist).' (Binelli 2012:182-3)

These are clearly functioning businesses, but they are described as if they are in themselves symptoms of urban decay. The tone is lurid, mocking; a clothing store, a fish restaurant, a hairdresser - standard mall fixtures anywhere else - become evidence of obesity, poor taste, and illegitimacy. This is a pattern that appears often - black businesses as *themselves* blight, or bad places, signs of poverty - particularly barbers and beauty parlors, the wrong kinds of restaurants, bars, and financial services used by poor communities. This is not to say there aren't gaps - a bank, a supermarket, a health clinic would undoubtedly improve quality of life in the neighbourhood. But it is not the absence of essential services that are used here as an illustration of blight, but the presence of businesses that are identifiably black, and associated with low income customers. "There are more than 400 liquor stores in Detroit", says Chris Hansen, "but if you want to buy food, good luck. In the entire 140 square miles of the city, there are no Krogers, no Safeways, only eight supermarkets, and they're discount stores. The bad economy certainly hasn't helped Detroit's crime rate, one of the highest in the nation" (NBC 2010). Hansen's words, spoken over a visual montage of liquor and discount store signs and arrest scenes, describe what is a very real problem of food access for much of Detroit. But once again, it is not just the absence of major supermarket chains that is framed as

problematic here, but the presence of businesses seen as unseemly. 'Liquor stores' in Detroit don't just sell alcohol, but basic groceries, milk, bread, and canned food. It is overpriced and largely unhealthy, certainly, but these are shops that in another place might be called 'convenience stores', or 'bodegas'. To have four hundred of them in a city of Detroit's size is singularly unremarkable; this framing then, seems designed to pathologise and to shock.

Charlie LeDuff, describing another neighbourhood, employs a similar narrative strategy to Binelli:

'Walk a mile along Mack Avenue in each direction from Alter Road to Gratiot Avenue. You will count thirty-four churches, a dozen liquor stores, six beauty salons and barber shops, a funeral parlor, a sprawling Chrysler engine and assembly complex working at less than half capacity, and three dollar stores - but no grocery stores. In fact, there are no chain grocery stores in all of Detroit.' (LeDuff 2013:270)

Leaving aside the slight inaccuracy of LeDuff's final statement (there is certainly a shortage of chain grocery stores, but they do exist), we might ask what work this kind of description does to both the landscape and the people associated with it. LeDuff himself provides one answer a little earlier in his book. Describing the 2010 police killing of seven year old Aiyana Jones, he quotes a medical examiner who tells him:

"You might say that the homicide of Aiyana is the natural conclusion to the disease from which she suffered", Schmidt told me. "What disease is that?" I asked. "The psychopathology of growing up in Detroit" he said. "Some people are doomed from birth because their environment is so toxic".' (LeDuff 2013:259)

Shot in the head as she slept on her grandmother's sofa, Aiyana's death attracted notable media attention after it emerged that the SWAT team who carried out the raid also included a television crew filming for reality series *The First 48* (Dolan et al 2010; Horng 2010; Schaefer 2010). Mayor Dave Bing responded by banning police from working with reality crews; shortly after, police chief Warren Evans - the man who called Detroit the 'wild wild west' - resigned from his post after it emerged that he was working on a pitch for his own reality TV series *The Chief* (Foley 2010). The idea that Aiyana's death was somehow inevitable, an outcome of her parents' lifestyles or of the environment in which she lived, rather than a trigger-happy police officer and the prioritising of spectacle over public safety, is given credence by the constant repetition of descriptions such as those above. It is precisely this imagining of Detroit (and black neighbourhoods across the US) as spaces of abandonment, neglect, and constant

hostility, which makes it acceptable to, as Radley Balko argues, 'treat neighbourhoods like battlefields' (Balko 2013).

Moving from toxic environments to the redemptive power of nature, the following chapter describes a narrative that simultaneously follows on from 'The Badlands' and runs parallel to it. Drawing on analysis of reporting on urban farming in Detroit, alongside participant observation and interviews with individuals involved in various greening projects, I will argue that not only do the constructions of emptiness and lack described in this chapter lay the foundations for land grab by any means 'necessary', but many 'green' initiatives aiming to fill this apparent void also rely on their own fantasies of de-civilisation.

Chapter 6 The Prairie

'Now the seeds of a remarkable rebirth are being planted – literally. Across Detroit, land is being turned over to agriculture. Furrows are being tilled, soil fertilised and crops planted and harvested. Like in no other city in the world, urban farming has taken root in Detroit, not just as a hobby or a sideline but as part of a model for a wholesale revitalisation of a major city.'

(Harris 2010)

While the 'Badlands' of the previous chapter represent a distinct and pervasive narrative in discourse around Detroit's decline and apparent 'emptiness', it is certainly not the only one. Coverage of the city's emerging urban agriculture movement has in recent years provided a parallel story; one of a post-urban return to nature represented not by the image of trees growing unbidden through the roofs of abandoned structures, but of the urban farmer and the pioneer, bringing order to that chaos. The relationship between gentrification and those described as 'urban pioneers' has been well discussed in geography and beyond (Carpenter et al 1995; Lees et al 2008; Smith 1996). Here however, I approach the term in a rather more literal sense, to discuss the practical and symbolic role of urban farming and 'green' volunteer projects, and their implications within colonial narratives currently playing out in Detroit.

This chapter draws upon media coverage of Detroit's greening; interviews with newcomers to the city working on urban agriculture based projects and 'green' development; focus groups with residents in areas where farming and greening projects are happening; and participant observation conducted as a volunteer and volunteer co-ordinator for a neighbourhood organisation in the city's far north-west neighbourhood of Brightmoor. It should be noted that perhaps the most significant urban farming effort, in terms of productivity, actual use value and political reach (if not journalistic coverage) is D-Town farm, operated by The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN). Monica White's ethnographic work with D-Town and DBCFSN demonstrates the central role both organisations play in terms of local resistance to government withdrawal and colonial domination, as well as the articulation of a historical and specifically African American tradition of self-sufficiency and urban farming in the city of Detroit (White 2010; 2011). There are also numerous other politically radical, grassroots and community-oriented gardens in the city. My aim here is not to map or investigate urban farming in Detroit, however, but to understand how carefully selected representations of

urban agriculture have come to stand for 'green Detroit' in media discourse, and how this narrative is being reproduced in the city.

Images central to the narrative construction of Detroit as the Badlands - a dehumanising of specific groups of people in their framing as 'blight', and a perverse, parallel anthropomorphising of aspects of the landscape itself - were a frequent trope in discussions with journalists, property developers and residents I encountered in areas undergoing 'green' development as much as those in more traditionally 'inner city' environments in Detroit. The repetition of the 'crack heads and hookers' refrain when talking about the recent history of both Brightmoor and the Cass Corridor, for example, becomes so constant that these words are no longer understood to be attached to individuals, but to a category of mess, of waste to be swept away, eradicated, to 'improve the neighbourhood' either for the benefit of 'respectable' residents, or of potential real estate profit.

On a group tour of the well-tended gardens of the Brightmoor Farmway, organised by right wing policy organisation The Franklin Center, one journalist found it impossible to understand how community gardens and hand-painted murals could remain intact, undefended as they were in such a high crime neighbourhood; no fences or alarms, no razor wire or armed, responsible citizens. *"Don't you find that... people... wander over into the good areas?!"*. The journalists' guide for the afternoon, a community organiser and local resident well-practised in dealing with the press, was ready with her explanation. *"The kids who work in the gardens", she told them, "are the drug dealers kids, and their cousins. They have no interest in messing their work up! Drug dealers in this neighbourhood make less than minimum wage. The real criminal comes in from the suburbs in an SUV and delivers the drugs; the real criminals live in YOUR neighbourhoods"*. After a brief thirty seconds of uncomfortable silence, questions about property values and police response times resumed.

Hard as it appears to be for visitors to the city to shake this idea of people as a contagion, blighted units at risk of despoiling areas of beauty and order; it seems much easier- as we also saw in the previous chapter- to afford the landscape itself agency. One farm volunteer told me;

"these houses, where their windows are just cracked open, they're dark, their doors have been kicked in, and you can see inside and it's just been like- I don't know. Empty houses like that, they just make me so sad. I don't know why, I feel like they're people" (Interview with OT)

And echoing director Julien Temple's sentiments on the pull of the ruinscape, a high-profile property developer explained to me his attraction to the city:

"Detroit just kinda calls to you, and you come here and you're like 'ok yeah, the buildings are burned out, yeah there's high crime, yeah it's a little kooky here but... there's something that kinda anchors people, which is I guess the romance of it all." (Interview with PA)

From lack to growth

Perhaps most striking thing in the US and international media's treatment of Detroit's urban agriculture movement are the consistent allusions to an imagined frontier past, with journalists revelling in the opportunity to play *Little House on the Prairie* with the handful of spokespeople on their often rather repetitive interview circuit. An article for *Bloomberg* in 2013 tells us:

'For Greg Willerer, Detroit's new urban frontier is a lot like the Wild West: Grow enough food to support your family, make do with what you have and rely on your neighbors when you need help.

"For all intents and purposes, there is no government here," said Willerer, 43, checking the greens and other crops he is growing on an acre off Rosa Parks Boulevard, across from an abandoned house with broken windows. "If something were to happen we have to handle that ourselves.' (Bjerga 2013)

Willerer, co-owner and operator of Brother Nature Produce, a commercial urban farm in Corktown, is a fairly regular feature of such articles (Bjerga 2013; Kalish 2011; Lewan 2014; Sundeen 2017). *TIME* magazine featured him as 'the nature guy', in a piece titled 'The Committee to Save Detroit', in their October 2009 Detroit special issue (Barrett 2009). Willerer was joined in this 8-person line-up by, amongst others, Oakland County's L Brooks Patterson, famous in his disdain for the city; Dan Gilbert, Chairman of Quicken Loans; and John George, of Blight Busters. The otherwise all white, all male panel was disrupted only by the addition of two black women; Faye Nelson of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, and Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy.

Within the shoehorned puns and breathy enthusiasm in discussions of 'greening', three distinct narratives emerge. There are the plucky entrepreneurs, like Willerer, who have left

their suburban lives to return to nature and make their living growing salad crops to sell to locavores and high-end restaurants. Then there are the community gardens; non-commercial efforts to bring together neighbours in blighted areas, teaching people about healthy eating, and providing local kids with safe activities to do outside. And there are the large scale, corporate ventures, such as Hantz Woodlands, which I will return to later in this chapter. Mark Covington of the Georgia Street Community Garden on the city's East Side seemed to be the go-to interview for the second narrative around the time I began my research. An *Observer* article from 2010 is perhaps typical in its conjuring of a bucolic, redeemed landscape;

'Mark Covington, 38, is one of those 21st-century pioneers, though he stumbled on his role almost by accident. Finding himself unemployed after losing his job as an environmental engineer and living back with his mother two years ago, he started tidying up an empty lot near his Georgia Street home, planting vegetables and allowing local people to harvest them for free. An orchard of fruit trees followed, as did a community centre – made by converting a pair of empty buildings – which keeps local youths off the streets. The result is a transformation of the area around his childhood home. Local kids come to movie nights held amid the crops. Residents love the free, fresh food in an area where no major supermarkets exist. The Georgia Street Community Garden is never vandalised.' (Harris 2010)

Covington however, stands out as a Detroitier transforming his own neighbourhood; the majority of such projects given space in national and international press coverage are led by transplants to the city, many of whom migrated for this express purpose. The Michigan Urban Farming Initiative (MUFI) is a not-for-profit organisation set up in 2011 by two University of Michigan students in the North End, a central neighbourhood just north of New Center, and adjacent both to the mansions of Boston Edison, and the densely populated city within a city of Hamtramck. Tyson Gersh, the organisation's co-founder has made himself immensely popular with journalists and funders alike, due in no small part to his fluency in planning and regeneration-speak. With mentions in the local and specialist press, as well as bigger titles like *Slate*, *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, *Crain's* and the *FT* (Cassar 2016; Eligon 2014; De la Herronniere 2011; Maclean 2015); and sponsorship from *Target*, *GM* and *Garnier* among others, MUFI represents what has perhaps become the archetypal urban farming project for Detroit's post-2010 media profile: white-led, education-focused, and mobilising the language of green technology and urban regeneration. MUFI's mission statement centres on ideas of education and engagement, providing a service to people, (who we are to presume are currently *uneducated* and *disengaged*), and living near to the farm site as they:

'Seek to engage members of the Michigan community in sustainable agriculture. We believe that challenges unique to the Michigan community (e.g., vacant land, poor diet, nutritional illiteracy, and food insecurity) present a unique opportunity for community-supported agriculture. Using agriculture as a platform to promote education, sustainability, and community—while simultaneously reducing socioeconomic disparity—we hope to empower urban communities.' (MUFI 2016)

The overwhelmingly white organisation's efforts to 'reach' less than enthusiastic African American community members are a central part of their story, demonstrated particularly well in this excerpt from a 2014 *New York Times* article describing Pinky Jones and her brother Olando's journey from sceptics to participants;

...over time, she started realizing something unusual about farm volunteers. They kept coming back. They grew some delicious-smelling basil. And one afternoon, the beds of basil looked especially plentiful, and she had a great chicken pesto recipe but not that much money and nothing to make it with. So, along with her brother, Ms. Jones sat next to the player piano in their home, and they peeked out the front window, watching as the cars of volunteers parked on the street pulled off. When it seemed that all had left, they grabbed a plastic grocery bag, strolled over to the basil beds and started snapping leaves. Then, out of nowhere, a young, peppy blond man came bounding toward them. "Heeey!" he said. It was Tyson Gersh, 25, who founded the farm group with Darin McLeskey, 23, who is no longer with the organization. Ms. Jones said she thought she was caught, that she was going to have to ask him if he accepted a Bridge Card for food stamps. But Mr. Gersh did not reprimand them. He told them they could take what they wanted. He invited them to come look at the cabbage. He said they could return any time they wanted to get vegetables and asked them if they would volunteer some time. They returned regularly to pick vegetables, but passed on the volunteering, until one day when Ms. Jones felt guilty. (Eligon 2014)

While the article gives space to concerns over the uneven racial power dynamic, the overall narrative here is very much one of redemption on the part of traumatised locals who, through outreach and education, eventually come to trust the newcomers. Olando's words in the quote below, (ebonic inflections clearly marked out for the benefit of the reader), give way to an oddly lurid description of his sister's personal life and home:

"When you black and you broke and you poor and you ain't got nothing, you, like, really picky over everything," he said. "It was all white people over there. It was like, 'What the hell are y'all doing?' Seemed like it was going to be some type of takeover."

In many ways, Ms. Jones seemed an unlikely person to be volunteering. Her new home has no electricity or running water because she cannot afford to pay for utilities. She owes hundreds of dollars in property taxes and only recently got a paid apprenticeship as an electrician after quitting her last steady job a couple of years ago over the stress of losing her daughter. The psychological scars still burn. Ms. Jones leaned on a narrow dresser with several empty plastic bottles of Pepsi on it and, taped to the corner of the mirror, a picture of her other daughter, Bella, 10, who lives with a family member. "I ain't had my Pepsi," she said, lighting a Newport. "It's got to be either-or." (Eligon 2014)

Completing the narrative trio of the entrepreneur and the community garden is Hantz Woodlands (formerly Hantz Farms), representing corporate urban agriculture with its large scale, landscape altering proposals. Named for owner John Hantz, financial services tycoon and 20-year Detroit resident; day-to-day running of the operation and media relations falls to Mike Score, company president and agricultural consultant. I first interviewed Score in 2012, when the company was waiting on a land purchase decision from the city council, and again in 2014, as we walked through a house the project was in the process of demolishing. Hantz Farms was a controversial project from the outset, drawing concern from residents and activists over both the sale of large swathes of public land to a single private investor, and the relative ease and low price at which this was achieved when compared to the experiences of individual gardeners and community organisations attempting to do the same (see Gabriel 2012; Safransky 2014; Sands 2012). Coverage of Hantz Farms has been mixed but prolific, with the project garnering at least a mention in any article on urban agriculture in the city (see Austen 2014; Harris 2010; Lewan 2014; Runk 2010; Tortorello 2009; Whitford 2009).

The relationship between the two narratives of the community garden versus 'serious' urban agriculture is particularly clear in Harris' 2010 *Guardian* article, where the author's portrait of Mark Covington stands in marked contrast to that of Mike Score;

'Standing next to a freshly planted bed of onions, potatoes, garlic and collard greens, Covington is a genial soul with gentleness built into a giant physical frame that could play American football. As he walks his neighbourhood, it seems everyone knows his name and calls out hello. He seems unsure of whether or not he is at the forefront of a social revolution, but he does know that he has made a big difference to a part of the city where real improvements have been in short supply. "I just did what seemed like needed to be done," he shrugs.' (Harris 2010)

While our picture of Covington's already established food producing project revolves around images of black naivete, a gentle giant reacting to immediate circumstance, Score's still

unrealised vision is what will *really* save the city, drawing on discourses of land productivity to establish its ultimate superiority:

'Mike Score, president of Hantz Farms, has a vision of something that no other modern city has ever attempted: running full-scale commercial farms. Operating out of a former factory, Hantz Farms – the brainchild of John Hantz, one of the last remaining wealthy white financiers living in the city – is planning a wholesale transformation of the landscape and the creation of a proper agricultural industry. Score sees a future for farming on a large scale, on city land cleared of houses and their residents, with abandoned factories turned into hydroponic operations full of tomatoes and other crops planted all year around in artificial climates. The business could create the jobs, taxes and income that no other industrial sector in the city has provided for years. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape Detroit," says Score. "Small-scale farming cannot create jobs. We believe we can do that. We can make all the difference." (Harris 2010)

This racialisation of reporting on Detroit's urban farming landscape extends further, too. In an archival search for the keywords 'Detroit' and 'Farm' or 'Garden' between 2009 and 2016 in the *New York Times* and *The Guardian*- newspapers which, as I have shown in the previous chapter, display a particular fixation with Detroit- I found thirty articles describing the city's urban agriculture movement in some detail. Twenty of these devoted a majority of space to flagship efforts by white transplants to the city- either Hantz, MUF1, or other, smaller projects. Covington is mentioned in very similar terms to the above in three articles, and five mention the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), operators of what is probably the largest and one of the longest-running urban agriculture projects in Detroit, farming seven acres of land near the Rouge River on the city's west side, D-Town Farm. In three of these five articles, the DBCFSN is brought in to comment on the activity of white-led projects, rather than their own.

Away from the media picture, there are numerous gardens and farms of different forms and scale across the city. Keep Growing Detroit, a community organisation connecting gardeners and food producers across the city, supports around 1500 growing projects with their Garden Resource Program, a seed sharing and training network (KGD 2017). Some of these are community gardens like Covington's, others are attached to churches, soup kitchens or schools, or maintained by individuals on vacant city lots; many are on land not legally owned by those who tend them. D-Town Farm operates on land leased from the city, the result of two

years of negotiations. Understandably, DBCFSN's Executive Director Malik Yakini was one of the more vocal critics of the relative ease of the Hantz purchase.

While socially networked to varying degrees, Detroit's urban farms are for the most part geographically fairly spread out. One exception to this - and an area that has also received considerable media attention, is the far north-west neighbourhood of Brightmoor. Roughly four square miles sandwiched between Eliza Howell Park and the more stable neighbourhoods under the remit of the Grandmont Rosedale Development Corporation (GRDC), Brightmoor's reputation for blight and crime sets it apart as Detroit's own 'Detroit' - the place where the police and city services never come, where criminals rule the streets, and where Detroiters warn each other not to venture. Of course, as with that of the wider city, this framing is built on both reality and legend; Brightmoor, much like other neighbourhoods in the city, bears the scars of the crack epidemic and the War on Drugs, at the same time as it continues the Detroit traditions of neighbourhood organisation and community building through block clubs and churches. It is an area of high vacancy and significant infrastructural disinvestment, known locally in the 1980s and 90s for its concentration of Appalachian whites, a number of whom remain.

The Brightmoor Farmway is an affectionate and initially informal name given to the 15-21 block area around Greyfield and Chalfont streets by members of Neighbours Building Brightmoor (NBB), the community organisation founded in 2009 by residents who had been running a youth gardening project and maintaining their own food-producing gardens in the area. The Farmway, NBB, and specifically one of its founders, Dutch-born Riet Schumack, have been extensively covered by both national and international press (see Capretto 2015; Clarke 2013; Lewis 2013; NPR 2013; Olasky 2013). The story is invariably one of redemption and community building through getting back to the land, and the Farmway's photogenic gardens, pocket parks and murals appeal to both food justice narratives and small government, anti-welfare advocates alike. The story of a group of neighbours joining together to tackle blight, food insecurity and abandonment by city services provides an effective canvas onto which we can project various understandings of freedom, independence and self-determination. It's true that the level of disinvestment and government disinterest has allowed for a certain amount of freedom for those willing to forego certainty of access to water, electricity, and other services in exchange for cheap land and the ability to build and farm relatively undisturbed. However, the neighbourhood's relationship with the city is, of course, rather more complex in practice, involving constant negotiation and communication between the neighbourhood organisation

and various city departments to tackle issues like policing, water services, land purchase and illegal dumping.

I spent six weeks in summer 2014 as a volunteer on the Farmway, conducting participant observation and semi-structured interviews with residents and visitors. I worked with local teenagers taking part in the Youth Garden program - growing and selling produce at a farmers' market; participated in neighbourhood meetings; supervised visiting volunteer groups, and took part in a series of focus groups organised by the University of Michigan. The concentration of urban agriculture in this small part of Brightmoor, as well as the high level of vacancy and consequent growth of vegetation, give much of Brightmoor the appearance of a rural or semi-rural area. As grass covers sidewalks and road surfaces stop being maintained, the streets can often take on the appearance of country roads; a picture only added to by the low-rise, wooden construction of much of the remaining housing stock.



Figure 14: (Above from top) Keeler Street, Brightmoor; and a community wildflower garden at the corner of Chalfont and DaCosta streets, nearby. Both images from Google Street View, 2013.

These visuals, along with Brightmoor's physical distance from downtown and other, better serviced parts of the city (exacerbated by a fairly comprehensive lack of public transport to these areas), allows for understandings of the neighbourhood as somewhere out of place or time. As one volunteer, a young woman from New York City told me:

"I always thought the most interesting thing about Brightmoor is when you turn off that main street, Telegraph, the first thing you pass is that Liquor store. 5 and Telly I think it's called? And that's kind of when you know, you're entering Brightmoor. And the second thing I noticed is that the lane dividers disappear. So when you're driving down the street, first you see lanes, and then they come to a certain point where they actually go away, so you're on a 2 lane street, but there's no lane dividers any more. So I always thought that was interesting to me, just kinda was like... there are so many indicators of how that... of how.... Rugged, and like, wild it was. No lane dividers. Or you drive into some of these streets and you have entire houses obscured by tall grass and trees and wild flowers. Or just the way people survive there, you know they're surviving literally off their gardens. Or they're surviving by doing very crude labour with their hands. So it just felt almost third world, like a second, third world country."

(Interview with AP)

The interviewee equates physical evidence of disinvestment and unevenly allocated city resources (street markings, tree maintenance) with the idea of wilderness, and a process of de-civilization. She also connects the landscape and the people within it in a way that goes beyond the practical, linking the physical shape of one to the inner life of the other. The vacant lots of the neighbourhood were in fact at that time being mowed once a season by the city - not enough, certainly, but not quite the image of utter abandonment and timelessness the visuals described might lead us to expect. Nevertheless, she continues:

"Brightmoor has not been like that for 5 years. Brightmoor has been like that for- just look at how tall the grass is. Brightmoor has been like that for decades. And if some of these people are hardly over 30, this is how they've lived for their whole life. So getting them to change that is not so much about saying you're wrong for thinking this way, it's about saying like, there's a greater way to think, here's a possibility that we can all get behind." (Interview with AP)

"Ultimately blight is an expression of the breakdown in human dignity, and a breakdown in community. Poverty in itself doesn't cause blight, it's when people lose hope, and stop caring", says NBB co-founder Riet Schumack in a segment from Oprah's Super Soul Sunday, aired in 2014 (OWN 2014). The piece, titled *'Revitalizing Detroit: One Garden at a Time'*, features Riet

discussing her family's move to Brightmoor and the impact gardens have had on the neighbourhood, interspersed with shots of Youth Garden participants at work. Filming began in 2014 just after I had left Detroit, and I spoke later with some of those who had been present. The film crew had apparently been unsatisfied with the young people's more nuanced answers to their questions about the neighbourhood and their work in the garden, and had chosen instead to give them pre-written lines to reproduce on cue, a situation which had made all involved very uncomfortable. The story presented in the video revolves around some key tropes that define framings of NBB and the Brightmoor Farmway across media; hope, care, and responsibility:

"We try to instil in the children the fact that this is their garden, that they own it. Owning something is different than working for somebody else. I think it does something to your self-esteem, and it does something to taking responsibility, and seeing that it's worthwhile. They're learning everything about life. They learn about reality, they learn about hard work, patience, waiting for things. Planning your time, showing up, working in teams." (Riet Schumack, OWN 2015)

Drawing on ideas about the relationships between race, social class, personal responsibility and deferred gratification, the piece sets up an opposition between the space of hope and care offered by the Youth Garden, and the implied chaos and hopelessness of the young people's home lives. Around two and a half minutes in, Gwen Shivers, who runs a daycare center in the neighbourhood and is a community organiser in her own right, is featured telling us that:

"When Riet Schumack started gardening around here, the next thing I knew there were gardens all through this community. And we haven't stopped building them! We have a diverse community now, it's no longer one race. And the greatest part about it is that we all work together." (Gwendolyn Shivers, OWN 2015)

As with Mark Covington's words earlier, here we can see African-American speech patterns highlighted in a way that ends up implying a lack of knowledge or leadership ("all I know is", "next thing I know"). As with Covington, Shivers is a central figure in her community. But her wish to give credit to her collaborators, and reluctance to centre herself in the narrative, allows for her words to be used in such a way as to diminish her role, and in this case cast her as recipient rather than originator. The idea of Riet as a catalyst for change, inspiring her neighbours to join her efforts is certainly not untrue - as the full-time co-ordinator of the organisation, a responsibility for much of the momentum and logistics does fall to her. But this

framing also speaks to a larger narrative. If the problem in Brightmoor is not a lack of resources, city services, job opportunities and schools; if the problem is a lack of hope, then the solution must lie in making people *believe* in themselves, rather than in addressing structural inequality. Riet's own position, while focused very much on hope and on self-sufficiency, is rather more nuanced, as I will discuss later. But the dissemination of this very simplified message, and its popularity amongst enthusiastic affluent and right-leaning commentators has significant reach.

Having become the default spokesperson for the organisation and neighbourhood, Riet - a white, educated European in her 50s - personally receives requests for interviews on a regular basis, and sees a clear pattern in what these people are looking to obtain from her:

"I get somebody at least once a week. And they are from all over the world, like I've got a request now from Denmark, I've had people from Japan, England, France, Germany, all over the US. There's a couple of categories. They either want to hear something about the blight, or they want to hear something about how we fight blight by our gardening and placemaking efforts. Or they want to hear something about economic revitalization through urban agriculture. Or they want to know something about community organising, how we set about organising a community, and thereby creating a safer environment." (Interview with Riet Schumack)

Riet's attempts to manage this narrative are relatively successful, but sometimes result in conflict, as demonstrated by the anecdote below:

"Some of the journalists have preconceived ideas, they're, they just want you to quote something that they can use in their newspapers. And so if they just want to come run in and out I always refuse them. I had one TV crew from France, and they were interested in blight, they just wanted to hear about blight. And they weren't even interested in the solutions to blight, they just wanted to hear sob stories about blight, how horrible our lives are... And they had emailed me and I had told them, that's not our story at all, so you're going to have to go somewhere else, because our people have no sob stories about blight, we do something about it. However, if you want to know something about what we do about blight, then you can come and film. And so they emailed back, and they wanted to come in for a 10 minute interview. Like, that's not the way it works. And then somebody else did a tour with them, and took them through the neighbourhood and then dumped them here in front of my house. So suddenly I had these two French film guys' camera in my face. Well, could they talk to somebody in the

neighbourhood, a resident? So I said yes, you can. So I brought them across the street to Ms Patricia. So, they said 'what do you think of Detroit, and this neighbourhood?'. So she said 'oh I love loooove this neighbourhood, la la la!' (laughs). Well, 60 seconds, they shut the camera off, they got back in their taxi and they were gone. Because that's not what they wanted to hear. We laughed so hard." (Interview with Riet Schumack)

An understanding of Detroit as empty, abject and in need of intervention is foundational to narratives of both hope and its lack. A common refrain from developers and other newcomers, particularly when their projects are criticised, is that with Detroit's vast footprint and high vacancy rate, there is enough room for any and all ideas. Mike Score, president of Hantz Woodlands told me:

"there are a lot of opponents that go to meetings and yell about how they don't like our project, and how there are alternatives, but there's a lot of room in Detroit, and other than suggesting the alternatives, they aren't doing anything to implement them." (Interview with Mike Score)

In response to doubts about the social value of his own property renovation in the gentrifying neighbourhood of Woodbridge, a residential developer had a similar answer:

"If you wanna do something different, please, I welcome you! Do something, build something, clean something up- I don't care! Detroit has plenty of room for everybody right now. Yuppies, hipsters, derelict - everything. It's a melting pot of everything, it's a motley assortment of individuals." (Interview with AP)

A white woman in her 30s who moved to the city after college and now shares a large garden plot on the east side with two of her (also white) neighbours told me that she perceived gentrification to be occurring, but she didn't view this as a bad thing:

"My opinion is there's enough space in the city that everyone can find a place to be. You might not be able to live in the exact same place in the Cass Corridor that you used to live before, but it doesn't mean you're not gonna have a fabulous place to live in the city." (Interview with BS)

A white female Woodbridge resident, originally from northern Michigan, was likewise provoked by complaints of gentrification:

"The city is humungous, and the city is empty! Like why are we even talking about who gets to be here and who doesn't? That doesn't even make sense. And like I said, the people who live here I feel like, it's a matter of being open." (Interview with DC)

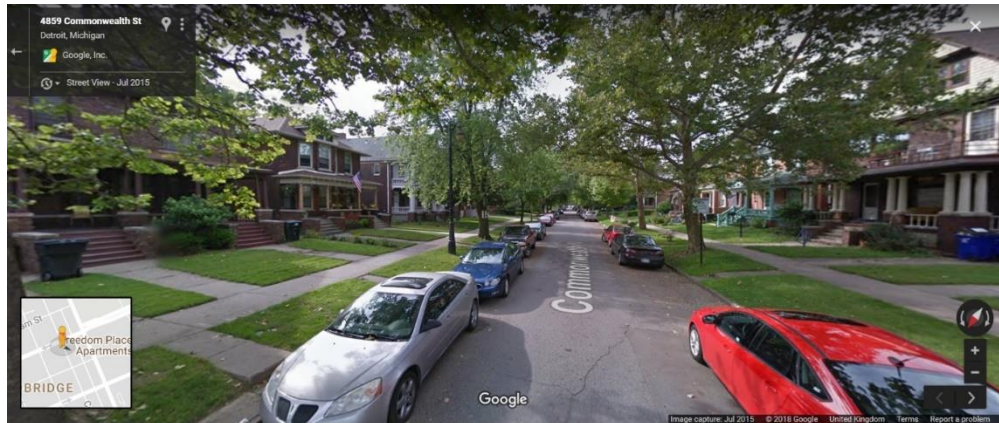
The final comment about openness is key here, as this framing of the city is one not just of limitless space, but also of stagnation and inertia. Not only is the city empty, but it is a welcome canvas for any and all ideas, as any plan or project is better than the nothingness currently understood to exist there.

Property developer Alex Pereira gained attention in 2014 for the house he was renovating in Woodbridge. A particularly enthusiastic article in the *Huffington Post* (Woods 2014) led with the title *The Lorax House In Detroit Speaks To The Trees — And Offers A Message Of Hope*; detailing Pereira's plan to renovate the crumbling century-old brick house bought cheaply at auction, into a five-unit 'Luxury Historical development'. The building now boasts full occupancy, providing tenants with CCTV, secure parking, and energy-efficient technology starting at \$1050 per month for an unfurnished studio apartment - around a 200 to 300% increase on rents residents of the neighbourhood had been paying previously; a demonstration of Smith's 'Rent Gap' in action (Smith 1979). The development's unique selling point, and the reason for the media attention afforded it and Pereira himself, was a specially commissioned Lorax statue in front of the house, complete with a brightly coloured mural that read, in the words of the beloved Dr Seuss character, *"Unless someone like you cares a whole lot, nothing is going to get better, it's not!"*.



Figure 15 (Left): 'The Lorax House', Trumbull Avenue, Woodbridge. Image is taken from developer Alex Pereira's website: http://securerealtyllc.com/current_project/

Figure 16 (Below): A google street view image showing leafy and well-tended Commonwealth Street, one block away. This is the neighbourhood Pereira wants to inspire to 'care' about blight.



The message is intended to inspire Detroit's residents to tackle the city's blight, as Pereira explains in the *Huffington Post* article;

"How much more clear do you need to get? You have to care," he added. "With all the noise that's going on, we get so beaten down by everyday life that we just fall into apathy. We act like blight is normal. It's not normal. Sometimes all it takes is a little paint and an afternoon and you can transform the place." (Woods 2014)

When I interviewed him later that year, Pereira explained his approach with relation to local critics:

"the old enclave is scared of what's happening, they feel like they're losing control of the city, and its changing rapidly, but - change can be good! There's a lot of good stuff that's starting to happen - there's some not so good stuff that's starting to happen, but you know, I think for the most part, a direction is better than no direction, which is where Detroit has been mostly in the past, in my opinion..."

...Some folks are not happy that there is a Dr Seuss character there... But in my opinion it sure beats the collapsing, dilapidated drug house that used to be (laughs). I take it in strides, everyone's a critic. I've engaged with the message boards, but then I realised it doesn't matter, I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do, and if people like it - I think there's more people that like it than don't like it - at the end of the day you know, yes I'm doing it for the community, but I'm also doing it for myself. I may not be an artist with a paintbrush on canvas, but that was still my art project, just like the next one is my art project." (Interview with Alex Pereira)

Talking in 2013-14 about the work of emergency manager Kevyn Orr and new mayor Mike Duggan, two white female transplants shared similar sentiments. *"I think that overall, the intention and direction is forward, as opposed to stagnant",* said H, a resident of the east side.

"I'm not worried, because I feel like at this point we have to do something, a change is in order. And I read here and there about what's going on, and I think that's the right way to go, I mean I'm not opposed to an emergency manager. Because we need somebody objectively coming in and taking a look at the situation. It had to happen, we couldn't- you can't keep doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results, they say that's insanity, and that's the definition of insanity. Well that's what the city's been doing forever, so do something different! It'll be interesting to see what the new mayor, and the emergency manager, and now bankruptcy, I think will leave us no choice but to do something different, and I'm ok with that. They say that the best thing you can do is the right thing, the second best thing you can do is the wrong things, and the worst thing you can do is nothing. So ok, let's do something."

(Interview with CC)

I have found it significant that most of the individuals, (Detroit residents or otherwise, and of various racial backgrounds), who have put forward this argument to me in interviews or casual conversation are not those who might be expected to show frustration at an ineffective city government and willingness to try anything; and they are also not those who are most likely to be negatively affected by movement in one direction or other. Rather, it is the people who see themselves as uniquely qualified to manage and plan, and to cast their own vision for the city, who seem to favour the 'try anything' approach.

Beyond the symbolic violence done by these prevailing narratives of emptiness and stagnation, there are also tangible consequences for the city's residents. In Brightmoor, residents spoke of multiple incidences of property - either housing or land - being purchased by companies and individuals outside of the city, via the online auction; the same method Pereira had used to

buy the Lorax House in Woodbridge. Often only using google street view to check the condition of the property, investors frequently bought lots that were in use either as gardens, housing or community spaces, for what seemed to them, ridiculously low prices. As a reference, the images from street view I have included above were downloaded in 2018, but the photos themselves have not been updated since 2013. Residents and community members, unable to buy the land themselves due to either affordability, limited internet access, familiarity with the auction process or the difficulty of tracing the current absentee landlords, often wouldn't find out about the sale until it was finalised.

Motivations of these investors are mixed. I spoke with one property manager who was in Detroit to check on the condition of her Japanese clients' property investment portfolios. Often houses are bought sight unseen and assumed empty. Others buy properties with the intention of 'doing good' - starting a greening or education project in a blighted neighbourhood, for example -but had not gone to the effort of investigating whether or not a property was already in use in what they understood to be an uninhabited, derelict street. Residents were particularly concerned about these investors buying up contiguous lots, or even whole blocks at a time. In one particularly memorable example of such narratives of emptiness at work, a resident related a story to me of the time he and his wife returned to their carefully tilled and planted wildflower meadow to find that two young men from the suburbs had driven their truck into the middle of the lot and begun to dig. When asked what they were doing, they enthusiastically explained how they'd heard Detroit was full of empty land, and so had decided to come here and start a garden. The residents explained the situation and invited the would-be gardeners to the next neighbourhood meeting to discuss their ideas. "Well that was the last we saw of them", he told me.

Dumping was a recurrent topic of concern in neighbourhood meetings and general conversation in Brightmoor, as suburban contractors habitually used the neighbourhood to illegally dispose of old tyres, vehicles, waste from building sites and landscaping works. One resident set up a website where neighbours could log sightings of vans bringing waste into the neighbourhood, and trace number plates to report companies to the city. On my first day there, as Riet showed me around the neighbourhood, we stopped to take pictures of a burnt-out van to send to a contact she had in a city department. Its interior was destroyed, but a partial logo remained on the paintwork; a company located somewhere out in the suburbs. It was the sixth she had found at that intersection that week, she told me, and the local consensus was that someone was torching vehicles to destroy evidence of some kind. A

community tyre sweep that summer removed several thousand discarded car and truck tyres which had been hidden in the long grass of vacant lots, preventing the city or volunteers from mowing them. NBB had repurposed some of the tyres as planters, just as they had turned a huge pile of discarded woodchips into compost; the majority however, they took themselves to be disposed of properly. The city's blight authority had also demolished multiple derelict structures in the neighbourhood, and hadn't always followed through by removing the debris or filling in basements. Fast-growing summer grasses had quickly covered these piles, making it difficult to see around street corners, and presenting a serious hazard to children playing on these grassy 'hills'. The visuals of piled-up debris only confirmed the neighbourhood's status as dumping ground to the contractors who continued to use it at such, piling their own trash around that left by the city.

Pioneers

In this section I draw on interviews I conducted in the summer of 2014 with participants who had relocated from the Detroit suburbs or further afield, to take up urban agriculture in the city. I argue that this group represents a distinct movement of mostly white, often young people who view themselves as modern day 'pioneers', often drawing on explicit 'old west' imagery to articulate a future city in which humans and 'nature' exist alongside one another in a relationship that directly challenges ideas of the urban and suburban they have themselves been raised with. My participants were mostly living in Brightmoor at the time of these interviews, but while this location represents a significant concentration of these 'pioneers', it is a phenomenon repeated in locations across the city.

While an ongoing theme throughout this thesis, it is here where the departure from Smith's more figurative 'Pioneers' may perhaps be seen most clearly. For while Smith found the urban pioneer in the language of developers and the images employed in advertising geared towards (potential) gentrifiers, here I will show that in contemporary Detroit, such conceptions have now been fully realised by gentrifiers themselves and taken on in a quite literal sense as part of how they understand their own roles within the city. While many academics, following Smith, have also noted the colonial overtones present in instances of gentrification, I argue that in the case of Detroit at least, we rarely go far enough in understanding gentrification as a colonial process. As I show in this chapter and in chapter seven, a significant part of both the pleasure and the moral justification for gentrifiers centres around an element of historical 'dress-up'; imagining oneself playing pioneers, settlers, frontiersmen, and even 'conquistadors'.

In Brightmoor as with other blighted neighbourhoods in the city, residents both new and old at first seemed to me to be particularly concerned with aesthetics. The question of lawn care and municipal mowing came up in community meetings as often as did the issue of illegal dumping. Street lighting and water were mentioned regularly but less so, and schools, policing and other city services, while also constant concerns for people I spoke with, received far less attention in public forums. Some of my recently arrived interviewees found this confusing, and at odds with their own aesthetic and lifestyle values. One woman told me:

"A lot of the women in Brightmoor seem super concerned with mowing lawns - as care. And I'm curious where that - the disconnect between the way I see the world, and the way they see the world...I don't know... I don't really like mown grass lawns everywhere! I like to play in them, I like to lay in them, I think they're good for like playing squash or something. But just have all of that? I think it's terrible. I was just discussing this with somebody, we were trying to figure out why lawns happened. And I think... rich people outside of London, once upon a time, made lawns to hang out on, and then somehow it became a sign of being wealthy"

I: That you can have an area of non-productive growing?

"Right, right! And we don't live in that world in Detroit, like- we're not wealthy British people from several hundred years ago. We're not gonna play squash! And it's just really really wasteful, and we're really obsessive about that- I mean we dumpster dive, [my husband] made a documentary about dumpster diving. So if we don't have to waste things, we're not gonna waste things." (Interview with RB)

In a focus group however, a young, white, recently arrived urban farmer was the first to bring up the question of lawns when prompted to talk about evidence of care in the neighbourhood. Taking a slightly removed, academic position, her performative critique of her neighbours' lawn care practices connected with ideas of both property ownership and community pride in a way that seemed at odds with her own status as a squatter:

"You know I find it interesting how in just a few blocks, how people do their own lawns. One of our neighbours doesn't do anything, doesn't even mow it. Another keeps it immaculate, like a golf course. Our neighbours, they're renters, they don't do ANYTHING to their lawn, and the people on the other side do just enough. And then there's one guy a few blocks over who takes

care of the whole side of the road, and plants flowers, and takes pride in his community!" (TS, in Focus Group)

The broader narrative seemed to be one of an outdated and impractical suburban aesthetic of unproductive, manicured lawns, versus untidy agriculture, out of place in a city neighbourhood. While many older residents remained uninvolved but generally supportive of local greening efforts, some resented certain elements - particularly when it came to their neighbours keeping goats and chickens. I rarely witnessed open conflict on these issues, differences were expressed as in the quote above, in terms of self-talk; *'we don't like waste'*, or *'this is a city neighbourhood, not the backcountry'*. Neighbourhood aesthetics, both actually existing and potential, were understood to reflect the values of the people living there.

Towards the end of the summer I took part in a focus group organised by academics from the University of Michigan. The researchers provided the racially and generationally mixed group with digital cameras and asked us to take pictures of things in the neighbourhood that represented 'care'. Despite their criticism of older residents' apparently shallow understanding of care as garden maintenance, new, younger, white residents had difficulty seeing any evidence of care around them, aside from in urban agriculture or neighbourhood clean-up projects. One participant told me that she'd struggled to find anything to photograph around her own house (an area not covered by the work of NBB), apart from the home renovations being done by her own household. In later conversations, she mentioned neighbours who had given her free electricity when she moved in and had been waiting to be connected, and a man who was rarely home to take care of his garden because he worked two jobs to support his two children alone. This however, was not in itself seen as 'care', but simply evidence of the material difficulties of living in a poor neighbourhood. Another participant found an old sign with the word 'care', partially hidden behind some undergrowth, and captioned his photograph:

"The juxtaposition of the care sign amidst of a lot that has been apparently abandoned calls into question the nature of care as it is concerned with the natural world. Perhaps when it comes to caring for the earth, humans would do better to step back and let nature take her course, thus restoring order to a world that is quite out of balance".

Wild nature is here seen as an ordering force, resetting the chaos and damage wrought by consumer capitalism and American suburban lifestyles. After a particularly heavy rainstorm

caused widespread flooding, road closures and property damage, the same participant took a photo of the waterlogged road near his house, giving it the following caption:

"The flood has historically been associated with rebirth. The great flood in the bible as well as many other indigenous creation myths all make reference to a great deluge that wiped the earth clean to start anew. It seems fitting that we may now start again here in Detroit, as we move toward a new, more harmonious way of living on the land. From a blank slate may we reassess our lives, and strive towards creating our own paradise".

The mobilisation of the blank slate trope here is also a form of self-talk, and is not intended to devalue the city or the participant's neighbours. Passionate about ideas of community building, communal living and food justice, his vision of this idyllic post-deluge world certainly includes his African-American neighbours and older residents of the area. But the connections here with wider neo-colonial narratives invoking terra nullius remain significant, and point to the ease with which people otherwise engaged with ideas of social justice are able to cast themselves as pioneers and reformers in Detroit. After a summer in Brightmoor I finally began to understand the importance of mowing, beyond an apparent attachment to suburban values and the memories of better days. Watching new ailanthus trees and chicory stalks shoot up to shoulder height by July, obscuring drivers' ability to see across a previously clear intersection; seeing quack grass take over whole lots, spreading over sidewalks and forcing pedestrians to walk down the middle of the road; these are not merely superficial concerns. In an unlit street where you can't be sure of access to emergency services, wanting to see who and what is around you is an entirely rational impulse.

The quite literal wild west imagery appearing in the media outputs discussed in chapter five also finds its way into everyday speech. A property developer explains the attraction of the city:

"Let's not kid ourselves, Detroit IS the wild west! So this is a place where - I don't wanna say lawlessness, because that's not an accurate statement, but... Where laws are a guideline, that aren't necessarily enforced - for good or for worse; where there is very little semblance, in the market, of rationality, so... I think, from an investment standpoint, Detroit is definitely the wild wild west. And the urban prairie? Ok, I mean there's a lot of that too, but what do you expect? The city's been demolished for countless decades and continues to be so, you're going to get a little bit of open land." (Interview with AP)

And describing Brightmoor, a recently arrived farm volunteer drew on similar imagery:

"It's just like so quiet. And it's so hot, the sun just like bleaches that little city, that little neighbourhood, and you see the kids and they're just playing by themselves, or just like walking by themselves up and down these huge wide empty streets and just looking at you like why are you here? While the people on their porch are just like watching you walk by, and maybe they say hi, maybe they don't. So it's kind of like you know, any minute there's gonna be a cowboy shoot-out on the street, that's kinda how it felt, it's like wild, but not just wild, like waiting."

(Interview with OT)

Within this imagined wild west landscape, the figure of the pioneer is paramount. Brave, heroic, maverick risk-takers, fundamentally American, and implicitly white; the pioneer pushes the limits of the frontier, civilising, taming, and staking a claim in a disordered landscape in the name of freedom, self-determination, and picturesque domesticity. The term 'urban pioneer' is by no means unique to Detroit, or to images of urban agriculture (Smith 1996), but in the confluence of Detroit's 'prairie' landscape and the existence and possibilities for urban agriculture in the city, the image of the pioneer takes on new significance, with individuals engaging directly with the idea of themselves as twenty-first century incarnations of an imagined frontier spirit. This is exemplified in an ad posted on the city of Portland's Craigslist in November 2013. The text read:

Are you fascinated by Detroit? Are you, like me, a young person (or young person at heart), who does not want to get stuck with some lame position working for table scraps for the rest of your life? Have you, ever played the computer game Oregon Trail as a youngster? (or better yet, as an adult?)

If your answer was YES to any of these questions, send me an email. Tell me about yourself, your current position in life, your passion/s, skill/s, desire/s, and issue/s (there don't have to be =) and how you see yourself living and creating in Detroit. Idealists welcome. I'm in the process of rounding up a good group of fellow Michigan-Trail-ers for the long trek to the promised land. Detroit.

The plan is to round up a good group, (no number in mind yet), buy a property, or two or three, fix em up, farm everything to Eden, and give back to the community (ourselves included). Gentrification not included. What you will need: Your brain. Your body. And most importantly, your Heart. It kinda keeps everything going. Besides that, you will need to have a reserve of funds (or food stamps) to live off of while the housing and farming comes together (plan to have reserves to last you at least 12 months). I am looking towards acquiring a parcel or a few sometime early next year to early 2015, depending upon the number of people interested in

this little project, and the level of energy. You will not need to provide anything monetarily towards this project except for your own food and basic sleeping comfort.

The sky is not the limit. There is no limit. This is your chance to be a part of something great, something amazing, and something with the potential to be a complete failure. If you're not ok with taking risks, putting yourself out there, and living in the most violent large city in the country, take some time to re-evaluate your participation in this project. Detroit will be Portland without large-scale gentrification. It will be revitalization that includes the people who are currently living there, the people worst affected by the arbitrary machinations of a system and way of life that does not care enough for people's well-being. It's time to take back our world for the people. It's time. And the place is Detroit

With all Sincerity, Heart, Aloha, and LOVE -Manu

It is important to recognise that Manu's position, as expressed here, is one ideologically opposed to gentrification; the ad is designed to appeal to people who want to leave Portland *because* the city has become too gentrified. The vision for these 'pioneers' is one positioned as a direct challenge to capitalism and the structures of oppression that accompany it, and many of the people who engage with this discourse are fundamentally invested in their own status as oppositional to mainstream American culture. While Manu's ad above is a particularly direct use of the pioneer imagery, similar sentiments were expressed to me by a number of young, white, recent transplants to the city; one of my participants in Brightmoor had placed an online ad herself looking for people to join her in building an intentional community there. The conviction that one is 'doing good', that a project is ultimately in the best interests of yourself and everyone around you; these too are a central feature of the pioneer narrative.

Safransky (2014) points out the way Manu's post highlights the inherent mobility of the pioneer, in contrast to local residents without the disposable income needed to take such 'risks' as described here. Savings to support yourself for twelve months. Your brain, your (presumably non-disabled) body. The discourse, intended to emphasise risk, hardiness, commitment and responsibility; once again plays as well to a conservative, anti-dependency position as it does to an anti-capitalist one. Carine Martinez-Gouhier, a right-wing blogger who I accompanied on a tour of Brightmoor in 2014 ends her first report with words that wouldn't seem at all out of place in the ad above:

"Detroit is fighting for its life. At the heart of the revival, is something quintessentially American: individuals taking responsibility for their own lives, fighting the wilderness when necessary, convinced that they can make it on their own. " (Martinez-Gouhier 2014)

For the self-identified pioneers at least, material hardship (if temporary) is a key component of the adventure. Buy a cheap house (\$500-\$5000), move in, fix it up yourself. Four couples I met in 2014- educated, white, and with earning power elsewhere - had moved into their homes the previous winter, with no water, no sewage or gas supply. They used wood burning stoves, 'borrowed' electricity, engaged in lengthy battles with city bureaucracy to get the water supply turned on, or bought a water key and did it themselves. Each grew vegetables, joined community associations, and all positioned themselves in some way as educators - of local children, each other, or the community at large. Another resident, a white academic who had been studying Brightmoor told me:

"One of the things that I find so interesting is the hopefulness that people here can bring to what might seem like a lot of drudgery. Like, you're living in a house, you don't have running water, you don't have electricity, you have to fix it yourself, or you're going to fix it yourself because you're not going to hire somebody - that's kind of out of the question for most of the people that come in to that kinda situation." (Interview with JB)

This particular form of drudgery is of course marked out from that engaged in by the city's less mobile residents by the question of choice. To relocate from a place where you have access to housing and employment in order to willingly do battle with a recalcitrant water department is a different matter to being forced to face the same obstacles in your home town. This position of relative choice and mobility also brings with it a base level of emotional energy, physical and mental health, education and literacy that makes it possible to view such challenges as an adventure, and practical skills as something easy to learn, as in the excerpt below, from an interview with a white lawyer in her thirties who was in the midst of renovating a house with her husband:

"The things that we're learning to do - people are like how are you doing this, I'm like, google! (laughs) We wired our house with google, it's amazing. It's really fascinating to me how simple - how houses are built, and like how easy most of these things actually are. And how much people charge to do these things - like to tile your bathroom they'll like charge you ten thousand dollars, and like, I did that myself in a day! And it was really easy, and I spent less than a hundred bucks, and it was kinda fun!" (Interview with RB)

At the time of my fieldwork, keeping livestock was technically prohibited in the city of Detroit. Many agriculturalist newcomers I spoke with either kept, or planned to keep chickens, goats or bees; the animals rounding out the pastoral image and providing a base for income generating projects - goats milk soap, beeswax products. Quietly, and intentionally under the city's radar, many residents had been engaging in animal husbandry for quite some time. Their long-term status was threatened in 2014 however, when Mark Spitznagel, a hedge fund billionaire and hobby farmer from northern Michigan, moved a herd of goats to Brightmoor. While the project had been organised in partnership with a handful of residents, it was Spitznagel's decision to call the *New York Times* which propelled the project into the public sphere and the attention of the authorities. The article, published on June 5th 2014, outlined Spitznagel's project:

“To most of the world, the solution to debt-ridden Detroit is money. But for one hedge fund manager, it's goats. Mark Spitznagel, the founder of the \$6 billion hedge fund Universa Investments, on Thursday brought 20 goats to graze among abandoned homes and general detritus in Brightmoor, one of Detroit's most blighted neighborhoods. Not to be outdone by JPMorgan Chase, the country's biggest bank, which recently pledged to invest \$100 million to help Detroit over the next five years, Mr. Spitznagel says he is contributing directly to the community. “It's an urban farming experiment,” he said of his plan to leave his goats to roam and munch on overgrown grass. “Goats are an effective way to do landscaping,” he added.

The goats, which will number as many as 60 this summer, have come from Mr. Spitznagel's farmstead, Idyll Farms, in Northport, Mich. When Mr. Spitznagel is not busy managing investments for his 15 or so clients, which include institutions and sovereign wealth funds, he tends to a business rearing goats and making cheese. Mr. Spitznagel will enlist the help of the community — paying previously unemployed adults and enlisting the help of local youths to herd the baby goats — and he plans to build portable housing for the goats in addition to pens and electric fencing. At the end of the summer, Mr. Spitznagel said, he will sell the goats to Detroit butchers and give the proceeds back to the community.” (Stevenson 2014)

Journalists from the *New York Times* contacted the Mayor's office for comment, who were then forced to take a public position on the project and, by extension, the practice of keeping goats within city limits. Soon after, animal control officers arrived at the home of some Brightmoor residents who had for a number of years kept their own goats, and gave them two days to get rid of the animals. I interviewed Leonard Pollara, Spitznagel's agricultural consultant and business partner in late summer 2014, after the goats had returned to Idyll's northern Michigan farm. Aware that their project was in contravention of local law, but hoping

that they would gain public support, Pollara explained the decision to publicise the endeavour in such a high-profile fashion:

"There was considerable discussion about what would be the best approach in terms of working to manage the media, because we recognise that it would be virtually impossible to engage in the project over the 100 days that we had targeted for the project period without rising to the point of getting municipal scrutiny about what was going on, even with fewer than 20 animals, that was enough of a seed that we figured it would grow within the community, you couldn't hide it underneath a rock, essentially.

Our hope was that the city, the political machine, would either be willing to offer some type of extension that we would be able to enter into some type of discussion or a negotiation, or something less emphatic than essentially the guillotine dropping on the project.

So while we were having the discussions of how to proceed with that, Mark made the decision to go ahead and engage the press, in hopes that it would be in the best interest of the project and the community if we managed the message - at least the initial message - and that was the New York Times article." (Interview with Leonard Pollara)

Having done some research into Detroit's general demographics, Pollara and Spitznagel had decided the goats could be used to benefit not only the population immediately adjacent to their grazing area but the city as a whole; providing blight clean-up, employment, and culturally appropriate food:

"Detroit has the largest mid-Eastern community in the United States in a focal point, in a group, and goat as a meat, as an animal protein, is a foundation protein in these communities. There are also Caribbean communities, there also Mediterranean communities, for whom goat is a foundation animal protein...

...not only were we cleaning up, not only were we escalating the clean-up by having volunteers participating, not only were we providing salaries or stipends to people, in terms of the herdspeople, so that there was no expense to the community whatsoever. The ultimate, or the final opportunity here was to actually take the animal protein that was created through the process, and make that available through slaughtering and having that sold into the community, and having the proceeds of that sold into the community as well. This was a, a designed in every stage of it to be a fully and completely philanthropic effort, on behalf of the community."

Throughout our interview, Pollara expressed his incredulity that the city would refuse to negotiate with the project, and that they would willingly throw away an opportunity such as that offered them by himself and Spitznagel:

"We offered our services and our expertise to - I know Detroit is big, but it's still a municipality - so we offered our services and our expertise, and our resources to the municipality to help them craft the ordinances, or adjust the ordinances to help make this possible, and we were told in no uncertain terms that they don't need any help from anyone who doesn't live in Detroit. Which is really kind of head in the sand and unfortunate, particularly in this case because we're not trying to do anything extractive. All that we are doing is philanthropic and supportive. It's, I think that - I'm not going to interpret that, but I think what I think about it, I think it's unfortunate. It's an unfortunate mindset in this case, because they've been offered a significant opportunity. They've been offered a very substantial resource, one that they would not necessarily have available to them".

Idyll Farms Detroit is perhaps the epitome of a Detroit pioneer project, albeit a short-lived one. Informed by prevailing discourses of emptiness, and of abject communities waiting to be saved, it was a plan worked out mathematically down to the last detail, apart from actually finding out whether it would be welcomed by the community at large. Indeed, it was difficult to establish with Pollara just who 'the community' was in this instance, and where these goat-eating ethnic cultures were located - certainly not in Brightmoor. People, like the landscape and the goats themselves, were understood as cogs in a larger system, variables to be controlled for. Taking an illegal activity that others had been successfully managing under the radar, Idyll Farms did their best to broadcast their intentions as widely as possible, expecting negotiation rather than criminalisation, their claim to the use of public land articulated through their status as public benefactors. Indeed, so confident were they in the righteousness of their project, that they expected to have input into crafting new laws to replace those they contravened. That the message was 'managed' via the *New York Times* is itself significant; a message quite clearly intended for an elite, national audience rather than Detroiters themselves.

The Detroit pioneer invariably sees themselves as the 'little guy with big dreams' - the plucky risk-taker, out on a limb, following through with a crazy idea that just might work. It is, of course, a position of significant power, requiring economic and social freedom of movement, and an apparently static landscape into which the pioneer may carve a path. It's not about being at home (although it may be about making one), safety, or familiar culture; it does however often come with an implicit assumption of authority. Explaining her decision to move from the suburbs to the city after college, a white urban farmer told me:

"I decided that I would move to the city, because I thought that the city needed people, you know, people that would be supporters of- my family had always been, my parents had always brought us into the city for cultural activities and that sort of thing, so I felt comfortable...it was also the only place where I knew I was gonna be 'from here', you know, I felt like I had ownership. Whereas if I'd gone to California, or Chicago I'd be a transplant. And I preferred the idea of having, you know, owning the city." (Interview with BH)

Like many others, this interviewee measured other newcomers' commitment to Detroit by their willingness to invest financially. Mike Score, president of the Hantz Farms project, expressed irritation at his detractors in these terms:

"They're non-profits and activists, people that are... they've taken an interest in the issues, but a rhetorical interest, not a personal interest, they won't spend any of their money championing their cause, they'll just say that what we're doing is wrong and people should be doing something else. People should be, not 'I am', but they should. And those people annoy me." (Interview with Mike Score)

Resource inequality, in this schema, is explained as a lack of dynamism, commitment, vision, an unwillingness to take risks. The risk-taking entrepreneur, on the other hand, is - like the architects of the Idyll Farms scheme - understood as doing the city a favour by their very presence. As property developer and owner of the Lorax House Alex Pereira told me:

"I'm a market capitalist, I am an entrepreneur, I am here to improve, but I am also here to generate wealth. I'm a for-profit, private enterprise, and I'm taking on the risk that a lot of the folks may not necessarily wanna take, and I have to be compensated for that because otherwise I can't keep doing it." (Interview with Alex Pereira)

For Pereira and others, this exciting new landscape seemed to be a place where every project or thought could reflect their own heroism. Talking about the Shinola-sponsored dog park recently established in the part of the Cass Corridor recently rebranded as 'Midtown', he explained:

"This is one of the biggest reasons why I think the recovery this time is sustainable. It's not just institutionally driven, you've got this grassroots movement, you know, folks that - 'hey, we don't have a dog park, screw it, we're gonna make a dog park! Cause we need a dog park!'. Those types of entrepreneurs that are in the area, it's just, it's so amazing. They're willing to take on the crazy risks without any financial incentives behind it." (Interview with Alex Pereira)

Hantz too, rather than a large-scale land speculator, is framed as a benefactor, keeping land 'viable' by privatising it and planting new trees to replace those already growing there;

"There is this question of what do you do with the larger sections of the city that aren't inhabited. You need some cost-effective way to keep that land viable. And they really appreciate having John as a major investor who is willing to carry that financial weight."

(Interview with Mike Score)

The pioneers' dynamism and self-sufficiency is, importantly, framed in opposition to an inert and dependent home population. The 'prostitutes', 'loiterers', and 'porch sitters' many of my participants frequently referred to constitute, alongside the blighted structures and vacant lots, a landscape of abject stasis. People doing nothing with their time, nothing with their city - unproductive, irresponsible, and waiting for intervention. A circle of unemployed men who sit on the same milk crates on the same corner near the Farmway each morning was not understood as a social institution but an expression of blight and disorder; a sex worker who walks down unlit streets to work each evening is not a hardworking parent, but a series of bad decisions. Describing her understanding of the community in Brightmoor, a journalist who had been volunteering told me:

"You see two Brightmoors, you see this super helpful Brightmoor, and then you see the super despondent Brightmoor, like the prostitutes, or like the loiterers, or the people who are drinking from ten in the morning, just sitting on their porch all day not doing anything. When I volunteered at the soup kitchen, you know, the people who come every single week, and like fill up their bags with free food, and you don't know how in the world they keep it fresh, cause most of them probably don't have refrigerators." (Interview with TN)

Explaining the challenges faced by Neighbours Building Brightmoor, as she saw them, she went on:

"First you have the infrastructure challenges, which are all the empty houses, all the empty lots, all the untended natural resources, you know the places that are overgrown and need to be mowed, right? And then you have the challenges of building a community, which is like a personality challenge, and getting all these different people, and...compelling them to become a part of this bigger community. And that leads into another challenge of the people that are left there. The people who are there are the people who were kind of left behind, and a lot of them have very physical or, mental, or world-view obstacles, that just take time to work through..."

...a world view obstacle- I would say is like, you know... where people don't value responsibility in the same... like, ideas, they might not agree with the same ideas. Responsibility like - you want something to happen, you claim it, you make it happen, we're not gonna do things for you. Or like, your destiny is in your hands - that sort of stuff, like, that just takes conversation after conversation. Some people, you can see are clearly on that bandwagon, some people, for various reasons, aren't. So I think that's a challenge that any organisation that involves people has to deal with, not everyone is gonna see the world in the same way. The loiterers, the men that hang out in the park...

... I think it could be despair, not thinking it's actually possible, I think it could be laziness, not wanting to do the work - being used to just having someone do things for you. The people that come in the soup kitchen, you could see that, they were just kind of used to it. Some of them were. They were picky - like we don't want that, we don't want that, we just want this, this and - you know, you could just tell, they had gotten used to this way of living." (Interview with TN)

Comfortably positioning herself as a community leader or authority figure during a month-long stay in the area, she here takes the stated ethos of NBB - 'we won't do anything *for* you, but we'll do everything *with* you', and removes the emphasis on solidarity, replacing it with an understanding of those who are suffering as fundamentally irresponsible and lazy. In community organiser Riet Schumack's explanation however, the focus shifts:

"Our guiding principle is that it's neighbours helping neighbours. Not outsiders coming in, doing it for us. So, you could be an outsider coming in, but then you have to come in, and be a neighbour..."

Two of our big words are generosity and hospitality. When you can give somebody, or where you can empower somebody to where they have something to share, or they have a place that they can receive people and be proud of it, it changes their lives. And so when you get too much outside money, and outside people coming in, doing all the work for you, then that is in danger, because then it just becomes a service that is provided to you by somebody else, it doesn't change your life, you're just receiving it. And we did not wanna do that." (Interview with Riet Schumack)

While also engaging with narratives of dependency and self-sufficiency, Riet's emphasis on hospitality provides a crucial difference, and is central to the NBB model. I witnessed multiple interactions between Brightmoor residents and the suburban volunteers who had come to help with blight remediation, in which the visitors, who had expected to deliver charity to grateful and helpless poor people, were instead *hosted* by them. This shift in the power dynamic often caught the visitors off-guard; they were quieter, unsure how to respond, and

generally rather more respectful of and deferential towards their hosts - at least while they were there. However, this ability to control the narrative, while powerful, may be limited to immediate interaction; what volunteers took from these experiences back to their own neighbourhoods, it is hard to know.

Towards the end of July 2014, I accompanied Riet on a tour of the neighbourhood with some bloggers on a program run by The Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity, an online news agency dedicated to promoting a right-wing, small government, position⁹. The group were in Detroit for several days and had already met with a number of community organisations and entrepreneurs. We drove around the neighbourhood in their minibus, Riet pointing out various ongoing projects - boarded up and brightly painted structures, wildflower gardens, nature trails, a children's play space, a community stage. They asked questions about house prices and land values, and about the ways in which the city government stood in the way of residents' projects. They were particularly excited about a hand-painted sign that read 'dumpers will be shot', and when we passed a house almost obscured by the trees and vines growing up around it, they piled out of the van to take pictures. Of the six bloggers whose output from this tour I was able to trace subsequently, only one wrote about their experience in Brightmoor - although several others used pictures they had taken on the tour to illustrate posts. Two tweeted portraits of themselves posing with their guns in vacant lots somewhere in the city¹⁰. Mostly they wrote about tech start-ups and entrepreneurship, once-great buildings as symbols of the city's decline, and the need for residents to 'make better choices' at the ballot box and in their daily lives (Caruso 2014; Martinez-Gouhier 2014; 'Rachel' 2014; Ring 2014; Salles 2014). *"Detroiters, in their willingness to help, should be careful not to replicate the government's mistakes"* wrote Carine Martinez-Gouhier, the only blogger who seemed to have taken an interest in Brightmoor. *"Most individuals are capable of taking care of themselves when left free to work and to keep the product of their labor. They—not the government, not other people—are the best judges to make the choices that need to be made in their lives, and they have to be willing to make these choices. Only a limited government and a free market will allow them to fully take responsibility for their own life though."* (Martinez-Gouhier 2014)

This narrative of personal responsibility was echoed in the words of a recently arrived white resident of Woodbridge, a gentrifying neighbourhood on the west side. Working in the arts,

⁹ <https://franklincenterhq.org/>

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/TheBatriarchy/status/492721220677152768>,
<https://twitter.com/JayCaruso/status/490849887127605248>

she had strong feelings - stemming from her own childhood experiences - about the ways that poor Detroiters' lives might be improved:

"If you change the minds of children, then it can change a family. So, even lower socioeconomic statuses, if you break the cycle, and show the children that there is a different way, and you can pursue, and you can be responsible, and disciplined. And delayed gratification...

...[to stop] relying on the system instead of relying on yourself and believing that you have the power within yourself to make changes and to work effectively and to learn whatever you need to learn - whatever that means for you, not from society's standards but your own. That can change a whole family - that changed mine, that was my life." (Interview with CC)

And a white gardener and business advocate from the east side had her own ideas about what might be done about Detroit's 'problem populations':

"...what do you do about the fact that you've got multiple generations of people who have been completely neglected, undereducated, and raised on a system of dependence? And not asked to change that at all. If you're not asked to get rid of your crutches you won't. So how do you deal with people who have never learned how to maintain a house, or haven't learned about how to excel and get through school... how do you help remediate that? And it's generations long now...

...I'm gonna buy a bunch of houses, and give everybody a job - everybody that lives there has to get work at the place - the big place, like Henry Ford - because Henry Ford had plants! He had people move to Dearborn and into Ford homes, you know. And you worked at the Ford plant, and you had a Ford home, and you - you know, it's like that kind of a model you know, where you have some kind of structure - it's like a big 12 step program or something, I don't know." (Interview with BS)

While this Fordist plan is intended to be somewhat tongue-in-cheek, it does a lot to illustrate some of the morality laden assumptions at the heart of dependency discourse, and of affluent, white conceptions of African Americans in Detroit. Here, it is the population that is the problem in itself - that they haven't *learned* how to get through school, or maintain a house, rather than the fact that the school system has been gutted, or that low or non-existent wages might prevent all but the most essential maintenance of century-old properties. Employment in this story is not just a matter of resource allocation, but of *rehabilitation*, with the city's majority population as essentially deficient.

This was particularly stark in many interactions I had around the children involved in the Brightmoor Youth Garden. Growing produce on multiple lots across the Brightmoor Farmway,

the young people, aged 11 to 17, work on a profit share basis to plant, harvest, and sell their crops at a suburban farmers' market. All are from Brightmoor or surrounding neighbourhoods in north west Detroit, and all are African American. As a volunteer, I worked with the Youth Garden participants in the garden and at market and witnessed their interactions with other adult and teenage volunteers. I found myself becoming more and more uncomfortable in group situations with the kids and other adults who weren't from the neighbourhood. One volunteer, offended by what I would view as fairly unremarkable teenage backchat, told me that the neighbourhood kids were "like that because nobody has ever given them boundaries". This seemed a strange conclusion, given that the young people in question had been participating in a highly-structured garden program for several seasons. Surrounded by adult role models and witness to multiple community activities long before she or I had arrived as volunteers, the teenagers' loudness and irreverence was nevertheless put down to their presumed chaotic home lives, and blighted neighbourhood. At the farmers' market in suburban, affluent, and majority white Farmington Hills, many shoppers avoided the Youth Garden stand altogether, and those who did visit were often visibly uncomfortable interacting with the kids. White stallholders were quick to reprimand them when leaflets blew away in a sudden gust of wind, and any positive sentiments were usually directed towards the white adults supervising, in recognition of their 'great work'. A longer-term NBB volunteer and white Detroit resident shared similar concerns with me in an interview:

"All of [the young people] have expressed that it's weird, that they feel weird when they're at market, that they're uncomfortable when they're at market, that they don't like the way that people talk to them when they are at market. I don't like the way people talk to any of the people affiliated with our stand at market, they're all treating us either like we're like... children, which I guess some of us are, or that we're like, I don't know... Criminals being reformed? I hate it when they look at me - I'm standing behind the kids while the kids are making a sale, and somebody will look at me with this look in their eyes like 'good for you, helping these kids!' You know what I mean, and it's like, I wanna tell them like fuck you, that's not what I'm here for! I'm not their like, parole officer or anything, I'm just... the dude that drove them here, like I'm leaving in 5 minutes and they're gonna do it themselves. I feel like everyone at the Farmington market, their eyes gravitate to the white dude at the stand, and then they like silently thank me in their heart of hearts for taking care of these little terrible black children or something, it's the worst feeling." (Interview with AA)

Indeed, the rather missionary idea of reform and rehabilitation seems for many to be entrenched in urban agriculture in the city. When asked whether she knew her neighbours and what they thought of her using vacant lots, one farmer's response was telling:

"we chat with the neighbours, but we haven't actively... whereas Riet is definitely doing community development. That hasn't really been our desire so much, it's been a beautiful space that we're willing to share... we talk to people but we are not... haven't had a mission to develop and outreach to the community. We're pleasant to the kids that come by, and we do our best to do some little mini education and you know, I've given them seeds to take home and plant in their own yard, but we're not, we don't have a community development mission. For me that's probably due to the fact that I have other volunteer stuff I do, like there's only so much time. And if I had decided that, you know, if like food security was.... And sustainability was, if that was my mission, it would be a great place to do it. Because there are definitely people living nearby and you could be setting a great example and bringing em in, and working on having them help in your garden, and then helping them start something in their own backyard, and helping them find a lot to do their own thing, and you know, there's a lot of opportunity for that, it's just not been on my radar because I've been being pulled in other directions." (Interview with BH)

The two options here seem to be not engaging locally, and doing good works elsewhere, or of 'community development', with its attendant hierarchies. In the conversation above, I am trying to find out what her relationship is with the interviewee's immediate neighbours; what she seems to hear is 'what work are you doing to educate and empower the locals?'. She is only able to understand the surrounding community in terms of lack, and doesn't seem to consider that they might have something to offer her, or possess knowledge that she does not. As I will show in the following section, the missionary overtones of some of these interactions find further expression in practices of Christian 'voluntourism' enacted in Brightmoor, as church summer camps send groups to the neighbourhood throughout the summer season.

Missionaries

If the pioneer comes to stake a claim to a place, the missionary arrives to save and domesticate it. In Detroit, these two narratives are deeply intertwined, along with the messy but continuous thread of whiteness. Many who have recently come to make their place in Detroit both speak about their journey in 'pioneer' terms, and consider it their obligation to improve the lives of others in the city. However, in conversations with many of my participants, an assumed power dynamic inevitably emerges, whereby the newcomer understands their natural role to be one of leader, teacher, advocate or organiser. There is of course, a certain logic to this - many of these recent transplants have a lot more formal

education than is the city average; they possess a confidence in their ability to succeed and manage in both bureaucratic settings and unfamiliar environments that reflects years spent in upper middle class educational systems; they have often been able to use their race and/or class privilege to negotiate advantage and 'get things done' in ways that have not been accessible to their neighbours. Understood as resources, these attributes can all be incredibly helpful; however, it is the assumption of leadership and superior knowledge that many find troubling. Talking about the establishment of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, food justice activist Hanifa Adjuman told me:

"...we were concerned about the fact that it was around this time - 2005, 2006, when urban gardening became 'the thing' in Detroit. And the face of urban gardening began to change. And all of a sudden, we had this influx of young white suburbanites moving to the city of Detroit to teach black people how to garden. That was problematic. And it was problematic on two levels. The first level is, there's always been gardening and farming with African Americans in the city of Detroit, Detroit has a long history and legacy of urban gardening. The second thing is, as it relates to our children. Oftentimes or too often, our children see that whenever it's something that's life-giving, life sustaining before them, it has another face.

So if you are well meaning, and your intention is to assist as opposed to dictate, then by all means, there's room for all of us. But when you feel that it's your right to come in and tell us how we should govern our lives, we have a problem. And you're gonna get some push back. There's enough here for all of us, but we have to understand it from that standpoint. Not only is there enough for all of us, but there is enough for all of us to share ideas and to exchange ideas, and we don't always have to agree on one another's ideas, as long as we understand that everybody is valued. We don't all agree on the same ideals in the same family, but understand that we are all valued as equals." (Interview with Hanifa Adjuman)

"To assist as opposed to dictate" seems to be a particular challenge for formally educated white people in a poor, majority black environment. In Brightmoor, I found myself channelled into leadership roles within a week of landing. I supervised kids in the youth garden, I organised groups of church volunteers; my opinion was asked for and valued at community meetings, and many people tried to convince me to stay there, buy a house, and become part of the neighbourhood permanently. It was hard work physically and emotionally, but it was also easy: I felt competent, dynamic, useful. Privilege is incredibly seductive. I hadn't thought I'd arrived as a missionary, but there is no doubt I had much in common with many of the 'missionaries' there - both secular and religious. *"What these people need..."*, I found myself saying at one point. It was this, in part, which prompted the decision to switch my object of

study from urban farming in general to Detroit's visitors and newcomers themselves, whose choices and actions seemed far less often to be the object of scrutiny.

Not all Christians who come to Detroit are missionaries, and not all missionaries are Christians, but there are, of course, deep linkages between the two. I was surprised early on by the number of my informants who, across the board, expressed explicitly religious motivations for their move to, or work in, the city. When I asked Mike Score of Hantz Farms whether he too had a religious motive in Detroit, his answer was surprisingly emphatic, taking on aspects of a Christian testimony, and ending in the present with his coming to work with John Hantz in Detroit:

"Back in 1980 I was going forward in life but I had no interest in god or religion, or... I was really interested in self, in having a good life. And that experience where the god that I'd heard about actually said that if I wanted to have a more meaningful life I was gonna have to follow him instead of follow me... so I had to make a choice. And back then I decided that I was more interested in following god than living for myself. So then I went through this very, long circuitous process of having my life re-shaped. And I met my wife, and we wound up going to Zaire to do work with the church, and we were there for four and a half years, and I went to seminary for a year. And wherever I went, I met with other Christians and studied the bible with them, and talked about how do you do this, how do you live a life that's committed to serving god as opposed to serving yourself, and it's something that you had to learn. I had to learn because I'm inclined to serve myself, but I had to learn to do that less, and to shift more weight over to actually being deliberate about serving others as I serve god, rather than serving myself. So that started back in 1980, and it actually prepared me, what - 30 years later, to do something that's bold and innovative, that's big, and almost celebrity status, but not to be caught up in 'look what I'm doing', or 'how do I make this serve my needs?'. So that for me was the process of getting here, I'm fully committed to doing this so that other people can have a better place to live. And I see that as god answering people's prayers. So if you walk through this neighbourhood and ask them like five years ago, did you believe anybody would be coming in here and removing the blight, they will tell you that they prayed for it but they never fully believed that it would happen. Then all of a sudden, here I am with the willingness to do it, here's John Hantz with the willingness to fund it. If you like to call it coincidence, that's a really big coincidence that all of that would unfold naturally." (Interview with Mike Score)

A Woodbridge resident was keen to explain her own religious practice, but was ambivalent about the idea of Detroit as a 'mission field':

“For me personally, I have a personal relationship with god that I feel like, is really, that's the focal point of my life, that's how I'm driven, that's what I listen to, and that's the model that I go by, for peace, and love and, loving everyone where they are, that we're all loved the same... So I do feel like - I'm sure some people think [Detroit is] a big mission field, but the world's a big mission field.” (Interview with CS)

This interviewee didn't see herself as being called to Detroit, but rather saw Detroit as a place where she could live out her calling:

“I feel like god can use you anywhere. So it's not like I'm called to Detroit, I think god calls us to love, wherever you are or happen to be. That's kinda where I'm coming from I guess. So I see opportunity here, that's another pull to Detroit. I see... because there's so many empty spaces, that's potential. I drive around and think what could be in that space, and I see people in it. And what I see is love, and I see people, and I see people who are not hungry, and who have hope, and optimism, and who are living out passion and finding their creativity and their talent, and where that lies, I think that's what I see in the city.” (Interview with CS)

Some families I spoke with in Brightmoor had moved there from wealthier neighbourhoods in the city, following the principles of Christian Community Development (CCD). Rooted in early 1970s civil rights work and ideas of anti-racist biblical social justice, the CCD philosophy is based on Mississippi social justice activist and preacher John Perkins' 'three r's of community development'; redistribution, relocation, and reconciliation (Perkins 1976)¹¹. In making the choice to 'live among the people' as they believe Jesus did, those who have never been or are no longer trapped by poverty relocate to or remain in poor neighbourhoods as an act of solidarity and bridge building. As the CCDA website puts it,

“...if a person ministering in a poor community has children, one can be sure that person will do whatever possible to ensure that the children of the community get a good education. Relocation transforms “you, them, and theirs” to “we, us, and ours.” Effective ministries plant and build communities of believers that have a personal stake in the development of their neighborhoods.”

Through this act of permanent relocation resources are redistributed, and this is perhaps where the CCD philosophy is at its most radical in comparison to other missionary narratives, which tend to emphasise education and rehabilitation rather than locating justice in the redistribution of resources themselves:

¹¹ See also CCD website at: <https://ccda.org/about/philosophy>

“When God’s people with resources (regardless of their race or culture) commit to living in underserved communitiesworking for justice for the entire community, and utilizing their skills and resources to address the problems of that community alongside their neighbors, then redistribution is being practiced. Redistribution brings the principles of Justice back to the underserved communities. Justice has left communities of color and lower economic status, leaving an unjust criminal court and prison system, unjust hiring practices, unjust housing development and injustice in the educational institutions. Justice has been available only to people with the economic means to acquire just treatment.” (CDDA website)

Reconciliation in this schema has two aspects: evangelism, reconciling people to god; and racial and economic desegregation of churches and neighbourhoods, reconciling people to one another. However, after some considerable time living in the neighbourhood, the practical and neighbourhood element of this reconciliation seemed to be emphasised over the need to evangelise, and ‘bring people into the church’. Participants spoke thoughtfully about the changes in their own approach:

“When I moved here, I thought I had no saviour attitude, I thought I had gotten rid of it. I had one, enormous. And I still struggle with it. But, living here and seeing the resilience and the beauty and the strength, and the wisdom of the people that live here. Seeing that they were not you know, helpless sinners, they were... well, they're all sinners, like I'm a sinner too, but they are people that are fun to be with, and that have strengths that I could not touch. I mean if I had to live like some of these women here live? I would commit suicide. Within a half a year, I could not do that. So they're strong, oh my gosh, and they have a faith - I could not touch on that. And a lot of them are so creative, and you know, they manage so well with the little things that they have, it's amazing to me. And they have hope, they keep trying.” (Interview with AB)

While accepting that their work was somewhat missionary in nature, there was also a rejection of that particular word, for reasons associated with this move away from evangelical Christianity:

“I'm not a missionary. Missionaries.. Well, I am a missionary, but... Because a missionary is somebody who sets out to make Christians out of other people. And [my husband] and I, that's not what we do. We set out to live the life that Jesus lived, which is to serve one another, lay down your life for another, be good to one another.” (Interview with AB)

Another Brightmoor resident, who had similarly relocated from a more stable Detroit neighbourhood, spoke about the personal importance of his own faith, but saw a push for social justice as the organising principle for his work there:

“There’s a faith perspective or component to what I’m doing here. I wouldn’t say its religion or Catholic as such. I see my faith as being both about what I believe and how I celebrate with my faith community, but also a social justice component, and community building component. And I think we both see our work in the gardens here and in the community as a social justice issue. And that’s become even more apparent with the bankruptcy and the water turn off.” (Interview with BL)

But in Brightmoor, as in other neighbourhoods, dumping and the withdrawal of city maintenance make frequent and labour-intensive neighbourhood clean-up projects necessary, bringing, at least in the warmer months, another distinct religious demographic into the neighbourhood in large numbers. Working through NBB, teams of anywhere from eight to several hundred volunteers descend upon the neighbourhood all through the year, and almost weekly throughout the summer. Some are from colleges or youth programs, others are corporate groups; during my stay, however, the overwhelming majority were church based summer camps. The volunteers mowed vacant lots, cleared trash from dump sites, boarded up blighted structures, put up fences, maintained paths and painted murals - each group ‘sponsored’ by a local resident who had come forward at the neighbourhood meeting with a project that needed doing. Taking on tasks which, in another city, might be expected to fall to local government, not only did the work of the volunteers make the neighbourhood more liveable, it served to take some pressure off the workload which otherwise fell to residents. As one community organiser explained;

“People are hardworking and keep their lot clean and try to pick up a little bit around them, but you know it’s just so overwhelming, there’s just so much; and then to give them volunteers for a week and see their entire block cleaned up by the end of the week. It may sound very simple, but it changes their lives, it just... you know, now they have some extra energy to spend on other things. It adds a depth to their lives that they didn’t have before, because before it was just pure survival, and maybe now there’s a little bit of room left for something else.” (Interview with AB)

However, the way that residents and community leaders understand this relationship, and the way it is viewed by the church groups themselves, can often be a source of tension. Overwhelmingly white, usually suburban or rural, and with limited knowledge of Detroit outside of what they might have learned from mainstream and often right-wing news outlets, the teenaged volunteers and their chaperones usually arrived in “the ghetto”, as they understood it, with a mixture of fear, pity, distaste and evangelical zeal. The larger groups would ‘camp’ in a high school a short drive away in the suburbs, to be bused in daily. On full work days they ate a picnic lunch together at the work site; those on half-days returned to the

high schools to be fed. On a day off, one group visited a waterpark, again in the suburbs; another an amusement park. I met one adult chaperone who was interested in seeing something of the city as a tourist; but most church volunteers I spoke with couldn't imagine what Detroit might have to offer them. As a majority of the volunteers were minors, I did not conduct any formal interviews; the data presented in this section comes from my own fieldwork diary, and the participant observation undertaken while volunteering with NBB, facilitating and working alongside the church groups. Along with several other longer-term volunteers, my job was to welcome the groups, liaise between residents and group leaders, distribute tools, and make sure the volunteers were on task, as well as join them in whatever work they were doing on a particular day.

Within the church camps, there was a great deal of variation in terms of both theology and social attitudes; something particularly visible in the degree to which groups would prioritise evangelising versus physical labour. As one of my fellow long-term volunteers put it:

"Some of them are great and wanna work- and sometimes being a church group helps because this is like their earthly mission of god that they're here to do, and so they're really intense about it, and they're like, you know, you say 'go mow that lawn', and they're like 'Jesus wants me to mow the lawn!', and they mow the lawn in like 5 minutes and it's perfect. And in that sense they're sometimes the best groups ever because... they have some other motivation to be here. And then you have the Seeds of Hope group. Who as you have experienced - not just Seeds of Hope but a lot of church groups - who get here and they really... care a little about working, but they mostly care about taking pictures of them working, and then... talking to you about Jesus." (Interview with BG)

*Seeds of Hope*¹², mentioned in the quote above, were probably the most memorable volunteers; a group of over 100 middle and high-schoolers and their adult chaperones who came from a variety of Michigan Evangelical churches to participate in the week-long camp. Mornings were spent, in the words of the organisation's promotional material, becoming '*personally involved in intensive hands-on work projects*', while afternoon activity was located at a nearby public housing complex, organising '*Backyard Bible Clubs, ministering to over 300 plus children in the inner city neighborhoods*'. "Inner city" is a significant choice of words here, Brightmoor and its surrounding neighbourhoods being located very much on the edge of the city of Detroit. It can perhaps be assumed that rather than geography, this phrase is intended to communicate poverty and blackness.

¹² Name of organisation has been changed to preserve anonymity

Scheduled to work from 9am until 11am each morning (but often starting rather later), the volunteers were split into teams of ten youth each with a college aged mentor, and adult chaperone. Dropped off by bus each morning at a Methodist church in Brightmoor, each group were to walk the two to six blocks to their worksites, spread throughout the neighbourhood. From the outset, it was clear that for this group, 'sharing their faith' took ultimate priority over all other activities, and had been a key part of their preparation for the trip. I witnessed multiple conversations between the young volunteers and their neighbourhood peers, all sounding very similar. On one occasion, towards the end of the week, I was approached by one of the older kids with the same script. Nervously, she asked whether I believed in god, before continuing with the by now familiar spiel: *"You know, people say there's no manual for life, but there is, it's called the bible"*. On two occasions, people from the neighbourhood - one man in his early twenties, and another, older man, had approached the group I was working with to ask what we were doing, and whether they could help out. The younger man was welcomed and given a shovel, but was able to dig turf away from an overgrown sidewalk for about ten minutes before he was approached by a chaperone and two of the older youth volunteers who wanted to sit down with him and *"talk about Jesus"*. The second, older man had first approached me, but as I began to answer his questions about the neighbourhood association we were interrupted by one of the male group leaders, hustling him over to a group of adults who proceeded to surround him and pray. On both occasions the bewildered residents - Christians already - went along with what was happening to them and joined in the prayer, but quickly disappeared afterwards.

Indeed, such was the level to which work was deprioritised, that I spent most of the two-hour morning sessions checking that kids who had been assigned to particular tasks were still working on them, and finding tools which had been misplaced. Most of the equipment used by volunteers comes from a storage container owned by the neighbourhood association and must be counted out and back in each day. Many of the young people soon discovered that their shoes were unsuitable for the yard work they were doing, leading to several minor injuries. On a twenty-minute walk along one of the neighbourhood's woodchipped woodland trails, one group's adult chaperone was suddenly nowhere to be seen, having stopped walking because her feet hurt too much to continue. On discussion with other supervising volunteers later, I found that there had been multiple angry complaints from the adults about the two to six block walk from the church car park to the work sites and back, purportedly due to the perceived danger of the neighbourhood. Pickups were subsequently arranged from the work sites themselves, taking extra time out of the work session to allow for the large buses to make their way around the neighbourhood.

Whether it was laziness or fear which caused the group to avoid walking around Brightmoor, hyper vigilance and suspicion certainly dominated the conversation. Kids spoke to me and one another about which houses they thought might be 'drug houses', and whether they would call the police if and when they saw a drug deal take place. One adult I worked alongside was particularly concerned about security, approaching me twice in one session with what she believed to be important observations about passers-by who might be "*up to something*". The first, a white man who had driven his pickup truck past several times before walking along the street to the home of our sponsor; and the second, a young black man who walked past us with a ten-year-old boy skipping along behind him. Seeing danger and menace everywhere she looked, the neighbourhood itself was evidence enough to turn what otherwise might have been read as a lost contractor and a neighbour out for a stroll, into a drug dealer and a gang member casing for a robbery.

The whole effort was organised by a former pastor and his wife, who had lived in Brightmoor some decades ago before leaving for the suburbs. While most of the work was supposed to be carried out by the youth alongside their mentors and their chaperones, there were also a number of older white men in supervisory roles, who spent the majority of the week driving between sites in pickup trucks with a photographer, occasionally joining in with some work. In terms of getting tasks finished on schedule, these were perhaps the biggest obstruction. Photo opportunities, prayer circles, and the arrival of power tools frequently disrupted the work session. At one site, where volunteers had been tasked with clearing debris and weeds from an obstructed sidewalk, two of these supervisors arrived mid-morning with a chainsaw. Uninterested in the fact that, unrequested by residents, this was in fact out of their remit, they proceeded to fell a large tree, part of which landed on a power line, creating further work to make the corner safe again. Bored with their less impressive tasks, the teenaged boys of the group abandoned their trowels and shears in the long grass, and gathered around the supervisors, eager to join in. Repeated redirection from myself and other long-term volunteers limited damage somewhat, but while some of the younger campers were willing to take direction, the supervisors would defer only to the older white woman who had been their main neighbourhood contact. After the third tree was cut down unnecessarily that morning I resorted to hiding the chainsaw until one of my colleagues could drive by and remove it to a safer location.

A group of 150 volunteers certainly enable NBB to get a volume of work done that would be impossible without the input of such labour. But managing the logistics and adverse effects, as well as ensuring that the group enjoy themselves enough to repeat the trip the following year,

takes its own volunteer labour force. Following our week with *Seeds of Hope*, one of my fellow long-term volunteers expressed doubts about the arrangement:

“At the end of the day, I think, it helps, but it stresses us out a lot more than it helps us, and it deters people, neighbours, who would usually come up - especially when we're doing a big project, neighbours always come out and say what are you doing? The matching t-shirts, and the Jesusey vibe... they can spot them a mile off and stay away. In fact I know that's the case because I'm driving around all day dropping off tools, and there will be pockets of neighbourhood people that never overlap where the pockets of volunteers are... for instance, there were way more people than have ever been at St Christine's headquarters, across the street from the soup kitchen, just sitting on the lawn, than there ever are, and I'm sure they're the same people that usually hang out a block down from where the volunteers were, on DaCosta. It's the same street, a block away. I'm sure they would be out there where the volunteers were, but they... they just don't wanna deal with it. So in that sense, that sucks.”

(Interview with GB)

Temporarily displacing people from their usual neighbourhood hangouts, and creating more work for the volunteers and residents who tidy up after them, the negative impacts of these evangelical summer camps may ultimately lie more in the realm of irritation and inconvenience than lasting damage. But with regards to the particular brand of evangelism practiced here, it is important to understand the religious context of Brightmoor itself. A neighbourhood of roughly 13,000 individuals, the area has around 50 churches (Flintoff et al 2012: 38), from storefront establishments to large commuter churches, and including the areas immediately surrounding its borders, is ministered to by representatives of Catholic, Methodist, Baptist and multiple Charismatic faith positions. Indeed, a frequent and rueful observation by visitors to the area is that Fenkell Avenue, a main thoroughfare adjacent to the Brightmoor Farmway, seems to consist mainly of “*churches, liquor stores, and biker bars*”. The United Methodist Church, whose community hall and large parking lot is used as a base for *Seeds of Hope* and other volunteer groups, is a key neighbourhood institution. The church has its own store of mowers and other garden equipment that residents and groups can borrow, and operates a well-organised free-store, where local volunteers sort and display donated clothes and homewares for their neighbours to take as needed. There is a large hall in the basement with children’s art facilities, a kitchen and meeting space, and the church operates very much as a community centre, with the demographic -as far as I observed - fairly representative of the surrounding neighbourhood. Local parents, otherwise worried about their kids playing unattended in the street, were happy for them to walk down to the church

together, as they knew there were always familiar adult faces there to watch them, or draft them into some kind of activity.

Church is important to many people in Brightmoor; even those who don't regularly attend services frequently talked about their faith as a basis for hope and persistence, and their survival of the historical and ongoing deprivations of their neighbourhood. Despite its missionary history, the Christian church has also been an important institution for black liberation and hope, and a location for powerful and ongoing community organising (Dillard 2007; Nembhard 2014; Perkins 1976). The people of Brightmoor do not need to be brought to the church; the church is very much already in Brightmoor. But if it is not religion itself which is being imposed here, then what is it? The wilful blindness to established church and community in favour of a pre-determined narrative that pits the hopeless masses against the shining light of Christian believers; this is not just a misunderstanding on the part of the missionary volunteers, it is a fundamental part of their pleasure and motivation. Perhaps this is not a theological issue at all then, but one of social power and a deep investment in whiteness; like the pioneer, the central conceit of the missionary narrative is that of the self as heroic protagonist.

Indeed, this dynamic seemed equally evident with corporate volunteers as with evangelical groups; the neighbourhood as being in a constant state of receptiveness, participants as 'doing good' just by showing up, and the day (or week) heavily managed in order to create a rewarding experience for the volunteers. Larger scale projects of both religious and secular nature were often accompanied by pep rally style after-parties where volunteers congratulated themselves on their good work, and residents were invited to come and performatively express their thanks in public. And while for its faults this was generally understood as a necessary part of getting the labour needed to tackle the huge scale of neighbourhood maintenance required, in some cases this exchange did not pay off. After a particularly bad experience, one resident told me:

"Corporate volunteers are the worst. They are the worst possible volunteers. Because they're getting paid to be there, so they don't have to do any work; they don't want to be there, because it's required from the company, the company doesn't care if they work, because the company just needs it on their record that they had a service day. So, they showed up two hours late, they did no work for two hours, then they took a two-hour lunchbreak and then they were done. So basically, they just wasted all our time and resources, and pissed off a neighbour who they were working with. He was just like 'if this is what volunteers are like, I don't want it.'"
(Interview with AA)

Earlier in the year, at a 250-volunteer event with employees from a collection of advertising agencies had been more productive. At the end of the day however, when residents went to view the murals painted on a row of newly boarded up houses, they discovered that each panel had been decorated with the volunteers' corporate logo.

In a series of tweets, and then in his 2012 essay of the same name, Teju Cole identified what he called 'The White Saviour Industrial Complex'. Responding to the viral Kony 2012 video, in which photogenic-white-guy Jason Russell implores viewers to lobby celebrities and policy-makers and 'raise awareness' of Ugandan guerrilla leader Joseph Kony, Cole links this media event with practices of white American voluntourism in Africa, arguing that:

"...Africa has provided a space onto which white egos can conveniently be projected. It is a liberated space in which the usual rules do not apply: a nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike savior or, at the very least, have his or her emotional needs satisfied. Many have done it under the banner of "making a difference." (Cole 2012)

Not questioning Kony's status as mass-murderer, but rather analysing the singling out of this issue as the evil of all evils, Cole uses the example of the Iraq invasion to ask why it is that the horror expressed in viral campaigns such as Kony 2012 can have such an impact on the American public in ways that the violence committed by their own troops do not. The idea that the saviour's need to "make a difference" negates all other factors - structural violence and colonial legacy, for example; - can be as easily applied to the international 'voluntourism' industry at large, as, I would argue, to domestic voluntourism in Detroit. Cole's original series of tweets, reproduced in the article, sums up these transferable aspects of his framework best:

"1- From Sachs to Kristof to Invisible Children to TED, the fastest growth industry in the US is the White Savior Industrial Complex.

2- The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.

3- The banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm.

4- This world exists simply to satisfy the needs—including, importantly, the sentimental needs—of white people and Oprah.

5- The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.

6- Feverish worry over that awful African warlord. But close to 1.5 million Iraqis died from an American war of choice. Worry about that.

7- I deeply respect American sentimentality, the way one respects a wounded hippo. You must keep an eye on it, for you know it is deadly.” (Cole 2012)

Having dismissed the idea of the volunteer/neighbourhood dynamic at play in Brightmoor as a purely theological issue, it may nevertheless prove valuable to focus on some of the Biblical frameworks which continue to inform and shape mainstream American understandings of wealth, morality, and work. As Weber famously put forward, it was the Protestant work ethic - the belief that hard work, self-discipline and frugal living were virtues in themselves and thus reflected a person's godliness - which provided the conditions for the development of liberal capitalism in Europe and the United States (Weber 1971). Capitalism continues to make sense to many as the obvious and only viable economic system in part because of the deeply held beliefs and assumptions which have entered US culture via Protestant theology.

The American Religious Right, an internally heterogeneous group of churches, political and civic organisations and individuals, have in the past three decades, Hackworth argues, shared a focus on reducing welfare, taxes and government regulation, and an emphasis on markets and property (Hackworth 2012:15). Even outside of the growing evangelical conservative movement, the logics of neoliberal capitalism and protestant morality seem to converge in the US mass consciousness in ways that draw a clear line between 'hard-working Americans' and the recipients of welfare and charity. Whether they pay tax or not, the affluent and those who spiritually and politically align themselves with them, are capable, shrewd, hard-working and ultimately deserving of their unequal share of the country's wealth. The 'unpaid' labour they perform in giving service to the poor is credited as work, and their influence or mere proximity is presumed to have a reforming effect upon their lessers. Conversely, those who find themselves on the sharp end of late capitalism are not just resource-poor, but morally and spiritually deficient. Their predicament is the result of 'bad choices', a loss of hope, or the 'cycle of poverty'; the intensive labour they must perform in order to access government or charity assistance is understood as penance, rather than work. This framework is efficiently described in the press release for Marvin Olasky's 1994 book *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, which argued that state welfare had failed America;

'Can a man be content with a piece of bread and some change tossed his way from a passerby? Today's modern welfare state expects he can. Those who control the money in our society think that giving a dollar at the train station and then appropriating a billion dollars for federal housing can cure the ails of the homeless and the poor. But the crisis of the modern welfare

state is more than a crisis of government. Private charities that dispense aid indiscriminately while ignoring the moral and spiritual needs of the poor are also to blame. Like animals in the zoo at feeding time, the needy are given a plate of food but rarely receive the love and time that only a person can give. Poverty fighters 100 years ago were more compassionate--in the literal meaning of "suffering with"--than many of us are now. They opened their own homes to deserted women and children. They offered employment to nomadic men who had abandoned hope and human contact. Most significantly, they made moral demands on recipients of aid. They saw family, work, freedom, and faith as central to our being, not as life-style options. No one was allowed to eat and run. Some kind of honest labor was required of those who needed food or a place to sleep in return. Wood yards next to homeless shelters were as common in the 1890's as liquor stores are in the 1990's. When an able bodied woman sought relief, she was given a seat in the "sewing room" and asked to work on garments given to the helpless poor. To begin where poverty fighters a century ago began, Marvin Olasky emphasizes seven ideas that recent welfare practice has put aside: affiliation, bonding, categorization, discernment, employment, freedom, and most importantly, belief in God. In the end, not much will be accomplished without a spiritual revival that transforms the everyday advice we give and receive, and the way we lead our lives. It's time we realized that there is only so much that public policy can do. That only a richness of spirit can battle a poverty of soul.' (Olasky 1994)

Editor-in-chief of the well-established Christian publication *World Magazine*, and a former advisor to senator and then president George W Bush (Hackworth 2012:21), Olasky's book was a major influence on the Bush administration's so-called 'compassionate conservatism'. Casting conservatives and their 19th century forbears as the truly compassionate, Olasky argues that the spiritual and moral neglect enacted upon the poor by state-based welfare should be replaced by a privatised and church-based system of social service provision, able to supply the 'love' and individual connection the state cannot. Employment, rather than an exploitative relation whereby the capitalist extracts profit from the employee's labour, here becomes a gift to be bestowed upon the deserving. Olasky's emphasis on reform and re-education works from an assumption that the poor have by their nature sinned, evident presumably in their 'poverty of soul'.

Analysing decades worth of articles in evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, Hackworth finds that recipients of state welfare are frequently described in terms which position them as children, while the state becomes a sometimes well-meaning but ultimately injudicious parent, with evangelicals as the responsible adults charged with intervening to 'break the cycle of dependency' (Hackworth 2012:59). This framing was a recurrent one in conversations I had with temporary volunteers and permanent transplants to Detroit, and as I have already shown,

remains dominant in media discourse too. This, and Olasky's approach, perhaps explains *Seeds of Hope's* attitudes to their work in Brightmoor; practical support deprioritised because practical and economic issues are understood as only symptoms of a deeper, spiritual lack - one that can only be cured through prayer and becoming saved. If the 'poor unfortunates' are poor and unfortunate because of their godlessness and their child-like attitudes, then making sidewalks passable can never be as important as a conversation about Jesus and personal responsibility. Using religious housing provider and college resume favourite *Habitat for Humanity* as an example, Hackworth also shows the moral weight that a religious imperative can provide to political positions which might otherwise be seen as cruel and punitive:

'Habitat (for humanity) offers some a politically feasible way to criticize the welfare state and its recipients without being mean spirited. Its religious roots provide a sort of theological cover for ideas that sound a great deal more callous when spoken in secular terms. "Work harder and you will pull yourself out of poverty" sounds considerably more compassionate when cast under the rubric of quasi-Calvinistic Jesus economics than when inspired by quasi-individualistic Milton Friedman economics.' (Hackworth 2012:84-85)

There is of course, some excellent work we might turn to for a deeper understanding of the roles of faith-based organisations and NGOs within a wider landscape of neoliberalisation (Hackworth and Akers 2010; Cloke and Beaumont 2012; Cloke et al 2010). Arguing against understandings of FBOs as simply 'foot soldiers of neoliberalism', Cloke and others (Cloke and May 2010; Cloke et al 2012; Williams 2015) argue for a more nuanced view of their activities. Developing the concept of a 'postsecular rapprochement', this body of work provides compelling evidence for the ways in which religious and non-religious institutions and actors can often in practice be seen working together to both provide frontline services *and* carve out space for the enactment of alternatives to an anti-welfarist neoliberal agenda. This is certainly something I witnessed in Detroit, where several key locations for both the care of local vulnerable populations, and community/anti-gentrification organising were to be found in churches (and in one case, a Capuchin monastery). But while these debates provided useful background for thinking through my research, their focus on FBOs in terms of their role in frontline service provision is quite different to my own. The FBOs studied by Cloke, May and others in the UK are very much part of the wider landscape of social care and welfare provision. These kinds of organisations of course exist in Detroit too, are often faith based and employ volunteer labour in much the same way. But while there is some institutional crossover with my own research locations- for instance, Brightmoor's local Christian soup kitchen was often used as a venue for community organising and the staging of volunteers for neighbourhood projects- the organisations I am focusing on here are quite different. In the

case of groups like Seeds of Hope, rather than a religious organisation responding to local need, we see what are essentially summer camps set up to provide 'experiences' to their volunteers; the neighbourhood itself simply providing an appropriate backdrop. While the labour they supply is often successfully martialled by other neighbourhood organisations to get things done, the groups themselves do not play an independent role in the social welfare landscape.

It is extremely difficult to talk about power and race in Detroit without resorting to stark and over-simplified frameworks of white versus black, poor versus affluent, or established residents versus recent arrivals. But not only is there great breadth of political opinion and social attitude across all groups in the city, class dynamics complicate any attempt to tell a simple story. This is particularly evident in Brightmoor, where the neighbourhood's status as historically white and Appalachian is used both by middle class white suburbanites to claim authority over a place where they no longer reside, and by middle class black Detroiters in adjacent neighbourhoods to define themselves in opposition to. I have attempted here not to summarise a 'white position' or a 'black position' in Detroit, but rather to delineate some of the structures of symbolic power which support and perpetuate what I argue is a growing movement to 're-colonise' the space of the city. While they may be engaged by people from multiple racial and class positions, these narratives are themselves deeply racialized and classed.

In some places however, these distinctions do present themselves with alarming clarity. A series of focus groups I participated in alongside eight residents of Brightmoor and its surrounding areas seemed at certain points to resemble two separate conversations happening simultaneously. On our first meeting, with most participants arriving as strangers, people appeared to arrange themselves around the table into a black side and a white side. Assembled to discuss a photovoice project in which we were asked to take pictures showing evidence of 'care' in the neighbourhood, the older, black women present were more likely to talk about the things they wanted to see changed, while the non-black and on average, younger side of the table were keener to talk about the good things that were already happening. This never manifested in any kind of disagreement or conflict, and all participants talked about both positives and negatives. Black women spoke much more about danger and fear, about people who have been murdered, and what might happen when taking pictures in the neighbourhood. Many of the white participants (including myself) were keen to downplay the dangers of the neighbourhood and talk about how great it is. I would argue that this in some ways reflects the different audiences they are speaking to, even while they appeared to be speaking just to one another. For young white newcomers, the ongoing conversation is with

other affluent, white, suburbanites who have told them how dangerous this foreign place is. This downplaying of danger is intended in part as a response to racism, and a counter to the assumptions participants had grown up around; an attempt to change dominant narratives about Detroit. However in this context, this also takes the form of talking over the older black women's actual experiences and legitimate fears, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Rainbow- *I'd like some benches by the river- there's nothing opposite us, I'd like to return it to native Michigan plants. There's fields of wild raspberries and strawberries out there, we've been making jam - but people don't go there*

Facilitator- *Why do you think people don't go out there?*

Emily- *because people don't go out there, we watch it, there's nobody there!*

Facilitator- *No, why do you think it is*

Rainbow- *oh its rumours, they put dead bodies in the park, and the woods are a dangerous place to go!*

Patrice- *right, cos that's what happened, that's what they did...*

Rainbow- *City kids are taught that woods are dangerous. I go out there...*

Patrice- *the two ladies that got killed there...*

Emily- *I grew up in the woods and it's not that bad.*

Patrice, a black woman and 19-year resident of the area in her late 50s, is talking here about the high profile 2012 murder case, in which the bodies of 22 year old Ashley Conaway and 18 year old Abreeya Brown were found buried in the woods next to the Rouge River (CBS 2012). While keen to boost the positive aspects of their neighbourhood, the older black women also had a different truth to tell about a neighbourhood which had the potential to present a real danger to them, in a US where black bodies are seen as disposable, and where they themselves could quite feasibly be killed without repercussion. Not only were white participants like Rainbow and Emily here reluctant to hear such stories, there were several points where they actively conducted their own, unrelated conversations while the black women were speaking.

The immediate plans of the two groups were often quite distinct too. It would seem at first that the black women in the group had a more limited vision - of peaceful neighbourhoods with working street lights, kids playing safely outside, enough healthy food to eat, a place that isn't stigmatised, dumped in/on and feared. The white participants' ideas were much grander -

changing the world, 'one neighbourhood at a time', reworking our relationship with nature, with the food system, turning the American suburb on its head, and creating a utopia from the ashes of consumer culture. But in the context of violent white supremacy, in a city that has been systematically disinvested from, burned down, schools closed, air poisoned and water cut off; I argue that the first picture might in fact be seen as the truly radical one. A world where black children are valued and invested in, and where people have and expect to have access to the basic necessities of food, water, shelter, education; treasures that the current economic and political system, as much as its predecessors, allocates not equally but along stark lines of race and class. The plans of the white pioneers then, however politically or ecologically radical they might be, also share a narrative similarity; pioneer as architect, bringer of a new way of life, rightful bearer of authority through birth, connections, education and racial privilege recast as ingenuity, creativity, and vision.

In media output and white conversation, it is these grand plans and networks of authorship which are repeatedly and continually valorised. Reporting on urban farming is full of excited descriptions of (white) people bringing energy, enthusiasm and vision to depressed and blighted Detroit; 'teaching', empowering', and 'inspiring' the apparently inert (black) population. MUFI, the newly established and intensively sponsored, white-led urban farming initiative in the North End which, despite hosting a rolling stock of enthusiastic young volunteer labour somehow manages to get minimal amounts of food into local households, is spoken of in glowing terms in both national and international press. The as yet still unrealised grand plans of Hantz Farms (now Hantz Woodlands) continues to receive positive write-ups, while the ongoing farming and educational programs of the unapologetically political Detroit Black Community Food Security Network are mentioned only in terms of the lack they attempt to address. White mediocrity is celebrated as visionary, while black persistence, when recognised at all, is ultimately dismissed as impractical and ineffective. In the next chapter I will show how, far from being specific to Detroit's philanthropic and greening landscapes, this relation persists across the board; in the emerging tech sector and creative industries, and in the city's post-bankruptcy re-branding.

Chapter 7 Detroit 3.0

"I have this idea that I'm going to write a children's book, called 'Christopher and Christina Discover Detroit'. Well I'm not a wit. But the whole notion is that in the United States, often things aren't significant unless white people discover it. They can be here, they can be ongoing, they can be thriving, and people keep talking about Detroit like 'are you coming back?'. We haven't been anywhere! People have been doing things. But there is this sense that things don't happen until white people discover them, until they define them, give them definition. They control all the press, radio, television. Even among black people, whites are allowed to determine what's significant. We've had many significant businesses, enterprises, doing outstanding things that are never covered by the white press. And often what we call the white press, doesn't even know the difference between the East side and the West side. They'll be talking about something happening in a place, and they'll identify it being on the other side of town, and have nothing about the city, and very little about the people." (Interview with Daniel Aldridge)

In this final chapter I introduce the term 'Creative Managerial' (CM) class, an attempt to bring together the various narratives of my research participants into a broadly defined central thread; a way to understand the striking commonalities in the ways many of Detroit's more recent arrivals talk about their own motivations and actions, and to frame this as part of a movement to re-colonise the city. 'Class' is perhaps a misnomer here; I do not intend to argue that this group represents a cohesive social or economic group; the term is a descriptor and not a sociological measure. I use the term here as something of a place holder in lieu of a more accurate measure, for which more research is clearly needed. It may even prove more accurate to describe the CM class as a set of social attitudes, behaviours, and cultural capital rather than a distinct social class.

I use this admittedly clunky place holder because I have not yet found an existing, quantifiable measure to describe I witnessed in Detroit. More than occupational or economic class, in many ways it names a certain self-appointed role within the landscape of gentrifying Detroit. 'White people' would have perhaps been the most obvious alternative, but it is too big a category. While white supremacy is a key thread running through these narratives, such a broad measure is complicated by class, and by the fact that a small number of affluent non-white people are also present in CM circles. 'Middle-class' or 'affluent' too, don't quite work; there are affluent Detroiters and a black middle class in the city whose own stories the dominance of

the CM class is working to write over. Ehrenreich's Professional Managerial Class (PMC) doesn't account for the centrality of ideas about 'entrepreneurship' and 'creativity' in the CM narrative, and is a framework which even its authors argue is now out of date (Ehrenreich 2013). And while many of my CM class respondents might describe themselves as such, Florida's Creative Class provides more of a valorisation than a critical framework through which to view gentrification in Detroit. They cannot be reduced to a statistical measure of those in professional, managerial, and technical occupations, as many of the CM class do not come to Detroit employed, or see themselves as being on a 'traditional', corporate or industrial career path. Similarly, neither are they Ley's 'new middle class' (Ley 1996), for while they may have access to professional and managerial work and its associated social capital, they cannot be defined as 'workers' in the traditional sense, many engaging in the gig, entrepreneurship or start-up economy alongside or instead of wage labour.

So who are the CM class? *Quicken Loans* billionaire Dan Gilbert is not, but he is a staunch supporter of their move to Detroit. When Gilbert talks about rebuilding the city's downtown to attract 'creative, innovative and talented young people' (Carey 2013), few would imagine he's referring to black Detroit high school leavers. The CM class move to Detroit to be somewhere they 'can matter' (See Nussenbaum 2012 for a particularly enthusiastic example of this sentiment); because, in the words of our tour guide at the beginning of chapter four, the city is "big enough that it matters to the world, but small enough that one person can matter to it". And as I shall show in this chapter the CM class, through channels of racial, class, and educational privilege and networking, have access to the resources to indeed, make things happen, and have those happenings witnessed and lauded.

The CM class may be made up of individuals from a range of racial and social backgrounds, but overwhelmingly the CM class is white, and in many cases it is suburban. While accurate data on recent changes to the demographics of Detroit's greater downtown is yet to be produced, a significant majority of my interviewees and their social circles had come to the city from the Detroit Metro area suburbs or those of other Midwestern cities. The CM class is formally educated, self-assured, and quite certain of its own benevolence. Members understand themselves and their peer group to be normal, average, more or less representative of America as a whole. In the Detroit Metro area, this usually means distance from the public school system through private or 'alternative' education, college education as an expectation, creative sector employment as a goal, and home ownership as an inevitability marking the achievement of adulthood.

Everyday conversation continually reinscribes this central position, with the repetition of highly subjective statements that become understood as truisms. You *can't* raise a family in Detroit; rents are *ridiculously* cheap; *any* project is better than *nothing*. The CM class is deeply concerned with solving 'the problem of Detroit' and may take varied political or economic stances on the best way to achieve this, but central to all of these is a belief that the city's misfortunes can be traced back to white population loss, often represented directly through their own parents' or grandparents' move to the suburbs. The logical extension of this story puts forward remedies centred around (white) repopulation of the city, allowing for a hero narrative to support their own move to Detroit. Indeed, following the arguments of 'regeneration' proponents elsewhere, the very presence of affluent people becomes understood as itself a social good (Vigdor 2010; Whyte 2009), and the arrival of young white college graduates choosing Detroit over other major cities as the standard of success by which regeneration efforts are measured.

With a seemingly innate confidence gained in many cases through privileged education and professional, managerial or entrepreneurial upbringing, the CM class emerge as naturally qualified to supervise, innovate, and make decisions on the behalf of Others. Their comparatively easy access to funding and networked opportunities through their peer group and mentors only serves to confirm this self-conception, facilitating a view of themselves as dynamic and creative new blood 'getting things done' in ways that the city's existing population has thus far been unable to. While perhaps less directly evocative of an imagined early America than those featured in the previous two chapters, these relations are of course deeply colonial - from the belief in the overall benevolence of a project defined by conquest and domination; the framing of a grab for resources, land, and power as somehow 'civilising'; to faith in a natural superiority barely removed from more crass and direct articulations of white supremacy.

Resources and networks

A large majority of my interviewees could be described as part of the CM class. They were easy to contact, interview and socialise with, partly due to their age and use of social media, partly because many of them had projects of their own to promote, but mostly because I am also white and college educated. The power of racial and class networks to distribute social, political, and economic resources, while sometimes acknowledged by my informants in the abstract, was something many found difficult to apply to their own successes. The most obvious of these

resources are the small business grants and start-up funding streams made available to new entrepreneurs as Detroit's creative 'resurgence' continues apace. While socially oriented projects initiated by longer term Detroiters have certainly benefited from this funding in places, an unrepresentative proportion of the recipients of certain high-profile grant schemes seemed, at the time of my research, to be white, recent transplants, and/or ventures catering to this population. For example, following the demolition of the Old Tiger Stadium in Corktown, grant money from the US Department of Housing and Development (HUD) was made available to 'assist entrepreneurs and small business owners' in regenerating the surrounding neighbourhood¹³. Of the businesses in thirteen spaces supported by this grant money, some already established and others newer; one has a black co-owner, and another a tenant business owned by a Mexican American woman. All others are white-owned and operated¹⁴. The Hatch Detroit grant scheme, a 'crowd entrepreneurship' contest established in 2011, lists twenty-one small business 'alumni' who have gone one to open stores in the city; of these, five are black-owned and one has a black partner¹⁵. The winners of these awards tend towards artisanal food production, micro-breweries and distilleries, bespoke homewares; businesses not necessarily intended to serve the city's existing needs, but to attract and sustain an affluent population. The allocation of these grants allows for a fiction that attributes of change and dynamism belong solely to an incoming population. As M, one of a small number of black entrepreneurs to successfully establish herself in this environment put it:

"White people get funding for things black people wanted to do for ages. Obviously it's true. So 'Detroit is desolate, it's vacant, there's burned down buildings, there's no hope... here comes the people with the strategies, and they have the plan'. Meanwhile, the people who have been here are going 'wait a minute, I wanted to work on that, but I didn't get the \$500,000 grant!' And here's some kid from Ann Arbor or from California, or New York, or another country, decided to come to the city, and that door is open for them to be able to make that change." (Interview with MP)

The ability to remain blind to this imbalance is supported by the CM class's strikingly inward-facing social and professional networks. In all of my interviews I asked participants to describe Detroit - its social makeup, its problems, the things they liked best about the city. The response below, from the young CEO of a small tech start-up, was typical:

¹³ See <http://www.zacharydetroit.com/OTSC/AboutOTSC/index.html>

¹⁴ See <http://www.zacharydetroit.com/OTSC/GrantRecipients/ProjectSummaries/index.html>

¹⁵ See <http://hatchdetroit.com/hatch-alums/>

"There's this group of weird, passionate people, doing a bunch of weird... like everyone's got a side gig, right? Trying to do something, like... everyone wants to do interesting things, and everyone wants to explore, and I just really like that. Right now it has a really small town feel, like you see the same people a lot - now obviously if the things we want to happen happen then it won't have that small town feel as much, because there will be more people... But yeah, I really feel like there's a big sense of community that I have not felt anywhere else, and I don't think it existed 6 years ago, it's new, so I hope that lasts." (Interview with TK)

Outside of this 'small town' of other creative transplants and their own home communities, the CM class's peer group is understood to be a wider mobile elite; their contemporaries in Chicago, or the coastal cities. And indeed, many spoke about a wish to show 'everyone else' the positive side of Detroit:

"I really love proving people wrong about Detroit. So I go back to Missouri, or I go back to Washington DC or anywhere else I've lived, and anywhere else in the country, and in the world I'm sure, thinks of Detroit and immediately has a picture of Detroit or what they think it is, that I am always able to say no actually it's really cool. Because there's a lot of stuff going on, there's a lot of people moving here. It's well, it used to be really cheap to live here, now it's getting more expensive, but like - it's so fun, you know, there's always something going on. So that's what I really like about it, kind of the more evangelist part of it, like 'Detroit's really cool!' to everybody." (Interview with AF)

For B, an advertising executive from the Metro Detroit suburbs, challenging the city's 'underdog' image was a key motivation for spreading this message, particularly among colleagues who she believed saw the area as 'second class':

"There's a thing about Detroit and Michigan, that a lot of us are born and raised here, this is what we do, our parents grew up in automotive. I went to school here, I didn't think I was particularly gonna get into advertising or automotive or stay in the Detroit region, but I did. So I think sometimes people feel a little second class, by other people who are like 'oh I worked in New York, and San Francisco, and I'm going to Shanghai', and there's this level of worldliness. Not many people come in to Detroit, right, you see a lot of people leave, and if you're not one of the ones that leave, you're not always so proud about what you've done, because the rest of the world doesn't see us like that." (Interview with BW)

Attracting this mobile elite, for B and others, was understood to be the ultimate measure of the city's comeback. *"We need to be a viable option for young smart people"*, one tech worker told me, before going on to explain his own relationship to the area:

"As someone who grew up in the suburbs here, it's just baffling that anyone came into the city other than 'I got a job at Ford or GM'. So it's great, and that's what's been the most exciting. And I think we need that because there's still I think a worse reputation in the suburbs here, of Detroit, than there are elsewhere." (Interview with DD)

This close relationship with the suburbs, and with earlier processes of white flight, enabled many recent transplants from the Detroit Metro area to claim a kinship with, and ownership of, the city that often made longer term residents uneasy. This was not an issue ignored by the CM class entirely, but I found it significant that those creative and tech sector workers I spoke to who *did* challenge prevailing narratives tended to be either black, from working class backgrounds, or both. Responding to what she saw as the appropriation of Detroit as a brand by white suburbanites, one young woman from Dearborn told me:

"A lot of people say they're from Detroit when they're not, and that actually bothers me a lot. Because not only are they claiming somebody else's identity, they're also not claiming their own. Not claiming their own heritage, and their own story, just because Detroit is like a thing now, people talk about it... Because I get like, Detroit is the bigger city, and people know where it is, but that's not why they say it. That's what people say is why they say it, but it's not. That's why I will never claim that I'm from Detroit, and I'll always say like I'm from Dearborn, which is an inner ring suburb of Detroit. Even when I was living in Detroit I didn't feel comfortable saying that I'm from Detroit. I think that's really insensitive to say that you're from somewhere when you're not. That's one thing that really grinds me, especially making that into a brand. You get people wearing shirts and saying, 'I'm from Detroit!' Like, no you're not, you're from Auburn Hills. You bought that shirt that was made by Kid Rock, in Clawson." (Interview with HM)

As HM indicates in the passage above, there is often an unspoken power imbalance in this claiming of the city; not so much a move towards solidarity with Detroit's struggles, but rather an appropriation of them. A number of suburban interviewees would take care to mark themselves out from their high school contemporaries, by demonstrating the ways in which they engaged with the city from the suburbs before moving here, against the reservations of their peers and parents. While friends were afraid to come to the city, believing it too dangerous, they themselves snuck into Detroit to attend illegal raves, or they took part in structured activities -

tutoring, mentoring middle school kids, participating in volunteer programmes. This early engagement with the city tended to take one of two paths - illicit pleasure, or a paternalistic relationship.

A tech employee, working downtown and living in Corktown, lamented the city-centre focus of her peers, and told me that she wished her company, a small software start-up, could be part of another neighbourhood. When I asked what this would look like, she found it hard to imagine such a relationship outside of a benefactor/recipient structure:

"In the past we've tried to organise volunteering days in different places, and we actually hooked up with this boxing gym. It's amazing. It's situated between the three worst neighbourhoods or like intersections in Detroit and so therefore in the US, it's literally the most dangerous... I would have to look up where exactly, but it's on the East Side. So anyway the gym, they've taken kids anywhere leading up to high school, and they're allowed to work out and box if they want to. They don't have to, but they do have to spend some time doing their homework and getting tutoring and stuff like that.... The guy who started it who is like the president or the founder, he has a really cool back story, like similar rough upbringing, he was in a gang and all of that, and has since turned his life around, has started this gym - so I think that resonates a lot with the kids. But yeah so anyway, the whole point of that story is that we have volunteered with them in the past, but that's not a neighbourhood we could move to, because it would be... (laughs) ridiculous, dangerous." (Interview with CD)

'The 7.2', a term that quickly came into usage following the publication of a 2013 report of the same name, refers to the 7.2 square miles of land which make up a particular version of 'greater downtown' Detroit; areas considered 'strong' neighbourhoods for regeneration by the report's author organisations: *The Hudson-Webber Foundation*, the *Detroit Economic Growth Corporation*, the *Downtown Detroit Partnership*, *Midtown Detroit, Inc.*, *Invest Detroit* and *Data Driven Detroit* (Ali et al 2013). The area includes the neighbourhoods now known as Downtown, Midtown, Woodbridge, Eastern Market, Lafayette Park, Rivertown and Corktown. Alongside New Center (just north of 'Midtown') and the Wayne State Campus, these locations, a relatively small fraction of the city's total area and home to some of the lowest vacancy rates and best-preserved infrastructure, are where many CM class transplants choose to live. But while many will not often venture outside of these boundaries, the rest of the city still has an important role to play in their self-talk. In a conversation reminiscent of the one with CD, above, a male tech

leader described his own Midtown neighbourhood of Brush Park by comparing its component parts to Detroit as a whole:

"So you've got the old historic mansions where a few have been revitalized. You've got some that are just completely trashed and fallen apart. You've got like my building is a loft building, and then you've got the new town homes. So I think that's very similar to Detroit as a city, what's happening; you have the like hip loft developments, and then you have the new town homes, then you have let's restore this old building, and then you also have the dilapidated buildings, and then you have- I mean I forgot, what are the projects called that they're tearing down? So those used to be the biggest federal housing projects in the US, and that could be like your Brightmoor so to speak, which isn't the right comparison because there's lots of people in Brightmoor and they're doing things there, but... So anyway, I think that's a nice microcosm of Detroit." (Interview with XP)

Speaking here about the historic Brewster-Douglas projects, XP is keen to present important statistical information about them, but is unable to remember their name, much in the same way as CD, above, is able to reproduce enough information to impress drama and seriousness upon her audience, but not to remember the actual location of the place she is talking about. Because these various places - The Brewster Projects, The East Side, Brightmoor- are only important in such conversations for their role as Other; the limits of 'safe' Detroit, a representation of decay to throw 'good' and 'new' things into relief. That the four recently demolished fourteen storey tower blocks of the Brewster Douglas public housing projects are seen as different to the low rise, outer Detroit neighbourhood of Brightmoor only though the distinction of the latter having 'lots of people doing things there', is emblematic of this relation.

'The neighbourhoods', Detroit's blackness and the city's poverty not only act as boundary markers for the victories of regeneration; they are also a crucial part of the branding effort that supports the process itself. Detroit is 'real', unlike the bourgeois and by extension 'fictional' suburbs, and the affectations of New York or LA. Detroit is 'gritty', it is 'authentic', it is any number of words used by those with relative economic privilege to describe a place and a life they both lust after and will never have to suffer. This is of course a relation much wider and older than the specific iteration played out in twenty first century Detroit. White appropriation of black culture and black struggle is a foundational aspect of 'hipster' culture, from Harlem tourists (Edwards 2001:119-170) though Norman Mailer's 'White Negro' (Williams 2001:149; Mailer 1957) to 21st century hipster racism (Current et al 2015; Zukin et al 2017); much in the same way that work on gentrification continues to examine the appropriation of working class

'edge' by the middle classes (Cahill 2007; Halnon et al 2006; Lees et al 2008; Smith 2006). But this relationship rarely translates to actual connection. One of my informants who had recently left her job at a creative development agency in the city described the difficulty of communicating with management at the majority-white organisation. A self-described working class white woman, and one of the few employees critical of the racial and class dynamics at work in this burgeoning art and entrepreneurship scene, she found herself often approached for input on how to improve the organisation's profile:

"My boss asked me, 'what can we as an organisation do to improve our standing, or to do better'. And he means in the community, and to not be as evil. And basically I wanted to say, well this place existing is not good, in the first place. But of course I can't say that, so I said... if you really want to know what the community wants and needs, ASK PEOPLE. Like, go to events, go to things and ask people. We were just going to very new things, where people were talking about the new places that people were interested in, the hot places. No-one would actually go to art or cultural events that were happening that wasn't some white kid who had just moved here from New York. But I do think that when he was asking me to be forthright about my criticisms, it wasn't really about trying to make the organisation run in a way that was less harmful to other people, it was about co-opting the language of activism. And I fed into it, I gave my criticisms and they just incorporated the things I said as new buzzwords. And that was really scary to watch happen." (Interview with TC)

Realness, authenticity, edge - qualities afforded black Detroit over white newcomers, but only in the service of developing these as commodities, and Detroit, as a product and a brand. In the same way, the CM class can talk about preserving the 'original charm' of historic houses, industrial architecture, or working class culture; without having to make any connection with the idea of preserving the rights of the inhabitants of these spaces and the producers of that culture to remain in them. A Corktown resident originally from Missouri, a white woman in her early twenties working in tech, told me her concerns and hopes for the city's future:

*"I mean it still has a long way to go. It still is really dangerous and really poor, and ...uh... I have a lot of hope for it, but I also worry about it too. I also worry very much about gentrification, which I hope that I'm not a part of. Like, there's a lot of development and a lot of people moving here and all that, but I just hope there's a way to avoid like losing all the original charm...
...I would like to see like, the really dangerous and poor neighbourhoods to get better, obviously.(What would that involve?) I guess just more police, better police, just to reduce crime,*

and... um... I don't know, I keep wanting to say better people? I don't know, just not so many criminals?" (Interview with DM)

Alongside law and order, she saw dealing with blight as a key strategy for improving the city:

"I think it's also important to start dealing with all the vacant buildings that are in Detroit, whether that's tearing them down and rebuilding, or fixing them up, again, not that I would know even where to begin with all that, but I think that would help a lot. Because I think that leads to a lot of squatting, and you know, drug deals and all that." (Interview with DM)

Moving immediately from the idea of illegal housing to illicit activity, DM's account draws attention to a foundational belief of the CM class - that to exist outside of the known world of secure housing and reliable income is to belong to an abject and criminal class who, by definition, cannot possess rights to space and liberty. Another informant told me excitedly about the activities that went on in the 'abandoned' hospital across the street from the house he was renovating:

"Homeless people get in fights, hobos start fires! There was a bunch of homeless people living there for a while, because they had like hospital beds, and it's protected. And there was a big fire - apparently two homeless people got in a fight and started a fire, I don't really know the details." (Interview with AZ)

Here 'homeless' and 'abandoned' are not used as descriptors but as categories of abject status. The suspension of logic that allows us to describe 'homeless' people making a home in a building, and that building remaining nevertheless, abandoned; this is not just a lazy use of language, it is a fundamental ideological investment in the non-personhood of the Other. And in this trope writ large, we see whole swathes of the city described as 'no-go' areas, meaning, of course, that 'people like us don't go there'; meaning 'this space is as yet unclaimed by whiteness, and is therefore unsafe for me'. And in designating these areas as non-places, it follows that the usual rules do not apply there. One participant, happy to leave her windows open all night in gentrified Corktown, told me how she wouldn't even stop at red lights when driving on the East Side; the perceived danger she felt as a white woman alone in a black neighbourhood outweighing her responsibility towards pedestrians and other drivers who might be injured or killed` by her actions. Another respondent, while challenging his suburban relatives' fear of Detroit, also drew on the idea of 'no-go' areas:

"It's still a bugbear in my family, like, 'I don't understand why you're living in Detroit'. But they're also people who have always lived in suburbs, and that's the biggest thing- I mean whenever people talk about crime in Detroit, they've clearly never been to New York or Chicago, like, there's crime in every city! And there are lots of great things about living in a city, but that also means you have to just know where to go, and there are certain places you shouldn't go in Chicago, and same thing in Detroit." (Interview with TF)

In comparing the city to Chicago or New York, TF attempts here to play down the idea of Detroit as especially dangerous, instead locating it within the broader context of 'Urban America'. But while this may serve to emphasise his own cosmopolitanism in relation to his family, it relies on a received wisdom no less based in ideas of race and class.

The funding landscape and the housing preferences of the CM class have the 'snowball' effect of concentrating a majority of the 'new' resources pouring in to boost the city's revitalisation on select areas, mostly within 'the 7.2'. This is not a process in which a single originator may be traced, but the product of a self-sustaining network of institutions and actors which includes local and national media. Journalist Peter Moskowitz provides a jarringly succinct summation of this circuit in his 2017 book *How to Kill a City*:

"When a new (usually white-owned, hipster - or yuppie-oriented) store opens, it's often profiled by Model D Media, a news outlet funded by non-profits and corporations to cover what's happening in Detroit in a positive light. Big Detroit-centric foundations such as the Knight Foundation or the Kresge Foundation might issue press releases about the new businesses to drum up support. They might give out small grants to help with renovations. Urban Innovation Exchange, which is partially funded by Knight, might help that business connect with the plethora of other non-profits in the area dedicated to helping "innovative" new businesses thrive—Hatch Detroit, Detroit Creative Corridor Center (DC3), and TechTown, to name a few. The city, through its Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, might get involved—issuing more grants, paying for historical renovation costs, promoting the business on social media. Then bigger media outlets such as Curbed or the Detroit Free Press might do a little profile on this new business that seems to be making it in a down-and-out neighborhood despite supposedly long odds. Eventually, the New York Times might come to town and declare that the business is, for example, "a gleam of renewal in struggling Detroit ."" (Moskowitz 2017:73-74)

While grants from the big five philanthropic funds working in Detroit can still be accessed by community organisations in 'the neighbourhoods', they now find themselves competing with

the projects of the CM class, particularly for money earmarked for small business development, creative entrepreneurship and the arts. In addition to the long-established presence of the *Kresge, Kellogg, Skillman, Ford* and *Fisher* foundations, new funding sources have become available as the corporate philanthropy of the city's newer big-name millionaires seek to establish their own presence alongside these old Detroit families. Dan Gilbert and Mike Illitch in particular have emerged as key funders through *Quicken, Bedrock, Little Cesars* and the new *Red Wings* development respectively. But while this new investment is welcomed, its allocation also does not reflect the city's demographic. As Alex B. Hill found, 69.2 percent of the grantees of non-profits, fellows at various organisations committed to revitalization, and those chosen to take part in tech and business incubators in 2014 were white (Hill 2014)¹⁶. *Hatch Detroit* - the organisation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter - was set up to support independent retail in the city. Its yearly contest awards the winner \$50,000 to set up their retail business in Detroit, Highland Park, or Hamtramck. The contest is also open to social enterprises and non-profits as long as they are retail focused, and looks for businesses that "engage and positively impact the surrounding community"¹⁷. The five winners to date have included *Hugh*, a 'classic modern' homewares store on Cass Avenue in Midtown where you can buy a \$50 badger hair shaving brush; *La Feria*, a Tapas restaurant located one block away on the same street; *Batch Brewing*, a microbrewery in Corktown; *Sister Pie*, an artisanal bakery in the East Village; and *Live Cycle Delight*, a cycle and yoga studio two blocks away. Of these, only *Live Cycle Delight* is black-owned. It is clear that the 'positive impact' on the local community is understood to come from 'regenerating' the locale to serve a distinct, moneyed demographic. One resident expressed her dismay at these decisions in an interview just after *Sister Pie* had been awarded the grant:

"I mean I love pie, so good job. And I'm sure she's a very hard worker. But, this is a Detroit economic development fund - and it's an astronomical amount of money that she won, too. How is that going to a pie company? That just really upsets me too much. Why can't that go to afterschool programs? They didn't start rehabbing this area until all that (previous gentrification) happened in Cass Corridor. But now we find value in it." (Interview with AL)

¹⁶ A graduate student at Wayne State University, Hill has also been responsible for collecting and collating huge amounts of Detroit data into map form, for his website *Detroitography* <https://detroitography.com/about/>. Some of this work, such as this data, painstakingly gathered by trawling the websites of the city's start-ups and foundations, does not exist elsewhere.

¹⁷ See <http://hatchdetroit.com/about-the-contest/>

But while grant awards are an obvious place to look for evidence of resources being channelled into white-led and CM class focused enterprises, it is perhaps in the realm of informal and personal networks that the majority of this work takes place. Some might be seen as intentional, such as the choices made by landlords able to handpick their tenants as the market becomes more active. One Woodbridge landlord mentioned in previous chapters had a particular reputation for this, as the following interview with one of his tenants shows:

"He has mentioned to us before that he prefers to rent to college students, because he's 'not racist or anything, but sometimes black people have a harder time paying the rent'... so he definitely has a type of person that he likes to rent to, and it's young and white." (Interview with CS)

But the direct curation of rental properties does not have to be overtly anti-black to have an exclusionary effect. Speaking about his own renovation project, which promised a steady stream of tenants through links with an internship program for young venture capitalists, one entrepreneur in his early twenties, who would never speak in such explicitly racial terms as the older landlord above, told me that not only would his new venture fill a gap in the market, but:

"they're also like pre-vetted, things like if they're part of this program they're not gonna be like scumbag tenants." (Interview with AZ)

It was unclear quite what would constitute a 'scumbag tenant'; when pressed, the interviewee spoke to generic fears of property damage, antisocial behaviour, and unpaid rent. But this particular young man had also told me that his early plans for buying property in Detroit had involved getting together with his friends and current business partners to *"buy a house for like \$5000, not fix it up at all, and just have parties there and just let it be a shithole!"*. The group had decided against this course of action in the end, not because of the antisocial impact on their neighbours, but because of the danger of old electrical systems and the slim likelihood of getting a return on their investment. The current venture, a plan to establish themselves as landlords and to develop a business offering technical support to other small landlords, had been more successful. With a good deal of free advice from residential landlords in the area, who had been happy to talk to four bright young, enthusiastic white guys; some free workspace at a downtown tech hub where a college buddy happened to work; a crowdfunder heavily supported by affluent friends and relatives in New York and Massachusetts; and match funding from the internship program they had all been a part of, the group had been able to 'strike out on their own'.

Crowdfunding is a particularly good example of existing social and economic power (or networked connections to it) masquerading as merit, good fortune and popularity; but it is not the only one. The idea that if you state your excellent business case clearly and persuasively to the right people then resources and support will inevitably come your way, was a key belief for the CM class. But while some crowdfunding campaigns might go viral, branching out beyond their home networks through a particular issue; the majority of donations to AZ's venture and projects like it is via those already connected to the originators (Borst et al 2017). While a successful campaign might feel like validation of the project itself, those with wide and affluent connections are of course far more likely to meet their targets. Similarly, an expectation of media interest in a project seemed to be standard for CM class entrepreneurs; something of a self-fulfilling prophecy borne out by personal connections to those already working in the media. Yet, this personal interest is understood as irrelevant, merely a conduit by which news of a great project happens to travel. Below is an excerpt from a longer interview with AZ, the young entrepreneur mentioned above, discussing the various types of media attention his project had received:

"We didn't court media attention, in fact we've had very little - in fact we were just in the Free Press today, I mean I don't know how, I don't know where it came from originally, but once it did, we definitely liked it. And because this whole project started with crowdfunding, we have like several hundred people who feel like they, like it's part of their story too. So we've been keeping a blog, and sending out an email newsletter, and doing video updates, because when you do these crowdfunding campaigns, you have to keep - you don't have to, but you want to keep everyone feeling like they're still involved. So that I think made it very easy for people in the media to write about us because like, the Free Press guy can like go on the website and watch the video or read the post. The documentary's definitely gonna be invasive, but we all think it's really cool, and it has the potential to be really good for our careers long term." (Interview with AZ)

The documentary AZ mentions at the end here follows a number of young people as they begin their careers establishing their own start-ups, after graduating from two years in the venture capitalist internship program, a nationwide scheme that recruits participants from elite colleges and sends them to 'struggling cities'. The producers had heard about the program because one of their own children was a participant. While the start-up and entrepreneurship narrative is invariably one of risk, independence, and doing things a 'different way'; the role of extended family and class-based networks cannot be overstated. And for a movement so apparently new, there remains a striking reliance on old sites of power. A former employee of an organisation supporting creative entrepreneurship told me of her discomfort at finding herself the only

person not from an upper middle-class background amongst her colleagues. The issue came up continually in work and social situations, usually in the form of lifestyle expectations:

"This guy says to me 'you know when you're in the yacht club dining room...' and I said 'no, I don't'. 'You haven't been to the yacht club?' 'No'. 'You're not a member at the yacht club?!' 'No'. 'Why not?' Like, that's his world. You just go to the yacht club. Everyone else I worked with, with the possible exception of one, was a member of the Detroit Yacht Club." (Interview with ZL)

The entrepreneur vs the corporation

The fiction of independence, and a belief in the existence of a democratic meritocracy, of course has broader relevance in US culture. But in Detroit, the city so famously founded and failed by corporations; at the intersection of the gig economy, an influx of young 'creatives' from across the country, and the re-emergence of significant financial resources previously directed away from the city, the figure of the entrepreneur is central. Despite a common aspiration, particularly in the tech sector, to build a small company's value and sell at the highest price, in as short a time frame as possible; 'entrepreneurship' is defined very much in opposition to 'corporate' culture. Entrepreneurs are cool, new, young, dynamic; the corporation is old, a lumbering, senseless bureaucratic beast - at best a stolid and uninspiring place to work, at worst the root cause of Detroit's financial and social woes.

In conversation with participants and others in Detroit, the language of entrepreneurship came up continually, often in unexpected places. A member of an advertising team working primarily on Ford, and bro bono clients identified by or associated with the automotive giant, defined the positives of her workplace against what she saw as the stuffy corporate environment typical of 'old' Detroit:

"It's a cool agency, the culture of it is very flexible and very informal, and not what you would typically see in other offices around Detroit... I think Ford are very aware that it's not the old kind of manufacturing, work on a line for 30 years, union, that sort of idea; it seems to be very much more what are we gonna do, how are we gonna make it smart, how can we make it green, how can we make it... they're very into sustainability and just being a smart, modern company, we've got a lot of cool ideas about working globally. Unfortunately, people still look at us as like the rust belt, like it doesn't matter, you're just manufacturing. And it's not, they're almost like technology companies, they're doing good stuff, it's good to be a part of it." (Interview with SH)

This rush to be associated with tech/'creative' labour, rather than working class, manufacturing labour, characterises much of the talk around Detroit's emerging economy. Even employees of a car company, (albeit its 'creative' wing), take care to establish their distance from old, 'corporate' approaches to doing business. But, of course, both the auto industry and the tech sector necessarily involve 'creative' and manufacturing labour simultaneously; start-up wunderkinds are propped up by a vast structure of outsourced labour on assembly lines across the world, just as the development and advertising of the new Ford C-Max electric hybrid would not exist without plant workers in Germany, Mexico, Dagenham and Wayne. SH may be right about the end of job security and unions, across both industries, but the key difference here is one of visuals and branding.

Tech workers, small business owners, and in fact a majority of those I spoke with working downtown talked in some way about this opposition between entrepreneur and corporation. Without exception, all associated themselves with the former, even those working within a corporate structure. A young executive assistant at a mid-sized start-up explained her position, and her idea of the kind of person she needed to be to work in downtown Detroit:

"I wanted to do a start-up because I think just being in Detroit and then being able to add to that, I don't know, it's just something about it, you know. Being down here and being able to add your creativity. So even though I'm only like an assistant, I'm still able to wear many hats. So I'm doing special projects, and analysis of this company, where we are in the marketplace and things like that. And in a start-up company I feel like you're able to wear more than one hat, and everyone leverages together, and you get that experience, you learn, it's more agile than a corporation.

...I think you have to really be open to getting feedback on things that you can do better. You have to be open-minded, you know what I mean? That comes first. You can't be a closed-minded person. You have to be open-minded to get feedback, you have to be open-minded to give input that's not just a simple answer. You have to be open-minded to work with others that are totally different from you... to be open-minded means to be kind of like flexible and... I think that's kind of the one overarching things, we're all open-minded people, and we're not so quick to say no."
(Interview with LT)

Open-minded, flexible, creative, embracing of difference - these buzzwords of Detroit's emergent economy might have come straight from Richard Florida himself. It is a position that defies critique; positivity being a key characteristic of the 'successful'; an openness to ideas and to innovation, and a faith put squarely in the hands of the market. This language can also be found peppering the pithy aphorisms of the *Quicken Loans* employee handbook. An early

adopter in the rush to relocate downtown, Quicken's much-lauded CEO and 'Detroit Superhero' Dan Gilbert (Alberta 2014; Segal 2013) is a key figure in Detroit's renaissance, in terms of both land ownership and domination within the discourse. While I will turn to the personality cult around the man himself later in the chapter, here I want to look specifically at one technology through which the corporate ethos of his companies is re-framed and disseminated amongst workers and associates. Published in a new edition yearly, the colourful 140 page 'ISMs in action' is distributed to every one of the organisation's employees, as well as those working for any of the companies in the Quicken 'family' (72, as listed in the 2014 edition). It describes the 'foundation and philosophy' of the parent company and all those operating under its umbrella, through 19 phrases, or 'ISMs', such as; *'obsessed with finding a better way'*, *'yes before no'*, *'ignore the noise'*, and *'simplicity is genius'*.

Amongst the cute illustrations and employee testimonies, the handbook also features lots of comedic vignettes about 'bureaucracy gone mad'. A six-year-old suspended from school for bringing a spork, a bank insisting an armless man provide a thumbprint to access his account, compulsory drivers ed classes for blind students in a Chicago high school. Positioning the 'Quicken family' as NOT 'Corporate America' is an essential part of the creativity/anti bureaucracy shtick, even within what is quite clearly a corporate structure:

"We use words that encourage cooperation, respect and teamwork. If we don't embrace this and recognise that words matter, we'll end up like our friends over in Corporate America - locked up in bureaucracy." (Quicken Loans 2014:76)

Near the end of the book, under the 'ISM': *'You'll see it when you believe it'*, is a two-page spread where employees can fill in their own job title to complete a series of affirmations, signing as if as a contract at the end. Some highlights below:

"I am a (fill in your role). I love what I do. I live and breathe to succeed during the business day. I think about "greatness at night. I don't have a job, I have a "business".

...Business is being "alive". Business is being creative...

...Any negative thought, word or action is "noise" and a distraction from my mission. It also wastes time. And time is my friend and most precious asset..

...I refuse to be mediocre. Mediocrity is a demon that I will not allow in my house. Mediocrity is for the masses, not for the ones who cherish greatness. It is not in my DNA to be in the middle. I will get closer to my "potential"...

... I choose light. I choose greatness. I choose life. To the naysayers...goodbye. To those who refuse to believe anything but success...hello. I will start NOW... There is no "then". It is always now. Am I on the "lunatic fringe"? You bet. Name a "great one" who isn't"

...Look out, because "potential" and I have a date with destiny. I will start now.

X (your signature)" (Quicken Loans 2014:136-137)

The creative entrepreneur, the flexible worker, those who 'refuse to be mediocre'; membership of this elite requires more than 'just' the invisible networks of whiteness and educational advantage discussed earlier in the chapter. Positivity, self-belief, hard work, and a refusal to compromise one's dreams - these are all standard building blocks of an old narrative, based squarely in the twentieth century American Dream. But the millennial worker must add 'love' to this formula. 'I don't have a job, I have a business', Dan Gilbert tells us. "Do what you love, love what you do", says the framed, inspirational quote attributed variously to Steve Jobs, Oscar Wilde, Mark Twain and Martin Luther King. And of course, meaningful work, on fair terms, paying a living wage, should indeed be a universal basic expectation. But as Miya Tokumitsu argues, the exhortation to 'do what you love' (DWYL) leads us in a rather different direction. Allowing for exploitation via unpaid work, and an increasing pressure to be always available, to 'live and breathe to succeed during the business day' and 'think about "greatness at night' (Quicken Loans 2014:136-137); this narrative frames any move for better working conditions, pay, or time to oneself as a lack of commitment or belief, a lack of 'love'. Not only does this affect the culture of work and firm up class barriers to entry into elite professions for those unable to commit to unpaid internships; it also, Tokumitsu holds, sets aside a majority class of 'invisible workers'. Lovable work is, she argues, 'visible work', and the DWYL narrative has a vested interest in actively ignoring those whose labour operates outside of its schema, as does most of the service and manufacturing industries, and those who represent its broken promises. The reality is that for many workers, hard work and dedication does not pay enough to live without hardship (Tokumitsu 2015:25). And particularly for the CM class, the idea of DWYL:

"...provides cover for beguiling ourselves that work and class float free from each other, that the type of work one does is a function of personal choice rather than class membership, and that class membership is a function of nebulous other factors, often implying strength (or frailty) of moral character." (Tokumitsu 2015:54-55)

Work

Key to the CM class's power, as well as its self-conception, is a process of defining apparently basic and everyday terms to mean something very specific, often at odds with their received

meaning. These definitions, far from causing confusion and discord, come to be accepted as common sense. 'Work' becomes, in practice, the management of Others' labour. A decision to charge anything below recently hyper-inflated market rent is considered a 'subsidy', while grant funding is simply well-deserved support for a great idea. 'Corruption' lives in the behaviour of black mayors and not the networks of power that support their white successor; 'diversity' becomes shorthand for 'less black people', and 'creativity' is a quality attributed to a specific type of person, performing a specific type of marketable labour. It is to these redefinitions that I will now turn.

"My grandfather owned a construction company, so he built a lot of the roads around here", one white suburbanite told me of downtown Detroit. I heard this kind of statement with considerable frequency from the CM class descendants of twentieth century business owners, explaining the emotional connections in their move 'back' from the suburban ring. It is a similar way of talking as is often applied to people like Henry Ford, a radical shortening of distance between business owner/management, and the labour of building itself. This 'management' view of the city becomes, in conversation with the CM class, the default position, obscuring any alternatives. And in the same motion – with this casting of managers as 'builders', workers become 'hands', tools, part of a machinery used by the master builder to enact change upon the landscape. This analysis is by no means a new one; those designated as 'hands' have long been cognizant of their role in building not only the fabric of a world claimed by those with power, but also the very names and reputations of such profiteers. Patricia Hill Collins recalls an 1833 speech by free black abolitionist, teacher and public speaker Maria Stewart, in which she describes the very same:

"Like King Solomon, who put neither nail nor hammer to the temple, yet received the praise; so also have the white Americans gained themselves a name . . . while in reality we have been their principal foundation and support... We have pursued the shadow, they have obtained the substance; we have performed the labor, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them." (Stewart 1933, in Richardson 1987, 59, cited in Hill Collins 2000:1)

Just as the opposition between 'careers' (meaningful, fulfilling, a reflection of talent) and 'jobs' (a necessary financial relationship) is fundamental to the 'do what you love' story, an existing division of 'skilled' and 'unskilled' work, and by extension 'skilled' and 'unskilled' workers, becomes key in prevailing CM class ideas around work and value. In this schema, 'unskilled' workers, those without college education, class privilege, or proficiency in a strictly bounded

subset of trade and 'artisanal' skills understood as useful to the CM class, do not in themselves bring value. They are people for whom jobs must be provided by benevolent and responsible managers, in order to avoid the chaos of poverty and crime. A central concern for the CM class in Detroit is "*what should be done with those people*", the majority population of the city, and the stubborn piece of the redevelopment puzzle that refuses to be flipped, made over, or rebranded:

"What do we do with those people, because as much as you can talk about training, like that autoworker is never going to be a developer. So the thing that's been interesting is I've seen a handful of, not start ups but through production companies, so there's McClure's, and there's the granola place and there's the salsa place, and that's interesting like ok, if we can take some of these manufacture lines and convert them into manufacturing something else." (interview with RT)

The above passage taken from an interview with a young tech worker is reflective of other conversations I had with members of the CM class, many of whom had their own ideas about '*what to do with those people*'. A concern with the welfare of others is far from problematic in itself, but it is the easy assumption of managerial expertise which stands out in these accounts. 'What should be done with' masses of people, a majority of the city's residents in fact, is to young members of the CM class a perfectly reasonable area of expertise for a white 22 year old creative writing major or app designer. 'The problem', people would explain to me at dinner parties, in bars or at interviews, 'is *their* lack of education'. Or lack of inspiration, of hope, or role models, or interview skills. None of which, of course, are entirely untrue. Detroit's residents suffer from a radically disinvested school system, public services so difficult to navigate that they seem designed to crush anyone's hope, the chances of getting a job at a downtown start-up, or even a service industry position in one of the new bars and coffee shops is, for most Detroiters, slim. And Detroiters, like most people living under capitalism, do need jobs. But this position also has no conception of 'their' labour, potential or actual, as valuable. As something that, ultimately, will make money for a business owner. Instead, jobs are envisioned as a gift, as a service provided to 'them', the poor.

The domestic labour of parents and grandparents working to raise children in neighbourhoods without street lighting, or schools, or emergency services; the low wage work that keeps offices, hospitals and casinos clean, guts newly purchased development projects for less than minimum wage, spends hours and days navigating welfare systems, and engages in criminalised, underground economies to get the rent paid and keep the water from being shut off. All of this

work is understood as survival work at best - people doing what they have to, perhaps, but something that ultimately, they should be *encouraged* away from, and more wholesome (but necessarily 'flexible' and non-unionised) work found to keep them occupied. This task, of course, falls to the natural overseers of the CM class.

But while the actual (paid and unpaid) work of working class people is devalued, an assumed 'blue collar' aesthetic is a key part of the new Detroit's visual branding. *McClure's*, the pickle producer mentioned in the quote earlier, was founded in 2006 by two brothers from Michigan; one working as an actor in New York City, and the other an academic in Detroit¹⁸. Their bold product packaging features what might be described as a classic mid-century industrial font, and an urban skyline under the words 'Brooklyn' and 'Detroit', in reference to the company's origins and current production locus.



Figure 17: McClure's Pickles

Taking the brothers' surname, *McClure's Pickles'* branding strategy is based very much in the idea of the family business; a homespun recipe passed down the generations, a management team comprised of the two brothers and their parents, plucky entrepreneurs with no experience but all the belief in their great product. An all-American success story. The *McClure's* website features an interactive timeline where customers can view events in the lives of both the family and the company alongside 'notable' historical moments for New York City and Detroit, focusing on the founding of the Ford Motor Company, Motown, the Tigers' 1984 World Series win, and the Woodward Dream Cruise. Urban and 'old-timey', wholesome and hard-working; the selling of *McClure's Pickles* involves the selling of Detroit (and New York), in terms shaped by a carefully curated historicised Americana. Neither is the New York/Detroit link entirely coincidental here;

¹⁸See <https://mcclures.com/pages/culture>

the brothers credit their initial success to a *New York Times* article (Schwaner-Albright 2009), launching them 'into the pickle business', their products onto the shelves of Wholefoods and other national and international distributors, and into the hippest bars and restaurants across the US.

None of this analysis is intended as criticism of *McClure's* themselves; their back story seems genuine, their pickles taste good, and if they do trade off of Detroit's image to sell their product, they also produce it in the city. Their historic/industrial aesthetic is not particularly new or remarkable either; not only can a similar style be seen in many of the city's newer food/service based enterprises (see fig 1 and 2 below), it is one that has become instantly recognisable across the stripped down 'loft' spaces and exposed brick facades of the shops, bars and restaurants that characterise gentrified districts across the US and beyond. What I am interested in here, however, is the way in which across this emerging market a particular idea of 'Detroit' intersects with this broader hipster aesthetic, to frame the city itself as a commodity, as something eminently saleable and as such, removed from its context as actual civic space.



Figure 18: Logo for *The Great Lakes Coffee Roasting Company*, whose flagship store is located at Woodward and Alexandrine, part of the new 'Midtown' Detroit.



Figure 19: Logo for *Slow's Barbecue*, owned by Phil Cooley and located on Michigan Avenue, Corktown

A 2015 article in advertising industry journal *AdWeek* attempts to tell the story of 'How Yesterday's Blue-Collar Brands Became Today's Coolest Clothes' (Klara 2015). NAFTA, the loss of US blue-collar jobs, and the later rise of 'heritage' labels and 'work inspired' fashion all get a mention, as does the problem of selling 'authenticity'. The notion of appropriation and class tourism, however, does not. An article from the fashion pages of the *New York Times Magazine*, published the same year, takes a marginally more political view on the continued ubiquity of the denim shirt, noting that:

"The phrase "blue collar" has flourished precisely because it is concrete in its imagery and vague in its connotations, vividly conjuring a labor-class scene while sidestepping such a nasty word as "class."" (Patterson 2015)

Patterson, like Klara, writes of the heritage-based rebranding of old industrial clothing manufacturers for an affluent, urban, millennial generation who, *"rejecting the flashy aesthetics and marginal quality of fast-fashion chains... has developed a taste for the sturdy, utilitarian style of workwear from decades past"* (Patterson 2015). The marketing of these brands - among them *Carhartt, Filson, Red Wing, Dickies, and LC King*, is very much about elite consumption; a positioning of the self as oppositional to the cheap and disposable culture of lower end fashion, as discerning and even ethical - choosing long lasting clothes made by skilled craftsmen in American factories. That these workers - for whom such garments were originally designed - are more likely to wear t-shirts made in Bangladesh, is an irony not lost on Patterson. And while the idea that working class people might have some prior claim to this aesthetic culture is rarely a

consideration, the incongruity of tech kids and office workers play-acting rugged masculinity via buffalo check shirts and carefully tended beards is the basis for many a sardonic aside.

Writing on the role of the 'heritage hipster' aesthetic in the gentrification of Vancouver's Downtown East Side, Lindsay Brown points out the somewhat darker and distinctly colonial overtones implicit in this trend. As older residents are pushed out of what has historically been the city's Chinatown, the sight of affluent newcomers dressing themselves and their businesses in the style of white 1890s settlers is a particularly troubling one. Much like the appropriation of 'blue-collar' brands, the adoption of a settler colonial aesthetic in the form of hair pomade and braces, wall-mounted antlers and 'old-timey' provisions stores is intended as a rejection of a disposable, consumer culture. But, Brown argues, that the history they reference is specifically white and male, is not a coincidence:

"Is it merely an accident that people have retained an 1890s aesthetic for more than nine straight years – highly unusual in fashion – in this time and place? Or is it a deeply meaningful code designed to assert a particular type of historical entitlement, in terms of white male privilege generally and land title in particular?"

...Increasingly, it seems that heritage hipsters are appropriating the garb of an earlier colonial era as an aesthetic cover for their entrepreneurial role in this one, all while overwriting local history with their own self-justifying myth of origin." (Brown 2015)

We should also resist the temptation to understand this apparently millennial phenomenon as something new. In terms reminiscent of earlier work on the relationships between American inventions of both wilderness and masculinity (White 1996; Cronon 1996; Short 1991) Willa Brown writes of the bourgeois invention of the lumberjack 100 years ago, a (semi) whitened 'noble savage', and a fiction packaged for the vicarious enjoyment of an urban leisure class:

"The archetypal lumberjack—the Paul Bunyanesque hipster naturalist—was an invention of urban journalists and advertisers. He was created not as a portrait of real working-class life, but as a model for middle-class urban men to aspire to, a cure for chronic neurasthenics. He came to life not in the forests of Minnesota, but in the pages of magazines, including this one... In 1900, The Atlantic published a glowingly romantic portrait of the authentic and natural men of the Michigan lumber camps. In it, Rollin Lynde Hartt described scenes of "jovial hilarity" in the shanty, where the jacks recited songs with "a touch of primitive poetry." The men danced and played games of rough masculinity—games that, essentially, consisted of beating the hell out of one another, but which seem, in the misty eyes of an urban, East-coast reporter to be harmless

“rough jocularity.” The lumberjack, Hartt tells us with almost nauseating sentimentality, has a “brave and generous soul,” no doubt because “the open air breathes a spirit of chivalry.” The lumberjack “speaks of youth and ardor and strong life.” He was everything the effete, over-civilized, urban white man was not.” (Brown 2014)

Just as the frustrated urban middle class of the 1900s acted out their pastoral fantasies through the imagined lifestyle of the rugged woodsman, the 21st century freelance developer can ride his American-made, 'hand assembled' bicycle to the small batch coffee roastery; work on his app pitch from his 'craftsman leather' shod ipad, over a locally grown, hand fermented lunch, before finishing the day discussing micro-brewing techniques with a selection of other 20 something white guys similarly dressed in *Carhartt* trousers and plaid shirts. But while the 'lumbersexual', or the moustachioed 'heritage hipster' might be an easy target for ridicule, the broader aesthetic these figures typify is far reaching and verging on omnipresent. Few would self-identify by such terms, but many of us consume similar products and move in much the same spaces. A full beard, buffalo check shirt, work boots and a vintage bicycle might identify a hipster, but as Klara's *Ad Week* article illustrates, a pair of camel coloured *Dickies* jeans, some brown *Red Wing* boots and a *Filson* jacket provide the basis for an entirely unremarkable standard 'casual office' uniform (Klara 2014).

And so, to *Shinola*. Originally a shoe polish brand out of production since the 1960s, the name was purchased in 2011 by Tom Karsotis, former CEO of *Fossil* watches. Producing watches, bicycles, leather goods, *Shinola* quickly established itself as a high-end lifestyle brand, drawing on images of American manufacturing and a 'heritage' aesthetic. Retailing at \$1000- \$5000 and \$500-\$2000 respectively, *Shinola's* bikes and watches are all assembled in Detroit - a key part of the company's branding strategy. The quote below, a keen mix of capitalist patriotism, artisanal branding and Detroit specificity, is taken from the company's website in 2014, at the height of their brand launch:

"We don't think American manufacturing ever failed for being too good. Our worst didn't come when we were at our best. It happened when we thought good was good enough. It's a tall order to return to form, but we're up for it. We're starting with the reinvigoration of a storied American brand, and a storied American city. Because we believe in the beauty of industry. The glory of manufacturing. We know there's not just history in Detroit, there is a future. It's why we are here. Making an investment in skill, at scale. Creating a community that will thrive through excellence of craft and pride of work. Where we will reclaim the making of things that

are made well. And define American luxury through American quality." (archived Shinola website, 2014)

Shinola, with deep respect for American manufacturing, and a recurring 'us' that seeks to subsume the categories of management and worker under the banner of 'community', has come to Detroit to be part of the city's resurgence. "*Because we believe in American skill, in taking pride in our work, in resurrecting those values we called American when we were at our peak.*" One of my participants, whose employer had been involved in the initial deals between various institutions to bring the company to the city, and to provide its initial work space, had a rather more cynical and mundane story to tell:

"A couple of years ago they did a survey of New York residents who buy luxury goods. I remember in the survey it was about pens. And they asked how much would you spend for a luxury pen that said made in China on the label, or a luxury pen that said made in the USA on the label, or a luxury pen that said made in Detroit on the label. And what they found is, people were willing to pay an astronomical amount more for a pen made in Detroit, versus one that was just 'made in the US'. Obviously buyers of luxury pens were less excited about the China pens, but they were the most excited about buying pens from Detroit, because they saw purchasing anything that was made in Detroit as a kind of charity, they felt that they were doing something good for a struggling economy." (interview with LC)

And *Shinola's* strategy, selling heritage, authenticity, vintage Americana and most of all, 'Detroit', has been a highly successful one. With more than twenty stores in the US (including in Los Angeles, Denver, Miami, and Washington DC) and stockists in the UK, France, Germany, and Italy the company has expanded its product range from bicycles and watches, to high end pet accessories, leather goods, stationery, homewares, and even a \$2500 turntable. The images below show some of the company's advertising strategies; all are taken from issues of *Shinola's* customer newsletter, sent by email between 2014 and 2017.



DETROIT IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

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Figure 20: Father's Day Collection (UK), *Shinola* 31st May 2016

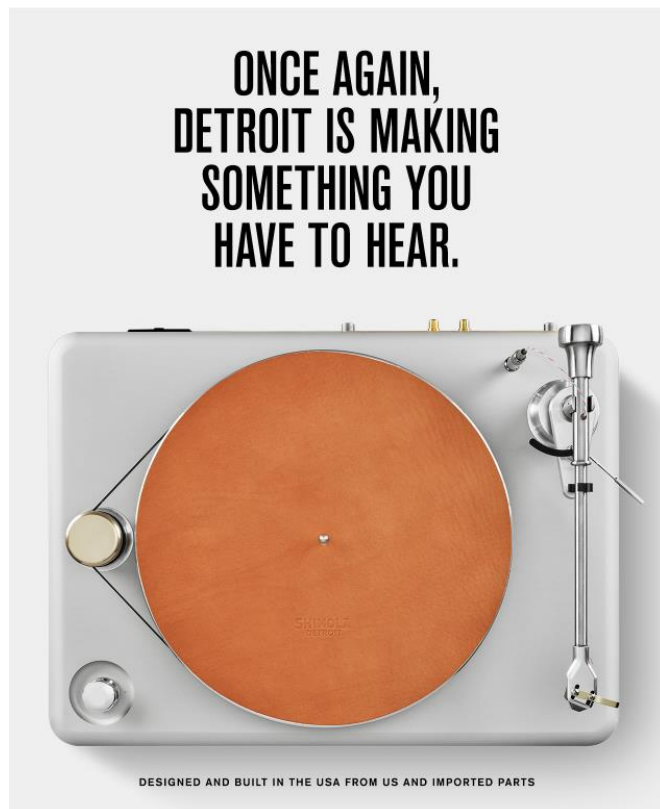


Figure 21: Runwell Turntable, *Shinola* 17th November 2016

TRUE AMERICAN GRIT

INTRODUCING THE BLACK BLIZZARD TITANIUM WRISTWATCH

INSPIRED BY THE DUST BOWL OF THE 1930s AND THE HOMESTEADERS WHO WEATHERED THE STORM, THE BLACK BLIZZARD TITANIUM WRISTWATCH IS AN EMBLEM OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT—A WILLINGNESS AND DETERMINATION TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY.

HAND-BUILT IN DETROIT, THE BLACK BLIZZARD FEATURES A SOLID TITANIUM CASE AND TURNING TOPRING BEZEL. EACH 48mm AND 42mm SPORT WATCH COMES WITH A TITANIUM BRACELET AND INTERCHANGEABLE BLACK RUBBER STRAP, AND A COLLECTORS BOOK ON THE DUST BOWL.

SHOP NOW



Figure 22: Black Blizzard, *Shinola* 4th November 2014

The image immediately above, while unusually for the brand, *not* referencing Detroit, nevertheless speaks to a pernicious willingness to appropriate, repackage, and capitalise upon working class history. A final image (overleaf), demonstrates the key role ideas of philanthropy plays in the company's marketing strategy, as well as reproducing the idea of 'jobs' as a commodity to be gifted, and echoing LC's sentiments about 'charity' in the purchase of luxury goods.

SHINOLA
DETROIT

654 JOBS & COUNTING

Dear Friend,

We wanted to take a moment to say thank you and wish you a Happy 2017!

When Shinola was founded in 2011, it was our belief that products should be well-made and built to last. As makers of modern watches, bicycles, journals, jewelry, leather goods and now turntables, Shinola has, since our beginning, stood for skill at scale, the perseveration of craft and the beauty of industry.

For five years we've stuck to our core mission and created jobs and products we are proud of. With your support, we have opened 22 stores globally, manufactured 624,775 watches, sewn 275,000 leather watch straps, created 201 meaningful manufacturing jobs and over 600 jobs total.

Well-made products don't make themselves—it takes 37 hands to assemble just one watch and 654 people to make this company great. And that number is growing. There has been a lot of discussion recently about manufacturing jobs in this country. As we head into 2017, we are excited about the jobs we will continue to create in the cities that need them most. We've always said it's a tall order to return to form, but we're on our way with your help and support.

It's time to roll up our sleeves, and get back to it!

Figure 23: *Shinola* email newsletter, January 14th 2017, titled 'Thank You from 600+ *Shinola* Employees'

Subsidy

In the economic logic of the contemporary US, welfare, education, and public services are understood as subsidies. As in, my tax dollars are subsidising your lifestyle. As in, your quality of life is unearned and undeserved. In Detroit, a property owner whose access to extremely cheap real estate is contingent upon both his own access to ready cash, and the dispossession of previous tenants or owners through debt, foreclosure, or state intervention; understands the

possibility of continuing to charge existing rent at a rate now suddenly below a violently inflated market as *subsidy*, and considers any absence of this newly possible revenue as a personal loss. The sums involved here are considerable - not the standard yearly rent raise which might be expected to cover inflation and a landlord's costs, but often a doubling of rents year to year, in response to the presence (or anticipated arrival) of a new demographic with means far outstripping neighbourhood averages. A tenant I spoke to in August 2014, who had mentioned to the landlord but not yet confirmed her intention to vacate her apartment in a rapidly gentrifying area, was surprised when he stopped her in the street outside her home. He had found a new tenant, he told her, and wanted to get in and renovate the unit as soon as possible. These renovations were not essential work; but constituted the cosmetic upgrades which would allow KC's landlord to charge the much higher rents that were now being commanded by properties in the neighbourhood:

"I said we were planning on moving out in September, and he said 'well then I might not be able to get in there until October, see...that's gonna be a big problem for me with the rent'. And I can only interpret that as he's considering not being able to make more money off our unit faster as a loss. And he eventually implied that it would be more appropriate for me to make myself homeless for the summer, than for him to have to wait a couple of months to make more money off a unit he's already making money off of." (Interview with KC)

"I'm making a loss", implies the landlord, by not making the maximum amount of money from this property. Not only does he have a right to the property itself, and to collect rent in exchange for its occupation by another; he also understands himself as having a right to its *potential* revenue. When an influx of affluent potential tenants makes it possible to rent an apartment at \$900 a month instead of the \$500 it was 'worth' the previous year, the landlord sees himself as *losing* \$400 for every month the existing tenants continue to occupy their home. Smith's *potential* ground rent has become something understood as already owed to him (Smith 1979).

Meanwhile, grants made available to business ventures in the name of 'economic development' are not seen as subsidies, but a reflection of the merit of the project itself. The new businesses fuelling 'Midtown's' comeback, the hip restaurants lining Corktown's Michigan Avenue; these are cited as evidence of the success of local entrepreneurship, of a new, flexible, creative approach to business in a city previously held back by its reliance on big industry. A significant number of these are themselves subsidised in one way or another, although Detroit's CM class would rarely describe them as such. One longer term Cass Corridor resident told me of her frustration at watching new, expensive, lifestyle-oriented businesses continually chosen for

financial support over black owned, community focused ones. Speaking about a particular locus of regeneration at the intersection of Cass Avenue and Canfield Street (also the location of the new *Shinola* store), and the institutional support awarded two adjacent designer boutique stores, she explained:

"Hugh and Nora got money, and they're from Bloomfield Hills or something. And they sell upscale homeware bullshit. And they're next to Source Booksellers, who are amazing. And the Gallery across the way, the Dell Pryor Gallery. That's a really awesome resource, it's been there for a long time. And why don't they get money? I don't know. Well I do, the real reason is that they're black. And they've been here forever. That's the real reason. Old news, and racism, that's the reason. I don't know what the reason on the books is." (Interview with SF)

Investment in a venture, particularly of the kind that is expected to be paid back only in the event of success, is similarly understood as a deserved gesture of faith rather than a subsidy. A 24 year old co-owner of his own start-up told me (as something of an afterthought) about some additional money he and his friends had got through a contest for 'small amounts of venture capital'. It wasn't much, he said, but it had allowed them to quit their jobs and work on the project full-time, paying themselves "next to nothing". All of them owning cars and high spec laptops, drinking craft beer and eating takeout, 'nothing' and one's proximity to it is as ever, highly relative.

It is not just smaller ventures that are subsidised to set up business in Detroit. *Quicken's* move to the city garnered a \$50 million tax break from the state, the largest that year. *Broder and Sachse*, the property developers behind the refurbishment of 1214 Griswold Street into luxury apartment building 'The Albert', and the eviction of the low income senior citizens who lived there, were likewise awarded a ten-year tax abatement for that development (Moskowitz 2017:67;82). *Quicken*, along with other large scale downtown white-collar employers *Compuware*, *Blue Cross Blue Shield*, *Strategic Staffing* and *DTE Energy*, supported their workers to move to Detroit via the Live Downtown program. Employees renting a property within the designated area would receive a \$3500 rent subsidy in the first two years of residence; those choosing to buy could expect help in the form of a \$20,000 down payment on a mortgage. The program was inspired by Live Midtown, a similar initiative by Detroit Medical Centre, Henry Ford Hospital and Wayne State University, in connection with Midtown Inc (Moskowitz 2017:83, Muller 2014). And state funds follow this private investment, to ensure an urban environment that will attract and retain the largely white, young, and affluent workers these stakeholders are so keen to recruit. While the streetlights may still be out in certain neighbourhoods on the East

Side, it becomes unacceptable for such things to be neglected in Midtown or Downtown. Peter Moskowitz situates these processes in a continuum with those earlier interventions that sent much of Detroit's population to the suburbs:

'Now, just like generations before, though with the geography reversed, the same dynamic is playing out: white people are being subsidized by the local, state, and federal governments to re-inhabit cities, while black Detroiters are ignored or even forcibly pushed out. Fifty years ago subsidies came in the form of billions spent on highways and suburban housing. This time they come in the form of billions used on tax breaks for stadiums and condos, for renovations of storefronts and homes, for streetcars and bike lanes.' (Moskowitz 2017:103)

But regardless of this institutional assistance, CM class entrepreneurs are of course heavily subsidised by their personal networks of affluence. The iconic *Slow's Barbecue*, the Michigan Avenue restaurant listed as an essential stop on any Detroit visitor itinerary and cited as the anchor development responsible for sparking Corktown's regeneration with its establishment back in 2005 is owned by local celebrity Phil Cooley. As a typically gushing *New York Times* article from 2010 titled *'Detroit's Renewal, Slow Cooked'* tells us:

'With his parents as co-signers on the leases for two buildings totaling \$159,000, and the chef and sous-chef as sweat-equity partners, Mr. Cooley opened Slows using an advance on his inheritance, helping to refurbish the space himself.' (Ryzik 2010b)

This inherited wealth does nothing to diminish Cooley's image as the maverick, independent businessman and 'community builder'; neither does the fact that along with his father and brother, he now owns a sizeable chunk of the real estate housing the businesses most frequently covered in national and international press features on Detroit. Articles like Ryzik's above continue to frame Cooley as the hardscrabble "restaurateur-turned-do-gooder". 'The 7.2', Moskowitz argues, can in fact only exist 'as a heavily subsidised state' (Moskowitz 2017:17), channelling resources away from the rest of the city in patterns already shaped by the city's history, and in ways that only serve to bolster the self-image of its gentrifiers:

'The people who are benefiting from all these subsidies—the gentrifiers of the 7.2—do not seem to realize the work that has gone into bringing and keeping them there. They consider themselves cunning pioneers who've figured out how to make the economics of a rough city work, ignoring the fact that hundreds of millions of dollars that could be used to keep people... in their homes are propping up their lifestyles of conspicuous consumption. And they do not seem to realize that

they are benefiting directly from the past oppression of those whom they hope to lift with their rising tide. (Moskowitz 2017:83)

Doing well by doing good

Such is Cooley's cache, that early attempts by the restaurateur and several others to have a local soup kitchen shut down seem not to have sullied his good guy reputation much at all. The group, in a move as jarring in its honesty as it was ill-advised in PR terms, called themselves 'The Corktown Conquistadors' and formed as a neighbourhood improvement association some time around 2007 (Moskowitz 2017:74-75). Alongside the adjacent Cass Corridor, Corktown has been a hub for the city's homeless population for decades, and thus the location of multiple services geared towards this demographic. Much like the Cass Corridor too, the neighbourhood has become in more recent years, a locus for gentrification - particularly along Michigan Avenue, where Cooley's 'anchor' businesses are located. As part of a concerted effort to transform the neighbourhood into an environment more hospitable to new businesses and their patrons, the group made targets of a local liquor store and the soup kitchen attached to nearby St Peter's Episcopal Church (the latter running since 1976), making clear their wishes to end *'the free handouts in our neighborhood that facilitate the drugs, crime and general malcontent.'* (Dawsey 2011)

Bill Wylie-Kellerman, pastor at St Peter's and long-time social justice activist, reproduces an email between the 'conquistadors' in his book *'Where the waters go around: beloved Detroit'*. Following a neighbourhood summit, the pastor was forwarded the minutes of the group's prior meeting, an excerpt from which follows, with names redacted by Kellerman:

'Hi Conquistadors. The meeting was super. PLEASE FORWARD TO ANYONE YOU THINK MIGHT BE INTERESTED. (My email list is not very big.) For everyone who wasn't there: we've picked four projects to get started on. (And a secret one that can't be discussed via email . . . how very mysterious.)

1. *The Music Festival Hopefully, this totally radical indie rock concert will be held next year in front of the train station—in tandem with tour de troit, already a successful Corktown event. XXX, XXXXX and XXXX will be leading the Music Festival Committee—and working with XXXX, who is heading up the annual tour de troit. She's thinking the after-event this year can be a mini-music fest, which will help make next year's big festival debut all the better...*

2. *Team Bagley Market. These folks will start organizing complaints against Bagley Market, as well as rogue acts of bad will. 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. Would anyone like to lead this team?*

3. *The Bermuda Triangle. This includes (but is not limited to) activism 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. XXXX and I are hoping to go talk to the people at the church next week and will give an update. We'll try being nice first . . .'* (in Wylie Kellerman 2017:121-122)

The emphasis in Cooley and his Conquistadors' comments to the press, is very much on tackling issues of addiction, and the cycles of poverty they understand as stemming from them. And we can see these themes, albeit in rather less sympathetic form, in the excerpt above. As Wylie Kellerman notes, it is ironic then, that these concerned citizens' neighbourhood development plans have quite so overwhelmingly favoured alcohol related enterprises - bars, craft breweries, micro distilleries. 'I count seventeen bars on or adjacent to Michigan—seven of them new in the last couple of years', he writes. 'Some are so close that St. Peter's is required to sign off on their liquor licenses' (Wylie Kellerman 2017:122). Yet the *New York Times* and others continue to profile Cooley and his compatriots (who wisely chose to drop the offensive moniker) as saviours of the city. 'How much good can a restaurant do?' begins Ryzik's 2010 piece (Ryzik 2010b). A profile of Cooley in *Vice* magazine tells us that 'the city has been relying on young innovators and entrepreneurs like Phil to rebuild it stronger and smarter' (VICE 2012), while *The Guardian* calls him 'one of the heroes of emerging Detroit' (Conlin 2014).

Quite what constitutes 'the city' being saved in these accounts is invariably vague; it certainly isn't the rough sleepers and vulnerably housed folks who eat at St Peter's. In fact, for all their rhetorical emphasis on community and neighbourhood, the interests of the CM class seem far more aligned with the preservation of *buildings* than of human relationships. 'Detroit's historic homes', 'Detroit's industrial heritage'; paying 'homage' to old uses by, for example, naming a hip new restaurant after the pawn shop that formerly occupied its premises (Abraham 2014). And it is through investment in real estate, rather than people, that contributions to and belief in 'the city' are so frequently quantified. As with the residential landlords mentioned in the previous chapter, the willingness and ability to invest financially - that is, to purchase property for one's own use and profit - is understood as a measure of an individual's commitment to Detroit. And few have invested so much, and so publicly, as Dan Gilbert. Chairman and founder

of *Quicken Loans* and *Rock Ventures*, Gilbert and his 'family' of companies can now lay claim to around 100 buildings in downtown Detroit (Afana 2017), most of them located along the central Woodward corridor between Grand Circus and the Riverfront.

'Is Dan Gilbert Detroit's New Superhero?', asks the title of a 2014 article in the *Atlantic* (Alberta 2014); and despite taking pains to note the implications for democracy and privacy of such a monopoly downtown, the answer from this article, as with others (Austen 2014; Muller 2014; Segal 2013), seems to be a resounding yes. Gilbert's famous maxim, that he and his companies are 'doing well by doing good', skilfully positions him as both saviour and savvy businessman, in a magical capitalist landscape where one aim supports rather than obstructs the other. In a city so radically disinvested as to be lacking basic services, Gilbert's investment in the infrastructure around his acquisitions is painted a public service, and any profits Gilbert might eventually accrue, as just reward for his magnanimity and openness to 'risk':

'...if he is known for one thing around here, it is for reaching for his wallet when Detroit can't cover its tab and betting, in the end, that he'll get paid back in some way.' (Alberta 2014)

'Opportunity Detroit, as Mr. Gilbert has branded it, is both a rescue mission and a business venture that, if successful, will yield him a fortune.' (Segal 2013)

'Whether or not they're expecting to profit, Gilbert and other capitalists — large and small — are trying to rebuild the city, even stepping in and picking up some duties that were once handled by the public sector.' (Austen 2014)

And in this at least, Gilbert is markedly different to other land speculators, as rather than letting his portfolio of properties lie idle until the market lifts, he is actively renovating, programming, and maintaining these spaces, and attracting new taxpayers to the city to live in them. But as Akers and Leary point out in their takedown of Austen's glowing paean to the man, nowhere else would he be lauded in such a way for simply doing business:

'One of Gilbert's PR triumphs... is how he has managed to earn a reputation for civic-mindedness mostly by attempting to lure tenants to his properties. Tycoons of an earlier era had to pursue something besides their main hustle to earn the laurels being heaped on Gilbert. Henry and Edsel Ford founded hospitals, endowed schools, built museums. The charitable giving Gilbert makes, however, isn't an especially big part of his image. He is portrayed as a

Detroit benefactor simply for doing what he does: run mortgage and real-estate companies.'
(Akers and Leary 2014)

And that particular business, it must be remembered, is itself deeply implicated in the most recent bad fortunes of Detroit and places like it in the form of the subprime mortgage crash. Indeed, as Christine Macdonald reported for *The Detroit News* in 2015, Gilbert's own *Quicken Loans* can claim fifth highest number of mortgages ending in foreclosure in the city over the previous decade, half of which, at the time of writing, were now recorded as blighted structures. The company was also the only one of that top five to survive the crisis (MacDonald 2015). Despite vehement denials of involvement in predatory lending, *Quicken* has undeniably played a part in the creation of the blight affecting the city of Detroit, simply through the use of foreclosure. And these now (not always) vacant homes, thus designated as 'blighted structures', have subsequently become targets for large scale demolition which Dan Gilbert, as co-chair of the city's Blight Removal Task Force, so publicly spearheads.

Corruption

I have discussed some of the ways the CM class is able to define ideas of work, subsidy, and civic mindedness to create a reality in which their power and superiority is legitimised. While all of these terms tap into ideas of moral citizenship, it is the concept of corruption that really lays bare the race and class dimensions of this relation; the ways in which the values of the CM class are fundamentally rooted in structures of white supremacy

A corrupt public official takes bribes, grants favours, acts dishonestly in return for personal gain. Corruption undermines the structures of government and law which keep 'us' safe, ensure fairness, order, justice. To corrupt is to pollute, to despoil something which was once pure; the constitution, the principle of democracy. But, of course, these systems and declarations of universal rights to liberty and property, were written by men who owned other human beings, and whose descendants continue to profit from the wealth created by that forced labour. White people, for the most part, who feel secure in the assumption that the legal system, the police, and the economy; when left alone to work properly, will serve the best interests of 'the people'.

So, who or what corrupts? Former mayor Kwame Kilpatrick is corrupt, corrupts others, perverts the system, is incarcerated. Decades of corruption and mismanagement, backhanders etc. (Alberta 2014; McGregor 2013;) have led to Detroit's decay, ruin, eventual bankruptcy. But as William Tabb points out, in the context of structural adjustment programs both global and regional:

'The rationale for austerity is always the claim that elected officials failed to do their job properly. The context that constrains their choices and triggers crises is often excluded from the conversation and blame is misdirected from systemic causation onto the personal failings of leaders.' (Tabb 2014:94)

And while Kilpatrick may be an awful husband, boss, and civic leader, his 28 year corruption conviction essentially rests on accusations that as mayor he ran the city on a 'pay to play' basis; hiring contractors according to who offered a benefit to himself or others in his networks, and effectively running the mayor's office as a criminal enterprise. Kwame was seen by many as the epitome of old Detroit, corrupt and mismanaged Detroit; *Black* Detroit. Mike Duggan, who was elected to that same office in 2013 - the first white mayor since the early 70s - moved from the suburb of Livonia into the city to do so. Previously manager of the city's SMART bus service, CEO of the Detroit Medical Center, and Deputy Wayne County Executive, Duggan ran a campaign based on his successes at 'reducing deficits' within all of these organisations. Positioned as a voice of reason, a sensible, no nonsense, and - despite his long career as very much *part of* the Wayne County municipal structure - a non-partisan candidate able to stand up against newly appointed emergency manager Kevyn Orr, and shake up the city's stagnant bureaucratic structure. Duggan won the vote with 52% as a write-in candidate (Rushe 2013b).

And the new mayor has delivered on many of his promises. The street lights are back on in most Detroit neighbourhoods, emergency response times are down, and basic city services like trash collection and pick up from illegal dumping sites are more reliable and responsive. Duggan's major legacy project, however, is in the arena of blight clearance. During my time in Detroit in 2014, near the beginning of Duggan's term, residents in neighbourhoods like Brightmoor - who had been asking city hall for years to take care of the dumping and vacancy in their neighbourhoods - seemed particularly enthusiastic about the new mayor's actions, even as many of them remained sceptical of what his future plans may be, and his status as a white man leading a majority black city. On July 19th 2016, the mayor's office reported the 10,000th building demolished in the city since his appointment, quoting the man himself as

saying: “The magnitude of the blight problem in the city is enormous; but *instead of whining about it, we got to work on it*” (Duggan for Detroit, 2016).

As early as 2015, however, questions were beginning to be asked in the local press about the rising costs of blight elimination, and the way in which contracts for the demolition work were allocated (Washington 2015). The excerpt below, from a May 2016 article in the *Detroit Free Press* is typical:

“Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan pledged full cooperation Friday with federal investigators probing bidding practices and rising costs in the city's demolition program and said that, while there were mistakes in its early days, he doesn't anticipate the probe will find serious problems.

The FBI is assisting the U.S. Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or SIGTARP, in an investigation of bidding and price hikes for tearing down blighted homes in Detroit after costs rose from \$8,500-\$10,000 per home under former Mayor Dave Bing to an average at one point of \$16,400 in 2014 under the Duggan administration's aggressive revamp of the city's demolition program. The city has received more than \$170 million in demolition funds through TARP's Hardest Hit Funds, and SIGTARP is the federal watchdog on spending of \$475 billion in TARP funds nationwide.” (Helms 2016)

But while local reporting has, as is appropriate, sought to hold local elected officials to account, wider coverage of Duggan’s blight removal has on the whole shown little interest in the scandal. A September 2017 article in the US print edition of *The Economist* speaks of the mayor’s achievements in particularly glowing terms, leading with the headline: *‘In Detroit, the end of blight is in sight: What happens when a city accustomed to bad government elects a good one’*. Dealing briefly with the federal investigation in a single paragraph towards the end of the piece, these accusations of impropriety are framed - after Duggan’s own account of the scandal - as an unfortunate and minimally significant fallout of a project that was just *too* efficient for its own good:

‘With this speed have come problems. Allegations that the city’s demolition programme awarded contracts improperly have dogged the administration and attracted a federal investigation. Michigan’s state housing agency suspended funds for two months, after a state audit found improper controls in place. Land bank officials, including the director of demolitions, have resigned. Mr Duggan, who is not a subject of the investigation, blames the mistakes on a desire to increase the pace of demolitions, but acknowledges that regulators were right to rap his knuckles.’ (The Economist 2017)

Both Kilpatrick and Duggan have been found to allocate municipal contracts to their own advantage, and to have diverted precious funds from a struggling city in doing so. Why then, is one offence worth a 28 year prison sentence, and the other a 'rap on the knuckles'? Putting aside the differences in scale, and the evidence of embezzlement in Kilpatrick's case over a more mundane rigging of the system in Duggan's; how is it that a federal investigation of the new mayor's pet project can be of so little note, and have minimal impact upon his image, when only a decade previously Kilpatrick's downfall was seen to represent the failure of 'Detroit' itself?

While Duggan's PR team initially positioned him as a counter to the imposition of emergency management, it is perhaps more useful to view his 2013 election, Michigan's instalment of Kevyn Orr as emergency manager the same year, and the EM's subsequent filing for the city's bankruptcy, as part of a distinct moment in a much longer, concerted trajectory. To revisit Tabb's comparison of emergency management and global structural adjustment; *'An Emergency Financial Manager performs a similar role in Detroit. In each case, political leaders were blamed for not making 'difficult choices'. Of course, when politicians in a large number of places are said to have made the same 'mistakes', we need to look for larger structural constraints that lead them to act in similar, inadequate ways. Under such conditions, blaming politicians for creating a crisis situation may in reality be more a rationale for overruling democratic governance and imposing unpopular measures necessitated by forces beyond the realistic control of public officials'* (Tabb 2014:91).

The construction of emptiness in Detroit, as I have described in previous chapters - in visual, ideological, and physical terms through popular culture, art, news reporting and processes of disinvestment and dispossession;- can in this way be understood as part of a movement to reclaim space that has for a time been deemed surplus to the needs of capital, and return it to the service of the overculture. That human beings have continued to occupy this space during that period is of little interest; their role in this new moment is either to be grateful for the re-establishment of order, or to be swept away in the restructure.

While it is useful to view such a moment and such a system in terms of its structure, it is also important to avoid understanding it simply as a headless behemoth, a machine unstoppable and operating under its own internal logic. There are certainly clear connections with global financial processes in Detroit as with the IMF, the World Bank, the state legislature and the mortgage industry; but the *choices* of organisations and powerful individuals within them to

sustain an exploitative and damaging system at the cost of human suffering should not be ignored. Tabb again:

'... we should not underestimate the rationality of individual actors along with the power of mortgage originators, investment banks, credit rating agencies, lawyers and others who benefitted so substantially from what has been a corrupt wealth-generating project that produced the real estate bubble. They made out like bandits and when it all collapsed escaped with their ill-gotten gains.' (Tabb 2014:87)

The idea that the financial system itself is corrupt, while a familiar notion to even the least radical newspaper reader since the financial crash, is often noticeably absent from everyday discussion around Detroit's foreclosure rate and resulting blight. For many who have not experienced it, the image of foreclosure is one of misfortune or poor choices; a lost job, unpaid bills, financial incompetence, lack of education, unwise overstretching of resources, refusal to pay property taxes. That many of the blighted structures in the city were recently homes to working or retired people with fully paid off mortgages, would come as a surprise to many. I have discussed in earlier chapters the history of redlining, and racialised mis-selling of poor mortgages with impossible to meet conditions. But should a resident of Detroit manage, against these odds - as many did - to find a home and buy it outright, the ease with which they may be dispossessed from it is, frankly, chilling. Property taxes, to the tune of thousands per year, haphazardly enforced and historically with very little value to show in the form of actual city services, may suddenly be demanded. At rates among some of the highest in the US, and charged at a percentage of home value assessments as much as ten times their actual, wildly depreciated market value, a property delinquent on taxes three years in a row may be foreclosed on, occupied or not. A pensioner or low-paid worker failing to produce the required \$5,000, \$10,000, \$20,000 or more may easily find their home seized, and auctioned off to a new owner for as little as \$500. Water bills, notoriously inaccurate and often impossible to correct, may now be attached to tax liens so that falling behind on payment would not only result in disconnection (illegal in many countries, which recognise access to water as a human right), but also eventually in the loss of the family home through foreclosure too (Wylie Kellerman 2017:130-131). While large commercial accounts such as that of Joe Louis Arena, owned by billionaire Mike Illich, were found to be still operating with large unpaid bills, domestic water bills only have to be \$150 in arrears to receive a shut off notice (Clark 2014). Add to this those residents induced to leave 'voluntarily' though the systematic withdrawal of schools, churches, emergency services and even fire hydrants, and you have the prime conditions for an apparently benevolent takeover by the new (old) order.

That these individuals and organisations are so deeply involved in the very structures of power that created this 'empty' Detroit to begin with is, in all but the most radical circles, not defined as corrupt, chiefly because these are the people and institutions who get to define what corruption means. Those who might benefit from the clearance of poor and black neighbourhoods are those in charge of this very process; Bill Pulte, head of the Detroit Blight Removal Authority, also happens to be the grandson of the United States' largest homebuilder, based in Bloomfield Hills (Wylie Kellerman 2017:131). Dan Gilbert, whose rapid acquisition of 100 plus buildings downtown was discussed earlier, heads the Blight Task Force, the organisation charged with mapping and identifying the structures to be demolished. And if Gilbert's potential conflict of interest here is merely distasteful, we might instead look to his contributions to Kwame Kilpatrick (Berman 2009), or his college career as an illegal bookmaker for evidence of corruption. But no, these seem only to add colour to the past of a risk-taking entrepreneur. As these quotes from the Austen and Segal profiles of Gilbert show, even his arrest for running a sports book is treated as teenaged high jinks, rather than any kind of criminal past:

'One early and ill-fated venture was running a short-lived bookmaking operation with some friends while a freshman at Michigan State University. It ended when he was arrested by an undercover agent. He served probation, the charges were dropped and there was no conviction. "We were college teenagers," he said.' (Segal 2013)

'At 9, Gilbert started buying candy and reselling it at a profit to his friends. As a teenager in suburban Detroit, he delivered pizzas he made himself. He spent a night in jail while at Michigan State for running a sports book, with the police handing him Egg McMuffins through the bars in the morning. (The charge was later dropped).'' (Austen 2014)

This ability to incorporate rule breaking as part of a personal development story rather than as criminality is something present throughout CM class narratives, as is an inability to see nepotism and 'mutual interest' as anything other than networking. One tech entrepreneur whose start-up involved the purchase and renovation of foreclosed property cheerfully told me:

"One of my partners in the house, XXXX, works for special projects for Rock Ventures, and basically ran the blight survey. So he is working very closely with the city of Detroit and the landbank in all of this stuff they're doing, so it's kinda funny, basically, he's working to develop a program that would provide financing for people doing what we're doing." (interview with MW)

Another worker in the arts sector complained of what she saw as a troubling culture at her workplace:

"Of course nepotism is a thing in business anyways, but this was even more so, it was very very nepotistic. Our friends are involved in this, our friends are involved in that- it's very friends based. It completely stifled any critique of any projects that were problematic, it was like 'those are our friends though, you can't say anything bad about our friends'." (Interview with LD)

This speaks, I argue, to a fundamental belief by the CM class, and affluent white culture more broadly, in their own natural authority. Whatever political beliefs a majority of my participants might hold - as liberals, believers in 'diversity', and young people generally well versed in the standards of their liberal arts educations; the unshakeable belief in their own ability to lead would time and again prevail. Even the principle of democracy - so fundamental to most US citizens in name if not always practise - may be compromised in the interests of getting the 'right' things done with expediency. As one informant told me:

"...the city government has gotten better, and with the emergency manager too, which I have very unresolved feelings about. In theory I'm opposed to the entire idea that a state can usurp a city's government and install an emergency manager. That said... Like, I think that entire idea's, I don't think that should be allowed to happen, ever. That said, the emergency manager's doing a great job, and is doing a way better job than anybody who was running the city before. So like, I'm opposed to the entire concept, but in like... in this one situation it has been way better for Detroit than if it hadn't happened." (Interview with MN)

Diversity

While 'corruption' is used so effectively to dog-whistle racist moralities, 'diversity' - a term perhaps more readily associated with progressive ideas of social justice - is rather more awkward. A word arising in many of the conversations I had in Detroit, its particular use here caused me to re-examine some of my own assumptions around its meaning. Certainly in a UK context, 'diversity' tends to conjure images of equalities legislation, institutional commitments to championing opportunity for people of colour, women, and others understood to be left behind or discriminated against by a prevailing system. 'Diversity' is liberal, progressive, multicultural; at its best the outcome of addressing entrenched structures of power, at its worst an institutional buzzword. In Detroit, however, the term seemed to be used in a far more literal sense. Interviewees often spoke of the city's whitest neighbourhoods as the most

'diverse', and talked of a positive future of 'economic diversity' and 'mixed' neighbourhoods. Strictly speaking of course, they were correct - a neighbourhood like Woodbridge is statistically more 'diverse', having a fairly even white to black ratio¹⁹ compared to Detroit as a whole. And in a region devastated after abandonment by its key industry, diversifying the economy seems a sensible way to avoid such disasters. But as much as my informants sought to couch these ideas as simply objective fact, it is of course impossible to divorce them from their context. To imply that 'diversifying' a majority black city is no different to efforts to do the same in a majority white city is a false equivalency. While the latter may challenge dominant power structures, the former essentially seeks to 'dilute' blackness. While local political power in Detroit may indeed be dominated by African Americans, this power stretches only as far as Eight Mile Road, and cannot be separated from its state, federal, and economic context. To understand the whiteness of Woodbridge as a bastion of progress in 83% black Detroit is to co-sign on white supremacy.

For Detroit's CM class, diversity is a basic liberal value and a measure of an area's desirability, but it need not necessarily be quantified in any real way. It is a vague, intangible quality that is *a good thing* simply because it is. This is something already identified by Florida. Alongside individuality and meritocracy, he positions diversity as a key value of the creative class. They *'use the word a lot, but not to press any political hot buttons. [it is] simply something they value, in all its manifestations'* (Florida 2012a:74). However, the 'diversity' originally championed by Florida emphasised tolerance of immigrants, gays, and 'artists and bohemians', rather than *racial* diversity per se. Indeed, each of these categories may conceivably be made up solely of white people and still fulfil Florida's mandate for a diverse urban environment. And like much of the Creative Class Thesis, such ideas have informed trends in urban planning as much as they have shaped how contemporary 'creatives' understand their own positions. From 'mixed income/use' developments providing cover for social cleansing (see Bridge et al 2011; Lees and Ferreri 2016), to a diversified, 'gig' economy that manages to provide all of the services of its predecessor with none of the worker rights, we can understand this depoliticised push for diversity as part of a larger shift.

'Diversity' was often the attribute residents and landlords named when asked what made their own neighbourhoods stand out positively from the rest of the city. But when pressed to quantify this measure, responses were often vague and contradictory. For one young

¹⁹ 43.4% white, 44.7% black. Source: data for US census, via <https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Michigan/Detroit/Woodbridge/Race-and-Ethnicity#overview>

entrepreneur, diversity in practice meant an even split between people he saw as like himself, and those he saw as different; the major dividing factor based on age and newness to the city:

"[The neighbourhood] is a really nice mix of 50% shared houses of young 20 somethings who recently moved to the city, but like 50% like older people, families who have lived here forever."

(Interview with ML)

A residential landlord who boasted of the diversity of the neighbourhood he had chosen to invest in also used age as a key metric, as well as making a point about the area's success in 'tolerance' as a home to 'young professionals, families, and gay people'. However, I also interviewed some of his tenants, one of whom complained that her landlord, despite being aware of her marital status, seemed to make a point of consistently referring to her wife as her 'room-mate'. A commitment to making the area hospitable to Florida's 'canaries of the Creative Age' (Florida 2003:256) did not in this case translate into personal respect towards actual gay people living there.

Likewise, the notion that 'championing diversity' entails some kind of obligation towards those whose presence makes your organisation diverse seemed particularly absent among those in the tech industry. Well versed in the problems of the sector's heavily white and male composition, one CEO told me of his attempt to address the diversity problem at his own start-up:

"...we had a high school intern that came in and we were like ok let's get someone...[black]. And he just couldn't be helpful at all. And it was still fine like having him around, and I would take another one, but there's just still that- can we find that one really smart high school kid in Detroit, that has a laptop... like that doesn't exist, and it's not his fault, and I don't know how you make that exist, where you can find one of those in Birmingham because of the way he grew up." (Interview with RT)

Putting aside the obvious issue of gender, R understands that there is inequality here, but he sees the culprit broadly as 'economics'. That the cheap rent which made his own start-up possible is part of the same situation that has denied Detroit high schoolers the opportunities to compete with their contemporaries from the suburbs, does not figure into this consideration. His solution doesn't involve justice, but paternalistic largesse; *allowing* a young person to come and work for free, even though he sees little benefit to the company. The ability to talk about 'diversity' while separating oneself from the need to actually challenge the system that denies it is one of the hallmarks of colour-blind racism. As Bonilla-Silva argues, it:

'...allows a President [Bush] to state things such as, "I strongly support diversity of all kinds, including racial diversity in higher education", yet at the same time, to characterize the University of Michigan's affirmative action program as "flawed" and "'discriminatory" against whites. Thus whites enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding "racist".' (Bonilla-Silva 2003:93-94)

A way to associate the self with progressive values without having to relinquish any racial advantage, or as window dressing for the adventurous rich white kid experience; appeals to diversity tend in reality to mean 'just enough black and poor people to add flavour, while maintaining a white majority'. In Florida's work and elsewhere, the talk is generally about openness and tolerance towards gays and ethnic and racial *minorities*; white people find it exceedingly difficult to equitably address a situation where the non-white population is in fact a majority. Removed from a position in which we may make easy gestures of 'inclusion' towards marginalized outsiders, such a situation instead asks us to do the much harder work of de-centering whiteness.

Transience, speculation, eviction

While many of the 'pioneers' I spoke with in the previous chapter intended, for now at least, to make a permanent home in Detroit, CM class interviewees - particularly those working in the burgeoning local tech sector - seemed to have plans to move on within the next few years. Perhaps unsurprising for members of a mobile elite, some explained this by their youth, and a wish for adventure, to see other cities before 'settling down'. Others said they would move wherever the best job offer was - usually the coasts or Chicago. Some, thinking about having children in the near future, spoke to the perceived 'impossibility' of raising a family in the city. The two excerpts below, one from a tech worker in his early twenties and another in his mid-thirties, are fairly typical:

"Part of the reason I moved to Detroit is I was just like let's have an adventure you know, and I think after a couple more years here, I'll probably move somewhere else like same kinda idea... I think, you know... the four of us expect to own this house for at least 10 years. I don't think I'll live in Detroit for the next 10 years. Not even because of anything about Detroit, but just because I don't wanna spend all my 20s living in one place, like that's when you have the chance to move around a lot, I want to take advantage of it. But we definitely expect to be homeowners here for the long-term, and I'll probably stay involved and visit frequently. So in

that sense thinking about the development, we still take the long term view." (Interview with MN)

"I don't know [about staying long term], I mean it depends on what happens to the company. I love Detroit, and I would love to stay here. There could be a reason I need to move, for something with the company, and then my girlfriend also grew up in Michigan, and has been here her whole life, and sort of stayed here for me, so I kind of owe her, if we sell the company I might have to move somewhere because like, if she wants to experience something different. But I would be very sad, because I love Detroit." (Interview with TR)

Note that while their plans to live in the city may be relatively short term, their business interests extend much further into the future. Continuing the doublespeak theme, it is interesting to think about the politics of the words 'home', 'house', and 'property'. In contemporary US parlance, it seems a building can only be a home if you own rather than rent it, but we see M here refer to himself as a 'homeowner' of a rental property he does not live in. The overall transience of the CM class, and the culture it creates within the arts and entrepreneurship scenes in the city, can also make it difficult for its more critical members to stay. One woman in her late twenties told me about her decision to leave her creative sector job and move out of Detroit:

"..first, when I was getting out of college, I thought maybe I could mitigate stuff [gentrification], maybe I could help with that by talking about peoples' history, and that was my ideal. But that's not the only piece though. There's all these infrastructural, structurally related pieces, like racism and economic disparities that are keeping people... and I'm tired of people assuming that I'm a student, I'm tired of people assuming that I'm just here temporarily - which, is a self-fulfilling prophecy right, because now I'm so fed up with all this bullshit, that I'm planning on being here temporarily. Things are just not going in a direction that I feel comfortable with, and I'm tired of being complacent to that. And I'm tired on a whole lot of other personal levels as well." (Interview with LM)

This kind of transience, and large-scale investment by transient (or absentee) property owners, inevitably results in the removal of large amounts of property from community control. Either property is bought by CM class transients as investment, in order to stake a claim in a neighbourhood; or held empty by landlords waiting to cash in on the existing or expected wave of young people with disposable income. As Josh Akers argues:

'All speculation isn't necessarily destructive... But many types of speculation that we're seeing affect the city's neighborhoods are detrimental. Not only does the condition of the property decline over time, but the property is essentially extracted from the community—it's owned now simply for its exchange value.' (University of Michigan-Dearborn 2016)

Even downtown's much vaunted success belies the managed vacancy and speculation operating within buildings acquired by *Bedrock* and others. As a junior ambassador for the real estate company told me as he showed me around in 2014:

"We own a lot of premier retail space on the first floor of Woodward, like this over here. And we're not really in any hurry just to plug people into it just because we have it, right? ...we're in a unique position now where there are literally probably a couple hundred people that wanna move down here, but we're vetting them out, and making sure that we're putting in the best of the best, so in five years we're gonna look back and know that we did it the right way."

(Interview with TH)

As we have seen, when not already cleared by earlier processes of dispossession, this 'empty' space (downtown and elsewhere) is made available by the rather less subtle process of eviction. Dan Gilbert and *Bedrock's* interest in downtown has involved *emptying* spaces as much as it has 'programming' them, as the residents of Capitol Park found in 2013. Outside of downtown, there is actually a relatively small pool of well-preserved housing, with resources, time and labour having been invested by the people who have lived there. Their eviction becomes a necessary step for the actors we are more accustomed to referring to as 'investors', who are thus able to directly extract this wealth and labour; once again, not putting in to the city, but taking out. As Moskowitz writes:

'An activist from Detroit Eviction Defense explained to me one day: Detroit may have tens of thousands of vacant homes, but the ones that have been lived in have usually been maintained lovingly by the people living in them. The roof repairs, flooring, lighting, and yard upkeep have already been paid for by the existing tenants. Kicking people out is a better investment.'

(Moskowitz 2017: 90)

While the terms I use here may make this process sound rather academic, it is a system well understood by many people in Detroit. As one low-income resident of a gentrifying neighbourhood told me, in conversation:

"There are a lot of cheap, ridiculously cheap houses on the property auction, because other people have been kicked out, you know? And you're capitalising on that by snatching up those places for prices that prior residents wish they could have paid and just gotten by with."
(Conversation with DL)

A new landlord may choose to accept rent from an ex-homeowner wishing to stay, but the trauma of having their home taken away from them and sold, means many would rather move elsewhere than suffer the humiliation of paying rent for a property they once owned. Community organisations like Detroit Eviction Defense and the United Community Housing Coalition advocate for homeowners and tenants facing foreclosure, and even participate in the tax auction to try and buy back homes. There are limited funds, however, and they are often outbid by investors.

The Conquistadors mentioned earlier in the chapter may have dropped their name and disbanded, but many of the agenda items from that controversial email have nevertheless come to pass. Again, framed as positive *additions* to the neighbourhood by the press and, no doubt, in the Conquistadors own minds, Wylie-Kellerman puts these in context with the *removals* deemed necessary to create the new Corktown:

'The park in front of the train station now has its own conservancy and hosts a totally indie rock festival as an annual event, along with a barbecue tent, and the starting line for the bike tour, plus an annual "corn hole" tournament. Roosevelt Park, long a home and hang out for homeless folk, had its benches officially removed to pre-empt loiterable rest. And one mid-November a police sweep carted off people's tents and lean-tos, kindly removing residents to shelters or if need be jail.' (Wylie Kellerman 2017:122-123)

Gentrification

In the relatively short time between beginning this research in 2013, and writing now, in 2017, Detroit's landscape has changed dramatically. From a city where many considered worries about gentrification laughable, to one whose name has since become, in many arenas, synonymous with that very process; it is no longer controversial to say that gentrification, for better or worse, is happening in the city of Detroit. From Toby Barlow's 2009 piece in the *New York Times* on the fabled \$100 house, and the idea that Detroit's value lay in its emptiness;

'... Detroit right now is just this vast, enormous canvas where anything imaginable can be accomplished... In a way, a strange, new American dream can be found here, amid the crumbling, semi-majestic ruins of a half-century's industrial decline. The good news is that, almost magically, dreamers are already showing up.' (Barlow 2009)

...to articles only a handful of years later, in which Detroit's revival is treated as a *fait accompli*, its value located in the energy and creativity of its imported entrepreneurial class;

'...a city whose future hinges on a new generation of entrepreneurs, the risks they take and the ingenuity they muster.' (Bruni 2015)

"Gentrification is about returning cities from the dead. So it's a vital obligation. It happened in Detroit. It can happen here..." (Bayley 2015)

As early as 2014, the *Detroit Free Press* and others were reporting on Downtown and Midtown rent raises pushing out middle class residents (Reindl 2014; Tuttle 2014). And despite his alleged commitments to nurturing entrepreneurship, Gilbert and other investors have been steadily raising rents on occupied business premises, forcing long standing establishments to close or relocate (Farrell 2017; Witsil 2016). In 2017 Detroit made number nine in *The New York Times*' '52 places to go' for that year, described as 'A comeback city set to make good on its promise' (Glusac 2017). Conversations I had in Detroit around gentrification tended to follow one of four narratives, and understandings of the word's meaning unsurprisingly varied according to context and speaker. There were those, generally longer-term residents and not members of the CM class, who were engaged in eviction defence efforts and saw gentrification as an immediate threat to their neighbourhoods. Then there were those like the city's 'Economic Growth Czar' George Jackson Jr, who understood it as part and parcel of 'regeneration'. "When I look at this city's tax base," Jackson told a suburban audience in 2013, "I say bring on more gentrification... I'm sorry, but, I mean, bring it on. We can't just be a poor city and prosper" (Neavling 2013). This approach reflected narratives in wider coverage of Detroit's 'revival' through high-end retail (See Conley 2016; Conlin 2015a; Williams 2016). *"Gentrification is just one of the many words which describes the way that cities grow. And Detroit needs some gentrification"*, one tech worker told me (Interview with XP).

There were also those - particularly younger people I spoke with - who viewed the word itself as an accusation, one which they were often poised to defend themselves against. In these conversations, 'gentrification' referred to what might be called its 'peak' form - the direct

displacement of 'poor, black people'. Several property developers told me the city was "at least five years away" from gentrification, but did not view the trajectory it was already on towards that point (or their own roles within it) as negative. A fourth narrative sees gentrification as inevitable, inescapable, an almost natural process; the relative economic privilege of the speaker deciding whether this was something to 'roll with' or to dread.

One participant, the CEO of a tech start-up, told me he preferred to explore the "interesting Detroit places", outside of the "comfortable spots" of Midtown and Corktown, lamenting gentrification's inevitable tendency to make things too boring and safe. He and others saw gentrification as an unfortunate side-effect of economic growth, rather than an intended outcome of the model. Many CM class participants recognised that there was 'inequality', in a broad sense, but saw the culprit equally broadly as 'economics'; imagined solutions revolving around paternalistic largesse, rather than any consideration of justice. Gentrification, in this schema, is a necessary evil in the march for progress, not a method of dispossession. As the same CEO went on to explain; *"no-one has ever found a way to regenerate a city other than through economic growth, and there's also lots of bad side effects, and I think everyone would agree to that. But I don't know another alternative"* (Interview with TR).

Others, usually those with much lower incomes, and who had themselves experienced displacement, recognised their own roles within processes of gentrification but found their choices constrained by the same processes in turn:

"It's difficult choosing where to live, because even though we don't have economic privilege, broke artists still play a huge role in gentrification, they are often first wave gentrifiers in a place." (Interview with SL)

These participants also spoke of the insidiousness of gentrification; a knowledge that they were implicated in the process by just being present in the city, and a feeling that Detroit's gentrification was too big, too all-encompassing to effectively challenge. We had several conversations about the ways in which opposition to gentrification could often inadvertently end up taking the form of a distaste for certain 'hipster' signifiers - coffee, bikes, 'artisanal' food trucks, rather than for the imbalance of power and resources that these commodities express and rely upon. But the self-awareness and sense of responsibility I found in this small sample of low income, 'first wave' gentrifiers was not necessarily replicated in the larger scale movement of artists and 'hipsters' from places like Portland and New York City (Ellison 2015; Nadrowski 2015). When Robert Elmes, executive director of Brooklyn's Galapagos Art Space

announced that the centre would be moving to Detroit in 2014 (Elmes 2014; Moynihan 2014), his widely-reproduced press release displayed an understanding of artists as victims of gentrification and displacement, but not of their active role in the process. Detroit, in this framework, provides the space and resources, creativity however, needs to be imported:

*'WHY IS GALAPAGOS MOVING TO DETROIT? Simply put, New York City has become too expensive to continue incubating young artists. The white-hot real estate market burning through affordable cultural habit is no longer a crisis, it's a conclusion. You can't paint at night in your kitchen and hope to be a good artist. It doesn't work that way. The canaries in New York City's real estate gold mine - its young artists and thinkers - are no longer talking about the next show they hope to land. They're talking about the next city they can land in once their current lease runs out. If the core competitiveness of the big apple is culture, but actually being an artist in New York City costs you a full-time career in another industry, then the best and brightest – the ones our meritocracy would obviously miss the most - won't allow their work to suffer just to be among our tall buildings. After nearly 7,500 programs and over 1,000,000 audience members through our doors, Galapagos Art Space is moving to Detroit...
...To flourish, a well-functioning creative ecosystem needs three things in abundance; time, space and people. Arguably, New York City has people but they no longer have time or space. Detroit has time and space and is gaining its critical third component - artists - at an astonishing rate.'* (Elmes 2014)

Giving lie to any presumption of innocence through simple self-involvement or lack of awareness in these omissions, is the fact that just a year later Elmes was reported to be attempting to 'flip' one of the buildings he had bought in Detroit for \$6.25 million; 12 times the price he had paid for it just a short time before (Steinhauer 2016). Outside of the direct impact of evictions and displacement, property speculation and a sudden intensification in the market for specific kinds of industrial buildings in the city, Elmes and others like him are also implicated in a (marginally) more subtle gentrification of the *narrative* around Detroit. As we see in the statement above, creativity becomes not an aspect of all human activity, but a commodity (Peck 2005:763), a specialism, and if much of the enthusiastic reporting around Detroit's creative renaissance is to be believed, one owned by white people.

In a 2015 article titled *Is Soho in the '70s Just a Two-Hour Flight Away?* Swanson (2015) interviews nine artists on why they live in Detroit; all are white. Alvin's 2014 piece for the *New York Times* travel section focuses on Corktown, profiling five new venues, all white-owned. And while many have critiqued this kind of reporting, pointing out the wealth of black

creativity also occurring in the city; such articles are usually found in local and online-only publications, rarely achieving the kind of reach an article in *The New York Times* is capable of (Abbey-Lambertz 2016; 2017; Foley 2014a; 2014b; Jackman 2014). Taking aim at the inordinate amount of attention focused on *Slow's Barbecue* owner Phil Cooley and others like him, Aaron Foley writes:

'Minority business owners — there are 30,000 of them, at least — seem to make or sell all the things that make an East Coast hipster drool (hand-dipped candles, tacos, T-shirts, boutiques in warehouses) but can't be put on the same pedestal with the male model from New York who decided to make macaroni by the train station.' (Foley 2014b)

Responses to these complaints tend to appeal to notions of 'colour-blindness', and a tacit implication that failure to include black-owned businesses in such coverage reflects a missed opportunity to show their 'special interest', rather than an active choice to profile only white projects in a majority black city. For example, an addendum to Swanson's article reads:

'Note: As many commenters have pointed out, this story, which focuses on artists who have chosen to make Detroit their home, missed an opportunity to highlight artists of color. The list does not fully reflect the diversity of voices and experiences in the city, for which we apologize.' (Swanson 2015)

This continual reframing of 'creativity' was reflected in local institutions as well as national media. Describing her work at a 'creative incubator' and grant-making organisation in the city, one participant told me about what she saw as an intentional definition of the organisation's mission so that funds could be directed to potential revenue-generating projects rather than local artists;

'They used to directly cite Richard Florida, and actually their mission statement is directly based on his ideas - all about the creative class, all about bringing in these artsy people. But they're less concerned about artists, and more concerned about designers. Part of that is even more classism, I think.' (Interview with LT)

When I asked local civil rights leader Dan Aldridge for his take on this problem of representation and understandings of 'creativity', his response recalled older divisions between ideas of 'skill' and 'unskilled labour':

'I think in part it's racism. In part classism. Now certainly, the racism's clear. I don't think they know how to deal with creative working class people. They're looking for a certain kind of... and when you have a working class community, for example, because of the auto industry, we have tremendous guys who know how to sculpt with metal and make tremendous metal sculptures. Let me give you an example. I lived in DC for 5 years. And black and other southern people do a lot of barbequing, smoking food. Well in DC I've gone all over, can't find a barbeque pit anywhere, because it's basically an administrative community. You come to Detroit, there's several, particularly black men, I don't know about white men, I'm talking about the black ones, but I've seen the white men too; who make their own barbeque pits out of oil drums. Well you only get that in a working class community! But you have to recognise these people have skill. If your definition of skill is something else...' (Interview with Dan Aldridge)

I want to end this chapter with two quotes, which I think sum up this process of erasure and over-writing; this gentrification of the discourse around Detroit's past, present, and future. The first is from a PBS article asking the question 'Is Detroit the New Brooklyn?' (Hughes 2011). The second is an excerpt from an article by DBCFSN's Malik Yakini, featured in local Black newspaper *The Michigan Citizen* in 2014, and written in response to exactly this kind of coverage (Yakini 2014):

'These "creatives," as they are being called, are taking advantage of low rents and the opportunity to recycle this abandoned, blank slate of an urban landscape into something new and exciting. There are restaurateurs and entrepreneurs of all stripes living alongside environmentalists and urban farmers. The city, according to the Times, seems like "a giant candy store for young college graduates wanting to be their own bosses"' (Hughes 2011)

'There has been much said and written over the past few years about the role of the "creative class" in the revitalization of Detroit. This term has generally been used to refer to the young, mostly white, folks moving into Detroit's downtown and "midtown" who are designers, artists, educators, health care workers, architects and various other types of professionals. Creative Class? Really? This is what happens when white supremacy defines the narrative. We become invisible while white saviors populate the imaginations of the naïve and ignorant. For the past 40 years I have been part of a cultural/creative/revolutionary Black community in Detroit. It has changed and shifted and morphed. That community now includes ancestors, elders, adults and children; second and third generation legacy extenders. Members of that community are/have been saxophonists, guitarists, drummers, dancers, poets, filmmakers,

vegan chefs, crotchetiers, photographers, painters, sketchers, runners, jewelers, colon therapists, mid-wives, community organizers, inventors, martial artists, gardeners, broadcasters, teachers, herbalists, scholars, incense makers, DJs, spoken word artists, journalists, Independent school builders, sweet potato pie, bean pie and cookie bakers, priests, leather crafters, hair braiders, and cannabis growers.

It has been a community of Kujichgulia-type, under-resourced, boot-strappin' kinda Black people. We use our creativity to make things more beautiful and beneficial. We use our creativity to challenge the domination of our craniums by Western Europe and her children. We use our creativity to challenge systems of oppression. We use our creativity to survive in an often-hostile environment. But we are more than survivors. We are visionaries! We are new paradigm builders! We refuse to be negated! We refuse to be discounted!

Over the years we have done what we do in places called Vaughn's and Charisma and Crummell and Black Star Hall and The Gates and Lloyd's Club and Hart Plaza and The Co-op and the Shule and Culture Island Sub-Center, and Getdown and Kabazz and The Shrine and Ta-Merrian and Temple #1 and Liberty Hall and the DIA and Nataki and Nsoroma and Cobb's Corner and Black Star Bookstore and the Shrine Bookstore and Trane's Place and Ford Auditorium and Johanson Gallery and Timbuktu and Aknartoons and Baker's and Bert's and Pullum's and Tropical Hut and the Walker-Williams Center and the Serengeti and Malcolm X Academy and Chic Afrique and Fetchu Menu and Garvey Academy, and the B.A.I.T Building and the West Indian American Hall.

...We refuse to be negated! We refuse to be discounted! We refuse to be made invisible! Now, tell me again about your "creative class".' (Yakini 2014)

Chapter 8- Conclusions

In this thesis, I have argued that mass media and popular framings of Detroit's history and present in terms of lack and its remediation constitute a significant cog in a much larger colonial project; one in which whiteness and capital work together to claim and ultimately monopolise space and resources in the city. Gentrification and decline, I have shown, far from being oppositional terms or outcomes, are key elements in a larger system of capital circulation. As Slater writes, the 'Columbian encounter was uneven development by genocide and false treaty: accumulation by colonial dispossession. Today it's the world urban system of cities competing for investors and creative-class gentry on the new urban frontier' (Slater 2014: 523). And while it may at first glance appear a bloodless takeover, this 'new' colonial landscape also expresses a profoundly racist violence. 'The myth of Detroit as empty cannot exist without the accompanying idea that black people don't matter', argue Stovall and Hill. 'The "blank slate" myth wipes black people out of the history of the city as well as the present efforts to revitalize neighborhoods' (Stovall and Hill 2016:119).

In chapter four I showed how the ways in which the city's history is narrated via mainstream channels serves to privilege whiteness, and diminish the roles of non-white actors in positive, creative aspects of the city's foundation and culture. These same histories re-cast the *fate of* black communities under white supremacy- disinvestment, dispossession and violence- as *products of* the presence of a black majority; tracing Detroit's late twentieth century fortunes to riots and mayoral corruption, rather than the everyday processes of neoliberalism and global capitalism. The selection of certain points in the city's history as significant above all others also works to frame Detroit's industrial legacy as one of job *creation*, with employment and opportunity as resources gifted to the working class, rather than avenues by which industrialists profited from the labour of Detroit's residents. These histories provide the framework for contemporary logics which understand jobs not only as a gift to the struggling city- to be accepted, with thanks, at whatever cost- but also as a form of rehabilitation for uncivilised urban dwellers who have lost their way in a corrupt and blighted city.

Chapter five traced the manufacture of these images of chaos, disorder and emptiness, from the circulation of a particular body of 'ruin porn' photography, habitually employed to illustrate any and every article making reference to the city's fortunes; to discourse around the city's 2013 bankruptcy, and the precondition of 'crisis', applied to cities like Detroit, and used to justify the suspension of democracy and the withdrawal of access to basic resources (Peck 2006, Wacquant 2007). Via close analysis of a stable of Detroit documentaries produced in the

years leading up to the 2013 bankruptcy I demonstrated the persistence of narratives of abandonment, even in descriptions of the city's still present inhabitants. I examined the role of a deliberate fictionalisation in description of the city's past and present, with film-makers, commentators, and many new residents preferring to revel in images of the post-apocalyptic or an imagined frontier, rather than confront the more banal processes of dispossession in which they are implicated.

Chapter six showed how, far from offering a counterpoint to these stories, the narratives of greening and redemption by nature most favoured by national and international press and recent transplants alike express a continuation of this colonial framework, creating the conditions in which self-styled pioneers and saviours of the city may congratulate themselves (and be rewarded with both material resources and media attention) for bringing 'hope to the hopeless'. Drawing on data from my periods of participant observation with Christian missionary volunteer groups in the city, I argued that the saviour narrative occupies a central role in the pleasure and motivations of volunteers both religious and otherwise, with considerable energy and resources often expended by residents in order to provide a rewarding experience for these visitors.

Chapter seven looked at current processes of dispossession and gentrification in Detroit's greater Downtown area, attempting to outline some of the strategies by which the youthful elite of the city's Creative Managerial class articulate their right to authority and ownership of the city, and justify the colonial project of which they are part. I examined ongoing work to redefine certain key terms in service to the centring of an affluent, white experience of the city, and how these processes are played out in branding, advertising, news reporting and everyday conversation. Building upon Peck's argument that 'Creative Class' discourse serves to commodify art and culture (Peck 2005), I also turned my attention to the appropriation of 'working class' aesthetics by companies like *Shinola*, one particular aspect of a larger scale co-option of images of 'authenticity' and 'diversity' which in fact work to consolidate power for a (white) elite whose financial and political interests never really left the city, even as they temporarily decamped to the suburbs. This appropriation perhaps expresses a fundamental ability of capitalism to adapt itself and consume its challengers; as Katz reminds us, this is a process as much present in corporate adoption of 'environmentalism' as political currency (Katz 1998:51). In a similar vein, the narratives of chaos and emptiness, redemption, salvation and rebirth articulated by participants throughout this work may be understood as representing a colonisation not only of the landscape's meaning, but of somebody else's struggle, in order to achieve the imagined status of resilient, risk-taking pioneer.

To enable the conditions by which whiteness (however defined) may take up its habitual position as saviour, governor and manager, it has been essential to devalue the city; its black residents, black history, black creativity, economic activity and community, in order that its land and culture can be sold low and turn a profit. Crucially, what had happened in recent years in Detroit is about a process of undermining the principle of civic democracy- namely that a city government should be answerable in some way to those who live in that city (Newman and Safransky 2014). While the narratives I have described here may define a particular moment in Detroit's history, there is nothing new about the structures of power involved, the ideology employed to justify them, or the imagery mobilised in the service of this project. What is new however, are some of the technologies employed to achieve it. Much of the property buying, selling, and speculation which forms a practical basis for many of the projects I have described in Detroit relies on the particular format of the tax foreclosure auction- that technology by which both derelict and inhabited properties are appropriated from residents, and sold via the internet at prices often far below the liens owed by tenants on them. Touted as a solution to the city's widespread blight, the auction in fact does very poorly in terms of returning property to local reuse compared with other methods of sale (Dewar 2015), and as well as facilitating the foreclosure of many owner-occupied properties, the auctions in fact disadvantage buyers who would become owner-occupants, enable investors' purchase of properties in neighbourhoods deemed strong at extremely low prices, and pass on a disproportionate amount of residential property to destructive buyers (Dewar et al 2015).

But what hope then, for alternatives to this bleak landscape of seemingly insurmountable forces of colonisation and dispossession? Arguing for an understanding of gentrification and decay as fundamentally part of the same system, Slater suggests that a refusal to buy in to this 'false choice urbanism' opens up avenues for alternatives (Slater 2014). I would hope that my research goes some way towards supporting this reframing of ideas of 'regeneration' and 'decline', in terms understandable to those members of the 'CM class' open to examining their place in Detroit. But of course, on a grander scale, the success of this rests upon the idea that those with the most significant financial and political resources in the city have any interest in relinquishing their power, or any investment in the humanity of those they profit from evicting; a notion that after my fieldwork in Detroit and my own experience of gentrification in London, I am thoroughly disabused of. I am more hopeful however, of Slater's suggestions for solidarity campaigns, and organised disruptions to the smooth operation of projects of gentrification (Slater 2014:521-523).

Safransky (2016) talks about articulations of local opposition to the Hantz Woodlands project taking the form of ideas about an 'urban commons', in which protestors argued that land

framed as empty in fact belongs to those who have suffered for it; and as such, cannot be considered empty. Crucially, she shows how many garden spaces in Detroit- less covered by the national and international press- are able to in fact operate as extensions of radical political activity, as, in the words of Freedom Farm's Wayne Curtis, 'liberated territory'; 'a means of survival and a process of "centralizing resources so that we can survive mentally, physically, and spiritually. It's about surviving the onslaught from enemies until we can figure out how to transform the situation"' (Safransky 2016:18).

While not the subject of my research, community activism in Detroit has provided much of the motivation for it. A huge amount of work is happening in the city to challenge evictions, address issues of transport justice, and join with activists in Flint and beyond to both campaign for access to clean and safe water, and to provide it to those whose access has been cut off by state and civic greed and incompetence (Howell et al 2017). My object of study has been the colonisation narratives of Detroit's gentrifiers, and the media and policy discourses which inform and support them. But these are one part of a much bigger story; one in which community organising and local radical political action is far more than a response to immediate pressures and injustices, but rather part of a long history of imagining and enacting alternatives for a more just and equitable city. Excellent academic work is now being done to take apart both the prevailing media discourse surrounding Detroit, and its material effects upon the city (Akers 2013, Safransky 2014, 2016, Stovall and Hill 2016, Tabb 2015). Much of this however- including my own- fails to connect in material ways with local activism and offer concrete solidarity with the daily efforts of resistance to the forces of domination and dispossession we describe. The crucial next step for gentrification scholarship is to re-calibrate the ways in which we write the products of our research, so that it may be of actual use to those fighting gentrification at a local level.

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