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(SĪ'TĪNG) DETROIT
VISION AND DISPOSSESSION
IN A
MIDWEST BORDERTOWN

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

American Studies

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July 2020

DEDICATION

For the People of Detroit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All scholarship is collaborative. Thus, I hold myself accountable to the scholars, artists, and activists with whom I work and the Tewa people on whose land I write. Thank you to Irene Vásquez, a true public servant and self-proclaimed troublemaker. I will advocate as unyieldingly for my own students. To Jennifer Denetdale, your dedication to your community is unmatched. Thank you for grounding my work in critical Indigenous studies and for the friendship over beers and boulevards. Thank you to Nicholas Mirzoeff for the scholarship informing much of the analysis in my work and for continuing to model activist aesthetics in and out of the academy. I am eternally indebted to — ugly-crying grateful for — Kirsten Buick. Thank you for trusting me and pressing me to think more deeply, to feel more fully. I appreciate everyone who has supported this endeavor through various forms of emotional and intellectual labor: Kency Cornejo, Laura Golobish, Lazarus Letcher, Raquel Madrigal, Uahikea Maile, Jenny Minniti-Shippey, Leah Shlachter, Frankie Thaheld, Sandi Yellowhorse, Naomi Ambritz, Joan Ligeia, Luke Mattson, Michelle Martinez, Kristi Goldade, and Aziza Murray. Antonio Cosme has been an inspiration, collaborator, and friend throughout this project. I'm also grateful to Salvatore Engel-DiMauro at *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Eric Campbell at *Riverwise Magazine*, the archivists at the Detroit Public Library and the Newberry Library, and my cohort at the 2017 Newberry Consortium in American Indian Studies. Mina Sardashti, the last year has been unexpected, joyous, difficult, clarifying, and just wild. I love you; thank you for believing in me. Finally, to my kids: I'm done. Thank you for your patience, for being such wonderfully loving siblings, and for continuing to include me in your games despite all the times I said, "Just 20 more minutes."

(SĪ'TĪNG) DETROIT
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IN A
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by

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BACHELOR OF ARTS
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the relationality of dispossession, racialization, and migration in Detroit, connecting the neoliberal rationality of (re)development to its foundations in Indigenous dispossession and racialized labor. “(Sī’ tīng) Detroit” understands Detroit as a bordertown, where “the border” is the organizing structure and condition for the operation of settler colonialism in Detroit. From the international boundary to the county line, the border is the on-the-ground, everyday method for controlling space, disciplining populations, and limiting mobility for racialized subjects. To examine possession and belonging in a Black city on an international border, this dissertation introduces a “(sī’ tīng)” — a methodology for locating (siting), seeing (sighting), and discussing (citing) dispossession as a social process and discourse produced and reproduced in the built environment through news reports, maps, plans, statements, advertisements, murals, graffiti, landscape, and architecture. “(Sī’ tīng) Detroit” cites the sites and sights of Detroit’s Woodward Avenue to halt the dispossessive logics of renewal and redevelopment. Then, it goes “off-site” to unsettle them.

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PREFACE

(SĪ'TĪNG) WOODWARD

(SĪ'tĭng) is a methodology for researching and writing about dispossession — a way of locating (siting), seeing (sighting), and discussing (citing) dispossession in an urban setting. It draws from news reports and popular narratives, rhetoric, visions (mapping, plans, statements), and visual culture (maps, advertisements, murals, architecture). It interrogates dispossession as a social process and discourse produced and reproduced in the built environment. (SĪ'tĭng) is what Sarah Keenan calls “holding up”—rather than purely spatial, it is a relation of belonging that defines and controls settler space through social processes, structures and networks.¹

The *site* is the location of dispossession. It is property. Because property is a concept, the site is also a discourse between transnational movements (“mobilization”) and local concerns (“specificity”).² The site is the built environment — architecture and landscape — as a “refection of the social interests of those who construct it.”³ It reflects power relations (i.e. “conflicts between different social actors”), but is also a medium through which power flows, a space of discipline and self-discipline.⁴ The site is *sight*: the ability or right to *envision* the city and the visual products of authoritative imaginaries (maps, landscapes, architecture, public art).⁵ Sight is aesthetic, both the “sensible” (as in self-evident, natural) and “sensible” (as registered by the senses).⁶ It is spectacle and surveillance, a field of vision in which discipline takes place.⁷ *Citation* is an approach to academic discourse committed to theory generated by the dispossessed and research grounded in particular sites/sights, even when it’s inconvenient, messy, or contradictory. I *cite* the visual and spatial history of a particular location to reveal what Robert Nichols

calls “misapprehensions” of dispossession and to pause what Iyko Day calls “the moving spirit of settler colonialism” in order to provide a study of simultaneous and relational dispossessions. Settler colonialism, Day writes, “is transnational but distinctly national, similar but definitely not the same, repetitive but without a predictable rhythm, structural but highly susceptible to change, everywhere but hard to isolate.”⁸ As discussed in the introduction, the moving spirit of settler colonialism deploys similar tools of dispossession across subjectivities, but each deployment is predicated on the fiction of white property/possession.⁹ In response to the conditions of dispossession, Jodi Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Chandan Reddy, and Jodi Melamed call for analyses “quite literally situated in relation to and from the land but without precluding movement, multiplicity, multi directionality, transversals, and other elementary or material currents of water and air.”¹⁰ This “grounded relationality” is what I call “(sī' tǐng)” — a method, as well as a methodology, for bringing theory to the ground, understanding dispossession as “a perpetually incomplete project” continually asserting and adapting “the terms of value and belonging.”¹¹

The site, the sight, and the cite overlap, compound, and create one another. (Sī' tǐng) is ideological. Ideology, Stuart Hall explains, concerns the ways in which “ideas of different kinds grip the minds of masses, and thereby become a ‘material force.’”¹² It is “historical, not a natural or universal or spontaneous form of popular thinking” secured by and through prejudice, what Gramsci called “common sense.”¹³ Yet, as Barbara Fields shows, ideology is “best understood as the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of ... social reality.”¹⁴ It is the interpretation of social relations, produced and reproduced collectively “in all the varied

forms ... collective being may assume: family, clan, tribe, nation, class, party, business ...”¹⁵ It *must* be “constantly created and verified in social life” in order to survive as a “material force.”¹⁶ Colonization is an ideology of progress and possession, expressed today through financialization and debt, absorbing Hall’s assertion the prevailing logic of ideology, today, is neoliberalism, vis-à-vis “the market”: “[T]he market experience is *the* most immediate, daily, and universal experience of the economic system for everyone.... We see, in the ‘free choice’ of the market, the material symbol of the more abstract freedoms: or in the self-interest and intrinsic competitiveness of market advantage the ‘representation’ of something natural, normal, and universal about human nature itself.”¹⁷

(*Sī tǐng*) is ideological and *discursive*. Discourse, Michel Foucault writes, “an institutional incitement to speak ... and to do so more and more, a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.”¹⁸ Silence is “an integral part of the strategies” of discourse. Not merely “the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name,” silence is determined by “the different ways of not saying ... how those who can and those who cannot speak ... are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required.”¹⁹ The silences are the “counterpart of other discourses ... that were interlocking, hierarchized, and all highly articulated around a cluster of power relations.”²⁰ Discourse is a multiplicity of discourses operating in different institutions and dispersing from those centers into diverse forms and complex deployments.²¹

In this dissertation, white possession secures its place through ideological and discursive constructions of the built environment, a social relation involving space, place,

landscape, and vision in a peripatetic disciplinary structure. Foucault defines the “two main images” of discipline as the “discipline-blockade” and the “discipline-mechanism.”²² The former is “the enclosed institution, established on edges of society, turned inwards toward negative functions, such as the prison, the school, the factory, and the hospital. The latter is “a functional mechanism,” a subtle coercion for a society to come — “a lighter, more rapid, more effective exercise of power.”²³ Though Foucault suggests a movement from the blockade to the mechanism, from a schema of exceptional discipline to one of a generalized surveillance,” I understand discipline as surveillance and, as I explain below, spectacle (the overwhelming, and therefore pacifying circulation of an image or representation). Though I read discipline through institutional policies and practices, I do not identify discipline with those institutions. Rather, I identify it, with Foucault, as “a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of applications, [and] targets” given material force by ideology and discourse.²⁴

SITING, PROPERTY, SPACE

Dispossession, Nichols tells us, is typically understood as “a broad macrohistorical process related to the specific territorial acquisition logic of settler colonization.”²⁵ It has referred not only to the “fact that in large sections of the globe, Indigenous peoples have not only been subjugated and oppressed by imperial elites,” but also to the ways in which “they have also been divested of their lands ... the territorial foundations of their societies” to support “the territorial foundations ... of new, European-style, settler colonial societies.”²⁶ Recently, however, Nichols and others have

begun to recognize dispossession as the condition of possibility for white possession through capitalism. Dispossession creates possession and assigns ownership to the settler state while figuring Native people as “original owners” only retroactively through the transfer or forfeiture of their lands. In other words, no ownership had been recognized until land became settler property/possession. Dispossession, he continues, creates an interactive relation between Black and Indigenous struggles in which “racialization processes were woven throughout the creation of landed property.”²⁷ But where dispossession indicates structurally negated property rights for Indigenous people, it represents structurally negated personhood for enslaved Africans and their descendants. Dispossession manifests today in “systemic and everyday forms of devaluation, exploitation, and expendability, as well as the violence of racial terror and carceral regimes.”²⁸ Because dispossession in Detroit has resulted in foreclosure (i.e. loss of property) for Black residents, scholars argue Black Detroiters are “native Detroiters,” but as I show in this dissertation, such a claim entrenches the settler property relation and negates Indigenous subjectivity. Property takes place as the physical space of the city and the physical space of the city naturalizes property.

In the introduction, I examine property as a legal fiction created through dispossession, but here I describe the ways in which property, in Keenan words, is “held up” in space; it is “a spatially contingent relation of belonging.”²⁹ The foundations for space, property, law, and government come from Enlightenment-era philosopher John Locke, who, Craig Wilkins writes, reads space as an essentialized construct, visible only by the position of points, objects or bodies, within it: As something that preexists, “space is primarily empty, symbolic, establishing objects primarily in order to define itself. In

short, space is understood in relation to place—a location—and place is the site, the locus of property,” creating an “essential, interdependent triad—space, place, and property.”³⁰ Property in Locke’s view, furthermore, is made by labor: “Locke submits that a person owns what he or she can produce with his or her own labor. Having labored to create something, that something becomes one’s property. One’s labor has cemented one’s interest in labor’s result.”³¹ In this formulation, Locke collapses the product-of-labor—*resulting from the intrinsic property of the person*—and the place/material-of-labor—*resulting from the extrinsic property of the common*—into one. Therein, the “fundamental principles of property are established: the *rights to have and/or to appropriate a thing or place*, in addition to the thing or place itself.”³² Thus, the claim to property can only be secured through *properties/rights*, which include freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom from bodily harm, and free and equal opportunities to use personal faculties.³³ Locke explicitly stated slaves were property and had no rights: “blacks were *objects* (property),” Wilkins writes, “while whites were *subjects* (owners), part of civil society, and therefore enjoyed access to property.”³⁴

In her work on refugees, Sarah Keenan makes a similar observation, writing, “Property of the subject (her belongings) and properties of the subject (characteristics that determine where and/or to what social group she belongs) operate in the same way and blur into one another.”³⁵ However, rather than focus on property as a legal category determining types of belonging, Keenan sees property “held up” by the space in which it exists. “Holding up’ is a more diffuse, heterogeneous, spatial process than state recognition,” Keenan writes, “it invokes a wide range of social processes, structures and networks that give force to relations of belonging. To have property in an object and to be

properly oriented in a space both require spaces that hold up those relations — spaces that are conceptually, socially and physically shaped towards them: *spaces of belonging*.”³⁶ Belonging signifies “membership of a community, property ownership, political accountability, a relationship to place and/or a behavior or identity that ‘fits,’ or is ‘at home.’”³⁷ It also “connotes a particular connectivity and a sense of propriety, of the proper.”

While Keenan draws from theories of Doreen Massey, Andrew Herod pulls from Henri Lefebvre to describe the shift in social-spatial dialect from production *in* space to production *of* space in terms of a broad relation between workers and capitalists.³⁸ Briefly, Lefebvre describes the production of space as a tripartite discourse between spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation.³⁹ *Spatial practice* is social activity concealing society’s space. *Representations of space* are the formalized portrays of space by urban planners, scientists, architects, engineers, artists, and other “experts” via maps, models, plans, paintings, and so forth, intended to guide the material construction of the built environment, such that “historical transformation in ideology can be delineated through examination of” plans for particular spaces.⁴⁰ The legal conception of space falls under representations of space.⁴¹ *Spaces of representation* are the physical places in which everyday life is lived and wherein symbolic meanings are enacted in spatial format and are drawn from the built environment, as through murals, advertising billboards, architecture, and so on.⁴² Lefebvre also describes these as *perceived* physical form, real space, generated and used; *conceived*, the space of knowledge and logic, maps, mental; and *lived*, space produced and modified over time through its use.⁴³ Through Foucault, Herod describes the social production of space as a reflection of power

relations as well as a medium through which power flows: the space of the factory, for instance, creates the worker, both as the observed and therefore disciplined worker in Panopticon style and the self-disciplined worker “caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” through, say, “workplace behavior.”⁴⁴ “As such,” Herod writes, “the spatiality of the built environmental and how this spatiality is used to inculcate particular ideas and ways of being within the heads of those who occupy it are connected to what Foucault calls “governmentality” — the notion that governments ... try to produce citizens/workers best suited to the government’s/company’s wants and desires.”⁴⁵ Social actors have influence over their environments, but they are not free to engage as they please. “The landscape’s physical form,” Herod writes, “is the outcome of conflicts between different social actors, some of whom have more power to impose their vision on it than do others.”⁴⁶ “Landscape’s purposeful construction can be a central element in political conflict,” what Wilkins describes as “the desire to say something.”⁴⁷ Thus, Herod argues in his conception of labor geography, “landscapes are not simply geographical stages upon which social life unfolds. Rather they are both reflective of, and constitute of such life.... For instance, unions and employers may struggle over where work is to be located, with the outcome of such struggle determining whether a particular region remains a landscape of employment or becomes one of unemployment.”⁴⁸ Less concerned with labor, Wilkins addresses Lockean space as a limit on mobility, “determining who will live where and why,” as well as who can move through public space: “Lockean space dichotomizes and polarizes the predominant understanding of space by legitimizing its inherent *whiteness* as THE desirable defining factor—and the implied non-whiteness of space as undesirable.”⁴⁹ George Lipsitz refers to this spatial

practice of whiteness as the “white spatial imaginary,” structuring feelings as well as social institutions. Lipsitz writes: “The white spatial imaginary idealizes ‘pure’ and homogenous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior. It seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them. The white spatial imaginary promotes the quest for individual escape rather than encouraging democratic deliberations about the social problems and contradictory social relations that affect us all.”⁵⁰ In other words, Wilkins writes, the white spatial orientation “anesthetizes the public (to real conditions)” and in response, the “public avoids politics (because government is taking care of the hard problems), freeing themselves to become more interested in selfish pursuits.”⁵¹ As example, Lipsitz cites Indian Removal, a “moral geography” producing the “redemptive American landscape as a refuge from the corruptions of European ‘time.’”⁵² Here, space and time combine and collude to create the “realm of difference itself,” supporting a single “trajectory of ‘progress’ ... with some areas understood as ‘catching up’ with others.”⁵³

Aware of time and space as social constructs fixed in the built environment, Keenan stresses Massey’s understanding of space as a multiplicity of spaces, “practiced, embodied and relational” — the “simultaneity of stories so far”: “The simultaneity of multiple and very different stories of subjects, streets, mountains, communities and empire; stories which are, importantly, unfinished.”⁵⁴ Alongside but not identical to Lefebvre, Keenan offers Massey’s conception of time as physical, social, and conceptual. Physical space is the tangible environment (natural or built); social space is socially and culturally created in and through our environment; conceptual space includes abstract ideas and designs about the physical and social world and how it operates.⁵⁵ All three can

and necessarily do operate simultaneously, emerging as the “articulated moment” of place.⁵⁶ “To understand how that moment is articulated,” Keenan writes, “the multiple relations and connections that intersect to form that place must be analysed.”⁵⁷ Taking Keenan and Massey’s understanding of space as stories combined “so far,” this dissertation goes further, arguing the spatial intersections through which white possession takes place as the natural property relation in the built environment depends on constant renewal or what Keenan calls “holding up.” The site of dispossession depends on holding up to describe the way ideology coheres in the built environment. Holding up refers to the constant renewal of space, here understood as the process of white property-making. Thus, what Neil Smith calls “uneven development” is not merely a strategy for profiting from land speculation through investment and divestment (i.e. redevelopment cycles), but also a means of determining who belongs in a particular place. In development discourse, holding up determines who should benefit from investment and who should suffer from disinvestment, but it is essential for the space of dis/possession to be constantly renewed. Holding up is aesthetic: It draws from news reports and popular narratives, rhetoric, visions (mapping, plans, statements), and visual culture (maps, advertisements, murals, architecture). Siting therefore is also sighting.

THE SIGHT OF DISCIPLINE

(Sī tǐng) is aesthetic: It draws from news reports and popular narratives, rhetoric, visions (mapping, plans, statements), and visual culture (maps, advertisements, murals, architecture). Siting therefore is also sighting. Dispossession coheres in the built environment through ideological and discursive construction of space and vision into

place and landscape. Though Keenan makes a distinction between places as “things to be lived inside of” and landscapes as “something the viewer is outside of,” both are ideologically and discursively constructed in/as the built environment.⁵⁸ As ideology, the built environment “naturalizes a cultural and social construction, re-presenting an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpolating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness *as sight and site*.”⁵⁹ As discourse, the built environment acts as a medium through which “various political positions may be articulated” and a cultural practice that silences discourse, “disarticulate[ing] the readability of [the built environment] in order to carry out a process of institutional and political legitimation.”⁶⁰ Whether urban or rural, artificial or natural, the built environment “always greets us as space, as environment, as that within which ‘we’ (figured as ‘the figures’ in landscape) find — or lose — ourselves.”⁶¹

Place, Keenan writes “produces social memory in everyday life” through institutions, monuments, architectural styles, etiquette, and work ethic — each of which I discuss in this dissertation.⁶² Landscape, W.J.T. Mitchell tells us, “may be represented by painting, drawing, or engraving; by photography, film and theatrical scenery; by writing, speech and presumable even music and other ‘sound images,’” but before all the representation, landscape is a physical and multisensory medium ... in which cultural meanings and values are encoded, whether they are *put* there by the physical transformation of a place in landscape gardening and architecture, or found in a place formed, as we say ‘by nature.’”⁶³

These meanings and value don't adhere on their own, but through vision, which has been trained, conditioned, and disciplined. Foucault understands vision as a form of "immediate knowing" — not "a privileged form of knowing," but "itself an object of knowledge, of observation."⁶⁴ Observation, rather than isolated, consistent sensations, is an interaction of forces and relations historically shaped by what Nicholas Mirzoeff and Jonathan Crary, among others, call "the division of the sensible" or "the separation of the senses."⁶⁵ Mirzoeff adapts Foucault's understanding of the division of history to the division of the senses into Observation, Document, and Fable; in other words, "what we see, what others have observed and handed down, and what others imagine or naively believe."⁶⁶ Crary routes these separations back to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European technologies of vision — such as the camera obscura — as they formed in relation to shifting knowledges of subjectivity. In 1840, Crary argues, vision separated from the body/touch through the implementation of optical technologies — the camera, the commodity, and perception itself — that arranged bodies in space, regulated their activities, and deployed individual bodies. As a result, vision came to codify the observer and manage their attention; the process of perception had itself become the object of vision.⁶⁷

Beller expands vision beyond the sensible to "the manner in which production generally becomes organized in such a way that one of its moments *necessarily* passes through the visual."⁶⁸ For Beller and Crary, the separation of the senses coincided with the alienation of labor through industrialization. Less important than the content of vision is the way in which a formalized perception ordered the human body according to the needs of capital: "the body as worker, student, soldier, consumer, patient, criminal."⁶⁹

The organizing mechanism is spectacle, the reorganization of the subject and the built environment by an image in circulation.⁷⁰ Developed by Guy Debord, spectacle is a form of discipline that pacifies and depoliticizes.⁷¹ “Through the passive consumption of spectacle, the subject is ‘separated from actively producing one’s life.’”⁷² “Debord’s analysis,” Sandy Grande writes, “illuminates the inherent paradox of spectacle; despite (or because of) its intention to illicit emotion and (re)action, spectacle produces alienation and passivity.”⁷³ The spectacle is the “self-portrait of power” producing an “appearance of pure objectivity” that conceals power as a benign relationship “between human beings and between classes.”⁷⁴ It moves through personal and collective life while taking place through public policy, social practice, and cultural production.⁷⁵ Culture is a scene, Beller writes, “and is fast becoming the principal scene (the *mise-en-scene*) of economic production.”⁷⁶ He continues: All zones of creativity — “thought, imagination, proprioception, aesthetics, faith” — as well as creativity itself, the source of all value, “now fold into primitive accumulation,” not just in the body of the worker, but in the mind as well.⁷⁷

Foucault doesn’t think much of spectacle as a controlling mechanism, writing the surveillance of the prison replaced the spectacle of the scaffold. He continues:

Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather than the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies.”⁷⁸

Where Foucault sees only surface in spectacle, Crary sees “new forms by which vision itself became a kind of discipline or mode of work.”⁷⁹ Though his period of study

predates the conditions in which Debord wrote, Crary sees the separation of the senses and the industrial remapping of the body as a prehistory of the society of the spectacle. “Once vision became relocated in the subjectivity of the observer,” he writes, “two intertwined paths opened up.”⁸⁰ The path of spectacle affirms the autonomous vision of the newly empowered body of liberal humanism; the path of surveillance creates knowledge about the “visionary body” through forms of standardization and regulation issued by the abstraction and formalization of vision.⁸¹

Spectacle and surveillance meet in Jacques Rancière’s conception of “the police” not as the repressive state apparatus, but as the distribution of the sensible in the contemporary context.⁸² Rancière defines “police” as all the parts of the community (or the system of social relations) that are “real,” by which he means actual groups defined by differences in birth, functions, places, and interest.⁸³ The police is the symbolic construction of this socially determined sensory experience. In other words, the distribution of the sensible is a partitioning of the world and its people so that the separations both exclude and allow participation. “The police is,” Rancière argues, “that which says that here, on this street, there’s nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along.”⁸⁴ Surveillance, then, orders knowledge and bodies in space as orders of *propriety*, the *proper*; spectacle encourages us to move on.

Surveillance and spectacle unify under the concept of “visuality.” The term “visuality” originated in 1840 — the same year Crary implicates in the implementation of optical technologies — with the historian Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle referred to the visualization of history or, more specifically, to the “tradition of heroic leadership, which visualizes history to ... contain anarchy and restore Authority.”⁸⁵ With the perspective of

the general, the Hero has the authority of the sovereign and therefore the capacity to make decisions.⁸⁶ The Hero has the power to sell property (including slaves), the power over life (i.e. biopower), and he is a specialist in messages endowed with the ability to interpret signs.⁸⁷ “This ability to discern meaning in both the medium and the message generates visuality’s aura of authority,” Mirzoeff writes. However, the self-authorization of these rights and abilities requires an aesthetic supplement to confirm its self-evidentiary nature — the ways in which authority is *visibly* able to “set things in motion.”⁸⁸ Thus, visuality is “a medium for the transmission and dissemination of authority and the means for the mediation of those subject to that authority.”⁸⁹

In this dissertation, visuality is best understood as “a set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight (ideas) into a rendition of physical and psychic space.”⁹⁰ By naming, categorizing, and defining, it “separates and segregates those it visualizes to prevent them from cohering as political subjects, such as the workers, the people, or the (decolonized) nation.”⁹¹ I argue the built environment of Detroit renders self-evident white possession/property not merely as the physicality of the environment. Rather, the space of Detroit takes place through its discursive and ideological representation, achieved through maps, news reports and popular narratives, rhetoric, advertisements, and murals, collectively known as the redevelopment strategy “place-making.” Redevelopment, however, is a spectacle, the “self-portrait of power” concealing the relations behind its authority and encouraging us — with grand conceptual drawings, ribbon-cutting ceremonies, and multi-purpose rec-rooms — to look away from the society it is creating. It is a society defended through surveillance regimes consisting not just of security cameras and police patrols, but also of representation. Redevelopment creates an

out-of-placeness for the dispossessed which they themselves enforce (as self-discipline) along with the new owners.

CITING WOODWARD

Detroit appears often in historical and scholarly literature, as well as popular commentary, as a “model city.” It is an “experiment,” a “laboratory,” an “engine” for policy, and an “origin” of decline for other (post)industrial cities.⁹² While the literature has produced essential documentation and theorization of racialized industrial decline, much of which has informed in this dissertation, I wonder why Detroit’s authentication as a subject for academic inquiry so often takes place through its relation to other locations. I wonder what’s lost by abstracting in order to compare conditions in Detroit to those in other cities. At the same time, I wonder about the value of policy-focused analyses dependent on case studies selected from disparate parts of the city. In relation to my particular project, I wonder what do these analyses risk losing in terms of layers and intersections of dispossession, historically and spatially? What would it look like to focus on a particular redevelopment zone? Not just any redevelopment zone, but *the* redevelopment zone in Detroit, Woodward Avenue. On the one hand, a successful redevelopment district like Woodward is about creating a narrative to encourage redevelopment across the city. It demonstrates the authority to “set things in motion” and naturalizes the authority to do it elsewhere. On the other hand, focusing on one zone of production for white possession might unsettle the model theory altogether by revealing it to be instead a zone of existence for real human beings.

Looking at a map — any map — of Detroit, Woodward Avenue splits the city in half. Unlike other industrial cities developed around tenements and high-rise apartments, Detroit’s urban geography consists largely of single-family homes built quickly to accommodate the rapid influx of workers.⁹³ The cheap frame-and-brick homes remain the majority of the housing stock, where they haven’t been demolished or burned down. The exception is Woodward, a wide cut through the city marked by with noteworthy architecture and ongoing development. Running a total of 21.5 miles from downtown Detroit to Pontiac, Michigan, Woodward Avenue is the Motor City’s most storied street, a site for dispossession and racialized violence as well as celebration and resistance. During the Great Rebellion of 1967, police shot and killed Carl Cooper, Aubrey Pollard, and Fred Temple at the Algiers Hotel. After leaving a bar in Highland Park in 1982, out-of-work white autoworkers murdered Chrysler machinist Vincent Chin on Woodward, blaming him, a Chinese-American, for Japan’s dominance in the auto industry.⁹⁴ Since 1995, the Woodward Dream Cruise, “presented by Ford,” has occupied the street with nostalgia for the drive-in restaurant era, now numbering tens of thousands of classic cars and at least a million participants and spectators.⁹⁵ Gone along with the Algiers Hotel are the original Detroit Athletic Club, J.L. Hudson’s and Co. (one of the first and largest department stores in the world), and the international ferry dock to Windsor, Ontario, operational from 1921-1939.⁹⁶ Today, the architecture of modernism anchors the built environment of Woodward Avenue, including Ford Highland Park Plant, Temple Beth El, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Public Library Main Branch, Detroit Historical Society, and the Fox Theater — all built, between 1900 and 1928. The campus of Wayne State University, partially abutting Woodward, takes its name after “Mad” Anthony

Wayne, the Revolutionary War veteran credited with ending Native resistance in the “Northwest Territories” of Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana.⁹⁷

On Woodward, Albert Kahn designed Temple Beth El, and Ford Highland Park, Also on the Arts Commission responsible for building the Detroit Institute of Arts, Kahn hired the principal architect, Paul Cret. He also designed the new Detroit Athletic Club on Madison Avenue and Fischer Building, just a few blocks to the west of Woodward. As the designer of countless automobile factories, including Ford’s River Rouge plant — commemorated in Diego Rivera’s *Detroit Industry* murals at the DIA — Kahn was the architect of Ford and therefore the architect of modernity. His buildings constituted, in Craig Wilkins words, “grand and noble gestures” to “the *white* cites of Athens and Rome, from which the symbols of our national architecture have been appropriated; the *white* marble on the *white* Capital; the *white* temple *White* House.”⁹⁸ Along with Ford’s Sociological Department (discussed in chapter one), Kahn’s focus on efficiency also demonstrated architecture’s “long history of being used to perpetuate spatial dichotomy and marginalization,” viewing “the urban condition as an inevitable illustration of the pathologies of its residents, becoming a place to mitigate, not to cultivate.”⁹⁹ Thus, while Kahn’s design’s supposedly incorporated the “high idealism in humanitarian concerns,” improvements in lighting, ventilation, temperature control, and sanitation at the Rouge plant acted as alibis for brutal working conditions, the logic being healthier, happier workers could be pushed harder.¹⁰⁰ Artists and architects like Moholy-Nagy of the Bauhaus and the fascist Le Corbusier admired the Rouge plant not for its architectural achievement, but for its “overwhelming monumental power.”¹⁰¹

Over the last half decade, Woodward Avenue has again become the primary site of redevelopment in Detroit. Recent additions include Whole Foods (the only chain supermarket in Detroit), Little Caesar's Arena (Detroit Red Wings), Comerica Park (Detroit Tigers), and Shinola Hotel. The city, along with a handful of private investors, built a three-mile trolley along Woodward called the QLine (subject of chapter two). Thanks to the emergency manager, Billionaire financier Dan Gilbert, now owns countless properties along the thoroughfare, including "Hudson Site" (subject of chapter four). The former location of Hudson's department store will soon be a mixed-used monstrosity or, in the words of the architect, "city within a city."¹⁰² The build is a model for Gilbert's neoliberal utopia if we understand, with Frederick Jameson, "the city is the fundamental form of the utopian image and the individual building is the space of Utopian investment."¹⁰³ For Jameson, Utopia is an inherently colonial occupation of the future to justify forms of discipline and possession in the present. If "forms of domination, based in cultural capital, are [often] made to appear as pure aesthetic judgments," writes Kim Dovey, "then seemingly benign claims to what is generally positioned as 'best' are often very specific claims to 'what *we* think is best,' and what we think is best is always what makes us most comfortable."¹⁰⁴ What's "best" for white possession is often the "right to rule" or what Mirzoeff calls the "right to the Real."

Also known as Michigan Highway One, Woodward followed the path of many Michigan Highways over a previously established Indigenous trade route. In Philip Mason’s 1959 text, *Michigan Highways From Indian Trails to Expressways*, two very basic maps of “Indian Trails” (fig. 1) and “Michigan Highways” (fig. 2) demonstrates the constructive role maps play in white settler imaginaries, where a map naturalizes the organization of space and therefore society; a map makes the world without “revealing the processes of its making.”¹⁰⁵ Cartography, Sherene Razack writes, expresses new subjectivities and enables them to exist: “The subject who maps his space and thereby knows and controls it” she writes, “is also the imperial man claiming the territories of others for his own.”¹⁰⁶ Mishuana Goeman describes “narrative mapping” through literature as a form of meaning-making that overwrites Indigenous organization of

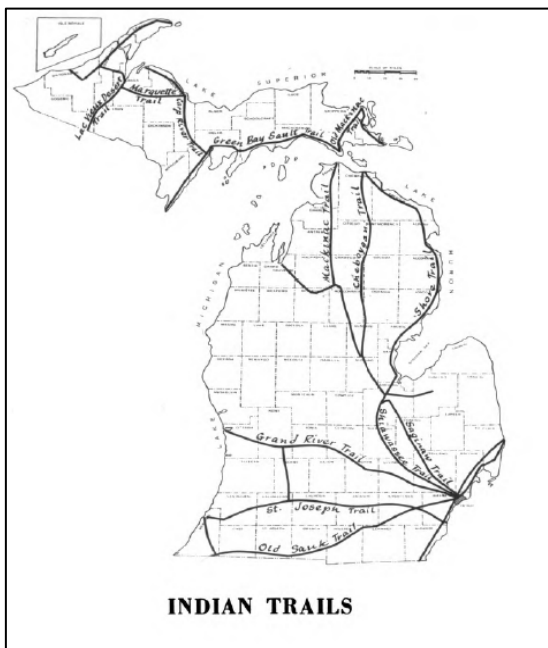


Figure 1. “Indian Trails” Mason, Philip P., 1959. Michigan highways from Indian trails to expressways: manual to accompany filmstrip. Prepared for the Michigan Historical Commission through the Munson Michigan History Fund. Detroit. Print copy University of Michigan.

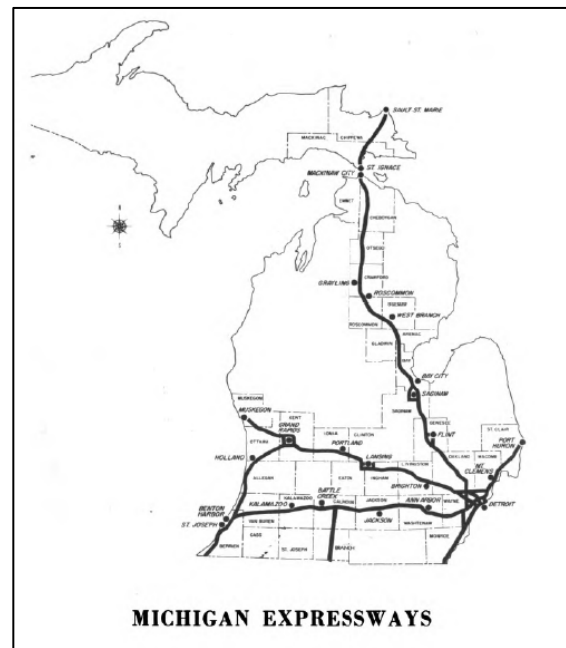


Figure 2. “Michigan Expressways.” Mason, Philip P., 1959. Michigan highways from Indian trails to expressways: manual to accompany filmstrip. Prepared for the Michigan Historical Commission through the Munson Michigan History Fund. Detroit. Print copy University of Michigan.

space.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, the maps in *Michigan Highways* belie the settler conceit about building a nation on *terra nullius*, unoccupied and uncultivated land. As we can see in the comparison of “Indian Trails” and “Michigan Highways,” the Saginaw Trail became Woodward Avenue and Michigan Highway One, the U.S. settler nation-state built itself on the infrastructure of existing nations and networks at the same time it claimed the right to own through the labor and discourse of “improvement.” Improvement ensured conquest. Mason writes,

The lack of an adequate transportation system delayed the settlement of [Michigan]. In the first three decades of the nineteenth century thousands of settlers poured across the Allegheny Mountains to take up homes in the recently acquired Northwest Territory. Michigan, however, was bypassed by the settlers, who, instead, chose to settle in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Although the Indian menace and the widespread unfavorable accounts about Michigan's poor soil and climate were major reasons for this situation, equally important was the lack of adequate roads.¹⁰⁸

The street has been a site of development and contestation since Judge Augustus Woodward arrived in 1805 — the same year Michigan became a U.S. territory — to design and rebuild the city after the great fire. A controversial figure with a Mark Twain oratory style, the judge worked closely with President Thomas Jefferson and even penned his own screed similar to Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* in which he similarly described a “natural connection between the Africans and slavery.”¹⁰⁹ Continuing, he wrote, “[T]hey must not be put on a par with that dignified being a white man.”¹¹⁰ With several other signatories of memo requesting federal military aid, Woodward described Native resistance to settlement as a “conflagration,” even while noting settler aggression: “[T]he savage mind, once turned upon plunder, once inflamed by the loss of their kindred and friends, once satisfied with the taste of blood, is difficult to appease, and as terrible as subtle in vengeance.”¹¹¹ Years later, while a judge in Florida, Woodward wrote, “A

System of Universal Science: Considerations on the Divisions of Human Knowledge and on the Classification and Nomenclature of the Sciences,” a typical “history of white people,” in Nell Painter’s words, arguing the white race has dominated since, 331 A.D., when the “science and power of Greece pervaded the dominions of the ancient Persian and Assyrian monarchs.”¹¹²

Woodward’s proposal for Detroit followed the L'Enfant Plan for Washington D.C., a spoke-and-wheel design connecting a “system of interlocking hexagons with the center of each hexagon ... to be used for public purposes — churches, schools, and markets” (fig. 3).¹¹³ The treelined streets would radiate around each center and Grand Circus Park in the heart of downtown would be a hundred-foot circle connecting Madison, Park, Washington, Miami (Broadway), Woodward, and Adams Avenues. Woodward envisioned Detroit as the “Paris of the West” with “wide, shady boulevards and conveniently located shops and plazas.”¹¹⁴ Considering the plan too ambitious, Governor William Hull and other civic leaders cut the Grand Circus Park into a half circle with Woodward Avenue emanating from the center of the flat side to the north of the city. They set the rest of the city follows a grid pattern, but many of the street names remained the same. Judge Woodward denied naming the street after himself, saying instead the name described its direction “wood-ward” from the river. A number of reporters in historical record accept this description, but his response was clearly a flippant retort to Hull.

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from the original in the Cornell University Library.
This is number 17 of an edition limited to 500 copies.

Figure 3. "Plan of Detroit. Woodward, Augustus Brevoort." <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-000079284/3>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed: April 13, 2020.

The same year Woodward arrived in Detroit, officials began to make roads across the state, if not for travel, then at least to improve communications. However, the U.S. government didn't take territorial officials seriously until the War of 1812 demonstrated both the necessity of a broader communication system and the strategic positioning of Michigan on the border with British-held Canadian territories. Over the next century, material limitations, funding shortages, and inconsistent government support meant rocky, marshy, stumpy, and gravelly roads until the latter part of the century.¹¹⁵ At that time, new types of roads and surfaces — including tar, oil, asphalt and macadam — expanded Michigan highways. In 1884, Detroit historian Silas Farmer wrote of Woodward Avenue,

This avenue is par excellence the avenue of the city, with one terminus at the river's edge, and the other reaching in a straight line for an indefinite distance into the country. Of an unusual width, and with an ever-increasing number of the most elegant stores and residences along its route, it is probably excelled by no avenue on the continent. It stands as a type of progressive American ideas and is eminently modern and stylish.¹¹⁶

In 1909, Woodward Avenue between Six Mile and Seven Mile roads became the first paved highway in the U.S. More than thirty-five million vehicles traveled the mile-long stretch before it was replaced in 1922.¹¹⁷

Throughout the 1920s and 1940s, city planners focused expansion and redevelopment efforts for the city on Woodward Avenue, including several efforts to widen the road requiring the city to assert eminent domain over shop-owners and homeowners. In 1924, Albert Kahn sat on the widening committee. In 1944, an effort to control signage on Woodward generated so much backlash that, in a lawsuit to prevent expansion, business owners demanded the city prove it actually owned the avenue.

Responding to the hearing, an uncredited March 9, 1944 news item on the front page *The Detroit Free Press* argued if the city's ownership couldn't be proven, Woodward Avenue should revert to Indigenous people. Over a photograph looking up Woodward Avenue and its skyline, including Hudson's tower, a headline in a cursive font, "Anybody See Chief Pontiac?"¹¹⁸ A text box in the lower half of the page begins with two questions in large bold letters: "Giving it Back to the Indians? And "Who Owns Woodward Ave.?" The plaintiffs' counsel argued, "There is nothing to show that Woodward ever was dedicated by any record to the City of Detroit."¹¹⁹ Attorneys asked the judge to determine whether Woodward belonged to the City or the federal government, but the reporter concluded their findings "might be interpreted as giving Woodward back to the Indians."¹²⁰

The following day, columnist Malcolm W. Bingay responded to the question "Who Owns Woodward Ave?" by suggesting, tongue-in-cheek, he'd like to see land go back to Native people. He wrote, "What we need in this town is bigger and better Indians," then he explained why Detroit in fact owned Woodward.¹²¹ In a flippant, ambling account of Judge Woodward's work in Detroit, Bingay writes, "He took over Detroit as his own personal property" and intimates the judge handed over the city to an ungrateful population before departing for a courtesy judgeship in Florida. However, he ends by saying the final answer to the question "who owns Woodward" can only be found in the judge's book. Since "A System of Universal Science" doesn't include any mentions of Woodward Avenue or Detroit, Bingay is merely naturalizing the white possession of Woodward Avenue, a feeling of attachment to place based on "ownership

and achievement,” Moreton-Robinson writes, for “the people who made this country what it is today.”¹²²

The sentiment that Woodward belongs to those who have “made” or “improved” it, while Indigenous people (i.e. Chief Pontiac) remain unseen and therefore unable to claim their land, continues today through redevelopment. In 2017, Gilbert’s property management company, Bedrock, posted an advertisement across four storefront windows at its Woodward Avenue property, reading “See Detroit Like We Do.” It featured an all-white cast of merrymakers. After public outrage, he promptly apologized on Facebook, calling the advertisement “tone-deaf,” but then walked back his apology:

Who cares how ‘we see Detroit’?! What is important is that Detroit comes together as a city that is open, diverse, inclusive and is being redeveloped in a way that offers opportunities for all of its people and the expected numerous new residents that will flock to our energized, growing, job-producing town where grit, hard-work and brains meld together to raise the standard of living of all of its people.¹²³

Gilbert’s faux gaff and his colorblind logic join Bingay and a century of development logic possessing Detroit not only through fixed legal or social claims, but through the ideological and affective renewal (ie holding up) of settler space through maps and development rhetoric. Returning to *Michigan Highways*, the text narrates a “natural” progression from Native possession to settler possession through a series of “improvements,” while the maps observe the fact of ownership: what were once “Indian Trails” are now “Michigan Expressways.” Detroit owns Woodward Avenue because Judge Woodward named it. Gilbert owns properties on Woodward, not because he bought them — for as little as \$1 — but because he has improved them. In short, the right to “improve” Indigenous land becomes legal and social white possession of it. More than mere historical record, *Michigan Highways* renewed the white possession of Woodward

in the author's present of 1959. More than an empty branding gestures or social gaff, Gilbert's message, "See Detroit As We Do," acknowledges development is not an ambivalent process but an attempt to renew the white possession of Detroit by envisioning (sighting) it's future.

(SĪ'TĪNG) AND UNSETTLING

(Sī'tīng) is a method and methodology for approaching the "grounded relationality" of dispossession, racialization, and migration in Detroit. I cite the site and sights of Woodward Avenue to bring theory to the ground. If dispossession is "a perpetually incomplete project," (sī'tīng) exposes its movements, renewals, and adaptations in order to unsettle them.¹²⁴ I draw from Sarah Keenan's definition of "unsettled space" to describe ways in Indigenous possession or presence stands to unsettle the impression of permanence established by renewal and redevelopment. Redevelopment is a form of holding up that coheres in the built environment, especially new buildings and (infra)structures, but also through events and use-narratives that inform architectural design (especially related to labor) and ceremonial events related to that design (i.e. press conferences, groundbreaking ceremonies). Though space "is shaped so that it holds up a particular relation of belonging," Keenan writes, it is not fixed or inevitable.¹²⁵ It has to be maintained through regular redevelopment and renewal; that is, by holding up space. Thus, with holding up as a necessary process for the perpetual incompleteness of settler colonial dispossession, (*sī'tīng*) presupposes the possibility of unsettling Woodward Avenue through countervisual and counter-spatial activities, creating a "space of appearance."

Keenan describes “unsettled space” as a contested space wherein Indigenous subjectivity is a “state of embodiment that continues to unsettle white[ness].”¹²⁶ She continues:

“Indigenous populations are sometimes described as representing a political crisis because their out-of-place-ness also jeopardizes the nation-state-citizen classification system — their long-standing connection to the land does not fit the legal systems of property and sovereignty upon which those states are founded.”¹²⁷

This view is consistent with Indigenous feminists like Mishuana Goeman who writes “[t]he inability to bind land to settler societies or expunge is the anxiety producing thorn in the side of the nation-states.”¹²⁸ Their presence “threatens the safety and welfare of the (white) nation,” which assumes ownership of Indigenous land through hard work and nation-building, in a phrase “white possession.”¹²⁹ These views foreground embodiment as the “entry point” for sovereignty, understanding “property is not just a material, but it is also constructed through social relationships.”¹³⁰

Whether “natural” or built, the environment of the city stands poised to *unsettling* behavior from the dispossessed. “People who do not control physical places,” George Lipsitz writes, “often construct discursive spaces as sites of agency, affiliation, and imagination.”¹³¹ Movement is central to the Black spatial imaginary. The Black spatial imaginary celebrates movement “in defiance of constraint, confinement, and police violence.”¹³² It emerges “from complex couplings of race and space [to] promote solidarities within, between, and across spaces,” as well as vision in the form of Black expressive culture.¹³³ Through movements like #blacklivesmatter and the Red Nation focused on marching, the street “geometrically defined by urban planning” (empty, disconnected) becomes “an inhabited, communally connected ‘space.’”¹³⁴ They create

spaces of appearance — defined by Mirzoeff as both a kinetic, live space in which “real people” interact and a potential, latent form of mediated documentation.¹³⁵ A space of appearance is a rupture occurring when you “put your body in a space where it’s not supposed to be and stay there.”¹³⁶ Thus, while this dissertation is preoccupied with dispossession as the elimination of Indigenous people alongside the exclusion of Black people and immigrants, it also honors and acknowledges appearance as not merely acts of resistance, but as processes developing and arising in response to settler renewal and expansion, creating instead an abolitionary vision, “a glimpse of the society that is (potentially) to come.”¹³⁷ Appearance is therefore a refusal of the ideological and discursive imposition of white possession. Though they may not always or even often succeed, the agents of decolonial counter-visions in this dissertation reveal the perpetually incomplete nature of dispossession not only as a settler colonial project to seize Indigenous land and control racialized labor, but also as a regime of spectacle and surveillance attempting to discipline the hearts, minds, and bodies of its subjects.

Introduction

Bordertown Dispossession

or

The Relationality of Dispossession, Racialization, and Migration in Detroit

On January 31, 2015, the *Detroit Free Press* published a feature story on James Robertson, a Black fifty-seven-year-old machinist who walked to work for ten years after his car broke down. Dubbed Detroit's "Walking Man," Robertson trekked 21 miles a day, every weekday, for a factory job in the neighboring county.¹ Photographs accompanying the story show him bundled up in a winter coat, beanie, and gloves, with a tote bag slung across his chest as he walks through unnamed locations of Detroit. The story also includes a graphic of Robertson's route and the online edition includes a fourteen-photo slideshow of Robertson's "journey," including two images of him standing in front of an American flag. Within days of publishing, the story of Robertson's "marathon commute" went national and several readers launched crowdfunding campaigns to buy Robertson a car. Later combined into a single GoFundMe account run by a local college student, the campaign ballooned into \$350,000 in a matter of two weeks. For reporter Bill Laitner, *Free Press* readers and the thousands of people who donated, Detroit's "Walking Man" is an exemplary citizen, a "true Detroiter."² His message, as one elementary-school student put it, is "not to be lazy [sic] and to do the things I am sposed [sic] to do without complaining."³ By the end of his venture, Robertson received a car, gratis, from a local dealer, left his girlfriend, moved closer to work in Oakland County, and received several honors, including a Detroit Spirit Award and the key to the City of Troy. A year later, in

a where-is-he-now article, Laitner assured readers remained rooted in his values — namely, pride in his job and loyalty to his employer — even if he had put on some weight and had begun thinking of himself as “suburbanized” by convenience and access to abundance.

While popular response to Robertson’s story tended to praise his effort and affirm his value as a worker or “true Detroiter,” a handful of cultural commentators and scholars have described the response as peak neoliberalism: Detroit readers gathered to help an individual they deemed worthy, but they wouldn’t get behind a citywide transportation network that would have saved Robertson ten years of hardship and provided a basic service to hundreds more Detroiters. The photographs accompanying Laitner’s stories, rather than illustrate his observations of Robertson’s commute, fetishized the man to commodify his hard work, obscuring — literally blurring — the details of his commute and the conditions of his employment. The streets are empty, representing him as some kind of post-apocalyptic hero on a quest to survive. Robertson has no friends, no coworkers as far as the photographs are concerned; in fact, the only other people in the images are benefactors: the boss whose wife occasionally cooks him dinner, the college student who tried to buy him a car, and the banker who occasionally gives him a ride. All three are white.

However, there is more to the Walking Man story than a neoliberal discourse on individual hard work and personal responsibility. The obfuscations of Robertson’s structural conditions came only a year after Detroit’s emergency manager had reorganized and privatized much of the city. While longtime Detroiters, most of them Black, began leaving the city, immigrants experienced an increase in surveillance and

deportation. At the same time, white people began moving in, some of them claiming to be “moving back” after parents and grandparents had moved to the suburbs in the decades before. They were artists and “creative entrepreneurs” bored by shopping malls, attracted to the idea of Detroit as an “urban frontier” where they could refurbish an abandoned home to make themselves and their fortunes (or their art). Some were “social entrepreneurs,” people who turn philanthropy into private businesses like GoFundMe, and many others bought the social commodity of Robertson’s extreme work ethic when they donated to his campaign.

A number of scholars including Thomas Sugrue, Scott Kurashige, and Rebecca Kinney have addressed Detroit’s neoliberal conditions under emergency management. Kinney, Sarah Safranksy, and Jessi Quizar have unpacked the settler colonial implications of terms like “urban frontier” and “urban wilderness” as designations for Detroit during redevelopment. However, none has satisfactorily connected neoliberal rationality to its foundations in the dispossession of Indigenous people and, in fact, some have altogether sacrificed Indigenous subjectivity in the present to identify “similar” conditions in a majority Black city, what Robert Nichols calls a “misapprehension” of dispossession. Further absent from the rhetoric and discourses on redevelopment, as well as the scholarship responding to it, is Detroit’s position as a bordertown wherein labor discourse remains significant. For one thing, Robertson’s commute demonstrates the ways in which the county line acts as border for labor and goods. The line between Detroit’s Wayne County and the suburbs in Oakland County is a border limiting the flow of resources, in form of taxes to Detroit, and people, in the form of transportation to employment. On a map made from 2010 census data by the University of Virginia’s

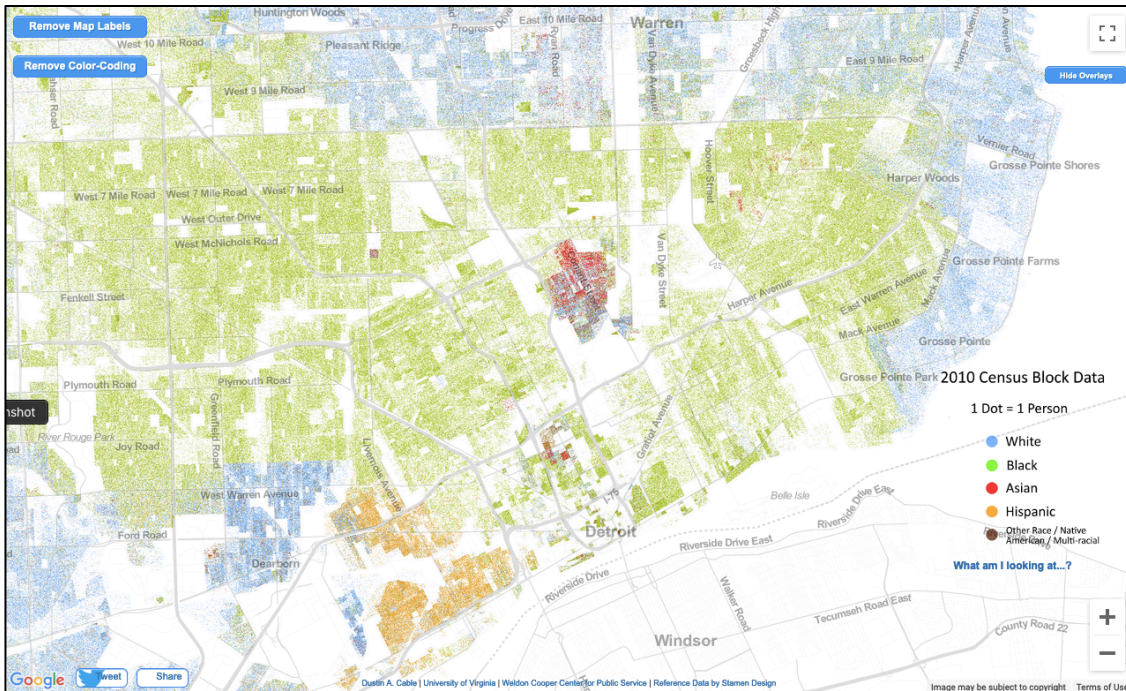


Figure 4. “Racial Dot Map,” Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, <https://demographics.virginia.edu/DotMap/>. Copyright Google 2020.

Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service shows how the county line still acts as a border for Black Detroiters, a hard line separating white residents (shown in blue) from Black residents (shown in green) along 8 Mile Road (fig. 4). What this means for Robertson is, once he crosses 8-Mile, he can no longer count on public transportation because wealthy suburbanites have opted out of the bus system. On the other end of Woodward Avenue at the international border, Detroit played a decisive role in the history of U.S. immigration policy. Up until the 1930s, laborers migrated back and forth to work daily and, today, the U.S.-Canadian border represents a constant state of surveillance for many residents. Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes immigration and border control as an attempt to reaffirm settler possession of Indigenous territory. Similarly, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn writes, “Colonization is the first and only border-crossing that matters and yet it remains unspoken, hidden beneath U.S. border policy.”²⁴ To understand the coherence of dispossession, racialization, and migration in Detroit, we have to understand Detroit as a

bordertown, a space of violent separation structured by and reaffirming settler domination while limiting the everyday mobility of racialized subjects. Yet, even as scholars have examined neoliberal policy and practice as the outputs of settler colonial structures in Detroit, none have considered immigration policy, let alone the violence and separation of border enforcement, as a settler colonial project to eliminate and exclude racialized subjects. This absence overemphasizes elimination and land dispossession over exclusion and labor dispossession, which the border and the concept of “bordering” addresses along with hierarchies of racialized labor.

In response, this dissertation understands the border to be the organizing structure and condition for the operation of settler colonialism in Detroit. The border is the on-the-ground, everyday method and mode for controlling space, disciplining populations, and limiting mobility for racialized subjects. It identifies, orders, and controls the movement of people in order to exclude and/or eliminate them — to dispossess them of their land, labor, and self. Spurred by the Walking Man phenomenon, I examine the production and circulation of settler colonial belonging in a Black city on an international border. Not any Black city, but Detroit: a particular place where “interlocking systems of oppression,” in Sherene Razack’s words, operate at the local level.⁵ With Razack, I take for granted that “difference is a sustained feature of urban spaces”; however, as a visual culture scholar, I am less concerned with legal apparatuses maintaining difference than I am with social and cultural practices creating dispossession as an everyday condition or social fact.⁶ If cities make racialized labor by making space, as Razack suggests, then it does so by naturalizing settler colonial discourse in the built environment of the city and all it entails, from architecture and landscaping to advertisements, murals, and graffiti, to

media, promotional rhetoric and other forms of public discourse. So, what do we make of social and culture discourse elevating the precarity of neoliberal working conditions at the same time it circulates images of itself as an “urban wilderness”? How do we acknowledge Black dispossession and migrant deportation in the present without taking for granted *ongoing* Indigenous dispossession? How does labor remain a discourse of exclusion through a period seemingly focused on elimination and land speculation? What are the everyday discourses, representations, visions, and spatial practices ideologically (re)producing white possession/property in Detroit’s built environment? Finally, how do we capture the moving spirit of settler colonialism — the “interlocking systems of oppression” — when it remains mobile even within the limited boundaries of the city?

In this introductory chapter, I provide theoretical foundations for understanding Detroit as a bordertown wherein the relationality of settler colonialism’s “intimacies” — dispossession, racialization, and migration — come to bear. In doing so, I emphasize dispossession as the elimination and exclusion of racialized subjectivities, managed in these neoliberal times as debt and financialization, in order to prepare the ground for an analysis of the ways in which the concept of property/possession materializes through redevelopment; the built environment produces and naturalizes whiteness as property. Then, I define bordertowns as psychic and political boundaries, points at which violent separations depend on the dispossession of Indigenous people to make nations and create hierarchies of laboring subjects. Throughout this chapter, I rethink the neoliberal rationality of emergency management responsible for restructuring Detroit’s economy and redistributing property/possession. I conceive of it as a settler colonial process organized by the violence of the border and, in doing so, I correct misapprehensions in

recent scholarly literature on Detroit, describing it as a settler colonial city without attending to the *ongoing* dispossession of Indigenous people or the violent separations of labor and self on the border. I end with a chapter summary, outlining the ways in which dispossession takes place through the consistent renewal of white possession on Woodward Avenue. Redevelopment, I argue, is a form of “holding up” — not just the upside of the economic cycle described by Neil Smith as “uneven development,” but a strategy necessary to maintain the boundaries of white possession. Redevelopment is territory marking. Finally, by taking a cross-section of simultaneous deployments of anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, and anti-immigrant discourse in the built environment of Detroit’s Woodward Avenue, I pause the moving spirit of settler colonialism to expose its parts and hold accountable its operators. As I describe in the preface, I refer to this cross-sectional pause as “(sī’ tǐng)” Woodward.”

‘LINE IN THE WATER’

Detroit is a bordertown.

It sits on the Detroit River, opposite Windsor, Ontario. The river became the boundary between the U.S. and British Canada in 1783 as a result of the Revolutionary War and was originally considered “no more than a line in the water” among borderland residents who ignored it.⁷ Native Americans made up the majority of the population, especially Wyandots, Ojibwas, Odawas, and Potawatomis. Next were French descendants of the first colonial regime, followed by the British military and merchant class, and Africans, both free and enslaved.⁸ “Americans” were not well represented in Detroit until July 1796, when the British finally vacated the city following the Jay Treaty of 1794.⁹

After Michigan became a state in 1805, commercial and personal relations across the border remained unhindered until the War of 1812 forced borderlands residents to choose their loyalties.¹⁰ From the 1830s to the early 1870s, after the Civil War, the Detroit border region was also “fraught with danger” but “saturated with meaning” for African-descended people traveling the Underground Railroad to freedom.¹¹ Founded in 1891, the U.S. Bureau of Immigration employed one immigration inspector in Detroit in 1894, two in 1901, and eighteen in 1913.¹²

Beginning in 1921, the Detroit border became a key site for the flow of people and goods, making it both a site of contestation and a reference point for U.S. immigration policy. From 1921 to 1939, the Woodward Avenue ferry dock (fig. 5) acted as a “gateway to America” for more than eleven million people commuting to work in the auto industry and its many ancillary businesses, from parts manufacturers to mercantile stores and restaurants.¹³ “Canadians, Poles, Italians, and African Americans passed ‘ramshackle buildings, the relics of the older city,’” writes Ashley Bavery, “before the art deco hotels and department stores of Woodward Avenue drew their eyes upward to stained glass windows and gilded adornments, markers of wealth and success in a city that was fast becoming one of the most important in the nation.”¹⁴

Thousands of southern and eastern Europeans traveled to Canada with



Figure 5. Detroit Publishing Co., Ferry dock near Woodward Avenue, Detroit, Michigan. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016801873/>. Library of Congress.

the hope of entering the U.S., often smuggling themselves with the help of organized crime.¹⁵

In 1929, seventy-five major gangs — including the notorious Purple Gang, run by Jewish-Russian immigrants — smuggled liquor and people through the Detroit River region.¹⁶ Their presence helped increase enforcement in cities along the northern border, while border patrol in Detroit harassed and criminalized immigrants regardless of their legal status.¹⁷ “During the Progressive Era,” Bavery writes, “nativists had protested against immigrants for their lack of morals or hygiene, but now, new quotas and enforcers turned potential immigrants into criminals, a far more dangerous prospect for the nation.”¹⁸ By 1929, the patrol had organized everyday Detroiters in a “collective practice of border enforcement,” asking them to inform on friends and neighbors who may be authorized to work in the U.S.¹⁹ By 1931, the number of immigration inspectors patrolling the Woodward ferry dock, the Detroit-Windsor tunnel, and the Ambassador Bridge had jumped to one hundred fifteen.²⁰ They patrolled from Lexington, Michigan, to Port Clinton, Ohio, with a handguns, handcuffs, and flashlights that could also be used clubs.²¹ Historian Thomas Krug links the increase to a number of factors: “the increase in the volume of border crossings, ... the concentration of the automobile industry in the Detroit area, the increase in the region's population, highway construction, improvements in the ferry companies’ boats and landing facilities and the push for twenty-four-hour ferry service, and increased tourist traffic.”²² Krug does not account for the ways in which labor officials and border officials had racialized immigration, criminalized immigrants, and militarized the border. Deportation raids criminalized and targeted ethnic neighborhoods and workplaces and, by 1930, Border Patrol conducted raids hundreds of

miles from the border and increasingly cited crime prevention as a reason to target certain populations.²³ With the nearest long-term detention facility located sixty miles south in my hometown of Toledo, Ohio, a short-term detention room on Woodward Avenue near the ferry dock became a short-term holding facility where immigrants might wait for months to be processed.²⁴ Deportation of racialized Europeans brought border patrol into the heart of the city, where federal officials worked with city police and everyday citizens to patrol neighborhoods. Policy and practices on the northern U.S. border, then, predates and predicts the “wide net of exclusion” cast during the Great Depression, which saw more than half a million Mexican laborers forced out of the U.S. by repatriation and deportation, many thousands of them coming from the Detroit region.

SOCIAL BORDERS

Borders act as physical and psychic sites for racialized processes of exclusion, creating extreme conditions of surveillance and policing for ethnic communities, especially ethnic laborers. Yet, few scholars have taken up migration in relation to African slavery or Indigenous dispossession in Detroit history. Broadly, Audra Simpson has shown the Jay Treaty, which allowed British and American subjects to flow freely across the border, also granted rights to Native people crossing the borders, but the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 cut sovereign nations in half by conferring citizenship status to Natives residing in the U.S. while deeming commuting Natives “alien.”²⁵ While U.S. courts ultimately secured Native rights to cross the border freely, it conferred immigrant status on Iroquois workers through the foreign-government structure of the U.S.²⁶ Nora Faires has argued the “racialist preoccupation with Asian and Latin American migration

into America's West and Southwest" has become the "sole narrative of migration by land."²⁷ It creates the U.S. as a "nation of immigrants" while obscuring African and African-descended migration across the northern border, which she argues is no less important to the meaning of nation and immigration in American history.²⁸ At least fifteen percent of Detroit's Black population, for instance, were Black Canadians.²⁹ In her study of eighteenth and nineteenth century slavery in Detroit, Tiya Miles goes further than most scholars of Detroit, considering border-making a foundational settler colonial process. In her work, dispossession, slavery, and immigration both make and are made by settler colonial borders. In the early nineteenth century, she writes, the border between the U.S. and Canada solidified through contestations over the legal definitions of slavery, forcing abolition in Detroit before anywhere in the country in order to justify the arming of fugitive slaves from British Canada against British slaveholders and their Indian allies.³⁰ "A conceptual line was now being drawn between Native Americans and African Americans that favored blacks in the pre-War of 1812 years" Miles writes. "Black men had one thing the Michigan Territory needed more than almost anything else: the willingness and strength to defend Detroit and America's borders," especially against the "threat of Indians."³¹ She reads Detroit as a settler border city "at the intersection of territorial, national, and international laws," complicating settler/Native contestations over land in relation to slave labor.³²

Lisa Lowe provides the historical context for this work, arguing the geographies of colonialism and slavery across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas resonate today as "residual" and "emergent" forms of dominance, still setting the conditions of possibility for the self-possessed white individual of liberal humanism.³³ The intimacies

of settler colonialism, slavery, imperialism, capitalism, and trade, as Lowe describes them, fracture histories and subjectivities, and overlaying them with a universalized, ostensibly more ethical, ideal in order to defuse them for the benefit of capital. This overlay appears through the concept of *terra nullias* (empty land), through which white labor becomes the right to occupy land, or through the practice of importing Chinese labor to suppress Black slave rebellion and expand production.³⁴ From an Indigenous standpoint in the U.S., Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz argues, these intimacies ultimately lead to dispossession. Locating the “culture of conquest” in the Crusades to conquer North Africa and the Middle East, the privatization of the “commons” in England, and the invention of “whiteness” in the British takeover of Scotland and Ireland, she argues the transfer of common land into private hands created an indebted working class and a dependent lower class, both which later became the settler class destroying Indigenous alliances and forcing Indigenous people off their land.³⁵ As Andrés Reséndez demonstrates in his history of Native enslavement in the U.S., these histories are not just intimate, but deeply entangled. Long before the Thirteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution reframed slavery as (Black) crime, frontier captains justified their ongoing participation in Indian slavery by marking their victims as “rebels” or “criminals.”³⁶ Spanish military in Mexico rounded up unemployed or “lazy” Indians and forced them to work in the silver mines at a nominal wage, while labor laws in California did the same during the gold rush.³⁷ And though African slavery had been abolished in Mexico’s California of the mid-nineteenth century, ranchers and missionaries still readily accumulated Native slaves. Demonstrating Native slavery was common practice in Detroit, Miles also reveals this “other slavery” was inherently gendered. Indigenous

women were the most enslaved people in Detroit, she writes, and “sexual coercion and violence was integral to their experience,” even as Black slaves remained the racially inferior group.³⁸ Reséndez estimates that Native slavery approximated African slavery in scale and loss of life, suggesting slavery joins disease, warfare, and famine as a major cause of the radical decline of Indigenous people in the Americas.³⁹ Though elimination does seem to be the end result of Native slavery, Reséndez’s account resists rigid classifications of Natives as disappearing and Africans as enslaved.

Pointing to the transatlantic African slave trade as the “quintessential example” of settler colonialism, Monika Kashyap also stresses the ways in which settler colonialism recruits and then makes illegal immigrant labor. “In addition to Indigenous elimination,” she writes, “settler colonialism depends on the subordination of racialized outsiders in order to extract value from the invaded and expropriated Indigenous lands, secure its colonial foothold, and fuel its expansion.”⁴⁰ Defining subordination as a “variety of methods and practices such as enslavement, exploitation, exclusion, criminalization, manipulation, and elimination,” Kashyap expands the place of immigration in settler colonial discourse with Moreton-Robinson, who describes migrants as the “perpetual foreigner” in the settler state, “allocated a position within whiteness that is off white.”⁴¹ The “illegal immigrant,” Moreton-Robinson continues, ideologically affirms the “possessiveness of a patriarchal white sovereignty through its border-protection policy.”⁴² The policing of national borders assumes the prior white possession of Indigenous lands.⁴³ This right to exclude assumes one already owns, and justifies increased surveillance along, as well as within, the borders of the nation-state.⁴⁴ For Moreton-Robinson, “[c]ertain migrants ... legitimize patriarchal white sovereignty through their

presence and subscription to national core values tied to capital” for Moreton-Robinson.⁴⁵ Day affirms Kashyap and Moreton-Robinson succinctly: “Migration, slavery, and the dispossession of Native Americans were integral to the project of nation-building.”⁴⁶ However, Day wants us to see these as simultaneous deployments by triangulating Native, alien, and settler positions “beyond a binary theory of settler colonialism, which is predominantly structured around an opposition between Indigenous peoples and settlers” to one clarifying the role nonwhite migration plays in settler colonialism and how it intersects with other aspects of white supremacy.⁴⁷ Thus, alongside Moreton-Robinson’s concern for “certain migrants,” Day empathizes with the positions of vulnerability felt by immigrants and descendants of the enslaved, writing, “the degree of forced or voluntary migration or level of complicity with the settler state is ultimately secondary to their subordination under a settler colonial mode of production driven by the proprietorial logics of whiteness.”⁴⁸ Racialization, settler colonialism, and imperialism — in all their gendered, sexualized, classed, and ableist forms — are what Byrd calls a “settler imperialism,” possible only through and as Indigenous dispossession and experienced not as imperialism abroad, but as U.S. domination of “those who were now its own citizens,” meaning not only Natives, but also descendants of the enslaved.⁴⁹ The overlapping conditions and competing volleys for freedom represented in this discourse constitute what Jodi Byrd calls “cacophonies”; that is, “discordant and competing representations of diasporic arrivals and native lived experiences” that ultimately reinforce settler power.⁵⁰ She writes:

That cacophony of competing struggles for hegemony within and outside institutions of power, no matter how those struggles might challenge the state through loci of race, class, gender, and sexuality, serves to misdirect and cloud attention from the underlying structures of settler colonialism that made the United States possible as oppressor in the first place.⁵¹

This might look like undocumented immigrants “facilitating the transparent recognition of black criminality” to redeem their own “illegality” or through the disavowal of immigrant rights necessary for a civil rights claim to personhood rooted in U.S. citizenship.⁵² Thus, Byrd warns these competitions “reproduce colonialist discourses even when they attempt to disrupt and transform participatory democracy away from its origins in slavery, genocide, and indentureship.”⁵³ She asks we read the “cacophonies of colonialism as they are rather than attempt to hierarchize them into coeval or causal order.”⁵⁴

With Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed, and Chandan Reddy, Byrd uses the term “economies of dispossession” to describe those cacophonies today as the “multiple and intertwined genealogies of racialized property, subjection, and expropriation through which capitalism and colonialism take shape historically and change over time.”⁵⁵ Economy means the mode of organization (i.e. the order of things) as well as the specific circuits of exchange (i.e. the national economy).⁵⁶ Capitalism is racial capitalism, “a way of hierarchically organizing” subjectivities in order to eliminate and exclude Indigenous people as well as “the racialized lives that refuse and exceed its totalizing aspiration.”⁵⁷ Thus, “economies of dispossession” refers to the ways in which “financial institutions and land and market speculators have produced and profited from those most economically disenfranchised.”⁵⁸

Dispossession Robert Nichols explains, derives from the notion of property in Western European thought as the *prior* right and priority of the sovereign to claim land for the “common good,” solidified in the eighteenth century through the concept of eminent domain.⁵⁹ Property comes into being, he argues, through theft. Through

colonization and modernity, a new subject emerged, a white property-owning subject and, Moreton-Robinson writes, “possessiveness became embedded in every discourse as a ‘firm belief that the best in life was the expansion of self through property and property began and ended with possession of one’s body.’”⁶⁰ With Cheryl Harris, Nichols and Moreton-Robinson describe whiteness as a form of property, accumulating Moreton-Robinson writes, “capital and social appreciation” for white people, the proper, legal property-owning subjects.⁶¹ Where liberal thought emphasized ownership in oneself and private property, the right to claim property is to claim to proprietary rights in oneself as “part of normative behavior” producing “colonial, racial, gender, and sexual categories.”⁶² Property, in short, is a power relation taking place through dispossession and/as capitalism. “For the powerful,” writes Robert Nichols, “property anchors and solidifies.”⁶³ He continues,

Conversely, for those in positions of relative weakness and subordination, the rendering of something into a property form is frequently the first step to losing control over it, since it is also a way of making things more alienable and fungible. For the first, property is a concealing agent. For the second, it is a solvent. What matters then is less whether or not one has a proprietary interest in something but rather the background power relations that give property its specific valence in any given context.”⁶⁴

What Moreton-Robinson calls the “white possessive” is what Nichols calls a “relation of exclusion” for nonwhite people — both the socially practiced idea of the proper (i.e. propriety) and the notion of property (ownership) resulting from private and public relations.⁶⁵

Property (or possession) in this formulation is made possible only through dispossession: racialization and settler colonialism “transform nonproprietary relations into proprietary ones while, at the same time, systematically transferring

control and title of this (newly formed) property.”⁶⁶ In other words, to claim property is to create property and therefore to “construct a relationship with others, namely, a relation of exclusion.”⁶⁷ Through divestment and alienation, “those negatively impacted by this process — the dispossessed — are figured as ‘original owners’ but only *retroactively*, that is, refracted backward through the process itself.”⁶⁸ Land is a concept that creates property while possession more broadly produces and delimits subjectivation, property and value as accumulation and profit, thereby continuing dispossession in the present through “debt, financialization, land speculation, the accelerated concentration of wealth, and possessive individualism.”⁶⁹ In addition to a mode of accumulation, debt conceals “capitalist terms of relation, land theft, conquest, and coercion (past and present).”⁷⁰ Debt is material debt as social debt, an indebtedness to the settler society that provides Natives with health services or Black Americans with welfare.⁷¹ It is debt to society, fines owed, the justification for austerity measures that suffocate pensioners to pay banks. Configured by settler colonialism, debt and financialization are the “new civilizing discourse ... for neoliberal times,” consuming all aspects of social and political life.⁷²

NEOLIBERAL WHITE POSSESSION

In Detroit, debt and financialization (dispossession) begins with neoliberal policies and practices dating back to deindustrialization at the end of World War II.⁷³ Neoliberalism, Wendy Brown tells us, is “a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human

life.”⁷⁴ In the neoliberal rationality, the contemporary firm becomes the model for people and governments, both which are then expected to “maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value ... through entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting investors.”⁷⁵ As a result, neoliberalism “convert[s] the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy’s constituent elements into *economic* ones.”⁷⁶ Brown description of neoliberal economic policy sounds a lot like dispossession as described above. She writes,

These [economic policies] include deregulation of industries and capital flows, radical reduction in welfare state provisions and protections for the vulnerable; privatized and outsourced public goods, ranging from education, parks, postal services, roads, and social welfare to prisons and militaries; replacement of progressive with regressive tax and tariff schemes; the end of wealth redistribution as an economic or social-political policy; the conversion of every human need or desire into a profitable enterprise ... and, most recently, the financialization of everything and the increasing dominance of finance capital over productive capital in the dynamics of the economy and everyday life.⁷⁷

Early neoliberal public policy began with deindustrialization as a way to move manufacturers out of industrial centers and reduce labor costs.⁷⁸ In Detroit, automation and the relocation of manufacturing to the suburbs, as well as the U.S. South, meant lower wages and less union support while national politics tended away from radical intervention and communist ideals.⁷⁹ In the 1950s, the nation embraced a pro-business, anti-communist economic view, shifting economic policy from institutional structures to individual skills, allowing “manpower” theory to suggest unemployment resulted from individual failure, and citizens’ fundamental belief the private sector would absorb surplus labor.⁸⁰ In reality, with the neoliberal turn, deindustrialization created four labor divides. Lester Spence describes them as divides between good and bad jobs, unionized and non-unionized, employed (citizen) and unemployed (criminal), institutionalized and

non-institutionalized.⁸¹ Like cities reduced to economic units in neoliberal rationality, financialization reduces laboring and nonlaboring bodies (i.e. the unemployed, the criminal) to “human capital,” but with neoliberalism, financialization strips human capital of its labor, connecting the human to capitalism through virtuality and numeracy.⁸² Human groups are divided and devalued “on the basis of economic criteria determined by relations of accumulation that benefit financial-asset-owning classes,” while financialization operates as “its own mode of valorization and violence.”⁸³

Labor divides are also spatial divides. Millions of Black workers migrated from the rural South at the same time manufacturing decreased and segregated housing practices forced Black people into overcrowded and underserved neighborhoods and served the notion of race as individual failure.⁸⁴ In the 1940s, white homeowners formed “neighborhood improvement associations” to exclude Black residents through redlining, covenants, and regional elections.⁸⁵ By 1950, highway development and urban renewal programs became an excuse for destroying Black neighborhoods: highway development cleared 423 residences, 109 businesses, 22 manufacturing plants, and 93 lots, while promises to develop new housing for displaced Black residents rarely materialized.⁸⁶ Public housing plans instead succumbed to a neoliberal rights discourse privileging the individual right to *own* a home over the public right to housing.⁸⁷ Kurashige describes economic policy and public practice limiting opportunity for people of color in Detroit after World War II as, in Grace Lee Boggs’s words, an intentional “counter-revolution”: “Detroit was targeted for disinvestment and political repression *because* it was a center of power for labor and civil rights.”⁸⁸ White residents left the city, he writes, to preserve racial segregation and discriminatory control over local governance, taking their taxes

with them and attracting the “attention and money of extreme right-wingers like the Koch brothers.”⁸⁹ More than a set of economic policies, however, neoliberalism is, in Kurashige’s words, “an ideology that leads to unfounded assumptions that the public sector is inherently wasteful and that the private sector always has a better, more cost-efficient way to carry out a task.”⁹⁰ Neoliberal policy-makers and pundits refuse to acknowledge the hypocrisy of punishing foreclosed homeowners while the state bails out banks that gamble away billions. Thus, by 2010, on the heels of the subprime mortgage crisis, a twenty-five percent drop in population, and a twenty-five percent unemployment rate in Detroit, Michigan elected venture capitalist Rick Snyder to the governor’s office.⁹¹

After voters in Michigan overturned an emergency management law by referendum in 2012, Snyder pushed through a referendum-proof bill the following month, forcing a financial state of exception on majority-Black cities throughout Michigan.⁹² A state of exception, Giorgio Agamben tells us, is the device through which a government defers the law while still claiming to apply it; that is, the power to institute a state of exception demonstrates no such state exists.⁹³ In Michigan, this means a suspension on the power of city governments in order to establish fiscal solvency sought by those very city governments while ignoring the people. The neoliberal rationality of this state of exception quietly undoes “basic elements of democracy” by reconfiguring social and political life in economic terms.⁹⁴ The new EMs had the ability to enact new law and disregard existing law, “the ability to cancel collective bargaining agreements and other contracts, the ability to take over pension systems, the ability to dissolve or disincorporate municipalities.”⁹⁵ The outcome included drastic austerity measures for cities like Flint, where the EM Darnell Early, in 2013, infamously changed the city’s

water supply to the contaminated Flint River, leading to the poisoning of thousands of residents, while Governor Snyder pretended not to know what was going on.⁹⁶

In Detroit, Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr pushed the city into bankruptcy, a process which led the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to institute city-wide water shutoffs for tens of thousands of households with bills overdue by at least two months.⁹⁷ The shut-offs followed what Josiah Rector called a “wild west” period for predatory lenders.⁹⁸ In 2005, Detroit entered into a \$1.4 billion dollar deal built on speculative financing, including an “interest rate swap” to fund DWSD. The swap bet interest rates would rise, but after the 2008 crash, interest rates plunged and DWSD incurred a \$537 million debt in the form of swap termination payments to banks. In 2012, DWSD increased water rates and took out another \$489 million in bond debt. By then, debt service at DWSD had reached more than forty percent of revenue. Nearly half of Detroiters’ water payments went to banks, inflated by the banks’ predatory swap deal.⁹⁹ The shutoffs led to sweeping foreclosures, as Michigan law labels homes “blighted” once they’ve been “disconnected” from water lines, and tax foreclosures through a DWSD initiative connecting overdue water bills to property taxes.¹⁰⁰

Also during the bankruptcy, Orr threatened to auction off city-owned art at the Detroit Institute of Arts to pay \$400 million to \$500 million to creditors. The DIA responded by proposing the State take over the museum and use the collection to leverage city debt, which left many wondering what would happen if the debt defaulted.¹⁰¹ Orr nonetheless had the collection appraised by the auction house Christie’s, while the Detroit News illustrated its story on the issue with an image of Diego Rivera’s *Detroit Industry* murals, to which Nicholas Mirzoeff responded, by wryly saying “I can’t see that

happening, just because it would involve so much work to remove them.”¹⁰² In 2013, Mirzoeff called the matter a classic neoliberal bait-and-switch: “If Orr decides to leave the DIA alone,” Mirzoeff wrote, “he wins plaudits from mainstream media for his, what will they say, ‘statesman-like approach.’ If he chooses to push the position that it’s preferable to raise revenue from art rather than already-impoverished Detroit, any counterargument sounds whiny and elitist.”¹⁰³ In the end, Orr threatened to auction off the collection if city employees didn’t give up sixteen percent of their pensions to creditors. When they refused the across-the-board cut, they entered into an agreement deemed the “Grand Bargain,” in which the city’s “moneyed elites,” Kurashige writes, swept in to save the city’s collection, ensuring \$466 million in pledges, primarily from private foundations, as well as another \$350 million in long-term state funding.¹⁰⁴ Pensioners took a settlement which included an end to cost-of-living adjustments and city-sponsored healthcare, as well as an overall cut to their pensions.¹⁰⁵ After a year in office, Orr relinquished his post in 2014, while ensuring his reorganization of city finances would remain in place for at least ten years. Three years later, Mayor Mike Duggan complained the pension payments were too high and accused Orr of hiding his calculations.¹⁰⁶ Somehow, the city found \$50 million to drop into a trust for future payments.

After Dan Gilbert’s mortgage lending company Quicken Loans caused mortgage foreclosures across the city, his real estate company Bedrock gobbled up properties in the downtown core, including dozens along Woodward Avenue.¹⁰⁷ Gilbert has been a booster of the city’s redevelopment regime often through public-private partnerships. Spence calls these partnerships “[c]rucial components of the neoliberal turn in the wake of urban

disinvestment. Private firms have resources; public institutions create markets and redistribute risk, whether that be financial risks to residents or accountability to residents.¹⁰⁸ For instance, Gilbert has backed tourism-driven projects like the three-mile QLine streetcar (subject of chapter two) and promotional campaigns like “Opportunity Detroit,” designed to attract the tech industry to Detroit. At one of those promotional events, Gilbert endorsed the emergency management law that made his purchases possible with an evocation of the sovereign’s common good. He said, “As hard as it is to suspend democracy for a short period of time, I think it’s in the best interest of everyone.”¹⁰⁹ The other major beneficiaries of dispossession — those who came to *possess* Detroit — were the Ilitch family, founders of Little Caesar’s Pizza and owners of the Detroit Red Wings as well as the Detroit Tigers. After intentionally blighting at least seventy of their own downtown properties, the Ilitch’s grabbed more prime downtown properties and extracted more than \$300 million from the city, paid with property taxes, for their downtown redevelopment plan, which included their new \$450 million hockey stadium.¹¹⁰ “The allegedly bankrupt African-American city,” Mirzoeff wrote in 2013, “has all that for a stadium for possibly the whitest sport in the entire world.”¹¹¹ Because the Ilitch’s will technically lease the stadium, they won’t pay property taxes and the Red Wings will occupy the space rent-free for up to ninety-five years.¹¹²

The takeover of downtown Detroit — especially along Woodward Avenue — by private foundations and elite individuals wouldn’t be possible without the legal fictions of property and emergency. The former indicates the *prior* right of the state to determine and correct proper relations in and as white possession, while the latter, as state of exception dispenses with the pretense of democracy in such a relation. As an abstraction

process through which land becomes property becomes monetary value, predatory lending, mortgage foreclosure, and tax foreclosure are, as K-Sue Park argues, “means of taking land for debts past due.”¹¹³ Innovated through the colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples, these economies of dispossession occur today through neoliberal policies shifting municipal and corporate debt responsibility (i.e. for water and pensions) to individuals. Through a “vocabulary of morality and selfhood captured by that of contract and debt,” payment becomes the only proper response rather than say, r
duling, regulating or refusing the debt.¹¹⁴ Thus enacted through settler colonial ideology, redevelopment unsurprisingly began to produce settler colonial rhetoric, particularly through tourism, arts, and start-up culture, representing Detroit first as an “urban wilderness” for explorers and eventually an “urban frontier” for artists and entrepreneurs looking for cheap land to subsidize financial risk as well as personal and professional development. These new, *proper* and property-owning subjects of capitalist occupation and development were known as the “creative class.”

MISAPPREHENSIONS: PROPERTY AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

While Michiganders struggled to defeat financial dictatorship, a by-now familiar narrative about the power of art and culture to transform struggling (Rust Belt) cities had taken root. Deemed the “creative economy,” the narrative suggests artists increase the visibility and value of economically devalued neighborhoods, inspiring other young, creative people to visit as tourists and eventually to move in for cheap rent and vast cultural opportunity. Sociologist Richard Florida famously coined the phrase “creative class” to describe “creatives” as engineers, designers, ad-men, tech entrepreneurs. In his

study of the “hustle economy,” Lester Spence defines the “creative class,” as “the most likely to be able to consume the goods the corporations offer, the most likely to work for the corporation, or ... the ones least in need of certain types of public goods (public housing, food stamps, etc.).”¹¹⁵ These are people who can work from home or other off-site locations, like coffeeshops. Coffeeshops with minimalist aesthetics and other storefront businesses proliferate with the creative class, attracting more people, and so on, until bigger industries either sprout up from all this creative activity or relocate from more expensive cities. Municipalities began to invest in this idea through a variety of means, from tax incentives for creative industries and cheap housing for creative people to city-sponsored arts and music festivals and increased opportunities for individual artists. The creative city has since been widely debunked as a gentrification scheme — the art itself described as “art-washing” — even by Florida himself. The creative city is an inherently neoliberal project through which cities are “viewed as economic units designed primarily to generate profit for capital,” rather than social or political bodies.¹¹⁶ In the shift of focus from rule to management, cities become “not the place where people can express fundamental political liberties but rather where people can develop products and services for the market and then sell those services without undue regulation.”¹¹⁷ Yet, municipalities continue to invest in creative development and artists, understandably, continue act as boosters.

Detroit entered the creative economy discourse in 2003 with Governor Jennifer Granholm’s “Cool Cities” initiative.¹¹⁸ Foundations, like Kresge and Knight in Detroit, began investing in programs and artists whose work would articulate the creative economy and invite investment. Pointed at Detroit, however, the rhetoric of creative

economic development took on a different character. Newspaper reports, magazine articles, photography monographs, and nonprofit promotional materials, referred to Detroit as an “urban frontier” or an “urban wilderness” where “urban pioneers” (especially young artists and entrepreneurs) could find cheap housing. Scholars like Rebecca Kinney, Jessi Quizar and Sara Safransky analyze this white return through the lens of settler colonialism. They point to tax foreclosures resulting in housing programs for out-of-town artists. They read representations of ruin, resurgent nature, empty land, and potential as *terra nullius*, a no man’s land, “for which,” Safransky writes, “there is a moral imperative to settle.”¹¹⁹ The proliferation of “ruin porn” in particular overrepresents urban decay in Detroit as urban wilderness that ignores the city’s 700,000 residents.¹²⁰ Where Safransky describes “urban greening” Detroit as a potential settler colonial discourse, Quizar focuses on the potential of urban agriculture to provide “food sovereignty” in Black communities and a shift in focus from exploiting Black labor to taking Black land. Each understands settler colonialism after Patrick Wolfe as a “structure not an event.” As a logic of elimination, it destroys to replace,” but “maintains the refractory imprint of the native counter-claim” in order to provide a figure against which settler colonialism can be maintained.¹²¹ Founded in the doctrine of discovery, which justified the transfer of occupancy from Native to the “discovering” sovereign, settler colonialism argues the “scattered, unorganized Indigenous people who occupied it” weren’t using it.¹²² Kinney, Quizar, and Safransky argue this logic transfers to Detroit, where redevelopment discourses evince an ongoing settler colonial project to erase Black Detroiters through the same logics of property and possession used to dispossess Indigenous people.¹²³

These understandings of settler colonialism seem to fit Jodi Byrd's description of Indigeneity as a "transit of empire" where the U.S. settler state "make[s] Indian" people who stand to disrupt U.S. economic interests: however, they don't account for the myriad ways in which "blackness," in Aileen Moreton-Robinson's words, "functions as a white epistemological tool servicing the social construction of whiteness in its multiple and possessive forms, displacing Indigenous sovereignties and rendering them invisible through a civil rights discourse."¹²⁴ Kyle Mays demonstrates this in his study of "Indigenous Detroit," where Black radicals like Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hampton described institutional racism in urban cities across the U.S. as "internal colonization."¹²⁵ So, while they recognized settler domination of Indigenous peoples, they failed to "acknowledge that those people who were dominated still persisted — and resisted — colonialism."¹²⁶ Thus, when Safransky writes "representations [of empty land] become more problematic when excessive nature is celebrated as cleansing, a discourse with racial connotations," she marks the erasure of Black Americans, but neglects the symbolic and selective absorption of Detroit's Indigenous people into the colonial landscape, achieving, in Moreton-Robinson's words "the unattainable imperative of becoming Indigenous" in order to belong.¹²⁷ In her study of Asian racialization and settler colonialism, Iyko Day echoes Moreton-Robinson, adding that the settler investment in appropriating Indigeneity "functions to cover over colonial invasion and reimagine a natural affiliation to the land."¹²⁸ Both also demonstrate the ways in which the desire to create a "shared" struggle between racialized subjectivities and Indigenous people also fails to acknowledge the ongoing project to erase Indigenous people under settler colonialism.¹²⁹ Going further Day reverses Moreton-Robinson's contention blackness is a

white epistemological tool, writing the opposite is *also* true: “slavery and the abject condition of blackness complicate a straightforward approach to settler colonialism organized around a central opposition between settler and Indigenous peoples.”¹³⁰ Labor remains significant, especially in the context of migration, forced through slavery or imperialism. What Lowe calls the “asymmetrical, racialized, and colonial division of humanity” is *the signature* feature of liberal modes of distinction, presenting white subjects and societies as “rational, civilized, and human” in relation to other “laboring, replaceable, or disposable” subjectivities.¹³¹

For Nichols, failures to “trouble the basic distinctions between whiteness and Blackness on which the relation between property and personhood has historically been structured” recovers and restores “the expectations of racial privilege that have been partially thwarted by the inequalities of patriarchy or waged-labor exploitation.”¹³² Dispossession in Black radical tradition refers not to land, but to the body, self, or person.¹³³ However, in addition to labor, the enslaved were commodities, circulated as objects of trade and investment.¹³⁴ Capitalism brings “property in their labor power” and “property becomes the right to appropriate the unpaid labor of others or its products and the impossibility, on the part of the worker, of appropriating his own product.”¹³⁵ Personhood is property, which for the descendants of the enslaved is associated with labor (freely or unfreely) given through self-possession, made possible only in the moment when they are “radically estranged from their own social contexts.”¹³⁶ Thus, Day writes, spatial alienation, rather than Indigeneity, determines the exploitation of racialized labor under settler colonialism: They have left or been taken from their homes through slavery and transnational/imperial influence.¹³⁷ This includes immigrants as well as

descendants of the enslaved. “While a logic of elimination functions to increase white property through the decimation of Indigenous populations who stand in the way of territorial expansion,” Day writes, “a logic of exclusion secures industrial capitalism by furnishing a vulnerable labor force.”¹³⁸

Safransky, Quizar, and Kinney dispute this distinction between Indigenous elimination and Black/immigrant exclusion. They argue settler colonialism in Detroit takes place through “Black land.” Quizar in particular bases her analysis on the distinction between exclusion and elimination, noting a shift in desire from Black labor, with its referent in chattel slavery, to Black land, with its referent in Indigenous dispossession.¹³⁹ But, as Day writes, exclusion and elimination are not discrete logics; they operate on a moving spectrum of biopolitical violence through which, I argue, exclusion can look like elimination.¹⁴⁰ Thus, suggesting “the racialization of Black people has shifted to more closely resemble that of Native Americans” involves what Nichols calls a misapprehension of dispossession vis-à-vis property relations.¹⁴¹ He writes,

As dispossession has taken a more central role in debates over colonization, property relations, racial capital, and slavery and its afterlives, a number of tensions and outright conflicts have emerged between differently positioned communities and modes of analysis ... emerg[ing] from misapprehension since shared terms of critique frequently mask distinct and divergent histories, intellectual contexts, and traditions of interpretation, all which feed polysemic conceptual intension.”¹⁴²

Indigenous land seized/created as property can never be understood as Black land in the same context — it already exists as property in the settler state — and labor remains the property relation for Blackness through its absence, negation, exclusion. Black elimination is exclusion from social and political life, from

decision making. It is social death, exclusion from redevelopment planning, which results in loss of land but is not elimination, because Blackness does not propose an alternative to white settler property relations related to land. As I argue in chapter one, the white possession of Detroit demands Black labor only to exclude it when Black laborers make demands. As I argue in chapter two, the focus on Black land disregards Indigenous subjectivity, pushing Indigenous people into the category of “original” or “prior” owners.

Rather than a monolithic process, the transit of empire picks up new technologies and discourses of exclusion, creating multiple subjectivities, in Byrd’s words, “through notions of injury, grievance, and grievability,” forcing articulations of freedom at the expense of others.¹⁴³ I understand this to mean settler governance deploys identical technologies of dispossession across racialized subjectivities, while dispossession has different meanings in each context, ensuring continued dispossession. In Detroit, this means diving into the entanglements of Native and Black dispossession, while avoiding the trap of substituting one racialized group for another as dispossessive technologies travel across boundaries of subjectivity, but it also requires us to think about dispossession in the context of immigration and the international border where a vulnerable labor force can be managed and excluded.

BORDERTOWNS

Detroit is a bordertown.

The whole state of Michigan is less than 100 miles from the international border and therefore within the jurisdiction of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). From 2001 to 2016, border enforcement in the area jumped 981 percent, from thirty-eight agents in 2001 to four hundred eleven in 2016. By 2019, ICE arrests in Michigan were second highest in the nation and enforcement disproportionately concentrated on Latinx residents regardless of citizenship or immigration status.¹⁴⁴ People who just looked foreign (i.e. brown-skinned in the ICE enforcement logic) reported increased harassment, confirming Day's assertion, "The racialized vulnerability to deportation of undocumented, guest-worker, or other provisional migrant populations exceeds the conceptual boundaries that attend 'the immigrant.'"¹⁴⁵ Geoffrey Boyce uses the concept of "automobility" to describe the effect immigration policy has on racialized populations, regardless of immigration status. Automobility is an "expressly racial and racializing condition through which peoples' access to and control over the conditions of work, leisure and everyday social reproduction are mediated via specific logics of policing and related state violence."¹⁴⁶

Citizenship does not confer rights on people of color. Rather, modernity is a period in which the state "shifts from being concerned with society defending itself against external threats to focusing on its internal enemies," while still using the border to police and criminalize.¹⁴⁷ Indigenous people are the original enemies of the interior, made "foreign" to their homelands by Removal and the establishment of the U.S.¹⁴⁸ Bordertowns, in Jennifer Denetdale's words, are "formerly recognized Indigenous spaces," like Gallup, New Mexico, where "Indigenous people are endlessly cast as the outsiders and aliens ... who threaten white civilization."¹⁴⁹ In Detroit, Mays observes,

“non-Indians used images of indigeneity to erase Native people,” even framing “Indigenous people as the new immigrants to the city.”¹⁵⁰ The state constantly affirms its boundaries and defines the immigrant to affirm and define itself, where the right to exclude means one owns in the first place.¹⁵¹ White possession is contained and monitored at the borders of the settler state.

Focusing on the violence of exclusion on U.S. borders, Harsha Walia uses the term “border imperialism” to describe the settler colonial processes by which “the violences and precarities of displacement and migration are *structurally* created as well as maintained.”¹⁵² She identifies four overlapping structures: mass displacement of impoverished and colonized communities and the securitization of the border against them; criminalization of migration with extreme discipline for those deemed “alien” or “illegal”; racialized hierarchies of citizenship; and state-mediated exploitation of migrant labor, “akin to conditions of slavery and servitude, by capital interests.”¹⁵³ Immigrant laws, she writes, criminalize migrants while legalizing the occupation of Indigenous lands.¹⁵⁴ Day notes, with Adam McKeown, “border controls are not a remnant of an ‘illiberal’ political tradition, but a product of self-conscious pioneers of political freedoms and self-rule.”¹⁵⁵ Importantly, she links Indigenous dispossession, racialized labor recruitment, immigration restrictions, and internments to the settler colonial control of land and labor. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, in their sweeping theoretical text on border methodology, identify borders with the “multiplication of labor,” referring to “the intensification of labor processes and the tendency for work to colonize the time of life,” as well as social stratifications of labor producing subjects who do not fit into established categories of political belonging.¹⁵⁶ These neoliberal processes are managed at the

border, where for instance surplus labor populations can be recruited and restricted, while preserving “cognitive” or psychic borders through, Day writes, the racialized abstractions of high tech labor and working-class labor — what Spence defined as labor and spatial divides.¹⁵⁷

Understanding bordertowns as inherently Indigenous spaces made possible by the border-crossing and border-making of colonization (“the first and only border-crossing that matters”), I apply the term in multiple senses to Detroit to include the international border and the county line, as well as the psychic or cognitive bordering processes through which labor multiplies, subjectivities flatten and fracture, and the settler state affirms itself.¹⁵⁸ The border upholds property. It creates the U.S. as white property and conditions relations within. But, the bordertown itself is a space of immediate and particular violence brought on by the urgency of upholding those boundaries. Where neoliberalism creates conditions for dispossession in the present as financialization and debt, the bordertown is the space of exclusion, elimination, and violent inclusion. It is the locus of white possession made possible through dispossession as “a perpetually incomplete project” continually asserting and adapting “the terms of value and belonging.”¹⁵⁹

CHAPTERS

Settler colonial analysis on Detroit has focused on land — property formerly owned by Black people according the laws and political philosophies of the U.S. settler state. Responses to the “Walking Man” story demonstrate the degree to which labor remains a discourse and ideology of belonging in Detroit. In this neoliberal moment, the

logic of the “hustle economy” applies equally to college-educated, grant- and foundation-funded individuals and industrial laborers who can’t count on basic city services like public transportation or water. But, where the creative class can aspire to wealth-generating outcomes resulting from their freely designated labor, industrial workers like Robertson can only hope to be recognized by the munificence of the creative class. His labor in the becomes a disciplining discourse, suggesting if anyone expects to remain (i.e. occupy land) in Detroit, they have to reach a new standard of work ethic and they have to do it without complaining. As Moreton-Robinson argues, “working hard” is a discourse on morals and virtue, implicitly rejecting those who don’t emulate those “commitment and values.”¹⁶⁰ The Walking Man discourse suggests a state of unbelonging for a number of workers in relation — from the unemployed and underemployed to boarding house managers, hairdressers, and undocumented workers. Though many of these workers are self-employed, their work is considered “unskilled,” not creative and therefore illegible to social entrepreneurs and city government alike. At the same time, leaders of Detroit’s redevelopment regime — including the emergency manager, city government, private developers like the Illich family and Dan Gilbert, and even media outlets promulgating the story of Detroit’s great “comeback” — have made overtures to creative workforces and tech firms across the country. They want Detroit to be the next Silicon Valley. In other words, labor remains a key factor in determining who belongs in Detroit; thus, it remains a key factor in our understanding of dispossession in Detroit throughout this dissertation. In each chapter, I discuss the intersections of elimination and exclusion on Woodward Avenue from 2013 to 2019. Though I focus on the current redevelopment period, I put each site in its regional historical context, highlighting the co-creation of

subjectivities and competition over labor as well as space. Beginning with James Robertson's route, this dissertation follows Woodward Avenue from the northern border of Detroit at the county line to the southern border at the Detroit River, the "line in the water" separating the U.S. from Canada. The dissertation rides down the QLine streetcar system with stops at the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Hudson Site to demonstrate, before going "off-route" to Southwest Detroit for the conclusion. Where the body chapters discuss the overlapping and peripatetic roots and routes of dispossession along the famed avenue, the conclusion demonstrates while bordertown residents feel dispossession as everyday limits on mobility, they also respond to these conditions with renewed vigor and coalitional counter-discourse.

In chapter one, "Extreme Labor in a Bordertown: The Detroit Walking Man," the Walking Man is a neoliberal discourse on citizenship and belonging in Detroit routed (invested) and rerouted (sustained) through Black labor, the counter to entrepreneurial (white) labor. Robertson's story about extreme labor conditions is coopted by a neoliberal discourse merging individual hard work with political acquiescence. Media coverage and reader comments demonstrates the ways in which redevelopment discourses discipline Black labor in order to authorize privileged forms of white labor, more attractive to developers, employers, and the neoliberal city which thrive on creative, contract work. Yet, as I show, Black labor history demonstrates the precarity and extremity of Robertson's situation runs consistent with a century of Black labor struggle in Detroit. Under neoliberalism, labor precarity moves from unsafe workplace conditions and job insecurity to unreliable transportation and improper personal attributes. Discipline takes place by bordering — flattening and fracturing — subjects to prevent them from cohering

as political subjects, which in the neoliberal city moves from the institution to public discourse. Therefore, I move into a border methodology to uncover the changing relations and multiple formations of identity that delimit boundaries of citizenship, belonging, and possession in Detroit. This close reading of Robertson's case is an attempt to reveal the ways in which white citizens (i.e. the creative class) form their sense of belonging through individual acts of philanthropy. By establishing border theory as an analytic for understanding labor relations in Detroit, I set up the next chapter, where I interrogate popular and scholarly descriptions of Detroit as a settler colonial city — an “urban frontier,” where “urban pioneers” can rebuild the city, ostensibly bringing more jobs to town, while pursuing their own financial goals on cheap, empty land.¹⁶¹

In chapter two, “The White Possession of Detroit: Landscape and Place from Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive* to the QLine Trolley,” I argue empire transits settler colonial ideology in Detroit through descriptions of Black Detroiters as “native Detroiters.” Where scholars understand the settler colonial return to Detroit in terms of a black/white binary, I employ Aileen Moreton-Robinson's theoretical intervention into whiteness studies and Kyle Mays's study of “Indigenous Detroit” to demonstrate the logic of white possession relies on a mythologized Indigenous past that continues to erase, deny or delegitimize Indigenous people. Thus, one goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the ways in which Indigeneity appears as an analytic in Detroit at the same time Indigenous viability is denied, even by scholars of Detroit. Deploying settler colonialism as an analytic for Black Detroiters means ignoring existing Indigenous claims to the region and accepting U.S. property law (a feature of white possession) as the basis of land tenure. It also negates the discursive role Black labor plays in

redevelopment discourse, as discussed in the previous chapter. Searching for a rounder expression of settler colonialism in Detroit, I enter the argument through a vampire film by the auteur filmmaker Jim Jarmusch. While the film duplicates the image of Detroit as an “urban wilderness” for tourists and urban explorers, it does (however momentarily) recognize the futurity of Indigenous people. I understand *Only Lovers Left Behind* as an instance in which landscape representation, tourism, and land speculation collide and collude to suggest Detroit as not merely in need of saving from poor Black people, but more insidiously as a space *reclaimed* as white property through tourism and the settler colonial logic of prior white possession. *OLLA* suggests a Detroit in which Indigenous people do exist in the present, even if the film pushes them to the margins.

Where *OLLA* demonstrates the degree to which tourism carries the urban frontier narrative into public discourse, I argue a new streetcar system on Woodward Avenue, the QLine, articulates settler ideology in the built environment of Detroit. By connecting the QLine to *Only Lovers Left Alive*, I bring broad discourses on white possession in Detroit to the ground, where they operate materially. In other words, the same discourses and rhetorics that make it possible to accept Jarmusch’s depiction of Detroit as a city for creative white entrepreneurs make it possible for us to understand the QLine as material evidence of growth and innovation. It is the literal, visual transit of settler colonial discourse in Detroit, carting tourists and tech entrepreneurs up and down the length of the Woodward Avenue redevelopment zone.

In chapter three, “Motor City *Indigenismo*: Diego Rivera and the Space of Whiteness,” I interrogate the Detroit Institute of Arts’s promotion of “industry and technology as the indigenous culture of Detroit” through Linda Downs’s reading of

Rivera's *Detroit Industry* murals. Scholars and critics have written at length about the representation of labor in Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry* murals, much of it focusing on Rivera's departure from the Mexican Communist Party. Interpreting the murals themselves, scholars disagree whether Rivera's message was received by workers and whether it succeeded in subtly subverting the capitalist narrative of his employers. And while scholars have spilled much theory over Rivera's use of *indigenismo*, the Mexican nationalist ideology, they have not analyzed Indigeneity in the murals, especially as it relates to labor, and the ways in which it continues to be relevant to the DIA today in its location on Woodward Avenue. Thus, I argue Rivera's mythologized Indigenous laborer subsumes Asian and Black labor into a universal whiteness while eliding immigrant (especially Mexican) labor, actual Indigenous people, and Indigenous land tenure. I suggest the DIA remains invested in this process through overtly discriminatory depictions in the 2015 exhibition, *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit*, which includes comments on the "war whoops of Native Americans" and "terrified settlers" as well as confluences of Indigenous people with industrial laborers, the degradation of Rivera's labor utopia, and the elevation of creativity as a moral, even revolutionary ethic realized through business and industry. Pairing theory from critical indigenous studies, visual studies, and architecture with regional and labor histories of Detroit, I argue the DIA's investment in *Detroit Industry* is an attempt to hold space for whiteness on Woodward Avenue in the midst of a neoliberal redevelopment scheme focused on attracting creative white labor. Thus, the phrase "industry and technology as the indigenous culture of Detroit" can be interpreted as "*whiteness* as the indigenous culture of Detroit."

In chapter 4, ““Throw in The Blankets and The Corn’: Unsettling Neotopia,” I understand redevelopment as a progress narrative that “colonizes the future” to secure the capitalist present.¹⁶² I read development on the former site of J.L. Hudson’s department store as the visuality of redevelopment/progress, Dan Gilbert’s vision for a neoliberal utopia, or “neotopia.”¹⁶³ The Hudson Site is the metonymic part (the visual evidence) that describes and authorizes Gilbert’s larger vision for the city, thereby empowering him to determine what the city will look like, who will have access to it, and, more importantly, who will work in it.¹⁶⁴ Going further, I draw from Sarah Keenan’s definition of “unsettled space” to describe ways in which the utopic progress narrative depends on regular renewal and redevelopment to establish the impression of permanence. To “unsettle” the space of white possession, I discuss an attempt by several Michigan tribes to open casinos in the city. While anti-Indian sentiment and white possessive logic undermined those efforts, Indian casinos suggested an alternative to neoliberal, capitalist development models. Indian casinos create support networks for tribes and have economically benefitted neighboring communities. Indigenous claims to the original Hudson building demonstrates the space is not fixed, even if it’s rebuilt with capitalistic intentions, so Indigenous people and other Detroit residents are free to imagine other uses for the Hudson Site.

In the conclusion, “Off-Site Countervisuality: Emergency Management and Emergent Indigenous Praxis in Southwest Detroit,” I go “off-site” in order to describe an instance in which emergency management instigated the rise of Indigenous resistance in the city along with coalitional efforts to reject any redevelopment plan designed to eliminate or exclude Detroit’s many residents and workers of color. This chapter provides

a more detailed history of emergency management in Detroit in order to demonstrate the ways in which Detroit residents repeated showed up (i.e. emerged) to oppose it. I read the correlation between emergency and emergence as a contest for space that takes *place* through and as visual discourse. The emergency regime understands controlling the city means controlling its image. Using Nicholas Mirzoeff's counter-history of visibility as a frame, I argue while the emergency regime claims the right to envision a Detroit absent people of color, the Raiz Up and other activist/artist groups create a field of appearance through cultural production and a form of appearance called "snatching the mic."

As I argue throughout this dissertation, Woodward Avenue is a landscape of dispossession where redevelopment discourse disciplines laboring subjects of color in order to create a safe place for creative white labor. But rather than a fixed space consisting of landscapes, architecture, and public art, the built environment of Woodward Avenue *sites* social and political conditions for dispossession, racialization, and migration, making them seem natural. White possession is an ongoing social and cultural ideology and discourse that coheres in the built environment. In Detroit, settler colonialism operates under the violence of bordertown policing, both a spectacle of development and a surveillance regime limiting "people's autonomy and control over the conditions of their everyday circulation through space."¹⁶⁵ The border represents competition over labor — especially questions over who deserves to live and work in Detroit, who is a "true Detroiter" — as well as the naturalization of white possession through the ongoing expulsion of Indigenous people, where the right to possess is confirmed by the right to exclude at the boundaries of the settler state.

Chapter One

Extreme Labor in a Bordertown

The Detroit Walking Man

On February 6, 2016, the *Detroit Free Press* published a where-is-he-now article on James Robertson, a Black fifty-seven-year-old machinist whom the *Free Press* had made famous a year earlier by tracking his “marathon commute”: Every weekday for ten years, Robertson walked twenty-one miles (roundtrip) to a factory job in the neighboring county.¹ Laitner assures readers, despite receiving \$350,000 in donations from people all over the world, Robertson remained rooted in his values: namely, pride in his job and loyalty to his employer. For Laitner, *Free Press* readers and the thousands of people who donated, Detroit’s “Walking Man” is an exemplary citizen. His message, as one elementary-school student put it, is “not to be lazy [sic] and to do the things I am sposed [sic] to do without complaining.”²

James Robertson has appeared in more than a hundred online news articles and commentaries. Some are duplicates, appearing either in different sections of the same publication on different days and with different headlines or showing up in multiple publications across the country through syndication services like the *USA Today* network, Reuters, and the Associated Press. *The Detroit Free Press*, which broke the story, inevitably gets credit in each story and very few media outlets provide original reporting to supplement or interrogate the *Free Press*. Throughout this chapter, I recount Robertson’s story as it develops in the *Free Press*, tracking in particular the quotes,

descriptions, and accolades other media duplicate without question or comment. The images accompanying Laitner's original story, or very similar ones, likewise circulated with the unquestioned narrative. Thus, I also provide image descriptions at the head of each section, followed by contextualization and analysis. Through this structure, the chapter follows citizenship discourse as it develops through the routes and reroutes of Robertson's story. Journalists, readers, and viewers *make* Robertson into the Walking Man — a fiction — to know themselves in relation, as either noncitizens (unemployed, underemployed, unemployable), passive citizens (laborers subject to the market), or active citizens (entrepreneurs in the position of helping workers like Robertson).

In their original contexts, the images, rather than illustrating media narratives, fix Robertson into his public identity as the Walking Man. In Leigh Raiford's words, the images "function as visual indicators of the social and moral status of their subject" by working in relation to one another, to the map of Robertson's route, and to the Walking Man narrative, the journey.³ The online version of Laitner's story includes a fourteen-image slideshow capturing his journey on January 28, 2015 and fixing his identity to that particular route on that particular day.⁴ Where movement is "essential to how people come to relate to landscape," "identity is routed, rather than rooted, in landscape."⁵ Thus, just as Robertson's actual physical journey is part of the narrative, the narrative and the images of the journey create the Walking Man. In disability theory, the "ideology of walking ... gives the fact of walking a set of meanings associated with being human and being masculine."⁶ George Lipsitz describes "movement in defiance of segregationists constraints and confinement" as an essential component to the "black spatial imaginary."⁷ Describing the violence Black Detroiters experienced trying to buy homes, Thomas

Sugrue quotes Reverend Charles Butler as saying, “The desire and ability to *move* without the right to move is refined slavery.”⁸ We recognize differences in motivations to move, the speed with which we do so, the routes we take, how we feel about doing it, and our encounters with boundaries.⁹ The rhythm (gate, frequency, energy) with which we walk is aesthetic. It says something about us to others, especially authorities. Walking in general is aesthetic, “equally conditioned by the total stock of senses, movement and emotions.”¹⁰ The way policymakers, urban people or academics see walking is “a productive exercise of power”; it’s indicative of governmentality of the will to create an order of things.¹¹ As an image repeated, the Walking Man’s walking is spectacle, a “self-portrait of power” concealing the class relationship between the Walking Man, his boss, his benefactors, and his readers.¹² New photography in particular “invests and sustains the power of the existing political and economic system.”¹³

In this chapter, the Walking Man is a neoliberal discourse on citizenship and belonging in Detroit routed (invested) and rerouted (sustained) through Black labor, the counter to entrepreneurial (white) labor. Robertson’s story about extreme labor conditions is coopted by a neoliberal discourse merging individual hard work with political acquiescence. Russ Castronovo describes passivity, or “necro citizenship,” as a social death that “emancipates” subjects from “passionate debates, everyday engagements, and earthly affairs that animate the political field.”¹⁴ He continues, “The U.S. democratic state loves its citizens as passive subjects, unresponsive to political issues, unmoved by social stimuli, and unaroused by enduring injustices.”¹⁵ Wendy Brown identifies passive citizenship as the product of a “neoliberal political rationality”¹⁶ that converts “the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy’s

constituent elements into *economic* ones.”¹⁷ Social justice issues become economic stimuli to attract consumers and investors,¹⁸ as when a Detroit cyclist’s desire to booster the city by “show[ing] people cool stuff” on a weekly bike ride became, in the words of *USA Today*, “community activism.”¹⁹ The cyclist’s appearance in an Apple commercial became a “gift ... for the city of Detroit.”²⁰ Similarly, Robertson’s story becomes not about conditions forcing him to walk 21 miles a day, but about the endurance of hard-working Detroiters and the well-spring of financial support he received from total strangers, what Lester Spence categorizes as “social entrepreneurship,” which is only possible in the neoliberal city, “not the place where people can express fundamental political liberties but rather where people can develop products and services for the market and then sell those services without undue regulation.”²¹ Social entrepreneurship relies on “innovation, creativity, and energy mobilized through market principles” — a creative class to take financial risks on cheap real estate.²²

Robertson’s story demonstrates the ways in which redevelopment discourses discipline Black labor in order to authorize privileged forms of white labor, more attractive to developers, employers, and the neoliberal city which thrive on creative, contract work. Yet, as I show in this chapter, Black labor history demonstrates the precarity and extremity of Robertson’s situation runs consistent with a century of Black labor struggle in Detroit. Though the Detroit automobile industry provided unprecedented opportunity for many Black workers, it also relied on frequent layoffs and programs to oversee workers’ everyday lives. Under neoliberalism, institutional modes of discipline merely prefigure neoliberal self-discipline today. Labor precarity moves from unsafe workplace conditions and job insecurity to unreliable transportation and improper

personal attributes. Oversight becomes self-discipline and the tendency of work to occupy everyday life. Black labor remains a disciplining technology of the state and the corporation, ever more closely linked through public/partnerships, a crucial component of the neoliberal city.²³

As I show here, manufacturers used Black labor to break up unions and immigrant labor to limit Black presence in the factories. The unions, meanwhile, included Black caucuses in leadership and decision-making only to limit Black power. This form of discipline takes place by bordering — flattening and fracturing — subjects to prevent them from cohering as political subjects, which in the neoliberal city transfers from the institution to public discourse. Therefore, I move into a border methodology to uncover the changing relations and multiple formations of identity that delimit boundaries of citizenship, belonging, and possession in Detroit. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson use the phrase “multiplication of labor” to describe the articulation of belonging through labor as a social process producing subjects who do not fit into established categories of political belonging, such as Robertson’s neighbors, roommates, or girlfriend — all who are ostensibly lazy because Robertson is not lazy.²⁴ They are unworthy of philanthropy because Robertson is worthy. This close reading of Robertson’s case is an attempt to reveal the ways in which active citizens (i.e. the creative class) also form their sense of belonging through individual acts of philanthropy. By establishing border theory as an analytic for understanding labor relations in Detroit, I set up chapter two, where I interrogate popular and scholarly descriptions of Detroit as a settler colonial city — an “urban frontier,” where “urban pioneers” can rebuild the city, ostensibly bringing more jobs to town, while pursuing their own financial goals on cheap, empty land.²⁵ I argue the

desire to understand Black land as “the site of settler colonial desire” wrongly articulates Black Detroiters as “native Detroiters,” thereby erasing Indigenous people and their land claims while essentializing blackness to a racialized category of difference. While critical Indigenous studies provides this corrective to settler colonial studies, border theory — with its focus on labor, migration, and “cognitive borders” between subjects — provides a framework for understanding settler colonialism as a peripatetic capitalistic process that crosses subjectivities without vacating Indigenous people or Native nationhood.

MAKING THE ‘WALKING MAN’

[Image description: In the first image, James Robertson walks on a sidewalk at night. He wears a gray beanie, a gray winter coat with black sleeves, black pants, and black gloves. The lawn along the sidewalk is patchy with snow. The background, which is blurry, includes traffic lights at an intersection, as well as a building with white trim along the roof. A long oval light shines below a peak in the trim and the front windows are lit.]

On January 31, 2015, *Detroit Free Press* reporter Bill Laitner told the story of James Robertson, whom he dubbed Detroit’s “Walking Man.” He describes the fifty-six-year-old African-American machine operator as “pudgy” and “soft-spoken” — specifically “not an endurance athlete”— but also a “champ” and an everyday Detroit, facing the challenges, Laitner writes, of “getting to work in a region of limited bus service, and where car ownership is priced beyond ... reach.”²⁶

Robertson wakes up at 6 a.m. and begins his walk two hours later, heading two miles to a bus stop. By 8:30, he’s in Royal Oak, a Detroit suburb, heading for the hour-long ride to the upscale Somerset Collection shopping center in Troy. From there, he walks seven more miles to Schain Mold and Engineering in Rochester Hills, where from 2 to 10 p.m., he pulls levers on a “garage-sized machine.”²⁷ Robertson also eats dinner at

the plant, often a hearty Southern meal prepared each night by his boss's wife. At 10 p.m., Robertson begins his commute home with the seven-mile walk back to the upscale mall in Troy. At nearly one in the morning, he boards a bus to South Detroit, but it turns around at the State Fairgrounds on 8 Mile Road, which doubles as the Detroit city limit and the county line. Robertson walks the remaining five miles, arriving home at around 4 a.m. He promptly goes to bed, preparing to do it all over again after only two hours of sleep. He has never missed a day of work.

Running on only two hours of sleep a night, Robertson sleeps on buses (as only the photos accompanying the piece demonstrate) and he stays awake at work by drinking “gallons” of Mountain Dew and Coca-Cola. His co-workers and friends also keep him going, either because he sees them as family — “every day is a tribute to how much he cares about his job, his boss and his coworkers,” Laitner writes — or because they support him in various ways. After seeing Robertson walking day after day, for instance, banker Blake Pollock started picking up the Walking Man to drive him part of the way.

Robertson works at Schain Mold and Engineering in Rochester Hills, Oakland County. To help Robertson, the manager Todd Wilson delivers homemade meals to Robertson, prepared by Wilson's wife. They include “turnip greens with smoked pork neck bones, black-eyed peas and carrots in a brown sugar glaze, babyback ribs, cornbread made from scratch, pinto beans, fried taters, cheesy biscuits.”²⁸ Wilson says if he can step away from work for a few minutes, he drives Robertson home, and Robertson's coworkers are “very much trying to get James a vehicle.”²⁹ But, Wilson says, Robertson has a routine he seems to like, implying that he wouldn't want a car. When Pollock suggested Robertson move closer to work, Pollack told the *Free Press*, Robertson said

his girlfriend had inherited “their house” and didn’t want to leave. The only other option seems to be a federally funded door-to-door service, called Job Access and Reverse Commute, which, for a charge, helps low-income workers get to work. Robertson tells Laitner he is unaware of the program.

The image of Robertson walking in the snow at night is the first image we see of him. It tells us we should be concerned about him before we even read about his commute. Blurriness and darkness render the landscape behind him unintelligible. We know the photographer took the image at nighttime and we know by Robertson’s clothing, as well as the snow, the temperature is low. The focus of the image is quite literally on Robertson, just as the focus of the story is on Robertson, the humble and extraordinary man whom everyone is out to help. But, he walks alone — again, literally and figuratively. He refuses help. He refuses to complain. He is an individual facing circumstances beyond his control, but by walking through these dark and uncertain circumstances, he is asserting his masculinity; he is taking his circumstances like a man. He is a man, walking.

THE DAILY ROUTE

[Image description: A map of Robertson’s route. The cities of Detroit, Royal Oak, Troy, and Rochester Hills are connected by gray shading, while the rest of the metro area is yellow, except for the river on the far right, which is blue. Robertson’s commute to work is a black line. His commute home is blue. A dotted line and arrows circle around the route, showing the direction of his commute. Woodward Avenue and Crooks Street are named along with four junctions: His starting/ending location near Holbrook Avenue, the State Fairgrounds bus stop, Somerset Collection, and “an industrial park near M-59” where he begins his factory shift. Eight shaded boxes mark the times and locations of his journey. The start and finish are highlighted in red. The words, “James Robertson’s Incredible Daily Commute: The daily route of the “incredible commuter” James Robertson, 56, of Detroit” appear in the upper right-hand corner.]

In the story titled “Heart and Sole,” Laitner dedicates roughly two hundred words out of about two thousand to the dearth of public transportation in the Detroit area, lamenting that Rochester Hills is “one of scores of tricounty communities (nearly 40 in Oakland County alone) where voters opted not to pay ... transit millage” for the bus system.³⁰ The city has never been friendly to public transit. First, public transportation was in direct conflict with the city’s main industry, automobile manufacturing, which influenced regional planning and development, as well as residents employed by auto manufacturers. Throughout the 1920s, Detroit’s Rapid Transit Commission introduced comprehensive transportation plans to integrate highways, subways, and streetcars, which the city and voters repeatedly rejected.”³¹ While cities similar to Detroit built subways, Detroit increased its capacity to move people to the suburbs and transport goods out of the city through the highway system. Following Woodward Avenue as the first paved highway in the U.S., Detroit’s highways fueled suburbanization while the absence of a subway prevented the residential and business development at the city’s core.³² With white flight, the number of people who used public transportation dropped from 13.8 percent to 2.6 percent and the number of people who walked or biked to work dropped from 6.4 percent to 2.0 percent.³³ In 1960, vehicle ownership in averaged 365.5 cars per one thousand people; by 1990 it had reached 693.4 cars per 1,000 people.³⁴

Similarly, Laitner turned his focus from public transportation to private transport, describing the impossibility of car ownership on a working-class salary, writing “[Robertson’s] job pays \$10.55 an hour, well above Michigan’s minimum wage of \$8.15 an hour but not enough for him to buy, maintain and insure a car in Detroit.”³⁵ The rest of Laitner’s feature story details Robertson’s commute and tries to make sense of his

determination, but he doesn't get that from Robertson, who tends to fall back on sentimental references to values instilled in him by his father and strength afforded to him by divine powers. Instead, he backs up his observations that Robertson is humble and hardworking with testimonies from his co-workers and friends, all who remark that, for all he suffers, Robertson never misses work and he never complains. For instance, he won't admit, in the words of plant manager Wilson, "some punks tuned him up pretty good" in the Highland Park section of his route.

The map of Robertson's route appears in the story after the photograph of Robertson walking, but the lack of detail conceals and confines the labor-time of his commute, as well as the labor motivating it (i.e. his job), at the same time it fixes Robertson to the route. The Walking Man exists in and as this "incredible commute." Yet, the map places the whole commute in a single field of vision like a bus route, as if it were routed by the transportation department. It is part of a plan. The plan too is fixed by the map, which does not include the bus routes Robertson could have taken if they had been funded by Oakland County voters.

BLACK LABOR IN THE CUT

[Image description: This is a slideshow. Among more photographs of Robertson walking on empty streets, we see an image of him asleep on a bus, another of him standing with his boss by the American Flag, three in the breakroom (in one of them he's praying), two of him with Blake Pollock, two of him working alone, one of him standing alone in the snow (again with the American Flag in the background), and a close up of his face.]

Robertson is a passive citizen. He's "unresponsive to political issues, unmoved by social stimuli," and subject to a "neoliberal political rationality" through which "the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation" of his story become *economic*.³⁶ Rather than make political statements about the transportation system or his employer

who doesn't pay him enough to buy a new car, his friends and coworkers suggest he fix his car, buy a new car, or move closer to work. Promulgated by media and reinforced by readers, this response seems natural, when in fact it is creating (indeed, *routing*) passive citizenship through Robertson's struggle, not only ignores the political conditions of his endeavor, but also conceals the roots of this particular neoliberal political rationality in Detroit labor discourse, dating back to 1880.

From about 1915-1920, the Great Migration saw an increase in Black residents from less than 6,000 to more than 40,000.³⁷ They came from all over the country but mostly from the South, flocking to Detroit for Henry Ford's five-dollar-a-day promise.³⁸ Ford employed half of all Black wage earners and only fourteen percent of the white workforce, thereby facilitating the emergence of Detroit's Black community.³⁹ However, he employed white and Black workers in separate and distinctly unequal ways.⁴⁰ All 17,000 of his Black employees worked in the Rouge Plant in the lowest paid and least desirable jobs, making them Ford's "least skilled and most expendable" workforce.⁴¹ They were forced to work harder and faster to increase productivity under increasingly unsafe, unhealthy, and uncertain conditions.⁴² As Herb Boyd shows in *Black Detroit*, waves of white immigrants from about 1880-1920 consistently displaced Black workers, forcing them into decreasingly job security with lower level positions. Layoffs became so common many autoworkers only worked about half of the time in the auto industry, while other employers refused to hire them in the first place, claiming Black workers didn't have the skills or the ability to adapt to discipline of factory work.⁴³ Black women made up 246 or less than one percent of all Black autoworkers, while white women were ten percent of white workers. Employers, unwilling to train Black women, denied them

positions as clerks or other low-level administrative staff.⁴⁴ Though defense contracts created a surge in production at Ford's plants during World War II, he stopped recruiting Black workers at defense plants by 1942⁴⁵.

In 1952, when resource restrictions from the Korean War began to relax, automakers started recruiting from outside the city, despite a large, Black labor supply in Detroit.⁴⁶ The downward spiral into unemployment or underemployment for many Detroiters, their purchasing power diminished, meant the small Black businesses no longer could depend on consumers of any color to patronize their stores.⁴⁷ High unemployment and the threat of reincarceration for the high proportion of parolees in the factories helped discipline the workforce and offset high turnover.⁴⁸ While Black caucuses within the unions pushed for more diverse programs, unions used small gains to avoid structural change and Black caucuses fell for electoral politics and accepted the small gains for individuals.⁴⁹ Despite high unemployment, unions only focused on workers who had jobs.⁵⁰

By 1950, the nation began to embrace a pro-business, anti-communist economic sentiment, shifting economic policy from institutional structures to individual skills.⁵¹ Even when politicians and policy makers recognized structural inequalities, they turned to market solutions.⁵² With the end of the Korean War, resources became abundant and the plants embraced free market conditions, marking a shift to neoliberal policies and politics privileging a business's "right to profit" over protections for workers.⁵³ Decentralization of the factories, white flight, and suburbanization began in the 1950s with automation and relocation of manufacturing to the suburbs and the South. Wages dropped lower, unions weakened, the dramatic reduction of entry-level jobs

disproportionately affected Black workers, and the increasing use of overtime reduced the labor overall force.⁵⁴

Overtime, job shortages, and decreasing wages preface and predict Robertson's extreme commute in the neoliberal city where a worker explains his extreme conditions not as a desire to stay employed in a city low on jobs, but as loyalty to one's employer. Though Laitner acknowledges many low-wage workers in Detroit make sacrifices, he describes the Walking Man's circumstances as a convergence of unfortunate, market-oriented events. Robertson's 1988 Honda Accord broke down and he couldn't afford to repair it. He lived far from his coworkers, so carpooling was not an option. He didn't want to move because his girlfriend had inherited the boardinghouse where they both lived. And, *voters* opted not to fund the bus routes on which Robertson depended.⁵⁵ When Laitner marvels at Robertson's "uncanny work ethic," we can almost anticipate him saying, with George W. Bush, Robertson's dedication is "uniquely American."⁵⁶ In 2005, Bush used those words to describe Mary Mornin, the single mother of a mentally disabled adult child who had just told him she works three jobs.⁵⁷ Laitner standardizes Robertson's work ethic, quoting Robertson's boss as saying, "I set our attendance standard by this man.... I have people in Pontiac 10 minutes away and they say they can't get here — bull!"⁵⁸ Another *Free Press* story would actually coin the phrase "Robertson economy" to describe this "new reality" in which manufacturing jobs don't pay a livable wage and low-wage workers are expected to go to extremes.⁵⁹ Brown calls this a fusion of "hyperbolic self-reliance with a readiness to be sacrificed," while Castronovo writes passive citizenship require citizens to "cultivate a demeanor and subjectivity ... [free] from the contingencies and insistent needs of embodied existence."⁶⁰ That is, passive

citizens exclude themselves by acquiescing to their conditions, as Robertson has, but they also do so out of a sense of duty.

Rather than a new phenomenon, the celebration of Robinson's "work ethic" represents the neoliberal turn from corporate hiring and management practices to ideological self-discipline in Detroit. Many auto manufacturers routinely "hired private detectives and did surveillance on employees," but Ford dedicated an entire department to worker discipline.⁶¹ His Sociological Department, Greg Grandin writes, "probe[d] into the most intimate corners of Ford workers' lives, including their sex lives," with a particular emphasis on Black women.⁶² Grandin continues:

[B]y 1919 the Sociological Department employed hundreds of agents who spread out over Dearborn and Detroit asking questions, taking notes, and writing up personnel reports. They wanted to know if workers had insurance and how they spent their money and free time. Did they have a bank account? Did they send money and free time. Did they have a bank account? How much debt did they carry? How many times were they married? Did they send money home to the old country? Sociological men came around not just once but two, three, or four times interviewing family members friends, and landlords.⁶³

Ford's Sociological Department has been recognized as both a "system of paternal surveillance" and "a program of civic reform."⁶⁴ These aren't opposing descriptions, but evidence of a discursive process through which the basic premise of the Sociological Department — control — remains today. While Ford hired Black workers as strike-breakers and union-busters, the unions and Black community leaders practiced their own forms of paternalism, often meant to confront issues like racial discrimination, but too often conceding to small successes for individuals.⁶⁵ For instance, Urban League officials, Black ministers, and Black business leaders recruited Black workers to work at the factories and used their influence to ensure they'd stay loyal.⁶⁶ The United Auto

Workers barred discrimination, worked to stop hate strikes, and pressed auto manufacturers to promote Black workers at the same time it denied top jobs to its own members, many of whom were pushing for a more radical agenda to include housing, hiring practices, and police brutality.⁶⁷ Union leaders like the UAW's Walter Reuther supported Black caucuses as long as they didn't interfere with his desire to centralize control and he outright opposed overt racial expressions on the premise it undermined class solidarity.⁶⁸ The Black-run Trade Union Leadership Council, organized in 1959 to address discrimination in work and in unions ended up moving closer to the UAW to hold the line against Black Power politics.⁶⁹ Postwar efforts by Black nationalist groups like Uhuru or anticolonial thinkers like James and Grace Lee Boggs were labelled Communist. Shifts in the 1950s and 1970s from plant-based organizing to electoral politics prefaced neoliberal self-discipline as white workers took their tax dollars to the suburbs, plants left Detroit for the South where there weren't unions, and working conditions for Black workers became more precarious.⁷⁰ With the neoliberal turn after 1950, the institutionally disciplined worker became a self-disciplining (self-surveilling) worker who reforms himself according to the mores of the entrepreneurial class. Number one among them: don't complain.

Before Robertson caught the attention of the *Free Press*, his coworkers and friends had tried talking to him about fixing his car, but he refused. He "has a routine now, and he seems to like it," one of his coworkers said.⁷¹ And, remember when Robertson said he didn't want to move because his girlfriend owned the building where they lived? He failed to mention his girlfriend was also his landlord and she had been charging him almost \$900 a month, which made it difficult for him to save up for a move.

As Brown argues, this willingness to “bear up uncomplainingly in the face of unemployment, underemployment, or employment unto death” is a condition of “properly interpolated” neoliberal citizenship.⁷² In letters-to-the-editor, *Free Press* readers confirmed this mandate, calling Robertson a “silent hero,” and “marvel[ing] at his determination to do it the right way, the American way, which is we don’t complain.”⁷³ Instead of complaining, moreover, Robertson rests his fate in vague spiritual belief, saying that “faith” and family keep him going—a sentiment that completes Castronovo’s theorization of passive citizenship as the “dematerialization and spiritualization of democratic practices.”⁷⁴

As the photos accompanying “Heart and Sole” indicate, Robertson isn’t riding on a bus with the landscape flying by. He’s walking across a post-industrial city full of unemployed workers and abandoned lots, which we do not see. The photographs of Robertson walking blur out the background, focusing on him without providing detail of the landscape or people he encounters. The online slideshow reveals nothing more about his commute, but his commute frames a kind of journey through which we recognize his humanity in relation to others, his sense of belonging in relation to industry and Americana. When Robertson isn’t alone, he’s with people who take care of him by giving him rides or food. Never is he seen with other workers, walkers, commuters. The dematerialization of Robertson’s route, then, is the dematerialization of his conditions. The emphasis is on the individual worker, asking us, in relation to the photographs, to focus on Robertson as an all-American worker like Mary Mornin who show us routes to employment still exist if one is willing to work hard enough not only at work, but also to get to work. The slideshow makes use of what Jonathan Beller calls “the interval” or “the

cut,” a gap between that abstracts and erases the social conditions through which the subject (the “Walking Man”) is made.⁷⁵ The cut is the discontinuity through which continuity is created in the representation.⁷⁶

HOW TO SAVE A WALKING MAN

[Image description: James Robertson sits in a diner with Evan Leedy. He is in focus, right of center, speaking and gesturing with one arm laid across the table. Leedy is blurry in the foreground, arms crossed on the table, and he’s smiling or laughing. A bald man holding a cell phone to his ear, also blurry, is passing behind them.]

Robertson’s fantastic — by which I mean implausible — story got traction with national media such as *The New York Post*. After reading about Robertson in Laitner’s “Heart and sole,” *Free Press* readers offered him cars, jobs, rides to work, and encouragement. But, the story really took off on February 2, when word spread Evan Leedy, a 19-year-old student at Wayne State University, had launched a crowdfunding campaign, via the website GoFundMe.com, to buy Robertson a car. He told ABC News after he read the *Free Press* story, “I thought to myself, ‘What would I do if my car broke down?’ and I thought, ‘I have my parents and I have money to get an Uber.’”⁷⁷ Reporters also quote him as saying he launched the campaign from his phone, initially hoping to collect only \$5,000. Within an hour, donors had contributed \$2,000.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, two other people, Jiyan Cadiz and Maggie Mastro, had also begun campaigns for Robertson. Reports vary on who contacted whom first; regardless the three got in touch and combined their campaigns, each well into the thousands, under Leedy’s. During and after the transition, potential donors accused Mastro of creating a fraudulent account, despite her repeated efforts to clarify and to direct them to Leedy’s account. Over the next twenty-four hours, Leedy’s \$5,000 request prompted donations of around \$80,000 and a

second story in the *Free Press*.⁷⁹ National news outlets such as *People Magazine*, *USA Today*, and *Slate.com* picked up the story. Robertson didn't know any of this was going on until Laitner told him during a second interview.

Laitner summarized the viral giving spree, writing, "The unprecedented power of the Internet turned what a generation ago might have been local civic leaders passing the hat into a digital phenomenon of thousands, across the globe, giving amounts from \$1 to hundreds."⁸⁰ With the rapid crowdfunding success, Robertson's story appeared in the *Huffington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *New York Daily News*, *People*, *Reuters*, *RT.com*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post* — which only increased the giving frenzy. Local news stations and the networks (ABC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC), as well as outlets in Germany and Canada, also ran the story. Few of them could resist duplicating, in full, the quote Robertson's boss gave the *Free Press*: "I set our attendance standard by this man. I say, if this man can get here, walking all those miles through snow and rain, well I'll tell you, I have people in Pontiac 10 minutes away and they say they can't get here — bull!" The national attention also revealed new details about Robertson and his friends. Turns out, for instance, Blake Pollock, the banker who occasionally gave Robertson a lift, tipped the *Free Press* off to Robertson's story. Asking him why he didn't look for a job closer to home, *Today.com* quoted Robertson as saying, "Do you know how long it took me to find this job? No matter how tough things are, I like to stick it out."⁸¹ *Today.com* also interviewed Robertson's girlfriend, Tanya Fox, who, like his coworkers, said Robertson tended to be soft-spoken, even introverted, but dependable. "He's a good man," she emphasized.⁸² Laitner reported in his own follow up

to the story Robertson also had sisters and other relatives in the area, “some of whom have been out of touch with him until the ... flurry of publicity.”⁸³

With the donations continuing to pour in — \$35,000, \$40,000, \$73,000, \$87,000, \$149,000 — over the course of just four or five days, news outlets struggled to stay current. “In the time it took us to write this story, it grew by another \$1,000,” *Business Insider* reported, and Leedy eventually told RT.com the campaign would “accept donations as long as people are willing to donate.”⁸⁴ Meanwhile, local dealerships and corporate offices for Honda, Ford and Chevy contacted Leedy, offering to donate a car, so Leedy also priced insurance, received quotes as high as a \$15,000-a-year, a premium that “illustrates Detroit’s notoriously high insurance rates,” according to Reuters.⁸⁵ Leedy and Pollock also assembled a board of advisers, including Pollock, who would work pro-bono to help Robertson manage his money.⁸⁶

Specifically referencing Robertson’s case, Lester Spence writes that social entrepreneurship depends on a “creative class [of] white educated artists, intellectuals, and small business owners” who subscribe to market principles, believing even social ills can be resolved through the market.⁸⁷ GoFundMe, Kickstarter, and other crowdfunding sites “require individuals to treat their cause as if it were an economic product, and their personal network as a potential ‘market.’”⁸⁸ In other words, their participation in social causes both establishes and develops a “brand” that functions socially for them and economically for the tech companies that run such sites. Meanwhile social entrepreneurship “misses the crucial role business principles played in generating the crisis, and therefore the role government should play in solving the crisis.”⁸⁹ The outpouring of support for Robertson also represents what Renato Rosaldo has called

“imperial nostalgia” — the act of trying to uplift the very societies and cultures dominant cultures have displaced, dispossessed, and/or disappeared.⁹⁰ Understanding, with Jane Jacobs, that imperialism “even in its most marauding forms ... necessarily takes hold in and through the local,” Leedy’s response to the GoFundMe donations reinforces global imperial processes and ideologies like neoliberalism through which those who benefit from economic conditions act as saviors to those who suffer from them. Consider Leedy who said, “God kept tugging” at him to take “this amazing journey to change a man’s life.”⁹¹ Robertson’s labor journey is Leedy’s spiritual journey; one survives, the other ascends. “Before James drove off in his new car to go home,” Leedy continued, “he gave me a big hug and said ‘It’s not even about the money and the car, it’s about random strangers like you ... wanting to help a guy like me,’” as if Robertson, the worker, “a guy like me,” is undeserving.⁹² Leedy’s attitude toward Robertson isn’t merely nostalgic. He’s not expressing guilt; he’s affirming his position as a citizen of Detroit through an emphasis on individual philanthropy.

While Leedy turns the story to himself, the photograph of him with Robertson suggests the focus remains on Robertson. Leedy is in the foreground, but blurry. With Leigh Raiford we understand the reason for this. Photography “orders, contains, and exploits the physical world,” according to colonial and imperial desire.⁹³ It transforms history into nostalgia by coopting, depoliticizing and commodifying the subject.⁹⁴ Dushko Petrovich, furthermore, argues the “blur” in news photography signals “not just a story, but rather a plot.”⁹⁵ “After countless courtroom scenes and party vignettes,” he writes, “we have learned to see a relationship between foregrounding in space and foreboding in time.”⁹⁶ Thus, understanding neoliberal support for Robertson as an act of

imperial nostalgia and the blur as a desire to suggest things to come, we can see the photograph as an attempt to keep the attention on the suffering, grateful subject — the subject, Kirsten Buick shows us, of countless nineteenth century abolition images — to prevent us from witnessing the conditions of his making.⁹⁷

MULTIPLICATION OF THE WALKING MAN

[Image Description: James Robertson walks toward the camera. He's wearing a gray beanie, a gray winter coat with black sleeves, black gloves, black pants, and black shoes. He's carrying a black and blue messenger bag. Positioned right of center in the photograph, Robertson is walking left of center on a city street. The street is frosted, the lawn is patched with snow, the sky is gray, the background is blurry. Several cars are parked on the left. Trees, fire hydrants and homes line the street on either side.]

Robertson's patrons and fans call him an inspiration—a hero, even. They say he earned the car and the money by working hard and keeping his mouth shut. School children write in to thank him for setting an example, and he visits some of them to offer words of encouragement. He's a true Detroitter, a real American. Against this flurry of endorsements celebrating the power of the Internet and the kindness of strangers, columnists begin to note the sentiment of individual philanthropy doesn't seem to manifest into acts of benevolence in the voting booth or public policy.

On February 6, 2015, when the GoFundMe was around \$300,000, Robertson received a new car: a “fully loaded” 2015 Ford Taurus. Jim Elder, a manager at Suburban Ford of Sterling Heights, told the *Free Press* getting his own employees to work on time is often difficult. “There's nobody who deserves it more than him,” Elder told reporter Tresa Baldas.⁹⁸ By February 8, 2015, the *Free Press* reported that Robertson's GoFundMe account had totaled more than \$350,000.⁹⁹ Readers subsequently wrote Robertson had *earned* the donations by working hard and staying quiet.

Detroit Free Press Walking Man coverage includes three basic types of reader response in the reporting: celebratory, grateful, and cautionary. Celebratory letters-to-the-editor and online comments focus on Robertson's work ethic. Thus, Elliot Eggins writes,

This is a man who is truly blessed to have an understanding of that which is freely given can be taken away at a moment's notice. He is so appreciative of all the heartwarming display of appreciation from the people who marvel at his determination to do it the right way, the American way, which is we don't complain, we overcome and strive to work for our American Dream and that people will help if you help yourself.¹⁰⁰

Grateful responses reflect on readers' own life situations, such as this one by Al Raguckas:

If you calculate 20 miles a day for 10 years, Mr. Robertson has walked more than 50,000 miles to keep his job. What dedication. In the future, when I encounter obstacles that seem insurmountable, I will remind myself what this man has been through and I will tough it out. I salute you, Mr. Robertson.¹⁰¹

Readers with cautionary letters and comments focus on the conditions of low-wage labor and insufficient transportation. Here's Tom Griebe, with a not uncommon snarky response:

This intervention is heartwarming, but there are millions more like him toiling at Walmart and McDonald's on less than a living wage. The difference is that the media put a face on him, whereas it is easy to dismiss the working poor as being faceless, lazy slackers that just don't want to get ahead. Now, let's get back to giving tax cuts to the "job creators" and raise the sales tax on guys like this ...

GoFundMe patrons who left comments with their donations made similar remarks. This one by Sudane Lewis, which also appears on Inquisitr.com, celebrates Robertson, but, in it, Lewis also congratulates herself for donating:

James, I'm so inspired by your story. I hope that you get to see another aspect of life that you never really got to enjoy because you were working so hard. May God continue to bless and keep you. You deserve every dollar we are giving you and more....¹⁰²

Hand-written letters from children at Norman R. Barnard Elementary School, which the *Free Press* scanned and published, tend to be celebratory and grateful, offering what they have learned from Robertson's example. Jocelyn writes,

After hearing your story, I learned not to be lazy [sic] and to do the things I am sposed [sic] to do without complaining, because I noticed that there are more worse things in life. Thank you for teaching me this important lesson and for makeing [sic] me a better person.¹⁰³

Jocelyn's classmates also worried about being lazy. They promised to do their homework and to commit to doing what they have to do before doing what they want to do.

Robertson rewarded these students with a visit to the classroom, where teacher Suzanne Siegel introduced him by saying, "Look who's here — superhero!"¹⁰⁴ The children continued to tell the Walking Man what they learned from his example and they asked him questions about his job. Responding to a question about his coworkers, he said, "They're just like your friends. We work, but we also have fun." When Ryan asked him, "What do you do if you get sick?," Robertson said he still goes into work. "It's something that I have to do," he said, "and something that I like to do." Laitner, who attended the class, detected a "disciplinarian's cant" in Robertson's themes — "perseverance, punctuality, collegiality, following directions and respecting one's elders" — tempered by what he described as an "unmistakable ring of sincerity ... borne of hard experience."¹⁰⁵

Not everyone was buying it. While happy for Robertson and moved by the outpouring of (financial) support, some critics worried all the ink spilled and money doled on Robertson's behalf turned the focus away from the systemic issues undergirding the conditions through which he felt he had no other choice but to walk. Following up on

Laitner's original feature story, *Free Press* reporters Nathan Bomey, Alisa Priddle, and Brent Snively wrote, following globalization and the Great Recession, Robertson represents a "new reality in the manufacturing business," in which "[f]actory jobs no longer represent ... economic vitality."¹⁰⁶ Dubbing this new normal "the Robertson economy," they warned, "either the wages stay low, or the work goes away, somewhere overseas or South of the border."¹⁰⁷ Implicit in the report is a critique of Robertson's employers at Schain, which the *Free Press* explained received criticism and threats (ostensibly for not paying Robertson enough or otherwise helping him) following the publicity. Though Cindy Estrada of *U.S. News and World Report* did not level accusations against Schain directly, she was the first reporter to ask of Robertson's situation, "Why is a manufacturing worker in America paid so little that he can't afford to replace and insure his broken-down car in the first place?"¹⁰⁸ Noting manufacturing jobs like Robertson now earn "fast food wages," Estrada also pointed out fast food workers have successfully gone on strike for higher wages and union rights altered the power relations between workers and owners. "The solution to poverty-wage manufacturing jobs," she concluded, "isn't on-line fundraisers for individual workers."¹⁰⁹

Even as the digital dollars and accolades streamed in, the *Free Press's* editorial page editor Stephen Henderson criticized the neoliberal slide from civic engagement to privatized fundraising. He writes, "helping Robertson on an individual basis ... badly misses the larger point," reflected in "profound policy failures: a pitiful arc of nonaction, stretching more than 40 years, that has made this one of the nation's least commuter friendly metro areas."¹¹⁰ Henderson asks how many readers who praised or helped Robertson also voted to opt out of the bus system. "How many [readers] would support a

new tax to create a coordinated, regional system that could get people all over the place from where they live to where they work?”¹¹¹ I would also ask whether donors would support living wage ordinances, rent control, or low-interest mortgages for low-wage workers. At the same time Henderson claims Robertson’ dedication to work is representative of and represented by a universal Detroit work ethic, he also distinguishes between *Free Press* readers, who are in a position to help, and Detroiters like Robertson who *need* help: “People in this region respect hard work, and perseverance ... They want to help someone who seems to need it, but isn’t really asking.”¹¹²

Reporters at *Detroit Metro Times*, *Detroit News* and Citylab.com (a project run by *The Atlantic* magazine and, for a time, Richard Florida) echoed, and even cited, Henderson’s evaluation and his criticism of a system that allows communities to “opt-out” of public transportation. Ryan Felton, of *Detroit Metro Times*, called Robertson’s predicament “unacceptable” and the policies that created it “insane.”¹¹³ Dennis Williams, at *Detroit News*, wrote the generosity bestowed upon James Robertson is “admirable,” but it ignored “the inequalities that surround the lives of the majority of the people in our region.”¹¹⁴ He argued Detroit “cannot create a future based on feeling good about how we help one person while damning whole generations to poverty and pain.” *CityLab*’s Sarah Goodyear was more critical of Detroit voters, writing, “strangers are falling over themselves to help subsidize a personal vehicle for one individual ... but voters in dozens of suburban communities in the Detroit area have voted to ‘opt out’ of the region’s public transportation system.”¹¹⁵ Goodyear also argued Robertson’s story is not all that exceptional; rather, she writes, without reliable transportation, families across the U.S. “already struggling with housing, food, medical, and education costs”

face “enormous financial burden.”¹¹⁶ She concluded, “[Y]ou shouldn’t have to be some kind of hero and win a virtual lottery to have a decent commute.” Michelle Singletary, “disturbed” that “one man’s story” eclipsed structural issues, expressed similar concern that people are “eager to [only] help those they think are worthy.”¹¹⁷ However, rather than call for systemic change, Singletary calls for compassion and a kind of blind philanthropy, writing, “Give regularly, as part of your budget, even when you might not know the backstory of the person in need.”¹¹⁸ The harshest criticism came from Charing Ball at MadameNoir.com, a lifestyle publication for African-American women. Ball wrote, “For whatever reason, Bill Laitner of the Detroit paper sees something dignified in [Robertson’s struggle]. And highlights it in the most flowery of prose.”¹¹⁹ She called for Robertson to embrace #blacklivesmatter and quoted Zora Neale Hurston as saying “if you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”¹²⁰ Where “charity becomes an exercise in meritocracy,” Ball warns, poor people become “projects,” subject to patrons’ expectations, which they see as earned through their philanthropy.¹²¹

In addition to the coverage and commentary on the Walking Man story itself, local press increased its coverage on Detroit’s transportation gap, penning a number of op-eds demonstrating the ways in which Robertson’s story is not all that unique in Detroit, from the number of people who travel to low-paying jobs through communities that opted-out of the transit system (10,000) to the percentage of Detroit jobs held by Detroiters (twenty-eight percent) and the percentage of Detroiters who travel outside the city for jobs paying \$15,000 or less (forty-three percent).¹²² Karen Bouffard, of *Detroit News*, also used Robertson’s story to call for policies changes related to worker health and wellness, writing “limited access to jobs, housing, transportation and social services

has hurt health in Detroit.”¹²³ Journalists wrote job sprawl and inadequate transit were “isolating the urban poor,” but described the difficulty of “selling” rapid transit to the greater Metro Detroit population. Nancy Derringer of *The Bridge*, a local magazine, appealed to the popular idea young people returning to the “urban core” would embrace a more diverse and reliable transit system.¹²⁴ She also described these people as “multimodal,” willing to go by bus, train, bicycle, automobile or “their own two feet.”¹²⁵ They also like to use short-term car rentals like Zipcar, ridesharing services like Uber and Lyft, and bike-sharing services, Derringer added.

As 2015 came to a close and journalists looked back at the year’s events, they similarly began to look forward to new transportation trends. On December 25, the *Free Press*’s Alisa Priddle outlined ten “microtrends” identified by Ford Motor Company’s “futurist,” Sheryl Connelly. Connelly said with all the bad news “including economic uncertainty, terrorist attacks, and fallen idols such as Bill Cosby and the world soccer organization,” people have “fought back with meditation and yoga rooms in airports, embracing everyday heroes for inspiration and becoming more tolerant and resourceful overall.”¹²⁶ James Robertson was one of those everyday heroes, both (overly) tolerant and resourceful. Priddle concluded, “Ford is not in business to be magnanimous. Knowledge of each trend is incorporated into the automaker’s longterm strategy. It helps explain why a company that sells cars is engrossed in projects involving bicycles and carsharing concepts that seemingly would lead to fewer vehicle sales.”¹²⁷

The naturalized perspective that an automaker would never act magnanimously isn’t dissimilar from the celebratory or critical logic of the Walking Man story. Critical commentary is far outweighed by celebratory remarks and, in many cases, reinforces the

neoliberal discourse of hard work, as Henderson does when he verifies the neoliberal desire (imperial nostalgia) to help people who need it, but don't ask. Celebratory remarks likewise focus on the deservedness of a hard worker who doesn't complain. The logic they share with Priddle's estimation of Ford is the unlogic of pouring money into projects unsupportive of one's position economically. In the neoliberal city, one's economic positions is the same or at least overlapping with one's social position. The question is, what economic and social positions are produced, naturalized, and/or held up by the commentary on the Walking Man's work ethic?

Throughout this chapter, I've discussed the Walking Man story as a neoliberal discourse on labor rooted in Detroit's Black labor history. The precarity associated with employment today comes out of the instability of the auto industry from its founding and Black workers always felt the brunt of it. Black workers experienced some of the worst working conditions and lowest job security in the factories, while paternalistic programs like Ford's Sociological Department attempted to discipline laborers inside and outside of work. Today, workers like Robertson are celebrated for self-disciplining, for taking on hardship outside of work to stay employed. Their working conditions are erased and/or concealed behind their life conditions, which can be relieved through market-based philanthropic ventures. While I have established a continuity from institutional discipline to self-discipline and the rewards of self-discipline in the neoliberal city, I have not yet discussed how the Walking Man story disciplines labor beyond Robertson himself. To do so, I turn to border theory.

The Motor City is, of course, on a geopolitical border, just across the river from Windsor, Ontario. Robertson's route along the northern end of Woodward Avenue also

emphasizes the ways in which the historic thoroughfare both splits the city in half and connects people across neighborhoods, districts, cities, and counties. Likewise, Robertson's commute demonstrates the ways in which borders are "more open to flows of goods and capital but more closed to the circulation of human bodies."¹²⁸ He takes a bus from the county line all the way to a high-end mall called Somerset Collection, he also walks seven more miles to work. It's the longest continuous stretch of his commute and it takes place in Oakland County, where wealthy suburbanites opted out of the bus service. In other words, while goods and capital float freely from the mall to Detroit, workers from Detroit do not have access to employment in the manufacturing district outside Wayne County, unless they can afford a car.

Yet, the borders Mezzadra and Neilson address are cognitive processes that form multiple subjectivities and hierarchies of labor form to *include* people in "ways no less violent than those deployed in exclusionary measures."¹²⁹ Consider the seniority system at the auto factories: while it was intended to give Black workers opportunities to advance, it also locked them into the worse, because they would lose seniority if they transferred departments. "The seniority system," a Black worker wrote in 1970, in the radical newspaper *Inner City Voice*, "once a defense against favoritism and arbitrary firing, has been adapted to give legal force to the white male monopoly of the better jobs."¹³⁰ After the neoliberal turn through deindustrialization, Spence writes, labor divides in four ways: good and bad jobs, unionized and non-unionized, employed (citizen) and unemployed (criminal), institutionalized and non-institutionalized.¹³¹ Spence argues all four divides overlap, which creates the likelihood of even more separations. Mezzadra and Neilson describe these separations as the "multiplication of

labor.” As with Robertson’s commute, the multiplication of labor includes the “intensification of labor processes” and “the tendency for work to colonize the time of life,” as well as a “social stratifications of labor” in which skill is only one requirement for employment.¹³² Like we saw with Ford’s Sociological Department and “Americanization” programs, language, family values, adequate health, and cultural assimilation become addition job requirements.¹³³ Robertson’s work ethic and political acquiescence become job requirements.

Cognitive bordering “structure[s] the movement of thought” across political subjectivities and labor hierarchies, but only because it can be seen and felt as natural by subjects and laborers.¹³⁴ In other words, cognitive bordering is also aesthetic. Where Mezzadra and Neilson use cognitive bordering to refer to social separations understood through geopolitical borders, Nick Mirzoeff understands the order of “physical and psychic space” as a set of relations “combining information, imagination, and insight (ideas).¹³⁵ Space creates thought, thought creates space, and one’s subjectivity determines one’s ability to move physically and psychically in relation to capital. However, just as Robertson is fixed to the route by the map, the photos of him walking fix him in motion. The blur suggests place and landscape don’t matter to the Walking Man. He’s just passing through. In the image of him walking down a street lined with homes, he is out of place, doesn’t have a home. His movement abstracts place, landscape, and workers, as well as neoliberal conditions and relations, in order to normalize extreme conditions. If Robertson wishes to remain, he must keep moving.

Visually and cognitively the Walking Man story classifies its subject (Robertson as “Walking Man”), separates him from similar subjects to deny his political subjectivity,

and naturalizes those separations.¹³⁶ His supporters see him walking to stay employed and they feel this to be natural. As a result, the Walking Man story multiplies labor in the neoliberal city by defining extreme conditions as the proper conditions of a machine laborer in a neoliberal city evermore leaning to entrepreneurial labor. The extreme work ethic, in turn, creates a new, lower category of worker and therefore a new, higher standard for employment. We can define the hierarchy of labor in the “Robertson economy” as something like capitalist, creative entrepreneur, creative industry staff, service industry manager, service industry worker, laborer, extreme laborer, underemployed, unemployed, and unemployable. This hierarchy of labor is racialized, gendered, and divided in confounding and overlapping ways where success for individuals, including recognition in the form of overwhelming donations, substitutes for structural change.

SECURITY AND SOCIAL DEATH

[Image description: A parking lot. The front end of a red car occupies the right side of the photograph. A bright light shines off it. Two police cars sit on the other end of the parking lot. The asphalt is wet and piles of snow rest along a fence behind the cop cars. A house with its lights off and a residential building with its lights on occupy the background. The sky is reddish, dark, and streetlights are on.]

Within a couple days of Laitner’s “Heart and sole,” Robertson became a celebrity, bouncing around town for interviews with local and national press. Before another week passed, however, Robertson found himself trying to avoid attention from his neighbors who began asking him for money. He hadn’t received the money, he was worried about his new car, and he had heard about an eighty-six-year-old Detroitier who had been killed following rumors that he had won \$20,000 in a lottery game.¹³⁷ Now recognizable nearly

everywhere in Detroit, Robertson also halted his visits to an area casino, where he also felt threatened. On February 10, 2015, Robertson “abruptly” moved out of Madison Heights, which *People Magazine* declared a “dangerous neighborhood,” with assistance from Detroit police who weren’t available when he was just an unknown Black man walking to and from work, getting “tuned up” by other people on the street.

After the move, Robertson told Laitner, “I wanted to get it over with — there were so many factors involved.”¹³⁸ One of those factors was his longtime girlfriend and landlady Tanya Fox, who, Robertson now claimed, had been charging him \$220 a week though he only made about \$317 a week after taxes and other deductions.¹³⁹ Robertson had also told Laitner Fox’s ex-husband, her son and another man lived in the house. Fox, who lived in a separate room from Robertson, told Laitner she and Robertson had been together for fifteen years. When Laitner got a hold of her after Robertson moved, Fox told him they were still together even though he did not give her his new address. “[T]he issue was, she liked to control everyone and everything,” Robertson said of Fox.¹⁴⁰

With Robertson settled into his new home and his “new life,” the city council of Detroit recognized him with a “Spirit of Detroit” award on February 16, 2015.¹⁴¹ The award acknowledges people or organizations for outstanding achievement or service. In response, Robertson said, “I never would have thought that something I was doing since I was 8 years old would become this big.”¹⁴² At the ceremony, the council also recognized Leedy and Pollock for helping Robertson. A month later, Mayor Dane Slater, welcomed Robertson to his new home in Troy, “the safest city of the state,” with the key to the city. “If I can, I’ll be the best resident that Troy has ever had,”¹⁴³ Robertson said.

When Robertson left his home of fifteen years to the applause of readers and city officials, the Walking Man narrative concluded with the trajectory for passive citizenship laid out by Castronovo. “Freedom” for racialized subjects in nineteenth century literature, he shows us, only comes at the moment of death.¹⁴⁴ A “dead” citizen, like the Walking Man, is one who does not participate but is “emancipated” from debates that have specifically excluded nonwhite and female citizens.¹⁴⁵ His passivity and reward is likewise a kind of spectacle, numbing viewers to the political conditions of Robertson’s suffering in the character of the Walking Man, as well as a form of discipline, informing them of their own potential (or lack thereof) in Detroit’s new economy.

In the end, Robertson moved out of Detroit with a police escort. The photo suggests he has become legible to the neoliberal city at the same time his story is starting to raise questions about transportation and labor in Detroit. In the moment he becomes a political subject for journalists and commentators, he leaves. Police, who weren’t present when he was beat up on his commute, are protecting his property, while darkness and danger loom in the distance. Robertson is not in the photograph. The background is in focus. We are meant to see the danger and the protection, but we also see a shift from the focus on the Walking Man to concern for a working man’s hard-earned property. In the end, the Walking Man story promulgates the same old American fiction with a neoliberal cant: work hard, keep your head down, and not only will you have what you want, but you will have the rule of law to protect it.

ON THE BORDER WITH THE WALKING MAN

Robertson inhabits the world’s borderscapes not as a marginal subject that

“subsist[s] on the edge of society but as central protagonists in the drama ... of the social itself.”¹⁴⁶ His conversion to “Walking Man” creates hierarchies of labor in this moment when entrepreneurs are moving into the city and claiming their right to be there through social entrepreneurship. Alert to Mezzadra and Neilson’s warnings against correlating border activism with border-crossers, I view Robertson’s walk an act of survival coopted by neoliberal discourse as self-liberation to, in Jodi Byrd’s words, “make Indian,” and therefore to designate as non-citizen, subjects like Robertson’s neighbors and girlfriend who occupy land now desirable to developers.¹⁴⁷ And, yet, Robertson’s route along Woodward Avenue also provides an entry point for considering the changing relations and multiple formations of identity delimiting boundaries of citizenship and belonging through this period of redevelopment. This work begins by refusing the neoliberal articulation of working-class people of color as resilient in favor of an “emancipatory vision” of democracy with the understanding “it has always been saturated with capitalist powers and values.”¹⁴⁸ If we understand Robertson’s case as an attempt to rationalize the exclusions and violent inclusions of redevelopment through individual philanthropy and extreme dedication to work, then we are also in a position to denaturalize the market rationality of redevelopment. In its place, we might imagine a process accountable to the people of Detroit, but that also means confronting what Brown calls “civilizational despair,” or the tendency to accept passive citizenship as the only viable response to the “seemingly unharnessable powers organizing the world today.”¹⁴⁹ That despair looks particularly insurmountable in the face of stories like Robertson’s suggesting power will reward us for behaving as proper neoliberal citizens with our heads down.

Chapter Two

The White Possession of Detroit

Landscape and Place from Only Lovers Left Alive to the QLine Trolley¹

Two years after a new trolley system launched on Woodward Avenue, *Metro Times* labeled it a disaster.² Ridership dropped. Accidents happened. Delays ensued. Everyone who opposed the project came out to say, “I told you so.” Steve Neavling reported in the *Times* what many Detroiters had been saying all along: project developers understood it “as economic development, not transit improvement.”³ They called it the QLine. The QLine (fig. 6) is the product of another Dan Gilbert signature private/public partnership called M-1 Rail. Lester Spence calls such partnerships, “[c]rucial components of the neoliberal turn in the wake of urban disinvestment ... to coordinate and spur interest in certain types of development projects.”⁴ Thus, the trolley covers only three miles of Woodward Avenue, less than a sixth of Detroit’s main thoroughfare, and it’s disconnected from the larger metro system. The route runs along prime real estate (much of it owned by Gilbert), stands apart from a larger rapid transit plan, relies on outdated technology, and it the same route as the Woodward Avenue metro bus. Even with a \$25 million federal



Figure 6. Author photo of QLine streetcar.

grant, the project went about \$40 million over budget. This, in a city where twenty-six percent residents don't have cars.

The QLine is not a transportation system, but it's not just an economic development tool either. It is a visual rhetorical device. It attempts to persuade all who see it the city is safe, fun, and convenient. As widespread public condemnation and ridicule of the trolley had little effect on its development, I argue even negative coverage of the Q-Line project brought it and the city into view, demonstrating the city's capacity for change in the face of opposition. As I argue here, the QLine speaks to tourists and tech entrepreneurs. Press on the QLine is full of headlines like "What to see and where to visit near each stop" and Gilbert used his investments in the QLine to run his own highspeed internet cable, Rocket Fiber, under the tracks and therefore along his Woodward Avenue properties.⁵

The QLine arrives on the upswing of the city's latest investment/disinvestment cycle to convince viewers Detroit is, in the language from Detroit's Downtown Development Authority, "dense, lively, and attractive for people from the entire region and beyond."⁶ Neil Smith describes investment/divestment cycles broadly in his theories on "uneven development" and in Detroit scholars like Paul Draus and Juliette Roddy, Rebecca Kinney, and Kyle Mays focus on the ways in which Detroit is always declining, always returning in the public imagination. Kinney, along with Jessi Quizar and Sara Safransky, describes the ways in which return in this historical moment is predicated on racialized dispossession and narratives of *white* return. In a phrase, settler colonialism.

Their understanding of settler colonialism follows Patrick Wolfe definition: as a logic of elimination, settler colonialism is a "structure not an event." It destroys to

replace,” but “maintains the refractory imprint of the native counter-claim” in order to provide a figure against which settler colonialism can be maintained.⁷ Its key mechanism was the doctrine of discovery, which justified the transfer of occupancy from Native to the “discovering” sovereign, based on the notion that the “scattered, unorganized Indigenous people who occupied it” weren’t using it.⁸ Kinney, Quizar, and Safransky argue this logic transfers to Detroit, where redevelopment discourses evince an ongoing settler colonial project to erase Black Detroiters through the same logics of property and possession used to dispossess Indigenous people.⁹ This reading seems to fit Jodi Byrd’s understanding of Indigeneity as a “transit of empire,” where the U.S. settler state “make[s] Indian” people who stand to disrupt U.S. economic interests.¹⁰ Byrd recognizes “Indians and Indianness ... as the ontological ground through which U.S. settler colonialism enacts itself as settler imperialism,” but rather than merely describe Indigenous dispossession as the discourse that structures and prefigures U.S. dominance elsewhere, she’s concerned with ways in which those later discourses “relegate American Indians to the site of the already-doneness that begins to linger as unwelcome guest to the future.”¹¹

In this chapter, I argue empire transits settler colonial ideology in Detroit through descriptions of Black Detroiters as “native Detroiters.” Where scholars understand the settler colonial return to Detroit in terms of a black/white binary, I employ Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s theoretical intervention into whiteness studies and Kyle Mays’s study of “Indigenous Detroit” to demonstrate the logic of white possession relies on a mythologized Indigenous past that continues to erase, deny or delegitimize Indigenous people. Thus, one goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the ways in which Indigeneity

appears as an analytic in Detroit at the same time Indigenous viability is denied, even by scholars of Detroit. Even by scholars of Detroit who have deployed Moreton-Robinson's framework.¹²

Settler colonialism is an enticing analytic for Detroit, because on the surface it fits: developers see land they want so they call the land empty and send in entrepreneurs to cause friction with the locals. However, deploying the analytic means ignoring existing Indigenous claims to the region and accepting U.S. property law (a feature of white possession) as the basis of land tenure. It also negates the discursive role Black labor plays in redevelopment discourse, as discussed in the previous chapter. Searching for a rounder expression of settler colonialism in Detroit, I enter the argument through a vampire film by the auteur filmmaker Jim Jarmusch. While the film duplicates the image of Detroit as an "urban wilderness" for tourists and urban explorers, it does (however momentarily) recognize the futurity of Indigenous people. I understand *Only Lovers Left Behind* as an instance in which landscape representation, tourism, and land speculation collide and collude to suggest Detroit as not merely in need of saving from poor Black people, but more insidiously as a space *reclaimed* as white property through tourism and the settler colonial logic of prior white possession. Where scholars have evoked Indigeneity only to understand the dispossessive logics of redevelopment in a Black city, *OLLA* actually suggests a Detroit in which Indigenous people do exist in the present, even if the film pushes them to the margins. Next to the vampire elite (European settlers) and the mindless mass of zombies (the ineffective white working class) who populate the film, Black people are ghosts (that is, invisible) and Native Americans are savages (that is, regressed/wild). With Indigenous people vacated from analyses of Detroit, I challenge

us to consider whether the settler colonial analytic applies. Going further, I suggest the labor analysis from border studies provides tools for overrepresenting Indigeneity as a relationship to land and blackness as a relationship to labor.

Where *OLLA* demonstrates the degree to which tourism carries the urban frontier narrative into public discourse, the QLine articulates settler ideology in the built environment of Detroit. Both *OLLA* and the QLine carry settler ideology through tourism, but where *OLLA* invites “urban explorers” to imagine the possibilities for exploration and development in the city, the Q-Line is a marquee of “creative city” economic development, promising safety and fun, as well as the ability to overcome opposition. The creative city, Lester Spence explains in his study of the “hustle economy,” is a redevelopment project through which a city attempts to make itself a good place for the “creative class,” which he defines as productive people who are “most likely to generate the type of buzz the city can use to further sell itself to other corporations and potential residents.”¹³ Potential residents are “the most likely to be able to consume the goods the corporations offer, the most likely to work for the corporation, or ... the ones least in need of certain types of public goods (public housing, food stamps, etc.).”¹⁴

By connecting the QLine to *Only Lovers Left Alive*, I bring broad discourses on white possession in Detroit to the ground, where they operate materially. In other words, the same discourses and rhetorics making it possible to accept Jarmusch’s depiction of Detroit as a city for creative white entrepreneurs also make it possible for us to understand the QLine as material evidence of growth and innovation. It is the literal, visual transit of settler colonial discourse in Detroit, carting tourists and tech entrepreneurs up and down the length of the Woodward Avenue redevelopment zone.

JARMUSCH'S MOTOWN

If we were to make a list of filmmakers who have considerably influenced their fields or popular discourse in the U.S., Jim Jarmusch wouldn't likely scale to the top; indeed, his largest audiences and the majority of his financial backers come out of Europe, and few of the books written about him have appeared in English.¹⁵ Yet Jarmusch is also a favorite of countless critics and fans of independent cinema. Juan Antonio Suárez, one of the few scholars to address Jarmusch's films at length, claims the director is "one of the most influential filmmakers to emerge in the United States."¹⁶ He's been referenced by Spike Lee, Kevin Smith, and Gus Van Sant. His aesthetic shows up in the films of Tom DiCillo, Hal Hartley, Sofia Coppola, and Richard Linklater.¹⁷

Importantly, Suárez also sees Jarmusch as a rebel auteur, carrying the banner for 1960s and 1970s arthouse.¹⁸ Suárez's Jarmusch "drew considerable attention to the independent cinema" at a time when "hegemonic stories and worldviews were called into question, when minority perspectives erupted into public debate, and... the boundaries between high art and low culture turned progressively blurry."¹⁹ Jarmusch "downplay[ed] the centrality of class and nation" for "temporary social locations," featuring outsiders, "transients and immigrants," and subjectivities that "go against the grain of birth-given nationality and ethnicity."²⁰ In other words, Jarmusch is both producer and product of liberal multiculturalism. The trouble with this positionality really comes into view in the context of this paper, where Jarmusch's investment in "a world that is immediately recognizable but also fantastic and intertextual" becomes a space for the articulation of fetishized Others.²¹ If the Europeans in *Only Lovers Left Alive* are recognizable and

fantastic because they are vampires with an abundance of Euro-American historical knowledge, then the working-class and ethnic immigrants in Jarmusch's films *Stranger Than Paradise* and *Mystery Train* are recognizable and fantastic because they are naïve exotics with a superficial knowledge of American pop culture and often a tendency for whimsical acts of desperation, like betting on dog races and stealing food. Though *Only Lovers Left Alive* does seem to depart from thematic realism of the Jarmusch universe—in which actors and characters migrate from film to film—the director's aesthetic of recognizable fantasy brings it back into line. And so, too, does his continued tradition of making films from “preexisting stories, films, and songs,” considering he modelled Adam and Eve on the eponymous characters of *The Diary of Adam and Eve* by Mark Twain.²² The recognizable fantasy drawn from cultural memory invites my reading of Jarmusch's Adam and Eve as vampires metaphorically (re)settling an American city. It also invites us to think of Jarmusch himself as a “creative entrepreneur” through whom the ideology of (re)settlement, Stuart Hall would say, becomes a ‘material force’ in Detroit.²³

At the outset of *Only Lovers Left Alive*, Adam (played by Tom Hiddleston) and Eve (Tilda Swinton) live separate lives of leisure. In Detroit, Adam's a musician who collects rare instruments and builds “alchemist” devices based on theories of Nikola Tesla. He's around 500 or 600 years old.²⁴ In Tangier, Eve collects literature and seems to be a connoisseur of all-things fine and/or antique, which she dates merely by touching them. She refers to flora and fauna by their Latin names. She's about 2,000 thousand years old.²⁵ In Detroit, Adam's main contact with the outside world is a local “rock-and-roll” kid, Ian (Anton Yelchin), who slips Adam's anonymous records into the underground market and eagerly tracks down guitars and other “weird, interesting” items

for his enigmatic client; he even found a guy to make a wooden bullet by Adam's request. In Tangier, Eve's main contact is Christopher Marlow, the very "Kit" Marlow of Elizabethan England who, rather than being mysteriously murdered, actually penned a number of Shakespeare's plays. As a vampire, he's also immortal.

Despite geography between them Adam and Eve live a stock heteronormative existence steeped in Western-European cultural traditions. Adam is suicidal. Eve recognizes in a video chat that something is wrong: "Can't you tell your wife what your problem is?" Eve says. "It's the zombies and the way they treat the world," Adam responds, referring to living human beings, whom Adam blames for marginalizing civilization's greatest (Western) minds. Photographs of this brain trust populate the walls of his study: Edgar Allan Poe, Franz Kafka, William Burroughs, Mark Twain, Joe Strummer, Buster Keaton, and Max Ernst. Throughout the film, references are also made to Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Samuel Coleridge, and certainly Tesla. All of them, Adam suggests, have suffered at the hands of zombies, who are "afraid of their own imaginations."

After Eve arrives in Detroit, she and Adam spend their time having sex, drinking blood, and site-seeing. They tour city relics that represent, for Adam, signs of more cultured, more civilized times: the ruins of the Michigan Theater built where Henry Ford designed the prototype for the first car; the Packard plant "where they once built the most beautiful cars in the world"; and Jack White's house, which ends up standing in for Detroit's long, multiethnic music history. As they drive around the city, they pass dilapidated and abandoned homes, dimly lit on the edges of streetlights, and describe

Detroit as *terra nullius*. “So, this is your wilderness,” Eve says. “Everybody left,” Adam replies.

Lest Adam and Eve fall into a sex-laden, drug-induced and immortal rut, Eve’s younger sister Ava (Mia Wasikowska) shows up. They haven’t seen her in decades as a result of some unspecified wrong she committed in the past, and despite Eve’s hopeful observation that Ava has grown up, she remains a destabilizing force. Ava begs Adam to go out on the town, and Eve, to convince him, says, “We *are* in Detroit,” suggesting they, tourist-like, take advantage of the attractions. Ian takes them to a local club where, during the band’s set break, the house plays Adam’s music, and Ian steps away to sell an unmarked LP in a black case—presumably Adam’s music—to a hipster who declares, “So mysterious.” The hipster also steals a look at Adam, and the whole scenario seems to make Adam nervous, so he abruptly stands up to leave.

The vampire family vacation comes to a sudden end when they go back to Adam’s house. Failing to see Ian out before they go to bed, Adam and Eve wake to find that, in addition to having broken a number of Adam’s LPs and instruments, Ava also “drank” Ian. They kick out Ava and get rid of Ian’s body by melting it instantaneously in a pool of acid at the Packard plant. But, after more rock-in-roll kids, presumably Ian’s friends looking for him, come to Adam’s house, he and Eve flee to Tangier, leaving behind all of Adam’s instruments, recording gear, heroes and all. They arrive in Tangier just in time for Kit to die from a dose of bad blood. Growing weak without a supply, Adam and Eve stalk a couple of victims. The film fades to black as they bare their fangs, bearing down on the young lovers who are making out on a park bench.

LANDSCAPE OF DISPOSSESSION

Although *Only Lovers Left Alive* reproduces larger settler colonial discourses in a postindustrial era, Detroit is a particular settler colonial landscape or “urban frontier” in which the language, behaviors, and physical form of Detroit “stand in for a particularly American set of fears about urban society and where it is headed” or what Slotkin—describing the frontier myth as an ongoing “political rhetoric of pioneering progress”—would call “eternal strife with the forces of darkness and barbarism.”²⁶ Where creative entrepreneurs are the “urban pioneers” settling the postindustrial Motor City, Adam and Eve represent “beleaguered capitalists and besieged bureaucrats” playing Custer to the savage “dangerous classes” of the urban frontier—that is, the white working class, Black people, and Native Americans.²⁷ The apocalyptic, post-industrial Detroit landscape represented in *Only Lovers Left Alive* does not sit idly behind Adam and Eve, reflecting Adam’s mood or his flight from (Western) civilization in the midst of one of its greatest failures. Rather, Jarmusch actively constructs a landscape of social and spatial monstrosity.

“Landscape,” Mitchell writes, acts like ideology — it is a *medium* that “naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable.”²⁸ His definition extends landscape representation to any number of media, including cinema, but also to discourse, “in which various political positions may be articulated” and to cultural practices that “silence discourse... to carry out a process of institutional and political legitimation.²⁹” This is consistent with Hall’s understanding of ideology as “mental frameworks” social groups and classes “deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society

works.”³⁰ Continuing, Mitchell calls landscape a “technique of colonial representation,” or what Eric Purchase describes as a process to “treat land—regardless of its state of development—as if it were a new frontier” for the purpose of profiting from it.³¹ The ideological perspective of Detroit as a landscape of monstrosity doesn’t just encourage the (re)development of Detroit but makes it possible by denying the events and politics that turned a one-time “model city” into a zone of conflict, dating back to the Great Rebellion of 1967. A landscape of monstrosity is a landscape of dispossession.

Often referred to as a race riot, the Great Rebellion is often considered the metaphorical, if not actual, point of decline in Detroit’s social-economic history. Yet, the conditions that led to the conflict began almost a century earlier with the concomitant and systematic processes of racial segregation and ecological degradation. The Homestead Act of 1862 was the first of these racially structured projects, both excluding Black Americans and depending on the removal of Native Americans.³² Throughout the mid-twentieth century, the act’s exclusions continued in spirit: white neighborhoods circulated covenants to prohibit integration, the mortgage lending industry introduced “redlining” to exclude Black neighborhoods from home loan opportunities, and developers even designed “curvilinear” city streets to make the suburbs more difficult to navigate, therefore discourage city people (ie Black Detroiters) from entering.³³ Indeed, some neighborhoods just over the county line loop around like a circle maze with few connecting streets.³⁴

Though its economic and ecological conditions began to take shape as early as the 1920s, “white flight” began in earnest during the 1950s, when Ford, Chrysler and GM constructed twenty new plants in the suburbs. From 1964 to 1966, an average 22,000

white people left the city each year. White people fled in a such a panic about the city's "increasing blackness," Kinney writes, that white flight should actually be viewed as "black containment."³⁵ Suburbanization also negatively impacted the regional ecology as developers, eager to accommodate white people, converted wide swaths of "natural/agricultural" land into suburbs, reaching out at a rate of 13 times faster than population growth from 1960 to 1990. It obliterated Detroit's wetlands, forests and farmlands, while increasing carbon output through automobile use.³⁶

By the time of the rebellion, Detroit was thoroughly segregated, with white Americans in the wealthy suburbs and Black Americans in the underfunded city.³⁷ Throughout 1980s and 1990s, the decommissioning of Detroit's auto factories accelerated the city's economic decline. Over the last 10 years, white flight, industrial flight and, more recently, "Black flight" brought the population down by 25%, or 2,000 people per month.³⁸ By 2010, a city built for nearly two million people had dropped to roughly 700,000 residents, up to eighty-five percent of them Black. The decline left from 44,000 to 100,000 vacant lots, which were subsequently set on fire, graffitied or appropriated by squatters.³⁹ The proliferation of empty lots over the last decade has resulted in the phenomenon of Detroit "ruin porn" populating the Internet: photos of burned out houses, crumbling structures and vacant land.

Ruins, Purchase explains, are part of an "epochal cycle," represented in the nineteenth century by Thomas Cole in his series of paintings, *The Course of Empire*. The series-marked "increasingly intensive uses of land" cautioning Americans to seek wealth through "hard work and steady savings,"⁴⁰ but didn't account for the ways in which ruins would inspire the entrepreneurial spirit by erasing the preconditions for disaster.⁴¹

Landscape and those who “make” it participate in the cycles of uneven development in which capital, according to Neil Smith, “strives to move from developed to underdeveloped space, then back to developed space which, because of its interim deprivation of capital, is now underdeveloped.”⁴² This is an all-too-familiar cycle for Detroit, expressed in popular culture through death and revitalization rhetoric. *Time* magazine has been pronouncing the city dead since 1961, while films such as *Robocop* (1987) and *The Crow* (1994) have presented a city overrun by violence.⁴³ Representations of Detroit as an urban nightmare have coincided with a persistent “narrative of rebirth,” a permanent desire for arrival that teeters eternally between developed and underdeveloped, as demonstrated by the Latin phrases on Detroit’s official flag—translated as “we hope for better things” and “it will arise from the ashes.”⁴⁴

The latest effort to rise comes in the form of green infrastructure. In December 2013, the city released a 50-year “Detroit Future City” (DFC) plan, which introduced a section on green spaces and urban agriculture. The “greening” of Detroit has also received widespread support in popular literature and film. In particular, books like the *Unreal Estate Guide to Detroit* and *Detroit City is the Place to Be*, as well as films like *We are Not Ghosts* and *Urban Roots*, chronicle the hope and enthusiasm of locating the city’s revival in urban farms and community gardens. Entrepreneurial farmers and community gardeners have staked claims on abandoned lots. Detroit’s small-scale urban farmers view themselves as creating sustainable businesses and community endeavors, while wealthy investors such as John Hantz of Hantz Farms see agriculture as a way to increase property values. In *Detroit: Three Pathways to Revitalization*, Lewis Solomon, a law professor at George Washington University, echoes many of these hopes, placing

urban agriculture in the category of “creative entrepreneurship” and arguing for its social benefits, such as community development, nutrition, self-sufficiency, and racial integration.⁴⁵ Hopeful economic visions like this reflect popular accounts of Detroit back to the 1960s, when the Motor City was *the* model American city: racially integrated and industrialized, with a booming middle-class.⁴⁶ It’s a hope Diego Rivera duplicated in his idealized, mixed-ethnic representation of Detroit industry and labor in his murals, *Detroit Industry*, at the Detroit Institute of Arts (chapter three).

The representation of Detroit as an urban wilderness indicates a turning point, back to (re)development after more than a half-century in the lurch, while harmony between humans and nature in the interim acts as “compensation for and screening off of the actual violence perpetrated there.”⁴⁷ While promoting urban agriculture, the city reduced public services for people trying to keep up their neighborhoods.⁴⁸ The focus on widespread decay and wilding has also obscured investors’ increasing interest in developing the area. In 2007, at the same time Detroiters began greening the city’s abundant vacant lots, Dan Gilbert squeezed a \$50 million tax break out of the city to relocate the headquarters for his mortgage loan company, Quicken Loans, from the wealthy suburb of Novi to downtown Detroit. Gilbert’s empire now includes a slew of businesses at the intersections of finance, private equity, urbanism, entertainment, sports, and gambling — many of them under the Rock Ventures umbrella — and when the city was desperate for cash after the 2008 real estate crisis, he saw his chance to grab even more. That year, he acquired One Woodward, a twenty-nine-story skyscraper at the head of Woodward Avenue for \$8.4 million—a steal, given that the same building sold for \$20 million a decade before. Gilbert and his companies went on to buy more than ninety-five

properties on or near Woodward, in many instances paying \$10 or less for vacant city-owned land and buildings related to multimillion dollar development deals. Perhaps his most ostentatious of these purchases was the Z, a parking structure that he bought for \$1 and adorned with murals from twenty-seven international street and graffiti artists. In 2013, on the same day Michigan's lame duck legislature passed the Emergency Management law, Public Act 436, Gilbert announced his plan to develop retail stores, apartments, and offices along Woodward—an effort he branded “Opportunity Detroit.” Before the legislature had even acted, he endorsed emergency management at a press conference, saying, “As hard as it is to suspend democracy for a short period of time, I think it’s in the best interest of everyone.”⁴⁹ With all stops pulled, Gilbert worked directly with bankruptcy lawyers and others to purchase and renovate buildings along Woodward, from I-75 to the water.

While securing his properties, Gilbert consistently coupled the city’s past greatness with the failure of Black management, blaming fifty years of Black leadership for industrial (white) flight. “There was the unions, and there was the car companies, there was foreign competition and stuff, you can put all aside,” Gilbert said at the time. “It was flat out mismanagement, primarily government mismanagement of the city that cause the issues that we have for the most part.”⁵⁰ When Kinney notes the “[t]rope of past greatness of Detroit is essential to the narrative of present day decay,” she’s marking the continuation of a frontier ideology as “part of the language... contain[ing] all of the ‘lessons’ we have learned from our history and all of the essential elements of our worldview.”⁵¹ The decay narrative prepares the Motor City for a settler colonial takeover by marking Black leadership as its downfall. Eve’s wilderness view of Detroit is an

invitation to creative development, made active when she declares, “This city will rise again.” Importantly, she makes this declaration on a foundation of exploitable nature and through a natural metaphor: “There’s water here,” she continues. “When the cities of the south are burning, this place will bloom.” Eve signals nature as a site for development, but also development as nature’s inevitable outcome, a notion complicated by the urban agriculture movement’s claim on Detroit’s future: while we might hope for community gardens, agribusiness is just as likely.⁵²

Various stages of development and existence persist between the extremes of ruin and renewal, but the play between them has grown wider in the post-industrial context. Representations of ruin, resurgent nature, empty land, and potential suggest *terra nullius*, a no man’s land, “for which,” Safransky writes, “there is a moral imperative to settle.”⁵³ Declaring “the decline of American empire is very much transparent in Detroit,” Jarmusch constructs a *terra nullius* that absorbs non-white residents into the landscape.⁵⁴ The only Black actors in *Only Lovers Left Alive* work as service people—a bartender, a cab driver. A Black doctor (played by Jeffery Wright) acts as a drug dealer, selling Adam the “really good stuff” — O-negative blood — on the black market. The metaphor of blood as a drug really takes off when we see Adam and Eve drink it in small amounts and then slide back with their mouths open in ecstasy. Aside from these subordinate positions, Black people do not exist in the Detroit of *Only Lovers Left Alive*. They are ghosts, as Draus and Roddy write, “disappearing into the landscape, especially when confronted by law enforcement.”⁵⁵ Thus, the images of abandoned homes and overgrown lots in *Only Lovers Left Alive*, Safransky would say, encourage a settler colonial logic of

ownership-via-labor while ignoring that the 100,000 acres of “empty” land still house around 90,000 people, many of whom care for vacant properties.⁵⁶

Where Black people are absent from the abandoned spaces of *Only Lovers Left Alive*, nature reclaims space. Plants grow through the cracks; they *create* cracks and tear down buildings. In the crumbling, gutted Packard plant, Adam and Eve hear coyotes before catching their eyes flashing in the light. When Eve says, “I think they’re clocking you,” she seems to be nodding toward the competitive relationship between vampires and werewolves that shows up in popular films such as the *Twilight* (2008-2012) and *Underworld* (2003-2016) series. If vampires represent civilization, then werewolves represent wildness, a city sinking into a savage state. Where *Twilight* and episode 207 of the *X-Files* (1994), “Shapes,” also associate werewolves with Native Americans and where Native Americans repeatedly appear as the embodiment of nature in colonial representations, the suggestion in *Only Lovers Left Alive* is the fall of civilization is the resurgence of Native American lifeways.

Despite this recognition, the apparent return to nature is just preparation for new development. Jarmusch’s Detroit landscape implies this imperative to develop, accounting for both his depiction of the city as empty in the film and his description of the “black parts of Detroit,” in *Sight & Sound* magazine, as “like a lot of urban America... kind of apartheid, segregated, heavily.”⁵⁷ Jarmusch ignores completely the history of racial spatialization behind Detroit’s decline. Though he said his depiction of Detroit is “limited and somewhat unrealistic,” he also said the Motor City is the “best city you could imagine” for a character who is hiding out.⁵⁸ In the film, he periodically drives us around the city with Adam and Eve to see the ruins, and when Eve describes Detroit as

Adam's "wilderness," she locates the postindustrial landscape within a sublime landscape tradition forged by many a settler and Romantic painter/poet.⁵⁹ Like Slotkin's frontier, Detroit becomes a "mythic region whose wildness [make] it at once a region of darkness and an earthly paradise."⁶⁰ It's perfect for vampires who live in the dark but who take their names from Christianity's first couple. Yet Jarmusch based his characters on Mark Twain's in *The Diary of Adam and Eve*, which largely takes place outside of paradise after Adam flees, "hoping to get clear of the Park and hide in some other country before the trouble should begin."⁶¹ Detroit, then, is not Paradise, but that "other country," a landscape of dispossession waiting to be inhabited—indeed, to be *made*—by (white) settlers.

Adam does as his heroes have done, except where many of them sought a remedy for civilization's decline in landscape, Adam wants to wallow in civilization's failures. By blaming zombies for those failures, Adam maintains his savior narrative, like Twain's Adam, who witnesses, after the fall, "every beast was destroying its neighbor."⁶² Adam's zombies are not the flesh-eating undead. Rather, Adam uses the term "zombie" symbolically to refer to everyday humans whose brain-dead ideologies or motivations don't align with his own. They are "mindless, automaton-like bodies," the "lowest of the low," a "persistent mass."⁶³ Given the lack of Black actors in *Only Lovers Left Alive*, Jarmusch's zombies are living (white) humans. They represent a kind of white Other, working-class Detroiters, caught up in "the same 'laws' of capitalist competition" inherent in the film's frontier myth.⁶⁴

Adam's exalted position denies capitalism as the logic of deindustrialization while ignoring the ways in which his heroes have participated in nationalist, capitalist projects.

Adam doesn't find this problematic because, as a vampire, Adam too is a capitalist. Richard Dyer recognizes the association of whiteness, as a color, with the pale, exsanguinated skin of death—thereby figuring vampires as representatives of white capitalism, sucking the life out of cities and their inhabitants.⁶⁵ Adam's wall of dead white men secures his authority and reinforces his nostalgia for better capitalist times, but it also identifies him as the inheritor of their entrepreneurial "white spirit," which Dyer defines as that "get up and go, aspiration, awareness of the highest reaches of intellectual comprehension and aesthetic refinement."⁶⁶ It's a spirit of (re)settlement that identifies the one fit to rule over people and the environment. Whiteness is competence, visibility, the ability to set things in motion.⁶⁷

Clearly, Adam's misanthropy in some ways resists this classification. He seems to contradict the white spirit in his melancholy laments for the decline of civilization, but at the same time, "the right not to conform, to be different and get away with it is the right of the most privilege groups in society."⁶⁸ For example, Adam has time and money, so he's not worried about being recognized or getting paid for his music. He just wants it "out there," and, as someone who does not have to worry about aging or poverty, he flippantly argues artists shouldn't complain about appropriation — it's the ideas that matter, the poetry, the art. From this privileged position, Adam's view of himself as savior is very much tied to a landscape that invites creative activity for some while foreclosing possibilities for others. Where his music unapologetically appropriates and disappears Blackness, the film, as a form of landscape representation, dispossesses Black workers of their land and labor history. They appear as ghosts rather than zombies.

As a narrator of Adam's experience, guiding him through his existential crisis, Eve is as much an author of this particular settler landscape. Amy Kaplan has argued that women in nineteenth century literature domesticated the landscape by taming wild children in the home, conflating progress with Manifest Destiny, and rescuing men from foreign influence.⁶⁹ On the flipside of this "civilizing mission," Dyer recognizes white women have also been represented as a challenge to imperial rule, by "enflame[ing] the already overheated desires of native men" and by condemning settler treatment of Native people.⁷⁰ Where Eve expresses her "moral conscience" by undermining Adam's melancholic vision of existence, her younger sister, Ava, represents a "negative variant": She is simultaneously the wild child the motherly Eve cannot tame and the temptation for white "native" Ian. Ava's seduction of Ian, in fact, "signals the beginning of the end" for vampires in Detroit. Moreover, her declaration she just couldn't help herself ("He was so cute," she says) and Eve's muted façade of disappointment at Ian's death embrace the seemingly contradictory do-nothingness of "white femininity," repeating colonial violence by refusing to do anything about the suffering of locals, except sympathize with it.⁷¹

PIONEERING TECHNOLOGY

Only Lovers Left Alive is ruin porn. It obscures racial spatialization as the force behind Detroit's decline, ignoring the opulence in Detroit's suburbs, quickly gentrifying neighborhoods, people who still live in this "wilderness," and the work people have put into fighting against illegal dumping, arson, vandalism and squatting.⁷² The film assumes the narrative of Detroit's white return through a disaffected European immortal whose

lamentations over better days elide the causes of decline. The film opened in Germany in 2013, in the U.S. in 2014. This means it was under production in the midst of Dan Gilbert's Woodward Avenue buying spree and Governor Snyder's effort to push through the Emergency Management system against the wishes of Michigan voters. Around that time, Gilbert also started the nonprofit Bizdom to provide office space, training, and up to \$125,000 in startup funding for young tech entrepreneurs. It's no secret he imagines Detroit as another, if not the "next," Silicon Valley. In 2011, he purchased the Madison Theatre building on Broadway to open a tech hub he christened M@dison. In 2012, Rock Ventures rolled out "IT in the D," a program to give local university students real-world tech experience and the "Valley to Detroit" campaign to recruit laid-off Silicon Valley techies. In 2014, Gilbert made his pitch at the *TechCrunch: Disrupt San Francisco* annual conference: come to Detroit, there is opportunity for innovation and cheap real estate. While popular discourses upheld the vision of Detroit as an urban frontier, Gilbert was inviting tech workers and tech entrepreneurs to the city. In other words, tech workers and tech entrepreneurs are explorers and pioneers and Gilbert's plan in part depends on them viewing themselves as people willing to take a risk.

Adam is the custodian, if not the architect, of a frontier mythology that "doesn't argue its ideology," Richard Slotkin would say, but valorizes it through acts of bravery.⁷³ As vampires, Adam and Eve represent capitalism's last-ditch efforts to suck the life out of Detroit at the same time that they offer it as a refuge from a world that hasn't come face-to-face with its demise. The film's narrative, meanwhile, represents Detroit's decline as a failure of culture, rather than the inevitable outcome of disinvestment. Understanding Adam sees Detroit as a failure of civilization, Eve's reassurance the city will rise is not

merely a sentimental vision for great societies. Rather, by saying that it will rise *again*, Eve defines great societies as the product of Western/European ingenuity, written into the landscape. Mitchell reminds us landscape acts like ideology, interpolating the beholder of the representation in “relation to its givenness as sight and site”: where ideological categories, such as colonizer and colonized, position us as social actors in discourse, monstrosity “reaffirm[s] the shared normality of the person or people encountering the monster,” drawing “a clear line of difference between them and the ‘other’” to justify mistreatment of the other.⁷⁴ That is, as ideology, landscape doesn’t just predict or insist on some kind of ownership, but also determines who owns and who doesn’t. Furthermore, if land speculation depends on the process of making undesirable land valuable, then tourism is one way to accomplish that, and disaster tales play a key role in concealing the “entrepreneurial spirit” at work, while at the same time perpetuating a narrative of wealth saving destinations from poverty.⁷⁵

In *OLLA*, disaster creates the ideological perspective creative white people will save the city, first as tourists (explorers) and then as entrepreneurs (pioneers). This explains why, with Western civilization harassing his characters, Jarmusch takes the orientaling turn to Tangier. They broke the rules by killing a white man. Though Eve tells Ava that they can’t go around killing people in the “bloody twenty-first century” of Detroit, Adam and Eve kill locals in Tangiers, ostensibly Arabs, with impunity. Jarmusch says Tangier is a city in decline, like Detroit, but, unlike Detroit, Tangier suffers from *over*population, which both justifies knocking off a few people and creates an alternative landscape of monstrosity, in which Adam and Eve, corrupted by civilization, seek their true natures.⁷⁶

Gilbert, like Jarmusch, Gilbert presents Detroit as an “opportunity” for young hip pioneers to settle the “empty” lands and his plan to attract the bravest among them seems to be working. Among the more than 60 tech start-ups that claim Detroit as their home are Cribspot, which maps off-campus rentals for college students; Remake Detroit, which tells stories about products made in Detroit and the people who make them; and, not surprisingly, Kidpreneur, which teaches entrepreneurship and technology to kids. Adding corporate credibility to Gilbert’s vision, in late 2015, Amazon opened a corporate office in Detroit, and, at the beginning of the 2017, Microsoft announced the relocation of its Southfield office to downtown Detroit.

VAMPIRE WEEKEND

While Safransky roots white possession in Detroit to the legal designation of property rights, she doesn’t go as far as Moreton-Robinson does in Australia, arguing possessive individualism is a hallmark of privileged (white) subjects who claim the right to property as a “normative behavior, rules of interaction, social engagement.”⁷⁷ Kinney understands white return as a *nostalgic* process. It persists even if white people have temporarily lived elsewhere, only recently or temporarily lived there, or never lived there at all. White possession is *commonsense*, what Hall tells us, is a “historical ... form of popular thinking” secured by and through ideological struggle.⁷⁸

Adam identifies with white people who made Detroit what it *was*, before the zombie apocalypse. His entitled behavior is “understandable,” normal, commonsense for the vampire/capitalist class.⁷⁹ Though Adam and Eve are visitors, they belong in Detroit because they have existed on the privileged side of European history. As immortals, they

are witness history and can speak to it; they naturalize ideology as history. Like Twain's Eve, who names everything in existence by sight, for instance, Jarmusch's Eve knows everything by touch; she uses the Latin, which suggests not only origins in Western epistemology, but more specifically science—a colonial tool that, like art, assumes the right to describe, and therefore to define, colonized people. Adam, of course, stakes his claim to Detroit in his knowledge of and sense of loss for history. Jarmusch also clearly separates Adam and Eve from Detroit's real monsters, saying, "Vampires are not monsters, they're not zombies, they're not the undead. They're humans that have gone through a transformation, so they're still basically human."⁸⁰ Adam and Eve earn this humanity in the film through their ability to make decisions as self-possessed liberal subject. By choosing to live in Detroit and demonstrating their ingenuity (i.e., Adam's Tesla-inspired machines), they separate themselves from the immobile locals. By buying blood from blood banks instead of killing people, they separate themselves from the monstrosity of vampirism. They place themselves above the monstrosity of the city and its other inhabitants, which include the hypervisible zombies of Western civilization, but also the very invisible residents of Detroit who are too poor to move or who resort to various forms of violence/savagery in Jarmusch's Detroit. Adam and Eve are disaster tourists, whose nostalgia for a lost civilization heralds in its renewed form. Disaster tourism, Eric Purchase informs us, makes visible, and therefore desirable to land speculators, landscapes that otherwise don't exist in the public imagination. These constructed landscapes, W.J.T Mitchell would add, make development possible or attractive by creating and naturalizing an ideological perspective (1994, 2).

Jarmusch's ideological construction of Detroit draws on Twain's *The Diary of Adam and Eve*. In the foreword to the 2002 Hesperus edition, John Updike writes the text first appeared in *The Niagara Book*, a souvenir for the 1893 World Fair in Buffalo, New York.⁸¹ Updike writes, "[Twain] saw that 'Adam's Diary' might be relocated to an Eden that contained Niagara Falls" (vii). Indeed, the falls appear in the first few lines of the text, where Twain's Adam writes, "[T]he great waterfall... is the finest thing on the estate, I think. The new creature [Eve] calls it Niagara Falls — why, I am sure I don't know. Says it *looks* like Niagara Falls."⁸² This ability to name the Falls and Twain's willingness to locate them in his Eden, mark what Ginger Strand describes as a "monument to man's meddling."⁸³ "The manicured, repaired, landscaped and artificially lit" Falls are a study in self-delusion," she writes, scheduled to suit tourists.⁸⁴ The Falls represent the commodification of mythologized nature and Native American history upon which Americans forge their national identity. Like Niagara Falls, Detroit exhibits a sublime quality that arouses a sense of danger and excitement in potential visitors: Where the magnitude of the falls attracts people to the area, the magnitude of destruction attracts visitors to Detroit.⁸⁵ As Wanda Corn demonstrates, picturesque landscape paintings of the Falls and other wild tourist destinations prepared us to view cityscapes through a similar tourist lens.⁸⁶

So, while Eve is one kind of tourist in *Only Lovers Left Alive*, taking in the sublimity of Detroit's remains, Adam is another, perhaps a second homeowner. He's on retreat, but he feels expresses a sense of connection to place. His wilderness is not so much a place to *make* himself as a place to withdraw. In the settler colonial context, Moreton-Robinson argues this normative, nostalgic sense of belonging through the

ideologically privileged history of white people as “the people who made this country what it is today,” on a feeling of attachment to place derived from “ownership and achievement.”⁸⁷ It’s carried by the modernist notion of “America,” popularized by the circle of artists around Alfred Stieglitz, especially Georgia O’Keefe whose work in New Mexico appropriated Indigeneity to define the true American place.⁸⁸ The Indigenous art collective Postcommodity satirized the view of the American spirit in a video installation titled, “It’s My Second Home, But I Have a Very Spiritual Connection With This Place” (2010). Revealing “the longitudinal flow of land, people, and commerce within the Santa Fe region ... on tribal lands, the City of Santa Fe, and the property holdings of its speculative inhabitants,” the video criticizes the commodification of Native land for American identity.⁸⁹

If this chapter describes *Only Lovers Left Alive* as a form of landscape representation, it does so in order to reveal and unpack dominant ideas and ideologies about post-industrial Detroit more broadly. In other words, the Detroit of *OLLA* isn’t Jarmusch’s alone; it’s the product of popular discourses and ideologies on tourism and redevelopment. By reading *OLLA* as landscape, we can understand the (re)construction of Detroit as an ideological process that produces and reproduces official policies and practices. Guidebooks dating back to 1974 consistently lock Indigenous possession in the past, describing Detroit’s founding as a French and later British outpost. They gloss over modern history, from suburbanization and deindustrialization to the resulting 1967 Rebellion.⁹⁰ Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Kinney writes, “urban explorers” laid the groundwork for a “mini tourism industry” by breaking into abandoned buildings and describing all the “beautiful architecture,” the ruins, the emptiness, and the absence of

civilization.⁹¹ She couples it with state campaigns highlighting environmental tourism in the state, featuring the wildness and purity of Michigan, arguing alongside geographer Carolyn Finney suggestions for proper use of nature is another kind of partitioning through the lens of whiteness.⁹² In the 2010s, Governor Jennifer Granholm pushed Michigan's environmental tourism with the award-winning "Pure Michigan" Campaign. At the same time she developed Michigan's "Cool Cities" initiative, building off Richard Florida's "creative class" literature, like every other governor in the country.⁹³ By 2013, Governor Snyder — of poisoned Flint water infamy — channeled the tourism momentum into a campaign focused on Detroit as "America's great comeback city." That same year, Snyder declared a financial state of emergency, ushering in Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr who had the power to cancel collective bargaining agreements, control the pension system, and dissolve municipalities. With three months, he initiated bankruptcy, which sold off public assets, cut off utilities, and slashed pensions while the state tourism board amplified its campaign for Detroit tourism. "This narrative of 'America's great comeback story,'" Kinney writes, "rings almost like a Detroit version of 'Make America Great Again.'" Continuing, she writes the narrative is

... a gesture toward a 'comeback' to repeat of white ruling class, hyper-segregation, and a colorline that predicted not only where you live but what job you hold, the quality of your child's education, and whether you have access to running water.⁹⁴

The slide from frontier-evoking tourism to creative economic development sounds a lot like settler colonialism. Similar to nineteenth century pioneers, urban settlers make the land more attractive to investors, help increase property values, and displace the people who lived there. Their run-ins with squatters and highly marginalized communities justified a regime of law-and-order across the city. The idea white people

are *returning* to the city, *reclaiming* what was already theirs, forgets the U.S. had stolen it from the Anishinaabe and had ensured their claims through violence toward Native people. Unfortunately, scholars who describe Detroit as a settler colonial city repeat this violence by referring to Black Detroiters as “native Detroiters,” thereby relegating Indigenous to the past. Meanwhile, according to the 2010 Census, more than 2,400 Detroiters identify as *only* Native American.⁹⁵ Down from 12,487 in 1980, the Native population in Detroit has likewise been displaced by deindustrialization and white flight.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, many Natives still live in the city, but they remain invisible.

WHITE POSSESSION

Only Lovers Left Alive describes the (re)development or (re)settlement of Detroit as a settler colonial landscape that affects and administers Native Americans and Black Americans in significantly different ways. Adam and Eve claim the moral authority and presence (of body and mind) to exclude others — the commonsense of white possession which, Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes, assumes they have *the right to* exclude in the first place.⁹⁷

Quizar notes that a narrative of return for or rebirth of whiteness persists in Detroit through the proliferation of artist residencies and other programs to encourage creative economic development.⁹⁸ With Kinney, she has also argued, accompanying narratives of Detroit’s decline, white people harbor a sense of nostalgia, believing they were driven out of the city by violence; they see themselves as refugees of violence and economic collapse.⁹⁹ The opposite is true: White people who left the city center accelerated Detroit’s economic collapse by taking their tax dollars with them as they

“increasingly sought newer and larger residences in the suburbs.”¹⁰⁰ This discourse of mobility, Kinney adds, depends on “access to whiteness,” while ruin porn suggests people (of color), who stayed, didn’t keep things up, allowing white people to think of themselves as exiled caretakers awaiting their return. Indeed, Jarmusch’s depiction of a hip, all-white music scene in an abandoned city blatantly references gentrification as much as it erases Black Detroiters, suggesting by their absence in a scene of urban activity black people are “both a cause and a symptom of ruin.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, when Adam chauffeurs Eve past Jack White’s house—rather than, say, Berry Gordy’s—the film neglects the city’s Black cultural history at the same time it suggests, despite Detroit’s reputation for poverty and violence, creative (white) people still (or can) thrive in the Motor City.

However, recent attempts to recognize the erasure of Black people and Black history in Detroit as a settler colonial process have failed to take into account the ways in which that process depends on the continued erasure of Indigenous people. When Safransky recognizes settler colonialism “in the abrogation or containment of native rights, the racial geography of cities and the selected absorption of immigrant populations,” her lowercase “native” invites a reading of Black Americans as “native Detroiters,” thereby disappearing Indigenous people.¹⁰² The frontier myth, Hall would say, explains how the ideology of (re)settlement intervenes in social struggles, so it would be no leap for the settler state to view any number of enemies as “Indians.”¹⁰³ Indeed, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s excellent history, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, details the ways in which the rhetoric and logic of the U.S. genocide of Indigenous people has continued in current U.S. military strategy. And yet we should be

careful not to repeat the violent erasures of Indigenous people while deploying settler colonial analysis. Though Safransky recognizes the ways in which the dispossession of Native people has set a legal precedent for white land acquisition in Detroit, she treats Indigeneity as prior to the contemporary city, foreclosing the possibility of Native possession in Detroit. Quizar is more careful: Where she observes “Black land has become the site of settler colonial desire,” she also acknowledges the configuration of Black Americans as “native Detroiters” repeats the logic of Native dispossession.¹⁰⁴ Kinney similarly explains she is not conflating “the relationship between contemporary development and extractive colonization”; however, she continues to relegate Indigenous people to a past in which they exchanged goods and resources with the French.¹⁰⁵ She writes, “Moreton-Robinson’s framework of the white possessive enables the simultaneity of a critique of settler colonialism that also holds open the space to consider, for example, James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs’s charge that Detroit and other location in urban American represent ‘the city as the black man’s land.’”¹⁰⁶ This reading of Moreton-Robinson is demonstrably untrue, even if we only read the back cover of Moreton-Robinson’s *The White Possessive*, which reads, “Whiteness studies are central to [Moreton-Robinson’s] reasoning, and she shows how blackness works as a white epistemological tool that bolsters the social production of whiteness — displacing Indigenous sovereignties and sidestepping issues of settler colonialism.”¹⁰⁷

Quizar, Safransky, and Kinney understand settler colonialism inserts Native Americans and Black Americans into the same landscape and they recognize how settler colonialism operates by assuming white people already own Detroit. Yet they don’t adequately address the constant reformation of white possession in Detroit through

Native dispossession. Moreton-Robinson demonstrates the black/white binary of whiteness studies, maintained by Dyer, ignores the “positioning of Indians as incommensurable savages” in American history.¹⁰⁸ Further, Kyle Mays argues while many Detroit historians have “focused on the tensions between Black and white races” in relation to labor struggle, the twentieth century has produced only one book on Detroit’s Native American community.¹⁰⁹ When Safransky writes “representations [of empty land] become more problematic when excessive nature is celebrated as cleansing, a discourse with racial connotations,” she marks the erasure of Black Americans, but neglects the symbolic and selective absorption of Detroit’s Indigenous people — Moreton-Robinson’s “symbolic appropriation of the sacred” — into the colonial landscape that “achieve[s] the unattainable imperative of becoming Indigenous” in order to belong.¹¹⁰ Against these appropriations, Mays argues Detroit’s urban history is co-constitutive with the region’s Indigenous history, writing the “[t]he creation of a local history rooted in white male ‘origin myths’” has relied on the appropriated “celebration of indigenous imagery and the memorializing of Indigenous people (and their histories) through pageantry.”¹¹¹ He cites Detroit’s official flag (adopted in 1948) as an example of “white male settlement and domination.”¹¹² It absences Indigenous people in British, American and colonial iconography, and memorializes the 1805 fire, which nearly eradicated the city, as a beginning of civilization.¹¹³

Even while referencing Moreton-Robinson and Mays, Kinney shifts the “white possessive” analytic to “slavery, external colonization, and genocide,” vacating or sidelining Indigeneity from settler colonial critique — the very operation of Moreton-Robinson’s theory — and Indigenous people from Detroit in order to make a broader

claim about tourism and redevelopment in Detroit. In the conclusion of her essay, Kinney compares the investment/disinvestment cycle in Detroit to Jean O'Brien's description of "firsting, replacing, and lasting" as the attitude toward Indigenous people in historiography that won't let them exist in the present. Kinney, instead, applies the theory to Black Detroiters: "From the French who 'founded Detroit to the 'urban pioneers' who are 'revitalizing' the city, the narratives of those who remained present are being written out of existence in the mainstream media In resisting mainstream narratives of firsting, a number of projects by and about longtime, primarily black Detroiters were already well underway at the same time as, for example, the height of Detroit's pronouncement of emptiness that cycled through the late 2000s and 2010s."¹¹⁴ As recent as February 2020, Quizar also repeated the conflation of Blackness and Indigeneity in Detroit. She writes,

"As Black labor has become increasingly "surplus" in the industries that employed many Black workers in the early and mid-twentieth century, capitalist investment strategies have increasingly focused on possible profits from Black-occupied land. That is, the racialization of Black people has shifted to more closely resemble that of Native Americans as their place in a white settler economy has come to more closely resemble that of Native Americans.

This shift in economy, I posit, has led to a dominant development discourse in rapidly gentrifying Black cities, like Detroit, which melds racialized tropes commonly used in the context of settler colonialism (discourses of erasure, a sense that new "urban pioneer" residents are fulfilling a moral duty to improve the city by occupying land, etc.) with longstanding portrayals of Black urban violence and dystopia."¹¹⁵

Quizar notes a shift in desire from Black labor, with its referent in chattel slavery, to Black land, with its referent in Indigenous dispossession. While Black dispossession certainly takes place in Detroit through debt, financialization, and racialization (as anti-blackness) — what Byrd and company call economies of dispossession — "Black land"

in Detroit is private property, whereas Indigenous land is nationhood (a political identity), a social relation even when it engages in currency exchanges, as I argue in chapter four. Deployed through Black land, settler colonial critique relegates Indigenous people to the past as it flattens the richness of blackness, creating a racialized category of difference or what Kirsten Buick reminds us is essentialized categorization. “Essentialization,” Buick writes, “is defined as absolute being, which stands outside the sphere of cultural influence and historical change.”¹¹⁶ Continuing, she quotes Diane Fuss: “Essentialist arguments are not necessarily ahistorical, but they frequently theorize history as an unbroken continuum that transports, across cultures and through time, categories such as ‘man’ and ‘woman’ without in any way (re)defining or indeed (re)constituting them.”¹¹⁷ Black land as a racialized category of belonging/possession in Detroit fails to account for Indigenous enslavement, Black immigration, and Afro-Indigeneity, while also ignoring the ways in which class struggle has fractured Detroit’s Black population. Black land as the site of dispossession in Detroit also excludes, for instance, the poor, racialized immigrant village of Delray — mostly Hungarian — recently forced off their land to make way for the Gordie Howe International Bridge to Windsor.¹¹⁸

The characterization of Black as Native, moreover, falls into the trap of “competing oppressions,” getting stuck in analyses on complicity in the settler colonial project whether it be Buffalo Soldiers in Indian Country or Cherokee slave-owners or the Homestead Act, which took Indigenous land for settlement but excluded African-descended people. From a postcolonial perspective, Byrd warns this competition itself “reproduces colonialist discourses even when they attempt to disrupt and transform participatory democracy away from its origins in slavery, genocide, and

indentureship.”¹¹⁹ From a Marxist perspective, Ikyo Day asks us to refuse this trap, writing the “level of complicity with the settler state is ultimately secondary to their subordination under a settler colonial mode of production driven by the proprietorial logics of whiteness.”¹²⁰ The move to define Blackness as Indigeneity in order to call the conditions settler colonialism is also unnecessary, considering, as Day argues, “land and labor are constitutive features of settler colonialism.”¹²¹ Settler state ideologies in Detroit work Black labor even in its absence to clear the land for privileged labor forms. That is, to represent Black labor as surplus — industrial, outmoded, criminal — is to discipline Black labor, render it unintelligible and unadaptable in the new economy, therefore discursively inviting creative, technological white labor to take its place. Devaluing Black labor to establish a new industry favorable to white possession is a bordering process, a “multiplication of labor,” as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson describe it, creating the category of unemployed/underemployed to justify tax foreclosure, water shut-offs, criminalization, and redevelopment. While the “intensification of labor processes” and “the tendency for work to colonize the time of life” creates extreme working conditions for Walking Man James Robinson in chapter one, surplus Black labor demonstrates the “social stratifications of labor, in which skill becomes only one criterion for employment.”¹²² Language, family values, health, and cultural assimilation become requirements for employment and therefore citizenship, the right to be in or own land in Detroit.¹²³ This is historically rooted in white flight/black containment, itself a bordering process that excluded working-class Black labor. Suburbanization took place in neighboring counties, the county line preventing the flow of tax dollars into the city, while suburbanites continued to make use of city services for work. So, while the county

line may have been “more open to flows of goods and capital but more closed to the circulation of human bodies,” configuration only applies to working class Black labor, not white people nor upper/middle-class Black people from the suburbs.¹²⁴

If, in contrast to Quizar and Kinney, we read Jarmusch’s coyotes as monstrous incarnations of Native Americans in the Detroit of *Only Lover Left Alive*, then we’re witnessing an invitation to rethink the relationship between land and labor in Detroit. We see the coyotes in the context of post-industrialization — not only the end of Black labor, but also of racial capitalism, in Detroit. They appear to Adam and Eve in the Packard plant. The plant looming over the coyotes replaces Indigenous history with an origin myth rooted in U.S. modernity. Yet before Eve says the coyotes are “clocking” Adam, she notices them with a hint of excitement, calling them by the Latin name, *canis latrans*. Still understanding coyotes/werewolves as Native Americans, Eve’s sense of surprise acknowledges Native Americans exist in the present. Even if she still tries to “name” them in a language of colonial oppression, she recognizes their right to be there and she recognizes their return. As the one being “clocked,” *Adam* is the intruder. I’m suggesting, then, post-industrialization presents an opportunity to reconstitute land and labor in Detroit outside of capitalist frameworks. By positioning Black Detroiters as ghosts, the film does seem to confirm Quizar’s description of the ways in which Black people are “increasingly invisible in mass media discourse about Detroit,” but that doesn’t make them “Indian” as Quizar concludes. Though not represented as such in the film, Black Detroiters too have focused on (i.e. returned to) the land through urban agriculture. And while “food sovereignty” is a goal, Quizar shows in her dissertation on Black-led farms, that personal fulfillment and a sense of community are significant incentives for people

who get involved.¹²⁵ Farmers, she writes, think of “nature in terms of connection with culture, with history, with other people, and with a vision for a more just world.”¹²⁶ Quizar and Safransky describe agriculture as survival for marginalized people and resistance against settler colonial model development, a place agriculture has long held in the georgic tradition of art and literature.¹²⁷ But, again, the focus is on labor and community, not land and certainly not nationhood. Given the desire to “earn a living” or to improve property values is also a part of the urban agriculture movement, agricultural labor still figures within capitalist understandings, especially considering some farmers describe urban farming as an opportunity to keep them occupied while they wait for factory work.¹²⁸ As the film “produces ideology and exists within it,” it also, as Anne Bermingham writes, “registers the inconsistencies within [settler colonial] ideologies.”¹²⁹ By repeating the stereotype of Native American savagery in resurgent nature, *Only Lovers Left Alive*, however derogatorily, reinserts Indigenous people into the landscape of Detroit and recognizes their right to be there. The film, in other words, “threatens to unravel” the logic of (automatic) white possession that underwrites the (re)development of Detroit by inadvertently marking Indigenous presence in the post-industrial, landscape.¹³⁰

QLINE OF EMPIRE

Just months after *OLLA* opened in theaters across the U.S., the M-1 Rail Consortium began construction on Woodward Avenue to install the QLine streetcar system. M1-Rail formed in 2008 as a private sector public transportation initiative, the first of its kind in the U.S., and in 2011, got the go-ahead to develop the rail line with a

\$25 million federal grant originally issued for a citywide rapid transit system.¹³¹ Out of a total \$238.6 million, \$105.2 came from foundations, private corporations, and hospitals.¹³² Gilbert contributed \$10 million, more than any other single donor, with half of it going to the naming rights, the “Q” standing for Quicken Loans. With \$140 million going to the purchase of the streetcars and the laying of the tracks, the additional \$98.6 million will update infrastructure and pad operations for the next decade. At that time, ownership will transfer to the Regional Transit Authority.¹³³

With the street torn open for the M-1 rail, Gilbert’s Rock Venture Investment corporation dropped \$31 million into a plan to install fiberoptic cables below the QLine. As the main artery Rocket Fiber high-speed internet system, the cables connect Wayne State/Midtown to the city center, now known as Gilbertville. Rocket Fiber saved millions of dollars on the QLine deal by not having to tear up streets, connecting Rocket Fiber not only to many of Gilbert’s newly renovated Woodward Avenue buildings, but also to the streetcar system itself. Rocket Fiber also provides WiFi to the QLine, as well as the 14 train stops along Woodward. On par with Google Fiber, Rocket Fiber exceeds the needs of the average internet user in Detroit, making it clear Gilbert’s service is a pitch to the tech industry and related industries.

As I’ve argued throughout this chapter, redevelopment discourse in Detroit depends on settler colonial ideologies continue to dispossess and disappear Indigenous people through tourism rhetoric and scholarly analysis. These ideologies have circulated in Detroit as landscape representations through magazine, residencies, ruin porn, and film, inviting tourists and creative entrepreneurs to explore and eventually settle the region. The QLine has a similar purpose: it seeks to persuade potential residents the city

is safe and fun for them. Rocket Fiber, underneath the QLine, targets creative entrepreneurs in particular, suggesting through infrastructure civilization is returning. The QLine and Rocket Fiber thus articulate settler colonial ideology into the built environment of Woodward Avenue. Articulation, Hall says, has a double meaning: it means “to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate” and “two parts ... connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken.”¹³⁴ “A theory of articulation,” he writes, “is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects.”¹³⁵

As Greg Culver demonstrates in his analysis of streetcar project documents, municipalities push streetcar systems through by describing them as economic engines.¹³⁶ “These projects are indeed rather clearly formulated through a neoliberal, creative city logic,” Culver writes. “The streetcar is viewed as a vehicle through which vibrant street life can be (re)inserted into the urban core, and which serves as a highly visible symbol meant to improve the city’s image on the competitive global urban stage. Along with vibrant urbanity and positive city image, this “high-quality” transit is predicted to attract creative talent, which will in turn spur economic development and new investment.¹³⁷ Yet, successful streetcar systems are few and far between and, yet, as Culver shows in his study of twelve streetcar projects. Rather than economic engines, then, they are vehicles for settler colonial ideologies. Transits, even.

Streetcars are rhetorical devices for creative economic development and it’s no surprise to Detroiters. Developed and constructed at the moment when Detroit is being described as a settler city for creative entrepreneurs, QLine and Rocket Fiber take on the

particular settler colonial ideologies of redevelopment in Detroit. However, more than make these ideologies concrete on Woodward Avenue, QLine/Rocket Fiber attempt to persuade potential residents the city and its partners in the private sector have the locals under control. They moved forward with their plan despite criticism and pushback, even from city planners and leadership¹³⁸

In this sense, it is a form of visuality — in Nicholas Mirzoeff’s conception, a “set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight (ideas) into a rendition of physical and psychic space.”¹³⁹ The streetcar materializes visually as evidence of developers’ ability to “set things in motion,” but rather than naturalize authority by claiming the right to visualize history and therefore *envision* the future, as is the function of visuality, the streetcar asks future residents to imagine it themselves.¹⁴⁰ In this case, however, people weren’t buying it. Three years after QLine launched, it is failing to meet expectations and taxpayers are reluctant to dump any more money into an RTA that may one day take on the broken system.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile, a number of developments along Woodward have stalled, both leaving Detroiters with little confusion about what QLine and Rocket Fiber were all about in the first place.¹⁴² Randy Essex expressed the exasperation of many Detroiters when he wrote an opinion piece in the *Detroit Free Press* titled, “Get serious about fixing the QLINE or admit that it’s just for show.”¹⁴³ Instead, we see the QLine for what it is. Just as Detroit’s decline is the product of racialized disinvestment by industry and whiteness rather than blind market forces, “private development, not intrepid urban pioneers,” leads redevelopment efforts in Detroit, and it depends on public money ... funneled through tax subsidies.”¹⁴⁴ Understanding this, we can also understand the “urban frontier” narrative as a

redevelopment narrative produced and perpetuated visually/ideologically by private development, culture, and tourism. As I have argued here, then, our task is not to accept the frame without considering all it entails. To consider Detroit a settler city, our analyses must seek Indigenous representations and subjectivities, while considering the ways in which settler colonialism uses the figure of the Native to claim prior white possession of Indigenous land and then fractures and flattens those who live upon by race, class, ethnicity, and Indigeneity.

Chapter Three

Motor City *Indigenismo*

Diego Rivera and the Space of Whiteness

In 2015, the Detroit Institute of Arts launched a massive exhibition dedicated to Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. The two lived in Detroit from 1932 to 1933, while Rivera painted his monumental mural, *Detroit Industry*. In the catalogue for *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit*, curator Mark Rosenthal claims it was a formative period for both of them. Rivera completed “arguably his greatest work” encompassing “a larger geographical domain” and painting “a sweeping vision for a united Americas.”¹ Kahlo, “largely unnoticed except for her colorful personality and native Mexican attire ... found in Detroit her artistic voice as a painter of personal traumas and self-realization.”² Though they worked separately, he concludes, their influence on one another, as lovers and painters, cannot be dismissed.

After visiting the exhibition, *artnet* contributing editor Ben Davis immediately recognizes Kahlo’s minor position in the exhibition:

The heart of the show clearly resides in the galleries that chronicle the crucial year of 1932: the large-scale cartoons Rivera made to plan *Detroit Industry*, his meticulous 27-panel cycle depicting scenes from Ford’s River Rouge plant, which surround the DIA’s Rivera Court, and which are widely considered Rivera’s most important mural work in the United States. Also in these galleries are Kahlo’s series of canvasses and drawings showing her sharp turn towards Surrealism.³

Notice how Davis’s “also in these galleries” appears parenthetical, like Kahlo herself. Out of eight essays in the exhibition catalogue, one concentrates on Kahlo alone (titled “The Lost Desire: Frida Kahlo in Detroit”), another makes a strange attempt to

interpret Rivera's work through letters between Kahlo and her father, Don Guillermo ("April 21, 1932"), and third one, Rosenthal's introductory essay, includes Kahlo in a discussion on the exhibition themes ("Diego and Frida: High Drama in Detroit"). The rest of the essays focus on Rivera and the murals: one on his relationship with then-Detroit Institute of Arts director Wilhelm Valentiner ("The Director and the Artist: Two Revolutionaries"), another on Arts Commission president Edsel Ford ("He's the Artist in the Family: The Life, Times, and Character of Edsel Ford"), a get-off-my-lawn contribution by a Wayne State University scholar about all the "racket" the murals caused in industrial Detroit ("Modern Racket"), and *two* essays on Rivera's full-sized cartoons for *Detroit Industry*. Rosenthal makes a point of noting Rivera has received criticism for his absent representation of women's labor in the mural cycle, but in the end, Rosenthal hardly does more, exhibiting Kahlo's work alongside Rivera's merely to defer gender and gender critique.

The DIA staff have been obsessed with the cartoons since 1979, when then-curator of education Linda Downs and an associate found them in storage, all rolled up and looking like water pipes along a dusty wall.⁴ The discovery led to the Ford Motor Company sponsored exhibition in 1985, "Diego Rivera: A Retrospective," with the cartoons at the center of a massive effort to show 340 artworks from institutions and private collectors.⁵ The exhibition included a documentary film. Downs's research during the exhibition came together in a 1999 catalogue, *Diego Rivera: The Detroit Industry Murals*. In the 2015 exhibition, the cartoons, *Detroit Industry*, and the museum itself again appear to be the main focus. Indeed, the catalogue begins with four, full-color, two-

page spreads of the murals and each of the trailing essays touches on the murals in some way.

Davis, in the opening lines of his review, offers an explanation for the DIA's cyclical investment in *Detroit Industry*:

During the Great Depression, the museum almost went under; the storm of publicity surrounding its commission of Diego Rivera's epic *Detroit Industry* frescoes in 1932 saved it, inspiring the city to step in to fund the DIA. Having just suffered another near-death experience amid Detroit's recent bankruptcy, the DIA is clearly hoping this show focusing on the art-history power couple's year in Motor City can serve as a symbolic comeback. It will certainly bring crowds.⁶

While Davis correctly gives the DIA the side-eye for its revisit of Rivera's work on the tail of Detroit's bankruptcy, he doesn't explain the role the DIA played in Detroit's bankruptcy through what has been luxuriously, nostalgically deemed the "Grand Bargain." In Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr's plan to settle the city's debt through bankruptcy, he promised "meaningful and necessary investment" to improve city services, foster economic and residential growth, reduce crime, and remove blight.⁷ The catch was city employees would have to give up sixteen percent of their pensions, or else ... the DIA would have to put up a chunk its collection — what Scott Kurashige calls "rarefied masterpieces" — for auction.⁸ "The fear of the museum losing the art proved more urgent to the moneyed elites than the fear of pensioners starving," Kurashige writes. In the end, Orr secured \$466 million in pledges, primarily from private foundations — which Lester Spence calls venture capitalist firms trafficking in ideas — and \$350 million in long-term state funding.⁹ Pensioners, meanwhile, took a settlement cut

to their pensions, which included an end to cost-of-living adjustments and city-sponsored healthcare.¹⁰

If *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit* is signaling a symbolic comeback for the museum, as Davis asserts, the exhibition is just an opportunity to talk about the *Detroit Industry*, its significance to the museum, and therefore the museum's significance to Detroit in order to secure the DIA's future, even if it means ruining the lives of city workers. The exhibition, rather than a verification of the museum's worth is an homage to the "monied elite." It is an attempt to hold space on Woodward Avenue. The museum, as a building, literally occupies space on Woodward. It is a cultural hub, defined by architecture and collections. As an institution, the DIA also holds space through the interpretation of its collections, which, I show in this chapter, cannot be viewed separately from its architecture. So, the question is: What exactly is the DIA holding up? If *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo* is a symbolic comeback, what is symbolically coming back through the literal space of the museum? The answer, I suggest, appears in phrase extracted from Linda Downs's reading of *Detroit Industry*.

In the late 1990s, with Downs's catalogue for the murals, the Detroit Institute of Arts began promoting "industry and technology as the indigenous culture of Detroit." I first picked up on the phrase in the DIA's promotional material during the summer of 2015 when I visited the site and the phrase appeared in locations throughout the DIA's website until at least May 21, 2018, when I grabbed a final screenshot.¹¹ It's not clear from the available materials whether Rivera himself ever made this claim, but the DIA has been invested in it

since Downs coined the phrase in her 1999 catalogue *Diego Rivera: The Detroit Industry Murals*. It also resonates particularly strongly today, while media refers to Detroit as an urban frontier and scholars apply settler colonial analysis to development in the city. If industry and technology are indigenous to Detroit, what are Indigenous people to the city?

Scholars and critics have written at length about the representation of labor in Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry* murals, much of it including focusing on Rivera's departure from the Mexican Communist Party. Anthony Lee writes Rivera's split with the Communist Party because of association with the October Group, a coalition of artists who kept critical distance from Stalinist social realism and ideological rigidity in favor of a free, experimental art.¹² David Craven suggests the Communist Party saw Rivera as an agent of U.S. imperialism, while Mark Rosenthal, a the DIA curator, emphasizes Rivera's employment with the Mexican government as the reason for the split.¹³ Rivera's trip to the U.S., Rosenthal supposes, must have been a welcome break from his conflict with the Communist Party, while Downs describes Rivera's break from the party as a utilitarian choice of "employment over politics."¹⁴ Meanwhile, scholars agree Rivera saw technology and productivity in the U.S. as analogous with Marx's understanding of capitalism as a potential for socialism.¹⁵ They also make much of Rivera's fascination with Henry Ford, who he saw as an unwitting custodian of communism, recalling Rivera's description of his visit to Russia. Visiting a workers home, he discovered a portrait of Stalin below three additional portraits: Ford appears alongside Vladimir Lenin and Karl Marx, because after all Ford made machines that made communism possible.¹⁶

Interpreting the murals themselves, scholars disagree whether or not a message prepared in Mexico and Russian was received by workers in the U.S, and then whether or not Rivera succeed in subverting the capitalist narrative of his employers. Lee addresses this split as an “ambivalence at the heart of [Rivera’s] practice.”¹⁷ Rivera, he writes, failed to find a more stable alternative form for labor other than the one presented by industry, so he fabricated one, but still allowed for competing political beliefs about the worker’s place in industrial life.¹⁸ And while I will draw some of these competing images in my analysis, the topic of this chapter is that which remains missing from Rivera’s murals and related scholarly discourse.

Scholars have given much ink to Rivera’s use of the assimilationist Mexican nationalist ideology of *indigenismo*, but they have not analyzed the operation of Indigeneity in the murals, especially as it relates to labor, and the ways in which it continues to be relevant to the DIA today in its location on Woodward Avenue. In this chapter, then, I argue Rivera’s mythologized Indigenous laborer subsumes Asian and Black labor into a universal whiteness while eliding immigrant (especially Mexican) labor, actual Indigenous people, and Indigenous land tenure. I suggest the DIA remains invested in this process through overtly discriminatory depictions in *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit*, from depictions of early Detroit as a territory beset by the “war whoops of Native Americans” and “terrified settlers” to conflations of Indigenous people with industrial laborers to the degradation of Rivera’s labor utopia. The exhibition catalogue also elevates creativity as a moral, even revolutionary, ethic realized not through labor but through business and industry. Drawing on theory from critical indigenous studies, visual studies, and architecture with regional and labor histories of

Detroit, I argue the DIA's investment in *Detroit Industry* is an attempt to hold space for whiteness on Woodward Avenue in the midst of a neoliberal redevelopment scheme focused on attracting "creative" white labor to Detroit. In this project, the phrase "industry and technology as the indigenous culture of Detroit" can be interpreted as a disciplinary technique to mean "*whiteness* is the indigenous culture of Detroit." Though the DIA abandoned the phrase in the 2015 catalogue for the Rivera and Kahlo exhibition, its insinuation remains in Downs' evocation of José Vasconcelos — proponent of *indigenismo* and patron of Rivera — but, more importantly, in the catalogue's reconfiguration of business as art and curation as revolution. The absence of any discussion on *indigenismo* also represents a desire to move from a right to occupy Indigenous land through cultural assimilation to a right earned through creativity and hard work. Business/capitalism appropriates Indigenous land and working-class labor as the context and precondition for its own expansion.

BUILDING DETROIT INDUSTRY

Detroit Industry is the DIA's most popular exhibit. The mural cycle and Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* are the only two "notable acquisitions" in the DIA's "About" page online.¹⁹ Premiering just five years after the museum itself opened, the murals appear in the center of the museum at the end of the promenade from the museum's entrance on Woodward Avenue. The murals are a central part of the museum's architecture, occupying a space originally conceived of as a winter garden by architect Paul Cret. Museum director William Valentiner's reorganization of the space from Garden Court to Rivera Court represents more than just an acquisition; rather, it is analogous to

ideological differences between Cret and Valentiner on the role of museums in the social and political life of the city.

The DIA established as a private institution in 1885, after a spontaneous exhibition of privately held works, art on consignment, works by children, and promenade concerts, attracted 138,472 paying visitors in a city of 200,000.²⁰ It opened in 1889 in a temporary location as a place of popular entertainment in which painting and sculpture appeared, cabinet-of-curiosities style, in no particular order with stuffed animals heads, needlework, coins, and student drawings.²¹ The new Arts Commission, tasked with developing new museum, began looking for a new location and an architect to fulfill their vision of cultural unity.

At the turn of the century, museums were meant to reflect a larger bourgeois vision of the city as, in John Kasson's words, "orderly, regulated, learned, prosperous, 'civilized.'"²² The museum was expected to transform historical artifacts into exemplars and inspire Americans to a higher purpose.²³ By about 1904, this meant carefully controlled selections and the installation of artifacts to bring viewers "optimistically designated the 'general public' to the realization of the transcendent potential of art."²⁴ It represented a shift from sculpture and objects loosely arranged to a regime of classification expressing quality and national and regional styles of art, limiting display to masterpieces "not simply as manifestations of individual genius" but as the "key moments of a history of the chronological and geographic development of style."²⁵ Martin Berger marks the turn to "masterpieces" as an historic shift to distinguish modern European "fine arts" (painting, sculpture, music, and architecture) from racialized craft traditions, thereby breaking a 2,000-year-old convention defining art as *any* activity

“practiced with skill and grace” to uphold values of the white elite.²⁶ Quoting Larry Shiner, Berger writes, “To elevate some genres to the spiritual status of fine art and their producers to heroic creators while relegating other genres to the status of mere utility and their producers to fabricators is more than a conceptual transformation.”²⁷ More than an ideological opposition between fine and craft arts, Berger continues, the whiteness of art “is a structural reality that rigidly polices access to economic and cultural resources on the basis of race,” class and gender.²⁸

By 1920, when Detroit’s population was largely immigrant with a growing Black workforce, white industrialists were preoccupied with “American values” and countered social diversity with “melting pot” ideology, reflected in the reorganization of city government to non-partisan elections, “at-large candidates” to break up ward politics and political parties.²⁹ The new museum could play an instrumental role in fostering the values of an American elite preoccupied with instilling the value of cultural unity in the face of increasing social and ethnic diversity.³⁰ Yet, as Berger argues, “architecture, design and arrangement of American expositions increasingly invoked racial others to articulate imperial, national, and racial identity.³¹ Thus, the selection of the new museum’s location would have to reflect the elite’s desire to center this unity around its own interests and, at the time, European-Americans perceived a clash between the commercial and industrial identity of the neighborhood and the cultural aspirations off the institution, which we can read as another attempt to exclude workers considering how many dollars of capital came from commercial and industrial profits.³² Indeed, Edsel Ford was president of the Arts Commission and his principal architect, Albert Kahn, was the commission’s consulting architect. In the end, the commission found a location in a

fashionable residential area along Woodward Ave and, to solidify their claim to the neighborhood's cultural identity, they subsequently lobbied the city to build the Detroit Public Library across the street with the desire of creating a cultural center in the city.³³

The location secured, the commission approached Paul Cret on Kahn's suggestion with the understanding the museum architecture would reflect the new values for displaying art. It could have a stylistic history, but it had to properly highlight painting and sculpture to elevate public taste and values.³⁴ The museum was expected to have a classical façade and imposing interior, a staircase embedded in columned and vaulted foyers, and hallways to represent the public significance of art. Cultural unity could be achieved by reducing open space to galleries where meaning could be produced and contained. The galleries had to be banal to highlight the art.³⁵ Cret had different ideas. He went for an eclectic style rooted in transitory culture, rather than the transcendence of modern architectural theory.³⁶ He wanted the architecture to play a role, to be visible, and he wanted a constant variety of settings within overall architectural unity, including variable lighting for different subjects, rather than diffuse or dramatic top-lighting.³⁷ Customized galleries with shapes, lighting, ornamentation. Proposed a t-shape designed to break from rectangular style of modernism, and an early design included curved galleries at the front to give the impression of unpredictability.³⁸ Instead of stairs separating the street world from the elite art world, Cret proposed a winter garden. He also provided a visual "bridge" over Woodward to the Detroit Public library.³⁹

Though Cret didn't seem to recognize the inherent whiteness of the museum, he did seem to understand architecture could undermine the social (and racial) determinations of fine art categorization and selection. He aspired to an architectural

unity that “would make the works of art appear as what they were, fragmentary remains from other cultures that time and chance had brought together and that now served the pleasure and edification of the viewer.”⁴⁰ Time, chance, and of course colonialism. In the end, he conceded to an amended box plan with a winter garden in the center and he replaced the visual bridge with a driveway and a broad but shallow flight of stairs to accommodate cars and a grand entrance.⁴¹ The commission was satisfied with Cret’s combination of traditional and innovative features, but at the last minute hired Wilhelm Valentiner as the museum’s new director, demonstrating, as Elizabeth Grossman argues, the DIA dedication to the melting pot ideal as a government agent.

Wilhelm Valentiner came from decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He was interested in emotional “atmosphere” of individual works and called for a whole museum full period rooms, galleries in which meaning could be articulated not just through the selection of artworks but through the procession of space. “Period audiences,” Berger writes, “knew that the sequence of bisected and shallow arches moved them through space in a manner that had a significant influence on their experience.”⁴² To wit, Valentiner wanted to “create a series of theatrical events that would transport the visitor to other times and places” and to make this happen, the galleries had to match the artworks of art, not a larger architectural scheme.⁴³

In the end, Cret lost control of the galleries to Valentiner, but he got to keep his winter garden, the Garden Court so essential to all his conceptions of the museum: it was the climax of promenade, the atrium for Mediterranean and Asian art, and the entrance to the auditorium.⁴⁴ A classical grotto with a heavy frame of carved travertines, cypress beams, a cascading fountain pool full of fish, basins of ferns and palms, and benches and

iron furniture, the Garden Court fulfilled Cret's vision of the museum as a place of pleasure and artifice, not to be confused with real life.⁴⁵ The museum opened with the Garden Court in 1927, but Valentiner got the last word just five years later, when he went to Edsel Ford with a request to commission Diego Rivera for a monumental artwork to fill the Garden Court.⁴⁶ Rivera was on board to overwhelm the "baroque architecture" of the museum, especially the Garden Court, with his vision, and he persuaded Valentiner to remove the fountain and let him cover all the walls.⁴⁷

With Rivera's subject and aesthetic, Valentier destroyed Cret's hope for the court as a place of refuge, instead elevating the DIA's "moral mandate" to educate the public. Cret and Kahn opposed the murals, but Ford overpowered them.⁴⁸ Thus, what the museum lacked in architecture, from Valentier's perspective, he inserted into one of its most prominent features, Garden Court, eventually renamed Rivera Court. In doing so, he fulfilled what Berger describes as the white imperial vision of museums: "Not only did black, brown, yellow, and red bodies signal everything that whites were not, but, as Curtis Hinsley contends, the 'exhibition techniques tended to represent [nonwhite] peoples as raw materials' for the creation of civilized societies."⁴⁹ Berger might as well have been talking specifically about *Detroit Industry*.

THE INDIGENOUS CULTURE OF DETROIT

Generally read east, west, north, south, the murals portray the geological, technological, and human history of Detroit, boiled down to four continents (Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe), four raw materials (coal, iron, sand, lime), and four colorized races (Black, Red, Yellow, White), to go along with the four directions. The east, Downs

writes, is the direction of the rising sun, “the origin and abundance of life.” The west is the direction of “the setting sun, death and afterlife, the last judgement.” North is “the absence of light, darkness, and the interior world.” South represents “light, the exterior world, and the surface of things.”⁵⁰

Entering from the west as Rivera and Cret intended, viewers first encounter the east wall. Also an entranceway, the wall is divided into several panels, with a large opening in the middle, supported by two columns, with arched windows on either side. A stairway extends left to right behind the columns on the ground level. A horizontal panel sits atop the columns with another opening and two smaller columns above that. This horizontal panel holds the main image, intended to be an orchard scene with tractors and workers depicting agriculture as the beginning of technology. Rivera changed it to reflect on Frida Kahlo’s miscarriage during their time in Detroit.⁵¹ It depicts an infant in the bulb of a plant, rooted in soil. Plowshares appear in the corners and in the panel on either side of the main panel, above the arched windows, Rivera has depicted fruits and vegetables commonly found in Michigan. In the panels above the fruits and vegetables, nude women represent European and Indigenous populations of the Americas. The nude on the left with golden hair and bronze skin holds wheat, representing North America. The woman on the right with dark hair and skin holds apples, representing South America.

Across the court, the west wall counters the origins of modern technology on the east wall with its denouement in Detroit industry. Rather than cars, however, Rivera depicts airplanes as the height of transportation technology, both as passenger planes (on the left) and instruments of war (on the right). The image appears in the upper register, split part-way in the middle by a vent and on either side by architectural ornamentation.

Below the left corner panel, a bird of peace appears. Below the right corner panel, a bird of war. The west wall, with only a ground-level entranceway and two arched windows, has much more surface than the east wall. On either side of the entrance, between it and the windows, two vertical panels depict scenes from Ford's Power House #1, designed by Albert Kahn. On the left, a worker generalized as Rivera stands with arms resting on a flat surface.⁵² He's holding a hammer in his right hand and his glove on the left hand features a red star. Behind him, the component parts of a steam generator reach up the wall. The image ends at the cross-section to a second level where workers hunch over to look into a blast furnace. On the right-side vertical panel, a manager thought to be a composite of Henry Ford and Thomas Edison stands with his arms outstretched on a flat surface.⁵³ Where the worker is looking down and resting on his arms, the manager is grimacing and propping himself up. He holds a ruler and appears to have blueprints of some kind in front of him. Behind him, the power house's electricity generator. Above the cross-section, workers stand upright along a wall of gauges, hands on release valves. Rivera painted all of these panels in full color.

The panel in the middle register, directly opposite the child in the bulb of a plant, is the only scene Rivera prepared in a monochrome format. It has *trompe l'oeil* quality, appearing like an intaglio etching into the surface of the wall. This scene represents the interdependence of North America and South America, as its title "The Interdependence of North and South" suggests. Originally designed to depict workers drawing rubber from trees, Rivera pushed Ford's Brazilian rubber plantation and its workers to the far right. On the opposite side, industrial workers operate port machinery. The plantation workers are shirtless and shoeless, wearing wide-brimmed hats. The industrial workers are fully

clothed, wearing cuffed pants, work boots, gloves, and caps. Between the workers, a body of water said to represent both the Amazon and the Detroit River, though it has also been described as the Rouge River.⁵⁴ Fish swim from the plantation shore. Single-manned boats race toward the fish from the Industrial shore. Across the river in the near distance and the background, freighters stretch across the scene. The skyline of Detroit appears in the distance. In the center of the scene along the top, a star sits between half a face and half a skull.

Moving to the north and south walls, the murals represent “the four races” and the four elements for steel, as well as the automobile industry and secondary technological industries such as science and medicine. Though also divided by architecture elements such as vents, columns, arched notches, and doorways, the north and south walls are much larger. Before Rivera insisted on filling the whole court, he had originally been commissioned only to paint the north and south walls and they remain the central focus of the installation, following a basic organizational pattern: monumental figures in the upper registers, the elements below, then workers in the factories, and modern day-in-the-life predellas along the bottom. The upper corners contain images related to science and medicine.

The monumental figures on the north wall are Indigenous (red) and African (black). The elements below them are iron ore and coal. The monumental figures on the south wall are European (white) and Asian (yellow). The corresponding elements are lime and sand. On the north walls, the corner panels depict gas bomb production and vaccines. On the south walls, the corner panels depict pharmaceuticals and commercial chemicals. The central panels are a coterie of images depicting worker, managers, elite

observers, and patrons within the guts of a factory based almost exclusively on Ford's River Rouge plant. In the north, the workers prepare component parts. In the south, they assemble auto-bodies. The narrative from primitive accumulation through agriculture to industrial modernity concludes on the south wall, where the only finished product appears as a tiny red car outside the factory.

Much has been made of Rivera's class consciousness, his relationship to the Communist Party, and his understanding of Marxism. In addition to Downs and Rosenthal who wrote with support from the DIA, David Craven and Anthony Lee provide insightful interpretations of the murals through historical and contextual readings of Detroit labor relations. While details of these readings and interpretations come into play in the analysis ahead, I focus on (absent) representations and confluences of Indigeneity and immigration in the murals in relation to Downs's statement that Rivera depicted "industry and technology as the indigenous culture of Detroit." Downs sees an historical similarity between Mexico City of the 1920s, in the midst of revolution, and Detroit in the early 1930s, decimated by industrial decline. In this juxtaposition, Indigenous people and industrial workers belong to a unified proletariat class and Downs isn't the only person to make this connection. I will address the proletarianization of the Indigenous people later in this chapter. For now, I want to focus on Downs's deployment of Indigeneity as an industrial ethos. In 1999, Downs wrote,

Just as the Mexican muralists had painted images that connected ancient cultures of Mexico to contemporary Indian culture, so did Rivera introduce *industry and technology as the indigenous culture of Detroit*. He aspired to broaden interest in industrial design and promote a greater understanding, acceptance, and celebration of the working class as well as American engineering genius. An idealist, he saw himself as an ambassador of cultural revolution. He brought the realities of the factory into the rarefied aesthetic atmosphere of the city's art museum. The

Detroit murals include the concept of the continuity of indigenous American culture. The meeting of the ancient past of North and South America in the artists' eyes represented a common Pan-American culture.⁵⁵

On the next page, Downs writes the opposite: Rivera abandoned the “grave realities” of the Depression to concentrate on the “strength of [Detroit’s] indigenous industrial culture.”⁵⁶ Later, misreading a statement by Rivera’s biographer Bertram Wolfe, she writes, “[T]he end result is that he synthesized seemly contradictory beliefs to present an image of hope.”⁵⁷ What Wolfe said is Rivera, “[i]n making his work utopian, saved his ideological contradictions” to avoid putting his career in danger.⁵⁸ Unable to resolve the tension between Rivera’s idealized factory and the life the real factory provided workers, Downs fabricates a utopian reading of the murals, where Indigeneity acts a temporal and geographic claim to America eliding the present in which Rivera painted the murals. However, much as Downs may be responsible for connecting industry and technology to Indigeneity, she didn’t arrive there on her own. She had some help from Mexico’s Minister of Education, José Vasconcelos.

As Minister of Education from 1920-1924, Vasconcelos was as a proponent and progenitor of the Mexican nationalist concept of *indigenismo* — a historical continuum between modern Mexican culture and ancient Indian culture as the source of Mexican national identity.⁵⁹ He developed the concept of *mestizaje* “as a mode of Mexican nationalism,” writes Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez, “that called for the whitening of the race, that is, breeding out the indigenous and African qualities of the Mexican race.”⁶⁰ Vasconcelos, in other words, was a eugenicist. Lest there be doubt about his white supremacist vision, let’s have a look at what he wrote in *La Raza Cosmica*:

As research advances, more support is found for the hypothesis of Atlantis and the cradle of a civilization that flourished millions of years ago in the anguished continent and in parts of what is today America. The thought of Atlantis evokes the memory of her mysterious predecessors... [which] vanished without a trace... [T]he Lemurians or the black race from the south; the Atlantean civilization of the red men; immediately afterwards, the emergence of the yellow races, and finally the civilization of the white men.⁶¹

In his explanation claiming “intuition supported by the facts of history and science,” Vasconcelos imagines four stages of geological development on four continents with four corresponding races. While the other races rose and decline, the white race, “after organizing itself in Europe, became the invader of the world” and subsequently “brought the world to a state in which all human types and cultures will be able to fuse with each other.”⁶² He describes colonization as a “period of general and definitive transformation” leading to “a new race fashioned out of the treasures of all the previous ones: The final race, the cosmic race.”⁶³

While scholars tend to agree with Guidotti-Hernandez’s reading of Vasconcelos, they differ on whether or not artists, scholars, and writers who evoke *mestizaje* automatically reproduce Vasconcelos’s whitewashed *mestizaje*. Writing elsewhere about border art through Gloria Anzaldúa’s conception of *mestiza*, I summarized the argument this way:

[Guidotti-Hernandez argues] Anzaldúa derives the *mestiza* at the heart of her Chicana feminist perspective from a misreading of José Vasconcelos’s *la raza cósmica*. She reads what Vasconcelos figures as a whitening of the race for the sake of Mexican nationalism as a claim to self-determination, dignity and civil rights. In contrast, [José] Saldívar argues convincingly that Anzaldúa actually goes beyond the “twoness of national consciousness” through her use of language. Guisela Latorre has also argued that “indigenism” (or “the act of consciously adopting an indigenous identity”) in Chicano art is an ambivalent appropriation that may also work for Indigenous people. Further against Guidotti-Hernandez, Latorre writes, “Anzaldúa stripped *mestizaje* of the essentialism that

Vasconcelos had advocated and reformulated it to include the previously marginalized experiences of women and lesbians. The different stakes illustrated by these selections demonstrate that border identity — especially between Indigenous people and Chicanas/os for whom a claim to Indigenous roots is critical — remains open for interpretation. This state of unsettledness erupts when *mestizo*, Chicano, or even Anglo claims to Indigenous heritage become claims to property rights, citizenship, or the right to define history.⁶⁴

It's at this juncture of rights, citizenship, and history that Downs, and by extension the DIA, enters the debate. However, where scholars like David Craven and Anthony Lee, defend Rivera's *indigenismo* as a break from Mexican nationalism, Downs digs in with Vasconcelos.

In 1920, Vasconcelos sent Rivera to Italy to study public art of the Renaissance and following year, invited Rivera, along with a host of Mexican muralists, to study Indigenous art of the Yucatan at the archeological sites of Chichen, Itza, and Uxmal.⁶⁵ Six month after Rivera's trip, Vasconcelos commissioned him to paint a mural at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City, where, Downs writes, Rivera was excited to associate himself with the new government and the spirit of change."⁶⁶ The resulting mural, *Creation*, David Craven writes, embodies Vasconcelos's racial fusion philosophy; however, Rivera was displeased with the result and by the time he received his next commission from Vasconcelos, for the Ministry of Education, Rivera took more creative and critical license.⁶⁷ Rivera worked on the murals from 1923-1928, at a time when Rivera's growing fame made it difficult for the Mexican government to remove Rivera or destroy his work.⁶⁸ Though Vasconcelos had resigned his post in 1924, he still made a point of criticizing the murals, to which Rivera responded by denouncing Vasconcelos's "exoticism" and "orientalism."⁶⁹ In defense of Rivera, Craven identifies Rivera with the manifesto of the "Mexican Muralist Renaissance," which defined the collage style and

corresponding *mestizaje* figure as a combination of Western and non-Western aesthetics and ideals, nonlinear history, a reconsideration of visual language conventions, and, importantly, a commitment to anti-colonialism and internationalism compatible with national self-definition.⁷⁰ Rivera's work breaks from Vasconcelos, he writes, by reclaiming "the past like a campesino reclaiming his land," and he credits Rivera with forging a new national language in the arts based in a "transcultural" vision decentering European art.⁷¹

Mary Coffey is not so generous with Rivera or the Mexican muralists, writing in 2006 Rivera's eclecticism and progressive narrative continued in at the Ministry of Education even after Vasconcelos took his assimilationist agenda with him.⁷² Rivera's dependence on Indigenous people as a vision of past and future and a basis of education mirrors Vasconcelos's disciplinary rhetoric.⁷³ Preceding Guidotti-Hernandez's warning about *mestizaje* by eight years, Coffey writes Rivera's "idealization of indigenous culture is complicated by the assimilative governmental initiatives that were undertaken simultaneously."⁷⁴ She continues:

"Under the auspices of national progress, these initiatives employed culture and education to reorganize the affiliations and conduct of Mexico's indigenous populations into a homogenized citizenry that was predicated on the principle of *mestizaje* (racial and cultural mixing)."⁷⁵

What Downs, Rivera, and Craven celebrate as a liberatory vision for the future, Coffey describes as the "disciplinary logic of modernizing nationalism ... making the indigene an object of both knowledge and regulation, as well as the proscribed subject of national development."⁷⁶ Going further, she shows *indigenismo* had its corollary in colonial aesthetics and national identity across the globe, whether it be "True North" in Canada, endless frontiers in the U.S., or the *Pampa* in

Argentina.⁷⁷ Thus, at the same time Vasconcelos called for Mexican people to draw on their cultural heritage, “Machine Age” modernism in the U.S. expressed “admiration for all [Americans] thought was lost to them — namely, appreciation for rural life and spiritual values such as could readily be found south of the border.”⁷⁸ When Rosenthal, following this logic, compares Rivera to “Machine Age” modern artist Fernand Léger he signals not just an international aesthetic, but a colonial imperative to form national identity through encounters with Indigenous people. The same year Downs and the DIA released the catalogue for the murals, Wanda Corn unmasked the nationalist tendencies of American modernism through the circle of artists around Alfred Stieglitz, including Georgia O’Keeffe, Charles Demuth, and to a lesser degree Marsden Hartley. Corn ties Hartley, in particular, to Rivera and nation-building projects such as *indigenismo*, writing,

Like Diego Rivera in Mexico who was similarly tracing a lineage between modern artists and ancient native cultures, Hartley sought some genealogical connection between modernists like himself and Native Americans, and between Manhattan and another part of the country. While Rivera would make a life-long commitment to promoting such cultural unities, inventing a powerful iconography to bring native and modern cultures into a *utopian* continuum, Hartley ... soon lost his sense of excitement about, and connection with, indigenous culture. But other artists after him venerated the religiosity and spiritual ancestry offered by Native American culture.⁷⁹

Rivera, then, was part of a larger obsession with machines, technology, business (especially advertising aesthetics) and Indigenous people as not just a national art, but as the foregrounding and consequence of the nation itself.

AMERICANIZATION

In Detroit, Craven writes, Rivera spent three months capturing the “human spirit” embodied in the machines, both “inherently good” as suggested by Machine Age modernists and “intrinsically evil” as suggested by Mexican muralists like José Clemente Orozco, author of the Mexican muralist manifesto.⁸⁰ This can be seen in images split by benefit and detriment and their corollaries in nature: a passenger plane coupled with a peaceful bird, a war plane coupled with a predatory bird. Adding geological processes and a utopian vision to the history of Detroit industry, Rivera expanded on the charge handed him by his benefactors, Arts Commission president and DIA financial backer Edsel Ford and DIA director Wilhelm Valentiner. His dual theme, Craven writes, was industry’s dependence on natural resources and the expansion of nature’s potential through technological development.⁸¹ The dependence between nature and technology included a series of nested interdependencies: agricultural production and industrial production, agrarian southern countries and the industrial northern countries, leisure classes and “indigenous” labor classes. If, in *Detroit Industry*, these interdependences converge through the notion of an idealized Native laborer who is neither Mexican nor affiliated with any of the hundreds of tribes recognized in the U.S., then they do so while sweeping Asian and African workers into a white industrial nation, as well.

With Terry Smith, Craven recognizes the emphasis on class in *Detroit Industry* subsumes the influence of race on Detroit labor relations, but race is very present in the murals through the conflation of Indigeneity and industrial labor. Rivera clearly meant for the four races to align with the four elements in order to suggest while the elements come together to create automobiles, the races come together through industrial culture (i.e. modernity). This is explicit in the depiction of iron ore and coal funneling into the

blast furnace in the factory panel on the south wall and this interpretation is not in dispute. While Craven and Lee reading racial blending as a representation of “all human history,” however, Downs approaches the four races via Vasconcelos.⁸² She writes,

To Rivera, the yellow race is the oldest and most numerous and thus it is compared to sand, which is used in making molds for steel. The red race was the first in the Americas and thus is like iron ore, whose crystals reminded him of Indian decoration. The black race’s aesthetic sense I like fire and its labor represents the hard strength that carbon in coal gives to steel. Carbon under pressure produces diamonds. The white race has a disciplined structural character and is the organizer of the world, which, like lime brings other agents together, as in the making of steel.⁸³

For Downs, Rivera’s racist organization of ethnicity is entirely excusable because “[i]t was common practice to assign stereotypical racial characteristics, and Rivera’s intention was to describe each race positively.”⁸⁴ Downs is more concerned with progress, connecting the abstract monumental figures of the four races to the workers in the main panels: “In a metaphorical sense,” she writes, “Rivera viewed Detroit’s multiracial workforce as the indigenous people of the city’s industrial culture and as such it’s link to the civilization of the future.”⁸⁵ Through this racialized narrative of progress from mythological Indigenous past to agrarian idyll to modern industry, we can also see a repeat of Rivera’s work at the Ministry of Education where, Coffey writes, the murals “promote the indigenous largely in the name of proletarianization.”⁸⁶

In the first of a new body of Indigenous scholarship looking at the relationship between capitalism, Marxism, and Indigeneity, Glen Coulthard reminds readers Indigenous dispossession begins with land, not labor, and he therefore offers a corrective for Marxism: “The historical process of primitive accumulation,” he writes, “refers to the violent transformation of noncapitalist forms of life into capitalist ones.”⁸⁷ By accepting the Marxist conception of primitive accumulation as a fixed historical period,



Figure 7. "The Red and Black Races" (1932-1933). Diego Rivera. Detroit Institute of Arts. Author photo.

dispossession continues to reproduce colonial and capitalist social relations in the present through neoliberal, state-orchestrated enclosures.⁸⁸ Though barbaric, Marx argues, colonial dispossession brought Indians into the fold of capitalist modernity. Therefore, proletarianization is on the way to liberation/emancipation for Indigenous people via socialism. That would be Rivera's position. However, Coulthard retorts, proletarianization is a process through which Indigenous people are forced into capitalism on their own land. Cheap, imported labor, moreover, meant less need for Indigenous labor, so Indigenous struggle is over land, not status as emergent "rightless proletarians."⁸⁹ Ongoing dispossession, then, is produced by neoliberal governance reducing Indigenous people to a culture divorced from political authority, whereas Coulthard understands Indigenous culture as an interconnected totality of a distinct mode of life encompassing the economic, political, spiritual, and social.⁹⁰

Thus, the conflation of Indigeneity and industrial labor in Rivera's four races continues the dispossession of Indigenous people through assimilation, at the same time it folds Black and immigrant labor into the funnel of modernity, much like industry itself does. "The explicit link between race and industrial production that Rivera articulated verbally and through his art," Esch writes, "was one that Henry Ford made as well."⁹¹ But what we also see in Rivera's conflation of the Indigenous Mexican with Industrial labor



Figure 8. “The White and Yellow Races” (1932-1933). Diego Rivera. Detroit Institute of Arts. Author photo.

is the erasure of both immigrant Mexican labor and Indigenous culture, as described by Coulthard. This Indigenous culture is precisely what Rivera elides in *Detroit Industry*, making possible Downs’s description of Detroit’s “multiracial workforce” as the city’s Indigenous people. Where the combination of “The Red and Black Races” (fig. 7) on the north wall and “The White and Yellow Races” (fig. 8) on the south wall represents a mythological assimilation of essentialized racial types, “The Interdependence of North and South” (fig. 9) on the west wall suggests cultural assimilation according to an industrial hierarchy from nature/primitive to industrial/modern. It provides, intentionally or not, the only link to the labor necessary to harvest the raw materials for automobile production — none of Ford’s foundries in the upper peninsula of Michigan appear in the murals— while simultaneously evoking Indigeneity and, I argue, immigration. The connection comes through Detroit’s Americanization movement, which attempted to assimilate immigrant laborers in the U.S. as well as, Indigenous laborers at Ford’s Brazilian rubber plantation, to U.S. lifeways more beneficial to industry from an industry-centered “work ethic” to nuclear family life.

With a surplus of labor following Ford’s five-dollar-a-day wage, the Committee for Immigrants in America used inflated data from the 1910 census to warn masses of immigrants would, Anne Brophy writes, provide “fertile soil for the seeds of anarchy and

violent socialism.”⁹² The only solution, they argued, was massive Americanization focused on the image of immigrants as “impressionable individuals,” who could be contained only if they weren’t allow to influence each other.⁹³ Thus the Americanization Committee of Detroit, active from 1915-1931, combined job training and employability with a proper home life through a melting pot approach: ACD attempted to eradicate ethnic organizations while calling for a form of assimilation incorporating “the best the immigrants had to offer into their own culture.”⁹⁴ With a “backdrop of intense xenophobia, nativism, and racism” after World War I, ⁹⁵ fear of detention and deportation for unemployed immigrants and “alien radicals” sent hundreds of immigrants into Americanizing night schools. As the decade wore on, however, industrialists were less interested in working with ACD, so the organization shifted to agency work focused on “the processes of adjustment of peoples of alien races to the requirement of the social environment in the America of today.”⁹⁶

As an ideology and a process beyond the formal structure of ACD, Americanization included Ford’s Sociological Department (discussed in chapter one), which Ford attempted to export to Brazil on his failed rubber plantation, represented in “The Interdependence of North and South.” As Elizabeth Esch demonstrates in her work on Ford’s Amazonian company town, Fordlândia, Rivera included the rubber plantation as an extension of his overall interdependence narrative (i.e. nature and industry,



Figure 9. “The Interdependence of North and South” (1932-1933). Diego Rivera. Detroit Institute of Arts. Author photo.

primitive and modern), while re-producing “the idea that industry’s ‘development’ of the natural world would provide the basis for human liberation,” a racial discourse all-too-familiar from Vasconcelos.⁹⁷ Brazilian rubber tappers are also the only people outside of the U.S. to appear in the murals. Ford chose Brazil specifically for the potential to recruit specific racialized type, whose “mixed-race” status (i.e. part white) made them made them improvable.⁹⁸ In Detroit, Ford had his own ideas about what it meant to be improved and, therefore tied his five-dollar-day for immigrants, like other Americanization programs, to everyday behaviors, such as sobriety, cleanliness, marriage, English literacy, and religion (preferably Christianity).⁹⁹ In Brazil, this meant wearing shoes, living on the plantation, returning to work day after getting paid, eleven-hour days, through the heat of midday.¹⁰⁰ It also meant controlling the regional ecology, which Ford saw as a problem, not only because it was dense and unmanageable, but because it made the workforce unmanageable.¹⁰¹ Thus, the built environment of Ford’s plantation included hospital, barracks, cafeteria, and mill to discipline Fordlândia residents, not only by containing them, but by using, for instance, doctors to distinguish between sick and “lazy” workers.¹⁰² At the site of the hospital, Fordlândia exhibits what Michel Foucault called “governmentality,” which, Coffey reminds us, “refers to the ‘problematics of rule,’ but “also refers to a ‘mentality’ or way of thinking about ... authority ... ‘as a *practice*.’”¹⁰³ Coffey writes, “Foucault’s coupling of the words ‘govern’ and ‘mentality’ signals the extent to which the reflection of experts participates in the regulation of individual and group conduct.”¹⁰⁴

In the end, however, Indigenous workers in Brazil refused to be governed and led strikes against the company; Ford relocated in 1934, only to pull out altogether when

synthetic rubber was invented.¹⁰⁵ We can only speculate on how Rivera, who completed *Detroit Industry* in 1934, may have reconsidered “The Interdependence of North and South” in reflection of this fact. The failure of Fordlândia does seem to presage the evacuation of the auto industry from Detroit in response to increasing pressure from organized (Black) labor, just as, Esch argues, “life on the plantation ... reflects the accumulated practices of Ford, in its Americanization programs at Highland Park and in its repressive system of rules in the Rouge plant.”¹⁰⁶

Where Ford did not see governmentality (i.e. Americanization) in Brazil or Detroit as forms of imperial domination, Esch writes, Rivera erased Indigenous laborers and obscured the capitalist violence of Fordlândia. Rivera’s use of a monochrome *trompe l’oeil* technique, furthermore, suggests a sort of nostalgic gaze to the past, as if looking at cave drawings. Perhaps this explain why, Esch observes, rubber tappers find no place in Rivera’s cosmology, “being actually neither yellow nor red, neither black nor white.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, they aren’t represented in Rivera’s monumental figures of the four races and are therefore excluded not only from history, but also Rivera’s utopian future. Though Ford wanted to “proletarianize” and “civilize” rubber tappers through industry, they remain outside the nation as imperial subjects.¹⁰⁸ Esch, in her analysis, encourages us, then, to reconsider Rivera’s idealized figure of the “red” race. If Rivera’s Indigenous figure is based on an idealized Indigenous Mexican of the past, a la *indigenismo*, where are immigrant Mexican workers and Native Americans?

In her review of anthropologist/historian Jovita Gonzalez’s Texas literature. Guidotti-Hernandez recognizes the deployment of ancient Mexican Indigeneity as a nation-building, labor-multiplying technology. Gonzalez, Guidotti-Hernandez writes,

never mentions tribal affiliations: “Unlike the vanished Kiowa, Comanche, and Apaches, these generic Mexican Indians, ostensibly the descendants of the extinct Aztecs, are a part of Gonzalez’s imagined Texas-Mexican nation, where they will be productive citizens and laborers.¹⁰⁹ But, where Gonzalez’s “Aztec-descended Mexican Indian” erases Afro-Mestizo, African-American, and Native American subjects along the U.S.-Mexico border, Rivera’s generic red race negates immigrant Mexican labor and, with Coulthard’s reorientation of primitive accumulation as ongoing dispossession, Native American land tenure, while sweeping Black and Asian labor into the machinery of progress (pun intended).¹¹⁰ This relation, this structure, can’t be described as any other than settler colonialism.

BORDER IMPERIALISM

Detroit, as I’ve argued throughout this dissertation, is a bordertown. Recent scholarship has demonstrated the ways in which geopolitical borders uphold and reinforce settler territoriality while providing a service to a neoliberal capitalist economy ostensibly valuing hard work and self-motivation, while requiring a mechanism (deportation) to control labor and provide greater economic security for white settlers. As Juan Gomez-Quinones and Irene Vásquez, “Complaints about immigration practices and against immigrant residents coexisted with the entrepreneurial practices that encouraged immigrants.”¹¹¹ Migrants, Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes, are the perpetual foreigner in the settler state, “allocated a position within whiteness that is off white.”¹¹² She continues, “Certain migrants function within the logic of possession to legitimize patriarchal white sovereignty through their presence and subscription to national core

values tied to capital.”¹¹³ Meanwhile, the “illegal immigrant” ideologically affirms the “possessiveness of a patriarchal white sovereignty through its border-protection policy.”¹¹⁴ The policing of national borders — this right to exclude — assumes the prior white possession of Indigenous lands.¹¹⁵

In Iyko Day’s excellent study of settler colonialism and Asian racialization in the U.S., she notes, with Adam McKeown, “border controls are not a remnant of an ‘illiberal’ political tradition, but a product of self-conscious pioneers of political freedoms and self-rule.”¹¹⁶ The “moving spirit of settler colonialism,” she writes, “is transnational but distinctly national, similar but definitely not the same, repetitive but without a predictable rhythm, structural but highly susceptible to change, everywhere but hard to isolate.”¹¹⁷ Importantly, she links Indigenous dispossession, racialized labor recruitment, immigration restrictions, and internments to the settler colonial control of land and labor. Monika Kashyap makes similar connections, writing, “In addition to Indigenous elimination, settler colonialism depends on the subordination of racialized outsiders in order to extract value from the invaded and expropriated Indigenous lands, secure its colonial foothold, and fuel its expansion. Subordination refers to a variety of methods and practices such as enslavement, exploitation, exclusion, criminalization, manipulation, and elimination.” Where the transatlantic African slave trade provides a “quintessential example” of settler colonialism, in Kashyap’s work, she also demonstrates the ways in which settler colonialism acts as a bordering process that multiplies labor through immigration policy. “For example, in the 1840s, the United States recruited Chinese men to fill pivotal labor needs in railroad construction, domestic work, and laundry industries. Then, after a period of economic recession, Congress passed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion

Act, which restricted new immigration from China. Similarly, in the 1940s, the United States recruited close to 5 million Mexicans to work in agricultural and railroad industries through the Bracero Program.”¹¹⁸ As these programs and exclusions demonstrate, extracted, forced, and deported labor is also a product of industrialization.

Finally, focusing on the violence of exclusion on U.S. borders, Harsha Walia uses the term “border imperialism” to describe the settler colonial processes by which “the violences and precarities of displacement and migration are *structurally* created as well as maintained.”¹¹⁹ She identifies four overlapping structures: mass displacement of impoverished and colonized communities and the securitization of the border against them; criminalization of migration with extreme discipline for those deemed “alien” or “illegal”; racialized hierarchies of citizenship; and state-mediated exploitation of migrant labor, “akin to conditions of slavery and servitude, by capital interests.”¹²⁰ Immigrant laws, she writes, criminalize migrants while legalizing the occupation of Indigenous lands.¹²¹

In the previous section, I describe *Detroit Industry* a racialized labor narrative that erases Indigenous and immigrant Mexican subjectivities while subsuming Black and Asian laborers into the White capitalist structure. Here, I continue that analysis with a history of Mexican immigration to Detroit and concurrent labor discourses designed to limit migration across the U.S.-Canadian border. Looking to tighten restrictions on Canadian commuters, Detroit labor organizations and the U.S. Department of Labor eventually raised concerns about U.S. sovereign control over its territories and borders, writ large. The Secretary of Labor racialized the issue when he warned of hordes of Mexican laborers streaming in from the U.S.-Mexico border.¹²² What began as an attempt

to block strike-breaking Canadian labor resulted in massive deportations of Mexican laborers instead.

In the 1910s and 1920s, well before the Bracero Program, the U.S. recruited Mexican immigrants to work industries such as railroad construction, mining, steel, ranching and farming.¹²³ Their willingness to work for low wages was a determining factor for agricultural and industrial interests, but, “in the elite U.S. imagination,” write Juan Gomez-Quinones and Irene Vásquez, they provided an additional service to capital in the form of “a laboring group did not intrude into the important facets of society—major politics, public institutions, high culture, and so forth.”¹²⁴ In Michigan, sugar companies throughout state brought thousands of Mexican immigrants to the state to as contract laborers on beet farms.¹²⁵ Paralleling settlement patterns of Black and white migrants arriving from the South, Mexican laborers began finding work in auto factories and foundries after World War I.¹²⁶ By 1925, the majority of Detroit’s Mexican population lived in the southwest part of the city near Ford’s River Rouge plant.¹²⁷ Most of them worked for Ford.¹²⁸ By 1930, the Ford Motor Company — including the Highland Park, River Rouge, and Fordson tractor plants — employed approximately 4,000 Mexicans, making it the largest employer of Mexican laborers semi-skilled.¹²⁹ Over the same period the Bureau of Immigration, founded by the U.S. Legislature in 1891, had increased its personal to 115 immigrant inspectors at the ferry docks, the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, and the new Ambassador Bridge to account for and an increase in border-crossing resulting from the auto industry, transportation improvements, and tourism.¹³⁰ By 1927, however, Canadian workers commuted to Detroit on a regular basis and manufacturers were all-to-eager to use this “alien” labor force to break strikes. The

Detroit Federation of Labor pushed federal officials to act and in 1927 the Department of Labor and the Bureau of Immigration issued General Order No. 86 reclassifying commuters as immigrants.¹³¹ While it prevented Canadians from traveling freely over the border, it conferred resident status on Canadian workers in the U.S. After a string of challenges in U.S. courts, the Secretary of Labor racialized the issue. He predicted hordes of aliens would enter the U.S. from Mexico and the West Indies (from ports in the Southeastern U.S.) to take American jobs — not a surprise to and Gomez-Quinones and Vásquez, who write, “the Mexican immigrant ... provided profit and services and even sometimes a rationale for what worried individuals in U.S. society.”¹³² They made easy scapegoats for economic decline, being “readily identifiable socially and culturally, a laboring population set off by ethnicity, set off by a certain skin color, not quite black but certainly not white.”¹³³ Thus, despite their reputation as “hardworking” and “law-abiding,” Mexicans and their American-born children easy targets during periods of economic decline, like the Great Depression.

By 1929, when the Depression hit, Detroit’s Mexican population had grown to 15,000. That year, the U.S. with state and local governments initiated a program to open jobs for white Americans during the Great Depression by deport Latino immigrants, primarily of Mexican descent, whether or not they were citizens. Many, in fact, were citizens or legal residents.¹³⁴

Beginning in 1931, the federal government began the first raids by abducting persons of Mexican descent from public places without regard to citizenship or legal status.¹³⁵ The Detroit city government jumped in right away, recognizing the auto industry preferred Mexican labor in its “hiring logic” (i.e. low wages and strikebreaking

potential), making repatriation a benefit for ballot-box-enabled “residents and citizens,” looking for job.¹³⁶ Canadian workers, meanwhile, maintained immigrant status through General Order No. 86 and the 1794 Jay Treaty guaranteed U.S. citizens and British subjects the right to pass freely over the border for trade and commerce.¹³⁷ The Jay Treaty also granted rights to Native people crossing the borders, but the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 cut sovereign nations in half, by conferring citizenship status to Natives residing in the U.S., while deeming commuting Natives “alien.”¹³⁸ While U.S. courts ultimately secured Native rights to cross the border freely, it conferred immigrant status on Iroquois workers through the foreign-government structure of the U.S.¹³⁹ Though the American Federation of Labor adopted resolutions throughout the early thirties to close the gap left by these rules, Congress wouldn’t take up the issue again until 1936.¹⁴⁰

The Mexican Repatriation program continued through 1944, deporting or “forcibly persuading” between 500,000 and two million Mexicans, *mostly U.S. citizens or legal residents*, to leave the U.S. for Mexico.¹⁴¹ In Detroit, approximately 1,288 Mexicans left “voluntarily.” Another 4,000 from Michigan and Ohio repatriated through Detroit, while Detroit joined the state in deporting indigent Mexican workers and the Detroit Department of Public Welfare began to coerce Mexicans to leave. Police in Dearborn beat Mexicans who refused to leave and dragged from their homes.¹⁴² Rivera gave \$4,000 of his mural commission fee to establish League of Mexican Workers and Peasants, as a liaison between Mexicans in Detroit and local repatriation efforts and “even arranged work on Mexican farm for people who went home.”¹⁴³ Unfortunately, most workers who accepted repatriation to agricultural worker cooperatives in Mexico,

found nothing but arid land and faulty tools.¹⁴⁴ Some former autoworkers resorted to begging, while others immigrated back to Detroit, only to be deported.¹⁴⁵ Rivera eventually denounced repatriation.

Though Detroit's Mexican population had been greatly reduced, many still would have worked among the 17,000 Black workers at Ford's River Rouge plant during the Hunger March. On March 7, 1932 the Communist Party led more than 3,000 workers in a protest for more pay and better conditions at the Dearborn facility.¹⁴⁶ The workers faced teargas, hoses, and firearms at the Dearborn limits. Police killed four men and injured hundreds more. At a funeral procession four days later, 60,000 people showed up.¹⁴⁷ Rivera arrived a month later and, as suggested by his financial contributions, he got involved with the Mexican community, but despite his enthusiasm for the march leading up to his visit, he never discussed it, nor the funeral march, once he arrived. He didn't include it in *Detroit Industry*, though Mark Rosenthal suggests a predella depicting workers walking over a bridge is a reference to marchers crossing the Miller Road overpass in Dearborn.¹⁴⁸ Yet, while these men and women with their heads down might represent the oppression of workers, they clearly are not marching with dignity or demand. Lunchboxes in hand, they are going home after a long shift.

In reflection of the Hunger March and Mexican repatriation, Lee reads the monumental figures, the four races, through Detroit's racial conflicts, "seeing them as a way to make the utopianism of social realism seem somehow not absurd in such an unequal working-class society.¹⁴⁹ Alongside the common top-to-bottom reading of the murals in which "the ancient races combine to generate industry's very structure and, more important, the conditions for socialism's concrete development," Lee asks "not

whether race was effectively used to organize an image of the Rouge, but *why* ... race became a determining issue for imagining the socialist factory.”¹⁵⁰ The answer, he says, is outside the factory where Mexican workers were being repatriated and deported:

“In the context of 1932, the goddesses permitted Rivera a means by which to represent race and working-class race relations as a *symbolic* as opposed to an *actual* instrument of change, the imaginary basis of the modern industrial process and not its actual force in the contemporary factory.”¹⁵¹

The figures’ “strategic impossibility of racial identification” with actual workers suggest a “*compensatory* picture of the working classes in an effort to avoid, perhaps even overcome, the sticky problem of American working-class racism.”¹⁵²

In addition to apologizing for Rivera in order to maintain a utopian aesthetic, however, Lee recuperates Mexican workers at the expense of Indigenous people, whether immigrant, imperial subject, or Native American — the conflation made all-to-obvious by the Brazilian rubber workers in “The Interdependence of North and South.” Instead, to find a place for the Mexican workers with whom Rivera interacted, Lee abstracts the monumental figures to the point they could very well hold a place for all workers, workers of all races, all races.

Instead, if we view the four races and the rubber plantation through the frameworks of border imperialism, we can understand them as racialized and idealized forms of settler colonial labor, multiplying labor by flattening (i.e. conflating) Indigenous and immigrant labor across the globe, while simultaneously claiming modernity (industry and technology) as the improvement of, and therefore right to occupy, Indigenous land. Where I argue in chapter one, precursors for the neoliberal multiplication of labor exist in states of precarity for Black workers, here I argue “industry and technology as the

indigenous culture of Detroit” disciplines labor in the neoliberal mode by erasing Indigeneity and immigrant labor through *mestizo*, “we’re all immigrant” rhetoric. If we understand “indigenous culture of Detroit” also defers Black and immigrant Asian labor by folding it into a utopian progress model, what is left of industry and technology is whiteness, the white race that brings all the others together. If industry and technology are whiteness, then Downs’ phrase “industry and technology [are] the indigenous culture of Detroit” means “whiteness is the indigenous culture of Detroit.”

HOW WHITENESS IS HELD UP

The DIA is invested in the murals as a matter of literally holding space (i.e. staying open in its location) on Woodward Avenue. By adapting Sarah Keenan’s conception of holding up to redevelopment, I refer to a process through which space is renewed and redeveloped for particular subjects. It is established through the built environment as well as events, narratives, and rhetoric about who can use or occupy space. Thus, while the building at 5200 Woodward Avenue in Detroit is the Detroit Museum of Art, the building alone does not make it so. The collections, temporary exhibitions, the website, the mission statement, and its values all contribute to our understanding of “Detroit Institute of Arts.” As I have suggested at points throughout this chapter, no collection or exhibit better articulates the DIA’s place in Detroit, on Woodward, than *Detroit Industry*. But, before I describe the ways in which the DIA holds space literally and figuratively on Woodward through its rhetoric on *Detroit Industry*, I want to address the effect the murals themselves, in Rivera Court, have on viewers and

therefore suggest why they are so significant to viewers' experience of the museum and therefore so significant to the museum's articulation of its place in Detroit.

Museums, as sites of selection, are disciplinary institutions. That is, if fine art is “a structural reality that rigidly polices access to economic and cultural resources on the basis of race,” class and gender, then museums create that structural reality by selecting which artworks to display and indeed which objects count as art.¹⁵³ Discipline in the arts, however, begins before artists or visitors enter the museum with admission cost, university admissions, and “cultural capital” (knowledge, skills, and values determining who fits in).¹⁵⁴ It also includes the attempt to discipline the behavior of attendees through noise restrictions, architectural flow, prohibitions on food and drink, etc., which historians and critics have tended to read as “class based, ignoring the ‘racial implications’ of bad behaviors associated with immigrant and Black audiences, Berger.¹⁵⁵ The inherent whiteness of the museum also exists in educational missions “whether it be ideas about citizenship and nation, morality or particular aesthetics.”¹⁵⁶ This includes ways of seeing, participating, viewing in museum.

The DIA's mission statement reads, “The DIA creates experiences that help each visitor find personal meaning in art, individually and with each other.”¹⁵⁷ It sounds rather banal, but, as I hope is evident from my earlier discussion on the museum's founding, a lot is packed into the idea the DIA wants to create experiences for personal meaning in art. What greater experience does the DIA create than the panoramic enclosure of *Detroit Industry*? While panoramas produce and reproduce themes valued by the masses, Stephan Oettermann argues, they have a panoptic effect, appropriate considering the Panopticon and the panorama developed concurrently in the nineteenth century along

with the Industrial Revolution. Panoramas, he writes, offer an unconfined view that simultaneously confines viewers to ideas “tied to nationalism and the elite gaze,” he writes; you see what they want you to see.¹⁵⁸ Like panoramas in the U.S., *Detroit Industry* is a highly contextualized exhibition with catalogues describing historical details not necessarily represented in the murals themselves, including nostalgic depictions of disappearing Indians and warnings for aristocrats.¹⁵⁹ But, this contextualization also changes, not only with each rollout of a Rivera-based exhibition, but also with each visit to Rivera Court. If you’ve ever viewed *Detroit Industry* in person, you know a special docent unit lurks among the visitors, waiting to personalize your experience even when you’re not asking. Thus, their desire to educate represents the ways in which museums discipline vision itself with an unfixed set of conditions and possibilities even when the object itself or the viewers position within it remains (relatively) fixed. Jonathan Crary writes, “[W]hat determines vision at any given historical moment is not some deep structure, economic base, or world view, but rather the functioning of a collective assemblage of disparate parts on a single social surface.”¹⁶⁰ This is another way of saying rhetoric about *Detroit Industry* from inside Rivera Court reflects the changing desires of the DIA outside the museum. Visitors to Rivera Court are much more likely to follow the rhetoric even when it changes because they have stood within the unchanging aesthetic of the murals themselves. Another way of putting it is the murals, again quoting Iyko Day, reflect the “moving spirit of settler colonialism ... transnational but distinctly national, similar but definitely not the same, repetitive but without a predictable rhythm, structural but highly susceptible to change, everywhere but hard to isolate.”¹⁶¹ This is not to say everyone accepts disciplinary aesthetics or technologies, but the DIA’s rhetoric about and

through *Detroit Industry* tells us something about its position and its vision — even and especially when that rhetoric shifts to account for new, and perhaps more critical, ways of reading the murals.

The assimilation narrative Valentiner attempted with his period rooms, Rivera completed with his “four races,” and Downs continued. For almost twenty years, the DIA promoted “industry and technology as the indigenous culture of Detroit.” However, in the catalogue for *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo*, Downs abandoned the analogy along with *indigenismo* altogether. She mentions José Vasconcelos only once. However, she continues to draw together Indigeneity, industrial labor, revolution, and the future. “Rivera’s exploration of Detroit’s industry,” she writes, “produced in him the same excitement and enthusiasm as his trip to the Yucatan, and a similar creative spark, resulting in a new vision of world order based on harnessing materials, energy, men, and machines.”¹⁶² Not that she does this alone. Take, for instance, Jerry Heron’s “you-kids-stop-making-all-that-racket” essay, which begins with a description of “war whoops of Native Americans” and “the anguished cries of terrified settlers,” before going into a protracted explanation about all the industrial, technological, and artistic noise in Detroit.¹⁶³ Beyond that, however, the catalogue does not revisit melting pot themes and certainly doesn’t take up *indigenismo*. In its place, we find demotion for Rivera and elevation for his benefactors.

In Rosenthal’s opening essay, he admits to the cold hard truths of the murals, built in the midst of the Depression: Ford’s desire to cleanse his image in the wake of the Hunger March and, as Ben Davis argues, the collapse of the banking industry.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, people were unemployed, the city was facing bankruptcy, and the DIA was

facing cuts from an annual budget of \$400,000 to \$40,000. Ford still committed \$10,000 to the murals, which he later more than doubled. Rivera, meanwhile, had expressed an interest in promoting “a Communist message in a capitalist land,” but he arrived just after the Hunger March and never said anything about it. Conversely, Rosenthal argues Rivera was positively involved with the Mexican community of Detroit, using Rivera’s support for repatriation as an example. He suggests Rivera “helped” Mexican immigrants willing and eagerly return to the U.S., without explaining the forced conditions of repatriation or the failure of the program to provide repatriated workers with opportunities back home. In short, Rosenthal drags Rivera down with Ford to absolve the museum in a present moment in which little is lost by criticizing the auto industry, while suggesting the best way to help Mexican workers is to send them back to Mexico.

In his essay on Edsel Ford, however, John Dean recovers the industrialist-banker from Detroit’s labor and industry history by describing him as the artist in the family. He begins, “Edsel Ford uniquely represents the confluence of art and industry in the United State during the 1920s and 1930s.”¹⁶⁵ He was both businessman and artist or, rather, the “businessman as artist.”¹⁶⁶ As evidence, Dean writes that Edsel pushed Ford Motor Company to a signature style in its new models, he drove the creative vision of the advertising department, demonstrated his “practical creativity” by build a home for himself and his wife, Eleanor (in collaboration with Albert Kahn), and he hired Rivera to paint *Detroit Industry* at a time when FMC needed an aesthetic alibi for plant violence.¹⁶⁷ “Edsel Ford,” Dean writes, “expressed the power of art within the framework that life had offered him.”¹⁶⁸

In the next essay, Linda Downs returns to recast museum director Wilhelm Valentiner in the role of revolutionary. She begins by arguing Valentiner rejected oppressive ideological regimes in his life in Germany. Against nationalistic interpretations of Richard Wagner, Downs writes, he saw value in the aesthetic/emotional experience of Wagner's music meant to invoke "a state of bliss by means of a combination of art forms that heighten the viewer's awareness," which she sees evident in Valentiner's installation methods vis-à-vis period rooms.¹⁶⁹ Next, she describes a leaflet Valentiner wrote in 1919 for the Working Council for Art, which "chillingly foreshadows" the "House of German Art" Hitler opened in Munich in 1937, except, she argues hastily, he put forward his ideas well before the Third Reich came to power, "when the atmosphere among the intellectuals in Berlin was one of positive involvement in shaping the new democratic government."¹⁷⁰ When he met Rivera, Valentiner found in him an ideological counterpart. Like Valentiner who left Germany after the November Revolution, Downs's logic follows, Rivera had stood up against an oppressive regime by breaking from the Mexican Communist party to choose "employment over politics" in the U.S.¹⁷¹ Beyond that, Rivera shared Valentiner's desire to captivate and overwhelm the viewer and "completely dominates" the architecture of the Garden Court. Valentiner, likewise, shared Rivera's desire to fuse art and politics.¹⁷² Of course, being in the position he was as director of the museum, Downs explains, Valentiner couldn't always say what he meant. With Edsel Ford — the poor artist-industrialist doing best he could with the hand he'd been dealt — Valentiner shared Rivera's radical views, "however privately he held them."¹⁷³ Downs concludes, "The *Detroit Industry* mural commission represented a new beginning for both Rivera and Valentiner that harked back to the exciting prospect of

artists and governments building new cultures in Mexico and Germany, different from the definitively bourgeois culture in which each of them grew up.”¹⁷⁴

Contrary to her apology for Rivera, who she says merely followed the conventions of his day when he combined the four races, Downs suggests Valentiner was somehow uninfluenced by National Socialism even as he penned his own Nazi tract for the display of art and the circulation of nationalist ideas. We’re supposed to forget that in 1999 Downs accepted and reproduced Rivera’s four races mythology without question while also describing Valentiner as Vasconcelos’s double at the DIA, a visionary attempting to cultivate “an aesthetic identity for the community.”¹⁷⁵ Underneath the handwringing about community, education, and aesthetic experience, the connection between Wilhelm Valentiner and José Vasconcelos couldn’t be more obvious: the two came together in Rivera through white eugenicist conceptions of national identity built on a conflated Mexican/Indigenous figure representing both a “nation of immigrants” and prior claims to Indigenous land through industrial progress. It’s worth remembering Henry Ford was an avowed anti-Semite who expressed his views in a regular column in a Dearborn newspaper. Whether or not Rivera succumbed to their influence is irrelevant to Downs’s ongoing efforts to strip Valentiner’s aesthetic and organizational philosophy down to catchall terms like “education” and “community.” Positioning Valentiner as a revolutionary goes beyond complicity to unethical fabrication in the service of ... what?

The decision to avoid discussing race, Indigeneity, and immigration in the 2015 catalogue, *Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in Detroit* not only upholds, but creates whiteness on Woodward Avenue, both through the architectural structure of the DIA and the institutional mission to help people have their own experiences. In the absence of

industrial culture and the demotion of Rivera — a failed, uncommitted idealist — they offer Ford and Valentier to a white neoliberal patron class. The businessman as artist, the director as revolutionary, and the artist as Communist traitor arrive in time for a neoliberal era of redevelopment in which employment precarity for workers of color and heightened border security is punctuated by the city’s attempt to build a city for the “creative class” — a class in which engineers, ad-men, and tech workers are considered artists, but industrial workers are thought to be disappearing along with the “industry,” now no longer “indigenous” to Downs or the museum, which has removed the phrase from its website. In short, the DIA doesn’t have to make the case for industry and technology after Emergency Management. It only now has to make peace with the past to ensure ongoing support from private foundations and philanthropists.

The discourse through which *Detroit Industry* articulates a neoliberal desire for artistic production upholds the status quo through ambivalent social commentary and a focus on process — not only how artworks came to be made, but also how they came to be funded. The process allows patrons to view themselves as revolutionaries and artists, especially when they fund revolutionary artists, without consequences in material life. These are old tricks, which we see continue to be carried out by cultural institutions. In this sense, I see the murals and their reemergence at moments of cultural and economic crisis, for the elite, as the ideological antecedent to Detroit’s City Walls Mural Program, which not only monitors graffiti in Detroit and works closely with the Detroit Police Departments graffiti taskforce, but also pays artists to paint innocuous murals on businesses and city-owned properties across the city.

Chapter Four

‘Throw in the Blankets and the Corn’

Neotopic Vision from the Hudson Site

On December 14, 2017, Dan Gilbert’s Bedrock real estate company broke ground on a new mixed-used development on Woodward Avenue between Grand and Gradiot (pronounced grash-it) avenues. Artist renderings from New York-based SHoP Architects depict two glass buildings connected by a skyway. The nine-story “podium” has been slated for commercial space, while the residential tower consists of living spaces and commercial lodging. At 912 feet high, it will be the tallest structure in Detroit. Principal architect Bill Sharples referred to the project as a “city within a city,” featuring “makers spaces,” a technology lab, gyms, visual and performing arts spaces, restaurants, and markets.¹ He based the design, he said, on Gilbert’s request for a building to contain many uses and attractions, a “civic gesture” that “rediscover[s] all the great things Hudson’s was.”² Sharples was referring to the J.L. Hudson Company, the department store that occupied the site until 1983. Built in 1881 and expanded over the course of several decades, Hudson’s became the tallest building in Detroit and took up a full city block. It was a center of economic activity and an originator of many retail practices.³ During the Great Depression, Hudson’s invented “bargain basement” pricing, literally locating deeply discounted goods in its basement floors. During World War II, it issued an early credit system based on numbered charge coins on key chains. Hudson’s was also central to the culture of the 1950’s, known for its fashion and regular fashion shows as much as the Hudson family was known in Detroit society. In 1915, Hudson’s niece

Eleanor married Henry Ford's only son, Edsel, who commissioned Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry* (chapter three). On Armistice Day in 1923, the store displayed a 3,700-square-foot American Flag, the world's largest flag, on Armistice Day. The display became an annual tradition. Inaugurating the Thanksgiving parade with an appearance by the "real Santa" in 1924, Hudson's "was as synonymous with Christmas and fashion as it was Detroit."⁴ In the 1950s, the store issued its own guide to downtown Detroit, including descriptions of the Detroit Museum of Art, Greenfield Village, and the Masonic Temple, as well as high schools, colleges, parks, and hotels along with descriptions of Hudson's floors and departments.⁵ In 1958, *Time Magazine* celebrated Hudson's with a double-page cut-out illustration of its floors and departments.⁶ In 1959, Hudson's sponsored the first Fourth of July fireworks at the International Freedom Festival "to celebrate the unity between Hudson's and the community."⁷ After decades of expansion into the suburbs, the downtown flagship store closed in 1983, administrative headquarters moved to Minneapolis in 1984, and the remaining offices vacated in 1990. The building remained empty until October 1998, when Mayor Dennis Archer demolished the whole block to make room for the software company Compuware and other business developments which saw the empty, vandalized building as a liability. "More than likely," write historians Michael Houser and Marianne Weldon, "no other building in southeast Michigan has evoked as many memories as the famed J.L. Hudson Company department store."⁸

As recently as November 2019, the *Detroit Free Press* continued to describe Hudson's in step with Bedrock and the rest of Gilbert's supporters as a beacon of social and economic life for Detroit.⁹ And yet, for many Black Detroiters, the department store

merely concentrates, in one prominent city block, the racist policies and practices of industrial Detroit, from job discrimination and lack of resources to paternalistic oversight committees and exclusionary development schemes. For instance, Hudson's hired Black workers in prominent positions only after pressure from labor groups and the federal government, while Black shoppers remained unwelcome on certain floors. Later, Hudson's became instrumental to white flight when opening the world's first mall in the Southfield suburb of Detroit. It subsequently abandoned Black shoppers when it closed its downtown location. After suburbanization drained downtown of resources and jobs, Joseph L Hudson Jr. (the founder's grandnephew) became instrumental in a post-Great Rebellion effort to rebuild the city that ultimately kicked out poor and middle-class workers, many of them the Black youth who had rebelled.¹⁰

In the 1990s, after the store closed, The Grand Traverse Band and Lac Vieux Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians obtained an option to open an off-reservation Indian casino on the site. At that time, then-Governor Jack Engler described Indigenous casinos as lawless and immoral, only to back a state constitutional amendment in favor of corporate casinos. Media discourses leading up to the referendum represented Indigenous sovereignty as a threat to Detroit's economy and Indigenous labor as a threat to Black labor, while also warning that if Michigan voters didn't approve commercial gaming, U.S. dollars would cross the international border to new casinos in Windsor, Ontario.

The Hudson's story told by Dan Gilbert is not history, but rather an attempt to inform the present. The store's expansion over several decades and its reputation as a "world of its own" is the aesthetic and rhetorical predecessor to Gilbert's "city within a city"¹¹ — a MAGA-like return to "simpler times" intentionally evoked by the project's

name “Hudson Site.” Understanding with Craig Wilkins that the “motivation to build something is really about the desire to say something,”¹² I view Hudson Site development as an attempt to justify further development of Detroit by presenting Detroit history as a temporarily stalled progress narrative.¹³ By developing the site, Gilbert claims “men of ideas” like J.L. Hudson as his forebears and revives the progress narrative. The site confirms Gilbert’s view of himself as Detroit’s white savior, or what Nicholas Mirzoeff terms the “Traditional Hero.” He is the one who sees, the one who has the authority to envision the future. That vision is a neoliberal Utopia, or what I’m calling neotopia.

In this chapter, I understand redevelopment as a progress narrative that, in Frederick Jameson’s words, “colonizes the future” and secures the capitalist present.¹⁴ I read the Hudson Site as the visuality of redevelopment/progress, where visuality is, in Mirzoeff’s words, “a medium for the transmission and dissemination of authority and the means for the mediation of those subject to that authority.”¹⁵ However, with Frederick Jameson, I understand “the city is the fundamental form of the Utopian image and the individual building is the space of Utopian investment.”¹⁶ Thus, I read the Hudson Site as the metonymic part (the place, the visual evidence) that describes and authorizes Gilbert’s larger vision for the city (the form), thereby empowering him to determine what the city will look like, who will have access to it, and, more importantly, who will work in it.¹⁷ Going further, I draw from Sarah Keenan’s definition of “unsettled space” to describe ways in which the Utopian progress narrative depends on regular renewal and redevelopment to establish the impression of permanence, which Indigenous presence stands to “unsettle.”

First, I provide the popular history of Hudson's as a progress narrative, what Mirzoeff calls "Visuality I," the "narrative that ... creates a pictures of order that sustained industrial division of labor as its enactment of the 'division of the sensible,'" or history as the history of capitalism.¹⁸ Then, I re-place the J.L. Hudson Company in Detroit history by outlining some of the ways in which Hudson's success depended on the same racialized exclusions and paternalistic attitudes that defined post-war Detroit, especially white flight/suburbanization. Then, I discuss an attempt by several Michigan tribes to open casinos in the city to demonstrate the ways in which anti-Indian sentiment and white possessive logic underlie redevelopment efforts in Detroit — a potential for what Mirzoeff calls "countervisuality," "solidarity ... autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but he claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity," the right to look.¹⁹ With this potential countervisuality, I unsettle the neotopic, white savior narrative of the Hudson Site by demonstrating Indian casinos are an alternative to neoliberal, capitalist development models. Indian casinos create support networks for tribes and have economically benefitted neighboring communities. In short, when Gilbert ignores Black history and Indigenous presence in his neotopic vision for the Hudson Site, he does so to reinforce his authority as property-holder to *envision* the future for Detroit. Yet, Indigenous claims to the original Hudson building demonstrates the space is not fixed, even if it's rebuilt with capitalistic intentions, so Indigenous people and other Detroit residents are free to imagine other uses for the Hudson Site.

VISUALIZING HUDSON'S

J.L. Hudson's isn't the history of a company, but the history of a city; one of paternalistic "men of ideas" taking advantage of an expanding economy and causing its decline through suburbanization, only to blame politicians and circumstance. Once the tallest department store in the world, the downtown flagship store occupied the whole 1200 block of Woodward Avenue, just up the street from Campus Martius and the downtown core. Historians credit the company's early success with its founder's reputation as a businessman of integrity and one of the city's greatest citizen. To wit, during financial crises, J.L. Hudson twice paid off creditors in full though the law required him to pay only 60 cents on the dollar. As a philanthropist, he provided the site for the Michigan State Fair, helped develop the Detroit Institute of Arts, the United Way, and the YMCA. His father was an English immigrant who settled in Ionia, Michigan, where he worked for the clothier C.R. Mabley. Richard Hudson bought an interest in that store and renamed it R. Hudson and Son. Richard died during the Panic of 1873 and three years later the store went bankrupt. J.L. Hudson moved to Detroit to work for Mabley and in April 1881 opened his own store in the Detroit Opera House, a space formerly occupied by one of his competitors. He became known as a pioneer in merchandising by marking the prices on all goods and improving the displays. By 1885, he moved into a new building on Woodward and expanded by building an eight-story building at Farmer and Gratiot, changing his business from a men's clothier to a department store. He also began expanding to other cities, including Grand Rapids, St. Paul, Toledo, and Buffalo,²⁰ By 1888, he was so successful, he looked up all the creditors he had shorted in the bankruptcy proceedings twelve years earlier and paid them in full, with compound interest.²¹ In 1912, at 66 years old, Hudson died while on vacation in England. By that

time, having no children of his own, his nephews — with the surname Webber had assumed operation of the company.

J.L. Hudson wasn't the first to develop the department store model, but he was one of the earliest to succeed with it, in part because he arrived in a Detroit on the verge of major industrial growth. Before the turn of the century, immigrants from “as close as the American South and as far away as Europe” arrived to work in the city's expanding manufacturing districts, pushing the population to 200,000. As the U.S. entered World War I in 1914, Henry Ford's five-dollar day — which doubled the minimum wage — attracted thousands to Detroit for work.²² Detroit factories began to make munitions, the city's population reached more than one million.²³ When the war ended in June 1919, the city began to grow rapidly. Hudson's took on theme “Growing with Detroit” and expanded the building twelve times from 1919 to 1946. The 1919 addition included the first storefront on Woodward and a system of pneumatic tubes for interdepartmental communications, which wiped out the company's staff of messengers.²⁴ The 1927 purchase of the Newcomb Endicott building on Woodward and Grand avenues led to the construction of the 25-story tower bearing the Hudson's name and the 1946 addition connected the rest of the sections. With this final expansion, Hudson's officially occupied the whole block.

At 410 feet high, Hudson's was the tallest department store in the world. With more than two million square feet of floor space, it was second in size only to Macy's in New York. This included more than two hundred departments across forty-nine acres of floor space and featured 600,000 items from vendors all over the world. It had thirty-two floors, fifty-one passenger elevators, seventeen freight elevators, eight employee

elevators and forty-eight escalators. Hudson's had three transformer centers, which generated enough power for city of 20,000 people. The store had thirty-nine men's restrooms, fifty women's restrooms, and ten executive bathrooms. It had 705 fitting rooms, a world record. The dining rooms and cafeterias served an average of 1,000 meals a day to guests, as well as another 6,000 a day to employees. Add a hospital to all this commercial space and Hudson's was a "world of its own," a city within city.²⁵

Less than a decade later, in 1954, Hudson's sales reach their peak at \$163 million (\$1.28 billion today). That same year, the company opened its first shopping centers in the suburbs of Southfield and Harper Woods.²⁶ In a documentary titled *The History of Hudson's Department Store*, the narrator describes suburbanization as a natural, even evolutionary, process: the city that build cars, builds roads for the cars, and people move out of the city.²⁷ Though Woodward expanded for ease of travel, downtown parking did not increase to accommodate them. The city contained 15,000 spots for more than 100,000 cars.²⁸ "In the visionary tradition of J.L. Hudson himself," the narrator says, "the Webber brothers foresee this evolutionary movement and respond." He continues: "Where once there stood an empty field, now stand 108 specialty shops surrounding the Hudson's anchor store."²⁹

In November 1954, as Hudson's moved into the suburbs, then-president and CEO Oscar Webber gave a speech to a businessman's social club, called the Newcomen Society, in which he claimed his family's company to be the principal of American entrepreneurialism. He wrote, "In this story of the JL Hudson Company you have heard once more the familiar but significant story of *opportunity* in our beloved Country. We must never forget that the good things which Americans enjoy in such abundance are

basically the fruits of our system of free enterprise. This system has enriched us both spiritually and material because men of ideas and initiative had the incentive under its guarantees to seek constantly for advancement in every walk of life.”³⁰

In 1961, after graduating from Yale University, Joseph L. Hudson Jr, grandnephew of the founder, become youngest president and CEO of the company at 29 years old. He started out working the docks at the downtown store in 1950 and he led ongoing efforts to expand into the suburbs with Westland, Pontiac, and Oakland malls.³¹ In 1969, Hudson’s merged with Dayton Corporation of Minnesota to create Dayton Hudson Corp., moving decision-making to Minneapolis. In the early 1970s, with downtown shopping losing its base to the thriving suburban malls, Hudson Jr. suggests building a downtown shopping center, the Cadillac Mall. But despite support from corporate and civic leaders, the project fails because, the Hudson documentary narrator says, the economy is “against them.” While celebrating all the expansion, the narrator blames a retail economy that shifted to specialty stores for the recession in the downtown retail economy. In 1978, Dayton-Hudson Corp. sells Northland, Eastland, Westland, and five other shopping centers to an insurance company based in New York.³² Hudson Jr. retires for “new business activities” in 1982 and the next year Hudson’s downtown flagship store closes. Headquarters went to Minneapolis in 1984, while mall development exploded with locations all over the Midwest, including Franklin Park Mall in Toledo, Ohio, which I frequented as a kid. After 1983, the company added a new lobby and security entrance to the building for corporate offices and a staff of about 1,200 who remained until 1990. At that time, Dayton Hudson Corp. sold the building to Southwestern Associates of Windsor, Ontario.

CITY WITHIN A CITY

Fourteen years after the implosion, the Hudson's site remained undeveloped except for a portion, which became an underground parking garage marked on the surface by steel beams and a concrete mass.³³ Nonetheless, the site remained a mnemonic device, conjuring nostalgic tales and visions for industrial Detroit, which Gilbert and company would eventually seize on. By 2012, Bedrock LLC acquired the rights to develop the site through Detroit's Downtown Development Authority and in 2015, Bedrock purchased the parking garage to complete the block, which officials said would save the city considerable money in upkeep.³⁴ A subsidiary of Gilbert's Rock Ventures and downtown's largest landlord, Bedrock owns or manages more than 90 buildings in Detroit.³⁵ Bedrock also partially owns the 1.1 million-square-foot building on Campus Martius once occupied by Compuware, the company that insisted Archer implode Hudson's to make room for its headquarters.³⁶ The company's website marks 1954 — the year Hudson's sales peaked at \$163 million — as a “zenith” for the store and the city. According to the website, the store's closure left “a large vacant space in the heart of this great American city.”³⁷ For L. Brooks Patterson, the downtown closure was a tipping point for Detroit.³⁸

Gilbert announced plans to develop the Hudson Site (fig. 10) in 2015. At the December 2017 groundbreaking ceremony, Mayor Duggan said, “Ever since Hudson’s closed its doors in 1983, Detroiters have waited and wondered what would come next and what could possibly live up to the incredible history of that block. It’s taken nearly 35 years to get that answer, but when people watch this incredible new building rise and see all of the jobs and opportunity it brings, it will have been worth the wait.”³⁹ Hudson’s former president and CEO, Joseph Hudson Jr. likewise endorsed the project. “Hudson’s stood for quality, and we did things for the city,” he said. “We held the parade, had the fireworks.” He hoped the new structure would similarly benefit Detroit social life, saying, “This was a hole that needed to be filled, so now you see what’s going to come.”⁴⁰ SHoP



Figure 10. Hudson Site in development. Author photo.

Architects principal architect Bill Sharples filled in the vision for what's to come: "We're going to have kids that are going to come here and make and play with robots in the makers space," he said. "We're going to have potentially chefs in the market hall creating new ideas, new foods. Artists having eureka moments in the galleries and the studio in the exhibition hall." He continued: "We're going to have music, dance, tech talks in the flex hall space. We're going to have innovation conferences in the main hall. We're going to have the state-of-the-art tech space to draw the youngest and the brightest to Detroit. And, most importantly, we're going to have people living on the site. This is going to be a 24/7 community."⁴¹ News organizations across Detroit and business publications across the country amplified Sharples declaration that the new development would be a "city within a city."

While Gilbert echoed these sentiments, saying "this development becomes the twenty-first century version of what Hudson's was to metropolitan Detroit for so many decades in the 20th century," he also spoke more broadly about what the site represents for redevelopment in Detroit: "When we break ground today, we're going to send a powerful message about the future of Detroit."⁴² That message is clear: If Hudson's history is understood as Detroit's history, then the ability to revive Hudson's is the right to revive Detroit. More specifically, Gilbert's development on the Hudson Site prefigures and authorizes his vision for a neoliberal Utopia, or neotopia.

In Thomas More's *Utopia*, Utopia begins as a settler colonial project, planting colonies "wherever the natives have plenty of unoccupied and uncultivated land," and setting up properties each with "two slaves bound to the land."⁴³ "Utopus," More writes in 1516, "conquered the country and gave it his name."⁴⁴ He "brought its rude and uncouth

inhabitants to such a high level of culture and humanity that they now excel” and he changed the geography of the land to meet his desire for security and economic development.⁴⁵ In his study of Utopian texts and fantasies since More’s, Frederick Jameson explains Utopia as settler colonial redevelopment scheme defined by two impulses: The first includes “attempts to project new spatial totalities in the aesthetic of the city,” while the second “serves as a lure and bait for ideology, leading to liberal reforms ... commercial pipedreams” and, I would add, neoliberal conventions like public/private partnerships and the “gig economy.”⁴⁶ Gilbert’s neotopic vision, outlined in the pamphlet “A Placemaking Vision for Downtown Detroit,” meets both of these criteria with a promise to “transform the downtown by articulating an exciting new vision,” described as such:

Detroit’s downtown core will be an area that is dense, lively, and attractive for people from the entire region and beyond. An intense focus on the public realm will transform streets, sidewalks, promenades and buildings so that they relate to pedestrians on a human scale. The downtown core will become all about activity on the streets, sidewalks, parks and plazas that draw more and more people. This transformation will be as much about the public space and physical realm, as a dramatic culture change that will help transition Detroit from a city dedicated to the car, to a city where pedestrians have more and more priority and where downtown Detroit becomes “a place you drive to instead of one you drive through.” The goal is to create of a dense urban core that concentrates people, life and excitement — centered on a Woodward Avenue reconfigured as a grand Promenade.⁴⁷

The Placemaking Vision defines placemaking as “a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces.”⁴⁸ It describes a process that involves “looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in a particular space to discover their needs and aspirations.” It calls for “an exciting reexamination of the settings that people experience everyday — the streets, parks, plazas

and waterfronts.”⁴⁹ In other words, the Placemaking Vision understands that place is, as Keenan writes, “a social construct ... embedded in the material reality of the world,” especially architecture and built environment.⁵⁰ Place produces social memory in everyday life through institutions such as national museums like the Detroit Institute of Arts, objects such as monuments or other public artworks like the Industry murals, work ethic (Walking Man James Robertson), and architectural designs like the Hudson Site, as well as “etiquette for buying groceries or catching the bus.”⁵¹ Thus, “placemaking” is an attempt to determine the built environment and etiquette related to it in order to manufacture social memory or, as Jameson writes about Utopias, to evoke progress in order to “colonize the future.”⁵²

Where Jameson writes that the “city is the fundamental form of the Utopian image and the individual building is the space of Utopian investment,”⁵³ I argue the Hudson Site is the metonymic part (the space) that describes and authorizes Gilbert’s larger vision (the Utopic form); it is the city within the city, the city that describes the city. Though the pamphlet doesn’t mention the Hudson Site by name, Gilbert connected the site to his neotopic vision at the groundbreaking by describing the project in similar terms: “We want people to see in [the building] and people to see out,” he said. “That’s the whole point. We want to push traffic, people into the streets to shop. You have to have an experience. When you come to an urban city, it’s an experience.”⁵⁴ In previous interviews he has explicitly evoked the authoritative, metonymic quality of the site, saying “I think when it’s done, it’ll give Detroit the confidence once we are done that we can create new and really build and develop.”⁵⁵ The pamphlet about the city and remarks about the site attempt to describe the totality of the city (as a walking city) and invite an

ideology about what people should expect out of a city (an experience) in order to justify reforms (“reexamination of the settings”).

The future promise made by Utopia prolongs the capitalist present, “making it possible to bulldoze the terrain for future development,”⁵⁶ so that even opposition to the project affirms the authority to go ahead with it. At the Hudson Site groundbreaking, representatives from Detroit People’s Platform protested the development, saying the city didn’t build a strong enough Community Benefits Agreement into the deal, which includes \$618 million in taxpayer subsidies for the \$1 billion project. Specifically, the group said the city should have required a specific number of Detroit-owned businesses and affordable housing units in the new skyscraper. They wanted to know exactly how Gilbert planned to meet the requirement to hire fifty-one percent of its construction force from Detroit residents, considering Gilbert claims that Detroit doesn’t have a skilled trades workforce. A few days before the groundbreaking, he said, “What a shame anyone should be unemployed in Detroit when we have a shortage of skilled trades.”⁵⁷ Event emcee Paul W. Smith from radio station WJR called the protesters “Luddites” and “members of the Flat Earth Society.”⁵⁸ “A Placemaking Vision” likewise insinuates that Detroiters are stuck in the past, calling for “culture change” in “a city where there is too much bad news and things sometimes seem to change so slowly.”⁵⁹ By calling for experimentation, “innovation, dynamism and unorthodox ideas” at the same time that it calls for change, the placemaking vision assumes Gilbert’s authority to determine what counts as experimentation and innovation at the same time it sees Detroiters in the past, out of political life.

To make the future seem viable in the present, Jameson writes, Utopian fantasies conflate individual and collective time; the people with the city, the existential with the historical.⁶⁰ When Gilbert's says it's a "shame" Detroit's unemployed aren't qualified for the jobs he has to offer, he's saying the life of the city is more important than the lives of its inhabitants, while projects like the Hudson Site provide the visuality of his position. He has succeeded in creating jobs and therefore has the moral authority to determine who works in the city.

Through references to opportunity and transformation, the Placemaking Vision claims the right to make place by claiming the right to envision the future, whether as the owner of the property or as the mediator of a public discussion on how to use that property. As a view of the city and its potential, the Placemaking Vision and Gilbert's comments are consistent with "the mentality of imperialist explorers ... who would 'command views' over the 'natural' landscape and assess its suitability for the imposition of a particular socio-legal regime."⁶¹ It specifically looks up and down Woodward Avenue, designating what it will look like and for whom (i.e. what kind of laborers). Where Keenan writes "landscapes are something the viewer is outside of," she explains "places are things to be lived inside."⁶² Thus, if Woodward is Detroit's landscape of dispossession, the Hudson Site is the place ("things to be lived inside"). It is the site/part to the larger form, the position of enunciation from which to describe Gilbert's neotopic vision.

As the place of viewing as well as a place that can be viewed from below, the site establishes Gilbert's authority as a form of visuality, where "visuality" is, in Nicholas Mirzoeff's words, "a medium for the transmission and dissemination of authority and the

means for the mediation of those subject to that authority.”⁶³ Visuality, Mirzoeff explains, refers to the visualization of history; rather than strictly perceptual, it is a set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight (ideas) into a rendition of physical and psychic space.⁶⁴ It is, in short, a way of ordering by classifying subjects, separating them to prevent them from cohering as political subjects, and naturalizing those separations.⁶⁵ The understanding of visuality as a technique to order society and the authority to do so conflates history with its representation, how it is *seen* by capital. As a representation of Detroit’s white history, the Hudson Site provides Gilbert with an event and a position from which to articulate his vision for Detroit as a society ordered around particular kinds of labor or laborers. The event includes every occasion — press conferences, the groundbreaking — when Gilbert describes the history of Hudson’s, connects that mediated history to his current project, and/or describes his vision for Detroit. The position is the site itself, the accomplishment establishes Gilbert’s moral authority and empowers him to determine who belongs in the city by providing visual evidence of his ability to “set things in motion.”⁶⁶ It suggests his authority and ability to realize his vision.

BLACK HUDSON’S

Black Detroit is absent from popular histories on Hudson’s, including documentaries like *The History of Hudson's Department Store*, websites like HistoricDetroit.org, and books like *JL Hudson: The Man and the Store* by former Hudson’s president and CEO Oscar Webber and *Hudson’s: Detroit Legendary Department Store* from the Images of America series. By focusing on the white history of

Hudson's — what Mirzoeff calls Visuality I — Gilbert excludes Black (labor) history from the site. By suggesting Detroit workers don't have the skills to work on his new site, he categorizes them outside of redevelopment and therefore unfit to occupy the space. Though Hudson's employed Black workers as elevator operators and janitors as early as 1919, administrators didn't hire Black sales personnel until 1953; even then, Hudson's did so under pressure from the Communist Party.⁶⁷ In 1942, white workers at the Hudson Motor Company joined white workers at Packard and Chrysler-Dodge in staging work-halting sit-down strikes to resist the transfer of Black workers to better paying, less dangerous, and less tedious positions.⁶⁸ Hate strikes continued at the Hudson plant throughout the year, and though Hudson was more amenable to expanding job opportunities for blacks than other companies, white workers continued to impede change, even in the face of federal intervention (President Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802) and censure by the local UAW-CIO.⁶⁹ In June 1942, when "a handful" of black workers moved into the machine room, 10,000 white workers stopped working until the Secretary of the Navy issued a telegram denouncing their actions as disloyal. This was during WWII and the Hudson plant worked for the U.S. Navy.⁷⁰ Black women were not well-represented during war-time production. Hudson, along with several other plants, employed only a half-dozen each as matrons, janitors, and stock handlers.⁷¹ Hudson was among to first comply to the Executive Order, making "significant progress" by the end of the year.⁷²

In 1967, after the Great Rebellion, Joseph L. Hudson Jr. became referee of an effort to rebuild Detroit when Mayor Jerome Cavanagh made him chairman of the "New Detroit Committee," charged with selecting committee members.⁷³ The original

committee was white and included Henry Ford II (chairman of Ford Motor Company), Walter Reuther (UAW president), and James Roche (chairman of General Motors), as well as executives from Chrysler, Detroit Edison, Michigan Bell, National Bank of Detroit, and Michigan Consolidated Gas Company. It also included Max Fisher, chairman of Marathon Oil and chairman of United Foundation, the predecessor to United Way backed by J.L. Hudson Sr.⁷⁴

Even with the incorporation of nine black businesspeople, “New Detroit” resisted input and influence from Black community activists, though according to at least one account Hudson was a proponent of their inclusion. “The initially White Committee had to be balanced with Black members,”⁷⁵ writes Helen Mataya Graves in a complementary 1975 account of the New Detroit Committee. Hudson tapped Arthur Johnson, Deputy Superintendent of Detroit Public Schools, and Damon Keith, co-chairman of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, to help him. He said they “were most constructive in their suggestions of Black nominees” who, Graves recalls, “underscored the necessity to involve ‘legitimate’ Black groups, who “ought not to be displaced by other Black leadership.”⁷⁶ They wanted to “counteract the strong White feeling that the established Black leaders no longer knew what was going on,” and Hudson credited the Detroit Industrial Mission, a Black church organization, for its influence in picking Al Harrison, Lorenzo Freeman, Norvell Harrington. *The Michigan Chronicle*, a Black newspaper, said the committee still didn’t represent Detroit’s citizenry and warned that Henry Ford II would never take seriously Norvell Harrington (a student and head of the Inner City Student Organizing Committee). Graves writes that “old-line community leaders,” Black

and White, thought it a mistake to attempt to ally the city's elite with Detroit's militant Black residents.⁷⁷

With hindsight, Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin write that the Black Revolutionary Workers Movement came out of this period partially in response to New Detroit. "The New Detroit Committee," they write, "represented forces that were the social anthesis of the movement led by black revolutionaries," especially black revolutionary workers.⁷⁸ Where Graves, in 1975, celebrated the private funding and organization of New Detroit, Georgakas and Surkin describe it as a way to "bypass openly the elected government and to finance its projects directly from corporate and foundation coffers."⁷⁹ Eventually fifty Detroit firms pushed \$50 million into a waterfront building plan and the formation of a separate organization called Detroit Renaissance.⁸⁰ Two years later, when New Detroit had failed to produce results, a program director named Phil Meeks blamed the city's Black leaders and residents, telling *Newsweek*, "If some of the black leaders had been content to allow some well-intentioned whites to give them help, there might be more being done."⁸¹ Six years later, industrial workers — thirty-five percent of the population — found themselves working longer and faster, paying higher taxes for fewer city services, and facing inflation that outpaced wage gains.⁸²

Hailed by Governor Milliken as "a monument to the vision of a few men and the faith of many," and described as an interracial effort by Graves — i.e. headed by white chairman Max Fisher and black president William Patrick — New Detroit's proposal to rebuild the center of Detroit for banking and tourism would mean that "eventually the blacks, Appalachians and students who inhabited the area between the riverfront commercial center and the Wayne State University area would be removed to make room

for a revitalized core city repopulated by middle- and upper-class representatives of the city's various racial and ethnic groups.”⁸³ New Detroit's legacy is the Renaissance Center, a “big, convoluted mess” that failed to meet expectations while retailers like Hudson's were leaving downtown.⁸⁴ The massive structure increased prime downtown office space by twenty-eight percent in a market already short of prime tenants and thirty percent of RenCen's tenants were Ford employees. Ford was thirty percent owner of the development. In 1982, the center sold for a loss to an investor group out of Chicago.⁸⁵

Regarding the Hudson's downtown store, many Black Detroiters remember feeling abandoned when it closed and they avoided shopping in the suburbs where racist policies and practices like redlining and neighborhood covenants made for hostile environments. Mayor Coleman Young explicitly accused Dayton Corporation of abandoning the city and people that made the company, while city council president Erma Henderson said, “The people who miss it the most are those who are abandoned by Hudson's ... I'm talking about the blacks, the poor, and the elderly who are unable or can't afford to go to the suburban shopping centers. I guess these people didn't fit into their plans.”⁸⁶ At a story-telling workshop hosted by the Detroit Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2012, activist Sandra Hines told a reporter, “I'd be willing to bet you most black people's memories of Hudson's are similar to the memories you had. And white people would not understand why we would feel like that given that Hudson's was so magnificent. But it wasn't for 'us.’”⁸⁷ Attendee Gwen Felter, who grew up in the majority-Black downriver suburb of Ecorse, said something similar. She recalled going up to Hudson's on special occasions, but remembered having limited access. “[T]he floors that we did go to shop on the people weren't disrespectful to us. Just certain floors

we couldn't go on. We couldn't go to the restaurant floor.”⁸⁸ Detroit historian Joe Darden wrote that commercial disinvestment was more damaging to Detroit than industrial abandonment in terms revenue lost and the prospect for future economic development.⁸⁹ To wit, when Hudson Jr., the founder's grandnephew, tried to bring a shopping center back to downtown, it was only after the company's decades of mall development across Michigan, Ohio, Minnesota, and New York had devastated downtown environments.⁹⁰ The cruel joke of the failed downtown Cadillac Mall project, of course, is that Hudson's helped create the suburban economy that drained downtown, a point Hines made at the story-telling event, saying “Malls were built up. They had left Detroit. So there was no need for Hudson's anymore. [P]eople did feel when they tore Hudson's down that it was something being taken out of downtown Detroit that could never be replaced. But they didn't have a need for it once we had white flight.”⁹¹ While city leaders claimed the failure to revitalize the building resulted from bad logistics, faulty proposals, and the need for a more “synergistic plan,” the event's organizer, Aurora Harris, said structural racism determined Hudson's fate. “Hudson's is a good example of how they controlled the property to drain this city,” she said.

All told, Hudson's and its leadership exemplified much of the paternalistic, anti-Black sentiment that drove policy and everyday life in industrial Detroit. Described as progress or “evolution,” suburbanization and “white flight” draw off the eighteenth century ideology of social evolution theory. A process that excludes people of color and depends on the acquisition of “empty” land is part and parcel with the racist premise of social evolution theory that Indigenous and African people are “primitive” priors to the self-realized white European or American man. In Detroit development discourse, it

manifests as the belief that Black people don't know what kind of development is best for them and that Indigenous people don't understand how to extract the full value from their land. The latter played out in the 1990's, when several Michigan tribes attempted to open casinos in the city only to have the governor thwart their attempts, ostensibly for a higher percentage of the take.

INDIGENOUS HUDSON'S

In 2014, Oakland County executive L. Brooks Patterson offered a solution to Detroit's economic and social problems. He said to turn it 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."⁹² Ironically, in the early 1990s, casinos in Detroit very well may have created the reservation scenario he supposedly desired. However, at the time Michigan tribes proposed opening casinos in Detroit, he opposed them on the grounds they posed an economic threat to gaming operations in Wayne County. While Patterson objects to any developments in Detroit he sees as threats to his extremely wealthy county, he also evokes Indigeneity as criminality and waste in order to drive investment northward. In Michigan, a similar evocation by the Governor in the 1990s drove voters across the state to support a state constitutional amendment in favor of corporate casinos in place of Indian casinos.

It was a classic bait-and-switch, with an anti-Indian twist. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Michigan voters rejected corporate casinos within city limits at least two times. On one of those occasions, in 1988, legendary Detroit activists James and Grace Lee Boggs formed a coalition called Detroiters Uniting to fight another corporate casino

proposal by Mayor Coleman Young.⁹³ At a June “speak-out” that year James Boggs, who was also an autoworker, lamented Young’s continued support of casino gaming despite popular opinion and he was wary of Young’s description of gaming as an “industry,” merely an attempt to bring “large-scale production for the national and international market” back to Detroit.⁹⁴ Boggs called for a more holistic approach based on education, farming, and community development. Detroit, the Bogges argued, could not rely on a single large “industry.” Instead, it had to develop, “the kinds of local enterprises that will provide meaningful jobs and incomes for all citizens.”⁹⁵

Boggs recognized the dispossession of Indigenous people as the transit of empire around the globe, writing

Capitalism in the United States is unique because, unlike capitalism elsewhere—which first exploited its Indigenous people and then fanning through colonialism to exploit other races in other countries—it started out by dispossessing one set of people (the Indians) and then importing another set of people (the Africans) to do the work on the land. This method of enslavement not only made blacks the first working class in the country to be exploited for their labor but made blacks the foundation of the capital necessary for early industrialization.⁹⁶

And, while he recognized “Indian dispossession and African slavery [as] the twin foundations of white economic advancement in North America,” he didn’t recognize Indigenous people as actual living Detroiters when he asked, “What is going to happen to the one million people who still live in Detroit, half of them on some form of public assistance, not only blacks but Chicanos, Arab Americans, Asians, and poor whites?”⁹⁷ Notice the absence of “Indians.” Though the record doesn’t show the Boggses’ position on *Indian* gaming in particular, his statements speak to the understanding of Natives as already gone. And yet, Indigenous sovereignty may have provided an opportunity to fulfill the Boggses holistic vision of Detroit not just a place to get a job or to make a

living, but as “the place where the humanity of people is enriched ... liv[ing] with people of many different ethnic and social backgrounds.”⁹⁸

Following new provisions in state a federal Indian law several Michigan tribes proposed to build casinos in downtown Detroit. At the same time, officials in Windsor, Ontario had approved casino development. Governor Mike Engler argued against Indian casinos, implying they were amoral, lawless, and ungovernable, while warning that casinos in Canada would take American dollars overseas. Both Indian casinos and Canadian casinos threatened the economic interests of Detroit and its majority Black population. Ostensibly following his constituents wishes, Governor Engler refused to negotiate with tribes and eventually backed a state constitutional amendment in support of corporate casinos. This time voters conceded to the new rule. Other than treaties, the settlement documents from *Tribes v. Engler* are the most litigated documents in Michigan tribal history, demonstrating the degree to which settler governments view Indian casinos as a threat.⁹⁹ In her study of Seminole gaming operations in Florida, Jessica Cattelino writes, contrary to scholarship arguing that “indigenous market participation entails capitalist dependency and promotes internal colonialism,” that Indian casinos are a way to preserve distinctive identities and secure sovereign rights.¹⁰⁰ Thus, they “bring into relief the double binds that characterize the politics of indigeneity in the United States and other settler states.”¹⁰¹ She continues:

“Casino rights are based in tribal sovereignty ... but once tribal nations exercise their political autonomy in order to gain economic self-reliance, they immediately must fend off attacks on their sovereignty. That is, so long as American Indians are economically dependent, their political independence largely goes unchallenged, but any economic independence in turn threatens their political autonomy.”¹⁰²

The reason for this, she argues, is images of Indigenous peoples are central to how settlers identify, politically, culturally and spatially.¹⁰³ Settlers need Indigenous people to seem poor, criminal, and dependent on U.S. institutions in order to justify settler occupation.¹⁰⁴ Thus, when tribes pursue casinos as vehicles for economic power, they threaten the interests and self-image of the nation, by securing tribal control over social services, housing, education, healthcare, and governance.¹⁰⁵ Now make these off-reservation casinos backed by sovereignty rights in the middle of a post-industrial city like Detroit and casinos are also a threat to settler spatiality.

The moral authority to justify these statements about Indigenous people and their economic activity is a derivative of anti-Indianism, what Lakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn describes as that which denigrates, demonizes, and insults Natives; it places the blame on them for settler colonial history; and it appropriates Native cultures and beliefs. In short, anti-Indianism replaces the moral world known by Indigenous people with the “ethical example throughout the world of a democratic and ‘good’ society developed for the purpose of profiting from that activity.”¹⁰⁶ Following Cook-Lynn, we can understand the representation of Indigenous casinos as lawless and immoral, the counter to the proper and lawful economic benefits of corporate casinos.

Three entangled discourses convinced voters to approve corporate casinos: the threat of Indigenous sovereignty, the threat of border security, and the threat of competition for jobs between Indigenous and African-descended people. All three discourses rely on cognitive bordering processes that fracture and flatten local populations into adversarial identity groups. Bordering takes place whether or not geopolitical boundaries separate identity groups, but in the case of Detroit casinos, the

county line and the international border demarcate competing interests. Consider L. Brooks Patterson's position on Detroit casinos: He called them "a declaration of war" because he didn't want gaming in Detroit's Wayne County to cut into business at the Palace and Hazel Park Harness Raceway in Oakland County.¹⁰⁷ Rather than viewing casinos as merely a geopolitical issue, however, I follow Jennifer Denetdale and Melanie Yazzie's understanding of bordertowns as cities like Gallup, New Mexico, which exists on the border of Navajo Nation. Like extractive industries in these bodertowns, casinos in Detroit fold Indigenous people and land into capitalist modes of production/development that demand their disappearance at the same time it depends on their participation. Engler never would have convinced Michigan voters to approve corporate casinos if he hadn't threatened them with Indigenous casinos.

THE THREAT OF INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY

Indian gaming began with the Regan Administration's neoliberal effort to dodge treaty agreements. In 1982, Congress enacted the Tribal Tax Status Act, which stated tribes should be empowered to develop their own economic activities rather than depend on congressional appropriations.¹⁰⁸ In other words, gaming is not a special right granted on the basis of race or economic disadvantage. It is governmental right.¹⁰⁹ Yet, as Heidi Stark argues, trade and intercourse acts do little to enforce Indigenous self-determination. Instead, they create a set of paternalistic statutes and policies that disguise settler criminality (i.e. possession of stolen land, broken treaties) as attempts to "save" natives from exploitation and pauperism.¹¹⁰

The first tribal casino in Michigan, and the U.S., opened on New Year's Eve in 1983 when Fred Dakota of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community opened a casino in his garage.¹¹¹ After eighteen months, the U.S. federal government shut him down. In 1984 and 1985, five federally recognized tribes extend gaming operations and the U.S. Attorney for the Western District sought an injunction to shut them down.¹¹² The Department of Justice protested gaming operations based on a concern about lawlessness in Indian Country. Indigenous criminality becomes a common attack on Indian gaming in Michigan, confirming what Stark observes as settler representations of Indigenous criminality that “*reduce* Indigenous political authority, domesticat[e] Indigenous nations within the settler state, [and] *produc[e]* the settler nation-state.”¹¹³ The state government meanwhile opposed Indian casinos on the grounds that they would compete with government lottery revenues and constituent gambling industries in horse and dog racing, sports books, and card rooms. In *United States v. Bay Mills Indian Community, et. al*, the court acknowledged that casinos are necessary to provide tribal government services, that federal statutes on gaming were concerned with non-Indian organized crime, that federal agencies had been helping tribes develop gaming, and Indian gaming had been on Congress's legislative agenda since 1983.¹¹⁴ The court also noted that lawlessness claims “rang hollow,” given that State of California had endorsed gaming without succumbing to criminals.¹¹⁵

In 1988, the Michigan legislature passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act to allow Michigan tribes to continue casino-style gambling. However, tribes had to sue Governor Blanchard and later Governor Engler for failing to negotiate in good faith to make casinos possible. The Grand Traverse Band, Bay Mills Indian, Hannahville Indian,

Keweenaw Bay Indian, the Salt Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians stated that they need the casino in Detroit because they lack an adequate land base to provide facilities for economic development and much-needed jobs for Indigenous people. The local Indian community would also benefit from the funding of social programs operated by Indian organizations in the Detroit area, which would have a tribal office. At the time, more than 8,000 Indigenous people lived in Wayne County, which includes Detroit.

By 1993, the tribes sued Governor Engler, directly, ending with an identical gaming compact for seven tribes. Engler agreed to waive regulatory rights, but he insisted on a consent decree that requires tribes to share revenue with the state at eight percent and local units of government at two percent.¹¹⁶ Engler also insisted on an additional provision that would, he thought, further limit tribes' ability to open off-reservation casinos: He demanded off-reservation casinos share revenue with *all* tribes in the state, but he didn't expect any of them to take him up on it. Simply put, he didn't understand the economics of tribal casinos, not only organized to meet members needs and secure sovereignty, but also, as Razack argues, to "include an ethics and practice premised on stewardship over the land and the interdependency of all."¹¹⁷

In the 1994, the Grand Traverse Band and Lac Vieux Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians acquired an option on the Hudson's department store building in downtown Detroit to convert it into an off-reservation American Indian casino.¹¹⁸ An ad for the casino depicts an atrium that would include a multilevel spiral escalator that would carry passengers to an upper-level entertainment complex, including bowling

alleys, movie theaters and pool tables. Through nostalgic references to Hudson's heyday, the ad suggests the casino will revive Detroit's economy.¹¹⁹

As casinos began to pop up in Michigan, it was obvious that gaming benefited tribes in the form of new schools and community centers, low-income housing, loans for development, cultural activities and traditions.¹²⁰ Neighboring communities also benefited from revenues the tribes pushed into local governments and growth of the casino industry generated jobs and revenue for its members spread out across the state.¹²¹ Sault Ste. Marie Chippewa in particular were able to increase benefits to members, including free health coverage, hunting and fishing permits, housing assistance, educational grants and scholarships, and elderly dividend checks.¹²² They also provided tax breaks for members living on historic tribal lands located off-reservation. These are forms of development that Cattlino understands as non-capitalist processes of "valuation," "the ways that people determine, enact, represent, and evaluate that which matters to them."¹²³ The economic impact of Indian gaming in particular, she argues, "cannot be measured by financial indicators alone."¹²⁴ Rather, in the case of Seminole gaming, economic security has empowered tribes to reconsider their tribal identity and reorganize governance.¹²⁵

Arguing against Engler's plans to tribes' attempts to add more land to their reservations, Sault Ste. Marie Tribal Chairman Bernard Bouschor noted the tribe operates a number of businesses and employs a number of people on those lands. "Nobody argued about our reservation land when we had nothing," he said. "The tribe has taken worthless land that had little or no taxable value and developed it, creating thousands of jobs and spinoff benefits to the community. Without land, we are not a tribe."¹²⁶ The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe had 20 businesses across the state that employed nearly 3,000 people and an

estimate for one casino suggested that at least 1,000 Indigenous people from southeast Michigan would find jobs at the facility.

Nevertheless, as Michigan's tribes began proposing off-reservation gaming establishments, pundits and politicians began presenting Indigenous sovereignty as a form of Indigenous criminality and a threat to the Detroiters' autonomy. Reminding Michigan residents they had opposed casinos, John Pepper, from the *Detroit News and Free Press*, wrote voters "would have no direct authority over the issue, by placing the land in the trust of an Indian tribe."¹²⁷ In a story about the Hudson's ad, the *Detroit Free Press* reminded readers that only the U.S. Department of Interior and Governor Engler had to approve off-reservation casinos — not Detroiters, who had three times voted against corporate casinos by referendum. Reporter Tina Lam, further stressed the loss of control for Detroiters, writing: "If casinos come to Detroit ... Detroit will have a sovereign nation within its borders."¹²⁸ That means, she explained, Detroit would be unable to collect taxes and casino-goers would subject to a tangled system of rules about who has authority to act when, for instance, a fight breaks out. She provided this warning, despite that, just a year earlier, two prominent Detroit law enforcement unions had said that job creation will likely reduce crime.¹²⁹ They also pointed out the tribe would pay for additional law enforcement.

Governor Engler similarly coupled Indigenous immorality with lost control and lost taxes. "Once I say yes, it's gone. I can't take it back. There are no enforcement mechanisms. We couldn't overcome that hurdle."¹³⁰ He also stressed his view that casinos were immoral, contrary to the hard-working society he envisioned. Meanwhile,

the *Free Press* began reporting on the increased land holdings of the state's seven established tribes, reminding readers that the land would be removed from local tax rolls.

Keenan writes that an “unsettled space” is a contested space wherein Indigenous subjectivity is a “state of embodiment that continues to unsettle white[ness].”¹³¹ She continues:

“Indigenous populations are sometimes described as representing a political crisis because their out-of-place-ness also jeopardizes the nation-state-citizen classification system — their long-standing connection to the land does not fit the legal systems of property and sovereignty upon which those states are founded.”¹³²

This view is consistent with Indigenous feminists like Mishuana Goeman who writes, “[t]he inability to bind land to settler societies or expunge Indigenous sense of place is the anxiety producing thorn in the side of the nation-states.”¹³³ Mark Rifkin similarly writes that Indigenous people appear in U.S. history as “queer deviations” from “the normative structures of home-making and land tenure.”¹³⁴ Their presence “threatens the safety and welfare of the (white) nation,” which assumes ownership of Indigenous land through hard work and nation-building, in a phrase “white possession.”¹³⁵

Located in the downtown core of Detroit, Indigenous sovereignty threatened to replace the capitalist system with intertribal economics, which, Jessica Cattelino argues, appropriate capitalist practices like casino gaming to expand social services and secure tribal sovereignty.¹³⁶ Indigenous laborers (i.e. casino workers) also represented a threat to Detroit's unemployed workers. By refusing casinos, Detroiters affirm their possession of the city, even if it means handing it over to corporate casinos, while the state and corporations benefit in terms of taxes and revenue. And yet, following Doreen Massey and later Keenan in understanding space as the “simultaneity of stories thus far,” we can

remember Black and Indigenous experience with the Hudson Site to denaturalize the neotopic vision. Indigenous attempts to claim the site, in particular, suggest the possibility of other, non-capitalist uses.

As casinos began to pop up in Michigan, it was obvious gaming benefited tribes in the form of new schools and community centers, low-incoming housing, loans for development, cultural activities and traditions.¹³⁷ Neighboring communities also benefited from revenues the tribes pushed into local governments and growth of the casino industry generated jobs and revenue for its members spread out across the state.¹³⁸ Sault Ste. Marie Chippewa in particular were able to increase benefits to members, including free health coverage, hunting and fishing permits, housing assistance, educational grants and scholarships, and elderly dividend checks.¹³⁹ They also provided tax breaks for members living on historic tribal lands located off-reservation. These are forms of development that Cattlino understands as non-capitalist processes of “valuation,” “the ways that people determine, enact, represent, and evaluate that which matters to them.”¹⁴⁰ The economic impact of Indian gaming in particular, she argues, “cannot be measured by financial indicators alone.”¹⁴¹ Rather, in the case of Seminole gaming, economic security has empowered tribes to reconsider their tribal identity and reorganize governance.¹⁴²

While tribal leaders in Michigan stressed they were trying to reclaim some of the land that was once theirs, the *Free Press* reported, nearby business owners began complaining about unfair advantages for tribes that open restaurants, motels, convenience stores, and bars on reservation land.¹⁴³ With fewer taxes, fees and inspections, the tribe can afford to pay higher wages and better benefits. Complaints like these led Engler to start opposing requests from tribes looking to add to their reservations, while his spokesman John Truscott began to complain about their economic status, calling them

“very wealthy” and insisting that the tribe doesn’t need the extra advantages anymore.”

While opposing purchases for economic development, Engler approved a 200-acre parcel the Sault Ste. Marie tribe purchased for “recreation and powwows.”¹⁴⁴ By focusing on “traditional” activities, Engler didn’t merely relegate Indigenous people to the past, but, as Sherene Razack argues with Phil Deloria and Scott Lyons, effectively vanished Indians from history, positing them as timeless things rather than as social actors with only “the right to hunting and fishing ... not the right to determine how the land should be used.”¹⁴⁵

Specifically relating to Indian casinos, Cattelino writes the success of Indian casinos destroys the traditional Indian of American ideology, the “poor, antimaterialist, out of the space and time of modernity” Native. Speaking with Seminole leaders, she writes, “No one bothered them so long as they were poor and selling trinkets to tourists, but once they started making money they came under harsh public scrutiny and were subject to new stereotypes and resentments from non-Indians.”¹⁴⁶ Ken Meshigaud, chairman of the Hannahville tribe, understood this history all too well when he called the governor’s attempted block on future purchases “that old paternalistic, colonialist attitude that federal and state governments need to get rid of. We were poor and no one ever thought about us.”¹⁴⁷ Now that tribes are exercising their sovereign rights, “it becomes a problem, and we’re at the forefront of their minds.” These machinations over crime and morality — including tax-paying as the factual and moral obligation of hard-working citizens — justify the white possession of Detroit through the prior, moral occupation and use of Indigenous lands. Meanwhile, Indian casinos represent a threat not only to

economic policy in Detroit but also to the basic authority of white possession, which claims the right to exclude whomever it deems a threat to U.S. economic interests.

BORDER SECURITY

The only argument for casino development that gained any traction came in the form of another threat: if Detroit didn't open casinos, U.S. dollars would flow overseas to the new casinos in Windsor, Ontario, just across the river from Detroit. In return, Windsor would traffic casino crime back over to the States. Columnist Bob Talbert couldn't contain his nostalgia for what he clearly thought was a romantic past, asking in a 1993 column "Border and Indian wars over casino gambling?" In what he called a "border skirmish," the Canadian government was going after the "hundreds of millions of entertainment dollars Michigan residents will spend in Canadian casinos."¹⁴⁸ And, here's Tina Lam in 1993: "While Detroiters who oppose casinos for moral reasons say Windsor is welcome to all the casino business, a chorus of business leaders and others say Michigan will miss a big opportunity if it lets Windsor hold a casino monopoly in the Detroit metro area. This argument keeps the four existing casino dreams alive."¹⁴⁹

While Windsor casinos became an external threat to the economic stability of Detroit, they also set the conditions for Indigenous sovereignty and employment to appear as internal economic threats to Detroit's economy and Black labor. By 1995, city planners and the city's Black leadership wanted casino jobs for Black Detroiters. And Greektown casino developers tried to negotiate, promising that sixty-five percent of casino jobs would go to Black people and fifteen percent to other people of color.¹⁵⁰ They also promised to contract with a firm composed of Black ministers to act as a watchdog

over hiring, subcontracting, and community relations, not unlike the paternalistic hiring process established by Henry Ford. Private casino developers began saying that fairness and free enterprise demand that the casinos hire non-Indians, and eventually Black ministers come out against Indian casinos altogether. The Rev. Norflette Mersier, a member of Detroit Area Ministers for Economic Development, said the Hudson's plan should not be allowed to move forward.¹⁵¹ His group supported a non-Indian casino plan in Detroit by Atwater Entertainment and Mirage Resorts.

Meanwhile, radio talk shows were hearing from listeners complaining the requirement casinos hire a certain number of Black workers was also unfair, discriminatory, and illegal. Columnist Dorin Levin wrote, "I'm troubled by provisions of the Chippewas' agreement with the city that mandate the racial composition of the casino's workforce. The provisions don't sound legal though I'm not a lawyer and they encourage polarization between the city and its neighbors, which no one needs. To his credit, Mayor Archer is no admirer of casinos. He'd like healthier, cleaner types of development."¹⁵² It's hard to miss Levin's juxtaposition of the "racial composition" of casinos. With the suggestion that Indian casinos are unhealthy, unclean, and illegal, he also erases the sovereignty of Indigenous nations by categorizing Indigeneity as a racial category subject to anti-discrimination laws, rather than a set of conditions shared by autonomous tribes. In reference to Indigenous people, Mark Rifkin writes, "Race does not so much take place of what might be termed *politics*, but rather it serves as a crucial way of defining and circumscribing *tribe* when the United States recognizes limited Native self-governance."¹⁵³ Thus, race folds tribal governance into U.S. jurisdiction, recognizing their political significance as diminished or domestic while suggesting they

govern themselves (i.e. “a sovereign nation within city limits).”¹⁵⁴ As Cattelino argues, the “racial composition” of Indigeneity suggests the past doesn’t matter and therefore forces tribes to “make their way in a social landscape dominated by a white-black racial logic.”¹⁵⁵

The racial rhetoric about workers disguises attempts to expand capital as bureaucratic failures to negotiate with Indigenous nations or to understand their state of exception within the boundaries of the U.S., while reducing them to racial populations that can be managed under U.S. law. The split between Black and Native populations in the press then becomes a race discourse that ultimately upholds the moral authority of patriarchal white sovereignty by conceding to Engler — and therefore to capital — the right to decide what counts as fair and legal.

THE CORPORATE CASINO

Political scientist Fred Wacker suggests attitudes toward casinos changed in Michigan because of a loss of manufacturing jobs, as well as the rise of Indian gaming and legalized gambling in Ontario. Native casinos outside of cities were taking in \$1 billion a year, three times the Windsor casinos and approximately four-fifths of that take came from metro Detroiters. Thus, Windsor and Native casinos (outside of city) weren’t viewed as simply as competition for Detroit, but also a threat to the Detroit economy, and experts warned that if Michigan voters didn’t approve corporate casinos in the 1996 referendum, Native casinos would continue to monopolize the industry.”¹⁵⁶ In fact, as Adam Bubb acknowledges, the success of tribal gaming made commercial gaming viable.”¹⁵⁷

In 1995, Governor Engler rejected all the Indian gambling proposals. “The question before me is this: “Will I use a loophole provided by federal law to circumvent state law that says casino gambling is a crime? ... No, I will not.”¹⁵⁸ Again, Governor Engler described Indian casinos as illegal, but then he shifted the responsibility to voters, hinting that he would approve casinos if they did first in a referendum. In the 1996 state referendum, Proposition E, Detroit was the assumed subject.¹⁵⁹ An amendment to Proposal E in fact said commercial casinos could operate only in cities with 800,000 residents or more, which meant Detroit alone.¹⁶⁰ That amendment also stated that the state would offer only three contracts per city. Two projects had begun development even before the vote: Greektown, a collaboration between two Detroit entrepreneurs and the Sault Ste. Marie, and gaming boats on the Detroit River operated by the Atwater group.¹⁶¹ Because Engler rejected the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe proposal for an Indian casino, Greektown banded together with Atwater to push for the referendum.¹⁶² Detroit’s new mayor, Dennis Archer, meanwhile leaned on his reputation as the anti-Coleman Young (i.e. more agreeable to conservative Republicans) to push what he saw as potential for job creation.¹⁶³

Eventually, the man who worried about the morality of gambling when Natives were trying to open them backed a state constitutional amendment — the Michigan Gaming Control and Revenue Act of 1996 — that allowed for three non-Indian casinos to be licensed in the City of Detroit.¹⁶⁴ Governor Engler built a massive thirty percent tax rate on each casino into the Michigan Gaming Control and Revenue Act of 1996, compared to ten percent revenue-sharing he had negotiated with Michigan tribes. What he rationalized as an attempt to get the best deal for the state appears actually follows the

juridical and legal frameworks of the U.S., arguing for the “necessity of imposing western law over foreign territories and bodies” by creating the image of Indigenous space as lawless, thereby continuously and expansively affirming the boundaries of the settler nation.¹⁶⁵ In short, Engler argued that if Detroit was going to have casinos, then Natives weren’t going to be the primary beneficiaries because that would affirm their sovereign rights and voters responded.¹⁶⁶

Greektown property owners, who bankrolled the petition drive for the gaming act, ended up with one of the three slots, building Greektown Casino with the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe, the only tribe that ended up with any ownership of a casino in a process that Michigan’s Indigenous people had begun. They didn’t not establish the casino as an Indian casino and it therefore had no benefits of off-reservation sovereignty. Having no experience running a corporate gaming establishment (on land they held as commercial property), the tribe eventually watched the casino slide into bankruptcy.

On the tail of the casino bait-and-switch and despite several other attempts to redevelop the Hudson’s block, city officials had the structure imploded at 5:45 p.m., the store’s closing time, on October 24, 1998. At the time, it was the largest structure ever imploded.¹⁶⁷ “With a deafening roar that will echo in the hearts of Detroiters for decades,” The Detroit News wrote, “the Hudson’s building was blasted to the ground — ending one era and beginning another in 30 ground-shaking seconds. A symbol of glamor for three generations, a symbol of decay for another, the mammoth structure wobbled like a drunk, hesitated, then collapsed into a 60-foot-high pile of rubble — coating downtown streets with a fine gray dust.” Asked years later about his decision to demolish the Hudson’s building, Mayor Archer said, “There were proposals coming from people who

said if we get the casino license we will be happy to redo Hudson's. But when all of that went by the wayside then there was nothing productive that was presented to me or presented to the city to do something at Hudson's. So, we decided that we would take it down to make the site available for business development."¹⁶⁸

When Greektown Casino fell into economic trouble in 2010, Mike Duggan, as a board member of Greektown Super Holdings, oversaw the bankruptcy and when the Michigan Gaming Control Board approved a deal to end the bankruptcy. As Detroit's current mayor and a big supporter of Gilbert's redevelopment scheme, Duggan has also been a lead proponent of citywide water shutoffs and tax foreclosures. The bankruptcy deal allowed a group of 10 hedge funds and mutual funds to do so without formal licensing. Three years later, in 2013, Dan Gilbert and his acquisition company quickly purchased ninety-seven percent ownership in Greektown Casino-Hotel.

Only a couple of decades after Engler convinced voters to change the state constitution to dispossess Michigan tribes, Gilbert consolidated the dispossession of the only tribal casino in Detroit. Like his predecessors, Detroit's white patriarch described his purchase as a moral obligation to "defend" Detroit from economic ruin, while downplaying his \$400-million profit: "We bought it as a defensive play more than anything else," Gilbert told *Crain's Detroit*. "Two and a half years before we bought it, it came out of bankruptcy under the bondholders, and they weren't running it well. It would have been very bad for downtown if Greektown went under. But (the casino) is probably a business that's fully valued right now."

As 2019 concluded, Gilbert sold his investments in Greektown for \$1 billion, ostensibly to invest in a soccer franchise for Detroit.¹⁶⁹ Though flipping Greektown for

\$400 million seems innocuous alongside some of Gilbert's other redevelopment projects, he also consolidated a process that had dispossessed the casino's original owners, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe, of property they had been attempting to refinance.

UNSETTLING HUDSON'S

As an attempt to express Gilbert's neoliberal utopia, the Hudson Site is a space of forgetting held up by a particular relation of belonging. It depends on the disavowal of Black history and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous people, where "ongoing" refers not to a static state of possession, but the necessity of constantly renewing white possession by presenting Indigenous people as threats to U.S. economic security. Simply, Black and Indigenous people do not belong in Gilbert's Detroit. I assume redevelopment is a way to hold up space through the built environment, especially new buildings and (infra)structures, as well as events and use-narratives that inform architectural design (especially related to labor) and ceremonial events related to that design (i.e. press conferences, groundbreaking ceremonies). However, as Jameson shows, the "mass of people" who depend on legal/political/social systems for work and potential investment do not have to believe in "any hegemonic ideology of the system"; they only have to be convinced of its permanence.¹⁷⁰ Keenan likewise emphasizes though space "is shaped so that it holds up a particular relation of belonging," it is not fixed or inevitable.¹⁷¹ It has to be maintained, in this case with regular redevelopment and renewal. Thus, as a space merely held up by redevelopment, Gilbert's neotopia loses its sense of inevitability (as progress) or permanence (as the future), opening up potential uses or intended residents for the Hudson's Site. If Gilbert's development is the visuality of his self-evident

authority, then Black and Indigenous history related to the Hudson Site also unsettles or denaturalizes the representation of permanence in Gilbert's larger utopic vision and thereby decolonizes the future of the space.

By describing this process, I am not (merely) lamenting a missed opportunity for Detroit and Michigan tribes, but denaturalizing — indeed, unsettling — the capitalist space of the Hudson Site. If space is renewed and redeveloped for particular subjects, then Hudson's represents the attempt to maintain (i.e. hold up) the value of the space for capital through the narrative of what the site has been and what it could be. When Gilbert makes statements about buying properties (Greektown, Hudson's) to prevent them going under or falling into ruin, he is also holding them for capitalist redevelopment (i.e. colonizing the future). He is, in other words, preventing other forms of development and is profiting from those foreclosures. Further, by appearing as Detroit's white savior/Traditional Hero — the one who visualizes history — he gets to write himself and other capitalist “men of ideas” like the men of the Hudson family out of Detroit's decline. The Hudson family hastened suburbanization and white flight; Gilbert, as founder and CEO of the mortgage company Quicken Loans, quickened the disinvestment, dispossession-by-foreclosure, and bankruptcy of Detroit through the mortgage crisis and emergency management. Knowing Hudson's represents the capitalist exploitation of land and labor in Detroit, as well as a missed opportunity for Indigenous valuation, won't prevent Gilbert from developing the Hudson Site or the city more broadly according to his own vision, but it can unsettle the space by unsettling his MAGA narrative of redevelopment. That is to say, Indigenous valuation denaturalizes the capitalist use of space not only so we can imagine other sets of relations on the Hudson Site (and across

Detroit), but also so we can challenge the assumption that capitalist spaces need to be maintained. What would happen, for instance, if we let the space go empty like so many of Detroit's neighborhoods? What if we understood "empty" to be a capitalist frame, as in not-producing-for-capital? Because, as widespread urban farming in Detroit has demonstrated, people in the city have other ways of maintaining the city for their own uses ... outside capital.

Conclusion

Off-Site Countervisuality

Emergency Management and Emergent Indigenous Praxis in Southwest Detroit

Returning to the instigating subject of this work, I am ready to answer what I see as the question guiding all the others: When I first read about James Robertson, the Detroit Walking Man, while researching creative redevelopment, I asked, how does settler colonialism operate in a Black city on an international boundary?

The short answer: the quick transformation of James Robertson overworked laborer into the Detroit Walking Man hero — doesn't merely reveal the neoliberal political rationality of redevelopment, but silences and immobilizes him as a potential figure of resistance. Neoliberalism converts his social-political labor (walking) into economic terms as the *proper* conditions for laborers, the *property* of laborers to give (i.e. to alienate from themselves). In the end a Black man, a worker, who walked in order to refuse his disappearance, an act of resistance in the Black radical tradition, became instead a figure of the new order, immobilized by a new, supposedly better life far away from his friends and family. His immobilization moreover articulates a logic of exclusion for would-be workers in Detroit that says, "If you want to stay in the city, these are the new terms of your employment, and if you're lucky, one day we'll set you up someplace else where your worries will be gone."

Beyond Robertson, the misapprehension of dispossession makes it possible for even the most well-meaning activists and artists to negate Indigenous life in the present

and to deny the significance of Indigeneity in a majority Black city, while the least-thoughtful of them say things like — and a white activist in Detroit actually said this to me — “Well, I think you’re Indigenous if you have a relationship to land?” I see the logics of elimination and exclusion playing out through everyday discourse in Detroit, lack of access to public space, surveillance and policing, and exclusion from redevelopment strategy. Settler space reduces mobility for racialized populations in Detroit to the degree that many are afraid of leaving their homes.

In 2019, Detroit activist, artist, and educator Antonio Cosme took his kayak out to Belle Isle late one summer afternoon and found himself detained by U.S. Border Patrol.¹ Cosme was born in Detroit of a Boricuan mother (Boricua is the pre-colonial Taíno term for Puerto Rico) and Native father from Texas. His skin is brown. He wears his black hair long and curly and he lets his beard grow out. Belle Isle is right on the Detroit River between the U.S. and Canada. The park’s legacy of racial violence extends beyond its founding on Indigenous land to 1943, when white Detroiters began a race riot to chase Black Detroiters off the island. In 2013, writes Kurashige, “the same sentiments could easily be found in online comments” when Governor Snyder and Emergency Manager Orr seized control of Belle Isle, added a checkpoint, and instituted an eleven-dollar fee, thereby restricting access to the park.² Thus, already a precarious site of recreation for people who look like Cosme, the park became the site of increased surveillance under the neoliberal rationality of emergency management, what Geoffrey Boyce describes as a process to create more “mobility for capital to cross borders and claim private ownership over resources,” while limiting mobility and access for the public. Boyce uses the concept of “automobility” to describe the effect immigration policy has on racialized

populations, regardless of immigration status. Automobility is an “expressly racial and racializing condition through which peoples’ access to and control over the conditions of work, leisure and everyday social reproduction are mediated via specific logics of policing and related state violence.”³

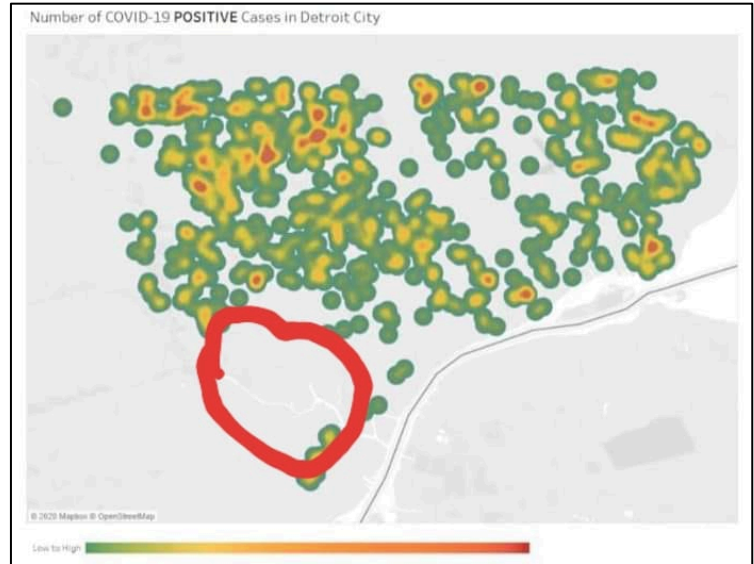
As I’ve argued in this dissertation, the bordertown is a site of contestation realized as a cacophony or entanglement of overlapping and competing technologies of dispossession, racialization, and migration. Immigration policy and border enforcement structure organize settler colonialism in Detroit to eliminate and exclude racialized subjects through what appears as both a spectacle of development (all the promises for a new Detroit) and a surveillance regime limiting mobility for racialized subjects. Citizenship does not confer rights on people of color, rather they become internal enemies of the state, “made Indian” as threats to the economic interests of Detroit’s monied elite. Settlers justified Native slavery on the grounds that Natives were rebellious, criminal, and/or lazy, while prisons today are, Ruth Gilmore argues, modern-day slave plantations in which “surplus” (i.e. unemployed or unemployable) Black people and surplus land (now occupied by prisons) are “put to work” for capital.⁴

The intimacies of land and labor through dispossession, racialization, and migration persists in this spectral threat. Detroit archives are full of stories of “savage,” drunk, and criminal Indians—social outcasts such as Josephine Kidroe, an Afro-Indigenous woman thought to be a prostitute who committed suicide, Mays surmises, because she hadn’t a home among the Walpole Indians nor the Black community of Detroit.⁵ The imperative to code Native peoples as criminal, as “terrorist populations, as queer deviations,” and/or as “threat[s] to the safety and welfare of the white nation” is

both a claim on Native land and an attempt to preserve settler innocence.⁶ It is also the state's attempt, as Heidi Stark shows, to dismiss, ignore, and extend its own illegality and violence.⁷ This performance plays out most violently in the space of the bordertown, where "material histories, social relations, and structural conditions" of criminality remain not unexamined but *redeployed* as visibility. The carceral state overrepresents racialized bodies as inherently criminal in order to decriminalize white crime. This is not racialization of crime, but rather, Naomi Murakawa tells us, "criminalization of the race problem."⁸ Criminals don't need to break laws, because their behaviors (drug use, poor health, loitering in "bad" neighborhoods) are criminalized and their bodies are marked by sight. They might be seen socializing with people already classified as gang members, they might "look the part," or they might show up in places *seen* as crime-ridden.⁹ Police classify black and brown people as gang members visually to justify more intense surveillance. while technologies of seeing and classifying (i.e. surveillance) make subjects and fix racialized representation.¹⁰ Illegible to capitalist production but overrepresented as criminal, the racialized resident, comes to embody placelessness as criminality. "[P]ublic space," Razack writes, "is configured as a space that belongs to the public and one in which the homeless are intruders," who threaten to contaminate white people.¹¹ Evicting a homeless person or someone otherwise viewed as a threat to capital creates "the public" through the space the public can occupy.

White possession reduces automobility for racialized populations in Detroit, the result being many are afraid of leaving their homes. Nothing could be more dire as Covid-19 spreads throughout Detroit. A map of the outbreak provided by the city shows a

big blank space over Southwest Detroit, home to the city's Latinx community (fig. 11). Rather than indicating Southwest Detroit has avoided Covid-19, it indicates, as activist Michelle Martinez has



pointed out, “people who are undocumented may be

Figure 11. Covid-19 Heat Map of Detroit. Detroit Health Department. <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/detroit-health-department/programs-and-services/communicable-disease/coronavirus-covid-19#vizContainer>. 2020 © Mapbox © Open Street Map. Alteration by Michelle Martinez on Facebook. Author screenshot.

scared to go get tested, likely uninsured and not eligible for emergency medicaid [*sic*], or being threatened by ICE.”¹² The blank space in the Covid-19 map suggests a far-reaching regime of surveillance, risk, and violence for undocumented residents, while ICE’s harassment of Cosme suggests a desire to “reserve” public space for private use, confirming Day’s assertion, “The racialized vulnerability to deportation of undocumented, guest-worker, or other provisional migrant populations exceeds the conceptual boundaries that attend ‘the immigrant.’”¹³ Cosme, for instance, was not on the island to work.

As Ana Muñoz writes, “community groups, police, and policy makers dedicate so much time, resources, and narrative effort” to these “geopolitical spaces in flux,”¹⁴ because there is so much at stake in them, as land and labor for capitalist development, as well as possession as a sense of belonging. Along with “narrative effort,” white possession employs any number of ideological and discursive resources including

redevelopment itself as a form of holding up space, a way of (re)claiming space. News reports and popular narratives, maps, brochures, advertisements, and architecture, as well as surveillance and police, embed the built environment with the logics of white possession. The built environment in turn limits the automobility of racialized subjects. However, none of this occurs without resistance from racialized populations. As I show in this conclusion, Indigenous activists in Detroit understand control of the city does not default to public policy, but through the space of the city itself. Resistance to emergency management coheres as counter-space and counter visibility. In some ways, emergency management doesn't merely draw the ire of activists, but creates resistance *movements* by signaling the failure of capitalist values through necessity of violence realignment and renewal. Redevelopment, therefore, is also an opportunity to claim space from whiteness. Thus, graffiti was a hallmark of resistance to emergency management, literally claiming space from redevelopment. The city responded with increasingly brutal policing and incarceration for graffiti artists under the Detroit Graffiti Taskforce while developing its own sanctioned public art regime, the City Walls Mural Program — a not-to-subtle recognition of the disruptive power of graffiti. In this chapter, I narrate the simultaneous trajectory of the emergency management regime — “emergency regime” — with the emergence of counter-visual Indigenous activism in Detroit.

As the emergency regime gave name to ongoing processes of exclusion and dispossession in Detroit empowering the privatization of city's future, it also provided the occasion for activist activity to coalesce and amplify; that is, for it to emerge. I read the correlation between emergency and emergence as a contest for space that takes *place* through and as visual discourse. The emergency regime understands controlling the city

means controlling its image. Using Nicholas Mirzoeff's counter-history of visibility as a frame, I argue while the emergency regime claims the right to envision a Detroit absent people of color, the Raiz Up and other activist/artist groups have created a field of appearance through public cultural production, including graffiti, children's literature, digital occupations, and a form of appearance called "snatching the mic."

FREE THE WATER

By 2010, Detroit, a city built for nearly two million people had dropped to roughly 700,000 residents, up to eighty-five percent of them Black. At the height of this latest push to depopulate the city, the billionaire financier Dan Gilbert leveraged a \$50 million tax break to relocate Quicken Loans from a wealthy suburb to downtown. His downtown buying spree began in earnest after the real estate crisis in 2008, when the city was desperate to unload properties. Gilbert and his companies went on to buy more than ninety-five properties in many instances paying ten dollars or less for vacant city-owned land and buildings he promised to develop later. Then, in October 2012, a lame duck legislature passed Public Act 436, overturning a successful statewide ballot initiative, supported by eighty-one percent of Detroit voters, that rejected a previous emergency manager law.

In March 2013, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder instituted the emergency management system against the will of Michigan voters. Detroit's new emergency manager, Kevin Orr, negotiated to share administrative responsibilities with the newly elected Mayor Mike Duggan. While Orr initiated the city's controversial bankruptcy, Duggan amped up the police force, and together they drove the campaign to rid the city of blight. Their main benefactor is Dan Gilbert, whose mortgage lending business

(Quicken Loans) has hastened foreclosures throughout the city. The triumvirate—Orr, Duggan, Gilbert — constitute what I’m calling an “emergency regime,” after Dylan Rodriguez’s term “prison regime,” to describe a development-centered private/public partnership that disciplines, criminalizes, and otherwise excludes people of color in order to create and protect white property, meaning the right to control city spaces.¹⁵

Jackie Wang describes emergency management as a financial state of exception, a “suspension of so-called democratic modes of governance” to install “emergency managers (EMs) who represent the interests of the financial sector.”¹⁶ As if to prove Wang’s point, on the same day that the Michigan legislature passed the Emergency Management law, Gilbert announced his plan to attract out-of-town investors and entrepreneurs by developing retail stores, apartments, and offices with his properties at the center. His company Rock Ventures and Quicken Loans named this redevelopment scheme “Opportunity Detroit” and they represented visually around town as a series of banners advertising the webpage. In Mirzoeff’s reading of visibility, Gilbert is the Traditional Hero. He has the power to sell property, the power over life, and the ability to assign meaning or interpret signs.¹⁷ He not only determines who has the *right* to see, but also has the right to imagine change or create what Linda Bolton calls a “realm of appearance.”¹⁸

Around the same time the emergency regime went into effect, the Indigenous artist/activist collective The Raiz Up rose to prominence as a voice for local people lost in the rhetoric and materiality of the city’s decline. The group organized around political graffiti, but also hip-hop and other forms of cultural production and disruption. Rolling back to January 2012, Antonio Cosme had just returned to the Southwest Detroit

neighbor where he grew up from Eastern Michigan University, where he studied economics and political science. Right away, he became active in the Detroit graffiti scene, painting in what were typically unpatrolled areas,



Figure 12. "Gentrify Detroit," courtesy Antonio Cosme.

eventually working with a handful of Anishinaabe graffiti artists who prefer to remain anonymous. Eventually, they founded the Raiz Up as an Indigenous artist and activist collective. In Cosme's words, they were frustrated watching their city "get sold off piece by piece, watching every asshole with an idea and a bunch of money get their shit done."¹⁹ They painted the word "Decolonize" on empty factories, along concrete eddies, across overpasses, and pretty much anywhere else they could get away with it, including a water tower. Their work included a dozen closed fists of solidarity and the phrase "free the land," referring to foreclosures and residents' desire to farm on empty lots. The group also wrote the Anishnaabe word for the Detroit region, Zagajibiising [zah-gah-ji-bee-shing], meaning "where the water goes 'round," and hung banners reading "Zagajibiising B4 Detroit" from a freeway overpass. The Raiz Up responded to Opportunity Detroit and the emergency regime in 2013 with a correction, stenciled over the banner at a Hudson Site location to read "Gentrify Detroit" (fig. 12). Returning to Mirzoeff's counter-history on visibility, I read the Raiz Up's work not only as a form of resistance, but as a countervisuality, or what Mirzoeff calls "the right to look," the expression of friendship,

solidarity, or love.²⁰ The right to look is also the right to present a vision of a world “that should exist, but was as yet becoming.”²¹ The Raiz Up’s work also creates a “space of appearance” — defined by Mirzoeff as both a kinetic, live space in which people interact and a potential, latent form of mediated documentation.²² In the latter sense, the Raiz Up’s space of appearance is a visual counter-history to development that enters the archive even as Raiz Up members eventually retreat from the city’s unrelenting graffiti taskforce.

In February 2013, Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr took control of the city. A month later, Gilbert endorsed emergency management at a press conference promoting a new initiative between his venture capital fund Rock Ventures and the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation. He said, “As hard as it is to suspend democracy for a short period of time, I think it’s in the best interest of everyone.”²³ They called the project “A Placemaking Vision For Downtown Detroit.”²⁴ The vision called for a “rebirth” of downtown and public space. Gilbert worked directly with bankruptcy lawyers and others to purchase and renovate buildings downtown, while courting the tech industry through a

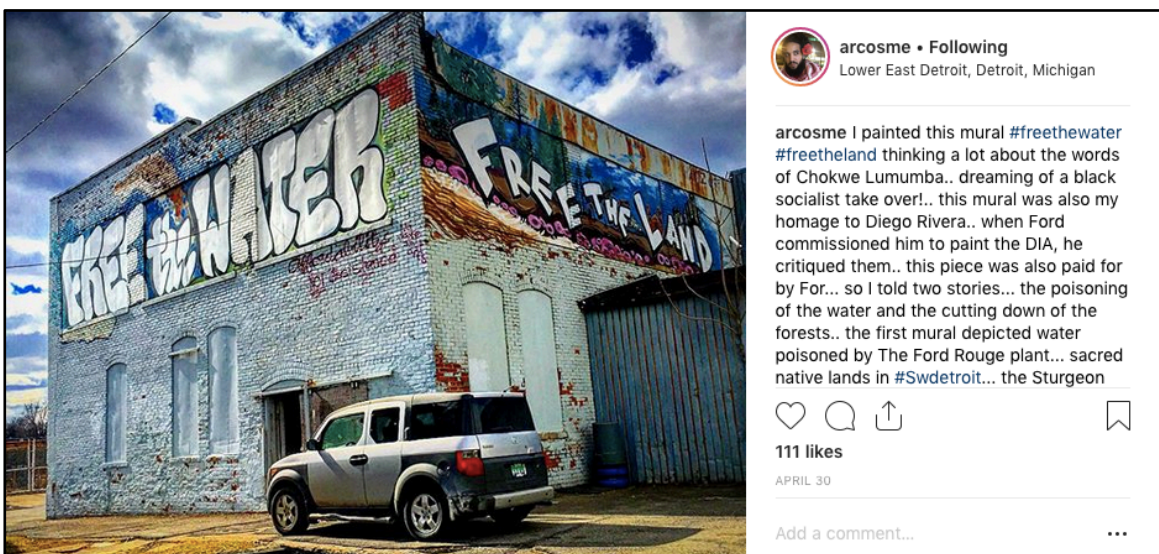


Figure 13. Author screenshot from Instagram. Courtesy Antonio Cosme.

paternalistic anti-black narrative. During the 2014 TechCrunch, Gilbert responded to questions about Detroit's economy by saying, "It's been 50-60 years of complete ineptness ... government mismanagement of the city that caused the issues we have."²⁵ When Gilbert claims fifty years of Black leadership, rather than industrial flight or white flight, led to Detroit's decline, he positions himself as Detroit's hero, empowered by the emergency regime to envision the city's future. He reframed his real estate development project as an act of benevolence that appear as or behind public art projects that disguise gentrification as improvements, like "The Z," Rock Ventures 10-story, 535,000-square-foot parking garage and retail development.²⁶ Among the development's defining features are its walls, adorned with murals painted by twenty-seven international street and graffiti artists.

As Gilbert was unveiling "The Z," 2014 also proved to be a marquee year for the Raiz Up. First, the Knight Foundation awarded them \$25,000 to host hip-hop parties that also organized communities and promoted civic action. The Knight Arts Challenge, which funds the arts "because of their ability to inspire and strengthen communities by connecting people to each other and their city" acted like an endorsement of Raiz Up's values, even if they weren't aware of some of the Raiz Up's activities. Also that year, the Raiz Up began writing "Free the Water" (fig. 13) on city structures, responding to a city plan that threatened to turn off the water for nearly thirty percent of its residents in some districts.²⁷ Thus, the Raiz Up discovered itself caught in the net cast by the emergency regime when police arrested Cosme and William Lucka for spray-painting a prominent water tower with a black fist of solidarity and the words "Free the Water." Before the would year ended, police would arrest Cosme and Lucka just after they depicted the

phrase with a fist of solidarity on a water tower in Highland Park, a separate municipality created as a tax shelter for the auto industry right in the middle of Detroit. Highland Park and Detroit Police actually argued over who would get the arrest. Cosme and Lucka, however, wouldn't hear from authorities for almost a year and a half, so they remained active with other Raiz Up members. In 2015, they doused a prominent statue of Christopher Columbus in red paint and glued a hatchet his head. They also began to "Snatch the Mic" from city officials, first interrupting them at press conference meant to celebrate the so-called successes of the bankruptcy on its one-year anniversary and then in early 2016 at Duggan's state of the city address with New Era Detroit and Black Youth Project 100. Cosme wrote about Snatching the Mic on Facebook, saying "I just wanna say, don't let people in power use public events to define their narrative... it took no money, and very little organizing to have a huge impact on these fools"²⁸ Snatching the Mic is a space of appearance that rejects and replaces the emergency regime's place-making narrative through the kinetic activity of "real people" who, Mishuana Goeman would argue, also practice autonomy from authority as embodied spatiality of social relations. These interventions are consistent with Indigenous feminisms that foreground embodiment as the "entry point" for sovereignty, reframing land as "not just a material, but also a construction of social relationships."²⁹

In 2015, the Detroit Graffiti Taskforce, a newly formed criminal justice unit charged with tracking and prosecuting taggers and graffiti artists, announced itself with a high-profile warrant for Shepard Fairey, the commercial street artist whose work tends to appear in areas undergoing gentrification.³⁰ After completing the 18-story retreat of his brand "Obey" on Gilbert's One Campus Martius, Fairey wheat-pasted several other

versions of his brand illegally in public spaces, including a water tower. He turned himself in and a year later, a judge threw out the charges.³¹ Cosme and Lucka, whose message was political rather than commercial, would become a warning for other street artists. In early 2016, the taskforce took over their case, raiding Lucka's home, taking many of his art-related materials, and eventually bringing a slew of new charges against him, using one of the taskforce's key tools: an expanding graffiti database. As the disparity in outcome for Fairey demonstrates, the contest over city walls in Detroit is a contest over city space and who can occupy it, creating on the one hand a space of opportunity for would-be residents and on the other hand a carceral space for people of color, made all the more material by Gilbert's downtown surveillance program and his recent deal to build the new county jail. The Raiz Up refuses both the space of opportunity and the carceral space through Indigenous appearance in part by creating a counter-archive of redevelopment, even as they get caught up in the emergency regime itself.

At the same time, the city has initiated its own sanctioned graffiti regime called the City Walls Mural Program.³² Launched in 2017 as Mayor Duggan's explicit response to graffiti and blight, City Walls not only monitors graffiti in Detroit and works closely with the Detroit Police Department's graffiti taskforce, but also pays artists to paint innocuous murals on businesses and city-owned properties across the city.³³ The program even includes a Blight Abatement Artist Residency, for artists to paint murals in areas regularly graffitied.³⁴ In addition to issuing citations for unsanctioned public art, City Walls keeps a self-serve online registry. If City Walls staff find the artworks don't meet

standards, they issue a citation and property owner can choose to either paint over it or have the program assign a muralist to the location.³⁵

It's unclear who exactly is making these decisions, but City Walls is another in a long line of public-private partnerships: the city runs the enforcement arm, while a marketing and publishing company called 1xRun administers the mural program. 1xRun ("one-time run") also runs the annual mural festival, Murals in the Market, and ... the Quicken Loans Small Business Mural Project.³⁶ That's right, City Walls has ties to Dan Gilbert. So, while Gilbert himself likely isn't checking every piece of public art registered with the program, the ideology of the emergency regime is certain enforcing Detroit's "look" and therefore its space. It has created a hypervigilant state of visual security in which the programs own artists have been harassed and arrested even when carrying permits. Even with a city official present, artist and deejay Sheefy McFly, who is Black, was arrested in June 2019 for resisting and obstructing police while working on a City Walls commission.³⁷ When he went to check his bag for his permit, an officer tried to detain him and one put her hand on his neck before they ushered him to the cruiser. Though eventually cleared of all charges, McFly — whose real name is Tashif Turner — said the event left a mark on him. The arrest, he said without any irony, "shows the dark side of hypergentrification."³⁸ In October of that year, McFly showed up again in the news, this time to promote City Walls as it reached a milestone: crews had removed one hundred thousand works of graffiti. McFly said., "[Y]ou can become a professional muralist ... beautify your city instead of defacing the city."

Without addressing the content of any particular mural, we can say City Walls acts as surveillance and spectacle to discipline (and punish) Detroit's aesthetic activists under the auspices of "beautification." It beautifies to pacify and it squashes dissent while

homogenizing aesthetic judgement under the guidelines of a branding agency. These sanctioned forms of beauty, as well as Gilbert's Rocket Fiber high-speed internet, make the city seem safe for white entrepreneurs, investors, and tech firms. Yet, like redevelopment itself, these images are incomplete. As ways to hold up space, they demonstrate the impermanence and insecurity of the white possessive logic, of settler colonialism itself, and therefore can be unsettled by ongoing Raiz Up activity. During the summer of 2017, Cosme was active in the Detroit/Puerto Rico Solidarity Exchange at the Allied Media Conference, where participants worked out the correlations between Detroit's bankruptcy and Puerto Rico's debt, both of them managed by the law firm Jones Day. Afterward, Cosme began stressing his Boricuan ancestry, appearing for both his Indigenous Puerto Rican comrades and with Indigenous people on the U.S. mainland, expressed through coalitional work with tribes in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and at the #NoDAPL protests in Standing Rock. He has achieved Instagram fame with more than five thousand followers, which, in addition to his bursts of throwback and attention-seeking photos (i.e. "thirsttrap"), he uses to promote outdoor lifestyles and knowledges for Black youth, amplify activist gatherings, and share decolonial Indigenous histories through food, foraging, and land.³⁹

As City Walls was amping up, Cosme and Lucka reached separate plea deals for the water tower arrest. They plead guilty to their charges and received immunity from future prosecution for all previous work if they claimed it. Without an immunity deal and fearing prosecution by the graffiti taskforce, Cosme's Anishinaabe comrades have quieted down and the ordeal continues to haunt Lucka. For reasons I will not discuss, he never followed up on his probation, court costs or volunteer hours, and therefore remains

vulnerable to arrest.⁴⁰ What remains is the documentation of the Raiz Up's work, which Cosme presents regularly at conferences and other speaking engagements. The significance of Cosme's record cannot be underestimated in Detroit, a city that Grace Lee Boggs considered "a stronghold of possibility." Boggs looked to future generations to take up the mantle of activism and Detroit writers like adrienne marie brown have taken that charge seriously not only by continuing the tradition of activism, but also by imagining, as the title of brown's book, *Emergent Strategies*, suggests, new ways of engaging conflict in the city.⁴¹ So, while the Raiz Up may not emerge with these new ways of being and engaging, it has expanded a space of appearance through which activists and artists continue to emerge.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁴ Andrew Herod, “Social Engineering Through Spatial Engineering: Company Towns and the Geographical Imagination” in *Company Towns in the Americas: Landscape, Power, and Working-Class Communities*. Oliver J Dinius and Angela Vergara, eds. (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 22.
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- ¹⁹ Ibid, 27.
- ²⁰ Ibid. 30.
- ²¹ Ibid, 33-34.
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- ²⁴ Ibid., 215.
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- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 139.
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- ²⁹ Keenan, *Subversive Property*, 5.
- ³⁰ Craig L. Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity: Notes on Race, Space, Architecture, and Music*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 12.
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- ³⁷ Ibid., 12.
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- ³⁹ Henri, Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 38-39.
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Chapter One, Extreme Labor in a Bordertown

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- ⁴⁶ Boyd, *Black Detroit*, 70.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 54, 69, 77.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 101
- ⁴⁹ Boyd, *Black Detroit*, 89.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17; Boyd, *Black Detroit*, 89.
- ⁵¹ Sugrue, *Origins*, 156.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁵³ Boyd, *Black Detroit*, 72; Spence, *Knocking the Hustle*, 9.
- ⁵⁴ Sugrue, *Origins*, 5, 146, 150.
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- ⁶⁵ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 34, 155; Boyd, *Black Detroit* 89
- ⁶⁶ Lewis-Colman, *Race against Liberalism*, 17.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 23; Colleen Doody, *Detroit's Cold War: The Origins of Postwar Conservatism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 74.
- ⁶⁸ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, 78; Lewis-Colman, *Race against Liberalism*, 20.
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- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.
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- ⁹⁰ Rosaldo, 1989.
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- ⁹³ Raiford, *Imprisoned*, 13.
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¹⁴⁴ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship*, 3

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3

¹⁴⁶ Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method*, 159.

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¹⁴⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 205-206.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 222

Chapter Two, The White Possession of Detroit

¹ Selections from this chapter appear in *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 2017, as well as *Riverwise Magazine*, Summer 2017, with co-author Antonio Cosme.

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⁴ Spence, *Knocking the Hustle*, 102

⁵ Runyun, 2017

⁶ Bedrock Detroit. “A Placemaking Vision For Downtown Detroit.”

⁷ Safransky, “Greening the Urban Frontier,” 388-390.

⁸ Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 392; Dunbar-Ortiz, *Indigenous Peoples’ History*, 47.

⁹ Safransky, “Greening the Urban Frontier,” 240.

¹⁰ Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, xxxv.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xix, 20.

¹² Detroit scholars are deeply invested in reading Detroit as a settler colonial city in which Black Detroiters are *made Indian* and Indigenous people don’t exist. I addressed this problem in my 2016 essay, “‘Your Wilderness,’ The White Possession of Detroit in Jim Jarmusch’s *Only Lovers Left Alive*” (*Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 2017). Though aware of my critique — if not that particular article — Rebecca Kinney and Jessi Quizar continued to focus on Black land as the object of settler desire in essays published in 2018 and 2020, respectively. Like my article, Kinney’s 2018 essay, “America’s Great Comeback Story’: The White Possessive in Detroit Tourism.” (*American Quarterly*, 2018) applies Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s “white possessive” framework to tourism discourse. Where I find an absent presence of Indigenous people, Kinney reads Black Detroiters as the first residents of the city, replacing the original inhabitants of the region. Thus, in addition to my original critiques of their work, this chapter insists on a more loyal reading of Moreton-Robinson’s scholarship and a broader application of critical Indigenous studies to settler colonial analysis.

¹³ Spence, *Knocking the Hustle*, 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Juan Antonio Suárez, *Jim Jarmusch*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

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¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

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²³ Hall, “The Problem of Ideology,” 27

²⁴ Pinkerton, “Jim Jarmusch.”

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- ²⁶ Paul Draus and Juliette Roddy, "Ghosts, Devils, and the Undead City: Detroit and the Narrative of Monstrosity," *Space and Culture* 19, no. 1 (2016), 69-70; Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 12.
- ²⁷ Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier," 241-242; Jessi Quizar, "Urban Pioneers: Settler Colonial Narratives and Land Speculation in Detroit," Association of American Geographers. Hyatt Regency, 151 East Wacker Dr., Chicago. April 22, 2015. Conference Presentation; Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 14.
- ²⁸ Mitchell, Introduction, 2.
- ²⁹ Ibid. 3.
- ³⁰ Hall, "The Problem of Ideology," 27.
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- ³⁶ Johan Couling and Stephan Barthel, "The Potential of 'Urban Green Commons' in the Resilience Building of Cities." *Ecological Economics* 86, no. 2 (2013), 156.
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- ³⁸ Jessi Quizar, "Who Cares for Detroit? Urban Agriculture, Black Self Determination, and Struggles of Urban Space." (Dissertation, University of Southern California. Los Angeles, 2014), 4.
- ³⁹ Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier," 239; Quizar, "Who Cares for Detroit?," 5.
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- ⁴¹ Purchase, *Out of Nowhere*, 84.
- ⁴² Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. (New York: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1984), 150.
- ⁴³ Draus and Roddy, "Ghosts, Devils, and the Undead City", 69.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 68; Mays, "Indigenous Detroit," 22.
- ⁴⁵ Lewis D. Solomon, *Detroit: Three Pathways to Revitalization*. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2014), 128-129.
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- ⁴⁸ Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier," 238; Quizar, *Who Cares for Detroit?*, 3.
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- ⁵¹ Kinney, "Longing for Detroit," 5; Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 16.
- ⁵² Draus and Roddy, "Ghosts, Devils, and the Undead City," 68.
- ⁵³ Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier," 241.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.; Pinkerton, "Jim Jarmusch."
- ⁵⁵ Draus and Roddy, "Ghosts, Devils, and the Undead City," 71.
- ⁵⁶ Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier," 238.
- ⁵⁷ Pinkerton, "Jim Jarmusch."
- ⁵⁸ Throughout this chapter, I argue settler colonialism in Detroit disappears Black Americans into the landscape as ghosts and Native Americans as resurgent nature in order to ensure safety and fun for white people in the city, whether they are returning or arriving for the first time to take advantage of cheap land, which is truly *theirs* for the taking. *Only Lovers Left Alive* so readily duplicates these settler colonial logic people have suggested to me the film, its characters, and/or its representations might be ironic. They wonder whether Jarmusch is mocking creative white people moving to Detroit to work on themselves/their art. In my original essay, I provided the following analysis of Jarmusch and irony:
- "In Jarmusch's interview with Nick Pinkerton, he is sincere in his understanding of, and even concern for, Detroit. He hints to the possibility that Adam and Eve, or the film's viewers, are twentieth-century hipsters for whom irony is an identifying form of expression and interpretation. This makes it hard to deny ironic tendencies in the film, yet it's also difficult to see Adam as anything other than a possible

iteration of Jarmusch himself. Though he denies this outright in *Sight & Sound*, he also admits Adam's "heroes" are his own, as well as many of Adam's obsessions. In other words, his construction of these characters and their relationship to the world is genuine, not ironic. Further, even if Jarmusch does intend to expose the white (re)settlement of Detroit, then he does so by performing colonial processes outlined in this paper, allowing him to acknowledge racism without taking responsibility for it.

"In the film, Adam and Eve have lived through the colonization of the Americas. Yet, for all the trivial knowledge and fetishized artifacts they have collected from Euro-American culture, they remain impervious to the settler conditions that benefit them and structure the failure of the civilization Adam so adamantly mourns, including the ease with which they uproot themselves, leaving behind all of Adam's treasured guitars. Their Detroit is a city of monsters, predicated on hearsay perpetuated by people who live far away and who have an interest in speculating on cheap land. This is a very real scenario in Detroit, where a market-only property system ensures that outside investors can buy property on-auction for as little as \$500 *without even being present*. Meanwhile, the people who live in Detroit—the vast majority of them being people of color—are excluded from determining the future of the land they exist on, as we see in the uncertainties experienced by urban farmers who cultivate land that the city can reclaim at the drop of a developer's hat. As irony, then, *Only Lovers Left Alive* would be a 123-minute "God, Don't White People Suck?" joke, told by a white person showing he is "down" with people of color without acknowledging he might have benefited from a system that discriminates against them" (Matthew J. Irwin, "'Your Wilderness': The White Possession of Detroit in Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*." *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 28, no. 4 (December 2017), 93-94).

⁵⁹ Purchase, *Out of Nowhere*, 2.

⁶⁰ Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 11.

⁶¹ Mark Twain, and John Updike. *The Diary of Adam and Eve: And Other Adamic Stories*. (London: Hesperus Press, 2002), 10.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶³ Draus and Roddy, "Ghosts, Devils, and the Undead City," 73.

⁶⁴ Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 15.

⁶⁵ Richard Dyer, *White*. (London: Routledge, 1997), 210.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 14-15, 23, 31.

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⁶⁸ Purchase, *Out of Nowhere*, 12.

⁶⁹ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 32, 34, 37.

⁷⁰ Dyer, *White*, 186-187.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 184-185, 187.

⁷² Darden, 93; Quizar, "Who Cares for Detroit?," 2-3

⁷³ Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 19.

⁷⁴ Hall, "The Problem of Ideology"; Draus and Roddy, "Ghosts, Devils, and the Undead City," 70.

⁷⁵ Purchase, *Out of Nowhere*, 76

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⁷⁷ Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier," 238; Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*, 50.

⁷⁸ Hall, 44.

⁷⁹ Draus and Roddy, "Ghosts, Devils, and the Undead City," 72.

⁸⁰ Pinkerton, "Jim Jarmusch."

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⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ⁸⁷ Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*, 4.
- ⁸⁸ Corn, *Great American Thing*, 256-260.
- ⁸⁹ Postcommodity, "It's My Second Home, But I Have a Very Spiritual Connection With This Place" (2010), postcommodity.com.
- ⁹⁰ Kinney, "America's Great Comeback Story," 782-783.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 782, 785.
- ⁹² Ibid., 790.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 790-791.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 794.
- ⁹⁵ Mickey Lyons, "A cultural history of Metro Detroit, Chapter One: Native Americans," *Model D Media*, Jan. 23, 2017, <https://www.modeldmedia.com/features/detroit-ethnic-history-122216.aspx>.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*, xxiv.
- ⁹⁸ Quizar, "Who Cares for Detroit?," 2015.
- ⁹⁹ Kinney, "Longing for Detroit," 8.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4.
- ¹⁰¹ Quizar, "Urban Pioneers."
- ¹⁰² Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier," 239.
- ¹⁰³ Hall, "The Problem of Ideology," 41; Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 16-17.
- ¹⁰⁴ Quizar, "Urban Pioneers."
- ¹⁰⁵ Kinney, "America's Great Comeback Story," 778.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 780
- ¹⁰⁷ Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*, back cover.
- ¹⁰⁸ Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*, 48-49.
- ¹⁰⁹ Mays, "Indigenous Detroit," 25, 30.
- ¹¹⁰ Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier," 240; Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*, 25.
- ¹¹¹ Mays, "Indigenous Detroit," 18.
- ¹¹² Ibid.
- ¹¹³ Ibid., 21-22
- ¹¹⁴ Kinney, "America's Great Comeback Story," 799.
- ¹¹⁵ Quizar, "Comeback as Re-Settlement."
- ¹¹⁶ Buick, *Child of the Fire*, 36
- ¹¹⁷ Fuss in Buick, *Child of the Fire*, 36.
- ¹¹⁸ John Carlisle, "Is this the End of Delray?," Dec. 7, 2017, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/columnists/john-carlisle/2017/12/07/delray-neighborhood-detroit-michigan/676597001/>; Paul Sewick, "The Origins and Demise of Delray," *Curbed Detroit*, May 3, 2018, <https://detroit.curbed.com/2018/5/3/17314922/the-origins-demise-delray>.
- ¹¹⁹ Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, xxvi.
- ¹²⁰ Day, *Alien Capital*, 22.
- ¹²¹ Day, *Alien Capital*, 25.
- ¹²² Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method*, 21-23.
- ¹²³ Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method*, 139.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid., 19.
- ¹²⁵ Mark MacInnis, *Urban Roots*, (Tree Media Group, 2011); Mark Dworkin and Melissa Young, *We Are Not Ghosts* (Moving Images, 2012); Quizar, "Who Cares for Detroit?," 15.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid., 124.
- ¹²⁷ Ian Frederick Finseth. *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery, 1770-1860*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 229.
- ¹²⁸ MacInnis, *Urban Roots*.
- ¹²⁹ Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 4.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Railway Gazette International. "Detroit light rail project gets grant," Feb. 3, 2013. <https://www.railwaygazette.com/news/urban/single-view/view/detroit-light-rail-project-gets-grant.html>.

¹³² Cosme and Irwin, "Gilbert's Trojan Horse."

¹³³ Neavling, "Two years in, Detroit's QLine."

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Conclusion, Off-Site

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