

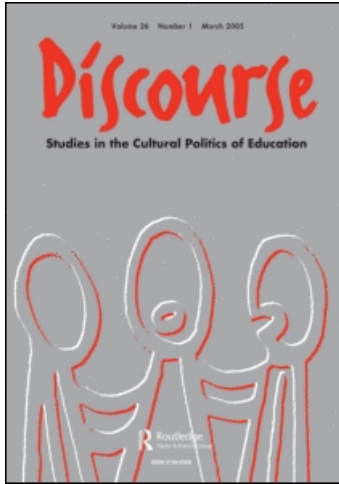
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Urban shrinkage as a performance of whiteness: neoliberal urban restructuring, education, and racial containment in the post-industrial, global niche city

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Although Detroit is not a centre of global finance, and plays a declining role in global production, it nevertheless participates in the present remediation of the relationship between cities and the globe. Manoeuvring to reposition the city as the global hub of mobility technology, metropolitan Detroit's neoliberal leadership advances particular development strategies in urban education, housing, infrastructure, and governance, all with implications for social exclusion. This paper analyzes Detroit's neoliberal policy complex, uncovering how rituals of place-making and suburbanite nostalgia for the city intersect with broader struggles over the region's resources and representation.

Keywords: neoliberal urbanism; neoliberal; globalization; urban education; Detroit; race

There are areas in our city where we are going to have to make hard decisions to get people to move, and move into those communities that I think we can support. Relocation, absolutely. That's the reality that we are in. (Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, 24 February 2010)

Many factors have been bringing Americans back downtown. The memory of the vibrant downtown as the central place for gathering and business, the irreplaceable historic buildings that are increasingly valued by communities and, most important, the pent-up consumer demand for walkable, vibrant places in which to live, work, and play have been the driving reasons for recent downtown revitalizations. (*Downtown Detroit in Focus: A Profile of Market Opportunity*, October 2006)

Whereas cities such as Tokyo, New York, London, and Sao Paulo play key roles in neoliberal globalization as interlocking centres of global finance and production, the fact that rust-belt cities such as Detroit, the focus of this paper, do not rise to the level of *global city* (see Sassen, 2006, but also Smith, 2002) does not preclude them from participating in the present remediation of the relationship between cities, the nation-state, and the global economy. While Detroit is not positioning itself as a command centre of global finance (unlike Chicago; see Lipman, 2004), and is rapidly declining as a global production centre for the automobile industry (e.g., in contrast to Chennai, India; see Madhavan, 2008), the impact of the changing relationship among cities, nation-states, and the global economy in the context of neoliberal globalization (Brenner & Keil, 2006) is manifested in struggles over urban

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development strategies in Detroit. As the region's largely neoliberal corporate and political leadership manoeuvres to reposition the city as the global hub of mobility technology, it advances particular development strategies in urban education, housing, infrastructure, and governance, all with implications for social exclusion (Detroit Renaissance, 2007). In this process of reimagining the city, branding initiatives work to supplant the present dominant racially-coded narrative of Black, chaotic, crime-ridden industrial hulk with a vision of the metropolitan region as a gleaming, dynamic, hip (and discursively white) global hub of emergent mobility technology. While such deployments are framed as both inevitable and in the best interest of everyone, they are also deeply implicated in the restructuring and deepening of social and educational containment and exclusion, particularly for the city's overwhelmingly impoverished Black and immigrant residents (see Wilson, 2007).

Utilizing tools from critical urban sociology and political economy, this paper analyzes Detroit's neoliberal policy complex in relation to education, housing, infrastructure development, and governance. Recognizing the devastating impact of massive home foreclosures, urban flight to first-tier suburbs, rampant segregation and poverty, and the closing of many public schools due to declining enrolment, the paper analyzes Detroit's policy environment and reveals a contradictory and contested cultural politics in which nostalgia for the city among suburban whites, rituals of place-making, and their intersection with the racial imaginary and issues of territoriality play out in broader struggles over the city and the metropolitan region's resources, cultural representations, and power.

The city in crisis

During the postwar heyday of Detroit's dominance as a centre of the Fordist economy, Detroit's population reached nearly two million, making it the fifth largest city in the USA. Shortly thereafter, with the advent of deindustrialization in the early 1950s (which, it should be remembered, represented the industrialization of the suburbs and the American South; see Freund, 2007) and urban, almost exclusively white, flight, the city entered a period of sustained population decline and associated public disinvestment (Garreau, 1991; Jackson, 2007; Katz, 1990; Sugrue, 1996). But today, unlike 'revitalized' cities such as Chicago, the city continues its rapid contraction, shedding approximately 100,000 residents, mostly African American, in the first decade of the new millennium. Detroit has now suffered the indignity of losing its status as one of the nation's 10 largest cities, with an estimated 2006 population of fewer than 900,000. The 2010 census numbers are likely to put the city closer to 800,000 (US Census Bureau, n.d.).

Deindustrialization and disinvestment in public infrastructure have continued apace, although now, in the era of neoliberal globalization, the jobs go wherever capital finds the best buys in human capital and other 'friendly business conditions' worldwide. Detroit, at the behest of capital of course, continues to shift dwindling revenues away from broader public investment and toward attracting capital investment (Detroit Renaissance, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Wilson, 2007).

Population decline in the city has, at least since 1960, been accompanied by plummeting enrolments in the Detroit Public Schools. A district that served almost 300,000 in 1960 enrolled only roughly half that number in 2002. Since 2002,

enrolments have declined even more precipitously, at the rate of approximately 10,000 students per year leaving for nearby public suburban schools and, increasingly, charter schools, with present district enrolment estimated at 86,000 (Mirel, 1993; Mrozowski, 2009). According to the school district's Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb, appointed by the state governor in 2009 to shore up the district's finances, enrolments will decline below 57,000 by 2015 (Office of the Emergency Financial Manager, 2010).

In Detroit, enormous tracts of abandoned houses, commercial districts, and industrial zones are a testament to the city's dramatic population decline, with estimates of the existence of more than 30,000 vacant lots and abandoned housing units within the city (Data Driven Detroit, 2010). The plummeting school enrolment, meanwhile, has led the district to close and consolidate over half of its schools, with nearly 150 schools closed since 2004 (Office of the Emergency Financial Manager, 2010).

In many ways, Detroit has entered the global imaginary as the quintessential poster child of the havoc wreaked by deindustrialization and global restructuring, with increased media attention to its unemployment, poverty, crime, and perceived despair (e.g., *Time*, 2010). It is also the poster child for public school failure, with Arne Duncan, United States Secretary of Education under the Obama administration, confiding recently that he loses sleep over Detroit's miserable schools (Mrozowski & Wilkinson, 2009).

Stepping into the crisis: neoliberal urbanism

In *High Stakes Education* educational sociologist Pauline Lipman (2004) draws upon emerging work in critical urban studies, critical geography, political economy, urban sociology, and theories of racial formation in order to reconceptualize the relationship between global restructuring and urban restructuring. Moving the critical urban studies debate into new territory, she documents and theorizes the centrality of urban educational policy and reform within this restructuring. Examining this mutually constitutive reworking of the global/urban dialectic within the city of Chicago, Lipman indicts neoliberal urbanism for further marginalizing urban populations that are already among the most educationally and socially dispossessed (Lipman, 2004).

On the surface, the cities of Chicago and Detroit present a number of similarities. Both cities are located in the Midwest of the USA, and both have been characterized as rustbelt cities having experienced significant post-industrial decline. Their metropolitan regions, increasingly regarded in the last half of the twentieth century as areas of concentrated urban poverty resulting from vast government incentivized racialized suburban sprawl into former farmland ('greenfields') have both been sites of extreme inequalities in access to social goods such as health, education, and employment. Both cities have experienced sharp cleavages along racial lines.

Yet there are also significant differences in the histories and likely future trajectories of the two cities. Perhaps most obvious to casual observers, whereas developers and their partners in government in Chicago are jockeying to position the city as a command centre of global finance, Detroit, with economic development centred on the auto industry, continues to shed jobs and population with relatively little prospect for new capital investment, though it tries.

Therefore, while it is immensely useful for conceptualizing neoliberal urbanism in Detroit and other urban contexts, Lipman's framework cannot be imported wholesale and requires careful translation. While there are indeed similarities between the two contexts, their differences point to the heterogeneity of neoliberal processes, particularly in their production of divergent social inequalities across urban space. This is relevant within national boundaries as in the US case, but also more broadly as critical educational researchers in this special issue and elsewhere reconceptualize neoliberal educational reform in multiple urban contexts in the global north and south. As is demonstrated in a comparison between Detroit and Chicago, different urban centres and regions play a variety of roles within the process of mutually constitutive global/urban restructuring. Thus, while Detroit cannot claim the mantle of global city in the way Chicago has, its regional leadership does attempt to position the city in particular ways in response to perceived new global realities.

In the process, it remediates its relationship to places like Chicago, Paris, London, and Sao Paulo, entering into a different kind of interdependence as a niche player. As it works to position itself as a global niche city, it is also constitutive of global restructuring. Thus a city that is often regarded as abandoned and left behind by globalization is actually playing an important role within the process of geospatial global reorganization.

Lipman's framework encourages us to look for continuities in novel ways among urban government, neoliberal globalism, race, and education, and it guides us to locate their path-dependent divergence and complementarities within the dynamism of differentiated global and urban restructuring. As the Detroit region repositions itself globally, it also engages in an internal spatial reordering, which is the focus of the next section.

Venture philanthropy and the spatial fix for Detroit

In this section I demonstrate how neoliberal education policy in Detroit, as in Chicago, buttresses neoliberal urbanism, participating in a highly racialized creative destruction and reconstruction of urban space. Although Detroit is a different kind of city from Chicago, just as in that city, neoliberal urbanism involves a process of creative destruction that remakes the city physically and discursively. In the process, a different kind of city emerges – a city imagined by someone else, and not for the people who remain there. As I will show, neoliberal urbanism provides a 'spatial fix' through a process of what Harvey and others have called accumulation by dispossession, one that educational policy for the city supports and guides. This spatial fix – also a racial fix – reproduces and intensifies inequality and exclusion along lines of race, class, and ethnicity, and does so in new ways; ways that beg for the imagination of new forms of resistance.

Detroiters learned of the new spatial fix that was in store for them on 24 February 2010. On that day Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, a former basketball star and businessman who moved to Detroit after becoming mayor, announced his plan to 'downsize' Detroit. His plans for closing down parts of the city were based on a report funded in part by Living Cities, a national organization that, according to Detroit journalist Diane Bukowski, includes the Bank of America, Deutsche Bank, J.P. Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, and Prudential Financial, along with

'philanthropic' groups like the Ford, Kresge, Kellogg and Skillman Foundations (Bukowski, 2010). I will say more about this particular quartet of philanthropic organizations later.

Mayor Bing's announced vision for the city centers on 'clearcutting' and then mothballing 'vacant' areas of the city for future development, with current residents of those areas enticed to leave through federally-subsidized purchase offers, and, for the more determined holdouts, through the discontinuation of vital services such as utilities and police and fire protection (MacDonald & Nichols, 2010).

Of course, the mayor's plan is not just his plan. Within weeks of his announcement he was buttressed by two academic conferences, funded in part by the previously mentioned foundations, and held at Wayne State University in downtown Detroit. The two meetings supported Bing's proposal with expert testimony, lending academic legitimacy to the downsizing plan by framing the cordoning off of certain areas of the city as natural, market driven, and guided by notions of good governance, rather than as a continuation of earlier urban renewal programs widely despised in Detroit as land grabs carried out in the interest of largely suburban private developers at the expense of low-income communities of colour (Perotta, 2010; Sugrue, 1996). The potentially explosive race and class politics embedded in the downsizing proposal and soothed to some degree by the university-based conferences were within days further complicated by another set of announcements of dramatic transformations planned for the city's public infrastructure – this time not in relation to housing or utilities or other basic city services, but rather in regard to the radical reshaping of the city's public school district, the Detroit Public Schools. Notably, not only officials of the state but also a variety of philanthropic organizations played a key role in rolling out the new educational direction for the city, as I discuss below.

In *The Gift of Education*, Kenneth Saltman (2010) documents the disproportionate influence that philanthropic organizations have recently asserted in relation to matters of educational policy. Within a few short years, the fortunes of such philanthropic organizations as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and the Broad Foundation have funded fairly dramatic education reform mostly centered on introducing market mechanisms into the public education sector. In my own earlier work (Pedroni, 2007) I noted the profound influence that the Bradley Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Enterprise Institute, among others, have exerted in underwriting the national movement for vouchers and tuition tax credits.

In Detroit, the venture philanthropy of some of the more powerful foundations, most notably Broad, has been fused with the educational activism of regional organizations such as the Kresge Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, the Skillman Foundation, and the McGregor Foundation. These regional foundations have acted in concert in areas as varied as urban land policy, neighbourhood redevelopment, and public education reform. Their reach in Detroit has been further augmented by alliances with prominent nonprofit organizations mostly comprised of the CEOs of major regional corporations. These include Business Leaders for Michigan (formerly Detroit Renaissance), New Detroit, the United Way of Southeastern Michigan, and a handful of others. While several of these organizations emerged in the wake of the 1967 Detroit Riots/Rebellions and have been active in the city for decades, it is noteworthy that in recent years they have entered into very close partnership through

the umbrella organization One D. The constellation of philanthropic and nonprofit-sector organizations operating under such close working relationships and sharing in their commonsense commitments to neoliberal modes of urban development portends the emergence of a governance sector outside the state political apparatus in most US urban contexts, in which traditionally democratically accountable state entities are at best minor players to an agenda for urban development for the most part initiated and propelled by extra-state entities.

In Detroit, venture philanthropy is very present in the urban development process at all three levels – national philanthropic organizations, regional philanthropic organizations, and nonprofit-sector organizations often operating in unison. In relation to education reform, the \$425,000 salary of Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb is largely paid for by the Detroit Public Schools, but is also enhanced through supplemental salary and other fringe benefits valued in 2010 at \$145,000 through the Broad Foundation and other philanthropies (Beene, 2010).

Notably, Bobb's association with Broad did not begin in Detroit – Bobb is a graduate of The Broad Superintendents Academy Class of 2005. As a Broad Fellow, he joined other Fellows accepted into the program because of their perceived managerial strengths as leaders in the corporate, military, or nonprofit sector. At Broad, future educational leaders are encouraged to view themselves as 'Bullish CEOs' focused on bringing private management styles to displace the inefficient, monopolistic, and unaccountable public-sector ethos deemed to pervade and suffocate most urban public school systems. The dire performance of many urban public school systems, from the perspective of Broad, is largely a problem of poor management (Saltman, 2010). Strong and effective management would inject a new private-sector ethos centred on delivering value to the consumer, meeting quantifiable performance benchmarks, and removing inefficiencies within the supply chain.

Bobb is not alone in bringing a neoliberal educational reform agenda to Detroit, but rather is flanked in his efforts by a host of regional foundations and nonprofit organizations. In March 2010, a new coalition of regional philanthropies calling itself Excellent Schools Detroit introduced a reform agenda under the title *Taking Ownership: Our Pledge to Educate All Detroit's Children*. Their plan asserted that it would produce 90% graduation rates in Detroit, the first major US city to accomplish this, within 10 years through such reforms as disbanding the elected Detroit Public Schools Board of Education, advocating mayoral control, and bringing in Teach for America recruits. Furthermore, it called for the introduction of a broad range of educational options for parents, as well as means by which parents might better understand and compare their options: 'Parents must have the information they need to choose schools based on academic performance. Schools should compete, and persistently low-performing school programs should close'. Both Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb and Detroit Mayor Dave Bing were signatories to the document, as were a number of educational management organizations, the quartet of regional philanthropic organizations, and New Detroit (Excellent Schools Detroit, 2010).

Within days of the release of *Taking Ownership*, the Office of the Emergency Financial Manager released its own academic plan, which it called *Excellent Schools for Every Child* (Bobb & Byrd-Bennett, 2010). Whereas the *Taking Ownership* plan merely claimed a 90% graduation rate by 2020, Bobb's plan upped the ante by boasting a 2015 graduation rate of 98%, with 100% proficiency achieved that same

year in the state's mandated assessments in mathematics and reading. As with *Taking Ownership*, the primary mechanism propelling the upward trajectory of the graphs in the document is the introduction of 'a marketplace of choices' coupled with greater accountability and transparency through more high stakes testing (Bobb & Byrd-Bennett, 2010).

But the implications of the two academic plans were easily outpaced by the school facilities closure plan that Bobb released within days of Bing's city downsizing announcement (Office of the Emergency Financial Manager, 2010). In partnership with the mayor's office and the philanthropic quartet, Detroit Public Schools Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb became the public face of the first concrete implementation of the city's spatial reorganization, in which decisions about the closing and consolidation of schools was primarily guided by a vision of residents reconcentrated into areas where services could be maintained (Kaffer, 2010). The same discourses of efficiency at the heart of the Mayor's incipient plan to close off bus service, fire and police protection (MacDonald & Nichols, 2010), and the provision of utilities to particular neighbourhoods was first actualized in short order by the school closure plan. While the academic plans called for the establishment of educational markets as a cure-all for raising student performance and teacher quality, the school facilities closure plan most clearly and radically demonstrated education's centrality to the highly racialized process of remaking urban space and place as a prerequisite for neoliberal urbanism's bottom line of accumulation by dispossession centred on the realty market (Harvey, 2005), as discussed later in the paper.

The market road to renaissance

Educational reform in Detroit has not operated in isolation from other reform trajectories related to economic development, land use policy, public infrastructural investment, and governance. As mentioned previously, both the quartet of regional foundations and nonprofit-sector organizations like New Detroit have also spear-headed policy initiatives in non-educational urban sectors. What unites the various reform efforts is a common commitment to neoliberal ways of understanding how sectoral reform and economic development within the city is to be accomplished.

The umbrella organization One D has been the focal point of coordinated regional development efforts in metropolitan Detroit, comprised of most of the major CEO-directed nonprofit organizations in the area. One D was launched as a coalition of organizations in November 2006 including New Detroit, Business Leaders for Michigan (formerly Detroit Renaissance), United Way of Southeastern Michigan, the Detroit Regional Chamber, the Cultural Alliance of Southeastern Michigan, Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau, Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, and Southeast Michigan Council of Government, among other organizations. By 2007 the coalition had mapped out a comprehensive development strategy, called *Road to Renaissance: Final Business Plans*, for the nine-county Detroit-Warren-Flint Combined Statistical Area. Focused on the broad themes of economic prosperity, educational preparedness, quality of life, social equity, and regional transit, the document enumerated six strategic priorities for development: (1) reposition Detroit as the global hub for mobility technology research and development; (2) develop an aerotropolis, or air transit-based business corridor,

centred on the two existing passenger and freight airport complexes in the western metro region; (3) catalogue and expand greater Detroit's 'creative community' assets; (4) expand the region's entrepreneurial capacity; (5) secure the 'future talent base' through educational reform, particularly in Detroit; and (6) engage in a sustained public relations campaign to promote and rebrand Detroit (Detroit Renaissance, 2007).

In each of these six priorities we see the region's corporate leadership keenly aware of the need to 'renew' growth in metropolitan Detroit by responding to new global conditions in capital flow and investment. There is an acute sense in which Detroit must locate its niche role not within a national economy, but rather in a new global framework, and to do so it must both capitalize on and develop its human capital as well as the way it is thought about in the global imaginary. Detroit's current signification as a dangerous city can be recast as a city for adult adventure in a 24-hour playground featuring casino gambling and musical revelry. Its crumbling warehouses and industrial facilities can regain status as lofts and art spaces for twenty-first-century 'creatives' and knowledge workers of the global economy. And its past automobile glory can be rebranded as the raw material for future corporate development centred on high-technology mobility research and development (which is especially ironic given the near complete lack of public transit infrastructure in the city).

However, as Harvey and others tell us, the most crucial area for increasing growth in post-industrial urban areas is through speculation on urban land itself. In urban areas like Detroit, the potential value of the land is the city's greatest asset, much more so than its human capital or decaying industrial infrastructure or its tourist-ready branding. Thus creating conditions for the real-estate growth machine must lie at the heart of any urban revitalization, as we have seen in case after case in urban revitalization 'success' stories in the USA and beyond (Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2002).

Growing virgin land by locking the schoolhouse door

Seen through the lens of the real-estate 'urban growth machine', the downsizing plan put forward by Bing is essentially an effort to unlock real-estate value currently 'contaminated' by a population in need of containment (Wilson, 2007), as I will now show. The spatial fix envisioned by Bing and his allies requires that targeted land first be cleared of both its physical structures and, in particular, its discursive inscription, including in this case its dangerous racial inscription.

The school closure plan released within days of Bing's downsizing announcement by the public schools Emergency Financial Manager explicitly called for the shuttering of schools in all of the neighbourhoods that were to be shrunk. Bobb explained that his decisions about which schools to close were closely related to Bing's vision of a downsized or rightsized city, and that they had been in close contact about this as decisions were made about which particular schools should be closed and which should remain open (Kaffer, 2010).

The schools slated for closure have, like other neighbourhood schools across the city, functioned as anchors of the local community; as one of the only remaining public spaces in the community. As Lipman and others have documented, schools represent something constant even over generations within the lives of urban low-income residents, and have functioned as sources of place-based identity and pride

(Lipman, 2004). According to the logic of insuring liquidity in real-estate investment, many critical urban sociologists would argue, the targeted schools needed to be closed because the racially-invested meaning of the areas in which those schools were situated also needed to be changed (Weber, 2002). As I argue here, the closing of schools represented the opening salvo of the cleansing of racial histories and place-making from neighbourhoods destined for a very different future.

At the university conferences and in other talks by the mayor, the good governance of shrinking the city was invoked in relation to the urban budgetary crisis worsened by the recent global economic crisis (Perotta, 2010). According to the Mayor's developing plan, residents would be moved out of certain 'deserted' districts of the city to areas with higher occupancy, with the city deriving savings from its ability to close off costs associated with public service delivery in those areas (MacDonald & Nichols, 2010). With home values depressed because of the foreclosure-induced economic crisis, the timing is fortuitous for the city and investors to realize the greatest differential between property value pre- and post-shrinkage. As the mayor recently warned potential holdouts in the deserviced zones, 'this would be no pay day' for them. They would be paid the 'fair market value' of homes triply blighted by the mayor's discourse about them (Weber, 2002), by the global financial and foreclosure crisis, and now, by their impending disconnection from municipal utility services.

The mayor's plan, as he explained, creates a system of 'urban villages' surrounded by newly empty land for eventual future development including in some cases corporate urban agriculture (MacDonald & Nichols, 2010). According to urban sociologist Rachel Weber, resulting clear areas such as those planned in Detroit are to be understood as temporarily obsolete land within a mostly obsolete city. Through a process of blighting and disinvestment, the city in effect creates new 'urban greenfields' both physically and discursively (Weber, 2002). That is, not only does the mayor's plan of closing off portions of the city allow the land to be cleared physically for future development, but it also allows the land to be cleared of its racial inscription like the formerly racially unsullied lands of the suburbs. By 'mothballing' large swathes of the city, the mayor and his allies create a new land without a people for a people (urban hipsters and unchilded highly educated knowledge workers, and later also families of children) without (urban) land (Perotta, 2010).

Thus the spatial fix creates the same sorts of conditions underlying earlier white flight to the suburbs, for both real-estate interests and prospective homebuyers, including government subsidy and supportive government policy (Freund, 2007; Kruse & Sugrue, 2006). This time though the new 'greenfields' are closer to the urban playground – close to the attractions of a new/recovered city rebranded as a 24-hour adult entertainment centre offering sports, theatre, historic architecture, gambling, and music (e.g., Motown), not to mention urban chic, largely expropriated, it might be added, from the very cultural base which presently 'contaminates' real-estate values.

From the perspective of distant real-estate investors, as urban sociologist Rachel Weber points out, building new from nothing in greenfields is preferable to rehabilitation of existing commercial or residential housing stock in that it gives real-estate investment the liquidity within the broader market that it has historically lacked. Investment decisions about property to be rehabilitated require intimate knowledge of both the upkeep and 'nonobsolescence' of the housing stock, as well as

the ‘promise’ of the area. Here rehabilitation is to be understood to refer not just to the physical housing stock, but also the difficult and time-consuming rehabilitation of the white imaginary *vis-à-vis* the city (Weber, 2002). Another way of putting this is that it is difficult to wash the ‘Detroit’ (imagined as a black crime-ridden dystopian city) out of Detroit (Macek, 2006). But the strategy of designating large areas of the city to be returned to nature, and thus ‘purified’ of their discursive blackness (at least the physical inhabitants and their material surroundings, if not commodified versions of their cultural practices, which city rebranders see as central to the city’s niche ‘flavour’) allows for sound risk management of real-estate investment decisions at a distance. Under the mayor’s plan the housing and commercial stock will be ‘new’ both physically and in terms of its racial inscription, and thus it possesses enhanced liquidity for investors. There is no messy educational juxtaposition as in Chicago between the children of the families of housing projects (such as in Chicago’s Cabrini Green) and the new gentrifying kids on the block (see Lipman, 2004). In Detroit, the urban pioneers never need to rub up against the natives; the indigenous do not need to be defeated in a struggle over place-making (Haymes, 1995). Rather, both the recent exodus from the city and the forced removal of those who remain in designated neighbourhoods are cleared out through a process more reminiscent of post-Katrina New Orleans. Investors can be comforted that this is virgin territory, an open land. New public investment can flow, unevenly, to schools and other public infrastructure in the new territory with minimal risk that it will fall into the wrong hands.

Through mechanisms such as TIFs (tax increment financing) risk can be reduced in advance for realty investors (the city inherits the risk from the private sector; see Fainstein & Campbell, 1996) and proceeds from the property taxes from new development can flow to those areas of the city that have ‘performed’ well in the market sense. As is already occurring, new streetcar lines can be built up and down Woodward Avenue, the primary artery of the city, and one of the only areas where some gentrification has taken place, while the city bus service for Detroit’s less affluent neighbourhoods is curtailed in the name of balancing budgets. Parks can be expanded and beautified along the river with bike paths and benches while neighbourhood parks remain closed or unmowed. The City can be divided into basket case zones (racial containment sites; Wilson, 2007) and those that are rewarded for their positive performance with more public investment – a system of merit pay for neighbourhoods that holds them accountable.

As Brenner and Theodore (2002) have written, cities are sites for neoliberal experimentation. As Lipman argues in this issue, Chicago has certainly been this. But Detroit is the Iraq or Chile of urban experimentation. Who is going to miss Detroit beyond the sports stadiums and the casinos and Motown anyway? Activists in Detroit frequently argue that precisely because of Detroit’s abandonment, it is rife for experimentation in developing new human patterns of interaction, ecological living, and so on (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Yet neoliberal urbanists also want to experiment, and they have more assets and more powerful allies. Thus Detroit offers wonderful opportunities for neoliberal experimentation. And like the public sector in education, Detroit is so stigmatized as a failure that people, except perhaps for those who are targeted by the rightsizing, are unlikely to raise any objections. In the neoliberal imaginary at least, even urban residents will greet neoliberal occupiers as liberators.

We have a history in the USA of learning through experimenting on the black body. In this respect the Tuskegee syphilis experiments come to mind. Detroit, like New Orleans and other American cities, represents neoliberal experimentation on the black body politic. Detroit is uniquely Black. It is the country's most black large city, with the highest rate of black home ownership among comparable US cities. In relation to the possibility of resistance, to struggles over place-making and the right to the city (Haymes, 1995), this fact deserves greater attention. Detroit is the city with perhaps the most significant homeownership and ownership of property among a people who have historically been denied property rights. Many Detroit homes are black going back multiple generations. After the exodus from the Jim Crow post-slavery south, factory wages enabled many black families to own land and homes for the first time. Many times these are the same homes, in the same black-‘owned’ neighbourhoods, that are threatened by the racial spatial fix.

Remaking white space

Within this struggle over for whom the city exists, schools in Detroit play a vital role in maintaining or relinquishing one's stake in the city, which is why they are central to both the fostering of and resistance to neoliberal urbanism. Neoliberal education policy in the city, as evidenced by the two academic plans and the school facilities closure plan discussed in this paper, helps ready the ground in Detroit for the city's spatial reorganization.

Neoliberal urban education reform in Detroit does this in two ways. First, it accomplishes this by shattering established black space, by disrupting neighbourhood schools that, although underfunded and poorly functioning, have served as key sites of black place-making and identity construction in the city. Historically this has been accomplished in American cities by building interstate highways or other large development projects through predominately black business and cultural corridors, as was the case also in Detroit with the construction of I-75 and other large urban renewal projects (Sugrue, 1996). Today, however, schools remain as one of the only remaining public institutions sustaining black community life in the city. Thus, school closures are necessary to prepare the ground discursively and materially.

Yet accumulation through dispossession requires not just the rupturing of black space and subsequent racial containment in districts of the city that are likely to languish through the uneven distribution of future public investment. Discursively white space must also be created. That is, while blackness can be made less intimidating for realty investment through adequate shrinkage and containment, black dispossession is not enough. If suburban, discursively white nostalgia for the old neighbourhoods is to be linked to twenty-first-century developments, there must also be a reassertion of white space once land has been cleared.

By establishing a marketplace of school choices, as envisioned by both the philanthropic *Taking Ownership* agenda, as well as the Emergency Financial Manager's academic plan, the conditions are created under which new schools can flourish within the urban core that are not predominately intended for the low-income residents who currently live there. Schools can be recreated as if *Brown v. Board of Education* never even happened.

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