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# The Tale of Two Cities: a Feminist Critique of Economic Development & Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Milwaukee

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THE TALE OF TWO CITIES: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT &  
NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM IN MILWAUKEE

by

Yui Hashimoto

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfilment of the  
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Doctor of Philosophy

in Geography

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2018

## ABSTRACT

### THE TALE OF TWO CITIES: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM IN MILWAUKEE

by

Yui Hashimoto

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018  
Under the Supervision of Professor Anne Bonds

In this dissertation, I examine how race articulates with economic development in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Drawing on two years of participant observation with the Milwaukee Fight for 15; participant observation of public meetings and days of action; semi-structured interviews with City officials, business leaders, non-profit professionals, and community organizers; and media and document analysis, I find that normative discourses of race underpin economic development in Milwaukee even as City officials and boosters give nominal recognition to racial inequality and purport to embrace diversity and colourblindness.

First, I trace historical and contemporary trajectories of economic development and segregation to show how the elision of such histories allows City leaders and members of the business community to pose inadequate solutions that fail to actually address entrenched segregation and racialized poverty. Then, I examine the Milwaukee Fight for 15 as a mobilization to counter the City's redevelopment strategy, which is reliant on low-wage workers, and show how it was ultimately unsuccessful because of its inability to embed the everyday lives of fast food workers within a broader racial capitalist context in the city. Finally, I examine the City of Milwaukee's creative class-based economic redevelopment strategy to understand how

the circulation of the ‘tale of two cities’ discourse reproduces normative socio-spatial patterns of racialization even as it puts forth an agenda of diversity and colourblindness.

Taken together, my dissertation sheds light on how racial capitalism operates and rearticulates through colourblind discourses of economic development in a local urban context with a specific racial politics. My dissertation illustrates how local discourses and strategies of development are contested terrain where movement building for social justice comes into conflict with urban restructuring in a neoliberal context.

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## CHAPTER 1

### *Introduction*

This dissertation began with my reading of an article entitled, “Why these Midwest millennials are choosing Milwaukee”, published in 2013 in *The Atlantic*’s *CityLab*. The article interviewed young transplants from Chicago, lauding Milwaukee for its cheapness, “working class vibes” (Aronowitz, 2013), local pride, and amenities of a big city. This article articulated a contradiction that I had wondered about since moving to Milwaukee in 2012. In a city well known as one of the most segregated (Denvir, 2011) and poorest cities in America (Steininger & Hopkins, 2017) and for being the worst place to raise a Black child (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014) and having the nation’s highest rate of Black male incarceration (Pawarasat & Quinn, 2013), how could Milwaukee simultaneously garner attention for attracting white millennials? The article ends by highlighting a paradox that ultimately spurred my dissertation: upon leaving a young professionals’ organization housed in the declining Grand Avenue Mall in downtown Milwaukee, the author observes the Fight for 15 campaign advocating for a \$15 per hour minimum wage and the right to unionize without retaliation. The author concludes that the positives outlined by millennials are not ‘accessible’ to all Milwaukeeans, but states that such “change and conflict... isn’t necessarily bad” (ibid.). But what kinds of changes, and for whom? How do low-wage service workers of colour fit into this narrative of millennial development?

Aronowitz (2013), perhaps unwittingly, bifurcates the city into two: one for millennials, specifically those associated with the so-called “creative class” (Florida, 2002), and the other for poor residents of colour. Even after observing protests in the streets for adequate wages, she concludes that the changing demographic of the city can only be positive. Indeed, as my dissertation reveals, this perspective resonates with commonly-held opinions in the city. In fact,

the bifurcation effected by Aronowitz (2013) was a repeated theme throughout my fieldwork as I interviewed public officials, local business leaders, and activists about development strategies in Milwaukee. Discourses in my interviews, in public meetings, and in the media repeatedly frame Milwaukee as two cities. The ‘tale of two cities’ narrative is well captured in the City of Milwaukee Common Council’s Public Safety Action Plan (2016):

Milwaukee has become a tale of two cities. On the one hand, Milwaukee sits on the banks of Lake Michigan, one of the greatest natural resources in our nation, has a booming downtown, ...and enjoys ongoing commercial investment and development. On the other hand, however, Milwaukee faces serious problems that are many and profound. They include a stubbornly high crime rate, multigenerational poverty, joblessness, breakdown of the family, widespread drug abuse, a challenged education system and the lingering effects of the housing foreclosure crisis (p. 3).

Yet this is not a narrative emerging in City plans alone. This discourse appeared in interviews, media, city documents, and general conversation. I became intrigued with the ‘tale of two cities’. Why is there such purchase in this framing and what work does it do? How could the tale be articulated in so many different venues with so little analysis? In this dissertation, I examine some of the outcomes of the bifurcation reproduced by such narratives. I show that the bifurcation occurs very much along the socio-spatial lines of race, segregation, and investments in economic redevelopment. I further document how this discourse shapes labour and community organizing in response. I argue that the ‘tale of two cities’ discourse sustains the very historical and socio-spatial patterns that the City and its boosters purportedly seek to resolve *and* legitimates particular economic development strategies at the expense of investments for struggling neighbourhoods of colour.

## Situating Milwaukee

Milwaukee is a mid-sized American city located 100 miles north of Chicago on the western shore of Lake Michigan. In 2016, it had a population of approximately 595,000 residents, and the racial make-up was 46% white, 39.2% Black, and 18.2% Latino or Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The City of Milwaukee, though racially and ethnically diverse, is sharply segregated by race, with Latinx<sup>1</sup> residents concentrated on the South Side, Black residents on the North Side, and white residents on the East Side (see Figure 1; Denvir, 2011). As Figure 1 highlights, the City is then surrounded by a ring of wealthy, predominantly white suburbs, including communities such as Brookfield (Milwaukee County), Waukesha (Waukesha County), and Mequon (Ozaukee County). Milwaukee's population peaked in 1960 at 741,000, but has declined due to white flight to the suburbs (Rodriguez, 2014). Once the "machine shop of the world", the city is struggling to recover from deindustrialization and the devastating impacts of segregation and racialized poverty.

To fully appreciate Milwaukee's racial geographies, we must turn back to the city's founding, which was predicated on the expulsion of Native Americans from the area in which the city now stands (Gurda, 1999). In the 1840s, Milwaukee first experienced an increase in population due to its exploding industrial sector. During the 1840s and 50s, the German population increased by 1,000 residents per week (Jones, 2009). Between 1850 and 1900, the population of Milwaukee grew over ten times, from 20,000 to 285,000 (ibid.). German, Irish, and Polish immigrants comprised much of the population in Milwaukee during that time, working in

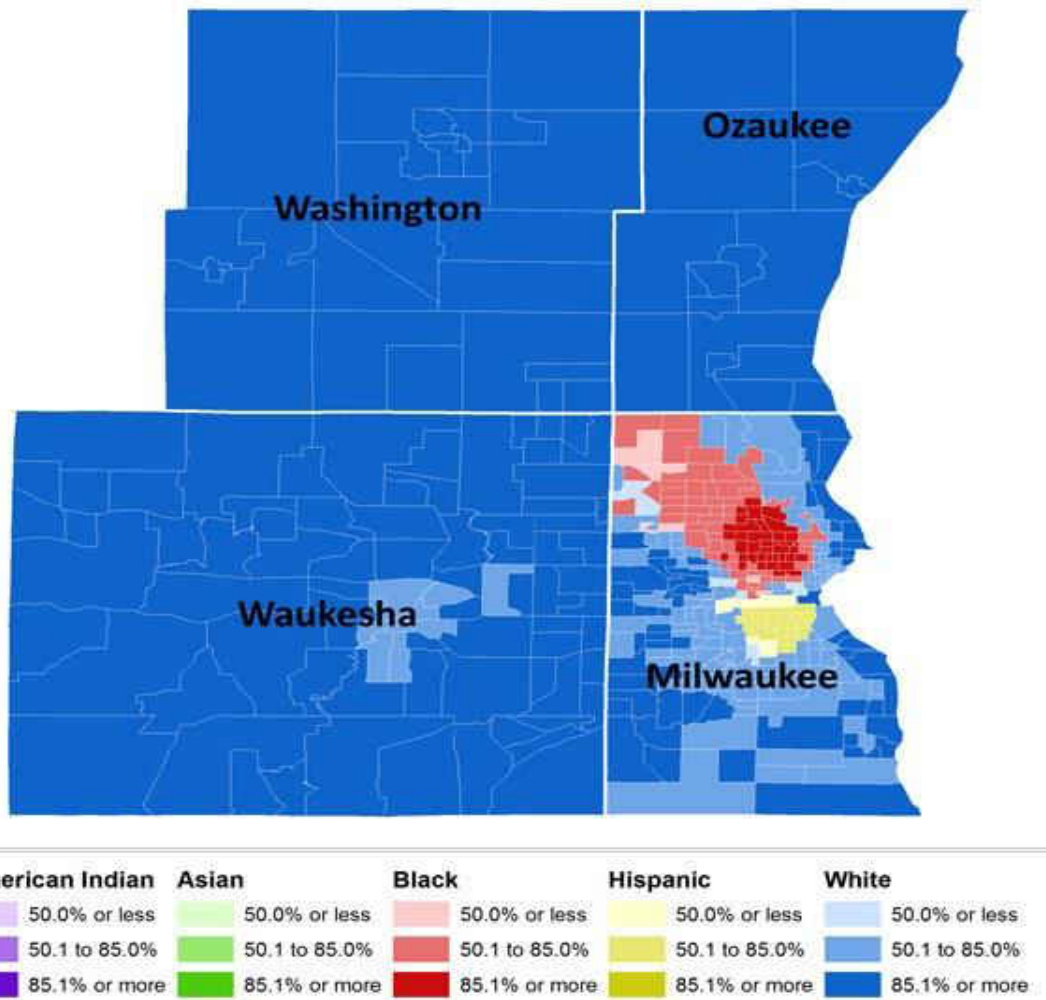
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<sup>1</sup> This is not a Census category, but a gender neutral term used in place of the gendered terms Latino and Latina. Additionally, Latino or Hispanic counts as an ethnicity rather than a racial group. This means that Latino or Hispanic can be combined with racial groups such as white Hispanic or Black Latino.

the burgeoning breweries, tanneries, meatpacking houses, and machine shops. It was not until the 1940s and the end of the Second World War that Black Southerners began to migrate to Milwaukee (Trotter, 2007). Between 1945 and 1970, Milwaukee's Black population grew by 700%, with the promise of industrial jobs (Jones, 2009). However, even as the Black population continued to grow in Milwaukee, signs of deindustrialization—decline of manufacturing jobs in the city and growth in the suburbs—began to appear as early as the 1960s (*ibid.*).

As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, the contemporary racial geographies of metropolitan Milwaukee are an accumulation of numerous policies, practices, and visions of the city at a variety of scales. In particular, the post-war years into the 2000s, and the confluence of federal and municipal practices of urban renewal (e.g., freeway construction, “slum” clearance, and downtown revitalization), as well as suburbanization, have deeply impacted the racial geographies of Milwaukee. The razing of Black communities for freeway construction cordoned off the inner core from downtown and decimated Black livelihoods in housing, business, and community spaces (Jones, 2009). As Miner (2013) highlights, Milwaukee's attempts at school desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s accelerated white flight to the suburbs. Suburbanization has significantly remade and contoured Milwaukee's position in the state's political economy. First and foremost, the tax base of the city has shifted out to the suburbs and decimated City coffers to provide public goods for social reproduction. This decimation happened concurrently with urban restructuring, in which cities and their residents were made responsible for services once provided by the state and the federal governments (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Beyond the materialities of suburbanization, through white flight and the production of an extremely segregated racial landscape, Milwaukee occupies a particular position as the container of the region and state's problems (Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming). It is the very Black and brown

bodies, families, and communities who have been most impacted by what I describe as organized abandonment in Chapter 2 who are also deemed to be at fault for the economic stagnation of the city, region, and state (see also Cope & Latham, 2009; Wilson & Grammenos, 2005). As I describe in Chapter 4, these discourses further justify budget cuts and increased surveillance and policing.



**Figure 1:** A map of intra-metropolitan segregation in Milwaukee (Denvir, 2011). This map clearly illustrates the predominantly Black North side in red (historically known as the ‘inner core’) and the predominantly Latinx South side in yellow within the City of Milwaukee. This map also highlights the stark segregation between the suburban and rural counties surrounding Milwaukee County. The racial geographies of the Milwaukee metro area contour many of the racist and racialized discourse I describe in the dissertation.

Milwaukee is a city of contradictions. On the one hand, it has a rich history of Socialist municipal politics, locally referred to as ‘sewer socialism’, a vibrant labour movement due to its industrial past, and civil rights organizing against deep-seated racial injustices (Bonds, 2018). On the other hand, Milwaukee has also been the site of punitive and draconian policy experimentation. It was the first municipality to test workfare<sup>2</sup>, or paid work outside of the home as a condition of receiving welfare, even before it became federal policy (Peck, 2001; Collins & Mayer, 2010). The voucher school system<sup>3</sup>, or ‘school choice’, was first tested in Milwaukee as an attempt to desegregate schools (Miner, 2013). It is home to conservative thinktanks, such as the Bradley Institute and MacIver Institute, as well as nationally syndicated conservative talk radio, such as Charlie Sykes.

In many respects, Milwaukee shares similarities to other so-called ‘rust belt’ cities like Cleveland and Detroit. They are racially segregated Midwestern cities on the shores of the Great Lakes that once had robust manufacturing sectors. A significant body of literature traces how post-industrial cities still struggle to ‘recover’ from the devastating effects of deindustrialization (e.g. Doussard et al., 2009; Cope & Latham, 2009). In Milwaukee, City leaders and the business community have emphasized a creative class-infused economic redevelopment strategy as a solution to the ongoing challenges of deindustrialization. Recently, the City of Milwaukee and the metropolitan region have attempted to entice corporations to set up portions of their operations in Milwaukee. Various levels of government, including the City of Milwaukee, lobbied intensely to recruit Amazon (unsuccessfully) and Foxconn (successfully) to the region

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<sup>2</sup> Workfare, implemented with President Bill Clinton’s 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWOA), requires able-bodied recipients of welfare to work as a condition of receiving assistance. Time limits are also placed on the duration of receiving payments.

<sup>3</sup> This allowed families to receive a voucher for the cost of public education and use it towards attending a charter or private school. The voucher system allowed families to ostensibly take public funds out of public schools and put them towards tuition at private or semi-private institutions under the guise of providing choice.



even as they continue to slash funding to vital services such as public schools, Food Stamps<sup>4</sup>, the University of Wisconsin system, and public transportation. The Foxconn manufacturing plant, however, will be located 30 miles to the south of Milwaukee in Mount Pleasant.

As I describe throughout the dissertation, the specific brutality of the racial geographies of Milwaukee, however, are not considered in many analyses of Milwaukee (cf. Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming; Bonds, 2018). Milwaukee continues to struggle with how to recover from deindustrialization and to resolve the issues of segregation and racialized poverty in the city. I argue that we cannot understand the City's redevelopment plans and their failure to improve quality of life for all of its residents without a consideration of how its racial geographies, and their attendant racial hierarchies, are produced. Specifically, I highlight how the City of Milwaukee's two-pronged approach of creative class-based redevelopment on the one hand, and punitive and remedial social policies on the other, are deeply racialized forms of redevelopment. Milwaukee serves as a compelling case study because of how its local racial politics shape and are remade through economic redevelopment and mobilizations for change.

## **Theoretical framework**

In considering Milwaukee as my case study, I argue that an analysis of the City's economic redevelopment strategy cannot be read without considering racial capitalism, and its racial hierarchies, as an imperative organizing logic of capitalism (e.g. Robinson, 1983;

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<sup>4</sup> Food stamps are currently called Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). At the federal level, they are implemented through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Legislatively, Congress votes on SNAP funding as a part of the Farm Bill. Funds are then disbursed to individual states who are required to keep extensive metrics on work requirements (personal communication). The SNAP program in Wisconsin is called FoodShare. In this paper, I use the term 'Food Stamps' to remain consistent with my interviewees.

Melamed, 2015; Bonds, 2013). Through the purported objectivity of economics and depoliticized notions of ‘culture’, the City of Milwaukee and its boosters claim to be implementing a strategy that will improve the lives of all residents. Thus, I am particularly interested in examining what I discuss later in Chapter 4 as colourblind discourses<sup>5</sup> used to legitimate seemingly non-racial decision making (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

My dissertation builds on the rich geographic scholarship on racial capitalism and social reproduction to show that the ‘tale of two cities’ discourse obscures how these two cities are, in fact, relationally produced, and that each one requires the other for its maintenance (see Barraclough, 2009). Brenda Parker’s (2017) recent analysis of urban politics in Milwaukee considers how gendered and racialized subjectivities and discourses come together with New Urbanism, the creative class thesis, and welfare reform to produce differential outcomes. Building on her analysis of Milwaukee, I show that racial hierarchies not only shape outcomes, but also always underpin capitalism (Melamed, 2015).

### *Urban political economy*

I build on geographers’ examination of urban political economy through a discussion of neoliberalism, uneven development, accumulation by dispossession, and the means by which the urban mediates global processes of neoliberalism. Peck and Tickell (2002) trace the rise of neoliberalism to the elections of Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. and Ronald Reagan in the U.S., who promoted the dismantling of the post-war Keynesian welfare state, labour protections, and civil rights protections. This effected the deregulation and the retraction of the state, which was

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<sup>5</sup> In the dissertation, particularly in Chapter 4, I draw on Bonilla-Silva’s (2014) definition of colourblind racism, which describes “contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of non-racial dynamics” (p. 2). Rather than relying on scientific racism and the genetic deficiencies of people of colour, a post-Civil Rights era ushered in “‘new racism’ practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently non-racial” (ibid.).

now to be pliable for unfettered capital accumulation. Market logics of competitiveness, freedom, and individualism pervaded all aspects of life, particularly public goods for social reproduction such as welfare, public education, and redevelopment. Such logics legitimated the decimation of collective social reproduction and ushered in austerity in the name of global competitiveness. At the same time, market logics also legitimated deindustrialization in the so-called ‘first world’ to outsource labour to the so-called ‘third world’, allowing businesses both to find new markets and to remain competitive in the global market place by reducing labour costs. Moreover, neoliberalism enrolls the so-called ‘third world’ into punitive and draconian relations with the ‘first world’ through global development agencies like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the Inter-American Bank of Development. Harvey (2005) describes neoliberalization and economic restructuring as restoring class power to the upper classes.

Political economists have highlighted the urban as a site and scale that allows an examination of how neoliberalism unfolds (e.g. Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Specifically, while national-scale policymaking may shape factors such as financialization and trade policies, the devolution, localization, and privatization of previously national policies like welfare force increasingly cash-strapped municipalities to take on the labour of administering such programs (Peck, 2002). Even as public goods for social reproduction are decimated, many American cities have strived to revitalize after deindustrialization through the built environment and financially speculative means. As Smith (1990) describes, uneven development is an inherent contradiction built into the fundamental operation of capitalism. Capital is invested in the built environment at the same time it is withdrawn from the same environment in order to seek out accumulation elsewhere. In doing so, uneven development functions spatially to produce development in one place and ‘underdevelopment’ in another (ibid.).

Harvey (2003; 2006) theorizes accumulation by dispossession as the mode through which uneven development can occur. Harvey originally theorized accumulation by dispossession as divesting non-elites of land and appropriating it via privatization and commodification. Under neoliberalism, however, he extends it to include privatization of public goods writ large, deregulation of finance and relations of debt, the management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions towards capital accumulation (ibid.). Neoliberalism is not a totalizing force, however. City officials, boosters, and social movements also mediate how neoliberalism functions in a local context. For example, Sites (2012) highlights how the City of Chicago welcomed neoliberalism as a way to crush labour organizing in the city.

My dissertation builds on this work by understanding difference and inequalities, including class, as a fundamental organizing logic of capitalism. Thus, neoliberalism is not only a restoration of class power, but as Woods (2017) describes, also a restoration of racial power. Scholars of racial capitalism also call on examinations beyond neoliberalism to understand the contemporary racial capitalist moment. Moreover, feminist scholarship builds on this work to understand how broad political economic analyses of the global and urban are lived in everyday life (e.g. Nagar et al., 2002). I bring together urban political economic analyses of economic restructuring with scholarship on racial capitalism and social reproduction to reveal how global processes of economic restructuring contour and are contoured by local racial politics and mobilizations for change.

### *Racial capitalism*

In my dissertation, I bring together urban political economy with three broad and overlapping bodies of literature as a theoretical framework. I consider the work on racial

capitalism by scholars such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Laura Pulido, Clyde Woods, and Jodi Melamed. I find that Milwaukee's myriad crises of redevelopment, segregation, and racialized poverty are made possible through the "devaluation...[of] both [residents'] blackness and their surplus status, with the two being mutually constituted" (Pulido, 2016, p. 1). Thus, racial hierarchies and inequalities are a fundamental organizing logic of capitalism rather than solely incidental to or an outcome of capitalism.

Through my fieldwork, I found that popular discourses relied on static and distinct racial categories, such as Black and white. The City of Milwaukee's redevelopment plan and the interviews I conducted, however, highlight a different racial formation that blurs distinct racial categories. Jodi Melamed (2011) theorizes neoliberal multiculturalism as the differential valuing of people of colour based on their value under neoliberalism. Under this framework, a neoliberal value system cross-cuts distinct racial groups to produce new, racialized subjectivities of deserving and undeserving people of color. Discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism promote deserving people of colour through discourses of diversity and colourblindness, while explicitly racializing poor and undeserving people of colour as morally deficient, violent, backwards, and uncompetitive (Melamed, 2011). In bifurcating deserving and undeserving people of colour, racial categories become depoliticized through notions of race as culture. Thus, deserving people of colour have become it by virtue of being culturally superior — the model minority.

Relational racialization builds on these new racial formations by highlighting how those discourses are spatialized. It illuminates the production of white spaces as requiring the maintenance and confinement of racialized poverty elsewhere (e.g. Barraclough, 2009). In the case of my dissertation, the production of multicultural spaces for the creative class requires the confinement of undeserving racialized, poor bodies elsewhere. This process reproduces and

cements racialized categories into place, such as the zipcode 53206 in Milwaukee (Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming). Such spaces are then discursively cast as failing, poor, and criminal, and these labels are reproduced through teleological analyses that prove the very problems the discourses create. Blackness becomes equivalent to poverty and crime, and whiteness becomes associated with productivity and value. These poor and failing places are deemed to be disposable, uncompetitive, and inflexible to the needs of capital in a global economy, thereby blamed for their own failures, the overall decline of their surrounding city, and concomitant disinvestment (Cope & Latham, 2009; Lawson et al., 2012). Together, these discourses and analyses are deployed by planners, City officials, and pro-business<sup>6</sup> interests to justify concentration of development favoring white bodies and spaces. This form of development is seen to produce value and the legitimation of what Gilmore (2008) calls organized abandonment for Black and brown bodies, families and communities.

Theorizing through organized abandonment works to illuminate how racial capitalist crises are produced and experienced (Gilmore, 2008). It sheds light on the production of contemporary racial geographies over a longer period during which processes of disinvestment change constantly but iteratively exacerbate previous rounds of crises. Clyde Woods (2017) describes how each period of disinvestment and reconsolidation of racial and class power in New Orleans worked to produce maximum devastation for Black communities during and after Hurricane Katrina, further paving the way for vulnerability to disaster in the future. Tracing histories of organized abandonment also reveals that, rather than being a process of pure disinvestment, the state simultaneously retracted and extended its reach even before the

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<sup>6</sup> I deploy the term ‘pro-business’ throughout the dissertation as this is how some of the interviewees identified. Self-identifying as such connotes a particular set of political economic commitments that include reducing or eliminating regulation because it impedes business and creating incentives to entice businesses to the state and the Milwaukee metropolitan region.

neoliberal turn<sup>7</sup>. Thus, extension of state power to raze Black homes, communities, and businesses for ‘urban renewal’ and freeway construction to facilitate the mobility of white suburban residents cannot be read without the denial of Black veterans for GI Bill benefits in the postwar era. Similarly, those histories must be read alongside more recent iterations of organized abandonment in multiple rounds of welfare retrenchment, which has resulted in increasingly punitive and draconian conditions to receive benefits, concurrent with increasingly militarized police to protect private property and stifle dissent (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Bonds, 2018). Moreover, the previous rounds of abandonment create the conditions for City officials, boosters, and pro-business interests to propose solutions to the very problems they created in the first place.

### *Social reproduction*

Gilmore’s (2008) theory of organized abandonment serves as a link between racial capitalism and feminist scholarship on social reproduction. It fundamentally highlights the devaluation and destruction of the socially reproductive capacities of Black and brown bodies, families, and communities through the confinement of crises in those very bodies and relations. It further illustrates how institutions and relations of social reproduction for communities of colour are consistently destroyed and remade in increasingly punitive ways. Bringing together Gilmore’s (2008) theory of organized abandonment with feminist scholarship on social reproduction highlights how structural processes unfold and are resisted in everyday life (e.g. Loyd, 2014).

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<sup>7</sup> Harvey (2005) and other political economists point to the late 1970s and the global oil crisis as the ‘neoliberal turn’ and the beginning of the implementation of neoliberalism as political and economic policy.

While a contested term, social reproduction incorporates a variety of paid and unpaid practices and activities required to live everyday life. Within geography, Katz's (2001) definition of "the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life" (p. 710) and Mitchell, Marston, and Katz's (2004) "life's work" serve as central definitions. Through an analysis of social reproduction, feminist economic geographers have worked to blur masculinist distinctions between dualisms such as public/private, home/work, and production/social reproduction. Black feminists have highlighted that liberal feminist approaches to social reproduction<sup>8</sup> elide that Black women have always worked, whether paid or unpaid, outside of the home on behalf of their families (e.g. Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Moreover, socially reproductive work takes place far beyond the home, from policymaking about welfare and funding for public schools (e.g. Collins & Mayer, 2010; Fraser, 2009) to transnational networks of paid social reproduction (e.g. Strauss, 2012; Arat-Koc, 2006; Nagar et al., 2002). Geographers have also drawn attention to the socially reproductive work of organizing (Wright, 2010; Hashimoto & Henry, 2017; Loyd, 2014).

### *Black sense of place*

Finally, I consider Katherine McKittrick's (2011) Black sense of place to link Black life and social reproduction to organizing efforts in the city that attempt to counter the 'tale of two cities' and other dominant discourses of work and poverty. A Black sense of place also complements and builds on Gilmore's (2008) theory of organized abandonment by examining the "process of materially and imaginatively *situating* historical and contemporary struggles

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<sup>8</sup> Liberal feminist approaches to social reproduction include Betty Friedan's (1977) work on white, middle class women's confinement to the home. Liberal feminists believe that women's liberation comes from working outside of the home.



against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 949). Organized abandonment theorizes how institutions for and supports of social relations and social reproduction are destroyed, as well as “the unexpected alliances that might be forged in the face of dispossessed isolation” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 958). Thus, Gilmore (1999; 2007), McKittrick (2006; 2011), and Woods (2017) highlight the production of a Black sense of place where “racial violences... shape, but do not wholly define black worlds” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 947). From a multi-racial group of mothers organizing against the incarceration of their children (Gilmore, 1999) to the thriving of Black arts and culture in New Orleans (Woods, 2017) in spite of organized abandonment, Black communities have always resisted racial capitalist violence. Laura Pulido and Jordan Camp (2017) describe this tension in the introduction to Woods’ (2017) posthumous book as a ‘dialectics of Bourbonism and the blues’. There is always a struggle between racial capitalist consolidations of power and the blues tradition of working-class, multi-racial solidarities organizing to resist and to imagine a more just future through music, art, mobilizations, and everyday life.

## **Research design & methods**

Methodologically, I am inspired by Black geographies’ call for more nuanced analyses beyond, “[locating] where black people live” (McKittrick & Woods, p. 6) and feminist methodologies that understand everyday life as embedded within but not defined by structural processes. Katherine McKittrick (2011) calls for scholarship that complicates teleological analyses of ‘urbicide’ that construct cities and their residents as already “dead and dying” (p.

951). Specifically, in relation to research that claims to uncover racial violence, McKittrick (2011) observes that,

the dead and dying black/non-white body becomes the conceptual tool that will undoubtedly complete, and thus empirically prove, the brutalities of racism. This analytical logic can only ‘end’ with black death which, interestingly, reifies the very colonial structures that research on racial violence is (seemingly) working against (p. 953).

Thus, studies on Blackness must provide nuanced material and historicized accounts that weave together racial violence with the notion that Blackness has always been implicated with struggle (McKittrick, 2011). McKittrick pushes scholars to consider and counter how “the process of uneven development calcifies the seemingly natural links between blackness, underdevelopment, poverty, and place within differing global contexts” (ibid., p. 951).

I also understand this dissertation as a feminist project, one that attends to feminist methodologies and the politics of citation (e.g. Mott & Cockayne, 2017). In engaging with feminist methodologies, I center the lives of those marginalized most by the City of Milwaukee and its boosters’ attempts to redevelop and revitalize. In a similar vein to McKittrick’s (2011) Black sense of place to counter analyses of urbicide, I examine the “topographical and embodied view” (Mitchell et al., 2003, p. 417), as well as a longer view (Pollard, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2003). I also theorize how such views are embedded within structural processes of organized abandonment and global processes of economic restructuring. Moreover, in engaging with feminist methodologies, I acknowledge that my own positionality, which I discuss below, comes from a particular situated knowledge and deeply shapes the knowledge production process of how my research is framed, conducted, analyzed, and represented (Rose, 1997; Mohanty, 1997; Crenshaw et al., 1995) and therefore the knowledge produced.

As I describe below, neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2011) helps me to position myself in the research process to understand how my various identities—racial, gendered, classed, occupational, and so forth—situate and implicate me in the research process such that society values me more than the workers whose voices I seek to center. My position shaped the way that research participants of various racial, gendered, classed, and occupational identities responded to me and the questions I asked. Finally, I position my work as a feminist project through citational politics. As Mott and Cockayne (2017) recently discussed, not only do research topics and subjects shape knowledge production and who gets to engage in it, but the politics of citation also highlights how geography reproduces its own knowledge. Citational choices are political and shed light on how the discipline understands authority, expertise, and whose knowledge is worthy of reproduction. I make a concerted effort to center the scholarship of feminist and anti-racist scholars, particularly scholars of colour, who have played an instrumental role in building up the discipline of geography but have thus far remained marginal because of citational politics.

I engaged in nearly two years of fieldwork between 2014 and 2016. I deployed a range of qualitative methods, including volunteering with Wisconsin Jobs Now (WJN), an organization related to the Fight for 15 in Milwaukee; attending and observing public meetings, forums, and days of action; interviewing City officials, business leaders, non-profit professionals, and community organizers; as well as analyzing media articles, City economic development plans, and documents from pro-business, activist, and research organizations. I describe my methods as participant observation and volunteering over ethnography<sup>9</sup> because I examined discourses and

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<sup>9</sup> Within ethnography, which is not well explored in geography, there are various modes of theorization and deployment. For example, McGinty (2015) and Herbert (2000) take distinct approaches to ethnography. While they both focus on individual meaning making of social phenomenon and human behaviour, Herbert (*ibid.*, p. 551) takes more of a positivist approach in which ethnographers “unearth what the group takes for granted” and the researcher

policy making at an institutional scale and how they shaped and were shaped by Milwaukee's local racial politics. While institutions are always comprised of individuals, I was less focused on human behavior and meaning making of individuals that comprise a group and more focused on how discourses and strategies were legitimated and circulated. This did not, however, preclude my interest in how the everyday, socially reproductive lives of fast food workers fit into these institutions.

In volunteering with WJN, I gained insight into how a community organization is structured, produces its messaging, and organizes its workers and community members. I volunteered with them two half-days a week. I was housed with professional staff working on communications and media. I worked on various administrative tasks, such as building a database of action attendees, making signs for actions, and a database of media coverage of the Milwaukee Fight for 15. In volunteering with WJN, I worked to gain the trust of staff, organizers, and fast food workers. Volunteering with WJN gave me access to information that I was unable to gain through formal interviews by informally interacting with staff, organizers, and fast food workers. For example, I witnessed communications staff prepping fast food workers to be spokespeople for different actions, as well as some of the planning that went into orchestrating highly coordinated days of action.

Volunteering became a particularly important method for data collection when WJN-related interviews became an unreliable source of data. I found it challenging to recruit WJN-related interviewees for a variety of reasons. WJN staff seemed hesitant to be formally

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is “[gaining] unreplicable insight”. Moreover, this approach to ethnography seems to take more of an extractive approach through which the researcher is mining the group for knowledge. McGinty (2015), on the other hand, situates individuals and groups within broader contexts that take cognizance of personal and discursive meaning making. Moreover, McGinty (ibid.) theorizes the ethnographic research process (i.e., interaction between researcher and ‘group’) itself as shaping the research process also.

interviewed and recorded, despite being guaranteed confidentiality. From interactions with staff about potential interviews, I became aware that Service Employees International Union (SEIU) restricted what staff contracted by them could disclose in interviews. Personal politics also played a role in limiting interviews at WJN. As I describe in more detail below, a problematic bifurcation between organizers and professional staff also shaped my interactions with organizers. Finally, there were many factors that contoured my interactions with fast food workers. I found that fast food workers were extremely private about their lives and had limited time to talk to a researcher about their everyday lives. Thus, I was only able to formally interview two fast food workers (Appendix B).

To supplement the above data, I also engaged in participant observation of public meetings, forums, and days of action during the same timeframe. This included county budget meetings, town hall meetings with local politicians, and a meeting of fast food and home care workers with the former Secretary of Labor, Tom Perez. Participant observation helped me narrow down a list of potential key informant interviewees. Most importantly, participant observation allowed me to see how broader discourses about work, poverty, race, and redevelopment were circulated by City officials and public testimony in different spaces. I was interested in who articulated specific positions and how they justified their positions. For example, in attending the county budget hearing, I was able to witness and hear how Black residents of North Side connected their neighbourhood conditions with the declining funding for public transportation and lack of green space (fieldnotes). In contrast, I heard suburban, white residents complain about the increase in wheel tax for a bus system they did not utilize (fieldnotes). Attending days of action allowed me to observe the Fight for 15's strategy to organize fast food workers and draw media attention to low-wage work. They allowed me to

gain insight into conversations between organizers, staff, and fast food workers in orchestrating the actions, as well as the emotional labour required to stay energized for over 12 hours. In engaging in participant observation, I wanted to untangle discourses of low-wage work, economic development, and urban politics to show that discourses are produced, and are neither monolithic nor immutable.

In the fall of 2016, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with a variety of City and state officials, business leaders, non-profit professionals, and community organizers to understand their views on Milwaukee's redevelopment plans in an era of colourblind racism (see Appendix B & C). The City and state officials were elected officials or appointed by one. They ranged from the state senate to a bureaucrat in the City of Milwaukee's Department of City Development. The business leaders came from Chambers of Commerce at the city and state scales. The non-profit professionals came from a variety of organizations in Milwaukee related to poverty reduction. They ranged from Milwaukee chapters of national organizations to Milwaukee-based non-profits. The community organizers came from a variety of grassroots organizations based in Milwaukee working on local issues of racialized poverty and social justice. The community organizers took more radical approaches to social justice, describing the structural forces that produced racism and poverty, whereas the non-profit professionals described more reformist approaches to poverty that recognized policy as producing poverty but ultimately blaming individuals for poverty and racism.

Within this context, I was interested in their views on the state of the economy in Milwaukee and how they believed it could be improved. I engaged in these interviews to build out my field observations, as well as media articles and publications. In addition to discourses circulated at public meetings and through media, I conducted these interviews to deepen my

understanding of the sources of discourses and how they extend beyond short statements made at meetings and media interviews. Despite focusing my attention on their perceptions of economic development, I was surprised at how much race and racially-coded language appeared in the interviews. I was particularly surprised at the brazenness and unapologetic nature with which many of the interviewees deployed racist discourses in their analyses of Milwaukee (see Appendix A).

In nearly two years of fieldwork between 2014-2016, I collected over 500 articles from various print and digital media, as well as publications from various organizations working on issues of economic development in the city, region, and state. I also collected an additional 100 articles during 2017-18 as I was writing with updated information on the Fight for 15 and more broadly about economic development in Milwaukee. The print and digital media came from predominantly Milwaukee-based publications, such as the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, *Milwaukee Magazine*, and the *Shepherd Express*. These articles were related to the Fight for 15, as well as the City of Milwaukee's redevelopment strategy more broadly. In examining media, I was interested in the broad circulation throughout the city and metropolitan region of the varying discourses on segregation and racialized poverty. Moreover, how were they connected to or separated from the City's redevelopment strategy? I examined the articles and publications for themes such as poverty, race, and visions for redevelopment. Media articles were also a way to see various perspectives on redevelopment presented together. Other publication materials came from organizations such as the City of Milwaukee, chambers of commerce, and WJN. In analyzing all of these publications, I examined how specific organizations presented and justified issues of economic redevelopment. For example, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce (MMAC) and WJN produced different discourses of work and redevelopment to

advocate against minimum wage laws and for living wages, respectively. To contextualize Milwaukee and, in recognition of local organizations' connections to those on a national scale, I also collected some national-scale articles and documents related to the Fight for 15 and economic redevelopment of rust-belt cities from news media like the *New York Times* and *BuzzFeed*, as well as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the national Fight for 15 campaign.

Finally, I examined primary sources such as U.S. Census Data and U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, as well as secondary sources, including reports from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development (CED), media articles, and City of Milwaukee planning documents, for descriptive statistics in order to contextualize some of the discourses of work and redevelopment in the city. I used Census data for basic descriptive statistics on population and poverty rates. The U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics data was useful in understanding the structure and financing of the Fight for 15. The CED reports, media articles, and City of Milwaukee Planning documents provided further descriptive statistics on employment, deindustrialization, and City investments in infrastructure and construction of downtown.

### **Situating myself in the field**

To me, one of the most impactful lessons I learned from feminist theory is an understanding of positionality and reflexivity. One's various identities shape not only how we construct research questions, methodologies, and analyses, but also how we engage with research participants—as well as how participants themselves position and respond to researchers. I know that my identity, in the simplest terms, as a tall East Asian American with an obscure accent,



shaped how I engaged with and was perceived by participants in Milwaukee's particular racial geographies. While I am unclear on how, I believe it deeply affected how participants responded to me. In a city that is very much separated along the problematic racial lines of Black/white and some Latinx, I observed quite a few perplexed faces in response to my project.

Theoretically, I find analyzing my positionality through Jodi Melamed's (2011) neoliberal multiculturalism a useful framework. As I describe above and in Chapter 4, people of colour are divided into deserving and undeserving categories. While I use it in my dissertation to work through the City of Milwaukee's current economic development plans, I also deploy it to situate myself within my dissertation. I recognize I am a beneficiary of neoliberal multiculturalism. While I am not white<sup>10</sup>, I am a highly and elitely educated mobile woman of colour who loves coffee shops as much as the next creative class subject. I have intense class privilege in terms of education and upbringing, but no woman in my family has a college degree. I have an accent that in the U.S. is perceived to be 'exotic' and 'classy'<sup>11</sup> even though I also used to have one of the most denigrated accents, the Southern accent. Such positionalities have made me wonder how neoliberal multiculturalism operates to value me in complex and different ways to others.

I am aware that neoliberal multiculturalism influenced my research process specifically. While I cannot predict or know exactly how, I observed that participants had difficulty positioning me in a city that is both so starkly divided along the lines of race and class and possessing a relatively low Asian American population. Why would I be interested in Black labour organizing and economic development in the city? With City officials, pro-business elites,

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<sup>10</sup> Although I have been called a Twinkie ("yellow on the outside, white on the inside") by white folks in Milwaukee. I have also been told that my English is 'really good' even though English is my first language.

<sup>11</sup> These are actual statements I have received in Milwaukee about the way I speak.

and non-profit professionals, I took on a professional student persona, wearing suit-like attire to try to cultivate the ambiance of an informational interview. I was always overdressed for these interviews. On a few occasions, I found it challenging to engage with professionals. They were reticent to talk with me, and I felt this was because of how they perceived my identities as a student and Asian American. They were unsure of my political positions and so were cautious at first. In one instance, I disclosed that my father was a business owner. As soon as I did so, the ‘pro-business’ interviewee began to speak more freely about their organization. In other instances, particularly with business leaders, I got the impression that my gender and racial identities provided, at best, the interviewees some comfort in feeling like I was at least an empty vessel to be filled with pro-business rhetoric, or at worst, a silly Asian woman who needed to be taught the ‘right way’. In these interviews, I focused attention on questions of economic development and the state of Milwaukee’s economy as a way to examine the explicit and implicit ways racially-coded and racist language are embedded within discourses of development (Appendix A). I was interested in popular discourses in a context of colourblind racism. How were elites discussing race and reproducing racial hierarchies in seemingly non-racial terms? As I discuss in the last empirical chapter, even without asking questions about race, it came up overtly on most occasions; when interviewees remained silent on the topic, we discussed racialized themes, such as skill and work ethic.

By contrast, with fast food workers and some of the organizers, I had difficulty gaining trust. Why would I be interested learning more about their struggles? I felt that my position as an Asian American and student served as impediments to gaining their trust and building relationships because they saw me as an outsider. While such was never explicitly stated, I got the impression that the workers and organizers had interacted with enough researchers who had

reproduced normative discourses about them. Through the process of writing Chapter 3, I also came to the conclusion that the part of the organization I volunteered with also served as a detriment to relationship building. As I describe, the organization with which I volunteered was bifurcated between organizers and professional staff in problematic ways. During the time that I worked with the group, I was placed in an office of professional staff that was spatially segregated within the organization and socially segregated by race and profession. The division between organizers and professional staff meant that I was positioned as professional staff, and therefore ‘different’: an outsider to the fast food workers and organizers. I believe that this split, in addition to personal politics, was a factor in complicating my original goals of working more closely with fast food workers during my fieldwork. I was unable to get buy-in from the organizers, who did not vouch for me with the workers. Nonetheless, my experience with WJN gave me insight into the Fight for 15’s organizational structure and strategy that limited the Milwaukee Fight for 15’s efforts.

### **Overview of chapters, research questions, & project contribution**

The following chapters are unified by the theoretical framework and methodology outlined above. From this research, I have developed three empirical chapters that examine economic redevelopment, social reproduction, and mobilizations under contemporary racial capitalism.

In the second chapter, I consider the persistence of segregation and racialized poverty in Milwaukee to ask what strategies the City proposes to tackle them, and whether they are effective. I argue that the solutions proposed do not tackle segregation, and therefore fail to

redress decades of disinvestment. I specifically examine the City's strategies of advanced manufacturing, deconcentration of low-wage workers, New Urbanism, and investments in large capital projects. I use Gilmore's (2008) theory of organized abandonment as described above. In extending its reach, the state deploys its powers to facilitate investments in its pro-business agenda and to implement draconian and punitive measures for those seen as impediments. At the same time, the state retreats in providing social services for the social reproduction of society, such as public schools and transportation. Viewed from a historical perspective, organized abandonment has created the very conditions and subjects City officials and boosters seek to fix and punish. Moreover, in eliding specific histories, organized abandonment works to legitimate inadequate solutions to decades of disinvestment.

In the third chapter, I turn to the Fight for 15 as an example of a mobilization attempting to improve the lives of low-wage workers in Milwaukee to ask why such a mobilization did not gain traction in Milwaukee. I take up Katherine McKittrick's (2011) theory of a Black sense of place, together with feminist theorizations of social reproduction, to build a framework that illustrates why it was unsuccessful in its campaign for a \$15 an hour minimum wage and the right to unionize without retaliation. I argue that, while calling attention to the realities of a low-wage economy and challenging discourses of low-wage work, the Fight for 15 was ultimately unsuccessful because it was unable to situate wages within the broader racial capitalist context in Milwaukee. Specifically, I highlight how the Fight for 15's structure and organizing strategy impeded the articulation of local concerns and the connection between fast food workers' everyday social reproduction with broader conditions of organized abandonment discussed in Chapter 2.

In the fourth chapter, I take up the City of Milwaukee and its boosters' contradictory redevelopment strategy to ask: How can City officials and boosters legitimate and justify such a strategy even as inequality intensifies? I engage with Melamed's (2011) neoliberal multiculturalism as a lens through which to examine the City of Milwaukee's current uptake of Richard Florida's (2002) creative class thesis as a redevelopment strategy. I situate the creative class thesis within the City's long trajectory of economic development projects in order to argue that, despite celebrating diversity and colorblindness, the City's implementation of its strategy is an inherently racial project. I examine how discourses of colourblindness and diversity intertwine with racialized discourses of work and development to show how they reproduce historical socio-spatial patterns of racialization despite their nominal agenda of promoting diversity. Neoliberal multiculturalism complicates engagements with race and racialization by highlighting that discourses and practices can be explicitly racialized even as they espouse colourblindness.

In the current political moment, in which both white supremacist racial violence and colourblindness dominate public discourse, it is imperative to take stock of how Black bodies, families, and communities have both endured racial violence far beyond the Trump presidency and continue to resist and mobilize against their current conditions. To do this, I examine the contradictory case study of Milwaukee, at once a city renowned for its Socialist and progressive politics, punitive and draconian policy experimentation, and its intense racial politics. As a whole, this work contributes to racial capitalism scholarship in geography by examining how, in an era of 'colourblindness', the discourses and practices that are reproduced remain racial in nature. Moreover, this work reveals how urban economic redevelopment, shaped heavily by local racial politics, is a site of contestation between global economic restructuring and

mobilizations for racial and economic justice. In bringing together scholarship on racial capitalism, social reproduction, and a Black sense of place, this dissertation builds on political economic analyses of urban change to highlight that even while global processes of economic restructuring shape cities, specific local racial hierarchies play a central role in discourses and decision making.

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## CHAPTER 2

### *“Not stadiums but real investment where people live”:* Theorizing organized abandonment in Milwaukee

#### **Introduction**

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele’s office (OCE) sent the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors a report to propose the creation of the Office on African American Affairs (OAAA, Office of the County Executive, 2016). This document, like many other local reports and media articles, outlines and enumerates the dire conditions of ‘African Americans’ in Milwaukee. The report begins with the line, “Milwaukee’s racial inequities have existed for as long as Milwaukee has had a measurable African American population” (OCE, 2016, p. 1) and goes on to describe some of the outcomes of the Civil Rights movement in the city.<sup>12</sup> While acknowledging that some changes have taken place, the report states that, “many of the issues that afflict Milwaukee today are functionally identical in form and degree to the issues” (ibid.) taking place during the Civil Rights movement. Ultimately, the report attributes the poor state of Milwaukee’s Black residents to “numerous” factors (ibid.), though it provides no elaboration on the complex processes driving racial inequality nor analysis of the impacts of those factors. Instead, it moves on to discuss the outcomes of segregation.

Six months following the creation of the OAAA, on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016, a 23-year-old Black man named Sylville Smith was shot and killed by a Milwaukee Police Department officer

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<sup>12</sup> Milwaukee is well known for its Civil Rights agitation during the 1960s and 1970s. It earned the nickname “Selma of the North”. Jones’s (2009) book of the same name chronicles the history that caused the mobilizations for Civil Rights in the city. Some of the events included: 200 nights of marching by Black youth with the NAACP in order to secure the passage of an open housing ordinance in the city (Jones, 2009), and civil disobedience over segregated schooling and busing (Miner, 2013).

in the Sherman Park neighborhood, located in Milwaukee's predominantly Black North Side.<sup>13</sup> For three days following the shooting, residents and their supporters demonstrated against Smith's death and police killings.<sup>14</sup> Media coverage of the demonstrations described and visually represented both the neighbourhood and the participants as violent. For example, media accounts paid little attention to the issues motivating demonstrations, and instead, focused on property damage and violence. Residents and the alderman representing Sherman Park, however, clarified that the events were protests over police brutality, segregation, persistent poverty, violence, and the inequalities in investment between downtown and the North Side (Mak et al., 2016). The creation of the OAAA and Smith's death—when considered together within a longer trajectory of Milwaukee's racial history—reveal a pattern of containing crisis and locating blame in Black individuals and communities. Smith's death, the police killing of Dontre Hamilton two years prior, demonstrations, and media portrayals underscore a persistent state of racial capitalist crisis in the city concerning racialized poverty, joblessness, and violence (Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming).

The discrepancy between Abele's unveiling of the OAAA and the uprisings after Smith's death sheds light on a persistent contradiction in Milwaukee, where solutions to deeply entrenched segregation (see Figure 2) and racialized poverty are wholly inadequate to resolve the root causes of segregation. In fact, many of these solutions work to reproduce or even exacerbate

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<sup>13</sup> See Figure 2. The North side of Milwaukee is predominantly Black and has been actively produced over decades. When Black Southerners first migrated to Milwaukee at beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were confined to living in what became known as Bronzeville, the 'inner core' and the near-North Side (Trotter, 2007; Jones, 2009). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the inner core was a 35-block area to the northwest of downtown Milwaukee produced through discriminatory housing practices, racially restrictive covenants, and overt racism. By 1940, it was a 75-block area (Jones, 2009). Figure 2 highlights the current extent of the North Side. I also discuss more about the expansion of the North Side below.

<sup>14</sup> Sylville Smith's death was not the first killing of its kind in recent years. On April 30, 2014, Dontre Hamilton, a 31-year-old Black man was shot fourteen times and killed by a Milwaukee Police Department officer in Red Arrow Park in downtown Milwaukee.

segregation and poverty. The solutions proposed by conservatives and liberals alike are inadequate because they fail to address segregation itself, and instead channel investment into tangentially-related projects. As the quote in the title to the chapter suggests, the City's proposed solutions to the problems of segregation and racialized poverty have emphasized a range of redevelopment strategies. However, few of them involve investment in the North Side or the demands of its residents. Some examples of solutions include workforce development programs (Schneider, 2017), entrepreneurial incubator programs (Hughes, 2018), philanthropy (Greater Milwaukee Foundation, 2018), community policing (Bonds & Loyd, forthcoming), and neighbourhood revitalization programs (City of Milwaukee Department of City Development, n.d.).

Segregation and racialized poverty are lamented in the media, and feature regularly in regional documents and discussion, even as racial inequalities seem to be deepening. The circulation of discourses about Milwaukee's deep racial segregation (Denvir, 2011), the growing gap in Black-white high-school graduation rates (Richards, 2016), and the extraordinary rate of child poverty (Crowe & Glauber, 2016) are often repeated in policy documents and popular media. The creation of the OAAA and other such programs are meant to redress some of these statistics that City officials see as problems specific to Black Milwaukeeans. The OAAA's objectives highlight the limitation of solutions proposed by many elites:

The creation of an [OAAA] include as its objectives: the examination and definition of issues central to the rights and needs of African Americans; recommendations for changes in programs and laws that disparately impact African Americans; development and implementation of policies, plans, and programs related to the special needs of African Americans; and promotion of equal opportunities for African Americans (OCE, 2016, p. 16).

Though histories of racial inequality are acknowledged, the OAAA's objectives elide the fact that residents of the North Side and community activists have long articulated the causes and

solutions to segregation (Jones 2009; Bonds, 2018; Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming). Urban social movements have highlighted the deliberate production of the North Side through decades of disinvestment and abandonment, and have repeatedly articulated demand for jobs and investment at myriad fora across the city (e.g. Miner, 2015; Herzog, 2017). Nevertheless, City and county officials, as well as business and non-profit elites across the political spectrum, continue to contort rationales that propose community discussions, research to enumerate Milwaukee's problems, and various programs. The OAAA report is indicative of dominant discourses about segregation in Milwaukee in which the active production of segregation and racialized poverty have been completely elided from analysis (Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming). Instead, segregation is a taken-for-granted, unchanging fact within popular discourses.

Solutions like the OAAA are entangled within racial frames that locate the problem of segregation, and the related issues such as racialized poverty, violence, and crime, as spatially and temporally "elsewhere". Media coverage of Smith's death and the Sherman Park demonstrations situate the root causes of segregation in abandoned neighbourhoods and their residents, rather than recognizing them as structural (see Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming). Other analyses point to segregation as a historical phenomenon that renders its contemporary form an inevitable outcome of history (e.g. Kane, 2016). The creation of the OAAA highlights how popular discourses invoke segregation but do not address the structural roots of segregation.

This chapter focuses on the specific ways in which disinvestment and abandonment have occurred on Milwaukee's North Side to legitimate inadequate solutions to complex historical and socio-spatial processes. I take up Pulido's (2017) call for "[placing] contemporary forms of racial inequality in a materialist, ideological, and historical framework" (p. 527). In doing so, I argue that ostensible solutions proposed to the problems of segregation and racialized poverty do not in

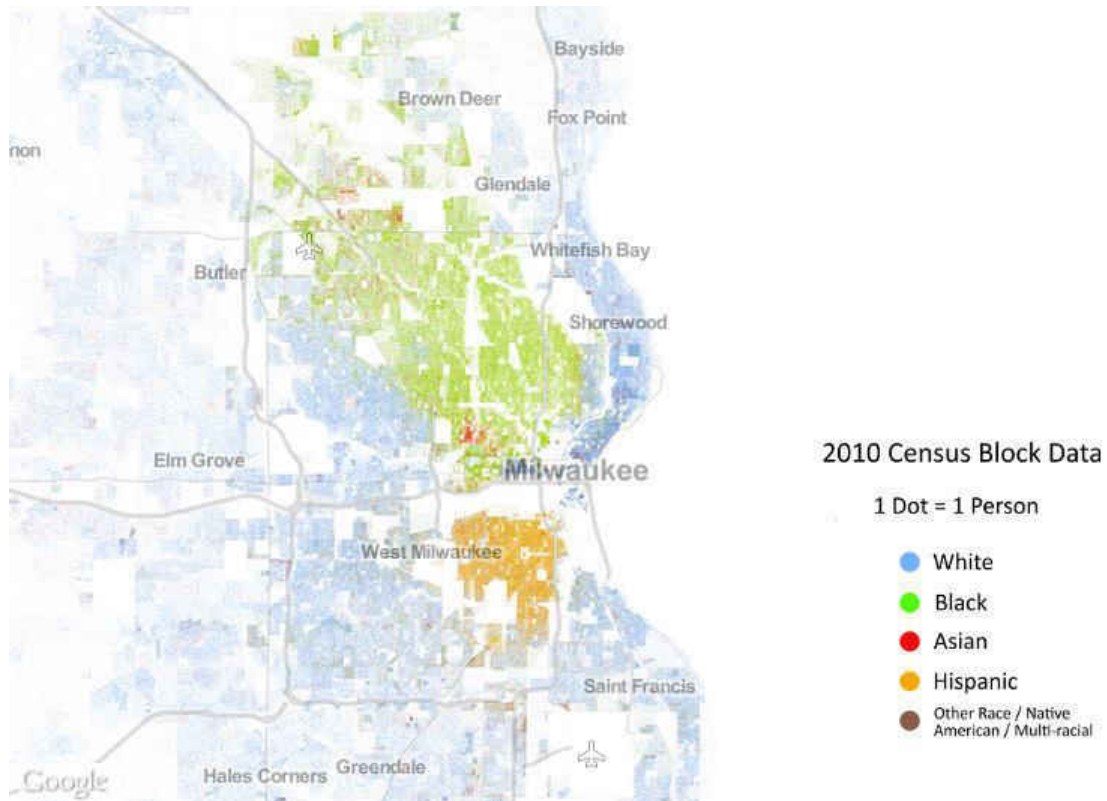
actuality address their historical and socio-spatial production. Building an analysis of what Gilmore (2008) has called “organized abandonment”<sup>15</sup> reveals how City and county officials, pro-business elites, and non-profit professionals can continue to advance solutions that fail to address segregation and sheds light on the simultaneous retreat and extension of the state.

In what follows, I trace the specific historical production of racial segregation in Milwaukee in tandem with the City’s redevelopment strategies. First, I will illustrate that segregation is far from inevitable. In doing so, I seek to illuminate the deliberateness—but perhaps not conscious intentionality—with which policies, the law, popular discourses, and places are produced (Ranganathan, 2016). Then, through an analysis of semi-structured interviews with City officials, pro-business elites, non-profit professionals, and community activists, as well as an analysis of City planning documents and media, I will highlight four solutions that, like the OAAA, have been put forth as remedies to segregation and intersecting problems on the North Side and that fail to address the demands of residents and improve their lives.

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<sup>15</sup> While Gilmore (2008) cites Harvey and *Limits to Capital* (1989, p. 303) as the source of the term “organized abandonment”, I am unable to find any reference to the term in any edition of the book or many of his other texts. I have heard that the citation was a misinterpretation of Gilmore’s personal notes. Also, I acknowledge that Gilmore discusses organized abandonment in previous work (e.g. Gilmore, 1999; 2007) but I cite Gilmore (2008) as it is the first place where I was able to develop a definition. Gilmore & Gilmore (2016) was also helpful in furthering a definition.





**Figure 2:** Racial dot map of Milwaukee highlighting the stark inter- and intra-metropolitan segregation (Cable, 2013).

### Theorizing organized abandonment

In Milwaukee, public discourses and elites across the political spectrum situate segregation and racialized poverty as common sense and an inevitable part of the city’s landscape. How can we understand this, and what is revealed when segregation is understood as produced? I bring together Gilmore’s (2008) theorizing of organized abandonment and Barraclough’s (2009) theorizing of relational racialization to trace when crises were produced, where they are located, and who bears their burden.

Gilmore (2008) theorizes organized abandonment as a set of complex processes of disinvestment and state intervention that constantly change but iteratively exacerbate themselves and one another. Moreover, each successive round of abandonment helps to create the conditions for solutions provided by officials. For example, the destruction of Black neighborhoods through freeway building and urban renewal built a physical wall between the North Side and downtown, thereby paving the way for a bifurcated redevelopment strategy that persists today. Abandoned places have experienced repeated rounds of disinvestment based on the “devaluation... [of] both their blackness and their surplus status, with the two being mutually constituted” (Pulido, 2016, p. 1). Through the example of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, Pulido (2016) charts out three material forms of abandonment: that of capital, that of white residents from the city, and that of the state at multiple scales. This framework is readily applicable to the case of Milwaukee. As Woods’ (2017) analysis of New Orleans illustrates, myriad ‘disasters’ built upon each other to result in contemporary, unevenly experienced crises. Organized abandonment facilitates the tracing of how these ‘disasters’ have occurred historically through deliberate policymaking and planning by elites to consolidate their racial and class power.

Organized abandonment emphasizes the state as a central actor in the production of crises and the legitimation of abandonment long before the neoliberal turn. As a framework, it is useful in analyzing the case of Milwaukee because as Gilmore & Gilmore (2016) highlight, it is a two-pronged approach. Rather than a unilateral abandonment and disinvestment of poor neighbourhoods of colour, organized abandonment consists of a simultaneous investment in punitive policies and disinvestment in public services for social reproduction. Abandonment by capital, white residents, and the state occurs concurrently with an extension of state reach for capital accumulation. In the contemporary moment, the state has destroyed or cut socially

reproductive necessities for already abandoned neighbourhoods, such as public schools, transportation, social assistance programs, and affordable housing to prioritize privatization and tax incentives to corporations. Gilmore & Gilmore (2016) highlight how the welfare state has tempered the crisis tendency of racial capitalism; however, with the welfare state's devolution, racial capitalism has thrown social reproduction for individuals, families, and communities into crisis.

Organized abandonment is made possible through its underlying premise that racial hierarchies are both an imperative and an outcome of racial capitalism. Tracing histories and relationalities in organized abandonment and racial capitalism more broadly dislodges a common-sense belief in Milwaukee that segregation and racialized poverty are inevitable or are problems of individual will. Rather, this approach sheds light on racial capitalism's need to produce a "landscape of differential value which can be harnessed in diverse ways to facilitate the accumulation of more power and profit than would otherwise be possible" (Pulido, 2016, p. 1). Drawing from the Black Radical tradition, Jodi Melamed's (2015) often-cited premise powerfully illuminates the connections between race, racialization, and capitalism. She writes:

capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups... These antinomies of accumulation require loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires (ibid., p. 77).

Melamed's analysis underscores how race and other forms of difference are foundational organizing principles of capitalism. Moreover, she emphasizes that inequalities, and the differentiations produced based on these categories, facilitate capital's ability to accumulate. These inequalities are produced discursively and materially. In the Americas, the enslavement of

West Africans and the dispossession and genocide of Native Americans was made possible through racial hierarchies based in scientific racism (McKittrick, 2011; Bonds & Inwood, 2016). The unequal differentiation and the subsequent value placed on such groups—in this case, race—vary over time to accommodate the political economic needs of power structures of the time and specific geographic context (Melamed, 2015). In the contemporary context, however, racial capitalism produces difference and devalues through liberal and multicultural discourses (Melamed, 2015; Ranganathan, 2016). Neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2011), and the simultaneous valuing of people of colour in the creative class and devaluing of low-wage workers of colour (described in Chapter 4) is one such example. In fact, as Ranganathan (2016) argues, racial difference is foundational to liberal market societies.

In a similar vein, Pulido (2017) specifically describes how differential value can be achieved through the production of relationalities. As relationalities, racial hierarchies become defined through “constant rearticulation of what it is not” (Barraclough, 2009, p. 169). For example, whiteness becomes defined through the absence of Blackness and visions of productivity, normalcy, and contributors to society—in contrast to ‘Black idleness’, ‘criminality’, and ‘freeloading’. In understanding differential value as relational, the production of it happens through socio-spatial phenomena. In theorizing relationality and organized abandonment, it is possible to see how racial capitalism both facilitates and reconfigures relationalities constantly for capital accumulation. Gilmore (as cited in Melamed, 2015, p. 78) describes racial capitalism as a “technology of antirelationality” in which collective life is destroyed and alternative connections made to funnel into capital accumulation. In the following sections, I shed light on how Black collective life has been constantly destroyed through

practices of suburbanization, white flight, urban renewal, and downtown revitalization, as well as legitimated through racist discourses.

Relationality can be understood as being produced through both social relations and space. Barraclough's (2009; see also Pulido, 2006) theory of relational racialization is of particular salience to examining racial capitalism and the historical socio-spatial patterns of development in Milwaukee. It is the socio-spatial production of concentrated wealth and 'white privilege' in one place that requires non-white poverty and disinvestment elsewhere (see also Lawson et al., 2012). This discursive construction is materialized through the valorization of one group while devaluing another. In turn, the social formation is spatialized through the simultaneous accumulation and abandonment of particular places. For example, Bonds (2013) describes the contradictory recruitment of both a prison and luxury housing development in Madras, Oregon to relationally produce a white, wealthy community that relies on the devaluation and exclusion of low-income residents of color. These seemingly disparate places then reproduce distinct racial meanings and categories, such as white and Black, and their attendant historical and contemporary racial systems (Barraclough, 2009; Bonds, 2013; Hankins et al., 2012). While the production of relational racialization occurs in a "structural racial economy" (Brahinsky, 2011, p. 147), policymakers and planners that comprise it, and who actually produce relational racialization, download responsibility onto racialized bodies who are to blame for their own poverty, joblessness, and decline (Cope & Latham, 2009; Wilson & Grammenos, 2005; Wilson, 2009). Cope & Latham (2009) ask, however: is the city a site for production and capitalist accumulation, or a place to live?

An understanding of relational racialization highlights the contradictions in an economy imbued with notions of race. When describing the production of relational racialization in Los

Angeles in the early 20th century, Barraclough (2009) describes the irony in requiring the cheap, racialized labour to build and maintain the very white landscapes of luxury and wealth the workers threatened to destroy. Processes of relational racialization can be explicitly racialized (e.g. Lai, 2012; Cope & Latcham, 2009; Wilson & Grammenos, 2005) and silent on race (e.g. Hankins et al., 2012; Bonds, 2013; Derickson, 2014). Explicitly racialized discourses and practices deploy narratives of crisis, decline, and moral decay; those silent on race employ racially-coded language to justify their discourses and practices. Economic development plans or practices devoid of race, however, are still racialized, regardless of the ability to prove intent, and still shape racialized socio-spatial development (Brahinsky, 2011; Pulido, 2000). Put differently, white people can deploy “presumably nonracial spatial values” (Barraclough, 2009, p. 171) to reproduce relational racialization and the material characteristics of those very places through technocratic economic and legal language that have value, such as historic preservation, that are predicated on the very exclusion of people of colour.

The socio-spatial production of relational racialization works to legitimate what Gilmore (see, e.g., 2008) calls organized abandonment, where the state’s capacity to extend its reach in some areas like policing and economic development for the rich (like in financing large-scale, speculative development projects) and withdrawing in other, socially reproductive necessities such as public schools, public transportation, infrastructure, and welfare. This requires discourses such as economic necessity and competitiveness on the one hand and individualized blame for poverty on the other. When these discourses are spatialized through white flight and segregation, abandoned places and the people that live within them are ripe places for experimental and draconian policies, such as the voucher school program and workfare (Pulido, 2017).

## A brief history of organized abandonment in Milwaukee<sup>16</sup>

Sylville Smith's death was not an isolated incident. The conditions of his death (or murder) reflected an accumulation of relational racialization and decades-long organized abandonment of the North Side. To understand his death and broader conditions of abandonment as separate from redevelopment downtown erases the ugly and racist historical production of contemporary Milwaukee (Kenny, 1995; Rodriguez, 2014). This section is just a brief overview of the historical scholarship on Milwaukee to provide a genealogy of organized abandonment. I trace the history of organized abandonment because most Milwaukeeans know that it is one of the most segregated cities in America, but cannot explain how or why. Many Milwaukeeans understand white flight and 'neighbourhood decline' as having occurred because of the change in tastes and preferences of the white middle class (Schmidt, 2011). The stark segregation in Milwaukee is seen as an ontological fact that just *is* rather than having historical roots that accelerated during post-Second World War urban renewal, white flight, and *de facto*<sup>17</sup> segregation. As I describe in Chapter 4, this seemingly naturalized bifurcation between a white Milwaukee and a Black Milwaukee is used to legitimate the City's redevelopment strategy, while boosters of Milwaukee center nostalgia over the city's Germanic heritage, beer (e.g. Pabst, Schlitz, and Miller), and dairy products (Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004; Zimmerman, 2008).

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<sup>16</sup> Many scholars have produced more in-depth histories of Milwaukee from a variety of perspectives. Collins & Mayer (2010) provide the most in-depth historiography of organized abandonment in Milwaukee. Gurda (1999) in the *Making of Milwaukee* provides an overview of the history of the city. Trotter (2007) charts the history of *Black Milwaukee* until the end of World War II. Parker (2017) in *Masculinities and Markets* examines the history of Milwaukee and how race and gender are implicated in Milwaukee's contemporary economic redevelopment strategy. Jones (2009) in *Selma of the North* traced the Civil Rights history of Milwaukee in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>17</sup> *De facto* segregation is segregation by practice. In contrast to Jim Crow laws in the South and the legal segregation of public accommodation (*de jure* segregation), *de facto* segregation was not legally sanctioned but still practiced in Northern cities. Real estate practices, such as redlining (assessments of neighbourhood value based on the race and class of residents), are prime examples of *de facto* segregation (see for example, Ranganathan, 2016).

Indeed, Milwaukee has always been segregated along the lines of class, ethnicity, and race. Before the significant increase of the Black population in Milwaukee in the 1940s, Milwaukee was segregated along the lines of European ethnicities (Gurda, 1999). The 1938 Residential Security Map of Milwaukee County shows a very low Black population but an “infiltration” of “foreign-born families”, in particular Polish, German, and Jewish immigrants, in neighbourhoods that are now predominantly Black (U.S. Federal Home Bank Board Division of Research and Statistics, 1938). The production of a Black-white segregated Milwaukee has been a continual process since the early 20th century, when Black migrants fled from the violence of the Jim Crow South, for economic opportunities in Milwaukee, and because of the precipitous decline in immigration after the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act. As the population of Black Milwaukeeans increased, however, the City needed to find ways to contain and confine them to assuage white fears (Bonds, 2018).

The City achieved this by confining (through *de facto* means) the areas in which Black residents could live to an expanding area to the northwest of downtown, which became the inner core (Trotter, 2007). Black migrants from the South shared the increasingly dilapidated and overcrowded housing and neighbourhood with recently-arrived European immigrants (Gurda, 1999). Black workers were also initially confined to domestic work, and when Black men were finally allowed into manufacturing, they did the most strenuous and dangerous work (Trotter, 2007). Because of their labour market positions, they were the most susceptible to economic shifts and recessions (*ibid.*). Despite employment discrimination and residential segregation, Black arts, culture, social institutions, and business thrived in Bronzeville (Gurda, 1999; Jones, 2009). Class differences between the working and middle classes often interfered with organizing against racial discrimination (Jones, 2009).



In the postwar years, residential segregation intensified through policies of urban renewal and suburbanization. White Milwaukeeans, through the GI Bill, were able to buy new homes in the expanding suburbs surrounding Milwaukee, while Black Milwaukeeans were steered towards housing on the North Side (Gurda, 1999; Ranganathan, 2016). White residents began to see Black migrants as the cause of urban decay and racial conflict rather than the scapegoat of racial capitalism (Jones, 2009; Bonds 2018). At the same time, financing for urban projects began to change, increasingly relying on debt and speculation (Fure-Slocum, 2013). Freeway construction and urban renewal tore apart the very neighbourhoods in which Black residents were supposed to live. After the Second World War, the Greater Milwaukee Committee, a group of Milwaukee business elites, consolidated their influence to divert tax dollars to housing, highways, and buildings (Norman, 1989). Despite heavy community resistance,<sup>18</sup> using the discourse of “urban blight”, the preparation for and construction of Interstate 43 (which connects the North and South sides of Milwaukee), lasted from 1952 into the 1970s. The City of Milwaukee razed a large portion of Bronzeville and the inner core, bisecting the heart of the Black commercial district along Walnut Street (Shashko, 2000). Not only did the City raze 426 businesses in the commercial district—they also demolished 11,000 housing units and only rebuilt 7,700 in their place, exacerbating existing overcrowding and dispersing other residents unable to find housing (Norman, 1989). Meanwhile, white suburbanites flowed in and out of downtown Milwaukee on the maze of freeways that cut through those very neighbourhoods. Such a strategy relies on increasingly speculative investments, and because of their public-private nature, risk becomes a public burden and the goals of pro-business elites becomes a public one (Kenny, 1995).

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<sup>18</sup> This included Black members of the City of Milwaukee’s Common Council threatening to block funding for the Grand Avenue Mall in downtown unless freeway construction and destruction of Black neighbourhoods ceased (Parker 2017).

As with cities across the U.S., the 1960s was a decade of tumult and contradictions in Milwaukee. The population of the city peaked in 1960, at 741,000 residents, with the immigration of Black Southerners and before the acceleration of white flight into the suburbs (Rodriguez, 2014). Milwaukee was approaching its manufacturing zenith, and 60% of metropolitan Milwaukee industrial jobs were located within the city limits (Levine, 2013b). Signs of deindustrialization were on the horizon, however: between 1960 and 1970, Milwaukee lost 10% of jobs in the city, while the number of jobs outside the city grew by 75% (Jones, 2009). Moreover, because of discrimination and their late arrival to the city, Black workers occupied the lowest-paid positions, were the first to be fired, and suffered the most from recessions (Trotter, 2007). By the 1960s, with urban renewal and white flight, residential segregation was well cemented into the landscape, and the inner core had grown to an area six times the area of the original inner core (Rose, 1972; Jones, 2009). Civil Rights agitation also gained momentum against decades of *de jure* segregation and discrimination. This organizing came into conflict with the city's shift from Socialist mayors to more pro-business, Democratic leadership under Mayor Henry Maier (1960-1988) (Bonds, 2018).

Smith (2003) highlights a transition in municipal politics away from class to racial politics by the early 1960s. Even though Black residents did not comprise a significant proportion of the Milwaukee population until the 1970s, white fears of a Black invasion infiltrated political discourse, particularly over public housing (ibid.). At the same time, deploying seemingly race-neutral language, Maier continued urban renewal policies and cleared 266 acres of land in preparation for downtown redevelopment, including the now-struggling Grand Avenue Mall and office space (Norman, 1989). The City also razed predominantly Black neighbourhoods just north of North Avenue in preparation for the never-built Park Freeway, and

also completed the construction of Interstates 43 and 94 during this time (ibid.; Jones, 2009). In total, 9.7% of all housing units in the city were demolished for urban renewal (Norman, 1989). Razing houses and failing to replace them in already-crowded neighbourhoods with crumbling housing stock and a lack of affordable housing proved disastrous for the inner core (Jones, 2009; Collins & Mayer, 2010). Funneling public dollars into downtown, combined with white flight, crippled the City's ability to direct resources towards public goods, such as public schools. Against this backdrop, Black youth and their supporters marched for 200 nights in the 1967 open housing marches (see Bonds, 2018). While a city ordinance for open housing never passed, the comparatively weakened federal policy forced Milwaukee to ban discrimination in housing based on race. In addition, Civil Rights activists engaged in civil disobedience in the 1960s against "intact busing"<sup>19</sup>, finally winning a U.S. Supreme Court case in 1976 that ruled Milwaukee's school segregation unconstitutional and ordered desegregation of public schools over three years.<sup>20</sup>

While organized abandonment of the inner core and Black communities has been a continual process, the 1970s seem to be a turning point in the production of the contemporary North Side where Smith was killed. A confluence of factors led to further abandonment, and the strategies used to mitigate their effects deepened and accelerated abandonment of Milwaukee. Between 1945 and 1970, Milwaukee's Black population had grown by 700% (Jones, 2009). It was during this time that a bifurcation of the labour market took shape, with white, high-wage

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<sup>19</sup> Intact busing was a strategy first employed by Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) Superintendent Harold Vincent in 1957 to solve overcrowding in Black schools while assuaging white fears of Black students at their schools. It involved busing Black students from their regular school to a white school with extra classrooms. Black students would arrive after white students were settled in their classrooms, and have separate classrooms and recesses. The Black students would then be taken back to their regular school for lunch and then back again to the white school for afternoon classes (Miner, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> However, due to a combination of accelerating white flight out of the city (no doubt shaped by white fears of school integration) and the U.S. Supreme Court taking up an appeal by MPS in 1977 against the 1976 decision, school desegregation as ordered in 1976 was never fully implemented (Miner, 2013).

workers living in suburbs and Black, low-wage workers living in the central city (Levine, 2007). Once the “machine shop of the world”, the industrialists of Milwaukee blamed a slowing economy and rising fuel prices for the need to outsource its production to places like Mexico and China. Deindustrialization affected the city as a whole, but was particularly devastating for the inner core, who depended on manufacturing jobs for their livelihoods and still occupied the lowest-paid, most dangerous positions. By the 1970s, over 55% of Black men worked in manufacturing sectors. However, between 1970 and 1990, 80% of manufacturing jobs were lost (Levine, 2003a). Simultaneous with deindustrialization was, and is, the continued expansion of the low-wage service sector. Levine (1994) found in the same two decades that Milwaukee was first in low-wage job growth. When considered in the context of employment discrimination and white flight, the vast majority of those losing manufacturing jobs and gaining service jobs were Black workers.

The infrastructure for white families to continue abandoning the city—freeways nearing completion, the abandonment of the city by industry, and tax incentives for businesses and housing developers—made moving to the suburbs easy. Residents unable to leave increasingly abandoned neighbourhoods were spatially dislocated from their new forms of employment (Collins & Mayer, 2010). In an attempt to mitigate the effects of deindustrialization and white flight, the City of Milwaukee and its boosters scrambled to “isolate and contain urban disinvestment” (Schmidt, 2011, p. 569). During this time, the City took an ‘urban triage’ approach to development in the city, defining and demarcating neighbourhoods that were in decline but ‘savable’ through investment (ibid.). The City of Milwaukee focused the investment scarce resources on the preservation of already-existing assets rather than into neighbourhoods deemed ‘unsavable’. Schmidt (2011), however, finds that the strategy of ‘urban triage’, in fact,

reproduced practices of redlining and deepened segregation and urban decline. Nonetheless, while the City claimed limited resources to ‘save’ neighbourhoods, it continued to pour investment into downtown (Rodriguez, 2014).

The 1980s were a challenging decade for Milwaukee. Recessions intensified the impacts of deindustrialization, white flight, and failing urban redevelopment projects (Kenny, 1995). Milwaukee’s industrial powerhouses, such as Schlitz Brewing and Briggs & Stratton<sup>21</sup>, eventually closed their doors, leaving City leaders and boosters scrambling to reinvent the city’s image in a post-industrial context (Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004). Ronald Reagan’s assault on labour at the federal level had devastating impacts on working class Milwaukee by allowing employers to demand concessions of workers (Collins & Mayer, 2010). Milwaukee’s population continued to decline. Between the 1980s and 1990s, Milwaukee’s population declined by 31,000 residents, or 9% of its population and 5% of jobs (Kenny, 1995, p. 80). In 1981, the number of service jobs overtook the number of manufacturing jobs in the city (Collins & Mayer, 2010). Even still, City leaders and boosters developed a redevelopment strategy that attempted to overshadow Milwaukee’s political economic and socio-spatial problems through a nostalgia for its idyllic industrial past and a renewed investment in downtown (Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004).

Concentrating development downtown was failing to stem the tide of white flight and disinvestment of the city. In the 1990s, the Milwaukee economy struggled to recover, businesses continued to flee the city, and yet City officials and the business elite continued with its downtown revitalization efforts by spending over a billion dollars in promoting tourism, arts, and culture (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Levine, 1994). In the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>21</sup> According to their website, Briggs & Stratton is the world’s largest producer of gasoline engines for outdoor power equipment. It is headquartered in Milwaukee, but the vast majority of its manufacturing plants are located in right-to-work states (no union contracts between unions and employers) in the South, such as Kentucky.

Milwaukee gained just over 1,000 jobs, while its suburbs gained 107,000 (Levine, 2003a). With employment opportunities declining in Milwaukee, the state of Wisconsin began to implement its new workfare program, on which President Bill Clinton based his welfare reform, in September 1997 (Collins & Mayer, 2010). With the election of Mayor John Norquist in 1988, and his emphasis on New Urbanism<sup>22</sup>, the City cemented its design-based redevelopment strategy. Norquist and proponents of New Urbanism believed that urban renewal was detrimental urban policy, but not because it razed neighbourhoods of color — but rather, because it promoted automobility and cookie-cutter suburbs. Therefore, urban problems stemming from poor design could be rectified through better design of dense, walkable, and well-planned neighbourhoods (Rodriguez, 2014). Perhaps the most detrimental aspect of Norquist's New Urbanist vision was his support of local control, as well as decreasing 'dependence' on federal funds by making municipalities compete for limited funds (Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004). He called for the abolishment of welfare and public housing (Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004). New Urbanism also depoliticized racial and class inequalities in the city by reorienting them to promote cultural diversity (Rodriguez, 2014). Despite heavy investments downtown, job and population growth was still the largest in the suburbs (Levine, 2003a; Rodriguez, 2014) and suburban residents were taking most of the high wage jobs downtown (Levine & Zipp, 1994). Despite Norquist's focus on New Urbanism downtown, the inner core continued to expand north and westward towards the suburbs and contemporary boundaries of the city (Jones, 2009).

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<sup>22</sup> New Urbanism is defined as “a planning approach based on the principles of how cities and towns had been built for the last several centuries: walkable blocks and streets, housing and shopping in close proximity... New Urbanism focuses on human-scaled urban design” (Congress of New Urbanism, n.d.). It was offered up as a planning philosophy and practice to counter the impacts of suburbanization. Parker (2017) has highlighted how New Urbanism is often deployed as a way to attract and retain the creative class through designing neighbourhoods in which members of the class want to ‘live, work, and play’. In Milwaukee, former Mayor John Norquist (1988-2004) was instrumental in implementing New Urbanism principles in redevelopment plans by, for example, working to remove the Park East freeway spur. He went on to become the President of the Congress of New Urbanism.

Racial disparities continued to intensify at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Milwaukee, in line with national trends, experienced a recession that deeply impacted employment such that in 2001, the Black unemployment rate was more than four times higher than the white rate (Levine, 2003b). The devastating impacts of the 'war on drugs' and discourses on crime-ridden neighbourhoods continued to justify disinvestment. These converged with the destructive force of deindustrialization and segregation to decimate inner core families and neighbourhoods (Lloyd & Bonds, forthcoming; Collins & Mayer, 2010). Levine (2003b) found that Milwaukee had 62 census tracts where the majority of Black men were jobless.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, dovetailing with Norquist's New Urbanist redevelopment, City officials and boosters began to weave elements of the creative class thesis into their redevelopment strategy. They intentionally focused their efforts on drawing the young, white, and wealthy to the city by catering to their lifestyle and consumption needs (Zimmerman, 2008). Anyone exhibiting resistance to the plan was seen as backwards and conservative (Zimmerman, 2008; see also Rodriguez, 2014). According to Zimmerman (2008) two interconnected developments are emblematic of the convergence between creative class and New Urbanist development: the demolition of the never-completed Park East freeway and the development of the Beerline neighbourhood along the Milwaukee River.

Today, City officials and boosters struggle with questions of how to best redevelop the city. They have continued along the trajectory of downtown-centered redevelopment, but as I argue in Chapter 4, they have taken up new discourses of diversity and colorblindness to

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<sup>23</sup> Levine (2004) deploys joblessness to count unemployment amongst all working age people, which includes workers who do not have employment but are not in the formal labour force. This includes students, homemakers, discouraged workers, formerly incarcerated workers, and the disabled. Unemployment rates only incorporate workers actively seeking work but unable to obtain it. Pager (2003) found that Black men with no prior record found it harder to gain employment than white men with a record. Criminal records heavily impacted Black men's ability to gain employment.

legitimate such a strategy even as class inequalities sharpen (see Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming). By the time of the most recent economic downturn (2008), the population of Milwaukee had declined to 600,000 from its peak of 741,000 in 1960 (Rodriguez, 2014). However, in 2010, 91.1% of Black Milwaukeeans live in the City of Milwaukee, whereas 52% of white Milwaukeeans live in the surrounding suburban counties (Levine, 2013a). Moreover, the Black poverty rate was 35.9%, the highest among the 40 largest metropolitan areas in the United States (ibid.). This also means that Black poverty is concentrated within the city and, when taken together with segregation indices, it is confined to the North Side. Between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, there was a net job decline in the City of Milwaukee but growth in the suburbs (ibid.). The median household income between 2012-2016 in Milwaukee was \$36,801 and 28.4% of Milwaukee's population lived in poverty (U.S. Census, 2016). The median household income has declined by 12% in Milwaukee since 1979 (Levine, 2013a).

After the 2008 recession, all of the net job growth occurred in low-wage sectors. The very low-wage sectors, with median wages under \$10.10, grew by 73% between 2000 and 2013 (Levine, 2014). For example, between 2010-2013, there was a more than 35% increase in employment as fast food cooks in Wisconsin, whose median wage sits at \$8.54 (ibid.). Moreover, despite simplistic pro-business discourses of getting a better job, 90% of job losses during the recession were in middle wage occupations (ibid.). Between 1980 and 2013, the number of jobs in the City of Milwaukee declined by 14% (Levine, 2013a). This has had devastating impacts on the employment rate in the city. For working-age adults, 24-54, 84.9% of Black males were employed in 1970. By 2011, only 53.6% were employed (ibid.). When focused on Black male youth, this decline is even more precipitous. Black female employment, however, has increased from 57.7% in 1970 to 63.8% (ibid.). As Fraser (2009) points out, however, the



increase in women's participation in the workforce has occurred with the expansion of low-wage service work and more punitive welfare regimes that require work.

The City and pro-business boosters continue to spend much of their energies attracting investment into the city and investing public funds downtown to attract the creative class. They still cast the city as being on the verge of development opportunities (City of Milwaukee, 2014). Highly-contested developments like the Northwestern Mutual Towers and Commons, a City investment of \$54 million<sup>24</sup>; the nearly-complete Milwaukee Bucks stadium, a City investment of \$47 million; and the Couture mixed-use high rise, a City investment of \$17.5 million, continue to be erected (City of Milwaukee, 2017). In line with privatized solutions to Milwaukee's problems, the City and pro-business leaders offer entrepreneurial and individualized ways abandoned people and places can revitalize along with downtown. One example can be seen through the proliferation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)<sup>25</sup> and Neighbourhood Improvement Districts (NIDs) that are public-private partnerships working to beautify and make secure commercial and residential areas respectively (Ward, 2007; City of Milwaukee, 2014). It is against this backdrop that I move on to discuss some of the City of Milwaukee's solutions to decades of organized abandonment.

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<sup>24</sup>The Northwestern Mutual Towers is financed through Tax Incremental Finance.

<sup>25</sup> Wisconsin has the third highest number of BIDs in the U.S. (after California and New York), with the vast majority located in Milwaukee (Ward, 2007).

## Redressing organized abandonment in Milwaukee

### *Infrastructure and construction to be a world class city*

In charting out organized abandonment in Milwaukee, investment in and building of infrastructure has been contested terrain. Infrastructure and construction have been concentrated in downtown or have required the razing of predominantly Black communities. City officials and boosters currently frame infrastructure and construction as a necessity to entice businesses and the creative class to relocate to Milwaukee while creating jobs for those whom City officials term the ‘hard-to-employ’ (Shepherd Express, 2015)—generally, poor, Black Milwaukeeans. Infrastructure was seen as a necessity for the creative class to fulfill its ideal of mobility and for corporations to move their products through the region more easily. Thus, pro-development discourses framed downtown redevelopment as a ‘raise all boats’ approach.

While the City of Milwaukee invested heavily in a New Urbanist-influenced design strategy, the State of Wisconsin, along with the City, also engaged large-scale, controversial projects that facilitated the mobility of car-dependent suburban residents and workers<sup>26</sup> in order to usher in Milwaukee’s revitalization. The simultaneous investment in highways and other infrastructure seemed to contradict the City of Milwaukee’s desires for dense living. The state, county, and city governments all prioritized highway construction in and around Milwaukee. In Milwaukee, highway expansion projects to the south and west of downtown<sup>27</sup> were seen as necessities to entice the creative class to Milwaukee. However, the streetcar was an infrastructure

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<sup>26</sup> Culver (2014) provides a more in-depth analysis of the controversies and funding structures of these infrastructure projects.

<sup>27</sup> These projects are: the re-decking of the Hoan bridge and reconfiguration of the I-794 interchange on the southern edge of downtown Milwaukee; the Zoo interchange between I-94, US 41, US 45, I-894, and I-41; and, improvements to I-94 south towards Racine, Kenosha, and Chicago.

project that fit the city's New Urbanist visions. Despite objections from disinvested neighbourhoods that saw no benefit from streetcars, many city residents emphatically supported its construction. As Culver's (2017) analysis illuminates, the City and boosters presented the streetcar as a requirement of a modern, world-class city capable of attracting and retaining the creative class. The current plan for the streetcar limits its route to the downtown core, serving as an immediate amenity for downtown workers and tourists while the city as a whole underwrites it.

The emphasis on construction and infrastructure was based on the creative class' ability to move to where creative jobs are located (Florida, 2002). According to the City of Milwaukee's redevelopment plans (2014), both the City and individual workers must be flexible in order to adapt to the whims of abstract 'global economic conditions', "as industry has become uncoupled from geographic location, quality of life and place have become much more central to location decisions" (p. 67). The way interviewees and the City's plans describe mobilities relied on the assumption of putative, unrooted workers who were not attached to place and who could move to the next "cool" city with jobs and amenities. Rather than describe the spatial mismatch affecting low-wage workers already living in Milwaukee, the City's redevelopment plans likened mobility to a skill: "Often, available labor exists, but a mismatch occurs when individuals do not have the skills or experience needed, or the ability to relocate, for the jobs employers are looking to fill" (2014, p. 5).

Milwaukee's intense intra-metropolitan segregation requires freeways and infrastructure to facilitate the movement of the creative class from the suburbs to downtown. Despite heavy investment by the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County in the built environment and in amenities for the creative class in and around downtown Milwaukee, interviewees described

high-wage workers commuting to the city from the surrounding suburbs. While the City's redevelopment plans (2014) emphasized density and walkability, interviewees observed a different pattern emerging from their research or their experiences. Interviewees described creatives traveling long distances to work. A City official "[saw] a lot of development happening in the city. It seems to [them] ten years ago, there seemed to be a huge mismatch as far as how do you get the workers to the suburban communities? Nobody talks about it much anymore... It's reverse now. People from the suburbs are coming to the city for the jobs is what [they] hear. They're not employing people from the city" (personal communication). They went on to observe that, in fact, businesses were employing residents from Milwaukee. This socio-spatial pattern in turn reinforces the existing segregated racial geographies of the metropolitan region.

When describing the poor state of the economy in Milwaukee, a state bureaucrat observed from their research that, "there are excellent jobs in Milwaukee. Milwaukee has some of the highest wages in the state" (personal communication). When asked to describe the discrepancy in their statement, they observed that,

"the high wage jobs located in [the City of] Milwaukee are many times occupied by Washington, Waukesha, and Ozaukee County residents [counties surrounding Milwaukee County<sup>28</sup>]... The Ozaukee rate of out-commute is 50 percent. 50 percent of people who live in Ozaukee County who work leave Ozaukee County to go to work... And people don't drive 25 miles for an \$8.50 an hour job. And there's lots of those in Milwaukee, and that's what the locals get" (personal communication).

They observed that residents of surrounding suburban and rural counties in the Milwaukee metropolitan area drove into Milwaukee to work in, for example, the Northwestern Mutual headquarters. The bureaucrat's analysis dovetails with Levine & Zipp's (1994) analysis

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<sup>28</sup> See Figure 1.

that describes white, suburban residents commuting to high wage jobs downtown and Black, city residents working minimum wage jobs in the region.

A community activist pointed out the contradiction between the City's desire to develop downtown and the surrounding neighbourhoods for the creative class, its further abandonment of neighbourhoods like theirs, but its failure to recognize where the creative class actually lives in Milwaukee: the suburbs.

I think the condo developments along the [Milwaukee] river are a big sign of hoping that the new employees in the [Northwestern Mutual] tower will live in the city, but I also think you're going to see plenty of those folks who settle in the burbs and commute in to work downtown, and all they see is the freeway into downtown and then out of downtown and back out on the freeway. So I think it is still benefitting outsiders... and I think it's benefiting those who are already secure in neighborhoods like Third Ward and east side... (personal communication).

Later, the activist also highlighted how the City's downtown redevelopment strategy not only included housing for the creative class, but also amenities targeted specifically at them.

These amenities, however, were publically financed through increased taxation in the city and,

... a county-wide tax, and it has a far greater benefit to folks who drive in from the suburbs to consume the entertainment, and then drive away. But the residents of Milwaukee who can't afford the tickets, who aren't part of the consumption of these goods at best they get a low-wage job serving concessions... so it's a system that caters for folks who don't live in the city (personal communication).

The activist's discussion drew attention to how residents of the city subsidized consumption for suburban residents. In fact, as described in more detail below, city and county residents are not even paying for a portion of the \$1 billion stadium itself; instead, they are paying \$47 million to build a parking lot for suburban residents to park their cars next to the stadium, as well as a public plaza (City of Milwaukee, 2017).

*Creative class, New Urbanism, and dense living downtown*

Even as the City of Milwaukee and its boosters invest in freeway and infrastructure development, they make no secret of its downtown-focused strategy. The *New York Times* recently published an article entitled, “In the Heart of Milwaukee, a Gleaming Tower Leads an Urban Renewal” (Schneider, 2017). Perhaps without knowing the history of postwar urban renewal and the material ways in which it and white flight have deeply shaped Milwaukee’s contemporary landscape, the article celebrates the symbol of Milwaukee’s potential future, the Northwestern Mutual Tower. In the article, City of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett explicitly states that, “our strategy is to rebuild from the center... You have to have a strong heart, and downtown is the heart of the city” (ibid.). However, as the author points out, such a downtown-centric development strategy works to make downtown “more inviting for housing developers and buyers” (ibid.). New Urbanist and creative class-based development, however, has spurred on further abandonment of already dispossessed neighbourhoods in also advocating for subsidies for corporations and luxury amenities. A design-focused redevelopment strategy elides tackling entrenched racial geographies to instead focus on how design can reduce inequalities.

In focusing downtown, City officials and boosters believe that the benefits will touch everyone, ‘trickle out’ to neighbourhoods outside of downtown, and ‘raise all boats’. Some boosters recognize, however, that while there is an estimated \$5 billion of projected private development planned downtown, “we also acknowledge that some of our residents do not feel connected to this growth or the downtown, fearing being left out or pushed out” (MKE United, 2014a; b). Without naming racial geographies, these boosters acknowledged that predominantly Black neighbourhoods, such as Bronzeville<sup>29</sup> and Harambee, are disconnected socio-spatially

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<sup>29</sup> The original Bronzeville neighbourhood was razed during urban renewal in the 1960s to make way for Interstate 43 that runs north-south in Milwaukee. Currently, a City of Milwaukee redevelopment project called the Bronzeville

from downtown because of freeways and the discrepancy in investments within such close proximity. Maskovsky (2001), in his analysis of Philadelphia's redevelopment, highlights how downtown redevelopment projects present a façade of revitalization, but in fact rely heavily on public financing channeled away from already-disinvested neighbourhoods. Cities like Milwaukee and Philadelphia have taken on this model of development, banking on the trickle-down effects throughout the city in bringing construction and service jobs to impoverished Black communities.

Arguably the most controversial development during recent years is the Milwaukee Bucks<sup>30</sup> arena being built on the edge of downtown. The new stadium has been built on some of the never-built Park East freeway land and therefore the razed homes and communities of Black Milwaukeeans. Beyond the controversy over whether publicly financed professional sports stadiums are prudent investments for cities, in Milwaukee, debate over the stadium illuminated the central critique of the City of Milwaukee's redevelopment strategy: already-impoverished Black communities are expected to accept the strategy because (at least) the City created jobs, which were billed as having broader, trickle out effects. While City officials and private investors could point to the stadium producing jobs for 'hard-to-employ' Milwaukeeans through construction and concessions, they fail to highlight the temporary nature of construction jobs, and the low wages of concessions jobs. On a broader scale, the stadium remains controversial for

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Cultural and Entertainment district, "inspired by Milwaukee's original Bronzeville district of the early to mid 1900s," is attempting to resurrect the cultural heritage of the neighbourhood (City of Milwaukee Department of City Development, n.d.). The original Bronzeville was located along Walnut Street between Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and 12<sup>th</sup> Street. According to the City's Bronzeville redevelopment website, by the 1930s, the number of Black-owned businesses in the neighbourhood—especially between 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets—exceeded all other areas of the city (ibid.). There is one reference to the demolition of the neighbourhood to make way for freeway construction. While Bronzeville no longer exists, some community activists referred to the geographic area of Bronzeville as a neighbourhood on the periphery of downtown that had the potential to gentrify because of its proximity to downtown, 'cheap' and historic housing stock, the resurgence of culture and arts, and the potential streetcar extension (personal communication).

<sup>30</sup> The Milwaukee Bucks are the city's NBA basketball team.

numerous reasons, including that the \$524 million stadium required \$250 million in public financing, and the speculative benefit of a stadium overall (Nelson, 2017; Spicuzza, 2016; personal communication). The stadium incorporates New Urbanist principles for its creative consumers in mind, with a City-financed public, open-air plaza planned for concerts, skating, and a beer garden, highlighting once again the City's investment in amenities over socially reproductive necessities such as public schools (Nelson, 2017).

At the same time, pro-business boosters want to attract suburban residents to consume downtown, they are working hard to assuage detractors' criticism of low-wage service jobs in concessions. As a part of receiving public funds, the Bucks are promising to hire unionized workers, train them, and have a wage floor of \$12.50. The Bucks framed themselves as, "... continuing to create jobs that pay family-supporting wages, while providing opportunities for those living in the hardest-hit districts in the city. As we've consistently said, this project will benefit the entire city, not just Downtown" (Carlton, 2018). A City official echoed these sentiments through the examples of a business whose proposal to locate in Milwaukee was rejected partially on the basis of wages (see Holifield & Zupan, 2014) and the approved Bucks arena, "Isn't it better for them to be in the city employing people, even if it's less than the requested 15 or ten dollars minimum wage?" (personal communication). A community activist, however, remained skeptical of the City and Bucks' promises of city-wide benefit. They observed that,

even when we fight for local hiring ordinances, they're not being enforced, so were being sold a bill of goods that never happens... the Marquette interchange... that didn't happen... the same deal was made for the new stadium, but we aren't seeing that play out... folks go from transitional job to transitional job at low wage rates that never translate into permanent jobs and so there's a problem with a system that props up transitional jobs that don't lead to a pathway of employment (personal communication).



Even as City officials touted job creation as a city-wide benefit, it was apparent that the stadium was to benefit suburban and creative class residents. A pro-business economist admitted that stadiums provided little economic benefit to cities in terms of, “growing an area or as a major job generator...” but that, “[Milwaukee businesses are] recruiting people from all over the country, if not the world, to live in Milwaukee. And that talent is important. And if they want to have professional sports in the area, you’ve got to have professional sports” (personal communication). Reminiscent of previous stifling of criticism of downtown-centered growth, they added: “That’s not to say that counterarguments don’t have validity. I think it really comes down to what you want your community to be” (personal communication). One of the owners of the Bucks, Wes Edens, made it clear for whom the stadium and its vicinity are intended: “I want to give people a reason to get out of their houses in the suburbs in the middle of the winter and drive downtown” (Nelson, 2017). Edens’s quote highlights Milwaukee’s catch-22 of redevelopment, in which the city is dependent on the metropolitan region to attract corporations like Foxconn because of historical socio-spatial patterns of white flight and suburbanization. The organized abandonment of the city means that the white personal and business wealth and tax base has built up around the city, and must therefore be harnessed in a regional way to recruit ‘skilled’ workers and business. The reliance on white, suburban consumption further justifies the abandonment of Black residents who are too impoverished to consume and are relegated to “adverse incorporation into the economy” (Lawson et al., 2012) through low-wage service work.

Ultimately, interviewees conceded that developments like the arena were not about jobs, but their broader impact. The City official went on to conclude, “Ok, the majority of the people that work there will be service... What are their wages? But in reality, I guess we really have to think about economic development, and how that’s promoting tourism and economic

development in the city” (personal communication). At a public forum on race in Milwaukee, Alderman Ashanti Hamilton, who represents 1<sup>st</sup> District that covers part of the North Side, reflected similarly that any development was good development—that, as a city, “we can’t suppress investment and amenities for the sake of proving a point. Redevelopment is not just for downtown but the whole city” (fieldnotes). He and another speaker agreed that the City needed to focus its attention towards locating large capital projects in disinvested neighbourhoods, such on the North Side. Keisha Krumm, a community organizer, however, drew attention to the fact that projects like the stadium fail to address everyday life in disinvested neighbourhoods. Instead, “we should be investing in places where people live. Not stadiums, but real investment where people live and where they can walk, like parks” (fieldnotes). Krumm’s analysis highlights that North Side residents, again, demand jobs and vital services, not stadiums and amenities. In eliding the organized abandonment of Milwaukee, contemporary projects of highways and amenities like stadiums may seem like vacant land being utilized for redevelopment. When tied to the historical production of Milwaukee and organized abandonment, however, highway and stadium construction reveals how they are made possible through Black dispossession of homes, livelihoods and communities.

*‘Ship’ low-wage workers out to jobs: deconcentrating low-wage workers*

While residential segregation continues to confine Black Milwaukeeans to the North Side, discussions of employment in interviews led to the theme of deconcentration. Infrastructure was also necessary for the movement of low-wage workers from the city out into the surrounding suburbs and rural areas for work. Ironically, the very freeways that sit over formerly vibrant Black communities are used by Black and other workers of colour to leave the city for low-wage,

temporary employment. Freeways and infrastructure were also viewed as conduits to ‘ship’ low-wage workers out of the city to the Amazon processing plant approximately 40 miles to the south of Milwaukee in Kenosha and as a part of the contract to bring a Foxconn manufacturing plant to southeastern Wisconsin (Marley, 2017). As Figure 3 indicates, low-wage jobs are located far outside of abandoned neighbourhoods and require significant commutes via a struggling county transit system. In a similar vein to the creative class, pro-business elites emphasized the ultimate need to have low-wage workers move to where jobs are located.



**Figure 3:** Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) bus advertising transit out to suburban jobs (photo by author). The photo was taken right after MCTS announced it was cutting nine lines, including three lines that serve industrial and business parks (Behm, 2018).

Pro-business discourses locate low-wage workers’ poverty in their concentration in and lack of wherewithal to move out of the North Side of Milwaukee. A pro-business interviewee contradicted themselves by describing poor workers in constant motion through their organization while lamenting their inability or lack of desire to move as a reason for their

poverty. This interviewee's organization had started a program to bus workers to manufacturing jobs across the state, and we discussed Sherman Park, the neighbourhood where Sylville Smith was shot and killed by a Milwaukee police officer:

In Milwaukee, we've got the Joseph Program where we're shipping African-Americans who are living in the Sherman Park area, which is essentially a jobs desert, to Sheboygan [Wisconsin]... Frankly, it's far more sustainable for my perspective to get the African-American community to move out of those areas [like Sherman Park] and move where the jobs are. Because frankly, A. O. Smith<sup>31</sup> and Briggs and Stratton aren't going back to those neighborhoods (personal communication).

They believed that if manufacturing was going to be mobile and leave Milwaukee, then workers must be willing to be mobile also. The program the interviewee describes requires 'shipping' Black workers approximately 120 miles roundtrip from Milwaukee to the predominantly white city and county of Sheboygan for work, but ultimately concluding that moving there would be far more efficient. They also extended the logic of mobility onto 'unskilled' workers to get the requisite training or education for a new job. The pro-business elite ignored the racial politics of the state, which I take up in the following chapter, where discourses of Milwaukee as full of idle Black criminals abound. They fervently believed that the solution to the poverty of Milwaukee neighbourhoods like Sherman Park was to uproot Black families and move them out of Milwaukee to "where the jobs are" (personal communication). When brought together with other discussions we had rooted in discourses of work such as work ethic, this pro-business elite's analysis seemed to conclude that, under the seemingly race-neutral discourse of economics and providing jobs, deconcentrating Black low-wage workers in Milwaukee into

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<sup>31</sup> Levine (2013a) uses A.O. Smith as a case study to describe offshoring and deindustrialization in Milwaukee. A.O. Smith specialized in manufacturing hot water systems. It, like many other corporations, sent many of its jobs outside of the U.S. in the 1980s. In the case of A.O. Smith, even though they are nominally headquartered in Milwaukee, since the 1990s, they have created more jobs in Mexico, particularly along the U.S.-Mexico border (and to some extent right to work states in the South like Tennessee) than in Milwaukee.

predominantly white places like Sheboygan and Johnsonville would help instill better, white values to produce better Black workers.

While neoliberal analyses of jobs and income alone might conclude that moving out of poor neighbourhoods rectify the outcomes of decades of white flight and disinvestment, Crump (2002) describes that “deconcentrating poverty” fails to achieve its goals of reducing poverty, and in fact, destroys mutual aid networks that arise to overcome the effects of organized abandonment. As Gilbert (1998) concludes, the spatialities of residents in abandoned neighbourhoods is more complex than the dichotomy of mobile/power and immobile/powerlessness through which residents’ lives are differentially constrained and enabled through their mobility. Moreover, the pro-business thesis that low-wage workers need to be in motion with capital and job opportunities seems unrealistic when promised jobs do not materialize (see Holifield & Zupan, 2014) or they perpetuate jobs sprawl and spatial mismatch<sup>32</sup>.

Pro-business emphasis on “shipping” workers out of the city elides how poor workers have had their mobility and spatialities drastically reconfigured by organized abandonment. Rather than being mobile like capital and creative workers, however, they are forced to constantly be in motion in order to meet their basic needs, such as grocery shopping, go to school, go to the Wisconsin Works (W2)<sup>33</sup> office, drop their children off at their childcare arrangements, and to go to work (Gilmore, 2008). The retraction of the state from supporting their everyday needs and extending their reach in others—such as policing and mass incarceration (Gilmore & Gilmore, 2016)—has required poor people of colour to travel longer distances even as the public transportation budget is slashed and the wheel tax on cars continues

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<sup>32</sup> “Jobs sprawl” refers to growth in low-density, spatially dispersed employment opportunities and “spatial mismatch refers” to the discrepancy between where poor and/or folks of colour live and where entry-level, and often low-wage, employment growth is located (Stoll, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> See Collins & Mayer (2010) for details on W2’s formation, and Peck (2001) for details on workfare broadly.

to rise. In interviews, the constant motion arose through both material, everyday movements, but also in abstract mobilities in which low-wage workers were expected to be as ‘flexible’ and mobile as the creative class in order to follow employment opportunities appropriate to their skill level.

The experiences and observations of interviewees reflected what a Brookings Institute study called “jobs sprawl” and “spatial mismatch” (Stoll, 2005). Both these terms appeared many times in interviews in a variety of contexts. Interviewees mentioned repeatedly the current spatialities of employment in the state: much of the low-wage, entry-level work was to be found in the suburbs and rural areas in the state, while high-wage, white collar work could be found in the city. A community activist described long commutes for workers living in Milwaukee by discussing the inaccessibility of transit due to both the lack and cutting of funding for public transportation in the region, and how this impacts job opportunities: “A lot of people that live in the city but work out in the ’burbs, they don’t really have a mode of transportation. If you’re a Black or Latino person and you live on the [North or South Sides] and your friend works at this place in Grafton or Menomonee Falls, but you don’t have access to transit, it’s like that opportunity doesn’t exist for you” (personal communication).

For many low-wage workers, long-distance commutes were dictated by the conditions of W2 and workfare. Many of the interviewees who worked with welfare recipients noted that many of them work multiple jobs and still require benefits to barely make it through the month. W2 in the Milwaukee metropolitan area is currently contracted out to a private company, ResCare Workforce Solutions, to administer the training and work requirements. A policy advocate for a local non-profit described ResCare receiving a bonus for every job their ‘clients’

receive, regardless of the type or quality of work. This incentivized recruiters to connect clients to temporary jobs regardless of location. ResCare was,

... providing buses for folks in Milwaukee to go to [a village 85 miles from Milwaukee]. So, you were getting temporary jobs at basically migrant camps. You were being bused there from Milwaukee County and your Food Stamps were reliant on you going to this job... they were stuck in these camps that were two, three hours outside of the city of Milwaukee... they were doing cannery work, where you're working on the assembly line basically (personal communication).

While poor workers of colour were constantly in motion to meet the conditions of W2 and/or meeting the demands of 'jobs sprawl' and 'spatial mismatch', pro-business leaders still cast abstract Black workers as immobile and static in poor, violent neighbourhoods in Milwaukee. When asked a question about what they believed caused the "slow recovery of Milwaukee's economy", one pro-business leader referenced Sherman Park, the uprisings that had taken place the summer before our interview, and the potential resources that lived there:

another barrier that's holding us back and kind of reared its head during some of the problems that happened in the Sherman Park area [in summer 2016] where we have a [pause] population, segmented population in the Milwaukee area that isn't necessarily seeing growth... I think we need to do a better job over time of *utilizing those populations*. And we're *underutilizing* them in some cases in the extreme. We typically fare very poorly in performance on education levels amongst some of the minority communities, and employment of *those resources*. So, if we don't [utilize them], we're going to be in trouble. Because we just don't have the growth in other areas that can support our economy. So, we need to do a better job of utilizing those resources (emphasis added; personal communication).

This pro-business interviewee, while deploying seemingly race-neutral language, refers to the impoverished, Black residents of Sherman Park as a resource to be extracted. This interviewee implied that the residents of Sherman Park are static in their neighbourhoods, their potential value ready to be harnessed. Moreover, contrary to analyses of organized abandonment

described above, they locate impoverishment in residents' lack of participation in the economy. Their analysis concluded that the uprisings were an indicator of residents' idleness rather than an outcry against decades of organized abandonment. This idleness and lack of participation in the economy was the Achilles' heel of Milwaukee's economic redevelopment.

These abstracted discussions of Sherman Park based on economic analyses are, however, in contradiction to my conversations with low-wage workers, residents, and community activists. They fully acknowledge the problems of poverty, violence, and joblessness in their neighbourhoods. These were, however, their homes, and they felt immense pride in them, and it was the conditions of organized abandonment that caused the structural problems that plagued their neighbourhoods (fieldnotes). During an informal conversation with a fast food worker, she described how she was, "born and raised in my neighbourhood. I love it. I love my neighbours. I never want to leave, but that doesn't mean I want to hear gun shots or walk by the house on the corner selling drugs" (fieldnotes). This conversation, in contrast to normative discourses about the North Side, revealed the complex feelings residents had about their neighbourhoods. After charting out their version of organized abandonment in Milwaukee of deindustrialization and redlining, one community activist described residents of the North side wanting, "a place where they can work. They want a place where they can shop, and they want things to be affordable... They want schools and secure housing... there's this constant level of threat to health and livelihood" (personal communication). Read alongside Keisha Krumm's analysis about the stadium, residents were always seeing redevelopment that only marginally addressed their needs and desires. The day after the Sherman Park uprisings, the activist called a few neighbourhood youths, having expecting them to see them at the uprising. Instead, the youths replied, "no we got to go to work today, and we were afraid we'd run into you and you'd call us out" (personal



communication). This activist's work highlights also that financial investment alone would not make neighbourhoods thrive. Relationship building and investing in undoing what Gilmore (as cited in Melamed, 2015, p. 78) called "anti-relationalities" was a form of redevelopment.

### *Bring back manufacturing*

On the surface, business leaders' and government officials' calls for bringing back manufacturing to Milwaukee seems like an appealing solution to the abandonment of capital and manufacturing from the city. However, as one pro-business individual began to explain with the Joseph Program above, the manufacturing jobs of the past were not returning to neighbourhoods like Sherman Park. Even while manufacturing had abandoned Milwaukee and the City focused its redevelopment efforts on creative industries as its replacement, the City of Milwaukee and pro-business groups continued to offer up manufacturing—and jobs more broadly—as the solutions to the North Side's problems with joblessness and poverty. Employment in manufacturing has declined by over 77% in the city of Milwaukee (Levine, 2013). In 1970, manufacturing constituted 36% of jobs or 119,284 jobs in Milwaukee, and by 2009, they comprised less than 10% of jobs, or 27,253 jobs (ibid.).

In eliding previous rounds of organized abandonment and controversies in attempting to bring industry to the North Side (Holifield & Zupan, 2014), the City and pro-business groups cast both the land and labour of the North Side as untapped potential for industrialization. Upon further examination, there are three caveats behind the calls to bring back manufacturing. Pro-business elites desired "advanced" manufacturing jobs that required higher education and training. Thus, while manufacturing was provided as a solution to abandonment, those jobs, were in fact, reserved for the creative class. Moreover, these manufacturing jobs were often located

outside of Milwaukee, as the new Foxconn development highlights. Finally, the call for manufacturing and the ostensible efforts to bring jobs to the state deflected attention away from the simultaneous decimation of social services and the deep state investment in attracting those high skill jobs. The call for manufacturing was a colourblind way to reproduce a bifurcation in the economy between white high wage jobs and Black low-wage jobs.

The City situated the need to bring manufacturing back to Milwaukee in its past as an industrial powerhouse (i.e., a resource it already had) and in the need to, “adapt and respond to global trends” (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 5) by competing with other regions throughout the world. Everyone admitted the devastating impacts of deindustrialization on a city that was so heavily reliant on industry. It was, however, workers’ lack of skills and demands for higher wages, not globalization, that led to manufacturing leaving the state. Despite the perceived lack of skills, pro-business interviewees held on to the belief that manufacturing continued to be one of the solutions to Milwaukee’s deindustrialization and poverty. The expansion of the service sector, predominantly occupied by workers of colour (see for example, Levine, 2013b), was, in fact, situated in relation to manufacturing as a “stair step that’s necessary to advance, especially for populations that may not have the training or education, to moving up the ladder” (personal communication).

A pro-business leader spent the vast majority of our interview describing manufacturing’s pivotal role in the state’s economic future despite deindustrialization and the expanding service sector. Manufacturing in Wisconsin and the Milwaukee metropolitan region, however, was not manufacturing from the past that consisted in simple assembly, for which “Henry Ford had to pay his workers for their boredom” (personal communication), but on what they described as ‘high skill’, well-compensated, advanced manufacturing that relied on computers and high tech

equipment. They believed that a robust manufacturing sector was “the ticket to the middle class”, and that if there was no manufacturing, there was no middle class (ibid.). At the same time they, the City, and other pro-business groups lamented the lack of skilled workers and blamed individuals for their inability to be skilled enough to take on manufacturing jobs. This framing of manufacturing contradicts a community activist’s analysis of manufacturing who described how manufacturing allowed Black working class families to sustain themselves, despite confinement to the lowest-paid, most dangerous jobs in manufacturing (personal communication).

A contradiction emerged between how the City and pro-business groups stressed the importance of manufacturing and the fact that most analyses, including the City’s own, reflected a national trend of the low-wage service sector as the fastest growing sector of the economy (e.g. City of Milwaukee, 2014; Levine, 2014). When asked to describe the rationale behind emphasizing manufacturing despite the data, a pro-business elite replied, “it’s not that we don’t consider [the service sector] important as much as we don’t work on it much... we’ve typically put our efforts more into those areas or industries that are economic based in that they’re the linchpin to future growth” (personal communication). Manufacturing was seen as vital to growth because they ‘export’ products out of the city and bring in dollars, whereas the service sector and other ‘non-basic’ sectors, such as education and health care, “just recirculate dollars around the area” (ibid.). They went on to observe that “[‘non-basic’ jobs] will always be there” if manufacturing jobs exist (ibid.). The pro-business leader stated that manufacturing was perceived as particularly vital to the local economy because it has a ‘multiplier effect’ on the local economy, such that for every one manufacturing job, there are two or three local jobs in ‘non-basic’ jobs such as restaurants, schools, hospitals, and supermarkets (personal communication). In a city with such a bifurcated labour market along the lines of race, the

interviewee deploys the colourblind language of economics to place value on high wage, white jobs that are the “linchpin to future growth” (ibid.). In doing so, low-wage sectors occupied by predominantly people of colour will benefit through the multiplier effect.

In order to remain competitive in the global economy, a pro-business leader believed that workers needed to be highly mobile like the creative class. They acknowledged that the closing of various manufacturing plants like the General Motors (GM) plant in Janesville, Wisconsin (soon-to-be-former Representative Paul Ryan’s district) was “devastating to the community and to those individuals... I mean those things do happen” (personal communication). They lamented that the closing of plants, “create a psyche that manufacturing is not stable or safe. But, you know you realize that the skills that the people had at the GM plant are portable. Now you may have to move... If you’re willing to move an hour or so from where you currently live, I’ll find you a job in the state that pays at least \$14 an hour plus benefits” (personal communication). They went on to claim that “people live where there aren’t jobs and we have perverse incentives that actually keep them where they are as opposed to incentivizing them to move where the jobs are,” (personal communication) again highlighting how mobility in the same vein as manufacturing industries and capital is likened to a job skill and a necessity for individuals to be competitive. At the same time, in an article entitled, “Manufacturing key to North Side jobs”, a CEO of a manufacturing company discussed how he wished he had located his manufacturing plants on the North Side as “I would have had all of the labor I needed” (Barrett, 2016). In this way, he likened Black workers similarly to other pro-business leaders as potential resources and energy to be harnessed for the accumulation of capital and under the guise of bringing manufacturing back to the U.S. from China.

## Conclusion

Debate over how to redevelop Milwaukee after deindustrialization and how to undo the effects of decades of segregation continues even as contemporary forms of organized abandonment continue to decimate the North Side and other racialized communities. Forums about racial justice, criminal justice reform, and the future of Milwaukee exist in tandem with the recent proposals to cut the budgets of Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee County Transit System, FoodShare, and other vital public goods that have already experienced numerous budget cuts and act as socially reproductive necessities because of historic patterns of organized abandonment. Paradoxical discussions about the state of Milwaukee's economic redevelopment appear daily in local media. Coverage of Milwaukee's bright economic future, signaled by construction downtown, could be read alongside coverage of Dontre Hamilton and Sylville Smith's killers being acquitted. As I highlight in Chapter 4, I show how the coexistence and circulation of such divergent stories are made possible through a particular understanding of racial hierarchies.

Nonetheless, City officials, pro-business elites, and non-profit professionals propose solutions like advanced manufacturing, infrastructure, construction for the creative class, and deconcentrating low-wage workers as ways to redevelop the city. As an analysis of organized abandonment reveals, however, they fail to actually address segregation or racialized poverty in any meaningful way. They do so precisely because they elide the very production of segregation and racialized poverty they seek to undo. Advanced manufacturing opportunities require advanced degrees and are often located outside of Milwaukee. Infrastructure projects facilitated the mobility of creative class workers from the suburbs to downtown, and facilitated the

movement of low-wage workers to jobs far outside of the city. Construction of amenities such as the Milwaukee Bucks arena in the hopes of attracting tourism downtown provides temporary work in construction or selling concessions. Finally, “shipping” low-wage workers outside of Milwaukee to where jobs are located seems like the ultimate way to solve organized abandonment: to break up entire Black communities in Milwaukee so the North Side need no longer be abandoned. Instead, such redevelopment strategies work to reinforce segregation and racial hierarchies produced through relational racialization.

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## CHAPTER 3

### *Wages, everyday life, and a Black sense of place: On the Fight for 15 in Milwaukee*

#### **Introduction**

At 6.30 AM on the frigid winter morning of November 11, 2015, I watched as approximately 50 fast food workers gathered at the McDonald's on 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Wisconsin Avenue to call upon workers at this location to walk off the job. Members of the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) and security officers locked the doors and stared out at the workers holding their signs and chanting as TV cameras and journalists focused on the fast food workers' messages. An hour later, I marched with fast food workers around the McDonald's at 27<sup>th</sup> and Capitol Drive, recruiting workers to join the strike. During the day, teams of workers with the Milwaukee Fight for 15 went out to 'blitz' various other fast food restaurants to recruit workers to the main mobilization in the evening: the Republican Presidential candidate debate<sup>34</sup> being held in downtown Milwaukee. In the evening, fast food workers organized through the Milwaukee Fight for 15 gathered outside of City Hall along with their labour and community allies. The energy was electrifying. In spite of the cold, the crowd was enthusiastic, jumping up and down to live music to keep warm and raising up signs stating, "Black Lives Matter, Immigrant Justice, Fight for \$15". The event culminated with the Milwaukee Fight for 15 coming together with two other community groups working on issues of immigrant and racial justice to march toward the Republican debate about a mile away. Activists and organizers were excited to hear the news that the first question asked at the debate was about raising the minimum wage.

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<sup>34</sup> The fourth Republican Party candidate debate for 2016 Presidential election was held on November 11, 2015 at the Milwaukee Theatre in downtown Milwaukee. Eight candidates participated in this event.

The Fight For 15, a national movement demanding a \$15 an hour minimum wage and the right to unionize without retaliation, first drew attention to the expanding low-wage labour market in 2012, where 200 fast food workers went on strike in New York City to demand better wages and working conditions. From there, they expanded with the support of Service Employees International (SEIU) to coordinate simultaneous actions in up to 200 cities across the United States, and in places across the world<sup>35</sup> (Rolf, 2016). A key focus of the Fight for 15 was to counter the stereotype of fast food workers as high schoolers working to make pocket money. Instead, they shed light on the meagre wages, long term under- and unemployment of service work, the older and more educated demographic of fast food workers, and the irony of working multiple jobs while still requiring state assistance.

In organizing fast food workers, Fight for 15 specifically focused on dislodging the popular discourse of a worker flipping burgers as unskilled and therefore undeserving of higher wages. Fight for 15's strategy underscored the inability of fast food workers to make ends meet, the difficulty of providing for children, and the inaccessibility of upward mobility despite long hours and hard work. This emphasis draws from discourses of social reproduction to make linkages between wages and the necessities of everyday life (Hashimoto & Henry, 2017). The Fight for 15 national organization was able to garner successes in cities across the United States, such as a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle and San Francisco. In Milwaukee, they were able to win a \$15 an hour minimum wage for county contractors and employees.

In Milwaukee, the Fight for 15 national organization worked with a community organization called Wisconsin Jobs Now (WJN). WJN organized predominantly Black fast food

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<sup>35</sup> Fight for 15 days of action took place in solidarity with U.S. days of action. Actions in Denmark and Australia were used to highlight the disparity in pay between fast food workers in those national contexts and the U.S. Actions in, for example, Japan, also highlighted the low wages in service industries like fast food (Rolf, 2016).

workers who live on the North Side of Milwaukee but worked at fast food restaurants across the city and metropolitan area. As I describe later in the chapter, the national organization of Fight for 15 ('Fight for 15 national' from here) coordinated a streamlined message across cities in an attempt to win local minimum wage ordinances<sup>36</sup>. Their main objective through the participation of local organizations was to orchestrate highly coordinated days of action to gain media attention. In Milwaukee, WJN was also responsible for orchestrating national days of action in line with other participating cities. Between 2013 and 2016<sup>37</sup>, WJN and the Milwaukee Fight for 15 coordinated at least two large national actions a year, in April and November. They also organized other smaller rallies and community meetings for in response to local concerns, such as the Milwaukee County living wage ordinance.

In 2015 and 2016, in the run-up to the national election, WJN also spearheaded days of action for the Republican Party candidate debate described above and the Democratic Party candidate debate held at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in February 2016. With the support of labour unions and community organizations, WJN and Fight for 15 national was successful in centering conversations about the minimum wage and low-wage work in Milwaukee and the country more broadly. Moreover, they were able to counter dominant discourses of work and poverty in the fast food industry by highlighting the realities of those who worked in fast food.

Despite the national organization's victories in San Francisco and Seattle, ultimately, the Milwaukee Fight for 15 was unsuccessful in achieving its goals of a \$15 an hour minimum wage and the right to unionize without retaliation. While the Fight for 15 continues to mobilize in a

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<sup>36</sup> The Fight for 15 national focused attention of winning local minimum wage increases because they did not feel a federal minimum wage increase was a political possibility (fieldnotes).

<sup>37</sup> WJN worked with Fight for 15 national during these years to bring workers into the Milwaukee Fight for 15.



few select cities, such as Chicago and Memphis, the Milwaukee Fight for 15 has faded from local and national attention, rarely orchestrating actions today. The separation of WJN and SEIU on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016 is one contributing factor to the Milwaukee Fight for 15's decline. The 2016 Presidential election and the subsequent slashing of funding for Fight for 15 national has also contributed to the decline (Lewis, 2016).

However, drawing from my two years of volunteering with WJN and participant observation, I find that the mobilizations in Milwaukee had begun to wane prior to these events (fieldnotes). Why, in a mobilization with so much energy and excitement, did the Milwaukee Fight for 15 deteriorate? In this chapter, I argue that the Milwaukee Fight for 15 was unable to gain traction because it failed to attend to and address the specificities of organized abandonment in Milwaukee described in Chapter 2. The Fight for 15 national failed to link these specificities with the challenges of everyday life as described by fast food workers. Specifically, the Fight for 15 national's structure and organizing strategy was incapable of addressing Milwaukee's local racial politics and the centrality of racial hierarchies in organized abandonment. Moreover, in failing to attend to local racial politics, the Fight for 15 national could not attend specifically to discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism that I describe in Chapter 4 even as it undermined organizing efforts. By producing deserving and undeserving Black workers, discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism made it more challenging for the Fight for 15 to demand racial justice<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> As I describe in Chapter 4, Melamed's (2011) theory of neoliberal multiculturalism delegitimizes claims for racial justice by producing deserving and undeserving people of colour. Those deploying discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism, such as City officials and pro-business elites, can point to deserving people of colour as evidence of 'racial equality' while undeserving people of colour are cast as morally deficient and blamed for their own poverty.

In the absence of linking everyday social reproduction with organized abandonment, the Milwaukee Fight for 15 was unable to sustain enthusiasm or significance with fast food workers. The Republican and Democratic Presidential candidate debates seemed to be where the Fight for 15 reached its zenith in Milwaukee. These days of action had the largest turnout, the most energy, and the most solidarity with other Milwaukee community organizations working on immigrant justice and racial justice. In a city where low wages and poverty intersect with underfunded public transit and public schools, high rates of joblessness (Levine, 2014), decimation of the welfare system (Collins & Mayer, 2010), lack of affordable housing (Bonds, 2018), and police brutality (Lloyd & Bonds, forthcoming), why did the mobilization around wages and economic justice fail to gain more traction? Fast food workers live within a broader context in a city that had recently gained national attention for the murder of Dontre Hamilton, a 31-year-old Black man, by an MPD officer in a downtown park in April 2014. Repeated analyses also brand Milwaukee as being the most segregated city in America (Denvir, 2011), one of the poorest cities in America (Steininger & Hopkins, 2017), the worst place to raise a Black child (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014), and a place still struggling to rebound from the devastation of deindustrialization (see for example, Rodriguez, 2014; Parker, 2017).

In this chapter, I bring together Katherine McKittrick's (2011) theorization of a Black sense of place and feminist analyses of social reproduction to constitute a framework through which we may understand the decline of the Milwaukee Fight for 15. A Black sense of place provides a framework of analysis that at once acknowledges the "geographies of relationality and human life without dismissing the brutalities of isolation and marginalization" (McKittrick, 2011, p. 955). Moreover, struggle and resistance has always been a part of Blackness in the Americas (McKittrick, 2011). In the context of the Fight for 15, a Black sense of place helps to

theorize the analytical necessity of drawing links between the everyday, material practices of social reproduction and broader assaults on social reproduction through organized abandonment (Gilmore, 2008). An analysis that builds a Black sense of place requires producing a more complex set of narratives of Black life and Black spatialities that melds together anti-Black violences with Black life that survive in spite of racial violence (McKittrick, 2011). These narratives disrupt teleological discourses that cast Black bodies as already lifeless, criminal, and lazy and Black life as already placeless and incapable of producing space (Woods, 2002; 2017; McKittrick and Woods, 2007; McKittrick, 2011). Moreover, a Black sense of place requires an analytical framework with specific historical and geographic contexts. The Fight for 15 national campaign centered struggle but did not produce an analysis of a Black sense of place capable of bringing together fast food workers' everyday lives with broader conditions of organized abandonment.

In addition to a focus that emphasizes a Black sense of place, feminist analyses on social reproduction serve as a way to insert the “flesh and blood perspective” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 958) into an analysis that builds a Black sense of place. I highlight the scalar conflicts in the structure and organizing strategy of Fight for 15 national. These served as particular barriers to articulating and embedding local concerns at a broader scale. Fight for 15 national controlled many aspects of local organizing from funding, to hiring, to messaging decisions. They operated under a strategy optimized to gain maximal media attention with as many cities as possible participating in coordinating days of action. Thus, even as urban racial politics contoured organizing in Milwaukee, the Fight for 15 national continued to foreground generic concerns about wages and poverty that were legible on a national scale but failed to wrestle with how they

were articulated within a particular urban, regional, and state context. This ultimately led to the breakdown of the social reproduction of the Milwaukee Fight for 15.

In developing this analysis, my intention is not to detract from the efforts of the Fight for 15. In fact, as mentioned above, the Fight for 15 national was successful in drawing attention to and mobilizing around the realities of a low-wage economy and centering discussions about wages and unionization. I do aim, however, to address the misalignment between top-down and streamlined organizing and local urban racial politics, and the inability of a national-scale mobilization to articulate local concerns. Specifically, the deployment of terms racial and economic justice by the Fight for 15 require analysis to understand how they align or disarticulate with the workers the Fight for 15 seeks to organize.

In what follows, I first provide a theoretical framework that centers social reproduction as a way to emphasize the tensions between racial violence and Black life required in an analysis of a Black sense of place. Second, I turn to describing the Fight for 15 national's structure and organizing strategy and how the Milwaukee Fight for 15 fit within their structure. I contextualize the Milwaukee Fight for 15 within Milwaukee's specific racial capitalist geographies by highlighting a few of the discursive and material challenges within which concerns about wages are embedded. I then turn to the stories of fast food workers who described the daily struggles to make ends meet. While fast food workers' daily lives would become less strained if the Milwaukee Fight for 15 was able to achieve its stated goals, they would not eliminate or solve all racial capitalist assaults on their lives or make up for decades of organized abandonment.

## **Building a Black sense of place through ‘life’s work’**

I bring together feminist theories of social reproduction with McKittrick’s (2011) theory of a Black sense of place to analyze a mobilization that sought to center the social reproduction of fast food workers within a specific racial capitalist context. McKittrick (2011) defines a Black sense of place as the “process of materially and imaginatively *situating* historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination *and* the difficult entanglements of the racial encounter” (p. 949, emphasis in original). Thus, a Black sense of place complicates linear popular and scholarly analyses that posit a Blackness as characterized only by racism in order to shed light on how, “a condition of being Black in the Americas... is predicated on struggle” (ibid.). A Black sense of place demands the centering of Black life, takes a “flesh and blood perspective” (p. 958), and considers Black temporalities and spatialities alongside the brutalities of racism and white supremacy. This framework animates seemingly abstract processes of racial capitalist austerity, such as the retrenchment of welfare programs, how they incite mobilizations and movement building, and begins to explain some of the reasons why the Milwaukee Fight for 15 failed to gain and maintain traction in a city so challenged by racialized poverty and segregation. In bifurcating the everyday, material socially reproductive lives of fast food workers and the historical and contemporary racial geographies in which they are embedded, the Fight for 15 was unable to build an analytic of a Black sense of place that resonated with and addressed the lives and concerns of the fast food workers they sought to organize.

Social reproduction complements theorizing of a Black sense of place through centering human life and posits broad processes of economic restructuring as simultaneous with granular specificities of everyday life. Feminist political economists and feminist economic geographers

such as Katz (2001) and Meehan & Strauss (2015) have worked to define social reproduction. However, it remains a nebulous term that incorporates a broad range of activities, practices, and spatialities. Katz (2001) highlights the scalar, temporal, and spatially contingent nature of social reproduction. While what constitutes the necessities of everyday life are constantly in flux through ongoing mobilizations like the Fight for 15, social reproduction is a set of practices and activities that include biological reproduction, daily carework, reproduction of the labour force, and the cultural reproduction of knowledge, social movements, and institutions (ibid.). Meehan and Strauss (2015) define social reproduction as, “a framework for examining the interaction of paid labor and unpaid work in the reproduction of bodies, households, communities, societies, and environments and the ways in which these activities are organized to support human flourishing” (p. 1). Within geography, Mitchell, Marston, & Katz’s (2004) definition of ‘life’s work’ and Katz’s (2001) oft-cited definition, “the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life” (p. 710) serve as central definitions. With the recent resurgence of social reproduction-centered analyses in geography, Meehan and Strauss’ (2015) edited collection and Andrucki et al.’s (2017) forum in *Society & Space* intervenes with new directions based on the unevenly experienced contemporary capitalist moment.

A Black sense of place builds on feminist analyses of social reproduction by understanding that difference, and its attendant inequalities, impacts social reproduction in numerous ways. Moreover, difference is not only an outcome of but also an imperative to the functioning of capitalism, and therefore social reproduction. The devaluation and destruction of social reproduction of Black life, bodies, and communities has always been a part of racial capitalism in the Americas (e.g. McKittrick, 2006; 2011; Woods, 2002; 2017; hooks, 2000; Roberts, 1997; Hill Collins, 2000; Loyd, 2014). Within this framework, fast food workers are

devalued in terms of paid employment, as reflected in their low wages and poor working conditions, at the same time fast food corporations claim record profits. Thus, racial capitalism dovetails with the creative class thesis that I describe in Chapter 4 that diminishes fast food and other service work even though it is the fastest growing segment of the economy (e.g. Peck, 2005). In earning low wages, being unable to pay for the necessities of everyday life, and weathering the 2008 financial crisis, fast food workers are forced to rely on public assistance in increasing numbers (e.g. Alegretto et al., 2013). As the Fight for 15, fast food workers, and their allies have pointed out: Whose social reproduction is valued, and who in actuality depends on welfare, when corporations make record profits and fast food workers rely on increasingly draconian, punitive, and meagre welfare?

Thus, in the contemporary moment, feminist analyses of welfare retrenchment and workfare, serves as a prime example of social reproduction as taking place beyond the home both materially and discursively. Feminists take up issues of welfare and its retrenchment because they highlight the state's changing role in the social reproduction of individuals, families, and communities. Feminists have pointed specifically to neoliberalism and the retraction of the postwar Keynesian state as the drivers of contemporary welfare regimes. In the United States, former President Bill Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) implemented in 1997—first tested in Wisconsin—is viewed as the turning point for welfare, introducing work requirements as a condition of receiving payments (see for example, Collins & Mayer, 2010).

Social reproduction and decision making thereabout occur in myriad spaces, such as chambers of government, media, community centers, and schools. Uneven experiences of social reproduction are legitimated through gendered and racialized discourses of the 'welfare queen'

and ‘welfare dependency’ to cast welfare retrenchment as unavoidable or inevitable (Schram, 2006). Welfare, in fact, subsidizes the profits of corporations, including purveyors of fast food, by having the state subsidize their workers’ cost of living and the low wages those corporations pay (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Moreover, thinking through welfare retrenchment helps to work through the connections between social reproduction and other forms of racialized economic restructuring, such as the expansion of the low-wage sectors in food service, retail, and poultry processing (Freshour, 2017). It situates the devaluation of social reproduction in a longer trajectory of organized abandonment where an increasing reliance on state-sponsored welfare has only become necessary through the destruction of other forms of care and mutual aid (Gilmore, 1999; 2008). Analyses of welfare also help to trace where and how racial violences such as decision making about social reproduction limit “human flourishing” (Meehan & Strauss, 2015, p.1) for some, and supports it for others, based on already-existing notions of race and difference.

McKittrick’s (2011) Black sense of place and feminist scholarship on social reproduction articulate together in examining organizing for social reproduction and the social reproduction of organizing. McKittrick (ibid.) calls for scholars to attend to “the unexpected alliances that might be forged in the face of dispossessed isolation” (p. 958) and foreground the lives of those who live crises every day. Wright (2010) shows through feminist scholarship that even by participating in capitalism, emotions and the political possibilities that stem from them can be formed and sustained beyond capitalism. Moreover, movements can deploy emotions to form relationships and express goals and demands in order to elicit emotional responses from an audience. Scholars such as Nadasen (2005) and Loyd (2014) shed light on how Black and brown activists, mothers, and residents have always challenged and resisted the devaluation of their



social reproduction. They do so through embedding welfare retrenchment within a broader context of organized abandonment that places the burden of social reproduction thrown into crisis on the shoulders of Black and brown bodies, families, and communities. Similarly, Woods' (2017) analysis of New Orleans reveals the constantly shifting redevelopment strategies of elites that undermine the social reproduction of Black Civil Rights and liberation movements. Elites do so through a divide-and-conquer strategy that pits movements against each other even as they continue to eviscerate welfare and other social programs.

In what follows, I argue that the Milwaukee Fight for 15 was unable to achieve its goals or reproduce itself because it was unable to produce an analysis of a Black sense of place, and in doing so, failed to reveal and foreground “the conditions that make stories of racial violence possible” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 956). Specifically, the Fight for 15 national, due to its structure and strategies, was unable to contextualize the complex stories of everyday life told by fast food workers within a broader framework that integrated the present realities of racial capitalist austerity with a recognition of historical patterns of organized abandonment that produced the contemporary landscape.

### **Fast food workers' everyday lives in Milwaukee**

The “process of materially and imaginatively situating” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 949) struggle and anti-Black violence must begin with fast food workers' stories of everyday life and end with a Black sense of place defined by the brutalities of racism. Fast food workers in Milwaukee described their daily grind in a variety of spaces, from marches, to townhall meetings with elected officials, to community planning meetings. The Fight for 15 national's analyses of

fast food workers' lives, however, were rarely aligned with a structural analysis of social reproduction under contemporary conditions of racial capitalism in Milwaukee. Their analyses remained distinct from broader processes of organized abandonment as outlined in Chapter 2 and the newer racial formations of neoliberal multiculturalism outlined in Chapter 4. It was unclear whether the lack of attention to an analysis of a Black sense of place was a failure of organizers to engage in political education or due to the reality of the short temporalities of poverty for fast food workers.

The sheer material constraints of being a fast food worker underscore the connections between low wages and the inability to engage in the basics of social reproduction. This is reflected in the fact that in 2010, a staggering 52% of fast food workers nationally relied on some combination of FoodShare, Medicaid, or Earned Income Tax Credit (Alegretto et al., 2013). While City officials tout Milwaukee's affordability in comparison to cities like Chicago, New York, and San Francisco, fast food workers clearly articulated Milwaukee's unaffordability and high cost of living for low-wage workers like themselves. In prepping to be spokespeople<sup>39</sup> and during days of action, they described the burdens of high rents with poor quality housing, the high cost of child care, and the high cost of health care and medications. The cost of everyday living has forced fast food workers to work while sick and into old age. At one meeting with the then-Secretary of Labour, Tom Perez, on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, an older fast food worker talked about working in the industry for 25 years but being unable to retire because they have never been able to save (fieldnotes). While describing "living paycheck to paycheck", fast food workers, in fact, were required to live beyond their means. The gap between low incomes (in the

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<sup>39</sup> Some of the work of WJN's communications staff was to train and prepare fast food workers to be spokespeople. Spokespeople were interviewed by media on days of action and for broader articles on low-wage work and the Fight for 15.

form of wages and welfare payments), and high expenditures (in the form of cost of living, and unexpected expenses such as car breakdowns and health emergencies) all contributed to workers' poverty and debts. Fast food workers were adept with the little money they had, and were always doing mental calculations to make sure their money went as far as possible. In a few discussions with workers on making ends meet, they calculated out loud to me how much they needed to afford their most basic needs of rent, food, and transportation for the month. And yet, many of them relied on food banks and welfare to cover (or fail to cover) shortfalls at the end of the month. One worker even described themselves as being forced to have a "dependency on the government" (fieldnotes).

Through their organizing efforts, fast food workers attempted to counter dominant public discourses in circulation with their own experiences. The most common phrases I overheard were that fast food workers, "work hard, do the right things, and do what we're told by society, such as get an education, and we still struggle" (fieldnotes). They described repeatedly needing to work multiple low-wage jobs, only to still fail to make ends meet. Moreover, they constantly flowed in and out of myriad low-wage jobs, of which fast food and the informal sectors were two such examples. Fast food workers experienced long-term but temporary employment in fast food and other low-wage sectors: while turnover in individual jobs was high, they always remained in low-wage sectors. This form of low-wage employment also required traveling long distances on public transportation to get to work. One worker and I discussed the scheduling practices of the Burger King franchise who employed them. They were unable to choose their schedules and were sent to stores at opposite ends of the city without notice. The worker described working one day on the North Side and then being transferred to South Milwaukee<sup>40</sup> the next week. They

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<sup>40</sup> South Milwaukee is a city within Milwaukee County but outside of the City limits.

spent over two hours one way on two buses to go to work (fieldwork). Nonetheless, workers expressed a tension between, “loving what I do and the customers I meet” and the realities of low wages (fieldnotes). When contrasting their everyday lives with discourses circulated by government officials, fast food corporations, and other pro-business elites, “I get [these stories] might seem like a fairy tale, but it’s a nightmare to us” (personal communication).

My fieldwork clearly indicates that the inability to engage in the daily carework of social reproduction through deep material constraints of poverty took psychosocial and corporeal tolls on fast food workers and their families. Fast food workers testified at days of action, in interviews, and in informal conversations at WJN as to how they were living organized abandonment in their bodies every day. Moreover, fast food workers made it clear that organized abandonment was not merely constituted in abstract processes such as urban renewal and deindustrialization, but are lived every day through their material and psychosocial experiences of racialized poverty. One worker summed up their life as living in “constant stress and always moving around” (personal communication). The majority of fast food workers were caretakers for children, their elders, a sick family member, or some combination thereof. They felt a sense of responsibility to be breadwinners and caregivers not only themselves but also their families, which amplified their feelings of stress. They felt stressed at not making ends meet, at their mounting indebtedness, and the constant need to choose between necessities of life and what fast food workers saw as luxuries. In one instance, a fast food worker parent described having to choose between the ‘luxury’ of a birthday cake for their child and the responsibility of paying a bill on time (fieldnotes). Another described the stress of everyday life overwhelming their ability to focus on being the best parent for their foster children (personal communication). Young fast

food workers lamented being unable to move out of their family home because they could not afford to live independently.

The confluence of stress and family obligations—layered with multiple low-wage jobs, long commutes, and poverty contoured by organized abandonment—meant that sleep, a fundamental socially reproductive function, often felt like a luxury. When asked how their life would change if they made \$15 per hour, a fast food worker responded, “a sense of relief. I can sleep at night” (personal communication). One worker described at a public meeting that even buying a mattress and a bed to sleep on and being able to move them constituted luxuries with which low-wage workers were only too familiar (fieldnotes). The stress and lack of sleep took a toll on the very relationships that inspired fast food workers to organize. One worker discussed the challenges of bringing their first child into their world while making low wages. The intensification of sleep deprivation and material constraints strained an already tense relationship between the worker and their partner (personal communication). Lack of sleep and stress around everyday life translated back into their work in the service industry: “It’s not easy being a strong individual, make nothing, and still find a way to smile” (personal communication).

When out on days of action, however, many of the complex details of social reproduction were distilled down into short soundbites for media and chants, and processes of organized abandonment faded into the background. The vignettes told at actions to media, via signs, or in chants were, instead, made easily audible demands and served as a strategy to engage marchers. Some of the most often-repeated and popular chants did not mention social reproduction specifically. They focused, instead, on the \$15 minimum wage and the work of fast food itself. Disrupting shoppers at Bayshore Town Center in December 2014, marching around McDonald’s on 27<sup>th</sup> Street and Capitol Drive every strike day, and attempting to rally and warm up in Lake

Park in February 2016, we chanted “we work, we sweat, put \$15 on our checks”, “if we don’t get it, shut it down”, “we’re worth more”, and “I want my \$15”. These chants only engaged with low wages, however. For the Republican candidates’ debate, I constructed some of the signs with questions workers directed at Republicans that evening. These came closer to referencing fast food workers’ daily realities by asking, “How are you going to create good jobs so I don’t have to work 3 of them just to pay the bills on time?” and “If you’re for family values, why do you tear immigrant families apart?” (fieldnotes). Nonetheless, they remained generic, ignoring the specific racial politics in Milwaukee.

Beyond demanding a \$15 minimum wage and the right to unionize without retaliation, fast food workers also made more intangible demands. When observing WJN staff prepping fast food workers to be spokespeople, fast food workers described low wages as “unfair” and “not right” and that they “fight for commonsense” or for their children and future generations (fieldnotes). They stated that they don’t deserve poverty. They didn’t choose it. They deserve a better life. They deserve dignity and respect. One older worker said, “we’re not trying to destroy anything, we just want dignity” (fieldnotes). The Fight for 15 national or Milwaukee did not make it clear how or what these demands would achieve beyond easing some of the material constraints of everyday life. If the Milwaukee Fight for 15 succeeded in gaining a \$15 an hour minimum wage, they could be comfortable, reinvest in their communities, buy a car, afford to pay bills on time, go to college, and own a home. However, how would those wages eliminate, for example, police violence? Here, the fast food workers’ analysis took a decidedly normative and patriotic turn. This minimum wage was not a luxury and did not make them rich, but allows them to live and to be middle class (fieldnotes). On numerous occasions, workers pointed to the American Dream and the prospect that if one works, one should be able to achieve and live it.

This is what many of them described as freedom and gave them the hope and energy to participate in the Fight for 15 (fieldnotes). In preparation for the 2016 Presidential elections, fast food workers began chanting, “Tell me what democracy looks like! This is what democracy looks like!” and “you want our vote, come get our vote” (fieldnotes). Getting out the vote was seen as an important way to participate in democracy, but voting was once again removed from the granular specificities of social reproduction described by workers. It seemed that getting presidential candidates to ask questions on wages or describe their support of fast food workers overshadowed actually campaigning to improve their lives through redressing entrenched organized abandonment of Milwaukee.

### **Contextualizing the Fight for 15 in Milwaukee**

Fast food workers’ socially reproductive lives are embedded within a specific racial capitalist context that I have described Chapter 2. Discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism (Chapter 4) and processes of organized abandonment in Milwaukee have, do, and will continue to contour their socially reproductive lives. In this section, I highlight specific discourses and attendant decision making on social reproduction that intersect with fast food workers’ everyday, material social reproduction described above. WJN organized predominantly Black fast food workers living on the North Side of Milwaukee. Thus, discourses of fast food workers dovetailed with other, racist discourses circulating in the city. Popular discourses across the political spectrum on public safety, Black infant mortality, the decimation of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) all help to legitimate the City’s redevelopment strategy. Moreover, fast food workers’

lives are also shaped by Milwaukee's racial geographies within the state of Wisconsin and decision making at the state scale over issues of welfare and economic redevelopment.

In Milwaukee, racist discourses of poverty abound. One only needs to look at the front page of Milwaukee's main newspaper, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, to understand how such discourses are reproduced and circulated. The City of Milwaukee, in its documents and the words of its officials, reiterates and reinforces much of what the paper says. Instead of understanding the immiseration of Black Milwaukeeans as structural and a predictable outcome of decades of austerity, their legitimation of further austerity relies upon racialized tropes of Blackness that target the individual, pathological Black body as the source of poverty. Specifically, racist tropes deploy the social reproduction of Black bodies as both the cause and effect of austerity.

I define social reproduction broadly in line with Mitchell, Marson, & Katz's (2003) definition of 'life's work'. Katz (2001) defines social reproduction as biological reproduction, socialization (through education, etc.), and daily tasks (such as laundry, cooking, etc.), and cultural reproduction. Racist tropes of Black bodies and their social reproduction work to legitimate the seemingly unavoidable and inevitable simultaneous retreat of the state away from public services for social reproduction—and the privatization of such services—and the concentration of investment downtown. In this section, I discuss some of the broader racialized discourses within which fast food workers are embedded.

These racist discourses are not outright fabrications, but are embedded within broader teleological discourses that create the very subjects and places that City officials and boosters seek to discipline. For example, the City of Milwaukee Common Council's Public Safety Action (2016) plan makes the case that crime rates are high on the North Side of Milwaukee and



therefore the City should increase funding for policing. The work of these discourses is to legitimate the production of, in this case, racialized people and places, to justify further organized abandonment. Discourses about Black bodies and criminality are ubiquitous in Milwaukee and the United States (see Muhammad, 2010). From the City of Milwaukee's perspective, Black criminality, while not naming race, becomes even more apparent further into the Public Safety Plan (2016), in which the City puts forth a plan calling for investment in more policing to go hand in glove with economic redevelopment efforts. In fact, one cannot happen without the other. They state that,

crime is the overarching problem affecting the entire community and holding Milwaukee back from reaching its full potential. And while high crime is not common in urban areas, Milwaukee is undisputedly in the midst of a public safety crisis. The crime rate is simply too high in many neighbourhoods, which has led to a culture of fear, hopelessness, and disinvestment (p. 3).

Discourses of Black criminality point to the social construction of crime, and other 'problems' as a way to contain racial capitalist crisis in specific bodies and communities (Muhammad, 2010). These discourses both produce the problems and pose a set of solutions to those problems. In the case of Black criminality, solutions proposed include increases in funding to policing, police presence in schools, and stop-and-frisk policies. Crime rates are, indeed, higher in particular parts of the city; however, this statement overlooks the drastic decline in crime rates over the past few decades (Barton & Luthern, 2017) and the racist discourses propelled by such statistics. Moreover, crime is at once framed as affecting Milwaukeeans equally while also being high in particular places. The City (2016) frames the crimes of a few as destroying Milwaukee's economic development potential. At the same time, any resident of Milwaukee will deduce the neighbourhoods with a 'public safety crisis' as the North Side,

reproducing the notion that the North Side equals crime. Rather than understanding and historicizing the very structural conditions that produced high crime rates, it instead blames current conditions for disinvestment, and not the other way around.

The Black body as criminal justifies and legitimates increases in policing, decreases in funding to public schools, and redirection of investment downtown, and deprives structural conditions of the credit for producing higher crime rates (Camp & Heatherton, 2016; Camp, 2016; Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming). In Milwaukee, as in numerous cities across the United States, police have had dire consequences for the socially reproduction of Black life, families, and communities. The MPD has caused what Gilmore (2007) calls “premature death”<sup>41</sup> through the killing of Black men including Dontre Hamilton, Sylville Smith, and Derek Williams. Six ZIP codes on the North Side of Milwaukee are also where two-thirds of Milwaukee County’s incarcerated population originate (Pawarasat & Quinn, 2013). Many residents in these ZIP codes continue to have some form of interaction with the criminal justice system, which severely limits how residents can reshape their socially reproductive lives, including limited access to educational opportunities, ineligibility for welfare, and constraints on renting a place to live.

Within Milwaukee, discourses of Black criminality have a specific racial geography. Loyd and Bonds (forthcoming) explore the ramifications of a spatial metaphor, the ZIP code 53206, where the City’s redevelopment plans put forth solutions to the very conditions those plans create. In this case, they argue 53206 as a spatial metaphor that becomes a shorthand at once containing all of the problems of Milwaukee, and allows elites to separate their strategies from the historical forces responsible for the production of such neighbourhoods. Moreover, City officials and pro-business elites locate the solutions to the problems of 53206 within its borders:

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<sup>41</sup> Gilmore (2007) deploys “premature death” in her definition of racism, which is “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (p. 28).

‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’. The spatial metaphor of 53206 is not limited to extending police power, but to justifying austerity through older, racist discourses of poverty, such as the ‘welfare queen’, the ‘Black criminal’, and the ‘negligent Black parent’. These discourses fundamentally rely on Black bodies to legitimate assaults on services necessary for social reproduction because of previous rounds of organized abandonment. In an interview with a policy advocate, we discussed some of the racist discourses of poverty they encountered in their work deployed by policymakers to make unavoidable cuts to funding for Food Stamps:

[A discourse] I hear frequently is that people buy junk food with their Food Stamps. Right? Or people are... buying crab and lobster and everything else with their Food Stamps. I had a legislator tell me last session that he was going to ban Food Stamps use at casinos. I'm like, "Okay, that's not how the program works." The idea that someone's buying lobster on their Food Stamps is not only an urban myth, but also something where if you're getting 106 dollars you're really hard pressed to go out and sort of go nuts with your Food Stamps. Right? (personal communication).

The discussion with the policy advocate sheds light on the intersection between discourses of ‘Black criminality’, social reproduction, and welfare and underscores the power and persistence of racist tropes of poverty. While the racist discourse has remained stable, the conditions of welfare have changed drastically. The ‘welfare queen’ is based on a living person, Linda Taylor, but gained traction in popular discourse through President Reagan’s deployment of her. Taylor, a Black woman, was first dubbed the ‘welfare queen’ in 1974 in the Chicago Tribune for allegedly using welfare payments to drive a Cadillac, wear furs, and live a luxurious lifestyle (Levin, 2013). Reagan adopted the mythical figure of Taylor as the archetype of rampant Black welfare fraud during his 1976 presidential campaign to garner support for seemingly race-neutral and objective cuts to excessive government spending on ‘freeloaders’ (ibid.). In its contemporary circulation, the ‘welfare queen’ discourse completely elides the

realities of welfare, including an increased reliance on welfare supports to make up for previous rounds of abandonment and destruction of institutions of social reproduction. As the policy advocate highlights through our discussion, the reality of living on Food Stamps is that they are barely supplemental due to the evisceration of welfare programs. Finally, the draconian implementation of work requirements, or workfare, as a condition of receiving payments contradicts the ‘welfare queen’ discourse that casts Black women as lazy, idle, and waiting for a handout.

Sziarto (2017) examines how these broader discourses dovetail with the City of Milwaukee’s campaign to tackle Black infant mortality. She traces how public health professionals and experts “[locate and localize] and Black infant mortality, without tracing the causes of those problems beyond the neighbourhood” (Sziarto, 2017, p. 307). Black infant mortality specifically draws attention to the inability of Black mothers to appropriately participate in the most corporeal form of biological reproduction because of their own alleged personal deficiencies. One non-profit professional reflected discourses circulated in City reports and officials in which Black infant mortality was an issue of the choices and knowledge of individual parents. They were the cause of the death of Black children on the North Side according to the interviewee:

[A non-profit working on issues for Black mothers on the North Side of Milwaukee] talked about additional resources that are provided from free car seats to free sleep and play's and things of that nature. So when we hear stuff like that...you think, well, why do we still have co-sleeping deaths, you know? Why do we still have some of these things taking place? It cannot be due to the organizations not making these resources available, because they do have these programs. But how can people not know about them? So there's a gap certainly somewhere in terms of access to the information and education in knowing that access is there (personal communication).

In this discussion, the non-profit professional relies on an intersection of liberal discourses of individualism and choice layered with racialized and gendered tropes of Black motherhood (Roberts, 1997; Hill Collins, 2000). According to the non-profit professional and the broader discussions highlighted by Sziarto (2017), the problem of Black infant mortality is located in Black parents' beds and solved with free baby goods. It is through the lack of personal wherewithal of Black mothers to seek out resources and knowledge, and not myriad structural factors such as a lack of a universal family medical leave,<sup>42</sup> the stress of racism on Black mothers (Villarosa, 2018), and lack of quality and affordable pre- and post-natal care. Beyond the lack of supports and services for the physical wellbeing of mothers and children, public goods necessary for social reproduction such as early childhood education, welfare, and public transportation have also been eroded through austerity. As Gilmore (2008) points out, the patchwork of community organizations provides stopgap measures that attempt to compensate for the organized abandonment.

Discourses about public education were also teleological, in which City and state officials demand improved test scores and graduation rates even as they continuously cut funding and teaching staff. This seems contradictory when considered alongside popular discourses of low-wage work that tell low-wage workers to 'just get an education'. Underfunding public education calls into question multiple forms of social reproduction, from reproducing the workforce to allowing parents to go to work. City officials and pro-business elites held Black parents responsible for the poor outcomes of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), including the low graduation rates of Black and Latinx students (Richards, 2016). At the same time, MPS

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<sup>42</sup> Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in Wisconsin is mandated by law but only under certain conditions of employment. It is offered through employers with 50 or more employees for at least 6 of 12 months and is only guaranteed for full time employees who have been employed for 52 consecutive weeks and for at least 1000 hours in the preceding 52 weeks (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, n.d.).

announced an \$11 million budget cut for the 2018-19 school year and the cutting of 140 positions (Johnson, 2018).

On the one hand, a community activist described how as a community, we should be investing in “public schools so [students] don't have these crappy books and teacher's rights are respected...if we expect students to become competitive workers” (personal communication). They contrasted the state of MPS to the City’s investment downtown and overall redevelopment strategy advocated by current City of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett and the city’s boosters. The activist stated, “Downtown's good. You don't need to focus on that. We don't need a streetcar. What we need is more resources on the South Side, more resources on the North Side” (personal communication). On the other hand, rather than attributing low graduation rates of Black high school students to the factors described by the activist and the decimation of funding to MPS, a pro-business leader situated the blame squarely with Black parents:

All of that stuff [like work ethic] starts at home. I mean, you've got the achievement gap in Milwaukee in particular that is very pronounced, you know, in the African American community. Well, how do you solve that? Better schools? Well, yeah. But my wife is a teacher and I know that teachers work pretty darn hard but there's only so much they can do particularly if somebody shows up hungry. If somebody is not getting the kind of support that they need at home, if they're not getting a good night's sleep, if they're not being told when they get home to do your homework... I mean, these are the things that society needs in order to have the glue to have productive young people and grow up into the workforce. I mean, it really starts with parents. It starts with a strong family union (personal communication).

In this instance, the interviewee specifically notes the racial disparity in academic achievement in MPS. However, as with discourses on Black infant mortality, they based their rationale for low test scores on individualized and racialized discourses of Black parenting where the solutions to MPS’s problems are located within the Black family and home. The lack of “glue” in Black families and homes resulted in poor test scores which then impacted the social

reproduction of the workforce, not of people. By locating the solution to low test scores of Black MPS students in Black parents and families, pro-business leaders deflect attention away from the intense state retraction of funds to the school system and redirection of investment into downtown Milwaukee and business interests. Thus, fast food workers not only faced the challenges of low wages, poor working conditions, and the inability to collectively bargain, but faced assaults on their social reproduction outside of the workplace. In short, they were being blamed for their own criminality, being welfare queens, causing the death of their own children, and the demise of the public school system.

The racial geographies of Milwaukee and its attendant racist discourses towards the North Side of Milwaukee are not limited to the city itself. Within the state, Milwaukee holds a specific racialized significance as the place where the state's social and fiscal problems are located and reproduced. The racial geography of Milwaukee seemed to discredit fast food workers' demands for better wages and unionization in the eyes of policymakers and pro-business elites because they could not see beyond racist discourses of 'welfare queens', 'criminals', and 'drains on the system'. Interviewees described how legislators from outside of Milwaukee viewed it as isolated from the rest of the state. One state assembly member reflected these sentiments by describing that the Republicans<sup>43</sup> controlling the state legislature "want to take money away from the public schools and wanted to build a wall around [Milwaukee]" (personal communication). A policy advocate elaborated on how the racial geography of Milwaukee within Wisconsin translated to policymaking:

I mean I've definitely been in the room when legislators make the argument that people are going to turn away jobs because they're going to no longer qualify for assistance. I've never met a person that said, "I'm not going to work because I'm going to lose my Food Stamps." I've met people who say, "Help me get two or three jobs because I'm trying to

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<sup>43</sup> Wisconsin has had a Republican governor, state senate, and state house since 2011.

better my circumstances.” So, I think that there is sort of a disconnect between how we think the reality is for people and sort of the struggle that people go through to work hard to better their circumstances (personal communication).

While the majority of Food Stamp recipients live outside of Milwaukee, the policy advocate described why Milwaukee was a scapegoat: “It’s really sort of the utilization of Food Stamps is higher in Milwaukee than the other parts of the state. And also I think it’s always easy to point to Milwaukee and say, ‘here’s part of the problem’” (personal communication). As of January 2018, 36% of Food Stamp recipients resided in Milwaukee County (Hunger Task Force, 2018). Moreover, the interviewee described that when policymakers point to “‘folks in Milwaukee’ [it] means something when you’re in Madison and saying that. And often what it means is people of color” (personal communication).

These statewide racist discourses were most prominent when discussing whose biological reproduction was valued and who reproduced the best workers. While Sziarto (2017) highlights the high Black infant mortality rate in Milwaukee as an indicator of deep racial inequalities, policymakers nonetheless relied upon racist and sexualized tropes of Black overpopulation and reproduction to make policy and further justify retrenchment of already-meagre state assistance programs (see also Loyd, 2014). According to the policy advocate, while policymakers had become more adept at using colourblind language, they understood that policymakers were referring to Milwaukee. In one instance, “a legislator proposed... that he wanted to introduce a bill that would limit how many children you had. Basically if you had three children, your benefits wouldn't go up on the fourth child. So, you would limit the amount of benefits you received so there wasn't an incentive to have another child” (personal communication). In contrast, a pro-business advocate described how businesses wanted to locate where white, resourceful, and skilled children were plentiful:



... we've got manufacturers up in northeastern Wisconsin and... they wanted to move there because of two things. Catholic farm families with lots of kids. Farm kids know how to fix things because when you're out in the field and the tractor breaks down, you've got to problem solve, get the tractor back to the barn and the tractor is going to be needed tomorrow (personal communication).

While many of the racialized discourses in Milwaukee and Wisconsin take the shape of racist discourses, race liberal discourses<sup>44</sup> are also in circulation. Race liberal discourses fail to counter racist discourses, and more importantly, to resolve the sheer material deprivation wrought by decades of organized abandonment. One city official attempted to redirect the discussion of the Sherman Park uprisings by framing the downtown redevelopment strategy as a 'raise all boats' strategy. The official "[hoped] that what we're seeing downtown, all those resources move out into other areas of the city" (personal communication). They move on to describe a brief history of segregation in the city and how it is implicated in its current problems and redevelopment strategy, but then states, "I've worked in Sherman Park, and it's a beautiful neighborhood. This was an isolated incident as far as what I think. And I don't think it came across that way in the media" (personal communication). Thus, while acknowledging the tension between the life and vitality of neighbourhoods and their racialized poverty and violence, the official fails to connect the uprising in a longer history of organized abandonment.

Race liberal discourses in Milwaukee, such as neoliberal multiculturalism (discussed in Chapter 4), become most problematic when rearticulating language from more radical ones

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<sup>44</sup> Historians have illuminated race liberal discourses and racial liberalism. In drawing from liberal principles of individualism (and the prerequisite of whiteness), self-reliance, equality, freedom, private property, racial liberalism was a modest attempt in early 20<sup>th</sup> century northern U.S. cities to assuage both Black communities mobilizing for equality and white fears of a Black invasion (e.g. Countryman, 2006; Sugrue, 2008). Unlike Southern cities where Jim Crow and *de jure* segregation legally separated all public accommodations, Northern racial liberals advocated for slow desegregation (from *de facto* segregation, or segregation in practice) and integration of Black communities even as they promoted policies like "slum clearance" that destroyed Black communities (Ranganathan, 2016). As Melamed (2011) highlights, neoliberal multiculturalism, as described in Chapter 4, is a contemporary form of race liberal discourses.

related to the life-or-death stakes of Black social reproduction. Once again, media coverage of the Sherman Park uprisings serves as a prime example. In a *Milwaukee Magazine* article entitled “Black Milwaukee Lives Matter”, the author begins with a quote by James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* to describe the “growing unrest in the African American community” (Kane, 2016). The author, like the City official above, uncouples the 2016 uprisings in Sherman Park from previous uprisings, including 1967 (see Bonds, 2018). Instead, the author writes that “this time the fire came to Milwaukee, and we may never be the same” after the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 (Kane, 2016). Moreover, by isolating the Sherman Park uprisings as isolated and distinct from other parts of the city, the author makes the case that Black Milwaukee lives matter in the context of the “continuing battle between police and residents” (ibid.), providing an analysis for the magazine’s creative class and elite audience that police violence is removed from the myriad discourses and materialities of Black social reproduction in a racial capitalist context. Most tragically, the author writes that the analyses of the “riot” will instead be deployed to see “how to avoid things in the future” (ibid.) rather than dismantling the systems that resulted in the uprising. In fact, the author seems quite content with the status quo because “it’s in no way clear that its arrival will do anything to improve the situation here” (ibid.). Thus, race liberal discourses also cast fast food workers’ and their families’ lives as an inevitable and unavoidable outcome of racial politics in Milwaukee where imagining a racially just city is impossible.

## **The Fight for 15 & Milwaukee Fight for 15**

A community organizer described how the race liberal discourses and practices, in addition to the racist discourses described above, constrained the Milwaukee Fight for 15's ability to organize for racial justice. The organizer specifically points to how white funders and organizers fail to see how they are implicated in reproducing racial hierarchies because,

A lot of white folks would much rather have a conversation with people of color, or about race and empowering people of color, to feel good about themselves for giving them organizing resources than to actually have to take those conversations back to white communities and try to move the dial in terms of views on racism and oppression in white communities (personal communication).

This discussion helps to shed light on why the Fight for 15 failed to gain traction in Milwaukee. First, the structure of the Fight for 15 national organization—and the politics of who controlled strategy, funding, hiring, and messaging—is key to understanding how they were unsuccessful at articulating local politics at a broader scale. Second, the organizer's analysis highlights the imperative to embed Milwaukee's fast food workers' lives within the local racial geography, and sheds light on how we are all implicated in reproducing racial capitalist relations of low-wage work and organized abandonment.

The Fight for 15's contested and relatively unpublicized origin story highlights the mobilization's potential to produce an analysis of a Black sense of place, one in which struggles for social reproduction intersect with broader conditions. While the movement's website and many media articles on the movement cite 2012 in New York City as its genesis, who started it and how are contested. The most common narrative of the Fight for 15's origins highlights how community organizers, wanting to organize around the issue of school closures in public housing

in New York City, ended up talking with residents about the low pay of fast food work and not being able to make ends meet (personal communication; Gupta, 2013). According to a community activist I interviewed, the community organizers realized fast food workers were a potential group to organize but it took time and effort to convince the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and other community groups to be partners in the organizing effort (personal communication). The president of SEIU International, Mary Kay Henry has stated that she and SEIU members are happy to support the non-unionized fast food workers to draw attention to a broader low-wage economy (Eidelson, 2013).

An alternative narrative told by former organizers (Gupta, 2013) and through my fieldwork provides clues as to how the Fight for 15 ultimately took up a unified and generic message around wages: that SEIU funded and directed organizing efforts from the beginning, using the grassroots origin story to gain legitimacy. This story is best reflected in the Fight for 15's top-down strategy where SEIU's goal has always been to organize fast food workers (Gupta, 2013). Rolf (2016), the SEIU local president with the Seattle Fight for 15, placed SEIU at the head of organizing efforts, working with local organizations to coordinate organizing efforts. Organizers from the original New York and Chicago community organizations support this origin story by describing how fast food workers have always been the target of organizing efforts and that SEIU has always funded and directed the campaign. Through my fieldwork, organizers and other participants in the campaigns also affirmed this strategy. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other anti-union, pro-business groups have taken the grassroots story as a cover for the top-down origin story. They allege that the origin of the Fight for 15 campaign is rooted in SEIU's desires to expand its membership and dues base by incorporating other non-unionized sectors (e.g. Manheim, 2017; Hackbarth, 2015). In doing so, pro-business groups work

to discredit fast food workers and their demands for what the U.S. Chamber of Commerce describes as an “inflated minimum wage” and unionization (Manheim, 2017).

Relatedly, the structure of the Fight for 15 is left out of media articles and invisible to those attending days of action but is instrumental in understanding how it did not articulate local concerns at a broader scale. Through their top-down structure, the Fight for 15 national controlled many aspects of local organizing, including messaging, hiring, and funding. Through an analysis of my fieldnotes, U.S. Chamber of Commerce documents, and U.S. Department of Labour<sup>45</sup> documents, the Fight for 15 is structured as follows. SEIU disburses funds to the Fight for 15 national campaign, which the U.S. Chamber of Commerce classifies as a worker center<sup>46</sup> along with the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) and OUR Walmart. Fight for 15 national has an affiliated national organizing committee comprised of fast food workers from Local Organizing Committees (LOCs) across the United States (personal communication). The Fight for 15 is broken down into LOCs in cities across the U.S. that are made up primarily of fast food workers, which, while comprised of un-unionized workers, constitutes a labour organization in legal terms (U.S. Department of Labour, Office of Labor Management Standards, 2016). In Milwaukee, the LOC was called the Milwaukee Worker Organizing Committee (MWOC)<sup>47</sup> and had their organizational funds disbursed through a Milwaukee-based community organization, Wisconsin Jobs Now (WJN). As a part of their agreement, WJN provided staff benefits and

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<sup>45</sup> Any organizations designated as a labour organization by the Department of Labour is required to file an Labour Organizing Annual Report (LM-2) annually to report all of its incomes and expenses. These are all publicly available online at the DOL’s website.

<sup>46</sup> According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Fight for 15 is a worker center, a coalition of community, labour, and religious organizations with non-profit status to be able to function outside of the legal restrictions placed on labour unions. However, as the case of Milwaukee highlights, the DOL classifies them as a labour organization.

<sup>47</sup> I refer to the Milwaukee Worker Organizing Committee (MWOC) as the Milwaukee Fight for 15 interchangeably throughout the rest of the chapter, and I specifically refer to the Milwaukee Fight for 15 in other parts of the dissertation.

consulting to the MWOC (ibid.). The MWOC's campaign in the Fight for 15 was called Raise Up MKE. WJN also served as the physical hub from which all organizing and actions took place. Organizers and other support staff, LOC meetings, community meetings, and assembling at the beginning and during days of action were located at WJN's offices (fieldnotes). WJN provided support by implementing the Fight for 15 national's strategy through communications and building relationships with sympathetic local politicians, as well as labour and community organizations.

As was the case with funding, the overall strategy of the MWOC was dictated by Fight for 15 national. As I discuss below, the top-down messaging also meant that cities could not address specific challenges in their cities, but instead relied on generic messaging that was applicable across cities to create a united front. Conversations with my officemates at WJN and observations of conference calls about Fight for 15 strategy revealed that the national wanted its LOCs to gain media attention in their cities and focus on the optics and spectacle of days of action (fieldnotes; see also Gupta, 2013). This strategy is reflected in SEIU spending \$2 million, or 20% of its budget for 2016, on hiring left-leaning public relations firm Berlin Rosen to build the mobilization's messaging and coordinate days of action (Lewis, 2016). The strategy of media attention required intensive communications and organizing work on the part of local organizations, who often received little support beyond funding. The question that seemed to drive Fight for 15 national strategy was: How can we get the most workers out for the most media attention? While WJN, in conjunction with MWOC, organized workers and decided on locations of actions and the exact logistics of demonstrations, such as routes of marches and permits for congregating, the strategy itself and "messaging" (their language) were controlled and dictated by Fight for 15 national. This included details down to how many workers each city

pledged to participate in days of action to the large red “1” and “5” signs held up at the height of mobilization (fieldnotes). While Fight for 15 national’s strategy demanded a lot of time and energy to orchestrate days of action, community organizations like WJN did not have control over hiring decisions, leaving organizations unable to hire or fire the organizers and staff they felt were best for the work.

The Fight for 15 national’s structure and organizing strategy did not go uncontested by WJN. Fight for 15 national and WJN also clashed over Fight for 15 national’s endorsement of Hillary Clinton for president and the Fight for 15’s fervent emphasis on voting over a broader analysis of voting rights as one in a range of other ways to incite change. Moreover, the strategy dictated by the Fight for 15 national seemed to siphon away the time of WJN’s staff from its pre-Fight for 15 community organizing around block captains and the goal of ensuring quality public schools. In Milwaukee, racial justice as an organizing principle came to the fore for the November 2015 Republican presidential candidate debates described at the beginning of the chapter. However, it seemed to be a nominal recognition, as it was unclear what constituted racial justice, the specific demands to achieve it, and what it would look like in Milwaukee.

#### *Milwaukee Fight for 15 & Wisconsin Jobs Now*

In everyday operations, the organizers of Fight for 15, some of whom were fast food workers, were engaged in the socially reproductive work of organizing to bring more fast food workers to the MWOC. It seemed that the Milwaukee Fight for 15 and WJN attempted to build an analysis of a Black sense of place in Milwaukee within the Fight for 15 national’s constraints. According to one fast food worker-organizer, each organizer was assigned a quota of workers and ‘turf’ by the lead organizer — that is, an area in which they were responsible for going into

fast food restaurants to invite workers to the next LOC meeting. Through informal conversations with WJN staff (not organizers), organizers were often not able to meet these quotas, but a larger problem was that organizers were not current with their documentation of whom they had invited and were not able to provide contact information for follow-up (personal communication). These administrative failures created rifts between the organizers and professional staff at WJN, and these rifts were always palpable.

The professional staff cited their frustration with organizers' inability to do their jobs, which consequently made the professional staff's jobs more challenging. For example, in one instance, while prepping fast food workers for media interviews, one staff member discussed being frustrated by organizers' failure to better educate workers on a class analysis of striking and withholding one's labour as a form of resistance (fieldnotes). The professional staff pointed to a broader lack of worker education in the movement because the Fight for 15 national's strategy was based in numbers rather than "consciousness raising" of the working class. As I describe below, the lack of worker education and socially reproductive work of movement building also contributed to the decline of the Milwaukee Fight for 15.

The Milwaukee Fight for 15's challenge was to gain momentum for days of action by making their demands legible to the broader public and policymakers — that is, by challenging discourses that situated low-wage workers as young, lazy, and in need of pocket money. In doing so, the Fight for 15 drew attention to the realities of working in the fast food industry, but, in the name of preserving a united, national front, did not relate these realities to a local context. They also framed demands differently for their different targets. For instance, fast food workers made demands to raise minimum wages to legislators in Milwaukee's City Hall all the way up to the White House by arguing that minimum wage laws are outdated and have not kept up with



inflation or the cost of living. At the same time, Milwaukee fast food workers joined fast food workers from across the country every May at the annual McDonalds shareholders' meeting in Oak Brook, Illinois to point out the contradiction between the corporation's skyrocketing profits, which were produced through the labor of their low-wage workers, even as those workers increasingly relied on Food Stamps to supplement wages. In the case of the McDonald's shareholders' meeting, fast food workers had little recourse, as McDonald's was under no obligation to raise wages and the majority of restaurants are franchises.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, because the shareholders' meeting was a national action, the fast food workers' demands were made legible through spectacle and a generic message about corporate greed rather than specific conditions of fast food work in Milwaukee. Thus, even if wages were raised in Milwaukee, workers would have what a community organizer described as "dignity and more breathing room" (personal communication), but would not resolve issues of organized abandonment in the city.

Moreover, there was little attention paid to the materialities and spatialities of workers' everyday struggle outside of the media spectacle of protest. Fight for 15 actions were extremely well orchestrated, from the time workers were to arrive on the scene, to the path along which they would be marching (fieldnotes). In approximately three years, the Milwaukee Fight for 15 held actions at a variety of locations throughout the city, from worker trainings on the North Side, to actions outside of the Milwaukee County courthouse, to rallies outside of fast food restaurants. Organizers stated this was intentional, aimed at drawing media attention to the fast food workers and their daily struggles (fieldnotes). The presidential debates were successful in building excitement for mobilizing around issues of wages. However, these events focused on

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<sup>48</sup> The National Labour Relations Board (NLRB) ruled in 2015, however, that franchises are, in fact, joint employers with their parent company, and therefore, are responsible for upholding labour laws. In 2017, this decision was overturned by a Republican-controlled NLRB (Filloon, 2017).

generic concerns about wages, and ignored issues of segregation, welfare retrenchment, and decimation of public services in Milwaukee.

While racial justice became a part of the Fight for 15 at the Republican candidate debate, it was unclear how the Fight for 15 national understood how racial justice and a higher minimum wage were linked. The Milwaukee Fight for 15, with assistance from SEIU and Fight for 15 national, coordinated marches on both of the party candidate debates, which were located in the whiter, more elite spaces of downtown Milwaukee and the East Side. In drawing media attention to the marches, fast food workers were able to highlight their mobility and their ability to take up space in elite, white spaces. They were not, however, able to draw attention to the spatialities of their everyday lives, and the challenges of getting to work, in affording rent, and taking care of their children. For the politicians and public whose attention the Fight for 15 and fast food workers wanted to garner, the spectacle subsumed the finer details of their demands and the specific ways in which racist discourses in Milwaukee impacted fast food worker lives.

### *Broader constraints to organizing in Milwaukee*

Milwaukee Fight for 15 organizers, however, cited the challenges of mobilizing in a state with a hostile legislature and organizing environment. It was unclear whether Fight for 15 national and Berlin Rosen heard these concerns and constraints. Starting at the local level, while the City and county were Democratically controlled, they were hostile to discussions about raising wages or living wages. For example, in 2013, Milwaukee County endeavored to pass a living wage ordinance to raise the minimum wage for county employees and contractors to \$11.32<sup>49</sup> an hour (Behm, 2016). The ordinance passed, but not without opposition from

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<sup>49</sup> In 2016, the ordinance raised the minimum wage for county contractors and employees to \$15 an hour (Behm, 2016).

Democratic County Executive Chris Abele. Furthermore, the ordinance excluded retail and service sector workers employed in the private sector, which contain the lowest paid workers. At the state level, Governor Scott Walker expressed skepticism about the purpose of a minimum wage, let alone the need to increase it. He stated that he wouldn't "repeal [the minimum wage of \$7.25], but [he doesn't] think it serves a purpose" (Bice, 2014) because he wanted workers to make more than minimum wage. While a nice sentiment, Walker, like his pro-business counterparts, ignores the fact that the largest growing sector of the economy is the service sector, which is disproportionately comprised of minimum wage workers (Levine, 2014). Making his sentiments clear, during his brief presidential bid in 2015, he called the minimum wage "lame" while talking to a Fox News pundit (Bump, 2015).

Organizers, activists, and their allies in various levels of government within Wisconsin pointed to pro-business groups writ large as one of their main opponents who produced incomplete knowledge about fast food workers and low-wage work more broadly. Despite recognizing such groups as their opponents, the Fight for 15 national did not have the Milwaukee Fight for 15 focus their attention on countering Wisconsin- or Milwaukee-based pro-business discourses or practices based on the idea that if Milwaukee were to raise wages, the city would lose business. Pro-business groups like the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce (MMAC) and Wisconsin Manufacturing and Commerce (WMC) have extensive lobbying arms that work in tandem across levels of government, going to city halls and the state capitol to pass pro-business legislation. Both of their quarterly publications in the run-up to the 2014 and 2016 elections provided business leaders 'report cards' on which legislators are the most 'business friendly' (e.g. WMC, 2016).

These organizations deployed the technocratic and colourblind language of the free market to distance themselves from the racist discourses above, and advocated for poor Milwaukeeans to have faith in the benevolence of the market. In interviewing a number of pro-business elites, it became apparent, however, that their language of the free-market relied heavily on racist tropes of ‘welfare queens’, ‘breakdown of the Black family’, ‘Black criminality’, and lack of work ethic. They reflected the Governor’s sentiments about the Milwaukee County living wage ordinance by deploying threatening rhetoric to the effect that if Milwaukee County (or any level of government) imposed wage ordinances, out-of-state businesses would refuse to locate in the state or would leave, allegedly hurting the very workers the ordinances were supposed to help (e.g. Baas, 2013). An extension of this discourse came through when a City official described the conundrum of “[the case of a business locating in a Milwaukee suburb] always left a sour taste in my mouth, because you have this dilemma of, ‘Isn't it better for them to be in the city employing people, even if it's less than the requested 15 or ten dollars minimum wage?’” (personal communication). The City official’s analysis reflects a common sentiment in economic development where some form of employment is better than none at all, regardless of the low quality and pay of the work. This sentiment also reflects the impetus of workfare, where there is a similar philosophy of work. One interviewee stated that welfare recipients were lucky if they could work in fast food (personal communication).

The state legislature and pro-business groups were not the only constraints on organizing fast food workers across the state. Racist discourses about Milwaukee and its residents impeded organizing, socially reproducing the Milwaukee Fight for 15, and “building worker power” (personal communication) at scales beyond the city. Organizers cited the popular bifurcation of Milwaukee as Black and the rest of the state as white as a wedge against uniting the working

class across the state. The stories of the fast food workers described at the beginning of the chapter became obscured by the racist discourses described above. Milwaukee was imagined and discursively framed as an ‘island’ in policymaking, popular discourse, and organizing in the state. One organizer described how, after the 2014 election,

we achieved all of these incredible goals and metrics. And yet it was for nil right? We ended up losing the election. What [workers] said to us is that we can't keep acting like Milwaukee as an island. Like we're not an island; we're part of the state and we can't win anything, we can't change our community if the rest of the state is pitted against us (personal communication).

Thus, while Milwaukee fast food workers' socially reproductive lives were deeply constrained by their status as low-wage workers, poverty, and their Blackness, this paradoxically impeded their ability to organize across the state collectively as fast food or low-wage workers. In some instances, racist discourses were directly implicated in deepening divisions amongst workers. Racialized discourses of criminality and fraud in Milwaukee came up during the 2016 elections over Wisconsin's implementation of its voter ID law: “There were pretend allegations of election fraud, you know, committed by [organizations in Milwaukee] and these stirring of controversies that are meant to exploit the tensions between up state working class white folks and people of color in the urban centers” (personal communication).

Two organizations in Milwaukee described wanting to hold focus groups with low-wage workers from across the state to discuss why organizing was so challenging. They were specifically interested in understanding how low-wage workers outside of Milwaukee voted for Governor Walker when he is unabashedly anti-labour, anti-working class, and anti-poor. The organizers described it coming down to the racist discourses about Milwaukee, as well as the understanding by organizers that, “I don't agree with [Walker] but at least he has a vision” (personal communication). To Black Milwaukeeans, the racist discourses of the rest of the state

and the inability of white, race liberal candidates to win resulted in Walker winning a recall election and a second term as governor in 2012. The organizers went on to describe why, despite many of the flaws with Walker's Democratic opponent, Mary Burke, including campaigning for a \$10.10 minimum wage, Black workers in Milwaukee voted for her: "we achieved the highest midterm election turnout in 60 years in Milwaukee. And I think it was absolutely clear to the people of Milwaukee that this was about their security; that Milwaukee was under siege and under attack, and this election was about trying to stave off that attack" (personal communication).

In discussing the racist discourses about Milwaukee and the challenges of organizing in the state, what becomes noticeable is the Fight for 15 national's lack of acknowledgement of race and racism in the lives of its predominantly Black and brown workers. The Milwaukee Fight for 15 eventually acknowledged the links among wages, racial justice, and immigrant justice, but I never heard an analysis of how they intersect and how the Fight for 15 in Milwaukee or nationally would achieve all three. Moreover, the Fight for 15's organizing strategy and structure does not seem to take racism and wages into account together. In national and local Milwaukee media coverage about Fight for 15 actions across the country, the photographs of the mobilizations are predominantly Black and brown workers, and yet overt and consistent discussions of the intersections of race and class were noticeably absent. Thus, the optics of the mobilizations are workers of colour, but the discourses produced by the national, and thus local, campaigns left out analyses of race.

At best, research on behalf of the Fight for 15 discussed racialized poverty and overrepresentation in low-wage work (e.g. Allegretto et al., 2013; COWS, 2013) and at worst, the Fight for 15 produced colourblind discourses of poverty in an attempt to organize workers

along the line of class or identities as fast food workers. Either way, in the case of Milwaukee, the Fight for 15 campaign was unable to garner support across the state because of pre-existing racial geographies and discourses. Racial justice writ large only became a prominent feature of the campaign in preparation for the Republican presidential debates in November 2015, in which they brought together the links between racial justice, immigrant justice, and economic justice. However, it was unclear how the Fight for 15 theorized how the three were materially linked in the racial geography of Milwaukee, what racial justice would look like for fast food workers in the context of Milwaukee, and the concrete demands required to make it reality.

The lack of discussion about race points to broader complications with organizing as fast food workers. In observing the preparation of fast food workers for press interviews, it became apparent that workers' identities as fast food workers were not central to their everyday lives or to their organizing (fieldnotes). This made answering the question of why they were striking more challenging to answer. For them, it was just a form of employment and source of income to meet their basic needs rather than a collective identity (cf. Bosco, 2001). Moreover, workers often worked more than one job often outside of fast food and sometimes in more informal economies like braiding hair or childcare. While they felt perpetually stuck in low-wage jobs, they moved in and out of myriad fast food jobs regularly. They identified more as daughters, sons, parents, community members, church-goers, block captains, and students, which begs the question of whether organizing around the collective identity of fast food workers would ever have been effective, since their identities seemed to be based more on their social relations and where they lived.

## *Postscript*

As I describe above, the Milwaukee Fight for 15 has faded from public attention. On August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016, WJN discontinued its relationship with SEIU as the hub of the Milwaukee Fight for 15. This change in structure shifted control of the remnants of staffing and administration of the Milwaukee Fight for 15 to SEIU International (WJN, 2016). In addition, the election of Trump in November 2016 forced SEIU to restructure its own funding and organizing priorities (Lewis, 2016). In 2017, SEIU cut its budget by 10% and again by 30% in 2018 (*ibid.*; personal communication). In returning to the SEIU International website to understand the most recent campaigns, I am unable to find a page for the fast food Fight for 15 (though home care and child care Fight for 15 campaigns still exist). In the media, nonetheless, the Fight for 15 national campaign remains adamant that despite its funding cuts, it still channels resources into the Fight for 15 (Lewis, 2016). These resources are, according to SEIU, funneled in ways that are not reportable to the Department of Labor (*ibid.*). However, notwithstanding this set of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the Milwaukee Fight for 15 seemed to be waning before the summer of 2016. I observed declining numbers of workers, less energy in the participants, and fewer fast food workers turning out for actions. At the last few actions I attended, which spanned the WJN-Fight for 15 split, I would strike up conversations with marchers and find that many of them were not fast food workers and not from Milwaukee (*fieldnotes*).

Despite formidable obstacles at a variety of scales, the Fight for 15 campaign has garnered successes. The campaign has also been successful in raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in cities like Seattle, San Francisco, and New York City<sup>50</sup>; further, a total of 19 states

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<sup>50</sup> In New York City, the raise to \$15 an hour minimum wage is for fast food workers only, and does not extend to other low-wage workers (National Employment Law Project, 2015)



implemented minimum wage raises in 2017 (Lewis, 2016). They have, however, been less successful at increasing the number of dues-paying members of SEIU (ibid.; Redmond, 2018). In Milwaukee, WJN was a part of a coalition that lobbied to pass a county ordinance for a \$15 minimum wage for Milwaukee County employees and contractors. They were also able to achieve similar ordinances for Madison and Eau Claire. For a while, Milwaukee Fight for 15 was also successful in cultivating a cross-generational sense of excitement and energy around improving workers' lives through increases in wages and unionization in a highly anti-union state. One worker described the "embracement" received from the older workers on strike as a motivation to join the movement: "If I got this 50-year-old man on his cane and he's looking up to me, and telling me, 'young brother, you need to keep going, you need to keep moving, because you've got it, you know, you solid'", that's what's going to keep me moving" (personal communication).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the Fight for 15 was ultimately unsuccessful in its goals of raising the minimum wage to \$15 and the right to unionize without retaliation even before the Milwaukee Fight for 15's collapse. I highlight that the mobilization's structure and strategy were not able to build an analysis of a Black sense of place that acknowledges tensions between Black life and racial violences. Specifically, I argue that the Fight for 15 was unable to consider or link together the daily struggles of fast food workers with a historical analysis of organized abandonment to situate contemporary challenges to daily life and organizing in Milwaukee. The national Fight for 15's top-down structure and strategy of dictating a nationally unified and

streamlined message for media coverage stifled any city-specific analyses that integrated wages and unionization within the racial geographies of Milwaukee, police brutality, the decimation of Milwaukee Public Schools, draconian cuts to and conditions on welfare, and Black infant mortality. The Milwaukee Fight for 15 was arguably at its peak when it brought the Fight for 15, Black Lives Matter, and immigrant justice together. However, the Fight for 15 was unclear how the analysis could be materialized in specific contexts like Milwaukee.

In providing a critique of the structure and strategy of the Fight for 15, I do not advocate that all movements and mobilizations focus solely on local issues and become insular. In contrast, the community response to the police killing of Dontre Hamilton, a 31-year-old Black man in a downtown Milwaukee park in 2014, provides insight into how to mobilize and articulate local concerns at broader scales. Hamilton's family formed the Coalition for Justice in response to his death. They demonstrated in Red Arrow Park, where Hamilton was killed, to shed light on racial inequality in the city and the racist policing practices of the MPD. They demanded "justice for Dontre" and further articulated what constituted justice. The Coalition sought transparency from MPD, crisis training, and an end to the MPD's stop-and-frisk policies (Barton & Luthern, 2017). On occasion, the Coalition came together with the Milwaukee Fight for 15 to link wages and Black Lives Matter. The Coalition was also able to expand its networks beyond Milwaukee, working with the American Civil Liberties Union to call for a U.S. Department of Justice investigation on the MPD's unconstitutional use of force and stop-and-frisk, all while grounding their work on the specific discourses and materialities of racial capitalism in Milwaukee (Lloyd & Bonds, forthcoming; Barton & Luthern, 2017).

Milwaukee faces deep, historically rooted, and urgent challenges ahead. The Fight for 15, along with other mobilizations in the city, was able to mobilize low-wage workers in a way that

had not been seen for decades. However, mobilizations such as these will not be successful in achieving their goals if they cannot address the following concerns from a community activist: “I can't tell you the number of young folks who don't have a dream beyond high school because they don't know that they'll live beyond high school, and the reality of what plays out is that statistically some of them won't. And so how do you have a prosperous city when folks are hopeless?” (personal communication). While low wages and poverty continuously shape the daily social reproduction of fast food workers in Milwaukee, they are also deeply tied to other crises of social reproduction such as gun violence, police brutality, and economic development in the city and region that point to Black fast food workers bearing the burdens of racial capitalist crisis. Their social reproduction is in a perpetual state of crisis highlighting that racial capitalism has always been in crisis.

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## CHAPTER 4

### *Racing the creative class: Economic development, neoliberal multiculturalism, and the racialized discourses of work*

*“Milwaukee is the ‘tale of two cities’, right? Because it’s the area of most concentrated wealth in the state of Wisconsin, but it’s also the area with the most concentrated poverty in the state.”*

— Interviewee, state official representing a Milwaukee district

### **Introduction**

The geography of Milwaukee is rather pleasant. The skyline of Milwaukee highlights its best assets: the shores of Lake Michigan, the iconic Calatrava-designed Milwaukee Art Museum, the numerous county parks (several designed by Frederick Law Olmstead), the beer gardens that dot the landscape, and its tree-lined neighbourhoods. Recently, the *New York Times*’ Frugal Traveler wrote that Milwaukee’s appeal lies in the fact that it is “cheap and vibrant” (Peterson, 2016). Similarly, the *Washington Post* noted that it “welcomes visitors with lake views, stellar food, never-ending brews and a hearty dose of Midwestern niceness” (Silver, 2017). These stories resonate with the City’s approach to development as influenced by Richard Florida’s (2002) creative class thesis (Parker, 2017). Florida’s creative class approach emphasizes the significance of urban design and attracting the creative class—or wealthy, professionals—as a means to revitalize and redevelop cities (Florida, 2002). The media coverage above, however, neglects the material reality of a highly socio-spatially uneven city described in Chapters 2 and 3, where City officials prioritizes design over the social reproduction of deeply racially segregated and impoverished communities already living in the city.

Through his creative class thesis, Florida (2002) argues that the creative class of workers will save cities by spurring economic growth through consumption. Similar to neoliberal theses of trickle-down economics, Florida (ibid.) hypothesizes that the creative class will have a trickle-down effect in cities and ‘raise all boats’. Florida (2002, p. 68) defines the creative class as “people who add economic value through their creativity”, such as professors, artists, high tech workers, and finance professionals. They are an ‘economic class’, which he defines as a “unique social grouping... [that] share many similar tastes, desires and preferences” (ibid.). In Milwaukee, City officials and boosters first implemented the creative class thesis in 2001 (Zimmerman, 2008). They specifically have focused on promoting the redevelopment of downtown and the Lakefront to make the city more amenable to the creative class — who have yet to arrive — even as they lament budget shortages for public goods such as public transit. In the past several years, Milwaukee’s skyline has changed drastically with a proliferation of condominiums along the Milwaukee River and high rises erected along the Lakefront. These strategies have emphasized design and the built environment over tackling the deepening segregation and poverty. Moreover, despite strategies to combat white flight, suburbanization has continued to increase in the Milwaukee metropolitan area (Rodriguez, 2014).

As noted in the introduction, the common notion that Milwaukee is a ‘tale of two cities’ has become a popular narrative through which the problems facing the city are framed. This discourse, I argue, constitutes specific problems and poses interventions to the very problems it creates. It bifurcates the city, situating one as a potential economic engine and the other as failing and holding the city back. This belies the deeply relational ways in which the city has become so segregated and unequal. Moreover, it creates a false dichotomy that legitimates geographies of disinvestment and creative class approaches to economic development. However, both the City’s

redevelopment strategy and popular discourses elide and reproduce deep racial and class inequalities. Milwaukee's approach to creative class thesis-informed strategies of development is embedded within and shaped by broader debates about how to revitalize the city after deindustrialization, white flight, and severe intra-metropolitan segregation. Alongside narratives that situate Milwaukee as idyllic, the city has also gained media attention for its intense racial inequality, poverty, unemployment, as well as gun and police violence (Loyd & Bonds, forthcoming). In the face of such scrutiny, City officials and the pro-business community have presented creative class as the cure for the city's problems (City of Milwaukee Common Council, 2016).

In this chapter, I interrogate the popular discourse of the 'tale of two cities' to argue that it works as a self-fulfilling racialized metaphor. This discursive bifurcation rationalizes and legitimates a creative class thesis-infused development strategy as a solution, all while materially reinforcing raced and classed segregation. I consider how the City can promote the creative class-based strategy, one that fashions itself as progressive through a nominal recognition of race, even as it reproduces existing racial hierarchies and inequalities. To do so, I draw on two years of participant observation between 2014 and 2016, an analysis of the 2014 City of Milwaukee redevelopment plans, and semi-structured interviews with City officials, pro-business interests, local non-profit professionals, and neighbourhood activists. I show how discourses of diversity and colourblindness are deployed by boosters to allow themselves to identify as anti-racist even as they propose strategies that reproduce the very discourses and materialities they seek to undo.

In drawing on the popular discourse of the 'tale of two cities' and one of its attendant solutions—specifically, creative class thesis-oriented development agendas—I build on

geographers' theories of racialized economic development to specifically focus on how discourses of diversity and colourblindness can still reproduce normative socio-spatial patterns of racialization and segregation. Examining this discourse reveals how City officials, pro-business interests, and stakeholders can frame economic development through the terms of equality and prosperity for all while deploying racialized narratives of work, including lacking 'hard' and 'soft' skills, lacking work ethic, and being untrainable and uneducated. Moreover, because of the intense segregation of Milwaukee, the 'tale of two cities' also imbues particular places as being naturally deficient in qualities ripe for and worthy of economic development. Celebrating diversity through development strategies underpinned by the creative class thesis in fact, helps to further justify the material and discursive bifurcation of the city. Thus, the City concentrates development in the locations in which the 'diverse', 'deserving' workers live and work and disinvesting in the racialized bodies and spaces elsewhere.

My work contributes to the geographic and urban scholarship analyzing colourblind urban redevelopment within the context of racial capitalism (Bonds, 2013a; Cope & Latham, 2009; Brahinsky, 2011). I draw from and contribute to feminist critiques of the creative class thesis within geography by theorizing it as a racialized development strategy that discursively and materially reproduces race even as it nominally embraces diversity and equality. My approach brings together the literature on the geographic contributions to racial capitalism and geographers' critiques of the creative class to analyze contemporary discourses of race in relation to Melamed's (2011) theory of neoliberal multiculturalism. Neoliberal multiculturalism helps to reveal contemporary discourses of race that simultaneously embrace diversity and equality even as they reinforce racial hierarchies and inequality. It works to illuminate contemporary articulations of racial capitalism by theorizing the creative class thesis as a redevelopment

strategy underpinned by neoliberal multiculturalism. Specifically, neoliberal multiculturalism facilitates an examination of discourses and strategies informed by liberalism and ‘Midwestern nice’. Through this focus, I show how neoliberal multiculturalism rearticulates and reinforces racial capitalism.

In the following sections, I situate the case of Milwaukee and the evolution of colourblind redevelopment policies within the urban economic development literature on the creative class. I then specifically examine the City’s post-deindustrialization redevelopment strategy to understand the centrality of race and racialization in the creative class thesis. Ultimately, I argue that even as a creative class-based redevelopment strategy illustrates a nominal embrace of race and racial equality, it nonetheless reproduces racialized discourses of work and historical socio-spatial patterns of segregation.

### **A ‘tale of two cities’**

As discussed in the introduction and throughout the dissertation, Milwaukee is a city of contradictions. Milwaukee has had both a rich socialist and labour organizing history (see for example, Gurda, 1999; Parker, 2017) and been the site of experimentation for punitive social policies, such as workfare (Peck, 2001; Collins & Mayer, 2010). From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Milwaukee was the manufacturing heart of the Midwest, and branded itself as the city that “feeds and supplies the world”<sup>51</sup>. However, Black workers have faced severe discrimination and violence in all aspects of life, including employment and housing, since their arrival in the 1920s (Trotter, 2007; Bonds, 2018). In the 1970s, white flight and intra-metropolitan segregation

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<sup>51</sup> This poster is a common image in the city used to evoke nostalgia about Milwaukee’s industrial heyday.

intensified (Schmidt, 2011) and like many rust-belt cities, deindustrialization devastated the broader large working class population of the city (Jones, 2009).

As highlighted in Chapter 2, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, City officials and boosters implemented varying development strategies in an attempt to revitalize the city. In the 1960s, City officials began its campaign for downtown-centered<sup>52</sup> redevelopment in an attempt to bring suburban residents into the city for entertainment (Rodriguez, 2014). In the 1970s, the City of Milwaukee took an “urban triage” strategy of development by focusing scarce resources on already-existing assets rather than investing in neighbourhoods, predominantly neighbourhoods of colour, deemed ‘unsavable’ (Schmidt, 2011; Fure-Slocum, 2013). Neither of these strategies stemmed white flight from the city nor shielded city residents from the devastation of deindustrialization. In the 1980s and 1990s, Mayor John Norquist heralded a new era of urban redevelopment with the implementation of a New Urbanist strategy in the city, calling for the end of freeway construction and a focus on redesigning parts of the city like the Riverwalk<sup>53</sup> (Rodriguez, 2014). At about the same time, the City’s tourism board rebranded the City’s crisis-focused “urban triage” strategy into a strategy to make Milwaukee a multicultural hub of cosmopolitanism in the Midwest (Kenny, 1995; Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004).

It is within this context that I analyze City officials and boosters’ embrace and deployment of the creative class thesis as a redevelopment strategy promoted as a solution to the city’s deep racial inequality and poverty. The City’s current redevelopment strategy targets their investment in changes to the built environment to “attract and retain” a young, wealthy, and

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<sup>52</sup> Rodriguez (2014) describes the City of Milwaukee deploying New Urbanist and creative class principles even before they were coined as theses and put into practice in the 1990s and 2000s respectively. In the case of Milwaukee, City officials and boosters heavily promoted downtown-centered development as one way to slow the suburbanization of the metropolitan area and the depopulation of the city.

<sup>53</sup> The Riverwalk is stretch of redevelopment along the Milwaukee River that incorporates downtown. As a way to lure residents and tourists downtown, the Riverwalk is a paved path that connects to other trails in the City, and is home to luxury condominiums and apartments, parks, the Lakefront Brewery, restaurants, and corporate offices.

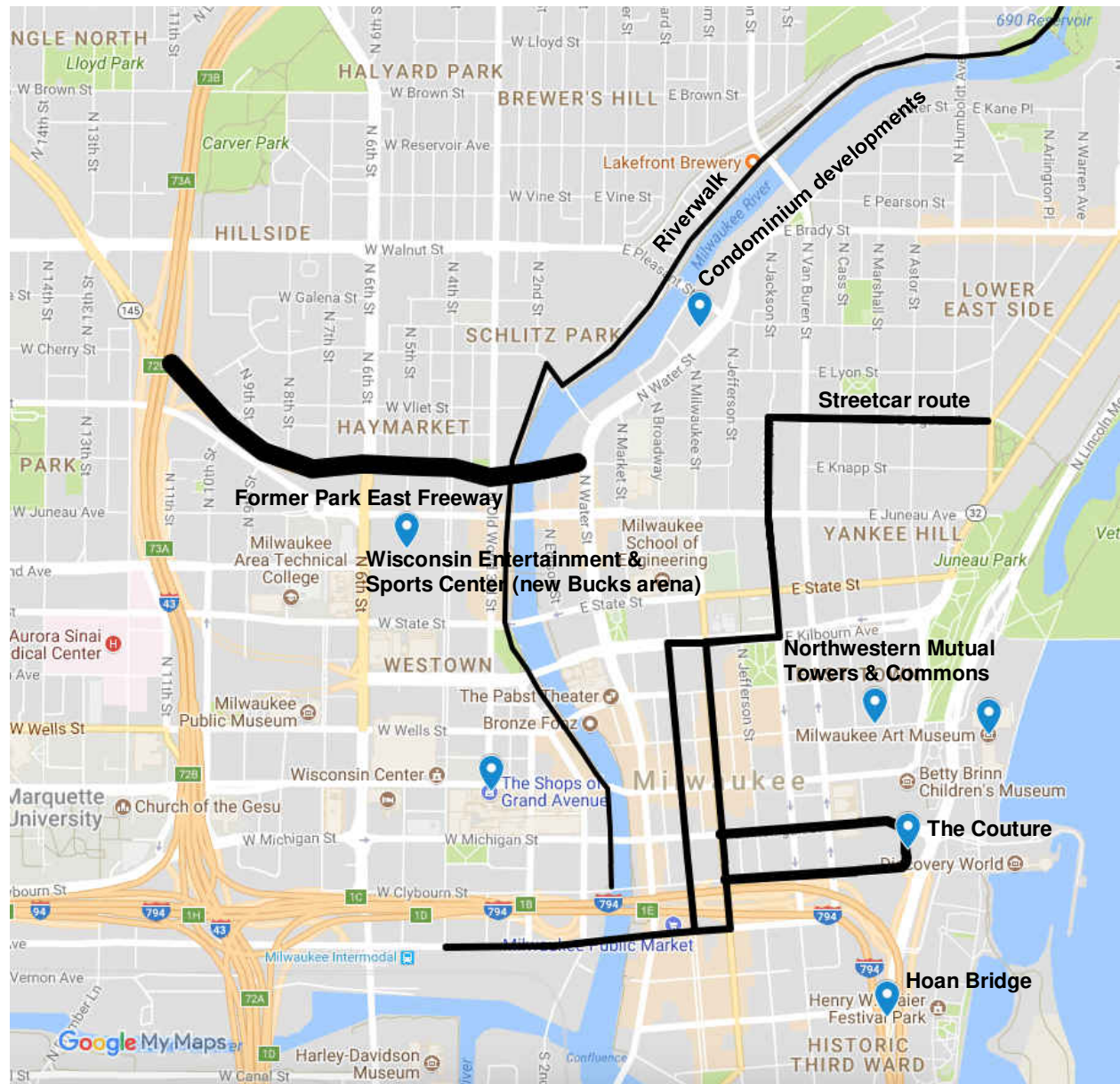
predominantly white creative class (City of Milwaukee, 2014). Highly contested developments (see Figure 4), such as the building of the newly-opened Northwestern Mutual high rise<sup>54</sup>, the Couture high rise apartment building, the Milwaukee Bucks arena (currently under-construction, to be called the Wisconsin Entertainment & Sports Center), and the Park East Redevelopment along the Milwaukee River, are just a few examples of projects that aim to increase the quality of life and attractiveness for the creative class. However, even as capital construction continues on these developments, areas just beyond the highway borders of downtown have benefitted minimally. Milwaukee struggles with consistently being ranked as the most racially segregated city in the United States (Denvir, 2011), the third poorest city in the country (Steininger & Hopkins, 2017), the fourth highest rate of child poverty in large U.S. cities (Crowe & Glauber, 2016), and the worst place to raise a Black child (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). These figures are often portrayed alongside analyses in which Wisconsin has the highest annual Black unemployment rate<sup>55</sup> in the country (V. Wilson, 2015) and the highest rate of Black male incarceration in the country (Pawasarat & Quinn, 2013).

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<sup>54</sup> Opened in August, 2017, it is a part of a broader Lakefront Gateway project to redevelop the Lakefront in downtown Milwaukee with luxury apartments, corporate offices, efficient highway access, arts and entertainment amenities, and trails.

<sup>55</sup> This is for the state of Wisconsin, but over 70% of Black Wisconsinites live in the City of Milwaukee (Wisconsin DHS, 2016).





**Figure 4.** Map of downtown Milwaukee highlighting some of the redevelopment to entice the creative class back to the city.

## Racing the creative class

In the case of Milwaukee, the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC)<sup>56</sup> invited Florida on a series of visits. He is famously quoted to have said that Milwaukee needed to promote its “coolness” through the fact that “the Violent Femmes, one of the best rock bands ever, are from Milwaukee” (Sherman, 2002). Peck (2005) charts with linear simplicity how Florida (2002) proposes cities can revitalize: the creative class—comprised of the raceless, genderless, young, highly educated, and mobile professionals in their ‘no-collar’ workplaces—will save dying cities by fueling economic development through consumption and their lifestyle demands. Cities can attract the creative class by producing ‘cool’ and ‘edgy’ neighbourhoods filled with coffee shops, farm to table restaurants, and artist spaces. These neighbourhoods, often in conjunction with New Urbanism, are hailed by many cities as the panacea for urban decline, such as poverty, deindustrialization, and suburbanization (Florida, 2002).

Florida’s (2002) creative class thesis posits that the creative class embrace the notion of diversity and want to live in open and ‘tolerant’ cities. He calculates gay, Bohemian, and foreign-born indices to show how open, ‘tolerant’, and diverse metropolitan regions are vital to fostering the creative class (ibid.). In his more recent work, Florida (2012) has recognized the inverse correlations between ‘racial diversity’, economic development, and growth in the creative class to add a tolerance index that takes into account the levels of metropolitan integration or segregation. In calculating this index, however, Florida conflates ‘racial diversity’ with

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<sup>56</sup> The MMAC is Milwaukee’s Chamber of Commerce.

residential integration. It is these indices that serve as evidence for the success of a metro region's creative potential, and therefore the thesis itself.

The creative class thesis, however, has been widely critiqued by geographers for discursively and materially reproducing poverty and inequality. Peck (2005) has described the thesis as “work[ing] quietly with the grain of extant ‘neoliberal’ agendas” (p. 740) by valorizing meritocracy and flexibility for both the subjects and the cities of the creative class. In shoring up and reproducing neoliberal logics, geographers have also critiqued the thesis for eliding poverty and inequality in creative cities like Seattle and San Francisco (Peck, 2005; Wilson & Keil, 2008). For example, Florida (2002) theorizes class as an obsolete category of analysis and paints institutions that attempt to protect the working class, such as unions and the minimum wage, as archaic. In fact, Florida (2005) believes these institutions stifle creativity through regulatory burdens. Recently, Florida (2017b) praised efforts by the Fight for 15 to demand an increase in the minimum wage, but then cautions against raising it too high. Instead, he argues, cities need to use ‘evidence’ to raise their minimum wages “to locally appropriate levels” (ibid.). Florida and his creative class thesis, deploying conservative and neoliberal logics of individualism and small government, promote the active disinvestment in and privatization of public goods, such as public education (Peck, 2005; Zimmerman, 2008). The thesis also fails to engage with questions of social reproduction, and instead argues that socially reproductive public goods should be paid for by individuals (Peck, 2005; Parker, 2017). Aligning with neoliberal forms of governance, Florida's (2002) creative class thesis, and the closely-related New Urbanism, have always advocated for a form of local control that puts forth a matrix of privatization and the shadow state (e.g. the non-profit industrial complex and philanthropy) as solutions to poverty and inequality (Rodriguez, 2014).

Feminist urban geographers' critiques of the creative class thesis have been particularly important in understanding the thesis as an economic project that requires the construction of 'others' in order to succeed. The production of 'others' facilitates a bifurcated social formation split between deserving and undeserving under the guise of a seemingly identity-neutral desire for creativity. Feminist geographers have employed an intersectional analysis to highlight the interlocking nature of the raced, gendered, classed, and queered consequences of implementing the creative class thesis (Kern, 2013; Leslie & Catungal, 2012; McLean, 2014; Oswin, 2012; Parker, 2017). Parker (2017) specifically describes the subjectivities produced by Milwaukee's implementation of the thesis, specifically the race- and gender-blind creatives that in fact favor white males. She found that the City of Milwaukee, following the thesis, deployed creative class discourses by billing them 'natural' creators worthy of investment, while others were there to serve the class's needs (Parker, 2017).

However, critiques by geographers have yet to theorize the creative class thesis as an inherently racial project that uses race and racialization in uneven and contradictory ways. I build on Parker's (2017) analysis of Milwaukee by focusing specifically on how colourblind approaches to redevelopment underpin the deployment of the creative class thesis in Milwaukee to reproduce existing racial hierarchies. I propose neoliberal multiculturalism as a useful framework in understanding how the creative class thesis engages in "racial production" (Pulido, 2017, p. 527) through the simultaneous use of both colourblind and explicitly racialized language. Melamed (2011) theorizes neoliberal multiculturalism as a discourse of neoliberalism that at once proposes multiculturalism as a central tenet of neoliberalism, even as it obscures neoliberalism as a form of racial capitalism. Neoliberal multiculturalism facilitates the theorizing of contemporary articulations of race, building geographic scholarship that situates "race as

essential to organizing the economy” (Bonds, 2013b, p. 399) rather than solely a product or outcome of neoliberalism.

Neoliberal multiculturalism enriches geographic scholarship on race and economic development by problematizing the distinct racial categories that underlie many of these perspectives. In a post-Civil Rights context and with the neoliberal turn, Jodi Melamed (2011) theorizes neoliberal multiculturalism as “different treatment [of people of colour] according to their worth within neoliberal circuits of value” (p. 44). Discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism bring together neoliberal principles of individualism, competitiveness, productive value, austerity, and the rescaling of responsibility from institutions onto the individual. Geographers have specifically examined the downloading of responsibilities from national and state governments onto municipalities and their individual residents (Peck & Tickell, 2002). However, an analysis of neoliberal multiculturalism reveals how the neoliberal principle of identity blindness comes together in contradictory ways with existing racial hierarchies to “portray an ethic of multiculturalism to be the spirit of neoliberalism” (Melamed, 2011, p. 42). Distinct racial groups become blurred when race is no longer based solely on phenotype. Instead, neoliberal multicultural discourses produce new subjectivities of deserving and undeserving people of colour based on economic productivity. Such discourses promote ‘worthy’ and ‘deserving’ people of colour in language celebrating diversity and colourblindness, while explicitly racializing ‘poor’ and ‘undeserving’ people of colour as morally deficient, violent, backwards, and uncompetitive (Melamed, 2011). Proponents of colourblindness and diversity discourses can point to their so-called ‘diverse workforces’ as evidence of a successful economic development strategy.

As an “official antiracism” (Melamed, 2011; see also Goldberg, 2009) promoted through institutions like universities and the state, neoliberal multiculturalism obscures the mechanisms of white supremacy in a number of ways. First, neoliberal multicultural discourses atomize people of colour and sort them into deserving and undeserving people of colour based on individual achievements. In making distinct racial categories more flexible through the construction of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ categories, it dilutes definitions of and criteria to evaluate racial inequalities and white supremacy (Melamed, 2011). Moreover, it draws attention away from the role of whiteness and white supremacy in reproducing racialization. Questions of race become about the liberal principles of ‘race as culture’ and the model minority within a racial group (Melamed, 2006; 2011; Ranganathan, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This collapsing of race into other categories constitutes a political act (Bonds, 2013b). The culturally superior people of colour are the ones who achieve success under neoliberalism. Thus, ‘race as culture’ serves to depoliticize racial inequality and white supremacy by offloading responsibility for overcoming personal barriers to success from structures onto racialized bodies themselves. When considered alongside the racist and individualizing discourses of the ‘culture of poverty’ and the ‘welfare queen’, neoliberal multiculturalism is particularly effective in analyzing the production of anti-Blackness.

Furthermore, neoliberal multiculturalism redefines the criteria under which ‘racism’ can be made legible and ‘anti-racisms’ become appropriate (Melamed, 2011; Goldberg, 2009). By simultaneously creating new, less distinct racial formations and absorbing anti-racist language, neoliberal multiculturalism muddies what constitutes racial justice and the actions that can be taken to achieve so-called freedom (ibid.; Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Under this logic, white subjectivities are constructed as the most culturally superior. They are the standard in defining

appropriate ‘anti-racisms’ undergirded by liberal principles, such as peaceful protest, benevolence, freedom, equality, and fairness. They embrace diversity and colourblindness simultaneously. People of colour who have achieved nominal success under neoliberal multiculturalism are evidence of diversity, the ‘model minority’, and the truth of ‘race as culture’. ‘Unsuccessful’ people of colour, on the other hand, require the benevolence, paternalism, and discipline-through-reason of both of liberal whites and the diverse ‘others’. This reason takes shape under the guise of philanthropy, the non-profit industrial complex, and punitive government policies. In conjunction with cultural tropes like respectability politics<sup>57</sup>, such reason is designed to spur ‘undeserving’ people of color towards becoming ‘deserving’. Understanding ‘race as culture’ uncouples capitalism and white supremacy, again obscuring the mutually constitutive nature of capitalism and white supremacy, to instead see culture as the arbiter of deserving and undeserving subjectivities (Melamed, 2006). This form of racialization of people of colour along the lines of deserving and undeserving highlights the continued production of racial difference that allows us to see how “the human is universalized and freed by liberal forms, while the peoples who created the conditions of possibility for that freedom are assimilated or forgotten” (Lowe, 2015, p. 7).

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<sup>57</sup> Respectability politics is a term coined by historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1994) to describe individual and group changes to behavior and production of discourses that attempted to distance Black people from stereotypes and move them towards normative, acceptable, and seemingly white behaviors by believing in ‘personal responsibility’, ‘self-help’, and ‘racial uplift’ through, for example, dressing up, upholding gender norms, and emphasizing consumption (Kelley, 1997). Respectability politics is well documented in northern, industrial cities (see for example, Sugrue, 2008; Countryman, 2006).

## Deserving of development

The City of Milwaukee's (2014) current redevelopment strategy describes in detail the ideal resident and worker that will facilitate Milwaukee's redevelopment. Elements of the creative class thesis are apparent in recent City plans, which orient towards the recruitment and retention of the creative class because of "the return of activity, population, and the invigorating reinvestment that occurs as a result" (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 2). Moreover, concentrating redevelopment in the greater downtown is key to the creative class thesis because:

Quality of life matters in attracting and retaining skilled workers and employers, and making neighborhoods appealing and attractive. While most people relocate because of a job or the prospect of one, young professionals and millennials increasingly are prioritizing vibrant, dynamic and connected places when deciding where to live (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 67).

The introduction to the strategy (2014) highlighted that creatives "flock to cities like Boston, Seattle and Portland for their 'creative spark,' openness to new things, touted cultural amenities, shops and restaurants... quality public schools and vibrant neighborhoods" (p. 67), subscribing to the philosophy that, as Peck (2005) points out, "the creatives will only come if they get what they want" (p. 757). Inherent to the plans is the idea that these qualities will make Milwaukee competitive in the global economy. However, the City's strategy and business leader and non-profit professional interviewees spent much of their time constructing desirable residents through what and whom Milwaukee lacked, rather than explicitly stating what and whom it needed.

Throughout interviews, redevelopment plans, and public meetings, the term 'demographics', and the related 'human capital', was deployed as a code word for ideal residents



and workers. It was also a way to direct attention away from deeper social and economic factors that contribute to high rates of Black, and in particular male, joblessness. One pro-business leader who represents some of the service sector ignored these statistics to state, “Overall in Wisconsin, everybody is hurting for workers as our population of people who are seeking jobs decreases, as well as those who are seeking part-time jobs decreases... It’s because we’re having fewer babies on the whole or just our population is shrinking too, and more people are retiring” (personal communication). The term “demographics” served as a seemingly neutral and colourblind way that professionals like planners, economists, and non-profit workers could frame how race was discussed and justify racialized inequalities in the city and state. Pro-business interviewees believed that, “[Milwaukee] just doesn’t have the demographic characteristics that are generally what you would see in a fast growing city” (personal communication).

Moreover, according to business leaders, Milwaukee’s lack of demographics and reliance on manufacturing meant that it was slower to recover from the recession and broader deindustrialization. They specifically discussed the lack of migration into the state, a large baby boomer population retiring and leaving the workforce, and fewer young people to repopulate the workforce as economic issues the state faced. At the same time, the City’s redevelopment plans reframed the deficiencies with the potential of the creative class to revitalize the city, by claiming that Milwaukee was:

seeing considerable benefit from demographic shifts (young households, empty nesters, childless couples and single-member households) and their amenity preferences for a broad range of cultural and entertainment options... For the preferences of these groups, the suburbs fall short, with the notable exception of suburbs that are “embedded” in Milwaukee or nestled in the city’s borders (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 7).

The importance of demographics and the emphasis on colourblind language is underscored in the debate over whether Wisconsin had a workforce shortage or surplus<sup>58</sup>. Many pro-business elites, including interviewees, argued that Wisconsin has a workforce shortage and needed workers to move to Wisconsin. Those who worked with impoverished residents, including non-profit professionals and activists, however, described a workforce surplus, and therefore high unemployment. What this language obscures, however, is how these divisions were differentiated along the lines of perceived skill. City officials and business leaders described a workforce shortage for creative class-related, highly-skilled work while there was a workforce surplus for service-based, so-called ‘low-skill’ work. Moreover, these state-scale statistics belie the reality and specific geography that unemployment is high for working-age Black males in Milwaukee. A pro-business interviewee felt that “finding people for the jobs that we have right now and will have is our most significant problem. We have a workforce shortage in Wisconsin, and it’s only going to get worse” (personal communication).

Rather than job creation being a limitation to economic development as espoused by politicians, like Governor Scott Walker, they believed Wisconsin lacked the skilled workforce to fill available jobs because in part because of what they termed as an “enthusiasm gap” (personal communication). They described that workers, particularly young workers, did not want to take the available jobs because of a perception that manufacturing and trades were beneath them. To counteract these “demographic shortfalls”, they emphasized that “we’ve got to bring people in”

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<sup>58</sup> Amongst labour economists, workforce shortage or surplus are used to delineate the discrepancy between the number of workers and the jobs available. With a workforce shortage, there are too few workers for the number of jobs available and with workforce surplus, there are too many workers for the jobs available. See the debate between Noah Williams (Professor of Economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Marc Levine (Professor of History and Director of the Center for Economic Development at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) during May, 2015 published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. See also a televised debate between Kurt Bauer (CEO of Wisconsin Manufacturing and Commerce, Wisconsin’s state Chamber of Commerce) and Marc Levine on WISN 12, the Milwaukee affiliate of ABC, on so-called the skills gap in Wisconsin.

(personal communication) with the requisite skills. City redevelopment plans (2014) highlighted that unemployment rates in Milwaukee were high, hence a workforce surplus, but that employers in the city also reported having trouble finding workers to fill vacancies. A non-profit administrator agreed with this sentiment by pointing out that there was “no shortage of available jobs. It’s sometimes just finding the right people to fit positions” (personal communication).

By contrast, activists and other non-profit professionals did not perceive a workforce shortage or lack of ‘demographics’. To them, such terms did not hold true in their work and were ways to justify the recruitment of creative class workers from outside of the city and state. For instance, a non-profit policy advocate explained that the United States Department of Labour has designated Milwaukee County a “labour surplus area”<sup>59</sup>. In their work, they found that there were more people than jobs in all fields. Similarly, a state bureaucrat observed a contradiction between their own analysis and those put forward by institutions like the state and City, who claimed that Milwaukee lacked workers (or appropriately skilled workers). They found that the “workforce was plenty qualified for the jobs base” (personal communication). Instead, they saw these analyses as a ploy to make poverty and the lack of jobs “the working people’s fault” (ibid.). A neighbourhood activist challenged official discourses by specifically pointing out the racialized and socio-spatial discrepancy in the audience to which the City was trying to appeal: rather than working to help the poorest, racialized communities in Milwaukee, City officials and boosters focused on the creative class. When asked whether the City’s current economic development plans were moving the city in a positive direction, they replied: “I think we’re trying to attract white millennial professionals and we’re seeing that in where new housing is

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<sup>59</sup> This is a U.S. Department of Labour designation for cities where unemployment is 20% or more above the national average (U.S. Department of Labour, 2017). The interviewee in this case was describing Milwaukee as a labour surplus area and therefore received an exemption from workfare time limits.

going in. We're seeing that in the investment downtown... and all of these new developments are leaving out the North and South Sides, the communities that most need development..."

(personal communication).

Through terms like 'demographics', City plans and pro-business leaders emphasized repeatedly that downtown development and investment was the job creator in the city. I argued in Chapter 2 how the solutions proposed for workers outside of the creative class and downtown reproduced poverty and disinvestment for workers in surrounding neighbourhoods. As described later, City documents and officials justified these outcomes through racialized tropes of work. For these communities, the City proposed the age-old, but hollow, solutions of 'career readiness', 'transitional jobs', and 'workforce development' for the so-called "hard-to-employ", such as formerly incarcerated Black men (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 46). In a public forum at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee Alderman Ashanti Hamilton<sup>60</sup> supported the intentions of and had full faith in these programs to remedy the persistent problem of Black male joblessness in the city. As an example, he highlighted the City's employment requirements attached to City-funded construction projects that require 40% of workers to be from city neighbourhoods and the unemployed. Alderman Hamilton concluded the success of downtown redevelopment by stating that these workers were earning "wages they never thought they'd earn" and they were being "trained to produce family sustaining jobs". However, in order to sustain such success, the workers needed "to take advantage of opportunities [the City] creates" (fieldnotes).

To further justify the concentration of investment and development in downtown projects such as the Milwaukee Bucks arena, the Northwestern Mutual Towers, and the streetcar, the City

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<sup>60</sup> Alderman Hamilton represents the 1<sup>st</sup> Aldermanic district located on the North Side.

of Milwaukee attempted to produce a discourse of relationality between prospering and struggling neighbourhoods through describing ‘inclusivity’. Alderman Hamilton went on to exemplify Florida and the City’s overall philosophy of the creative class as ‘raising all boats’ through redevelopment. The City was engaging in its specific strategy because Milwaukee is an “independent, profitable city because of the amenities we have” but it still “[has] to make people want to live here” (fieldnotes). However, “downtown is everyone’s neighbourhood” with the “opportunity for everyone to live, eat, and play that is accessible and available to everyone” (fieldnotes). A creative class thesis-influenced downtown booster organization, on the other hand, “acknowledg[ed] that some of our residents do not feel connected to this growth or the downtown, fearing being left out or pushed out” (MKE United, n.d. b) and that therefore, the coalition needed to “[establish] a welcoming environment for all downtown neighbourhoods for Milwaukeeans and visitors” (MKE United, n.d. a) for everyone to prosper.

### **Undeserving of development: normative racialized discourses of work**

At the same time City officials, boosters, and other interviewees imagined the ideal demographics of Milwaukee, discussions of the city’s economic realities relied heavily upon normative, racialized, and to some extent gendered, discourses. In Chapter 3, I describe racist tropes of social reproduction and criminality. Here, I focus on racist or racialized discourses of work. They relied on tropes of poor, Black workers as uneducated, untrainable, unskilled, and otherwise lacking in training, work ethic, and soft skills. When neoliberal multiculturalism is theorized through the creative class thesis, City officials and planners bifurcate people of colour into those, who through their cultural superiority, have been able to achieve creativity, and those,

who through cultural deficiency, deserve the conditions of work and life that persist (Melamed, 2011). Oftentimes City leaders, business elites, and some non-profit professionals used colourblind, technocratic, but racially-coded language, and at other times explicitly discussed race in interviews to describe why poor, low-wage workers held Milwaukee back. This bifurcation of language was used to support the maintenance of the ‘tale of two cities’ discourse.

Feminists and critical poverty studies scholars have traced the historical production of these racialized and gendered discourses of work and poverty, including ‘welfare dependency’. Discourses of racialized poverty make policies like workfare and incorporation into capitalist social relations seem inevitable, justifiable, or unavoidable (Lawson et al., 2012). Even as policies like workfare continue to criminalize and punish the poor, they continue to be constructed as lacking competitiveness and flexibility to participate in the global economy. Moreover, they are blamed for the decline and decay of the city (Cope & Latcham, 2009; Wilson & Grammenos, 2005).

Normative and racialized discourses of work were particularly salient in discussions about deindustrialization and the expanding low-wage service sector. At the same time the City’s redevelopment strategy and boosters highlighted the merits of recruiting the creative class, the low-wage service sector was, like in many parts of the country, the fastest growing sector of the economy in the city (Levine, 2014). When asked about the discrepancy between the vision of a creative class and the reality of a service economy, City officials and pro-business leaders could not explain how or why it existed. Instead, they underscored that the service sector was a “stair step that’s necessary to advance, especially for populations that may not have the training or education, to moving up the ladder” (personal communication).

The City specifically pinpointed Milwaukee's diverse population as "essential to the city's prosperity. Connecting them to the labour force and economy through skills training, financial literacy, and opportunity for wealth formation will reduce inequality in our community" (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 18). While in this quote, the redevelopment plans locate prosperity in a 'diverse population', it was also up to individuals to gain the requisite skills to reduce inequality. Moreover, economic prosperity was the solution to Milwaukee's segregation, poverty, and inequality. But again, it was up to individual 'human capital' to make it happen:

Equal opportunity and economic growth are inseparable... cities with stronger economies had lower levels of income inequality, central city poverty, and racial segregation compared to cities with weaker economies... Strategies to maximize and leverage Milwaukee's human capital must not only serve employers' needs, but also provide pathways for individuals to compete effectively for job opportunities (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 40).

A colourblind strategy of redevelopment was constructed on the idea that anyone can be successful if they worked hard to become creatives. Normative, racialized discourses of work coalesced with the creative class thesis to result in what Lawson et al. (2012) have described as "adverse incorporation [within] specific sites of accumulation" (p. 5).

The discourses of 'skills gap' and 'soft skills' were of central importance in discussions about economic development in Milwaukee because they served as colourblind, but racially-coded, ways to describe racialized low-wage workers. They served as ways that elites could at once blame racialized low-wage workers for their poverty at the same time legitimate the expansion of the low-wage service sector. The City redevelopment plans and pro-business interviewees alike felt, however, that workers lacked technical skills, training, and education, but they also lamented workers' lack of 'soft skills'. Pro-business interviewees specifically blamed workers' lack of technical skills as one of the main reasons why manufacturing left and will not

return to Milwaukee. The City redevelopment strategy (2014) described the skills of an ideal worker thus: “The most competitive job applicants present a combination of basic knowledge, technical skills and experience appropriate to the demands of the position and ‘soft skills’ such as communication ability, a strong work ethic, initiative, interpersonal skills, and teamwork” (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 45). In describing the ideal worker and linking it to lack of education and high rates of employment, the City of Milwaukee points to an untapped resource in its economic development strategy: “employed residents are the single most important ingredient in the city’s economic health” (2014, p. 39).

The emphasis on ‘soft skills’ is particularly important in the expanding service industry, which relies heavily on the emotional labour of workers (McDowell, 2009). Moreover, because of the associations between emotional labour and women, service work is constructed as feminized, devalued, unskilled, and therefore poorly compensated. As sociologists have noted, the notion of ‘soft skills’, such as dotting behaviour, work ethic, self-confidence, and the ability to take constructive criticism, while taken for granted as colourblind and common-sense, are deeply informed by normative tropes of gender and race (see for example, Pager et al., 2009; Moss & Tilly, 1996). Milwaukee follows similar trends to other deindustrialized cities in the United States that rely on the expansion of low-wage service sector jobs, such as retail, food service, and tourism to replace lost jobs in manufacturing.

While employers desired ‘soft skills’, soft skills-intensive jobs in the service industry were not necessarily compensated to reflect such a valuable skill set. This seems ironic when service workers engage in the very work on which the City’s economic development strategy relied. A non-profit professional specifically described the racialized perceptions of “soft skills” and outright discrimination. They observed while working with white and Hispanic ‘clients’



whose time to employment was less than “clients who are of colour, African American clients, who might speak more white, if you will. I hear white employers sometimes call that an ‘issue of diction’” (personal communication). Thus, it was not just the ‘issue of diction’ that Black workers faced, but outright racism in the hiring process. The City redevelopment plans recognized the racialized nature of ‘soft skills’ that contributed to ‘unintentional’ discrimination in hiring practices, and thus “employers must ensure that their hiring and promotion practices provide an equal playing field for all applicants” (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 39). The City’s position seemed to be based on liberal notions of racism where employers need to work towards colourblindness in hiring and eliminating individual unconscious bias rather than eradicating institutional racism and discrimination.

Tropes about education and training in the name of closing the ‘skills gap’ and enhancing ‘soft skills’ were coded and colourblind ways of talking about race without naming it. The liberal notion of education as the gateway to prosperity was about disciplining rather than working towards the liberal ideals of prosperity and freedom from poverty. Racialized low-wage workers were cast as uneducated, untrainable, unskilled, and in need of discipline in order to become skilled, creative workers who produce value. Education, training, and skills were colourblind and anyone could acquire them if they worked hard enough or if they deserved them. A non-profit professional took a benevolent view by recognizing the structural constraints of their ‘clients’, and yet relied on individualistic tropes of ‘work ethic’. This became most apparent when they described which welfare recipients succeed by achieving gainful employment and stay employed, and which fail by remaining chronically unemployed. When discussing whether they saw their implementation of workfare as a stepping stone to independence for ‘clients’ or whether they saw ‘clients’ cycling back through, they observed,

as far as really pulling that family out of poverty, that takes that individual really deciding... I'm going to pull these different resources together. That takes a lot of personal motivation and coordination... It's just, you know [pause] they made some different choices [speeds up] but also have different individual capacity, and also had some different opportunities... that aligned with timing for them (personal communication).

The difference in 'clients' who succeeded and failed came down to whether individuals had the wherewithal, work ethic, and luck. They did not connect individual factors with structural constraints on their 'clients's' lives, such as organized abandonment as outlined in Chapter 2.

Despite recognizing the loss of family-supporting manufacturing jobs and the rise of a poorly paid service sector, under the banner of 'soft skills', many interviewees and the City redevelopment plans alike emphasized the need for increased 'work ethic', in particular amongst young people, if they are going to be competitive and well-paying jobs were going to 'return' to Milwaukee. A business leader described how 'work ethic' was central to their analysis of why businesses have not returned to the state:

Today, a lot of young people aren't exposed to work until much later in life and as a result they don't have the work ethic that they probably should... we've got to reinstate the work ethic that frankly they would call the Midwestern work ethic. You know, Norwegian, Germanic, I mean there was work ethic here that [Wisconsin was] known for that actually made us very attractive. And one of the reasons why businesses would locate in Wisconsin is because the workforce was so dedicated and very skilled. We'll get it back to that (personal communication).

In addition to being a disciplining mechanism, education and training reinforced individualistic tropes of self-improvement. This emphasis as the cure-all solution to racialized poverty and unemployment in Milwaukee seemed to span the political spectrum. For example, the City plans specifically pointed to "residents [needing] to accept responsibility for taking

advantage of educational and training opportunities at all levels, from pre-school through college” (City of Milwaukee, 2014, p. 39). When a non-profit professional and I discussed why they thought Black Milwaukeeans were faring so poorly, they blamed individuals similarly: “I mean I, I – [long pause] I would say it could be due to just lack of education, lack of awareness, unfortunately. [pause] I’d say that would... that would be the... I mean sounds harsh, but I think that’s the... that’s the truth” (personal communication). Another non-profit professional acknowledged that “[racism] plays into the skills gap a lot” but also articulated a commonly held sentiment that “if they haven’t had as good an education, it then becomes difficult to appear [pause] trainable” (personal communication).

On the other hand, other interviewees described how education and training was, in fact, not a panacea for racialized poverty in the city. A state bureaucrat noted that, per their analysis, all of the job openings in Milwaukee, in terms of growth and replacement of workers, were in low-wage industries like service (personal communication). Moreover, contrary to Governor Walker and his pro-business rhetoric, “the data points to [70% of jobs] requiring less than a high school education... so our workforce is plenty qualified for the job base” (personal communication). A neighbourhood activist deepened the analysis by highlighting a contradiction in “a system that props up transitional jobs that don’t lead to a pathway of employment” (personal communication). While elites view training and education as a path out of poverty, the activist observed that, “...the political response has been folks aren’t ready to work, so we’re going to do transitional jobs, but I can tell you folks go from transitional job to transitional job at low-wage rates, at training rates, that never translate to permanent jobs...” (personal communication).

Underlying many of the interviews and economic development plans was the reliance on the myth of meritocracy and the ability of all people to be successful if they were to just apply themselves. In line with the creative class thesis, with the correct combination of technical training, skills, and hard work, all people, regardless of race, class, and gender, ought to be successful. Those who end up poor, on welfare, or even end up incarcerated, fail to apply themselves and are not deserving of development. Some interviewees seemed sympathetic to Milwaukee's structural reality recognized structural barriers to education, training, and gainful employment. Nonetheless, they contradicted their analyses by weaving in individualistic tropes of work, such as meritocracy and 'work ethic'. When asked why they thought unemployment was such a prominent issue in Milwaukee, a City official connected the dots between a variety of issues affecting the unemployed: "well if you don't have education, you don't have a training and you have a record, or you have no transportation... and you haven't received any kind of mentorship or guidance, that all plays a role" (personal communication). However, when asked a follow-up question about why employers were not hiring Milwaukee residents, they replied employer decisions were down to merit: "I think it comes down to qualifications... If you have person A with a college degree, and person B who might have changed his life around but has a record, who do you pick?... I think an employer is going to take the safest route" (personal communication).

## **Conclusion**

Whether the City of Milwaukee's current redevelopment strategy is on track for success remains to be seen and depends on whom you ask. City planners and pro-business groups

continue to highlight the successes of their strategy through continued construction and other development, the renewed vitality of the downtown, and national attention on Milwaukee's revitalization. Elected City officials, activists, and non-profit professionals continue to grapple with how to reduce racial inequality, unemployment, and poverty. Nonetheless, the current creative class thesis-infused redevelopment strategies have largely ignored the historical production of the contemporary landscape post-white flight and deindustrialization and the instrumental role that race plays in structuring and mediating redevelopment even as they nominally mention race.

Some of the shortcomings of a creative class thesis-infused strategy come through in Richard Florida's (2017a) recently published *mea culpa* for the creative class thesis. Florida (2017a) introduces his central contradiction, the "New Urban Crisis", as the simultaneous revitalization of cities at the same time that inequality and housing crisis came to the fore in cities. He argues that the failure of the creative class thesis lies in the omission of whom he calls the "service class", and that redevelopment should be "about *inclusion* being a part of prosperity" (emphasis in original; Wainwright, 2017). In emphasizing the "service class", he continues to emphasize the importance of 'class' over an analysis that understands class, race, and capitalism as mutually constitutive. In a chapter on the rise of inequality in cities, Florida (2017a) begins with a vignette on the murder of Freddie Gray<sup>61</sup>, but skirts any discussion of how race underpins processes of gentrification and policing of urban space apart from mentioning that Gray is Black. Florida's (ibid.) analysis continues to reflect the City of Milwaukee's approach to analyzing racial inequality. Neoliberal multiculturalism contributes an analysis of the very contradiction highlighted by Florida's (ibid.) deployment of Gray's death. Specifically, it reveals

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<sup>61</sup> Freddie Grey was a 25-year-old Black man who was arrested by the Baltimore Police Department on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2015, and who subsequently died from injuries sustained during transportation.

the way in which he can highlight Gray's race and Baltimore's racial inequality but avoid a structural analysis of the conditions that resulted in his death.

An analysis of the City of Milwaukee's redevelopment strategy illuminates the centrality of race in a strategy that only nominally recognizes race and celebrates diversity. Moreover, neoliberal multiculturalism brings into focus contemporary articulations of racial capitalism through centering an analysis of race in the creative class thesis. By dissecting how city elites construct and deploys race through the creative class thesis, it is possible to see a reliance on normative, racialized discourses of work, even as it claims to celebrate racial diversity. I argue that such a strategy have reproduced the very historical socio-spatial patterns of segregation it seeks to undo even while attempting to produce a new class of simultaneously diverse and colourblind creative workers. The 'tale of two cities' discourse continues to persist and recirculate, discursively separating out two distinct cities. People of colour are only seen to be valuable to the economic future of the city when they can be incorporated into capitalist relations, such as creative workers and service workers employed to serve the creative class.

Moreover, the City of Milwaukee and its boosters show no signs of abandoning their implementation of the creative class thesis and its attendant approach to race. The *New York Times* recently published an article about the completion of the Northwestern Mutual high rise in downtown Milwaukee along Lake Michigan (Schneider, 2017). The City of Milwaukee's commissioner of the Department of City Development uses the boom in construction downtown as a way to address income and other inequalities in the city through employing 'hard to employ' city residents. The main benefit of construction seems to be financiers of the project, Northwestern Mutual, and the creative class workers and professionals who work there, and not the temporary construction workers. Thus ultimately, an analysis of creative class-infused City

redevelopment plans and practices reveals the ways in which City of Milwaukee officials, pro-business boosters, and non-profit professionals' liberal and colourblind approaches to redevelopment, in fact, reproduce the very historical socio-spatial patterns of segregation and racial inequalities they seek to undo.

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## CHAPTER 5

### *Conclusion*

The front page of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* on Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2018, proclaimed that the “‘Evicted<sup>62</sup>’ author says crisis remains” (Causey, 2018). Once again, Milwaukee’s crises made the front page of the paper, and once again, the mayor of the City of Milwaukee, Tom Barrett, proposed forums to pinpoint solutions. In response to the book *Evicted*, Mayor Barrett announced a \$10,000 grant to convene “stakeholders” working on issues of eviction to illuminate potential solutions (ibid.).

As I highlight in Chapter 2, the funding for and implementation of solutions like holding forums always fail to address segregation, racialized poverty, and decades of organized abandonment in Milwaukee. In informal conversations, I heard repeatedly that Black, poor, and North Side residents were tired of talking. They wanted change now (fieldnotes). If the title of the series in which the *Evicted* article appears—“50-year ache: How far has Milwaukee come since the 1967 civil rights marches?”—is anything to go by, not much has changed. And yet, as a city, we continue to discuss and hold community forums even as those living crises everyday tell us repeatedly what they need to thrive.

In my dissertation, I have highlighted how urban economic redevelopment and mobilizations for social justice operate in a colourblind racial capitalist context. Even as many in the city continue to be shocked by the stories in *Evicted*, as evidenced by its popularity in the county library system and book clubs<sup>63</sup>, many of the same residents continue to support creative

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<sup>62</sup> The author of *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city* (2016) is Professor of Sociology Matthew Desmond of Princeton University. To attend his visit to Milwaukee coming up in May 2018, attendees must pay \$125 for a ticket.

<sup>63</sup> I tried to borrow any copy from the entire Milwaukee County Library system a few months after the book was published, and there was a waiting list of 20-50 people system-wide per copy. In visiting the local book store on the predominantly white East Side, the shelves for local book clubs for a while were filled with copies of *Evicted*.

class-based redevelopment as a positive influence on the city. Since the book's publication, I have overheard numerous white liberal<sup>64</sup> residents of Shorewood and Whitefish Bay<sup>65</sup> talk about how they can't believe the realities of poverty and eviction happening just across the Milwaukee River, and yet they never mention who lives across the River and why. In the next moment, the conversations turned to how excited they were at all of the redevelopment downtown, the next new brewery to open, and the prospect of the new Bucks arena opening in the fall of 2018. This dissertation contributes to understanding how these seemingly disparate conversations similar to the 'tale of two cities' are produced and maintained through socio-spatial patterns of segregation, discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism, and the elision of histories of segregation and racialized poverty in Milwaukee.

Moreover, my work further develops critical and feminist geographers' critiques of the creative class thesis as relying on social difference and neoliberal logics of austerity, urban restructuring, and individualism. I specifically contribute an analysis of how City elites and the creative class thesis (and New Urbanism) shape and deploy race and colourblindness to legitimate particular strategies of economic redevelopment that reproduce historical socio-spatial patterns of segregation and poverty. In bringing together racial capitalism scholarship with geographic critiques of the creative class, I show how the burden and costs of racial capitalist crises are taken on by Black bodies, families, and communities who have already experienced decades of organized abandonment. I then build on Black geographies and feminist scholarship

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<sup>64</sup> Some of these residents are friends who identify strongly with being liberals.

<sup>65</sup> These are contiguous villages within Milwaukee County. Shorewood is located directly north of the City of Milwaukee's East Side and Whitefish Bay is directly north of Shorewood. They are perceived in the region as being bastions of white liberals who are against racism but who are quite content living in their pristine neighbourhoods. In my time in Milwaukee, I have lived in Shorewood and Whitefish Bay.

on social reproduction to shed light on how colourblind racial formations and local racial politics can contour mobilizations to counter such forms of redevelopment.

In Chapter 2, I engage with Gilmore's (2008) theory of organized abandonment to highlight how solutions proposed to the problems of segregation and racialized poverty do not actually address or redress them. Through the examples of advanced manufacturing, infrastructure projects, construction downtown, and "shipping" low-wage workers outside of the city, I show that none of these solutions meet the demands of North Side residents or tackle segregation. Moreover, City officials and boosters are able to continue proposing inadequate solutions through elision of the specific historical and socio-spatial production of segregation and racialized poverty.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the Fight for 15 as a mobilization that organized fast food workers to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and the right to unionize without reprisal. Through an analysis of McKittrick's (2011) Black sense of place, I argue that ultimately they failed to sustain themselves in Milwaukee because they were unable to embed the everyday, socially reproductive lives of fast food workers within broader conditions of organized abandonment described in Chapter 2. Moreover, their top-down organizing structure and strategy that focused on generic discourses of wages and poverty impeded their ability to gain traction in Milwaukee. The Fight for 15 was, thus, unable to articulate local concerns at a national scale.

In Chapter 4, I show how narratives woven in spaces like the book *Evicted* and the responses to it can co-exist alongside narratives of "In the heart of Milwaukee, a gleaming tower leads to an urban renewal" (Schneider, 2017). How can the City of Milwaukee propose a creative class-based redevelopment strategy to solve the city's problems? I argue that these co-existing narratives are made possible through discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed, 2011)

like the ‘tale of two cities’. Discourses of neoliberal multiculturalism shed light on the production of deserving and undeserving people of colour. The creative class, as culturally superior and deserving people of colour, are worthy of discourses of colourblindness and diversity. Undeserving workers of colour, however, are relegated to normative, racialized discourses of work.

My dissertation brings together urban political economy with scholarship on racial capitalism and social reproduction to demonstrate how urban economic restructuring both shapes and is shaped by local racial politics and mobilizations for social justice. Moreover, local economic redevelopment strategies and racial politics are contested terrain where mobilizations clash with global processes of economic restructuring. With the presidential election in 2016, and the ushering in of a different racial context—one where white supremacist public rallies exist alongside Childish Gambino’s *This is America* and Janelle Monáe’s *Django Jane*—my dissertation also underscores the contemporary failures of colourblindness and racial liberalism (in the case of my dissertation, neoliberal multiculturalism) to combat the resurgence of white supremacists; this is precisely because they are all racialized discourses and practices, and as I describe below, underpinned by white supremacy. As historians such as Countryman (2006) have highlighted, Northern U.S. cities like Philadelphia have already deployed racial liberalism to disastrous effect. Racial liberalism accelerated white flight, segregation, and organized abandonment of Northern cities, and I illustrate through the case of Milwaukee, the same is slated to repeat itself under neoliberal terms.

In writing my dissertation, I have come to a number of realizations about the research yet to be done in Milwaukee. The first is my project’s intense focus on the interface of Black-white dichotomies and dynamics. While many popular discourses in the city are framed, albeit



problematically, around Black-white dichotomies, the city shapes and is shaped by numerous racial and ethnic dynamics. From Muslim geographies (e.g. McGinty, Sziarto, & Seymour-Jorn, 2013) to Latinx geographies on the South Side, there are complex racial and ethnic dynamics at play that interact in different ways. As the work of scholars such as Bonds (2013), Lai (2012), and Pulido (2006) illuminate, the reproduction of racial geographies and hierarchies operates through multiple racial groups at once. Moreover, local racial politics is contoured by dynamics between non-white racial groups, as well as each group's relation to whiteness.

My fieldwork raised the question of examining white supremacy, or the “presumed superiority of white racial identities, however problematically defined, in support of cultural, political, and economic domination of non-white groups” (Bonds & Inwood, 2016, p. 719-720). Specifically, I became interested in how racial and ethnic hierarchies relate to whiteness in local racial politics. Moreover, how do non-white racial and ethnic groups relate to each other (e.g. Cheng, 2013; Bonds, 2013; Lai, 2012) and how do such dynamics shape the building of multi-racial solidarities (e.g. Pulido, 2006; Gilmore, 2008; Loyd, 2014). White supremacy would also serve as a useful lens through which to examine how different mobilizations for racial justice operated in Milwaukee's specific racial geographies. For example, in my fieldwork, I often wondered about different scalar and racial politics shaped organizing of Black North Siders, for example through Wisconsin Jobs Now, and Latinx South Siders, for example through Voces de la Frontera. They mobilized together in certain instances, such as presidential debates, but how did their work for racial and economic justice converge and diverge?

With these lessons and questions in mind, in future research, I will be examining multi-racial solidarities under contemporary neoliberalism. In thinking about my own role in research, I am interested in how Asian American communities organize in solidarity with related

movements for racial and economic justice particularly around anti-Blackness. As the both model minority and perpetual foreigner, Asian Americans occupy a contradictory role in the racial geographies of the U.S. Asian Americans, as the model minority, are often the beneficiaries of neoliberal multiculturalism. In the contemporary moment, they are at a critical point to grapple with these constructions, as seen through the Supreme Court case brought forward by Asian American students at Harvard University regarding affirmative action, ongoing debates about undocumented immigration, and the murder of Akai Gurley by New York Police Department officer Peter Liang in 2014. These issues have deeply divided Asian Americans, and have brought to the fore important questions about the specific ways they are racialized today, and how these processes of racialization inform movement building. Specifically, I have become interested in the question of how Asian Americans agitate against anti-Blackness in their own communities. This question grapples with white supremacy by understanding how it shapes solidarities and antagonisms amongst non-white racialized groups and racial hierarchies in relation to whiteness.

## Chapter 5 References

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**Appendix A**  
**Sample interview questions for City officials and boosters**

1. Tell me a little bit about your work and the work of your organization.
  - a. Who do you work with?
  - b. What sorts of projects have you been working on recently?
  
2. From your perspective, what is the state of the economy in Wisconsin and Milwaukee?
  - a. What is the role of the service industry, specifically food service, in the state and city economies?
  
3. What does your research/the work of your organization tell you about wages and the workforce, particularly in Milwaukee?
  - a. What are some of the highlights/successes of economic development in the state and Milwaukee?
  - b. What are some of the challenges?
  
4. What do you think of movements like the Fight for 15 and MKE Co. raising their minimum wage to \$15?
  - a. In your opinion, what do you think will result if the minimum wage were raised? How would it impact the industries you represent?
  - b. How would you respond to groups that oppose your position?
  
5. How do you think the economy of the Milwaukee and the state can be improved?
  - a. What would make for a successful economy in the state?

**Appendix B**  
**Sample interview questions for fast food workers**

1. Where do you work?
2. Why do you fight for 15?
3. What do you think the media, politicians, etc. get wrong about your life?
4. What do you think are the most important aspects of your life to highlight for politicians, people who aren't fast food workers, and maybe even folks who are against unions and a living wage?

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview schedule**

Interview 1, Wisconsin state representative, 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2016  
Interview 2, Milwaukee community organizer, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2016  
Interview 3, Milwaukee community organizer, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2016  
Interview 4, Wisconsin state senator, 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2016  
Interview 5, Milwaukee community organizer, 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2016  
Interview 6, Analyst, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2016  
Interview 7, Economist, chamber of commerce, 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2016  
Interview 8, Policy advocate, Milwaukee-based non-profit, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2016  
Interview 9, Non-profit professional, Milwaukee chapter of national non-profit, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov, 2016  
Interview 10, City official, City of Milwaukee, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2016  
Interview 11, Non-profit professional, Milwaukee chapter of national non-profit, 4<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2016  
Interview 12, Pro-business professional, state level organization, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2016  
Interview 13, Pro-business professional, chamber of commerce, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2016  
Interview 14, Milwaukee community organizer, 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2016  
Interview 15, Milwaukee community organizer, 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2016

Fast food worker 1, 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2017  
Fast food worker 2, 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2017  
Fast food worker 2, interview #2, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2017

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Curriculum Vitae  
Department of Geography  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

**EDUCATION**

- Ph.D. Geography**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee 2018  
Graduate Certificate in Women's and Gender Studies  
Dissertation: "The Tale of Two Cities: A Feminist Critique of Economic Development and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Milwaukee"  
Committee: Drs. Anne Bonds (advisor), Anna Mansson McGinty, Kristin Sziarto, Jenna Loyd, Ryan Holifield
- M.A. Geography**, McMaster University 2012  
Thesis: "Understanding food security for single mothers in neighbourhoods characterized as low socio-economic status"  
Advisor: Dr. Alison Williams
- B.A. Geography**, Macalester College 2009  
Minors in Biology, Anthropology, and Community & Global Health

**SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS**

**Refereed Journal Articles**

2017. **Hashimoto, Y., & Henry, C.** Unionizing for the necessity of social reproduction. In "Beyond Binaries and Boundaries in social reproduction" forum. *Environment & Planning D*.

**Book reviews**

2014. **Hashimoto, Y., & Bonds, A.** Review of Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets, by Rachel Slocum & Arun Saldanha. *Antipode*.

**Other publications**

2016. **Hashimoto, Y., Ramírez, M.M., Valencia, Y., & Wideman, T.** "The Relational Poverty Network at Urban Color-lines: Thinking through inequality, democracy, and a politics of hope". Blog post. <http://depts.washington.edu/relpov/the-rpn-at-urban-color-lines-thinking-through-inequality-democracy-and-a-politics-of-hope/>



## HONOURS

### Scholarships, Fellowships, & Awards

- 2018. R1 Distinguished Dissertation Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (\$17,500, declined)
- 2017. Graduate Student Excellence Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (\$1,500)
- 2017. Mary Jo Read Scholarship in Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (\$1,000)
- 2017. Distinguished Dissertation Fellowship (alternate), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (\$17,500)
- 2016. Economic Geography Specialty Group Graduate Research Award, American Association of Geographers (\$750)
- 2015. Evelyn L. Pruitt Fellowship for Dissertation Research, Society of Woman Geographers (\$6,072)
- 2013. Distinguished Graduate Student Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (\$16,000)
- 2013-16. Mary Jo Read Fellowship in Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (\$7,500)
- 2012. Mary Jo Read Fellowship for Incoming Graduate Students, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (\$5,000)
- 2010-12. McMaster University Graduate Student Scholarship (\$33,236)
- 2008. Ruth & Vernon Taylor Public Health Fellowship, Macalester College (\$2,500)

## PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTES

- 2017. 6<sup>th</sup> Institute for the Geographies of Justice, Antipode Foundation (declined for personal reasons)
- 2016. 8<sup>th</sup> Summer Institute in Economic Geography, University of Kentucky
- 2016. Urban Color-lines mini-conference, Institute on Inequality & Democracy, UCLA Luskin School of Public Policy
- 2015. Race.Space.Violence: Challenging Scholarly Praxis Workshop, UC Berkeley
- 2013. 24<sup>th</sup> International Political Economy and Ecology Summer School, York University

## CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

### Events organized

- 2017. With Caroline Keegan. "Racial economies and the everyday practice of low-wage worker movements I & II". Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 9<sup>th</sup> April. Boston, MA.

- 2016. With Caitlin Henry. "PQN - Organizing for Life's Work: The Present & Future of Social Reproduction I & II". Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 29<sup>th</sup> March. San Francisco, CA.
- 2016. With Max Andrucki & William McKeithen. "PQN – Social reproduction: Precarious? Queer? Natural?" Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 30<sup>th</sup> March. San Francisco, CA.
- 2016. With Max Andrucki, Caitlin Henry, Juliane Collard, Paul Jackson, Sarah Stinard-Kiel. Social Reproduction: Precarious? Natural? Queer? Mini-conference. Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> March, 2016. San Francisco, CA.
- 2015. With Martina Angela Caretta & Johanna Carolina Jokinen. "Geography & Post-graduate studies in the neoliberal university I & II." International Geographical Union Gender Commission conference: Gendered Rights to the City, 20<sup>th</sup> April. Milwaukee, WI.

### **Selection of papers presented**

- 2018. "Everything but development: Unpacking organized abandonment in Milwaukee." Paper session: "Racial finance capital 1: Financing the neoliberal city." Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 10<sup>th</sup> April. New Orleans, LA.
- 2017. "'Vibrant and cheap': Discourses of economic development, poverty, and low-wage work in Milwaukee." Paper session: "Racial economies and the everyday practice of low-wage worker movements I." Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 9<sup>th</sup> April. Boston, MA.
- 2016. "Countering 'urbicide': Social reproduction and the 'fight for 15' in Milwaukee." Paper session: "PQN - Organizing for Life's Work: The Present & Future of Social Reproduction I." Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 29<sup>th</sup> March. San Francisco, CA.
- 2015. "Fast food workers & discourses of low-wage work and poverty in Milwaukee." Paper session: "Gendering work: Feminist approaches to labour and the economy." Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 23<sup>rd</sup> April. Chicago, IL.
- 2015. "The gendered and racialized implications of austerity on Geography, graduate education, and the Wisconsin Idea." Paper session: "Geography & Post-graduate studies in the neoliberal university I." International Geographical Union Gender Commission AAG Pre-conference: Gendered Rights to the City, 20<sup>th</sup> April. Milwaukee, WI.
- 2014. "Poverty wages and the 'fight for 15': Reimagining fast food through feminist economic geography." Paper session: "Policy & policymaking: Reforming poverty?" Relational Poverty Network Annual Meeting, 10<sup>th</sup> October. Seattle, WA.
- 2014. "Social reproduction and precarious labour: Reorienting fast food in geography." Paper session: "Gendered livelihoods and social struggles." Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, 11<sup>th</sup> April. Tampa, FL.

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

### **Lecturer/Instructor of Record**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

2016. The Geography of Race in the United States, Geography 114  
2015. Nations & Nationalities, Geography 309

### **Lead Teaching Assistant**

2017. The Geography of Race in the United States, Geography 114  
2015-16. Perspectives on Geography, Geography 600  
2012-14. The Geography of Race in the United States, Geography 114

## **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

- 2014-15. Research Assistant, "Transforming Justice: Workshops for Liberation," Drs. Anne Bonds, Jenna Loyd, Lorraine Halinka Malcoe, & Robert Smith, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Studies Transdisciplinary Challenge  
2013. Research Assistant, "Enduring Incarceration," Dr. Anne Bonds, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

## **OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

2017. Project Assistant, Undergraduate Committee, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Advising undergraduate Geography majors and minors through specialized tracks and required coursework
  - Recordkeeping for majors, minors, and undergraduate program
  - Assisting in developing a new human geography track
2017. Project Assistant, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
2015-16. Project Assistant, Lectures Committee, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
2013. Project Assistant, Public Relations Committee, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

## **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

### **Leadership**

- 2017-20. Member (nominated), Committee on the Status of Women in Geography, American Association of Geographers

- 2015-17. Graduate student member (elected), Geographic Perspectives on Women (GPOW) specialty group, American Association of Geographers
- 2013-14. Graduate student representative (elected), Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee