Manufacturing decline: Ideas, conservative propaganda, and urban policy framing.

Jason Hackworth
Department of Geography and Planning
University of Toronto
Toronto, ON, Canada, M5S3G3
jason.hackworth@utoronto.ca

Manufacturing decline

"Detroit is a model of tax-and-spend liberalism", writes Cato ideologue Michael Tanner (2013), "…the city's own choices, not free markets and limited government, are really responsible for Detroit's failure". This facile diagnosis is common from conservative think tanks, Detroit is the frequent object lesson of this sermon because of its high visibility. That this vision emerges from such institutions is not terribly surprising. But the fact that it so closely aligns with actualized policy in Detroit, and much of the Rust Belt is much more so. Every major city in the region is headed by a relatively left-leaning Democrat, not a Cato ideologue. What accounts for the alignment between this idea and actualized policy in the region, given presence of elected officials who are likely hostile to it? This essay considers this question.

It is important to briefly review the broader question at stake: how and why does *any* idea get converted into actualized urban policy? Political scientists and sociologists have wrestled with this question for generations (D. Stone, 1989; Campbell, 2002; Béland, 2005; Block and Sommers, 2014; Weaver, 2015). One particularly compelling paradigm involves the intersection of ideas and institutions (Blyth, 2002). In a historical study of the rise and fall of Keynesianism in the United States and Sweden, Blyth (2002) argues that the essential two elements for broad paradigmatic change are crisis and the presence of an alternative ideational framework. For one policy paradigm to dissolve there must be a crisis that challenges its veracity. For laissez-faire economics that crisis was the Great Depression of the 1930s; for Keynesianism it was the stagflation of the 1970s. Both events caused the prevailing paradigm to lose credibility as the policy tools that flowed from the logic no longer seemed capable of mitigating the problem. In addition to external crisis, Blyth (2002) points to the importance of idea-makers. In both the United States and Sweden, these figures consisted of relatively heretical economists in the 1930s

(and the 1970s) who challenged the status quo by providing an alternative. At the national level, this paradigm is very apt and has been echoed by others (e.g. Klein, 2007). But adapting the paradigm to the relationship between ideas and policy to the aforementioned *local* question seems on the surface, invalidating. Detroit is, by almost everyone's definition in crisis, and there is sufficient organization—via left-wing think-tanks, sympathetic scholars, and the Democratic Party—to offer a counter narrative. Yet these conditions are *insufficient* for a set of policies built around such a narrative to emerge. The actualized policy universe in such places is much closer to the conservative conception of decline. Emphasis is on austerity, penality, and concessions to investors.

I would like to suggest a more subtle and supportive application of this paradigm, namely that "crisis" is not fixed or commonly experienced. The rhetorical construction of crisis (or resolution of crisis) does not have to be universally accepted for it to gain policy traction. The conservative conception of decline in Detroit is generally rejected by the residents and political figures of that city (and others like it). But the institutional geography of policy-making at the local level makes this irrelevant. Most of the important policies designed to mitigate decline in places like Detroit, Cleveland, and Buffalo, are set by state legislatures who are often hostile to their interests, and conversely very receptive to facile diagnoses of "the problem" that emerges from conservative think tanks. Moreover, the rhetorical strategies used by Right and "Left" are very different. The conservative conception of decline is uncompromising, rigid, and focused on vilifying a broad undifferentiated Left as the problem. The alternative is open to compromise, consumed with "balance", and does not frame the conservative institutions as a problem. Thus even when social problems are actually left to local authorities to solve, the policy frame consists of a Right side that is uncompromising and geared toward delegitimizing the Left side. The Left

side by contrast, is immanently open to compromise and balance. Within this frame, actualized policy details more often get pulled rightward than leftward. This essay is about how the narrative of one city, Detroit, is used to reinforce the values of austerity, penality, and market fundamentalism despite the presence of both an alternative conception of crisis.

The manufactured decline of Detroit

Serious, visible decline is evident across the American Rust Belt, but no city embodies it more or has drawn as much attention from both the public and conservative think-tank ideologues as Detroit. Despite being the 18th largest city in the U.S., only five cities are discussed more in the popular press, and seven in academic sources (Table 1). Within the world of conservative think tanks it is similarly over-represented as a subject of inquiry (Table 2). While the issues facing Detroit are not unique, its visibility is. The conservative narrative of the city pins much of its failure on "liberal social policy". The narrative is simple and relies on rhetorics that have long been associated with conservative and reactionary thought (Hirschman, 1991; Hackworth, 2016d). The narrative consists primarily of three elements. First, Detroit's leaders were profligate and bankrupted the city with poor "liberal" decisions. Second, the city became too dependent on large institutions—large firms, unions, and government in particular—and as a consequence, lost its entrepreneurial edge. And third, the concentration of Black municipal empowerment alienated White people who then moved to the suburbs.

The putative crisis of profligacy is the most common theme in this narrative. To the manufacturers of decline, the recent bankruptcy and fiscal crisis are less a consequence than a cause of Detroit's problems (Tanner, 2013). The message and style of this argument is tied to the classic argument made by Charles Tiebout (1956) 60 years ago. Residents will migrate from places with high taxes and bad services, to places with low taxes and great services. This will, in

4

Table 1: Ranking of the 18 largest American cities on population, and prevalence in academic and popular articles (Sources: US Census; Scopus Academic Article Search; Proquest Media Search).

City	2010 Population[1]	Population Rank	Scholarly Citations[2]	Scholarly Rank	Popular Media References[3]	Popular Media Rank
New York City[4]	8,175,133	1	3,474	2	1,726,907	1
Los Angeles	3,792,621	2	2,455	3	765,543	3
Chicago	2,695,598	3	4,578	1	1,039,537	2
Houston	2,100,263	4	449	9	237,773	6
Philadelphia	1,526,006	5	1,086	5	194,354	8
Phoenix	1,445,632	6	527	6	153,105	11
San Antonio	1,327,407	7	199	11	218,175	7
San Diego	1,307,402	8	523	7	178,902	9
Dallas	1,197,816	9	264	10	176,800	10
San Jose	945,942	10	144	15	63,839	14
Jacksonville	821,784	11	47	18	67,723	13
Indianapolis	820,445	12	159	13	88,043	12
San Francisco	805,235	13	1,442	4	320,241	4
Austin	790,390	14	195	12	51,923	15
Columbus	787,033	15	145	14	50,326	16
Fort Worth	741,206	16	76	17	20,106	17
Charlotte	731,424	17	105	16	10,229	18
Detroit	**713,777**	**18**	**516**	**8**	**254,192**	**5**

Notes:

[1] Population figures and rank were derived from the US Census: http://www.census.gov/popest/data/cities/totals/2012/index.html

[2] Scopus Academic Article Search was used here. Citations were limited to English-language, social-science and humanities, journal articles published between 1993 and 2013. These counts refer to the number of academic articles where the city's name appeared in the title, abstract, or keywords.

[3] Proquest Newstand, a search engine that indexes thousands of newspaper and magazine archives was used. The search was limited to English-language references that occurred between 1993 and 2013.

[4] Because "New York" can refer to both a state and a city, the search (Scopus and Proquest) for this city included mutually exclusive references to "New York City", "Brooklyn", "Staten Island", "Bronx", and "Manhattan". "Queens" was not added to this list because of the possibility of false hits for other invocations of that word.

Table 2: Frequency of mention on conservative think tank websites (Sources: Web-site search engines for: the Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, and Manhattan Institute).

City	Population Rank[1]	Cato Institute Citations	Rank	Heritage Foundation Citations	Rank	American Enterprise Inst. Citations	Rank	Manhattan Institute Citations	Rank
New York City	1	1,733	2	2,385	1	2,429	1	5,261	1
Los Angeles	2	1,052	3	1,456	3	1,339	3	1,304	2
Chicago	3	1,774	1	1,875	2	2,367	2	1,149	3
Houston	4	308	8	448	8	438	8	318	8
Philadelphia	5	573	5	890	5	618	6	456	6
Phoenix	6	188	11	243	10	57	16	35	14
San Antonio	7	99	15	163	14	123	13	102	12
San Diego	8	309	7	361	9	426	9	296	9
Dallas	9	300	9	513	7	470	7	244	10
San Jose	10	127	13	175	13	129	11	353	7
Jacksonville	11	34	17	46	18	61	15	14	18
Indianapolis	12	195	10	228	12	125	12	122	11
San Francisco	13	613	4	932	4	897	5	594	4
Austin	14	171	12	236	11	191	10	90	13
Columbus	15	61	16	126	15	76	14	31	16
Fort Worth	16	5	18	56	17	36	18	25	17
Charlotte	17	115	14	78	16	39	17	35	15
Detroit	**18**	**422**	**6**	**789**	**6**	**938**	**4**	**488**	**5**

NOTES

[1] Population ranks are for 2010. See Table 1 for more details and sourcing.

turn, discipline even the most entrenched governments from overspending. According to this line of thought, we are simply witnessing the long-overdue disciplining of Detroit's reckless profligacy right now. For Cato's, Dean Stansel (2011, p. 301) the path forward is simple: "If high-tax, low-growth metro areas like Detroit, Milwaukee, Buffalo, and Syracuse want to be more like high-growth areas such as Dallas, Tampa, San Antonio, and Austin, they should lower their onerous burden of taxation and bring spending under control." The framing of Detroit as a tax-and-spend wasteland whose wounds were self-inflicted is not confined to the aerie halls at Cato. Various efforts by the state to exact control over its resources have been tried repeatedly in the past and guided by the same essential logic. Despite the miserable track record of these efforts the profligacy canard gets confidently reapplied while more moderate government-oriented efforts with a mixed-track record get dismissed because they have "obviously failed in the past".

The second dimension to the explanation of Detroit has been deemed "the entrepreneurial deficit" (Glaeser, 2011). The basic argument is that early-twentieth century Detroit was host to a large number of inventive entrepreneurs like the Dodge Brothers, Henry Ford, and David Buick. They fought for market share by refining their product, opening new markets and keeping costs down. There was a flowering of industry and invention during this period. By 1930, the city was the fourth largest in the U.S., and workers from the South migrated by the millions to seek employment there. The early-twentieth century period is an intriguing one to be sure, and there was certainly a significant component related to the flowering of creative engineering that took place there (Klepper, 2010), but the manufacturers of decline have utopianized the period as part of their explanation for the city's fall. Glaeser, for example laments, that the chief problem for Detroit was turning its back on this idea-making period:

5

The irony and ultimately the tragedy of Detroit is that its small, dynamic firms and

independent suppliers gave rise to gigantic, wholly integrated car companies, which then

became synonymous with stagnation…Ford figured out how to make assembly lines that

could use the talents of poorly educated Americans, but making Detroit less skilled hurt it

economically in the long run. (Glaeser, 2011, p. 49)

"If Detroit and places like it are ever going to come back", he continues (2011, p. 43), "they will

do so by embracing the virtues of the great pre- and postindustrial cities: competition,

connection, and human capital. "

Of course, corporations are not the only big institutions responsible for this trajectory.

Within this world-view, labor unions are even more at fault for killing innovation, wealth, and

the cities that depend on them (Walters, 2010). Detroit's labor history is complicated and multi-

faceted to be sure, but neoliberal economists are unequivocal in their view that unions killed

Detroit because they were able to attract public sympathy which translated into labor protections

that drove up costs (Glaeser, 2011). In 1937, Walter Reuther and his fellow UAW protesters

attempted to cross a bridge to the then-largest auto factory in the world, Henry Ford's River

Rouge Ford Plant to organize its workers. They were mercilessly beaten by Ford's thug security

forces and the attack was captured by a *Detroit News* photographer who eventually won the

Pulitzer Prize (Binelli, 2013). The subsequent publicity turned the tide toward unionization in the

United States. To the manufacturers of decline, this event was unfortunate for precisely that

reason, namely it made the public more sympathetic to unions which served to steal wealth, stifle

creativity, and initiate the decline of Detroit. "It was a public relations disaster for Ford and it

made heroes out of the union men", laments Glaeser (2011, 50). It helped hasten the end of the

"golden period" for Detroit, and ushered in a deskilling idea-killing machine that eventually

destroyed the city itself. Eventually firms decided that the cost of production was too high in Detroit and decamped for the sunbelt where right-to-work laws had been passed and the pathway to innovation was paved (Walters, 2010; Glaeser, 2011).

This general notion has been embraced by the city's policy-making elite. "The goal" says current Mayor Mike Duggan "is to create a city where we're a center of invention and entrepreneurialism, like we were in the early nineteen-hundreds" (quoted in Williams, 2014). This time though, the city is not looking to boat manufacturers, and machine shops for innovation. It is looking to the arts, finance, and technology sectors. Investment is being focused around the places that this activity was already somewhat present: Midtown (and Wayne State University), Downtown, and Corktown.

The final and most dubious element of the manufactured decline element is the Black leadership and citizens simply scared away White people. They argue that Blacks, led by Coleman Young and his "unhelpful" "angry" social justice ambitions, conspired to scare away Whites to ensure political power (Glaeser, 2011; Malanga, 2013). Glaeser (2011, p. 54) scolds Black Detroiters for being so "foolish" as to start a riot, largely because it scared off wealthy Whites. When the riot started, police forces were not quick or violent enough to put it down. "Cities with more cops actually had smaller riots" he muses (2011, p. 55), "…unfortunately, draconian enforcement seems to be the only effective way to stop a riot once it starts."

When Blacks finally did get into office, they alienated Whites by not funding the services they valued, and spend too much on "Black services". Glaeser and Shleifer (2005) argue that the experience of former Boston Mayor James Curley is instructive in understanding the arc that occurred in Detroit and thus deems it "the Curley Effect" (see also Glaeser 2011). Curley was Irish Catholic and his politics (according to Glaeser) were singularly focused on getting Anglo

Saxons Protestants to vacate the city so he could more easily win elections (Glaeser and Shleifer 2005, 1). To Glaeser and Shleifer (2005), this is exactly what happened in Detroit—the city's first African American Mayor, Coleman Young, embarked on a similar project (replace Irish with African American, and anti-Protestantism with anti-White animus), and in so doing destroyed the city. "In his 24 years as mayor, Detroit's Coleman Young drove White residents and businesses out of the city", similar to how "Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe abused White farmers after his country's independence" (Glaeser and Shleifer, 2005, 2).

To the manufacturers of decline, Young did not inherit a dying city that corporations, state government and federal officials had systematically stacked the deck against. Young *created it* by engaging in a form of racial patronage designed to scare off Whites. Building on the apparent logic that only White people enjoy good police, fire, and garbage removal service, and only Black people live in subsidized housing, he writes:

> Young initiated large building projects that put his supporters on the payroll. He lobbied
> for federally supported public housing… to keep his supporters, as opposed to Whites, as
> city residents. At the same time, Young cut back on the basic services that White
> Detroiters valued, such as police and fire. In 1976, he cut the police force by 20 percent,
> which along with his other attacks on the police department, perpetrated lawlessness in
> Detroit. Trash collection declined by 50 percent during Young's early years. (Glaeser &
> Shleifer 2005, p. 13)

But perhaps most damaging of all was Coleman Young's desire to subvert the law of Tiebout. When corporations continued to locate their businesses downtown but residents moved to outlying suburbs, thus denying Detroit the ability to fund services for said businesses, Young and city council attempted to institute a wage tax. This exercise in taking "money from the rich to

8

fund services that helped the poor" generated crisis that other "more reasonable" cities like New York that elected centrist mayors.

> Local income taxes illustrate the problem of trying to create a just society city by city. The direct effect of Young's income tax was to take money from the rich to fund services that helped the poor. The indirect effect of a local income tax is to encourage richer citizens and businesses to leave… In a declining place like Detroit, well-meaning attempts at local redistribution can easily backfire by speeding the exodus of wealthier businesses and people, which only further isolates the poor. (Glaeser 2011, p. 59)

In short, the conservative construction of decline suggests that Black Detroiters over-reacted to discrimination, were coddled by police forces when they rioted, and then elected a social justice warrior who engaged in a systematic campaign to purge White people from the city.

The functions of manufactured decline

As an academic matter, this narrative of Detroit is not particularly compelling. It is easily countered by thousands of academic articles emphasizing among other forces—racism, exploitation by the suburbs, an emaciated welfare state, and over aggressive policing (see, among many others: Thompson, 2001; Sugrue, 2005; Bunge, 2011; Hackworth, 2016b; Hackworth 2016c). Nor is the narrative particularly surprising. It fits with simple conservative talking points, and is written by committed ideologues—those who think that virtually every form of the social economy is unnecessary. And yet, despite the fringe status of its authors, the narrative has several influential functions within the actualized world of policy making.

The most obvious function is that it frames policy outcomes in places like Detroit and beyond. By framing Detroit as a bête noire parable of what happens when governments spend

too much or over-regulate, it acts as a foil for policies beyond such places. Austerity becomes not only normal, but *necessary* to ensure future growth and stability. Conservatives began to more aggressively use highly visible cases of urban malaise in the 1970s after almost a century of progressives successfully mobilizing such spectacles into interventionist policies (Hackworth, 2016d). The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911, for example, was such an outrage to all those who saw and read about it, that politicians were able to invoke it to create labor regulations, first in the New York City, then in New York State, then as part of the New Deal in the 1930s (*Economist*, 2011). Decades later when Cleveland's polluted Cuyahoga River caught fire, the widely broadcast event was used by activists to agitate for the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (Stradling and Stradling, 2008). By selectively revising the story Detroit, the conservative manufacturers of decline have been able to frame future policy approaches. It is not poverty, wealth, or racism—it is intervention itself that caused Detroit to decline. Policy approaches that flow from this logic emphasize austerity. Within declining cities, the impact of this narrative is particularly severe. Urban policy in heavily-abandoned cities like Detroit, consists of a mix of intensified penality (everything from code violations to law enforcement to restrictions on publicly subsidized housing), demolition, and austerity, paralleled by incentives to get investors to return (everything from tax breaks to public subsidy for development, to title clearing capacity) (Hackworth, 2014; Hackworth, 2015; Hackworth, 2016a).

A second important function that the conservative manufacturing of decline serves is to fuse various elements of the Right together. As many have written, the American Right is composed of various factions that do not always align perfectly with one another (Diamond, 1995). Pro-interventionist military conservatives, anti-interventionist libertarians, family-values evangelicals, secular corporatists, anti-immigration Reagan Democrats, and pro-immigration

10

corporate bosses all sit within the proverbial tent of the Republican Party. The work of unifying such varied constituencies around simplified common-cause ideologies is challenging. Formal efforts to the Right fuse together date back at least to the efforts of William F. Buckley's *National Review* in the 1950s, but were arguably most perfected during the Reagan years. Fusing has taken on a variety of forms but typically foregrounds a rhetorical object, common cause, or common enemy (Hackworth, 2012). During the Cold War, that was the Soviet Union, but since then the foils have been smaller in scale. "Welfare Queens", "Islamic Terrorists", inner city drug dealers, and immigrants (of color) have all taken turns in this role. The manufacturers of decline have used Detroit in a similar capacity (Gold, 2013; Badger, 2016). It serves a foil, a common enemy. One *Washington Post* columnist recently described the "Republican obsession with Detroit" (Badger, 2016): every four years, the Republican presidential candidate visits the city, surrounds himself with White corporate employees from the suburbs, and rails against how the city is what happens if you vote Democrat. The city is a potent political symbol for the Right— used in part to fuse together its varied constituencies. Despite all of the putative differences between the think tanks of the Right, there is remarkably little difference when it comes to the diagnosis and prognosis for Detroit and places like it.

A third function that the manufacturing of decline serves is to sanitize, deny, or elide the racism that led to Detroit's current predicament. Scholars have long noted that rural Blacks who make the trek north as part of the Great Migration were met with a very different set of realities from the White counterparts. They were forced to live in dilapidated ghettos, denied access to good jobs, and homeownership (Sugrue, 2005; Gordon, 2009; Highsmith, 2015). When some middle class Blacks were able to move into White neighborhoods, they faced a steady array of opposition from racist realtors, residents, city officials, and police officers. When White

reformers tried to help by "renovating" the ghetto, instead they simply demolished and displaced Black neighborhoods with vacant lots and expressways that made it safer for Whites to go to work downtown without stopping in the city. When Whites moved en masse to avoid having their children attend schools with, or be neighbored by Black people, they took middle class property values and incomes with them. State legislators made it increasingly difficult for cities to annex satellite communities (Thomas, 2013). Black municipal empowerment emerged only after Whites had left en masse. A crop of new Black mayors were left with the ashes of White flight, fiscal chaos, and a state capitol that was increasingly open in its hostility toward them. Conservative manufacturers of decline have converted this set of inconvenient truths into a political opportunity by replacing them with "common sense" economics. Detroit failed because of poor decisions; not impossible circumstances. White people did not flee Black people; Black people scared them away. By inverting causality, the narrative sanitizes more openly racist sentiments and policy actions. This approach has been common in various circles and necessary at a time when the vast majority of White people deny that racism exists and do not want to be associated with the cases where it does—"racism without racists" as one sociologist deems it (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). The conservative manufacturing of decline supports this narrative by sanitizing, denying, or distracting from the racialized reasons that led to the demise of cities like Detroit.

The final function worthy of mention, is that the conservative manufacture of decline frames what was ultimately a puny Keynesian moment in American history as deeply socialistic. Serious scholars have long noted that the United States (along with Canada and the United Kingdom) adopted a very mild form of Keynesianism in the mid-twentieth century (Epsing-Anderson, 1990). Scandinavian countries more fully immersed their policy apparatus in the logic

12

of Keynesianism, building more robust safety nets, centralized regulation, and income supports (Blyth, 2002). Conservatives, by contrast, have long framed the period of the mid-twentieth century as an incredible over-reach and overregulation of the state. The paranoia that an overbearing state was an automatic "road to serfdom" (Hayek, 1944) motivated the rise of conservative think tanks (Stahl, 2016) and the conservative movement more generally. A variety of scare tactics have been used over the years—ginning up fears of taxation, government involvement in schooling, etc.—to reinforce this paranoia. The manufacturing of decline in Detroit serves a similar purpose. It provides a dystopian stage set on which to assert that this is what big government brought you—never mind that it was never "big" by Global North standards. Even more subtly, it allows conservative lawmakers to agitate for "small government" while continuing to push for the most obvious (domestic) exception to this—the carceral state (Hinton, 2016). Detroit simultaneously offers reactionaries "scary" example of what happens when you spend too much (on social services), and too little (on incarceration). It is completely without context (or factual basis), but it is effective propaganda.

The efficacy of manufactured decline

That a small group of ideologues affiliated with the Cato or Heritage Institutes feel that Detroit's decline was created by profligate liberalism is not terribly surprising. Nor is the notion that this group would be trying to promote this narrative to influence public policy. That is, after all, the point of being a think-tank ideologue. Far more surprising is how closely this vision aligns with actualized policies in the American Rust Belt. Urban policy, to the extent that it exists, is dominated by intensified austerity, demolishing "feral houses" (Malanga, 2009), increased attempts to incentivize land investment, on the one hand, and growing penality—

13

through code enforcement, welfare restrictions, the criminal justice system—for remaining residents, on the other. Such alignment would not be so surprising if the Heritage Institute was in charge of appointing the mayor of Detroit or Cleveland, but they of course are not. Every major city in the American Rust Belt is dominated by left-leaning Democrats. Major cities like Detroit, Cleveland and Chicago, have been important locales for Black municipal empowerment. Some of the most liberal-leaning federal congressional districts in the United States are located in the region's inner core areas. So why would urban policy in these locations align so closely with the vision of a small group of ideologues who are openly hostile to the politics of the region's elected leadership? There are multiple ways to think about this question, but this essay will conclude by focusing on two: the political geography of urban-policy making, and the lack of an ideational counterweight to conservative think tanks.

Much of what is commonly thought of as "urban" policy is, in fact, forged at the state level in the United States. A wide range of land use, taxation, housing, and educational policies are created or bounded at the state level. Even states where "local control" is more complete reserve the right to circumscribe the policy actions of cities. When, for example, the city of Charlotte openly mused about enacting a city-wide minimum wage that was higher than the rest of the state, the state of North Carolina preemptively prohibited it (Greenblatt, 2016). Cities are the legal creatures of states. The political and racial geography of the Midwest almost, therefore, predetermines that this relationship will be a rocky, if not openly hostile one. Though the region contains several cities with majority Black populations, the states themselves are heavily White—and suburban and rural—on balance. Most Republican state legislators not only represent White rural districts whose interests are different than the inner city areas of their states; they are often politically hostile to the latter (Greenblatt, 2014). Running for election as a

White Republican or even an out-state White Democrat in Michigan consists of promising to restrict the perceived abuses of Detroit when you are elected. In Ohio, Cleveland is the bête noire; in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh share this role. When these closely-divided (by Republican and Democratic seats) state legislatures take office, much of this myth-derived animus about the state's most prominent city infects the policy making apparatus.[1] At a minimum, the assumptions of Republicans and centrist Democrats about places like Detroit are very similar to the aforementioned manufacturers of decline—profligacy, Black militancy, and a lack of entrepreneurship are "the problem" that needs solved. Even more extreme and direct, is the influence of the think tanks themselves in policy making. As Akers (2013) has chronicled, for example, the Hudson Institute (a member of the conservative think-tank network ALEC) actually wrote Michigan's land bank legislation over a decade ago. It, like the others that followed, emphasized the virtues of the market. Land banks had to be self-funded, had to work to lower barriers to investors, and had to build their purpose around being market-centered (Hackworth, 2014). Such laws are not built on careful consultation with Detroit's (or Cleveland's, or Buffalo's) local left-leaning city councilors. They are deeply influenced, if not actually written by, the very think tanks who manufacture decline ideationally. Many of these laws or assumptions prove not to work,[2] but the legislators who promote them only gain politically because the impacts are not felt by their constituencies. Rural politicians not only ignore the needs of the main city, they rejoice in punishing it (Greenblatt, 2016). The sanitized language of the manufacturers of decline allows them to do with fewer accusations of racism, and lack of empathy. The fact that the failures of such approaches never reach their constituents allow them to do so without electoral consequences.

An additional factor has to do with the dissonance between the rhetorical strategies of Right and Left think tanks in the United States. As Stahl (2016) has argued, the conservative think tank movement began in earnest in the 1960s. Conservative benefactors wanted to create a counterweight to the perceived abuses and power of Keynesian-liberalism which dominated in the day. Many felt that the Brookings Institute was the ideational heart of the Keynesian movement in the U.S., and sought to create institutions that would favor a counter-ideology. A "market-place of ideas" emerged to replace the perceived ideational oligarchy of Brookings, but the sides that emerged were far from identical or equal. Conservative think tanks, then and now, enjoy greater funding, and a closer alignment with the most extreme fringes of the conservative movement (Peck, 2006; Akers, 2013; Peck, 2015). By contrast, "Left" leaning think tanks are dominated by an obsession with "balance" of ideas, and are heavily influenced by corporate money (Lipton and Williams, 2016). Unlike their conservative counterparts "liberal" think tanks have actually fought the left wing of the Democratic Party for influence—most recently when they led the charge to marginalize Jesse Jackson and the movement he built with his presidential run in 1988 (Stahl, 2016). Even more than the financial imbalance, the rhetorical strategies of modern day conservative and "liberal" think tanks are strikingly different. Liberal think tank conversations on places like Detroit foreground social problems, and rarely situate conservatives as one of them. Brookings, for example, has published many pieces on Detroit in recent years. They isolate factors like racism, economic opportunity, and poverty, but rarely the conservative movement or legislators fighting reform or intervention. Conservative think tank voices on Detroit and urban decline are by contrast defiant, unequivocal, uncompromising in tone. They situate liberalism itself—or its institutions like unions or the Democratic Party—as the problem. The policy framing that has emerged from this is an Overton Window wherein the Right-side is

rigid, uncompromising and self-assured, while the Left-side is open, seeking balance, willing to compromise. Within this framework, policy ideas get pulled to the right, more frequently than they get pulled to the left.

It has been posited that ideas only begin to move the machinery of policy when two conditions are met: a crisis of invalidating magnitude, and a sufficiently organized alternative idea around which to build policy. As this case illustrates however, the idea is crisis is not fixed or a natural by-product of the experienced crisis. Moreover, just because an alternative is present and organized, does not mean that its leaders have the institutional power to implement it. To the Right, Detroit is simple. It is in decline because its Black leaders were too militant, too profligate, and not respectful enough of (White) entrepreneurs who built the city. Extreme, facile, and racist as this narrative might be, it is deeply influential owing in large part to the political geography of city-State relations and institutional structure of think tanks in the United States.

References:

Akers, J. (2013). Making markets: Think tank legislation and private property in Detroit. *Urban Geography*, 34: 1070-1095.

Badger, E. (2016, August 8). The odd Republican obsession with Detroit. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/08/why-republicans-are-obsessed-with-detroit/

Béland, D. (2005). Ideas and social policy: An institutionalist perspective. *Social Policy and Administration*, 39(1): 1-18.

Binelli, M. (2012). *Detroit City is the Place To Be: The afterlife of an American metropolis*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Block, F., and Sommers, M. (2014). *The Power of Market Fundamentalism: Karl Polanyi's Critique*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Blyth, M. (2002). *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2014). *Racism Without Racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America,* fourth edition. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Bunge, W. (2011). *Fitzgerald: Geography of a revolution*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Campbell, J. (2002). Ideas, politics, and public policy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28: 21-38.

Diamond, S. (1995), *Roads to Dominion: Right-winged movements and political power in the United States*. New York: Guilford.

Economist, The (2011, March 19). Triangle Shirtwaist: The birth of the New Deal. Retrieved from: http://www.economist.com/node/18396085?story_id=18396085

Epsing-Andersen, G. (1990). *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. London: John Wiley and Sons.

Friedrichs, J. (1993). A theory of urban decline: Economy, demography and political elites. *Urban Studies*, 30(6): 907-917.

Glaeser, E. (2011). *Triumph of the City: How our greatest invention makes us richer, smarter, greener, and happier*. New York: Penguin Press.

Glaeser, E., and Shleifer, A. (2005). The Curley Effect: The economics of shaping the electorate. *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 21: 1-19.

Gold, H. (2013, August 18). Detroit, the right's perfect piñata. *Politico*. Retrieved from: http://www.politico.com/story/2013/08/detroit-michigan-conservatives-95630.html

Gordon, C. (2009). *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the fate of the American City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Greenblatt, A. (2014, April). Rural areas lose people but not power. *Governing*. Retrieved on 13 August 2015 from: http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-rural-areas-lose-people-not-power.html

Greenblatt, A. (2016, March 25). Beyond North Carolina's LGBT battle: States' war on cities. *Governing*. Retrieved on 15 August 2016 from: http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-states-cities-preemption-laws.html

Hackworth, J. (2012). *Faith Based: Religious neoliberalism and the politics of welfare in the United States*. Athens GA: University of Georgia Press.

Hackworth, J. (2014). The limits to market-based strategies for addressing land abandonment in shrinking American cities. *Progress in Planning*, 90: 1-37.

Hackworth, J. (2015). Right-sizing as spatial austerity in the American Rust Belt. *Environment and Planning A*, 47(4): 766-782.

Hackworth, J. (2016a). Demolition as urban policy in the American Rust Belt. *Environment and Planning A*, forthcoming

Hackworth, J. (2016b). Why there is no Detroit in Canada. *Urban Geography*, 37(2): 272-295.

Hackworth, J. (2016c). Race and the production of extreme land abandonment. Working paper. Retrieved from: http://individual.utoronto.ca/hackworth/Race&LA.pdf

Hackworth, J. (2016d). Defiant neoliberalism and the danger of Detroit. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, forthcoming.

Hayek, F. (1944) *The Road To Serfdom*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Highsmith, A. (2015). *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the fate of the American Metropolis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hinton, E. (2016). *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The making of mass incarceration in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hirschman, A. (1991). *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, futility, jeopardy*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Klein, N. (2007). *Shock Doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. Toronto, ON: Random House.

Klepper, S. (2010), The origin and growth of industry clusters: The making of Silicon Valley and Detroit. *Journal of Urban Economics,* 67: 15-32.

Lipton, E. and Williams, B. (2016, August 7). How think tanks amplify corporate America's influence. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/08/us/politics/think-tanks-research-and-corporate-lobbying.html

Malanga, S. (2009). Feral Detroit: Nature is reclaiming the Motor City. *City Journal*. Retrieved from: http://www.city-journal.org/html/feral-detroit-13242.html

Malanga, S. (2013, July 26). The real reason the once great city of Detroit came to ruin. *Wall Street Journal*. A13.

Peck, J. (2006). Liberating the city: between New York and New Orleans. *Urban Geography*, 27(8): 681-783.

Peck, J. (2015). Framing Detroit. In MP Smith and LO Kirkpatrick (eds) *Reinventing Detroit*. New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Transaction Publishers.

Stansel, D. (2011). Why some cities are growing and others shrinking. *Cato Journal*, 31: 285-303.

Stahl, J. (2016). *Right Moves: The conservative think tank in American political culture since 1945*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Stone, D. (1989). Causal stories and the formation of policy agendas. *Political Science Quarterly*, 104(2): 281-300.

Stradling, D., and Stradling, R. (2008). Perceptions of the burning river: Deindustrialization and Cleveland's Cuyahoga River. *Environmental History*, 13: 515-35.

Sugrue, T. (2005). *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and inequality in postwar Detroit*. (Princeton Classic Edition). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tanner, M. (2013). Government, not globalization, destroyed Detroit. *Cato Institute Web-Page*. Retrieved from: http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/government-not-globalization-destroyed-detroit

Thomas, J.M. (2013). *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a finer city in postwar Detroit*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Thompson, H.A. (2001). *Whose Detroit: Politics, labor and race in a modern American city*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Thompson, H.A. (2013). How prisons change the balance of power in America. *Atlantic Monthly*. Retrieved from: http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/10/how-prisons-change-the-balance-of-power-in-america/280341/

Tiebout, C. (1956). A pure theory of local expenditures. *Journal of Political Economy*, 64: 416-424.

Walters, S. (2010). Unions and the decline of U.S. cities. *Cato Journal,* 30: 117-135.

Weaver, T. (2015). *Blazing the Neoliberal Trail: Urban political development in the United States and the United Kingdom*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Williams, P. (2014, January 27), Drop Dead, Detroit!: The suburban kingpin who is thriving off the city's decline. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from: http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/27/drop-dead-detroit

ENDNOTES

[1] Additionally, the close division of these states tilts Republican (and rural) because of the political geography of prison populations. Prisons are disproportionately located in rural (Republican voting) areas of states like Michigan and Ohio, while the prisoners are disproportionately *from* the urban (Democratic voting) areas of the states. Though they are not permitted to vote, prisoners are counted by residence (i.e. in the prison where they currently reside). Thompson (2013) estimates that five (rural, Republican voting) state senate districts in Michigan alone would not exist were it not for this method of apportionment.

[2] Examples abound but two prominent ones include the frequent state take-overs of the "fiscally incompetent" Detroit School District. On a recent version of this, the State took over the District to straighten out its finances, but instead left it hundreds of millions more in debt than when it arrived (Binelli, 2012). And of course, most recently, the governor of Michigan-imposed emergency manager law led to the poisoning of the water supply for Flint. In neither of these cases is there an electoral backlash toward those who made these decisions because the consequences are largely felt by people who would *never* vote for them.