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Meghan Wilson

Prentiss A. Dantzer

Jason D. Rivera

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Managed Racial Capitalism: Understanding the Bureaucratic State's Racialized Practices in Detroit, Michigan

Meghan Wilson
Michigan State University

Prentiss A. Dantzler
University of Toronto

Jason D. Rivera
SUNY Buffalo State

Public administration navigates an important place in governing in that it is multi-disciplinary and focused on practice, thus all theories need to be prepared to face critique from the people. At this watershed moment of social justice, political reckoning, and revolutionary imagination, it is key that public administration contends with the racist logics driving the field and the practice. In this article, we examine the ways that the current governing system fails to account for the racialized political economy, thus reproducing the inequality inherent in that system. The paper poses two questions: 1) How does the public administration of local governments reproduce inequality? And 2) How can we rethink public administration through a system of governing that intentionally engages with and rectifies racialized practices? We argue that late-stage capitalism, manifested as neoliberalism, is always racialized. We propose a manageable possibility of community-focused engagement and deliberation.

Keywords: Racial Capitalism; Emergency Financial Management, Community Development, Detroit, Neoliberalism

Public Administration focuses on being a field of practice—a field of understanding and implementing meaningful impact in governing organizations. While this is true, the fact that many of our governing institutions have not produced change over their lifespan allows us the opportunity to examine the implications of our current practices while imagining a path

forward. In this article, we examine the ways that the current governing system fails to account for the racialized political economy, thus reproducing the inequality inherent in that system. While this is a critique of the practice of public administration, it is also an opportunity to move the field towards different less predatory and exploitative systems of governing. Toward that goal, this paper poses two questions: 1) *How does the public administration of local governments reproduce inequality?* And 2) *How can we rethink public administration through a system of governing that intentionally engages with and rectifies racialized practices?* To begin to answer these questions, we assume that racial capitalism (Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 2020) is the dominant political economic system governing the United States. Borrowing from Cedric Robinson, we understand that late-stage capitalism, manifested as neoliberalism, is always racialized. Throughout this article, we use the lens of racial capitalism to provide a praxis of understanding our governing practices and services and propose a manageable possibility of community-focused engagement and deliberation that addresses the institutional ways in which public administration reifies racialized programs, policies, and practices.

Through Michigan's emergency financial management of Detroit, we explore how the administrative state manages the production and distribution of capitalism, thus the foundation of the field of practice manifest as an instantiation of racial and economic inequality. The state of Michigan, with its emergency management laws, enables us to see the way that an administrative state in search of efficiencies reproduces inequitable efficiencies at the costs of marginally situated people. Exploring the geography of the Emergency Financial Management law in Detroit, we provide a history and a space for the theories of racial capitalism. This is not a traditional in-depth case study, but should be viewed as a glimpse into the geography of racial capitalism. Detroit has a long history of racial liberty praxis and radical imagination for Black organizers and therefore, has the possibility of imagining a non-predatory outcome if given the opportunity (Surkin and Georgakas, 2012; Boggs, 1974; 1998). However, as we argue here, the management of the city's finances has created a bifurcated racialized geography in which public administrators find themselves operating. As such, drawing from the field of community development, we articulate a pathway forward, one that reckons with the broader racialized political economy and centers the "public" in public service.

Situating the Bureaucratic State Under Racial Capitalism

Prior to discussing how the bureaucratic state is situated in continual political endeavors to "reduce" government size, we must first explain what we mean by racial capitalism. The term "racial capitalism" was used by Robinson as a means of explaining why Marx and Engels theory of capitalism did not correctly identify social relations that illustrated by the argued economic inefficiencies related to racism. The reason for this, according to Robinson (2), was that the development and expansion of capitalism occurred alongside social ideologies that promoted racialized social structures as opposed to tearing them down. As a result, "racialism" was profoundly embedded within social structures that expanded through capitalism from the old feudal order. Along these lines, understanding the presence and implications of racial capitalism requires acknowledging the purposeful public management of race and racial inequities using materialist, ideological, and historical perspectives (McKittrick, 2011; Melamed, 2015; Pulido, 2017).

Using racial capitalism as a lens for understanding, one can better understand how capital is accumulated and acquires value. Specifically, Melamed maintains: Capital can only

be capital when it is accumulated, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups...accumulation requires loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires. Most obviously, it does this by displacing the uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations.

As such, capitalism as we know it today, has not only benefited but is buttressed by racism and racialized administrative practices that have led to apparent and perpetual racial and ethnic inequities. These inequities, which one might argue can be altered if the social construction of populations is altered to reduce deliberations about the “deservedness” of various social groups’ access to government support and aid (Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Dantzler and Rivera, 2021), are actually more fixed than one might hope to acknowledge. Specifically, because the capitalist economic system is based on racialized social relations, public administrative actions that seek to correct inequities will inevitably result, if successful, in disrupting the value of capital and subsequently free-market dynamics (Dantzler, 2021). In response, neoliberalism developed as a mechanism for guarding free-market dynamics.

Within these free market dynamics, the state voluntarily releases many of its responsibilities to the market and market forces for the *good* of society and the interest of its own citizens. This model of the free market economy has become the dominant ideological shift for modern state “reform” (Brenner and Theodore, 2003). The state, as understood in public administration, has an obligation to create this kind of institution when it is not already present—it opens doors to more markets when they are not present. While this system creates new opportunities and efficacies in the government, it is also instantiating inequality by reinforcing the reliance on capital for full engagement into the political and social arena. As explained in Jenkins (2021), networks of power are built into municipal bond finance as an attempt to shield urban investment decisions from popular scrutiny. This network of power is found in the City of Detroit and the State of Michigan’s navigation of the financial crisis.

Racial Capitalism in Detroit

The city of Detroit was once a bastion of Black Freedom and vision—with a growing Black middle class, Black owners, and Black community actors. While people envisioned Detroit as a Black city, the state bondholders continued to see it as a financial entity that over time could not meet its financial obligations. The city of Detroit was tasked with balancing its financials and paying debts in a time when revenue was down, while expenditures and interest rates continued to rise. The public officials worked to find market solutions to a problem of public good, which came with extreme risk.

The story of Detroit is broken down in three fundamental sections that explain the ways that the city was reimagined over the last three decades. First, understanding the role that the auto industry has played in shaping and reshaping Detroit. This section considers the auto industries fierce decline, rise of globalization, and new influx of venture capitalist investors into Detroit. Each helps to explain the decline of the city as a viable democratic institution and the emergence of it as a hub for creative market innovation. Second, it explores the citizen in this narrative. As a political institution, the citizen is important to understanding who exactly is impacted by the changes. Population shifts have played a key role in this shift in the city; therefore, we observe what communities were most severely impacted by the demographic concerns. Third, it explores the political decisions that emerge before and after the financial crisis. Understanding that this is now a market institution, we must explore how budgeting and contracting works in the age of the neoliberal city. Because of Emergency

Management, Detroit has freedom to make deals that most cities envy since they have been able to move forward without carrying the ridiculous debt load.

Detroit, Michigan, a majority Black city, underwent Chapter IX bankruptcy in 2013 as a way of shedding legacy debt and restructuring its governing commitments. The bankruptcy was led by a state-appointed Emergency Manager, Keyvn Orr, an attorney who helped to negotiate other corporate restructurings. Even with the state appointed manager, Detroit had a unique opportunity of providing a blueprint for other cities in the midst of financial crisis as it worked to craft a new understanding of the political with a human first/community conscious approach. However, it actually served as the “miner’s canary” telling administrators how detrimental capitalist logic is to local governments and its citizens (Guinier and Torres, 2002). Margaret Somers (2008) terms it the contractualization of citizenship. Somers argues:

The contractualization of citizenship which is an effort to reorganize the relationship between the state and the citizenry, from noncontractual rights and obligations to the principles and practices of quid pro quo market exchange. [...] Contractualizing citizenship distorts the meaning of citizenship from that of shared fate among equals to that of conditional privilege (2).

Somers explores what citizenship means when the city is not expected to take care of the citizen. This is the story of Detroit. Thus, the question becomes what is the role of the institution if it cannot afford to govern? Detroit could not provide services based on current nor projected revenue. Emergency Management in theory allowed the appointed official to negotiate with private entities to provide public goods without representing the citizens. Governing in Detroit became a solely market transaction, which tended to disadvantage Black residents and political officials since market transactions instantiate inequality.

Managerial Class Perpetuating a Failed State

The growth of the bureaucratic state enables for many efficiencies in governing practice and budgetary allocations—public administration has called for the growth and development of an effective state. Neoliberal ideology is at the foundation of the adjustment to a smaller government. For many, “neoliberal” is an ominous word that moves the society toward a foundation of free markets, inequality, and injustice (Navarro, 2007; Lazzarato, 2009; Ostry, Loungani and Furceri, 2016; Watkins and Seidelman, 2019). However, it serves for communicating the framework presented in urban cities and states as a method of governance (Hall, Massey, and Rustin, 2015) within a broader political economy of racial capitalism (Dantzer 2021). In this article, we define neoliberalism as a set of economic, social, and political principles put in place to allow the market to occupy a critical part of the governance institution (see Harvey, 2005; Dumenil, Dumenil, and Levy, 2011). Furthermore, it is a set of governmental policies and ideologies driven by the market to promote individualism (Marx et al. 1964). We understand the tainted history of it as a theory and an embodied practice. As we understand this neoliberal concept, it is an ideology supported by corporate, social, and governmental practices that emphasize competition, individualism, consumerism, and capitalist productivity over group survival (Harvey; Dumenil et al.). Utilizing neoliberal ideology as a tool for governing works as an institutional framework whose goal is to shift the role of the state from providing for the public towards managing private investment. The

belief is that the free and competitive market handles public service delivery more effectively than the bureaucratic government since the government lacks the capacity, flexibility, and autonomy to shift with the ebbs and flows of the market. In promoting a market economy, scholars and policymakers must explore the ways that the state currently works within the broader political economy of public service (Wamsley and Zald, 1973; Bertelli, 2012).

Along these lines, local governments are limited by a variety of factors that include but are not limited to finances, power, and capacity (Judd and Hinze, 2019). Understanding a city's limited financial capacity forces that city to make difficult choices as it relates to meeting financial needs and ensuring residents service needs. Municipalities' organizational structure is typically antiquated and ridged, and the institution is unable to adapt when public sentiment changes relatively quickly and/or when market failures produce unforeseen outcomes (Dehoog et al., 1990; Lyons and Lowery, 1989). This provides little to no choice to residents that are not able to move to other locations, even if they are dissatisfied with the government, because they experience the legacies of neoliberal policies that have resulted in a lack of capacity to have full agency over their collective lives.

As a field of practice, public administration must contend with ways of adopting a managerial pedagogy that exploits the power of marginally situated people. Wendy Brown has spent a great deal of time engaging with this concept of neoliberalism and democratic institutions arguing, "neoliberal governance privileges economic freedoms at the expense of political as well as democratic values such as universalism, egalitarianism, promotion of an active citizenry, and conceptions of a public good" (Brown, 2015; Soss, Fording, and Schram, 2011, 20). Introducing the market empowers market choices for the citizen but denies democratic freedom. There is an argument that says neoliberalism is undoing the democratic society since it turns every interaction into an economic interaction. Neoliberalism turns voters into consumers in a way that disproportionately harms economically disadvantaged people (Brown), which is manifested in New Public Management (NPM) strategies and practices (Kantor and David, 1988; Lichter and Brown, 2011; Rivera and Nickels, 2018).

Although this has been the approach to city government since the 1980s, we want to provide a critique and a point of departure from this ideology. The critique is that the model of building efficacies in the name of growth and development is grossly overstated and, in fact, a fallacy, for communities of color (Nickels and Rivera 2018), especially Black people. The point of departure is a confrontation with a more generative theoretical praxis not rooted in racial capitalism. The point of departure is necessary because as public administration continues to build a practice on this foundation, we will only see a more instated exploitation of the most marginalized groups. To restate the core thesis of this article, the bureaucratic state manages the production and distribution of racial capitalism. Therefore, the foundation of it is designed to instantiate inequality especially minoritized Black and Brown people.

While emergency managers are temporary measures that require long-term institutional changes, they have the ability to restructure the local entity toward long-term stability. Toward that goal, the intervening entity has authoritarian-like power that releases them from the burden other government officials face. The Emergency Manager can terminate contracts, remove departments, or find new service deliverers in the name of financial stability—this is difficult to conceptualize because it undermines all preconceived institutional capacity. In short, neoliberalism weakens democratic processes. This deteriorating is most visible at the local level because of the vulnerability of the local democratic process. While the democratic process is coveted in theory, it is neglected in practice by all involved—especially in times of financial distress. It is most visible in distressing times because at that moment of crisis, neoliberal ideology proves beneficial in

providing for the basic needs of citizens.

Public Service as a Facilitator of Racialized Marginality

In order to elucidate the ways in which the bureaucratic state (re)produces inequality through its institutions, we have argued that neoliberalism is a guiding framework that enables the structures and practices of racism to be institutionalized through public service. Within the domain of public administration, the neoliberal critique is argued to have given rise to a movement within the discipline to focus on NPM, a mode of governance that focuses on entrepreneurial management practices. Given its origination in the 1980s, NPM often embodies a market approach that focuses on efficiency gains through the use of performance management and increased competition (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Kettl, 2015; Knafo, 2020). The economic logic of neoliberalism in addition to its laissez-faire approach of government to provide goods and services through market-oriented direction, has repositioned the state and private actors as mutually constitutive sectors of exploitation (see Kantor and David). However, instead of positioning these practices under a broader political economy of exploitation and expropriation, scholars have grounded this shift across several dimensions including idioms of public value governance (O’Flynn, 2007; Bryson et al., 2014; Dahl and Soss, 2014). Other scholars have suggested that New Public Service (NPS) has become a dominant paradigm centering democracy and citizenship as the basis for public administration theory and practice (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; 2015). Yet when it comes to issues of race, public administration has often treated it as a “nervous” area of government (Gooden, 2015; Starke et al., 2018), leading scholars to push for social equity as a needed fourth pillar of public administration (Woolridge and Gooden, 2009). This is largely in response to studies that have shown the culpability and/or complicity of the state to create and enact discriminatory laws, policies, and programs that disproportionately affect communities of color (Alkadry and Blessett, 2010; Blessett, 2015; Gaynor and Wilson, 2020; Gaynor et al., 2021). As such, any attempt to understand the role of the state in producing racial inequality must reckon with the political economy of racial capitalism with public administration functioning as the terrain in which exploitation and expropriation operate.

Discussions of the field of public administration tend to focus on underlying assumptions embedded within public institutions and public service. The NPM mode of governance implies a strong focus on the economics and politics of public administration, treating citizens as clients. Such an approach institutionalizes neoliberalism with policymaking and evaluation processes. Through a colorblind ideology, Whiteness becomes a realized public value (Heckler, 2017), leading to forms of administrative racism (Starke et al.). These effects are not circumstantial or the result of administrative error. Rather, the state is regarded as a participating actor in producing racial inequality. While social equity centers on questions of fairness, its stance as a desired principle obscures the ways in which people, institutions, and places are—and have been—racialized. Therefore, under the veil of neoliberalism, racial capitalism positions the state as an institutional force that incorporates practices of racialization within its organizational structure and service delivery. As Ray (2019) argues, we can understand organizations as racial structures that connect organizational rules to social and material resources. As a discipline, the nervous area of race within government obscures how and to what extent public administration centers on racialized practices. From this lens, public service practices situate Whiteness as a public value with disparities in public service predicated on socially constructed identities and values of people, institutions, and places (Heckler).

Under racial capitalism, public administration obscures its role in adhering to the structural influences of race, racialization processes, and racism within its operation, absolving the central role of the state in producing marginality and disadvantage. As such, any attention to reorient public administration around a common good must intentionally engage race in all its iterations. As Blessett (2018) suggests, “The unconscious and embedded nature of how racism operates requires special attention to the ways it manifests across all spheres of life” (2). In this paper, we situate our approach in the vein of Blessett’s (2018) call to contextualize race specifically, while also calling our attention to how multiple groups experience oppression through their multiple identities and diverse geographies. Here, we turn our attention to the case study, the city of Detroit, Michigan, to underscore how neoliberalism has produced marginality. Similar to Issar’s (2020) approach, we argue that historicizing neoliberalism within racial capitalism allows us to unravel the qualitatively different mechanism through which racialized people are pressed into the circuits of capital accumulation. We extend this thinking to consider the particular role of the state in facilitating these processes through extractive and exploitative means. Under a broader system of racial capitalism, neoliberalism becomes a guiding ideology that reinforces the role of the state as a facilitator of entrepreneurial management.

The Case for Detroit

From 2013-2018, the city of Detroit, Michigan underwent one of the largest Chapter IX Bankruptcies of any political institution after over a generation of financial distress. Detroit’s decline and eventual collapse enables scholars to better understand the ways cities manage, manufacture, and leverage financial circumstances for organizational restructuring. Over the course of five decades, Detroit went from a thriving industrial hub for Black middle-class residents to a community riddled with poverty, crime, and strategic disinvestment, losing more than half of its population in the collapse. Population decline directly translates to political power and less financial capital from taxes. With the state of Michigan and, in turn, cities losing large portions of their population because of relocation and job loss, it was difficult for many cities in Michigan to maximize capacity and provide optimal services for their residents (See Nickels 2019 for further discussion on Michigan). Cities are fundamentally service providers, but in good economic times and under the correct political circumstances, they also serve as real estate agents, social service centers, educational hubs, and key job producers (Peterson, 1981).

As a means of exemplifying our argument, we utilize a heuristic in-depth case study research design (Eckstein, 2000). Heuristic case study designs are explicitly used to aid in the development of theory and not specific configurations of circumstances that are used to make causal inferences (Mitchell, 1983). Rather, they focus on potentially generalizable relationships between aspects of the social environment and a particular subject of study as a means of engaging in descriptive inference. Along these lines, one of the primary advantages of using a case study design lies in the depth of analysis, which can be thought of as the level of, “Detail, richness, completeness, wholeness, or degree of variance that is accounted for by an explanation” (Gerring, 2004, 348). This depth of analysis provides the opportunity to test counterfactual arguments in a normative way. According to Levy, case studies with a depth of analysis provide an opportunity for researchers to investigate political leaders and situations in a critical way (i.e. through a moral lenses) (Tetlock and Belkin, 1996). This is particularly important in understanding social and political phenomena in ways that challenge traditional ideas and values of how society interacts with economics and other socio-political arrangements.

As such, this research uses the city of Detroit within the context of fiscal emergency management for analysis and comparison. Because our research is concerned with identifying various activities that perpetuate racial socio-economic circumstances that emanate in different settings, the case study design is appropriate (Agranoff and Radin, 1991). Moreover, Detroit is an appropriate city for analysis because of the varied economic and community development policy choices the city has made has resulted in varied outcomes between people of color and their White counterparts. Although this was true in the late twentieth century (Judd and Parkinson 1989; Judd and Hinze 2019), it was more recently observed since the city filed for bankruptcy in 2013. Additionally, Detroit's argued "recovery" from fiscal crisis (Larsen, 2017) has only highlighted the effects of racial economics, which, as a case, can be used in future studies as a point of municipal comparison (Yin, 1984). While this is not a traditional case study, we used semi-structured interviews of political elites conducted during the Detroit Bankruptcy from 2013-2015. These interviews coupled with fifteen years (2002-2017) of archival data provides the richness and level of detail needed to fully understand the ways that Detroit is a meaningful city as public administration moves forward in understanding the racial implications of financial and bureaucratic choices. However, as previously pointed out, observations made in this study should be used to inform theory in relation to economic perpetuation of racial disparities as opposed to making or justifying generalizable inferences.

Geographies of Management in Detroit, Michigan

Emergency Managers, the verbiage used in the state of Michigan for fiscal overseers, provides for an opportunity to shed long-term debt obligations without meaningful community engagement. This tactic of management has proven to be a moment of reckoning for the public management work within cities. It begs the question if management has a human component to it, or does it only contend with the efficiencies as demanded by neoliberalism? In the case of Michigan, Emergency Management allows administrators to build and rebuild institutions in a way that forgoes the voice of the individual in the name of fiscal responsibility and building effective governments.

Emergency Management in Detroit began to set the stage for the diffusion of neoliberalism throughout the government and society, particularly at the local level. The government centralizes power and forces the local government out of the way of economic progress by bringing down the debt and opening the doors to private market takeover of public goods. Any introduction of a market needs to also include a long-term method of sustaining clear accountability to the citizens and not the markets. Accountability helps to mitigate inequality in a democratic system. There is tension between democracy and market economy because there is inherent economic inequality in a market-based/capitalist state; therefore, there is also political inequity. When reimagining the government, Detroit could have adequately promoted a market economy that does not suppress democracy and accountability; however, they opted for efficiency at all costs. Efficiencies under racial capitalism often further the hyper exportation of Black people in the political system (Fraser, 2016; Dawson, 2016). Emergency financial management as a neoliberal tool disempowers Black people in the name of financial stability.

For the State of Michigan, the globalization of the auto industry weakened the entire state, causing unemployment to rise, population to decline, and once Black-led lively industrial communities to turn into vacant dilapidated shadows of prosperity. These private sector disasters leave a lasting impact on the political systems because the government must

care for the residential casualties that were left by the private sector. The impacts of these industrial shocks force the government to restructure its political and economic system without necessary resources.

Within the neoliberal framework, the government must be staged for the political institution that is receptive to neoliberalism, which is always anti-Black and exploitative. Often the governing institution creates internal checks to protect itself from losing its power. The state of Michigan began to prepare for this paradigmatic shift in 1990 and has evolved over the last three decades. Emergency Management legislation became more invasive and began to centralize power away from the oftentimes Black local official to the mostly White state level all in the name of fiscal responsibility.

The reimagining of government happens consistently across the United States, but none quite as radically as in the state of Michigan. Therefore, many states look to Michigan as a model for the possibility of restructuring entities faced with political and economic distress. In the State of Michigan, several cities are undergoing various levels of fiscal distress to the point where they required intervention from the State of Michigan. Stakeholders who are actively vested in the current political process observe and provide input on the reimagined institution, while less active citizens are passively accepting the changes put forth by the decision makers. For many residents in Michigan, they are less active because they feel fundamentally disempowered given the past failures of institutions to provide them a voice in governing. According to the Michigan State of the State Survey, Michigan residents' trust in the state government has declined drastically over the timespan of the Emergency Manager Laws. As the stakeholders reimagine the state, administrators must be aware of what these disempowering laws do to all people—particularly to the most marginalized. This law not only has a disempowering effect on the people's trust, but also shows to have a demobilizing impact on residents of those cities under emergency financial management. Those residing in the central cities, which are the cities that have been taken over in Michigan, are what W.J. Wilson (2012) would term the truly disadvantaged, making them more susceptible to modes of oppression. In Michigan, they have begun to centralize power away from the locality using the discourse of rightsizing government. Given the current economic climate, state governments are reimagining local institutions in the name of fiscal responsibility. Even though fiscal responsibility is necessary, it is not the threshold for sufficiency in promoting a government. States need to find a way to still provide for the wellbeing of their citizenry as political and social entities while still promoting economic development and fiscal responsibility. While trying to save the social, they destroy the political citizen.

As austerity measures, the state voluntarily releases many of its responsibilities to the free market for the good of society and the interest of its own citizens. This model of the free-market economy has become the dominant ideological shift for modern state "reform" (Brenner and Theodore). The state has an obligation to create this kind of institution when it is not already present, because it opens the door to more markets when they are not present. While this looks anti-democratic, it can be a driving force in producing a new kind of democracy—one that necessitates inequality. Dahl (1998) makes the claim that a free-market economy is essential for democracy; however, what is the cost for the democracy as a commodity? Emergency financial management is a way to open the municipal entities to the market without maintaining democracy in the name of fiscal responsibility (Nickels 2019). Detroit's Chapter IX bankruptcy—as a product of emergency management—explains how opening yourself to the "free" market can have human impacts that are racialized.

Detroit and Managing Racialized Practices

Detroit is a city of approximately 680,000 people, 82% of whom are Black Americans. The city's population has been steadily declining over the last five decades. The land area totals 138 square miles. The median household income is \$26,325 and more than one-third of residents live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Since 2008, tax foreclosures have pushed 27,000 occupants out of their homes (Dewer et al., 2014), adding to the abandoned homes number in Detroit. The appointment of an emergency manager to restructure the city seemed to be the only option to many conservative officials concerned about spillover effects. The emergency manager had the authority to renegotiate or cancel union contracts, hire and fire government employees, and sell, lease, or privatize local assets. The city could not provide basic municipal services like streetlights or functioning fire trucks. Emergency response time were averaging 50 minutes in 2013 (Turner et al, 2017). These problems are merely the lived experiences of the residents; the economics of the city were even worse.

Detroit's debt load was a collection of mismanagement, failed support from the state, and no new revenue. Chapter IX bankruptcy was the only option available to Kevyn Orr that could shed the kind of success he needed for measurable financial success. At this point, Detroit's debt load was so high that if the city provided only the basic needs of a city (no boat shows, no fireworks, nothing for the next fifty years), there was still no way Detroit could have paid off its debt. As of March 2013, the City of Detroit was holding almost \$21 billion of debt obligations. Of that \$21 billion, \$10 billion was secured debt principally connected to the enterprise. Secured debt is protected under federal bankruptcy law, which the city would have to pay no matter what, unless they were willing to have assets forfeited. The city could not survive asset forfeiture because it would then have no revenue even after bankruptcy. Of the remaining debt, \$10 billion was in first funded debt, which was the creditors, \$3.5 billion in pension underfunding, and \$6.7 billion in completely unfunded pension healthcare. The biggest concern of the bankruptcy was the \$6.7 billion in healthcare liability (Orr, 2013). Because of the Affordable Care Act's marketplace exchange, which provides access to healthcare options, some of the health care liability diminished. Pensioners could take their buyouts and buy their own healthcare through the exchange, which freed Detroit from covering that liability. Bankruptcy turned mostly Black pensioners from a protected public entity to a marketplace of healthcare options. While there was an option for subpar yet viable healthcare corrective, there was no federal safety net to provide retirees with their pensions. Bankruptcy was the only option because the city was hemorrhaging money at every end with no growth in revenue projected. Orr (2015) explains the necessity for bankruptcy as:

The story of Detroit wasn't the bondholders' vs pensioners. The story of Detroit was retiree healthcare. Not even current employee health care, but retiree healthcare. People who are 60, 70, and 80 years old have no chance of going into the bond market. If you don't find a solution for the healthcare they are going to die and you have no money to pay up (n.d.).

Crippling debt forces continual payments, cutting the funding to provide services, creating a cycle of borrowing to cover public services, and a need to cut overhead. Detroit financial obligations increased, and the state's revenue sharing support declined. In fiscal year 2013, the general fund debt service payments totaled \$246 million, which represents approximately 19.3% of the budget. The emergency financial manager's office shows that without fiscal stability bonds, the deficit would have grown exponentially. Since 2007, the

deficits to the general fund have gotten out of control. This was in no way sustainable for a local institution. The national government cannot even handle this level of debt and they are able to print money. Detroit could not sustain this kind of deficit much longer. Detroit was overextended in every way, and the creditors wanted payment. Bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes says, “[Bankruptcy] should be reserved as a last resort. Negotiating with creditors is always a better option where it is practical to do that. In the Detroit case, there were simply too many creditors to make that a practical option” (Rhodes, 2016).

In the 2013 fiscal year, Detroit only made 23% of its pension obligations—leaving their obligation to their most marginalized vulnerable. The city was running a deficit, raising its debt load, and still barely paying its bills. When Kevyn Orr was appointed, the city was three months away from having no cash, and unable to extend its bonds. In an effort to cut cost while addressing growing deficits, the city made major cuts to core budgetary spending. The city made deep and wide cuts in public safety, transportation, recreation, capital improvements, and continual deferrals to pension payments. The city was running on a skeleton crew.

While Orr was managing the city, he had 18 months to restructure the entire institution. Orr evaluated all of the options: maintaining the status quo, new found partnerships, and “outsourcing of operations and transferring non-core assets to other private or public entities in sale, lease, or other transitions” (Orr, 2013, 11). The EM position is difficult because they have very clear deliverables—get the municipality to zero debt as quickly and as painlessly as possible. The mandate is financial—never about the people. In Detroit, Orr could assess the community and make recommendations quickly. Filing Chapter IX bankruptcy provided a stalemate while Orr raised revenue and released what he considered baggage—public lighting, water and sewage, parks and recreations, and blight to the private market, contracted entities, or regional authorities.

For Orr, quality of life necessitates financial stabilities. With over 88,000 streetlights and 200 commercial electric customers, Detroit was an ineffective public service provider. Children are walking home in the winter with no streetlights. Infrastructure investment totaled between \$250-\$500 million. This is not inclusive of maintenance or daily operations. In Kevyn Orr’s plan he wrote, “The Emergency Manager believes that it is in the best interest of the citizens of Detroit for the City to exit the power supply business” (Orr, 2013, 9). Since the city cannot generate that kind of investment, as of 2014, the city’s electricity customers was transitioned to a third party and the grid will be closed. The transition continued for about seven years, with all customers (including the municipality) being moved to the private company’s meters. The new third-party company reconfigured the lighting structure to cut down the number of streetlights in the city to 46,000, catering to, “Detroit’s current population centers.” This means that ‘low density’ communities no longer have a public lighting option.

With the Chapter IX Bankruptcy and state takeover, Detroit could shed \$11 billion of the \$21 billion debt. They still have not fully stocked their cash reserves, but they are not as burdened. The city’s lighting infrastructure is beginning to be updated and many of the streetlights are starting to come back on. Currently, the biggest concern is collecting money from the residents. Because the population is so impoverished paying city taxes for lack luster services becomes less of a concern for the residents. When the city is unable to collect its projected revenue, there is potential to return to a cash flow crisis. The perception across the city council is that the state used the bankruptcy to strip the pension and create the necessity for venture capitalist to invest in the city. Managing municipal employee pensions in the future will be a delicate balancing act.

Demolition is the top and only priority in the city after the emergency management.

The city sees making Detroit visually appealing necessary to its future development. The city is investing \$850 million to demolition 80,000 blighted structures, using exit financing to fund this project. Detroit is borrowing new money to tear down buildings, while not making the necessary human capital investments. With this newfound land, the city is creating establishments for reassembling and redistributing real estate through the Detroit Land Bank. The fact remains that even with the newly reinvented city, those vulnerable populations that could not leave the city are still struggling in the city now, but instead of vacant homes they have vacant side lots. In some parts of the city, entire blocks have been leveled.

Emergency Management helped Detroit balance its books, and in 2018, had its third year of a surplus, thus able to exit receivership. The City of Detroit exited with a general fund balance of \$595 million at the end of the 2017 fiscal year and an expected \$36 million operating surplus for 2018. The emergency manager handled the debt through bankruptcy but cut cost through contracting out many public services. The emergency manager was able to ensure that the city had some resources to negotiate and sustain growth long-term. For Detroit, emergency management did what it was supposed to do—balance the books and turn the city toward fiscal health. What it did not do was restore the trust in the political system. Detroit did not want the state to intervene because they saw it as a threat to democratic participation. Former city council member Saunteel Jenkins (2015) stated in an interview that they saw emergency management as a, “direct violation of the spirit of the democratic process, even if it was legal.”

The failure of emergency management for Detroit, a predominately Black city, is inherent in the management policy. Race or the racializing effect of austerity was never considered. As previously stated, this was a set of financial transitions done to promote fiscal responsibility. Detroit today is a more fiscally responsible city at the cost of every Black homeowner pushed out of their home; every Black business owner moved from their storefront; every Black pensioner trying to navigate the exchange or live off of less than they budgeted for in retirement; every Black community member no longer able to see themselves in leadership. The public administration part worked: the financial health of the city is thriving, but the residents are struggling. Now they just get to struggle with streetlights on and renting from a foreign investor instead of their family-owned home. Is it a good management practice to balance the budget if we have to disempower people to do it?

Race is of course a salient issue, and it is further exacerbated by financial unrest. The media (*The Nation*, *The Atlantic*, and *Mother Jones*) have all made claims that emergency managements were racialized since many of the localities declared to be distressed were predominantly black cities (Orr, 2013). In 2013, at the peak of the emergency management, 86% of blacks living in the state of Michigan were under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager. While the policies are framed race-neutral, they can often have devastating consequences for marginally situated people as their class identities are racialized by and through public action.

Local political institutions are often the most susceptible to this kind of intervention because cities are less protected and autonomous. For all intents and purposes, cities are collections of people with only the power the state allows them to have, and that power can be taken away at any moment. That lack of autonomy is in major conflict with what we commonly believe to be the role of the city. Cities are Tocqueville’s (2002) “Mecca of democracy.” It is the assembly of the governed, but even in Tocqueville’s democracy, the city is relatively powerless. Emergency management actively takes the power from the local government and places it in the hands of a bureaucrat. Moving toward the next generation of

politics, it is important to see the ways in which politics changes in the face of racial difference. Race still matters, and racial injustice is still perpetuated through every political system. Local governments in crisis are no different, and public administrators need to take racial difference and the processes of racialization into account.

At the Edge of the Possible

So, what is to be done about this system? Should we as public administration scholars and practitioners accept the structural conditions under which we find ourselves? Should we tear down the capitalistic system and shift to another political economy? Or should we focus our efforts on addressing the immediate needs of the public? Here, we find the work of Robinson deeply insightful in order to tease out future possibilities. Given Robinson's focus on racialization processes within feudalism, a shift away from capitalism would not necessarily lead to a more equitable future. Capitalism is the economic system attached to liberalism (Schafran 2014). If anything, a shift to another political economy does not divorce the state from its role in creating a history of marginality and disadvantage across racial lines (and other intersecting identities). In fact, we run the risk of recreating the same type of race neutral ideology that we argue has been perpetuated in public administration. Second, we understand that there is always a politics of intervention to consider in addressing the needs of marginalized populations. Like the arguments raised by Dantzler and Reynolds (2020), we draw our attention to reconfiguring and rearticulating the colonial nature of communities of colors as racialized subjects. Dantzler and Reynolds argue that, "During periods of resistance, Black people bear the brunt of those changes accepting small, incremental gains as collateral for their collective trauma" (160). We extend this to all racialized communities.

Rather than articulate a new political economy under which public service, "puts the public first," we focus on administrators and practitioners as agents of this change. Here, we find promise and potential in the New Public Service (NPS) framework. NPS describes a set of norms and practices that emphasize democracy and citizenship as the basis for public administration theory and practice (Denhardt and Denhardt 2015). Yet, we further this discussion by focusing on community development as a needed praxis for realizing these principles. As Rivera and Nickels argue:

The principles and associated benefits of NPS that are advocated by proponents align with the purported goals of community development. Community development programs and policies...can be enhanced with a governing model that emphasizes citizen-centered accountability, empowered participation, and deliberation (11).

In this increasingly urbanizing world, we need to stop talking about neoliberalism, and instead start talking about building power (Schafran). If not, "We risk losing sight of the broader – and we argue more important – issues of community empowerment, community betterment, community uplift, and social justice" (17). While neoliberalism focuses on individuality, community development focuses on community, not as an abstract concept but one that infuses broader notions of collectivism and shared democratic principles. A reorientation of public administration requires us all to reconsider how "the public" is a separate group but embodies us all. As Rousseau (2008) describes in *The Social Contract*, "The social pact established equality among citizens in that they all pledge themselves under the same conditions and must enjoy the same rights. Hence by the nature of the compact, every act of sovereignty, that is, every authentic act of the general will, binds or favours all of the citizens

equally...” (4). Situating public service as one that values the public as authentic co-producers helps produce more equitable, sustainable, and legitimate programs and policies. And through a race-conscious approach, community development calls into particular attention the biographical histories of people and place that, as a direct byproduct of racial capitalism, have not experienced the social contract as described by Rousseau. Enabling a level of deliberation which includes all parties, supports meaningful community engagement (Collins 2018). Putting the *community* first in community development is just as important as putting the *public* first in public service (Nickels and Rivera).

In this paper, we explain how the neoliberal ideology used in public administration is meant to reproduce inequality since it requires an exploited class of people. A Marxist logic of primitive accumulation as manifest in the United States ensures that this exploited class of people is Black people, across the diaspora. We situate our argument in racial capitalism and use the case study of Detroit, Michigan to illustrate the ways that policies that do not consider the complexities of racial difference and subordination simply reproduces those differences. We show that while Detroit, Michigan is a more financially secure city than it was before Chapter IX bankruptcy, the majority Black residents were not considered, and are less empowered political and financially than they were pre-Chapter IX. Our corrective is two-fold: that public management take seriously the role of racial capitalism in policy creation and implementation, and that public management always take a community first approach to building a new world.

As public management moves forward with a growing diverse population, it must take seriously the legacy of racial capitalism in every choice. In Detroit, this could have manifested as community focused budgeting to account for the ways that large financial burdens shifting to the resident’s quality of life is not always the best option. The Emergency Financial Managers could have included residents as shareholders in the lived experience of the community building and budget allocations. Hidden in the cells of a budget document are community priorities and social sacrifices. Detroit faces large structural capacity deficiencies due to population declines. Given that cities should serve at the pleasure of the people, they could have had a voice in the deliberation as to how to reorganize and reallocate resources.

The cannon of public administration literature has made some *overwhelming* assumptions about power and the core values of cities, and local government and other public actors. It has held that powerful elites make most of the decisions at the local level—the literature also tells us that Blacks in coalition are, sometimes, able to collaborate other power groups to accumulate the resources to live under the guise of racial capitalism. The power of the marginally situated is only visible in the relationship to the hyper-visible or when it is providing a transactional good. Detroit under the logic of racial capitalism is only valuable to those who can profit from it—there is no help for the struggling city just through altruism. This praxis enables us to move toward a humanist approach to government.

Authors’ Biographies

Meghan Wilson, Ph.D. is a Research Associate in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University. Her research interest centers financial markets, political institutions and Black people—with a focus on urban centers.

Prentiss A. Dantzler, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto (UofT). He is also an affiliate of the Infrastructure Institute and the

School of Cities at UofT. His work typically focuses on urban poverty, housing policy, neighborhood change, race and ethnic relations, and community development.

Jason D. Rivera, Ph.D. is an associate professor of political science and public administration at SUNY Buffalo State. He coordinates the MPA program's public administration/management track and the disaster and emergency management graduate certificate program. Rivera's research typically focuses on issues of social equity, governance, public administration theory, research methods, and disaster and emergency management.

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