"Dirty Factory Town" or "A Good City?": Neoliberalism and the Cultural Politics of Rust Belt Urban Revitalization

by

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DEDICATION

For my family, both by blood and by choice, for their support and love.

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INTRODUCTION

"You can't make Palm Beach out of the Bowery"

> It started to get looking like Toronto—upper–middle–class Black and white people, and everybody was dressed nice, and ... we thought it would be the entertainment center of the county, in all truth. And that may be naïve, but that was my goal—let's make it the entertainment center, let's make it so that everybody wants to be in downtown Flint. We're going to have entertainment, we're going to have art, it's going to be very cultural, it's going to be very upbeat. And someone said to me—and maybe it's true—they said, "Maxine, you can't make Palm Beach out of the Bowery. You want Palm Beach, you have to go to Palm Beach."
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> —*Maxine Kronick, City of Flint Director of Special Events, 1989*[1]

In *Roger & Me*, Michael Moore's blockbuster 1989 documentary about his hometown of Flint, Michigan, city official Maxine Kronick offers the above explanation for the seemingly inevitable failure of early 1980s efforts to transform the city from a industrial and manufacturing center into a tourist magnet. Used by Moore to punctuate a particularly devastating segment of the film in which an array of flashy, expensive development projects and obliviously optimistic spokespeople are presented to the viewer as lambs to the slaughter of hindsight, Kronick's explanation stands as the final word on this flurry of hopeful activity, and on the millions of dollars invested in urban revitalization and downtown development projects, including a "luxury" hotel, a riverside "festival marketplace," and more. In

[1] *Roger & Me*. Prod. Michael Moore. By Michael Moore. Dir. Michael Moore. 1989.

the end, Kronick reminds us that one had to face the facts—Flint was Flint. Looking back, she can see that these hopes for making Flint something besides itself were futile and foolish and we, as viewers with the benefit of at least 5 years of perspective, are expected to see the pageantry and optimism of these efforts as a farce, albeit a tragic one. In this brief but powerful sequence, Moore is largely visually absent, narrating the story off–screen in the knowing and mock–earnest tone for which he would become famous. Maxine Kronick is held up as a generic "downtown official," meant to stand in for the mass of interests, public and private, that backed Flint's AutoWorld—the eighty million dollar theme park/museum devoted to the automotive industry, which closed its doors less than a year after its grand opening due to lack of visitors—and their ambitions for reviving the city's failing economy. In tone, both Moore and Kronick express ultimately similar sentiments: AutoWorld was clearly a doomed, if not deeply misguided, effort.

This is not entirely surprising for Moore, who had been a longtime critic of the project as more energy and money were poured into it, running stories about AutoWorld in his self–published alternative newspaper, *The Flint Voice*, with colorfully descriptive headlines such as "Dance Band on the Titanic." Kronick, as we learn in a short scene intercut with the final credits, is headed out of the city herself, presumably to a place with more inherent possibility after the disappointing results of Flint's revitalization—she moved first to Tel Aviv and eventually to Florida (though not Palm Beach). But standing on a sunny afternoon in front of the shuttered AutoWorld facility, Kronick gives us an explanation that is overstuffed with significance, not only for Flint, but also for illuminating the broader political

economic and cultural predicament of American cities in the late twentieth century. It is in this moment, as the New Deal order "died" and national ideas solidified regarding which places and populations had the potential to survive and grow in a new, flexible, neoliberal America, that cities like Flint were increasingly seen as unchangeable and unsalvageable.

In *Roger & Me*, however—a film that makes up the bulk of most of people's general knowledge of the city of Flint—both Moore and Kronick articulate analyses that are too simple and too steeped in hindsight to be historically useful. According to Moore, AutoWorld was a colossally stupid attempt at urban revitalization on par with "expecting a million people a year to go to New Jersey to Chemical World, or to Valdez, Alaska, to Exxon World. Some people," he reasons, "just don't like to celebrate human tragedy while on vacation."[2] But when we look at "successful" revitalization strategies regionally and nationally, a museum/theme park based on local "heritage" doesn't seem entirely ridiculous. As for the vision that Kronick describes in the film, it was also not an extraordinary or novel one. Despite her incongruous choice of Toronto as a reasonable comparison, this vision is cast from the same mold as many of the basic dreams of city governments, business leaders and urban boosters for at least a century: spaces of consumption, business and leisure made safe from people and forces that are perceived as threatening to destabilize the peace and plenty.[3] Downtown areas in particular have consistently

[2] Ibid.

[3] Although situated in similar geographic regions, Flint or even its larger downstate neighbor of Detroit have significantly different economies and population demographics (both in size and racial composition). Toronto, as a Canadian city, is also the product of vastly different governmental and corporate policies in the twentieth century in terms of

been the terrain upon which the struggle for this vision takes place, and the ongoing battles over the form and function of urban space more often than not rest upon the basic vision of an "upbeat" city filled with the "right kind" of people, safe to consume.[4] Of course, the terms and stakes of this struggle change according to cultural, historical, and economic context—as illustrated here by Kronick's subsuming a discourse of race into one of class—but ultimately, this vision is no more or less naïve than the dreams held by generations of those in her privileged position.

There is, however, something significantly different about this articulation of a somewhat familiar vision, and this difference hinges on the larger historical moment and the broad political economic and cultural shifts taking place in the US during the late 1970s and early 80s, as well as the place-specific way in which Kronick imagines Flint, Michigan in relation to the rest of the country. In her estimation, the future prosperity of the city would depend upon an embrace and

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employment and housing, and is thus in a very different historical position in terms of race and class dynamics.

[4] For an in–depth analysis of downtown politics throughout the twentieth century, see Isenberg, Alison. *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004.
see also: Teaford, Jon C. *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940–1985*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.*;* Sorkin, Michael. *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.*;* Hannigan, John. *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*. London: Routledge, 1998.*;* Simon, Bryant. *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004.*;* Gillette, Howard. *Camden after the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post–industrial City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005; Boyer, M. Christine. *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1983; Ross, Andrew. *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney's New Town*. New York: Ballantine, 1999; Nasaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. New York, NY: Basic, 1993.

exploitation of "the cultural," broadly defined. Instead of the concern for local downtown merchants that characterized an older "Main Street" boosterism, let alone for the manufacturing base that built and sustained the prosperity of Flint and former industrial centers like it, she and other city and business leaders express a faith in the economic value of entertainment, art, and self–representation. In the end, however, she implies that there is simply no hope and no place in this vision of urban America for the kind of town with the essential, unchangeable characteristics of the dead and dying Rust Belt, and maybe it was naïve to ever imagine otherwise. It is this sometimes disastrous intersection of political, economic, and cultural factors in Midwestern and Northeastern former industrial centers during the 1970s and 80s that produced what we now commonly understand as the "Rust Belt"—an abstract cultural construction with very real implications for very real places and people.

Deindustrialization, Neoliberal Transformation, and AutoWorld

Much of the historical work concerning the United States in the late twentieth century, and in the post–war period more generally, is haunted by the specter of Ronald Reagan and the question of how the nation "became" conservative.[5] This is not surprising given a twenty–first century political climate in

[5] This is the case for a generation of leftist scholars who began or continued to produce work in the Reagan era, but also serves as a model for especially postwar history of the last three decades, where the progressive moment of the New Deal declines toward the conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s and beyond. Examples of this declension narrative, or at least one of missed opportunities, are too numerous to mention, but some examples of the most explicitly reactionary are Fraser, Steve, and Gary Gerstle. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989.*;* Schulman, Bruce J., and

which the national political center has seemed to shift ever rightward, and where the central tenets of the New Deal have seemed to steadily erode (and have arguably thus become overly romanticized on the left). A number of recent scholars including Kimberly Phillips–Fein, Bethany Moreton, Angus Burgin and others have convincingly argued for the need to examine a longer twentieth–century history of pro–business activism that has consistently fought against New Deal–type programs and policies from their inception, tracing an established thread of conservative continuity that gained adherents and influence during the 1970s and throughout the 1980s. From this vantage, the rise of neoliberalism in the latter decades of the twentieth century doesn't come out of nowhere, and the common historical narrative of right–wing "backlash," as well as the tragic declension narrative of the Rust Belt synthesis, finds a bit more historical footing[6]. The Rust Belt synthesis in its most basic form constructs a history that progresses linearly from the 1950s apex of US manufacturing—sometimes uncomplicated by considerations of racial and class

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Julian E. Zelizer. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008.; Bailey, Beth L., and David R. Farber. *America in the Seventies*. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004.; as well as much of the literature on neoliberalism, such as Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

[6] Phillips–Fein, Kim. *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*. New York: W. W. Norton &, 2009.; Moreton, Bethany. *To Serve God and Wal–Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009. Burgin, Angus. *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012. A foundational articulation of the Rust Belt synthesis can be found in Bluestone, Barry, and Bennett Harrison. *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*. New York: Basic, 1982. For a critical discussion of the Rust Belt synthesis, see Ch. 1 in Highsmith, Andrew. *Demolition Means Progress: Race, Class, and the Deconstruction of the American Dream in Flint, Michigan*. Diss. University of Michigan, 2009., as well as examples in Cowie, Jefferson. *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy–year Quest for Cheap Labor*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1999.; Bensman, David, and Roberta Lynch. *Rusted Dreams: Hard times in a Steel Community*. New York: McGraw–Hill, 1987.; Beauregard, Robert A. *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of US Cities*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1993.; Cowie, Jefferson, and Joseph Heathcott. *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*. Ithaca: ILR, 2003.

issues in Northern industrial cities—to a sharp crisis of deindustrialization in the 1970s and 1980s. In any discussion of deindustrialization, however, it is important to keep in view the longer history of residential segregation, institutional racism, and corporate industrial efforts to undermine union power and constantly migrate toward cheaper labor, in order to avoid recapitulating a simplified narrative in which the mid–century "golden years of prosperity" gave way to the decline and wholesale collapse of Rust Belt industry in the 1970s and 80s.

This longer history, however, does not preclude the need for an examination of the late 1970s and early 1980s as a crucial turning point in US political economic and cultural history. The truth and depth of urban crisis in the Rust Belt at this time compels me to stake out a position between a relativist view of treating this period either as one unremarkable point in a series of larger cycles or, at the other extreme, as one singular cataclysmic turning point in global capital, unmoored from longer histories or the particularities of place. Lisa Duggan, for example, has charted the complex ways in which the New Deal coalition initially marginalized antistatist conservatives while absorbing (or marginalizing) multiple leftist viewpoints, before coming under attack again through the 1960s, and finally coming up against a new and vigorous pro–business activism that flourished in the 1970s.[7] Historicizing this decades–long development on the right of a mode of critiquing and dismantling the New Deal coalition and unleashing corporate power to maximize profits takes into account the late 1970s rise of neoliberalism as increasingly hegemonic. My understanding of neoliberalism is based on this model, which views it not as a

[7] Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon, 2003. XI.

narrow economic policy program, but as an ideology within which which US politics and culture have been constructed and viewed over the last three decades, and which has effectively become "common sense." As Duggan describes it, neoliberalism encompasses "the reconstruction of the everyday life of capitalism."[8]

Recently, scholars of neoliberalism have felt compelled to defend their analytical frameworks—in whatever form they take—against critiques that allege an over–reliance on the term "neoliberalism" to encompass too broad a range of processes to be precise or useful. In his book *The Neoliberal City*, Jason Hackworth compares the increasing frequency of the term's academic use to that of "globalization" in the 1990s, complaining that "it is used broadly to characterize the right wing; to mean the guiding light for the 'Washington consensus'; to mean anything related to business; to mean anything related to capitalism; to mean anything related to liberals in the United States. Neoliberalism is everywhere and, apparently, everything."[9] Despite somewhat accurately describing the effect of neoliberal paradigms' expansion into the realm of "common sense," Hackworth's critique, which admonishes scholars and activists for deploying the term without a rigorous historical mooring, or a full understanding of the longer liberal tradition from which neoliberalism developed, represents an increasingly–voiced concern. In some cases, scholars avoid neoliberalism as a concept or analytical frame altogether, as Kim Phillips–Fein explains in the bibliographic essay to her book *Invisible Hands: the Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal*—"Some people may wonder why I

[8] Ibid.
[9] Hackworth, Jason R. *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007. xii.

call these businessmen conservative rather than neoliberal or libertarian" she says, going on to detail all the ways in which they could in fact be classified as such in contemporary terms.[10] She argues, however, that these men overwhelmingly called themselves "conservatives," and although they subscribed to and fought for a set of principles that are core neoliberal tenets—a low–regulation, low–tax economy; a fear of the threat of economic redistribution; a belief that the "free market" is equivalent to freedom itself—they also believed that the term "liberal" had been claimed by Roosevelt for the New Deal, never to be regained.

Questions of whether or not the term is "overused," or used without proper grounding, are on one level indicative of academic fashion or disciplinary concern—social scientists, economists, and historians have different disciplinary investments in and anxieties over how the longer tradition of liberalism is framed and deployed, what processes might be at work in the development of "neoliberal" politics and policies, and what names must be given to these processes at any given historical moment, and all of these are important distinctions that must be taken into consideration to understand and critique neoliberalism as an ideology, an economic philosophy, or a cultural phenomenon. In fact, there has been much useful scholarship recently that has grown out of these concerns and has taken the longer history of neoliberalism seriously, carefully avoiding the totalizing notion of neoliberalism as "everything and everywhere."[11] Though it is undoubtedly a

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[10] Phillips–Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*. 321.

[11] See especially Ch 1 in Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*; also Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso, 2005.; Brenner, Neil, and Nikolas Theodore. *Spaces of*

(deliberately) slippery concept, and though I sympathize with the need to step back from the urge to simply swim in its expansiveness, what I find productive about neoliberalism as a concept is precisely its more open, rather than narrowed, utility in describing a broad political economic and cultural project of the late twentieth century.

Duggan is a useful model for using neoliberalism as a framework for understanding complex and sometimes contradictory processes, and as an analytical tool for making broader connections that may be excluded from a strictly economic perspective, without losing a historical grounding. Specifically, she examines the ways in which neoliberalism developed out of the pro–business activism (of the sort that Phillips–Fein describes) as a "wide–ranging political and cultural project," and has been integrated into political economic and cultural discourse as "common sense."[12] In Duggan's view, the two realms—of culture and of political economy—are not only related, but depend upon one another for existence. Hence she argues that, even though neoliberalism is generally associated with a set of specific policy imperatives, at every stage of its development, "the construction of neoliberal politics and policy in the US has relied on identity and cultural politics."[13] This is a crucial point in understanding that neoliberalism is

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Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.; Jessop, Bob. "Liberalism, Neoliberalism and Urban Governance: A State–Theoretical Perspective." *Antipode* 34 (2002): 452–72.; Touraine, Alain. *Beyond Neoliberalism*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2001.; Saad–Filho, Alfredo, and Deborah Johnston. *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*. London: Pluto, 2005.; Davis, Mike, and Daniel Bertrand Monk. *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*. New York: New, 2007.

[12] Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*: xi.

[13] Ibid., xii.

slippery and expansive by design, and even while its boundaries and history must be understood and maintained, it must in some ways be dealt with as such. One way in which Duggan does this is to use neoliberalism's central tenets themselves as lenses through which to interrogate its internal logic. Key terms for her that define the dominant intersections between culture and economic vision are "privatization" and "personal responsibility," both of which rhetorically justify the redistribution and concentration of wealth and power upward in a reversal of New Deal social and economic ideals, and which depend for their power upon cultural notions of legitimate citizenship and worth based on divisions of class, race, and gender. Although this connection is crucial for understanding the expansive nature of how neoliberalism operates and is deployed, I would argue for a reexamination of this point as it relates to urban space. Duggan's formulation of "personal responsibility" (as well as in much other relevant scholarship) understands neoliberalism as a process of individuation and social atomization, as it is categorically opposed to collectivism of any kind—the individual is ultimately responsible for his/her own conduct, successes and failures. Duggan identifies the "broadest cultural project" of neoliberalism as "the transforming of global cultures into market cultures," and it is often through the flexible disciplinary framework of "personal responsibility" that upwardly redistributive economic goals are joined to cultural values.[14] If, however,

[14] Ibid, 14. Although the conservative trope of "personal responsibility" certainly exists before Ronald Reagan deployed it so effectively—Nixon's calls for "law and order" and appeals for reasonable, patriotic Americans to resist the challenges of disenfranchised groups for economic and social change come to mind—Duggan's discussion of "personal responsibility" argues convincingly that the framework takes on a particular and newly powerful disciplinary form in this moment. She also attempts to track the ways that it is historically deployed through the 1980s and 1990s. See her discussion of Bill Clinton's

we apply these key terms to urban space in the US, we can usefully analyze how entire cities and regions also come to be seen culturally and economically as "good" or "bad" places depending upon their success in the marketplace. In other words, the declining Rust Belt is understood in a neoliberal context as being as undeserving as Ronald Reagan's infamously scapegoated (and fictional) "welfare queen," and suffers a similar dismal fate in popular and political discourse.

"Neoliberalism" is difficult to attach a static definition to, in part because of its integration into political economic and cultural discourse as naturalized common sense. If we understand neoliberalism as a cultural as well as a political economic project—and accept that, as Duggan argues, neoliberalism depends upon an artificial separation of these two realms to sustain itself—this allows us to narrate together the too–often separated analytical threads of deindustrialization, urban economy, and cultural history.

Returning to my opening example, it was in fact a pro–business reaction to leftist cultural criticism that generated the idea for what would become AutoWorld. Harding Mott, son of Flint automotive pioneer and philanthropist Charles Stewart Mott and head of the powerful and influential Mott Foundation, was infuriated by reports of a 1970 student protest at San Jose State College in which an automobile was buried to mark the first Earth Day, in a demonstration meant to symbolically declare the death of the internal combustion engine.[15] "We've got to do something to

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revamping of welfare and Temporary Aid for Needy Families, with broad cultural goals such as "self-esteem," p. 16.

[15]"San Jose Car Burial Put Ecological Era in Gear." *SFGate*. Web. 16 Mar. 2013.

show how important the automobile has been in improving society," Mott said.[16] His reaction was one not only of personal offense, but also of offense on the behalf of one of the largest industries in the history of the US. Never mind the fact that the automobile industry's viewpoint was arguably one of the best–represented in US politics and culture, truly disproportionate to a student protest of any size; at a moment when the auto industry was headed into a decade of multiple crises, Mott's impulse was to mobilize his vast resources to tell the story of the benefits of corporate and industrial power, in the city where General Motors was born. Mott's initial idea was to form some sort of spectacular automotive "hall of fame" that would focus on GM and the corporation's role in shaping the twentieth century world—a role that is indeed difficult to overstate, and which would also significantly feature the history of Flint as the city that was built by GM. What AutoWorld would become as the decade progressed, economic crises deepened, and auto industry jobs dwindled in Flint, was the centerpiece of a revitalization strategy based on shifting the basis of the local economy from manufacturing to tourism. This strategy was informed by, and in turn informed, developing Reagan–era neoliberal policies and rhetoric around urban space and race, economy, and labor.

What began as a "hall of fame" became a sprawling, conceptually complex theme park/museum hybrid costing nearly eighty million dollars and lasting less than a year before it closed due to lack of attendance. AutoWorld lay mostly dormant—with all its animatonic history lessons, giant model engines, and dreams of a rebirth for the city—for more than a decade, until it was finally demolished by a

[16] "The Road to AutoWorld: The Project Started with a Chance Remark and Rode Over Hurdles Into High Gear," *Flint Journal*, 22 June 1980.

Mott Foundation–funded implosion in 1997. This final chapter in its history demonstrates that AutoWorld was clearly driven by the Mott Foundation, from beginning to end. In fact, Flint itself was and is not possible without the Mott Foundation. Founder C.S. Mott was an early automotive industrialist in the city of Flint and helped to found General Motors. He was also a multiple–term mayor of the city, the head of GM and, as an example of the very definition of a "company town," he was occasionally both of these at once. In short, Mott Foundation money makes Flint possible—the Foundation chooses what programs to fund at what level, and in many ways determines the priorities of the city. In the case of AutoWorld, it is clear from its origins that the project's goal was to present a corporate view of the automobile, of Flint, and of their intertwining histories, because there was a perceived need "to show"—the critics, the people of an increasingly troubled Flint, the world—just how beneficial corporate power had been.

The power of the Mott Foundation to shape urban revitalization in Flint—and certainly beyond, as one of the top 50 charitable giving organizations in the world, comparable to the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Rockefeller Foundation—is both particular and illustrative. While it is certainly historically conservative in its founding and some of its positions, it, like all philanthropic enterprises, exists to serve a public good. The role of philanthropic organizations in the shaping of urban life and landscapes is a massively influential one; such organizations act as a third pillar of power in American cities alongside government and commercial enterprise, and have been a critical part of the public/private partnerships that increasingly fueled urban revitalization throughout the 1970s and

80s. Especially in the history of post–World War II American cities, and particularly cities that have attempted to revitalize their way out of the "urban crisis," philanthropic and non–profit organizations have wielded tremendous influence over revitalization processes, as well–funded arbiters of social good. As historian Oliver Zunz argues, while Andrew Carnegie may have been following a "social gospel of wealth" that obligated him to give back to society, the nonprofit sector (of which the Mott foundation in the 1970s was certainly a part) is a flexible "hybrid capitalist creation that operates tax–free so long as the profits are reinvested in the common good."[17] Zunz also argues that American philanthropists' most important innovation has been "to envision an unlimited agenda of works in which participants redefined goals as circumstances changed."[18]

This flexibility and power to redefine "the common good" depending upon circumstances is, I believe, crucial to understanding how the Mott Foundation operated in Flint during the city's revitalization efforts of the late 1970s and 1980s—not in a strictly top-down way, but as a powerful interpreter of neoliberal logic into widely accepted "common good." On the subject of urban renewal, historian Samuel Zipp argues that, "If postwar cities were formed by explicitly political and social contestation—policy initiatives, struggles between political coalitions, electoral decisions, and street level conflicts over racial and class boundaries—they were also subject to symbolic and imaginative struggle, attempts to give various cityscapes of feeling purchase in the actual cityscape of fact. These symbolic acts amounted to a fight for the right to give imaginative shape to the

[17] Zunz, Oliver. *Philanthropy in America: A History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011: 4.
[18] Ibid. 3.

city—to describe the character and nature of urban life—and to make that conception natural or normal, the commonsense, shared understanding of that place."[19] This fight for the right to give a city imaginative shape, I would argue, is also the one successfully waged by the Mott Foundation when advocating for pro–business, free market revitalization mega–projects as an expression of "the common good."[20]

The theme of "the need to show," first articulated by the head of the Mott Foundation, is one that resonates throughout AutoWorld's history. An alternate origin story, probably no less true, features Harding Mott saying to Mott Foundation vice president Homer Dowdy, "You know, what this community really needs is something to get its pride together. It's fading. We need to restore it. We ought to be able to do something about what we've got right here. After all, we're one of the main centers in the history of automaking."[21] There are two important points to consider in this statement: first, that the problem in Flint, an archetypal model of deindustrialization, was in fact a deficit of pride; and second, that this deficit could be remedied with a spectacular representation of the greatness of the auto industry.

Whichever moment was actually the initial catalyst to create AutoWorld, these impulses by Harding Mott and the Mott Foundation, and the solutions they

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[19] Zipp, Samuel. *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010: 6.

[20] The role and projects of the Mott Foundation, in Flint and beyond, obviously evolved form its founding to the period that I examine. Highsmith is particularly useful in understanding the influential community schools projects that Mott engineered in the postwar period, and for a contemporary account of the Foundation and Mott himself in the mid-1960s, see Young, Clarence H., and William A. Quinn. *Foundation for Living; the Story of Charles Stewart Mott and Flint,*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.

[21] "The Road to AutoWorld: The Project Started with a Chance Remark and Rode Over Hurdles Into High Gear," *Flint Journal*, 22 June 1980.

produced, were specifically cultural. As the project came to be understood as the center of a jobs–generating transformation of local economy, its mission became more complex, but at the core of it, there was the need to show. This is of course not a new phenomenon, for either cities or industry. From the World's Fair to the circus, we can point to examples of exhibition from at least the last 200 years, but there seems to be something unique happening in AutoWorld's emergence as both a corporate public relations reaction, and as a proposition to remedy a new kind of postwar economic crisis.[22] Moreover, there is something new in the 1970s and 80s about the ways in which a corporate vision of history and notions of community "heritage" are mobilized through the form of the museum. The incredible success of developer James Rouse's "festival marketplace" strategy for revitalizing such urban spaces as New York's South Street Seaport and Boston's Fanuiel Hall demonstrates an increasing enthusiasm and return on investment for areas seen as abandoned, now transformed into safe, nostalgic spaces of consumption—almost museums of themselves.[23] With the memory and heritage boom of the 1970s—including

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[22] On World's Fairs, Expositions, and museums, see Conn, Steven. *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876–1926*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998.; Evans, Jessica, and David Boswell. *Representing the Nation: A Reader : Histories, Heritage and Museums*. London: Routledge, 1999.; Loewen, James W. *Lies across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: New, 1999.; Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984.*;* Linenthal, Edward Tabor, and Tom Engelhardt. *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American past*. New York: Metropolitan, 1996.*;* Kammen, Michael G. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1991.; Kirshenblatt–Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley [Calif.: University of California, 1998.; Hinsley, "The World as Marketplace: Comodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893" in Karp, Ivan, and Steven Lavine. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991.

[23] The literature on heritage and self–display is instructive here, as is postmodern theory of the spectacle. For a book–length discussions of heritage, see Kirschenblatt–Gimblett,

Holocaust and white ethnic identity, African–American identity and the *Roots* phenomenon, and interest in local identity—actual museums also grappled with their missions to represent and serve communities while still maintaining relevance and keeping their doors open.[24] The 1970s and 80s saw dramatic changes in the way museums and cultural institutions represented themselves, and others, and remained economically viable. AutoWorld, as a place that claimed to tell the story of the automobile generally and of Flint in particular, is one example of the shifting meanings around community, history, and even the term "museum" in this crucial historical moment.

One of the most basic arguments that I make is simply that AutoWorld *matters*. This statement is actually quite a controversial one in Flint, but to explain in slightly less simple terms, AutoWorld is representative of an early attempt by a Rust Belt city to adapt to deindustrialization through a single cultural mega-project, meant to satisfy multiple neoliberal demands—including demands for flexibility,

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Destination Culture; Lowenthal, David. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 1998.; MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken, 1976.; Karp, Ivan, Christine Mullen. Kreamer, and Steven Lavine. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1992.; Karp, Ivan. *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/global Transformations*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. For discussions of the postmodern spectacle, see classic texts such as Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone, 1994.; Debord, Guy. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. London: Verso, 1990.; Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994.; Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.; and in a specifically urban context, Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford England: Blackwell, 1990.

[24] For discussion of Rouse and his impact on urban renewal projects, see Bloom, Nicholas Dagen. *Merchant of Illusion: James Rouse, American's Salesman of the Businessman's Utopia*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2004.; Olsen, Joshua. *Better Places, Better Lives: A Biography of James Rouse*. Washington, D.C.: ULI– the Urban Land Institute, 2003.; Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park*; Isenberg, *Downtown America;* Hannigan, *Fantasy City*; Gottdiener, Mark. *The Theming of America: Dreams, Visions, and Commercial Spaces*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997.; Judd, Dennis R., and Susan S. Fainstein. *The Tourist City*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1999.

image marketability, private–sector leadership, and profitability. AutoWorld is important for understanding the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s and 1980s, and provides us a unique opportunity to examine a material site where questions of identity and economy converge. AutoWorld also represents a unique site of analytical overlap, where the economic and cultural logics of neoliberalism interact and reveal themselves on the ground, giving us a tool with which to link conversations about capital, culture, heritage, and urban economy that too rarely intersect.

The so–called "cultural turn" in US history happened during roughly the same period on which this dissertation is focused. This shift in the late 1970s and early 1980s—really a series of "turns" in multiple disciplines and fields of study, rather than a consolidation of method or viewpoint—marked the influence of emerging inter/disciplines and theoretical positions including those produced in the fields of gender and women's studies, literary criticism, ethnic studies, and popular culture studies, and deepened as younger scholars further developed these theoretical and analytical positions. As William Sewell theorizes in his meditation on this intellectual moment, "the broad differences between the emerging form of capitalism and its Fordist predecessor are clear and not very controversial. During the forty years I am covering in this essay, we have lived through an epochal transformation in the nature of the capitalist world economy. I believe that this great transformation must be taken into account in explaining the history of

historical thought in these years."[25] The idea that the neoliberal turn of the late twentieth century also produced new ways of thinking culture and economy together has informed the ways in which I've formulated my historical approach here, and I, like Sewell, find utility in arguments advanced by scholars such as Fredric Jameson and David Harvey in the 1980s for getting at the broader forces at work on both economic and intellectual transformation.[26] Jameson's "structures of feeling" produced by late capitalism (his take on Raymond Williams' earlier phrase) is particularly informative, as I am interested throughout this dissertation in the political and economic usefulness of feeling in the discourses of urban revitalization, and the ways in which feelings are bound up in neoliberalism's logics of revitalization and strategically deployed in its service.

I am also influenced by Nan Enstad's recent exploration of the possibilities of a "visionary cultural history" that takes seriously failure and grief.[27] This vision is based in part on the lessons of a cultural studies that emerged in the 1990s, which

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[25] Sewell, William Hamilton. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005: 55.

[26] A brief list of some other works of cultural history that have informed this dissertation, especially as related to thinking about culture, capital and history together include Susman, Warren. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon, 1984., Fox, Richard Wightman, and T. J. Jackson Lears. *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993., Cook, James W., Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley. *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008., Kasson, Joy S. *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000., Zunz, Olivier. *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990., Sandage, Scott A. *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard UP, 2005., Nasaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. New York, NY: Basic, 1993., Kasson, John F. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.

[27] Nan Enstad, "On Grief and Complicity: Notes Toward a Visionary Cultural History," in Cook, James W., Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley. *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008.

she labels "deconstructive cultural history of categories and hierarchies," and from which she argues that we gained "the imperative of seeing power and ideology in more complex terms."[28] Enstad imagines from this starting point the possibilities of a new cultural history "poised on the brink of telling new kinds of stories," and which might allow us to "figure out what that hybridity and complicity means for our examination of culture and human action, and how we can envision justice utilizing such a critique." This is an appealing and useful vision to me of how to do cultural history, because this dissertation is shot through with failure—literally, symbolically, and rhetorically. AutoWorld closed its doors less than a year after opening, and the Rust Belt itself became a national totem for economic, social, and moral failure. The very act of taking AutoWorld seriously begs the question, "why did it fail?" The answer is, as one might expect, complicated—AutoWorld failed because it tried to be too many things (museum, theme park, local heritage center, tourist trap), and didn't do enough of them well; it failed because visitors expected thrilling rides and got singing animatronic robots; it failed because it miscalculated the desire among suburbanites and middle-class vacationers to visit an already–infamously depressed urban center; it failed because a drastically deindustrializing auto manufacturing town celebrating their automobile "heritage" for tourists showed too accurately the cruelly ironic economic transformations at work throughout the Rust Belt. The reasons for AutoWorld's failure are made even more complex with hindsight, as explanations offered in the almost thirty years since its

[28] This moment also produced an intellectual context for young scholars such as Bethany Moreton, whose work interrogates how modern capitalism operates in economic and cultural terms.

closing have ranged from underfunding (dubious, given the project's price tag) to simply being a ridiculous idea all along. Many in this range of explanations seem retrofitted to either cover up or perversely own the embarrassment of such a publicly ridiculed failure, and ultimately serve a broader historical narrative in which the Rust Belt's failure in a flexible new economy is naturalized or inevitable.

But what do we do with failure as the object of historical inquiry? Enstad, referencing Judith Butler, sees the possibilities for "an argument about the political potential that arises when we recognize our common dispossession by our relations. Butler argues that this dispossession could be a foundation for political community: we might recognize and become responsible to this commonality rather than to fantasies of autonomy and mastery." This is a cultural studies vision that I have found useful and appealing—one set against the isolation of neoliberalism, and which interrogates the meanings and usefulness of failure.

This vision also informs my methodology for this dissertation, as a serious consideration of failure calls for the serious consideration of sometimes unconventional materials and sources. When AutoWorld was imploded in 1997, all of the exhibits and many of the records inside went with it. Archival sources of information on its planning, execution, communications, and existence are limited and somewhat scattered, and so piecing together a narrative of a place as structurally and ideologically complex as AutoWorld is a challenge. In my analysis of this and the other sites I examine, I find that a remark from a single visitor can speak as much about how meaning is being made by and through these sites as an archival memo or official press release. Even though it may go without saying at this point, I

am—as are a few generations of scholars interested in the intersections of power/knowledge, culture, and political economy—indebted to Michel Foucault in my desire to understand how power operates at the broadest and smallest levels. The 1980s are a moment when what Aihwa Ong calls the first "wave" of neoliberalism—economic policies that implement the widespread privatization of public resources and deregulation of capital on a global scale—begins to overlap with a second "wave," in which neoliberalism takes on a moral dimension and individuals are called upon to adopt characteristics and behaviors (flexibility, self–discipline, entrepreneurialism) compatible with the new economic world that those policies have created.[29] Scholars interested in governmentality and in economic globalization have done much to explicate the ways in which individuals and nation–states, respectively, have been recruited into neoliberal regimes of self–governance, and subsequently judged and disciplined according to their responsiveness to those regimes.[30] With this study, I hope to demonstrate that parallel demands have been placed on American institutions, cities, and regions.[31] That is, as neoliberal economic policy has led to state and federal divestment from both cultural institutions and Rust Belt cities, those institutions and cities have been

[29] Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham [N.C.: Duke UP, 2006.

[30] See Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*; Rose, Nikolas S. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Routledge, 1990., McRobbie, Angela. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009.

[31] There is also much to be said outside the bounds of this particular project about the parallels between the processes within the U.S. of austerity, disinvestment and deindustrialization in particular regions and the attempt to shift to a more "culturally-based" economy, and global capitalist processes of international debt, structural adjustment and shifts to tourist-based economies.

called upon to adapt to the new norm of austerity by internalizing the same neoliberal logics, traits, and priorities (flexibility, self–discipline, self–entrepreneurialism) that are required of workers in the new economy. When it comes to cultural institutions and urban politics in the 1970s and 80s, culture and public policy are deeply and messily entangled, co–constitutive, and sometimes impossible to separate. Thus, methodologically, I employ a hybrid or "scavenger" methodology, tracing the discourses that produce such categories as "the Rust Belt" across multiple sites, from official government policy to the lyrics sung by a dancing animatronic robot in a theme park exhibit.[32] The proliferation of particular discourses across these diverse sites is evidence of their power and hegemony in the making of new economic "common sense" in a time and place when much of what had been understood as the bedrock of US economic life was shaken. My inquiry into the sites and projects that I examine is geared toward understanding how neoliberal ideology shaped, and was shaped by, articulation of a place's economic and cultural value, what it means to be a "good" or "bad" city in a moment of profound regional and national economic change, and what was seen as possible and effective in terms of revitalization strategies for these places struggling to reinvent themselves. Thus my hybrid methodology uses traditional archives of historical research in combination with a visual studies approach of reading the material culture of places like AutoWorld—the exhibits, the scripts, the costumes

[32] Such a hybrid approach has been put to particularly effective use in feminist and queer historical research. For a discussion of "scavenger" methodologies as a way to attend to subjects ignored or erased by traditional disciplinary coherence, see Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.

that employees wore, as well as the "structures of feeling" they construct and convey.

Flint, Michigan

As historian Andrew Highsmith recounts in his study of segregation in metropolitan Flint, Buick historian Carl Crow once claimed that "America is a thousand Flints."[33] Of course, that was a positive assessment by Crow in 1945, when the economic health of the city was considerably more robust, and its future more bright, than during the later twentieth century. I contend, however, that Flint can bear the same representative weight in 1984, inasmuch as any particular city can be "representative." As a canary in the coal mine of urban revitalization in the midst of neoliberal transformation, I make the case in this dissertation for Flint as a crucial site, materially and symbolically, for understanding the political, economic and cultural changes that accompanied the emergence and increasing hegemony of neoliberal policy and ideology from the late 1970s to 1997—the year of AutoWorld's demolition—and up to the present day.

Flint's history in the twentieth century closely mirrors the historical and popular narrative of the nation, and it has often been used as an exemplar, for better and worse. As a major crucible of organized labor, the 1930s sit–down strikes against General Motors in Flint are universally recognized as a turning point and model for worker activism. As the national model of a prosperous "company town"

[33] Crow, Carl. *The City of Flint Grows Up; the Success Story of an American Community.* New York: Harper, 1945.

in the 1950s, Flint was the image of what a well–functioning industrial urban center should be (despite the inequality, racial and otherwise, that lay beneath the surface of this image, and made such functionality possible).[34] Since the 1970s, even as the nationally recognized "worst place to live in America," as named officially by *Money* magazine among other publications, Flint has often been used on the national stage to illustrate the triumphs and disasters of the twentieth century. For me, Flint is the anchor that holds together the broader questions taken up by this dissertation. Here, the cultural politics of race, class, and gender are central not only to the construction of competing perceptions and (un)marketable images of Flint, the Midwestern Rust Belt, and urban space in general, but also to the specific representational and narrative tools employed by cultural institutions in an effort to survive, as David Harvey puts it, the "revolutionary turning point" that was the rise of neoliberalism.

Perhaps the most convincing example of the ties between Flint and the national arena is the fact that AutoWorld itself was partially financed, in the amount of $8.6 million, by a grant from the federal department of Housing and Urban Development, making it the first theme park to receive such funding. HUD officials were so impressed by the AutoWorld plan that when they made the grant in 1980 they not only awarded the full amount sought by the city, but they also were

[34] As in many cities throughout the industrial north, a veneer of opportunity and relative equality masked (and in many ways depended upon) deep racial and class tensions, segregation, and, as Thomas Sugrue puts it, "the origins of the urban crisis." See Sugrue, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996.*;* Gillette, Howard. *Camden after the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post–industrial City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005.*;* Highsmith, Andrew. *Demolition Means Progress: Race, Class, and the Deconstruction of the American Dream in Flint, Michigan*. Diss. University of Michigan, 2009.

enthusiastically prepared to make it a national showcase as the way forward for the nation's troubled cities.[35] In its unsuccessful efforts to navigate the neoliberal transformations of the late twentieth century, Flint instead became a negative exemplar that ultimately served to further legitimate, on both a local and national scale, the new model of increasingly fierce regional and individual competition for tourist revenue through its failure to achieve the central neoliberal tenet of "personal responsibility."[36] As a key connection between cultural and economic realms, "personal responsibility" functions in my analysis as not only a framework for understanding the individual implications of a neoliberal regime and its demands that citizens "take care" of themselves, but also as a way of interrogating the discipline that neoliberal policy and ideology impose upon urban spaces and communities. By absolving corporate responsibility in favor of maximizing profits and championing capital mobility, the requirement of "responsibility" can be as applicable to deindustrialized Rust Belt cities that fail to flourish in a changing economy as it can to the image of Reagan's "welfare queens"—in the end, both have negative moral implications and lasting social, economic, and cultural consequences.

Today, Flint is a changing but still iconically troubled city. After four decades of steady population decline—losing residents since 1970 both to the out–county suburbs and to relocation out of Michigan altogether—Flint is at its lowest population since 1920 with approximately 102,000 residents, almost 60% of whom

[35] "Grant Virtually Assures AutoWorld: HUD Awards All Flint Sought for Theme Park –– $8.6 million," *Flint Journal*, 30 October 1980.
[36] In Lisa Duggan's analysis, "personal responsibility," along with "privatization" are the central intersections between the culture and economic vision of neoliberalism.

are African American.[37] Despite being listed by *Kiplinger's* magazine in 2011 as one of eleven American "comeback cities," in an article that citied a slight upturn in health care and automotive industry jobs, unemployment remains in the double–digits at 10% after a peak of almost 15% following the 2008 nationwide economic downturn.[38] Health care employment has taken over as the city's primary employer, with a cluster of hospitals and peripheral organizations ranking at the top of the individual employers for the city and county. General Motors, once the unquestioned lifeblood of the city, still provides a significant number of jobs and is the city's number two employer, even if the raw numbers are a fraction of what they were at the company's peak.

But Flint is also in many ways a symbol of the seemingly endless urban crisis of the Rust Belt. Routinely posting staggering numbers of murders, arson, and other crime, Flint regularly hovers in the top five positions on the FBI's "most dangerous cities" list, usually trading off specific rankings with other Rust Belt (and, more often than not, other Michigan) cities from year to year. In 2013, Flint ranked at number three, with chances of becoming a victim of violent crime reported as 1 in 42. Echoing the infamous 1986 proclamation by *Money* magazine of Flint as the "worst place in America to live," Flint also makes regular appearances in *Forbes'* annual "Most Miserable Cities" list. In 2013, Flint came in at number two—only Detroit was deemed more miserable, based on the fact that only Detroit has a higher out–

[37] City of Flint Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, 2011: 163.
[38] Roshania, Neema, and Laura Kennedy. "Downtrodden Cities Making a Comeback." *www.kiplinger.com*. N.p., Apr. 2011. Web. 28 May 2013.

migration rate.[39] In late 2011, a Michigan State review panel appointed by newly elected Republican Governor Rick Snyder declared the City of Flint to be in the state of a "local government financial emergency," and recommended that the state again appoint an Emergency Manager. Michael Brown was named to the controversially powerful post—superseding the authority of both the Mayor and City Council—effective on December 1, 2011.

Still, despite a continually dismal national reputation, Flint is currently in the midst of another round of intensive revitalization efforts. A small group of private investors, in concert with the Downtown Development Authority and the city government, has accelerated efforts to remake downtown Flint as a middle–class consumer destination with numerous bars, nightlife activities and upscale restaurants as well as multiple "loft style" apartments built into the formerly vacant buildings along downtown's South Saginaw Street. There is likewise a conscious effort by city officials and boosters to promote the University of Michigan–Flint as the basis for a new, modern, knowledge–based identity for the city, or at least for its downtown. Meanwhile, debates rage about the relative lack of investment and resource allocation in the city's non–downtown neighborhoods, especially in traditionally African American neighborhoods, where development discussions have been much more geared toward strategies for "shrinking" the city inward to consolidate resources.

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[39] Badenhausen, Kurt. "Detroit Tops 2013 List Of America's Most Miserable Cities." *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 21 Feb. 2013. Web. 28 May 2013.

Rather than a case study of one place and its bounded, if fascinating, significance, this dissertation tells two parallel and intersecting stories. One is a local account of how a specific community attempted to navigate a difficult turning point in its history, with all the quirks and intricacies and particular politics of that place. The other charts the longer–term political economic and cultural trajectories that shape, and are shaped by, ground–level responses and battles in places like Flint during the 1970s and 80s. This latter history thus considers the stories of other local efforts and institutions both within and outside the regional/cultural designation of the Rust Belt—Cleveland and its quest for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; Toledo, Ohio's efforts to transform its image and economy; Youngstown, Ohio's attempt to memorialize the declining steel industry. Each contributes to a narrative that operates simultaneously on national, regional and local registers.

A 1982 *Detroit Free Press* article examined revitalization efforts in five different cities, chosen because of their similarity in some way to Detroit.[40] With the headline "Some Downtowns are Coming Back to Life," the article looks at Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Louisville to highlight both the successes and the challenges of each former industrial center, and how they might reflect upon Detroit's efforts to revitalize its downtown—efforts that had become a well–worn story by 1982, and one that would only continue to grow more grim. The common problems of these urban centers identified in the article—including age, industrial past, suburban flight, and overwhelming fiscal problems—provide comparative angles for the purposes of the article, but also allow us some insight into how these

[40] "Some American Downtowns are Coming Back to Life: A Look at Efforts in Five Cities," *Detroit Free Press*, 25 April 1982.

common problems were talked about in the early 1980s, and what solutions were thought of as reasonable and innovative. For instance, the chairman of the Pittsburgh Urban Development Authority is quoted in the article as saying, "People used to see us as a smoky, dirty industrial city. Well, there's nothing like that. In fact, we're becoming a very good city." The automatic equation of "industrial" with "bad" in this moment speaks volumes about what is perceived to be "the problem" with the Rust Belt. Here, the key to a city's vitality is in large part image management and public perception—a "good city" is not industrial, but rather must reorient its priorities and economic base toward an entertaining and "cultural" downtown. In the piece's conclusion, a Pittsburgh local official praises the city's efforts to revitalize via "historical preservation" and "that grand Victorian presence," and the issue of revitalization is framed similarly for each city as one primarily of image management, meeting with varying levels of success in each location.[41] The spatial framing of "downtown" in the piece points toward an increasing level of interest in the boundaries of urban revitalization and the policing of those boundaries according to "desirable" populations of consumers. At least two of the "success stories" profiled in the article—the renovated "eyesore" of Harbor Place in Baltimore as well as parts of Minneapolis and Pittsburgh—are James Rouse or Rouse–inspired developments. James Rouse, a Master Planner and real estate developer who became widely celebrated in the 1970s and 80s for his successful "festival marketplace" urban developments, is a significant and symbolic figure in the rise of neoliberal strategies of urban revitalization in the Rust Belt, and is

[41] Ibid.

examined more extensively in chapters one and three. This kind of comparative framework, especially from the perspective of a fellow deindustrialized urban center, is valuable in understanding the terms of debate on local, regional, and national levels.

Returning for a moment to Maxine Kronick and her comments, with which I began this introduction, there seems to be an underlying sadness or at least sense of disappointment as she looks back on the failed efforts to reinvigorate a city that was, and continues to be, a representative of the perpetually dying Rust Belt. As I write this, there are glimmers of hope for city boosters and officials as downtown Flint slowly fills up with small restaurants and hip new loft apartments, but they are cautious about making any grand claims. Twenty–five years after AutoWorld opened and closed, its failure still haunts any new development plan, and it is still referenced in local media as a punch line and a bogeyman. If you want to stop a conversation with a Mott Foundation official or a downtown developer, simply mention AutoWorld—believe me, I've tried. But even though the outcome of those efforts seems so clear and predictable in hindsight, and can be the object of such gallows humor as it is *Roger & Me*, there is no doubt that AutoWorld made sense to at least some important people in the context of the changing economic, political, and cultural landscape of the early 1980s. Neither the goal of image–transformation, nor the resources and representations mobilized in its cause, could have coalesced in any other historical moment, and the consequences still resonate into the present. As cities have become more and more "Disneyfied," and as scholars and cultural critics mourn the loss of a romanticized notion of urban public space, I believe we

can more profitably examine the places that were excluded from (or failed in) this process—places that couldn't or wouldn't be remade into something more.

In the increasingly unequal map of neoliberal development and growth, cities like Flint and regions like the Rust Belt function as a discourse as much as a collection of physical locations, helping to designate the new from the old, safe from dangerous, responsible from irresponsible. One of the goals of this dissertation is to keep an eye fixed on the longer history of the processes that shaped, and were shaped by, Flint in the early 1980s, and also on the fact that these processes continue into the present, often with unexpected outcomes. After all, the Bowery now has luxury loft living and a Whole Foods Market, even if Flint is still just … Flint.

Figure 1: AutoWorld as it appeared on opening day, July 4, 1984

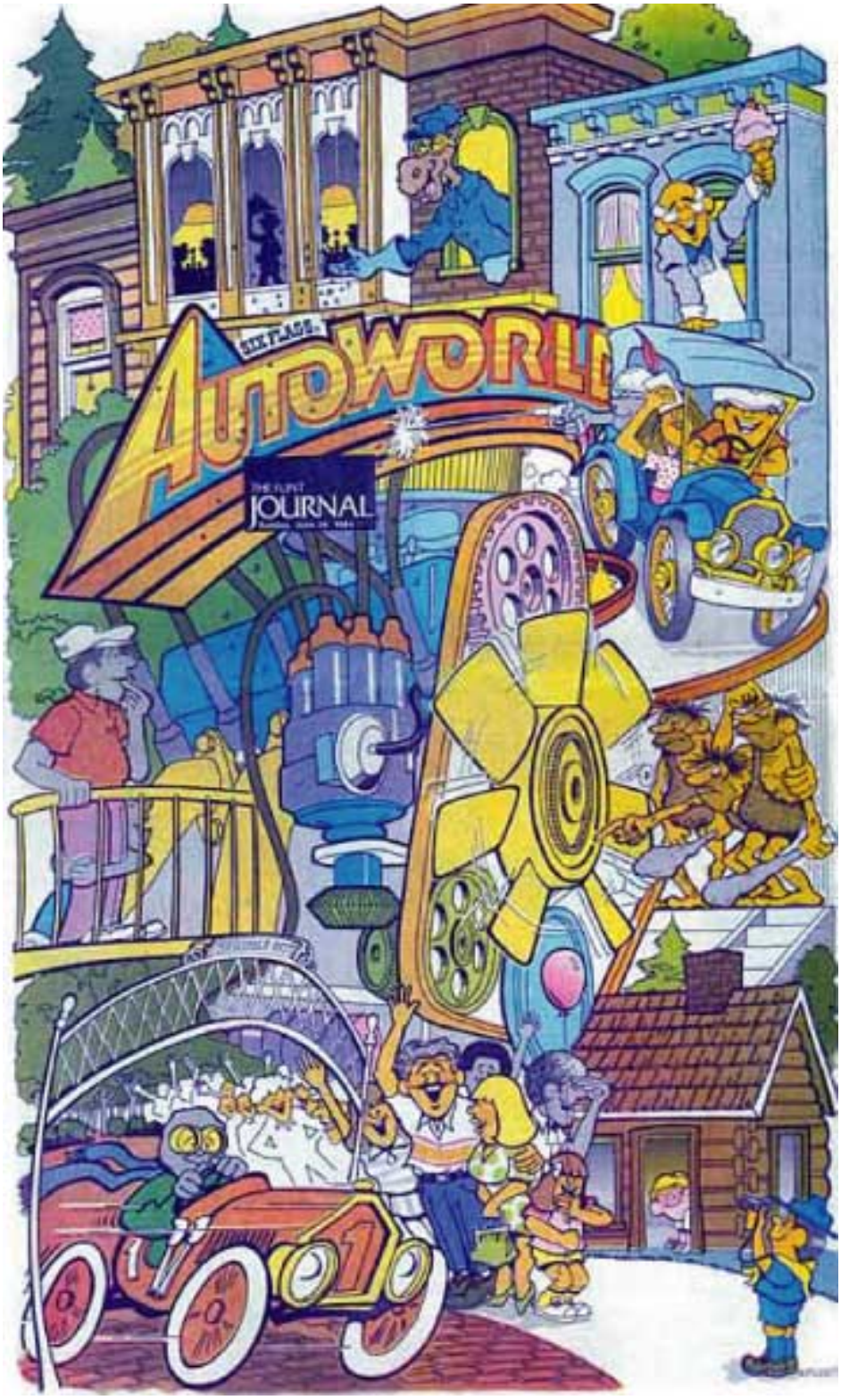

Figure 2: Special 95–page section of the *Flint Journal* to commemorate AutoWorld opening day

CHAPTER ONE

Neoliberal Strategies of Revitalization: Public/Private Partnerships and Mega–Projects

It is a great privilege for me to extend warm greetings to all who gather for the Grand Opening of AutoWorld. This important occasion provides me with a most welcome opportunity to commend the people in both the private and public sectors who have brought this project to fruition.

—President Ronald Reagan, in a letter to mark the Grand Opening of AutoWorld, June 29, 1984

The people of Flint have a right to be very proud of AutoWorld. It is a perfect example of how government, business, and most importantly a community, can work together for a better future.

—US Senator Donald Riegle, Jr., in remarks at the "Salute to AutoWorld" dinner, July 3, 1984

The public side of the public/private partnership has been slighted over the years, leaving government, and particularly urban mayors, the questionable role of subsidizing business interests.

—Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Merchant of Illusion: James Rouse, America's Salesman of the Businessman's Utopia*[42]

The late 1970s is generally regarded as one of the most tumultuous times in Cleveland's history. Deindustrialization, financial crisis, an infamously flammable river, and other now–familiar problems common to many cities in the "Rust Belt" combined to create the image of a hopeless, mismanaged "mistake on the Lake." In 1978, when the city's young mayor, Dennis Kucinich, refused to give in to

[42] Dagen Bloom, 185.

tremendous local pressure to privatize Cleveland's electrical utility, banks refused to continue extending credit to the city, causing a financial crisis, a recall effort, and even a mafia hit allegedly being called out on Kucinich.

Just eight years later, in 1986, Cleveland officially won a determined bid to become the site of the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum. Ostensibly chosen because the city was home to early Rock and Roll DJ Alan Freed, Cleveland won the right to call itself the home of Rock and Roll over cities like New York and Memphis, along with the potential tourist business, related economic boosts and image–transforming cultural capital that would undoubtedly come along with it. Cleveland also had something else that those other cities didn't—a package of $65 million in public and private funds that local leaders, eager to bring a tourist attraction to the city, put together to make it a particularly appealing location to the Hall of Fame. As *Cleveland Plain Dealer* music critic Michael Norman said, "It wasn't Alan Freed. It was $65 million. Cleveland wanted it here and put up the money."

These two events, while not necessarily historical bookends, illustrate a transformative period in the life of American cities, and especially in the life of the (de)industrial cities of the Midwest and Northeast. In the late 1970s, as the manufacturing and corporate patronage that built cities like Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Flint hastened their retreat from the region, local governments searched for survival strategies that would diversify their economies and stem the bleeding of jobs, population, and funds. The federal government had also retreated from their support of urban centers throughout the 1970s, and the dawn of the Reagan era saw a dedicated acceleration of that trend—federal support to state and

local spending didn't significantly turn down until midway through the Carter administration, but a clear trend was present by even the early 1970s, when both Congress and the White House showed less and less interest in helping especially industrial urban centers in the Midwest and Northeast as they struggled to remain financially solvent. In one of the most famous headlines of the decade, the *New York Daily News* declared "Ford to City: Drop Dead" when President Ford refused to help New York out of its fiscal crisis in 1975.[43] "Clearly by the 1980s," historian Jon Teaford concludes, "most older cities were on their own."[44] Increasingly, as Cleveland illustrates, "Rust Belt" cities attempted to transform their image and economy through cultural institutions with tourist appeal, often massive and spectacular in scale and funded through some combination of public money, tax incentives, and private business or philanthropic support.

The triumph of the public/private partnership is a hallmark of revitalization in the late 1970s and 1980s, and signaled a neoliberal model of development and governance that would become a new "common sense" for troubled urban centers. As the quotations that begin this chapter help to illustrate, the public/private partnership was hailed at the federal, state, and local levels as the new way to "get things done" in cities—President Reagan, Senator from Michigan Riegle, and many other officials on the local level all noted the importance of the public/private partnership in making AutoWorld's opening day a reality. As Rob Collier, who

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[43] Though Ford didn't explicitly say this phrase, it has come to symbolize an early articulation of federal unwillingness to support urban centers seen as fiscally or otherwise irresponsible. See discussion in Frieden, Bernard J., and Lynne B. Sagalyn. *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1989. 291.
[44] Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940–1985*. 261.

served as Flint City Administrator in the early 1980s, says, the public/private partnership was "born out of the ineptness" of government as well as business in this moment, and their seeming inability to accomplish any real change on their own.[45] The concept of business and government working together was not an entirely new one in the early 1980s—there is a long history of relationships between the two.[46] I will argue, however, that the public/private partnership, and the rhetoric around it, is fundamentally different than the boosterism, sponsorship, or social relationships between business and government that have long been a fixture of the American urban landscape. As a product of the neoliberal ideologies that increasingly permeated political and cultural life throughout the 1970s and 80s, the public/private partnership is emblematic of the narrowing of possibilities for cities when it came to negotiating postindustrial economic and cultural crises.

AutoWorld, Flint, Michigan's $80 million revitalization project built by a combination of public and private funds—and described by political and business leaders in glowing terms as one of the most complex and unique funding packages of its kind ever put together—is another clear example of this search for economic solutions when both government support and private business (in the form of General Motors jobs) were steadily retreating. The well–documented mania for privatization ushered in by the Reagan administration also framed the retreat of

[45] Collier, Robert. Telephone interview. 26 Oct. 2012.
[46] This includes individual boosterism as well as through non–profit foundations (such as the Mott Foundation) as well as social and professional clubs (such as Rotary International, Freemasons, and so on). For some discussion of these relationships in longer historical context, see Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*; Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940–1985*; Cowie and Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*.

federal support for struggling cities—which were increasingly seen as obsolete and morally deficient—as an opportunity for more private–sector intervention in revitalization. This reframing was a culmination of a decades–long effort by business conservatives to not only undermine the role of government in maintaining functioning cities, but also to propose the private sector as the best and only solution to urban problems, with the "public" contribution being to largely stay out of the way of progress. As Jason Hackworth observes in *The Neoliberal City*, "'Good' governance at the municipal level is now largely defined by the ability of formal government to assist, collaborate with, or function like the corporate community. Extant regulatory powers such as land–use zoning have been weakened, as have redistributive impulses in the area of social services and housing. Neoliberalism has been naturalized as the 'only' choice available to cities in the United States and elsewhere."[47] The legacy that Hackworth describes originated in the transformational moment of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The "Rust Belt" had a particular challenge to meet in this era, making it even more susceptible to the neoliberal turn. In both material and rhetorical terms, it was crucial for northern cities to seem as "business friendly" as their less–unionized and less–regulated competition in the thriving Southern/Western "Sun Belt." This effort sometimes took the form of strategies to retain traditional manufacturing jobs at steeper and steeper social and financial costs. For example, amid massive job losses, Detroit Mayor Coleman Young granted substantial incentives to General Motors in exchange for building what would become the Detroit/Hamtramck Assembly Plant,

[47] Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*. 10–11.

using eminent domain to raze an entire neighborhood of 4,200 residents, 1,300 homes, 140 businesses, six churches and one hospital to build a factory that has produced uneven and dubious economic benefits.[48] Cultural institutions such as Flint's AutoWorld—an unwieldy combination of history museum and theme/amusement park—were carefully aimed at retaining and creating jobs in struggling northern cities, fashioned after "Sun Belt" successes like Orlando, Florida's Disney World and Texas–based Six Flags (the company that would ultimately be hired to manage AutoWorld when it opened). Funded through an impossibly complex combination of philanthropic funds, private investment, tax dollars, and government funding, AutoWorld promoted itself as a "new" kind of institution, built through a new model of bold, efficient development that largely bypassed the traditional governmental "red tape" and bureaucracy that marked what was increasingly seen as a failed, outdated era in American city governance. Furthermore, the quotations that begin this chapter illustrate the rhetorical echo chamber that neoliberal strategies of revitalization became: Ronald Reagan had clearly laid out an agenda of retreat from American urban centers through a variety of federal policies, promoting private–sector involvement whenever possible; local political and business leaders explicitly reaffirmed the need for such partnerships; and then everyone gave speeches and statements celebrating how crucial this new framework was for advancing struggling cities back toward morally–right self–

[48] "Michigan History." *Detnews.com*. Web. 17 Mar. 2013. For a recent discussion on how corporations have consistently benefited over municipalities with this strategy of tax incentives in exchange for location, with extensive analysis of General Motors in Michigan among other cases, see Research., Louise Story; Lisa Schwartz And Ramsey Merritt Contributed. "The Empty Promise of Tax Incentives." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 02 Dec. 2012. Web. 17 Mar. 2013.

sufficiency.[49] At the federal, state, and local level (not to mention the global), neoliberal strategies of revitalization were, and are, in this manner reified as the only sensible solution to urban problems.

Writing about Cleveland's predicament under Kucinich, Jason Hackworth argues that "the notion that city officials should do everything in their power to placate corporate financial interests that threaten to leave or penalize the locality has become so unquestioned that it is considered common sense by public administrators and the popular press."[50] The public/private partnership and the changing relationships between government, business, philanthropic organizations and the public in the 1970s and 80s are the roots of this "common sense." In Cleveland, for instance—where Kucinich was seen by the media and by Clevelanders as a failure, dependent on an outdated New Deal politics—the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was, and remains, a success due to the power of the private sector working through the auspices of government. This "common sense" ties together revitalization strategies from Cleveland to Flint and beyond, and it has a political and intellectual history that precedes any of these mega–projects. Although not exclusively a right–wing framework—the public/private partnership and urban revitalization in general certainly share some common goals and concerns with

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[49] For the most compelling discussion of the Reagan–era moral underpinnings of neoliberalism, see Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?* The extensive literature on governmentality and the neoliberal policing of the self are also instructive here, as it illustrates the links between political economics and morality, including Rose, Nikolas S. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Routledge, 1990.; Cruikshank, B., "Revolutions within: self–government and self–esteem" in Barry, Andrew, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas S. Rose. *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo–liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996.

[50] Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*: 2.

progressives and even New Deal Liberals—the push toward a more powerful private–sector presence in shaping urban development is rooted in a decades–long anti–New Deal business conservative tradition.

American Business "Under Attack"

In 1972, *Business Week* magazine published an article nervously titled "America's Growing Antibusiness Mood," which was, as the title suggests, an examination of the overwhelming lack of public confidence in corporations that had emerged by the early 1970s.[51] In fact, as Kim Phillips–Fein argues about the late twentieth–century critical mass of antibusiness sentiment and activism, ranging from student protest to bank bombings to new government regulation, "all of it seemed a single continuum, one discordant challenge rising against American businessmen."[52] And although much of this was certainly rooted in the postwar affluence that had defined almost two previous decades beginning to give way to inflation and unemployment, American business also had a profound image problem, reaching back to at least Ralph Nader and the first line of his massively influential 1965 best–seller, *Unsafe at Any Speed*: "For over half a century the American automobile has brought death, injury and the most inestimable sorrow and deprivation to millions of people."[53] When General Motors attempted to discredit Nader upon his Congressional testimony regarding consumer safety and

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[51] "America's Growing Antibusiness Mood," *Business Week*, June 17, 1972. 100.
[52] Phillips–Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*. 154.
[53] Nader, Ralph. *Unsafe at Any Speed; the Designed–in Dangers of the American Automobile.* New York: Grossman, 1965. v.

the automobile industry, their attempts backfired, effectively further demonizing the company and making Nader an even more influential national figure. And although public opinion on, for instance, organized labor was also growing more unfavorable, by the 1970s business elites felt increasingly and unfairly under attack from a public who needed to be "educated"—or by other means persuaded—back to the side of American free market capitalism.

As Phillips–Fein, Bethany Moreton, and others have argued, one response of business elites to this image problem was to wage a cultural war for the hearts and minds of American youth, creating academic positions, scholarships, think tanks and college courses designed to spread free market capitalist philosophies to young people on their own terms.[54] Although business elites saw young people's unfavorable sentiments toward business as closely linked to student agitation around the American war in Vietnam, they also understood this alienation more generally as a product of a generational divide and a matter of "economic illiteracy." In 1971, Pepsico CEO Donald Kendall bemoaned "the Generation Gap—the chronic alienation of youth and parents, youth and religion … youth and free enterprise."[55] Opposition to American capitalism was thus, in the view of business conservatives, a misguided critique based on either ignorance that could be corrected or the

[54] In addition to her book *Invisible Hands*, Phillips–Fein's excellent article "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History (2011)* 98 *(3): 723–743.* provides a thorough review of the recent literature on business conservatism in the United States. For longer historical views, see also Galambos, Louis, and Barbara Barrow Spence. *The Public Image of Big Business in America, 1880–1940: A Quantitative Study in Social Change*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1975.; Fraser, Steve, and Gary Gerstle. *Ruling America: A History of Wealth and Power in a Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005.; Chandler, Alfred D. *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1977.; Zunz, Olivier. *Making America Corporate, 1870–1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990.
[55] Schulman and Zelizer. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*. 54.

dangerous troublemaking of spoiled children. Then–California Governor Ronald Reagan, for instance, paternalistically questioned what gave these arrogant children the right to bite the hand that fed them and the rest of America in a 1972 speech on "free enterprise."[56] In either case, business leaders' response was to regard such opposition as illegitimate, personally insulting, even strangely hurtful, often framing critique as a form of immature, ungrateful betrayal. Business conservatives, who had been organizing and agitating against the New Deal in various ways since its inception, saw the 1970s as a moment of crisis and an opportunity to answer and convert opposition, and to change the terms of discourse around the role of business in public life.

One man who was motivated to act by widespread opposition to American business was Harding Mott, then–President of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and son of C.S. Mott, founder and *original* partner in the creation of General Motors. Harding Mott was angry and indignant upon hearing the news in 1970 that students at San Jose State College had staged an "automotive funeral" as part of a proto–Earth Day demonstration on campus, burying a brand new car in a 12–foot deep grave to make an anti–internal combustion, anti–automotive industry statement (Fig. 3). Widely covered in local and national news media, the demonstration ultimately resulted in one of the first Environmental Studies programs established at a US university.[57] Mott, who was himself very much a product of the automobile industry, and who presided over one of the largest philanthropic foundations in the country,

[56] Reagan, Ronald. "Free Enterprise." *Vital Speeches of the Day* 39.7 (1973): 196.
[57] Whiting, Sam. "San Jose Car Burial Put Ecological Era in Gear." *SFGate*. N.p., 20 Apr. 2010. Web. 17 Mar. 2013.

which also happened to be a product of that industry, was less impressed. Recounting the story of Mott's reaction, his successor at the Foundation, William S. White, said in 1984,

> … back in the late 1960s [it] became fashionable to begin to knock the automobile industry. In particular, there were some students at San Jose State University who buried an automobile … Harding said someone needed to tell the story of the automobile industry: what it has done for our American society and culture and the world at large; the number of people it employs; the technology which has been spun off of it; the fact that this has truly revolutionized the world and is not necessarily the demon people make it out to be.[58]

In this statement, we again see the complex interpenetration of institutional and personal viewpoints, as well as the rhetorics of "ungratefulness" and arrogance that frame business elites' response to criticism. Not only does Harding Mott's original response to the relatively small student protest across the country from Flint, Michigan illustrate a much broader anxiety about the security of the automotive industry, and by extension the executive ruling class, but it frames that anxiety as one of a wounded patriarch, feelings hurt by a nation questioning his leadership instead of young people appreciating the world provided them by the American businessman. Moreover, White's retelling in 1984 of Harding Mott's reaction illustrates the intensifying of this framework through the 1970s and into the 1980s—with the benefit of hindsight and a businessman's perspective (White had a Master's degree in business administration and worked for a New York management consulting firm for ten years before leading the Mott Foundation), White displays both an increased confidence as well as undiminished anxiety in his

[58] Graham, David V. "Delays, Doubts Paved AutoWorld's Path, White Says." *The Flint Journal* 24 June 1984: 25.

role. Instead of the sharp anger and defensiveness of Harding Mott, White has taken on a paternalistic dismissiveness in his tone, describing the days back in the late 1960s, "when it became fashionable to knock the automobile industry." In referencing the San Jose students involved in the protest, he goes on to say, "One of the interesting side incidents of that little story of them burying the automobile was that the person who organized that protest later was employed in one of our grant programs on a fellowship here in Flint."[59] The implication here is clearly that not only was this protest a minor, passing moment of immature opposition, but that in the end, even the organizer of this protest was helped (or absorbed, appropriated, etc.) by the benefits of the automotive industry through the Foundation, effectively negating his original, youthful, wrong–headed beliefs.

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is a philanthropic foundation built on the $750 million personal fortune of C.S. Mott, an early partner in founding General Motors in Flint. Although the Foundation is global in its scope, promoting a vision of individual empowerment as well "community well–being" both locally and throughout the world, the city of Flint itself was and is not possible without the Mott Foundation. C.S. Mott, fiercely opposed to federal income taxation, clearly started his foundation in 1926 at least in part as a way to shelter a portion of his wealth, but also, according to his biographers, to reflect "an engineer's kind of planning for the future, a way of organizing his help to the community and making it business–like—taking as much care in the spending of his money as he had devoted to earning it."[60]

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Young, Clarence H., and William A. Quinn. *Foundation for Living; the Story of Charles Stewart Mott and Flint,*. New York: McGraw–Hill, 1963. 97. For a much more detailed

Almost always preferring self–help strategies rather than direct aid, he integrated his "business–like" viewpoint into the foundation that he built from the beginning. In short, Mott Foundation money makes Flint possible—the Foundation chooses what programs to fund at what level, and in many ways determines the priorities of the city. This is of course not unusual, as early industrialist fortunes founded many of the largest philanthropic organizations, and imbued them with similar business conservative philosophical views.[61]

The product of Harding Mott's anger over the San Jose student protest was an idea for a cultural institution that, in his mind, would restore the automotive industry to its rightful place in the American imagination as one of the greatest forces for good in modern history. Initially conceived as a respectable National Automotive Hall of Fame, his idea transformed over the course of a decade into the multi–million dollar complex of AutoWorld—a shape–shifting amusement park/historical museum hybrid that would bear the burdens of deindustrialization, job loss, and the need for economic diversification as the 1970s piled them onto cities like Flint. More importantly, this narrative of Harding Mott's anger was continually cited by officials and in the press as the origin of what AutoWorld became, authorizing a project intended to transform criticism of the auto industry—and increasingly, despair over material losses as General Motors steadily backed away from the city of its birth—into support, respect, and something like "pride" for those who were left with only a dubiously marketable automotive "heritage." Mott

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discussion of Mott and the founding of the Mott Foundation, see Highsmith, *Demolition Means Progress*.

[61] The relationship between Pittsburgh and the Carnegie fortune, for example, is in many ways similar to that of Flint and Mott.

himself was more cautious about the final version of AutoWorld, though his business conservative viewpoint remained unchanged. "We aren't going to go ahead with something that's doomed even before the start," he said in 1982, when the Foundation for which he still served as a trustee was split on its support for the project. "It's a worthwhile attempt, but it would not be right for the community if it's not going to work out."[62] As it turned out, AutoWorld did not "work out," closing after only nine months due to lack of attendance, and it was, just as some trustees feared, "not right for the community."

It perhaps illustrates the difference between Harding Mott and an earlier generation of industrialists, more secure in their claims to power that, when he told his father C.S. Mott in 1970 of his idea to enshrine the industry's contributions in institutional form, the elder Mott was not impressed. Then in his 90s, the father scoffed, "I don't need that."[63] While the elder Mott certainly disliked attempts to monumentalize him personally, there is also the suggestion of a generation gap in his reaction, informed by a different relationship to his own power, and his unfamiliarity with the impulse to use something like a cultural institution to respond to anxieties over the image of big business. "What in the world would you need that for?" the two–time former Flint mayor seems to ask. "Don't you know you're already in charge?"

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[62] Graham, David V. "AutoWorld Flops: The Flint Journal Presents: Journal of the Twentieth Century." *AutoWorld Flops: The Flint Journal Presents: Journal of the Twentieth Century*. The Flint Journal, n.d. Web. 17 Mar. 2013.

[63] "The Road to AutoWorld: The Project Started with a Chance Remark and Rode Over Hurdles Into High Gear." *The Flint Journal* 22 June 1980.

Dovetailing neatly with this deeply felt, culturally based backlash was a long–term effort on the part of business conservatives to advance a vision for America's cities that would place the best and only real solution to urban problems—problems that only seemed to grow more serious as decades passed—in the hands of the private sector, and away from New Deal–style federal government intervention. As historian Nicholas Dagen Bloom argues, American businessmen were eager to provide free–market solutions to urban problems at the dawn of the Cold War, in response to European nation–states' socialist strategies for rebuilding their own cities. "Business ideology, with its emphasis on cutthroat management, profit creation, self–help, and low taxation, gained remarkable strength exclusively in the United States as the best approach to a variety of long–standing and complex urban problems," he writes. "Businessmen, or at least the most idealistic among them … sought a perfectly managed vision of capitalism that could, with only a delicate amount of government money, create a uniformly impressive urban civilization."[64] In fact, Bloom argues, business leaders took on urban improvement and revitalization projects in the postwar period largely to *avoid* the perceived need for federal involvement—in this context, business working in partnership with local and state governments was the conservative, anti–New Deal option, and, as developer James Rouse stated on several occasions, "It's conservative to be radical in giving powers to local government. Unless we give the power to local government

[64] Dagen Bloom, *Merchant of Illusion: James Rouse, American's Salesman of the Businessman's Utopia*: xiv.

to take the action necessary to solve the problems, we are creating a demand for the power of federal government to—that gets beyond their control."[65]

This business conservative philosophy also celebrates the public/private partnership as the most efficient way to solve America's urban problems, not only because it is the properly conservative approach, but because the power of local governments—the comparatively more desirable "small government" in conservative terms—is seen as more easily bent to the will of business interests. This, it is implied, is how change will actually happen. Though Rouse articulated this view as early as the late 1950s, the deterioration of both material conditions in, and broader public sentiment concerning the state of, deindustrializing "Rust Belt" cities in the late 1970s gave new import to private–sector–based solutions. Furthermore, the turn toward neoliberal economic policies in this same period, which accelerated under the Reagan administration, promoted business conservative approaches to urban revitalization as the new "common sense" in saving cities from failed New Deal–era interventions. James Rouse, although part of a decades–long tradition of antistatist activism, and hardly alone in his views, became emblematic of the businessman as urban savior. The creation of his Enterprise Foundation in 1982, a private–sector institution designed to develop urban revitalization projects with only minimal government involvement, "made Rouse a darling of politicians, both Democrats and Republicans, throughout the country. The vacuum created by the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations' destruction of national housing programs and social welfare was partly filled with Rouse's vision of private sector

[65] Ibid. 31.

solutions."[66] Rouse's business conservative philosophies, though hardly unique, served a national neoliberal agenda so neatly that he was awarded a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1995 for his contributions to public life. Furthermore, Rouse is a crucial figure in linking a longer tradition of business conservatism to the neoliberal turn of the late 1970s through culturally–based approaches to urban revitalization—beginning in the mid–1970s, his trademark "Festival Marketplaces" with their mix of shopping, entertainment, locally–flavored "heritage," and attention to middle–class consumer comfort became a go–to model for cities from Baltimore to New York to Toledo to inject life into depressed city centers.

More broadly, the neoliberal model of public/private partnerships became celebrated and naturalized by officials at all levels as the "common sense" solution for saving troubled American cities in the 1970s and 80s, signaling a new relationship between capital and government. Struggling local governments, now characterized as failed, inefficient relics of a Keynsian welfare state, cooperated with and even behaved as private businesses in order to adapt and survive.[67] In the absence of federal support, and in the face of increasingly mobile corporate capital, local governments became entrepreneurial, pursuing strategies to transform and revitalize local economies hand–in–hand with private funding sources.

Which brings us back to Cleveland, Flint, and the quotations that began this chapter. Cleveland under Mayor Kucinich in 1978 is a textbook case of the neoliberal city's predicament, as banks rather than elected officials were dictating public policy

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[66] Ibid. 90.
[67] see Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*. 26.

decisions, threatening the city with default unless local government accepted the privatization of public services. But this does not exactly illuminate the more complex operations of power at play in Flint, where the city leveraged significant public money to make the Mott Foundation's shrine to business a reality. Business leaders and Mott Foundation officials wrote letters to both the Mayor and President Reagan, asking for recognition of the impressive public/private partnership that made AutoWorld a reality. The Mayor, business leaders, and the Mott Foundation all made requests that Reagan speak at the opening of AutoWorld, in appeals that highlighted the public/private partnership that made AutoWorld happen as evidence of Flint's status as a responsible neoliberal citizen. And though Reagan didn't ultimately speak at the opening, he sent a letter to be read, affirming that the arrangement had his blessing, and that this was a way forward for the nation's troubled cities. Yet all of these scripts were almost formalities, since Everyone involved already understood what was expected of each actor, and what types of action were legitimate strategies for revitalization. AutoWorld was touted by officials and by the press as a "unique partnership" between public and private investment, and the baffling complexity of its funding structure seen as a comforting stamp of legitimacy. When Senator Riegle said "[AutoWorld] is a perfect example of how government, business, and most importantly a community, can work together for a better future," did "the community" actually have a place besides accepting the only option offered? Did government have a role other than as an arm of the Mott Foundation's business–conservative agenda? In Cleveland, why was Dennis Kucinich seen as a failure, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame a savior? These

questions not only illustrate the neoliberal turn in American cities, and how it specifically structured "Rust Belt" revitalization efforts, but also allow us to draw together the seemingly disparate economic, political, and cultural dimensions of that turn.

The Endless Urban Marketplace

In a city, you ought to be able to buy chocolate–covered spinach or fried marbles if you want to.

—Richard Stein, Market Center Development Corp., Baltimore[68]

The commercial core has become the billboard of neoliberal governance in American cities, mega–projects the featured product.

—Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City*

The vision laid out by Richard Stein above is at once age–old and profoundly of the moment (that moment being 1983). The idea of urban centers as a bazaar of goods was nothing new. In the context of Baltimore, however—or indeed of Detroit, whose daily newspaper printed this quotation as an introduction to a story on primarily Rust Belt downtown retail—it illustrates the anxieties and possibilities envisioned by these former industrial cities for transforming themselves at a moment of economic and cultural transition. This vision imagines the purpose of a city—that is, what and whom a city is *for*—as an endless marketplace, existing to provide consumers with whatever they might desire, however ridiculous, and to offer it in a way that is so unique and total that it will draw these consumers from as far and wide as is possible. Furthermore, this statement suggests an explanation for

[68] Hansell, Betsey. "Retail Scene Looking up in Other Major Cities." *Detroit Free Press* 14 Dec. 1983

just what was *wrong* with cities like Baltimore—or, again, Detroit—and why they were in such desperate need of reinvention. The implication is that these cities have so far failed entirely in the mission of meeting consumer demand, not in what they *make*—or, in most cases, *made*—but in what they *are*. To be a "real" city, in other words, is to be a unique, entrepreneurial, and completely available landscape of exciting shopping and entertainment choices for middle–class consumers. Although cities have always been some combination of community and marketplace, and never purely egalitarian public spaces, this new emphasis on the city itself, and more importantly the *image* of the city, as a consumable and marketable product illuminates the neoliberal shift that structured Rust Belt urban revitalization strategies in late 70s and early 80s.

The private sector clearly had a material and philosophical stake in strategies that prioritized market solutions over direct government intervention and/or aid, but such strategies were also clearly put forth by other major actors in urban revitalization at this time, including philanthropic foundations. In their 1983 annual report, the C.S. Mott Foundation clearly articulates their position on the changing role of the private sector and philanthropic foundations in the revitalization of distressed urban centers, especially in the struggling Midwestern Rust Belt. In the narrative portion of the annual report, which is traditionally the place where the Foundation conveys the overall theme of their funding priorities for that year (titled "The Rebuilding of America" for 1983), they go so far as to begin by quoting a favorite neoliberal proverb and celebrating its "universal" implications:

> Give a hungry man a fish and he will be satisfied for the whole day. Teach him how to fish and he will never be hungry again. That proverb, with its theme of self–sufficiency, is finding an increasingly receptive audience among those concerned about the conditions of life facing many Americans. There is growing agreement that facilitating and accelerating the development of the US economy may be the most effective way of addressing many of the problems, social as well as economic, facing the country.[69]

Claiming support for this "growing agreement"—meaning, presumably, the rightward–shifting consensus of the Reagan era—on how to best fix social problems, the strong positioning of philanthropy on the side of the private sector is not exactly surprising, especially given the industrial roots of the Mott Foundation and other similar institutions, but it nevertheless illustrates the increasingly dominant neoliberal framework of market–based solutions for urban problems that had become the new "common sense" by the early 1980s. Again, private sector involvement in urban development was not a radically new phenomenon in the early 1980s, but the terms in which solutions were proposed by the private sector, government, and non–profit/philanthropic institutions—and the "public/private partnerships" proposed and advanced by all of them—were specific to this moment. Solutions to the problems of former industrial cities, for example, were explicitly set against what was characterized as the obvious failure of government programs from the 1960s, placing new "common sense" market–based solutions in stark contrast with New Deal and Great Society models of urban revitalization and aid. It is worth quoting the Mott Foundation annual report at length on this point:

[69] *C. S. Mott Foundation Annual Report*. Publication. Flint: C. S. Mott Foundation, 1983. 9.

> Similarly, the social welfare programs launched to improve the economic and social conditions of the disadvantaged face sharp constraints on their ability to have a lasting impact. Since the 1960s, vast sums have been spent to provide new housing, improved medical care, and a better standard of living for the poor. Yet these programs are now perceived as dangerously addictive for many of the beneficiaries, trapping the poor in a culture of dependency. Families that know only welfare cannot easily teach their children about work or encourage them to participate in the economy.
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> In light of these trends, the terms of the American welfare debate have changed markedly since the 1960s, when many argued that an affluent nation could afford to sustain its poorest members in dignity and a measure of comfort through government–administered transfer payments. Significantly, minority leaders have become the most vocal critics of the dependency and despair that the welfare system often breeds, but they are hardly alone. Increasingly, there is broad agreement that welfare exacts a toll on its recipients as well as on those who pay for it, and there is growing consensus that places a high value on the economic and psychological values of having a regular job and a regular paycheck.[70]

Aside from reproducing the racially and sexually loaded language of Reagan conservatism on welfare (welfare as "addictive," and as "breeding" problematic behavior; Black women as deviant, immoral, and irresponsible), and despite the fact that it is the stated mission of the Foundation to improve the quality of life for the disadvantaged, the solution proposed by the Mott Foundation to what was "generally agreed" as the "failed" policies of the 1960s is clearly laid out in this narrative, as well as in their funding priorities: to stimulate the private sector to create jobs where industrial work has disappeared. Specifically, they suggest "a 'public/private partnership' involving a variety of American institutions" to provide a business–friendly climate that will ultimately encourage the formation of new

[70] Ibid. 10.

economic development.[71] The public/private partnership, specifically as a tool of neoliberal growth and revitalization to combat a dismal history of excessive government intervention, is posited here by the Mott Foundation as a central and defining feature of the strategy to finally turn distressed cities around.

In some ways, institutions like the Mott Foundation were not purely ideological, but were perhaps simply reacting to the political reality of the Reagan administration, and its antipathy toward federal support for urban centers, and especially toward Democratically leaning, labor–friendly strongholds of the Northeast and Midwest. Under Reagan, the goal of national policy was fundamentally reoriented toward encouraging the "development of private institutions conducive to individual responsibility and initiative," and, as Bruce Schulman has noted, business assumed "much more responsibility not just for the economic but for social and cultural life as well."[72] Cutbacks in appropriations to cities during the Reagan administration—which began even earlier under Carter, but accelerated dramatically beginning in 1980—also forced urban mayors and others involved in revitalization to look toward a "new localism" that shifted the burden for development and economic activity to state and local governments and public/private partnership arrangements, ultimately pitting struggling cities against each other in bidding wars using tax abatements and incentives in attempts to attract economic activity.[73] Non–profit foundations, however, presumably still had a

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[71] Ibid. 11.
[72] Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. New York: Free, 2001. 230.
[73] see Times, John Herbers, Special To The New York. "MAYORS STRESS 'NEW LOCALISM' IN REBUILDING CITIES." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 18 June 1985. Web. 17

basic mission to remain in troubled communities and to foster positive change—the conflicted nature of this mission can be easily seen in the contradictory list of organizations that received Mott Foundation funding in 1982, which included both James Rouse's Enterprise Foundation (which promoted market–based urban revitalization) and the National Congress for Community Economic Development (which worked to fill the gap "caused by the reduction in federal funding for economic development").[74] These contractions also illustrate how influential the neoliberal framework had become in discussions at multiple levels about what was seen as possible and desirable in terms of revitalization and development. Explicitly referencing the constraints within which cities and institutions found themselves forced to work, the Mott Foundation even recognized that, "As federal support for many activities ceases to grow, non–profit organizations have a responsibility to their constituents to develop alternative means of sustaining themselves and their work."[75] Almost immediately following this recognition, however, the Foundation defines a role for itself in the same market–based terms, arguing that "the nation's great foundations can almost invariably trace their histories back to a single entrepreneur and the growth of a major corporation. They would do well to help the wheel turn full circle by using the fruits of those earlier entrepreneurial successes to help spawn new enterprises." Community support and urban development is thus defined as a closed business circuit, with the philanthropic organization as venture capitalist.

Mar. 2013.; Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 231.; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity.*

[74] *C. S. Mott Foundation Annual Report*. Publication. Flint: C. S. Mott Foundation, 1982. 88.

[75] *C. S. Mott Foundation Annual Report*. Publication. Flint: C. S. Mott Foundation, 1983. 12.

The specific history of the Mott Foundation intersects with the broader history of philanthropic organizations in important ways. In 1963, Charles Stewart Mott gave the bulk of his vast assets to the Foundation, multiplying the organization's already considerable power for grant–making and giving, and putting it on the path to be one of the top fifteen philanthropic organizations in the country based on assets. Already heavily involved in shaping the Flint public school system, the organization expanded their reach and scope while maintaining a general charitable mission that allowed it to adapt to funding priorities as it saw fit; in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, the Mott Foundation took an increasingly active interest in addressing Flint's "urban crisis."[76]

Other powerful non–profit organizations were also developing and promoting neoliberal urban revitalization strategies based in public/private partnerships and market–based frameworks. In response to the clear trend of declining federal support, the Ford Foundation produced an influential discussion paper in 1979 titled "Communities and Neighborhoods: A Possible Private Sector Initiative for the 1980s," which called for a new strategy for funding Community Development Corporations with a combination of public and private sources, and which established the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) later the same year.[77] LISC, along with Rouse's Enterprise Foundation and the Mott Foundation, were, according to Mott Program Officer Rob Collier, all key parts of an emerging

[76] For an extensive discussion of the Mott Foundation's role in Flint schools as well as other arean in this era, see Highsmith, Andrew. *Demolition Means Progress: Race, Class, and the Deconstruction of the American Dream in Flint, Michigan*. Diss. University of Michigan, 2009.
[77] Anglin, Roland V., and Susanna C. Montezemolo. "Supporting the community development movement: The achievements and challenges of intermediary organizations." *Building the Organizations That Build Communities* (2004): 55. 6.

model for urban development in cities like Flint in the late 70s and early 80s, based in the neoliberal public/private partnership.[78]

While they shared a common framework, what these revitalization strategies looked like "on the ground" of course varied. As will be discussed at length in the following chapter, it was not uncommon for projects funded by these philanthropic organizations, in partnership with private stakeholders, to focus on image transformation and/or quasi–therapeutic goals. For example, one project in South Bend, Indiana was extensively profiled in the Mott Foundation annual report from 1984. The South Bend Heritage Foundation, a group dedicated to "halting physical, economic and social decline in several inner city neighborhoods"—as well as managing real estate in these neighborhoods by marshaling both public and private funds—had taken over management of an arts and education center called the Colfax Cultural Center, and the Mott Foundation was supporting their efforts. South Bend was once a thriving industrial town, home to the Studebaker automotive corporation among others, but in the early 1980s, it was suffering the effects of deindustrialization like many Rust Belt cities—the workforce of the largest employer in town had dwindled from 20,000 to about 4,500 by 1984. The Mott Foundation saw funding organizations like the South Bend Heritage Foundation as important because, according to the grant profile, "revitalizing neighborhood spirits is as important as refurbishing structures. And the Colfax Cultural Center neatly serves that purpose."[79] Furthermore, the profile is titled, "South Bend, Indiana: Revitalizing Spirits as Well as Structures." While not directly funding an

[78] Collier, Robert. Telephone interview. Dec. 2012.
[79] *C. S. Mott Foundation Annual Report*. Publication. Flint: C. S. Mott Foundation, 1984: 30

entrepreneurial venture, this funding priority—so appealing to the Mott Foundation that it warrants its own narrative section in their annual report—reveals the multilayered relationship between the economic and the cultural spheres of neoliberalism. At a time when union–wage industrial work, and the peripheral industries surrounding it, that had built and sustained what were now becoming Rust Belt cities were disappearing, the focus of redevelopment strategies often shifted toward a self–help model of esteem–building projects that would essentially make revitalization an individual task in which each citizen could take responsibility for their own attitude, thereby transforming community spirit in the process—revitalizing spirits was, in this model, a goal in itself, meant to generate material change.

AutoWorld was certainly a project dedicated to revitalizing the spirits of Flint at a time when the effects of deindustrialization were becoming increasingly acute, but it combined its therapeutic goals with image restoration, economic transformation, and downtown redevelopment in such a way as to make it a perfect storm of neoliberal revitalization strategies. Again, the AutoWorld concept was born out of the Mott Foundation, and Mott's guiding support for the project brought it to fruition (and would ultimately demolish its abandoned shell). As a "mega–project" par excellence, AutoWorld expanded into the role of all–purpose savior for the struggling city of Flint, an investment in scale and spectacle to combat Flint's myriad problems—big problems, logic dictated, called for big, bold solutions. As Jason Hackworth argues specifically about AutoWorld, it was indeed a thoroughly neoliberal project and was furthermore not anomalous in the annals of city

government in the 1980s.[80] He explains that projects such as AutoWorld "can be considered neoliberal not least because they entail a turn toward the market to solve social problems in particular regions, and also because they involve a significant privatization of publicly held land or resources to reach completion."[81]

AutoWorld relied not solely on Mott Foundation money, but on a complex web of funding that was in fact reliant on extensive public resources—for which a potentially tourist–friendly mega–project was deemed by private and philanthropic interests to be the best use. The financial arrangement for AutoWorld, however, was notoriously complex and even inscrutable, and accounts of the funding details changed from year to year, and sometimes from account to account (Figs. 4 and 5). This is perhaps because there were undoubtedly sound criticisms offered for the use of public funds, among other things—G. Bridget Ryan, president of the Historic Flint AutoWorld Foundation, consistently declined to talk about the project's financing details to the media. This is perhaps also in part because of the inherently complex nature of the public/private partnerships under which AutoWorld operated, and the labyrinth of legal entities those partnerships created. For example, AutoWorld itself was a for–profit venture, but was controlled in the development stages by the Mott–created non–profit "Historical Flint AutoWorld Foundation," not to be confused with the group of private investors called "AutoWorld Associates Inc.," who would own

[80] It is important to note, however, that Hackworth mistakenly identifies AutoWorld as a James Rouse-managed project, which it was not. I would also argue against his reading of AutoWorld as simply a "bread and circus" distraction from "real" economic issues.
[81] Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*. 151.

most of the building in partnership with the non–profit Flint Renaissance group. As the *Detroit Free Press* reported in July 1983,

> Lawyers who drew up the AutoWorld financing agreement said it was the most complex financial deal they had ever seen. The closing supposedly involved 500,000 sheets of paper.
>
> "This project almost beat us," said one city official who worked on the package.
>
> The financing involves a complex mix of private and public monies. AutoWorld will cost about $63 million, which interest payments will push that into at least $70 millon.[82]

This complex arrangement was celebrated, however, by the project's partners and supporters, as exemplary of a new funding model that would ultimately save Flint and finally "make things happen." A hallmark of legitimacy, the financing structure also had the crucial sheen of private–sector stability and innovation. The for–profit Downtown Development Authority (who in 2013 almost completely controls Flint downtown affairs) was proud enough of their role to declare in their own 1983 annual report:

> The AutoWorld project is innovative in two significant respects: it is the first major urban indoor entertainment of its kind in the world, and it is supported by a unique and complex financing package.
>
> The package involves one of the most intricate combination of participants and requirements ever. The Downtown Development Authority Participated with the C.S. Mott Foundation, private investors, private contributors, a non–profit foundation and the city, county, state and federal governments to develop a financial arrangement satisfying the objectives of every one of the participants.

Mott Foundation head William S. White expressed the same sentiment with a bit more concern, saying, "I've never seen such a complex project, in terms of financing.

[82] Christoff, Chris. "AutoWorld: A Car City Will Celebrate the Car." *Detroit Free Press* 24 July 1983, sec. B

It could fall apart at any time."[83] Ultimately though, as the *Flint Journal* reassured its readers in 1984, "the financing was successful and, more important, it was a success for a unique public–private partnership aimed at revitalizing downtown Flint."[84] In short, the enormous complexity and scale of this cutting–edge revitalization strategy was intended to communicate comfort to the general public, in large part because of the entrepreneurial stakes and business experience being injected into the funding mix—a comfort enhanced by the fact that the public's financial stake was effectively obscured by the complexity of the funding structure itself, thereby further minimizing the perceived risks of such an arrangement.

And what *was* the public's financial stake in AutoWorld? In the most simple breakdown of the financing structure, $6.5 million was to come from the City of Flint's sale of tax increment bonds, and $7.5 million from the sale of revenue bonds, a sum roughly equal to the Mott Foundation's direct initial investment of $11 million in grants and a $2.4 million land lease—a commitment from Mott that would continue to grow as the project progressed, to a total of about $31.6 million by opening day on July 4, 1984.[85] Public funds, supposedly proven ineffective if used for New Deal/Great Society–style aide programs and investment, were now seen as having the most impact when combined with private investment toward entrepreneurial and market–based projects. There was criticism, particularly from mayoral candidates looking to challenge sitting Mayor Jim Rutherford, who was a

[83] "AutoWorld Would Not Exist without Mott Foundation Aid." *The Flint Journal* 24 June 1984: 71.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Christoff, Chris. "AutoWorld: A Car City Will Celebrate the Car." *Detroit Free Press* 24 July 1983, sec. B

loyal supporter of the Mott Foundation's vision. City Councilman Chester Simmons advanced an argument based on the very real concern that projects like this came at the expense of support for African American communities and business, long neglected by city governments both in Flint and throughout the Rust Belt. Calling AutoWorld a "pie–in–the–sky monument," Simmons expressed frustrations that existed among the city's Black residents, who by then made up 45% of Flint's population. Another candidate, former Flint ombudsman Joseph Dupcza, opposed the use of public money for private projects in general, presciently saying that if AutoWorld were to fail (which it did almost immediately) the city would be responsible for paying off the $6.5 million in general obligation bonds sold by the Flint Downtown Development Authority. "The investors have nothing to lose," Dupcza said. "The city does."[86] Dissenting voices were rarely reported by a positivity–centered local media, however, and were dismissed publicly as having the "wrong attitude" on revitalization, and as ultimately being part of the city's problems—Mayor Rutherford himself responded to critics by labeling them "those negative doomsday people."[87]

The role of those private investors who had nothing to lose is crucial in understanding the power of public/private partnerships, and the ways in which such partnerships blur political authority and economic power, on the national level as well as the local. Although private–sector fundraising was generally disappointing, a private investment firm ultimately did provide $9.5 million of their clients' money toward AutoWorld's financing. This investor money was then used to

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

leverage millions of dollars in federal funds, as the presence of private support was the element most attractive within the Reagan administration's neoliberal ideal of market–friendly self–sufficiency. As the *Flint Journal* reported, "The investors were attracted by tax benefits primarily generated by the rehabilitation of a historic structure—the IMA Auditorium—in which part of AutoWorld is housed and by depreciation benefits."[88] Here, we see that in neoliberal strategies of revitalization, what is most critical, and what will produce results—in terms of both access to federal support, and also theoretically success in revitalization—is the presence of financial stakeholders who are able to see a struggling city as a sound investment opportunity, ideally without necessarily having any particular interest in the social ramifications of the proposed project. The consensus on the part of local government, the non–profit sector, and the business community regarding exactly what was expected of Flint in its revitalization to become a model neoliberal city, and to be recognized as such on a national scale, is reflected in the letters sent to President Reagan requesting his presence to speak at AutoWorld's grand opening. "AutoWorld has been funded through a unique blend of local, state, federal and philanthropic funding as well as private investment," new mayor James Sharp, Jr. wrote in his letter to the White House. "Soon this city that has had to battle with so many obstacles, will be receiving national attention, because of the numerous progressive changes it will be making in the future."[89] The General Motors Corporation, itself a significant source of funding to AutoWorld, was more

[88] "AutoWorld Would Not Exist without Mott Foundation Aid." *The Flint Journal* 24 June 1984: 71.
[89] Sharp, James A. Letter to Ronald Reagan. 13 Mar. 1984. MS. Sloan Archives, Flint, Michigan.

straightforward in its ambitions for a Presidential appearance: "We are hopeful the President will be able to comment (10 to 20 minutes) on AutoWorld as a prime example of a private sector/public sector partnership, used to diversify the economy of a major industrial city which has experienced very high unemployment in the recent past."[90] There is a noticeable lack of elaboration here on General Motors' role with regard to the cause of Flint's "very high unemployment."

Just as crucial to AutoWorld, and countless urban revitalization projects in other cities, were federal Urban Development Action Grants (UDAGs). Created in 1977 by the Carter administration as part of its comprehensive urban policy initiatives, UDAGs were designed to provide funding for struggling cities to undertake significant redevelopment projects with the goal of increasing shrinking tax bases and providing avenues toward fiscal recovery. Although technically available to cities nationwide, UDAGs were aimed primarily at the Rust Belt cities that were experiencing financial crises en masse in the late 1970s. While UDAGs were a significant source of federal support for urban areas at a time when such support was generally in decline, they were also very much an early vehicle for neoliberal strategies of revitalization. At their most basic level, UDAGs represented a shift away from federally funded and administered urban programs in the mold of the Great Society, and toward the market–driven, private–sector–oriented solutions that would become increasingly dominant over the course of the following decade and beyond. Requirements for UDAG awards explicitly favored market–based

[90] General Motors Public Relations Staff Regional Manager Kenneth Cameron to Anthony DeLorenzo. Cameron, Kenneth. Letter to Anthony DeLorenzo. 16 Mar. 1984. MS. Sloan Archives, Flint, Michigan.

revitalization projects, as private investment funds had to be part of the funding equation for cities to leverage federal money. In this way, public/private partnerships were not only favored, but mandated, leaving struggling cities more or less at the mercy of the private sector when it came to the types of revitalization projects that were possible. Although not exactly popular with the Reagan administration once it came to power, the UDAG program was continued through the 1980, although it experienced steady cuts and the almost constant threat of elimination during that time. Just months after AutoWorld's grand opening in 1984, and in the face of possible elimination of the UDAG program during a post–re–election round of federal budget cutting, the *Flint Journal* reported on the significant role of UDAG support in Flint's recent revitalization efforts. Not only did AutoWorld itself receive $8.6 million in UDAGs, but the Hyatt Hotel built to lodge expected AutoWorld visitors received $6.5 million; Water Street Pavilion, Flint's James Rouse–designed Festival Marketplace, received $3.5 million; Windmill Place, an enclosed downtown shopping center, received $731,000; and other projects in the city had received $34.8 million in total UDAGs since 1979. All of these projects used private investment dollars along with public funds to leverage federal support. Anxieties over the elimination of the UDAG program in the mid–1980s were high, however and, as Flint's community development director Kathryn Stoughton explained, "The Southwest states claim they aren't getting their share of the UDAGs."[91] Besides exacerbating the divide between the "Rust Belt" and the "Sun Belt," this made political sense to Reagan, who drew much more support from the

[91] Graham, David V. "UDAGs Hand in Hand with Downtown Rebirth." *The Flint Journal* 9 Dec. 1984, sec. E: 1.

Southwest and West than from the traditionally pro–union industrial Northeast and Midwest—whose urban areas were particularly in need of financial support, and which had taken greatest advantage of that support, whether it came with neoliberal strings attached or not. Director Stoughton goes on to put the rationale for elimination more bluntly: although the UDAG program was in many ways pro–business conservative, "The administration wants to kill it because it thinks this [redevelopment] is something the states ought to do."[92]

Michigan's US Senators Donald Riegle and Dale Kildee first announced the $8.6 million UDAG grant to support AutoWorld—the full amount that Flint officials sought—in October 1980. This was unusual at the time for several reasons, not the least of which was what seemed like a radically elastic interpretation of HUD mission—after all, AutoWorld was explicitly defined in the grant proposal as a "theme park." In fact, this was the first grant ever given by the Department for a project of this kind, essentially placing building a theme park on par with building low–cost housing. In addition, HUD would provide significant support for AutoWorld outside the UDAG program in the form of a $4.5 million Section 108 loan guarantee. Riegle suggested that "Flint having the highest unemployment rate in the country because of the slump in auto sales probably helped get the grant."[93] Flint was to be a national test case for this new type of urban revitalization, and there was excitement and high hopes on both sides, especially with the clear recognition that this had simply not been done before. Riegle acknowledged that "getting the action

[92] Ibid.
[93] Gustin, Lawrence R. "Grant Virtually Assures AutoWorld." *The Flint Journal* 3 Oct. 1980, sec. A: 1.

grant was difficult because a theme park is such a novel use for a federal grant," especially in the last month before the 1980 election that would bring Ronald Reagan to power. "HUD granted the full amount," Riegle continued, "because it wants to make sure its first use of such a grant will be successful. This project is crucial to Flint and it could be a HUD national showcase."[94]

In AutoWorld, HUD saw an opportunity to display the power of market–based solutions to the problems of market failure, i.e. deindustrialization, financial crisis and the attending social disintegration. What seemed to be an unusual funding target actually made perfect neoliberal sense—a theme park that could transform the economy of a textbook "company town" once the company moved on to the greener pastures of cheaper labor, *and* turn a profit for investors, all with less government intervention. The fact that AutoWorld failed to do any of these things, instead of invalidating the proposed model, perhaps only served to reinforce a broader neoliberal logic of regional identity, and the sense that the cities were emerging as losers in the national competition for tourists and service jobs were suffering because they could or would not adapt to the new realities of urban economy.

In hindsight, after AutoWorld's dramatic failure, there seemed to be a consensus that the strategy was either (a) interesting but fundamentally misguided, or (b) obviously doomed from the beginning, even if no one involved could see it at the time, blinded as they were by admirably foolish optimism. There was some public outcry in the immediate aftermath—a special section of the *Flint Journal* ran

[94] Ibid.

a full page story in February 1985, when the park closed its doors just six months after the grand opening, detailing the range of reader responses they got to the question of "what about AutoWorld?" One respondent, Albert Mansour of Flint, offered these thoughts:

> I agree with Flint's Ombudsman James D. Ananich, who said 'the Mott Foundation suckered the city into building this monument to someone, and they should pick up the tab. … Millions of federal tax dollars went into AutoWorld, and Mayor James Sharp is going to ask for more tax money for "a major redevelopment." A recent news report stated GM is going to spend $5 billion on a new plant, and $2.5 billion of that amount will be a tax writeoff. Probably another $100 million or so will be written off by the state in which the plant will be built. At this rate AutoWorld Associates and GM should be home free after they sucker us taxpayers, as we pick up the tab for them.

Here, we see not just a critique of one particular project, but of the neoliberal model that subsidizes private development at the cost of public resources. In a sense, Mansour suggests, there is very little functional difference between a theme park and a manufacturing plant, since the possibilities for development cost the public the same in any case, with very little chance of a real return on investment (unlike the private sector, which will certainly reap some reward). In the end, however, critiques like this one had little impact—"those negative doomsday people," as Mayor Rutherford would call them, were not a valued part of the public/private partnership.

"Out-Rocking" the Competition

[The decision to base the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum in Cleveland] means that Cleveland is alive and well and has a future, and it's hep and has a great appeal to a lot of younger people.

—Cleveland Mayor George Voinovich, 1986[95]

Cleveland in the 1980s was anything but "hep." The city had experienced problems similar to those faced by other deindustrializing Rust Belt cities since at least the middle of the pervious decade, including population loss, increases in crime, a dismal national image, and staggering job loss. Metropolitan Cleveland had seen manufacturing jobs decline, gone from employing two out of every three workers in the more robust 1940s, to just one out of three by the 1980s.[96] Local business and political leaders were desperate for ways to replace lost manufacturing jobs, rebuild a tax base stretched thin by population loss, and reignite some kind of excitement to "rebuild the spirits" of current and potential Cleveland residents. According to Bruce Conforth, the first curator of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland in many ways saw Baltimore and its successful James Rouse–developed "Festival Marketplace," Harborplace, as a viable model for revitalization.[97] This was a feeling shared by many Rust Belt cities that saw Baltimore seemingly transform itself from depressed deindustrialized urban center into a celebrated national icon of market–driven, tourist–based development. Not only would a tourist destination ostensibly create jobs (primarily low–wage service

[95] Landsberg, Mitchell. "Cleveland Picked for Rock Hall of Fame." *Associated Press* 5 May 1986

[96] Frieden and Sagalyn, *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities*, 287.

[97] Conforth, Bruce. Personal interview. 12 Dec. 2012.

jobs, but jobs nonetheless), tourism neatly fit a neoliberal logic of healthy competition between destinations and an appealing self–reliance—after all, what was a successful tourist destination but a self–made industry based on the attractive individual character of the location? So when the recently formed Rock and Roll Hall of Fame began to look for a permanent institutional home in 1985, Cleveland went to work.

When the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was founded in 1983, primarily by Atlantic Records co–founder Ahmet Ertegun and *Rolling Stone* magazine's Jann Wenner, it was essentially placeless for the first three years of inductee selection and even its first "all–star jam," except for a conceptual home in New York City. Seeing an opportunity for a unique tourist attraction and motivated by a desperation to revitalize the city, Cleveland business and political leaders, in conjunction with local media, mobilized a campaign in August 1985 to gather 660,000 signatures in one month for a petition to locate the Hall of Fame Museum in Cleveland. Early the next year, after a scouting visit from the Hall of Fame Foundation, Cleveland residents swamped telephone lines responding to a *USA Today* reader opinion poll on where the museum should be located. Cleveland outpolled all the other cities combined by about 5–1, with 110,315 calls in its favor. This allowed Ohio Governor Richard Celeste to announce at the official press conference naming Cleveland the official home of the future Hall of Fame Museum that the decision "was irresistible because of the cooperation of the tremendous outpouring of support for rock 'n' roll that's been here since the day the phrase was first coined right here," and the Associated Press to argue that "Cleveland, which

claims to be the birthplace of rock 'n' roll, won the board's approval over arch–rivals Philadelphia and Chicago by simply out–rocking them." The general support for the Hall of Fame or rock and roll in general, and the great outpouring of enthusiasm from the people of Cleveland was over and over again used as the most convincing evidence for the Foundation's decision, which only further illustrates the dependence of neoliberal strategies of revitalization on the shifting of public attention toward individualized issues of "attitude" (or in this case, a positive, can–do, "rocking" outlook) on the part of citizens, and away from the complex play of capital at work—or a conscious statement on the part of distressed cities and their residents advertising a willingness to submit to the desires of business in exchange for choosing them over other possible locations.

Beyond the serviceable but generally flimsy rationale that Cleveland coined the term "rock and roll"—true, DJ Alan Freed played an important role in rock history, but certainly no more so than any other figure that Philadelphia or Chicago could claim—the "community support" story rang hollow almost immediately. According to Conforth, "The only reason Cleveland got it was for the financial package from businessmen."[98] Mayor Voinovich himself went on record saying that he didn't even much care for rock and roll, but that clearly wasn't at issue, any more than his car preference would be if he were courting an automotive plant to locate in the city. This was a competition for revitalization prestige and potential revenue, as evidenced by the t–shirts that the Mayor, Governor and others wore at the press conference declaring, "Cleveland—We Won" (Fig. 6).

[98] Ibid.

The selection of Cleveland for the opportunity to build such a potential tourist destination was clearly the result of the $65 million dollar package of public and private funds offered to the Hall of Fame by city leaders. In addition, the funding package included the sale of $18 million in tax–exempt bonds towards the project. The state promised to contribute about $4.4 million, Cuyahoga County committed $5 million, and corporations and other donors pledged $7.4 million.[99] Years later, after the Museum had been established and judged a success by many, Ziona Austrian, director of the Center for Economic Development at Cleveland State University's Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs, argued that The Rock Hall and other public–private partnerships in downtown Cleveland had been critical to the local economy. "To make our downtown into a more livable and enjoyable place, you need public–private partnerships," Austrian said. "You need unique attractions to attract people, and the Rock Hall is definitely unique. You can't find it in the next city."[100] In this formulation, clearly the only way to survive as a viable city is to "attract people," and the only way to competitively attract people is through the proven model of neoliberal public/private partnerships.

Interestingly, however, the federal government did not support the Rock and Roll Hall of fame in the same way as they had AutoWorld (and perhaps precisely because they *had* supported AutoWorld so publicly). In 1989, questions arose as to the future of the yet–to–be–built Hall of Fame Museum when a $6.9 million UDAG grant to help fund the more than $85 million dollar total price tag was denied. HUD

[99] Rizzo, Katherine. "No Hope From HUD: Hall of Fame May Remain Cleveland's Rock 'N' Roll Fantasy." *Associated Press* 13 Oct. 1989.
[100] Soeder, John. "Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum Is Going Strong, 15 Years after Opening." *Cleveland Plain Dealer* 29 Aug. 2010.

Secretary Jack Kemp told the city, "My children love rock 'n' roll. I love rock 'n' roll. But I have no discretion. The rock 'n' roll museum is a worthwhile project for Cleveland and rock 'n' roll but it couldn't meet the criteria for a UDAG grant."[101] Clearly, Kemp's enthusiasm for rock and roll didn't translate into material support the way that the citizens of Cleveland's had, but the denial points to two trends: first, the steady shift away from supporting struggling cities through UDAG grants in general throughout the decade had created even more scarcity of federal funds than existed earlier in the 1980s; and second, neoliberal strategies of revitalization were becoming increasingly dependent upon the "private" side of public/private partnerships. Kemp ended his statement on the matter, addressing a clearly disappointed Mayor, Governor, Representative and city by saying, "There is nothing that I can do about the rock 'n' roll museum aside from urging the private sector and the rock 'n' roll musicians and the music industry to put up some more money."[102]

And that is in fact exactly what happened. The project was deemed too important to Cleveland's future economic wellbeing to lose, and widely understood to be a savior mega–project for the city and its "best hope for transforming a decaying riverfront area into a glistening tourist draw."[103] And so to avoid defaulting on a Hall of Fame Foundation deadline for securing funding before pulling the project, the city's major banks agreed to back up private investor pledges with a $7 million loan intended to make up the difference if the major pledges didn't come through. Today, the Hall of Fame Museum's economic impact on the city is debated,

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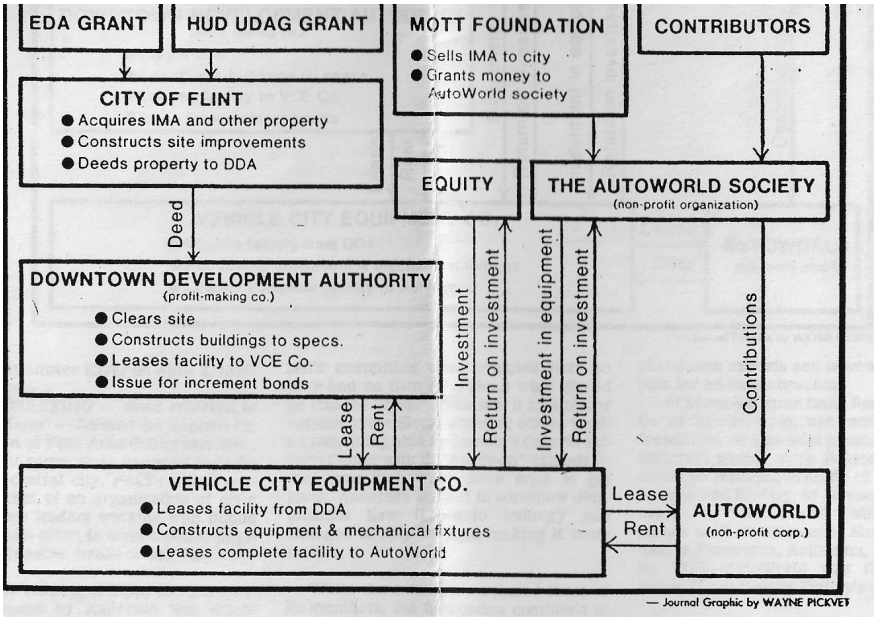
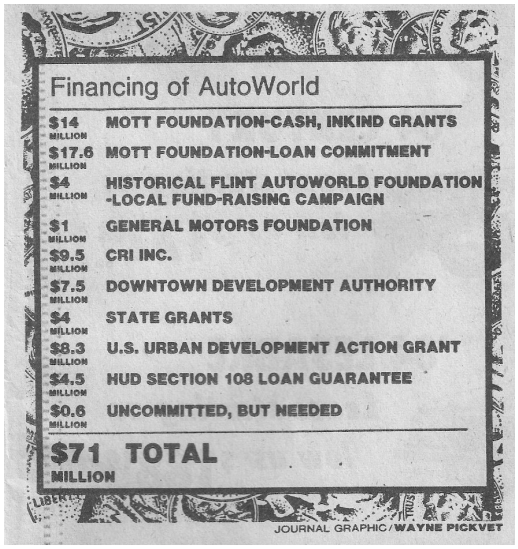
[101] Rizzo, Katherine. "No Hope From HUD: Hall of Fame May Remain Cleveland's Rock 'N' Roll Fantasy." *Associated Press* 13 Oct. 1989.
[102] Ibid.
[103] ibid.

but it remains open and in many ways a symbol of the power of public/private partnerships and neoliberal strategies of revitalization. At issue, as we have seen, is more than whether or not the Hall of Fame is a strictly financial success. Even as a break-even proposition, the terms of revitalization success are also judged by intangible factors such as "livability and enjoyability," or the simple ability to draw people with "unique attractions" and perhaps change the minds of the larger public as to what Cleveland is, and what it can be. The full dimensions of the therapeutic and image-changing aspects of these revitalization projects will be taken up in the following chapter.

Figure 3: Students bury an automobile at San Jose State University, 1970





Figures 4 & 5: *Flint Journal* graphics attempting to detail some of AutoWorld's complex funding structure

Figure 6: Mayor George Voinovich announces Cleveland as the official location of the future Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum, wearing a hat reading, "CLEVELAND—WE WON."

CHAPTER TWO

"Positive Thoughts": Deindustrialization, Personal Responsibility and the Image of the Rust Belt

In the summer of 2011, the voters of Detroit, Oregon were faced with an important decision. An initiative brought to the ballot by business leaders of the small resort community in Northwest Oregon asked voters to consider changing the name that the town had held since 1891 to "Detroit Lake." Although the town does border the Detroit Lake, the catalyst for the proposed change was a more symbolic one in the eyes of the local business community—as hotel owner Doug DeGeorge explains, "the name Detroit doesn't bring positive thoughts to anybody's mind."[104]

Despite being separated by more than 2,000 miles and a population difference of more than 700,000 residents, business leaders were concerned that the possible association between Detroit Lake and Detroit, Michigan would be damaging to the town's tourism industry, and that the name itself would be a "turn–off" to potential visitors. The name change, it was argued, would "shift the mental image" that the old "Detroit" moniker would conjure in tourists' minds, scrubbing it

[104] Lehman, Chris. "Detroit, Oregon To Vote On Name Change." *NPR*. NPR, 4 Aug. 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.

of the crumbling Rust Belt city's "unsavory image" and its "crime, corruption, failing schools and a shaky auto industry."[105]

Although the measure was ultimately voted down by Detroit, Oregon's residents, the premise of the proposal—as well as the fact that this item was picked up and reported by the Associated Press, National Public Radio, CBS News, the *Huffington Post* and other national media outlets—poses deeper and more important questions than the brief story may at first suggest. What's in a name? What are the ties between image and the "real?" How does a "mental image" impact economy, and vice versa?

These are questions that have been asked by and of "Rust Belt" cities as they have struggled to defend, define, and sometimes salvage a respectable—and, most importantly, a *marketable*—image within a shifting national context. Especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, urban centers in the industrial Midwest and Northeast US have experienced increasing economic pressures to reinvent themselves as "cultural" destinations in the wake of massive deindustrialization, and have become competitors for tourist revenue.[106] This competition has produced both a rhetoric and a reality wherein a city's image—as a "cultural center," as "desirable," or as "business friendly"—defines the "real" economic opportunities available to that particular place. And, as the business leaders of Detroit, Oregon understood, a bad image (even if it's a confused one) can mean economic disaster.

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[105] Auletta, Kate. "Detroit, Oregon Considers Changing Its Name To Draw More Tourists (PHOTOS)." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 26 Oct. 2010. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.
[106] For a definitive discussion of this phenomenon, see Ch. 4, "Postmodernism in the City," in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

There is a difficulty in speaking with any real specificity about the thing we know as "the Rust Belt," especially since there is obviously a diversity of local experiences that are impossible to take account of individually. Chicago's story is not the same as Flint's, and Cleveland's is not the same as Gary, Indiana's and so on. This has been the challenge of thinking regionally and trying to make meaning out of large, often vaguely defined geographical areas in US history. Rust Belt scholar Steven High notes a trend in recent scholarship on deindustrialization leaning toward the individual case study, especially told through oral history and/or photographs in an attempt to capture the "lost voices" of workers and places seemingly left behind in deindustrialization's wake, as well as the loss of regional, national and broader historical meaning that accompanies this "scholarly penchant for local community."[107] My goal here is to analyze the "cultural" *as* economic (and vice versa) in specific cities such as Flint, Toledo and Baltimore, as a way to better understand both how the "Rust Belt" took shape as a discourse in the American popular imagination, and how that discourse shaped real economic revitalization strategies, and had material consequences for many people in the deindustrializing Midwest and Northeast.

I use the Rust Belt, then, as an analytical framework that is both a discrete region made up of multiple sites, and as a cultural construct that takes on new and powerful material economic dimensions in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Stretching from east coast cities such as Baltimore, Philadelphia and even New York, west through Pennsylvania and upstate New York and encompassing the Great

[107] High, Steven C. *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2003.13.

Lakes region, the Rust Belt is a phrase commonly used to describe the former industrial and manufacturing centers largely concentrated in this geographic region, all to some extent devastated by concentrated waves of deindustrialization. As High explains in his *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969–1984*, the term "Rust Belt" was born out of a culturally association of the ailing industrial cities of the Midwest with the Great Depression–era "Dust Bowl," as evidenced by the interim term "Rust Bowl." In the 1970s, national media were grasping for ways to describe a vaguely bounded but ultimately conceptual region encompassing cities that were suffering similar economic and social pains. Attempts to describe the apparent decline in this region from what was once "The Foundry of the Nation," as well as an attempt to conceptually contrast this region with the ascending "Sun Belt," eventually coalesced into the phrase "Rust Belt."[108]

As a cultural construct, the image of the Rust Belt is tied to a specific economic history, but also expanded to fill the antagonist role in a national image economy deeply influenced by a cresting neoliberal wave of New Deal order backlash in the late twentieth century, in which Northern industrial centers were becoming densely layered symbols of Liberal failure, especially on the fronts of labor and race. Mike Royko, columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote in 1985, "I guess we must face sad reality—the pain and humiliation of rejection. A lot of people out there just don't like us." He continues,

> By "us," I'm speaking as a Chicagoan. But I could just as well be speaking as a resident of any of the big, old, Rust Belt, Snow Belt, smokestack cities of America. Detroit, Cleveland, New York, Newark—any of them …

[108] High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984.* 19–23.

> I get mail from all over the country. And oh, the things they say about us. First of all, we are too black. Those who mention that to me are usually talking about Chicago, but it applies to Detroit, New York and most of the others. And we are too Puerto Rican. We are too sinful and criminally inclined. We have too much welfare and too many babies. At the same time we have too many babies, we have too much abortion. We have too much garbage and too much political corruption, and most of us are dirty, depraved and gritty and deserve everything that happens to us—whether it is snow or budget cuts.

Despite Royko's trademark liberal snark, the views he is caricaturing are not entirely off the mark—or they at least align with the common sense emerging out of this historical moment, the widely held notion that, despite decades of migration to cities in this region for a chance at some form of the American Dream through industrial work, it now has nothing to offer. It has been used up, and any memory of cities like Detroit or Cleveland or Flint as desirable, either culturally or economically, is a dim one.

As a parallel analysis of the national image of cities in the Rust Belt, Flint native Michael Moore, in his breakthrough documentary *Roger & Me*, dismisses (without much irony) the early 1980s efforts to turn the city into a tourist destination:

> I guess it was like expecting a million people a year to go to New Jersey to ChemicalWorld or a million people going to Valdez, Alaska to ExxonWorld. Some people just don't like to celebrate human tragedy while on vacation.[109]

The pairing of these two quotations illustrates what I will argue are two major and interrelated ways that the nation made meaning out of the Rust Belt in the late 1970s and 1980s, and that the Rust Belt made meaning out of itself in the emerging neoliberal political and cultural order. First, there was an increasing national sense

[109] *Roger & Me*. Prod. Michael Moore. By Michael Moore. Dir. Michael Moore. 1989.

that these (post)industrial urban spaces were dirty, dark, dangerous, and generally undesirable. Second, Rust Belt cities absorbed this narrative and tried (often in vain) to navigate revitalization strategies within a neoliberal framework of personal responsibility, resilience, and economic flexibility. Image–management and image–improvement was in many ways central to urban revitalization efforts in deindustrializing cities in this period, and a new consciousness of that undesirable regional image both produced and reacted to the developing conceptual framework of the "Rust Belt."

Image–consciousness is, of course, nothing new in the history of American cities, especially in the twentieth century—boosterism, civic organizations, and Convention and Visitors Bureaus have histories that long predate the 1970s. Alison Isenberg, for instance, makes a convincing case in her *Downtown America* about the serious role that promotional postcards played in image–creation campaigns for cities and towns in the 1940s, playing with idealized views of downtown to promote a safe, clean, business–friendly environment.[110] These were certainly attempts by local business leaders and government to "sell" a particular image of a place, and an important part of the story of twentieth–century urban development. I will argue, however, that although there is a convergence, there are also meaningful differences between the long tradition of urban boosterism and late twentieth–century strategies for image transformation. "Image" takes on a specific meaning in the race during this period to transform older manufacturing centers into differentiated, "brandable" destinations in a growing tourist and service economy, in which

[110] See Ch. 2 in Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*.

shedding the symbolic burden of "dirty" factories, racialized notions of crime, and [especially white] population flight becomes paramount in a city's effort to attract new business investment and tourist dollars. In this sense, cultural perception of a particular place plays a vital material role in a city's survival, and in determining its chances in a national landscape of "winners" and "losers," "good cities" and "bad cities," that became increasingly regional especially beginning in the mid–1970s.

Also specific to this moment are the ways in which image–consciousness became a framework that shaped and shored up emerging neoliberal logics of privatization and personal responsibility.[111] "Personal responsibility," as it is understood in much scholarship on neoliberalism, is a process of individuation and social atomization, and is categorically opposed to collectivism of any kind—the individual is ultimately responsible for his/her own conduct, successes, and failures, in a supposedly free market of equal opportunity and choice. This tenet is central to Reagan era political logic, as well as the growing business–friendly, anti–New Deal Right coalition that preceded him in the 1970s. If we apply these key terms to urban space in the US, however, we can also usefully analyze how cities and regions come to be understood—and to understand themselves—culturally and economically as "good" or "bad" places, depending upon their success in the marketplace. In this way, it perfectly serves a neoliberal logic to shift and fix a city's economic fate based on cultural notions of "attitude," "pride" and "image," a framework for assessing urban economic success or failure that sharply distinguishes it from earlier modes of boosterism. It also illuminates the new ways that urban revitalization came to be

[111] See especially Lisa Duggan's introductory discussion of personal responsibility in *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy.*

framed as each individual citizen's personal responsibility, as campaigns, slogans, and political rhetoric placed a real, material stake on "feeling good/proud/positive" about the city, and blamed "naysayers" and negative thinking for cities' economic plight.

By examining the deep interpenetration of the cultural and economic spheres at work here, we can begin to understand this moment as a turning point in not only urban economy, but also for the broader understanding of what American cities were and what they were for. It also helps us to more fully understand the sense that Mike Royko got from the rest of the country that "we deserve everything that happens to us," or Michael Moore's hyperbolic sense of his own home as a tragic wasteland. There is something embedded in these parallel statements, too, that speaks to the role of "feeling" in shaping notions of regional and local image, and more importantly, the materiality of affect at play in this historical moment. Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" is instructive here in examining the linkages between affect and "that moral–intimate–economic thing called 'the good life,'" in that a sense of optimism—shot through with a feeling of personal responsibility—about attaining and maintaining the increasingly impossible postwar liberal American dream is central to how American individuals, cities, and regions have understood and determined worth since the 1970s. As Berlant points out, "Discussions about the contours and contents of the shared historical present are therefore always profoundly political ones, insofar as they are about what forces should be considered responsible and what crises urgent in our adjudication of our survival strategies and conceptions of a better life than what the metric of survival

can supply." Such discussions also track the "fraying relation between post–Second World War state/economic practices and certain postwar fantasies of the good life endemic to liberal, social democratic, or relatively wealthy regions."[112] In other words, while it became more and more structurally difficult for urban centers in the Rust Belt to survive as model cities—or even respectable ones—in a neoliberal climate of increasingly mobile capital, budget cutting, and population flight, their failure to adapt was increasingly framed in moral terms, placing blame collectively on cities themselves, as well as on individual citizens whose "positive feelings" were now a material part of the economic equation, and must be properly policed and maintained.

And indeed, that is exactly what discussions of urban revitalization became, as feelings of responsibility, self–worth, and a compulsory optimism about a better future in the face of unimaginable structural obstacles powerfully shaped what survival strategies and tactics were seen as responsible and appropriate in a climate of ongoing crisis. As an artifact of that early 1980s legacy, one can still see the mass–produced bumper stickers plastered on mid–Michigan cars that read, "ATTITUDE: The Magic Word for Success in Flint and Genesee County" (Fig. 7). Produced in the mid–2000s, by the "Committee to Promote Flint's Attitude," in response to the prolonged economic dislocation in the area, this bit of material culture speaks to the long shadow that optimism has cast in the public imagination about economic possibilities, and the internalization of the demand for personal responsibility, not only on the individual level, but in terms of city identity and governance. In fact, this

[112] Berlant, Lauren Gail. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011.

sentiment has specific roots in the early 1980s, as billboards from 1982 also identify "attitude" as the "magic word" that will keep Flint alive and well (see Fig. 8). Optimism is integral to the structure of a neoliberal political economy, bearing the weight of loss as older modes of material and political support for urban centers have been eroded through privatization, deregulation, and other forms of governmental retreat from New Deal involvement and support. In *Bright–Sided*, an examination of what she sees as the particularly American obsession with positivity, Barabara Ehrenreich links optimism with neoliberal imperatives, saying that, "If optimism is the key to material success, and if you can achieve an optimistic outlook through the discipline of positive thinking, then there is no excuse for failure." "The flip side of positivity," she goes on to explain, "is thus a harsh insistence on personal responsibility."[113] My intention in this chapter is, in part, to employ these analytical frameworks developed and argued by contemporary scholarship on neoliberalism, which in many ways focus on the increasing individualization of governmentality and personal responsibility since the 1970s, and expand them back out, exploring how they also are brought to bear on entire communities, cities, and regions. By understanding how image, self–image, and national narratives of moral fitness shaped the material economic and political landscape in former industrial centers, we can perhaps start to make some sense of the real stakes of Mike Royko's feeling that "a lot of people out there just don't like us."

I also find that I share Berlant's interest in generalization, and desire to "track the becoming general of singular things"—not to smooth over the irreducible,

[113] Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*. New York: Metropolitan, 2009.

un–smoothable diversity of experience, but in fact to attempt to avoid an ultimately myopic hyper–individualization, and to make important linkages between the local, the regional, and the national through a commitment to a hybrid methodology intended to bridge a standard "historical" and a Cultural Studies approach. Instead empirically demonstrating through archival sources that Detroit was a national cautionary example, or unearthing the specific origins of Cleveland's nickname "the Mistake on the Lake," I argue that the strategies that Rust Belt cities employed in response to a tanking national reputation are illustrative of the process by which the "Rust Belt" became a discourse for multiple forms of failure, as well as the material effects that this discourse had for cities in this region—and for the revitalization strategies that were understood as possible and appropriate for them.

"Dirty Factory Town" or "A Good City?"

"Once we get people here, they are surprised by the fun and the exciting atmosphere." These are the optimistic words of Steven Wilson, president of the Flint Convention and Visitors Bureau in 1986. "People have a stereotyped image of a factory town," he continues, "but when they arrive, they're delighted to see a beautiful city."[114]

Wilson is quoted here in a special "Economic and Lifestyle" edition of Piedmont Airlines' *PACE* in–flight magazine focusing on the Flint area, presumably because Piedmont served Flint's Bishop International Airport. The entire 58–page document is a fascinating archive of image promotion—particularly since less than

[114] Rugg, Carol D. "Meetings and Conventions." *Flint Area Report - A Piedmont Airlines PACE Magazine Exclusive* 1986: 31F.

one year later, *Money* magazine produced its first "Best Places to Live in America" edition, in which Flint placed infamously last—but the most prominent theme throughout the magazine's discussion of image is that of combating "stereotypes" and "previously held images." This is not unusual in the language of Rust Belt revitalization, and in fact, the language employed by city officials, boosters, and residents themselves often juxtaposes the image of a place that is "dirty," "dreary," or otherwise unappealing with that of a "good," "beautiful," or otherwise appealing (and marketable) place. Reflecting a damage–control marketing ethic that has absorbed national narratives of Rust Belt failure, as well as an internalization of these very narratives, this language frames the issue of deindustrialization in the moral terms of personal responsibility, setting up success and failure in the national marketplace of tourist destinations in terms of use–value and of "good" and "bad," "beautiful" and "ugly," "light" and "dark."

Historian Steven High provides us with a useful history of the language of the Rust Belt, and how it emerged to describe not only a discrete geographical region, but also a cultural image of deindustrialized urban space. Drawing on Michel Foucault's contention that societies contain their problems spatially and imaginatively, he asserts that "many of the industrial cities of the northern tier of the United States were overwhelmed by racial strife and deindustrialization … The discourse of industrial decline and the emergence of the Rust Belt label provided a

spatial fix for Americans' generalized insecurities about economic change in the late twentieth century."[115]

The phenomenon of deindustrialization itself is not necessarily confined to the late 1970s, as American popular imagination might suggest (Thomas Sugrue, among others, has argued for a "long history" of deindustrialization rooted in capital's concerted effort to combat organized labor since at least the 1930s), but late capitalism has produced particularly acute and intensifying crises of deindustrialization in multiple locations, particularly in former industrial capitals throughout the Rust Belt.[116] The phenomenon of deindustrialization, first introduced widely and defined by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison in 1982 as "the widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation's basic productive capacity," can be traced to the way "capital—in the form of financial resources and of real plant and equipment—has been diverted from productive investment in our

[115] High, Steven C., and David W. Lewis. *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*. Ithaca: IRL, 2007. 26.

[116] The literature of deindustrialization is vast, and I can in no way claim a comprehensive bibliography of the subject. However, useful texts in this study have been Bluestone, Barry, and Bennett Harrison. *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*. New York: Basic, 1982.; Wilson, William J. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Knopf, 1996.; Dandaneau, Steven P. *A Town Abandoned: Flint, Michigan, Confronts Deindustrialization*. Albany: State University of New York, 1996.; Sugrue, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996.; Lord, George F., and Albert C. Price. "Growth Ideology in a Period of Decline: Deindustrialization and Restructuring, Flint Style." *Social Problems* 39.2 (1992): 155-69.; Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984.*;Cowie, *Capital Moves* and Cowie and Heathcott, eds., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*.

basic national industries into unproductive speculations, mergers and acquisitions and foreign investment."[117]

Linking deindustrialization to an emerging moral/political/economic framework of neoliberalism from the 1970s into the Reagan 80s, however, is crucial for understanding how Rust Belt cities' revitalization strategies responded to the economic and cultural crises brought on by deindustrialization, as well as how the "Rust Belt" designation functioned as a complex national discourse of class anxiety, racial fear, and urban failure. A prime example of this moral–economic discourse comes from John Robin, chairman of the Pittsburgh Urban Development Authority. A 1982 article in the *Detroit Free Press* with the headline "Some American Downtowns are Coming Back to Life" examines five deindustrializing Rust Belt cities and the revitalization efforts underway in each, with the aim of sizing up Detroit's chances of a renaissance based on the developments in urban areas facing similar circumstances. Beyond Pittsburgh being described as "grim," the article quotes Robin as saying, "People used to see us as a smoky, dirty industrial city. Well, there's nothing like that. In fact, we're becoming a very good city."[118] This deceptively short quote calls for significant unpacking.

To begin with, for Robin to say "there's nothing like that" unintentionally crystallizes the economic situation in Pittsburgh and other cities like it. The collapse of the steel industry in Pittsburgh in the years surrounding this statement produced some undeniably grim circumstances, as 1982 saw some of the highest national

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[117] Quoted in Dandenau, *A Town Abandoned: Flint, Michigan, Confronts Deindustrialization*. xx.

[118] "Some American Downtowns Are Coming Back to Life: A Look at Efforts in Five Cities." *Detroit Free Press* 25 Apr. 1982, sec. A: 1.

rates of unemployment of the decade (Flint topped all metro areas at the peak of this recession with a rate of 23.4%, while national rates were up to 10.8% by official statistics, which generally under–represent actual numbers), and Pennsylvania's historical high would be reached the next year at nearly 13%.[119] Following the 1981–82 recession, steel mills laid off more than 150,000 workers, and two years later, the Homestead Steel Works would be demolished, making the seemingly positive statement that there is "nothing like" an industrial city in Pittsburgh unfortunately somewhat accurate.[120]

More importantly, the contrasting juxtaposition of the "industrial city" and the "good city" points to the moral framework that deindustrializing urban spaces found themselves navigating. In this binary, "industrial" becomes equated with "bad," as evidenced by the very economic crisis that Pittsburgh was facing—again, since failure is always seen a product of a breakdown of personal responsibility and not structural forces, Pittsburgh must prove that it can defy its national reputation and redeem itself through the erasure (through image transformation after the material fact) of smoky, dirty industrial labor. In fact, Robin's choice of "becoming" as the active verb is key to understanding the active self–policing that is required of cities in this moment. Image–shaping and economic revitalization are active processes, and Pittsburgh's renewal seems contingent upon the same technologies of governmentality that scholars have argued are central to producing the neoliberal

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[119] Flaim, Paul O. "Unemployment in 1982: The Cost to Workers and Their Families." *Monthly Labor Review* 107.2 (1984): 30-37.; "State's Jobless Rate Trails Only Michigan, West Virginia." *Gadsden Times* 19 Jan. 1983: 18.
[120] Hoerr, John P. *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 1988.

individual.[121] This seemingly small statement has at its core the essence of Rust Belt revitalization in the late 1970s and 1980s—an appeal to the nation that is at once contrite for what this city was (an "industrial city," with the attendant smoke, dirt, and New Deal organizations of unionized labor and fixed capital), and a promise of what it's "becoming" (a "good city," self–policed and flexible through new organizations of labor in a service economy). Whether a city like Pittsburgh *can* "become" something besides what it "was" is an altogether different question.

Baltimore, too, is a case in which image–transformation efforts were based upon the juxtaposition of the bad "old" city, and the good "new" city that it can become. Known by Washington, D.C. residents as "the Pit up the Parkway" or "Washington's Brooklyn (back when that was still an insult)," by 1981, Baltimore was a well–known symbol of urban decline. Familiar urban Rust Belt issues such as riots, deindustrialization, and racial anxiety brought on by white flight and Black population growth plagued the city and damaged its image as an "undesirable" location. Between 1960 and 1980, Baltimore's population dropped from 939,000 residents down to 780, 000 (a trend mirrored by virtually all of the cities in the Rust Belt), with 55% of them African American, and of that group 40% or more unemployed.[122]

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[121] See especially Barry, Andrew, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas S. Rose. *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996.; Lemke, Thomas. *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2011.; Rose, Nikolas S. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Routledge, 1990.

[122] Demarest, Michael. "He Digs Downtown: For Master Planner James Rouse, Urban Life Is a Festival." *Time* 24 Aug. 1981: 42-53.

It was also in 1980 that developer and "urban visionary" James Rouse opened Harborplace, one of many successful "festival marketplace" developments that sought to transform areas of "declining" cities—particularly in the former manufacturing centers of the northeast and Midwest—through concentrated shopping and entertainment districts meant to attract white middle class shoppers back to central cities. Harborplace was seen as a fantastically successful venture upon opening, as well as an important development in revitalizing cities that were seen as "dead." In its first year of operation, Harborplace attracted 18 million visitors and generated $42 million in income, prompting a wave of media attention that speculated on its significance for the future of the American city.

One of these celebratory pieces of media coverage was a *TIME* magazine cover story in August 1981 dedicated to Rouse's vision of urban revitalization, focusing specifically on Harborplace. Of particular interest is the insistence upon the terms of Baltimore's transformation, and the contrast that the author draws between what the city "was" and what it was, in 1981, "becoming."

> This is the new Baltimore, not to be confused with the old, a.k.a. *Bawlamer*, in the state of *Merlin*. (The *naves* drop *consnans* as liberally as cockneys dispense with aitches). The machine with which you mow your lawn is, of course, your *paramour*. It has long been called Survival City. Another moniker was Mobtown, after its citizens' proclivity for rioting. Because it was long famed for 5 cent beer, 10 cent crabcakes and 15 cent rye whiskey, it was more affectionately dubbed Nickel City. *Bawlamer*, 252 years old, was traditionally a beer–and–shot town, built on 19th century technologies, mainly steel and shipbuilding, that has since trailed off, as has its population.[123]

Baltimore's national image as an *old* city is being forcefully asserted in this passage, in the most negative sense—dirty, run–down, primitive in its desires and tastes.

[123] Ibid.

Images of class difference are central to the description, as the author draws obvious comparisons to British cockney accents, long associated with the uneducated lower and working classes, but not without a certain quaint whiff of "authentic" local culture that Rouse's festival marketplace developments required. Specific references to deindustrialization (the industries that have "trailed off") are framed again as the logical passing of emphatically *old* manufacturing technologies that are now understood as rightfully outmoded in the "new" Baltimore, which is celebrated in the article as finally drawing important white middle–class consumers back to the city through "clean" and modern service industries. "Today, the Inner Harbor is not a cesspool but a scene of jams and jollity," the author praises. "The white middle class is returning from the suburbs in droves."[124] Elsewhere, Rouse himself says that his goal was to create a "warm and human place, with diversity of choice, full of festival and delight," which is a long way from the image of "old" Baltimore—dirty, abandoned (by whites), and virtually devoid of use. What becomes clear in this article is that "becoming" the new Baltimore is a cultural process in which image transformation plays a central role, as it is above all an image of white middle–class safety and clean family fun that will produce economic results in a post–industrial urban center.

Toledo, Ohio was one of several smaller cities that invested in James Rouse's acclaimed "festival marketplace" strategy in the early 1980s. A city of nearly 355,000 residents in 1980 (down from its historical peak of 385,000 in 1970), Toledo was a primarily automotive manufacturing town that faced similar

[124] Ibid.

challenges as other Rust Belt urban centers in this moment. When Portside, Toledo's Rouse–developed festival marketplace opened on May 19, 1984, it was the culmination of an effort to transform the city's image that was framed by the media, residents, and officials as a moral and economic triumph of positive thought.

Portside's perceived role in transforming Toledo's image—as well as the prevailing image of Toledo—can be glimpsed in a *Detroit Free Press* travel article focusing on the new attraction. "Painstaking research has revealed the five words never uttered in the history of travel," the article teases, before revealing the slightly pointed punch line: "'Hey, let's go to Toledo!'"[125] The fact that the major newspaper in a city as nationally denigrated as Detroit in 1984 would make such a snide joke the framing device for an overwhelmingly positive travel article certainly gives some sense of the extent to which projects such as Portside were seen as regional engines of image transformation, putting that transformation in dramatic "before" and "after" terms. Explicitly citing the fact that Portside "draws on the marketplace concept of two successful cousins [Harborplace and Fanuiel Hall]," the article goes on to assert that positive words on Toledo's tourist value have never before been uttered, "until Portside."[126] In fact, the very headline of this piece celebrates the fact that Toledo has, through this new project, somehow harnessed the ephemeral, hard–to–describe quality that desirable destinations all share: "Portside gives Toledo a new sizzle."[127]

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[125] Sylvain, Rick. "Portside Gives Toledo a New Sizzle." *Detroit Free Press* 22 July 1984, sec. H: 1.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.

Moreover, the opening of Portside was seen as a moral victory for the city and a much–needed boost to its collective confidence, which was framed as virtually synonymous with economic progress. Wayman Palmer, director of the Toledo Economic Planning Council, said of Portside, "I've lived in Toledo for 50 years and I've never seen, felt, heard anything just like the spirit here."[128] Reuben Bumpus, the chairman of the Greater Toledo Chamber of Commerce agrees, and argues that the biggest part of Toledo's new economic development strategy hinges primarily on an intangible sense of optimism, saying "the most significant thing here today is the positive feeling by all that we are on the move."[129]

At the Portside grand opening, there were more officials and residents that seemed to agree, as Toledo Mayor Donna Owens excitedly proclaimed that "[This year marks] the turning point for Toledo. Our heart isn't beating, it's pounding!"[130] Declaring Toledo not only "not dead"—it had a heartbeat after all, despite rumors to the contrary—but at a "turning point" was a bold statement, echoed by those in attendance. James Heer, a 37 year–old elementary school principal from the city said that "the most significant impact Portside has had on Toledo is a renewed sense of pride in the city." "I've lived here all my life," he continued, "and the transition downtown recently has been amazing and refreshing. It [Portside and other riverfront developments] creates a good feeling and pride in Toledo natives."[131] The conflation here, as seen in Flint and other Rust Belt cities, between the purposes of

[128] Graham, David V. "Officials Recall When Toledo Wasn't 'ready' for Portside." *The Flint Journal* 20 May 1984, sec. A: 15.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Graham, David V. "Portside Liftoff: Marketplace Called Toledo Turning Point." *The Flint Journal* 20 May 1984, sec. A: 1.
[131] Ibid.

attracting a tourist audience and a feeling of "local pride" is significant, as it calls attention to the neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility as it functions on local and regional registers—"good feelings" of "pride" here will logically make a location more desirable on any number of material economic levels, whether for tourists or business. One *Flint Journal* article praising the opening of Portside—and there were many, since Flint explicitly saw itself as allied with Toledo's festival marketplace project—ties the realms of economics and morale together neatly, as the writer observes, "like Flint, hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on riverfront redevelopments designed to improve the downtown retail situation while raising the morale of a blue collar town hurt by white flight to the suburbs, and a poor self–image. In short, Toledo is remarkably like Flint."[132] There seem to be two things at work in this quotation: first, the huge sums of public/private money being invested into downtown redevelopment projects like Portside, in locations tied together through a "Rust Belt" identity defined by a working–class base and white flight, are authorized by the logical connections between the business environment and community morale; second, the term "hurt" can be understood both in a real economic sense, through a fleeing tax base and retail failure, but also in a less tangible emotional sense, where the city itself has experienced some trauma (presumably shared by other similar cities) that has caused their ever–worsening situation. "Poor self–image" is here bound up with the broader national image of Rust Belt cities, shifting the responsibility for Toledo's structural woes to the citizenry, who somehow don't even think highly enough of themselves to succeed.

[132] Ibid.

For those involved in creating projects such as these, there was likewise no room for negativity, especially if it undermined the credibility of the strategy as a whole. One year after Portside's opening, merchants at Portside told the *Toledo Blade* that Enterprise Development Co.—Rouse's firm that developed festival marketplaces for several Midwestern cities—"exaggerated revenue and attendance projections, charged too much for rent and provided weak leadership. This, they said, resulted in sub–par performances by a number of Portside businesses."[133] Because of "overblown projections" based on the glowing success of Baltimore's Harborplace four years earlier, business owners in Toledo were claiming that expectations for Portside were unrealistic—and, in fact, Portside continued to struggle until it closed completely in 1990. James Rouse's reaction to complaints such as these was in keeping with the premise of positivity at work in his creations, as he wrote in an internal memo to executives at the Enterprise Development Co.: "We cannot let this rest without word from us. Perhaps the best response is to <u>not</u> deal with these negative notes, but to engineer positive word from Portside."[134]

In Flint, revitalization hopes were likewise pinned on the proven success of Rouse, as his firm was tapped to develop Water Street Pavilion, a festival marketplace modeled, like Portside, after past Rouse successes. AutoWorld, however, was the clear centerpiece of Flint's cluster of downtown projects in the early 1980s, and was instrumental to a comprehensive revitalization strategy in a city that was being recognized as an early poster child for the consequences of

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[133] Tanber, George J. "Portside Merchants Blame Management for Business Woes." *The Toledo Blade* 15 Aug. 1985, sec. A: 1.
[134] Rouse, James W. "Portside." Letter to K. Aubrey Gorman. 20 Aug. 1985. MS. Columbia Archives, Columbia, Maryland. (Emphasis in original.)

deindustrialization.[135] As the birthplace of General Motors, Flint experienced the prosperity associated with being the quintessential postwar "company town," where the majority of the local economy and employment was tied to the auto industry. Beginning in the late 1960's, however, General Motors began to cut costs by building more cars in the non–union South, and the process of withdrawal from Flint had begun. By 1984, when AutoWorld opened its doors, GM's Flint labor force, which had numbered 120,000 employees in the 1950's, had shrunk to 60,000.[136] The city'seconomy was largely dependent on money paid by General Motors—or, as it was both affectionately and bitterly referred to in Flint, "Generous Motors"—with a $2 billion–plus local annual payroll.[137] As this influx of capital became increasingly a thing of the past, Flint found itself in multiple crises of economy and of identity. AutoWorld was developed to address these crises, and was invested with an impossible mission to reverse Flint's spiraling economic, social, and psychic states through therapeutic image–shaping and the transformation of the local economic base from industrial to tourist revenue—or, as Frederic Hope, the designer responsible for much of AutoWorld's exhibit content, put it, the project "was developed to bring a little light to the dark place that was Flint 1979–82."[138] Hope's stated mission here is an almost grotesque collision of therapeutic and image–based language with dire economic need—indeed, by the time that AutoWorld opened in

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[135] See Zwerdling, Daniel. "And Then There's the Disneyland Solution." *The Progressive* 46.7 (1982): 35.

[136] Moore, Michael. "Dance Band on the Titanic: AutoWorld and the Death of Flint." *The Michigan Voice* [Flint] Sept. 1984: 10.

[137] Dandenau, *A Town Abandoned: Flint, Michigan Confronts Deindustrialization*: xxi

[138] Historic Flint AutoWorld Foundation. *Storytellers: Art and Artists of the AutoWorld Rides*. Flint: Historic Flint AutoWorld Foundation, 1984.

July 1984, the community that it greeted with its celebratory message had 26% unemployment, 80% unemployment among Black and Latino/a youth, and 25,000 families in food stamp lines each month. One half of the 30% of residents who were unemployed in 1982 had left the city, and 75% of original downtown stores (a short 2 blocks away from the AutoWorld complex) had been boarded up.[139]

Even before the exhibits were designed, however, the economic promise of image transformation through cultural projects and personal responsibility can be clearly seen in the 1981 promotional film *The Little Town That Could: An Introduction to Flint's AutoWorld*. This film was produced for the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which was the main economic and ideological engine of the AutoWorld project, by New York-based public relations firm The Glyn Group. The Mott foundation, which was built on $750 million of Mott's personal fortune (he was an early partner in founding General Motors in Flint), conceived of and funded the AutoWorld concept as a way to promote the virtues of the automobile and its history in a time of perceived "image problems" for the industry. The film was scripted by the Glyn Group with collaboration and guidance from the Mott Foundation/AutoWorld officials. Through multiple drafts, the script is grand in scope and tone and consistent in its narrative construction—a "little town" called Flint becomes an important and "internationally famous" industrial center, but "despite its fame, it somehow never occurred to outsiders that the 'Vehicle City'—which was what the town came to be called—was an interesting, historical and

[139] Moore, "Dance Band on the Titanic," 10.

exciting place, a good place to visit."[140] So, according to this narrative, despite its fame, the problem with Flint was that it was somehow not bringing anyone to see—or spend tourist dollars—in the city. Denying economic difficulty as a motivation for the creation of AutoWorld, and instead maintaining focus on the "issue" of proper recognition or respect in the broader culture, film introduces the character of "Fred the Carriageless Horse" as a foil to the "progress" of this supposedly unifying and uniformly beneficial transformation, from an urban identity based on blue collar manufacturing to one linked to a culture–based service economy (see Fig. 9). The passages introducing and characterizing Fred are worth quoting at length. In his first appearance, he interrupts "the townspeople," who are giddy with excitement about the idea of AutoWorld:

> "What a load of horse feathers," said Fred, the Carriageless Horse, who always knew everything about everything. "You'll never pull it off." Fred, of course, was the local noodge. Ever since the advent of the car—which had forced Fred into an early retirement—he'd always pooh–poohed everything, always looked on the dark side of things. But people didn't really mind Fred, because they knew that if they tried hard—they could pull it off.[141]

Here, Fred's character is positioned as adversarial from the very beginning. He is unrelentingly negative about not only the prospect (though significantly not the *concept*) of AutoWorld, but of his entire situation—he "always looked on the dark side of things." Furthermore, his negativity is a nuisance of the worst kind, in that he is sure that he knows best in every possible situation, and this negativity is explicitly caused by his forced unemployment due to the rise of automobile production. Fred

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[140] *The Little Town That Could: An Introduction to Flint's AutoWorld*. The Glyn Group, 1980. Transcript.
[141] Ibid.

is unable to adapt to the realities of "progress" and an industrial capitalist marketplace, and so he is perpetually—and unreasonably—bitter, and ultimately marginalized by the dominant discourse of "the townspeople" to the role of the "local noodge" to whom no one pays much attention. Moreover, the use of this character effectively shifts any blame of failure or lack of progress onto an individual "negative" citizen.

There is the promise of salvation for Fred, however, later in the script, after the preparation and construction of AutoWorld (described in hyperbolic, almost magical language as events where "everyone cheered and hugged each other" and "everyone agreed"):

> …one of AutoWorld's major attractions [was] a terrific ride that took you through a whole series of colorful adventures depicting a humorous history of the automobile. A tour down through the years with the most perfect guide in the world—you guessed it—Fred! For the townspeople brought him out of retirement to be his own inimitable noodgey self and remind the audience of his favorite topic … "how the car could never seriously replace the horse." Well everyone thought Fred was a riot; and cheered and applauded and bought Fred–buttons and Fred–hats and Fred–t–shirts. Fred loved every minute of it.[142]

Resurrected from obsolescence and reinserted into the marketplace as an aesthetisized representative of his "species," Fred is given a new purpose and opportunity to be of use in a new and spectacular version of his former, pre–industrial reality. What makes him "the most perfect guide in the world" is the fact of his being nostalgically authentic as a representative, but endearingly laughable in his irretrievably antiquated worldview—as well as the fact that he believes, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, that he is not beaten by technology. It is even,

[142] Ibid.

and arguably *most*, important that he remain "noodgey" and adversarial as a marker of his authenticity and his at least partial inassimilability into the current culture and economy. In fact, in later correspondence concerning the script for the "Humorous History" ride, AutoWorld officials are specific in their concern that Fred does not have enough "edge to his wit" and that the lack of a "chip on his shoulder" would leave little to laugh about.[143] Any instance in the script of Fred voicing a dissenting opinion outside the context of his role within AutoWorld, it is worth noting, is met with affectionately patronizing pats on the head.[144]

The goals of this characterization in the context of AutoWorld and of Flint in 1984, either intentional or unintentional, seem relatively obvious. Of course, Fred embodies anxieties surrounding and actual dissent challenging the project of AutoWorld and the proposed "revitalization" plan in general. These sentiments are figured in Fred as working–class and certainly irrationally embittered in regard to a dislocated economic position in relation to a changing economy. By casting this dissent as irrational (and literally animalistic), he is set up in contrast to the overwhelming majority of positive "townspeople" who are in clear agreement about the move forward that AutoWorld represents. By determinedly and patiently enduring the protests of one bitter horse, the project is able to move forward through hard work and, in the devastatingly inaccurate conclusion of the script, "AutoWorld went down in history as a grand and noble event that brought great

[143] Burchill, Frederick J. Letter to John Tessmer. 20 Jan. 1984. MS. Sloan Archives, Flint, Michigan.
[144] *The Little Town That Could: An Introduction to Flint's AutoWorld*. The Glyn Group, 1980. Transcript.

reward and recognition."[145] Fred is even convinced in the end that his new and rightful place is now as a spokeshorse and celebrity, a role that he ultimately embraces—thus is his dissenting voice is contained and even commodified rather than being completely ignored. Most significant, though, is the insistence in this narrative—produced by a national agency in close collaboration with local elites—on economic revitalization being mainly a question of image transformation, emanating from positive individual outlooks and a sense that Rust Belt cities had something worth showing to a national tourist audience.

Narratives such as those promoted and deployed in this script were not just the product of a shadowy group of powerful but disconnected Flint officials designed to suppress discontent, but a collaboration between local elites who conceived of and pursued AutoWorld and a group of professional producers from New York who had no particular stake in the project or in Flint beyond, presumably, their contract obligations. This outside perspective that helped to produce the picture of Flint that we see in *The Little Town That Could* suggests that conceptions of deindustrialization in urban centers such as Flint were already circulating nationally in the early 1980s, and that perhaps the conflicts that Fred embodies and anticipates were, to those working on the formation of AutoWorld's image and developmental narrative, unavoidable if not unsolvable. For instance, Daniel Zwerdling, an "outsider" writing for the national *The Progressive* in 1982, at the height of the Reagan recession, was already describing the effects of deindustrialization in Flint as an iconic case study. In national media, Flint was an

[145] Ibid.

example commonly used in what were becoming hegemonic ways of representing the phenomenon of urban deindustrialization, and managing the race and class conflicts that emerge in deindustrialized urban contexts.[146] In the *Little Town that Could* script, we see not only the specific situation in Flint at this time—Fred and the rest of this story certainly have their basis in real local anxieties—but also an example of local and national discourses converging to produce ideas of what the "problem" in Flint was about, what it meant, and a strategy for how to fix it. Fred's character—which never changed through multiple script drafts that were otherwise overwritten with comments and concerns about the smallest detail—addresses working–class resentment and dissent through the early 1980s conservative rhetoric of "personal responsibility" for one's economic situation, insisting that the problem is located primarily in Fred's bad attitude toward progress of all kinds.[147] In this Reagan–era discourse, which might accurately be called the "privatization of blame," poverty or the inability to overcome structural economic circumstances were framed as personal or moral failings, leading to a logic that attributed any economic difficulty to, as Lawrence P. Ford, the president of the Flint area Chamber of Commerce noted, "a negative image of ourselves."

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[146] Zwerdling, "And Then There's The Disneyland Solution."

[147] Some useful sources used in this project on the cultural and political impact of Ronald Reagan's presidency include Wallace, Mike. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996.; Dallek, Robert. *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984.; Schaller, Michael. *Reckoning with Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.; Tygiel, Jules. *Ronald Reagan and the Triumph of American Conservatism*. New York: Longman, 2004.; Longley, Kyle. *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007.

Even following AutoWorld's closing, after only nine months of operation, the focus on image transformation and narratives of individual responsibility remained central to revitalization in Flint, and perhaps even intensified. In 1987, *Money* magazine released the first of its annual issues ranking the "Best and Worst Places to Live" in the United States, in which Flint placed last—a distinction made more distressing by the fact that of the ten "worst" cities in the country, eight were located in the "Rust Belt," and five were in Michigan. The magazine noted that this was "largely due to their high crime rates, weak economies and relatively few arts and leisure activities,"[148] indicating an increasing interest around this moment of scientifically calibrating a city's overall "worth" through a complex metric of both economic and cultural factors.

The previous year, the Flint Convention and Visitors Bureau collaborated with PACE Communications, a publisher of in–flight magazines, to produce a special issue called the "Flint Area Report," presumably for use in Piedmont Airlines flights serving Flint's Bishop International Airport. This full–length magazine promotion for the Flint area in a moment roughly contemporary to a major blow to its national image (which, it could be argued, was already cemented in the public imagination by this time) offers us a window into the intertwining narratives of what the "Rust Belt" signified on both the national and local levels, and how these narratives shaped the language and strategies of revitalization. The question of image itself is a major theme running through the magazine, as the cover text proclaims that "the Flint area has a sparkle and enthusiasm that contradicts any previously held

[148] "The Best Places to Live in America." *Money* 1 Aug. 1987.

notions."[149] Inside the cover, the introductory overview reinforces this point, saying, "stereotypical images of Flint, MI, are rapidly dissolving today … Nowhere are there more surprises in store for visitors than in Flint's downtown area … [where development] took an indistinguishable river and gave it character and pizzazz; cleared out drab buildings to erect an attractive urban campus of the University of Michigan–Flint; and replaced several blocks of fading retail stores with a colorful festival marketplace."[150] Despite the noticeable absence of AutoWorld in this overview (it had closed a year earlier and with its future very much in doubt), there is a deliberate focus on the notion of "previously held" or "stereotypical" images of the city. Exactly what those images are can apparently go without elaboration, as a general audience of air travelers would without question know at least something of Flint's—and by extension, other Rust Belt cities'—reputation.

Throughout the PACE article, the moral dichotomy between an "industrial city" and a "good city," seen in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere, is again employed in attempts to construct a new image for Flint. Charles R. Weeks, a bank executive who came to Flint in 1982, recalls his experience of recruiting employees from other cities, and remembers that "many of them were shocked to find that Flint 'isn't a dirty industrial town. There are wide–open spaces, green grass and blue skies."[151] Not only is Flint not a "bad" industrial city in this description, it seems that it's barely a "city" at all, and more like suburb. Flint mayor James A. Sharp, Jr., adds what is intended as enthusiastic praise, but ultimately reads as more of an apology,

[149] *Flint Area Report - A Piedmont Airlines PACE Magazine Exclusive* 1986: Cover.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

as he says the city has "many beautiful parks and many attractive buildings. It's really a very pleasant city."[152] Steven Wilson, president of the Flint Convention and Visitors Bureau, addresses the city's image directly while still maintaining this established moral framework, arguing that "once we get people here, they are surprised by the fun and the exciting atmosphere. People have a stereotyped image of a factory town, but when they arrive, they're delighted to see a beautiful city."[153] In short, we again see a resistance to national narratives of Rust Belt cities as "dirty," "dark," run–down and generally undesirable places, but a persistent reliance upon the same established and morally overdetermined dichotomies—there *are* dirty, bad, run-down factory towns out there, but Flint is certainly not one of them.

Jacob Smith, Racial Anxiety, and the Spectral Whiteness of Flint

These narratives of failure and hopes of redemptive revitalization were, as I've previously claimed, invested with a deep sense of racial anxiety on the part of elites, crucial white consumers, and the nation in general, about urban space, especially within the Rust Belt. To return to Mike Royko's characterization of the Rust Belt according to the rest of the country, cities were "too black," "too Puerto Rican," and "too sinful and criminally inclined."[154] As Royko also mentions, but does not fully explore, Rust Belt cities were also seen as "dirty" and "gritty," words used to describe these cities—and often reclaimed by these cities themselves to resist

[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Royko, Mike. "Ron, Jim To Big Cities: Drop Dead." *Chicago Tribune*. N.p., 07 Feb. 1985. Web. 24 Mar. 2013.

and distance themselves from this characterization—that are also loaded with moral and racial significance.

In 1983, the Flint Downtown Development Authority commissioned a survey to assess the habits and attitudes of shoppers in downtown Flint. Among 188 former downtown shoppers, a full 4% responded that they felt "afraid of blacks." Additionally, 8% felt "unsafe" downtown, 4% reported they "[did] not like the atmosphere," 4% felt that "downtown is not clean" and 7% felt that "people are odd" downtown.[155] Although not overwhelming numbers, especially as compared to practical issues such as downtown parking, which was cited by 50% of respondents as a primary reason they no longer shopped downtown, the collection of explicitly racial or at least racially loaded responses from presumably white, middle–class shoppers (the demographic whose abandonment of urban centers throughout the late 1960s and 1970s had been a source of concern for downtown retailers, city governments, and others) helps to frames the issue of racial anxiety as an economic one, as well as one related to image. This anxiety surrounding the racial character and "safety" of urban space was particularly powerful in the rapidly declining Rust Belt of former industrial cities in the Midwest—from Flint and Detroit to Youngstown and Baltimore—once seen as "model cities" and now as urban wastelands. Of course, American cities, and especially downtowns, had always been segregated spaces that managed cross–racial and cross–class contact in a variety of ways, but racial discourse and tensions were amplified in discussions of urban space following the racially–motivated urban rebellions of the late 1960s, many of which

[155] It should be noted that respondents were allowed to give more than one response.

occurred in what were becoming Rust Belt cities (Detroit, Newark, Plainfield, New Jersey and Minneapolis in 1967; Baltimore and Chicago in 1968).[156]

One of the ways AutoWorld, as a revitalization centerpiece, attempted to manage the issue of race was through its exhibits. As visitors were presented with a quasi–historical narrative of Flint and its place in the automotive industry, contemporary images of the city as a dangerous deindustrialized battlefield were elided or erased altogether. As exhibit designers, local elites, and public relations firms worked to produce a marketable heritage for the city, that heritage was grounded in nostalgia for segregated urban space, and a comforting white origin narrative that connected a stable, distant past to a troubled present very much in need of a reassuring racial symbol for middle–class consumers to grasp. Upon entering AutoWorld, visitors were immediately greeted by a figure of great importance and authority in the world that they were about to experience—as Flint's "first settler," Jacob Smith was accorded a considerable measure of power in the narrative of Flint's identity and development presented at AutoWorld, and particularly in the main domed exhibit area that contained a walkable recreation of Flint's history. If Fred the Carriageless Horse was AutoWorld's Mickey Mouse, condensing the entire experience of the park into a "fun" and marketable icon, then Jacob Smith was the respectable obverse, providing AutoWorld with an authentic historical anchor and a parallel mascot for the city itself. As a ghost from the distant past, Smith spoke with the unique ability to collapse historical time to "remember"

[156] For an excellent discussion of the historical segregation of downtowns, see Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It.* This argues against scholarship that proposes a more recent eroding and loss of an idealized "public space," such as Sorkin, et al., *Variations on a Theme Park.*

the past, present, and future of Flint, making him as reliable and omniscient a narrator as Fred is unreliable and wacky. By locating the authority of Flint's origins in this explicitly white figure, and through the specific technologies used to represent these origins, the figure of Jacob Smith does the important work of managing multiple racial anxieties that were very much a part of the urban culture of Flint, and the nation as a whole, as it grappled with the late–twentieth–century crisis of deindustrialization.

The technology mobilized in "Jacob Smith's Cabin" is not technically audio–animatronic in form, but rather a much older technology known as "Pepper's Ghost," which relies on projection and mirrors to create the illusion of ghostly figures in space. Developed in the late 1800s, the technique was, and still is, most widely employed in Disney theme parks in such attractions as "The Haunted Mansion," further illustrating the deep commitment of AutoWorld's developers to the lucrative Disney model. After gaining admission to the park, visitors would approach the entrance to the main exhibit space, where Jacob Smith's log cabin stood. Inside the cabin, visible through a large, diorama–like opening at the front, sat a ghostly white, blank–faced mannequin dressed in trapper's furs complete with fur hat and rifle. The cabin was similarly decorated with hanging and stretched furs and other "historical" artifacts to make Smith's nineteenth–century periodization clear. After visitors pressed a large button at the front of the cabin's "stage," a film of Smith's spectral white face was projected onto the mannequin's blank features, and Smith would appear to "wake up" from a sleep to give a prerecorded speech about his own background and the development of the little settlement that he had begun,

culminating with an enthusiastic endorsement of the park that the visitor was about to experience, and thus framing AutoWorld as the natural culmination of a history that began with himself. Smith then went back into his sleep and the projection stopped, leaving the figure once again blank (see Fig. 10).

Smith's speech begins with this introduction: "I'm Jacob Smith, fur trader. I died here in my cabin back in 1825. In those days, there wasn't any kind of city here, just an Indian village."[157] The immediate distinction made by this figure of authority between any kind of proper "city" and "just an Indian village" is a crucial moment in the construction of Smith as a representative of Flint—a "city" is something to be proud of and to monumentalize, and more importantly, something that was initiated by white settlers like Smith, who are immediately positioned as the rightful point of origin and identity against those who resided in "just an Indian village." Smith is a heroic and dignified figure, even if he goes on to marvel at how he could have never imagined such as thing as the automobile, calling himself an "old–timer" who nonetheless can transcend time to see everything about the development of his town. His monologue ends by encouraging everyone to explore the entire park, and further solidifying his position as an authoritative white subject by saying, "take the advice of a fur trader who knows the lay of the land…don't miss *anything*."[158] The Pepper's Ghost technology reinforces the metaphors of whiteness, which designers didn't hesitate to emphasize: aside from simply being a representation of a white man, Smith is "ghostly" and "ethereal" as his face is semi–transparent and made of

[157] *Jacob Smith's Cabin*. 13 Apr. 1984. Exhibit Script.
[158] Ibid.

light,[159] all of which serve to reinforce Flint's white–centric heritage as located in the figure of Smith.

The use of the Pepper's Ghost technology is distinct from, but resonates usefully with, the truly animatronic figures at AutoWorld, such as Fred. Although the effect of "bringing history to life" in both exhibits is similar, the difference in presentation makes the meanings of each technology mutually constitutive—the animatronic is defined and its effects overdetermined against those figures that are not animatronic. The blending of "fun" and "serious" here forms a mutually reinforcing relationship, illuminating the presentation of seemingly conflicting types of history. While it is conceivable that Jacob Smith could be made as cartoonish a character as Fred, the fact that he is given a more serious form, in which the imitation of reality (or unreality, as he is a ghost) is more highly valued, reinforces the importance placed on Flint's history and the ways it is represented. This is not to say that Fred's history is not treated as important within AutoWorld, only as more available than Smith's (and perhaps more desirable) for obvious fictionalization. Again, this can also be seen as a dialectic between a "serious" mascot and a "fun" mascot, a relationship that can also be seen in a parallel exhibits dealing with labor history.

In "On The Move," a diorama set frames a late 1930s kitchen scene, in which a white mannequin dressed in a blue factory–worker's uniform sits at a table reading a newspaper while his white wife prepares food in the background. At the push of a button, a face appears on the masculine figure, who narrates the changes

[159] "*Smith's Cabin AudioVisual Presentation*. 28 Sept. 1983. Exhibit.

in his life that occurred after the landmark 1937 sit–down strike in Flint. He describes seriously the reasons for the strike and the power of the union in what is marked as "working–class" diction (where, for example, "thinking" becomes "thinkin'" and "remember" becomes "'member"). His speech concludes with a controversial line that was taken out of the presentation at the last minute: "Funny, but I just don't hate the assembly line like I used to."[160] Even without this line, however, the impression remains that the strike did its work in the 1930s, and things have been wholly unproblematic for workers ever since. In this exhibit, labor history is treated "seriously" through this particular technology by allowing the worker to "speak for himself" with a prerecorded message and a white face—though he is, like Jacob Smith, long dead, only to tell his story as a forever–contented ghost.

This seemingly neutral normalization of whiteness through the representative worker resonates even more deeply in the figure of Jacob Smith. As Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and others have pointed out, the creation of national or local origin narratives is one of the major ways that political, cultural or economic groups are defined, and define themselves, as communities.[161] This process becomes even more significant in the case of AutoWorld when we consider that part of the competition between urban spaces to create and nurture a marketable image is to "act as a lure to both capital and people 'of the right sort' (i.e. wealthy and influential)."[162] To this formulation, I would add the category (or

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[160] *Labor on the Move*. 7 Dec. 1983. Exhibit Script.
[161] Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.; Hobsbawm, E. J., and T. O. Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
[162] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*: 295.

simply make explicit the implication) of "white." In the city of Flint—which, much like Detroit, has been shaped by de facto segregation in housing and racialized divisions of urban space such as highway construction that have only been exacerbated by deindustrialization—the interconnections of "race" with tourism and an image of "safety" are crucial for understanding how the cultural representations shaped, and were shaped by, discourses of race in the post-urban rebellion, post-"white flight" Rust Belt.[163] This concern is clear both in nonresidents' perceptions of Flint as generally "unsafe," as well as in more detailed descriptions of the "problem" with Flint. For instance, a 1984 *Saginaw News* reader survey, asking whether or not Saginaw, Michigan residents would be willing to make the 45–minute trip to visit AutoWorld, included responses such as: "besides the price being too high, if I'm lucky, I'll never have to go to Flint" and "it won't be any safer in that place than in downtown Flint." The conflation of a lack of "safety" with "race" (read: Black people) is just beneath the surface of comments such as these, but Maxine Kronick, a "downtown Flint official" speaking about AutoWorld and Flint's revitalization efforts in the 1988 Michael Moore film *Roger and Me* makes clear this connection between image, "the right sort of people" and race:

> It started to get looking like Toronto, upper–middle class Black and white people, and everybody was dressed nice, and ... we thought it would be the entertainment center of the county, in all truth. And that may be naïve, but that was my goal—let's make it the entertainment center, let's make it so that everybody wants to be in downtown Flint. We're going to have entertainment, we're going to have art, it's going to be very cultural, it's going to be very upbeat.

[163] For a full treatment of this phenomena as it has shaped the racial character of Detroit, see Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit.*

> Somebody said something to me, and maybe it's true. They said, 'look Maxine—you can't make Palm Beach out of the Bowery.' You want to make Palm Beach, you gotta go to Palm Beach.[164]

This representative of the cultural elite who most vocally and materially advanced the project of AutoWorld and urban renewal in general clearly frames the "problem" of Flint in terms of a classed formulation of local racial difference. "Middle–class" Black people are not a threat to this project, as they are presumably, like middle–class whites, on the tourist end of the spectrum, coming in to visit Flint from elsewhere to spend money in this new economy. The real threat, if we interpret Kronick's comments in the context of urban realities, are unemployed Blacks who live inside the city. Working–class and unemployed whites could also be considered a threat, but in terms of troubled urban centers and, more importantly, the *image* of these urban centers, the problem is that they are primarily Black and "unsafe" places, unfit for family entertainment—one must go to Palm Beach for that kind of thing. This image of problematic urban Blackness is grounded in racial discourses that proliferated in the early 1980s and throughout the Reagan administration. The widely circulated image of the "welfare queen" that originated with Reagan's repeated use of a disingenuous anecdote regarding a Midwestern Black woman who had defrauded taxpayers of millions of dollars in welfare funds advanced the image of an urban Black population that was dangerous, untrustworthy, and undeserving

[164]*Roger & Me*. Prod. Michael Moore. By Michael Moore. Dir. Michael Moore. 1989.

of support. Such narratives, alongside images of an exploding crack epidemic and accompanying media coverage, framed urban problems in terms of race.[165]

There are additional levels of racial meaning in Kronick's comments. While she does frame the problems of Flint in terms of "black and white," her allowance for theoretical class mobility within racial categories also grants both Blacks and whites status as worthy populations. If we consider this status as being also implicitly that of "citizen," then we can also read her statements against the other major anxiety that crossed class and racial boundaries at this time, especially in automobile–industry based communities like those of Michigan: the racialized threat of the "foreign competition" for American industrial jobs, and the growing success of Japanese–made automobiles in the US. There was a specific controversy that erupted around AutoWorld that contributes greatly to a better understanding of how an exhibit such as Jacob Smith's cabin constructed a stable origin through race, as Michael Moore describes in a 1984 *Michigan Voice* column:

> At issue is a poster at AutoWorld showing a car with stereotypical "Oriental" [my quotes] features—buck teeth, slits for eyes, etc.—dive–bombing an aircraft carrier named "Detroit" with the Japanese Rising Sun in the background. The idea is to point out how Japan's increased auto sales in the U.S. is our "second Pearl Harbor." (Fig. 11)
>
> But Helen Zia of Citizens for Justice says that "this is the same kind of racist defamation that killed Vincent Chin." It is also effective in turning autoworker anger against the Japanese instead of GM and Ford.[166]

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[165] See Jeremy D. Mayer, "Reagan and Race: Prophet of Color Blindness, Baiter of the Backlash" in Longley, Kyle. *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007.
[166] Moore, Michael. *The Michigan Voice* [Flint] Oct. 1984.

The 1982 murder of Vincent Chin that is referenced here, and which is documented in Christine Choy's 1987 Academy–Award nominated documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, refers to a Chinese American man murdered in Detroit by two unemployed, white male auto workers, and serves as a useful touchstone for understanding the depth of anti–Asian racial anxiety and hatred that accompanied deindustrialization in former automotive towns. Asian American community members and activist organizations were so vocal in their criticism of the poster that it was eventually removed, but only after AutoWorld officials defended it by suggesting that it shouldn't be taken so seriously—the poster was explained as just another part of the "wackiness" that AutoWorld offered.[167]

Against these social and cultural backgrounds, we can read Jacob Smith's Cabin as powerfully engaging with issues of race in local, national, and international contexts. By selecting the figure of Jacob Smith to speak as the authority on and irrefutable eyewitness to the beginnings of the modern postindustrial city of Flint, and further positioning him as the first feature that visitors would encounter, introducing them to the spectacular recreation of Flint's history, this exhibit participates in complex systems of meaning–making around race, class, citizenship, and community in the 1970s and 80s, as new discursive practices reified familiar representational strategies through which whiteness was normalized, Blackness was defined in relation to class and urban space, and Asianness was constructed as an always–foreign threat.

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[167] For the controversy, see *Asian Week* [San Francisco] 28 Sept. 1984: 1.; as well as *the Michigan Voice*, Oct. 1984.

Returning to Maxine Kronick's comments, we can also see an emerging narrative of a city's image that seemingly contradicts, but in many ways supports, the dominant impulse of Rust Belt cities' efforts to transform "stereotypical images" of themselves. Interviewed by Moore for *Roger & Me* after the massive failure of AutoWorld and other revitalization projects begun in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Kronick brings the benefit of hindsight to her analysis of "what went wrong." In her view, and no doubt in the view of those around the country, AutoWorld was *of course* a ridiculous idea, doomed to failure, for the simple reason that "you can't make Palm Beach out of the Bowery." This common–sense notion—that Flint and other Rust Belt cities like it had a certain unchangeable essence that was tragically transparent to potential tourists—is rooted in a sentiment that ultimately exposes the weakness of compulsory optimism, but also shores up a neoliberal logic that dictates that failure is always deserved, and is evidence of some inherent, individual failure of character. This is the double bind in which Rust Belt cities found themselves as they struggled to navigate a postindustrial future—radiate positive thoughts for the future, while simultaneously apologizing for the failure they'd become.

Figure 7: " ATTITUDE: The Magic Word for <u>SUCCESS</u> in Flint & Genesee County" bumper sticker

may not be built," White said. "It's too large, too complex of an issue. The budget has grown beyond what we hoped for... It seems like once a problem is solved, you get another one."

White stated that he thinks "there's hope for downtown. With hard work, something will materialize some day."

Also present at the luncheon was Flint Journal editor Al Peloquin and Journal reporter Kelly Kolhagen. They were there, according to Peloquin, for "background purposes" and not as reporters. The Journal is in the process, Peloquin said, of putting together a special advertising supplement about the Mott Foundation. Many Journal reporters are upset that the Journal has not printed

continuing decline of the area's economy with no end to the 24 percent unemployment in sight. The other pieces of the "salvation puzzle"—the Hyatt Regency, the State Office Building,

AutoWorld would create jobs and diversify the local economy.

In actuality, AutoWorld was to be a far cry from Cedar Point. It was to contain only two rides, one of which would take you through the "humorous history

idea from the start, will not do much for Flint's self-concept. James Schaefter, head of the Flint Area Conference, and AutoWorld board member, told the Voice last year that, "the most impor-

THE MAGIC WORD Attitude FLINT IS ALIVE & WELL!

Bill Carrington, Inc.

tant thing about AutoWorld is bringing a new spirit to the community and a new perception to this city. Flint has one of the worse self-images you can imagine. AutoWorld has the ability to improve the self-image of Flint."

AutoWorld apparently won't get that chance, and if Bill White's comments about Flint are any indication as to where the Mott Foundation is coming from, good times are not ahead for Auto City.

The abandoned IMA was to be the site of Auto World

PHOTO BY MATT SCHLINKER

FLINT VOICE / APRIL 30-MAY 13, 1982 3

Figure 8: "Attitude" billboard, Flint, 1982

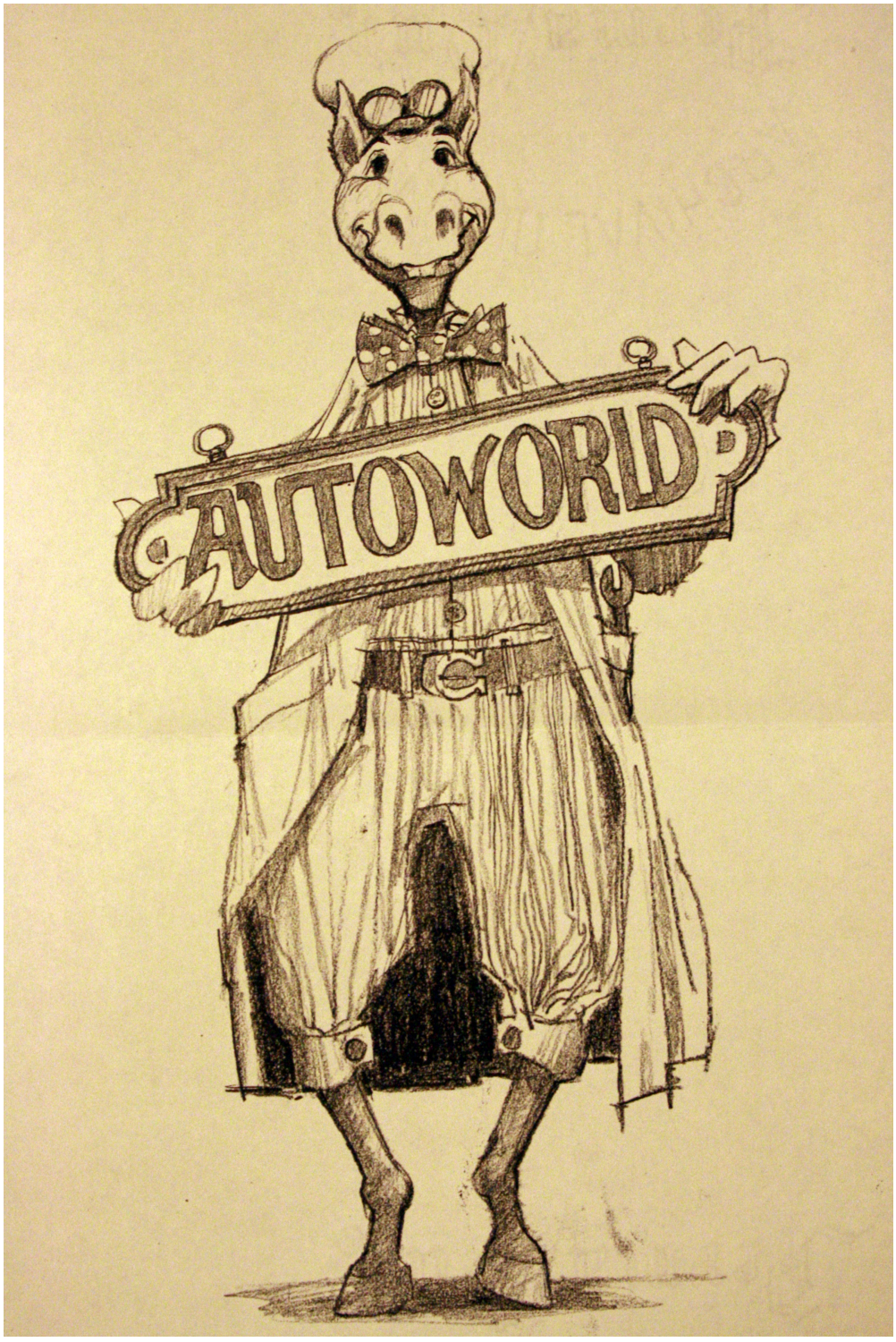

Figure 9: "Fred, the Carriageless Horse" character sketch

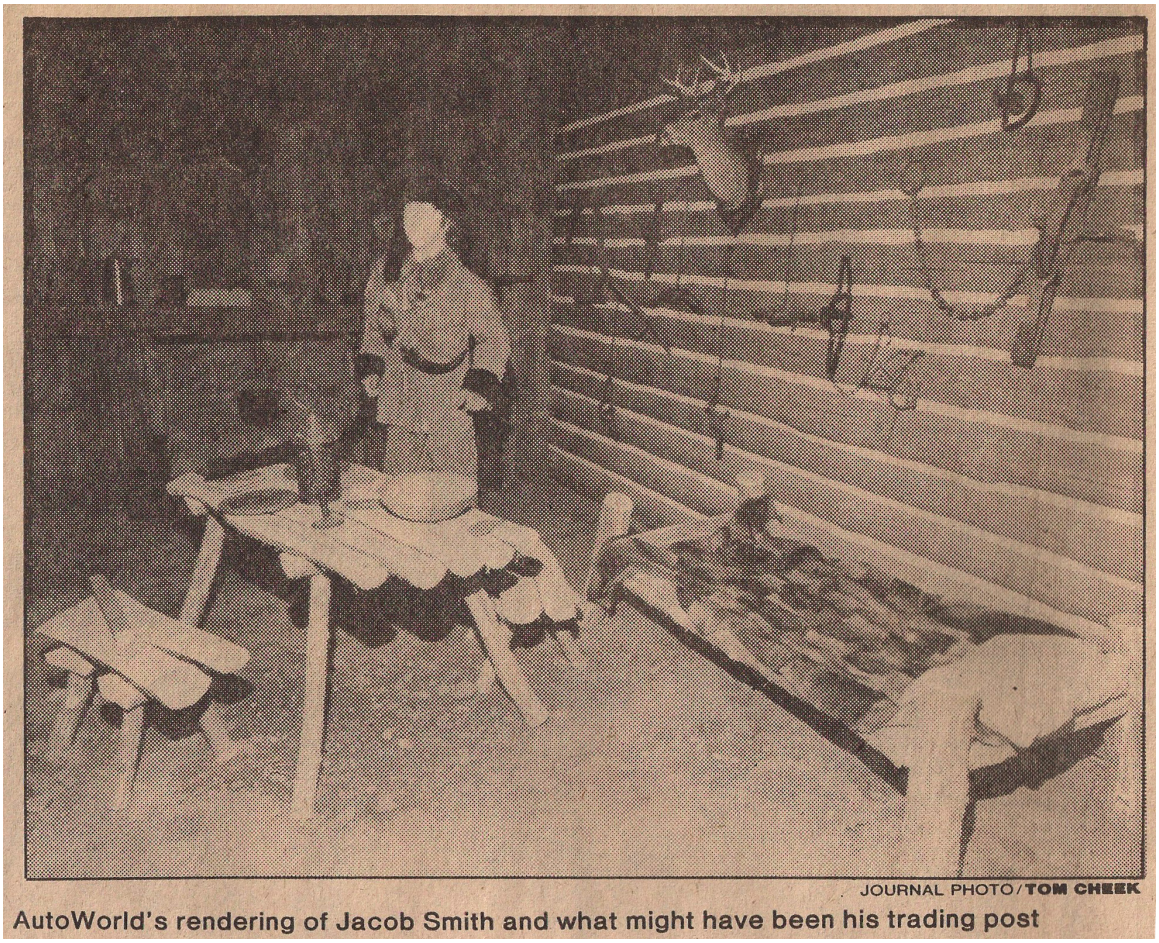

Figure 10: Jacob Smith in his cabin at AutoWorld

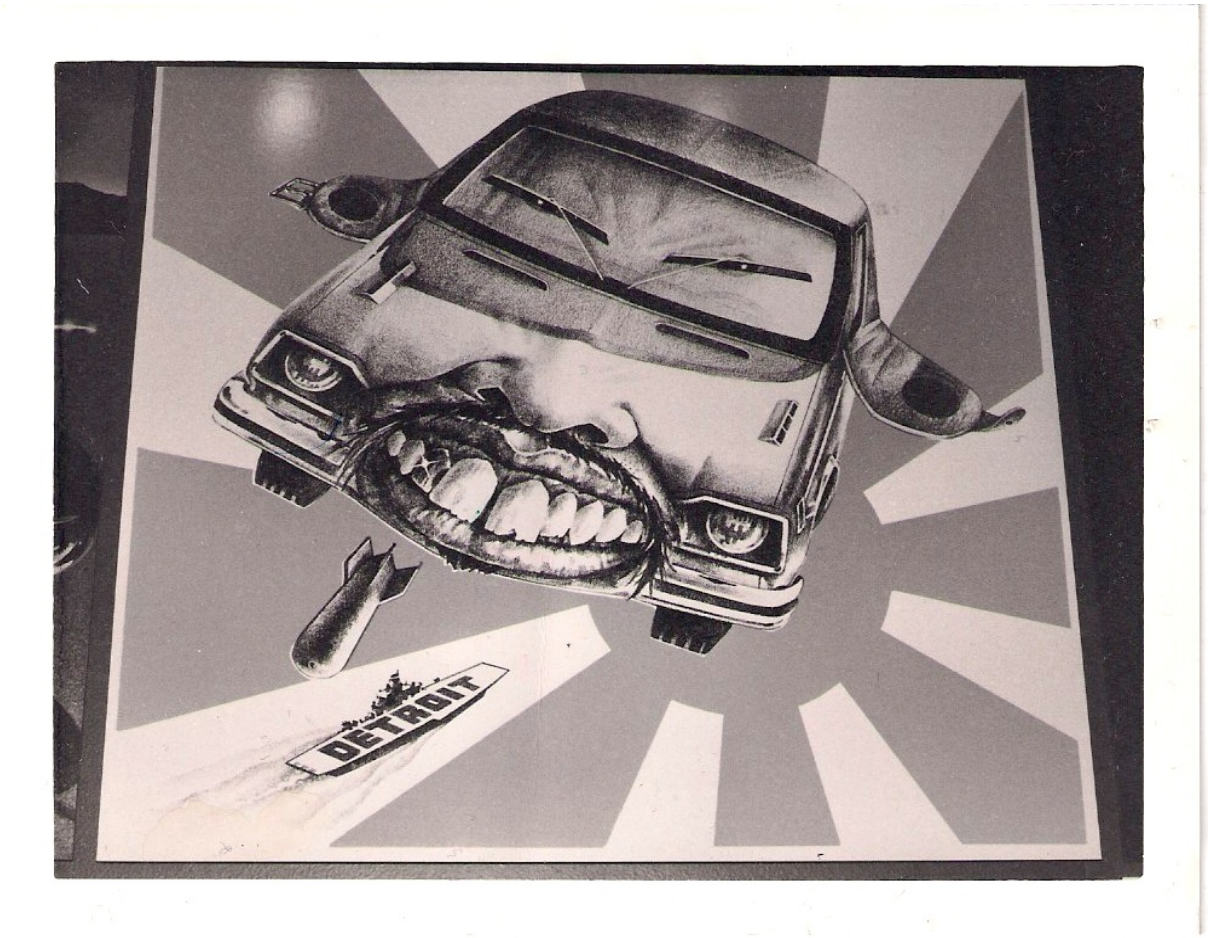

Figure 11: "Our Second Pearl Harbor" poster displayed at AutoWorld

CHAPTER THREE

Festival Marketplaces and Unemployed Horses: Crises and Spectacles of Labor at the Dawn of "Morning in America"

Figure 12: James Rouse on the cover of *TIME* magazine, 1981

On August 24, 1981, the cover of *TIME* magazine made a bold and triumphant declaration: "Cities Are Fun!"[168] This celebratory message was probably news to *TIME*'s readership and likely the nation as a whole in 1981, and the very need to make such a counterintuitive claim in such dramatic fashion was itself evidence of the state of America cities—or at least most middle–class Americans' view of them. For more than a decade, American urban centers, especially those in the Northeast, Atlantic coast, and Midwest, had been increasingly perceived as run–down, unstable, dangerous places. Unemployment had been steadily increasing as these regions hemorrhaged industrial jobs, and the increasing polarization between urban and suburban areas meant that cities were becoming more economically and politically isolated from the guarded affluence outside their borders. Waves of suburban tax revolts of the late 1970s, among other popular and governmental actions, had sent a clear message that the health of central cities was not high on the list of priorities for white suburban taxpayers.

In support of their celebratory assertion, the cover's illustration depicted a kindly white gentleman's bespectacled face, smiling comfortingly and identified as "Master Planner James Rouse." Rouse and his business, the Rouse Company, had been extremely successful in the several years preceding this article in transforming economically abandoned and commercially unviable urban districts into middle–class tourist areas, mostly in the ailing former industrial Northeast, and the story to accompany this cover image was in fact about Rouse's latest development, Baltimore's Harborplace.

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[168] "Cities Are Fun!" *Time* 24 Aug. 1981: Cover.

The secondary cover story, displayed in the corner foldout, shows a Professional Air Traffic Controllers' union (PATCO) picket line with the headline, "There is No Strike: Reagan Stands Firm." The PATCO strike had been an ongoing national saga since August 3 of that year, when nearly 13,000 organized air traffic controllers had walked off the job, hoping to disrupt the air travel industry and force the federal government to meet demands for higher wages, a shorter work week, and better retirement benefits.

These two headlines probably, at the time as well as today, seem unrelated beyond their temporal proximity and shared space within the red border of *TIME* magazine. Indeed, one occupied the "Living" section in the magazine, reserved for cultural, or at least not specifically political or economic, news, and the other had been a national headline for weeks, drawing the attention of President Reagan as well as every major national news outlet. The academic literature would seem to agree—much labor history, and history of this period in general, tends to deal with cultural dimensions of labor and class dynamics in an updated version of older analytical models where culture reflects some larger structures of what blue–collar life looks like. Even recent cultural analysis of the late 1970s and early 1980s concentrates much of its energy upon either (a) a backlash narrative in which the white working–class finds itself abandoned by or at odds with a post–1960s culture, or (b) the popular cultural politics of "Staying' Alive," the emergence of punk, or "All in the Family."[169] This unfortunately often comes at the expense of a deeper look at

[169] See, for example, Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds. *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*; Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*. New York: New, 2010.; Lichtenstein, Nelson. *State of the Union: A*

the largely unexamined questions about how changing economic and political conditions in this period are intimately tied to, and in many ways mutually constitutive of, cultural changes that ushered in and reinforced a shift toward the hegemony of neoliberalism. As urban space became an even more heated battleground in this period, literally and rhetorically, it is also an ideal location to trace how the intersections of labor, economics, and culture shaped American cities, especially in what would become widely known as the deindustrialized "Rust Belt" of the Northeast and Midwest. But still, what could the pleasant outdoor cafes of Baltimore's Harborplace development possibly have to do with the labor crisis gripping the nation during the week of August 24, 1981?

There is a level at which this magazine cover reads as a metaphor for the Reagan 80s—a brightly colored, defiantly upbeat, and tightly composed façade dominating the visual field while a corner of unrest literally intrudes into the space, unable to be completely concealed. The cover illustration itself, which is supposed to convince us of the fun to be had in urban spaces, actually seems more like an eerily hollow stage set. Rouse himself dominates the frame, placed centrally in the composition and pictured from the chest up. To one side of him is a brightly colored

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Century of American Labor. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2002.; Schulman, Bruce J., and Julian E. Zelizer. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008.; Bailey, Beth L., and David R. Farber. *America in the Seventies*. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004.; Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. New York: Free, 2001.; Freund, David M. P. *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007.; Steven P. Dandenau, *A Town Abandoned: Flint, Michigan Confronts Deindustrialization*; Lord, George F., and Albert C. Price. "Growth Ideology in a Period of Decline: Deindustrialization and Restructuring, Flint Style." *Social Problems* 39.2 (1992): 155-69.

geometric mass, meant to suggest architecture in the abstract and providing a solid presence against which the "master planner" can rest. To the other side lies a vast expanse of blue waves, referencing the tendency of Rouse's festival marketplaces to be situated on a waterfront, if the location allows. Two buildings are also included in the composition—one, placed downward to the front of the frame, is recognizable from its copper–domed bell tower as part of Rouse's successful Fanuiel Hall festival marketplace in Boston. The other, smaller and placed to the side, almost resting on Rouse's shoulder, is an abstract building again presumably meant to signify the concept of development and growth rather than any specific structure. Several things are immediately striking about the iconography and composition of this illustration. First, the depiction of a space that is supposed to be teeming with activity and development is decidedly spare and severe looking. The abstract architectural elements suggest nothing so much as an industrial skeleton, which seems antithetical to the article's aim. The two actual buildings, our only point of reference to any actual place, likewise seem more like warehouses than bustling marketplaces, and the largest compositional element besides Rouse himself is a rather stormy looking ocean that—unlike the built environment—seems to expand beyond the borders of the magazine's cover. But perhaps the most striking and significant feature of the illustration is what it's lacking: people. Whatever space this illustration is supposed to represent, it is as empty as a steel mill in Youngstown or an assembly line in Flint—the only sign of life in this supposedly revitalized urban landscape is the larger–than–life figure of Rouse at the center of it all.

There are also the multiple levels of visual and historical irony that hint at the tensions present in this captured moment. To begin with, the photo used on the cover depicts striking workers of Local 201, a New York City chapter of PATCO, which rubs uncomfortably up against the exuberant main headline of "Cities Are Fun." Even if New York weren't the site of South Street Seaport, one of Rouse's most successful and celebrated festival marketplace developments, the juxtaposition would call uneasy attention to the unrest in American cities at that very moment. What's more, the secondary headline seems to deny the very existence of the news item it's meant to report—Reagan's reaction to the labor crisis, that "There Is No Strike," asserts his power to control not only the situation, but reality itself. Reagan "stands firm" in this moment with iron–fisted reassurance to ultimately unify the message of the *TIME* cover—there is no strike; cities are fun; everything is fine.

But these narratives are also too simple to tease out the deeper relationships between urban revitalization, culture, and labor, one that is only glimpsed in the separate bodies of literature that address each. In this chapter, I argue that the two seemingly disparate elements that make up this magazine cover illustrate central tensions faced by both cities and organized labor in the early 1980s—tensions that, perhaps just as importantly, also shaped the *idea* of both cities and organized labor in the popular imagination and political discourse. The vision of urban revitalization successfully asserted by Rouse and championed by *TIME*, as well as by scores of city officials and boosters, meshed neatly with Reagan's deregulated, market–friendly, neoliberal framework within which deindustrialized Rust Belt cities found themselves operating at the dawn of the 1980s. Northeastern and Midwest

manufacturing centers, traditional strongholds of organized labor that had been losing jobs and population for years, increasingly came to be seen as relics of a social order that was being left behind, even as deserving of their fate as they insisted upon the failed politics of the New Deal. As neoliberal thought maintains that in a free market, (un)employment is always voluntary, the employment crisis in these former manufacturing centers became increasingly framed in individualized terms and was further removed from any social protection into a narrative framework built around the notion of "personal responsibility." That is to say, in the popular and political imagination, organized labor was behaving in a selfish and irresponsible manner when making demands, and was furthermore responsible for holding back cities and regions from the progress and plenty that was possible in a deregulated, post–New Deal, individualist economy. As an outmoded and unwelcome participant in the new economic and social order, organized labor was seen as in fact one of the causes of deindustrialization and unemployment in the Rust Belt, and as a legacy that must be transcended for the US and its cities to move forward and be economically competitive.[170]

All of these factors coalesced into a new cultural and political economic "common sense" about cities and labor at the dawn of "morning in America," wherein unions were the problem, the New Deal was finally over, and the Rust Belt was its unfortunate but inevitable casualty. In this atmosphere, attractively upbeat,

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[170] Thompson, Heather Ann. *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001. Thompson argues, for example, that a common problematic assumption about new scholarly examinations of cities, politics and labor in a post 1980 context is that the American labor situation by 1980, while notable, was largely unavoidable.

racially non–threatening models for revitalization like James Rouse's "festival marketplaces" thrived by promising to replace the lost, dirty, union manufacturing jobs with new service and tourism–based employment—and above all, to make cities "fun."

Situated at the center of this transformation was Flint, Michigan. As the birthplace of General Motors, Flint was integral to the development of the largest and arguably most economically and culturally significant corporation in postwar America, one that largely defined US industry in the twentieth century. Likewise, as the birthplace of the United Auto Workers union, Flint is the symbolic center of the modern organized labor movement in the United States. As the "strike heard round the world," the 1936–7 Flint sit–down strike inaugurated a new era of worker/capital relations as the US emerged from depression and entered the New Deal order that would define much of the rest of the twentieth century.[171] Labor history, and to an extent American history in general, has elevated this event and the waves of union activity that it set in motion to a legendary status, described by eminent labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein as "undoubtedly the most significant work stoppage in twentieth–century American history."[172] Without recapitulating a by–now familiar (and in many ways problematic) historical narrative of labor that positions white male industrial labor as the heroic stand–in for all American workers, and with a clear understanding that both the fight waged and the gains

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[171] "The 1936 - 37 Flint, Michigan Sit-Down Strike." *BBC News*. BBC, 28 Jan. 2002. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.; For the most definitive historical treatment of the characteristics of the "New Deal Order," see Fraser, Steve, and Gary Gerstle. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989.
[172] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: a Century of American Labor*: 48.

made by the iconic sit–down strike were fraught with gendered and racial tensions that are yet unresolved, I would like to retain this mythological notion—that Flint is historically and symbolically central to the building of "the American century." Detroit has garnered much attention in both urban and labor history for its journey from towering industrial capital to capital of the "urban crisis," and rightly so.[173] But if it is true, as historian Heather Ann Thompson has said, that Detroit "holds symbolic meaning for America in every decade since World War II," then I would argue the same holds true for the relatively unexamined symbolic role of Flint—and in the case of labor, perhaps even more so.[174] The origins of postwar prosperity, built on union wages that created a white (eventually suburban) middle class, and

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[173] Indeed, the 1936-37 Flint sit-down strike goes a long way to establish and perpetuate this narrative, as women were explicitly excluded from participating in the strike and relegated to support positions such as providing food for striking workers. This is also situated within a broader political and cultural context where the demands and concessions on either side of labor disputes, both before and after 1937, are articulated within a framework of a "family wage" for workers that would support a white, heteronormative nuclear family. For discussions of gender, race and labor, as well as the romantic ideal of industrial labor, see Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*; Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991.; Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City*; Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1990.; Kessler-Harris, Alice. *Out to Work: A History of Wage-earning Women in the United States*. New York: Oxford UP, 1982; Lichtenstein, Nelson. *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor*. New York, NY: Basic, 1995.*;* Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor;* Nelson, Bruce. *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001Enstad, Nan. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.*;* Zukin, Sharon. *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*. Berkeley: University of California, 1991.;Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.
For Detroit-specific histories, see Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*; David Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America*; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*.

[174] Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*: 7.

indeed the popular image of the broad prosperity born of a supposed corporate–labor accord can be traced to Flint and its iconic role in the history of organized labor. The same can unfortunately be said of its representative status as a deindustrialized shell of a company town where supposedly bloated and lazy union workers were increasingly left behind in a rapidly changing world.

As the "American century" that Flint helped to define waned, the dilemmas of a transforming economic and political culture resonated there deeply, and in ways that might serve as a warning to cities both within and outside the industrial Northeast and Midwest—in the popular imagination, it is safe to say that Flint embodied the very notion of the "Rust Belt." And at the center of Flint's need to reinvent itself in the early 1980s, at the dawn of "morning in America," was AutoWorld, the Flint/auto–industry themed museum and amusement park, which attempted in its remarkably short life (which lasted less than a year before the park closed due to lack of attendance) to narrate a business–friendly history in which labor conflict was a hermetically–sealed thing of the past.

As an early effort by one deindustrialized urban center to transform its real and symbolic economy, AutoWorld provides a unique lens through which to view the historical moment of the late 1970s and early 80s—especially as a real labor dispute over its construction unfolded shortly before the grand opening, illuminating the intersecting states of labor, culture, and urban revitalization in this moment even more poignantly that the cover of *TIME* magazine. Through national and local representations of industrial labor such as museum exhibitions, political rhetoric, and media images, this chapter traces the ways in which a different kind of

labor—specifically service work in a new, spectacular tourist economy—was posited as the only reasonable alternative to manufacturing for cities like Flint, and how these jobs were part of a broader neoliberal restructuring toward individualized, disposable employment, within which there was no space for the antiquated collectivist labor politics of the New Deal.

The Businessmen's Long War on Labor, From The New Deal to Reagan's America

Of course, the predicament in which American organized labor found itself was not wholly invented by Ronald Reagan, and was not as simple as a sudden backlash. Since before the watershed strike of 1936–7, and the waves of unionization that it inspired in the years soon following, corporate interests had been waging war on organized labor. The ferocious and often violent battles between labor and industrial bosses of the late 1800s transformed into a relatively less contentious system of welfare capitalism early twentieth century, described by historians such as Lizabeth Cohen. As industrial capitalism crumbled in the Depression years, "labor spies" were widely used as worker agitation built, and General Motors spent more money than any other American company on anti–union agents.[175] Anti–union consultants emerged in the 1950s, during the supposed "golden age" of labor relations, born out of corporate responses to labor victories of the previous twenty years, to establish a new front in the ongoing corporate

[175] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*: 48.

offensive against union activity, anticipating intensified union–busting strategies in the decades to follow.[176]

Recently scholars such as Kim Phillips–Fein and Bethany Moreton have argued convincingly for a long history of conservatism, refusing the familiar historical narrative rooted in post–1960s white backlash and the rise of Reagan to instead offer a more complex account of business conservatives and elites who led a sustained, decades–long "crusade" against threats to corporate power such as organized labor, and against the New Deal Order itself. Rather than an "accord," a "treaty" or a "golden age" of labor relations, this recent work reframes the "labor question" as one that is never answered or resolved at any point, but rather, one that is being attacked and undermined by corporate forces on multiple fronts, in practically every historical moment since it was first posed.[177] Anti–union activity has been not only a question of the bottom line, but also a question of what *ideas* would prevail. As Phillips–Fein argues, unions were dangerous in the bigger picture because they "implied the potential economic independence of the worker from his job … unions seemed to business conservatives to be the embodiment of the most social–democratic tendencies within liberalism. Defeating them was therefore the key to undoing the New Deal order."[178] In the 1950s, with an attitude eerily prescient of Reagan–era neoliberal rhetoric, General Electric corporate Vice President and staunch anti–unionist Lemuel Ricketts Boulware worked under the

[176] Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessman's Crusade Against the New Deal*: 106.
[177] Lichtenstein argues that these very ideas of stable and mutually beneficial relations between labor and management are in part a product of liberal and laborite reactions to the explicitly hostile relations of the early 1980s, and in any case are suspect and "a product of defeat, not victory," *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*: 98-99.
[178] Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessman's Crusade Against the New Deal*: 89.

principle that the union should never be able to claim a victory for workers, symbolically or otherwise, and that the union was ultimately "a destructive interloper, distorting the information given by the free market."[179] As the labor movement became "big labor" in the 1950s and 60s, organized labor was struggling with its own reputation and the popular perception of unions as part of the economic and political problem, rather than the solution—a perception due in part to business conservatives' efforts to control both perception and reality, as well as to institutional realities of the organized labor establishment.[180] This conflict, coupled with the structural inequalities of race and gender built into the New Deal as well as in the "victories" of the labor movement, meant that tensions were mounting from within the Liberal coalition as well as without as the "American century" wore on.[181] By the 1970s, Jefferson Cowie has argued, "workers," as a consciously identified group, had become largely unworthy of attention, disappearing from the national political scene, and that "the *idea* of workers in civic and popular discourse had been defeated."[182]

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[179] Ibid., 100.
[180] Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*: 141-3.
[181] Many scholars have explored the ways in which organized labor continually and systematically excluded African American workers, relegating them to the "meanest and dirtiest jobs" even as gains were being made for white workers. See Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit;* David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs;* Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City;* Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of Organized Labor;* Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor;* Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality*.
[182] Jefferson Cowie, "Vigorously Left, Right and Center" in Bailey and Farber, *America in the '70s*: 102.

Especially for cities in the Rust Belt, the process of deindustrialization itself can be seen as part of the long corporate battle against organized labor. Far from a golden age of labor relations, the years following the intense waves of unionization in the 1930s and 40s saw giant corporations like General Motors go immediately on the offensive, developing and deploying multiple strategies with the explicit or veiled purpose of undermining the power of organized labor (besides preemptive measures of labor spies and union–busters) such as automation, retooling and reorganization to make sit–down strikes less effective, and ultimately capital mobility and plant relocation at an accelerated rate.[183] The process of making labor politically and culturally weak is the product of a long effort by business elites and political conservatives that was not necessarily invented with the election of Ronald Reagan.

However, the historical moment of the late 1970s and early 1980s was a unique opportunity for those anti–labor interests and activists to exploit the growing cracks in the New Deal order, and set the stage for the Reagan administration's unprecedented level of hostility toward organized labor. Scholars of neoliberalism such as David Harvey have pointed to Reagan's national acceleration of trends that had begun to develop in the mid–late 1970s and which would bring labor "to heel to conform with the new social order," as the new administration transformed the National Labor Relations Board—a government entity that was largely the product of 1930s labor activism—into "a vehicle for attacking and regulating the rights of labour at the very moment when business was

[183] See Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most dangerous Man in Detroit*

being deregulated."[184] Returning to the famous example that began this chapter, Reagan's dismantling of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization strike in 1981 sent a very clear message regarding the political place of organized labor in the new administration. Immediately crushing the strike by declaring it illegal (if, indeed, it existed at all), Reagan fired the strikers, decertified their union and ordered military personnel to replace the dismissed controllers. Historian Bruce Schulman observes that, with these actions, Reagan actually won a major victory, saying, "The public applauded his principled stance, admired his toughness, and blamed the controllers for the ensuing delays at the airports. Business leaders realized that they had a staunch ally in the White House and turned up the pressure on organized labor."[185] With the PATCO strike as a watershed moment in labor history, in some ways symbolically bookending the New Deal order and organized labor's volatile but privileged place in it, the early 1980s were a time of real crisis for both the actual labor movement and the very idea of labor in political and popular discourse.

The Image and Idea of "Labor" and the "Rust Belt"

The image and representation of labor—or at least the image of a particular postwar abstraction of white, masculine industrial production—was in many ways shaped by two popular modes of understanding that relied either on iconic historical events such as the Flint sit–down strike and auto manufacturing in

[184] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 52.
[185] Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics*: 233.

general, or on a corrupt and bloated bureaucratic image of "big labor." In the late 1970s and early 1980s, as deindustrialization and unemployment grew to crisis levels especially in urban centers of the industrial Northeast and Midwest (what would be increasingly become referred to as the "Rust Belt"), the issue of organized labor took a rhetorical and representational turn as cities found themselves grasping for solutions to these crises. Not only was the idea of organized labor being devalued nationally, but in the case of individual cities, organized labor was being held responsible for creating a "bad business climate." The evaluation of a location's business environment, a product of neoliberal efforts to restructure urban space to better suit the needs of modern capital, became a common–sense priority for cities hard hit by job loss and capital flight.[186] The first feature of a "good business climate" was, and is, understood as providing low labor costs, which ultimately demonized the relatively well–off union worker as selfish and "a problem" for cities trying to economically revive themselves.

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[186] See Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 46-7.; as well as Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Noliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy*; Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Government, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*; Leitner, Helga, Jamie Peck, and Eric S. Sheppard. *Contesting Neoliberalism: Urban Frontiers*. New York: Guilford, 2007.; Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk, eds., *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*; Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, eds. *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban restructuring in North America and Western Europe*; Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*; Zukin, Sharon. *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982.; George F. Lord and Albert C. Price. "Growth Ideology In a Period of Decline: Deindustrialization and Restructuring, Flint Style."; Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization;* Steven P. Dandenau, *A Town Abandoned: Flint, Michigan Confronts Deindustrialization;* Jon C. Teaford. *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985.;* Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*.

Not that organized labor didn't have its place in revitalization strategies—its place just happened to be planted firmly in the past. Dominant modes of envisioning labor in the popular cultural imagination, possibly as one result of defining labor in the postwar era as the province of white masculine breadwinners, imply that there might have been a moment in which the labor movement was a noble and necessary, but that moment is past and irrelevant to contemporary political economic realities. As the former industrial belt rusted, there was at least the sense that labor was complicit in creating "dead" or "ghost town" cities in the region, and that it was in many ways dead itself.

One of the ways in which the implied death of labor became useful in Rust Belt revitalization plans was to seal off a history of strong labor activity as an important but outmoded historical relic, making such histories an element of marketable "heritage." Sharon Zukin and other scholars of urban transformation in this period have traced the ways in which deindustrialization has gone hand–in–hand with a cultural shift in industrial urban space from production to consumption, marking a new kind of commitment in cities to the middle and upper class—increasingly tourists—rather than the working class.[187] The proliferation of urban residential loft space, one of Zukin's major examples, nicely illustrates the repackaging of "abandoned" industrial space as it is transformed into a desirable middle and upper class residence, and can be seen everywhere from Brooklyn to Flint as an almost mandatory feature of a Rust Belt city's new life. "Gentrification" is

[187] Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*. Zukin argues this specifically in terms of residential space, but applies the idea broadly to include related processes.

in fact no longer a dirty word as cities officially pursue the attraction and retention of "the right sort of people."[188]

The success of Rouse–inspired "festival marketplace" models of revitalization also relies upon a repackaging of spaces of labor into spaces of consumption, and of aestheticized labor spectacle. A hallmark of this approach is to transform urban space where industrial work has been eliminated into a safe and nostalgic bubble of affluence filled with symbolic markers of a time gone by. South Street Seaport in New York City and the Harborplace development in Baltimore are clear examples of this kind of transformation, as M. Christine Boyer observes that "the Seaport's imaginary historical museum is everywhere, surrounding the spectator with an artfully composed historic ambience."[189] In the celebratory *TIME* article profiling Rouse, the historical break between the old city with its forms of labor and the new Baltimore defined by Harborplace's success is apparent. "This is the new Baltimore, not to be confused with the old," the article boasts, defining the "old" Baltimore by its accent, its riots, and its working class history, describing it as "traditionally a blue–collar, beer–and–shot town, built on 19th century technologies, mainly steel and shipbuilding, that have since trailed off, as has its population." Through the development of the middle–class and tourist–friendly Harborplace, this hopelessly

[188] Florida, Richard L. *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Basic, 2002.
[189] M. Christine Boyer, "Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at South Street Seaport" in Sorkin, ed. *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space.*

antiquated and dying place was rescued by Rouse, who had a vision that "Baltimore could become a *valuable* and joyous town (my emphasis)."[190]

Institutionally, there were also efforts to define, memorialize, and otherwise represent organized labor in this period of crisis. Youngstown, Ohio, for example, began work on the Youngstown Historical Center for Industry and Labor in 1983, after receiving funding from the state legislature, with an official groundbreaking ceremony taking place in 1986. Conceived and proposed by Youngstown native and State Senator Harry Meshel in 1977 shortly after Youngstown Sheet & Tube announced it was closing its Campbell Works operation, the center did not officially open with a permanent collection until 1992.[191] From its conception in a moment of industrial withdrawal, however, to its stated mission upon opening to provide "a dramatic overview of the impact of the iron and steel industry on Youngstown and other Mahoning Valley communities," it is clearly an institution born out of the desire to memorialize a particular kind of labor as it disappeared from the region.[192] The permanent exhibit on display since the center's opening has been "By the Sweat of Their Brow: Forging the Steel Valley," which explicitly seeks to explore "labor, immigration and urban history, using videos, artifacts, photographs, and reconstructed scenes."[193] The building that houses the center, designed by architect Michael Graves in 1986, is deliberately made to evoke the structure of a steel mill,

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[190] Demarest, Michael. "He Digs Downtown: For Master Planner James Rouse, Urban Life Is a Festival." *Time* 24 Aug. 1981: 42-53.
[191] "Steel Museum Celebrates 15 Years, Seeks Support." *Vindy.com*. The Youngstown Vindicator, 27 Sept. 2007. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.
[192] "OHS - Places - The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry & Labor." *OHS - Places - The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry & Labor*. Ohio Historical Society, n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.
[193] Ibid.

complete with stylized smokestack elements, further suggesting an aestheticized memorialization of industrial labor.

At the other extreme, we must consider Enterprise Square USA, a virtual "free market Disneyworld" which opened at Oklahoma Christian University in 1982. The product of decades of free–market evangelizing by George Benson, the head of Oklahoma Christian's sister campus, Harding University, Enterprise Square USA was a theme park of free–market capitalism and, according to its own publicity, "the nation's only major visitor attraction designed to interpret the free–market system."[194] With a structure and approach that at times seems identical to AutoWorld's, Enterprise Square USA enlisted the services of former Disney imagineers to craft exhibits that would "blend education and entertainment" with graphics, photography, animation, animatronics, and computers, as well as intellectual input from the chief economist of the conservative American Enterprise Institute.[195] As Enterprise Square USA's technical director explained, "It has some traits of a museum, and some traits of an amusement park,"[196] pointing toward the blending of education and fun that was happening more broadly within institutions, like museums, that were increasingly faced with a responsibility to attract tourists while also claiming some cultural authority—a blend that AutoWorld banked on. The biggest obvious difference between the two is their disparate levels of success, as Enterprise Square USA remained open and active until 2002, while AutoWorld closed within a year of its opening. There is also the common theme of regaining

[194] Moreton, Bethany. *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.168-169.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.

what has been lost, presumably as a cost of New Deal liberalism—at Enterprise Square USA's groundbreaking ceremony, Senator David Boren took the opportunity to declare the opening a chance to help America win back its lost prestige as "the number one nation in the world."[197]

Visitors to Enterprise Square USA experienced a three–hour tour of the capitalist system, guided by three aliens whose craft crash–lands right in front of them to begin the trip. According to the tour's narrative, the spacecraft has run out of fuel and the alien guides, innocent of capitalism, must learn the ways of the American free market system to solve their crisis. Visitors are guided through several interactive exhibits, all designed to teach a different lesson of capitalism. Historian Bethany Moreton describes one exhibit, the "grimly Orwellian 'Great Talking Face of Government.'"

> [The exhibit] covered one wall and housed nine separate video screens representing mouth, eyes, ears and brain. 'As the face expounds on the needs for more regulatory power to protect the people,' wrote an enthusiastic reviewer of an early sneak preview, 'the tempo and action increase until the face short–circuits. "It's overworked,"' explained the alien guide.[198]

Espousing the neoliberal gospel of free–market capitalism and meddlesome government regulation had the implied if not explicit message that organized labor was also an unwelcome interloper into the province of the invisible hands of the marketplace, and a successful theme park dedicated to such ideas could find no more comfortable or appropriate a historical moment.

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[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.

AutoWorld and the Memorialization of a Time Gone By

In his sweeping and influential synthesis of twentieth–century labor history, Nelson Lichtenstein argues that the "labor question" was central to American political and social imagination during the Great Depression and the years immediately following. In contemporary politics, however, he argues that "Americans have largely forgotten why the unions grew so explosively in the decade after 1933."[199] Although his arguments concerning the long–term loss of union power over the intervening decades is more problematic, he does observe that the tendency on both the left and the right to construct a "programmatically convenient mythology" around the dramatic rise of organized labor relies on a common theme of historical distance. Union sympathizers on the left recall wistfully a "golden age" of labor relations that conveniently leaves out structural inequalities of race and gender in the movement, and does little to deepen our historical understanding. On the other hand, Reaganites and business conservatives advance a narrative in which we are to imagine "an unbridgeable divide separating our era from both the economic structures of the depression decade and the technology of the mass production regime that was thought to dominate the first half of the twentieth century."[200] According to this narrative, these early strikes hold an honored place in American history, but since then, blue–collar work has become less significant and bosses have learned their lesson, meaning that unions are essentially an irrelevant and clunky relic of a time gone by. The outcome of both narratives, left and right, ultimately relegates organized labor to the past, to be briefly recognized and then

[199] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*: 20.
[200] Ibid, 21.

moved past. The representations of labor in the exhibits of AutoWorld perfectly exemplify this strategy in the moment when it was being formed nationally, and illustrate the cultural process of its formation in the birthplace of the modern labor movement.

To give a snapshot of the economic context in which AutoWorld was representing Flint and the wonders of the American automobile industry, by the time that it opened in July 1984, the community that it greeted with its celebratory message had roughly 26% unemployment, and Flint was in the middle of a sharp, decade-long decline in manufacturing employment that would see 30,000 jobs eliminated by the end of the 1980s. Population loss accelerated as well, as one half of the 30% who were unemployed in 1982 had left the city.[201]

Fredrick Hope was in the perfect position to bring a light into the dark place of Flint. As an exhibit designer with 9 years of experience as a Disney "imagineer," Hope was chosen to head the AutoWorld creative team specifically for his credentials with the most recognizable creator of entertaining and profitable environments in the world. The Disney "experience" or "atmosphere" of magic, wonder, and fun was repeatedly articulated as the model for the AutoWorld experience. A promotional film script, written to sell the project to investors, asserts that "not since Walt Disney opened his 'Magic Kingdoms' has such a concept been realized and AutoWorld will be a place that even *that* great man would be proud

[201] Moore, Michael. "Dance Band on the Titanic: AutoWorld and the Death of Flint." *The Michigan Voice* [Flint] Sept. 1984: 10.; Lord, George F., and Albert C. Price. "Growth Ideology in a Period of Decline: Deindustrialization and Restructuring, Flint Style." *Social Problems* 39.2 (1992): 155-69.

of."[202] Hope and his associates in "The Only Animated Display and Design Company" were frequently hailed in local media and AutoWorld materials for their impressive pedigree, and the animatronic character and eventual spokesfigure of Fred, the "Carriageless Horse" was explicitly described as a spokesman in the style of Mickey Mouse, which meant that he was both a character saturated with sometimes contradictory meaning, and a malleable product to be sold in many forms.[203] This strong and conscious connection to Disney and its theme parks also meant a strong commitment to animatronic displays as the main form of displaying the historical content at AutoWorld, with over 100 individual animatronic figures in use throughout the park. The specific history of animatronics also helps to illuminate the relationship between this technological form and historical representation—the first animatronic figure was the Abraham Lincoln robot created by Disney imagineers in collaboration with the State of Illinois for their "A Visit with Mr. Lincoln" pavilion, and later incorporated into the "Hall of Presidents" exhibit at the Magic Kingdom. Like the exhibits at AutoWorld, these original figures of animatronic technology were meant to narrate a serious history in an entertaining and technologically impressive way, and it is this "experiential"—but also potentially alienating, in the sense that visitors in both contexts were not expected to actually mistake animatronic figures for "the real thing"—method of narrating history, and its lucrative possibilities, that AutoWorld wanted to recreate. It is also important to recognize the resonance of Disney's valuing of the notions of "progress," especially

[202] *The Only Animated Display and Design Company*. Fredric Hope and Associates, 1984. Transcript.
[203] *AutoWorld General Concept Design Notes: Fred the Horse*. 17 Nov. 1982. Exhibit Design Notes. Sloan Archives, Flint.

in terms of technological innovation and virtuosity, in AutoWorld's privileging of animatronic exhibits, as it was a significant part of their stated mission to honor and memorialize the technological achievements of the automobile industry. The irony here, of course, is similar to that of Henry Ford's Greenfield Village, in the sense that it contained the same central contradiction of capitalism that I would argue AutoWorld reveals: the very industry that has destroyed the past through "progress" would then choose to honor it through nostalgic representation.

Fred the Carriageless Horse (hereafter, simply "Fred") was created and developed by Fredric Hope and Associates in collaboration with Flint AutoWorld officials as a highly complex and rounded character, with a nuanced history and personality that could be drawn upon to inform his interactions with the AutoWorld public. This is all to say that Fred was taken very seriously in his central role in representing the project of AutoWorld and its missions. As Fredric Hope, who articulated the character and shaped the look of Fred, asserted in his general concept design notes:

> "Fred, the "Carriageless Horse" is a mascot, logo and spokesman for the entire AutoWorld project. In addition to being featured in several of the entertainment events within AutoWorld, he will undoubtedly be called upon to support and promote the project. Because of this we thought that a bit of a psychological profile would be in order.
>
> First of all, Fred is not, repeat NOT an animated figure, a robot, automaton, audio–animatronic device or any other demeaning and meaningless aphorism. Fred is a living, breathing character and as such, he has strengths and weaknesses, talents and foibles, just as we human beings do (though he would deny it emphatically!).[204]

[204] Ibid.

Of course, however, Fred was all of these dreaded and "demeaning" things that Hope facetiously denied in his steadfast defense of Fred's "reality." As the audio–animatronic robot host to the main "ride" inside AutoWorld, called "The Humorous History of Automobility," Fred was the figure of authority presiding over a self–consciously frivolous version of automotive history. He also is the only character to appear multiple times in multiple contexts (he also appears to play banjo and entertain those visitors waiting to see another animated ride depicting a worker–less assembly line, along with his recurring presence on shirts and other souvenirs), solidifying his status as a mascot, logo and spokeshorse for AutoWorld. In this "dark ride"—much like Disney's "It's a Small World" or "Haunted Mansion" rides—visitors boarded a replica of an "antique touring car" and rode along a track that took them through a series of 20 animated and animatronic vignettes, "each presented in tongue–in–cheek manner, bringing to life the trials and tribulations of keeping America on the road."[205] In this history—significant in its explicit and unusual purpose to present as flawed but frivolous (or "fun") a narrative of the automobile and the industry around it as possible—the automobile is a perpetual underdog that pluckily fights its way through the history of America to rightful prominence. Fred, who is present bodily to introduce you to the ride and throughout the "Humorous History" as a narrator through a drive–in movie–style speaker attached to each individual car, "haplessly and hopelessly, but valiantly, tries to convince his touring audience that the automobile is just a passing fancy—a folly—certainly not to be

[205] AutoWorld Associates. *AutoWorld*. Flint: AutoWorld Associates, 1984.

taken seriously."[206] The layers of meaning here are complex, to say the least: we are taken as visitors through a ride presenting a history that is obviously serious, but is presented as frivolous by an unreliable narrator who we are/are not supposed to take seriously when he instructs us not to take automobiles seriously.

But what were the actual anxieties and dissenting voices that a text and character such as this were trying to manage and contain? Although it is difficult to uncover and quantify by the very fact of the dominant local discourse's virtual monopoly on rhetorics of "progress" and "consensus," there are glimpses of class–based dissent being voiced in opposition to the AutoWorld project. In the September 1984 issue of the local alternative newspaper *The Michigan Voice*, editor Michael Moore relates a story about a factory worker friend who insisted on joining him, drunk, on Moore's weekly Flint radio show to talk about his experiences. "The phones lit up," he writes, "and one caller after another talked about their hot, dirty, thankless jobs in the factories … and how much they hated General Motors—and AutoWorld ("a joke and an insult to my intelligence, my dignity and my wallet," as one caller put it)."[207] However biased or romanticized this account may or may not be—though I would argue that "bias" is always relative, especially in this context—it seems difficult to argue that this point of view did not exist. Occasional letters to the editors of various local newspapers also provide some insight. One *Michigan Voice* letter reads, "I've never worked on an assembly line, but I cringed at that inane 'My Buddy' display—this must make factory workers feel like garbage."[208] Another

[206] Ibid.
[207] Michael Moore, "Dance Band on the Titanic."
[208] Moore, Michael. *The Michigan Voice* [Flint] Oct. 1984.

letter to the *Flint Journal*, positive in its assessment of AutoWorld (unsurprising given the *Journal's* staunch and arguably biased boosterism of the project), references an amorphous local dissent in saying "the reason I'm writing is because it seems that AutoWorld seems to draw too many undeserved negative opinions."[209] Perhaps the most damning assessments come from a viewer survey conducted by the *Saginaw (Michigan) News*, where 97% of 292 votes gave negative impressions of the AutoWorld concept, including responses such as "What do they think it is, DisneyWorld?" and "I can just imagine the long line of laid off auto workers waiting to get in, ha ha."[210] These two texts are also clearly poles of sentiment concerning AutoWorld, with a majority of residents divided about the subject in one way or another. In any case, these sentiments needed to be managed by AutoWorld's dominant discourses if the project was to progress with what they had always assumed and expected to be the full mandate of Flint residents.

As the project of AutoWorld progressed, the animatronic incarnation of Fred began to take shape. Fred's appearance was codified in ways that marked him visually as both working–class—or at least as "a worker"—and quaintly obsolete or antiquated. In formal character sketches and animatronic costume instructions, he is dressed in striped overalls or belted pants, with a long shop or driving coat. He wears a polka–dotted bow tie, shop or driving gloves, and a conductor's hat with driving goggles. In his dress, he projects the look of a laborer "dressed up" for a special event, and combines a vague "old–timey" aesthetic with working–class

[209] "Letter to the Editor." *The Flint Journal* 28 Aug. 1984.

[210] "Reader Survey." *The Saginaw News* 7 Apr. 1984.

markings. The most telling detail in his wardrobe is the crescent wrench that he either holds in his gloved hand or protrudes from his jacket pocket—an item that is completely anachronistic to his character as it has been articulated, except for the purpose of providing a visual touchstone tying him in a general way to the modern world of manual, masculine "work." It is also significant that Fred is placed geographically within the specific concerns of the Midwestern "Rust Belt" and, we can assume, Flint itself, through the concerns and debates surrounding his appearance and performance as a three–dimensional animatronic character. In a memorandum to the exhibit designers from AutoWorld officials, it is specifically noted that "Fred should be more a Michigan horse, Midwestern and urban, as opposed to a 'Western' horse. Horses had urban experiences in addition to the ranch/farm experience."[211] This characterization of Fred as a specifically "Michigan" and "urban" horse serves to reinforce the insistence upon AutoWorld's representations addressing local concerns in a national context.

The driving apparel that Fred displays is a practical element relating to the specifics of his role as host to the "Humorous History of Automobility" ride. In this role, Fred has been given a partner that both complicates his defining character traits and affords him more authority to narrate the story of automobility—"Lin Tizzy" is an antique car that Fred interacts with and rides in. In his animatronic form, Fred retains his edge of resentment, but has somehow made peace with technology—at least on an individual, humanized basis—enough to sing with and even give some credit and thanks to the machines that replaced him and his kind. In

[211] Ryan, Bridget. Letter to Fredric Hope. 19 Jan. 1984. MS. Sloan Archives, Flint, Michigan.

the banter between Fred and Tizzie (though Tizzie speaks only in abstract but recognizable honks and beeps), and before singing a song titled "Necessity is the Mother of Invention" about how horses should actually be glad that the automobile was invented, Fred says to his friend/nemesis, "Where would I be without you, eh? Probably stretched out on some Ky–Ro Practor's back bench!!" The automobile has saved Fred from literally back–breaking labor, and there is some part of him that has made his peace with, and is indeed grateful for, it, even though that freedom cost Fred his livelihood and sense of purpose.

This sentiment is echoed in a much more explicitly contemporary and problematic way in another animatronic display contained in a larger exhibit called "The Wonders of Autowonders," which depicted three stages of automobile manufacture, from research and development to production to designing the "cars of the future." The display that is meant to show the production stage, taking place on the assembly line, consists of a human autoworker character and a robotic welding arm that the worker calls "Spot." This mechanical character is, like Tizzie, mute except for lights and beeps, but the autoworker and Spot together tell a story about how their partnership actually means progress and productivity. This story, very much parallel to Fred's, is meant to illustrate that technology rescues human workers from the hardships of manual labor, and culminates in a song that the two sing together titled "Me and My Buddy" about how they "make the dreams come true" for consumers (see Fig. 14).

In one of the most explicit efforts to seal off the presence of organized labor, AutoWorld boasted an exhibit dedicated exclusively to representing the assembly

line, perhaps the single most significant development in automotive history. Both designers and officials realized to some extent that exhibits such as this would have to deal in some way with the fact that assembly lines, and industry in general, required workers. "The dilemma we had," said Frederick Hope, "is we are trying to tell that story [the story of the automotive industry] in the middle of an area where nobody knows more about how cars are being put together than the people who are coming to see it."[212] The logic put forward to solve this dilemma seems flawed, at best, as Hope follows his previous statement by saying, "Because of that, a stylized or artistic approach was taken."[213] The result of this stylized approach was "the Magical, Musical Motor Car Machine," an exhibit that represented the assembly line as a dark ride where visitors drove through an extended set of moving gears and blinking lights, accompanied by a song about working on an assembly line—but representing no actual workers. A promotional letter included with an AutoWorld informational pamphlet describes the "Assembly Line" exhibit as "a ride on a moving sidewalk past a special effect, dimensional and animated collage that depicts the musical, magical evolution of the assembly process."[214] In this formulation, the process of auto assembly is not only not performed by anyone in particular, but is a spectacular, sensory and "magical" process, disconnected from actual work or any meaningful history of work. Despite concerns voiced by local university historians and the UAW about a lack of union representation in AutoWorld's exhibits, the

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[212] Worth, Jan. "Designer Wanted Rides to Reflect Wackiness, Humor, Magic, Surprise." *The Flint Journal* 24 June 1984: 59.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ryan, G. Bridget. *The AutoWorld Story*. 1984. Promotional Fundraising Letter. Sloan Archives, Flint.

creative solution to dilemmas regarding labor's place in Flint's new cultural revitalization strategy was to marginalize, aestheticize, and memorialize it out of the present. Just as James Rouse's "fun" city on the cover of *TIME* was eerily devoid of actual life, so this assembly line promised a history of industrial glory without conflict with actual workers.

These animatronic displays perform a complicated postmodern feat wherein the "human/horse/real" character is explicitly juxtaposed against the "mechanical/automated/unreal," all in animatronic form. Thus, even the "real" here is unreal and mechanized, and whether or not there is tension in the characters' interaction (Fred's resentment/gratitude toward the automobile or the wholly amicable relationship between "Me and My Buddy"), the foundation that these representations are built upon is always already removed from "the real"—these are machines talking about the relationship of people to machines. Though this might be seen as only (though monumentally) ironic, I would argue that this mode of representation was particularly suited to AutoWorld's mission to "leave the real world behind" while recognizing its obligation—not necessarily based in any moral or social impetus, but at least unavoidable on some level—to address the relationship of workers to machines. In these characters, the desired atmosphere of Disney–esque "fun" can be achieved by presenting singing, dancing technological marvels—which AutoWorld was very much committed to celebrating—while still grappling with a complex history.

AutoWorld Construction Strike

As a final illustration of the intersecting predicaments of Rust Belt urban centers and American organized labor, we must step back again, to before AutoWorld opened its doors and before it was filled with talking robot horses and anthropomorphic cars. Before Fred sang or spoke a word, a real–life labor dispute took place involving a group of construction workers who were building AutoWorld's skeleton. The issues at the heart of the dispute were not so dramatic as those animating the legendary strikers of the winter of 1936–7, but the events of the summer of 1983 were similarly historic, as they offer us a unique opportunity to better understand how the political economic and cultural climate had dramatically shifted; almost a time–lapse snapshot of the same place, through the same lens, showing us changes over the intervening decades.

In May 1983, just over a year before AutoWorld was scheduled to hold its Independence Day grand opening celebration, finishers of the Cement Mason Local 198 who were contracted to help the facility meet its scheduled debut declared a strike, in a work stoppage that threatened to eventually derail many other construction activities. At issue was a 70–cent–per–hour raise, which covered a 20–cent wage decrease from the year before, plus another 50 cents to match a raise for general laborers. The general contractors wanted a wage freeze and so found themselves at odds with the cement finishers union, leading to the work stoppage and almost a dozen rounds of unsuccessful bargaining sessions, some with a federal mediator.[215] The strike escalated to the formation of a picket line by the cement

[215] "No Time for Strike." *The Flint Journal* 12 July 1983.

finishers union on June 22, shutting down all construction at the AutoWorld site after allegations by the striking workers that the local contractor, Sorensen–Gross, was allowing other tradespeople to do their finishing work, using improper tools and methods. “They are using tricks to get it done,” the union’s business manager, Anderson Abrams, said. “They are doing everything in the book to get the job done with other trades.”[216] After almost a week, the finishers’ union withdrew from the picket line and returned to work under the original wage rate while negotiations proceeded, allowing all construction to be resumed. On the part of the union, the decision to back down and stop the work disruption was apparently a gesture of goodwill toward the general progress of the project, and Sorensen–Gross, the local contractor, joined in the selfless gesture by agreeing not to generate another obstacle by objecting to their $1 million cement work contract being terminated by the project manager, even though the firm only completed about half the work and considered the AutoWorld job a “plum.”[217] Almost exactly one year later, AutoWorld opened on July 4, right on schedule.

As labor sagas go, it is not necessarily the stuff of legend. It is a more or less ordinary story of a simple wage dispute that grew into a minor work stoppage. By Sorensen–Gross’s own calculations, the 70–cent increase that the cement finishers’ union was demanding would have cost about $500 for the whole project. What makes this significant beyond its local context is the debate surrounding the strike, carried on between labor leaders, business interests, city and project officials, and the local media—a debate that signals a significant shift in the real and perceived

[216] "Cement Union Pickets Halt AutoWorld Jobs." *The Flint Journal* 22 July 1983.
[217] "Resumption of Work on AutoWorld Hailed." *The Flint Journal* 29 July 1983, sec. A: 2.

relationship between organized labor and the changing political economic and cultural landscape of deindustrialized urban centers. As a dispute that took place in the midst of one of the most labor–hostile political climates in the twentieth century, in the birthplace of the modern labor movement, and concerning the construction of an institution meant to reverse the effects of deindustrialization and job loss, analyzing the terms of this strike and how it was resolved offer a revelatory perspective on the intersecting predicaments of labor, culture, and urban space.

To understand the terms of debate in this strike, we must again step back and understand the degree to which AutoWorld was seen at the time by city officials, the media, and a significant portion of the public as the key to Flint's economic revitalization. During the preceding years of planning and deliberation about how AutoWorld would run, what kind of institution it would be, and what it would look like, the economic situation in Flint had grown steadily worse, while the optimistic rhetoric surrounding revitalization plans and the successful shift to a tourist–based comeback on the strength of AutoWorld seemed to inversely rise. At the time of the finishers' union strike, at least $63 million had been poured into the project, and expectations for a return on that investment were tremendously high. These hopes are reflected in both sides of the labor dispute—the spokesman for striking workers explained their eventual picket withdrawal in selfless terms, saying, "I'm doing this in good faith so we can get AutoWorld moving."[218] Sorensen–Gross president Ghassan Saab was similarly magnanimous in explaining his firm's decision to allow their contract termination, saying that "we are pleased that the

[218] "Picketing Ends, Work Resumes at AutoWorld." *The Flint Journal* 28 July 1983.

project will be able to go ahead and won't be encumbered any longer by this problem."[219] In the name of such a massively important civic project, these opposing sides had seemingly found some common ground.

City officials and local media were even more insistent that AutoWorld was bigger than the issues threatening to slow its progress. Following the finishers' union decision to remove the picket line and go back to work, Flint mayor James Rutherford enthusiastically praised Sorensen–Gross, saying, "They deserve to be applauded for their community spirit. They gracefully stepped aside so that this project could continue."[220] Mott Foundation president and vocal AutoWorld champion William White said the move by workers to remove the picket line was "wonderful" and that Sorensen–Gross's decision was "a magnificent community gesture on their part."[221] These remarks clearly place the actions of organized labor as well as management in the realm not of politics or of the legitimate actions of a union to address grievances, but rather in terms of "community spirit" and of selflessness and service to a cause of greater social and economic import.

Coverage in the *Flint Journal* framed the unfolding events in even grander terms. Also a longtime supporter of the AutoWorld project, the paper's editorial page had grave concern for what any postponement of the attraction's opening might mean for the city, and praised any sacrifice made in its name, especially on the part of labor. "The cement masons showed commendable civic responsibility in their decision to permit other crafts to resume work at the construction site, even

[219] "Resumption of Work on AutoWorld Hailed." *The Flint Journal* 29 July 1983, sec. A: 2.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.

though no final settlement has been reached with contractors on the union's demand for an hourly wage increase," they said, while at the same time expressing some concern for the commendable–but–unfortunate decision by Sorensen–Gross to step aside, lamenting that "It is regrettable resolving AutoWorld's labor problems might require such economic sacrifice."[222] The final thought made the paper's position even more plain: "Work on the theme park, so vital to Flint's future economic well being, should be allowed to go on without disruption."[223]

It shouldn't necessarily be a surprise that the *Flint Journal* took a decidedly pro–business, pro–AutoWorld stance in this moment of crisis. Even during the 1936–37 UAW strike, the *Journal*, like many city newspapers, was staunchly anti–union, with allies in state and local government as well as in big business. What is different in the debate regarding AutoWorld's work stoppage are the terms being used to frame the issue of labor as it threatened a symbol of hope for economic transformation—AutoWorld represented a new neoliberal "common sense" solution to the city's woes, beyond petty concerns like organized labor that defined the New Deal order. In this new context, the old politics of labor had clearly failed, and the evidence of that failure was everywhere you looked in Flint. The way forward, the way to become competitive in a new marketplace of tourist destinations was clear, and nothing must stand in the way of its completion. According to this logic, Flint simply could not afford to wait, and that sentiment is made perfectly clear in the title of the *Flint Journal*'s July 12 editorial: "No time for strike."[224] In the midst of the

[222] "Good AutoWorld Move." *The Flint Journal* 29 July 1983.
[223] Ibid.
[224] "No Time for Strike." *The Flint Journal* 12 July 1983.

strike, even before a picket line went up, the editorial page declared that "Flint has sunk too much—financially and emotionally—into AutoWorld to watch next Independence Day turn into anticlimax because of the hard–headedness either of a handful of workers or of the contractors' association."[225] Carefully framing its own position as community–minded common sense rather than the deeply political stance that it was, the official position of the paper read:

> We are not in a position to judge the rightness of either side's position in this dispute, but we do know that many Flint people worked long and hard to bring AutoWorld to fruition. It has created work for contractors and construction workers, and we strongly urge both show their appreciation of this effort by negotiating earnestly, and continuing to work, until a settlement is reached. Flint supplied the work. Flint, eagerly awaiting economic recovery, deserves full value from those involved in it.[226]

Here, we see a radical redefinition of the relationship between workers, management, and the city that closely mirrored the national debate on organized labor's role in a changing economic landscape. Not only is it a call to transcend the outmoded and selfish politics of the New Deal—while at the same time *disavowing* a political position—but it posits AutoWorld, Flint, and indeed the economic survival of an entire community as the employing authority. Flint, as an abstract neoliberal individual, is demanding "full value" in what is essentially a market transaction like any other, and the demand is seen as both logical and moral. In short, in the birthplace of the modern American labor movement, a place saturated with an infamous history of class conflict, striking workers met with an outcry to abandon the old way of resolving issues in the interest of moving a single tourist attraction

[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

forward. And they did. The headline "No time for strike" can, I would argue, be read as an ideological companion to Reagan's declaration that "There is no strike"—both forcefully advance the position that the actions of organized labor are either too petty, or altogether illegitimate, in a changing political economic and cultural reality, especially for deindustrialized urban centers.

The stories of cities and workers have always been intertwined, and their relationship explored by scholars of labor and urban history. At the dawn of "morning in America," however, and in the midst of a profound shift toward what would become hegemonic neoliberal paradigms, the cultural terrain upon which the too–often separately analyzed historical threads of urban crisis and organized labor intersect is crucial to our understanding of both.

Figure 13: "Fred, the Carriageless Horse" wardrobe sketch

Figure 14: "Me and My Buddy" animatronic exhibit at AutoWorld

CHAPTER FOUR

"A Place Filled With Fun and Facts, Happiness and History": Museums, Economics and the Cultural Politics of Tourism

The usual Mickey Mouse fantasy stuff would be supplemented with a roller coaster ride through a reproduction of an early steelworks, a depiction of plantation life (complete with slaves), whizzbang "Audio–Animatronics" images of dead Presidents, and other history–related entertainments. The Disney Company is hoping to capitalize on the flow of tourists to the Washington area, and to sell its idea with ersatz history. Make no mistake: What the kids would remember about such an experience would be the technology and the thrills, not the history. This is not an educational undertaking; it is a business venture.

—*New York Times* editorial, "Virginia, Say No to the Mouse" February 24, 1994[227]

AutoWorld is unique! I call it a celebration. It is a celebration of the automobile industry and the men and women who made it great. Science museum? Theme park? Historical exhibit? Festival marketplace? It's all of them and more!

—William S. White, President of the C.S. Mott Foundation in his opening remarks to a "Salute to AutoWorld" gala dinner, July 3, 1984[228]

The tension present within and between these two quotations is striking, as they stake out the ideological territory and purpose(s) of contemporary cultural institutions. On one hand, in its critique of Disney's America—Disney's proposed, then abandoned, American History–based Virginia theme park—the *New York Times* is articulating a fairly traditional defense of disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

[227] "Virginia, Say No to the Mouse." *The New York Times* 24 Feb. 1994.
[228] White, William S. *The Evolution of AutoWorld*. 3 July 1984. Yankee Doodle Dandy: A Salute to AutoWorld Banquet Program. Sloan Archives, Flint.

Despite the fact that the Walt Disney World and Disneyland theme parks have always been in many ways based on some version of American history (or at least American myth), the *Times* argues that the Disney's America concept goes too far, and must be publicly rejected. They argue that "education," presumably the function of a traditional museum or historical site, is fundamentally distinct from the profit motive, and the blending of the two into some sort of "Disneyfied" historical hybrid is unacceptable, despite the wishes of local residents and politicians who welcomed Disney's "business venture" as a proven service–job creator.

On the other hand, William S. White, the head of the powerful C.S. Mott Foundation—which conceived of, funded, and executed Flint's AutoWorld—articulates a very different conception of what a cultural institution should be. Here, AutoWorld can be multiple things for multiple audiences and purposes—it is educational, entertaining, profitable, exciting, and authentic, without compromising on any one category. In contrast to the *New York Times* piece, there is no apparent anxiety in White's statement about the blurring of disciplinary lines, and White offers a model that is flexible, endlessly available to consumers of all kinds, and willfully transgressive of old boundaries. In fact, his characterization of AutoWorld as a theme park would have a literal basis, since the Six Flags company was brought in to manage the park relatively late in the process, signaling an important identity shift less than a year before opening.[229] Though written ten years apart, these two texts together illustrate the difficult terrain that theme parks, tourist attractions,

[229] The mechanics of this arrangement are too complex to detail throughout my entire dissertation at this stage, but for the purposes of this chapter, the partnership is important. For some details, see Graham, David V. "Six Flags Hired to Manage AutoWorld." *The Flint Journal* 24 May 1983, sec. A: 1.

and particularly museums had to navigate during the neoliberal shift of the late 1970s and 80s, and into the decades beyond.

None of the arguments presented in these two cases is particularly new. Disney, and especially Disney's theme parks, have long been the topic of popular and scholarly debate, and are a familiar academic punching bag when it comes to their construction of historical narratives.[230] And so it is unsurprising, and frankly easy to sympathize with, the *Times'* critique of Disney's motives behind Disney's America. Despite Disney CEO Michael Eisner's explanation in a published response to the *Times* that "We have always planned for our park to be an entertaining, enlightening and educational portrayal of history," it seems clear to us what the company's *real* motives are. But Eisner continues, citing concern for the state of Americans'—and especially young Americans'—knowledge of their own past: "Our debate is not with historians; we respect them and, more important, respect our history. But, sadly, American students do not know enough about our history. We have always been concerned to help educate through entertainment."[231] Even the title of his published response promises the benefits of a theme park like Disney's America to "bring the American Experience to life." But beyond displaying a fundamental disconnect between each side's view of the possibilities or problematics of a "Disneyfied"

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[230] The cultural criticism of Disney's film productions is vast, but for critical Disney literature regarding theme parks and treatment of historical narratives, see Fjellman, Stephen M. *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*. Boulder: Westview, 1992.; The Project on Disney. *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.; Wallace, Mike. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996.

[231] Eisner, Michael. "Disney's Virginia Park Will Bring American Experience to Life." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 23 June 1994. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

history lesson, this debate illustrates changing ideas about the most effective way to narrate history—particularly a US nationalist history—and what kind of institution can best bring that history "to life" as a product, making it appealing to a new generation of consumers in a tourist marketplace.

Disney's position in this debate is clear, but it also obscures perhaps a more important point: Disney's model of entertaining historical tourism had already been massively influential for at least a decade prior to the Disney's America project, and served as an idealized neoliberal model for institutions in crisis during the late 1970s and early 1980s. AutoWorld, which was largely designed by former Disney "imagineers" and based explicitly on the success of the Disney theme parks as tourist attractions, is an clear example of this influence. As White's explicitly open–ended description suggests, AutoWorld aimed to draw upon multiple institutional attributes for maximum marketability, deliberately without tying itself to a "traditional" identity of any kind. Again and again, AutoWorld officials and boosters insisted upon the project's cutting–edge flexible identity as a completely "new" kind of attraction. The traditional cultural authority of a museum is simultaneously undermined and deployed in descriptions of the project as "serious, but not *too* serious;" the excitement of a theme park is enriched and legitimized by "historical" content; the "festival marketplace," already a powerful buzzword in terms of urban revitalization at the time, is invoked as a reference to the kind of economic boon an institution like AutoWorld promised to be. AutoWorld was an ideal neoliberal subject in this sense, acting at once as a serious historical site, a thrilling tourist attraction, a location–specific celebration of unique cultural heritage, and a

responsible, self–sufficient corporate entity that would help to reinvent the local economy and pull Flint up by its own bootstraps.

AutoWorld's attempt to address multiple crises through an endlessly flexible brand identity is the crux of why I argue that it matters for our understanding of the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s and 1980s. As a material site where questions of identity and economy converge, AutoWorld represents a new kind of institution meant to deal with new political economic frameworks. Furthermore, it represents a unique site of overlap, where the economic and cultural logics of neoliberalism interact and reveal themselves in practice, providing an opportunity to link conversations about capital, heritage, and urban economy that too rarely intersect.

"Heritage" is not necessarily a novel category of concern for urban or cultural historians—Walter Benjamin spoke of the appreciation of heritage as a "catastrophe," and scholars such as David Harvey and Sharon Zukin have discussed some of the implications of heritage–based development in urban areas.[232] Less well explored, however, is the intersection of the broad theoretical contours of the rise of "heritage industries" with the specific demands being made upon cultural institutions in what I argue is a crucial historical moment in the history of American cities. The links between the heritage and memory boom in the late 1970s, and the concurrent rise of neoliberalism, have yet to be satisfyingly examined. Moreover, during the same period, museums were beginning to experience a crisis of identity, as their cultural role and their commercial viability were being questioned. No

[232] See particularly Harvey's discussion of Baltimore's HarborPlace in *The Condition of Postmedernity*: 91-93.; and Zukin's introduction in Zukin, Sharon. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.

longer an uncontested "temple of knowledge," museums were forced to navigate a changing cultural and economic environment. Barbara Kirshenblatt–Gimblett notes that the museum finds itself competing "with other attractions within a tourism economy that privileges experience, immediacy, and what the industry calls adventure. Forced to depend more than ever on earned income, museums are becoming more service oriented."[233] The founding of new museums in the US, and overall attendance at existing museums, were on the decline during the late 70s and into the 1980s as well, as traditional institutions had to compete with what historian Michael Kammen argues was the broadening of the very category of "history" into popular culture and alternative modes of constructing historical narratives. "It is not easy," he claims, "for conventional museums to compete with robotic presidents who have authentic hairlines and the capacity to speak!"[234]

And yet, history understood through "heritage" was in the same moment becoming increasingly important in the popular imagination as the late 1970s "memory boom" made it a central feature of national conversations about identity. In addition to factors as diverse as the national need to make meaning out of the recently–ended war in Vietnam and the nation's bicentennial, the 1977 television miniseries *Roots* proved to be massively popular and influential, sparking widespread popular historical interest, and the 1978 NBC miniseries on the Holocaust, with an approximate audience of 120 million viewers, similarly moved history and heritage to the center of national consciousness. Cultural productions

[233] Barbara Kirschenblatt-Giblett. *Destination Culture*: 7.
[234] Michael Kammen. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*: 640.

such as these, combined with a national mania for heritage–based events surrounding the US bicentennial in 1976, effectively moved "heritage"—racial, ethnic, national, and otherwise—into the poplar consciousness in unprecedented ways, making mass expression and consumption of history a tremendously influential and lucrative form of entertainment. It is not coincidental, it seems, that the proliferation of heritage and historical memory in the private sector comes at the same time that state mechanisms for memory in the form of traditional history museums are being gutted by neoliberal austerity—suggesting that instead of the familiar formulation of heritage as a turn inward, it in fact turns increasingly outward through popular culture.

Michael Kammen specifically refers to the "heritage syndrome," and its rise over the past four decades due in part to some of these factors.[235] As a recognition of the combination of cultural and economic forces at work in this moment, Holocaust survivor and history professor Yaffa Eliach wrote in 1979 of the "vast educational and financial potential of the Holocaust."[236] Andreas Huyssen expands on this point, and makes a case for the late 1970s as a unique moment in the longer history of "heritage," to argue,

> When it comes to present pasts, memory of the Holocaust and its place in the reassessment of Western modernity, however, is not the whole story. Many subplots make up the current memory narrative in its broadest scope and distinguish our times quite clearly from the earlier decades of this century. Let me just list a few of the salient phenomena. Since the 1970s in Europe and the United States we have the historicizing restoration of old urban centers, whole museum villages and landscapes, various national heritage and patrimony

[235] Ibid., 537.
[236] Quoted in Linenthal, Edward. *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*. New York: Columbia UP, 2001: 13.

> enterprises, the new wave of museum architecture that shows no signs of receding, the boom in retro fashions and repro furniture, the mass–marketing of nostalgia, the obsessive self–musealization per video recorder, memoir writing, and confessional literature, the rise of autobiography and of the postmodern historical novel with its uneasy negotiation between fact and fiction, the spread of memory practices in the visual arts often centered on the medium of photography, and the increase of historical documentaries on television including (in the United States) a channel dedicated entirely to history, the History Channel.[237]

Of course, all of the many phenomena Huyssen brings up interrelate, but of particular interest for this study is the "historicizing restoration of old urban centers" and the closely related issues facing museums in urban contexts. Although Huyssen is speaking generally about a national, as well as global, trend, there are specific historical circumstances that can illuminate the broader cultural and economic shifts at play in the transitional moment that I wish to examine. Cities in the Rust Belt in particular, which were experiencing their own particular crises of identity and economy, turned significantly in the late 1970s and 1980s to memorial and museological strategies to address these crises. In 1982, for example, when Youngstown, Ohio was planning a historical museum focused on the regional and national history of the steel industry—in many ways a memorial museum, given Youngstown's job losses in that industry at the time—the project's development proposal made the following points clear:

> Museums in general perform the important role of introducing the public to history in a palatable form and thereby facilitate educational processes concerning the past. In short, museums are successful because they provide an inherent attractiveness and a good atmosphere in which learning can be developed and fostered without the disadvantages that often accompany more structured methods.

[237] Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003:14.

> History is generating increasing interest among the public with each successful year. History books and historical novels continually appear on the best seller lists while television and motion picture producers find that presentations with historical themes captivate audiences. Recently, the television programs "Holocaust" and "Roots" have drawn more viewers than any previous television presentations. History wrapped in an attractive package has been and continues to be a most lucrative and popular enterprise.
>
> While many museums have been successful in meeting the needs of the public, it should be noted that Science and Industry museums, in the last decade, have led the way in fulfilling the dual role of attracting and educating visitors.[238]

This passage encapsulates several concerns that had become common among museums and their audiences in the early 1980s. For example, we see the broad understanding that there is in fact a national memory boom, and that it is an opportunity to be capitalized upon with a corresponding institution. More importantly, though, there is the immediate recognition that museums are now at once educational *and* commercial enterprises, and that the two are interdependent. This is not only significant as a general issue that concerns museums nationally and globally, but is also of particular concern to a city like Youngstown that is clearly interested in both educating visitors about their local heritage and making that heritage as marketable and attractive to potential tourists as possible.

The understanding that museums and similar cultural institutions signified not only cultural legitimacy at a time when deindustrializing cities in the Rust Belt were suffering from an abysmal national image, but also the potential for jobs and revenue through tourism activity, is crucial for understanding the linked trajectories of urban revitalization and museum development in this moment. Drawing on

[238] *Youngstown Historical Center*. 1982. Development Proposal. Youngstown Historical Center Archives, Youngstown.

Benedict Anderson's famous formulation of the museum as a necessary pillar of community identity formation, Barbara Kirshenblatt–Gimblett argues that "Having a past, a history, a 'folklore' of your own, and institutions to bolster these claims, is fundamental to the politics of culture: the possession of a national folklore, particularly as legitimized by a national museum and troupe, is cited as a mark of being civilized."[239] Although this has long been understood as a feature of national political and cultural identity, I would argue that it is likewise true for regional and local identity, as well as for institutional identity and self–definition. For Rust Belt cities in the late 1970s and 80s, museums became a flexible tool for redefining image and identity, and for reasserting legitimacy as a mark of being "civilized" within a postindustrial context. Museums themselves, also in crisis, were a ready and apt institutional form to be molded to these cities' purposes, based on the neoliberal call for private, cultural, and service–based solutions to urban problems; places like AutoWorld were explicit reflections of this demand for multi–purpose, profitable flexibility. When we examine the broader neoliberal cultural politics of the 1970s and 80s in the context of a history of cultural institutions, the familiar discussion in museum studies of the museum's transformation from "temple" to "forum" must be expanded to consider the proliferation of roles that they were made to take on, including marketplace, employer, tourist trap, and memorial site.

As Kirschenblatt–Gimblett also points out, "Indeed, museums—and the larger heritage industry of which they are part—play a pivotal role in creating the

[239] Kirschenblatt–Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*: 65.

sense of 'hereness' necessary to convert a location into a destination."[240] Cities like Flint, Detroit, Youngstown, and Cleveland were very much being framed in this moment as abandoned, old, and as more "nowhere" than "here," in terms of marketable heritage. Their various bids for "hereness" came, in part, in the form of cultural institutions that would bestow authenticity, excitement, and material remedies for the suffering that deindustrialization had wrought. These projects, while very much a result of neoliberal demand, also served the parallel purpose of obscuring the underlying structural causes of urban crisis—deindustrialization and mobile capital, slashed funding for cities, decades of racially biased resource allocation, and so on—by refocusing the major questions of urban revitalization to those of image, tourism, entrepreneurship, and unique "heritage," with cultural institutions figuring prominently in many cities' strategies.

To explore the range of institutional forms and their missions that arose to address those questions, in this chapter, I examine three primary sites, beginning with Flint's AutoWorld. The construction of AutoWorld's complex institutional identity from its inception in the early 1970s as a straightforward "Hall of Fame," to its ultimate form as a deliberately confounding history museum/theme park hybrid, will help to trace the pressures faced by cities hoping to reinvent themselves through cultural institutions during this time, and illuminate the underlying logic of a seemingly absurd project. I also pay some special attention to the feature of Flint's iconic "Vehicle City" street arches, originally structures used to light Flint's main downtown street at the turn of the twentieth century, re–created as a central exhibit

[240] Ibid., 7.

component within AutoWorld. Next, the Youngstown Museum of Industry and Labor—a museum born out of the same moment in the late 1970s that saw massive job losses and deindustrialization in Youngstown, Ohio—is a relatively traditional institution that was nonetheless uniquely shaped by the similar economic and cultural pressures as AutoWorld. Finally, I will consider Disney's America. Though conceived of in the early 1990s, this project represents the broader trajectory of many of these institutions, from Disney's takeover of the "theme park" form in the mid–twentieth century, to its pervasive influence in the transformation of historical narratives in the 1980s, to its attempt to redefine its own role in a changing institutional landscape. Finally, the fact that Disney's America never opened in its intended form, as well as the fact that AutoWorld closed its doors almost immediately after opening them, leads me to also reflect on failure as a feature of these institutions, as the aftermath of these projects tells us as much as their life. In the case of both AutoWorld and Disney's America, the "common sense" argument concerning their failure significantly does not address the underlying issues that I mean to get at in this chapter—AutoWorld is generally regarded as a failure in part because it was "confused" about its mission, and Disney's America was resisted primarily on the grounds that it would somehow taint the more "authentic" historical sites so close to its Virginia location. In each case, the arguments against these places miss the mark as much as the arguments in their favor Using the analytical framework of "failure," I conclude the chapter by exploring *why* both sides of these debates ultimately obscure the underlying cultural and economic logics that

persist to the present day, and ultimately accept neoliberal cultural and economic terms rather than interrogating them.

AutoWorld: "Where the past becomes familiar and the future peeks around every corner."

AutoWorld, as established in previous chapters, began its conceptual life as an "automotive hall of fame" designed to celebrate the automobile industry and those who played important roles in its creation, specifically those based in Flint, Michigan. As a project that was in many ways a reaction against critiques being leveled against the auto industry—and big business in general—in the early 1970s, the AutoWorld concept was not invested with much meaning beyond creating an institutional home to further legitimize a powerful, if somewhat increasingly unpopular, viewpoint. However, as the decade progressed—and the economic crisis in Flint deepened as automotive industry jobs bled more severely with recession, oil crises, and the continued out–migration of capital to lower–wage and non–union locations—AutoWorld became a concept that was posited more and more by local business and political elites as a viable mega–project solution to the problems of deindustrialization. As William White tells the story,

> In succeeding years, many consultants worked with the Mott Foundation and designated agencies such as the Flint Area Conference, Inc., to translate this story [of the automotive industry and Flint's place in it] into a workable format. Over the years, we realized what we wanted was not simply a scientific research laboratory nor another traditional museum, but a way to tell the story in a lively, entertaining manner. The result is AutoWorld.[241]

[241] White, William S. *The Evolution of AutoWorld*. 3 July 1984. Yankee Doodle Dandy: A Salute to AutoWorld Banquet Program. Sloan Archives, Flint.

In this quotation, White narrates how "entertainment" came to be understood as the most effective way to communicate historical and cultural information—it is no longer enough by the early 1980s, when White is speaking, to create an old, "traditional" institution to address Flint's needs. Over the years since AutoWorld's inception, it had become clear that a new type of project must be undertaken, one that is "lively" and "entertaining," especially—as White observes in the same speech—if it "will help us tap the tourist market and diversify our economy." And so the purpose of AutoWorld became not only "to show," but to transform, save, and sell *through* showing.

The central importance of demonstrating and marketing a unique heritage for Flint was articulated early on in the AutoWorld project. As I've discussed in previous chapters, The Glyn Group, Inc., a New York–based production company specializing in instructional and promotional films, was hired in the late 1970s by the C.S. Mott Foundation to produce promotional materials for AutoWorld with the aim of raising awareness and investor support. The narrative structure and rhetoric of the resulting film, *The Little Town That Could*, warrants further examination in this context, especially for its framing of heritage and history as an economic strategy. The narrative that the film constructs is grandiose and almost fairytale–like in tone, but it is consistent: a "little town" called Flint becomes an important and "internationally famous" industrial center early in the century, but "despite its fame, it somehow never occurred to outsiders that the 'Vehicle City'—which was what the

town came to be called—was an interesting, historical and exciting place, a good place to visit."[242] The script continues,

> Then, one day, someone had a really bright idea. "Why don't we invite people to come and see what we've done! … And let's do something really exciting for our visitors; they call us 'the Vehicle City'," he said … "Let's create a special event for our visitors around cars—an attraction that's like nothing else anywhere in the country. Or, for that matter, anywhere else in the world!
> … Naturally, word soon spread about the town and its 'AutoWorld' and every day, year after year, more and more visitors arrived. From far and wide they came … families … tour groups … international dignitaries … school parties … it was endless. And, as its fame spread, 'AutoWorld' expanded, adding new attractions, new rides, new excitement—for a whole new industry grew up around AutoWorld so that everyone flourished—the town, the townspeople, the investors…[243]

The implications of this narrative are clear: this town's "fame" as a manufacturing center, while somewhat important early in its history, is not enough to sustain it or allow it to achieve its full potential as a modern destination, as the fairytale structure strongly suggests a hazy "once upon a time" past progressing into a more clearly defined present and sunny future. Specifically, it is through the act of *showing* outside visitors that Flint is an "interesting, historical and exciting place" that it gains real value as "a good place to visit." This explicit equation of "historical" with "good" is of particular interest here, and is a crucial intersection of museums' and Rust Belt cities' intertwined crises, illustrating the contemporary demand in urban revitalization for authenticity and tourist potential, and giving new meaning and purpose to the museum's traditional role as a certificate of legitimacy and modernity. By this formulation, the "problem" with Flint is formulated not as

[242] *The Little Town That Could: An Introduction to Flint's AutoWorld*. The Glyn Group, 1980. Transcript.
[243] Ibid.

structural, or even as one with serious consequences—the "problems" that Flint is experiencing are framed more as loneliness than unprecedented unemployment, poverty, and crime. The "problem," according to this narrative, is that it had somehow not occurred to Flint's residents to share their story effectively with those in the outside world, so that they might come to see—and spend tourist dollars in—the city. Representing the impulse to put oneself on display as natural and good, the film also suggests that the ideal way to achieve this goal is through an institution that might sound like a museum, but is actually something "like nothing else anywhere in the country. Or, for that matter, anywhere else in the world!"

The "newness" and groundbreaking nature of AutoWorld as an institution is a feature that was advertised loudly and constantly. And yet, within these pronouncements of newness were always embedded references to the multitude of traditional qualities that it would contain within its cutting–edge identity. For example, this is just a sampling of descriptions of AutoWorld from a few particularly salient official representative and media sources:

> AutoWorld itself is a unique facility; it tells the story of the automobile in a very entertaining fashion. Many people will think it is a theme park, but it is not a theme park. It is essentially a celebration of the automobile and the worker and all those who have had anything to do with making the automobile and the industry great. At the same time, it does pay homage to Flint, the birthplace of General Motors. So it is a unique educational experience. Unlike most museums, it is going to be managed by a professional marketing firm, the Six Flags Corporation.[244]
>
> —William S. White, letter to Ronald Reagan's Appointments and Scheduling Director, April 14, 1984

[244] White, William S. Letter to Frederick J. Ryan. 14 Apr. 1984. MS. Sloan Archives, Flint, Michigan.

> [AutoWorld's purpose is] to provide in downtown Flint an attraction that is expected to help elevate tourism into the area's second largest industry. It will be "a celebration of the automobile and the people who made it great" and will combine elements of a theme park, a science center and a museum.[245]
>
> —C.S. Mott grant fact sheet, 1982

> AutoWorld … not a tired museum, not a raucous amusement park, but a place filled with fun and facts, happiness and history. An entertainment center with something for everyone. Yes, entertainment with a capital "E." our greatest common denominator. Touching a part of every person, and AutoWorld has it to spare!
>
> Not since Walt Disney opened his "Magic Kingdoms" has such a concept been realized and AutoWorld will be a place that even that great man would be proud of.
>
> … This, then, is AutoWorld. A place to celebrate and enjoy. Where the past becomes familiar and the future peeks around every corner.[246]
>
> —AutoWorld exhibit designers Fredric Hope and Associates promotional demonstration film

In these descriptions, we see a carefully calculated, yet seemingly haphazard, brand identity strategy. The slippage between the established terms of "theme park," "amusement park," "educational center," "museum," etc., allows an appealing play of significance as to what AutoWorld actually *is*. Even in writing this dissertation, I have consistently found the descriptive language difficult to pin down, and that very difficulty was seen as a strength by AutoWorld's creators. In its many contradictions—AutoWorld is/is not a theme park; AutoWorld is/is not a museum, and so on—it claims the strengths of every institution it flirts with, while assuming none of the responsibility for, for example, the historical accuracy that a traditional museum would be held accountable for. The only attribute that AutoWorld would

[245] *AutoWorld Project*. 1982. Grant Fact Sheet. Genesee Historical Collections Center, Flint.
[246] *The Only Animated Display and Design Company*. Fredric Hope and Associates, 1984. Transcript.

fully embrace was *excitement*, in part based upon its very non–identity. In this way, AutoWorld was in theory the perfect neoliberal institution, heeding every call for flexibility, profitability, self–sufficiency, and erasure of New Deal organizations of labor (the non–union service jobs it promised were also billed as a remedy for lost industrial work, not to mention the exhibits' complex erasures of labor and workers). This is also precisely the balancing act that was being demanded of museums in this moment, as traditional institutions turned increasingly toward service, excitement, and quasi–historical "blockbuster exhibits" to demonstrate their fitness as profitable, self–sufficient corporate subjects themselves. It is significant, for example, that William White boasts the qualification that AutoWorld will be managed by a "professional marketing firm," distinguishing it from "most museums" while at the same time tacitly identifying AutoWorld as a museum itself (albeit an exciting new kind).

It is also significant that the professional marketing firm being celebrated as a stamp of modern, responsible profitability in contrast to modest or failing traditional museums is Texas–based Six Flags. As the world's largest amusement park operator, Six Flags at the time ran theme parks in mostly Sun Belt locations, including Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Orlando, and Anaheim, and their involvement in AutoWorld was announced in May 1983, fairly late in the development process. The firm was pursued specifically because of their financial record of keeping parks profitable, a record put in appealing terms by AutoWorld officials as being "second only to the Walt Disney empire in sales and attendance

figures."[247] In perhaps the most complex marketing contradiction of all, Six Flags Senior Vice President George Delanoy described AutoWorld at the time as "a new frontier, representing a 1980s return to urban theme attractions, breaking a 30–year escape to the suburbs begun by Walt Disney."[248] This contradiction seems to play with the very foundation of marketability that AutoWorld was relying upon, but also makes perfect sense in the context of the operators' strategy of flexible identity—just as it both is and is not a museum, AutoWorld is like and unlike Disney, appropriating the profitable strengths without the possible unappealing connotations of Disney's bland suburban safety. The involvement of Six Flags then represents a multilayered neoliberal strategy, as a thriving Sun Belt enterprise that promised financial stability, tourist potential, and a significant shot of amusement park excitement to bolster any fear of the stuffiness associated with "most museums."

In fact, Flint was seen as a uniquely effective example of the neoliberal economic and cultural shift. In *Newsweek*, one of the few pieces of national media to examine AutoWorld, one journalist claims that "AutoWorld itself … could serve as the model for the gentrified theme park of the future: carpeted, air–conditioned, entirely enclosed…"[249] Here, the disconnect between a themed entertainment environment and any exterior reality that AutoWorld represents is actually described as the ideal way of taking part in "the service economy of the 1980s," an

[247] Graham, David V. "Six Flags Hired to Manage AutoWorld." *The Flint Journal* 24 May 1983, sec. A: 1
[248] Goodman, David N. "AutoWorld Needed Top Operator—got Six Flags." *The Flint Journal* 24 June 1984: 49.
[249] Adler, Jerry. "Honoring the Auto's Past." *Newsweek* 3 Sept. 1984: 9.

admission that tells us much about the larger economic processes, and their interaction with culture through memory and history, that are embodied in this site. Hence we see that the construction of a marketable past is necessarily a project of distancing, aestheticizing, and making the past "entirely enclosed," in order to take part in the national economic future in any meaningful way. The Newsweek article also addresses the lingering ambivalence of this process for Flint, as it is divided into thematic sections titled "Homage" and "Defiance."

Another promotional film script produced by exhibit designers Fredric Hope and Associates goes so far as to openly ridicule the atmosphere and mission of traditional museums:

> Did we say wacky? Why wacky is the best of it! Some of this stuff is downright OUT–RAGEOUS! Talking Horses and Wise Cracking Flivvens. Musical Robots and Dancing Chassis. Teetering Explorers and Tootering Transmissions. Hundreds of Hacked–up Historical High–Jinx. And Mirthful, Madcap Museums.[250]

Read in the context of the rest of the script, a complicated picture of this place emerges, a space where boundaries between "serious" and "fun" elements happily mix in a distinctive—and marketable—atmosphere. Directly preceding this moment, the film's narrator intones gravely about "history" and "tradition" before breaking the mood with a laugh at his own gravitas and remarking on the one significant aspect of AutoWorld that he forgot to mention: "It's FUN!" This atmosphere of "historical fun" and "wackiness" was defined largely through action, song and performances that were presented in the form of animatronic characters and representations, and the blending of these two elements was a self–conscious

[250] *AutoWorld: A Place of Magic*. Fredric Hope and Associates, 1982. Transcript. (Emphasis in original.)

strategy on the part of the creators and developers of the project to replicate the lucrative quasi–historical total environment of the Disney theme parks, thereby luring thousands of tourists and the economic promise they represented.

Fredrick Hope was in an ideal position to provide this kind of atmosphere. As an exhibit designer with 9 years of experience as a Disney "imagineer," Hope was chosen specifically for his credentials with the world's most recognizable company in creating entertaining and profitable environments. The Disney "experience" or "atmosphere" of magic, wonder, and fun was repeatedly articulated as the model for the AutoWorld experience, and Hope and his associates in "The Only Animated Display and Design Company" were frequently hailed in local media and AutoWorld materials for their impressive pedigree—the animatronic character of Fred the "Carriageless Horse," as discussed in previous chapters, was explicitly described as a spokesman in the style of Mickey Mouse, which meant that he was both a character saturated with sometimes contradictory meaning, and a malleable product to be sold in many forms.[251]

While it was open, what visitors actually found inside AutoWorld was a mixture of history lessons, corporate sponsorship, tame amusement park rides, merchandising, and vague nostalgia, all based on the automobile and the industry that produced it. In its form and its treatment of history, AutoWorld was, again, based explicitly on the model of the lucrative Disney theme parks, complete with historically–based "dark rides" similar to "It's a Small World" and "The Hall of Presidents." Moreover, Disney's fictional "Main Street USA" was a model for the

[251] *AutoWorld General Concept Design Notes: Fred the Horse*. 17 Nov. 1982. Exhibit Design Notes. Sloan Archives, Flint.

large exhibit in the main building that contained a walkable scale model of historic downtown Flint's Saginaw Street. In all of these ways, AutoWorld was committed to evoking the lucrative Disney–esque "full experience" of history, which inevitably relied on nostalgia and remembering a sort of "Golden Age" of automobiles and the auto industry, especially in Flint. AutoWorld's mission was at once very modest and impossibly grand—it meant to do no more than to provide some family fun and no less than to build a timeless institution that would save Flint from demise.

After encountering an animatronic representation of founding Flint settler–turned–tourguide Jacob Smith at the front gate, visitors walked through log–cabin Flint with scenes of animatronic Indians building canoes on the banks of a pristine Flint River (the actual river just outside AutoWorld's doors was infamously polluted by industrial waste), antique sawmills, log–cabin "general stores and so on"—all "historically accurate," according to one promotional booklet. This conscious emphasis on and tension surrounding ideas of "authenticity" and "historical accuracy" is on display in every aspect of AutoWorld, and can be seen most clearly in a conference report from February 16, 1984, just months before AutoWorld's grand opening. "In describing Six Flags AutoWorld," the conference notes suggest, "try to use more descriptive words, phrases—spectacular, awesome, authentic instead of historic, vastness, hi–tech, first of a kind."[252] The slippage between the meanings of "authentic" and "historic" here reinforces the notion that while it may not be strictly "historic," the playful and malleable "authenticity" of AutoWorld's representations allow for a kind of fantasizing, by creators and visitors, within a

[252] PR Associates. *Six Flags AutoWorld*. 16 Feb. 1984. Conference Report Notes. Sloan Archives, Flint. (Emphasis in original.)

plausible historical frame. Similarly, the explicitly desirable description of "first of a kind" continues to define AutoWorld through what it is not—namely, not just another dry "historical" museum. Within the "serious, but not really" logic of AutoWorld, all of this effort to create an "authentic" or "historic" experience has no trouble existing side–by–side with the marketing of the park's completely climate controlled dome that, "with a year–round temperature of 70 degrees," prevented any native Michigan foliage from being used to landscape the exhibit (the problem was solved by "importing more than a half million dollars in lavish, tropical foliage, carefully chosen to resemble native Michigan trees and shrubs").[253]

The culmination of Flint's history in this spatial timeline is the re–creation of early twentieth–century Flint, with shops and restaurants along Saginaw Street. Visitors would immediately notice the visual markers that identified this as Flint's main street, not only from its explicit designation as such, but from the distinctive red–brick cobblestones, which then (as now) paves Saginaw Street, the road that most visitors probably drove on to reach AutoWorld. But the re–creation also featured a reproduction of Flint's iconic "Vehicle City" arches, which no longer stood on the real Saginaw Street. Thus, the arches became the central element that—along with the obvious distinction of open, populated retail stores—distinguished this re–creation, both conceptually and visually, from the actual landscape outside, and marked the temporal and spacial distance between the two spaces (see Fig. 15).

The recreated arches are not purely ideological icons, but complex structures that serve to freeze as well as reshape imagined "better times," and to both

[253] PR Associates. *Six Flags AutoWorld's Football Field–Size Dome Is Starting Point for Excitement, Beginning July, 1984*. 1984. Press Release. Sloan Archives, Flint.

remember and forget Flint's connection to a preindustrial origin in AutoWorld's "authentic/(a)historic" institutional context. The model arches were based on actual structures that stood along and lit South Saginaw Street from 1899 to 1919, erected to replace the gas lanterns that had previously illuminated Flint's business district at night. Built by the Genesee Iron Works and financed by individuals and businesses to create a "new and exciting system of lighting Saginaw Street," five arches were placed at intersections along the street, and each arch was built with 50 light bulbs to illuminate it.[254] When Flint celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1905, two additional arches were erected with the words "Flint: Vehicle City" at their crowns (see Fig. 16).[255]

Despite this designation, the historical narrative presented at AutoWorld insisted that the arches were not directly related to the auto industry. Official literature stated that, "Though many believe the arches celebrated Flint's heritage as a center for automobile manufacturing, the original arches were a salute to Flint as the world's largest volume manufacturer of horse drawn carriages."[256] Automobile production in Flint began in 1903, however, with General Motors incorporating in 1908 from the already existing Buick motor company. It seems, then, more plausible that these arches were conceived of at least partially to solidify and commemorate Flint's place in a new modern era of industrial production. In AutoWorld's emphasis on the pre–industrial history of Flint—in celebrating the horse–drawn carriage, or even the earlier lumber industry—we can see a desire to escape a direct link to

[254] Lethbridge, Alice. "Main Street Illuminated by Arches Years Ago." *The Flint Journal* 24 June 1984: 61.
[255] *Flint Vehicle City Arches*. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. <http://www.flintarches.com/>.
[256] Ibid.

industrial production—and hence the subsequent joblessness and trauma of industrial withdrawal—while still appealing to a marketable common "heritage" for tourism. By denying any link between the "Vehicle City" arches and the postindustrial present, the creators and promoters of the Saginaw Street re–creation attempt to locate the history of Flint outside of a larger historical trajectory that is all too obvious, given Flint's late twentieth century economic condition, and into a nostalgic landscape where visitors can experience a "Golden Age" of the city.

This nostalgic landscape was haphazard but deliberate in its intentions, as is reflected in the brochure's description:

> You'll know AutoWorld is something special as soon as you step inside. There, enclosed within a spectacular dome so big it could cover an entire football field, is log cabin Flint. You'll follow a life–sized Flint River flowing past old mills, shops, and a working antique carousel through an expansive, lush green pine forest, right into Flint of the 1890's. It's a more modern Flint with ornate arches, brick building charm, and a cobblestoned Saginaw Street. Plus, you'll find shops to shop in and an outstanding restaurant to dine in. And no matter what the weather is outside, it's always a balmy summer evening inside.[257]

The historical illusion described here, and which the re–created Saginaw Street worked in large part to construct, was one that promoted the remembering of a vaguely defined past, full of possibility, through which an alternate present could be imagined for Flint and the troublesome postindustrial urban landscape that it had come to represent.

The signage for this exhibit reinforced the historical "freezing" of Flint by constantly reiterating the mantra of Flint as a "boomtown," with no hint of looming complications beyond the turn–of–the–century culmination that the exhibit offered.

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[257]AutoWorld Associates. *AutoWorld*. Flint: AutoWorld Associates, 1984. Print.

The final section of the exhibit that depicted the development of the lumber and carriage industries in Flint, and which included the Saginaw Street re–creation, is titled "From Village to Boom Town." Individual signage along the path offers a reassuring and celebratory historical trajectory. The timeline begins with settlement and early industry:

> A city at last! With Flint's incorporation in 1855, Jacob Smith's settlement was now a booming town. Settlers were arriving almost daily to partake of the area's rich resources and growing new industry—lumbering. For the next 25 years, lumbering would rule supreme before giving way to another "king"—carriage–making.
>
> Timber! As the lumberjack's axe and saw claimed scores of Michigan Pine, Flint's sawmills produced a profitable harvest. With the coming of the railroad in 1862, Flint's lumber was going places—and so was this bustling boomtown!

Continuing to more modern industrial production, the narrative takes up the continuity between carriage production and the automobile industry, and goes no further:

> It's a hit! By 1880, Flint had a new industrial "king"—carriage–making. Almost overnight, carriage manufacturers were mass–producing quality carriages and exporting them all over the world. As countless carriages rolled forth, Flint proudly claimed the title "Vehicle City!"
>
> Here to stay! With the coming of the Automobile, Flint entered the 20th century on the verge of a new industry and a new era. Carriage factories aplenty made the "Vehicle City" a natural place for auto production to take hold. And take hold it did! Soon Flint–made cars could be seen all over America![258]

Thus ends this exhibit's narrative of Flint's history: frozen at the birth of the automotive industry, with nothing but brighter days to come.

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[258] *From Village to Boom Town: The Lumber and Carriage Industries in Flint*. 23 Sept. 1983. Exhibit Signage. Sloan Archives, Flint.

In the historical narrative promoted by AutoWorld and the *Flint Journal*, there is a consistent emphasis on Flint's pre–industrial past, celebrating the horse–drawn carriage, or even the earlier lumber industry. Such a history elides any direct link to industrial production, while still appealing to a marketable "heritage" for tourism. By denying—or at least complicating—the link between the "Vehicle City" arches and the postindustrial present, the creators and promoters of this re–creation attempt to locate the history of Flint outside of a larger historical trajectory that is all too obvious, and into a mythical "Golden Age." This complex denial and relocation also serves in some ways to monumentalize a moment of prosperity and possibility as the norm, rather than a moment gone forever. With AutoWorld and the surrounding revitalization projects imagined as a renaissance for the city, visitors are also encouraged to imagine that the industrial age of Flint will continue to serve the "Vehicle City" well, now as a history that can be packaged and sold in the new tourism and service–based economy.

While the "Vehicle City" arches obviously serve as an iconic and symbolic monument to the memory of economic success at the turn of the century, as the re–creation makes clear, I would argue that they also invoke the booming auto industry of the 1950s, a time when Flint was enjoying such prosperity that it was hailed as a "Model City" in the modern corporate industrial age. In these years, which have been the fodder for much nostalgic longing, Flint as well as other major industrial centers were enjoying major growth and prestige as the capitals of the new postwar

American society.[259] In an illustration from a 1984 *Flint Journal* article inviting residents to "Take your pick" from two proposed symbolic gateways to the city in the form of highway overpass decorations, we can see how the two eras became conflated in the revitalization effort. Both options presented to the reader for articulating a visual identity for the new, tourist–friendly city are overdetermined in their historically–based aesthetic—a vaguely "classic" auto grill, or the antique arches. The article asks, "What's it going to be, Flint?"[260] Though neither overpass was eventually built, the proposed project, financed by the Mott Foundation, collapses the two most recognizable and memorable eras of auto–industry prosperity into a single postmodern gesture. We can literally "take our pick" because both choices provided here signify essentially the same thing: a vaguely–defined and nostalgic atmosphere mobilized to address economic trauma. As a further example of the call to memory throughout AutoWorld—and especially to the era of the 1950s, when many parents bringing families to visit the park could potentially remember this "better time"—there was a large display dedicated to the advertising and Automobiles of the 1950s called "Remembering the Car of Your Dreams." By mobilizing the eminently recognizable figures of Dinah Shore and commercial jingles such as "See The U.S.A. in Your Chevrolet," this exhibit further illustrates how visitors were encouraged to interact with AutoWorld's presentation of history in a broad sense: as appealingly "authentic" without being dryly "historic"; as exciting and new as well as comfortingly familiar; and above all, FUN!

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[259] For a discussion of this in terms of Detroit's development, which parallels Flint in many ways, see Thomas Sugrue,*The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit.*

[260] "What's It Going to Be, Flint?" *The Flint Journal* 11 Mar. 1984.

The Youngstown Historical Center for Industry and Labor: "A Monument of the Steel Industry"

While pursuing a different mission than AutoWorld, the Youngstown Historical Center for Industry and Labor in Youngstown, Ohio, was born from similar impulses and in response to similar crises. State Senator Harry Meshel called for the museum to be built in 1977, shortly following the September 19 announcement of the closing of Youngstown Sheet and Tube's Campbell Works plant, one of the area's largest steel–related employers. The date became known as "Black Monday" in Youngstown, and five thousand workers would lose their jobs in the months following the announcement. A museum to commemorate the steel industry specifically in a moment of steep decline and crisis was proposed by Meshel as a fitting way to memorialize what was seen as a disappearing mode of working and living in the Youngstown area. In a sentiment that echoes the similar founding impulse for AutoWorld, but from a different point of view (Meshel worked in an open hearth at US Steel in his college years), the Senator said, "I wanted to create a monument of the steel industry because of the deep and abiding impact it had on the community."[261]

While AutoWorld was in many ways about the denial of deindustrialization as well as a proposed remedy for the destruction it brought, the Youngstown Historical Center dealt with the steel industry's decline relatively explicitly—to even include "Labor" in its name reflects a certain point of view that did not aim to gloss over the experience (and suffering) of steel workers with a sheen of Disneyfied excitement

[261] Shilling, Don. "Museum Celebrates 15th Anniversary." *Vindy.com*. The Youngstown Vindicator, 28 Sept. 2007. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

and fun. This is understandable, given the economic realities of Youngstown in this period: between the announcement of the Campbell Works closing and 1983, when $3 million in state funding was actually approved for the museum project, an estimated 40,000 manufacturing jobs were lost, 50,000 people were displaced because of mill shutdowns, and unemployment would rise to 20 percent, remaining in double digits for the next decade.[262] During this time, Youngstown—like Flint, Detroit, and a handful of other "representative" cities—became a "poster child for deindustrialization," finding itself in crisis, with an identity that was "up for grabs."[263] Discussions during the planning stages, proposals for funding, and the final form the museum would take, however, all reveal similar institutional pressures as AutoWorld faced concerning what a cultural institution should be in this transformational historical moment.

Located on the campus of Youngstown State University and operated by the Ohio Historical Society, the Historical Center does not pretend to be anything but a museum in a traditional sense, presenting an object–based historical narrative of the steel industry, those who worked in it, and Youngstown's prominent—though radically diminished—role in American steel production. Although the project was initially proposed in 1977, it took six years to secure state funding to begin work on the structure, and another three years before the groundbreaking ceremony in 1986. The physical museum opened with temporary exhibits in 1990, but it took another two years of fundraising to build a significant permanent collection. Throughout the

[262] Bruno, Robert. *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1999:149; Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*: 131.
[263] Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*:150.

effort to bring the museum project to fruition, questions about the uses of history and memory, and how to properly honor and/or represent the past were debated by different factions of the Youngstown community. Since opening, the museum has had consistent problems attracting even local visitors. Five years after officially opening, the museum had a reputation as, as the local newspaper put it, a "beautiful and informative museum—that no one visits."[264] In "Steeltown U.S.A.," their prominent study of Youngstown's struggles over history and memory, historians Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo argue that, "While locals sought to understand the changing meaning of work and how their community was being reshaped by deindustrialization, representations produced for a national audience found the Youngstown story useful for everything from critiquing the excessive power of corporations to warning union members against fighting too hard for better treatment. Meanwhile, the community struggled over how to remember the past."[265] I would argue, however, that although the Historical Center is primarily local in focus, it also represents a more complicated middle ground. The new emphasis on tourist economies, and the increasing material stakes for image–crafting through cultural institutions, meant that museum projects in the 1970s and 80s attempted to self–consciously create identities that could reproduce and interact with national narratives in a marketable way, rather than being strictly products of local struggles between interested factions in a stable "community," somehow apart from national concerns.

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[264] Whitley, Chris. "Steel Museum Passes the Test of Its Mettle." *The Youngstown Vindicator* 6 July 1997.
[265] Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown:* 189.

From the beginning of the museum planning process, the dual concerns of education and economic or tourist appeal were intertwined, and appeared in discussions of the multiple uses of the prospective institution. A 1982 grant proposal by the Mahoning Valley Economic Development Authority acknowledges the breadth of the museum's ambition, saying, "The scope of the museum's content is truly national and not merely restricted to the Mahoning Valley." The grant proposal also makes clear the economic stakes of the project:

> Some mention must also be made of the benefits of an iron and steel museum located within the Mahoning Valley. There is little question concerning the educational value and need of an iron and steel museum for the steel industry, the nation, and, more specifically, the residents of the Mahoning Valley. Furthermore, the museum will generate a favorable economic impact throughout the Youngstown area. How significant this will be cannot adequately be foretold at this time, though it undoubtedly will be related to the quality, comprehensiveness and attractiveness of the displays and exhibits… Once open, the museum itself will provide a number of permanent job positions. The economic value of an iron and steel museum in the Mahoning Valley, however, will exceed these immediately recognizable benefits. A study of cultural institutions in Philadelphia indicated that a museum that attracts twenty–five people a day brings the same income into a community as a new business with a payroll of $125,000 and that an additional 100 out–of–town visitors per day will generate 111 industry–related jobs, $1.2 million in retail sales, and $78,000 in taxes.[266]

From this document, it is actually unclear why the educational value and need is unquestionable *specifically* for the residents of the Mahoning Valley—the implication is that this museum will be the main repository of a dying local way of life, but it also seems to imply that local residents are in particular, immediate need of education as to their own history. More important, however, is the argument that

[266] Mahoning Valley Economic Development Authority. *Youngstown Historical Center*. 1982. Grant Proposal Narrative. Youngstown Historical Center Archives, Youngstown.

a museum will be a unique and proven way to produce jobs, revenue, and tourists for the troubled Youngstown area. Going so far as to cite studies that place cultural institutions on par with any other new business venture in their revenue potential, the benefit of pursuing a museum project is framed in economic terms, as the of number of visitors/customers attracted. Although not nearly on the scale of the messianic expectations for economic transformation that were invested in AutoWorld, we still see here a self–conscious attempt to marry the dual purposes of historical education with profitability, with each enhancing the other, in a particularly powerful way that only a cultural institution could achieve.[267]

One of the clearest illustrations of the Youngstown Historical Center's strategy for creating an institution that would not only memorialize an industrial history, but also reflect the broader economic and cultural ambitions of a contemporary museum, was the building itself. In 1985, with planning stages for the museum in progress, local architectural firm Raymond J. Jaminet and Partners pursued and won the attention of Michael Graves, one of the most prominent modern architects of the time. While the Ohio Historical Society and Youngstown State University stipulated early on that an architect with museum design experience be involved, Graves certainly seemed to be overqualified by any standard, having been previously involved with the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Newark Museum, and

[267] And yet, there was considerable resistance from the Youngstown business community to the museum, as in their view, it represented a threat to a total business–friendly image makeover that would further erase the city's association with organized labor. Dubbed a "get over it" attitude by Linkon and Russo, business leaders feared that the museum would only contribute to the community's dwelling on a particular kind of past that was not in line with the neoliberal goal of completely shedding a Rust Belt image. See their discussion in Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*: 181.

several other museum–related projects. As a strategy for generating excitement and legitimacy for the museum, hiring a big–name architect to design the structure was a proven one, and one that was being increasingly employed by museums of all kinds to give an institution crucial "cutting–edge" appeal and tourist potential—I.M. Pei, though famously indifferent to modern popular music, was courted and won to design Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame based on name recognition and the air of respectability he brought to the project. This approach was successful in some ways for the Youngstown Historical Center (the structure was completed in 1989 at a cost of almost $4 million), as the design won awards for Graves and publicity for the museum (see Fig. 17).[268] The form itself appealed to architecture experts and critics, but so did the significance of the structure in a national narrative about deindustrialization and memory. Critic Philip Arcidi wrote in *Progressive Architecture*,

> The steel mills that once dominated Youngstown are closing down, and their former employees are adjusting to a postindustrial future. During these difficult transitional years, Youngstown might find its new museum, which won a citation in the P/A awards program (P/A, Jan. 1988, pp. 122–123), doubly important. The building, by Michael Graves, Architect, in association with Raymond J. Jaminet and Partners, serves the city in two ways: It documents the development of Ohio's steel industry and commemorates a vanishing way of life.[269]

Although no doubt biased in its opinion about the transformative power of architecture, these accolades illuminate the demands being made of cultural institutions at this moment, and specifically upon the Rust Belt. First of all, Michael Graves becomes a noble servant to Youngstown's naturalized transition from

[268] Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown:* 179.
[269] Arcidi, Philip. "Steel industry enshrined." *Progressive Architecture* Mar. 1990: 84+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 14 Mar. 2013.

"industrial" to "postindustrial," as this museum becomes a site not just of remembering, but of mourning. Presumably, those who visit the museum to witness the commemoration of a "vanishing" way of life are themselves the subjects of that vanishing–in–progress, and it is implied that this institution—now "doubly important" through its particular transformational power of memory—will in some way provide safe passage through these "transitional years." As an explicitly memorial site, the Historical Center does this work as monuments and museums often have, by attempting to detach and display a painful past and making it symbolic—and commodifiable—as "heritage." As a memorial site, the museum also has the power to level historical narratives, especially in moral terms, since although there is a certain defiance in choosing to represent deindustrialization or organized labor at all, there is no particular politics attached to that remembering. As I've discussed in previous chapters regarding the neoliberal national narratives framing the decline of organized labor as a natural economic evolution out of the antiquated New Deal era, the deindustrialization of Youngstown simply *happened*, and now something else is happening—all that's left is to properly *remember* the past.[270] As a 1986 Youngstown State University newspaper article about the Historical Center begins by saying, "Industry was an important part of Youngstown's

[270] Historian and critic Mike Wallace, for one, has suggested that the main permanent exhibit on display at the museum, titled "By the Sweat of Their Brow: Forging the Steel Valley," actually does a much better job of dealing with some historical details of deindustrialization than most other museum treatments of similar subjects. However, as Linkon and Russo point out, while the exhibit depicts aspects of working–class life, it also downplays the role of conflict in shaping the culture and community. I would also argue that the very form and planning of the museum, aside from the specifics of the main exhibit, suggest the naturalized narratives of heritage more than anything. See Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*: 92–93; Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*: 179–180.

history and even if we must move on to other things, it is important for us to remember our heritage."[271] We also see in this museum the multiple cultural and economic pressures that were placed on cultural institutions to do the work of redefining Rust Belt urban identity in a moment of crisis, as not only must Youngstown and its residents "adjust to a postindustrial future," but the city also must properly *exhibit* itself and its history to remain relevant and to cope with the present—and, in Kirschenblatt–Gimblett's formulation, to become "real" and modern.

The most widely praised element of Graves' museum design was also an explicitly memorial gesture, as he included elements meant to echo industrial buildings, including mill stack–inspired turrets. Director of the Historical Center Gary Ness praised the design in an Historical Society press release, particularly "the incorporation of industrial shapes from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries," and *Progressive Architecture* commended Graves' industrial–inspired elements, saying in their award citation that the building "recognizes the tension between the imagery of public buildings, in its classically inspired front facade, and that of industrial buildings, in the three architectural elements at the rear of the building."[272] Essentially a design strategy that aestheticized the functional forms of the very mills that were being closed all around the Youngstown area, the architecture crystallizes an effect of detaching the viewer from the lived history of work that it aims to

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[271] Morgan, Susan. "Museum Features Local Industrial Roots." *The Jambar* [Youngstown] 21 Aug. 1986.
[272] Ohio Historical Society. *New Museum Events Slated*. 29 Sept. 1986. Press Release. Youngstown Historical Center Archives, Youngstown.; Murphy, Jim. "Architectural design." *Progressive Architecture* Jan. 1988: 90+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 15 Mar. 2013.

memorialize. In fact, as noted by Linkon and Russo—and borne out by the often low attendance numbers—"while it appealed to architecture fans, many local critics complained that it simply didn't capture the scale or experience of the real thing."[273] The incorporation of nostalgic formal elements and/or explicit references to that which is being memorialized is not unusual in this kind of institution—Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, for example, has the suggestion of a record turntable built into its form by I.M. Pei, especially when viewed from above. Considering the opening of Pei's building was in 1995—a very dark time for vinyl records, since compact discs easily dominated the recorded music market, with vinyl widely seen as obsolete technology—the reference to a record player as the physical expression of the Hall of Fame can also be seen as a memorial gesture for a dying technology, or at the very least an affirmation of the Hall of Fame's nostalgic mission.

The industrial architectural references also have very real precedents in the development of the Historical Center. State Senator Harry Meshel, who originally proposed the idea of a "National Steel Museum" in Youngstown, advocated in 1983 for the museum to incorporate large pieces of an actual closed steel coke facility, the former Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co.'s Brier Hill plant.[274] Before that, there was serious talk of actually housing the museum itself in a vacant steel mill, raising questions of what that kind of repurposing might have meant for the museum's historical narrative, since such a move would have been a disturbingly literal illustration of the basic postmodern economic progression from "making" to

[273] Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown:* 180.
[274] Reiss, George R. "Meshel Proposes Brier Hill Plant Become National Steel Museum." *The Youngstown Vindicator* 10 July 1983.

"showing."[275] These plans were scrapped relatively early on in the planning process, however, since vacant steel mills are, it turns out, prohibitively expensive to renovate for commercial use, and to heat through an Ohio winter.

In contrast, AutoWorld had no such qualms about its location. When choosing a site, Mott Foundation and AutoWorld officials decided on a large lot on a northern corner of downtown on South Saginaw Street, occupied at the time by the Industrial Mutual Association, or IMA, Auditorium. Built in 1929 as a multi–purpose venue primarily used for entertaining the thousands of auto workers in the city, the auditorium was beloved for the years of memories it had provided, but largely unused by the early 1980s, and was prime downtown real estate. As the *Flint Journal* described it upon AutoWorld's grand opening, "The IMA Auditorium—that symbol of better days in a declining downtown, that place that held thousands of bright memories for Flint people of all ages—has become part of AutoWorld."[276] Not only did the AutoWorld facility occupy the land on which the IMA stood, it appropriated the building itself for exhibit space, forming the architectural companion to its newly constructed glass dome. The final act of this literal absorption of the past into the spectacular present was for the letters of the original "IMA Auditorium" sign to be taken down and rearranged into its new identity, spelling "AutoWorld." As the *Flint Journal* put it in ironically melancholy terms, saying, "Now, as part of AutoWorld, perhaps its identity will blend into that of the new complex. Only older residents may retain the image of the building that spelled

[275] Roberts, Tim. "$100,000 State Grant Will Help Area Industrial Museum Get Started." *The Youngstown Vindicator* 3 July 1983.
[276] Lethbridge, Alice. "Symbol of Old Downtown Remains." *The Flint Journal* 24 June 1984: 13.

magic and prestige, excitement and pride for so many years."[277] The old symbol of downtown, a monument to working–class leisure and the product of old Liberal arrangements of worker/company relations was gone, but in its new heritage–based form, perhaps we can at least remember it. That era simply *happened*, and now something else was happening.

Disney's America: On "Historicidal" Enterprises

In Mike Wallace's 1996 essay "Mickey Mouse History," he argues that "Corporate desire to fudge the past combined with Disney's ability to spruce it up promotes a sense of history as a pleasantly nostalgic memory, now so completely transcended by the modern corporate order as to be irrelevant to modern life."[278] The effect of this, he says, is a diminishment of Americans' ability to make sense of the past, to question the present, and to critically assess how we got here. This is not a unique argument when it comes to Disney, and there are two sides to the same "common sense" coin about how Disney's influence operates: Disney is the most recognizable and respected name in themed environments, which are almost by nature quasi–historical; simultaneously Disney is a synonym for "inauthenticity," especially when it comes to the question of history. Echoing the concerns of the *New York Times* editorial that began this chapter, Wallace sets up his examination of Disney's role in commercialized history by observing that, "Nowadays, it often seems as if the past gets presented to popular audiences more by commercial

[277] Ibid.
[278] Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*: 149.

operators pursuing profit than by museums bent on education."[279] If, however, we consider Disney's proposed historical theme park ("Disney's America"), and the debates surrounding it, in comparison with places such as AutoWorld and the Youngstown Historical Center, we find a more complex picture of cultural institutions in crisis.

Plans for Disney's America were announced in late 1993, on the heels of several pledges by the recently restructured Walt Disney Company to "reinvent" their theme park experience, and immediately following huge losses on its recent EuroDisney venture. The proposed site was 3,000 acres of rural Northern Virginia in Prince William County, abutting the busy interstate and roughly 35 miles from the White House in Washington D.C. Divided into nine themed "Lands"—a common Disney device for dividing space, having been pioneered in the original Disney parks—the theme park would represent the grand sweep of American history, bringing the American experience "to life," as Disney CEO Michael Eisner put it. Among the plans for each themed area was a recreated "Indian Village," complete with a Lewis and Clark whitewater ride; a "Main Street U.S.A."–type souvenir marketplace styled as a bustling town of the mid–1800s; a Civil War scene complete with replica fort, slaves and soldiers; an Ellis Island replica; and a vaguely "old–timey" (that is to say, pre–WWII and pre–modern labor unrest) "factory town" called Enterprise, where visitors could ride a thrilling roller coaster through a

[279] Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*: 135. I do not mean to imply that Wallace's views are exactly aligned with the *Times'* somewhat elitist hand–wringing—in fact, he qualifies his concerns later in the book, saying that there is no particular conflict inherent to the intersection of history and commercial enterprise—but rather to suggest that the education/entertainment anxiety is a common framework at this time.

replicated steel blast furnace. Significantly, however, Disney anticipated public skepticism regarding how they might treat American history in the proposed park, and insisted from the beginning that this would be no "Disneyfied" narrative. Especially after partnering with Columbia University historian Eric Foner to revamp and update the iconic "Hall of Presidents" exhibit at their Disneyworld park, Disney was keen to frame this new venture as "serious fun," not shying away from sensitive historical material. Eisner assured skeptics, for instance, that "We will show the Civil War with all its conflict." Disney Vice President Robert Weis said that "We want to make you feel what it was like to be a slave or what it was like to escape through the underground railroad"—which, apparently, was supposed to set troubled minds at ease. There was to be no "Pollyanna view" of history and no "propaganda" in Disney's America.[280] Disney also highlighted the proven marketable appeal of its theme parks, as the park's general manager insisted that despite some possibly difficult historical topics, "It is going to be fun with a capital 'F.'"[281] However, the goal of Disney's America, as Peter Rummel, head of the Disney Design and Development unit that designed the park, insisted, "is to make this real."[282] Disney's attempt to frame the new venture as not just another Disney experience, but a new kind of hybrid institution that took history seriously—but not so seriously as to be unentertaining—echoes many of the flexible mission claims made by AutoWorld a decade earlier, and the attempts to balance profitability with authenticity made by

[280] Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*: 164. References to "Pollyanna" are not intended to infringe upon trademarks relating to the 1960 Disney film production.
[281] Ibid., 167.
[282] Wines, Michael. "A Disneyland of History Next to the Real Thing." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 12 Nov. 1993. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

countless institutions—especially museums—since the 1970s.

While the proposal did generate criticism from intellectuals, academics, and some in the media on the grounds that the concept was inherently objectionable—Wallace notes that most historians "saw an irreconcilable tension between the subjects that Disney planned to treat and the way it planned to treat them"—the arguments against the park that gained the most traction were not ones ideologically opposed to the project.[283] In fact, polls showed that the project had support from a majority of Virginians, no doubt on economic grounds, since the promise of a Disney theme park certainly meant tourist revenue and badly needed jobs. As the *New York Times* reported, "Prince William County is in the economic horse latitudes after two go–go decades, and the park's 3,000 jobs seemed as thrilling to local residents as the prospect of something new to do."[284] Organizations of local officials and business leaders formed groups such as the "Welcome Disney Committee" to support the development, and Disney itself projected very attractive benefits for the local economy, including up to 19,000 permanent jobs, 2,800 construction jobs, $48 million a year in new state taxes, and up to $12 million in tax revenue for Prince William County. Governor George Allen himself spearheaded the effort to pass a bond issue to provide Disney with the $163 million in public money that the company had requested to prepare and improve access to the proposed site.[285] This tradeoff of public funds for private enterprise's promise of future

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[283] Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*: 165.
[284] Wines, Michael. "A Disneyland of History Next to the Real Thing." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 12 Nov. 1993. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.
[285] Janofsky, Michael. "Opponents of Disney Park Find Allies in Congress." *Www.newyorktimes.com*. The New York Times, 19 June 1994. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

revenue that is a standard feature of neoliberal governance seemed to residents and officials a safe bet, given Disney's reputation for profitability (EuroDisney notwithstanding).

However, as the proposal came under more criticism and pressure from opponent groups such as "Protect Historic America," made up of a group of historians and writers, as well as environmentalists and other concerned activists, the issue became much more than one of local development. The arguments getting the most serious consideration were those concerning urban sprawl, over–development, and the disturbance of nearby Civil War battle sites. In the summer of 1994, a bipartisan group of 16 House members in Washington, encouraged by activist groups, introduced a resolution opposing the building of the park. Although possibly haunted by principled anti–Disneyfication sentiment, the issue ultimately came down to a discussion of highway width, air quality, and general concern over what might happen to the "historic" Virginia countryside when Disney's America inevitably became *too* successful. The most influential critics were clear that they were not opposed to the project itself, but the proposed location, and even the *New York Times* opinion page, which had been routinely outraged at the very idea of Disney's plans, said, "There are millions of acres elsewhere more appropriate for such a project and where Disney can exercise its creative freedom."[286] The implication of these arguments seems to be that there are plenty of heritage–free blank canvases in America to work with—Orlando, for example—and that there is a distinction of value that must be made between "real" heritage and Disney's brand

[286] "Rebelling Against Disney." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 19 June 1994. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

of history. In the end, these arguments based on land use and potential environmental impact won out, or at least cost Disney too much in delays, and the project was abandoned.

Disney is a complex cultural force, and seems to signify at once the destruction of history, and the most successful popular expression of American historical appetites. The Disney theme parks have always been in part a historical enterprise, narrating a particular story of American exceptionalism and progress, from Frontierland to the future–obsessed Epcot. In many ways, the resistance mounted to Disney's America was the most powerful testament to their success in the marketplace of commodified history—a marketplace that Disney itself had shaped over the preceding few decades. Disney has long been cited as a prominent example for successfully attracting tourists, and as a compelling example for the economic possibilities of packaging heritage and theme–park excitement. AutoWorld constantly referenced Disney as a model for their "fun" approach to history, and explicitly hoped to replicate Disney's success as a tourist destination. When the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland was stalled in the planning stages, trying to secure funding, a frustrated Cleveland lawyer donated his personal collection of Elvis Presley memorabilia to the museum's collection in hopes that it might help the project move forward. "I believe," he said, explaining his deep desire to see the museum come to fruition, "that the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame will do for Cleveland what DisneyWorld did for Orlando, Florida."[287] Even though the Youngstown Historical Center had a more traditional mission, it is also clear that they had

[287] Harris, Rich. "Ground Being Broken on Rock Hall of Fame." *Kentucky New Era* 7 June 1993, sec. B: 7.

commercial ambition, at least for generating new economic activity in Youngstown, just as local Virginians had for the prospect of Disney's America.

In this way, Disney's development strategies were effectively legitimized by market forces—the most important neoliberal arbiter of value. Even if the Disney brand is at some points contested, the Disney approach to history has been thoroughly insinuated into accepted common sense about how to successfully package historical narratives—the very ideas of a historical "experience" and "bringing history to life," so commonplace in the language of museums and cultural attractions, are deeply indebted to the Disney model. I would not so much argue with Wallace, then, on his characterization of Disney's historical project, since Corporate Disney is undoubtedly a rabidly historicidal enterprise. Rather, I would try to step back and amend his statement by suggesting that neoliberalism itself is historicidal, and its hegemonic rise in the late 1970s and 1980s allowed Disney to multiply its power for historicide through the many cultural institutions that it shaped.

Even when we consider the issue of failure—failure as AutoWorld certainly was, the Youngstown Historical Center struggled not to be, and Disney's America never got the chance to be—we see that the neoliberal logic that Disney helped to construct remains intact. To become "real" and relevant in a postindustrial era, Flint attempted to transform itself into a destination with a marketable, fun heritage in the Disney mold. In hindsight, AutoWorld's failure is seen as clearly a desperate and ridiculous project from the start, both within and outside of Flint. Despite being based on proven tourist models and despite hiring veterans of the most successful

companies in the field, AutoWorld is seen as somehow destined to fail—and so ultimately, that failure is not about the strategies themselves, or about how to represent history, but rather about *where* they are implemented, and the value those places have in a heritage economy. Virginia's Civil War battlefields were too precious to commodify, and Flint was too inherently unmarketable.

Figure 15: Historical "Vehicle City" arches recreated inside AutoWorld

Figure 16: The original "Vehicle City" arches as they stood along South Saginaw Street, 1909

Figure 17: The Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor, designed by architect Michael Graves

CONCLUSION

In the final stages of writing this dissertation, I found myself unsure of how to conclude. I wanted to bring all the historical analysis of the previous chapters up to the present because, living and working in Flint, I see the legacies of 1980s revitalization projects all around me every day. Especially in the last several months, it seems that there has been a flurry of development activity in Michigan, and all of it seems an appropriate way to put an uneasy question mark on where exactly the neoliberal shifts of the late 1970s and 1980s have guided us, and what the future will look like.

In September 2012, tentative plans were announced to demolish downtown Flint's Genesee Towers building. Genesee Towers has stood as the tallest building in Flint and Genesee County since its completion in 1968, and remains a fixture of the downtown skyline, even after its last tenant left in 1997 and its official condemnation by the city in 2004. Since 2007, the roads around the Towers have been partially blocked off because of safety concerns, as sections of the building threaten to fall into the streets below. In its place, developers have proposed an as–yet vaguely defined "urban plaza," the details of which have not been elaborated upon.

The demolition of Genesee Towers sparked debate as a deal was apparently struck between the private Uptown Reinvestment Corporation—a group of local business elites who have almost single–handedly shaped downtown development for more than a decade with private investments—and the state–appointed Emergency Financial Manager Michael Brown, without public input. Under current state law, Emergency Managers are not required to follow traditional guidelines regarding such matters.[288] Furthermore, the *Flint Journal* revealed that Brown had already committed $750,000 of the city's federal community development grant funding to go toward the Genesee Towers demolition, funneling these funds into clearing more downtown real estate for private development at the expense of neighborhood demolition projects that would clear some of the city's many abandoned and condemned structures.[289]

Even more recently, in early March 2013, the Uptown Reinvestment Corporation also announced that they are planning to relocate the Flint Farmer's Market from its current location of more than 70 years, on the northern banks of the Flint River, to the center of downtown. Proposed as part of a $32 million redevelopment plan related to the demolition of the Genesee Towers, and justified by cost–prohibitive building improvements needed at the current location, the new Farmer's Market will become the latest attraction situated in the investment–rich

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[288] For a primer on Michigan's controversial Emergency Manager law passed under Governor Rick Snyder, see Savage, Chris. "The Scandal of Michigan's Emergency Managers." *The Nation*. The Nation, 15 Feb. 2012. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.; "7 Things to Know about Michigan's Emergency Manager Law." *Michigan Radio*. Michigan Radio, 6 Dec. 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

[289] Longley, Kristin. "Genesee Towers: Flint Torn over Fate of City's Tallest Building." *The Flint Journal*. The Flint Journal, 28 Sept. 2012. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

urban core. The Market has been an increasingly popular Flint destination in recent years, and estimates suggest that it attracts 270,000 visitors a year and brings in $4 to $5 million annually for its 30 to 50 vendors. Uptown Reinvestment hopes to double that revenue figure by moving the Market downtown.[290] Spokespeople for the Market and the investors even framed the move as an assertion of proper local heritage, saying that "the market is really coming back home."[291] This is a reference to the Market's original location when it was founded in 1905, but the insistence upon downtown as the proper historical site (especially when the Market relocated out of downtown in 1940), once again deploys the expression of heritage as the driving spatial and moral logic of economic development.

Critics of the relocation, as well the analysis of neoliberal revitalization strategies I've put forward in this dissertation, suggest that the move is simply another in a series of efforts by Uptown and other city elites to consolidate Flint's marketable aspects into the increasingly powerful and exclusive urban core, and to condense all meaningful development resources within the controllable, policed boundaries of downtown. The main business district is already more surveilled than any other part of the city, by two officially deputized private security forces provided by the Downtown Development Authority and the University of Michigan–Flint, to supplement the drastically underfunded city police force. In a one–question poll by the *Flint Journal* of Genesee County residents, respondents were split 50/50 on the question of whether the market should be moved, and the announcement has

[290] Byron, Shaun. "Flint Farmers' Market Moves to Downtown Location in 2014." *MLive*. The Flint Journal, 8 Mar. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.
[291] Ibid.

generated considerable heated debate.[292] However, as with the issue of the demolition of Genesee Towers, it is unclear whether, and frankly unlikely that, this debate will change the course of private investment and its partnership with city and state leaders. The city's previous mayor, like countless neoliberal politicians on the both the Right and Left, pledged to run Flint like a business, and that remains the prevailing standard for responsible municipal governance.[293]

Interestingly, the announcement of the Farmer's Market relocation came with an artist's rendering of what the brand new downtown site might look like. Situated at the entrance to the proposed new Market stood a prominent "Vehicle City" iron arch (Fig. 18). Although members of the Uptown Reinvestment Corporation, city officials, and others boosters would say (and have said) that the lessons of AutoWorld have been learned, and that Flint is pursuing smaller, "organic" entrepreneurial revitalization projects instead of big–ticket spectacles, it's difficult to ignore the similar undergirding logics, and the similar elite power structures that shape decisions regarding where resources will be concentrated. Instead of one sealed glass dome that holds a replica of a bustling Flint downtown, perhaps downtown itself has been sealed off, concentrating a vision of a prosperous city within ideologically policed borders—complete with the very same arches that adorned AutoWorld's pleasantly historic vision. The symbolism is not lost on Flint residents even thirty years later, as the artist's rendering of the new Farmer's

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[292] Byron, Shaun. "Poll on Flint Farmers' Market Shows Opinion Split Evenly on Move to Downtown." *MLive*. The Flint Journal, 21 Mar. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.
[293] Mayor Don Williamson, a polarizing business leader and political figure, who preceded the current Mayor, Dayne Walling. For this concept as "common sense" in neoliberal governance, see Hackworth, Jason R. *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007: 2.

Market site has a single, sarcastic reader comment on the *Flint Journal*'s web page: "Is that AutoWorld in the background?"[294]

It is not surprising that the Farmer's Market would use the "Vehicle City" arch as a symbolic entrance, since over the last ten years, the city of Flint has enthusiastically embraced the arch as its official symbol, adorning everything from the new seal of the city to souvenir t–shirts. This due in part to the fact that in November 2003, downtown Flint saw something it hadn't since 1919: seven ornate steel arches, each fitted with 50 light bulbs, were erected along South Saginaw Street, spanning the width of the street and demarcating the central business district of the city. The drive to replicate and install the iconic arches 84 years after they had disappeared from the streetscape was a popular and relatively easy project, as a broad coalition of community organizations, businesses, and individual investors—including the Flint Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Downtown Development Authority, Uptown Reinvestment Corporation, and the Genesee County Historical Society, among others—raised the funds and brought the project to fruition under the name "Arches Restoration to Celebrate our Heritage" (or ARCH).[295] The mania for the arch has recently extended to include mini–replicas at more minor downtown area intersections, highway entrances, and even vacant lots in other areas of the city—where there was once an abandoned building, blight, and visible evidence of Flint's economic and structural challenges, there can now be a new (old) symbol of the city's heritage and hope for a brighter future based on a

[294] Byron, Shaun. "Flint Farmers' Market Moves to Downtown Location in 2014." *MLive*. The Flint Journal, 8 Mar. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013: Photo Comments.
[295] *Flint Vehicle City Arches*. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. <http://www.flintarches.com/>.

brighter yesterday. The arch, once specifically a symbol of downtown, has grown to encompass the cultural and historical identity of the whole city. This is significant, of course, because although the only historical reference to the arches as a symbol of Flint since the turn of the twentieth century was their resurrection within AutoWorld, that fact is nowhere to be found in their current celebration. Instead, the arches have effectively been lifted from the context of AutoWorld, shedding all negative connotations, to define a "new" era of revitalization. Though many involved in current efforts would deny it, the roots of Flint's revitalization are still planted in AutoWorld's soil.

According to the ARCHES' website, "The well–known arches that once spanned Saginaw Street are being restored in downtown Flint. A group of community organizations, committed businesses and individuals are spearheading a fund raising effort to rebuild seven arches along Saginaw Street. You can help bring these magnificent symbols of Flint's past into the present! Be a part of Flint's future! Contribute now!" At this point, the rhetoric present in this effort is familiar and hopefully clear: the collapsing of history with the clear goal of transcending the troublesome present—which is still characterized by disproportionately high unemployment and a wide range of related social and economic problems—and into a vaguely defined "future" that is no longer explicitly based in a move to a tourism–based economy, but is still very much dependent on a therapeutic model of "bringing a new sense of pride to the community" after the demoralizing trauma of deindustrialization.[296] The levels of signification here are complex, however, and

[296] Ibid.

reveal new wrinkles in the project of revitalization nearly 20 years after AutoWorld opened, while using the same recreated monuments to signify progress. First, we see the conscious move in this group's name toward "heritage" as a therapeutic mechanism for revitalization from the "inside out," rather than from the "outside in" (as was the case with self–conscious tourist marketing). While this is still based in familiar notions of symbols of "hope" and "pride," we see these rhetorics aimed even more explicitly inward, mobilized as a reclaiming of roots and collective heritage for self–improvement. Furthermore, the element of local boosterism ("Be a part of Flint's future—contribute now!") explicitly links economic investment with a prosperous future; however, it is the investment in monuments and cultural representations rather than in economic or social programs that will help the city seize upon a useable heritage and make the "real" difference in attitude, thereby empowering individual citizens to help Flint collectively overcome the crisis of deindustrialization (and of past failed attempts to address it) with positive feelings.

In this way, the devices of memory and monuments are actually working against what I would argue is a more productive type of remembering—that of perhaps reconstructing the history of deindustrialization as an inherent part of the logic of modern capitalism, rather than privileging earlier moments in that process as a "cultural heritage" (or "inventing the tradition" of automobile–based prosperity, as Hobsbawm might see it). This is not to say that these monuments are simply a distraction from "real" issues—the arches in all their forms are actually complex and unique sites that help to reveal, and are knit together with, "real issues"—but they also are an important site where we see a community grappling with image and

identity using the imperfect tools of memory. AutoWorld has been consistently disowned and forgotten, but I would argue that the legacies of its neoliberal logic still suggest that a good enough representation can literally transform the problems of urban spaces, not only for outsiders, but also for residents. This individualizing ethic is articulated in the recent re–creation of the arches on Saginaw Street, as a way for Flint to "reclaim" its history and to "feel better" about itself as a crucial step toward material transformation.

When "branding expert" Eric La Brecque was brought in to work with the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2006, the debate over how to reinvent not only Detroit, but the entire region, echoed similar previous conversations in Flint. In trying to develop a brandable identity for Southeast Michigan to promote, La Brecque (not a Detroit native) observed that while Detroit is known worldwide primarily for automobiles and the auto industry, it doesn't have a central attraction celebrating it. Detroit Free Press columnist Ron Dzwonkowski immediately took the suggestion as a dangerous one that could send Detroit down the disastrous path to AutoWorld, saying, "No thanks. We don't need to repeat that debacle."[297] Instead, Dzwonkowski suggests a different strategy:

> They [the Convention and Visitors Bureau and La Brecque] will have to be careful not to let this comprehensive exercise in "branding" be boiled down to a slogan that—no matter how apt and catchy—is likely to be trashed from St. Clair Shores to Flat Rock. Why? Because that's the way this region is. Nobody is harder on us than us. Detroit area people will have to be sold on the Detroit area before they can be expected to sell it to the world. We will, collectively, need to stop apologizing for where we are and what we are, and start embracing it.

[297] Dzwonkowski, Ron. "Not Another AutoWorld: To Sell Itself to World, Region Should Think Attitude, Not Theme Park." *Detroit Free Press* 30 July 2006, sec. C: 3.

> … No, we don't need another AutoWorld. We need to appreciate the one that's already here, and everything that comes with it. We need to figure out our house, fix it up and show some pride in it before we invite the world in.[298]

This suggestion, which has very much in common with Flint's recent adoption of the arch, articulates a struggle to reconcile the continuing dominance of individualized neoliberal "common sense" in the broader context of Rust Belt cities, with the continued failure by these places to revitalize themselves over the past 30–40 years. Dzwonkowski's critique is simultaneously a hopeful rejection of the neoliberal strategies of the past, saying that Detroit doesn't need to subscribe to the specific demands that produced AutoWorld, while at the same time illustrating the difficulty of resisting the continuing and similar pressures still being brought to bear on Rust Belt cities, and the ways in which neoliberal logic still structures urban revitalization strategies. In his remarks, there is at once the rejection of ideas like AutoWorld that seem to have made a bad situation even worse by bringing (well–deserved) shame upon cities that irresponsibly pursued them, and an acceptance of the underlying notion that the real key to success and prosperity is taking personal responsibility, individually and collectively, to "figure out" and "fix up" our own houses. In some ways, we still believe that only when our cities and our selves are rebuilt into good neoliberal citizens will we be ready to "sell ourselves" and our image to the world—still the unquestioned goal of Rust Belt revitalization.

But in the insistent rejection and forgetting of AutoWorld, I believe that possible important critiques are lost. In his *Free Press* column, Dzwonkowski calls AutoWorld an "epic failure," and says that he was one of the few people he knew

[298] Ibid.

that visited AutoWorld, and that he "can't say [he's] proud of that fact."[299] He's certainly not alone in this sentiment, and even in his film *Roger & Me*, Michael Moore essentially dismisses AutoWorld as a tragic joke. But to remember and to take seriously what cultural and political work AutoWorld did, and the very serious national context that shaped its strategies and representations, is to consider that perhaps it did its job *too* well—allowing a harrowing glance into a changing landscape of capitalist processes as it happened, depicting deindustrialization a grotesquely cruel and comic debacle. Instead of inviting structural critique of the crises that it was supposed to ease, AutoWorld was instead absorbed into its own logic, further proof that there must be something wrong with Flint. AutoWorld and other sites of Rust Belt revitalization, when taken seriously, can reveal the logics of neoliberalism in material form as they happened on the ground, and can allow us to trace how they became common sense, how the Rust Belt became "the Rust Belt," and how those logics continue to operate today.

This analytical perspective is crucial, especially in a time when history seems to repeat itself more quickly than ever. In January 2013, *Detroit Free Press* business columnist Tom Walsh wrote, "It's time to get serious about creating a stupendous, one–of–a–kind, Disney–esque automotive attraction in the heart of Detroit. Something so exciting that it would draw millions of visitors from far and wide, cementing Detroit's place as the Motor City in the eyes of the world for generations."[300] This opinion was prompted by talk of such a project from Quicken

[299] Ibid.
[300] Walsh, Tom. "Tom Walsh: A Disney-esque Automotive Attraction for Detroit Could Rev up Motor City." *Detroit Free Press*. Detroit Free Press, 27 Jan. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

Loans chairman and Detroit developer Dan Gilbert, great–grandson of Henry Ford and Ford Motors executive chairman Bill Ford, and head of Penske Automotive Group Bill Penske, all of whom are have expressed enthusiasm about the idea. Again citing Disney as an influence for a new, exciting auto–themed cultural attraction, any talk of the concept being similar to Flint's AutoWorld is brushed off by Walsh in eerily familiar terms, as he dismisses out of hand the "legions of Detroit naysayers [who] will no doubt scoff at this idea."[301] After all, he argues, with such successful and established leadership, there's no way that Detroit would repeat the mistakes of Flint.

In response to this, longtime *Flint Journal* columnist Andrew Heller voiced his own hindsight perspective on AutoWorld ("My god, it was awful"), while offering his own sincere advice on how to do it right in Detroit—after all, he says, "Flint's lame, underfunded attempt at Disney greatness doesn't necessarily mean the concept was flawed."[302] Despite the wildly inaccurate characterization of AutoWorld as "underfunded," this reveals the legacy of AutoWorld, and of neoliberalism itself, in shaping the possibilities and limitations of Rust Belt revitalization in the decades since, as well as anything does. The structure and strategy are sound, we are told; it's the place that's the problem.

[301] Ibid.
[302] Heller, Andrew. "Andrew Heller: Here's What Not to Do with AutoWorld II." *The Flint Journal*. The Flint Journal, 1 Feb. 2013. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

On Hope, and Its Use

A good man is one who plants a tree and never expects to sit in its shade … Is there another city in this country that holds the promise of such a beautiful forest? I love Flint.

—anonymous AutoWorld contributor quoted in "Yankee Doodle Dandy: a Salute to AutoWorld" banquet program, July 3, 1984.[303]

Hope is a funny, fragile thing. It has uses both noble and cruel, and for people who live in the places I've spent this dissertation describing and analyzing, hope can often be exhausting. When new plans for development, revitalization or possible investment in these Rust Belt cities appear in local newspapers, they are more often than not appearing right beside the latest murder rates or national violent crime rankings or factory closing. And so we are in some ways so tired of hope—and yet, it seems more important than ever to cling to it whenever it presents itself. That is also why critical analysis of seemingly hopeful ideas—any ideas—is often pointedly ignored or greeted with hostility as harmful "naysaying" from those who are "just being too negative" or somehow "don't want the city to succeed." Michael Moore is an intensely polarizing figure in his hometown of Flint, eliciting a special kind of vitriolic response from residents for that very reason. And though I remain deeply critical of revitalization strategies I've examined up to the present day, I believe that hope is important, and hope is at the center of my desire to understand these places—where we've come from and where we may go.

I say "we" because I identify as thoroughly Midwestern, for better or worse, and I feel that more deeply than ever now, as I approach the end of this project.

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[303] Anonymous Contributor. 3 July 1984. Yankee Doodle Dandy: A Salute to AutoWorld Banquet Program. Sloan Archives, Flint.

What does that mean? I don't actually know for sure, but I feel it, in a way that I suppose I can't argue with hard evidence. I visited AutoWorld as a child with my family and with my grade–school class on field trips, and I was genuinely enchanted by the Disney–esque spectacle of it all, unaware of much except what great fun it was to ride the giant indoor Ferris wheel and to watch the animatronic characters sing and dance just for me (see Fig. 19). My father came from Poland with his family directly to Flint during the "golden age" of manufacturing, the mid–1950s. My mother's family came to Flint at the same time from rural Michigan, also in search of the work that the booming city could offer. My grandfather got a job without even knowing English at "Chevy in the Hole," the same plant that was home to the 1936 sit–down strike, and my father worked almost his whole life for General Motors as well. I live less than a mile away from the empty field where that plant used to stand.

More than all that though, I feel that I relate to Rust Belt cities in a particular, peculiar way—as I visited Toledo or Youngstown or Pittsburgh to do research for this dissertation, I would find them instantly and deeply familiar. I found myself instinctively navigating by landmarks I'd never seen before, as if I could find my way somehow by feel. This was of course not always the case in practical terms, and my generally poor sense of direction got me lost many times, but still, it was familiar to me in a comforting and eerie way. "Here is the river," I would think, "and here is the old factory surrounded by barbed wire, and so if I turn left, then there will probably be a business district, and if I go far enough in this direction, then the houses and roads and streetlights will probably start to look nicer," and so on and so on. I don't mean to imply that people and places share some sort of an innate character, or are

somehow supernaturally linked, but rather to try to explain a small part of how this project has made me even more aware of the funny, fragile hope that exists in me for my home, and of the shared histories and troubles and possibilities of the Rust Belt. And that hope keeps my attention and affection focused on these places that are not supposed to attract either.

Flint is difficult, and often heartbreaking, and it resists description—just like Cleveland or Youngstown or Detroit, or any other place on earth, I'd imagine. In the final months of writing this dissertation, the house near downtown Flint that I own and have lived in for nearly ten years was broken into and robbed. Robbed twice, actually, within six months. Each time, my computer and hard drive, including months of writing and years of research, were taken. The last time this happened, the laptop that was taken from my desk was actually open to a document in–progress much like this one, an attempt to grapple with the personal dimensions of making the troubles of Flint my academic work. Needless to say, I had to rewrite that bit from scratch once I'd replaced the computer. Each time my house was broken into, I came uncomfortably close to the endless layers of dysfunction that Flint faces these days. Tragically understaffed due to rounds of budget cutbacks, the police can't even pretend to pursue property crime, and the city now encourages citizens to report robberies and similar activity using an online system that will immediately generate a complaint number for insurance purposes. Even though it was clearly our nearest neighbors who had broken in both times (some of our only neighbors, in fact, since in the last year, the houses on each side of ours have burned due to arson and gone into foreclosure, respectively), the few remaining Flint city

detectives spend all day, every day investigating the staggering number of murders in the city, and have no time or resources for much else. The complex municipal and state dynamics of Flint under Emergency Financial Management only serve to heighten the dysfunction and neoliberal pressures of "personal responsibility" brought to bear on an already unbearably stressed city.[304] And so each time I started over with a blank computer screen, I was reminded of the complicated mess of cultural theory and life "on the ground"; of the realities of austerity in Rust Belt cities, and the challenges and the appeal of hope. And then I would try to start over.

Walter Benjamin writes that the "states of emergency" in which we live are not the exception, but the rule, and are manufactured to prevent the creation of a *real* state of emergency—one that would be oppositional, brought about to disrupt the dominant order of things.[305] The circumstances that Benjamin describes are clearly specific to his own historical moment, but this is still a hopeful notion to me. Instead of a reactionary politics of what our cities should look like and what work "revitalization" should do, perhaps we can hope and work for something to emerge that is better, and that challenges the ways in which business and political elites have framed our problems for the last 30–40 years. Something better than AutoWorld; better than what we've seen happen since; better even than the "golden age" of corporatism that was in so many ways no golden age at all. Perhaps

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[304] Emergency Managers are controversially appointed to cities in extreme financial difficulty under a recent Michigan law. The cities in the worst financial shape are, not coincidentally, usually former industrial centers with majority Black populations, further reinforcing the perception of these places as irresponsible neoliberal subjects, unable to maintain fiscal, political or moral order.

[305] Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings* 277 (1940): 279.

something more inclusive than exclusive, something broadly shared rather than held as a reward for the "desirable" and the "deserving." And in that spirit, I keep returning to the quote that I began this Conclusion with: "Is there another city in this country that holds the promise of such a beautiful forest?" This was said, I'm sure, with the intention that Flint could reclaim its former glory in some way, or at least become something more than a cautionary tale in the national imagination and perhaps even a halfway respectable place. But embedded in this quote is also the oppositional sentiment that Flint, badly beaten as it was, might just be a place where *anything* could happen—not just what was expected to happen, and not just what a limited group of people might want to happen, but *anything*. And I suppose that's what I hope for.

Figure 18: Artist rendering of proposed downtown site for the Flint Farmer's Market, complete with "Vehicle City" arch

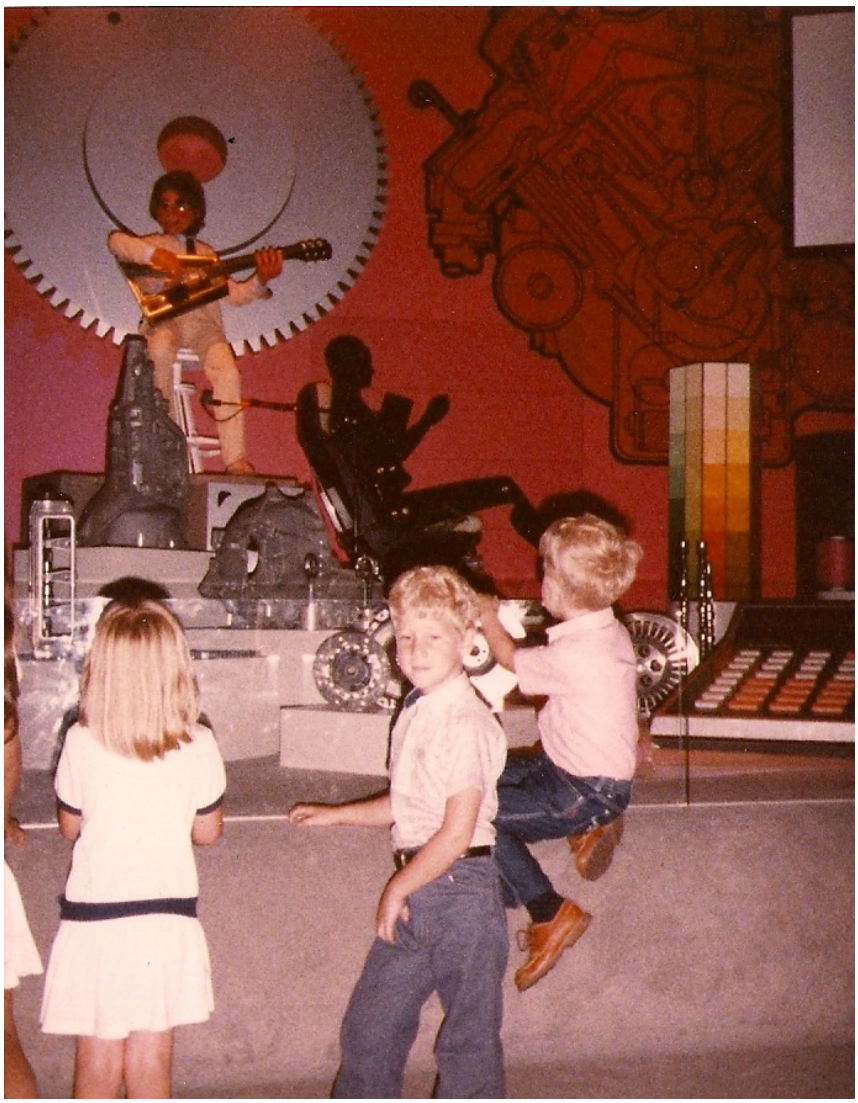

Figure 19: At AutoWorld, 1984

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