

Gilbertville:

the making of a gentrification

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THERE ARE
cities THAT GET BY ON
THEIR GOOD LOOKS,
offer climate & scenery,
VIEWS OF MOUNTAINS
OR OCEANS,
ROCKS OR with PALMTRES.
& there are cities
like **DETROIT**
THAT HAVE
to work
for a living.
— Elmore Leonard

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Detroit

Sustainability is the key to any city and Detroit struggles with that more than any city should. Since its existence, it has had dramatic up and downs especially concerning its black residents. Detroit was once a thriving city, relying heavily on the automobile industry – its biggest strength and weakness. Detroit was at one of its strongest moments in the industrial era – it was home to machine and stove manufacturing, cigar making, pharmaceuticals, food production, coal, iron, and copper mining. Although Detroit wasn't the greatest metropolis at that time, Henry Ford founded the Ford Motor Company in 1903. When he decided the five-dollar day, the most dramatic pay increase for industrial workers, the Motor City turned into the most racially and ethnically diverse place in the United States.

Before the heavy dependence on the auto industry, Detroit, more specifically African Americans, relied on themselves. In 1920, in the Black Bottom of Detroit, there were 350 black owned businesses bustling, ranging from doctors to lawyers to tailors to candy makers. Blacks were maintaining and striving all on their own. In the 1920s, many white

employers and residents were wary of black people. They often had to work the hardest, dirtiest, and most dangerous jobs. With the Big Three (General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler) offering generous wages and benefits such as health insurance, unemployment insurance, and retirement benefits, blue-collar workers were becoming apart of the middle class in Michigan. It is no wonder that by 1940, not only were black residents becoming dependent on the auto industry but the Midwest as a whole. Now, blue-collar workers could make a decent living, allowing for opportunities that were virtually unheard of for blue-collar workers. These workers could afford to purchase houses and send their children off to college and some could even afford lake/summer houses, leading to the rise of blue-collar resort towns throughout Michigan. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Great Migration allowed for many southern blacks to follow their "American Dream" basically promised and guaranteed by the allure of the opportunities in the North.

Although one could argue that the auto industry was the main draw to Detroit, it also was toxic to the city. “Between 1948 and 1967 – when the auto industry was at its economic peak – Detroit lost more than 130,000 manufacturing jobs. The auto industry began to decentralize its production, building new plants in suburban “greenfields” and in the small towns of the upper Midwest and, increasingly, the Sunbelt.”¹ The reduction of the city’s population from about 2 million in the fifties to 866,000 at present happened in waves; there have been dramatic changes in Detroit’s economy, causing waves of residents to move to “bigger and better” cities to sustain or maintain the lifestyle that Detroit just couldn’t offer anymore. “By 1967, when Detroit erupted with one of the worst race riots in American history, the city had already lost tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs, had experienced massive white flight, and had seen many of its neighborhoods (especially those that had been built in the shadow of the major automobile

¹ Thomas J. Sugrue, “Motor City: the Story of Detroit,” *The Journal of the Gilder Lehrman Institute*, unknown, accessed July 8, 2016, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/politics-reform/essays/motor-city-story-detroit>

plants) gutted by depopulation and disinvestment. By the 1970s, Detroit’s image had been completely transformed from the mighty engine of American capitalism to the embodiment of America’s urban woes. The auto industry, buffeted by the oil crisis during the Nixon and Carter administrations, continued to contract. The rise of international competition, especially from Japan and Germany, further weakened Detroit’s auto industry.”²

² Ibid.



Detroit,
HOME of the BIG 3
& the ILLUSTRIOUS
MOTOWN
RECORDS
IS NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE.

During the downfall of Detroit's auto industry, whites basically deserted the city; today, whites make up a little over 10 percent of Detroit's population. Although Detroit is still home to the Big Three, the population has shrunk to 886,000, job opportunities have dwindled, and the city is encumbered with useless, old factory buildings and once-thriving businesses that are now as desolate as the population. Currently, there are about 150,000 vacant or abandoned buildings and 38% of residents live under the poverty line and the city's median income is less than \$27,000.

Detroit may be burning but not everything is in flames. Midtown and downtown Detroit seem to be in the clouds in comparison to the rest of Detroit. With the new money being thrust into downtown Detroit, it has begun its revival. With Mike Ilitch and even more specifically Dan Gilbert, downtown Detroit has had an influx of tourists and more importantly jobs and with these jobs, new residents.

Billionaires\$ in THE

Reviving downtown Detroit started with Mike Ilitch and is carried on by Dan Gilbert. Mike Ilitch, owner of the Little Caesars Pizza franchise and Olympia Entertainment, owns two Detroit sports teams (Detroit Red Wings and Detroit Tigers, funding the new Comerica Park in 2000), Fox Theater, and Fox Office Centre. In 1996, he established Olympia Development to promote development in Detroit. With Olympia Development, he plans to create District Detroit – a world-class sports and entertainment district that “will transform dozens of blocks of underutilized land, connect Midtown to downtown Detroit and deliver an expected \$1.8 billion economic impact to the city, region and state.”¹ He presumably started with the recently created Little Caesars Arena downtown for the Detroit Red Wings.

The primary contributor is billionaire Dan Gilbert, owner of Quicken Loans, Rocket Mortgage, and the NBA’s Cleveland Cavaliers. Gilbert currently owns or controls 78 downtown properties, bought the naming rights for the M-1 Rail streetcar, and received Mayor Duggan’s blessing to “build at least 300 residential apartments

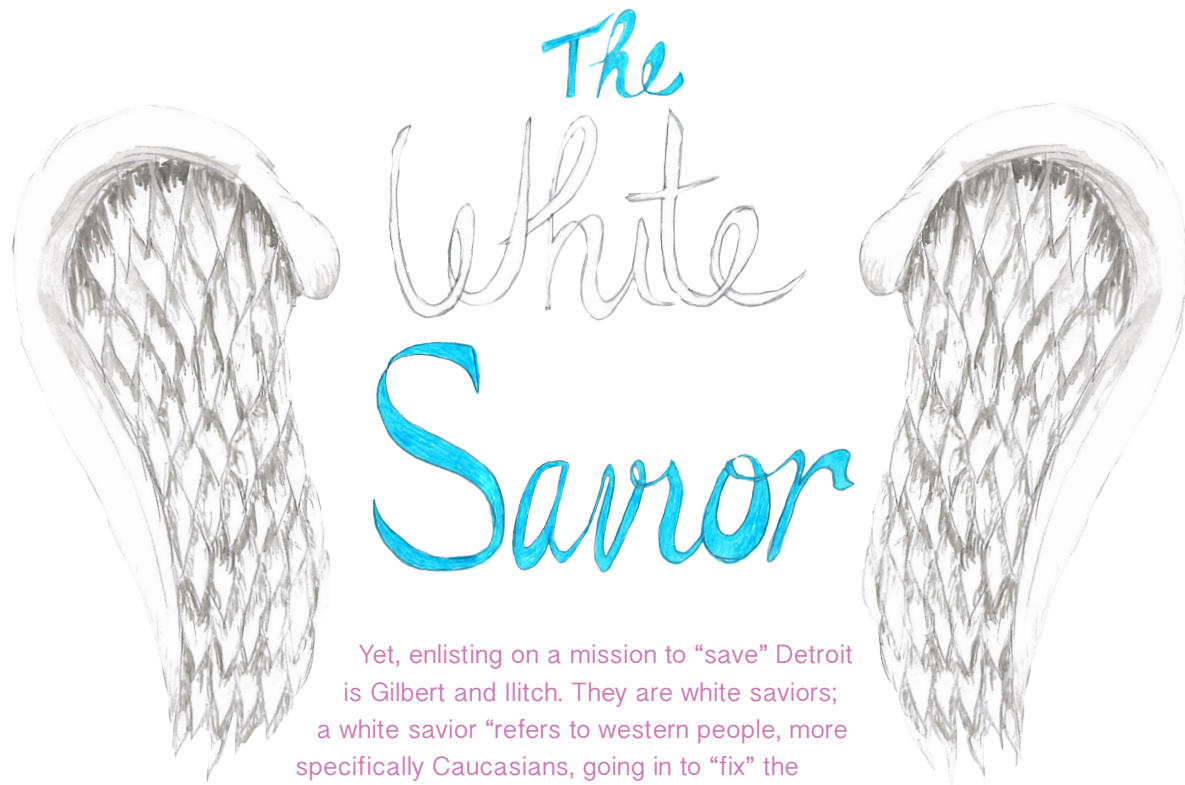
¹ Ilitch Companies, “Our Story,” Ilitch Companies, unknown, accessed August 4, 2016, <http://www.ilitchcompanies.com/our-story-2.asp>

on a 8.4 acre tract in the Brush Park district.”² “These billionaires of Detroit, along with the leaders of the car companies and the nonprofits they fund, have used their influence to build billions of dollars’ worth of infrastructure.”³ In the last few years, through his more than \$1.5 billion in private investment, Gilbert has drawn new people and attention to downtown Detroit so much so that a Nike store was recently opened and an Apple store is going to follow.

Unfortunately, the new money is only spent on a small portion of Detroit and only improves the lives of a few. Detroit is 138.7 square miles yet only 7.2 square miles of it is being used and these miles are only downtown. Majority of the residents aren’t benefiting from the improvements in downtown and Midtown – it is

² John Gallagher, “Five years in, and Dan Gilbert is just beginning,” *Detroit Free Press*, unknown, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2015/08/15/quicken-bedrock-dan-gilbert-cavsdan-detroit-downtown-buildings-hudsons-apple-store-retails/31742621/>

³ Peter Moskowitz, “The two Detroits: a city both collapsing and gentrifying at the same time,” *The Guardian*, February 5, 2013, accessed January 13, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/feb/05-/detroit-city-collapsing-gentrifying>



Yet, enlisting on a mission to “save” Detroit is Gilbert and Iltch. They are white saviors; a white savior “refers to western people, more specifically Caucasians, going in to “fix” the problems of struggling nations or people of color without understanding their history, needs, or the region’s current state of affairs.”¹ Although it is basically common knowledge that Detroit needs help, downtown does not need this remodel. Detroit needs to be fixed on deeper levels than tourism and new residents. It needs reforms in the government and education. If they truly want to “save” Detroit, give to those causes. The truth is they aren’t “saviors” but businessmen. They bought up cheap real estate and repurposed the spaces to make a profit off of their investments.

¹ Urban Dictionary, “White Savior,” Urban Dictionary, March 8, 2012, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=White%20savior>



These men bestowed with their white privilege are allowed these opportunities to “save” Detroit. White privilege is the societal advantages, obvious and passive advantages that benefit Caucasians. White privilege flourishes through intersectionality; intersectionality examines the affects and effects of the interconnection between social and political factors on minorities. Whiteness and masculinity sit at the top of the privilege standards in America. If you don’t believe so, think of how and by whom America was built. The founders were not only all men but white as well. The laws and the treatment of people ensured their privilege. Women, more specifically white women, had very little rights – they could not own property, only their fathers or husbands could, and they could not vote. People of color had virtually no rights and were disrespected, neglected, and abused by people in privilege/white people. Although throughout history, many whites have supported and stood up for civil rights and LGBTQ causes, it does not prevent their whiteness from giving them superior advantages in society.

How do white privilege and the white savior complex work as a benefit? These men come in with billions of dollars and are not questioned on their intentions because of this white privilege. They are allotted the benefit of not being questioned, allowing for their investments to flourish. With no end or restrictions on these billionaires, downtown Detroit will soon become a game of Monopoly. "As downtown's population grows younger and whiter as the core fills up with millennials, many employed by Gilbert, complaints of gentrification or what some have called a "cultural gentrification" have risen."¹

¹ John Gallagher, "Five years in, and Dan Gilbert is just getting going," *Detroit Free Press*, unknown, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://www.freep.com/story/money/business/2015/08/15/quicken-bedrock-dan-gilbert-cavsdan-detroit-downtown-buildings-hudsons-apple-store-retails/31742621/>

Gentrification



The 1st step in liquidating a people ...
is to erase its memory. Destroy its
books, its culture, its history. Then
have somebody write new books,
manufacture a new culture, invest
a new history. Before long the
nation will begin to forget what
it is and what it was. The world
around it will forget even faster.

– Milan Kundera

British sociologist Ruth Glass created the term 'gentry-fication', in 1964. At that time in England, gentry were moving back into London neighborhoods and displacing working class residents. Glass considered gentrification to be a complex urban process that includes the rehabilitation of old housing stock, tenurial transformation from renting to owning, property price increases, and the displacement of working class residents by the incoming middle classes.

Basically, gentrification is an economic, cultural, political, social, and institutional process that transforms a working-class or vacant area of a central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use that is "ready" for new investments and resources.

In gentrification, depressed land values draw investment, which change those values (taxes, rents, and costs) driving people out. In doing so, driving certain people out, typically minorities, change land values usually increasing property values. Not only does the property value increase display the economic side of gentrification, but

the new investments – business, apartment, homes, jobs – that bring new life and money into the city do as well. In gentrification, the rising housing prices (from property value increases) displace many long-term residents; they cannot afford these "rediscovered" neighborhoods. The new residents or newcomers to the city tend to be white and middle /upper-middle class, creating a more visible class divide from the rich and poor.

Therefore, gentrification institutionally whether consciously or unconsciously prompts division and a form of redlining by race and class. Some places have enacted legislation designed directly to encourage rapid rates of gentrification. In a number of cities, for example, tax incentives have been provided to people willing to purchase and renovate older homes in designated areas. Similar legislation designed to encourage historic preservation has also stimulated some gentrification.

There are three primary motives of gentrification. They are (1) economic incentives, (2) personal preferences towards housing and neighborhoods, and (3) ideological factors.

Detroit

has an

UNMISTAKABLE SOUL

Gentrification allows for overall stabilization of declining neighborhoods through increased local fiscal revenues, encouragement, and increased viability of further development, increased property values and reduced vacancy rates (reduction of suburban sprawl, increased social mix). With the rise of new businesses and subsequently job opportunities for locals, there allows for more money to be spent by locals and tourists coming to experience these new businesses that eventually create a “new and improved” Detroit. The image of the “new and improved” Detroit encourages more and more businesses and people to venture into this new hotspot, making the increased idea of further development viable. This newfound Detroit, this new hotspot, causes the property values to increase simply from its hype as well as that part of the new development usually goes into housing – typically improving the housing standards in the area therefore also increasing the cost. The new developments in Detroit usually involve taking the deed/ownership of Detroit’s abandoned buildings, reducing vacancy rates. Vacancy rates are also reduced by the influx of new residents drawn by the promises of job opportunities

and affordable housing. Vacancy rates in downtown Detroit are under 5% and rents are \$200-400 higher than they were a year ago and approaching \$2 per square foot. “Part of the knock-on impact is that residents of these under-serviced areas aren’t ready to take advantage of jobs coming to the city. Residents of Detroit’s outer neighborhoods are not only poorer and worse prepared for jobs than those in the core, where the per capita income of the 36,000 residents is more than \$5,000 higher (\$20,200) than the city as a whole, but young people are about four times less likely to be college educated.”¹ In the neighborhoods outside the downtown core, residents earn an average of 25% less. There is a clear division between the rich and the poor and it’s growing. It’s almost like a bomb and the only safe, sustainable places are Midtown and downtown.

¹ Peter Moskowitz, “The two Detroits: a city both collapsing and gentrifying at the same time,” *The Guardian*, February 5, 2013, accessed January 13, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/feb/05/detroit-city-collapsing-gentrifying>

Often gentrification is only portrayed as good because it is seen as an improvement instead of displacement because the poor and working-class are all too easily defined as “uncivil”, on the wrong side of a heroic dividing line, as savages. They tend to have higher crime rates in urban settings and higher rates of poverty and whether consciously or unconsciously, there then becomes a correlation between the two and poverty and crime become connected, so the savagery of crimes becomes the “fault” of the poverty/poor and their environment. Therefore, the substance and consequence of the frontier imagery is to tame the “wild” city – this monstrous incivility in the heart of the city. “It privileges wealth and whiteness, and reasserts the white Anglo appropriation of urban space and historical memory. And it universalizes the neoliberal principles of governing cities that force poor and vulnerable residents to endure gentrification as a process of colonization by more privileged classes.”¹

In “taming” the city, there are serious downfalls in gentrification. There are four major downfalls to

gentrification: commercial/industrial displacement, loss of affordable housing, cultural displacement, and increased cost and change in local services. Commercial/industrial displacement causes unemployment when in extreme cases can cause homelessness or can make the unemployed move to new cities to ensure their livelihood. Increased rent prices causes loss of affordable housing and can lead to the same outcome as commercial/industrial displacement, where people become homeless or will move to sustain their living. Cultural displacement is a psychological form of displacement where visibility of certain people, typically the outsiders, outshine residents in the media, causing an imbalance in residents’ sense of place, attachment to their communities, and their desire to maintain the city as their home. Increased cost and changes in local services are changes that are forced upon citizens, forcing them to accept that change because there are few options in their area.

¹ Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, Elvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2008).

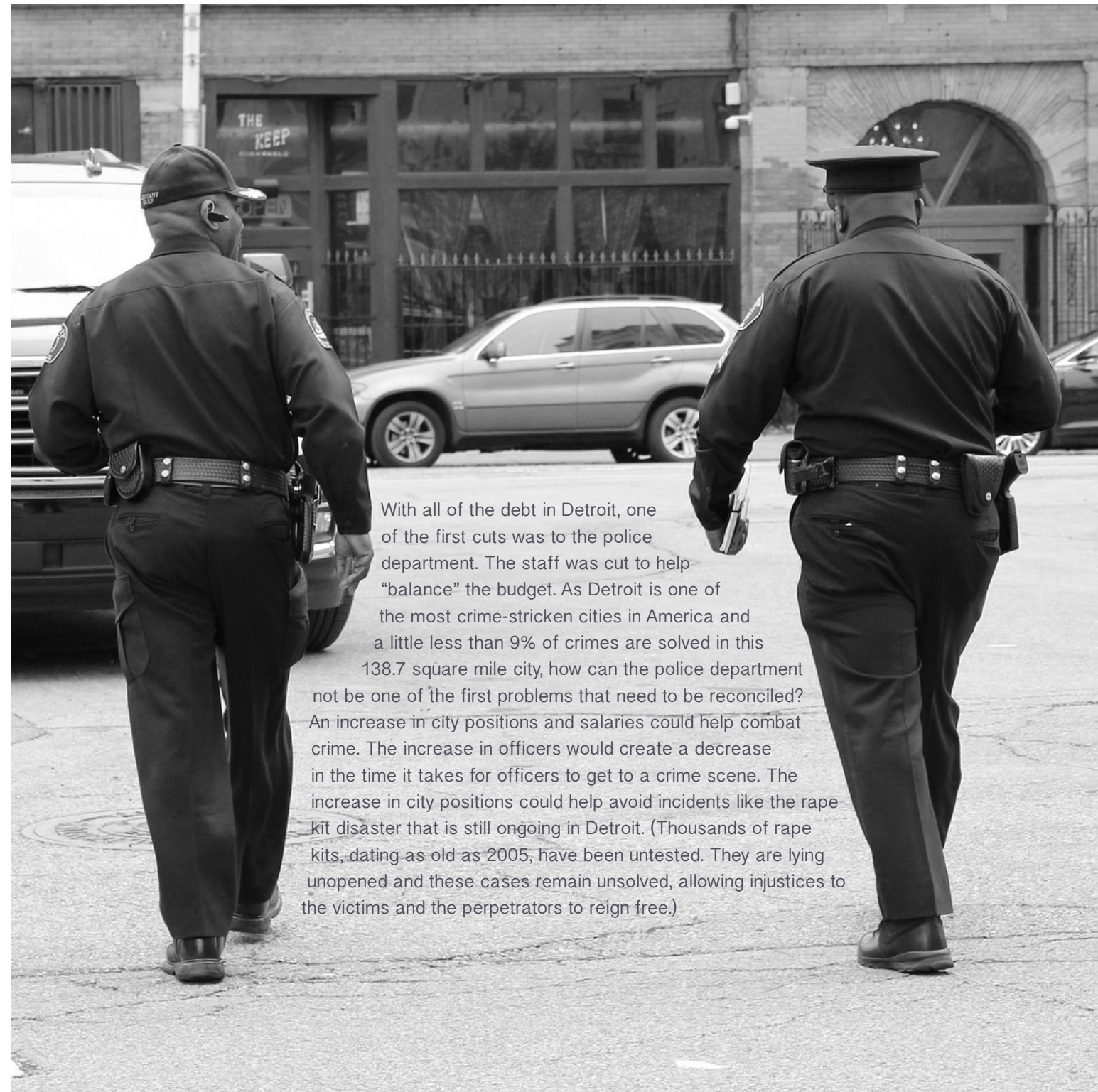
There's
more to
DETROIT
than
DOWNTOWN

Although gentrification has some positive effects and depending on whom you ask they outweigh the negatives, but it definitely will not fix the larger and more pressing issues in Detroit. “(1) The city’s unfunded liabilities top \$18 billion. (2) The city owes money to over 100,000 creditors. (3) Nearly 80,000 buildings have been abandoned and many are unsecured. (4) [The] Population of Detroit has fallen from \$1.86 million in 1950 to 866,000 today. (5) Some 47% of properties are delinquent in paying their taxes. (6) Police take an average of 58 minutes to respond to calls. (7) Only 8.7% of violent crimes are solved and Detroit has [one of] the highest crime rates in [the] US [in its] larger cities. (8) Manufacturing jobs in the city have slid from a peak of 200,000 to just 20,000 today. (9) Only 7% of the city’s eighth graders are proficient in reading. (10) The city manager says its retirement system is underfunded by \$3.5 billion.”¹ Detroit places its future in these pockets of wealth and whiteness and somehow expects gentrification to rescue the

city. Yes, gentrification will help stabilize the city’s tax base, which will help with essential services like cops and firefighters. But it would take an insane amount of gentrifying to have enough money to truly fix the issues that Detroit faces.

Detroit doesn’t need a “new” downtown; Detroit needs money for its debt, police department, and public school system. With all of the debt that Detroit has accumulated, the first priority is reducing/eliminating that. It is a leech to the improvements in the city. Detroit also needs to be brutal to people who own them money – it makes no sense that almost 50% of properties don’t pay their taxes. The money from taxes can really go into helping the city. Maybe Detroit needs to take a page from the president and reduce politicians and city officials’ salaries to help shrink the debt.

¹ [abc.com, “Top 10 Dilemmas Facing Detroit,” abc.com, unknown, accessed July 8, 2016, http://abcnews.go.com/Business/top-10-dilemmas-facing-detroit/story?id=19710933](http://abcnews.go.com/Business/top-10-dilemmas-facing-detroit/story?id=19710933)



With all of the debt in Detroit, one of the first cuts was to the police department. The staff was cut to help “balance” the budget. As Detroit is one of the most crime-stricken cities in America and a little less than 9% of crimes are solved in this 138.7 square mile city, how can the police department not be one of the first problems that need to be reconciled? An increase in city positions and salaries could help combat crime. The increase in officers would create a decrease in the time it takes for officers to get to a crime scene. The increase in city positions could help avoid incidents like the rape kit disaster that is still ongoing in Detroit. (Thousands of rape kits, dating as old as 2005, have been untested. They are lying unopened and these cases remain unsolved, allowing injustices to the victims and the perpetrators to reign free.)

Detroit
IS STILL
STANDING
it has RETAINED its
SOUL it STILL
HAS A
heart &
PULSE

On top of the underfunded police, Detroit's public school system is one of the most deplorable excuses for education. It lacks proper materials to teach and even some competent, committed teachers. School books tend to be out of date and in terrible condition, usually with pages falling out and/or taped up just so the book can stay together. DPS (Detroit public schools) teachers are so overworked, with most class sizes having at least 30 children, and on top of that having such limited resources to teach and continually having to strike just to be paid the meager salary that they make. It is not hard to see why DPS need reforms, but the only way to do that is to restructure its system and unfortunately, its system is heavily reliant on money. Without reforms, the cycle of ignorance will continue and Detroit will never be able to be pulled up by its own residents if only 7% of its residents can understand concepts that go beyond the eighth grade.

With all of the new businesses and people moving to Detroit, the population will eventually rise and the number of abandoned buildings will surely decrease. The abandoned properties will most likely be purchased from the city, making at least some money for Detroit. New jobs opportunities created by new businesses will

help supplement the loss in manufacturing jobs. Although it supplements those jobs, some Detroiters will still be at a loss because they have only been trained in manufacture jobs. But overall, the "new" downtown won't fix Detroit. It will just be a bandage.



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