

Detroit Will be Democracy's Decisive Battle

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Detroit is the battleground chosen by Wall Street to crush the last vestiges of American democracy by creating “the template for direct corporate rule.” Finance capital recognizes that it can no longer coexist with democratic institutions, which are most easily destroyed by attacking Black rule in the cities.

“If we don’t do something real soon, I think you’ll have to agree that we’re going to be forced either to use the ballot or the bullet. It’s one or the other in 1964. It isn’t that time is running out — time has run out!” – Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” Cleveland, Ohio, April 3, 1964.

A half-century after the man once known as Detroit Red spoke those words, the last grains of sand are trickling from the hour glass of what has passed for democracy in America. The principle of one-person, one vote – or any meaningful franchise, at all – is no longer operative for the majority of Black people in the state of Michigan, whose largely African American cities are run by emergency managers accountable to no one but Rick Snyder, the venture capitalist in the governor’s mansion. The same bell is tolling for every urban center in the land, as hegemonic finance capital creates the template for direct corporate rule through the systematic destruction of Detroiters’ citizenship rights.

The 82 percent Black metropolis has been reduced to a [Bantustan](#) in both the economic and political senses of the term. Surrounded by some of the richest counties in the nation, the impoverished city exemplifies a national racial wealth gap that is more profound than that which existed in South Africa at the height of apartheid, as detailed by Jon Jeter in this issue of BAR (See “[Worse Than Apartheid: Black in Obama’s America](#)”). The Emergency Manager law, passed by the Republican state legislature after rejection by voters in a referendum, makes the Bantustan analogy complete, with a Black corporate lawyer overseeing the dismantling of every mechanism of local democracy. Kevyn Orr’s ascension as plenipotentiary of Wall Street is also the ultimate logic of the most vulgar current of African American politics, which seeks only Black *representation* at the highest levels of power, no matter whose interests are served. Wall Street long ago scoped this Black weakness, and has exploited it at every political level.

Detroit’s dissolution also sounds the death knell for a generation’s dreams of authentic “Black Power” through purely electoral means in collaboration with corporate “renaissance” schemes. The Black masses have never been envisioned as part of any “renewal” of the cities under corporate auspices. Rather, investment is contingent on Black disempowerment and removal – the corporate axiom from which the Emergency Manager regime logically flows. Barack Obama, as loyal (and lawyerly) a servant of the banks as Orr, accepts the validity of the premise, which is why he raises no principled objection to Detroit’s

disenfranchisement, either in its particulars or as a model for urban America.

The drama unfolds in bankruptcy court, a venue whose rules were written almost entirely by the financial capitalist class. By virtue of the Emergency Manager law, Detroit is represented in court by its nemesis, Kevyn Orr – which is like imposing Newt Gingrich as chief counsel for the NAACP. (The Detroit NAACP seeks to halt the proceedings on voting rights grounds.) Orr's office is referred to as "the city" in both legal terms and by idiot corporate media, who confuse the public by reporting, as did Detroit PBS correspondent Christy McDonald, this week, that the issue is "whether *the city* can go ahead with its bankruptcy" process. In fact, hardly an elected official or candidate exists that openly supports bankruptcy, especially under Kevyn Orr's terms (Detroit holds a meaningless mayoral and council [election](#), next week).

Orr may be the most hated man in Detroit – a fact that would be noted by every media outlet in the nation, if the metropolis were largely white. But the Detroit model for democracy's demolition is depicted as a white supremacist morality play, in which corruption and incompetence are the inevitable fruits of Black majority rule, which must be extirpated by any means necessary. White Americans, in general, can be distracted by the slightest hint of ghetto graffiti from seeing their own futures written on the wall.

Kevin Orr, ensconced in a \$5,000 per month luxury penthouse condominium paid for by one of Governor Snyder's private slush funds with contributions from secret corporate donors, is building the template for urban democratic dissolution from scratch. He is a crude and unimaginative man, doing Wall Street's bidding with little finesse in the bright light of day. His arrogance is buttressed by the certainty that he is backed by the real rulers of the American State, Wall Street, and that the outcome in Judge Steven Rhodes' federal bankruptcy court will create precedent to render all of America's cities servile and neutered. Orr is also aware that his coloration provides perfect cover for his mission – added value for his services, well worth the luxury suite. (The judge ruled that Orr's accommodations were irrelevant to the case.)

First-responders, revered in the post-911 United States, are crucified along with the rest of the city rabble. Orr ejected 8,000 city retirees under age 65 from their city-paid \$605 per month [health insurance](#), including [police](#) and [firefighters](#). The state constitution specifically forbids [impairing pensions](#), which average only \$18,000 a year, yet Orr testified that he thinks federal law allows him to override those protections. He and the governor, who was subpoenaed by unions, both claimed they didn't start out wanting to bankrupt the city – but why would Snyder hire bankruptcy lawyer Orr unless that were the intention? The lying duo claimed they never conspired to push Detroit into the venue, and that it was the unions that refused to negotiate in good faith. Apparently, "good faith" means negotiating away rights guaranteed by law.

Orr admitted that he never even raised the subject of getting the state to help Detroit out of its fiscal difficulties. And, why would he? His mission is not to save the city, but to break it into auctionable pieces and to garnishee its remaining revenue streams for bankers. His opening fiscal reorganization plan would pay off Bank of America and UBS, who have already made millions on a 2005 derivatives scheme with the city, establishing Britain's Barclay's Bank as the [super-priority creditor](#) with dibs on \$4 million a month in Detroit casino revenues if the city defaults.

To ensure that the city can never escape the clutches of capital, the contract would allow

Barclay's to immediately declare Detroit in default if Emergency Financial Manager rule is ended for any reason - that is, the corporate plan calls for the permanent cessation of democracy in Detroit.

That's the plan for the whole country. Wall Street recognizes that it cannot effectively consume the public sphere as long as the public retains the electoral democratic mechanisms to stop it. In other words, concentrated capital can no longer coexist with even the thin gruel of American democracy. The Black polity is the weakest link in the U.S. democratic armor. White folks won't protect it, and Black folks have the least resources to defend it. The generals of Wall Street have purposely chosen Detroit as the decisive battleground, where the power of massed capital will be hyper-charged by an endemic, unreconstructed racism that can reliably be expected to deny that democracy is really at stake, at all. It's just, you know - "the Blacks."

And even some Black folks will agree.

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