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Resettling the City? Settler Colonialism, Neoliberalism, and Urban Land in Winnipeg, Canada

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RESETTLING THE CITY? SETTLER COLONIALISM, NEOLIBERALISM, AND URBAN LAND IN WINNIPEG, CANADA

by

OWEN TOEWS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Earth and Environmental Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2015
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Earth and Environmental Sciences to satisfy the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

RESETTLING THE CITY? SETTLER COLONIALISM, NEOLIBERALISM, AND URBAN LAND IN WINNIPEG, CANADA

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Owen Toews

Adviser: Dr. Setha Low

This dissertation considers the making of a single twenty-first century city – Winnipeg, Canada - and how the current dominant development vision conserves longstanding power relations that have shaped Canada’s Prairie West for over one hundred and fifty years. It situates a neoliberal city-center redevelopment authority within a much longer regional history of encounter between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, to produce an extended historical materialist geography of settler colonialism in the Prairie West. In doing so, it goes against dominant accounts that break apart imperial conquest from urban history or contemporary urban processes. It demonstrates how neoliberal restructuring of Native urban space both extends settler-colonial dispossession and derives tangible economic value from the disappearance of Native life.
For my parents, Neal and Miriam.
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

With this dissertation I consider the making of a single twenty-first century city – Winnipeg, Canada - and how the current dominant development vision conserves longstanding power dynamics that have shaped this segment of Turtle Island\(^1\) for over one hundred and fifty years. Winnipeg is a Native city: It is home to one of the largest and fastest-growing urban Indigenous populations in the world. Indigenous politics and dynamics of colonial encounter increasingly shape every aspect of urban life there. But while it may be one of the most visible examples, the dynamic is not specific to Winnipeg. Like so much of the world’s population, Indigenous peoples all over the world have migrated to cities at an accelerated pace over the last fifty years. Over half of Indigenous peoples in Canada now live in cities, and urban processes and policies have become an important site of encounter between Indigenous peoples and the state.\(^2\)

My primary empirical focus is the city-center redevelopment authority that Winnipeg’s City Council established in 1999. CentreVenture, as the authority is called, exhibits many of the hallmarks of neoliberal governance that have come to dominate cities worldwide in recent decades: It is a private corporation with little in the way of public accountability, created and financed by the local state; it privatizes public land, money, and buildings, redistributing these resources upward to wealthy land developers for the production of exclusive spaces for affluent people, in the name of regional progress; and it utilizes recent innovations in urban governance – such as the “enterprise zone” and tax increment financing (TIF) – to do so. But CentreVenture is only the most recent in a long line of dominant regional development visions that have concentrated power in the hands of a few and ensured that a vast range of human needs have gone unmet in the Prairie West.

\(^1\) The continent also known as North America.
My intention is to ground an analysis of CentreVenture and contemporary urban
development in general within a much longer regional historical geography of encounter between
Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on this segment of Turtle Island, and in doing so to
produce an extended historical geography of settler colonialism in a particular region. This will
reveal how recent trends in urban governance and redevelopment tackle and modify human
geographies produced over hundreds of years. This perspective allows us to understand how the
latest city making techniques are used not only to ensure ongoing capital accumulation and
profitability of urban space, but also how they are deployed to conserve both the dominance of
established regional powerbrokers and the endurance of regional dynamics of whiteness and
white supremacy. I situate my research among those working to understand how a process we
sometimes call “settler colonialism” produces material human geographies in the present; as well
as those interested in how “neoliberal cities” are actually made and experienced in specific
contexts, and how thinking about recent fashions in city making may fit into a larger world
historical picture.

I ground my understanding of the inter-connections between settler colonialism and
neoliberalism within the concept of racial capitalism developed by Cedric Robinson, who has
shown us how race and racialism – as well as slavery, genocide, and imperialism - have been
incorporated into capitalist development from the very beginnings of capitalist society. “The
development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial
directions, so too did social ideology”, Robinson writes in Black Marxism, “As a material force,
then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent
As such, Robinson demonstrates that capitalist social and economic categories - such as class – have always been viewed in racial terms.

The term settler colonialism describes the political, social, historical, and geographical process through which powerful interests partition humanity into “Natives” and “settlers” while seeking to dispossess Native peoples and replace them on their own lands. Scholars differentiate settler colonialism in countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand from franchise colonialism in “postcolonial” or “third world” countries. While there are many parallels between franchise and settler colonialism, Elkins and Pedersen offer a few important distinctions. In settler societies, according to Elkins and Pedersen, settlers form the majority of the population and have significant political independence from the imperial metropole. Settlers’ relationship to Indigenous peoples in settler colonies also differs significantly from franchise colonies. In territories where settlers intend to make a permanent home - “while continuing to enjoy metropolitan living standards and political privileges” - Elkins and Pedersen suggest, settlers wish “less to govern indigenous [sic] peoples or to enlist them in their economic ventures, than to seize their land and push them beyond an ever-expanding frontier of settlement”.

This production of Indigenous peoples as expendable – or, to go further, as Andrea Smith and Patrick Wolfe do, as fundamentally threatening to settlement - is an important defining characteristic of settler colonialism. A central aspect of Andrea Smith’s theorizing in *Conquest*, drawing on Ann Stoler’s work, is the idea that Indigeneity, and especially Native women as

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5 Ibid., 2.
agents of the reproduction of Indigeneity, “are bearers of a counter imperial order and pose a supreme threat to the dominant culture” and therefore are frequent targets of colonial control. Elkins and Pedersen, Wolfe, and Smith thus posit that Indigeneity and Indigenous peoples fundamentally trouble colonial settlement and its reproduction.

A central aspect of the above assumptions is the notion that settler colonial projects value Indigenous land over and above Indigenous labor. Land is at the heart of every colonial project, as Edward Said asserts: “the actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about”. Building on postcolonial literatures, Patrick Wolfe agrees on this point: “Whatever settlers may say”, Wolfe argues, “the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory”. In developing his theory of the settler colonial “logic of elimination”, moreover, Wolfe posits that Native societies are targeted for dissolution under settler colonialism – through military conquest, assimilation, and other processes- primarily because they obstruct settlers’ access to land. Therefore, Wolfe suggests, “territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element”.

The fact that bodies, lands, and peoples marked as Indigenous are troubling to white settlers intent on developing, profiting through, and establishing sovereign power over land, has prompted settlers (often utilizing the institutions of the settler state) to develop a range of strategies and tactics across space and time to mitigate the threatening aspects of Indigeneity. A central objective of the literature on settler colonialism has therefore been the identification and description of the ways in which settler colonialism as a process has manifested and perpetuated itself over space and time. Scholars of settler colonialism have inquired as to the various modes

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7 Smith, *Conquest*, 15.
8 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 78.
of power employed to achieve the ends of settler colonizers by asking such questions as: How do settlers conquer\textsuperscript{10}, rule\textsuperscript{11}, and dispossess?\textsuperscript{12} Following Ann Stoler\textsuperscript{13}, among others, scholars of settler colonialism have asked what strategies, practices, discourses, apparatuses, and technologies are assembled and deployed through such a process? The state\textsuperscript{14}, the reserve\textsuperscript{15}, and the map\textsuperscript{16}, for example, have been analyzed in relation to the settler colonial project, while others have examined the role of sexual violence\textsuperscript{17}, private property\textsuperscript{18}, and liberal multiculturalism\textsuperscript{19} in initiating, extending, and naturalizing settlement and Indigenous dispossession.

There is some danger, however, as Mary Renda reminds us, in sticking too narrowly to the “strategies of rule” lens.\textsuperscript{20} Renda argues that formations described as such tend actually to be “both more and less than “strategies of rule” – more because they do more than underwrite domination and less because they are not all that is needed for that domination to be effected”.\textsuperscript{21} Renda further suggests that such formations be understood in relation to the “particular histories of resistance that have shaped those strategies”.\textsuperscript{22} “Strategies of rule” do not merely circulate fully formed. Rather they are relatively unique products forged through interactions with particular histories and contexts.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10} Smith, \textit{Conquest}.
\textsuperscript{11} Simpson, “Captivating Eunice: Membership, Colonialism, and Gendered Citizenships of Grief.”
\textsuperscript{12} Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire.”
\textsuperscript{13} Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies.”
\textsuperscript{14} Alfred, “Colonialism and State Dependency.”
\textsuperscript{15} Adams, \textit{Prison of Grass}; Smith, \textit{Liberalism, Surveillance, and Resistance}.
\textsuperscript{16} Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire.”
\textsuperscript{17} Smith, \textit{Conquest}; Razack, “Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice.”
\textsuperscript{18} Blomley, \textit{Unsettling the City}.
\textsuperscript{19} Povinelli, \textit{The Cunning of Recognition}; Morgensen, \textit{Spaces Between Us}.
\textsuperscript{20} Renda, “Sentiments of a Private Nature.”
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 887.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 885.
\end{flushright}
In attempting to pull together a coherent framework for settler colonial inquiry, Patrick Wolfe calls for scholars of settler colonialism to chart the “continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures” through which the settler colonial logic of elimination “transmutes into different modalities, discourses, and institutional formations” across space and time.\(^{23}\) Many scholars of contemporary settler colonialism have effectively attempted to do just this, most often from political science or cultural studies perspectives. Elizabeth Povinelli announces a contemporary era of “liberal settler multiculturalism”\(^{24}\); Glen Coulthard argues current strategies of the Canadian settler state employ “the politics of recognition” to co-opt anticolonial struggles\(^{25}\); Morgensen following Puar critiques the “settler homonationalism” of contemporary queer political formations\(^{26}\); and Gibney et al describe the settler colonial present as an “age of apology”.\(^{27}\) What all four have in common is the notion that contemporary settler colonial nation states, often having acknowledged the wrongheadedness of de jure racist policies, increasingly respond to Native struggles for decolonization by bestowing on Indigenous peoples the same rights, freedoms, and protections that settler ethnic and cultural groups are granted within the framework of the settler nation state. This approach is theorized as a strategy that settler nation-states pursue in order to appear modern and enlightened while obfuscating ongoing processes of violence, exclusion, and dispossession. My research aims to build on the above theorists’ work and contribute specifically to an understanding of the new *material geographies* that are produced alongside such innovations in discourse and governance.

\(^{23}\) Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 402.
\(^{24}\) Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition*.
\(^{25}\) Coulthard, “Subjects of Empire.”
\(^{26}\) Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*.
\(^{27}\) Gibney, *The Age of Apology*. 
My work answers geographer Cole Harris’ call for studies of historically and
geographically situated settler colonialism that go beyond theorizing colonial logics in the
abstract.28 “Settler colonialism” is not something fixed, to be pinned down according to
immutable logics, but a process that shapes and is shaped by dynamic, shifting historical
geographies in different times and places. Henri Lefebvre’s socio-spatial dialectic is a useful
analytic with which to approach such a historical-geographical materialist account of settler
colonialism.29 Social processes, according to Lefebvre, produce space, while space
simultaneously conditions social processes. Wolfe’s injunction to study the historical unfolding
of settler colonialism is well suited to Lefebvre’s formulation. Indeed, recalling Lefebvre’s
argument that each society, mode of production, or process of liberation must produce its own
space, one way of answering Wolfe’s call is to trace the material production of settler-colonial
space. As a social process, following Lefebvre, settler colonialism can be viewed as productive
of material spaces that have consequences for the future extension or contestation of settler
colonial social relations.

Methods

Influenced strongly by Clyde Woods’ approach in Development Arrested, I structure this
dissertation chronologically, using Woods’ concept of the “dominant regional development
vision” as a guiding framework. Woods’ use of the concept is intended to demonstrate that
dominant development visions are not merely technocratic strategies to maximize economic
growth; rather, they are political strategies to preserve social domination and often-deadly
patterns of inequality. In the first two chapters, I use secondary historical literature to tell the
story of how four successive development visions – agricultural, urban industrial, suburban, and

28 Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire.”
29 Lefebvre, The Production of Space.
urban post-industrial - achieved dominance from the mid nineteenth century until the brink of the twenty-first. I highlight the major political and economic dynamics that contributed to the rise of each development agenda; the human geographies they produced; and the discourses deployed to justify them.

My reading of this literature combines Harris’ attention to the on-the-ground workings of settler colonialism with geographer Clyde Woods’ concept of the ‘dominant regional bloc’. Following Woods’ example, I show how large-scale geographical restructurings were achieved by the consolidation and coordination of regional interests in response to conditions shaped at multiple scales. This reading purposely avoids positing an historical break between a prior era of ‘colonization’ and a present moment in which ‘colonialism’ is supposedly past. Instead, I give attention to the ways in which relations of dominance endured, in ever-evolving formations, over the course of one hundred and fifty years.

In the final four chapters I focus on the urban post-industrial redevelopment agenda as animated by CentreVenture during the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century. To understand the emergence of CentreVenture, I analyze Winnipeg city planning documents to reveal the specific geographical conditions, understandings, and priorities underlying the authority’s creation. I use in-depth interviews with CentreVenture employees and political staff from the time to supplement this understanding, using their recollections to add depth and texture to my historical account. Analyzing the local media response, I show how the agenda was sold publicly using a range of politicized geographical constructions.

I then trace CentreVenture’s activities as the authority restructured three separate city-center districts in successive moments. To do this, I analyze CentreVenture’s own planning documents and annual reports; Winnipeg City Council minutes and transcripts; asset agreements
between CentreVenture and the City of Winnipeg; and media coverage of CentreVenture’s efforts. I highlight who gained access to land, money, and power through CentreVenture’s activities, and who did not. Most importantly, I show how CentreVenture was able to achieve the conservation of inequitable power-relations and resource distributions through a variety of technical, political, and discursive maneuvers carried out by planners, politicians, and media.

In each of the final four chapters I combine the above mode of analysis with ethnographic methods – interviews, participant observation, and physical traces mapping - conducted over the summer of 2013 and the winter of 2014. In the summer of 2013 I moved to CentreVenture’s Waterfront Drive district, living there for one month and getting to know several of my neighbors in a luxury condo building. From these conversations – and in-depth interviews – I gained an understanding of how luxury condo residents understood their migration to the area; the role it plays in their autobiographies; and how they see themselves in relation to the broader city-center population, especially the Native communities there. I also spent this time conducting participant observation in the public spaces of Waterfront Drive, hanging out, talking to people, and attending community events. This research provides an expanded understanding – beyond the usual state and media accounts - of the breadth of the community that uses and produces Waterfront Drive, giving a concrete example of how CentreVenture’s discourses, planning processes, and built environment exclude many of the actual inhabitants of the the areas it targets.

In chapter four, I follow CentreVenture’s migration to the city’s Main Street ‘strip’ – a low-income, predominantly Indigenous district a stone’s throw from Waterfront Drive. To construct a sense of the district’s recent history, I read the poetry of the Manitoba Indigenous Writers Collective (MIWC) for an understanding of how the Collective’s work constructs city-
center Winnipeg – and Main Street in particular - as a place of major significance to contemporary Indigenous geographies and lived experiences. Conversations and in-depth interviews with members of the Collective provide a deeper understanding of this historical geography, including the long history of segregation and attacks on Native spaces in Winnipeg. To conclude this section, I read the public statements of city-center Indigenous activists who resisted CentreVenture’s installation of an evangelical Christian youth center on the strip, deploying a critique of the dominant development vision and bringing to the surface key priorities and worldviews influencing the dominant bloc’s urban interventions.

In chapter five, I utilize ethnographic data to construct an expanded understanding of dynamics on the ground in an area newly targeted by CentreVenture. Engagements with CentreVenture planners, real estate agents, and government functionaries reveal an expanded geographical agenda of displacement and policing in this period that relies especially strongly on discourses of urban death and danger. I pursued further ethnographic engagement to counter these discursive claims, conducting participant observation in the public spaces of CentreVenture’s new Sports, Hospitality, and Entertainment District (SHED). This research showed how existing city-center residents use and produce space for a variety of everyday purposes, suggesting an alternative consideration of stigmatized spaces as human, valuable, and ordinary.

For the sixth chapter, I conducted a range of interviews and observed physical traces in the built environment to reveal a landscape of competing long-term visions for the region’s future. Through observation of the downtown landscape I highlight physical traces of a ‘future city’ – of luxury and recreation for the city’s professional classes - emerging within the old. I then use data from a series of interviews with government planners in the provincial Manitoba
government to detail how the state – even its purported social-democratic guise – justifies this development vision as the only way towards regional competitiveness and economic strength. Data from interviews with six community organizers in one city-center Winnipeg neighborhood show this agenda is experienced and critiqued by existing city-center communities. Finally, another mode of physical traces observation shows how the existing city-center landscape is inscribed with representations of potential counter development visions. Participant observation in the urban spaces crafted by the Idle No More movement in Winnipeg in 2013 and 2014 provide additional insight into the human geography of alternative development visions in the city.

Outline

In this section I will provide a summary outline of the main narrative threads of this dissertation. Chapter one details the emergence of an agricultural development vision for the Prairie West, beginning with the growth of the Western expansionist movement in the Ottawa valley and Toronto in the 1850s. A small group of powerful Anglo-Saxon men – who would come to be known as “Western expansionists” - in Ottawa and Toronto crafted a development vision for what came to be known as the “Prairie West” that would transform it from a fur-trade economy to an export-agricultural region. The expansionists were of the same background and class position as the Anglo male railway capitalists, merchants, real estate capitalists, and newspapermen that would eventually prosper in and dominate the Prairie West under the new development agenda. In the wake of the global economic crisis of the 1850s, the expansionists proposed seizing formal control of Rupert’s Land – a gigantic territory between the Great Lakes and Rocky Mountains - from the Hudson’s Bay Company and turning it into a frontier of agricultural settlement that would produce crops for the world market and function as a new
consumer base for commodities manufactured in the east. According to the expansionists’ vision, Rupert’s Land would be annexed along with British Columbia to secure British control over a northern segment of Turtle Island from coast to coast.

The expansionists faced opposition from their peers in Ottawa and Toronto, who had long ascribed little value to the region and resisted the expensive infrastructural outlays the expansionists’ development vision would require. Most Ontarians thought of the Prairie West as unfit for white civilization - a backwards, impoverished place best left to an inferior race of people. But through the production and circulation of new geographical knowledge, the expansionists were able to convince more and more people of the promise of settling Rupert’s Land. New scientific expeditions found that the region’s soils and climate were well suited to agriculture, defying long held beliefs that the area was an arid, frozen wasteland.

Western expansionists capitalized on geopolitical events to convince British and Canadian powerbrokers of the urgency of settling Rupert’s Land. After the U.S. acquired Alaska in 1867, expansionists warned their countrymen that the future of British rule on the continent would depend on the expedited annexation and development of Rupert’s Land. Without a strong British presence from coast to coast, expansionists argued, the U.S. could seize Rupert’s Land to create a contiguous American territory while isolating Upper Canada from British Columbia and making the prospect of total U.S. domination over Turtle Island much more likely. In this way, expansionists positioned their development agenda for the Prairie West as crucial to the future of the entire Dominion of Canada. They were successful - by the end of 1867, western expansion was official policy in Ottawa.

The new official development vision required huge amounts of work on the part of the state. Much was required to get the region ready for white settlement, including the land survey;
military conquest of existing inhabitants and subsequent treaty negotiations; Indian reserves; a regional police force; railroad construction; and new administrative offices. But even with this infrastructure in place and free land made available by the Dominion Lands Act (DLA) white settlers did not flood the area nearly as intensely as they had other segments of Turtle Island. The region was far less accessible than the American frontier, and old images of the area as a frozen wasteland died hard. As a result, an exceptional amount of work was steered toward promoting the region and recruiting settlers from around the world. State officials made the task much more difficult by adhering to a racial hierarchy of “suitable settlers” and going to great lengths to establish an Anglo-Saxon human geography in the Prairie West.

From its inception, the expansionists’ development vision excluded Indigenous inhabitants of the region. The plan to restructure the regional economy from fur-trade to agrarian capitalism rendered Indigenous labor – which had been indispensable to the fur-trade – newly expendable. While many Indigenous peoples resisted agricultural restructuring, preferring to maintain traditional hunting and trapping economies, even those Indigenous peoples who attempted to negotiate for inclusion in the new agricultural regime were largely excluded. The state was far more interested in attracting people from elsewhere who already possessed agricultural knowledge than in developing those skills among the region’s existing residents.

Racial concepts were used to deny Indigenous nations full participation in the new regional development agenda, and to initiate an apartheid geography that kept Indigenous peoples physically separated from the emerging white Prairie West. Indigenous communities were forcibly relocated off of valuable land intended for whites, and on to “Indian Reserves” away from the path of white settlement. Dominion of Canada mercenaries, the North West Mounted Police (NWMP), and a network of Indian Agents attempted to contain Indigenous
peoples within the boundaries of Indian Reserves through both sanctioned and unsanctioned violence. An agenda of assimilation – most notably pursued through the abduction and incarceration of Indigenous children in Indian Residential Schools – was implemented in an attempt to eradicate Indigenous identities altogether.

Although the Canadian state was not able to recruit as many whites to the Prairie West as it would have liked – the number of settlers never rivaled that of the mid western U.S., as Canadian officials had hoped - the area eventually became one of the greatest grain growing regions in the world. The city of Winnipeg, at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers on the eastern edge of the prairies, emerged as the economic capital of the new agricultural empire – and the political capital of the new Canadian province of Manitoba – processing grain exports and providing the litany of commodities required on the frontier. By the turn of the twentieth century, Winnipeg was home to a small “commercial class” of merchants, businessmen, financiers, and manufacturers who dominated the political life of the region and pushed for and profited from the dominant agricultural development vision, including the apartheid geography that kept whites and Indigenous peoples separated. The symbolic heart of the commercial elite was the Manitoba Club, a British colonial style men’s club constructed a stone’s throw from the Hudson’s Bay Company’s main fort. The location of the Manitoba Club next to the old fort suited a popular settler narrative of progress that traced the conditions of possibility for the booming white commercial city to the conquest of the region’s Indigenous peoples and the move beyond an economic model that relied on them.

In chapter two, I look at how the dominant bloc turned its attentions to three successive urban development agendas in the twentieth century that responded to geographies set forth in turn by each previous agenda. At the turn of the century, the dominant regional bloc pursued an
industrial development vision, seeking to manufacture in Winnipeg commodities being imported from the east. The attraction of the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) - for which the dominant bloc offered enormous public subsidies to the CPR Syndicate - was key to the urban industrial vision. As soon as the CPR was successfully lured to Winnipeg, a local real estate boom made many members of the dominant bloc instant millionaires.

Winnipeg rapidly transitioned from a small merchant-based economy to a booming manufacturing and wholesaling trade that produced an industrial city of factories and warehouses around the city’s first rail yards. Since the region’s original agricultural development agenda depended on offering free land to white settlers, strictly controlling Chinese immigration, and forcing Indigenous peoples to remain on Indian Reserves and attend Indian Residential Schools, urban industrialists required a new source of labor for an urban industrial economy. They found it in Eastern Europe, where they convinced thousands of Poles, Ukrainians, and Russians to migrate to Winnipeg and form a new urban industrial working class.

The newly arrived workers were housed in North End neighborhoods constructed as quickly and cheaply as possible near the rail yards; while capitalists, managerial, and professional classes profited and prospered in South End mansions. The city’s mostly Anglo elites demonized the Eastern European working class as inherently inferior. In 1919, Winnipeg workers brought the conflict to a head by coordinating a general strike that halted capitalism in the city for forty days. The strike prompted the dominant regional bloc to organize in perhaps the most transparent way it ever has, forming a “Committee of One Thousand” to end the strike with the help of the Canadian military, who were deployed in the streets of Winnipeg to defeat the strikers.
Workers with a diversity of ideologies and perspectives participated in the Winnipeg General Strike, but a strong current fought for inclusion within the dominant Anglo-centric settler-colonial industrial development vision. Workers and capitalists alike benefitted from the development vision that had transformed the region and relied on Indigenous death and dispossession. Eastern European migrants who settled Winnipeg’s North End were able to build better lives for themselves and their descendants – while struggling against racist, hyper-exploitative conditions – because of the dispossession of Native peoples from the lands surrounding the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, and from all the land that made industrial capitalism possible on Turtle Island. Many workers bought into the prevailing myths of dominant Canadian settler society – imaginaries of empire, modernity, whiteness, and the inevitability of Indigenous death and dispossession – through political slogans, for example, such as “Britons shall never be slaves.” Over the next several decades, the city’s Eastern European working class broke down many of the barriers of discrimination they faced and integrated with some success into the broader white Anglo city.

At the same time, First Nations peoples experienced often-brutal conditions on Indian Reserves and in Indian Residential Schools. Lands allocated to First Nations through treaties were never designed to provide sufficient livelihoods for a growing Indigenous population – like every action the Canadian state took, land allocations were based on the assumption that Indigenous peoples would die off or be assimilated into white settler society. In any case, Canada systematically broke its treaty promises to First Nations, leaving the latter with even less of an economic base, while mines, dams, and other resource extraction projects disrupted and displaced many Indigenous communities throughout the twentieth century.

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30 Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg.
In the decades after a strict apartheid regime was more or less abandoned by the Canadian state – the “pass system” was rarely enforced after the 1930s\(^\text{31}\) – Indigenous peoples began to migrate to cities in greater and greater numbers, breaking down the segregationist geography of the nineteenth century dominant development vision to a significant extent. White urban dwellers that had known nothing other than the apartheid arrangements of the past - and had grown to view them as necessary and proper, if they thought about them at all - responded with an array of new tactics to manage and control Indigenous peoples moving to cities. They posted “NO INDIANS” signs in storefront windows and refused service to Indigenous peoples, using tactics similar to those of Jim Crow in the U.S. The postwar urban housing market directed Indigenous families into the city’s North End, where a growing Indigenous community took root.

At the same time, the dominant regional bloc crafted a new development vision that would change the face of the city for decades to come. Shifting to a metropolitan-scale of planning and governance, Winnipeg City Council began an aggressive restructuring of the city’s infrastructural investments as part of a new suburban development vision, primarily based on the rise of the automobile and the construction of new intra-urban roadways. Real estate speculators and housing developers, as well as merchants and manufacturers began to shift more and more capital into suburban subdivisions, shopping malls, office and industrial parks on the edges of the city. Whites with money moved to the new suburban neighborhoods, where they were told the future of the city would be found in clean, spacious, wholesome suburban residential and commercial developments based around the nuclear family. In 1972 the amalgamation of twelve separate municipalities into a single municipality - dubbed “Unicity” - shifted the balance of

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\(^{31}\) Barron, “The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West, 1882-1935.”
power on Winnipeg City Council to the suburbs and pushed even more state investment into suburban roads, sewers, parks, schools, and other infrastructure.

This urban economic restructuring and the new human geography it fostered led to a growing sense among suburbanites, newspaper editors, and politicians of the city center “in decline”. Manufacturing capital largely abandoned the old industrial city in favor of suburban industrial parks or the global south. A segment of the dominant regional bloc that depended on city-center profitability - what I call its ‘urban wing’ – started to make a push for state reinvestment in the city center by the 1970s. The urban wing circulated more and more writing about the “decline” of the city center and the broad regional importance of a post-industrial redevelopment vision for that segment of the city.

After a short-lived federal urban renewal program that built a new City Hall and opera house on Winnipeg’s Main Street - as well as the city’s first two public housing projects - the urban wing organized to channel almost $100 million more from the three levels of government into Winnipeg’s city center through a five year plan from 1981 to 1986 that became known as the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative (CAI). The tripartite agreement would be renewed for three more five-year spans in the coming years for a total of $346 million in state funding invested over twenty-seven years in the redevelopment of Winnipeg’s city center.³²

The federal government’s focus on the redevelopment of a single city was unprecedented in North American urban planning – the CAI transported a regional development model to Winnipeg that had previously been applied only to large non-urban regions. Through the CAI, the urban wing brought national attention to the city’s deteriorated built environment and

³² Province of Manitoba, “Tri-Level Agreement to Invest $75 Million into City of Winnipeg.”
impoverished city-center residents, framing Winnipeg’s ‘decline’ as a national crisis. As a result, Winnipeg emerged as the country’s premier ‘troubled city’ in the Canadian popular imagination.

While affordable housing construction had been a major aspect of the federal urban renewal program, the CAI period lasted longer, had more resources, but was much more oriented towards commercial real estate and conspicuous consumption than human need. Material conditions worsened for city-center communities during the CAI era, especially for Indigenous peoples. By 1996, eighty percent of Indigenous households in Winnipeg’s city center had incomes below the low income cut off (LICO) poverty line. Food banks and homeless shelters – previously rare things in Winnipeg – became increasingly common features of the city-center landscape. City-center Indigenous communities formed pan-Native alliances and relationships with other groups to formulate new development visions to improve living conditions in the city, but people-first development visions were rarely able to stretch beyond the neighborhood scale.

The capital-centric city-center development visions of the urban wing maintained a dominant position in the regional context. By the 1990s, however, the urban wing was already casting about for a new development vision. While the CAI regime had created a series of organizations geared towards boosting downtown profitability, it did little to halt the overall suburban orientation of the city’s growth.

In chapter three, I chart the emergence of CentreVenture, the City of Winnipeg’s urban redevelopment authority of the past fifteen years. In a particularly progressive political moment that may have been ripe for state development agendas inspired by the predominantly poor, working class, Indigenous, and people of color communities in the center of Winnipeg, the urban wing of the dominant regional bloc was able to enshrine their own conservative development

33 Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*, 49.
vision once again. The urban wing identified a segmented organizational landscape created during the CAI era – a multiplicity of pro-business city center organizations had been created since the 1970s – and aspired to establish institutional capacity that would stretch over a larger geographical area and endure over a longer period of time than the five-year CAI plans had done. The urban wing allied with a new, charismatic young mayor – Glen Murray - who brought renewed political energy and a progressive sheen to the urban wing’s decades-old vision of retaking the city center for capital and white suburbanites.

Despite his reputation for “thinking outside the box”, Mayor Murray drew heavily from urban wing plans for making downtown attractive to investors through tax breaks, subsidies, free land, and technical assistance that had been drafted decades previous. Murray found a solution to the urban wing’s organizational fragmentation across the border in St. Paul, Minnesota where the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation had supposedly attracted huge amounts of capital to that city’s built environment through public payouts to land developers.

Murray and the urban wing circulated development plans and public statements that established specific normative conceptions about geography and development that ensured the burial of alternative development visions, including those that may have emerged from long excluded communities in the center of Winnipeg. In particular, they used four tactics to ensure that the new development agenda would reproduce the old order. Namely, the urban wing depoliticized development; popularized a revanchist view of the downtown; deployed abstract geographical constructions of space; and enshrined the upward redistribution of public resources through the concept of ‘leveraging investment’. These conceptions were not entirely new, nor entirely old. Instead, they represented new spins on geographical ideas that had dominated the region’s development for over one hundred years.
The development vision that came to dominate overwhelmingly excluded existing residents, catering instead to a set of people – suburbanites, tourists, and wealthy investors – with little previous involvement in the area. Through conversations with people both included and excluded by the CentreVenture development vision, in this chapter I build an analysis of development rooted in particular lived experiences and regional histories.

The plans cited in the creation of CentreVenture, and the newspaper accounts that introduced the authority to the public, were imbued with values and ideas now visible in the built environment produced by CentreVenture. CentreVenture’s Waterfront Drive luxury condominium district was the first major example of how the authority concretely manifested these forces within a newly reconstructed urban landscape. CentreVenture constructed an exclusive, private residential development for a small group of affluent people that became a symbol of generalized civic progress, exemplifying the depoliticized character of the development process. Waterfront Drive was a revanchist success because it brought hundreds of affluent, mostly white professionals to live in an area that had previously been inhabited predominantly by poor Indigenous peoples. The new district was a neoliberal economic success because it attracted hundreds of millions of dollars of private investment capital to an area previously abandoned by capital, at a cost of somewhere between ten to twenty million dollars in public expenditures. The transformation was a success of abstract space in the sense that standard spatial representations – such as land-use maps and property value listings – registered clear improvements.

After demonstrating its power to create the kind of city desired by the urban wing, CentreVenture shifted its energies geographically toward transforming the city’s Main Street strip, a stone’s throw from Waterfront Drive and arguably the most famous urban Indigenous
district in Canada. I begin chapter four by discussing how the Manitoba Indigenous Writers Collective (MIWC), specifically two of its most prominent poets - Marvin Francis and Duncan Mercredi – have established the center of Winnipeg and its Main Street “strip” as a place of deep meaning to contemporary Indigenous peoples. I then give an account of an oral history told to me by Mercredi, detailing the migrations of different groups of Indigenous peoples to Winnipeg in the mid twentieth century, their experiences of segregation in the city, the rise of Winnipeg’s Main Street strip as a diverse new pan-Native urban social space, and subsequent attacks on the strip by City Council’s ‘urban renewal’ schemes.

I then pick up where chapter three left off with CentreVenture, as it moves from Waterfront Drive to Main Street in the late 2000s with a new multi-year development vision for the strip. CentreVenture and the urban wing heightened their free-market, profit-centric rhetoric in this period – through a new plan entitled Heart of Gold - zeroing in on the strip and its inhabitants as the primary barrier against a profitable urban economy. CentreVenture deployed new financing techniques, building demolitions and closures, and increased policing to eventually change the face of the strip, and in doing so, came into direct, dramatic confrontation with coordinated Indigenous opposition.

At the dawn of the 2010s, CentreVenture moved its attention from the Main Street strip to Portage Avenue – which it began to call “Winnipeg’s most significant street.” The urban wing took this moment to reorganize and create a new, shadowy planning body it dubbed the “Downtown Council”. The small “Downtown Council” – consisting exclusively of long-time urban wing members of the dominant regional bloc - would chart CentreVenture’s course in to the next decade. This period heralded a nuanced but significant shift in CentreVenture’s relationship to capital. Rather than investing in infrastructure, destroying existing spaces, and
offering incentives in the uncertain hope of luring potential investors, CentreVenture began to work closely with specific land developers who already had designs on the area. Chapter five details this most recent development vision, in which “investment protection” – rather than attraction – became the authority’s new mantra.

Led by one of Winnipeg’s richest families – the Chipman clan - a segment of Canada’s capitalist class began to take a more serious interest in Winnipeg’s center during the beginning of the 2010s. By 2011, several $100 million-plus hotel and condominium developments were slated for the vicinity of Winnipeg’s MTS Centre hockey arena, on Portage Avenue, where the National Hockey League’s (NHL) new Winnipeg Jets (transplanted from Atlanta) were set to begin a stretch of three consecutive sold-out seasons. Through planning sessions with the “Downtown Council” and the specific developers involved, CentreVenture launched a new “mall management” strategy to clean up the area and reduce the financial risks faced by investors.

CentreVenture’s actions in this phase clearly revealed the racist and geographical character of capitalist risk in the Prairie West. As indicated by CentreVenture’s targeted actions in the early 2010s, the financial risks still faced by capital in Winnipeg’s city center related directly to the human geography of the area consolidated over the previous one hundred and fifty years. On behalf of the Chipmans and other newly arriving land developers, CentreVenture purchased, shut down, and/or demolished several area hotels and bars that had become home predominantly to Indigenous peoples visiting Winnipeg for medical care. The authority worked with commercial landlords to evict or avoid renting to retailers – dollar stores, payday loans outlets - that served existing poor, working class, Indigenous, and people of color communities in the area. And it worked with the municipal government, the provincial government, and the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) to beef up policing of the existing inhabitants of the area, which
CentreVenture now referred to as its Sports, Hospitality, and Entertainment District (SHED). To fund its restructuring of the SHED, CentreVenture convinced the municipal and provincial governments to designate an eleven-block area around the MTS Centre as a tax increment financing (TIF) zone, effectively redirecting area investors’ property taxes away from schools, hospitals, and public infrastructure towards interventions that would “protect” their own investments.

The urban wing amplified its use of demonizing rhetoric in this period to forestall and eliminate places frequented by poor, working class, and Indigenous peoples, referring to these communities as “troublemakers” and “undesirable elements”. Through participant observation in city-center public spaces, however, I pay attention to how such places are in fact far more lively, creative, and ‘family-friendly’ than the official SHED. At the same time, this methodology also reveals how poor, working class and Indigenous city-center spaces that have so far eluded annihilation are subject to intense, frequently violent, and often openly racist surveillance and policing by the urban wing’s constellation of pro-business organizations.

In the sixth and final chapter, I reflect on the ways in which conflicts in Winnipeg’s city center translate as battles over a regional future. The urban wing of the dominant regional bloc, through the formation of alliances, organizational capacity, and strategic plans, struggles to create a new city in which capitalists can find further avenues for accumulation through the production of a sexy, luxurious, futuristic urban lifestyle for the city’s managerial and professional classes. The ultimate vision for the city is represented – before it is realized – in a range of imagery and physical traces on the city’s investment frontier. The production of this emerging city-center landscape is the latest geographical process through which the old order struggles to make itself appear new again – as the bearer of an exciting, progressive regional
future - while conserving the same balance of power and social inequities that have ruled the Prairie West for one hundred and fifty years.

What is exceptional about the current political moment is that a Manitoba government with social-democratic roots has embraced the urban wing’s vision as its own. In interviews with government planners, I detail how the social-democratic state justifies a development agenda that channels state resources towards capital and luxury as the only path towards regional competitiveness and economic strength. Provincial planners primarily justify state support for the dominant development vision by asserting that the plan will have trickle-down benefits for the entire region.

But city-center neighborhood organizers reject the government’s assertion, crafting a counter analysis that prioritizes human need and sees no advantage in the dominant development scheme for the predominantly poor, working class, Indigenous, and people of color neighborhoods in Winnipeg’s city center. Through interviews with community organizers in one city-center neighborhood, I show how this agenda has left intense levels of human need – above all, for food and housing - unmet in Winnipeg’s center. These same organizers articulate an analysis of the dominant development agenda that is distinct from that of the social-democratic state, and is grounded in struggles to meet basic human needs.

In fact, the seeds of a counter development agenda are visible throughout the city center landscape. Alongside the urban wing’s simulacra, existing city-center communities have crafted a landscape replete with voices and images pointing the way toward possible counter development visions. In particular, the enormously powerful Idle No More movement, with its strong base in Winnipeg’s city center, demonstrates that movements for non-capitalist futures – for development visions that are not accumulation strategies - are alive and well in the city.
Moreover, the spaces produced by Idle No More organizers indicate the possibility of new consolidations and alliances between radical and progressive movements that could one day be turned towards the achievement of a more just development agenda.

*Theoretical contributions*

This dissertation integrates two perspectives – geographies of neoliberal gentrification and theories of settler colonialism – to generate new understandings that enrich both modes of understanding the world. By examining the intersection of settler colonization and neoliberalization in Winnipeg, I demonstrate that an account of contemporary settler colonial modes of rule is incomplete without an understanding of how Indigenous dispossession, displacement, and deprivation are exacerbated by contemporary forms of urban governance. On the other hand, I contribute to understandings of urban revanchism, gentrification, and “actually existing neoliberalism”\(^3^4\) that are grounded in and articulate with historical regional dynamics of settler colonialism.

To theories of settler colonialism, I add a grounded material understanding of how Indigenous dispossession is reproduced by post-industrial state-initiated restructuring of urban Native spaces. In so doing, I show how dominant blocs continue to profit from and orchestrate Indigenous dispossession in subnational regional formations. Dominant blocs install urban development visions and tactics of neoliberal urban redevelopment – “arms length” authorities; new taxation schemes; and “enterprize zones” – that keep land out of the possession of large pan-Native urban communities. Neoliberal logics of economic ‘feasibility’ and regional competitiveness cast possession of land - often mere occupation of land - by these communities as impossible, retrograde, toxic, and so forth. Thus, this dissertation spatializes and historicizes

\(^3^4\) Brenner and Theodore, “Cities and the Geographies of ‘actually Existing Neoliberalism.’”
the ongoing settler-colonial production of Native peoples as “internal enemies” – to use Andrea Smith’s reworking of Ann Stoler’s concept. By mapping flows of capital and the state activities that lay the groundwork for such flows, this dissertation shows how the politics of late capitalist geographical encounter forge new settler-colonial discourses and social relations.

I also add an understanding of how dispossessed Indigenous communities threaten the success of neoliberal urban restructuring efforts oriented around merchant and real estate profits. Segregation of dispossessed Indigenous bodies from more economically secure white bodies remains central to dominant development visions in the Prairie West. Coded language – of “troublemakers”, “drunks”, “families”, and “people” - is used to justify the sustained pursuit of this strategy, updating outmoded discourses of open white supremacy and anti-Native racism. These updated scripts appear to follow a liberal logic of punishing, removing, and containing bad behaviour, but the material interventions they justify target entire places and communities. Tactics of urbicide - real estate market exchanges, interference in such exchanges, building demolitions, and intensified policing - are applied to remove large numbers of dispossessed Indigenous peoples from areas to which economically secure whites are lured by advertisements, economic subsidies, and the promise of a new urban lifestyle. In so far as “seeing” Native poverty in the city center threatens profitability, urban restructuring agendas cast dispossessed Indigenous bodies as “matter out of place” on the urban frontier, and tangible economic value is derived from the disappearance of Indigenous life.

While concepts of neoliberal urbanism and the gentrification frontier lend crucial insights to our understanding of contemporary settler colonialism, thinking about these concepts together also bolsters our understandings of how neoliberal gentrification works in specific historical-

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35 Smith, Conquest.
36 Douglas, Purity and Danger.
geographical contexts. In *The New Urban Frontier*, Neil Smith compares the gentrification of late twentieth century cities to the nineteenth century settler-colonial frontier. In one passage, Smith introduces George Custer’s attempted extermination of the Sioux in the Dakotas during the 1860s and 1870s: “If Custer’s brand of extermination is now less than polite, even in the revanchist city,” Smith writes, “homeless people suffer a symbolic extermination and erasure that may leave them alive but struggling on a daily basis to create a life with any quality at all.”

Smith borrows the language of settler-colonial conquest to dramatize the “class war” of gentrification. “Gentrification portends a class conquest of the city” Smith writes, “The new urban pioneers seek to scrub the city clean of its working-class geography and history.” As a result, Smith convincingly traces the endurance of the frontier ethic within American culture through to the present; the new urban frontier of class conflict looks, sounds, and feels startlingly like the old settler-colonial frontier.

But this dissertation incorporates the gentrification frontier not only into the ‘ethic’ or discursive power of settler colonialism, but into its ongoing material geographical force. Gentrification deepens, extends, and modulates regional historical dynamics and social relations of settler colonialism. The urban frontier not only looks a lot like the settler-colonial frontier, it engages and reshapes the material geographical consequences of the nineteenth century frontier. One consequence of this theoretical framing for our understanding of gentrification is that historical identities – in the sense, for example, of one’s ancestors’ relationship to processes like settler colonial invasion – over-determine the class identities that matter to understandings of gentrification such as Smith’s. It matters who people’s ancestors were, how they came to Canada, or how Canada came to them. In Native cities, gentrification portends Indigenous

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38 Ibid., 25.
conquest at the same time as it portends class conquest - the erasure of working class geography and history constitutes the erasure of Indigenous geography and history.

Conclusion

This dissertation identifies four major geographical restructurings that have shaped the Prairie West. I think about all four in relation, examining how each moment of restructuring responded to the intended and unintended effects of previous development agendas. In particular, I incorporate the effects of a nineteenth century export-agricultural development vision – its dispossessions, accumulations, and apartheid geography – into an understanding of the region’s urban history. In this conceptualization, the historical geography of settler colonialism in the Prairie West and the history of Winnipeg become inseparable. I show how the ‘legacies’ of nineteenth century settler colonialism cannot be fully comprehended without understanding how ‘legacies’ are reshaped by contemporary urban agendas; and I demonstrate how contemporary urban agendas respond to previous geographical restructurings and are impossible to fully grasp without making such connections.

I assert the importance of conceiving the ‘legacies’ of nineteenth century settler colonialism not only in terms of Indigenous dispossession, but also in terms of the fortunes – both vast and modest – accumulated by white settlers. Among other things, this framing helps us understand the powerful social forces behind regional change. By tracing the particular class interests – real estate capitalists, financiers, merchants, industrialists, hoteliers, and so forth – that dominate and benefit the most from processes of regional change, I show how those presiding over contemporary urban restructuring in Winnipeg are the descendants of those who have dictated regional change in the Prairie West for over one hundred years. This approach identifies a single goal – capital accumulation – at the heart of dominant regional development agendas. By
utilizing Clyde Woods’ concept of the ‘dominant regional bloc’, I show how capitalists repeatedly secure political and ideological dominance by organizing themselves into various formations and institutions in different moments.

By reading these historical-geographical moments together, I also demonstrate how – even in vastly different economic and cultural contexts, and despite the rise of powerful alternatives – similar geographical strategies have repeatedly gained dominance. A repetitive set of geographical strategies can be identified: Space is segmented, particular segments are highlighted as crucial, and a range of interventions is pursued to restructure the targeted area. Existing residents – cast as useless or threatening to the new regional vision - are dispossessed, displaced, and policed. A privileged population of people often with little interest in the area – cast as crucial to the success of the new regional vision, either for their labor, consumption, or capital – are lured there with promises of land and/or money, and geographical constructions that while acknowledging the riskiness of the endeavor, promise comfort, safety, pleasure, prosperity, and participation in an improved regional future. Such interventions, while requiring vast resources and coordination and largely benefitting a select few, are cast as natural, inevitable, and universally beneficial.

The particular logic of the development agendas that have gained dominance in the Prairie West dictate that those dispossessed by earlier agendas are most likely to be dispossessed once more, while those lured and catered to be most likely to benefit again. As it turns out, the peoples dispossessed by the nineteenth century agricultural agenda are also being dispossessed by the twenty first century post-industrial urban agenda, and those who benefitted from the former are also benefiting from the latter. As categories for making sense of such human
geographical continuity, I suggest, “settler colonialism”, “whiteness” and “Indigeneity” retain their power in new ways.

Finally, state power has been crucial to the execution of each of the four dominant regional development visions discussed in this dissertation. The frontiers of the nineteenth and twenty-first century were delineated, secured, and promoted by the state largely in advance of any influx of settlers or capital. Moreover, I demonstrate how various arms of the Canadian state – including “arms-length” arms – in very different contexts, in addition to deepening existing material inequities, have taken on an educative role, resorting to and empowering a moral geography that casts Indigenous peoples as inadequate, threatening, and disposable, while casting white settlers as adept, innocent, and valuable bearers of a brighter regional future.
Chapter 1 – The Roots of the Twentieth Century

In this chapter I use a combination of primary and secondary sources to examine the rise and execution of the development agenda that dramatically restructured the segment of the earth that - through the geographical constructions of that scheme – would become known as the Canadian Prairie West. First I discuss the coordination and circulation of this development vision within mid nineteenth century Upper Canada, and I then detail the global economic and geopolitical events that precipitated the ascendance of the vision to official policy in Ottawa. I trace the concerns that dictated Ottawa’s engagement with the region, and the specific regional economic conditions at play that shaped the encounter. I detail the particular strategies, formations, and infrastructures deployed to achieve Indigenous dispossession and white settlement of the Prairie West, as well as the discourses and ideologies used to justify the process. This development process, lasting approximately thirty years, profoundly reshaped the human geography of the Canadian West and instituted a regional dynamic whereby an apartheid geography severely circumscribed Indigenous life chances while white settlers’ opportunities were significantly expanded. Finally, I discuss the emergence of a small commercial class of settlers in the booming regional capital of Winnipeg, who amassed large fortunes while celebrating a regional history of conquest and consolidating into a bloc to dominate the political life of the region.

The Rise of the Western Expansionist Development Vision

Canadian historian Doug Owram, in a 2007 piece on nineteenth-century Canadian expansionists, brings our attention to a map released by the Crown Lands Department of the Dominion of Canada in 1857, entitled “Map of the North West Part of Canada.” The map is strange for a number of reasons. First, the enormous segment of Turtle Island represented on the map – also known as Rupert’s Land - belonged at the time, in the eyes of the Queen of England, not to the
Dominion of Canada at all but to the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). Second, the map’s creator, Thomas Devine, based his creation not on firsthand knowledge of the West, nor on knowledge generated by geographers employed by the Crown Lands Department, the Dominion of Canada, nor even by the British Geographical Society, but on existing secondhand information from U.S. sources. Third, despite a total absence of new evidence, the 1857 map looks drastically different from the Department’s previous representations of the North West. The map’s most striking new feature is a litany of glowing, subjective assessments – casting, for instance, “the scenery of these fertile valleys as magnificent, and the banks of the rivers on either side luxuriant beyond description” – that the Department had not openly held until this point.39

The focus of much of Owram’s work is what he calls the “Canadian expansionist movement.”40 “Centred in Toronto and along the Ottawa valley,” Owram writes, “these individuals were a loose collection of people who began to look westward in their search for the destiny of the United Canadas.”41 They consisted mainly of capitalists, politicians, and newspapermen - including the editor of the Toronto Globe – but also included geographers, cartographers, civil servants, and entire government departments. “[Devine’s] map was,” wrote Owram, “as much a product of the expansionist impulse as was any editorial in the Globe.”42 The individuals involved in the expansionist movement came from many backgrounds, according to Owram, although they tended to be younger and more likely to be associated with the Reformers

39 Owram, “The Promise of the West as Settlement Frontier,” 5.
41 Owram, “The Promise of the West as Settlement Frontier,” 4.
42 Ibid., 5.
than the Conservative party. “What linked them was the cause itself”, says Owram, “visions of a Canadian empire of the West within a grand imperial context.”

While the grandiosity of the idea may have had its own magnetism in an era of worldwide imperial conquest, the political-economic momentum for the expansionist movement came from two sources – the overaccumulation of capital in Eastern Canada and the United Kingdom and the subsequent search for new markets; and the drive to entrench British control on Turtle Island in the face of US expansion. The mid-nineteenth century was a period of unprecedented overaccumulation of capital at a global scale. “The depression that swept out of Britain in 1846-7 and which quickly engulfed the whole of what was then the capitalist world,” according to geographer David Harvey “can justly be regarded as the first unambiguous crisis of capitalist overaccumulation.”

“The outcome,” Harvey continues “was a sudden paralysis of the economy, in which surpluses of capital and labour lay side by side with apparently no way to reunite them in profitable and socially useful union.” The crisis of 1846-7 set capitalists around the world on missions of territorial expansion as a solution for capital and labor surpluses. “The vast expansion of foreign trade and investment after 1850 put the major capitalist powers on the path of globalism,” Harvey wrote “but did so through imperial conquest and inter-imperialist rivalry that was to reach its apogee in World War I – the first global war.”

The Canadian expansionist movement emerged in the 1850s from the context of a worldwide search for new markets. Adding to the capitalist momentum of the expansionist vision, the British Empire ceased its policy of “imperial preferences” in the 1840s, cutting off an

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43 Ibid., 4.
44 Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, 260.
45 Ibid.
outlet for trade and investment that had been very profitable for Canadian capitalists.\textsuperscript{46} With the rest of the British Empire increasingly off the table, many Canadian capitalists turned to the U.S. for trade and investment opportunities. At the same time, those committed to an intercontinental Dominion of Canada seized the moment to lay the groundwork for their development vision.

The production of attractive geographical representations of the ‘Prairie West’ – more precisely, the region between the Canadian Shield and the Rocky Mountains, north of the forty-ninth parallel – accelerated exponentially during the 1850s. Until that time, little was know in the Dominion of Canada about who or what lay west of the Great Lakes, but it was not generally thought to be promising. Especially after 1821 - when the two dominant fur trading corporations, the HBC and North West Company (NWC), merged - the area had virtually no social, political, or economic ties with the Dominion of Canada. “The impression came to prevail that the West was an irreclaimable waste,” historian Ruben C. Bellan writes, “too arid for grain growing, exposed to recurrent frosts and grasshopper plagues, fit only for Indians, half-breeds and fur traders.”\textsuperscript{47}

In 1856 - a year before Devine’s map was published – according to Owram, the Toronto Globe reported for the first time that “there is a stretch of country [between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains] containing probably over two hundred million acres of cultivable land.” Soon after circulating a number of unsubstantiated reports on the Prairie West, expansionists began to harness the growing power of scientific discourse, through the deployment of geographical expeditions. Two official expeditions were organized in 1857 – one ‘Canadian Expedition’ and one ‘British Expedition’ sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society - to assess the region’s potential for agricultural settlement or in other words, for white “civilization”.

\textsuperscript{46} Friesen, \textit{The Canadian Prairies}, 163.
\textsuperscript{47} Bellan, \textit{Winnipeg, First Century}, 4.
The politics of geographical knowledge production were crucial to the eventual success of the expansionist movement. Geographical expeditions were deployed to the Prairie West specifically to gather information about the potential profitability of the region for Eastern capitalists. As laid out by the expansionists’ development vision, profitability depended on the viability of agricultural production in the region and to the expansionists agricultural production depended on white invasion and settlement. The region’s existing human and economic geography – predominantly Indigenous and fur-trade based – was to be supplanted and eventually eliminated. “Both [the British and Canadian expeditions] were instructed to look specifically at those economic questions raised by the idea of expansion” Owram wrote, “The instructions led to an examination of the potential of the region rather than its present state.”

The expansionists’ particular development agenda directed the findings of the explorers and shaped white Eastern Canadian perceptions of the region for decades to come. “The West was no longer seen through the eyes of the fur trader or the missionary” Owram wrote “but through those of the potential farmer.”

British and Canadian geographers returned to the East with maps of the Prairie West full of wheat-growing lands, hay-producing marshes, and pasturelands of varying levels of soil quality. Many geographers were highly skeptical of the prospects for agricultural production in the Prairie West. But others, as geographer John Langton Tyman put it, seemed “optimistic to the point of indiscretion.” Tyman refers specifically to Simon Dawson, of the British expedition, who seems often to have recorded observations more poetic than scientific, such as this one from just west of Lake Winnipegosis: “It required no great effort of the imagination in weary

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48 Owram, “The Promise of the West as Settlement Frontier,” 11.
49 Tyman, By Section, Township and Range, 11.
travellers to see civilization advancing in a region so admirably prepared by nature for its
development…to plant cottages among groves which seemed but to want them.”50

Geographical findings such as these proved sufficient for the purposes of Western
expansionists who effectively reversed long held Eastern perceptions of the area as a hopeless
wasteland. The 1857 expeditions even helped turn the Prairie West into one of the British
Empire’s trendiest frontiers, despite efforts of those with an interest in the existing political-
economic arrangement – including HBC agents – to promoted the idea that the region was not
 hospitable for European settlement.51 “In the years after 1857” Owram writes, “the North West
became almost fashionable as a destination for the young and adventurous tourist…well-to-do
young men from Britain headed to the far west [sic] in search of new game and new
adventures.”52 But this was not yet enough to leverage the full power of the British Empire
towards the expansionists’ vision.

It would take the geopolitical events of the 1860s to gather enough support to make the
vision a reality. The American civil war made the U.S. a much more risky place for Canadian
capitalists to invest, and in 1866 the U.S. terminated its economic reciprocity agreement with
Canada altogether. It was only at this point, according to economist V.C. Fowke, that capitalists
in the Dominion of Canada came to view Western expansion as the best geographical solution to
overaccumulation. “The decision to create and develop an integrated economy on a national
basis was adopted” Fowke writes, “because of the disappearance of not one but two more highly
regarded alternative possibilities – those of imperial and of continental economic integration.”53

50 Ibid.
51 Bantjes, “The Dominion Survey as Imperial Panorama: Inscriptions and Counter-Inscriptions,”
3.
53 V.C. Fowke quoted in Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, 163.
In other words, with the closing of trade opportunities in both the U.S. and the rest of the British Empire, Canadian capitalists began to view the creation of a new market on the Prairie West as the most viable path toward extended accumulation.

The expansionist movement also fomented fears of a U.S. takeover in this moment, casting control over the Prairie West as a crucial defense against U.S. control of the entire continent. Without a strong British presence from coast to coast, expansionists argued, the U.S. could seize Rupert’s Land to create a contiguous American territory while isolating Upper Canada from British Columbia and making the prospect of total U.S. domination over Turtle Island much more likely. Expansionists positioned their development agenda for the Prairie West as crucial to the future of the entire Dominion of Canada, and thus became increasingly involved in the movement to create a Canadian nation-state with independence from both the British Empire and the U.S. More and more Canadian politicians began to make grandiose statements about the inevitability of Western conquest in the late 1860s. One ‘Father of Confederation’, for example, described the Prairie West as “the vast and fertile territory which is our birthright - and which no power on earth can prevent us occupying.”

In response to the HBC’s requests to retain almost half of Rupert’s Land, the Colonial Office in London replied: “the whole progress of the Colony depends on the liberal and prudent disposal of the land…Colonists of the Anglo-Saxon race look upon the land revenue as legitimately belonging to the community.”

Canada’s first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, made Western expansion a central part of his platform in the new Dominion’s first election in August 1867, and reiterated it as a top priority in his first legislative program after being elected. Macdonald’s fellow “Fathers of Confederation” continued to amplify their rhetoric around Western expansion. “The future of the

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54 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “Canada Buys Rupert’s Land.”
Dominion depends on our early occupation of the rich prairie land,” avid expansionist and noted “Father of Confederation” D’Arcy McGee warned his countrymen. Western expansion soon became the central project of Macdonald’s National Policy, which historian John Herd Thompson describes as “the overall development strategy underlying [Canadian] Confederation.”

After Canadian resolutions on the issue were approved, an “Address to the Queen from the Senate and House of Commons” was issued to request the official transfer of possession over the region from the HBC to the Dominion of Canada. The request was approved and negotiations began in London for the termination of the 1670 Charter granting Rupert’s Land to the HBC. While the deal signaled the end of the HBC’s economic monopoly over Rupert’s Land, as well as the beginning of a transition from a fur-trade to an export-agricultural economy in the Prairie West, the HBC benefitted tremendously from the restructuring. London granted the HBC property rights to forty five thousand acres of land around its 120 trading posts, in addition to seven million acres – or twenty percent - of the region’s fertile agricultural lands. From the outset, the HBC – one of the largest and oldest capitalist corporations in the world – was one of the biggest winners of late nineteenth century Canadian state formation and the vast process of accumulation by dispossession that inaugurated it.

**Invading the Prairie West**

The area known to the Queen of England as Rupert’s Land was in fact home to a diverse and complex human society with development visions and aspirations of its own. Home to a large human community that had grown out of the region’s fur trade economy of the eighteenth and

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56 Wilson and Center, *Frontier Farewell*, 32.
57 Thompson, *Forging the Prairie West*, 51.
nineteenth centuries, the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers - seventy miles north of the forty-ninth parallel, where Eastern woodlands meet Western plains – was one of the primary economic, political, and cultural hubs of the region. The community, then known as Red River (later it became the city of Winnipeg) was the birthplace of the Metis nation, a new people of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry produced through fur trade encounters between French, English, Cree, Assiniboine, Ojibwe, and other Indigenous peoples. Twelve thousand people resided at Red River by 1868 - ten thousand of whom were Metis – making it approximately three times the size of Victoria, British Columbia and more than half the size of Ottawa at the time.59

Like the rest of the region that relied on the fur trade for its livelihood, Red River was in economic crisis by the late 1860s. Buffalo and fur-bearing animals in particular were subject to accelerated depletion as a result of technological innovation and the region’s incorporation into worldwide markets for furs and other animal parts, as well as the explicit US policy of exterminating the Plains buffalo to weaken the Indigenous peoples of the area. Modes of life that had supported Indigenous peoples, as well as French and English fur traders, and the HBC’s profit margin for generations had begun to decline in the 1840s and were fast becoming unsustainable. Buffalo would virtually disappear from the Canadian Plains by 1879.

But expansionists from the East tended to minimize the importance of existing conditions in the Prairie West. In 1868, a young Eastern tourist - Ontarian expansionist poet Charles Mair - visited a famine-ravaged Red River. In response to the desperate conditions in the community, according to Owram, Mair wrote, “The half-breeds are the only people here who are starving…it

59 Wilson and Center, *Frontier Farewell*. 
is their own fault – they won’t farm.” Mair’s comments were indicative of a growing culture of anti-Native racism that would govern the economic restructuring of the Prairie West in the decades to come. Race thinking such as Mair’s would emerge as an effective way to exclude existing inhabitants from the new development agenda, dismiss their political and economic claims to the territory, and ensure the future of the region belonged first and foremost to powerbrokers in Ottawa and Toronto and white Anglo men from Ontario more broadly.

Willful geographic ignorance combined with racist contempt to dictate the expansionist Canadians’ actions towards the existing inhabitants of the Prairie West. The geographical expeditions of the 1850s intentionally learned little about the existing human geography of the region. “In the language of western [sic] expansionists,” Thompson writes, “the land had to be ‘opened’ to commercial agriculture and ‘filled’ with white settlers – as if it had been ‘closed’ and ‘empty’ before.” The specific mode of geographical knowledge production deployed by the official geographical expeditions – with its focus on the agricultural potential of soil and climate – gave scientific weight to this sense of regional emptiness and left Ottawa ill prepared for the actual human geography it would attempt to upend.

Little thought was given even to any potential opposition existing inhabitants might pose to outsiders attempting a dramatic political takeover and economic restructuring of the region. “We are in utter darkness as to the state of affairs there; what the wants and wishes of the people are – or, in fact, how the affairs are carried on at all”, Prime Minister Macdonald admitted. Nevertheless, Macdonald’s first move after purchasing Rupert’s Land from the HBC was to deploy land surveyors to parcel out the prairie landscape, without consulting existing residents of

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60 Owram, “The Promise of the West as Settlement Frontier,” 10.
61 Thompson, Forging the Prairie West, 51.
62 Wilson and Center, Frontier Farewell, 50.
the region. All of Rupert’s Land was to be made visible to Eastern capital and its Dominion by what Bantjes has called the “imperial panorama” of the Dominion Lands Survey, the largest land survey in the history of the world.63

Indigenous resistance to the expansionists’ development vision was swift. Canadian land surveyors arriving at Red River in the summer of 1869 were quickly sent home by armed Metis residents of the area, who correctly viewed the surveyors as the first agents of a Canadian takeover. The events that followed culminated in a Metis-led uprising commonly known as the Red River Rebellion. Shortly after forcing government land surveyors out of Red River, Metis nationals prevented the Ontarian Member of Parliament who Prime Minister Macdonald had chosen as Lieutenant Governor of the North West from entering the territory. Metis forces then occupied the HBC’s Fort Garry and established a provisional government with Louis Riel as the figurehead.

Ottawa had underestimated the power of the region’s existing residents, but its response was to crush the Metis resistance with soldiers and settlers. “In another year,” said Prime Minister Macdonald after being informed of the Metis uprising, “the present residents will be altogether swamped by the influx of strangers who will go in with the idea of becoming industrious and peaceable settlers.”64 Macdonald deployed Ontarian troops – led by British General Garnet Wolseley, a veteran of British imperial conquest in Burma, India, and Sudan - to Red River in early 1870 to defeat the uprising and occupy Red River. The forks of the Red and Assiniboine soon became home to the first Canadian military base in the West and Red River functioned as a strategic military stronghold for the Canadian takeover of the region.

63 Bantjes, Improved Earth.
64 Wilson and Center, Frontier Farewell, 51.
Ottawa soon sent a team of treaty negotiators to broker deals with local First Nations that would extinguish Indigenous title to the land. While Indigenous peoples living away from the path of settlement were often allocated their first choice of a reserve location through these negotiations, those peoples unfortunate enough to occupy land intended for immediate white settlement at the time of treaty making – the “settlement belt” of the southern prairies for instance – were almost always pushed off of their traditional lands and confined to reserves on land considered undesirable by colonial administrators.65

The desire to control the geographical distribution of Indigenous peoples and their resource claims66, to produce a presence and absence of Indigenous bodies in, and claims to, particular spaces, was a key driving force behind the creation of Indian reserves. The Dominion of Canada excluded Indigenous inhabitants of the region from both the labor and profits of the economic restructuring of the region. The plan to restructure the regional economy from fur-trade to agrarian capitalism rendered Indigenous labor – which had been indispensable to the fur-trade – newly expendable. Dominion of Canada mercenaries, the NWMP, and a network of Indian Agents were deployed to police and contain the newly expendable population. Indian Reserve boundaries were enforced through both sanctioned and unsanctioned means. The result was an apartheid geography that attempted to separate Indigenous peoples geographically from the world of invading white settlers.67

Canada’s Indian Reserve geography also attempted to fracture and divide Indigenous nations themselves. In a 1994 article entitled “Reservation Geography and the Restoration of Native

65 Tough, As Their Natural Resources Fail, 151.
66 Claims not only to land but also to water, minerals, plant, and animal life.
67 There is evidence, for example, that the apartheid planning of South African officials was inspired by the Canadian reserve system’s precedent. See Bannerji, “Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation.”
Self-Government”, Geographer Robert White-Harvey demonstrates the extent of the isolation of Canadian Indian Reserves as contrasted with the U.S. infrastructure of Indian Reservations. Whereas “whole tribes, and in some cases several tribes, were relocated onto single reservations” by the U.S., Canada chose to recognize “only small individual subdivisions of larger tribes, and left these small bands dispersed across thousands of tiny and isolated reserves.” In addition to being allocated far less land in total than Indigenous peoples in the U.S., the result for Indigenous peoples colonized by Canada was in many ways a more carceral experience: they found themselves confined to much smaller geographical areas, physically separated from many other members of their own communities. Metis activist-scholar Howard Adams elaborates on the consequences of this Reserve geography for Indigenous organizing and worldviews:

> Under these conditions it was easy for white authorities to propagate suspicions and beliefs among native communities that served to ossify their culture. Each Indian reserve [sic] and half-breed community was encouraged to think it was alone in its struggle, that problems were unique to each community and of their own creation.

Adams argues that Indian Reserves served to hide Indigenous peoples from the settler population as well, making it easier to convince white settlers that Indigenous peoples and cultures would soon die off or disappear. This impression of disappearance achieved through geographical dislocation made a range of stereotypes far more convincing to the settler public and legitimized the paternalistic domination of Indigenous peoples – including attempts to eradicate Indigenous identity altogether through incarceration of children in Indian Residential Schools - in the eyes of most settlers, according to Adams.

While many Indigenous peoples resisted agricultural restructuring, preferring to maintain traditional hunting and trapping economies, many others negotiated for inclusion in the new

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70 Ibid., 37.
development agenda. Thompson suggests that the numbered treaties signed by Indigenous peoples in the Canadian West were significantly shaped by Native peoples’ recognition of the costs of war and the crises of traditional economies, and the decision to mobilize for access to agricultural modes of survival deemed more sustainable. To illustrate this point, Thompson cites “a petition sent by a delegation of Plains Cree chiefs to Governor Adams Archibald in Winnipeg.” “The chiefs”, Thompson writes, “protested the Hudson’s Bay Company’s sale of their land to Canada: ‘It is our property, and no one has the right to sell [it].’ However, understanding that ‘our country is no longer able to support us,’ they told the governor they wanted ‘cattle, tools, agricultural implements, and assistance in everything when we come to settle…’”

But even those Indigenous nations and peoples who attempted to negotiate for inclusion in the new agricultural regime were largely excluded. The Canadian state was far more interested in attracting people from elsewhere than in developing those skills among the region’s existing residents.

While First Nations peoples were run off the land and contained on Indian Reserves, Canada employed a different strategy to dispossess and displace the Metis people. The 1869 rebellion forced the Dominion to negotiate with the Metis and the results of the negotiation were stipulated in the 1870 Manitoba Act also known as the Manitoba Treaty. The Manitoba Treaty promised one point four million acres of land in and around Red River to the Metis people in the form of “scrip” – vouchers to be redeemed for plots of land by Metis individuals. (By contrast, veterans of the Boer War received two million acres through the Dominion Lands Act.)

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71 Thompson, *Forging the Prairie West*, 49.
72 Gaudry, “‘Free Men Consenting to Unite with Canada’: Métis-Canadian Negotiations and the Manitoba Treaty of 1870.”
promised amount of land, however, was never delivered to the Metis people, a long-understood reality only confirmed by Canada’s Supreme Court in 2013.

The Prairie West, and particularly the southeast segment where political and economic power was concentrated in the new regional capital – Winnipeg – was a militarized zone increasingly ruled by white Anglo-Saxon interests hostile to Metis and First Nations peoples. Government implementation of the Manitoba Treaty, according to legal scholar Paul L.A.H. Chartrand, tended to follow views such as those held by Chief Justice Wood, “who urged the freeing of the lands so that the province “would fill up quickly with an Ontario population and would yield a profitable return for the money expended on it.”” Many – though not all - Canadian historians agree, according to Thompson, that the Metis “were swindled out of their land in Manitoba by a deliberate government conspiracy to dispossess them.”

Conspiracy or not, the years following the 1869 rebellion were full of sanctioned and unsanctioned violence against the Metis people of the Prairie West. “Between 1870 and 1872,” Thompson writes, “four Metis were murdered, three others were savagely beaten, and no one was convicted for the crimes.” “The government dragged its feet on amnesty for important participants in the Red River Resistance, and was maddeningly slow to resolve land claims” Thompson continues, “There is plentiful evidence that federal politicians and bureaucrats shared the racist contempt that virtually every white Canadian felt towards people of Native ancestry.” In the face of such terrifying conditions, a large proportion of Metis sold their scrip and moved west, away from the path of invading white settlers.

73 Chartrand, Manitoba’s Metis Settlement Scheme of 1870, 7.
74 Thompson, Forging the Prairie West, 57.
75 Ibid.
The Canadian state lured white settlers to the Prairie West at the same time as it pushed out Native peoples. In 1872 the Canadian government introduced the Dominion Lands Act (DLA) designed to match and compete with the 1862 US Homestead Act and formalize a practice it had established since 1869 giving free 160-acre sections of land to white men in return for their promise to live on and cultivate the land. While a vast amount of land surveyed by the Dominion in the Prairie West was in fact redistributed to large capitalist corporations - in particular the HBC which received seven million acres and the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) Syndicate which received thirty-two million acres - the Canadian state gifted over seventy million acres to individual white male settlers through the DLA between 1870 and 1930.\textsuperscript{76} The administration of the DLA and the luring of settlers to the region were infrastructural functions carried out by the state on behalf of Eastern capitalists who dreamed up and profited from a development vision that relied on individual land-owning farmers.

The distribution of white land-owning agriculturalists throughout the Prairie West served several functions for Eastern political and economic interests. First, settler labor produced crops through which Eastern financiers and railway capitalists profited in various ways. Second, settler homesteads - by turning crops into money - created a new market for Eastern manufacturing capital by purchasing a wide range of Eastern-produced commodities. Third, land-owning settlers established a new cultural geography in the Prairie West where people who depended on and supported private property, Canadian law and order, white supremacy, patriarchy, Indigenous dispossession and disappearance, the capitalist market, and a range of other colonial institutions and power structures outnumbered - “swamped” to used Prime Minster Macdonald’s language – those who did not.

\textsuperscript{76} Lambrecht, \textit{The Administration of Dominion Lands, 1870-1930}. 
Finally, many historians argue that the commodification of land in general was the primary function of dominant late nineteenth century development agendas for Turtle Island’s “West”. Frances W. Kaye recently suggested that the US Homestead Act and the Canadian Dominion Lands Act were not primarily geared towards turning ‘unproductive’ land into family farms, but towards transforming the land into capital for the market. Bantjes similarly posits that the Dominion’s actions were primarily “designed to open prairie space to the flow of capital.”

“One of the central achievements of the imperialism of the 19th century was the transformation of communal property in land and resources to state ownership and then its privatization to individuals and firms” Warnock writes, “This was one of the central features of the [Dominion of Canada’s] National Policy.”

But even with this infrastructure in place and free land made available by the DLA, white settlers did not flood the Canadian Prairie West nearly as intensely as they had other segments of Turtle Island. As a result, an exceptional amount of state capacity was steered toward promoting the region and recruiting settlers from around the world. Much of this work took the form of geographical propaganda – advertising the Prairie West as something other than the isolated, Indigenous-dominated, frozen wasteland that European geography had long constructed it as.

Early nineteenth century attempts by the HBC to lure a handful of Scottish farmers to the region (to provide food security to the company’s employees) relied on outlandish claims – that the area was “an Edenlike environment in which groves of bananas and other tropical fruits flourished” – to deceive settlers who in fact experienced deeply subzero temperatures, winter

77 Kaye, Goodlands.
78 Bantjes, Improved Earth.
famines, and plagues of grasshoppers in the summer. Many of these first settlers quickly abandoned the region in favor of the U.S. or Ontario. Similarly, late nineteenth century Canadian attempts to engineer the mass-settlement of the region, while not going so far as to present the area as a tropical paradise, did advertise the Canadian Prairie West as the superior destination of footloose European agriculturalists in the midst of global upheaval and the rise of industrial capitalism.

Government publications from the period situated the settlement process as a solution to the twin surpluses of European labor and North American land. “The continuous emigration from the old settled countries of Europe, principally from the United Kingdom and Germany,” an 1874 Canadian Department of Agriculture publication began, “to new countries in different parts of the world within the last fifty years, is one of the most remarkable features of modern civilization.” “There is crowding in the labour markets, and a large amount of pauperism” the publication entitled Information for Intending Emigrants continues, “Emigration relieves both, while it builds up powerful and prosperous and happy communities in hitherto waste places of the world.”

Within this context, officials in Ottawa made their case to European settlers, positioning the Canadian Prairie West in competition with other settler colonies, especially the U.S. Information for Intending Emigrants uses official testimony from the U.S. Consul in Manitoba and a Winnipeg-based Collector of Customs to establish that Manitoba’s soil is “of unsurpassed richness…So rich and inexhaustible is the soil, that wheat has been cropped off the same place for forty years without manure, and without showing signs of exhaustion.” According to the

80 Manitoba, The Red River Settlement, 10.
81 Department of Agriculture, “Information for Intending Emigrants,” 7.
82 Ibid., 46.
Collector of Customs, “The soil [of Manitoba] is believed to be better than that of Minnesota. I believe there is no country where the soil is equal to it.”83 Relatively sober assessments such as these were marshaled to make spectacular claims about the future of the region and the future of the Canadian nation. “The climates of… the lands open for settlement are among the most pleasant and healthy in the world, and favourable to the highest development of human energy” the Department of Agriculture went on, “The Dominion of Canada must, therefore, from these facts, become in the not distant future, the home of one of the most populous and powerful peoples of the earth… Every immigrant will have an inheritance in the great future of the Dominion, and help to build it up.”84

With statements such as these, expansionist officials circulated images of a glorious regional/national future for potential settlers, promising them great rewards in exchange for their migration, settlement, and labor on the new frontier. This future was directly tied to the much larger process of worldwide British imperialism. The Prairie West was advertised as the latest settlement frontier of the British Empire, while imperial language and images were used to attribute a sense of connectedness and security to an isolated and uncertain region. The CPR published maps announcing “FREE HOMES FOR ALL” along “THE IMPERIAL HIGHWAY FROM COAST TO COAST”, that featured a collared hand stretching from Great Britain to lay its index finger on Manitoba.85

The notion that settling the Prairie West would make Canada one of the ‘most populous nations on earth’ was a pipe dream. In 1883, almost fifteen years after Prime Minister Macdonald promised to “swamp” the region’s existing residents, Canada’s Surveyor General

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83 Ibid., 50.
84 Ibid., 11.
85 Thompson, Forging the Prairie West, 54.
complained that the area’s dearth of settlers posed a serious risk to the very existence of the survey grid. Wooden survey posts, according to the Surveyor General, were being incinerated in prairie fires, carried away by melting snowdrifts, and repurposed by Indigenous peoples (most often for use as fire wood) at an alarming rate. Without a certain viscosity of settlers invested in the survey grid, the reliability of land tenure – a key task of the capitalist state – could not be guaranteed.

The Canadian state counted settlers compulsively in the decades after Western expansion became official policy, accumulating a wealth of census and homestead entry statistics for Manitoba and the rest of the North West. Before 1900, “Except during a brief settlement ‘boom’ that accompanied the construction of the CPR,” Thompson writes, “the population grew at a gradual pace that frustrated both the Canadian government and the settlers themselves, most of them from Ontario.” “The census-takers counted 10,000 farms in 1881 and 31,000 ten years later,” Thompson continues, “the total non-Indian population in Manitoba and the North-West Territories grew from 118,000 to 251,000 over the 1880s.” But this did not compare favorably to the numbers in the Western U.S. during the same period.

In an effort to dispose of the remaining lands, Canada introduced easier conditions on homesteads than those in the U.S., reducing the age limit to 18, reducing the residence requirement from three years to three months, and making it easier for settlers to annex adjacent lands to existing homesteads. Canada was also more accommodating than the U.S. to groups of settlers such as the Mennonites, Mormons, Icelanders, and Doukhobors who demanded block land grants for entire communities as opposed to the officially mandated individual homestead.

87 Thompson, Forging the Prairie West, 66.
Especially in the first decades after the Red River Rebellion, Canada offered generous terms to Mennonites and Icelanders who agreed to settle in Manitoba. This special anxiety on the part of the Canadian state created a regional cultural geography that endures to this day.

Even after 1900, Canada seemed desperate to drum up settlers for the Prairie West. In 1909, the Minister of the Interior released *Letters from Satisfied Settlers*, a collection of interviews with actual Canadian settlers, such as this typical exchange with Francis Green who moved to Minnedosa, Manitoba from Driffield, East Yorkshire in 1908:

Q: Are you satisfied with your prospects in Canada?
A: Above satisfied. I think Canada a great country.

Q: Would you advise British agriculturalists to come to Canada?
A: Certainly, if they be young men who have been farm hands same as we were, and mean to work. They can’t help but succeed. There are two chances here to one there is in England.

As the above exchange hints at, expansionist officials made the task of attracting settlers to the Prairie West much more difficult for themselves by focusing predominantly on a narrow segment of migrants from Great Britain, Ontario, and the U.S. and adhering to a strict racial hierarchy of ‘suitable settlers’. A ‘head tax’ on Chinese migrants was the most famous of Canada’s officially racist immigration policies in this period, but expansionist officials were openly prejudiced against most of the world’s population, citing racial characteristics to explain the unevenness of their activities to promote or discourage the migration of different peoples to Canada. Racial difference was made legible with specific reference to the agricultural development vision of Western expansionists. Vast segments of humanity - the dominant thinking went - were simply not

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predisposed to export-agricultural production and as a result were systematically prevented from migrating to the Prairie West.

Thus, as historian D.J. Hall writes of Canada’s most famous Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, “in his opinion Blacks, Italians (and most other southern Europeans), Jews, Orientals, and the English city-dweller were equally useless because he believed they simply would not be successful prairie farmers and would add to growing urban problems.”89 While Canada did not impose overtly anti-Black immigration laws, Hall writes, “The policy was mainly one of refusing to encourage Black farmers…whether from the United States or elsewhere.”90 To discourage Canadian immigration agents from helping Jewish peoples to come to Canada, Sifton - under direct advice from Canadian Prime Minister Laurier - drafted a memorandum stating, “Our desire is to promote the immigration of farmers and farmer labourers…Experience shows that the Jewish people do not become agriculturalists.”91 Thus, official ideas of whiteness were tied to a set of agricultural practices highlighted as valuable by the dominant development vision.

The agricultural development vision for the Prairie West cast whiteness as an attribute of sober, hard-working, beef-eating, grain growing farmers. Peoples to which white supremacist ideology did not attribute such characteristics were cast as non-white and systematically prevented from settling. Those who did make it to the Canadian Prairie West but resisted officially preferred life-ways were denied the privileges of whiteness. In his work on the Dominion of Canada survey, Bantjes writes that those

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 296.
peoples who resisted the private property grid were treated as suspect and “resisted “whiteness” along with the ethic of Crusoean self-reliance and bourgeois accumulation.”

An emerging dominant regional culture reflected the white supremacist human engineering with which Western expansionists had set out to restructure the Prairie West. “The English-speaking Protestant Ontarians who formed the largest and most influential group of white settlers in Manitoba and the territories had no intention of allowing the Prairie West to become a ‘multicultural mosaic’” Thompson writes. First Nations peoples and the Metis bore the brunt of a violent movement to produce an exclusively white Anglo political and economic region. The years immediately following the Red River Rebellion were filled with “persecution, ridicule, and demoralization” of the Metis by invading White Anglo Ontarians. The latter possessed, according to Governor Archibald, “a frightful spirit of bigotry…[they] talk and seem to feel as if the French half-breeds should be wiped off the face of the globe.” In 1885 Canadian militia regiments marched to confront a Metis uprising in Saskatchewan, “looting every Metis farm they passed.” In the aftermath of the 1885 rebellion the Dominion government executed eleven First Nations people in a widely celebrated lynching. On Dominion Day, July 1st, 1885, white Ontarians hung an effigy of Louis Riel on Main Street in Winnipeg alongside

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93 Thompson, Forging the Prairie West, 69.
94 Friesen, “Homeland to Hinterland,” 47.
95 Thompson, p.57.
96 Thompson, p.59.
97 ibid.
a banner reading, “EITHER SHOOT THE WRETCH OR HAVE HIM HUNG.”

“After 1889,” Thompson writes, “English-speaking Protestants began to ruthlessly assail the political and educational rights that the Manitoba Act and the North-West Territories Act guaranteed to [the Metis].”

“By 1920 they had succeeded in eliminating those rights”

Thompson goes on, “What was striking about the Prairie West at the end of the nineteenth century was how much it had come to resemble the other English-speaking provinces.”

_A Dominant Regional Bloc Emerges in Winnipeg_

“Probably no better idea of the prosperity of the country can be obtained than may be gained by a visit to the city of Winnipeg, to which it seems impossible for writers to do justice in ordinary terms of phrase,” the Department of the Interior announced in a 1905 Atlas of Western Canada published “For the Guidance of Intending Settlers”. “In commercial possibilities Winnipeg is great”, the Department went on, “It has electric railways, wide streets, well-kept boulevards, fine pavements, and the best of other improvements. During the present year about $10,000,000 worth of buildings will be erected, a record which is surpassed only by such cities as Chicago and New York.”

Although the Canadian state was never able to recruit nearly as many whites to the Prairie West as it had envisioned – the number of settlers never approached that of the Western U.S. - the area eventually became one of the greatest grain growing regions in the world. Winnipeg emerged as the economic capital of the new agricultural empire –

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98 Thompson, p.61.
99 Thompson, _Forging the Prairie West_, 69.
100 Ibid.
and the political capital of the new Canadian province of Manitoba – processing grain exports and trading in the litany of commodities required on the frontier.

To create an urban center for the administration of Western expansion, the Dominion of Canada invested heavily in Winnipeg’s built environment in the 1870s and 1880s. Heavy federal spending on the military, new departmental offices, public works, and subsidies to the new Manitoba government made up a significant portion of Winnipeg’s 1870s economy. State spending on urban infrastructure in Winnipeg made possible the production of space for a new stage of capitalism in the Prairie West - one characterized by the emerging dominance of merchants, financiers, and rentiers and the declining significance of trappers and fur trading corporations. Banks, warehouses, and trading floors for wheat and real estate emerged in addition to the many new political and administrative buildings.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Winnipeg was home to what historian Alan F.J. Artibise calls a small “commercial class” of merchants, financiers, rentiers, and manufacturers who dominated the political life of the region. To facilitate social interactions and coordination away from the working class hotels and taverns of Main Street, the city’s millionaires built their own private club, on Broadway, a stone’s throw from the HBC’s old Fort Garry and a few blocks from the new Manitoba Legislative buildings. The Manitoba Club, as it is still known, took its place alongside a constellation of such clubs throughout the British Empire, and soon became the symbolic heart of the dominant regional bloc of Anglo-Saxon capitalists and pro-business politicians. From the halls of the Club, this bloc pushed for and profited from a durable slate of pro-business politicians and policies.

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From 1874 to 1914, thirty-seven of Winnipeg’s forty-one mayors belonged to the city’s commercial elite as merchants, manufacturers, financiers, or real estate capitalists. “Commerce, Prudence, Industry” was enshrined as the city’s official motto while living conditions for the city’s working class settlers suffered immensely with little access to basic services. “Winnipeg’s businessmen directed their efforts toward achieving rapid and sustained growth at the expense of any and all considerations”, Artibise writes, “Regarding Winnipeg as a community of private money makers, they were little concerned with creating a humane environment for all citizens.”

Winnipeg’s commercial and industrial elite glorified Colonel Wolseley, the British Empire, conquest of the region’s Indigenous peoples, and notions of frontier ‘progress’. Winnipeg streets were named for people such as Donald Smith, who invaded Red River with Colonel Wolseley and became one of Manitoba’s first millionaires in large part through Winnipeg real estate transactions. Many keenly understood the connection between their vast fortunes and colonial violence. Walter Begg, a prominent Winnipeg merchant, conveyed this understanding in the opening lines of his popular history of Winnipeg, published only nine years after the Red River Rebellion:

On the morning of Tuesday, the 23rd August, 1870, Col. Wolseley, at the head of the 60th Rifles, entered Fort Garry [occupied by Metis forces during the rebellion]; Riel and O’Donohue had only left a few minutes previous to the entrance of the troops, and thus barely escaped capture. This was the closing scene of the Red River Rebellion and the march of progress was from that time commenced, by the then small village of Winnipeg. The arrival of the troops infused confidence amongst the people; trade which was almost dead suddenly revived, and money became very plentiful.

Capitalists took to the Manitoba Free Press and Winnipeg Telegraph to frame popular understandings of the city and its regional historical context. In a 1912 article about Winnipeg’s progress, one of the largest manufacturers of leather goods in the British Empire, Winnipeg-

103 Artibise, Winnipeg: An Illustrated History, 30.
104 Begg and Nursey, Ten Years in Winnipeg, 3.
based Ontarian E.F. Hutchings quoted from an 1878 poem by John Greenleaf Whittier entitled

*On Receiving an Eagle’s Quill from Lake Superior*, which reads:

> Behind the scared squaw’s birch canoe,  
> The steamer smokes and raves;  
> And city lots are staked for sale  
> Above old Indian graves.

> I hear the tread of pioneers  
> Of nations yet to be;  
> The first low wash of waves, where soon  
> Shall roll a human sea.

> The rudiments of empire here  
> Are plastic yet and warm;  
> The chaos of a mighty world  
> Is rounding into form!

Many members of the dominant regional bloc situated in Winnipeg had actually participated in much of the early expansionist processes, as Donald Smith’s case exemplifies. Another example is that of Duncan Curry, who retired from Winnipeg to San Diego, California in 1907 where he lived off the avails of extensive Winnipeg real estate holdings. After finishing his education in Nova Scotia, Curry travelled to Winnipeg in 1874 and quickly joined the NWMP, helping to enforce the newly crafted apartheid geography. After quitting the NWMP, Curry helped to partition vast sections of Cree, Assiniboine, Ojibway, and Metis lands into private property for white men as a Dominion Lands surveyor. In moments when he was unoccupied by the survey, Curry found work building Canada’s first inter-oceanic railway – the CPR - which upon completion precipitated a boom in Winnipeg real estate prices. In 1884 Curry capitalized – he was named comptroller of the newly incorporated City of Winnipeg and began investing aggressively in local real estate. By 1910, a few years into his California retirement, the *Winnipeg Telegraph* counted Curry among Winnipeg’s nineteen millionaires.

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Curry lived during the most intense and formative period of colonial conquest and economic restructuring in the history of the Canadian West. In just ten years, Curry participated in almost every aspect of the expansionist agenda, uncannily laying the foundations – apartheid, survey grid, railroad - for his eventual fortune. The final two decades of Curry’s life indicate how a small class of Anglo-Saxon men was able to accumulate vast fortunes through a development agenda that relied on white settler agricultural labor, Indigenous apartheid, and narrow elite control over the political life of the region.

Conclusion

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the Western expansionists’ vision had born out. Through political speeches, newspaper editorials, maps, and geographical expeditions, the expansionist movement built widespread support for its agenda. Global economic crisis, the closing of trade opportunities for Eastern Canadian capital in the U.S. and the rest of the British empire, and fear of U.S. annexation combined to throw enough political-economic momentum behind expansion to make it a central part of the National Policy of the emergent Canadian nation-state. In 1869, Ottawa invaded a region in the midst of an economic crisis that would soon bring the demise of the centuries-old fur trade economy. Military conquest, accumulation by dispossession, and economic restructuring towards export-agriculture deepened the crisis for the region’s prior residents. The latter were cast as belonging to inherently inferior - backwards, unreasonable, lazy – races, which justified their violent exclusion from the new economy through legally and extra-legally enforced apartheid and terror. The Canadian state invested in huge infrastructural outlays to make capitalist export-agriculture possible in the Prairie West, financing the largest land survey in world history and subsidizing the construction of an intercontinental railroad. Much of the newly valuable land was given away for free to some of
the world’s largest corporations – the HBC and the CPR Syndicate – while the rest was given away for free to white men lured to the region with promises of a glorious regional and national future. White supremacy operated through the agricultural development vision to cast vast segments of humanity as unfit farmers, therefore systematically excluding them from the region’s future and consolidating the Prairie West as a white settler colony. Meanwhile, profits concentrated regionally in Winnipeg, where a small commercial class secured real estate, mercantile, and financial fortunes. This class formed a dominant regional bloc that ruled local political life, glorified the regional history of conquest, and cast the city of Winnipeg as the highest manifestation of civilized progress and empire.
Chapter 2 – Factory, Suburb, Spectacle

Introduction

In this chapter I set out three dominant urban development visions of twentieth-century Winnipeg – industrialization, suburbanization, and post-industrial redevelopment. Over the long twentieth century, blocs of local capitalists – merchants, manufacturers, rentiers, and real-estate speculators – organized in different moments to direct the planning energies, infrastructures, and resources of the state towards the production of immensely profitable new geographies. Each vision was forced to respond to the intended and unintended effects – viewed as challenges or opportunities - of its forerunners. The industrial vision faced conditions shaped by the agricultural vision, the suburban vision faced the effects of the first two, and the post-industrial vision dealt with conditions produced by all three. In each historical moment, I pay attention to ways that race, class, and ethnicity were constructed in the context of competing urban development visions that produced divides in some moments and consolidations in others, as new urban landscapes and identities were made.

The Industrial Development Vision

The first organized efforts of Winnipeg’s dominant regional bloc of merchants, real estate capitalists, and industrialists were directed at attracting the main line of Canada’s new intercontinental railway to the city. The dominant bloc envisioned Winnipeg as a central hub – “The Chicago of the North” - in the continental trade network, the condition of possibility for a new industrial city. Ensuring the mainline of the CPR would pass through the city was crucial. The dominant bloc lobbied hard for this, forming a Citizen’s Railway Committee to draft petitions and send prominent businessmen along with the mayor to plead Winnipeg’s case in
The Committee promised various public incentives to the CPR Syndicate, and in the end paid a significant price: “exemption from taxation forever to all Canadian Pacific Railway property, the grant of free land for a passenger station and $200,000 in cash, as well as the construction of a $300,000 bridge over the Red River”. Once it was confirmed in 1881 that Winnipeg had been chosen for the final route, the city experienced a real estate boom that made many members of the dominant bloc instant millionaires.

After the CPR was completed, Winnipeg transitioned rapidly from a small merchant-based economy to a booming manufacturing and wholesaling economy for which an industrial city of factories and warehouses was constructed around the city’s new rail yards. But Winnipeg industrialists at this time required a new source of labor to ensure the growth of their incipient urban industrial economy. Since the region’s nineteenth century export-agricultural development agenda depended on providing free land to white working class settlers (working directly against the creation of an urban proletariat), strictly controlling Chinese immigration, and forcing Indigenous peoples to remain on Indian Reserves and attend Indian Residential Schools, industrialists looked elsewhere for a new urban working class. They found it in Eastern Europe, where they convinced thousands of Poles, Ukrainians, Germans, and Russians to migrate to Canada to work in their factories, warehouses, and rail yards.

Winnipeg’s population boomed in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, quadrupling from 42,000 to 163,000. The number of manufacturing workers also quadrupled in only ten years, between 1901 and 1911, while the number of manufacturing firms in the city

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108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., 200.
expanded from just over one hundred in 1901 to over four hundred in 1921.\textsuperscript{110} Over twenty percent of the city’s population was counted by the 1921 census as either Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, German, or Jewish, up from nine percent in 1901. (The Canadian census at the time confusingly counted “Jewish” people – regardless of country of origin - separately from “Ukrainians”, “Poles”, and other national origins). Still, Anglo-Saxons dominated the city - sixty-five percent of Winnipeggers were counted by the census as having British ancestry.\textsuperscript{111} The newly arrived workers and their families were housed in North End neighborhoods constructed as quickly and cheaply as possible near the rail yards; while capitalists, managerial, and professional classes profited and prospered in South End mansions. The city’s mostly Anglo industrialists and politicians frequently demonized the Eastern European working class, casting them as “aliens” unfit for full participation in civic life.

Other high-profile members of the dominant regional bloc - such as Winnipeg Mayor, merchant, and millionaire real estate capitalist J.H. Ashdown - expressed concern about workers’ living conditions in the North End. Ashdown’s and other elites’ sentiments translated into support for the growing ‘reform’ movement and its agenda of racial uplift for the alien working classes, with an emphasis on education and assimilation into the norms of Anglo-Saxon society. By design, this agenda did not translate into a critique of the existing economic structure, Anglo Saxon supremacy, or a challenge to the dominant bloc’s rule over the city.

North End workers crafted their own social analysis, however, and built up a formidable infrastructure of working class culture and politics that directly challenged capital and the dominant merchant-real estate-industrialist bloc. This movement became increasingly militant by the 1910s. In 1919, Winnipeg workers brought the conflict to a head by coordinating a general

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 199.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 207.
strike that halted capitalist accumulation in the city for forty days. Most scholars have cast the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike as a binary struggle between Eastern European workers and Anglo-Saxon capitalists, but understanding class politics in Canada with the country’s settler-colonial foundations in mind offers a slightly different perspective.

For one, many of the strikers were of Anglo-Saxon origin, and many strikers strategically bought into the prevailing myths of the dominant Canadian settler society – imaginaries of empire, modernity, whiteness, and the inevitability of Indigenous death and dispossession. These sentiments surface here and there in the historical record, such as in political slogans; “Britons shall never be slaves” was a popular rallying cry for the strikers.¹¹² In the process of fighting for a larger share of industrial fortunes, many strikers cast themselves as deserving white male citizens, effectively excluding women, “alien” outsiders and Indigenous nations from the industrial development vision that was presented as the future of the city and nation. This drive for inclusion within the ruling Anglo-Saxon society would presage later trends in Winnipeg’s development.

Another effect of the strike was to force the dominant bloc into perhaps the most politically transparent organization they have ever formed, the “Citizen’s Committee of One Thousand”. The Committee of One Thousand, as it was most often referred to, aggressively fomented fears of a Bolshevik invasion, and eventually put an end to the strike by calling in the Canadian military, which was deployed to beat the strikers into submission. The Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand morphed over the years into several different political organizations that dominated Winnipeg’s City Council – including The Citizens’ League of

¹¹² Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg.
Winnipeg (1919-1921), the Civic Progress Association (1929-1932), and the Winnipeg Election Committee (1936-1959) – virtually continuously to the present day.  

While the strike won certain concessions, unlivable conditions continued in Winnipeg’s North End over the coming decades. “A housing shortage of unprecedented scale was reported in the 1941 housing survey” reported the Winnipeg Tribune in 1942.114 “Housing conditions are so bad in our city that we cannot neglect the situation any longer”, said Winnipeg Mayor John Queen in response, “There is a constant violation of health bylaws but we cannot put the people out: they have nowhere to go.”115

While Winnipeg remained an industrial city into the 1950s - the percentage of Winnipeg workers employed in manufacturing rose from seventeen percent in 1921 to twenty-five percent in 1951, the highest percentage of any sector - Winnipeg’s strategic position in the world economy was already in decline by the time of the 1919 strike.116 The opening of the Panama Canal is widely cited – by scholars and lay Winnipeggers alike – as the beginning of a period of ‘slow growth’ in the city that has lasted into the twenty-first century. This was the end of the dominant bloc’s visions to make Winnipeg Canada’s “Chicago of the North”. The canal created a less costly shipping route than the trans-continental rail network, in which Winnipeg had been a major hub since the 1880s.117 For some decades, Winnipeg would remain the economic capital of the Canadian West, but by the post-WWII period Vancouver, Calgary, and Edmonton grew much faster than Winnipeg and began to eclipse it as the premier urban centers in the Canadian West. Winnipeg transitioned from a “gateway city” to a “central place city” at this time,

113 Artibise, *Winnipeg: An Illustrated History*, 207.
114 Anonymous, “Unknown.”
115 Ibid.
117 Ibid., 116.
according to historian Alan F.J. Artibise, “While Winnipeg’s once vast hinterland was severely and permanently reduced in size, the city remained the largest metropolitan center in the prairie region.” In its new position, Winnipeg became the economic capital of a circumscribed hinterland that Artibise maps as “Manitoba, northwestern Ontario, and most of Saskatchewan.”

Winnipeg experienced significant deindustrialization after WWII. By the 1950s, firms began to abandon the industrial city they had built up around Winnipeg’s first rail yards, in part due to the declining significance of rail transport and in part due to the global shift of manufacturing to the global south. Winnipeg lost over five thousand manufacturing jobs between 1951 and 1971, when many large firms – including Air Canada and John Deere – moved operations out of the city. In a ten-year span from 1976 to 1986, Manitoba experienced eighty-eight plant closures and lost over ten thousand manufacturing jobs in major industries such as meat-packing, metal fabricating, agricultural implements, and flour milling. Political economist Cy Gonick writes that Manitoba was especially hard hit by the 1981 recession, during which capital investment in the province’s manufacturing sector dropped by forty-one percent.

Winnipeg and Manitoba were unable to negotiate a smooth transition from industrial to financial capitalism, according to Gonick. “[F]inancial and distribution service continue their long-term decline”, Gonick reported in 1990, “with a spate of recent head-office departures – Hudson’s Bay Company, parts of Richardson-Greenshields, Great West Life, Monarch Life and Citadel Life…Whether Manitoba can develop a niche in the global economy of the future is not

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118 Ibid., 166.
119 Ibid., 199.
The popular idea of fostering a new “information-based” economy to replace the manufacturing sector had not been realized in Manitoba by 1990, according to Gonick. “While some new, high-tech, information-based companies have started up in Manitoba, they are not numerous enough to offset this trend.”

Despite the precipitous decline of Winnipeg’s global strategic position, significant manufacturing losses, and its failure to find a prominent place in the new finance-centric economy, Winnipeg’s decline was a relative one. The city maintained a mix of economic sectors into the late twentieth century and beyond – including financial services; “agribusiness”; oil, gas, mining, and hydro electricity firms; aerospace; and “advanced manufacturing” – and both its population and GDP grew slowly and steadily. With the city’s industrial boom long since over by the mid twentieth century, however, the dominant bloc – in particular, real estate, retail, and manufacturing interests – set their sights on a new regional development agenda.

The Suburban Development Vision

“The mall was invented in Winnipeg.”

Tomson Highway

The post-WWII period was a time of increasingly coordinated regional planning in Winnipeg. It was during this moment that the dominant bloc – still ruling City Council, this time under the “Winnipeg Election Committee” banner - consolidated a new development vision for the migration of industry, residences, and commerce to new suburban subdivisions on the edge of the city. The vision was oriented around the decline of rail transport and the rise of the

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122 Ibid., 26.
123 Ibid., 42.
124 Economic Development Winnipeg, Inc., Winnipeg: Overview of Key Sectors.
125 Leo and Brown, “Slow Growth and Urban Development Policy.”
126 Highway, Kiss of the Fur Queen.
127 Artibise, Winnipeg: An Illustrated History, 181.
automobile, which the dominant bloc embraced as the basis of a renewed period of growth and capital accumulation. It took only a few years after the close of the war for a consensus to emerge that the restructuring of the city would require a coordinated, scaled-up planning process.

Winnipeg was a leader among Canadian cities in pursuing regional-scale urban planning and governance. But despite the widely understood potential for metropolitan-scale planning to mitigate urban sprawl and suburbanization, Winnipeg’s dominant regional bloc in fact deployed large-scale planning towards the extensive suburbanization of the city. In 1949 the government of Manitoba approved a new Metropolitan Planning Commission for the entire Winnipeg urban region, encompassing over ten separate municipalities. This was the first time, according to Artibise, that a comprehensive planning process was attempted for the entire Winnipeg metropolitan region. The greatest single achievement of this round of planning was the construction of Winnipeg’s Perimeter Highway in the 1950s—a freeway circling the entire urban region, enabling motorists to make easy connections between suburban locations while bypassing the city center.

In 1960, a “second-tier” regional government called the Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg was created to oversee the regional planning process and give political direction to the region as a whole. This government drafted a series of Metropolitan Development Plans, writes regional planning scholar Richard Milgrom, which led to the construction of several “ambitious intra-city highway projects.” In 1972, Winnipeg became the first Canadian urban region to amalgamate under a single metropolitan government, often referred to as “Unicity.” Eleven formerly separate municipalities joined the old City of Winnipeg in the scheme, shifting the balance of power on City Council to the new suburban constituencies.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 179.
\textsuperscript{129} Milgrom, “Slow Growth versus the Sprawl Machine: Winnipeg, Manitoba,” 94.
The new metropolitan government – controlled by the dominant bloc under the banner of the “Independent Citizen’s Election Committee”\textsuperscript{130} – pursued an even more aggressive agenda of suburbanization through rezoning and extensive spending on new roads, bridges, sewers, waterworks, and other infrastructure.

As firms’ facilities in the old industrial city reached obsolescence by the 1950s and 1960s, those that did not abandon Winnipeg altogether moved to new industrial parks on the city’s fringes, subsidized by the infrastructural spending of the suburban development agenda. The city’s existing rail infrastructure was also suburbanized, as Canadian National (CN) abandoned locations at the Forks and Fort Rouge while opening new shops, terminals, and marshaling yards near the Winnipeg International Airport and in the suburbs of Transcona, St. Boniface, and Tuxedo. By the 1980s, the suburban restructuring of Winnipeg industry was clear. “The 1945-84 period has witnessed a continued shift of industrial activity to the suburbs” a Winnipeg Institute of Urban Studies (IUS) report described, “we see a shift of prime sites from the waterfront, to the CPR yards precincts, to the suburban truck route precincts and the airport precinct.”\textsuperscript{131}

Even more drastic than the suburbanization of Winnipeg’s industry was the suburbanization of the city’s population, its commercial activity, and its major centers of civic life. As in much of the rest of Turtle Island, Winnipeg’s white settler working classes did relatively well in the post-WWII era and moved in droves to newly constructed suburban neighborhoods. Land developers advertised spacious, pastoral, wholesome new subdivisions with images of prosperous, white, car-owning nuclear families, while City Council invested

\textsuperscript{130} Artibise, \textit{Winnipeg: An Illustrated History}, 207.
\textsuperscript{131} Lyon and Fenton, “The Development of Downtown Winnipeg: Historical Perspectives on Decline and Revitalization,” 156.
heavily in new suburban schools and parks. Between 1941 and 1973, Winnipeg’s suburban population increased from eighty thousand to over three hundred thousand.\textsuperscript{132} By 1981, only thirty-six percent of the metropolitan population lived in the old City of Winnipeg, down from seventy-four percent in 1941.\textsuperscript{133}

Commercial capital suburbanized alongside industry and the majority of the city’s population. Retailers moved from freezing downtown streets into climate-controlled shopping malls, for which the City of Winnipeg provided extensive planning assistance to developers.\textsuperscript{134} “Winnipeg’s first major shopping centre” – Polo Park - was constructed in 1959 in the western suburb of St. James, where the city’s major sports teams had recently moved in to new suburban confines. The Winnipeg Blue Bombers’ new suburban football field - Winnipeg Stadium – was built in 1953, while the Winnipeg Warriors moved into their own suburban hockey rink - Winnipeg Arena- in 1955.\textsuperscript{135} By 1973 twenty-five suburban shopping malls with at least 2,500 square meters of retail space apiece had been constructed in Winnipeg.\textsuperscript{136}

Suburbanization softened the class and ethnic divides that ruled the city’s boom years, according to Alan Artibise. For Artibise, the migration of the city’s non-Anglo Saxon working classes to new suburbs signaled the “absorption of ethnic groups into the mainstream”. While the dominant Anglo-Saxon population may not have entirely welcomed non-Anglo-Saxons into their neighborhoods - Artibise writes that much of Winnipeg’s Jewish community moved from the North End to River Heights and suburban West Kildonan; much of the city’s Ukrainian community moved to the northern suburbs of East and West Kildonan; while Anglo-Saxons

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{135} Artibise, \textit{Winnipeg: An Illustrated History}, 178.
\textsuperscript{136} Lyon and Fenton, “The Development of Downtown Winnipeg: Historical Perspectives on Decline and Revitalization,” 101.
tended to move to suburbs in the south and west such as Charleswood and St. James – they began to share common suburbanized lifestyles, interests, and worldviews. This period also coincided with a successful push to allow non-Anglo Saxons into professions such as law and medicine for the first time. As they entered the professions and became suburban homeowners, Artibise writes, non-Anglo-Saxons began to be accorded “increasing degrees of respect and tolerance” by the city’s Anglo-Saxon population. But while non-Anglo-Saxons made inroads into city council – electing the city’s first non-Anglo-Saxon mayor in 1956 - and other public positions, Artibise writes, Anglo-Saxons did not lose their overall position of political and economic control of the city.137

White ethnic working class peoples’ migration to the suburbs – and the privileges of ‘mainstreaming’ this migration gave them access to – coincided with Indigenous peoples’ accelerated migration to Winnipeg and other Canadian cities in the 1950s. A mass urbanization of humanity was underway in this moment, as people in Canada and around the world transitioned from a majority rural to a majority urban society. But as agricultural settlers - millions of them with wealth that could be traced directly to land gifted to their parents and grandparents by the Dominion Lands Act - moved to Canadian cities in large numbers at this time, their experience and the conditions shaping their migration differed drastically from those of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples.

A number of historical factors prompted Indigenous peoples to move to cities in the 1950s and beyond. Whereas the Canadian state enforced – unevenly and inconsistently – apartheid for the first fifty years after invading the West, it had largely abandoned the strategy by

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the end of WWII. The “Indian pass system” was rarely enforced after the 1930s, but “Through a variety of mechanisms, many of which remain to be fully documented,” geographer Evelyn Peters writes, “these largely segregated patterns of settlement persisted unaltered into the 1950s.”

Several important factors explain the rapid acceleration of rural-urban Indigenous migration after 1950. First, land bases allocated to First Nations through treaties with the Crown were never designed to provide sufficient livelihoods for growing Indigenous populations – like every action the Canadian state took, land allocations were based on the assumption that Indigenous populations would shrink to nothing - they would die off or be assimilated into settler society. In any case, Canada systematically broke its treaty promises to First Nations and Metis peoples, leaving them with even less of an economic base than they bargained for. Where resources did exist on or near their lands – such as in the booming hydroelectric energy region of Northern Manitoba - First Nations’ peoples were largely excluded from the benefits. These dams, mines, and other resource extraction projects destroyed much of the land that remained, while fracturing and displacing many First Nations. In this context, Indigenous peoples’ decisions to migrate to cities were often a matter of pure survival.

White urban dwellers who had known nothing other than apartheid – and had grown to view it as necessary and proper, if they considered it at all – were profoundly troubled to find themselves sharing space with Indigenous communities as urban Indigenous populations grew in the 1950s. “Despite their initially very small numbers, non-aboriginal people perceived First

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138 Barron, “The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West, 1882-1935.”
Nations peoples’ presence in urban centers as extremely problematic”, Peters writes. Settlers responded with an array of new tactics to manage and control Indigenous peoples moving to cities. They posted “NO INDIANS” signs in storefront windows and refused service to Indigenous peoples at restaurants, taking inspiration from Jim Crow regimes in the U.S. Racist landlords and the broader postwar urban housing market directed Indigenous families and individuals into the poorly constructed city-center neighborhoods that had segregated the Eastern European working class during the city’s industrial development agenda, and which were increasingly hard-hit by the systematic disinvestment of the suburban development agenda.

White and Indigenous peoples alike organized conferences and drafted reports on the “problem” of urban Indigenous peoples starting in the 1950s. Peters takes the title of her 2002 paper “Our City Indians”, for instance, from a 1958 conference organized by non-governmental organizations and government agencies in Regina, Saskatchewan. Conferences such as these, organized throughout the 1960s and 1970s, framed urban Indigenous peoples as a problematic population and a necessary subject of white analysis and management. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration introduced the concept of the “Urban Indian” as a category of analysis in 1962, Peters explains, following a report from a high-ranking Department official. “It is time that the expression “Urban Indian” began to take its place with others—the Plains Indian, the Woodlands Indian, the Enfranchised Indian, and the Half-breed or Metis [sic]”, Peters quotes from the 1962 report. “From the point of view of the Citizenship Branch, an urban Indian is anyone who is living off the reserve in a setting where there are industrial and commercial job

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140 Ibid.
141 Greyeyes, Mary Richard.; Personal interview 2014.
opportunities, and who identifies himself as an Indian.” 142 This shorthand entrenched and accelerated the targeted governance and analysis of Indigenous communities in Canadian cities.

The dominant mode of knowledge production at the time consolidated an explanation of urban Indigenous peoples’ situation that rested on an understanding of Indigenous peoples as unfit for, and therefore traumatized by, city life. “Our Indian Canadian is faced or hampered with...his own personality” Peters quotes the organizer of a 1957 conference as telling delegates, “These differences have nothing to do with his blood or heredity but are from his cultural heritage...For instance, his concepts of time, money, social communication, hygiene, usefulness, competition and cooperation are at variance with our own and can prove a stumbling block to successful adjustment.” 143 The urbanization of Indigenous peoples, narrated in this way, became an opportunity to present the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into white society as the only path toward Indigenous survival. This narrative rested on an individualization of social and geographical processes, as stories of an ‘Indian Canadian’ who experiences inadequacy in the big city ignored processes of exclusion or any perspective that viewed migration as a political negotiation between Indigenous and settler peoples.

Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, crafted their own narratives and strategies to try to ensure that urbanization would lead to more livable futures for their nations, communities, and families. The views of the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada (IEAC), while far from an entirely Indigenous organization, exemplify an interesting and somewhat more balanced understanding of the issue. While the IEAC continued to espouse assimilationist perspectives, by the 1960s the organization had taken to conducting “conferences and workshops” with urban

“Indian people” that led the association to frequently, if tentatively, recognize the myriad of ways that white hostilities shut Indigenous peoples out of urban economies.

In a summary of its 1966 “Conference on Indians and the City” - a national conference held in downtown Winnipeg - the IEAC places first and foremost the severe housing shortages experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canadian cities. The IEAC bluntly described Indigenous families’ “critical need” for “large accommodation priced in such a manner as not to over-tax a limited budget” while positioning this as the number one “problem area” cities posed to Indigenous peoples.144 Going further, IEAC Chairman Walter Currie described the dynamic of anti-Native “discrimination” that had already established a segregated urban geography in Canadian cities. “Indian people can easily be found in the city – merely go to the slum area, the cheaper beverage rooms or bars – in Toronto go to the Keystone on Jarvis Street; in Winnipeg the hotels along Main Street, in Vancouver’s skid-row”, Currie told delegates at the Winnipeg conference. “Why do they go to these parts of the city? The very economic reasons which pushed them to the city now dictate the place they will live – only here can accommodation be found; only here do they feel socially acceptable – their clothing, their speech, their money, their colour, their Indianness may not be a target of discrimination.”145 “Discrimination is a very real factor in finding suitable jobs and accommodation for Indian people in the majority of the larger Canadian centres”, Currie continued, offering a quick critique of assimilationist perspectives, “[urban authorities] feel that if any adaption is going to be made, it must be made entirely by the Indian people.”146

144 Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada, Conference on Indians and the City, 4.
145 Ibid., 11–12.
146 Ibid., 5.
Currie also recognized that Indigenous peoples in Canadian cities were being policed and incarcerated at an alarming rate – a trend that would harm Indigenous communities as severely as anything else in the second half of the twentieth century. There are “too many Indians found in the dockets of our courts and the majority charged with drunkenness, vagrancy, prostitution, disturbing the peace” Curried said at the Winnipeg conference in 1966. By 2012, nearly eighty percent of people incarcerated in Manitoba would be Indigenous, up from approximately twenty percent in 1965.

By the 1970s, Native activists had long resisted narratives that presented assimilation as the only mode of survival for Indigenous peoples in the city, and were actively negotiating pan-Native and other urban alliances to craft development visions of their own. A 1976 urban development plan published by the Manitoba Metis Federation stated that the “problems” of urban Indigenous migration “have been thoroughly documented in both public and private research and to amplify them further would only prove superfluous.” In opposition to the assimilationist narrative, many urban Indigenous organizers insisted on a circular, iterative geographical understanding of First Nation-to-city migration processes, asserting that migration to cities did not represent a one-way path or a rejection of traditional lands, cultures, and livelihoods, but an incorporation of urban spaces into these life ways. Indigenous peoples also fought determinedly for local control over plans to ‘address’ and ‘improve’ their urban communities. “The frameworks of meaning through which First Nations migrants interpreted the process of urbanization” Peters writes, “asserted a strong role for First Nations representatives in

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147 Ibid., 15.
149 Province of Manitoba, “Aboriginal People in Manitoba,” 51.
150 Fulham, In Search of a Future: A Submission on the Migration of Native People, 11.
defining a response to the urbanization process.” In short, Indigenous peoples struggled over the right to shape cities in their own image, resisting state efforts to have it the other way around.

The suburbanization of real estate, merchant, and manufacturing capital, as well as upwardly mobile working and professional classes, left Winnipeg’s city center disinvested, increasingly deteriorating, and home more and more exclusively to poor and working class people – more and more of them Indigenous - unable to afford new suburban lifestyles. This urban economic restructuring and the new human geography it fostered led to a growing sense among suburbanites, newspaper editors, and politicians of the city center “in decline”. These discourses evoked a sense of inevitability or naturalness, shielding from critique the dominant regional bloc that had coordinated and aggressively funded the infrastructure necessary for the movement of capital and people out of the city center.

The idea of “blighted” or “slum” neighborhoods in Canadian city centers gained political traction by the 1950s when Canadian housing activists won federal commitments for the construction of new urban affordable housing. At the same time as it pursued an expansive suburbanization agenda, the Winnipeg Metropolitan Planning Commission took advantage of these federal funds – which were earmarked for “slum clearance” projects - to bulldoze large sections of Main Street and the North End. These areas were replaced with new modernist buildings for the city’s arts and cultural organizations including a new opera house, museum, and planetarium; a new City Hall and “civic complex”; and Winnipeg’s first two public housing projects, Lord Selkirk Park and Gilbert Park. While the needs of existing residents purportedly motivated the construction of the two new housing projects, the bulldozing and displacement of entire neighborhoods reflected the exclusion of existing residents from the planning process. The

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“Citizens’ Advisory Committees” that were established during the period were filled exclusively with “experts”, “prominent businessmen”, and members of the professional classes.152

“Slum clearance” took place in Canadian city centers at the same time as more and more Indigenous peoples moved to them. The connection was not always experienced as coincidental. “The top-down approach of Urban Renewal and [the 1970s Neighbourhood Improvement Program]” Silver and Toews write, “were seen by many urban Aboriginal people as an extension of the practices of colonization.”153 In response, urban Indigenous communities organized for control over the reshaping of their neighborhoods. “This intensified grassroots pressures to have inner-city residents, and the [organizations] they created, deliver services to the inner city, and to have inner-city residents themselves, including Aboriginal people, benefit from the employment thereby created”, write Silver and Toews, “The movement towards greater citizen participation in inner-city planning was, by the 1970s, more and more part of a larger movement towards urban Aboriginal self-determination.”154 Indigenous communities in Winnipeg began to craft urban development visions based around the resurgence of Indigenous cultures and traditions within the city, as well as Native community control over the institutions that governed their lives.

The Urban Wing Gets Organized

While the case of the Citizen’s Railway Committee demonstrates that public gifts to capital were at the heart of Winnipeg’s industrial development vision, Gonick argues that an entrepreneurial logic of regional governance – that would later be described as “neoliberal” - whereby public resources are gifted to capital in order to attract investment, became newly entrenched in

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152 Gerson, An Urban Renewal Study for the City of Winnipeg: The CPR-Notre Dame Area, 6.
154 Ibid.
Manitoba politics by the 1960s. Gonick traces this shift to the creation of a new special authority - the Manitoba Development Fund (MDF) – by the Conservative government of the time, to provide loans, land, tax abatement, and infrastructure to foreign firms. “We are going flat-out to attract U.S. capital”, said the head of the MDF in 1967, “the provincial government is willing to use its influence where appropriate to create a profit opportunity where none might otherwise exist.” Its proponents described the MDF as the latest advance in state-capitalism: “It’s the opposite of socialist” said the minister of industry and commerce at the time, “it’s strongly anti-socialist, to help the small business to be successful.”

This logic would soon be adopted and redirected toward Winnipeg’s city center by a small but growing faction of the dominant regional bloc. By the 1970s, a coalition of property owners, merchants, and real estate capitalists dependent on the profitability of Winnipeg’s city center – a group I call the “urban wing” of the dominant regional bloc – started to make a concerted push to counter the city’s dominant suburban development agenda. The urban wing circulated more and more writing about the “decline” of the city center, the broad regional importance of a new redevelopment vision for that segment of the city, and the importance of the state in helping to redirect investment there. They formed their first formal organizations in this period as well, including business improvement districts (BIDs) designed to make urban space competitive with the controlled environments of suburban shopping malls. But their success was minimal, and the city’s suburban orientation persisted stronger than ever.

One of the most prominent political and intellectual leaders of the urban wing was Lloyd Axworthy, a Princeton PhD graduate who formed the technocratic IUS in Winnipeg in 1969. The IUS published a litany of reports documenting the decline of the city center and calling for state

intervention. Deindustrialization and the abandonment of land and buildings became a key concern of IUS literature - a 1979 report bemoaned the “abandonment phenomenon within Winnipeg’s inner city”, counting over two hundred abandoned buildings there.\textsuperscript{156} “The key factor is to find a successor land use”, a typical IUS report warned in 1984, “To leave the land idle or underutilized leads to the precipitation of decay and decline.”\textsuperscript{157} Through the subtle use of moralizing discourse such as this, Axworthy and the IUS built a case for a new urban redevelopment vision.

The urban wing seized an unlikely political opening in the late 1970s. Winnipeg City Council had proposed a new freeway to span the CPR rail yards and cross the North End, to which community opposition was fierce. Rather than investing in further infrastructure for suburban motorists and destroying even more of the city center, residents proposed an alternative development agenda: relocate the noxious rail yards entirely and replace them with affordable housing and services for the community.\textsuperscript{158} “The city retracted its planned overpass in the face of this public opposition” Silver and Toews write, “but the community’s counter-proposal was not taken up, the federal government citing prohibitive costs and “political barriers” as impediments to rail relocation.”\textsuperscript{159}

Axworthy, who by then was Federal Minister of Immigration and Transportation, mobilized support for an alternative plan: A five-year federal commitment of thirty-two million dollars for a broad initiative to ‘revitalize’ Winnipeg’s city center, conditional on equal contributions from the local and provincial governments. The new ninety-six million dollar deal

\textsuperscript{156} Benell et al., \textit{The Building Abandonment Study: Winnipeg’s Inner City.}
\textsuperscript{157} Lyon and Fenton, “The Development of Downtown Winnipeg: Historical Perspectives on Decline and Revitalization,” 156.
\textsuperscript{158} Urban Futures Group, \textit{Community Inquiry into Inner City Revitalization}, 26.
\textsuperscript{159} Silver and Toews, “Combating Poverty in Winnipeg’s Inner City, 1960s-1990s: Thirty Years of Hard-Earned Lessons.”
– termed the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative (CAI) – was signed in 1981 and promised a mix of funding for community-based initiatives and subsidies for large-scale private capitalist investments in the built environment. The tripartite agreement would be renewed for three more five-year plans in the coming years - the first CAI ($96 million from 1981-1986) was followed by CAI II ($100 million from 1986-1991) then the Winnipeg Development Agreement ($75 million from 1995-2001) and finally the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement ($75 million from 2004-2008) - for a total of $346 million over twenty-seven years.

The federal government’s focus on the redevelopment of a single segment of a single city was unprecedented in North American urban planning – in essence the urban wing transplanted a regional development model that had previously been applied only to large ‘under-developed’ non-urban regions. It was later described as “an experiment in urban policy-making which was arguably the most ambitious and comprehensive ever undertaken in North America.”

The urban wing coopted and capitalized on the intensified 1970s activism of city-center residents, exploiting their political energies and human needs in order to add weight to an agenda of city-center profitability and the channeling of state resources to capital. Axworthy played up the role of city-center residents’ grassroots organizing in the formation of the CAI. “In the summer of 1980,” he told the Free Press, “a crowd of inner city residents packed Rossbrook House [a youth drop-in in Winnipeg’s Centennial neighborhood] to demand of representatives of the three levels of government that some action be taken to arrest the serious deterioration of the core area of Winnipeg…Out of this Rossbrook town hall meeting, the CAI was born.” In fact, existing residents were shut out of the planning and implementation of the CAI agenda.

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Evaluations of the CAI regime found that “community input was sought on an after-the-fact basis”;\textsuperscript{162} that CAI advisory committees “were perceived to have inadequate inner city/Aboriginal representation and to be insufficiently sensitive to inner city needs”;\textsuperscript{163} and that “direct community participation in the day-to-day functioning of the initiative was minimal or nonexistent.”\textsuperscript{164}

When federal funding for urban renewal was cut in the late 1960s, Winnipeg’s Metropolitan Planning Commission estimated Winnipeg required forty-five thousand additional units of affordable low-income housing, and the authority had already completed plans for another seven public housing projects.\textsuperscript{165} But when federal funding for urban development returned to Winnipeg just twelve years later, these plans were jettisoned by the new urban wing agenda. While existing city-center communities won significant concessions for their own organizations and initiatives, the CAI sent the vast majority of its resources to merchant and real estate capital for the construction of urban amenities for the city’s suburban populace. A 2000 evaluation concluded that the CAI development agenda “reflected a largely one-sided commercial or corporate vision of what Winnipeg should be.”\textsuperscript{166}

Instead of social housing, as Silver and Toews write, “Two privately-owned consumer complexes were created: a downtown mall, Portage Place, owned by Cadillac-Fairview; and a festival marketplace—The Forks—constructed atop abandoned railyards at the confluence of the

\textsuperscript{162} Layne, “Marked for Success??? The Winnipeg Core Area Initiative’s Approach to Urban Regeneration,” 266.
\textsuperscript{163} Urban Futures Group, \textit{Community Inquiry into Inner City Revitalization}, 10.
\textsuperscript{164} Stewart, “A Critique of the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative: A Case Study in Urban Revitalization,” 159.
\textsuperscript{165} Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg, \textit{Downtown Winnipeg}.
\textsuperscript{166} Layne, “Marked for Success??? The Winnipeg Core Area Initiative’s Approach to Urban Regeneration,” 261.
Red and Assiniboine Rivers.” These two shopping malls received more than twice than did the largest “social” sub-stream of funding, and over three times what the first CAI invested in low-income housing. Neither did city center residents significantly benefit from jobs created by these projects. Decter and Kowall found that “fewer than 50 percent of the jobs created in the cost-shared programs went to core area residents.” While Silver and Toews write that “fewer than one-third of non-construction projects honoured the CAI’s affirmative action hiring policies for inner-city residents.” “More CAI dollars were allocated to the Forks alone,” Silver and Toews observed “than to all the housing programs of CAI I and II together.”

City-center residents organized in resistance to the urban wing agenda as soon as it became clear the CAI vision did not include them. A “Community Inquiry into Inner-City Revitalization” was convened in 1990, with the twin goals of supporting a third round of tripartite funding and critiquing the dominant development vision. “[L]ittle change has occurred with regard to the economic and social development of the city’s inner-city areas”, representatives of the Northwest Child and Family Services Agency told the Inquiry, “The physical “megaprojects” stimulated or sponsored under the CAI umbrella stand as constant reminders of where priorities for the revitalization of the heart of the city were found over the last ten years.”

By the 1990s, Indigenous community organizations had proliferated in Winnipeg – in part due to hard-won funds from the third CAI installment - transforming its urban fabric and making the city a national leader in urban Indigenous organizing. One research participant in

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170 Urban Futures Group, Community Inquiry into Inner City Revitalization.
Silver’s 2006 book on the subject estimated that more than seventy Indigenous community organizations were based in Winnipeg.\textsuperscript{171} There was also evidence that Winnipeg’s Indigenous community organizations had found ways to unite, despite the divisive dynamics of the non-profit industrial complex. A 1994 study of Winnipeg, Toronto, and Edmonton found that in addition to forming the greatest number of community organizations run by and for Indigenous peoples, Indigenous Winnipeggers had, compared to the other cities, forged a significant degree of effective inter-organizational structure.\textsuperscript{172}

And yet conditions worsened for city-center residents through the 1990s. By 1996, over fifty percent of city-center households lived in poverty – up from thirty-three percent in 1971. Winnipeg Centre became widely known, alongside Vancouver’s Downtown East Side, as Canada’s two poorest constituencies.\textsuperscript{173} Indigenous residents – who formed over fifty percent of the population of many city-center census tracts\textsuperscript{174} - of were even worse-off than the city-center average, as they experienced an eighty percent poverty rate in 1996.\textsuperscript{175}

The demographics of Winnipeg’s city center had also changed significantly by this time. By the 1990s the area was home not only to the country’s largest urban Indigenous population, but also to a growing number of migrant communities and people of color. In 1967 Canada abolished the openly racist immigration policies it had pursued since confederation, creating the conditions of possibility for growing Asian, Black, and especially large Filipino communities to

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\textsuperscript{171} Silver, \textit{In Their Own Voices: Building Urban Aboriginal Communities}, 138.
\textsuperscript{172} Clatworthy, Hull, and Loughran, \textit{Urban Aboriginal Organizations: Edmonton, Toronto, and Winnipeg}, 42.
\textsuperscript{174} Comack et al., \textit{Indians Wear Red}.
\textsuperscript{175} Lezubski, Silver, and Black, “High and Rising: The Growth of Poverty in Winnipeg,” 39.
\end{flushleft}
form in Winnipeg’s city center. In 2006 whereas three out of four residents of Winnipeg metropolitan area were white, Indigenous peoples and people of color – populations defined by the census as “Aboriginal” and “Visible Minority” - formed nearly half of the city-center population.

Regional development visions alone are not responsible for the collapse of living conditions in Winnipeg’s city center. Global economic restructuring and the deindustrialization of the Canadian economy were partly responsible for the proliferation of poverty nationwide in this period, as Canadian capitalists dispensed with relatively stable, well-paying working class jobs in favor of part-time, poorly paid positions. National trends in governance - in step with the global neoliberal consensus of the time – also significantly deepened the crisis by aggressively abandoning responsibilities to human need in favor of serving capitalist profits.

The provision of social housing is a key example: In 1982, social housing accounted for over fifteen percent of all new housing construction in Canada. In 1991 it was still near ten percent. But in 1993, the federal government withdrew support for social housing construction entirely, sending the social housing number plummeting to one percent, where it has remained ever since. At the same time, the federal government invested billions in corporate tax cuts. By 2012, the World Bank and Pricewaterhouse Coopers ranked Canada the eighth “most advantageous place to pay corporate taxes” out of one hundred and eighty-five countries studied (the U.S. ranked sixty-ninth). In 2011 Forbes magazine heralded Canada as “the best country in the world to do business”, referencing its “dropping tax rate, sound banks, investor protection

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176 Black, “The History of Canada’s Immigration Policy Has Been One of Exclusion. Today, the Country Continues to Welcome Some, but Not Others.”
177 Statistics Canada, “2006 Census Data - Inner City.”
178 Brandon, “Winnipeg and Manitoba Housing Data.”
179 Canadian Press, “Canadian Business Tax Rate among World’s Lowest.”
and relative lack of red tape.” Income inequality soared in Canada during this time. Between 1982 and 2010, the incomes of Canada’s richest 0.01% grew by 160% while the incomes of the poorest 90% grew by less than 5%. Canadian CEO pay increased by seventy-three percent between 1998 and 2012, while the average full-time worker’s pay increased only six percent.

Poverty, homelessness, and hunger increased significantly across Canada during this time. While emergency food banks were relatively rare in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s, by 2012 almost one million Canadians had turned to food banks for help. The Canadian state increasingly relied on police and prisons in response to growing poverty levels. The number of police officers per capita in Canada steadily increased beginning in the 1990s - by 2011 national annual spending on police totaled $13 billion. In 2012, annual federal spending on prisons increased to $4 billion, as the Harper government’s “omnibus crime bill”, including a slate of new mandatory minimum sentences, became official policy.

Winnipeg City Council and the Manitoba government followed suit with their own slew of business tax-cuts, prisons, and policing. Between 1999 and 2012 the Manitoba government constructed approximately eight hundred new jail cells, John Hutton, the director of the John Howard Society reported. “By way of comparison,” Hutton offered, “during the same period of time, Manitoba has only constructed 400 new personal-care-home beds”.

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180 Ibid.
181 Lemieux and Riddell, *Top Incomes in Canada: Evidence from the Census*.
182 Nguyen, “Top Canadian CEOs Earn Annual Worker’s Salary by Lunchtime on Jan. 2.”
184 Statistics Canada, *Police Resources in Canada*.
185 Hutton, “More Jail Cells Won’t Solve Overcrowding.”
committed significant funds for additional police officers in the capital, and by 2012, Winnipeg had the most police officers per capita of any Canadian city.\textsuperscript{186}

Winnipeg was hit particularly hard by this combination of global, national, and local trends. By 2013 ten thousand Winnipeggers were homeless - seventy percent of whom were estimated to be Indigenous\textsuperscript{187} - while one hundred and thirty-five thousand Winnipeggers were considered “at risk” of being homeless.\textsuperscript{188} In 2003, thirty-nine thousand Manitobans used emergency food banks; by 2012 the number had soared to sixty-three thousand.\textsuperscript{189}

\textit{Conclusion}

In this chapter I laid out three dominant urban development visions of the twentieth century – industrialization, suburbanization, and post-industrial redevelopment. I showed how blocs of local capitalists – merchants, manufacturers, rentiers, and real-estate speculators – organized in different moments to direct the planning energies, infrastructures, and resources of the state towards the production of immensely profitable new geographies. The real-world application of these development visions produced encounters and contradictions – usually because immense profits depended on immense poverty - that dominant blocs were forced to respond to sooner or later.

Indigenous dispossession and resistance have become the major contradiction of the nineteenth century agricultural development agenda for the prairie west, in the sense that these phenomena have posed a constant threat to new development visions and ongoing accumulation by the dominant bloc ever since. For some years Apartheid was enforced to contain this

\textsuperscript{186} Statistics Canada, \textit{Police Resources in Canada}.
\textsuperscript{187} Mental Health Commission of Canada, “Initiatives.”
\textsuperscript{188} Cooper, “Excuse Me, Canada, Your Homelessness Is Showing.”
contradiction. When this arrangement became infeasible, settlers encountered the post-Apartheid migration of dispossessed, rebellious Indigenous peoples as profoundly troubling.

The dominant bloc used this to its advantage in some cases, as when settlers’ anti-Native racism accelerated their migration to the urban periphery and contributed to the profitability of the suburban development agenda. Even when urban Indigenous peoples’ movements for sovereignty and economic justice gained momentum - through newfound alliances with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous city-center residents – a segment of the dominant bloc was able to take advantage: The emergent urban wing exploited the growing urban unrest of the 1970s to channel significant state resources into its own hands for the construction of private, for-profit city-center space designed for suburbanites’ pleasure. In the process, the urban wing jettisoned the short-lived urban development agenda of the 1950s and 1960s that had at least partially recognized the necessity of pursuing non-capitalist development modes to meet human need. As a result, poverty, hunger, and homelessness in Winnipeg’s city-center soared to new levels.

Increasingly, however, it has not been the case that the primary contradiction of the agricultural development agenda has played into the hands of the dominant bloc. The next four chapters chart the rise of a post-industrial urban redevelopment vision that increasingly views the unintended effects of the region’s agricultural and suburban development visions – Indigenous poverty in a disinvested city center – as obstacles to progress. Indeed, the urban wing’s most recent institutional innovation – an urban redevelopment authority called CentreVenture, which is the focus of the remaining chapters – increasingly views the removal or policing of existing city-center residents as the only way to ensure the future economic health of the region.
Chapter 3 – Waterfront Drive and the Birth of CentreVenture

“All these condos around here,” William tells me, doing a breaststroke in the air, “they should be putting all that money for condos into housing for the homeless.” It’s Christmas Eve, 2013, and William and I are sitting in a hamburger restaurant on the western edge of downtown. I came here to escape the cold, taking my coffee to the back of the restaurant where an ad-hoc group – mostly elders, a mix of white and Native women and men in jeans, toques, and parkas - have commandeered the red vinyl bench that spans the room. We sip our coffees, chat, laugh, and watch snow fall against the low winter sun. “And towards fixing up the housing around here,” William adds. He talks about how bad the homeless problem in Winnipeg is and mentions the man who froze to death on Main Street a few weeks ago. “I wish I could open my door to everybody,” William goes on, “but there’s only so much you can do.” He points to the Dollarama bag on the table and tells me it’s a couple of soup cans for his neighbor, saying it’s his way of helping out. William is a member of Tataskweyak Cree Nation, in Northern Manitoba, but he’s spent all of his forty years in Winnipeg. He grew up in the city’s North End, on Main Street, but he tells me he’s been without a home for much of his life, sleeping in shelters, on the streets, and occasionally locked up in prisons.

William is among the ten thousand people who experience homelessness in Winnipeg.190 I begin with William’s perspective in order to foreground an analysis of urban development, as well as a mode of urban survival, rooted in lived experiences, regional histories, and human needs that are systematically disregarded by CentreVenture and the dominant regional bloc. The lives and voices of people evicted from the private and public housing markets – especially Indigenous peoples – in Winnipeg fall away in all dominant accounts of urban progress and

190 Cooper, “Excuse Me, Canada, Your Homelessness Is Showing.”
Restructuring. By foregrounding William’s perspective, I hope to highlight the social and political specificity of CentreVenture’s agenda.

In this chapter I chart CentreVenture’s emergence from within a specific set of historical-geographical conditions that for some in Winnipeg had reached crisis proportions by the 1990s. By analyzing a range of city planning documents, reports, and media accounts, I assemble an understanding of how support was marshaled for the idea of a new development authority, and more significantly, how organizers ensured the authority would reproduce long standing relations of power in a political moment when such a consolidation seemed far from inevitable. I use ethnographic fieldwork – interviews and observation - to understand the human consequences of CentreVenture’s development vision, and to develop a richer, more nuanced understanding of Waterfront Drive, the authority’s first major reconstruction of the urban environment.

William and I talked at length about the city, its shortcomings, and different tactics for surviving in it. He’s had various jobs over the years, on and off as a bouncer, a stint as a radio repairman for the military, and he is a skilled craftsman, illustrator, and powwow dancer. At one point, a man who had been begging in the street came in to the restaurant to warm up. “When are you going to start work today, William?” the man asked. “Soon,” William replied. William turned to me and explained that, to him, “panhandling” is a good, peaceful way to make a living, since it doesn’t harm anyone else, and the income gives him some freedom from the city’s authoritian shelter system. Plus, he’s good at it. He told me he knows how to spot undercover bylaw officers on the bus (Winnipeg passed anti-panhandling bylaws in 2005) and he has a favorite spot, a grocery store parking garage where he returns people’s shopping carts for them. Whenever the manager confronts him, William told me, he smiles wide and says, “Don’t I have the right to ask people for their carts?” He has a line for the customers, too. “Hey Dave,” he calls
his friend over. “You know what I say at the Extra Foods?” William lifts his head high with a goofy, polite smile: “Excuse me ma’am, I’m homeless and starving, may I please take your shopping cart to return it for a dollar? I’m not trying to take the money out of your purse, I’m just trying to work my way up”. He drops the act and grins ironically at us. “That really works?” Dave asks. “Yeah!” William says. “I was saying stuff like that when I was ten”, says Dave. Everyone laughs.

The first thing William told me about when I described this research project was his ability to infiltrate buildings and parking garages at will, whenever other options for obtaining shelter don’t work out. I summed up my project as a study of “urban redevelopment” in city-center Winnipeg. “Oh yeah, I can look at any building and see the weakness in it,” William responded, “like how it’s constructed, and where the cracks are.” He went on, gripping the arm of his sunglasses like a tool, telling me how he can use something like that to manipulate a door and get inside any building to keep warm. “Where do you do that?” I ask. “Oh, Broadway, anywhere downtown,” he says, “multi-million dollar buildings, corporate buildings, I just make sure there aren’t any cameras on me, and I look up in the corner for those white things with the little lights on them.” William waved his hand in the air like he was warding off a mosquito.

Since he said he had grown up there, I asked him what he thought about CentreVenture’s recent transformation of Main Street. The new buildings “look nice”, he said, and sometimes the people in charge let him warm up in the lobbies. As the sun dipped under Portage Avenue that evening, William related a whole set of tactics he’s perfected for living in the city with some dignity, from hacking prison computers to connect with friends; to forging bus passes; to negotiating effectively with nurses, shelter workers, and police. His straight to the point analysis
of urban redevelopment - “they should be putting all that money for condos into housing for the homeless” – seemed inseparable from this everyday struggle for freedom and shelter.

One of the warm places in Winnipeg that people in William’s position sometimes manage to secure shelter is the The Straight, a luxury condo building on CentreVenture-produced Waterfront Drive. I rented a place in The Straight in the summer of 2013 from Albinka, a retired architecture professor. Albinka owns two suites in the building – one is a revenue property - and her partner and she between the two of them have two other homes, both in Manitoba’s lake country. In some sense, Albinka is the prototypical new urbanite that CentreVenture seeks to entice to the center of the city. She is of a social class, and of a place - Winnipeg’s wealthy South End – that has benefitted directly from CentreVenture’s activities. By juxtaposing Albinka’s story with William’s, I intend to draw out the historical and geographical situated-ness of those people who are catered to by dominant development visions and to assert their interrelatedness with those who are excluded.

Albinka’s grandparents emigrated from Poland to Canada in 1922, when her father was a baby. Both of her parents were Jewish, of Eastern European heritage. Albinka and I had coffee in her condo – a light, open-concept corner suite outfitted with colorful, modern furniture and fixtures - one afternoon. She looked down over the warehouse district through her large west-facing window and told me about her grandfather. “[He settled] on Jarvis Avenue with his family, which is probably the poorest street in the city,” Albinka told me, pointing north. “And he had a horse and cart, and he would go around in the mornings and collect old bottles and rags - he would have been called a rag and bone man, in London.” By the end of his life, Albinka’s grandfather had turned rag picking into a booming business. His main innovation was to have the rags come to him – people would mail him their torn clothes and in return he would send new
towels, blankets, and other merchandise. He named the company Adanac, Canada spelled backwards.

A few doors down from The Straight is the Market Building, a former factory originally financed in 1898 by E.F. Hutchings, the leather baron whose celebration of “Indian graves” was mentioned in chapter one. Albinka’s family acquired the Market Building in the 1950s when her father, who eventually became a physics professor, inherited Adanac and needed somewhere to store his newfound rag collection. Albinka coveted the place. “I used to go into that building,” she told me, “and dream of converting the top two floors to condos and living there.” Her dream was deferred. In 1990 the steam plant supplying heat to the building closed forever, and Albinka’s father sold the building, refusing to sell it to Albinka because he feared it would become a financial liability. “So when buildings started going up on Waterfront,” Albinka told me, “and one of them was actually right beside the building I had always dreamed about, I was, I think, the first buyer.” Albinka moved from River Heights to The Straight shortly after it opened in 2007.

Like many of the condo-owners I met on Waterfront Drive, Albinka is warm, funny, and unassuming, but also takes care to come across as sophisticated, cosmopolitan, and especially, urban. She called the suite I rented - a small apartment among many others on the top floor of the building - a “penthouse” and she loves that she can walk from The Straight to the opera, the symphony, and the theater. I wondered aloud why she hadn’t lived downtown prior to moving to The Straight, so late in life. “Even when I was looking for the house in River Heights,” she told me, “I actually wanted to live here, in downtown, I could see potential in downtown.” Living in the South End, she said, her eye was always trained north, on the city center:

191 This dissertation, p.53
I watched as the city very slowly started to do what many European cities that I knew had already done. I mean you could live downtown in London, you could live downtown in Paris, you could live downtown in Toronto, but you couldn’t live downtown in Winnipeg. There was some weird perception, of one, it being dangerous, and two, it not having any infrastructure to support family life.

Albinka’s perspective was shared by many of those I talked to on Waterfront Drive. It is nearly impossible, when speaking to people who live in city-center Winnipeg condos about their choice of residence, not to encounter a tone of defiance in response to the city’s prevailing anti-urban culture. To Albinka and the others I talked to, the stigma ascribed to Winnipeg’s downtown is a kind of backwater tendency:

I thought [the perception of danger] was a misperception. So I had no fear, and I really loved watching what was happening here, and it was very slow, really, really slow [laughs]. But a few things started happening, the building just behind you converted, and it was the first, as far as I remember, the first place that you could actually rent or buy into.

Very often, talk of anti-urban attitudes turns to talk of race, especially outside perceptions of the city’s “Aboriginal community.” I asked Albinka if her feelings had born out, if she felt safe living downtown, so close to some of the most stigmatized places in the city, the Main Street strip and the North End. She replied:

The worst scenario is that I’ve been approached by someone who was too drunk to talk, or I get approached for money, often, but that’s no different from any other city I’ve ever visited or lived in, and I don’t find that frightening. And uh, the Aboriginal community that people are concerned about, they’re human beings, I don’t, they don’t, I don’t find them frightening either. So, I’m always surprised when my River Heights friends say, ‘Oh my God, you’re living downtown, aren’t you scared?’ I don’t, I don’t take it. I don’t buy it.

Albinka’s comments show how closely a certain strain of wealthy urban sophistication in Winnipeg is tied to a liberal tolerance of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous poverty. To me, Albinka’s fearlessness seemed genuine. On the other hand, she made a point of telling me she appreciates living behind multiple locked doors in The Straight. And on the day I moved in to the building, lowering her voice, she warned me about people who sneak in through the parking garage door, to sleep there, or in the lobby. The building’s front door used to be open to the public, she told me, before homeless people began to sleep in the lobby. “It was maybe nice for
them,” Albinka said, “but not so nice for the first people who left in the morning.” I couldn’t help thinking of this exchange when William told me about sneaking into “corporate” buildings for shelter.

Albinka, like most other Waterfront Drive condo owners I spoke with, was eager to acknowledge the humanity of Indigenous peoples and to assert her fearlessness in the face of her low-income Indigenous neighbors. But at the same time, Albinka and most others seem to take great pains to keep certain elements of Indigenous poverty safely out of their lives. Elaine, my neighbor in The Straight, told me that she does not walk down Main Street north of the opera house, an area where most of the city’s temporary shelter infrastructure is based, and which has long been known as a major hub for the city’s Indigenous community.

How did a state development scheme in a poor Indigenous area end up giving wealthy white settlers new penthouses and giving homeless Indigenous peoples yet another place to evade motion detectors in search of a warm place to sleep? The story of Waterfront Drive – a luxury enclave carved into the edge of Winnipeg’s North End – encapsulates much of the region’s dominant development history. After Wolseley’s invasion, the land under Waterfront Drive was given to railway capitalists as part of the regional industrial development vision. A spur line was installed on the land, and thousands of settlers worked in factories along the line.192 (A public space adjacent to the rail line, Victoria Park, became a hub of worker organizing in the lead up to Winnipeg’s 1919 General Strike; following the Committee of One Thousand’s military defeat of the strike, City Council quickly sold the land and a steam heating plant was built over the park grounds.193) In the 1960s, a new rail yard was built on the edge of Winnipeg and CN soon abandoned the spur line. Title to the land reverted to the City of Winnipeg through

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192 Manitoba Historical Society, “Walking Tour of North Point Douglas.”
193 Lewycky, “Property and Public Access.”
tax foreclosures in the 1990s, by which time most of the area’s industrial firms had long departed. City Council established a public park along the riverbank, and the rest of the land was used as dirt parking lots.

While the IUS identified abandonment of city-center land and buildings as a regional crisis as early as the 1970s, the situation reached new depths by the end of the 1990s. In addition to the former CN lands, the City of Winnipeg still owned a wealth of land and buildings – former industrial sites, hotels, theaters, and vacant lots – in the city center that had also come into its possession through tax foreclosures. It quickly became a high-profile political issue. “Especially the late nineties and Portage Avenue, almost every second window was totally abandoned”, Eliza, an advisor close to Glen Murray’s 1998 Winnipeg mayoral campaign, told me. “There were empty storefronts all over the place, it was big.” By the late 1990s, calls for a new round of state-led redevelopment were amplified in part by a moral panic around child “firebugs” who were understood to be torching abandoned properties for sport. “POLITICIANS TALK AS WINNIPEG BURNS”, read a November 2, 1999 Winnipeg Free Press headline.

In many ways, the late 1990s were an exciting, progressive political moment in Winnipeg. Young, left-leaning leaders were elected to Winnipeg’s City Hall and Manitoba’s Provincial Legislature in 1998 and 1999, respectively, after years of far-right regimes at both levels. The social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) took an active role in urban redevelopment and was at the beginning of an unprecedented fifteen-year (and counting) mandate. Most importantly, city-center communities were more organized than perhaps ever before, as a result of gains won through coordinated resistance to the “corporate” character of the first two Core Area Initiative (CAI) agendas. Urban Indigenous organizations in particular, as
described in chapter two, used their growing power to influence the urban processes and institutions that shaped their lives.

With a significant swath of city-center land now owned by a left-leaning municipal government, and with social democrats committed to urban redevelopment controlling the more substantial provincial budget, a state development vision that would work in partnership with increasingly organized city-center residents would seem to have been more possible than ever. Such a vision did not come to pass. Instead, the development vision that came to dominate overwhelmingly snubbed existing residents, catering instead to a set of people – suburbanites, tourists, and wealthy investors – with little attachment, or even interest, in the area. How did it happen this way, despite indications that a different future might have taken hold?

The concept of the “dominant regional bloc” – the consistent set of interests who in different formations in different moments have dictated regional change since the mid nineteenth century – is crucial to answering this question. I borrow the concept from geographer Clyde Woods, who uses it to emphasize that regional-scale development projects are products of political, rather than technical processes; they emerge through organization and struggle in conflicts between social groups. In Development Arrested, Woods uses the concept to indicate processes of alliance formation in response to crisis, towards the conservation of regional power structures and patterns of inequality. Woods examines the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission (LMDDC), which in his view “was part of a new international movement” of such alliances formed in response to twentieth-century globalization.194 “The goal of the dominant alliances or blocs is to restore and reproduce their profitability and power”, wrote Woods, explaining that, “the LMDDC concerned itself with stabilizing the region’s dominant plantation

194 Woods, Development Arrested, 1.
leadership while simultaneously silencing the century-old African American vision of human development.”

“Consequently,” Woods continues “a development agenda based on social justice and economic sustainability fell before one based upon the relentless expansion of social inequality.”

While I use “dominant regional bloc” or “dominant development vision” in reference to what is sometimes called a “growth coalition” or “growth machine” I prefer the former terminology for two reasons. First, “dominant regional bloc” more strongly emphasizes a power relation of dominance than does the concept of the “growth coalition” which tends to stress the pursuit of profits; “dominant regional bloc” indicates the existence of a multiplicity of competing alliances and development visions in relation to one another. Second, the concept of the “dominant regional bloc” indicates the continuity of power over time and the reproduction – with difference – of regional conditions and power dynamics, whereas the concept of the “growth machine” tends to highlight a post-1970s “entrepreneurial turn” in urban governance as an historical rupture.

Winnipeg-based merchants, bankers, grain traders, industrialists, real estate speculators, hotel operators, and newspaper owners, among others, have banded together, in different formations in different moments, to chart the region’s course since its incorporation into the Dominion of Canada. In the decades following WWII, as we saw in chapter two, this group invested heavily in Winnipeg’s suburbanization, and by the 1970s members with a financial stake in the downtown began to organize an ‘urban wing’ of the dominant bloc to redirect investment back to the city center. After the CAI approach proved insufficient for its purposes,

195 Ibid., 2.
196 Ibid., 1.
197 Logan and Molotch, Urban Fortunes.
198 Gregory et al., The Dictionary of Human Geography, 320.
the urban wing began searching for a new post-industrial redevelopment model. As a 1995 City of Winnipeg planning document put it, “A healthy downtown requires a long-term commitment to a vision and a plan. Isolated projects and short-term programs do not meet that requirement. The foundation of a long-term commitment must be a coherent concept, both to protect existing investment and to direct growth.”

The urban wing’s search for a new development vision gained political traction with the 1998 election of Glen Murray - a young, ambitious, openly gay liberal of Irish and Ukrainian ancestry – as Winnipeg’s forty-first mayor. Murray made the search for a new city-center redevelopment model a cornerstone of his administration. To an impressive extent, despite an avowed commitment to ‘fiscal conservatism’, Murray convinced many in the city that he was a visionary leader who represented a new kind of urban future. His mayoralty was sandwiched between two far-right mayors, and some from an older generation remember the moment with a fondness and enthusiasm that can be surprising in retrospect. “The [Murray] campaign was mostly about just giving the people of Winnipeg an opportunity to dream and dream big”, Eliza told me, “and to have a really, really great vision for their city, and to have a really progressive type of person that would lead them in that direction.” Murray was an avid supporter of the urban wing’s doctrine, and an effective salesman. “He was just a really big thinker, you know, and he always thought outside the regular box,” Eliza told me. She remembered a State of the City speech Murray gave to almost a thousand people in 1999, a year in which Winnipeg hosted the Pan American Games. “People were so fired up and people were so excited, and then he started doing stuff, you know, he did CentreVenture, he initiated Waterfront Drive, and the condos, and everything happening down there,” Eliza reflected, “it was a time of great hope.” It was almost

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199 City of Winnipeg, “Plan Winnipeg...toward 2010.”
as if Murray gave the urban wing new life, making its decades-old ideas feel fresh to Winnipeggers once more.

While Murray did not dream up CentreVenture by himself, it is true that he seems to have been left to draw up the city’s new development plan with minimal assistance or interference from other levels of government. The Canadian federal government remained committed to the CAI model and showed little interest in committing additional funding or technical assistance for the restructuring of Winnipeg’s city center. The new Manitoba provincial government, while openly touting its support for the redevelopment of Winnipeg’s city center, appeared content to follow Murray’s planning lead.

To give political clout to the plan for CentreVenture, Murray picked up on the longtime urban wing assertion that renewed investment in downtown Winnipeg would be crucial to a broader regional future. “The health and vitality of downtown Winnipeg is important for those who live and work there, but also for the entire city and province”, Murray wrote in his CentreVenture Working Draft. “The renewal of the downtown produces a domino effect on the city and the provincial economy”, Murray asserted. Murray went on to quote a 1990 City of Winnipeg planning report, in what amounted to CentreVenture’s founding document: “Our image, and therefore our competitive position, will undoubtedly be influenced by the impressions created within ten blocks of Portage and Main. Planning and coordination are essential.”

Indeed, the doctrine became newly hegemonic across Manitoba’s political spectrum following Murray’s election as Mayor of the provincial capital. Candidates jostled to position themselves as the face of urban redevelopment during the 1999 Manitoba provincial election. Even arch-conservative incumbent Gary Filmon, whose base lay far from downtown Winnipeg,

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201 Ibid., 3.
supported CentreVenture and told the *Free Press*, “It’s vitally important that Winnipeg – which is the capital city, which is what people internationally see about us – become vital, become exciting, and become seen as a great place to invest.”202 Gary Doer, the eventual Premier-elect, was equally enthusiastic, linking the current moment to a fondly imagined history of urban renewal in Winnipeg, telling the *Free Press*, “We have to bring back the ‘can-do’ attitude that led to The Forks and business improvement zones…With a new mayor and council that are ready for downtown renewal, it’s time to get the job done.”203

In fact, despite his reputation for thinking outside the box, Murray drew heavily from plans that had been drafted long before he came to power. The *CentreVenture Working Draft* Murray submitted to City Council references downtown plans dating from a 1969 report entitled *Downtown Winnipeg*, which identified downtown disinvestment as a general civic crisis and laid the groundwork for, among other things, the construction of the Winnipeg Convention Centre.204 The general schema of making downtown attractive to investors through tax breaks, subsidies, free land, and technical assistance had been in place since at latest the 1970s when the City of Winnipeg gave $20 million to Montreal-based Trizec Corporation for the construction of an office tower and shopping mall at Portage and Main. But Murray provided political leadership for several new innovations the urban wing had begun to call for after reflecting on thirty-plus years of untransformative organizing.

Responding to what it viewed as a fragmented organizational landscape – since the 1970s the urban wing had established litany of business improvement districts, tourism and economic development offices, property-owners’ associations, and an authority to manage the two

202 Anonymous, “Politicians on Downtown.”
203 Ibid.
204 Klos and Douchant, “‘Development at the Core’ A Brief Outline of Downtown Winnipeg Development Over the Last 35 Years.”
shopping malls constructed under the CAI – a 1997 planning committee urged City Council to,
“Explore the possibility of creating a downtown planning and development corporation…a
downtown development corporation with a broader geographical mandate would be in a better
position to make decisions which would likely benefit all of downtown.” Murray, in his
CentreVenture Working Draft, built on the committee’s view. “There are a myriad of
organizations currently working on the different aspects of improving the downtown”, he wrote.
“They have said that what is missing is something that will bring them together, coordinate
activities, focus all of the efforts to revitalize downtown. We agree. We believe that a new
development corporation which takes on this leadership role is the best way of achieving this
goal.”

Murray made clear that the new authority be given access to the city’s wealth of
“surplus” land and buildings and that this constitute the core of the authority’s power.
“CentreVenture must have access to City assets in order to do business”, he wrote. “City Council
will have to make critical decisions about transferring City-owned assets or other options. This
could involve transferring property assets related to heritage buildings. Or, the City could
provide access through options to purchase, right of first refusal, leases, air rights parcels or other
vehicles.” Murray concluded, “Upon approval from Council, the administration will immediately
begin work on the feasibility of transferring assets.”

City Council welcomed the plan. While two city-center councilors unsuccessfully
objected to transferring funds from an affordable housing program to CentreVenture, the transfer
of ‘surplus’ City-owned land and buildings to the authority received little resistance.

206 Murray and Stephens, “CentreVenture Working Draft.”
207 Ibid., 9–10.
“CentreVenture, the city’s newly minted development corporation,” the *Winnipeg Free Press* reported less than seven months after Murray introduced the idea, “just became the busiest real estate agent in the downtown. City council approved an asset agreement yesterday that gives the agency an option on 44 city-owned downtown buildings and parcels of land. CentreVenture’s job is to find buyers and developers for the properties”. The properties in the original “bundle” were given to CentreVenture for $1 apiece, according to the asset agreement between CentreVenture and the City. “Properties that the city acquires in the future under tax sales”, the *Free Press* also reported, “will be turned over to CentreVenture for the value of the outstanding taxes.”

By design, the new authority gave capitalists access to City-owned resources with an unprecedented absence of democratic, or ‘political’ intervention. “We believe that for CentreVenture to be effective, it will have to be able to expedite decisions”, Murray wrote in the *CentreVenture Working Draft*. The local state would continue to make policy and provide infrastructure, he wrote, “However, we believe that attracting and finalizing business deals should be handled through an entrepreneurial group”. “What is needed is a pro-active group to support private sector investment and partnerships – a development corporation to work with the private sector and with government to spur the revitalization of downtown.”

“The agency will report to council twice a year,” the *Free Press* announced five months later, “but it will not need political approval for any of its deals.” The president of the Chamber of Commerce, according to the *Free Press*, “Said the agency needs to operate independently in order to establish credibility

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with the private sector.” “It has to transcend the political agenda of the day”, the Free Press quoted the Chamber president, “and operate untouched through successive administrations.”

*The CentreVenture Doctrine*

The plans cited in the creation of CentreVenture, and the newspaper accounts that introduced the authority to the public, were imbued with values and ideas now visible in the built environment produced by CentreVenture, including the Waterfront Drive district that replaced the CN railroad spur. These accounts established specific normative conceptions about geography and development that ensured the burial of alternative development visions, including those that may have emerged from the predominantly poor, working class, Indigenous, and people of color communities in the center of Winnipeg. These conceptions were not entirely new, nor entirely old. Instead, they represented new spins on geographical ideas that had dominated the region’s development for over one hundred years.

The first achievement was to depoliticize the planning process. This allowed the dominant regional bloc to monopolize decision making and narrow the field of participants from the diverse array of historically, politically situated communities inhabiting the city center, to a small cadre of “experts”, technocrats, politicians, “business people”, and property owners, most of whom did not live in the city center or have strong connections to downtown neighborhoods.

A major discursive tactic used to depoliticize the process was to describe downtown as a place that ‘belongs to everyone’. This was done in close connection with a trickle-down economic analysis that assumed universal benefits of profitable capitalist investment downtown.

The City’s 1995 CentrePlan: Working Together for Winnipeg’s Downtown - the first plan to call for an urban development authority in Winnipeg –after rehearsing the “heart” analogy that

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210 David O’Brien, “City ‘Open for Business.’”
Murray would echo again in his *CentreVenture Working Draft*, introduces the city center as “a special place with a responsibility to all Winnipeggers” and asserts the need for a plan that will “benefit the city as a whole by creating a predictable investment climate” through “consensus” and the creation of a “shared vision”. The urban wing’s argument that city-center profits will create an economic “domino effect” is rolled out to explain that the entire region will benefit. “[Downtown] determines Winnipeg’s competitive position within the country”, the plan claims, “The future of the whole Winnipeg region hinges to a very great degree on what is going to become of the city’s downtown in the future.” While the authority’s official mandate would be “the economic, physical, and social revitalization of downtown Winnipeg”, in practice it was the much narrower goal of “a predictable investment climate” that was pursued.

Through this logic, the task of development was transformed into the task of maximizing profitability and reducing risks to capital investment. This framing then made logical the appointment of members of the dominant regional bloc to positions of power within CentreVenture. The authority’s first board consisted of eight people: An heir to a national newspaper and television empire who was the chair of the board; the owner of the oldest luxury hotel in the city; a former president of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce; a business consultant with ties to the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce; an editor of a magazine for tourists; the executive director of the National Screen Institute; and an architect. After one year, only the first three board members remained. They were then joined by a banker; the CEO of an information technology company; and a pollster who happened to be married to the Premier of Manitoba.

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212 Ibid., 3.
213 Hilderman, Thomas, Frank, Cram Landscape Architecture, Planning and Property & Services Department, Planning & Land-Use Division, “CentrePlan Development Framework.”
I spoke with Angela, an Indigenous woman of Cree, Metis, Irish, and Scottish ancestry, about the lack of Indigenous participation in CentreVenture. Angela has long been active in Indigenous struggles in the city, including organizing in response to missing and murdered Indigenous women and establishing a community organization to support Indigenous women and their families in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. “Hey”, Angela asked me, smiling, “does CentreVenture have any Indigenous people on the board?” At that point, almost fifteen years after its creation, CentreVenture’s board consisted of the president of a multi-billion dollar agriculture and food processing firm; the vice president of a multi-billion dollar insurance company; the regional president of a multi-national bank; a developer and part owner of the city’s NHL hockey team; a broker in a multi-national real estate firm; the president of a shipping company; a partner in a law firm; a public relations strategist; and an architect. I told Angela that none of them were of Indigenous ancestry. “That’s a problem right there”, she said.

Angela told me it reminded her of a summit that had been convened recently about the future of Manitoba, attended by high-level politicians, including former Manitoba Premiers Gary Filmon and Gary Doer. One of the main topics of conversation, Angela had noticed, was the importance of Indigenous peoples to the future of the province. The problem was, “not a single Indigenous person was at the table”, Angela said, shaking her head. “White people just want to manage us”, she told me, saying that to her, authorities like CentreVenture and events like the summit indicate that instead of reflecting on “whiteness”, “centuries of colonialism”, and “structural” factors, white people continue to speak as if there’s some “inherent” problem with Indigenous peoples and the places they inhabit.

Despite the homogeneity of CentreVenture’s board - the absence of downtown residents, tenants, homeless people, youth, seniors, wage workers, people on social assistance, people of
color, and Indigenous peoples – there is a tendency for those involved to emphasize its diversity. Eliza told me a story about drinking with Murray one evening, as the mayor jotted names of potential CentreVenture board members on a coaster. “He looked for people he thought had a real passion for downtown,” she said, “he tried to be as inclusive as possible.” Annitta Stenning, the first CEO of CentreVenture, described the authority’s first board to me as “a wonderful mix of entrepreneurs and professionals” with “just a wonderful, rich mix of perspectives, but with a deep passion, and all of them very much committed to Winnipeg and the value of downtown.”

The “passion for downtown” that Eliza and Annitta speak of is related to a second geographical conception advanced by the urban wing, that is, the revanchist idea of the city center as a place that has been lost but is now an object of righteous desire and repossession. A non-confrontational way of doing this was to present the area as simply dead, sick, or empty. Annitta told me that CentreVenture prioritized residential developments in particular - “those kinds of things that would breathe some life into it” – “because the work day, there’s sixty thousand people that work in the downtown, but at the end of the day it really was vacant.” Characterizations like this enable the urban wing to present the retaking of the city center as an innocent, salubrious, vital, even thrilling movement of people into uninhabited terrain. Murray and others relied on a set of floating signifiers to dehumanize the downtown. “Everyone wants to do something to improve the downtown and make it a vibrant, active place”, Murray wrote in the CentreVenture Working Draft, making sure to reiterate that the area’s lack of “health and vitality” threatened the entire province’s future. “However, everyone agrees that the goal of a revitalized downtown has not been realized.”

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Prior occupants of the downtown, however, were not entirely erased by the plans that created the basis for CentreVenture. The authors of *CentrePlan: Working Together for Winnipeg’s Downtown* actually went to some effort to include them. “The downtown has a population of 14,000 and increasingly is home for recent immigrants and aboriginal people”, its authors acknowledge. \(^{215}\) Indigenous claims to the area are hinted at in *CentrePlan*. “In our vision of the future,” the report asserts, “the downtown exhibits a strong sense of community and belonging…It respects and honours its aboriginal ancestry recognizing their pivotal role in the success of the downtown.” \(^{216}\)

Even the “boundary neighbourhoods” that *CentrePlan*’s geographical boundary excludes come in to view for a moment, in *CentrePlan*. “Downtown Winnipeg is framed by a number of older residential neighbourhoods all of which have a significant impact on the downtown”, the plan states, and in a section entitled “Promoting Social Harmony”, the planners elaborate their views. “By far the most rapidly growing sector of the downtown and boundary neighbourhoods population is the aboriginal community”, they write. “It faces challenges related to poverty, unemployment, and low education attainment as well as the need to strengthen traditional cultural and spiritual values.”

Under a second subheading, “New Immigrants”, the planners go on: “The downtown continues to be the most significant location in the city and the province for migrants. Since the mid-1980s international migration has been on the increase. However the countries of origin for immigrants, have shifted from those in Europe to those in South-East and East Asia.” The authors conclude the section with a discussion of “Street Youth”: “The existence of street youth in Winnipeg is both well documented and plainly visible. These youth are either extremely

\(^{216}\) Ibid., 7.
vulnerable to, or are already enmeshed in, a lifestyle of unmet basic needs, high risk activities, and alienation. In order to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, street youth often resort to illegal activities.”

But instead of aiming to meet the needs of these groups, CentrePlan brackets them away from the heart of its development vision, which consistently remains the attraction and protection of capital investment. Downtown neighborhoods are treated as problems that, if gone unmanaged, could negatively affect the attraction of investment. In a special section on “Community and Belonging” CentrePlan instructs the City to, “Implement a long-term neighborhood management approach for dealing with boundary communities” and recommends separate “programs designed to address the multitude of issues manifest in these communities.” In so doing, CentrePlan construes lack of access to the necessities of life for people already living downtown as a side issue related to “social deterioration” rather than a result of the sustained exclusion of those communities from dominant development visions over decades and centuries.

In the CentreVenture Working Draft Murray wrote based on CentrePlan, Murray fails to mention existing residents and the presence of Indigenous, migrant, or “street youth” communities. Those groups were also subsequently written out of media depictions of the city center after Murray’s plan was released. Planners, politicians, and reporters were able to present the city center as a space devoid of inhabitants, and thus ripe for the introduction of humanity in general. “PEOPLE AT HEART OF CITY PLAN”, the Free Press proclaimed on the front page of its April 27, 1999 edition. “PEOPLE, PEOPLE, PEOPLE” ran a May 9, 1999 headline. “CentrePlan’s vision is more people downtown – more people living downtown, more people

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217 Ibid., 19.
218 Ibid.
working downtown, and more people playing downtown”, CentrePlan committee chairman Brad Hughes told the *Free Press*. The coverage hid the social engineering practiced by CentreVenture, which tended to divide the city’s population into ‘dead’ and ‘vital’ subjects. Existing Indigenous, migrant, and “street youth” residents signaled the death of the city, while the majority white suburban white-collar workforce represented its salvation.

Interviews with those involved reveal more of this social complexity than do official plans and newspaper coverage. Annitta talked to me about the park that had replaced the CN rail line. “Well as it turns out, it was a very unsafe park, very untoward people were using it, lots of drug deals,” she told me. “We actually cut in to the park, to create private space, so we could create development, so we could create condominiums, so we could create residential opportunities.” It was an initially unpopular move. “People said, ‘You’re crazy, you’re cutting into a park, you’re cutting down trees’. And we said, ‘Mmhmm, we are, because nobody uses it, it’s unsafe, and there’s no place for development’.” Much of the $10 million redevelopment of the park, as Annitta recalled, was intended to expose its “untoward” inhabitants to the gaze of presumably more toward people. “So, we’re actually going to use the road to facilitate residential development, we’re going to change the park, we’re going to cut some of those berms, we’re going to cut the trees up, so there’s beautiful sight lines right down to the river, it’s open, so people will go there during the day and at night and feel safe, we’re going to put lights in.” Today, Annitta continued, “You look out on the park, and when people know there’s lots of activity and eyes on the park, that’s not where bad people want to hang out.” The strategy, in Annitta’s eyes, worked wonders for CentreVenture’s bottom line. “As a result, it facilitated millions and millions and millions of dollars of development, it facilitated residential [development], the park is used, and I still have conversations with people to this day, over ten
years later, saying, ‘Annitta, the best thing they ever did in the downtown was create Waterfront Drive’.

The displacement of “bad people” was not only financially desirable to CentreVenture. To Annitta, it was a virtuous cause. “I think people knew that it was the right thing to do,” she told me, “and the big piece that we had to convince council and others of, is…that it would take twenty years to get it back, and it would take discipline, it would take courage, it would take leadership, it would take investment on all fronts.” Annitta spoke as a representative of the urban wing of the dominant regional bloc, detailing her struggle to convince suburban City Councilors of their responsibility in retaking the city. By asserting the righteousness of the process, she also made an argument for the role of the state. “The first part was the public investment [in the road and park redevelopment] had to happen,” Annitta said, “because without that, absolutely not, there wouldn’t have been the private investment, because it would have had no where to work, right?” Annitta’s views on Waterfront Drive were openly revanchist. But what she added to this was a sense that in this case, the local state – and its public – private institutional offspring – needs to play a key role in the process. In Annitta’s eyes, the city could not be ‘retaken’ without the local state literally paving the way.

Beyond merely asserting the emptiness of the city center through revanchist rhetoric, CentreVenture and its allies produced an array of geographical representations for the depiction of a two-dimensional, juridical, abstract space. Maps, computer-generated illustrations, architectural drawings, charts, graphs, zoning laws, and legal titles, provide an easily-digestible, supposedly objective representation of an area’s resources, attributes, and character – e.g. owners, land uses, zoning restrictions, building heights – without giving any sense of the existing historical, lived, social, cultural, or day to day reality of the area.
One afternoon I met with Richard, a developer and architect who had been involved in the early days of Waterfront Drive. The topic of buying and selling land ran deep, with Richard. Land markets – or lack thereof – were integral to the story of how his ancestors (Russian Mennonites) had come to Canada. “My parents,” he told me, “they came with very little, because one year made a big difference in terms of what you could do with your land in Russia, you know, it was being more and more taken away from you by the communists”. Fast forward to the early 2000s, as CentreVenture was attempting to solicit investment in Waterfront Drive. Richard told me a story that centered on a yearlong conflict between interested developers. Richard was a relatively small-time developer, and he felt he was being pushed around. CentreVenture had already awarded him a parcel of land, but a bigger, better known developer – Winnipeg-based fashion tycoon Peter Nygard - now wanted some of it. Richard was open to the idea, but he wanted his property expanded elsewhere in return. “You know, give us twenty feet and we’ll give you the big opening”, he recalled telling CentreVenture. But the land that Richard wanted wasn’t owned by CentreVenture. “It belongs, still, to Arnie Thorsteinson, Shelter Corporation”, Richard said, “And so Arnie and Nygard were trying to work a deal, or were working together in the background, so we proposed that, and they said no, Arnie wasn’t willing to give up any of his property.” But CentreVenture still wanted to satisfy Nygard. According to Richard, “CentreVenture called and said, um, would you consider the property across the street? And then you know Nygard would take your property here,” and so forth. “[Nygard] owned the old building next door here, and he owned some of the buildings on the other side; he claimed he owned all of it, but in fact he only owned some of those buildings,” Richard said. The deal eventually fell through, Nygard moved on, and ultimately Richard’s development had been delayed for nothing. The upshot for Richard was that building costs had increased dramatically
while the deal was being negotiated, and Richard ended up losing several hundred thousand dollars. Listening to Richard talk about land, property, and development had my head spinning. It felt like listening to play-by-play commentary on a Monopoly game. His point in telling me the story was to show how CentreVenture’s priority often lies in pleasing large developers, sometimes to the detriment of small-time players such as himself. It was an interesting point, but the real impact of the story on me was the way it brought me into the general mindset of a real estate capitalist. I understood more than ever how necessary it is for capital to have secure, predictable legal title to land, to be able to quickly buy and sell it, and to have an abstract, market-oriented idea of land well entrenched around them.

Finally, Murray and the urban wing, in order to sell their new vision for the city’s future, pushed the idea that civic ‘surplus’, in the form of city-owned land and buildings, as well as loan guarantees and other services the city may be able to provide, was best redistributed upwards, to wealthy developers, and indirectly to the wealthy suburbanites who would populate the developments. A “private” institution was regarded as necessary to achieve such a distribution. The private development corporation would be tasked, in particular, with “leveraging” private investment with public resources. Murray gave as an example, the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation in St. Paul, which according to Murray “levered over $428 million in investments with seed money of approximately $10 million.” “Leveraging” or “Levering” private investment – i.e. providing handouts to capital – would become the final goal. “In the long-term, we would like to see every public dollar lever significant private sector investment”, Murray concluded.

The top headline in the September 30th, 1999 edition of the *Winnipeg Free Press* announced Mayor Murray as the first chair of the CentreVenture board, and using a quote direct
from Mayor Murray, declared Winnipeg “‘open for business’.”\(^{219}\) As a result of Murray’s strategy, virtually all of the original forty-four plots of surplus City-owned land in the center of Winnipeg were transferred to the private sector via CentreVenture in the years following 1999. Most of this land was given over to millionaire developers for for-profit office and condo developments.

The former spur line that CentreVenture – with $10 million in government infrastructure funding - turned into Waterfront Drive was the largest contiguous collection of such land parcels during this phase. The area came in for special notice. “Waterfront Drive is the future” the *Free Press* editorialized in the summer of 2004, after CentreVenture unveiled architectural drawings of condos intended for the area. “Waterfront Drive is the symbol of what the downtown and Winnipeg can become”, the *Free Press* Editor in Chief wrote, in an article replete with references to “the frontier spirit”, urban “pioneers”, and their “castles”.\(^{220}\) Between 2005 and 2008, 200 luxury condos in four complexes were constructed along the former rail line, each originally priced from $200,000 to $700,000 (many are now valued at over $1 million).

In 2011, the *Free Press* checked in on the now-completed area in a piece entitled “Its ship has come in: Waterfront Drive transformed into a beacon of success.” “Today, Waterfront Drive is a sight to behold,” wrote the *Free Press*, citing as evidence “all the magnificent condominium developments that line the street.” Of the Waterfront Drive neighborhood, the piece continued: “Once a run-down, listless area, it has regained the vibrancy that once characterized the area in the early 1900s.” “An area that was once a beacon of failure,” the *Free Press* commented.

\(^{219}\) David O’Brien, “City ‘Open for Business.’”
\(^{220}\) Hirst, “Waterfront Drive Is the Future.”
Press quoted CentreVenture CEO Ross McGowan, “[has been made] into an area that’s now a beacon of success.”

I began my fieldwork in Winnipeg in the summer of 2013. A friend put me in touch with Albinka, and I agreed to rent one of her two condos in The Straight. The people I met in The Straight, and in the other newly developed parts of Waterfront Drive were warm and friendly. But the area itself felt much colder and more “dead” - to use the parlance of the urban wing – than the newspaper articles and advertisements I had seen made it out to be. Cars far outnumbered pedestrians on the street. There was not a casual human trace in the lobby, hallways, or elevator of The Straight – no notes, posters, shoes, decorations, or children’s toys – the environment felt sterile, strictly steel and glass. I virtually never saw anyone hanging around outside the building, or in its shared areas. I soon realized the building’s private parking garage was its main hub of spontaneous social activity, if it could be said to have one. This was for the simple reason that almost everybody - even in Winnipeg’s few warm summer months - drove in and out of the building for just about every purpose, from buying toilet paper to visiting friends. The Free Press’ use of the word “castles” to describe these condos, even before they had been constructed, felt prescient. It was in the garage, and the garage only, that people in The Straight would visit momentarily while getting out of the car. A few neighborly touches accompanied the Audis and BMWs in the garage, including my favorite, a novelty sign reading “NO PARKING – ICELANDERS ONLY.”

Commerce, the typical measure of urban life by CentreVenture’s standards, was barely in evidence during my stay on Waterfront Drive. Three of the four condo-complexes had ground-floor commercial space built into them, but only about half of the storefronts were active during

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221 Lewys, “Its Ship Has Come in.”
my stay. The shops that had been set up – a few nail, massage, and skin care parlors, for the most part – were closed on evenings and weekends. A $50 per plate Brazilian restaurant had recently opened in the condo-complex next door and seemed to be doing well - many of the people I spoke to liked to mention it as an example of the improving fortunes of the area. But to a person, they agreed that Waterfront Drive was a disappointment when it came to commercial life.

The condos and storefronts of Waterfront Drive face what is officially known as Stephen Juba Park, the strip of mostly well-manicured lawns, bright flowers, old elms, and benches running along the West side of the Red River, that Annitta took such pride in. It is a popular path for spandex-clad joggers and cyclists, as well as the odd dog-walker or office worker with a briefcase. But these people tend not to stick around for very long. The people that do inhabit the area for any length of time – apart from scheduled daycare outings and the odd athletic training session – tend to be the people I imagine Annitta is talking about when she talks about “bad people”.

From my time hanging out in the park, these people would include: Teenagers riding dirt bikes and smoking weed on the riverbank at dusk; a man and a woman sharing a bench and a bottle of beer in the early morning; three guys in their fifties who climbed up from the riverbank one morning, newspapers in hand, to block rush hour traffic while mouthing things at the stopped cars; the skinny guy dumpster diving in front of my building; and whoever scrawled the long, meticulously-drafted message in Cree syllabics on the bench down by the river. It was people such as these, usually dressed in less washed, looser fitting casual clothes, drinking or doing drugs, going through dumpsters and garbage cans, sometimes begging, but mostly just hanging out, who were more likely to be found sitting on the benches in the neighborhood or congregating in its public spaces.
There are more than a few people who, like William, sometimes live in the Waterfront Drive neighborhood without possessing the key to a condo. One afternoon I decided to walk along riverbank near my building, where Waterfront Drive and Stephen Juba Park slope steeply down to a muddier, less-manicured, mostly tree-covered terrain. Here I stumbled upon a kind of ‘tent city’. I had heard of people sleeping along the riverbank, but the extent of what I saw that afternoon surprised me. Later that day I took the following note:

On the river, along Waterfront Drive until where Waterfront Drive ends, I saw at least eight separate camps set up on the bank. Tents of all sizes, clothes hanging on tree branches, folding chairs, charred fire pits, couches, arm chairs, and other belongings are scattered in camps all over the place down here, including one camp directly under the Harbour Master building, where a boutique hotel and wine bar are now under construction, with a handmade sign reading PLEASE DON’T TAKE ANYTHING THX. Then, along the riverbank that runs parallel to Higgins, close to the same number of camps run along the river until the trees end around McFarlane Street. In all, I saw approximately fifteen camps down by the banks of the Red River this afternoon, between 2:00pm and 3:30pm.

A few weeks later, I attended an open house for a new condo-complex that was being proposed for Waterfront Drive. It was to be built on one of the final parcels of land that CentreVenture still owned in the area. The event hadn’t been advertised, but I received a last-minute invitation from Elaine, one of my Waterfront Drive neighbors. Inside, a man in a guard’s uniform welcomed us to a small room of freshly painted white drywall, where people in dresses, suits, khakis, and polo shirts milled around. A model of a twenty-five story tower stood on a table in the center of the room. It felt like a fancy art opening. Mounted on the wall were several computer-generated illustrations of the tower, displaying its height and the shadow it would cast at different times of day, along with various zoning and architectural drawings. Maps of the neighborhood divided the area in to “residential”, “cultural”, “parking”, and “greenspace” (The riverbanks were not described as residential). The price of the proposed condos was not displayed, nor was there any discussion of affordability, the area’s non-condo residents, or the larger development context. Nor were any questions posed as to the kind of city or neighborhood
people would like to live in, or the goals and principles that might guide the use of publicly owned lands in the city center. CentreVenture, even though it owned the land in question, was nowhere officially represented.

As I was staring at one of the maps, a short round man in a polo shirt sidled up to me, and we said hello. His name was Guy, and he lived in the condo-complex next to mine. After talking about the tower for a minute, Guy’s wife Val joined us, wearing a stylish red jacket. I ask them what they would most like to see in the neighborhood. “Parking”, Guy says, as Val nods. Guy says he thought he should be able to permanently buy a parking space, “for twenty thousand dollars or something”. He goes on, “If they can put a man on the moon they could do that”. I nod. “What about safety?” I ask, surprised that Guy didn’t mention it first. “That’s the one thing that everybody asks us, but it hasn’t been a problem”, Guy says. “But,” he adds, “there are some Natives”. Val nods her head, and she tells me that “one was in our trash” the other day. “But it was fine”, says Guy, “I just told him, ‘I don’t mind if you go through the trash, just make sure you pick everything up after you’re done’”. Guy goes on talking about the “Natives” he sees around the neighborhood. “Panhandlers”, Val specifies. “I don’t know what it is”, Guy goes on, “but there are more and more Natives these days”. “It doesn’t look good for the area”, he adds. “It was like that when we moved in”, Val says, “but it’s not as bad as Portage Avenue.” She gives me a smirking, knowing look. “Here, they ask for money, you say no, and they say, Okay, thank you”.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explained how the City of Winnipeg established a new urban development authority, CentreVenture, from within a specific set of historical-geographic circumstances in the 1990s. CentreVenture reinvigorated long-established patterns of regional inequality through
inequitable distribution of land and development financing, despite indications that the political moment may have been ripe for the rise of alternative development visions. I began with the example of William, a formerly homeless Indigenous man from the center of Winnipeg who sees himself left out of dominant development schemes for the area. William struggles to get by, primarily by panhandling, and rents badly constructed housing on the northwest edge of the downtown. Albinka, a retired university professor of Polish descent, by contrast, found herself pulled from a wealthy south-end neighborhood into the city center by CentreVenture’s Waterfront Drive development. In the process, Albinka realized her lifelong dream of living a luxurious urban lifestyle in the center of Winnipeg.

To explain how this came to be, I introduced the concept of the dominant regional bloc, borrowed from Clyde Woods. I added that in Winnipeg the bloc is split between an urban wing tied to city-center profits and a suburban wing resistant to supporting broad efforts at maximizing city-center profitability. The urban wing successfully assembled support for their new city-center development vision, CentreVenture, and pursued four tactics to ensure that CentreVenture would reproduce the old order. Namely, they depoliticized development; popularized a revanchist view of the downtown; deployed abstract geographical constructions of space; and enshrined the upward redistribution of public resources through the concept of ‘leveraging investment’.

CentreVenture’s Waterfront Drive was the first major example of how the authority concretely manifested these forces within a newly reconstructed urban landscape. CentreVenture was successful in attracting capital investment on abandoned railway land by convincing the state to invest significantly in new infrastructure, by providing favorable land prices and financing to developers, and by opening the land strictly to luxury condo development. CentreVenture considered Waterfront Drive a success almost solely because it was able to attract
capital investment to the land. Questions of ‘urban life’ and ‘vitality’ remained strictly secondary. Despite this, the authority was able to marshal glowing media accounts of the area’s ‘revitalization’, and its role as symbol of the city’s future. But lived experience on Waterfront Drive paints a much more ambiguous picture. Through ethnographic observation, I showed how the new ‘revitalized’ environment is often far from lively, while the supposedly ‘dead’ parts of the neighborhood may be the most animated.
Chapter 4 – “This City is Red”: CentreVenture vs. Main Street

“we gave our permission
to live side by side
watching our side lose
and places were removed
piece by piece
and invisible walls rose
to the sky”

Duncan Mercredi

“The Nazis of Main, in my opinion, were the economic ones.”

Marvin Francis

The Indigenization of Canadian cities – more than half of Indigenous peoples now live in urban areas and Indigenous peoples are the youngest, fastest growing population in many cities – has broken down much of the geographical divide established by Canada’s apartheid Indian Reserve infrastructure. But as more and more Indigenous neighborhoods are disinvested, demonized, violently policed, and set apart from the rest of their cities, apartheid is reproduced at the urban scale. Within these spaces, in resistance to colonial processes, Indigenous peoples have created new, distinctly pan-Indigenous urban communities. While non-Indigenous geographers and other scholars have engaged this new geography to some extent, it is Indigenous peoples themselves who have done the most to give voice to this new urban reality.

Indigenous poets in particular have identified and critiqued the urban processes of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century Canadian cities, while constructing a rich urban Indigenous sense of place. I begin this chapter by discussing how the Winnipeg-based Manitoba Indigenous Writers Collective (MIWC), specifically two of its most prominent poets - Marvin

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223 Francis, “Voices From Dark Rooms: Winnipeg’s New Occidental Hotel and the Spectre of Main Street.”
Francis and Duncan Mercredi – have established the center of Winnipeg and its Main Street “strip” as a place of significance to contemporary Indigenous peoples. I then give an account of an oral history told to me by Mercredi, detailing the migrations of different groups of Indigenous peoples to Winnipeg in the mid twentieth century, their experiences of segregation in the city, the rise of Winnipeg’s Main Street strip as a diverse new pan-Native social space, and subsequent attacks on the strip by City Council’s ‘urban renewal’ schemes. I then pick up where chapter three left off with CentreVenture, as it moves from Waterfront Drive to Main Street in the late 2000s with a new multi-year development vision for the strip. CentreVenture and the urban wing heightened their free-market, profit-centric rhetoric in this period, zeroing in on the strip and its inhabitants as the primary barrier against a profitable urban economy. CentreVenture deployed new financing techniques, hotel demolitions and closures, and increased policing to eventually change the face of the strip, and in doing so came into direct, dramatic confrontation with coordinated Indigenous opposition. Finally, through an interview with another poet and MIWC member, CentreVenture’s transformation of the Main Street strip are framed as an attempted resolution of the dominant development visions that have serially dispossessed and fractured Indigenous communities for over a century.

In 1989 a circle of poets came together under the banner of the Aboriginal Writers Collective of Manitoba, now known as the Manitoba Indigenous Writers Collective (MIWC), holding its meetings in Winnipeg’s warehouse district. It was a time of resurgent Indigenous radicalism and cultural production, one year before the Oka Crisis and three years before the five-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ invasion of Turtle Island. Within this circle, the poet, playwright, artist, actor, and theatre director Marvin Francis - a long time Winnipegger originally from Alberta’s Heart Lake First Nation - became a central figure. Francis
passed away in 2005, three years after the publication of his best-known work – the long poem *city treaty*.

In *city treaty*, Francis crafts a dense, anarchic vision of life in Winnipeg that ranges across centuries and landscapes but repeatedly comes back to the contemporary city’s center, the space-time from which a new relationship between inhabitants of Turtle Island will be forged. The poem is told loosely from the point of view of JOE TB, member of “the city band”. TB stands for “treaty buster”, and JOE sets out to replace an old “truce” with a new “city treaty” based on current conditions.

Before he can get down to work on the city treaty, JOE is sidetracked by questions, memories, and hallucinations most often inspired by Winnipeg street scenes. At one point Francis imagines Christopher Columbus walking down the Main Street strip: 224

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just think what if columbus had discovered himself instead
so to drink
to drink
there’s the rubbie walking down Main
doing that santa maria shuffle
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Neither can JOE escape the challenges posed by the city’s late-capitalist economy; he needs to hire a lawyer to get the city treaty going – “lawyer = life” – so he comes up with a money-making scheme called “mcPemmican”: 225

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let the poor intake their money take their health
sound familiar
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In the end, JOE is overtaken by a group of Indigenous writers Francis lists using sometimes-decipherable nicknames:

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here come the leaders the mavericks who cannot shut up
word drummers
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224 Francis, *city treaty*, 36.

225 Ibid., 6.
“[T]he landscape now has city”, Francis instructs, on the poem’s final page, leaving us with only this list of urban authors from which to move forward. “follow the word drummers to the city treaty”\textsuperscript{226}.

One of the writers Francis refers readers to at the end of city treaty is Duncan Mercredi, a Winnipeg-based Cree and Metis poet originally from Misipawistik (Grand Rapids, Manitoba). Mercredi is a senior member of the MIWC and a mentor to many. He has published several books of poetry, populated by images of smoke-filled bars, endless concrete, deafening city traffic, white bigots, the blues, and allusions to revolutionary violence. In 1997’s The duke of Windsor: Wolf sings the blues (named for a downtown Winnipeg blues bar), Mercredi includes a poem called “Mistress”, which hinges on the city’s segregated geography:\textsuperscript{227}

\begin{verbatim}
locked inside their fortress in the suburb
they neatly side step out stretched hands
cursing under their breath
I see them sometimes circling the red light
drawn into its hypnotizing gaze
long legs beckon and they forget their hate
for a quick few seconds of forbidden fruit
sampled under the blanket of the night
\end{verbatim}

In “Mistress”, the divide between the city’s affluent suburbs and low-income city center is dramatized through the image of suburbanites coming down from their “fortress” to visit the city center’s red light district. For this purpose the suburbanites are willing to navigate panhandler-type figures – “out stretched hands” – who irritate them, and to overcome their hostility towards the area’s inhabitants – “they forget their hate” – for a brief moment of pleasurable encounter.

The poem brings out a theme that runs through much of the work produced by the MIWC, that is, the dynamic of encounter between Indigenous and non-Indigenous urbanites and the way that such encounters are fueled by a complex mixture of fear, desire, pleasure, and pain.

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{227} Mercredi, The Duke of Windsor: Wolf Sings the Blues.
At the 2014 Manitoba Indigenous Writers Festival, in a cafe on the Main Street strip, Mercredi debuted a new poem, entitled “This City is Red”. It is perhaps the most overt take on urban dynamics of any of Mercredi’s – or perhaps any MIWC members’ – poems. “This city is red”, it opens:

- built on the bones of a thousand generations
- this city is Main Street
- each generation has its own stories
- told in the back alleys in the city core

Mercredi gives the reader a glimpse of the city’s apartheid mentality early on in the poem:

- a promise followed down from a northern road
- seeking a dream
- walking down Portage to Wolseley
- st. James
- then north again
- for the same answer
- no room
- no Job
- don’t bother me
- I’ll call the cops

“A color divide only by imaginary borders”, another line begins, “afraid to cross”:

- this city hides its hate
- but we have felt it for so long
- we know it’s there
- buried beneath the manicured lawns
- behind your drapes
- inside your gates

Later in the poem, Mercredi’s voice becomes more defiant:

- this city is red
- a blood red history you have chosen to ignore
- and when you become dust
- I will dance on your ashes
- I will see that a new flower blossoms where your ashes have settled

Once more, as in “Mistress”, Mercredi deals with the partitions – “imaginary boundaries” – that govern urban life and structure encounters between urban dwellers differently situated in the country’s colonial geography. Mercredi is even more forceful here, as he confronts his non-
Indigenous neighbors directly, calling out the fear, hatred, and willful ignorance that in his experience – “we have felt it for so long/we know it’s there” - rule their engagements.\textsuperscript{228}

Of all the urban locations written about by MIWC poets, Winnipeg’s Main Street strip is the most mythologized. “All the Aboriginal writers live on Main Street”, Francis joked while teaching at a local university. According to the story, Francis’ students had inquired whether Trevor Greyeyes, author of the poem “The Strip”, actually lived on the Main Street strip.\textsuperscript{229} “Natives and the strip are synonymous”, Francis once wrote, “A white person who lives on the strip is more of an outcast than is a Native person who lives there.”\textsuperscript{230} Like Mercredi, Francis viewed Main Street as an important site of encounter between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The large Indigenous presence on Main Street, according to Francis, “leads to the only interaction that many non-Native Winnipeg citizens have with Native peoples.”\textsuperscript{231}

In the winter of 2014 I was given an unpublished piece that Francis had written based on his experiences of the Main Street strip in the 1970s. In the piece, Francis describes that decade as “the heyday of the strip”. On first reading, I wasn’t quite sure what to make of Francis’ assessment. I was born in Winnipeg in the 1980s, and to me Main Street had always seemed like a lively, predominantly Indigenous area of Winnipeg. Two eye-catching developments were built on the strip in the late 1990s: The Canadian Pacific Railway depot – a large, ornate turn of the twentieth century railway station abandoned in 1978 – was taken over by a myriad of Indigenous organizations allied as the non-profit Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg Inc; and a huge new Indigenous cultural center – Thunderbird House – designed by Douglas Cardinal, was erected at

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{228}] Mercredi, “This City Is Red.”
\item[\textsuperscript{230}] Francis, “Voices From Dark Rooms: Winnipeg’s New Occidental Hotel and the Spectre of Main Street,” 7–10.
\item[\textsuperscript{231}] Ibid., 4.
\end{itemize}
the corner of Main Street and Higgins Avenue. If anything, from my perspective – gazing from a car at the buildings on the strip - it seemed as though the late 1990s were a heyday for the strip.

Soon after reading Francis’ piece, I met Duncan Mercredi for coffee at the downtown branch of the Winnipeg Public Library. I wanted to ask him what Francis could have meant by his “heyday” description. Duncan and I sat at a table in the back of the library, surrounded by magazine racks and people swaddled in parkas, reading or napping in armchairs, in a room full of bright winter light. Duncan is now sixty-two, with deep brown eyes, a small nose, round cheeks, and long grey-black hair. He wore a parka, stylish rectangular-rimmed glasses, and huge nylon mittens.

“It all started after the 1940s”, Duncan said, “when the Aboriginal people began to move into the city”. Prior to the 1950s, Duncan told me, there were only five Aboriginal families in the city, but in the 1950s and 1960s, more and more people began to move from First Nations and Metis communities near Winnipeg – places like Roseau River and Sagkeeng - into the city. In Duncan’s recollection, many if not most of these migrants were high school graduates heading to Winnipeg to attend university. Anti-Native racism was rampant in Canadian universities then, Duncan told me, and many in this generation became involved in the early days of the American Indian Movement (AIM).

By the 1970s, Duncan told me, families from more distant, mostly northern First Nations and Metis communities – not merely those within a short drive of the city - began moving to Winnipeg in greater and greater numbers. Something changed in the city at that point, Duncan said. In the 1940s and 1950s, Winnipeg’s few Aboriginal families were more or less tolerated by the city’s white majority. But when “the invasion”, as Duncan put it, began, white hostility
towards Aboriginal people increased, and the city became much more divided. Duncan went on in great detail about the geography of this divide.

The first Indigenous families to move to Winnipeg in the 1940s and 1950s, Duncan told me, settled on a few specific West End blocks - Young, Spence, and Furby Streets, north of Portage Avenue. “That was our territory”, Duncan said, “We didn’t go south of Portage Avenue because we weren’t welcome there”. Duncan said that many downtown hotels, bars, and restaurants south of Portage Avenue, which today are largely Native spaces, were bitterly inhospitable to Native people in those days.

“Let me tell you a story”, Duncan said. “I was a little boy, and we were living at the Mac, the McLaren Hotel [on the Main Street strip] because my father was a war veteran, and the McLaren gave discounts to veterans in those days”. “And my mother loved going to Eaton’s [the famous Canadian department store chain]”, Duncan continued. “So one day she got all dressed up and dressed all of us little kids up, and took us to dine at the fancy restaurant that used to be in Eaton’s”. “So we sat down”, Duncan continued, “and we waited two hours without being served”. His mother had been so set on dining at Eaton’s that she refused to move for two hours, Duncan said. “Eventually”, he went on, “that waitress ended her shift, and a new waitress took over, who served us”. “But my mom never went back”.

Rather than endure degrading encounters like this, according to Duncan, his family and most of the city’s other Indigenous residents headed north to the restaurants, bars, and hotels of Main Street, where they were more welcomed. Although there were some lively Indigenous social spaces at the time in and around Young, Spence, and Furby Streets – for example, a hotel and bar near the old Greyhound bus station – Duncan said, the scene shifted north to Main Street as more and more Indigenous people migrated to the North End.
Duncan compared the dynamic of Aboriginal people sticking with other Aboriginal people in Winnipeg to dynamics on the reserve. There, he told me, people tended to stick with their extended families. So for example, if someone on the reserve married into another family, he said, they mostly associated with that family from then on. The same thing happened in Winnipeg, at a slightly broader scale, Duncan said. When Native people saw other Native people in the city, they gravitated towards them, rather than trying to integrate into a hostile white-dominated city.

By the 1970s, the Main Street strip was the undisputed epicenter of Indigenous social and cultural life in the city. The strip was a diverse, exciting mix of people. University students, artists, and activists hung out with blue-collar workers - including Duncan, who because he was one of the younger children in his family (only the eldest sibling in a First Nations family was eligible for university funding in those days, Duncan told me) worked in highway crews and other manual labor jobs – as well as elders and more “hardcore” people who tended to live in the hotels on the strip. People with roots in a constellation of First Nations and Metis communities came together in a new pan-Native scene centered in the bars, cafes, and hotels on Main Street. If you didn’t know somebody’s address in those days, said Duncan, you went to Main Street to look for them, and more often than not you would find them.

Of course, Main Street in its heyday was not an exclusively Indigenous space. Many white people also hung out there according to Duncan, even though his white coworkers on highway crews mockingly refused each of Duncan’s invitations to join him for a beer on the strip. In his piece about the “heyday” of the strip, Francis also points out that “The Chinese have always had a strong presence on Main Street”. A few blocks of the strip overlap with what is usually considered Winnipeg’s Chinatown. Neither was the area populated predominantly by
single men, as many outsiders imagined it. While Duncan admitted that there were one or two bars at the time that refused to admit women, he said that most of the strip was populated by men and women equally.

The Main Street scene shifted over the years from place to place along the strip. The first locus of the strip in the 1960s – the place to be for Indigenous people in the city, according to Duncan - was the Brunswick Hotel. But City Council demolished the Brunswick as part of its first postwar foray into ‘urban renewal’, replacing it with a parking lot for a new opera house and museum complex. The scene quickly moved north up Main Street to the Occidental Hotel, Duncan recalled, then later to the Savoy Hotel and finally to the Leland Hotel as people migrated in response to the City’s path of destructive ‘renewal’ – hotel closures and demolitions. When the Leland closed, people moved further north, past the tracks, as well as west, to places like Brooklands, Duncan said. The demise of the Leland Hotel, for Duncan, was the blow that signaled the end of Main Street’s “heyday”.

A white-dominated City Council deliberately destroyed the city’s most important hub of Indigenous social and culture life in the 1970s. City officials successfully stigmatized the Main Street strip, casting it as an unruly threat to the health of the city, with full support from the Free Press and other local media. Duncan smiled and shook his head when he reflected on these accusations. The Brunswick could get lively, Duncan said, and there would often be fist fights out front, but neither the Brunswick nor any of the other hotels on the strip were nearly as violent or depraved as City Council and the newspapers made them out to be. The officials that deemed the Main Street strip a “blight” had no actual knowledge of what went on inside the bars themselves, Duncan said, and they painted a much worse picture than what he knew to be true.
Duncan said that it was his impression that city officials and journalists, like most of the rest of the city, obtained almost all of their knowledge of the strip by driving past and gazing at Native people hanging out, sometimes fighting, in front of the hotels. This dynamic of detached encounter is a theme in Mercredi’s poetry and in the work of many other MIWC poets and writers – it is the trope of a white city gawking at Native people and places through the windshields of cars. Duncan found bitter humor in his hunch that nothing more than this tepid form of geographical knowledge eventually led to the mass destruction of a beloved district.

In the post-heyday 1980s, Main Street became less diverse and increasingly populated by only the most “hardcore” people, Duncan said. Most of Main Street’s hotels, bars, and cafes were replaced – if they were replaced at all - with a sterile, authoritarian infrastructure of shelters, food-banks, and the city’s ‘drunk tank’, a collection of short-term cages for people arrested for public intoxication. “They started to patrol it more”, said Duncan – and many university-educated Indigenous people moved away from the strip, sometimes leaving the North End entirely. Much of the remaining bar scene moved south of Portage Avenue, into places like the St. Regis Hotel and the Garrick Hotel, closer to the center of downtown. Today, Duncan pointed out, CentreVenture is targeting these places for closure and demolition.

I asked Duncan what it felt like to be part of a community whose spaces are constantly under attack by City Council’s demolition crews. “I think we’re losing a lot of our history”, he said without hesitating. Duncan said that he thought the “older generation” didn’t like to talk about their first experiences in Winnipeg, when whites made Indigenous people unwelcome in most of the city, pushing them into the North End and on to Main Street, only to demonize and destroy those places in the years to come. They prefer to keep silent about it, Duncan said, hoping that it will go way if they don’t talk about it. “Kind of like residential schools”, Duncan
said. “But I think the opposite is true”, he continued, saying that he makes a point of telling the story of Main Street to his children and grandchildren. Duncan listed a few other examples that he thought compared to the loss of Main Street, including three Indigenous burial mounds and an informal settlement that had all been built over and erased by development projects dating as far back as the construction of the railway. Duncan’s telling communicated a sense of the cultural importance of tangible Indigenous geographies in the city, and the pain of losing them. His history of the Main Street strip explained much that has been doggedly erased from the city’s official history.

But the story of the strip does not end with City Council’s initial attack in the 1970s and 1980s. Indigenous planners and activists honed in on Main Street in the 1990s, making the strip the focus of a new Indigenous-led development vision. In 1997 the Winnipeg Development Agreement (WDA) – the third tripartite five-year plan for Winnipeg’s center – sponsored a planning process for the Main Street strip, after city-center residents criticized the first two CAIs for excluding them in favor of ‘corporate’ shopping malls.\(^{232}\) The final plan of the WDA’s North Main Street Task Force - drafted by a predominantly Indigenous sub-committee chaired by Mary Richard, a Metis woman originally from Camperville, Manitoba - referred to the area as “Neeginan”, Cree for “our place’. The Neeginan name had been used for the area since at least 1975, when a plan was drafted “for the creation of a native people’s community or village in central Winnipeg.”\(^{233}\) In the Neeginan Vision Statement, the sub-committee explained that Main Street remained a place of special importance to the city’s Indigenous community, and it would be through the development of that place that Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg would craft a more just future.

\(^{232}\) Urban Futures Group, *Community Inquiry into Inner City Revitalization*.  
\(^{233}\) North Main Task Force, *Our Place: North Main Task Force*, 11.
“We, the aboriginal people of the City of Winnipeg, have joined together to make a commitment to the future of our children” the Neeginan vision statement begins. “We have joined together to carve our future into the heart of Winnipeg, and by doing so, save our children and heal our tragic past. Neeginan and North Main Street will be our contribution not only to ourselves but to the City of Winnipeg.”

The plan included a mix of not-for-profit infrastructure and for-profit commercial initiatives. It called for 160 units of “housing for Aboriginal students who are in Winnipeg for educational and technical training, and housing for Aboriginal families who are here for relatively short periods for medical treatment or visiting friends and relatives who are hospitalized or receiving specialized treatment.” It also included a well-funded “Relocation Assistance Program” to make sure that if residents were displaced from the area they would “have the opportunity to relocate to comparable accommodation within their community.”

While the Neeginan plan eventually led to the construction of the Thunderbird House, the proposed housing was never built. The report detailed plans for a childcare center, “Hall of Justice”, art gallery, and athletic facilities that also were never built by the WDA or the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement (WPA) that followed.

CentreVenture took control of a large swath of Main Street land in 1999, just two years after the “Neeginan” plan was drafted. While the authority focused most of its energies in the early 2000s convincing the local and provincial governments to build Waterfront Drive and luring capital to invest there, it also went to work slowly on the Main Street strip. CentreVenture demolished several of the strip’s remaining hotels and theaters in these years, sodding over dirt lots and erecting signage aimed at potential buyers. “We’ve been talking to a couple of interested developers,” said CentreVenture CEO Annitta Stenning, “But the first stage is to clear the land

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234 Ibid., 38.
235 Ibid., 19.
and do some greening up.”\footnote{Janzen, “Committee Pulls Plug on Historic Savoy Hotel.”} The authority hoped that by paying for demolition and other costly preparations for development, it could cut developers’ costs and convince them to take on the properties. CentreVenture replaced the old structures with billboards advertising the number of cars that regularly pass through the area, and featuring slogans aimed at motorists, such as “PUT ASIDE YOUR PRECONCIEVED IDEAS ABOUT MAIN STREET AND BECOME PART OF THE DOWNTOWN REBOUND.” “Forget the squalor”, the \textit{Free Press} joined in, “bring on the lawyers and office workers.”\footnote{Hendry, “Main Street Hot Spot for Growth.”}

Despite the advertising and site-preparation subsidies, CentreVenture had little success luring new investment to Main Street in these years. By 2006, with construction underway on Waterfront Drive, the authority cast about for a new primary focus. A consensus seemed to emerge between CentreVenture and its urban wing allies that Waterfront Drive, while a success, had not done enough to transform the face of the city. To the dominant regional bloc, it seemed that while CentreVenture had focused on Waterfront Drive, far more “visible” parts of the downtown – namely Main Street and Portage Avenue, the city’s busiest thoroughfares - had been sorely neglected.

“[CentreVenture] has properly recognized that something needs to be done urgently to repair the pitiful state of Portage Avenue and Main Street”, the \textit{Free Press} editorialized in a 2007 piece entitled “It’s our downtown.” “As it stands now, visitors to Winnipeg are left with the impression of a city in decline”, continued the \textit{Free Press}, “It tells out-of-town investors that Winnipeg is not a good place to do business and it tells tourists there’s nothing here worth seeing.” The editorial concluded by urging local and provincial governments to eliminate taxes for developers. “A healthy downtown”, the \textit{Free Press} wrote, “is somewhat intangible…but at a
minimum, downtown Winnipeg must be seen by investors as a place where money can be made.”

This spirit – the exclusive privileging of exchange value – so pithily espoused by the Free Press, would come to dominate CentreVenture’s approach to Main Street in the coming years. Whereas the authority enforced very narrow land-use and architectural specifications on Waterfront Drive in order to produce its vision of a luxury condo district, CentreVenture was eager to settle for any investment at all in its Main Street properties. Brought to a dramatic extreme, this ethos would eventually attract the fiercest resistance yet experienced by CentreVenture.

The Free Press editorial came on the heels of CentreVenture’s second comprehensive plan, its Heart of Gold Strategic Business Plan 2007-2009, which it presented to City Council for approval in January 2007. At the time, CentreVenture needed to make the case to City Council for its continued existence. “There has been a marked improvement in the condition of Winnipeg’s downtown since CentreVenture’s creation in 1999”, Heart of Gold begins. “Arguably, the private marketplace is performing adequately in many parts of CV’s mandate area.” However “It is CentreVenture’s contention that the market is not yet functioning adequately with respect to the properties in two related areas”, namely, Main Street and Portage Avenue. These areas remained “plagued by an exodus of businesses and residents”. Somewhat more ominously, “civil society”, according to CentreVenture, was “not functioning adequately” in the area. At the time, an estimated one thousand people still lived in hotels on the Main Street strip.

In Heart of Gold CentreVenture refers to Main Street and Portage Avenue as the “Focus Area”. “The Focus Area is an embarrassment”, CentreVenture writes, citing “unsightly entire

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238 Anonymous, “It’s Our Downtown.”
239 Distasio and Mulligan, Beyond a Front Desk: The Residential Hotel as Home.
blocks”, “unattractive” empty lots, and a “skid row collection of hotels, restaurants, and pawn shops”. By way of explaining why City Council should fund the plan, CentreVenture rehearses the self-evident truth of the urban wing – “The downtown of any city is a snapshot of the real health, even the real meaning of a city.” But this time CentreVenture forwards a new claim – downtown may be crucial to the region’s future, but Portage Avenue and Main Street are the downtown’s most crucial segments:

For better or (mostly) worse, the most visible and vital section of Winnipeg’s downtown is the Focus Area. If suburban Winnipeggers ‘see’ (with their eyes and their minds) the Focus Area as an embarrassment, then they will ‘see’ the entire downtown as an embarrassment – a place they do not wish to be, or even to think about.

“Despite decades of best efforts,” CentreVenture continues, “the Focus Area is an embarrassment….It is a disgrace.” But CentreVenture claims that once the area’s fortunes are reversed, Main Street and Portage Avenue could act as a nearly literal “Heart of Gold”, driving the entire regional economy and lifting all boats. “[T]he Heart of Gold will act as the pump of economic power, and of vitality to the suburbs and beyond”, CentreVenture explains. “The word ‘Gold’ in this context, connotes the commercial success that will flow to participants (building owners, merchants, employees, local residents, and the tax collectors) in the new, invigorated economy in the area.” But first the existing neighborhood – that old “disgrace” - must be eliminated. “Everything must be done to remove this disgrace”, CentreVenture concludes, “there is no time to lose.”

Main Street became CentreVenture’s almost exclusive focus in the years following the release of Heart of Gold. But the authority did not turn to the 1997 “Neeginan” plan for inspiration. While it’s framing of the situation was extremely dire, CentreVenture’s actual “prescriptions” for Main Street were surprisingly modest. This was an outcome of an even bolder commitment to free-market ideology in Heart of Gold. “CentreVenture does not take a position
as to what a resurrected Winnipeg downtown would or should look like”, the authority explained, “Only the market can determine that. CentreVenture and others can only create conditions that allow the market to function efficiently.” CentreVenture proposed three tactics to create market-friendly conditions in the Heart of Gold.

First, it would ‘secure’ the area by working with the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) to increase its police presence there. CentreVenture’s new emphasis on policing came at a time of renewed geographic targeting of city-center residents by the WPS. Two years prior, in 2005, Winnipeg mayor Sam Katz announced an unprecedented round of broken-windows style policing in the city’s West End, which the mayor dubbed “Operation Clean Sweep.” A year later, with the help of the Manitoba NDP government, “Operation Clean Sweep” was expanded to target the entire city center.\(^\text{240}\) In *Heart of Gold*, CentreVenture promises to “continue to support strongly all existing security initiatives” - including already prevalent private police forces sponsored by multiple BIDs - but also proposes to deploy a team of “Special Safety Wardens” to the area: “[T]he knowledge that a figure of authority can always be found in a specific spot, during specific times, would come to be an important component in creating the reality, and the perception, of security in the Heart of Gold.”

Second, moving beyond its roll as mere inheritor of surplus City-owned properties, CentreVenture vowed to continue doing what City Council had been doing on its own for decades: purchasing outright and eliminating privately-owned properties – usually residential hotels - that it viewed as troublesome. CentreVenture categorized its purchase of such properties as “profile investments”. “In this category” it wrote, “is the outright, unconditional purchase of a troubled property whose rehabilitation will anchor the resurrection of a Cluster.” “This type of

\(^{240}\) Province of Manitoba, “Sustainable Funding of Operation Clean Sweep Announced by Macintosh and Katz.”
investment,” CentreVenture went on, “is intended to create high visibility and interest, to raise
the flag – in circumstances where it is difficult for the private marketplace to appreciate the
potential for profitable investment.”

The final method proposed by CentreVenture to “unleash the power of the market” along
Portage and Main was, predictably, the removal of existing taxes and regulations on investment.
“[A] long history of difficulty and disappointment, surrounding the development and ownership
of property in the Heart of Gold, has left a legacy, amongst many members of the local, national,
and even international development community, of cynicism at best” it wrote, “At worst, the
notion of development in downtown Winnipeg, particularly in the Heart of Gold, has simply
disappeared from their thoughts.”

To perk up the development community, CentreVenture suggested a general clear-cutting
of local and provincial property taxes in the area. Failing this, it proposed a litany of “special
incentives” for capitalists willing to invest downtown, from low-interest loans to “outright
grants”. CentreVenture proposed that a few tax breaks already in place – most for the private
redevelopment of heritage-designated buildings – be expanded into a general “Urban Tax Credit”
for any investment in the downtown built environment whatsoever. “The intent” CentreVenture
wrote of its proposed interventions, “is to tilt the playing field back in favor of the smooth
working of market forces.” In making its case for the new plan, CentreVenture aggressively
discouraged criticisms of its prescribed mix of police, eviction of the poor, and gifts to capital.
“It is not socially acceptable to stand in the way of this project.” CentreVenture told City
Council, which quickly approved the plan, assuring the continued existence of the authority.

The Bell Hotel
The Bell Hotel – originally constructed in 1904 to house settlers arriving on the CPR, and one of the most famous residential hotels and bars remaining on the strip by the 2000s - became the first high-profile battleground over the future of Main Street. (The Bell is a place of complicated Indigenous community in many texts, including Cree writer Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* – “Cree? In Winnipeg? Why not? He was, after all, in the Hell Hotel.”

CentreVenture’s first order of business was to purchase, close, and evict the Bell’s seventy-five residents, some of whom had lived there for upwards of twenty-five years. The urban wing described the Bell as the last stand on the Main Street frontier, and its residents - especially those who patronized its bar - were cast as the final remaining threats to the new order. Shutting down the Bell “could well be the catalyst that would kick-start a grand redevelopment of an entire neighborhood”, said CentreVenture’s new CEO Ross McGowan, a condo-developer who received land on Waterfront Drive from CentreVenture a few years previous. “In recent years,” added Jim Ludlow, President and CEO of the Manitoba Moose hockey team and chair of the CentreVenture Board, “CentreVenture has received numerous complaints from area businesses regarding the negative effect the activities related to the liquor sales in the beverage room and beer vendor was having on their ability to conduct business.” “CentreVenture’s mandate is to attract business and residential development to the downtown,” the authority’s news release stated, “not to sit idly by while negative activity causes an exodus.”

CentreVenture’s elimination of the Bell and displacement of its residents was swift and, in some eyes, cruel. I spoke with Simon, a University of Manitoba urban planning graduate who worked at CentreVenture during the mid 2000s. Simon was assigned to oversee the evictions of

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242 Giroday, “Bell Hotel Gave Them a Home.”
243 CentreVenture, “Revitalization of Main Street Expected with CentreVenture’s Strategic Purchase of Bell Hotel Properties.”
the Bell’s residents. “My boss basically said, ‘make sure it’s empty by the end of the day’”, Simon told me. CentreVenture offered no Relocation Assistance Program, as had been called for in the 1997 Neeginan plan. “People were moving with shopping carts”, Simon recalled, raising his eyebrows. Simon remembered hearing residents sneer at the “big, evil, developer”, as he oversaw their evictions. Winnipeg Mayor Sam Katz seemed oblivious to the reality of the situation. In a video statement, Katz seemed under the impression that Bell Hotel residents enjoyed their own evictions. “Although that was their home,” said Katz, “I can assure you they would not have been very proud to tell you that was their home.” Simon eventually quit his job at CentreVenture, in part because he had not realized how “conservative” the authority was.

Seventy-five units of affordable housing were lost in the closure of the Bell, adding to the city’s booming homeless population. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) interviewed the director of one of the largest homeless shelters on the strip, writing that the director “expects many former Bell residents will end up sleeping in his shelter.” But in its editorial, “Last call at the Bell” the Free Press ignored this loss, focusing strictly on the closing of the hotel’s bar and its supposedly degenerate clientele. “The Bell Hotel will serve its last drink on Friday”, the Free Press wrote, “That may make some people cry in their beer as they remember the good old days of brawling, boozing and bar-hopping, but it’s welcome news for those working to revitalize Main Street.”

The Bell remained vacant and boarded-up for years, as CentreVenture waited for the market to decide its fate. “We know there is interest by various private-sector developers in this property”, McGowan said of the Bell Hotel in 2007, but none emerged. Jessica, a CentreVenture

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244 CentreVenture, “Ringing the Bell.”
245 CentreVenture, “Bell Hotel Supportive Housing RE: IDA Downtown Achievement Awards.”
246 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “Bell Tolls for Downtown Winnipeg Hotel.”
employee, later told me that there had been virtually no private market interest in the Bell. Compared to Waterfront Drive, Main Street was still seen as a “rough area” with little to no potential for profitable condo or even rental housing development.

As a last resort, CentreVenture agreed to bring neighborhood residents back to the Bell, forestalling the invasion of “lawyers and office workers” envisioned by the Free Press. In a moment of capitulation, CentreVenture, which retained ownership of the Bell, accepted a proposal by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) and a large area homeless shelter – Main Street Project (MSP) – who had secured provincial funding to convert the Bell into forty-two tiny bachelor suites as part of the “housing first” public health trend the WRHA was pursuing at the time. CentreVenture echoed the “housing first” ethos to reify the idea that the strip’s residents – rather than the region’s long history of immiserating dominant development visions – were the source of the area’s “problems”: “The philosophy behind the project”, CentreVenture explained, is that “before an individual’s problems can be addressed, they first need a roof over their heads.”

Almost immediately, CentreVenture looked for ways to cease its involvement with the new Bell. I spoke with Will, the building’s new manager, who told me that CentreVenture would likely remove itself from the Bell as soon as it could. He told me that the provincial government and the WRHA had dictated to CentreVenture, on condition of their investing in the Bell, that the building would become part of its “housing first” strategy. “It wasn’t their cup of tea”, Will said of CentreVenture, as we sat in the Bell’s sage-scented Culture Room, adding that he didn’t think CentreVenture knew what it was getting into. This view is confirmed by a 2011 report on the Bell authored by CentreVenture, in which the authority writes, “Ultimately, a separate

247 CentreVenture, “Bell Hotel Supportive Housing RE: IDA Downtown Achievement Awards.”
organization, dedicated to addressing the issue of homelessness in Winnipeg may be established who might incorporate the Bell Hotel into their portfolio”^{248}

In the meantime, CentreVenture parlayed the new Bell into significant social-relations value; using its involvement with the “housing first” trend to soften its image and portray itself as compassionate towards existing city-center residents. “It’s just the right thing to do,” McGowan told the *Free Press* in 2009, in a rare moment of charity towards the area’s existing residents. “I think it’s important when we talk about community building to…help the people within the neighbourhood. And we see this as an opportunity to do that.”^{249}

In fact, CentreVenture handled the Bell in such a way as to serve the two hostile intentions – eviction and policing - that rule CentreVenture’s engagements with existing city-center residents. A substantial number of low-income residents were moved off the strip by CentreVenture’s restructuring of the Bell, which resulted in a net-loss of thirty-three affordable housing units. (None of the hotel’s previous residents were given homes in the new Bell, according to the new manager).^{250} By shutting down the Bell’s bar, CentreVenture eliminated a gathering place for neighborhood residents, further advancing the process of displacement.

The new Bell also extends the authoritarian, paternalistic restructuring of the Main Street strip from the vibrant 1970s social hub that Duncan remembers, to the sterile, heavily policed, tightly managed shelter infrastructure – where residents are treated as pathological charity cases - it has become today. This is true despite the fact that many aspects of the new Bell appear earnestly tailored to meet the needs of the strip’s residents in a dignified, humane way. Will took me - past two policemen standing at the front desk – to have our conversation in the Bell’s

^{248} Ibid.  
^{249} McNeill, “Full Steam Ahead for Main Street.”  
^{250} Personal Communication August 2, 2013
Culture Room, where a circle of chairs sits on a carpet with a Navajo design, beside a flip chart with “SHARING” and “HEALING” written on it. Beatrice, a Metis woman in her fifties who lives in one of the Bell’s new apartments, told me she prefers the Bell to the Main Street Salvation Army – the latter of which she described as “just like prison.” “I have my own place here”, Beatrice told me, she has friends in the building, and she likes volunteering in the kitchen.

But Beatrice felt that she lived under the control of Bell staff who impose unreasonable rules and, as she told me, don’t understand “our culture” - “Three quarters of us here are Native”, said Beatrice, when I asked what she meant by “culture”. Beatrice told me a story about her boyfriend Richard visiting her at the Bell. Richard was asked by staff to leave the building, but he declined, saying he had come to visit Beatrice. Instead of contacting Beatrice, the front desk staff called the WPS. Richard spent the weekend in jail, Beatrice told me, and she was furious at the front desk staff. “She said she cancelled the call”, Beatrice said of the front desk worker, “but how naïve can you get? You can’t cancel a call to the cops once you make it – once you call, they’re coming”. Part of the reason Beatrice was so upset was that Richard had recently been locked in Stony Mountain Penetentiary – just outside Winnipeg - for eight and a half years. Through their ignorance and insensitivity, according to Beatrice, not only had the Bell’s staff forbidden Richard from seeing her, they had put his entire future in jeopardy.

This heavy-handed approach is apparently the rule, rather than the exception at the new Bell. Will told me that he does not hesitate to evict tenants if they behave in a disorderly manner, and the Bell has strict visitation rules. “We can’t even have any guests on Wednesdays” Beatrice complained. (A sign in the lobby – announcing that Wednesday was “TENANT/STAFF DAY”, dedicated to tenants and staff doing “some important work together.” – confirmed this). When I
visited, a sign in the lobby warned tenants, “VISITORS CAN ONLY STAY OVERNIGHT 5 TIMES in 3 MONTHS”.

The rigorous control exercised over tenants by Bell staff reminds one of CentreVenture’s ominous assertions, in its *Heart of Gold* plan that “civil society” was not functioning adequately on Main Street. In failing to totally transform the demographic housed by the Bell hotel, CentreVenture settled for placing a reduced number of existing residents in a ‘controlled environment’, in the hopes that it would create more favorable conditions for investment on the strip.

*Making Main Street White-Collar*

After evicting the Bell’s original residents in 2007, CentreVenture set out on a path to transform the Main Street strip into a white-collar district of massive office-space developments, effectively finishing off Winnipeg City Council’s fifty-year assault on the strip.

To do so, the authority mobilized new techniques to transfer state resources to capital. Among the various financial innovations proposed by CentreVenture for the *Heart of Gold*, the recommendation that gathered the most momentum was its call for widened application of tax increment financing (TIF) grants – essentially, large upfront grants in the amount of tax breaks promised over the coming years – for developers. After shutting down the Bell, CentreVenture brokered two large TIF-funded office-space developments that changed the face of the strip.

In 2008 CentreVenture demolished six buildings – among them the Club Hotel, Epic Theatre, and Starland Theatre - and transferred an entire city block in the heart of the strip to developer Re Solve Group Inc. “The biggest commercial development on North Main Street in nearly a century was to be unveiled today” the *Free Press* announced on March 18, 2008, “as part of multimillion-dollar plan to breathe new life into one of the most desolate sections of
The deal called for Re Solve Group Inc. to construct a four-story, 74,000 square foot office building and a four-story three hundred-car parking-garage to house the WRHA’s corporate and administrative headquarters. CentreVenture gifted half a million dollars to Re Solve Group Inc., in the form of a TIF grant.

CentreVenture soon brokered a second large white-collar development on the strip, immediately next door to the WRHA building. In 2010 the United Way began construction on a new $10 million three-story, 20,000 square foot headquarters on the site. The federal and provincial governments paid $7 million of the total cost, with matching ‘economic stimulus’ grants of $3.14 million. Winnipeg City Council and CentreVenture together contributed $0.7 million in land and TIF grants. With its United Way and WRHA developments, CentreVenture replaced most of Main Street’s remaining single-room occupancy hotels with a landscape of gleaming glass and steel office buildings. The hotels’ low-income residents were replaced with three hundred white-collar office workers.

The arrival of hundreds of white-collar workers to the strip prompted a renewed police sweep of the area, according to Will. Will told me that the opening of the WRHA headquarters coincided with a steep increase in ‘quality of life’ policing on Main Street. Since then, Will said, the WPS increasingly descend on the strip to do “shake downs”, ticket people, crack down on public drinking and drug use, check if people have prior convictions or are breaking conditions of their parole, and order people to leave the area. Jessica, the CentreVenture employee I spoke with, confirmed that CentreVenture works closely with the WPS to maintain an expanded presence in the Heart of Gold district.

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251 McNeill, “North Main Getting Major Facelift.”
The local media broadly embraced CentreVenture’s transformation of the Main Street strip, but the authority did not escape at least some perfunctory criticism. “Respect the locals when it comes to Main Street”, read the headline of a 2008 *Free Press* editorial. “What is going to happen to people and institutions already in the neighbourhood?” the author asks, citing the WRHA development, the closure of the Bell, and the “trendy condos” popping up on Waterfront Drive. “If you are going to redevelop an inner-city area, treat the people who are already there with dignity.”252 “[I]n the continuing effort to gentrify the area for our civil servants”, a 2009 *Free Press* editorial went on, “Six of the worst hotels were torn down to improve the neighbourhood’s climate with no one, apparently, ever giving a single serious thought to where the people who lived in them…might go when they were gone.”253 Media observers were quick to link the developments to a caricature of the fearful Winnipeg suburbanite. “The bunker mentality demonstrated in WRHA design”, wrote the *Free Press*, “seems typical of the mentality of most Winnipeggers when it come to Main Street – keep your head down and you might get through it.”254 In another piece, the *Free Press* interviewed a Main Street business owner about the strip’s new office workers. “Main Street now looks great from the car” the man told the *Free Press*, “No one driving by would think there were any problems.” But he criticized the strip’s new white-collar inhabitants for not livening things up enough. “The people here make big salaries, eat lunch at their desks and drive home to Lindenwoods at 5” the business owner lamented. “Nobody wants to sip a latte or browse an art gallery,” the *Free Press* offered, “while somebody who just crawled out from under a bridge walks by.”255 But CentreVenture’s third and

252 Ford, “Respect the Locals When It Comes to Main Street.”
253 Oleson, “Walking down Main.”
254 Ibid.
255 Connors, “‘They Killed It Man.’”
final incursion on the Main Street strip - its most controversial development to date - was yet to come.

*Youth For Christ*

In 2010, near the end of CentreVenture’s Main Street redevelopment activities, the authority sponsored a development that shocked many by the depth of its historical ignorance and the severity of its disregard for the area’s Indigenous residents. This would be the first time that Winnipeg’s existing city-center residents would mobilize coordinated, open resistance to CentreVenture’s agenda. Community opposition brought a new level of scrutiny to the city’s urban development authority and revealed more clearly than ever the relationship of the urban wing to the people of Winnipeg’s city center.

Events began in early 2010, when the multinational evangelical Christian organization Youth For Christ (YFC) approached the City of Winnipeg with a proposal to build a $10 million dollar youth recreation complex in the city – a project for which YFC had already gained a federal stimulus grant of $3.2 million. YFC needed to find another funder quickly, as the federal stimulus money was ‘time-sensitive’ and would soon expire. The City directed YFC to CentreVenture, which proposed the former site of the Savoy Hotel. Simon, the former CentreVenture employee, told me that the parcel of land at Higgins and Main was the organization’s “last big obstacle” on Main Street, and that in order to sign on to the project, “the City’s condition was that this is the piece of land it’s on.”

While CentreVenture itself was able to finance developments without democratic oversight, the large TIF grants it brokered for developers still required City Council approval. On February 17, 2010 the Executive Policy Committee of Winnipeg’s City Council passed a motion to provide a TIF grant of $3.375 million to YFC for the construction of a YFC “Centre for Youth
Excellence” on the former Savoy Hotel site. On February 23, 2010, Diane Roussin and Tammy Christensen, executive directors of Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Inc. and Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc. respectively, published a scathing critique of the project. “Aboriginal youth represent the majority of youth in the neighbourhoods near the proposed Christian centre”, Roussin and Christensen wrote, noting that YFC’s guiding purpose is the “Christianization” of children and that the organization explicitly targets “the aboriginal youth community as a prime area for development”. “While the Youth for Christ approach is more subtle than that used in residential schools,” Roussin and Christensen continued, “it is in essence based on the same model – Christianity is viewed as superior and missionaries from outside the community will teach people a better way.” “Existing organizations working with youth in the inner city – Aboriginal as well as many non-Aboriginal – have been working for years to reverse the great harm caused by assimilationist policies and attempts to ‘Christianize’ a people with a strong culture and spirituality of their own”, Roussin and Chrisensen went on. Taking millions of dollars for YFC, Roussin and Christensen explained, “out of a budget that is supposedly so strained that it cannot support existing public recreation programs and more culturally appropriate community based initiatives, is extremely troubling for those who know first hand the damage that ‘well meaning’ Christians have caused.”

A coalition of Aboriginal and community-based service providers filled the City Council chambers on February 24, 2010 to speak against the plan. Speakers voiced a rich historical account of Indigenous experience in Canada, tracing the impact of Indian Residential Schools through present-day efforts to establish Indigenous-run youth programming with a decolonizing mandate. Activists positioned a publicly funded YFC development as especially counter

256 Roussin and Christensen, “Public Funds for Youth For Christ: Have Our Politicians Learned Nothing from Past Mistakes?”
productive in light of the Canadian state’s hard-won 2008 residential schools apology and its pursuant mandate to “reconcile” with Indigenous peoples.257 Nahanni Fontaine, Director of Justice for the Southern Chief’s Organization spoke about the Residential Schools Apology in city council that day:

As a result of this apology, Aboriginal peoples were assured that these sort of strategic and infringing policies and practices would never occur again, and despite this assurance, we're gathered here today debating the construction of a Youth for Christ Recreational Facility which is entirely founded on Christian world views and practices...[if the project is approved] this council will be doing nothing short of reinstating and state sanctifying another more contemporary, altered form of the Residential School experience, mentality and practice all under the guise of helping at-risk Aboriginal youth…To suggest that the same institution who on the one hand is complicit in the total destruction of Aboriginal peoples’ culture, traditions, lands, economies and language, can on the other hand, be the ones to offer change and healing is absolutely ridiculous and insulting.

Indigenous activists who spoke against the project articulated a sense of attachment and desire for local control over the Main Street strip and broader North End, and constructed a representation of an urban Indigenous community attempting to reverse the harms of colonization through the production of a network of place-based Aboriginal-run institutions. The corner of Main and Higgins was repeatedly described as the geographic center of these efforts.

“Now we are at the corner of Main and Higgins”, Damon Johnston, former director of the Aboriginal Center of Winnipeg, told City Council, “They’re going to be across the street from the Thunderbird House, which is our spiritual, the first spiritual house of the Aboriginal people, the First Nations in this city.”258 “[O]ne of the things about that corner lot that we’ve all agreed on,” said Marileen Bartlett, director of an Aboriginal economic development organization based at the Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg, “is that we wanted it to be something that would reflect

258 City of Winnipeg, “Hansard of the Council of the City of Winnipeg Wednesday, February 24, 2010.”
our culture, our heritage and a promise to our people that we are developing and we are moving forward.”

“Yes, Higgins and Main.” CentreVenture CEO Ross McGowan responded, “Who would have thought we’d be here arguing over Higgins and Main a few years ago?” “Stabilizing the area and providing a framework for further private and public investment is of paramount importance” McGowan continued, “the proposed Centre for Youth Excellence meets this objective and fills a major void on North Main”. McGowan added, “Leveraging three dollars of outside public and private funding for one dollar of civic investment strikes me as a good deal.”

City Councilors in favor of the development rehearsed familiar stories of the area’s wickedness in order to justify their support. “I know for a fact, Higgins and Main is a bad place,” said one Councilor, “People will not venture from Tuxedo, from Transcona, [they] say ‘don’t go there because it's a bad place.’…You’ve got transients hanging out, it’s a place that should not be visited.” “If it’s that [YFC] or crack, I’d rather have somebody have that” said another Councilor. After hearing over five hours of testimony Winnipeg’s entirely non-Native City Council voted 10-4 in favor of funding the project. The YFC center held its official opening on the strip on December 9, 2011.

The debate over the YFC development dramatized and made more tangible than ever the relationship between CentreVenture and existing inhabitants of Winnipeg’s city center, particularly the Indigenous community. Indigenous activists who spoke that day made clear, again and again, how CentreVenture’s actions infuriatingly resembled past experiences of
colonial violence. But this sense of déjà vu – of history and geography repeating itself in the contemporary city – stretches beyond the YFC example.

I spoke with Jason (not his real name), a poet, short-story writer, and journalist who has written about Main Street and is a member of the MIWC. Jason is a member of Peguis First Nation, near Winnipeg, but grew up and still lives in Winnipeg. Over coffee in a West End pizza parlor, I told him I was trying to understand the geographic mindset that seems to guide CentreVenture, that in the eyes of the authority, affordable spaces predominantly inhabited by Indigenous people are not intolerable in and of themselves but are intolerable in particular places. “I believe the term is gentrification,” said Jason, deadpan. “Yeah”, I nodded, trying again, “but it seems like it’s this contest between different groups of people for the right to be there, right.” “Well you know,” Jason responded, “it’s been done for years – why do you think most First Nations are located where they are?”

Jason told me the story of how Peguis First Nation – still then known as St. Peter’s First Nation – was forcibly relocated from its original site near the city of Selkirk, Manitoba thirty kilometers north of Winnipeg. “I remember part of the reason they gave for having St. Peter’s relocate,” Jason said, “was because of the ‘rampant poverty’ and ‘drunkenness’ and that sort of thing”, so close to the largely white city of Selkirk. Jason went on, talking about the political economic motivations for the relocation and the fraudulent means used to carry it out:

Because if you look north of Selkirk, that’s prime farming land here in Manitoba, so they had a huge swath of it, they were dealing with it in their own ways, and they did have private property, and people had their own farms, and there were little settlements here and there and that sort of thing, but there were also people, say, like my great grandparents who lived the way that they had lived for untold generations. They didn’t permanently live anywhere, you know, they worked out in the bush. In fact they lived so far out in the bush that the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] didn’t even care to go there to get my grandfather to go to residential school. But they wanted that land, so they tried on a number of occasions to get them to sign a surrender, but they weren’t able to do it, until one time, a number of people had gone off hunting in the fall for the gathering of the season, you know, so I imagine they did ducks and geese and that sort of thing. Then with the people they had in the local parish, they called them down for a meeting, and most of them spoke either Cree or Ojibway, it was a mixed reserve. And then they, the guy, the judge who was in charge, knew a little bit, so he said to them, ‘anybody who wants $50 line up over
here, anyone who doesn’t want $50 line up over there’. Then one of the, the guy who was the local
dacon of the church, you know, he could actually speak English well, and he could speak the
other languages, so he was trying to warn the people, ‘No, no, no, no, this isn’t just for money’.
Like, they kind of cut him off, and they didn’t even have a vote, but these people took the money.

Members of the Peguis First Nation immediately contested the so-called ‘surrender’ but it took
ninety years for Canada to recognize that the relocation had been fraudulent and therefore
illegitimate. “The exodus happened over like a twenty to thirty year span,” Jason said, “to what
is now known as Peguis.” The relocation was a serious economic blow to Peguis. “It basically
was like a swamp area, you know” Jason said of the area Peguis was relocated to, “So it floods
everywhere.” The original lands were never returned. Instead, in 1998 Peguis received a one-
time cash settlement.

“So it’s the same thing,” Jason reflected, “that’s happened over and over and over again.”
“You know” he went on, “Canadians have a certain image of themselves, a mythology, and so
they would rather embrace the mythology than actually confront the reality of historical
foundations.” This mythology amounts to a kind of willful amnesia, Jason said, that ideologically
sustains ongoing agendas to fracture and displace Indigenous communities. The human damage
wrought by these agendas is never ‘solved’, only managed – evicted, displaced, policed -
geographically. Angela, the community organizer I spoke with, went so far as to call this an
ongoing dynamic of “racial cleansing”, a term I heard used by Indigenous peoples more than
once during my fieldwork. As Angela put it, “They just want to sweep us under the carpet.” Her
comments reminded me of Duncan’s poem “This City is Red”, in which the non-Indigenous city
suppresses the ghosts, bones, voices and heartbeats – the “blood red history you have chosen to
ignore” – that form the Prairie West’s historical foundations.

Conclusion
In the second half of the twentieth century, Winnipeg’s Main Street strip became an avatar for urban Indigeneity in Canada. This chapter showed how the creation of CentreVenture gave the urban wing of Winnipeg’s dominant bloc a new shot at eliminating this version of the strip once and for all, something it had been attempting since the 1960s. Neighborhood resistance to the CAI, which led to the “Neeginan” plan, forestalled urban wing efforts to do so in the 1990s; but through CentreVenture in the 2000s the urban wing jettisoned the “Neeginan” plan - and its vision of a more robust affordable housing agenda, relocation assistance, child care, restorative justice, and Indigenous arts and athletic facilities – in favor of an aggressive free-market vision that relied on expanded police power and asserted that ‘only the market could decide’ the future of the strip.

CentreVenture combined amplified free-market rhetoric with aggressive interventions in the market, first by purchasing the Bell Hotel and evicting its residents, then by subsidizing site-preparation costs and offering generous grants to big developers for the construction of multiple white-collar office superblocks. The ‘entrepreneurial’ freedoms CentreVenture was given at its inception – i.e. the ability to dispose of public land and money with little to no democratic oversight – enabled the urban wing to impose their development vision over those of existing Indigenous and other city-center communities with little effective resistance. But taken to their extremes – as in the case of the YFC center – free-market logic and ‘entrepreneurial’ power pushed the urban wing into an almost unbelievable repetition of history: The dominant bloc found themselves stubbornly making a case, in the twenty-first century, for the economic value of something Indigenous peoples repeatedly told them looked to be nothing more than an updated Indian Residential School.
Chapter 5 – A New Frontier

“The gentrification frontier absorbs and retransmits the distilled optimism of a new city, the promise of economic opportunity, the twin thrills of romance and rapacity; it is the place where the future will be made…Behind the line, civilization and profit-making are taking their toll; in front of the line, savagery, promise and opportunity still stalk the landscape.”

Neil Smith

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first narrates the series of actions taken by CentreVenture in the early 2010s, as the urban wing of the dominant bloc reorganized; delineated a new zone of intervention – the city’s next gentrification frontier; stretched the TIF funding mechanism significantly over time and space; and pursued a plan to further displace existing inhabitants of the area. The second section utilizes ethnographic data to construct an expanded understanding of dynamics on the ground in the new gentrification frontier initiated by CentreVenture. Engagements with CentreVenture planners, real estate agents, and government functionaries reveal an expanded geographical agenda of displacement and policing that relies on discourses of urban death and danger. Further ethnographic engagement however, counters these discursive claims, showing how existing city-center residents use and produce these spaces for a variety of everyday purposes and suggesting what should be obvious: that these spaces can be viewed as human and valuable, rather than demonic and disposable.

CentreVenture’s next frontier

Canadian capitalists expressed increasing interest in city-center Winnipeg real estate in the years following the 2008 economic crisis, pressing the urban wing of the dominant regional bloc to coordinate a new round of regional planning in an effort not to squander the opportunity.

CentreVenture remained the redevelopment vehicle of choice for the urban wing in this phase,

but its capacities were redirected. Rather than attempting to lure capital in general to an area of it’s choosing, as it did on Main Street, CentreVenture followed specific capitalists to an area of their choosing, and then acted on their behalf to secure the area against financial risk.

The new planning phase was first made public in a 2010 City Council meeting, where the city’s Director of Planning, Property and Development Barry Thorgrimson informed City Council: “In November 2009, CentreVenture and the City of Winnipeg, represented by the Manager of Economic Development, met with a developer regarding a potential business opportunity for a Portage Avenue Development.” “The developer’s main concern with developing on Portage Avenue was related to protecting their significant investment.” Thorgrimson continued, “In January 2010, CentreVenture assembled the Downtown Council to discuss issues surrounding our downtown and what needs to be done to protect private and public investment.”

This small “Downtown Council”, acting in solidarity with the anonymous developer, would chart CentreVenture’s course in to the next decade. Unsurprisingly, the group consisted exclusively of long-time urban wing members of the dominant regional bloc, including representatives of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce; Economic Development Winnipeg Inc.; Destination Winnipeg; two city-center business improvement districts (BIDs); the Winnipeg Convention Center; and the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS).

Meetings with the “Downtown Council” redirected CentreVenture’s geographical focus away from the Main Street strip. “From those sessions,” McGowan wrote in a 2010 report, “our vision and action plan will direct us as we ‘Turn the Corner’ to focus our revitalization efforts on another important artery – Portage Avenue.” McGowan’s report, entitled “Turning the

264 Winnipeg City Council Executive Policy Committee, “Item No. 8 Portage Avenue Action Strategy.”
Corner”, included photographs of the new “revitalized” white-collar Main Street appearing in rearview mirrors, while photographs of Portage Avenue – now referred to by CentreVenture as “Winnipeg’s most significant street” - appeared through front windshields.\textsuperscript{265}

McGowan presented CentreVenture’s new \textit{Portage Avenue Action Strategy} – which was later renamed the \textit{Portage Avenue Development Strategy} - to City Council in the summer of 2010. It was another moment in which CentreVenture needed to justify ongoing operating funding and continued political support. Central to McGowan’s presentation was the recognition that much if not most recent investment in the city center had come from the state, rather than private capital. “While public investment is often the necessary catalyst of development, our real objective should be to attract and support private investment, the true indicator of economic success and community well-being” McGowan argued.\textsuperscript{266} “In order to achieve this objective it is essential that a comprehensive plan be in place – one that articulates a vision, that encourages and supports such investment and most importantly protects that investment.” McGowan was emphatic, “This fundamental principle of investment attraction and protection is the cornerstone of the \textit{Portage Avenue Action Strategy}.” “To attract public and private capital,” McGowan explained in the \textit{Portage Avenue Action Strategy}, “an Investment Protection Strategy, that is predictable and vigorously defended, is required.”\textsuperscript{267} CentreVenture proposed two “key elements” of a newly invigorated strategy.

The first “key element” of the Investment Protection Strategy would be for CentreVenture to “Adopt a ‘mall management' approach to Portage Avenue, providing for

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{265} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{266} City of Winnipeg, “Hansard of the Council of the City of Winnipeg Wednesday, July 21, 2010.”
  \item \textsuperscript{267} Winnipeg City Council Executive Policy Committee, “Item No. 8 Portage Avenue Action Strategy.”
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
visitor expectations and social responsibilities similar to what one would experience at a regional shopping centre.” The most specific method for doing this – in addition to increased lighting, expanded parking infrastructure, and a new “comprehensive safety strategy” – would be to “Increase public comfort by working closely with adjoining hotels and vendor owners…to address and resolve the impact of offsite [alcohol] sales within and adjacent to Portage Avenue.”

The urban wing’s war against the Main Street strip had long established talk of city-center hotel beer vendors as code for poor Native people drinking. CentreVenture’s latest proposed attacks on such spaces were clearly viewed as a response to the unintended geographical effects of its Main Street conquest. In a piece entitled “Hotel buyouts in core for fewer drunks?” the Free Press explained, “After the city closed down a series of skid-row hotels on Main Street, some of the clientele moved to Portage Avenue.”268 “We have some problems on Portage Avenue” McGowan told the Free Press, “we sure don’t have them on Main Street anymore.”269 Thus, CentreVenture set out to reframe Portage Avenue as an inappropriate place for low-income Indigenous peoples – coded as “drunks” and “problems” - to be.

In fact, CentreVenture’s vision for the elimination of existing low-income spaces in the district was more expansive than this. In the same year as it drafted its Portage Avenue Development Strategy, CentreVenture secretly thwarted a deal that would have installed a large ‘discount retailer’ on Portage Avenue. “I went to my board” McGowan later recalled, “and said we are either going to let Portage Avenue become a discount mall or we are going to make Portage Avenue into the great Winnipeg street it is.”270 “It was our position that this was the last straw in the decline of our iconic avenue” McGowan told the Free Press, “And if action was not

268 Kives, “Hotel Buyouts in Core for Fewer Drunks?”
269 Kives, “More Feet on Street Best Core Fix: Poll.”
270 Cash, “Good To Grow. Winnipeg Is an Investor’s Dream: Stable, Diversified and Growing.”
taken, our fear was that we would lose Portage Avenue for decades to come." CentreVenture purchased the building in question, demolished it, and made the land a centerpiece of its Portage Avenue restructuring. While the authority had similar designs on other properties in the district, it first needed more money to fund its plans.

CentreVenture turned to an unprecedented expansion of tax-increment financing (TIF) to fund its new mission. The second “key element” of its Portage Avenue strategy, CentreVenture proposed, would be to designate an entire eleven-block TIF zone around the Portage Avenue hockey arena – the Manitoba Telecom Services (MTS) Centre - built in 2005 by the Chipmans, one of Winnipeg’s richest families (with the help of $40 million in public money). Rather than propose TIF for individual projects in a piecemeal fashion as it had done on Main Street – and as the government of Manitoba had stipulated in its 2009 TIF Act - CentreVenture proposed that every cent of ‘incremental’ property tax revenues from all properties in the zone be automatically taken out of general state revenue streams and placed in a special fund controlled by CentreVenture for spending on its “mall management” strategy. CentreVenture suggested that the new TIF zone - which it dubbed its Sports, Hospitality and Entertainment District (SHED) – would become “the focal point of the new Portage Avenue.” CentreVenture vowed to lobby the municipal and provincial governments to make the zone a reality – noting that the cooperation of the provincial government in particular, which accounts for half of all property taxes in Manitoba - would be “crucial”. City Council unanimously endorsed the plan, but waited for the provincial government to commit to the TIF zone before committing itself.

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271 Cash, “North Portage Gets Makeover.”
273 CentreVenture, “2010 Annual Report.”
Both the *Free Press* and the *Winnipeg Sun* – the city’s far-right tabloid - lauded the *Portage Avenue Development Strategy*, amplifying the idea that the area’s existing human geography was a “problem” and a “stain”, while implying that city-center residents themselves - and not the dominant bloc’s suburban development agenda - had caused capital’s abandonment of the area. Both newspapers valorized the upward distribution of public resources represented by TIF as essential to the “greater good”. “Portage Avenue”, a *Free Press* editorial commented, “remains a challenge, and a problem”. “The city and province can get the ball rolling immediately by declaring the area a TIF (tax increment financing) zone that would use the new taxes raised by the developments to fund other improvements in the area.” “It can be done” the *Free Press* continued, “All it takes is an agreement to act decisively for the greater good of the community.”

The *Sun* pushed CentreVenture to go even further with its ‘mall management’ strategy. “[C]onsider making the area a ‘zero-tolerance’ zone for public intoxication, panhandling and vagrancy” the *Sun* wrote, “Until these crime-related issues are addressed first, no amount of boutique hotels or TIF zones will make people go downtown and stay downtown – especially after 5:30 or 6 p.m.” “These beverage rooms and hotels” the *Sun* went on, “are simply feeder zones that fuel the downtown’s demise.”

Less than a year later – in what many Winnipeggers consider a miraculous advancement for the city – Winnipeg’s city-center received an investment that gave CentreVenture’s SHED plans a new, high profile context. On May 20th, 2011 the Chipman family, in partnership with billionaire David Thomson - the Chairman of Thomson Reuters and Canada’s richest person - announced that they had purchased the NHL’s Atlanta Thrashers and were in the process of relocating the team to Winnipeg for the upcoming 2011-2012 NHL season. The new NHL

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274 Anonymous, “Let’s Make It Happen.”
franchise – which would bring back the old “Winnipeg Jets” name (the original Winnipeg Jets departed for Phoenix, Arizona in 1995) - would play its games in the MTS Centre, the centerpiece of CentreVenture’s new Sports, Hospitality, and Entertainment District. A month after the NHL announcement, the formerly anonymous developer who had originally prompted CentreVenture to draft its \textit{Portage Avenue Development Strategy} was revealed to be the Chipman family themselves, under their Longboat Development Corporation banner.

CentreVenture announced that the Chipmans would construct the first major development in the new district - a twenty-story, $75 million dollar hotel, restaurant, retail and office tower complex called “CentrePoint” - on the land CentreVenture had purchased in order to thwart the arrival of the “discount retailer”. McGowan had reportedly travelled to Montreal to convince the Germaine family – described by the Manitoba media as “the Chipmans of Quebec” – to build a hotel on the site in partnership with the Chipmans. It was reported that the tower would include a 150-room hotel owned by the Germaine family; office space for the Winnipeg headquarters of Alberta-based resource extraction consultants Stantec Consulting; a 450-stall parking garage; and restaurant and retail space.\textsuperscript{276} City Council, through its Winnipeg Parking Authority, provided $5 million for the project.

Politicians of all stripes hailed the publicly funded boutique hotel as evidence of a revanchist victory. “\textit{Downtown Winnipeg’s historic comeback as an exciting destination for Manitoba families and visitors alike is in full swing},” Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger enthused. “\textit{This major private investment next to the home of the reborn Winnipeg Jets},” Selinger continued, advancing a vision of Manitoba state-capitalism reminiscent of the 1960s Manitoba Development Fund, “\textit{demonstrates the kind of private-sector confidence that results when}"

\begin{footnote}{276}{Cash, “\textit{North Portage Gets Makeover}.”}
\end{footnote}
governments, agencies and community partners work together toward a shared vision of renewal.”

The next day it was announced that local hotelier Leo Ledohowski – owner of the multi-national Canad Inns hotel chain – would receive $3 million in state funding to turn a theater formerly owned by CentreVenture into a “state of the art conference, banquet and meeting facility.” CentreVenture had sold the ninety-year old Metropolitan Theatre to Ledohowski four years earlier for a mere $100,000. The $20 million development would add two new bars and a large banquet space to the SHED. “I think many high school graduations will be held here,” Ledohowski told the *Free Press*. Winnipeg City Council and the Province of Manitoba each gave Ledohowski $1.5 million for the project. “The province is demonstrating its confidence in the future of downtown Winnipeg” said Local Government Minister Ron Lemieux, “the MET renovation project will create another star attraction for the city centre.”

Despite the urban wing’s open excitement and the announcement of almost $100 million in new real estate investment in two days, the arrival of the NHL – which brought with it three consecutive sold out seasons to the 15,000 seat (57 luxury box) MTS Centre – cast an anxious light on the still disinvested, heavily poor, working class and Indigenous downtown. McGowan attempted to foment such anxieties in order to garner support for the SHED TIF zone, which it had yet to receive provincial support for. “Think of television broadcasts on Portage Avenue,” he told the *Free Press* soon after the NHL’s return, “What’s the backdrop to our international media exposure? Is it a surface parking lot or is it a vibrant district?” McGowan’s take appeared

277 CentreVenture, “CentreVenture Development Corporation Announces Major Development in the Sports Hospitality and Entertainment District (SHED).”

278 Canad Inns Corporate Office, “Canad Inns to Rejuvinate MET as Vibrant Downtown Destination Funding Assists with Costs Unique to Historical Building.”
accurate in some ways. The arrival of the NHL to Portage Avenue cast a new national – if not international - spotlight on the area.

The new spotlight amplified the anxieties of the urban wing. “The Winnipeg Jets are packing in the fans and sold out for years to come” the Toronto-based Canadian Press wrote in a nationally syndicated piece, “But does the return of the NHL hold the benefits for the city’s troubled downtown boosters have always insisted would materialize?” It did not, according to the Canadian Press. “Boarded up windows, payday loans storefronts and dollar stores aren’t going to draw tourists or suburb dwellers, who complain about panhandlers, drunks, litter and crime” continued the article, which was almost entirely framed around comments from McGowan. “The real challenge is changing the demographic of the people who frequent the area, a loaded issue but something that has to happen if new development is to work, says McGowan.”

The piece concluded with comments from an unnamed “activist working on homelessness issues” who critiqued the dominant development vision. “It detracts from the work we’re doing here,” the activist told the Canadian Press. “Low income people need housing. They should be housed downtown…They should not be displaced. But we’re a million miles away from having governments ready to do that kind of thing.”

In the spring of 2012, the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba announced that they would make the SHED TIF zone a reality. The two levels of government would transfer $25 million to CentreVenture over two years to pursue its SHED restructuring strategy. The Provincial funds, in keeping with its 2008 TIF legislation, would come entirely out of Manitoba’s education budget. These funds were guaranteed no matter how little investment actually occurred in the SHED - if incremental taxes from the SHED TIF zone over fifteen years

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Edmonds, “Downtown Development Gets Kickstarted by Return of the NHL to Winnipeg; NHL Renews Interest in Downtown Winnipeg.”
did not amount to the full $25 million then the rest of provincial and municipal property tax base would subsidize the shortfall. The governments seem to have been encouraged by the Chipman and Ledohowski developments – Winnipeg City Council cited “two primary private development opportunities within the TIF zone” as the existing initial sources of TIF (despite both developments receiving large government subsidies).  

Politicians again framed the return of capital to Winnipeg’s city center as the harbinger of a regional revival that would take back the city for its respectable classes. “Downtown Winnipeg is undergoing a truly remarkable renaissance”, Selinger announced. “By supporting the development of a sports, hospitality and entertainment district,” Mayor Katz added, “we can help turn downtown into a destination all on its own – a place where students, professionals, and families want to hang out in their free time.” The announcement signaled a significant achievement for CentreVenture, the Downtown Council, the Chipmans and other TIF beneficiaries. Rather than contribute to public education and other social services, Chipman, Ledohowski, and their fellow millionaire investors would contribute to a special fund – controlled by CentreVenture – dedicated solely to the protection of their investments through the “mall management” of the city.

People fighting for city-center affordable housing voiced their frustration that an NDP government with social-democratic roots would so heartily embrace public gifts to private millionaire developers in the name of “community revitalization”, while food and housing shortages among city-center residents reached new depths. These critiques resisted aspects of the legislation that aided revanchist modes of development, arguing that area residents’ needs should

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280 City of Winnipeg Executive Policy Committee, “Minute No.218 Establishment of a Tax Increment Financing Zone to Support Strategic Public Investments Consistent with the Portage Avenue Development Strategy and Sports Hospitality and Entertainment District.”
be built into TIF eligibility requirements. The provincial legislation made eligible any developer who could promise “significant improvements” deemed “in the public interest”. “This criteria says nothing about financial or community need,” the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) Manitoba office noted, “Projects that qualify for TIF should have to demonstrate, beyond just the generating of revenue, how they will benefit the surrounding community and the residents that live there.” The CCPA criticized the process through which developers were granted TIF - “it leaves community residents out of the process…Stronger public consultation mechanisms would give community residents a voice in determining how TIF funds could be best used to address the needs of the surrounding community, such as by investing it in affordable housing for the area’s lower-income residents.” The CCPA also noted that the Manitoba School Board Association opposed the taking of revenue from public education for private developers in the name of “community revitalization”, arguing “schools themselves are important players in building stronger communities, particularly in marginalized areas such as Winnipeg’s inner city.”

Premier Selinger and the NDP government did not acknowledge such criticisms, sticking steadfastly to the urban wing ideology that downtown capital investment held universal benefits for the region.

By late 2012, CentreVenture had put in place everything it needed to take action on behalf of the Chipmans, Germaines, Ledohowskis and other capitalists who sought further avenues of accumulation through a city-center restructured for a new class of consumers. The authority had taken on the task of reorganizing the urban wing into a new temporary assemblage (the “Downtown Council”); drafted a plan of action (the Portage Avenue Development Strategy);  

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281 Knight, “Tax Increment Financing and Social Enterprise: Promoting Equitable Community Revitalization in Winnipeg.”
drummed up renewed support from media and politicians; and secured a new source of financing to carry out its plan (the province’s first TIF zone).

In the course of doing so, CentreVenture reframed an eleven-block area around the MTS Centre as the linchpin to a revitalized regional future, prompting a new round of exaggerated discursive geographies of the area. These accounts, which rolled easily off the tongues of politicians, media members, and CentreVenture representatives forged a moral-temporal image of the area that demonized existing residents (widely understood to be Native but rarely acknowledged as such) as “drunks”, “panhandlers”, and “vagrants”, and conflated them and their spaces with trash; and valorized future inhabitants (widely understood to be white but rarely acknowledged as such) as “families”, “professionals”, “students”, and “tourists”. Popularizing this way of understanding the city’s present and future would be key to the urban wing’s new round of incursions starting in 2012.

Newly flush with cash, CentreVenture embarked on its “mall management” vision, which soon revealed itself as a targeted attack on existing inhabitants of the area. On November 15, 2012 CentreVenture announced it had purchased the St. Regis Hotel - the first major expenditure of its new $25 million SHED fund – one of the hotels near Portage Avenue that in recent years had come to host some of the “clientele” previously displaced from the Main Street strip. The St. Regis’ 101 rooms predominantly hosted families from First Nations communities visiting the city for medical care, according to media accounts and CentreVenture’s own press release.\(^{282}\) The St. Regis happened to sit two blocks from the Chipmans’ under-construction CentrePoint hotel, office, and condo development, which McGowan would soon describe as “The iconic face

\(^{282}\) CentreVenture, “Revitalization Efforts of Portage Avenue Continue with CentreVenture’s Strategic Purchase of St. Regis Hotel and Surface Parking Lots.”
of the SHED, ground zero for the redevelopment…the spark that lights the fire throughout the district.”

CentreVenture announced that it would immediately shut down the St. Regis’ bar and lease the hotel back to its previous owner – prominent Winnipeg developer Karampaul Sandhu - until a redevelopment deal could be brokered. “The purchase of this downtown hotel and parking lots is a major achievement for CentreVenture and the City of Winnipeg,” Mayor Katz said of the deal. “In order to attract public and private investment, an Investment Protection Strategy became the backbone of our Portage Avenue Development Strategy,” said McGowan in a prepared statement about the purchase. In a speech to local realtors days after purchasing the St. Regis, McGowan said of CentreVenture’s recent activities in the SHED: “this has sent a clear message to the private sector that a new era has emerged, that we want a great downtown, and that if you choose to invest here, our standards have been raised and your investment will be supported and protected.”

These statements revealed an important dynamic: The urban wing’s agenda was to restructure the city for a more profitable mode of accumulation that relied on a wealthier consumer. It was not as if the existing city-center was totally unprofitable - capital was accumulating and a few people were getting rich from the existing landscape of low-income hotels, bars, dollar stores, and payday loans. But the – largely poor, largely Indigenous - human geography of this capitalist landscape was viewed to be incompatible with a new, more profitable city dependent on the consumption of wealthier, mostly white people who were understood to be repelled by the presence of existing low income and Indigenous residents.

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283 McGowan, “Speech to Winnipeg Realtors.”
284 CentreVenture, “Revitalization Efforts of Portage Avenue Continue with CentreVenture’s Strategic Purchase of St. Regis Hotel and Surface Parking Lots.”
285 McGowan, “Speech to Winnipeg Realtors.”
CentreVenture and Mayor Katz were initially cautious not to articulate this dynamic in public explanations of the St. Regis buyout, but the *Free Press* was not. “There are a lot of glue-sniffing, Lysol-drinking, dope-smoking rubbies in this town who like to lie down on the sidewalk and sleep,” the *Free Press* quoted a local hotel owner in an editorial about CentreVenture’s St. Regis purchase. “Some of the people causing problems on the street were [St. Regis] hotel residents or visitors,” the *Free Press* explained “but most were people using the beverage room.” “Their behaviour raised safety issues not just around the hotel, but in the general vicinity.” “The troublemakers, addicts and aggressive panhandlers may try to move to nearby upscale hotels,” the *Free Press* warned “but McGowan says a strategy is being developed in co-operation with hotel owners, police and several agencies to prevent that from happening.” The editorial admitted CentreVenture’s St. Regis purchase was only the most recent in Winnipeg’s long history of hotel annihilation, and went on to call for “real solutions…to lift the homeless, addicted and mentally ill out of their misery.” “Otherwise,” the *Free Press* concluded, “they will remain a permanent stain on the conscience of the community.”

McGowan later confirmed that such views were at the root of CentreVenture’s actions. In an interview with the *Free Press*, McGowan went on in much greater detail about the deal. “Part of the rationale for buying the St. Regis was that when we were working with the [Germaine family’s] Alt Group to come to Winnipeg to build their hotel on Portage Avenue, one of their questions to us was that if we make our investment on the north side of Portage Avenue, which has some challenges to it, what is it that you’re going to do to help protect that investment?” McGowan continued, “One of the issues that was constantly being expressed to us was the excessive drunkenness and the aggressive panhandling that was going on in the area – the

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286 Anonymous, “The Hotel Domino Effect.”
Winnipeg Police Service helped us identify that one of the primary center points of that was in fact the St. Regis Hotel."^{287}

CentreVenture sought to dispose of the St. Regis soon after purchasing it. McGowan publicly promoted the fact that the structure was not an officially designated heritage building, and could therefore be demolished easily by any prospective developer.\textsuperscript{288} There is also evidence that CentreVenture was not waiting ‘for the market to determine’ the St. Regis’ future, but sought a specific land use deemed compatible with the new accumulation agenda in which “families”, “professionals”, and “students” retake the city. Brian, an employee of the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation (UWCRC), told me that CentreVenture approached the UWCRC with the prospect of turning the St. Regis into university student housing. The UWCRC declined the opportunity, but Brian provided a different suggestion. He has a close working relationship with Peguis First Nation and Brokenhead First Nation, he told me, and he knew they had significant funds for development as a result of Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) payments – money received as compensation for broken treaties and fraudulent negotiations. Brian suggested CentreVenture get in touch with these First Nations since, he reasoned, the St. Regis already predominantly housed people from these and other First Nations. Brian thought it would be an obvious fit, but CentreVenture was not interested. “He kind of didn’t say anything”, Brian said of the CentreVenture representative he made the suggestion to. “That’s what made me think, oh, this is a brown faces outside smoking thing.”

CentreVenture announced a second hotel buyout in the SHED less than a month later. In early December 2012 City Council increased CentreVenture’s SHED funds by $6.6 million to allow the authority to purchase the Carlton Inn, located across the street from the expanding

\textsuperscript{287} McGowan, McGowan to talk downtown development at News Cafe.  
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid.
Winnipeg Convention Centre. The Convention Centre had recently embarked on a $200 million expansion in the southwest corner of the SHED, a project CentreVenture had lobbied for – or simply saw coming - in its *Portage Avenue Development Strategy*. CentreVenture’s request to City Council for additional funds noted the proximity of the Carlton Inn to the expanding Convention Centre. Like the St. Regis, the 108-room Carlton Inn predominantly housed Northern and First Nations families visiting Winnipeg for medical care. McGowan said CentreVenture had identified “the Carlton and the St. Regis as the two properties which most affect development in the SHED.”

“Quite often there are things going on there that are not what you and I would call lawful to say the least,” Mayor Katz said by way of explaining City Council’s almost $7 million commitment. CentreVenture demolished the Carlton Inn in the summer of 2013 and offered no relocation program for residents of either the Carlton or the St. Regis, emphasizing that both had provided “short term” to “medium term” housing. “There are sufficient spaces in the other hotels nearby to handle the (two) losses,” McGowan told reporters when pressed to explain its responsibility for the loss of over 200 low-income housing units in the downtown.

Although CentreVenture handled the St. Regis and Carlton shutdowns less than sensitively, it was not until February 2013 that public criticism of CentreVenture’s scorched-earth approach to the SHED seemed to galvanize. On February 22, 2013 McGowan appeared on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio to announce that CentreVenture was in negotiations with the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) to shut down a government-operated liquor store one block north of Portage Avenue, across the street from CentrePoint. The broadcast was not archived on the CBC’s website, but an editorial published in

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289 Hammond, “Carlton Inn Finds Itself on CentreVenture Buyout Chopping Block.”
290 Ibid.
the *Free Press* – under the headline “New doubts about CentreVenture” - days later provided a summary of McGowan’s comments. In announcing CentreVenture’s intentions to relocate the liquor store, the *Free Press* reported, “McGowan likened drunks and aggressive panhandlers downtown to ill-mannered children who were not welcome to sit around the dining room table with the adults.” “If you’re too poor to afford a beer at Tavern United” – an expensive bar in the SHED owned by Ledohowski – “then you’re not responsible enough to purchase alcohol downtown,” the *Free Press* summarized McGowan’s remarks. “The social rebirth that McGowan seems to have in mind for the downtown has nothing to do with actually addressing the issues of poverty, addiction or racism in our city,” the editorial concluded, “Rather, [McGowan] is openly advocating for the simple removal of undesirable elements from our downtown so that we can all feel safe and happy flooding in and out of the MTS Centre before-and-after Jets games.”291

 McGowan doubled-down on his statement, in response: “In a recent interview” said McGowan the next day, “I did make reference to the SHED being compared to the “living room” in one’s house where the kids are sent to the basement until they can abide by the rules of the living room…Regrettably, my comments were taken out of context.” McGowan went on:

> The “kids” are always welcome in the living room; however, there are rules, boundaries and expectations of individual behavior. Actions such as excessive public intoxication and aggressive pan handling that make downtown residents, employees, and visitors uneasy, fearful, or unsafe should not be acceptable.

McGowan did not retract his views and CentreVenture presumably continued to negotiate for the closure of the liquor store, which despite CentreVenture remains open to this day. While CentreVenture seems to have dropped the phrase, the urban wing continues to circulate the concept of Winnipeg’s “downtown living room” in various promotional materials.

291 Sharpe, “New Doubts about CentreVenture.”
Despite failing to send the liquor store’s patrons “to the basement”, by early 2013 CentreVenture began to claim that its interventions had attracted real estate capital to the SHED at unprecedented levels. “In the last five years,” Mayor Katz wrote in CentreVenture’s 2012 Annual Report, “we’ve seen over $1.3 billion invested in [the SHED].”

“What is clear is that we are seeing a renaissance that will change the city forever,” McGowan told an audience of realtors while echoing the billion-dollar figure, “who would have thought this possible ten, even five years ago?”

The “billion dollars” line – which soon became “two billion dollars” - would become a touchstone in CentreVenture reports and media accounts in the months and years to come.

While CentreVenture’s numbers were padded significantly by the convention center expansion and recently constructed headquarters for Manitoba Hydro, the SHED did attract a level of high-profile capital investment – much of it in previously rare condo development - unseen in recent years. Three large projects were announced for the SHED in 2013, including a new $55 million 195-condo tower – “Glasshouse Skylofts” – developed by the Chipmans next door to the CentrePoint complex, in partnership with Toronto-based Urban Capital; a $150 million 200-condo tower next door to the St. Regis Hotel, billed by Toronto-based Fortress Real Developments Inc. as both the future “tallest building in the city” and “most desirable address in the city”; and a proposed $100 million mixed-use complex – “SoPo” – also to be developed by the Chipmans, just south of the MTS Centre. Celebratory headlines and computer-generated images of the towers filled the pages of the Free Press and the Sun in 2013, adding to

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292 CentreVenture, “2012 Annual Report.”
293 McGowan, “Speech to Winnipeg Realtors.”
294 Kirbyson, “City to Get a Touch of Glass.”
295 Cash, “New Structure to Be King of Downtown?”
296 Schlesinger, “Jets Effect Heats up Winnipeg’s Commercial Real Estate Market.”
a popular sense of regional revival.

Led by the Chipmans, with CentreVenture at their side, Canada’s real estate capitalists did seem to be taking a more serious interest in Winnipeg’s center than they had in a very long time. When I spoke with her in 2013, former CentreVenture CEO Annitta Stenning was seriously impressed by the investors McGowan had been able to lure to Winnipeg’s downtown. It seemed to her that it was not simply the return of the NHL to the city, but global economic events that had capitalists looking at Winnipeg in a new light. Stenning told me that in her opinion, Winnipeg – long a city of marginal but steady growth - became viewed as a safe bet for risk-averse capitalists in the wake of the 2009 economic crisis. “I think the crisis shook people up around the world, and they do start looking for places like a Winnipeg…we’re unique in a lot of the larger cities in Canada, in that we have a solid, stable, economy,” Stenning said, “we’re kind of like that bonds, slow, sure, environment.” In March 2013 Toronto’s Globe and Mail ran a feature on Winnipeg’s improving fortunes, again based largely around comments from McGowan. “The NHL’s return has sparked a commercial real estate boom downtown,” the Globe wrote, “New development – an unfamiliar sight in the city’s downtown since the 1980s – is becoming commonplace, says the head of the city’s arm’s-length development agency.” The Globe’s business section heralded CentreVenture for “helping to drive up property values” and noted “Winnipeg was the third-fastest growing commercial real estate market in the country, posting a 16.8 percent return for 2012.” 297 “We’re now seeing national and international developers coming to town,” McGowan told the Free Press a few months later, “and they’re game-changers.” 298

On the new frontier

297 Ibid.
298 McGowan, McGowan to talk downtown development at News Cafe.
The imperative to “protect” investment became the guiding motivation for CentreVenture and the urban wing in the 2010s. With several $100 million-plus developments slated for the SHED, a nervous state of uncertainty characterized the turnover time between Chipman, Germaine, Ledohowski and their peers’ decision to produce hotels, condos, and banquet halls, and the moment when they might realize surplus value from these investments. It was this risky interlude – inherent to all processes of capital accumulation - that CentreVenture sought to manage, and it was during this moment, in 2013 and 2014, that I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in CentreVenture’s “SHED” zone.

*Urban wing adherents*

I first spent time with agents of the urban wing, people – including CentreVenture employees, real estate agents, and government functionaries – invested in seeing and talking about the city through the dominant rubric. This work gave me a feel for how the concerns and logics of real estate capital integrate into people’s worldviews – making otherwise questionable views and practices appear reasonable and necessary - and how they gain power through embodied encounter and speech. This research gave me access to processes through which adherents of the urban wing ideology segmented the city into different parts, casting judgment on each piece. Through these interactions, I saw how particular intersections of race, class, physical appearance, and behavior either troubled or pleased the eye of the dominant bloc. Moreover, this research showed me how abstract capitalist processes – like the turnover time between production and consumption – come to depend heavily on the cultural dynamics of specific regions. Most fundamentally, turnover time for real estate capital in Winnipeg’s city center frequently manifests as anxiety over uncomfortable settler encounters with Indigeneity.

I began to use the term ‘surplus value anxiety’ to describe the atmosphere of nervous
uncertainty among agents of the urban wing during my research. This concept helped me to understand the often-desperate things CentreVenture, real estate capitalists, and others invested in the area’s transformation did to minimize the risks posed to capital in the SHED, from hotel shutdowns and increased policing, to guided tours of downtown condos, and proposing a $10,000 public subsidy to anyone purchasing a city-center condo.

This particular anxiety first hit home during a walking tour of the SHED I took in the summer of 2013. “CentreVenture’s downtown urban living tour” left every week at noon that summer from a plaza at Portage Avenue and Main Street. I joined the tour on several occasions, but one day stands out over the rest. It was a warm, sunny afternoon and other than myself there were eight people on the tour: five real estate agents and three CentreVenture employees. Jon – a tanned man in his thirties with blond stubble, wearing a tight pink polo shirt, dress pants, and expensive sunglasses – dutifully guided us west down Portage Avenue from the office plaza toward the MTS Centre. The realtors – three women and two men, all white – wore skirts, dress pants, blouses, and heels. Portage Avenue was crowded that afternoon with lanyard-marked office workers, bus stop crowds in dirty sneakers, and people sitting on knee-high concrete planters lining Portage Avenue, a few of whom – including one man in a “NATIVE PRIDE” cap - had placed hats on the street for spare change.

After passing the man with the cap, Jon stopped in front of the MTS Centre and turned our gaze across the street to the construction site where a crane towered over a turn of the twentieth-century bank’s columned facade. This was where the new “Bargain World” would have opened several years ago, Jon told us, if McGowan had not flown to Toronto to tell the “Bargain World” executives to forget the idea. “How would you like it if you had a dollar store right in the middle of your downtown”, said Jon, imitating McGowan’s plea to the developer. Having barely
escaped that fate, Jon went on, the land was now the future home of the Chipman’s CentrePoint complex, the “impetus”, said Jon, for CentreVenture’s TIF zone. “It represents everything we’re trying to do,” Jon explained, saying that CentrePoint would be “mixed-use” and exemplify quality design. The realtors nodded thoughtfully.

Before moving on, Jon pointed to a boarded-up storefront two doors down from the CentrePoint construction site, the former “4-Play” bar and restaurant – “a horrible name for a bar”, Jon pointed out – and said there were plans for a “micro brewery” there. One of the realtors asked about a store - “O Calcutta” – that sat immediately next door to CentrePoint and looked a little rough around the edges. “That’s where you can get a John Lennon T shirt and a bong”, Jon said with a kind of light-hearted contempt. The realtors giggled. “John Lennon T shirt and a bong,” they repeated nervously. Jon tried to reassure them by saying that the owners of the “O Calcutta” building “would get a great price” when they sold. It dawned on me that Jon’s only job that day was to give realtors information they could use to sell the new condos going up in the area.

We walked a few steps further and Jon pointed to an abandoned building across the street. He said that a “major financial institution” had recently committed to the space. “They’ve told us it’s definitely not the Dollar Store, or”, he corrected himself, “the Cash Store” (a Canadian payday loans chain). We turned down Donald Street, past “The Bargain Store”, one of the many large dollar stores already doing business in the area. I found myself at the back of the group with Bethany, a CentreVenture employee carrying a large sign that read “TIME TO LIVE HERE”, with a picture of a suited white man superimposed over a picture of Waterfront Drive. “There are a lot of dollar stores around here,” I said. “Yeah, unfortunately” replied Bethany. “It’s not really what you want to see across from your NHL arena,” Bethany added. She told me CentreVenture
is “trying to work with the building’s owner to get something in there that we want to see.”

We turned off Portage, behind the MTS Centre. Stopping in front of a huge parking lot, Jon told us about the towers planned for the site. “This is going to be the keystone development”, said Jon, pointing at the parking lot. He talked about “linkages” and “connections” between the future towers and CentrePoint, the Glasshouse Skylofts, and the MTS Centre. Jon told us that there would be a large outdoor public space incorporated into the development, for people to gather in “when the Jets win the Stanley Cup”. “We’ve also purchased the Carlton Hotel”, Jon adds, telling the group that the Carlton will be replaced by a larger, much better hotel. “The church, too, can you buy that?” asks one of realtors, pointing towards an old church at the end of the parking lot. “No”, Jon explains, “It’s a national historic site.” “Is there a shortage of hotel space, or just too many crappy old hotels?” asks another realtor. Jon says that since the purpose of the convention center expansion is to attract bigger conventions, the area will also need bigger hotels. “We need the hotels to get the conventions”, he says. “Oh yeah”, the realtors nod. “Is this where the screens are going to be?” one of the younger women realtors asks Jon, who nods.

“What screens are you talking about?” I ask the realtor as we walk towards a nearby shopping mall. She tells me, enthusiastically, that huge outdoor TV screens will show hockey games there one day. “Just Google ‘SoPo’” she says. I ask her if she sells condos in the area, and she says yes, she sells Glasshouse Skyloft condos. “Has there been much interest?” I ask. “We’ve sold sixty units already,” one of the men interrupts, a little too quickly. A lot of young professionals are interested, he tells me, seeming a little hurt.

We go into the mall, where an elaborate Glasshouse Skylofts display suite – complete with stylish clothes in the closet and big photography books on the coffee table - has been set up. Jon announces that this is the end of the tour. Without introduction, one of the realtors eagerly begins
to guide me through the suite. She shows me a map indicating where the condo tower will be. (Its entrance is a stone’s throw from the liquor store CentreVenture tried to shut down). She tells me about the rooftop patio, where “all owners” will have access to a full bar and yoga area. A sign on the map advertises “resort-style” rooftop cabanas. My eyes wander up to the atrium of the shopping mall. “What’s this mall like?” I ask the realtor, catching her off guard. “Oh, this whole mall will be revamped”, she says, pointing towards the Chipmans’ slick new casino – “Shark Club” – that recently opened on the second floor of the mall. “That’s a good template for what you’re going to see”. Sensing some doubt, she reassures me that the Glasshouse Skylofts, when completed, will “get life back on the streets.” I nod, thank her – she pushes her card into my hand - and leave.

Outside, it’s a hot summer day with no absence of ‘life on the streets’. The sidewalk in front of the mall is crowded with people waiting for the bus and hanging out. There are baby strollers, teenagers, elders, and people in wheelchairs. I pass a group of guys in their twenties smoking, wearing white tank tops, dirty sneakers, and tattoos. “He’s a two-faced rat, plain and simple,” one of them half yells, startling me, and confirming my departure from the world of condos, cabanas, and casinos.

The performance put on by CentreVenture employees, realtors, and the developers they work for is over the top, but not surprising – they are economically invested in it. I was surprised, however, to hear supposedly left leaning, politically correct Winnipeggers also casually stigmatize the low-income city center, echoing the urban wing’s story. This came across strongest one day in a conversation with Andrea, a white woman who held top positions in both the Doer and Selinger Manitoba NDP governments in the 2000s.

Andrea and I met at the Forks – the riverfront ‘festival marketplace’ built by the Core Area
Initiative (CAI) in the 1980s – in the summer of 2013. I wanted to get a sense of the provincial government’s long-term view of Winnipeg’s city center, hoping to hear something more substantive than the “heart” analogy rehearsed in every official plan. “We always measured our success based on how well downtown Winnipeg was doing,” Andrea said, telling me how much criticism the Manitoba government faced in the mid-2000s for its role in locating the MTS Centre downtown. Andrea recalled people who said there was too much “crime” and too many “panhandlers” and “Aboriginals” in the area for a downtown arena to be successful. “You know,” Andrea went on, “there’s just so much inherent, endemic racism in people’s views of downtown.”

It seemed like Andrea was about to tell a familiar white liberal story about her – or the NDP government’s – ‘passion for downtown’, disgust with anti-Native racism, and fearless encounters with Indigeneity. But when our conversation turned to Portage Place – the other shopping mall built by the CAI in the 1980s – Andrea’s tone changed. “Of all things,” she said shaking her head, “that should have brought people downtown.” Andrea’s eyes narrowed. “But it’s become a hangout,” she continued, “it’s a wasteland, you know, like a cancer on the downtown.” Andrea’s casual vitriol surprised me, but only because of the aggressiveness of her tone. At root, this is the dominant settler imaginary of Winnipeg’s city center, a mental map that spans the full spectrum of party politics in the region.

Demonized places

I pursued a second mode of ethnographic engagement, however, with the intention of countering the dominant - usually abstract, usually demonizing - image of Winnipeg’s city center. I made a point of visiting the places that CentreVenture and others had described as ‘dead’, ‘empty’, or ‘not exactly what we want to see’. Mine was an attempt to view those places as concrete and
human, fully inhabited by socially and politically situated – rather than individualized and abstracted – people who utilize and produce space for a myriad of purposes. For the rest of this chapter I will sketch an ethnographic image of Winnipeg’s gentrification frontier as I experienced it in 2013 and 2014, in an attempt to demonstrate the ideological and political specificity of the geographical constructions - the discourses and official plans – that empower the dominant bloc’s redevelopment schemes. In my experience, the places demonized by the urban wing are usually neither lifeless nor fearsome – as the dominant view has it - but consistently lively, enjoyable, useful, everyday spaces.

Among the places most demonized by the urban wing in the early 2010s – and the first to be eliminated by CentreVenture after it received its Provincial and Municipal TIF funding – was the St. Regis hotel and bar. In the summer of 2013 I started going occasionally to the St. Regis Hotel dining room for breakfast, remembering how derisively the Free Press had described the people of the St. Regis – its residents and their visitors, as well as its beverage room clientele. The scene was quiet one sunny summer Saturday morning as I approached the hotel, a boxy red and grey four-story building. The weekday white-collar office workers usually trudging around downtown were nowhere to be found. A couple of “Take Pride Winnipeg” garbage cans sat in front of the hotel, their green plastic lids flipped up overnight. A man and a woman in their forties walked side by side down the street, the woman with a backpack, the man swinging a green and gold Dollarama bag at his side. A lone, unlocked mountain bike rested against one of the St. Regis’ glass doors. Inside, three posters were tacked to the bulletin board in the vestibule – one celebrated the hotel’s recent hundredth anniversary; the second gave the name and photograph of a missing twelve year old girl; the third advertised a $7,000 reward for information on the whereabouts of a woman who had been missing for over two years.
The St. Regis’ lobby is cozy, its walls covered with framed paintings, posters, and photographs. A painting of a woman with a baby in a papoose hangs on one wall. On another is a map of Manitoba showing the numbered treaty territories in different colors, with “ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA CHIEFS 2009 – OUR LEADERS WORKING TOGETHER” written across the top, bordered by headshots of Manitoba First Nations chiefs. Old newspaper clippings and black and white photographs of the hotel throughout the twentieth century are framed along the other walls, including one depicting WWI soldiers in full uniform posing in front of the hotel. A pile of *First Nations Voice* newspapers is stacked in one corner. To my left is a small gift shop, offering a multitude of items – shirts, hats, plates – featuring medicine wheels, dream catchers, bears, wolves, and eagles. To my right is the former bar room, now empty of tables, it has been turned into a play area for kids complete with a toy castle, slide, and children’s books set among the old pool table and arcade games. The St. Regis offers rooms with multiple double beds and bunk beds to accommodate large families. Rooms start at $78 per night, much cheaper than the $138 per night Ledohowski-owned Radisson Hotel across the street.

In the dining room of the St. Regis this morning, four or five tables are taken, almost all by Indigenous families – a big group of eight men, women, and children eating eggs; a young woman drinking tea with her grandmother; an elderly man doing a crossword; a pair of women in their thirties, drinking coffee and laughing. I order the $4.99 breakfast special and look around. Along the ceiling runs a mural showing Turtle Island from sea to sea: eagles fly over black and purple mountains on one side; a man rides a horse over tipi-dotted plains in the middle; thick woodlands stretch across the other end. I linger, reading a newspaper. The waitress takes room numbers from the tables as they finish their meals. I pay – I’m probably the only one without a room number – and leave. Outside I pass a man wearing a shirt that reads
VEGETARIAN: INDIAN FOR BAD HUNTER. Up on Portage Avenue a man in a cap and sunglasses jokes with his girlfriend, “I’m trying to stay out of jail.” They both laugh.

After my first visit, it became clearer to me why CentreVenture targeted the St. Regis so swiftly after receiving its SHED TIF funds. The hotel is wedged between the construction site of the Chipmans’ CentrePoint complex to the northwest, and the site of Fortress Real Developments’ proposed “most desirable address in the city” directly next door, to the south. The St. Regis along with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) headquarters and the slightly more upscale Marlborough Hotel is part of a loose string of Native spaces on Smith Street that bisects Portage Avenue. About half of the people on this stretch of Portage Avenue at any given time are Indigenous.

To the immediate west of Smith Street is Donald Street – both streets are named for Donald Smith, who as we saw in chapter one invaded Red River with Colonel Wolseley in 1869 and became one of Manitoba’s first real-estate millionaires – where at Portage Avenue is the cluster of dollar stores around the MTS Centre that CentreVenture would prefer ‘not to see’. On weekends, the Dollarama at Portage and Donald is by far the busiest place on Portage Avenue. The store bustles with a crowd of Native, Asian, white, and Filipino children, teenagers, elders, and people in wheelchairs, browsing aisles packed with beef stew, macaroni and cheese, peas, corn, beans, children’s clothing, shampoo, diapers, toilet paper, holiday decorations, pet toys, big chocolate coins, and beaded necklaces. Across the street is the Bargain Store, another discount retailer with a slightly wider selection of clothes and footwear on the first floor, groceries in the basement. Young mothers and elderly women pick through the racks of shirts, jeans, jackets, and boots. Kids run through the aisles. A wider selection of household items and children’s merchandise can be found here, including a Queen-sized bed in a bag ($59.99), small pink

Next door to the Bargain Store are a payday loans chain called Money Mart – “TODAY CAN BE PAYDAY” – and a job bank called Opportunities for Employment – “HOPE IN ACTION.” The trees and concrete planters outside make a nice shady place to sit, and the block hums with people – men, women, young, old, white, Native - hanging out, shooting the shit. Young guys with tattooed hands, jeans, and caps stand around smoking. Some have Opportunities for Employment “VISITOR” badges clipped to their belts. One wears an “EAGLE” cap - the kind you can get at the St. Regis Hotel - and holds a duffle bag. An older man sits on the planter holding out a Tim Hortons coffee cup for spare change. The younger guys greet him warmly and loudly, “what’s up old timer!”

The CentrePoint tower rises across the street from the Bargain Store, adorned with billboards featuring hockey players and well-dressed white men and women laughing and holding wine glasses. “WATCH THE FUTURE UNFOLD” the billboard reads, “GET CENTRED.” There are no people in wheelchairs, elders, children, teenagers, or young mothers with strollers featured in the Chipmans’ billboard, but there are still many such people on this corner, waiting for the bus outside Dollarama. On the outside of the bus shelter an ad for Glasshouse Skylofts reads, in stark black letters: “WHEN YOU LIVE AT GLASSHOUSE, YOU WON’T HAVE TO WAIT FOR THE BUS.”

One block north of Portage Avenue is Ellice Avenue, a kind of shadow-Portage Avenue that while technically part of CentreVenture’s SHED feels more a part of the working class West End and ‘Central Neighbourhoods’ area than part of the city’s business district. Ellice Avenue is the northern border of the CentrePoint complex – it’s where the West End and Central
Neighbourhoods rub up against the coming luxury city. At Donald and Ellice is the biggest discount store of them all, Giant Tiger – actually an early-2000s CentreVenture project that no longer seems to fit the authority’s vision - its signature bright yellow bags radiate throughout the city center.

Heading west down Ellice one of my first days in the area, I see that an entire city block – formerly occupied among other things by a pizza slice place, Ethiopian restaurant, and one of the city’s oldest diners - has been leveled for the Glasshouse Skylofts, leaving a crater with a single crane in the middle. A large billboard has been erected at the corner of Ellice Avenue and Hargrave Street, proclaiming:

GLASSHOUSE SKYLOFTS IN THE CITY
WINNIPEG’S MOST POPULAR CONDOMINIUM

The low-rise liquor store that CentreVenture wants to shut down is directly across the street. Looming over it from behind is a tall brick building with a large mural depicting two Native women with feathers in their hair, tipis, a drum, a pipe, and a few bison. A new banner runs across the top of this building, beside the mural, featuring a corporate crest that imitates the HBC logo and reads “HUNTINGDON CAPITAL CORP. FOR LEASE.” A private security firm’s truck - “CONCENTRIC RISK AND SECURITY MANAGEMENT INC.” - idles in the small liquor store parking lot, which has been penned in by a new waist-high metal fence since McGowan’s “basement” comments.

This afternoon I sit down on a shady ledge in front of the liquor store. Across the parking lot I have a wide view of Ellice Avenue and Hargrave Street. I wonder what, or who, it is around here that the Chipmans and Germaines are afraid of. At first the place is quiet, but as the day gets warmer and sunnier more and more people head in to the store, leaving with armfuls of booze in brown paper bags. Eventually, a steady parade makes its way down Ellice. Three generations
saunter past, taking up almost the entire block, toting bright yellow bags, a woman pushes a stroller, little kids follow in the back. A pair of twenty-something men crosses the street chatting, wearing basketball shorts, in T-shirts advertising a landscaping company, with tattooed arms. The men are followed by an elderly woman using a walker, who sports a bucket hat with two cartoon dice on the front. A woman in her thirties walks through the parking lot with her daughter. A man in a cap with an eagle on it, with long black hair and a thick moustache – Leonard Peltier’s doppleganger – passes me and goes in to the store. Two teenage guys head south down Hargrave Street, cross Ellice, and cut through the parking lot of Air Canada’s Winnipeg headquarters, past a few people hanging out on a ledge. One of the guys has a huge Mohawk haircut, the other wears an old Philadelphia Eagles jersey. A wiry, deeply tanned man with skinny legs, short shorts, and high black socks wanders into the parking lot from Ellice, picking cigarette butts off the ground.

Across Hargrave, in front of a big Chinese food restaurant on the corner of Ellice, a small group of men and a woman hang out, chatting and asking for money from passers by. One of the men is in a wheelchair. Another, the most active beggar of the bunch, wears a sleeveless black nylon shirt, black nylon pants, dark sunglasses, a black pony tail, and a cap reading “COMPTON” on the front, NWA style. He’s working hard, asking every single person for money. Soon he crosses the street, comes up to me, and asks for $1.60. I give him exact change. “Thanks” he says and gives me a fist bump. The man goes back to his friends and soon they’re joined by another group of three generations, including a little kid on a bike and an elderly woman in a wheelchair. A police van rolls slowly by on Ellice. The man comes back, nods as he goes into the store, and comes out with a paper bag. He and his friends head off down Hargrave.

A block west of the liquor store on Ellice Avenue is the Quest Hotel, which bills itself as “a
hotel and independent living facility providing accommodations for senior and/or tenants with special needs as well as First Nations medical access.” The lobby of the Quest is a lively place, bustling with people of all ages - children run around, elders chat on couches, and a long line snakes out from the dining room where a hot buffet is the main attraction. Posters by the elevators speak to a northern First Nations audience. One advertises a bus departing the Quest Hotel weekly for Easterville Junction – 450 kilometers north of Winnipeg - near Chemawawin Cree Nation. (Chemawawin was flooded out of its original location by Manitoba Hydro in the 1960s). Another poster advertises an upcoming membership meeting of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, 600 kilometers north of Winnipeg.

“Has CentreVenture ever tried to shut down the Quest?” Angela, the community organizer I spoke with, asked me after I brought up CentreVenture’s targeting of the St. Regis, the Carlton, and the Ellice Avenue liquor store. Large groups of Native people regularly hang out in front of the hotel, and it’s this visible clustering of Indigenous people that CentreVenture seems to want to get rid of, Angela pointed out. CentreVenture has not openly attempted anything with the Quest, but at least to Angela it seems the logical next frontier.

Half a block west and half a block south of the Quest Hotel is Portage Place – the CAI-sponsored shopping mall formerly owned by multinational corporation Cadillac Fairview and now owned by Vancouver-based Peterson Group. High-end retailers and restaurants have largely abandoned the mall since the days when a local TV jingle advertised it as the new “face of the city”. Among other things, Portage Place now offers several dollar stores, a welfare office, and a youth break dancing non-profit. The mall has become a lightning rod for outside criticisms of the downtown. It is the place Andrea called a “wasteland” and a “cancer”. “Portage Place,” Guy from Waterfront Drive told me, “is the one place I don’t feel safe downtown, I see drug deals
going down there all the time.” On the plane, the man sitting next to me - an elderly shoe salesman from Charleswood - reminisced about the Portage Avenue of his youth “thirty or forty years ago” but told me that Portage Place had turned it into a “drug haven”.

Portage Place is a modern-day successor to the Main Street strip in certain geographical imaginings of the city. “I saw you one last time in Portage Place” MIWC member Trevor Greyeyes writes in his poem “The Strip”, about a woman the protagonist met years earlier on Main Street. In Greyeyes’ poem, the Portage Place encounter comes at a time when, “The strip was dying off And only those who knew nothing else Clung to the bones”. In Marvin Francis’ poem “New Crossing” Portage Place gives rise to complex, hazardous encounters: “Last nite on that late nite crowded sidewalk I saw this kid get jacked for his stainless steel colored Walkman,” the poem begins, “right up against the windows of the portage place bus shack”. “I call this the madhattan bus transfer,” Francis continues:

there were about six of them, all hood young, all part of this downtown mall culture, the great economic hope of the last millennium, I know, let’s build a mall and put a fountain in it, a mall of portages from street to jail to mall to street to long walk home in the hood late at nite.

Portage Place was built across multiple city blocks in the 1980s and literally functions as a portal – or portage - connecting Ellice Avenue to Portage Avenue. A four-story high atrium surrounds the Ellice Avenue entrance on the north side of the mall. This area is bright and lush, a greenhouse of dark ferns, spindly trees, flower-beds, and enchanting touches, including a two-story steel clock tower with swaying brass pendulum and bells; mirrors on the ceilings that run beneath the escalators; a plaque from the mall’s founding that honors “THE ENDURING SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE OF WINNIPEG” (and in the same sentence, “THE CO-OPERATION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS IN THE REDEVELOPMENT OF

300 Francis, Bush Camp.
DOWNTOWN WINNIPEG”); and beneath the plaque, a mysterious time capsule buried in a slab of marble, to be opened in 2062.

The atrium is an obvious place to hang out, especially in the depths of winter, and mall-goers easily mount a “sidewalk ballet” inside the superblock shopping complex. Kids in snowsuits sprint down ramps through the gardens; their mothers chat and rock babies in strollers; elders and people in wheelchairs sip coffees, waiting for “Handi-Transit” to pick them up; Francis’ “mall culture” teenagers, decked out in track pants, Air Jordan, snapback caps, and fur-lined parkas careen around in big groups, laughing, teasing each other, going for smokes.

Around the corner from the atrium, past a large dollar store, is the mall’s food court - the busiest social space in the mall and perhaps the entire city center. At least this seems to be the case for teenagers, elderly people, young parents, people with disabilities, and low-wage workers, in other words, everyone who is not the able-bodied professional man most of the downtown is designed for. Offering pizza slices, subs, burgers, seafood, fried chicken, sushi, coffee, and Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Indian dishes, with seating for two hundred, the Portage Place food court is practically the only place in downtown Winnipeg to purchase hot, affordable food seven days a week from morning to night. A hundred people or more can be found at any given time dining, sipping coffee, chatting, checking their phones, or sharing newspapers here. The food court is busy every day of the week, for every meal, as lively for breakfast on Sunday as it is for lunch on Wednesday.

On the day before New Year’s Eve, 2013, I wander down Portage Avenue towards Portage Place. It is 26 below zero, plus the wind chill – faces flushed and numb, eyeglasses steaming up - and the streets are almost empty. I pass the old 4 Play Bar and Grill, which still has not been replaced by a micro-brewery, and then the boarded-up building which still has not become a
“major banking institution”. Pulling open the door to the Portage Place food court, however, I am hit by a warm din of laughter and conversation.

Inside, a comically long line stretches from the coffee shop near the door to the middle of the food court. The feeling is festive, with Christmas decorations still hanging from the lofted ceiling and bright winter light streaming through the south-facing glass wall. I stand in the line and eventually get a coffee but it’s difficult to find a seat - even the aisles along the edges of the court are filled with people standing and talking. Eventually I find my way to a spot at one of the many long tables that have been assembled by pushing twenty smaller ones together, saying “hi” to an elderly man with a “WAR VETERAN” cap and a walker draped with plastic bags, who says hello to everyone who passes by. I sit down beside a group of women with babies in strollers drinking coffee and chatting to my left, a couple of older men in big parkas and EAGLE hats sit on my right, pointing out people in the crowd they seem to know and sharing stories about the drunk tank. A couple of guys in fluorescent construction workers’ vests eat Chinese food a few seats down, beside a woman sipping coffee and reading “First Nations Voice”.

The racial-ethnic character of the food court – it is predominantly inhabited by Indigenous peoples and people of color - reflects the white supremacist ‘too early/too late’ migration dynamic of the Canadian nation-state. An ad-hoc pan-Native community is in evidence mostly through the clothes people wear. The crowd is sprinkled with “NATIVE PRIDE” hats, American Indian Movement hoodies, jackets featuring emblems from various First Nations, and T-Shirts promoting Indigenous radio stations. A man in a straw cowboy hat who rides a scooter with a Metis flag license plate is a fixture. Many Idle No More actions since 2012 have occurred at Portage Place. Apart from the large Indigenous presence, the majority of patrons and workers in the food court are Black and Asian. Many if not most of the workers are Filipino, Asian, and
Native women, a dynamic that extends to most of the low-paid service-industry jobs downtown.

A lot of informal work happens in the Portage Place food court, too. Within a few minutes of sitting down, a skinny man with long hair and a beard comes to my table and places a card on it with a set of nail clippers attached. The card tells us the man is deaf and is selling the clippers for $3. He circles the food court, putting these cards on every table. Later I hear a little voice, “kush, kush”. I turn to see a man in his twenties with a long black ponytail, black track pants, and a black T-shirt that reads “THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE AREN’T THINGS”. He moves away swiftly without stopping. At the end of our table a man sketches intensely with pencil on a big sketchpad. Every now and then he passes the sketchpad around for the four or five other people he’s sitting with to see. I have seen him before, selling his sketches on Albert Street in the warehouse district.

It seems as if three generations sit at every other table. Elders with canes, scooters, and wheelchairs sit together with Francis’ “mall culture” teens in hoodies and tracksuits who push strollers with snow-suited babies inside. At a table across from me an especially big group of young men and women are fresh from the courthouse. They are white and Native, dressed in jeans, sweatpants, parkas, purple hoodies, with bright red dyed hair, long black braids, big strollers, babies, leopard-print purses. They’re in good spirits, drinking coffee and telling stories. A thick document is passed around and people laugh at it. People come over from other tables - “Good to see you stranger”, a woman says to one of the men, shoving him.

In the food court a few weeks later, I meet a man named Eli, a native Winnipegger who has lived outside of the city for much of his adult life, but says he likes to come to the food court when he visits the city. He said it was a place he could expect to find old friends. I mentioned that a woman in the government had recently told me the place was a “wasteland”. “That’s
bullshit,” Eli said, “Has she ever been here?” I said I wasn’t sure. “She’s never been here,” he said.

But it is true that Portage Place can be less than joyful, especially under the policing regime of Peterson Group. In 2008, mall management installed a small white box – “The Mosquito” - in front of the mall to deter young people from spending time there. The Mosquito emits a piercing high-frequency tone apparently audible only to youth, as adults’ ears are supposed to have deteriorated sufficiently not to pick up the tone. Metal ribbons jut from the concrete planters outside the mall making sitting impossible, and large signs announce “24 HOUR SURVEILLANCE”, “WPS CCTV IN EFFECT.”

The atrium near the mall’s Ellice Avenue entrance is lined with knee-high planters – it’s hard to resist sitting on them – but mall security has covered them with bold red and black signs that read “PLEASE DO NOT SIT ON THE PLANTERS.” Big signs are posted on the walls, announcing management’s policies for “SHOPPING SAFETY AND ENJOYMENT.” They include a ban on hanging out: “UNAUTHORIZED LOITERING IS PROHIBITED. THIS INCLUDES EXTENDED FOOD COURT USE WITH OR WITHOUT FOOD PURCHASE”, and rules governing behavior: “RUNNING, SKATEBOARDING, LITTERING, SWEARING, OR OBJECTIONABLE LANGUAGE, FIGHTING AND GENERAL MISCHIEF ARE NOT PERMITTED.” Failure to obey, according to management, “MAY RESULT IN YOUR REMOVAL FROM THE CENTRE AND POTENTIAL CHARGE UNDER THE TRESPASS TO PROPERTY ACT.”

One afternoon in the first weeks of 2014, I headed to the bathroom in the food court. A small crowd had gathered while a guard blocked the entrance and two other guards wrestled a woman out of the bathroom. She was in her forties, with long black hair, glasses, and a white
sweatshirt. The guards had her hands behind her back and pushed her from behind, out of the bathroom. Her face was flushed, her glasses fell halfway down her face, and she tilted her head awkwardly upward to keep them on. “Fifty thousand times!” one guard bellowed, “everyday!” The crowd waited, eyes on the ground, until the woman had been taken away and we filed silently in.

But not all incidents have met with such silence. On March 27, 2013 the family of a woman who was harassed by Portage Place security four days prior organized a “flash mob” in the mall in protest. “STOP ELDER ABUSE AND MISTREATMENT OF ALL PEOPLE AT PORTAGE PLACE MALL” the event flyer read. “Two security guards approached the tired, 80 year old woman and told her she can’t sit on the planters,” the woman’s granddaughter wrote on the event’s public Facebook page, “They told her if she didn’t move they would kick her out.” “My aunt…was furious for them talking to them like this” the woman’s granddaughter continued, “I dread going there now, for this treatment, imagine we are all dressed in nice clothing, my aunt is a teacher, my grandma an elder (senior) we still were treated unfairly.” Hundreds of people occupied the mall’s central atrium in protest, deliberately sitting on planters, carrying signs, waving flags, and beating drums in keeping with the practice of Idle No More round dances.

After frequenting the mall for some time, I met with Julie, a community organizer in the neighborhoods north of Ellice Avenue, sometimes known as ‘the Central Neighborhoods’. For Julie, Portage Place and nearby Central Park are major flash points in the battle over Winnipeg’s center. It was a cool, sunny summer day in Central Park when I met Julie; we sat on a bench near the park’s old gothic fountain, high-rise apartment buildings surrounding us on three sides, the Ellice Avenue entrance to Portage Place almost visible to the south. A soccer game was under
way on the central lawn, with fifteen or twenty kids sprinting around. A teenage couple argued on the bench next to us. The park reflected roughly the same demographics as the Portage Place food court.

Julie, who is in her forties, wore a light coat, jeans, sunglasses, and sandals. She has worked for a number of community organizations in the Central Neighborhoods, including an immigrant and refugee social service organization; an advocacy group for incarcerated women; and most recently as an organizer in a grassroots community development corporation. Julie told me she became involved in neighborhood organizations after becoming increasingly frustrated in an almost twenty year career as a magistrate. “The justice system becomes kind of like an assembly line,” Julie told me by way of explaining her career change, “and it doesn’t necessarily take in to consideration some of the important things like at the very beginning of the process…it was often times really hard not to pick a side and to be impartial because there were so many really unfair things that happen to people.” “I thought I could maybe do something more positive than working there”, Julie said, “I didn’t want to end up a bitter old lady.” Julie told me that working as a community organizer in the Central Neighbourhoods taught her a lot about “realizing the value of everyone.”

Central Park had recently received a large injection of government funds, with CentreVenture acting as coordinator. The park’s old crisscrossing footpaths were replaced with a sunken artificial-grass soccer pitch; the old wading pool was replaced with a modern ‘splash pad’; and large covered wooden tables that used to attract large groups of adults were removed. It had seemed to me one of the more community-friendly of CentreVenture’s undertakings, but Julie disagreed. “It was a gentrification project,” she said “I think it’s a big photo op, I think that’s a very superficial kind of involvement they’re interested in having.” Julie continued, “I
think CentreVenture along with the Downtown BIZ, the West End BIZ, the Exchange
BIZ…there’s really no pretense that they’re working at all for the good of the residents, unless
maybe you’re talking about the residents on Waterfront Drive and the Exchange Area.”

As she spoke, Julie pointed up at the apartment towers surrounding the park, explaining
that most of them were “Manitoba Housing” (subsidized housing operated by the province of
Manitoba). “I don’t see a lot of will to do things for that population at all,” said Julie, “other
than, especially for people who are homeless, people who spend time in the park, especially
anyone who looks Aboriginal, they’re always being moved a long to some other park or being
rounded up and taken to the drunk tank, to Main Street Project or wherever.” Julie’s voice grew
stronger, and she became visibly angry as she told me how park-goers are “abused” by a litany of
police forces, including the WPS, the WPS Cadets, and the various BID police.

Julie said it seemed to her that CentreVenture and its allies only wanted places like
Portage Place and Central Park “looking nice”, for the enjoyment of condo-owners or office
workers on their lunch breaks, most of whom come from suburban areas. “I think a lot of the
people that are living in Central Park, they don’t register for a lot of these [pro-business]
organizations, you know, all the kind of nameless, faceless people…I think they’re invisible for a
lot of people.” She told me of attending meetings where the typical urban wing representatives
referred to local residents as “riff raff” and “the leftovers from the night before”. “They actually
use that word,” said Julie.

I mentioned the dividing line that CentreVenture uses to mark its territory, which happens
to leave much – not all - of the Central Neighbourhoods technically outside of the agency’s
‘downtown’ mandate. Julie viewed this as a dubious construction. “Yeah,” she said, “but I mean
it all really is downtown.” Julie elaborated, “Where do people shop in Centennial [one of the
Central Neighbourhoods]? There’s no place for people to shop in Centennial, with the closing of Roedigers, and the closing of Extra Foods that was on Cumberland, there’s really no place, and so people now are shopping at Dollarama, they’re shopping at Giant Tiger” said Julie, “people go to Portage Place to shop, and I wonder why they do actually…just because of the attitude of the management, and how it’s run, it’s a very unfriendly place for people in the community.”

I asked Julie what she meant by this. “Well I think the most visible thing is all the signs that say you can’t sit on the planters,” she said “and then the incidents that have happened, you know, even this past year, with Aboriginal people, elderly people being actually forced off the planters even when they’ve been sick, um, and had to go to the hospital afterwards, and still this attitude of get off the planters, you’re not supposed to sit on the planters.” According to Julie, the incident that prompted the Idle No More style flash mob at Portage Place was not an isolated occurrence. “One elderly lady was kicked out of the food court because she bought coffee but didn’t buy food,” said Julie, “and was told she wasn’t allowed to sit their without buying food, but I personally know that at that time there was no one else in the food court, there were tons of tables.”

Then Julie told me a story about someone she knew, “a white lady who works for [Manitoba] Hydro.” “She likes to go to Portage Place sometimes for lunch and sit on the benches,” said Julie, “and they said it’s okay for you to sit on the planters, you can just sit there, it’s no big deal.” I asked Julie what she made of this. “A middle-aged white lady,” Julie concluded, “is probably not going to get kicked off the planters.” Then Julie said something I didn’t quite understand. Flicking her head to the side, in a deadpan tone, she said that the mall seemed to be “having a lot of problems with theft and things like that - I think it has a lot to do with their attitude towards the community.” Which came first, the community stealing from the
mall, or the mall abusing the community, Julie did not elaborate.

It struck me, in talking with Julie, how the existence of much of the poor, working class, and Indigenous space within CentreVenture’s “living room” is a direct result of other processes of uneven development coordinated and carried out by the dominant regional bloc. The evisceration of Main Street pushed people into Portage Avenue-area spaces; the suburbanization of Winnipeg’s economy led banks and grocery stores to abandon city-center neighborhoods, which combined with disinvestment in public transit pushed these communities into downtown dollar stores and payday loans chains; and the lack of health care facilities in northern Manitoba and Ontario pushed those communities into Winnipeg, where they found shelter in places like the St. Regis Hotel and the Carlton Inn.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with one of Winnipeg’s wealthiest settler capitalist families - the Chipmans - as they set their sights on an ambitious new real estate venture to build luxury condos, hotel rooms, and restaurants near the hockey arena they own. The Chipmans partnered with CentreVenture from the outset, as the development authority owned the land in question after purchasing it forestall the opening of another dollar store. The Chipmans viewed the existing inhabitants of the area – the predominantly poor, predominantly Indigenous peoples described as “drunks”, “panhandlers”, and “vagrants” by local media - as posing serious risks to the profitability of the investment. CentreVenture promised to ‘manage’ these risks, and the authority drew up an eleven-block zone around the Chipmans’ development site where it committed itself to doing so.

To fund its risk management activities, CentreVenture convinced the municipal and provincial governments to shift property tax revenues in the district away from education and
other public services, into CentreVenture’s control. This was achieved by institutionalizing TIF - a neoliberal financial mechanism that had already become common sense to both levels of government - at the scale of an entire district. Politicians refused to engage criticisms from city-center communities who resisted their exclusion from the plan and celebrated the occasion as an urban “renaissance” in which “families”, “professionals”, “students”, and “tourists” would retake the city.

After securing funding, CentreVenture set out to displace the population identified by the Chipmans as posing a risk to their profits, shutting down two large low-income hotels and their bars, and attempting to shut down an area liquor store. To justify its increasingly obvious agenda of displacement, CentreVenture and its urban wing allies in government and media began to describe the eleven-block area around the Chipmans’ investment as a place of exceptional importance to the city’s future, where usual levels of tolerance would no longer be exercised, and existing inhabitants would no longer be welcome. The urban wing defined these people without open recourse to race, class, or ethnicity, but by naming a set of behaviors these people supposedly engaged in: “public intoxication”, “aggressive panhandling”, and to paraphrase the Mayor, ‘things that are not what you and I would call lawful’.

Through ethnographic research, I showed how particular intersections of race, class, physical appearance, and behavior either troubled or pleased the eye of the dominant bloc. I demonstrated how the urban wing’s geographical imagination of city-center spaces that threaten real estate profits is not limited to those places CentreVenture has openly targeted. Through engagements with CentreVenture planners, real estate agents, and government functionaries, I showed how urban wing adherents have demonized or cast as ‘dead’ a full range of spaces that are subject to intensified policing and slated for eventual displacement.
But further ethnographic inquiry demonstrates that these places are in fact neither lifeless nor fearsome, but readily understood as lively and family-friendly, used and produced for a myriad of purposes by existing city-center residents. They are places where mothers buy food for their children; elders meet for coffee; or families stay during hospital visits. Framed in this way, it is clear that the dominant bloc strategically represents an entire, diverse already-existing city-center community as deviant or non-existent in order to justify its policing and replacement. People who view this community as present, human and valuable – rather than demonic and disposable – tend to perceive the dominant bloc’s intense policing and displacement as an inscrutable, aggressive affront.

The racial and geographical character of capitalist risk was on full display during this period. My analysis demonstrates how abstract capitalist processes – such as the turnover time between production and consumption – come to depend heavily on the social and cultural dynamics of specific regions. Most fundamentally, turnover time for real estate capital in Winnipeg’s city center is frequently viewed as a function of the presence or absence of Native people, due to the discomfort it is assumed moneyed consumers experience during encounters with people of Indigenous ancestry. As a result, the disappearance of Native life accrues tangible economic value.

Thus, the enduring racism experienced by Native people in the Prairie West can be traced in part to a post-industrial urban redevelopment agenda that has settled on the displacement and policing of urban Indigenous communities as the key to a profitable urban future. Indigeneity, in the eyes of the dominant bloc, morphs into a signifier of pathology (addiction and mental illness), immiseration (homelessness, vagrancy) and excess (insistent begging, fighting) that threatens profits through embodied geographic encounter. The urban wing recasts Indigenous
peoples yet again as barriers to - rather than full participants in - an improved regional future, updating settler cultures of anti-Native racism for the new, post-industrial urban Prairie West.
“If we take to heart the fact that we make places, things, and selves, but not under conditions of our own choosing, then it is easier to take the risk of conceiving change as something both short of and longer than a single cataclysmic event. Indeed, the chronicles of revolutions all show how persistent small changes, and altogether unexpected consolidations, added up to enough weight, over time and space, to cause a break with the old order.”

Ruth Wilson Gilmore

In this chapter I examine conditions in Winnipeg’s center in the context of long-term visions for a regional future. First, I consider the kind of urban future pursued by the urban wing of the dominant regional bloc by examining the downtown landscape for physical traces of a ‘future city’ emerging within the old. Second, using interviews with government planners, I detail how the state – even its purported social-democratic guise – justifies a development agenda that channels state resources towards capital and luxury as the only way towards regional competitiveness and economic strength. Through interviews with community organizers in one city-center neighborhood, I show how this agenda has left intense levels of human need unmet in Winnipeg’s center. These same organizers articulate an analysis of the dominant development agenda that is distinct from that of the social-democratic state, and is grounded in struggles to meet basic human needs. Finally, I show how the existing city-center landscape – still predominantly home to poor and working class people, Indigenous peoples, and people of color - is full of traces of potential counter development visions. I conclude with a discussion of one site in particular - the Idle No More movement - based on participant observation in the urban spaces crafted by the movement in Winnipeg in 2013 and 2014.

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Downtown Winnipeg is littered with wooden billboards, vinyl banners, glassy street advertisements, and metal signs announcing the immanent arrival of a new city, and with it, a new lifestyle for the city’s comfortable classes. The advertisements seek to lure moneyed suburbanites to the area and in doing so these installations function as placeholders or simulations of the city envisioned – but not yet achieved - by the urban wing of the dominant regional bloc. Within the existing economically depressed, largely poor, working class, people of color, and Indigenous present a new, more profitable, luxurious, largely white and professional future is depicted at every turn. Images and slogans foment suburbanites’ desires for a city center they could finally call their own – a dreamy setting for an exceptional, sexy new urban life oriented around conspicuous consumption. “LIVE THE HIGH LIFE”, commands a three-story high banner on Portage Avenue across from the MTS Centre. Around the corner, another enormous banner offers, “BE PART OF THE EXTRAORDINARY: GET CENTRED.” “GLASSHOUSE IS A WHOLE NEW STYLE OF URBAN LIVING”, proclaim the exterior walls of the Glasshouse simulation condo, where “TWENTY-ONE STOREYES OF CHIC DESIGN WELCOME YOU HOME.” On Waterfront Drive, a new boutique hotel is under construction behind a banner reading “SUNSTONE GROUP: CREATING A NEW URBAN LIFESTYLE.”

Sex, alcohol, and gambling figure prominently in the new ‘family-friendly’ city despite claims by the Mayor and others that the old city is being vanquished in the name of morality. The Chipmans’ Shark Club casino is a celebrated outpost of the coming downtown. In the skywalk system near the MTS Centre, in the middle of the walkway, is mounted a sign - featuring a thin white woman in a glittering cocktail dress holding a martini, fist raised in celebration – notifying passersby that “SLOT MACHINES, BLACKJACK, AND ROULETTE
ARE JUST STEPS AWAY.” Other Shark Club promo material features a blonde waitress – “Jenny from Red Deer” – in a little hockey jersey, handing you a beer: “GET TOGETHER WITH YOUR FRIENDS FOR A NIGHT YOU WON’T SOON FORGET.” A sandwich board in front of the Shark Club advertises the Chipmans’ other nearby investment: “WHEN YOU LIVE AT GLASSHOUSE, YOU CAN PRE-GAME IN YOUR LIVING ROOM.”

In 2013, CentreVenture mounted a print and Internet campaign called “Time to live here” – “condos & rentals for your new life downtown” - featuring a series of yuppie vignettes. “9:35 PM on James Avenue”, a stylish young white woman lounges in her loft. “I could check out the new DJ spinning down the street,” she says to herself, or “maybe the girls want to meet for drinks later…I’ll pour myself a glass of wine, send a couple texts and see what the night has in store.” “8:14 AM on Waterfront Drive”, another begins, as a white man in an expensive suit strolls past The Straight, holding a coffee. In the text of the advertisement, the man obsesses over the sexy artist who made his coffee, an opportunity his downtown condo affords him:

I watch her hands tamp the grinds as she tells me about her new gallery showing. Her eyes tell me I should probably check it out. We both know I will. I step back into the warm morning, and in the shade of the city’s most historic buildings, I walk the last few blocks to work.

The existing, physical juxtaposition between the officially wished-for city, and the actually existing one can be jarring. “Have you seen that condo display thing in city place?” My sister emailed me one day, “I walked past it the other day, and it was so weird. There was a velvet rope separating the line of people waiting to see the display condo, and on one side were the potential condo people getting free hors d'oeuvres, and on the other side were the regular city place folks.” The Shark Club is another excellent example of urban wing capital navigating an existing downtown that does not yet conform to its fantasy. In contrast to its sexy, youthful promo material, décor that features artificial exposed-concrete, and a top-40 sound track, the social scene in the Shark Club – at least in the daytime - in fact more closely resembles a seniors’
bingo hall than anything else. On any given day the casino’s roulette and blackjack tables can be found vacant and unstaffed, its rows of VLTs surrounded by the walkers, wheelchairs, and oxygen tanks of area elders playing the slots. As these contradictions accumulate, the top-down, manufactured essence of the ‘new urban lifestyle’ becomes evident.

CentreVenture’s “Time to live here” campaign compares uncannily to the Department of the Interior’s “letters from satisfied settlers” campaign, with the important exception that the former narratives are fictional. This is because the dominant bloc’s twenty-first century advertisements depict a city that is yet to come – it’s up to “you” to make it happen. And if you don’t get in now, you might be left behind. There is a particular futuristic alchemy at work here, where the future of capital accumulation, regional survival, and whiteness are brewed into a single post-industrial urban vision. Just like the nineteenth century settler-colonial propaganda, the twenty-first century version promises that intending settlers will get in on a regional future that is larger than any single one of them; and just as in the nineteenth century scripts, the specter of an historical break is deliberately circulated to drum up interest in real estate. “WATCH THE FUTURE UNFOLD” a CentrePoint advertisement urges. “OWN THE FUTURE” an ad for condos near Waterfront Drive commands. But the idea of historical rupture is deployed to sell a development vision that deliberately conserves the regional balance of power, serving as it does real estate capital, merchant capital, and white desires for a modern lifestyle free from the contaminating influence of those who have always been left out. Just like the wholesome twentieth century suburb and the rugged nineteenth century frontier that came before it, the sexy twenty-first century city is the space through which whiteness and capital accumulation – and therefore the entire region - will find new life.
While the benefits of such a scheme for urban capital and a segment of the city’s professional classes is obvious, what is striking is how thoroughly this – often violent and openly revanchist – agenda has been cast as progressive and universally beneficial. In particular, the unwavering support for the scheme on the part of social-democratic planners, economists, and others in the left-leaning Manitoba NDP government that has overseen CentreVenture’s entire run so far is a strikingly impressive achievement. The perceived importance of Winnipeg’s city-center to the entire provincial economy – a perception that, as we have seen, has been formulated and circulated again and again by the urban wing of the dominant regional bloc - is a central factor in explaining this. But what is perhaps most interesting is the way that the urban wing has positioned its agenda as a progressive, even left wing project, despite the fact that it conserves unequal power relations and only deepens the overwhelming level of human need that exists in Winnipeg’s city center. In the following section, I use data from interviews with high-level provincial planners to detail how CentreVenture and the urban wing’s agenda more broadly have embedded themselves within the workings of Manitoba’s social-democratic government, and how that government justifies upward redistribution of resources to developers and luxury condo buyers, as well as the elimination of poor, working class, and Indigenous spaces, all in the name of regional progress.

Provincial government planners – as opposed to city-center community organizers, as I will discuss later - were not at all surprised when I approached them to talk about Winnipeg’s urban development authority. “[CentreVenture is] a very important conduit if you will for the province to sort of achieve its downtown objectives” I was told by Mike, a Senior Project Manager in the Manitoba NDP government’s Finance, Priorities and Planning Secretariat. “We work hand in hand with CentreVenture all the time,” Sandra, Assistant Deputy Minister for
Local Government said to me in a separate interview. “Almost everything that they’ve done, we have contributed to.” The Manitoba government’s ‘downtown objectives’ seem culled straight from downtown condo advertisements, in so far as they are aimed primarily at luring suburbanites and tourists to Winnipeg’s city center beyond the nine to five workday. Mike, who has a master’s degree in economics, explained, “I guess it’s often thought that to renew the downtown, to have a vibrant downtown, you have to have some people living in the downtown, not just working in the downtown.” “The biggest challenge that I think developers face,” Mike added, “is just sort of changing folks’ mentality about thinking, considering downtown as a place to live.” Mike’s tendency to view the city center through the eyes of a private land developer – rather than those actually living in the city center - is indicative of the NDP’s allegiances.

Mike told me that the NDP government works closely with condo developers to make sure they can turn a sizable profit in downtown Winnipeg. “We talked with some developers about what the, what the gap is, if you will, in terms of what they needed to generate a reasonable rate of return” said Mike, “at the time it was in the neighbourhood of six to ten percent.” “What we did was we partnered with one developer, we came up with sort of a model building…[to] get a sense as to what the gap was,” Mike went on, “and it was thought to be fifteen to twenty thousand dollars a door, for example, a subsidy, in the form of a tax break would be sufficient.” This planning process led to the creation of the Downtown Residential Development Grant Program, a pool of money the provincial government gave to CentreVenture to dole out to downtown condo developers.

Sandra, on the other hand, had been closely involved with CentreVenture’s hotel shutdowns. She told me that the NDP government commissioned a confidential report that recommended the elimination of no fewer than seven low-income city-center hotel bars, and that
this report contributed to CentreVenture’s purchase of the St. Regis Hotel. “We did a study with [a consulting firm] on the St. Regis, the Garrick, and I can’t remember the name of the other, but three, specifically,” said Sandra “and in the report they also named another four that they recommended be purchased.” “And so what CentreVenture did was they made an offer to purchase the St. Regis Hotel, we contributed to the cost of the purchase, they closed the beverage room and the VLTs”, Sandra continued, “and then they recently put out an RFP for redevelopment of the site.” “So, the idea is to try to do this with several of those downtown hotels.”

The same fears and prejudices that motivate CentreVenture’s desire to send existing city-center residents “to the basement” also seem to motivate the NDP. “Crime”, “safety”, and “comfort” were very often at the fore of provincial officials’ explanations about the importance of CentreVenture. “CentreVenture is always involved to some extent when we’re talking about crime and safety initiatives” Mike told me. “Every year we fund, we’ve been funding more and more police,” Mike continued, “some of which will be specifically, well, recent commitments have focused on what we call beat cops, to patrol the downtown, you know, to give people a feeling of safety.” I asked Mike why policing was so integral to the province’s approach to Winnipeg’s city center. “Well, I mean a lot of it stems from the fact that even though the downtown’s made strides in terms of getting, you know, higher income people living there,” Mike replied, “there’s still a segment of the population downtown that is lower income, you know, you know, not to stereotype, but you know, where you have lower income people, crime is generally prevalent in that area.”

The NDP makes an effort to orchestrate, in various ways, the spatial distribution of social groups throughout the city. Mike told me provincial government hopes initiatives like
CentreVenture’s SHED will spearhead a demographic shift in the area, which itself could reduce crime levels. “With crime, one of the best ways of addressing that is to improve the densification of downtown, right. So one of the ways for addressing that is, you know, getting more people to go downtown after hours, and to go for dinner, or shows, or that sort of thing, and to have people living downtown, because the more people living downtown, that has a positive impact in terms of reducing crime.”

On the other hand, in Sandra’s view there is already a “critical mass” of people downtown, who effectively scare away the class of people to whom the city’s future truly belongs. When I asked Sandra why her office took an interest in shutting down the St. Regis Hotel’s bar, she told me: “What [the St. Regis’ bar] contributes to is a whole host of drunken people on the streets of downtown Winnipeg. So that, mm, element of people tends to make people feel unsafe, so if you’re walking in the middle of the afternoon downtown, and there are a bunch of drunks on the sidewalk, or people are hitting you up for money, it’s like ‘I don’t even, I wouldn’t live down there.’” “There has been criticism that just doing that just moves the problem out of the downtown, and there’s some validity to that complaint,” Sandra continued “except that because of the critical mass of the number of these beverage rooms, you get more of this kind of, um, activity, than you would if it was dispersed throughout the city.”

The dispersal of poor and Indigenous peoples away from the downtown was a clear objective for Sandra. When I asked her what she thought CentreVenture meant when it talked about “social issues” downtown, Sandra replied: “One is that critical mass of people that go to the beverage rooms, and the number of single room occupancy hotels that we have.” “Some of the social issues are homelessness, and um, we have a very transient Aboriginal population,” Sandra continued, “we have an urban Aboriginal population that’s higher than any other city in
Canada, and the interesting thing about that population, is that they’re not a stable population.”

“So there will be people from a reserve who move to town, and maybe are here for a year, or six months, and then they move back to the reserve.” “And all of the social supports exist in the downtown. So, homelessness shelters, um, housing, uh, social service agencies, they all have services in the downtown, so that tends to put everybody in the same physical space.” It was the physical concentration, but also the affect of poor and Indigenous peoples downtown that troubled Sandra. I asked Sandra what the difference was, in her view, between intoxicated people at the St. Regis Hotel and the ‘critical mass’ of intoxicated hockey fans the MTS Centre attracts.

“Just from an observation point of view,” Sandra said of the MTS Centre crowd, “I would say it’s a quick, sort of happy crowd, there’s not a lot of fighting or things like that, whereas people who start drinking at ten in the morning, and you know by midnight they’re just not people you want to mix with.”

When I asked provincial planners and economists why the Manitoba government was so interested in manipulating the demographics of Winnipeg’s downtown, I hoped to hear more economically or politically substantive explanations than the jargon-filled plans on the public record. But what I heard was an uncanny regurgitation of those plans. The same old metaphors were rolled out to explain Winnipeg’s exceptional importance to the provincial economy – “Winnipeg is frankly the backbone of the province”; “the heartbeat of Manitoba is the city of Winnipeg”; “Winnipeg needs to be a healthy, vibrant community, and the downtown is key to that.” I was informed that the specific historical-geographical conditions that led the province to invest in city-center redevelopment included “a decline in vibrancy of the downtown”; “a lot of vacant windows”; and the slightly more revealing, “you know, we were losing head offices to Calgary and Toronto and Vancouver and everywhere else.”
I pressed Mike, the trained economist, to explain how exactly CentreVenture—or developer subsidies, hotel shutdowns, and police in general—contribute to the economic well being of Manitobans. He offered several ways in which he believed the authority bolstered the regional economy. The first was that CentreVenture, in his view, could help to reduce urban sprawl, saving the state money in infrastructural expenditures. “So I mean if you have a situation where you have more businesses locating in downtown Winnipeg, more people living in downtown Winnipeg,” said Mike “I guess it can to some degree mitigate the urban sprawl, which from an economic standpoint would mean building fewer roads, and installing fewer infrastructure, you know in the far reaching areas of the city.” Mike even added that CentreVenture could make the city more environmentally friendly. “I mean from an environmental standpoint, too, if you have a situation where more people are living downtown you have potentially less car congestion, which leads potentially to less green house gas emissions, and that sort of thing, so from an environmental standpoint it’s important as well.”

Eventually Mike settled, perhaps more substantively, on CentreVenture’s role in attracting tourist spending. “I guess even from sort from an economic development and a tourist aspect, if you can get your downtown to a point where it becomes a destination for outside folks that can have positive impacts too,” said Mike, going on to cite the expanded convention center, the forthcoming Canadian Museum for Human Rights, and the return of the NHL. “When you pair all these things together,” Mike continued “having a vibrant downtown has the ability to generate positive economic benefits from tourist draws, both within Canada and even just within the province.” “If you have your capital city that’s exporting and generating a lot of jobs, that has direct benefits in terms of increased tax revenue, which allows the government to do more
things, to invest in healthcare, to invest in education, downtown redevelopment, so it’s yeah, it’s very important from that standpoint.”

Feeling unsatisfied with this rationale, Mike summoned an additional economic explanation that amounted to positing a kind of psychological trickle down effect. “At the end of the day, these things are, you know, they’re a point of pride for people who live in the city,” said Mike “I mean, your overall psyche’s improved when you see cranes in the downtown, it just makes people feel better, and it’s, uh, it provides a positive thing for people, which quite often translates into economic success as well.” Mike reiterated this point later, saying that “slowly, progressively, the downtown has, is evolving to a place where people want to be again…it’s a point of pride for people, I think that generates, or that does translate into tangible economic benefits.”

The people’s analysis

When momentum is built for a development vision that places human life over real estate profits it seems likely that it will come not from existing planners and politicians – whether they have social-democratic allegiances or not - but from longtime residents and organizers of city-center neighborhoods. The history of struggle in these neighborhoods against decades of neglect, disinvestment, and demonization has produced a development analysis that rejects the trickle-down theories of the past thirty years and beyond. In the following section, I detail the views and priorities of city-center community organizers as a counterpoint to the perspectives of provincial government planners, whose trickle-down theories are roundly refuted by the organizers.

I spoke extensively with six community organizers in Winnipeg’s Centennial neighborhood – a tree-lined district of small houses, duplexes, apartment blocks, and warehouses where a railway spur line used to run - over the winter of 2014. Centennial is a community of
just over two thousand people on the northwestern edge of CentreVenture’s jurisdiction. In 2006 (the last census for which the City of Winnipeg makes neighborhood census data available) Centennial had a median household income of $15,206 with three out of four residents considered “low income.”\textsuperscript{302} Statistics Canada estimates that forty five percent of Centennial residents are Indigenous, but these counts are typically considered lower than the actual number – one organizer I spoke with estimated eighty percent of the community was Indigenous. Thirty percent of Centennial residents are non-Indigenous people of color – “visible minorities” – according to Statistics Canada.\textsuperscript{303}

I spoke with Garth, whose family has lived in the area for over fifty years (they were displaced by City Council’s 1960s Main Street urban renewal schemes). Garth was friendly, mild mannered, and straightforward. At the time, he was vice president of the board of the small grassroots Centennial Community Improvement Association (CCIA), and years earlier he had been president of the board of the slightly larger Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation (CNDC). Garth first got involved in neighborhood organizing in the early 2000s when the Winnipeg Foundation - a multi-million dollar philanthropist organization then experimenting with a five-year neighborhood-based community development model - identified him as a potential “neighbourhood leader” and he got involved in the foundation’s “Centennial Project”.

Garth and I spoke over coffee in the dining room of the downtown hotel where he works. He told me he viewed the Centennial Project as the first time the broader city had significantly paid attention to conditions in Centennial. “[The Winnipeg Foundation] wanted to find a neighbourhood that was somewhat neglected throughout the times,” said Garth. “We are one of

\textsuperscript{302} Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation, “Communities.”
\textsuperscript{303} Statistics Canada, “2006 Census Data - Centennial.”
the poorest neighbourhoods in Winnipeg...and so the city really hasn’t put a lot of money back into the community.” Almost a decade later, Garth was ambivalent about the legacy of the Centennial Project. “It has been good and it has been bad,” he said, “in those five years actually there was a lot of money funneled into the Centennial Community,” but “at the end of the five years, everyone that was hired to do the work pretty much disappeared, so from that point on we were left to struggle and survive on our own.” The relatively new CCIA has only one full-time staff member, a neighborhood housing coordinator, and the organization struggles to get things done. “We don’t have a charitable number, and we don’t have the administrative sense to do a payroll or anything either,” said Garth, who told me the housing coordinator is in fact paid through a separate, citywide non-profit.

I met with Meredith, director of the Parent Child Family Centre at the elementary school in Centennial. The purpose of the center is to build trust between parents and their children’s school, Meredith told me, something made extremely difficult by the traumatic impact of Indian Residential Schools on many parents’ lives. The Parent Child Family Center is a highly active community space, where parents and children eat lunch, drink coffee, read, watch TV, use the printer, and work with Meredith to navigate a variety of issues from finding childcare to filling out Manitoba Housing applications. We spoke over coffee one morning in the room – which includes a full kitchen, several couches, a playpen, and a large mural of the Seven Teachings - that serves as the Parent Child Family Centre.

Meredith was funny and welcoming, smiled easily, spoke quickly, and made intense eye contact. Like Garth, Meredith was emphatic that Centennial had long been neglected by the city’s dominant development visions. “We always seem to be overlooked,” Meredith told me “I see things happening in the South End all the time, but what’s happening here?” “People think
they don’t have a voice”, Meredith explained, describing a sense of powerlessness built up over years by outside forces - landlords, school administrators, politicians, planners – with the power to dictate neighborhood change.

The palpable sense of injustice in Centennial – of being “overlooked” and “left to struggle and survive on our own” – is rooted in a severe decline in access to the basic necessities of life, most pressingly food and shelter. “There’s no housing here,” said Meredith, who told me that much of her time is spent helping parents navigate the Manitoba Housing application process or fighting with landlords – sometimes in court - to be treated with fairness. “The biggest issues are always with the housing,” said Garth, “whether it’s affordable, whether it’s livable.” Meredith told me that most parents she knows want strongly to remain in Centennial – to maintain social ties and keep their kids in the same school - but housing is so scarce, families are often forced to move away. “Landlords are handing out evictions like candy these days,” said Meredith, noting that many landlords in the neighborhood have evicted families with school-age children in the middle of the school year – which Meredith noted is illegal - often to raise rents and replace them with higher income tenants.

Part of the problem is that landlords have allowed a large portion of Centennial’s original housing stock has become uninhabitable. “There are so many boarded up houses around here,” said Meredith, pointing out the window, “that people started saying, ‘Why are these houses boarded up, when the thing we need most is more housing?’” She told me that residents organized a neighborhood housing audit, counting boarded up houses and trying to find out who owned them. Many of the houses turned out to be owned by landlords in Alberta, British Columbia, and the United States, who were impossible to track down. Much of the housing that is available, Meredith told me, is too small for neighborhood families, many if not most of whom
have several children, often four or five. It is essentially impossible, Meredith said, to find a place that is both large enough as well as affordable, even from Manitoba Housing, where large units are in extremely high demand. Without a sizable home, parents are vulnerable to losing their children to Child and Family Services.

Homelessness is a major issue in Centennial. Aideen, who runs a popular adult drop-in – primarily for solvent users - out of a former bank building in Centennial told me that most of the people who come to the drop-in are homeless. Many spend winter days in Portage Place, the MTS Centre lobby, or some other segment of the city’s heated indoor skywalk and tunnel complex. When they are evicted from these spaces, according to Aideen, they often spend the night in underground parking garages or other out of view public places. Part of this is because solvent users in particular, said Aideen, are banned from one of the city’s largest homeless shelters (just outside of Centennial) and are often picked on – having their shoes stolen, for instance - in other shelters. On the day I visited - in the middle of one of the coldest winters in decades - Aideen told me she knew that at least four people had slept under a nearby bridge that week.

Centennial faces another, more recent process of neglect, in the mass-exodus of grocery stores from the neighborhood and from more or less the entire city center. When I asked Meredith about the grocery situation, her eyes narrowed in mock-anger. “Oh, be careful,” Meredith said, “you can get lynched around here for bringing that up.” She laughed, and then listed one by one, the nearby grocery stores that had closed in the past year or two: “Roediger’s on Isabel”, “Extra Foods on Notre Dame”, “Zellers in the Bay basement” and so on. “Where’s the closest place you can walk for groceries, if you didn’t have your van?” Meredith asked a woman who was heating something up in the kitchen of the Parent Child Family Centre.
“Nowhere” the woman said bluntly, telling us that she usually drives to a big chain grocery store in the suburbs. “There aren’t any mom and pop stores?” Meredith asked, but the woman in the kitchen made a grossed out face and said she preferred not to shop at stores like that. That preference is something most in the neighborhood – without access to a vehicle or effective public transportation - cannot afford, Meredith said.

There are several food banks in and around Centennial, and I asked Garth if people in Centennial relied on them. Garth hesitated at first. “Mmm, I wouldn’t like to say that,” Garth answered, “but I know, I know there is.” “We have Freight House, which is our community centre,” Garth continued, “and there is actually food banks I think twice a week there, whether the people actually require it or not, I don’t know, but I know it’s put to use.” Garth’s hesitation – “I wouldn’t like to say that”, “whether the people actually require it or not” – struck me. I could feel his uneasiness at the indignity of the situation, but at the same time, it seemed to me, Garth felt a responsibility to acknowledge the reality of the situation.

Organizers in Centennial are doing what they can in the face of the grocery store exodus, but it’s an uphill battle. A mainstay of the drop-in Aideen runs in Centennial is a two-dollar Sunday brunch, which attracts neighborhood families in addition to the usual drop-in crowd. “For most families here, it’s been years since they’ve been able to take their kids out for breakfast, if ever,” said Aideen “now they can.” Julie, from the Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation, told me she helped to organize a forum at Portage Place about the dearth of grocery options downtown. “There were so many people at the forum,” Julie told me, “there were so many people around the periphery that didn’t have a chance to come in and actually participate in the break out sessions.” A petition had been drafted, to press City Council in to addressing the problem. “I took some of the petitions to talk to people in the food court
about the grocery situation downtown,” said Julie, “and I talked to maybe two or three people before security told me I had to leave the food court, they said I would have to get permission from management if I wanted to do that.” The petition, so far, has come to nothing.

The neighborhood organizers I talked to view the fact that CentreVenture’s jurisdiction overlaps with Centennial as more of a threat than an opportunity. As a community organizer for over ten years in Centennial, Garth said he has had zero contact with the City’s development authority. I told him I found that a bit surprising, given CentreVenture’s broadly defined mandate to pursue “the economic, physical, and social revitalization of downtown Winnipeg.”

“CentreVenture itself is more based towards businesses as opposed to the social and economic well-being of the residents itself”, Garth explained matter-of-factly. “Their budgets are based on businesses, not the people themselves,” Garth went on, “it doesn’t really translate into any social or economics into the community itself.” Garth was being – almost humorously, I thought – understated and diplomatic, but he couldn’t have been clearer or more emphatic. Later, Garth seemed a bit looser, and said, laughing, “What are they really going to do in our community anyway, really? Like I don’t see them coming in, and like you say, developing a grocery store in any way.”

The organizers I talked with in Centennial refused to acknowledge any possibility that the neighborhood would benefit from the $1 billion attracted by CentreVenture to the downtown, especially that invested in luxury condos. I was actually surprised at the sometimes-painstaking patience with which Garth, Meredith, Aideen and others engaged the theory that Centennial might stand to benefit from CentreVenture’s work; I could tell they were trying not to be rude to me by dismissing the question out of hand. This is how I posed the question to Garth,

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304 Hilderman, Thomas, Frank, Cram Landscape Architecture, Planning and Property & Services Department, Planning & Land-Use Division, “CentrePlan Development Framework.”
paraphrasing what Mike, the government economist had said to me: “There’s a hope that increased investment in the downtown built environment, so places like the MTS Centre, the convention centre expansion, um, this new condo and hotel development on Portage, will, improve the local economy and improve the economic circumstances of, um, all different kinds of people. Do you feel like that is happening at all, in Centennial?” To this Garth replied:

Well Centennial is again, a different type of place. If we were looking at the same type of residents that would be living in these condos, we would definitely be talking about gentrification then. Because again, the people that would be living in that newest condo, I believe they’re just selling like, for about $160,000, $170,000 for five hundred square feet. And that’s basically enough for a single person. We’re talking all families in Centennial right now, like I doubt, there’s very, very few single people living in Centennial.

As it turns out, from Centennial, most of the downtown residential development brokered by CentreVenture looks particularly unfriendly to city-center families. Even new housing advertised as “affordable” is usually out of the reach of Centennial families. “There’s a condo development going up down the street,” Meredith told me, “the sign says ‘CONDOS $120,000’ – parents can’t afford that, with condo fees and everything.” And yet billboards outside this particular condo development advertise it as “AFFORDABLE.” At one point, Meredith asked me, “Have they [CentreVenture] done anything that is supposed to be affordable for everyone, or for the community here?” While there have been one or two developments CentreVenture has worked with non-profit organizations to build, the first thing that came to mind was the Avenue Building on Portage Avenue, which Bethany from CentreVenture told me included eight affordable rental apartments as a result of conditions placed on a provincial government grant the developers received. “Okay,” Meredith replied, “so my question is, what is the application process like? And also, how big are these units? Because families here need three, four bedrooms.” Before this, Meredith told me about the process of applying to Manitoba Housing, and how opaque it is for the applicants, how they never know when they’ll be selected to receive housing, or where in the city it will be, so families end up forced to leave the neighborhood,
when they’d rather stay. It seemed like the Avenue Building might be an attractive, nearby source of affordable housing for people in Centennial, except that Meredith, who frequently helps Centennial families find apartments through Manitoba Housing, had no idea about it.

In the Parent Child Family Centre with Meredith, I had a list of the development projects that CentreVenture and the provincial planners I had spoken with routinely cite as the best examples of the city’s improving fortunes. I asked Meredith if she thought any of them had benefitted people in Centennial. “Let me look at this list”, she said gamely and went down the page with her index finger. First up was “Main Street redevelopment.” I mentioned the new Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) and United Way headquarters on Main. Meredith slowly shook her head, “Well we have partnered with the WRHA and that’s been positive, but it wasn’t as if the big new building was something that meant anything to people here.”

“Waterfront Drive?” “Hmm, nope” said Meredith, “We do go to the Forks sometimes, or to a baseball game when we can get freebies, but no, not Waterfront Drive, unless we wanted to check out the waterfront, but, hm, no, I don’t think so.” The new hockey arena was on the list. “Yeah, the MTS Centre, that’s expensive, I don’t think anyone can afford that,” said Meredith, “unless of course, the hockey program gets a few tickets through charity, or through the school police officer.” “Oh yeah, I was thinking about the convention centre”, said Meredith as she went down the list, “We went to a career expo there a few months ago, but other than that, not really.”

“Maybe if they had something there for kids and families, that would be the kind of thing we would go to”, Meredith added, “but otherwise, not really.” “And what’s CentrePoint?” Meredith asked. When I told her Meredith laughed a bit, and quickly said “nope.” “Like, who is that for?” Meredith asked, facetiously.
Aideen had a somewhat novel theory about how the dominant development vision might improve the economic circumstances of people in Centennial. “A lot of people around here,” Aideen told me, “are employed in the underground economy, or what I like to call the secondary economy.” She said that crowds attending Jets games, or coming downtown for dinner and a show might increase the business of “kids on bikes” who sell weed downtown. Or, Aideen said, she wouldn’t be surprised if there was a “posse of kids” that take game and concert nights at the MTS Centre as opportunities to break in to the influx of parked cars from the suburbs.

If I was really looking for people who benefitted from the dominant development vision, Garth suggested I speak to a group called Residents of the Exchange District (RED), which I knew many condo owners on Waterfront Drive were associated with. “We’ve never really been in touch,” said Garth “but they’re our direct neighbors, and demographically they’re very, very different from what we have in our community.” “They’re the upwardly mobile,” Garth explained “They’re the ones who live in the condos and everything, right on Princess [Street] itself, they’re not the ones that would venture deep into Centennial.” I asked Garth if he viewed RED as a potential ally for the CCIA. “Their concerns are a little bit different than what our concerns would be,” Garth told me “You know, their December was having a dinner at one of these furniture stores for $150 a person.” Garth chuckled. “That’s beyond what the concerns of our residents are, a lot of our residents are concerned with getting a hamper, you know” said Garth, referring to a Christmastime tradition of charities donating food to poor families.

Garth’s reference to Princess Street marked that thoroughfare as the place where the luxury condo neighborhood formed by Waterfront Drive and the city’s warehouse district – the Exchange District – rubs up against Centennial, which Garth contrasted as “A lot more social housing, like Manitoba Housing, there is affordable housing…there are some rooming houses,
again, demographically it’s a very different group of people.” At times Garth didn’t seem to put too much stock into the accelerated construction of luxury condos and other development nearby. When I asked him about the “divide” between RED and the CCIA, Garth said, “I wouldn’t necessarily call it a divide - it is what it is. They developed all these condos for almost $200,000 on Princess itself, uh, is there any need for them to come into Centennial? I wouldn’t think so.” Garth continued, “They’re probably the ones that work downtown or whatever, they just go from there to their office or whatever.” At other times, he seemed more concerned. “There’s always consideration for gentrification in our communities, there’s always concerns” said Garth. “I see all the money being put into downtown, and it’s a trickle down effect into Centennial, we’ll see some advantages to it, but not a whole – like I said, we really don’t want to see a lot either because of the gentrification effect.” “Housing values have risen almost by triple” in the past ten years, Garth added.

Nor was the increased policing of the city center welcomed by Centennial community organizers I spoke with. I asked Garth about the police presence in the neighborhood. “For a while there it was a little bit unfriendly,” said Garth “I’d have to say, you know, tension, in the sense of, the police chief at the time wouldn’t really want to listen to your concerns, he just kind of gave in, at times, to the City Council.” While Garth was hopeful that a new police chief would treat the neighborhood more fairly, Aideen was not. The Winnipeg Police Service is not typically friendly to the people - most of whom are homeless - who frequent the drop-in in Centennial, according to Aideen. “People talk about the new police chief and his ‘community policing’, how he listens, and everything, but he’s no different from the rest”, said Aideen. “I’ve seen him, when he was just a beat cop, I’ve seen him kick girls off the block, when I used to work at [a drop-in for neighborhood sex workers]” said Aideen, “I’ve seen him drop girls off at the edge of town
and steal their shoes.” Aideen told me she was fed up with the constant demonization of the neighborhood, especially the stigmatization of the solvent-users she works with. She told me about doing an interview recently with a supposedly progressive online magazine. Aideen was disappointed by the resulting article, which she described as “sensationalistic.” The author sent her a link to the article. “That’s great,” Aideen responded, “but I read the same thing in the Sun three months ago.” One of the author’s arguments was that solvent use should be criminalized. “Like, did that work for other drugs?” said Aideen, “They had a war on drugs, how did that go? I know teenagers who are locked up at Rockwood for weed.” Aideen suggested an alternative approach: “Try asking why there’s no housing for people,” said Aideen, “why there are no resources.” A significant part of the answer to Aideen’s questions is that ideas of a progressive urban future have been monopolized by a development agenda based in capitalist profits rather than human need.

While questions such as Aideen’s – questions of resource distribution and human need – are evaded by the dominant development agenda, they are taken up by a diversity of radical and progressive struggles rooted in Centennial and Winnipeg’s broader city center. In this final section - utilizing participant observation in urban public spaces, including participation in the Idle No More movement active in Winnipeg in 2013 and 2014 - I will detail how city center residents articulate the seeds of a counter development vision using the means available to them.

*Alternative Futures*

Just as the dominant development agenda relies on visual placeholders of its desired urban future, existing city-center residents articulate counter development agendas through the physical environment. In some cases CentreVenture has come under more or less direct critique. “YOUTH AGAINST CHRIST” appeared in black spray paint on the side of a West End building
in the days following the unsuccessful challenge to the Youth For Christ development.

“CULTURE NOT CONDOS” read the marquee of a Main Street bar following a failed attempt by CentreVenture to give $10,000 apiece to anyone buying a new downtown condo. In most other cases, grassroots spatial practices challenge the status quo in general.

On Selkirk Avenue, just across the tracks from Centennial, a concrete bell tower in a small plaza has become a hub of grassroots organizing in the past few years, mostly through weekly meetings convened by neighborhood youth using the banner “Meet me at the bell tower.” When I saw it in the winter of 2014, the walls of the bell tower had been made into an impromptu collage that seemed to function as a snapshot of the moment’s radical and progressive struggles. Front and center was a large poster made popular by the Idle No More movement, featuring the word “TREATY” in bold, in the style of Obama’s “HOPE” poster. All around this poster smaller images had been wheat-pasted to the concrete, including posters promoting a community dinner hosted by the Winnipeg arm of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW); a new revolutionary anarchist-communist group calling itself “Prairie Struggle Organization”; and Amnesty International’s “No more stolen sisters” campaign to end the mass murder and disappearance of Indigenous women.

On the day I passed by the bell tower, I took a long walk from the North End to downtown and the Central Neighborhoods, where physical traces of the city center’s counterculture were in abundance. A few blocks east, on Main Street, someone has handwritten “NATIVE LAND ALWAYS” over top of a commercial realtor’s “FOR SALE” sign in a vacant lot. “Neechi Commons” - an abandoned Main Street grocery store that has been turned into an Indigenous-run co-op – sells books in Native studies and Idle No More tank tops. A mural in the parking lot shows crowds of workers about to overturn a streetcar, in commemoration of the
1919 Winnipeg General Strike. A hand-painted circle-A hovers over a needle drop-box. “GET RIEL!” is spray painted in bright colors just down the block. A bit further south, in the tunnel where Main Street passes under the tracks, “NATIVE CANADA” is written in black marker over corporate chewing gum advertisements. “COPS JUST WENT PASS” is written in chalk on a wooden hydro pole on the other side of Main Street. Somewhat less cryptically, just a few blocks away in Centennial – on a wall right behind the ‘affordable’ $120,000 condos - someone has written “FTP FUCK THE POLICE 4 LIFE.” On the front of the nearby Old Market Autonomous Zone – established 1995 – scrawled over a giant mural of a raised fist, are a litany of messages, including “SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL REVOLUTION”, as well as “NEO NAZIS FOR OBAMA.” (In the fall of 2014, following the tragic death of Faron Hall – Winnipeg’s “homeless hero” – and the murder of fifteen-year old Tina Fontaine, Winnipeg’s city center was decorated with wheat-pasted portraits of Hall featuring the text “LEGENDS NEVER DIE”, and a butterfly emblem with “NO MORE STOLEN SISTERS” written across the the wings.)

By far the most powerful counter development agenda organized in Winnipeg in 2013 and 2014 was that forged by the Idle No More movement or what was often called the Idle No More “Indigenous revolution.” While Idle No More organizing in Winnipeg did not openly target the dominant urban development vision, it did make extensive use of urban space to articulate opposition to dominant capitalist extraction-based development agendas that threatened Indigenous lands, communities, and Earth itself. In Winnipeg, Idle No More brought together a wide range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in unified opposition to the privileging of capitalist profits – in the form of oil, gas, mining, hydro, and timber interests – over all other collective objectives, including sustaining human life, honoring treaties, and preserving the existence of Earth. In the process, activists and organizers countered the
divisiveness and racism of reactionary conservatives with a concerted effort to reach across the processes of othering and demonization that have long aided colonial capitalist development at all scales.

The Idle No More events I attended while doing fieldwork in Winnipeg highlighted for me the degree to which everyday life in the city isolates and individualizes. I began to see more clearly how, instead of attempting to overcome these dynamics, CentreVenture actually empowers feelings of anxiety, fear and suspicion through its strategy of eradication, policing, and surveillance. Perhaps the most central spatial practice of the Idle No More movement is the act of dancing with strangers in public. The “Round Dance Revolution” as it has been called, involves each member of the assembled crowd grasping hands with two others to form one large circle, and then dancing around and around, usually to the beat and often to the singing voices of hand drummers. I feel anxious and self-conscious every time I do this, and energized and joyful every time afterward. People smile awkwardly at each other at first, but by the end people are usually at ease, talking and laughing.

The Idle No More round dance, of course, also challenges the more specific divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the city, something that dominant urban and non-urban development visions work hard to solidify. Many Idle No More callouts include the message, “ALL WELCOME”, while some feature an emblem with red, yellow, black, brown, and white fists encircling the words “IDLE NO MORE.” “We are all one, we are all one” people chanted at one Idle No More round dance I attended, and the sentiment is made visceral by the round dance. One aspect of the sometimes ecstatic feeling produced by participating in the round dance, for me, came from the unity produced by hundreds of individuals of all backgrounds –
people who dominant urban processes tend to segregate - that becomes palpable as people join hands, act in concert, and the awkwardness subsides.

But the joy and promise of the Idle No More movement comes not simply from the diversity of people participating, but from the – unfortunately rare - way that different groups and movements seem to forge alliances through Idle No More, or at least seem to broach the possibility of alliance. Many large labor organizations, for example – including the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the Winnipeg Labour Council - expressed solidarity with Idle No More in written statements and joined in marches and round dances in Winnipeg and across the country. Urban spaces created by Idle No More organizers also became places of spontaneous solidarity. I attended a weekly Idle No More gathering called “Water Wednesdays” – organized in response to federal bill C-45 and “the Canadian Government’s reckless stewardship of our water resources”305 - over the summer of 2013. The downtown park where Water Wednesdays were held became a meeting place for organizers and activists of all stripes. The anti-violence organizers of “Meet me at the bell tower” mixed with people wearing the red squares of the anti-austerity movement; anti-homelessness activists that share bannock and other food on Main Street mixed with members of the local Copwatch. Indigenous radio stations, university radio stations, and other alternative media were regularly on hand. One day, a family from a community north of Winnipeg appeared, informing the assembly that a cohort of young people were on their way to Winnipeg by canoe in a show of defiance against bill C-45. The family announced that there would be a celebration at The Forks the next day to welcome the youth. Another time, people from the community of Shoal Lake - where Winnipeg extracts its drinking water from – spoke about how the community was literally

305 onewinnipeg.ca, “Winnipeg Water Wednesdays Have Returned for 2014!”
turned into an island by the infrastructure built to send water to Winnipeg and how Shoal Lake itself does not have access to clean tap water. On another day, an event organized by prison abolitionists – to gather and sing songs in front of a downtown prison, in a show of support for the people incarcerated there - was joined by a crowd of Idle No More demonstrators from a separate event. The two groups joined in a round dance that took the entire street, as the people being held inside watched from the prison windows.

Through Idle No More, urban dwellers brought a counter analysis of the dominant regional bloc into the streets. Activists occupied important economic spaces - major downtown intersections, shopping malls, the MTS Centre, the airport, and the street in front of the Winnipeg Sun’s offices – to highlight a series of connections between historical, economic, and ideological dynamics that work against social and environmental justice. “1812-2012 SAME FIGHT SAME GOVERNMENT” read one sign in a downtown march down Portage Avenue; “RAISE CORPORATE TAXES NOT CARBON LEVELS” read another at an Elsipogtog solidarity rally in front of Portage Place; “RACISM IS HATE - THE SUN SELLS HATE” activists in front of the Sun offices pointed out; while others wore hoodies and shirts featuring the simple reminder: “GOT LAND? THANK AN INDIAN.”

As if to confirm that Idle No More activists had gotten a thing or two correct about the regional-historical balance of power, reactionary backlash to the movement was widespread and often brutal. CSIS and the WPS monitored the movement closely. One organizer told me she found leaflets with the text “I’LL HANG WITH RIEL” on the steps of a bank at Portage and Main during a New Year’s Eve round dance there. (The message eerily echoes a nineteenth century action at the same corner, where an effigy of Riel was strung up alongside a banner
reading, “EITHER SHOOT THE WRETCH OR HAVE HIM HUNG.”)306 Rumors circulated that a North End statue of Chief Peguis – a nineteenth century Indigenous leader at Red River – had been vandalized. The Sun sponsored a contest in which readers were invited to find the most fitting descriptor for Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence – then on hunger strike in Ottawa - a prominent figure of the Idle No More movement. Winnipeg-based Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) reported that entries published by the Sun included “garbage”, “chief two-chins”, and “Stop sucking Lysol.”307 A Free Press poll, responding to a proposal from activists, asked its readers, “Should Victoria Day be renamed to honour aboriginals?” to which eighty-nine percent of respondents answered “No.” The editor-in-chief of a small town newspaper – the Morris Mirror - in southern Manitoba made national headlines when he gave a year-in-review “thumbs down” to “Canada’s native community…who are demanding unrealistic expectations of the government and who in some cases are acting like terrorists in their own country.” At the Chipmans’ MTS Centre, Idle No More activists were ejected from a preseason Winnipeg Jets game for chanting and displaying signs related to the movement.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined conditions in Winnipeg’s center in the context of long-term visions for a regional future. I showed how the urban wing of the dominant regional bloc struggles to create a new city in which capitalists can find further avenues for accumulation through the production of a luxurious urban lifestyle for the city’s professional classes. It is this process through which the old order struggles to makes itself appear new and progressive, while conserving the longstanding regional balance of power.

306 Thompson, Forging the Prairie West, 61.
307 Piapot, “Racial Tensions Rise along Edges of Idle No More Rallies.”
The current development vision deepens the contradictions of the past: Strategies to displace and manage excluded populations are just as central to the current development agenda as they were to past agendas. Whereas the agricultural development vision of the nineteenth century relied on apartheid to keep Indigenous peoples away from the path of settlement, the twenty-first century post-industrial urban development vision depends on evisceration – targeted destruction – and policing of Indigenous urban spaces. Rather than addressing their needs and perspectives as central to a brighter regional future, urban Indigenous peoples are once more purged from the path of capital and invading settlers. Moral claims about the desire for a more wholesome, “family friendly” city, free of “drunks” are used to justify these new rounds of evisceration. Yet excessive alcohol consumption – as well as sex and gambling - is central to the “Sports, Hospitality, and Entertainment” vision promoted by the urban wing. Government planners – latching on to the scheme as the only path forward for regional growth and economic competitiveness – justify state support for this vision by asserting the plan will have trickle-down benefits for the entire region.

But city-center neighborhood organizers reject this assertion, crafting a counter analysis that prioritizes human need – above all, for food and housing - and sees no advantage in dominant development schemes for the predominantly poor, working class, Indigenous, and people of color neighborhoods in Winnipeg’s city center. In fact, the seeds of a counter development agenda are visible throughout the city center landscape. In particular, the enormously powerful Idle No More movement demonstrates that the desire for non-capitalist futures is strong in the city. The spaces produced by Idle No More organizers also indicate the possibility of “unexpected consolidations” and new alliances between radical and progressive
movements that could one day be turned towards the achievement of a more just development agenda.
Conclusion

During the 2014 Winnipeg civic election, the campaign of the leading right-wing mayoral candidate was effectively ended by these comments made by Lorrie Steeves, the candidate’s wife, on the Internet in 2010:

> [Lorrie Steeves] is really tired of getting harrassed [sic] by the drunken native guys in the skywalks. we need to get these people educated so they can go make their own damn money instead of hanging out and harrassing [sic] the honest people who are grinding away working hard for their money. We all donate enough money to the government to keep thier [sic] sorry assess [sic] on welfare, so shut the f**k up and don't ask me for another handout!

Almost immediately after the comments became public, Winnipeg news media and public opinion cast Gord Steeves as an unworthy mayoral candidate, sending him plummeting to the bottom of the race. Steeves’ fall paved the way for the ascendance of Brian Bowman – a wealthy South End lawyer and former chair of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce – who became Winnipeg’s forty-third mayor on October 22, 2014.

Bowman - whom the Globe and Mail described as a “business-friendly conservative with progressive ideals” – campaigned on a neoliberal agenda of “fiscal conservatism” and was supported by the city’s South End and suburban constituencies. Winnipeg’s largely Native city-center did not support Bowman’s agenda, siding instead with the left-wing Ukrainian candidate. Bowman revealed little about his own ethnic identity during the campaign, but once elected he frequently identified as Metis and described himself as “Canada’s first Aboriginal mayor”.

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308 Kives, “Steeves’ Wife Complains about Harassment by ‘Drunken Native Guys’ in Facebook Post.”
309 Friesen, “Winnipeg’s First Native Mayor Seen as Bridge Builder.”
310 Mackinnon, “Will Winnipeg’s First Indigenous Mayor Bridge the City’s Divide? It’s Complicated.”
311 Bowman, “Bio.”
Globe, “but he’s now being cast as a politician who can help bridge a racial gulf in what by some measures is Canada’s most indigenous city.”

On January 22, 2015, Bowman was pressed into this duty more dramatically than any Winnipeg mayor before him. In front of a throng of television cameras at a staged media event, Bowman wept in response to the cover story of a national magazine – a publication found in almost every corporate lobby or doctor’s office in the country – that had just named Winnipeg “Canada’s most racist city.” “We’re not going to end racism tomorrow, but we’re sure as hell going to try” Bowman told reporters, promising that his words would soon be followed by “action”. Two weeks later, several city-center councilors leaked to the Free Press a proposal – apparently circulated by Bowman - to dispense with a litany of community centers and youth recreation facilities in the city’s Native neighborhoods as a proposed cost-cutting measure. Bowman denied having anything to do with the proposal, but the councilors maintained their accounts.

In the context of this dissertation, it is unimportant whether or not Bowman was behind the proposed cuts. Rather, the story matters in so far as it highlights a key dynamic of contemporary political life in the Prairie West: the contradiction between the dominant neoliberal agenda and rising pressures to address the needs and aspirations of urban Indigenous peoples. More than in most other places or historical moments on Turtle Island, settlers in Winnipeg are now forced to reckon with the power of Indigenous resurgence. With presumptions of Indigenous death and disappearance now forever off the table, old-guard urban politics in Winnipeg offers key insights into the future of settler colonialism. As the case of “Canada’s first

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312 Friesen, “Winnipeg’s First Native Mayor Seen as Bridge Builder.”
314 Santin, “Poor to Bear Brunt of City Cuts.”
Aboriginal mayor” – brought to you by the Chamber of Commerce - indicates, the dominant bloc is now compelled to formulate its capital-centric, neoliberal agenda in terms that embrace Indigenous survival. How this will play out in the near future, I suggest, depends on our ability to identify this contradiction as such – as a true contradiction - rather than as a ‘gap’ that can be bridged by more enlightened agents of the same old interests.

In this dissertation I have shown how the dominant neoliberal urban development agenda not only benefits from but in fact requires Indigenous dispossession, displacement, and the disposal of development visions crafted by urban Indigenous communities to address the set of pressing, concrete human needs they face every day. I have shown how contemporary neoliberal capitalist modes of making and remaking urban space encounter and produce Native space – that is, space cast by Indigenous peoples as crucial to the survival and resurgence of their families, communities, and nations - in such a way as to perpetuate many of the foundational dynamics of the settler-colonial nation-state. In so doing, I have shown that processes of late capitalist urban development and governance are an important component of contemporary settler colonialism. It follows that any substantive reckoning with settler colonialism, anti-Native racism, or paths toward reconciliation on the part of city-dwellers must take into account the ways that dominant modes and logics of urban development keep settler colonialism alive in the city.

This way of seeing urban space is indebted to Indigenous theorists – scholars as well as activists, planners, poets, novelists, and artists – who have shown us the crucial importance of urban space to the future of Indigenous resurgence. In this dissertation, those theorists have included poets such as *city treaty* author Marvin Francis; activists who theorized the colonial significance of state funding for youth Christianization in Winnipeg’s North End including Nahanni Fontaine, Diane Roussin, and Tammy Christensen; and urban planners who conceived
Indigenous control over Winnipeg’s city center – and named it “our place” – as crucial not only to Indigenous decolonization but to the entire regional future, such as Mary Richard and other members of the Neeginan task force.

In my reading, the work of the above-mentioned theorists is consonant with the recent work Tonawanda Seneca scholar Mishauna Goeman - who theorizes at the intersections of geography, Native studies, gender studies, and literary studies – has done to elaborate what Goeman calls “spatial decolonization”. Goeman’s work helps to situate contemporary Indigenous claims to urban space within a broadened geographical imaginary of Indigenous decolonization. “My aim”, Goeman writes in explaining her theory of anti-colonial “(re)mapping”, “should not be mistaken as a utopian recovery of land through mapping pure ideas of Indigeneity (which I find troublesome) on top of colonial maps.” Rather, Goeman writes, “(re)mapping is not just about regaining that which was lost and returning to an original and pure point in history, but instead understanding the processes that have defined our current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant Native futures.”

Goeman’s insights can help us to identify a much broader range of geographical processes that sustain settler-colonial power and Indigenous dispossession than we might otherwise have been able to. To name Indigenous dispossession in this manner is not necessarily to refer only or simply to the theft of national territories delineated with reference to past Indigenous economies and ways of life, but to understand the diversity of tactics through which control over contemporary lands and bodies inhabited, produced, and claimed by Indigenous peoples is removed from the reach of Indigenous peoples. Processes such as these not only

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316 Ibid.
destroy traditional Indigenous lands and economies but also arrest the development of future Indigenous economies and ways of life, including those reliant on urban land.

Indeed, as I have shown in this dissertation, urban development agendas have been at the forefront of contemporary dispossession of urban Indigenous lands. The most specific material evidence of this claim in this dissertation, as we saw in chapter three, is relatively banal: During the first fifteen years of this century a significant amount of urban land in a district that Indigenous peoples have long claimed as crucial to the future of Indigenous decolonization was redistributed by the local state – via an ‘arm’s length’ middleman – to powerful outside interests, effectively eliminating Indigenous as well as diverse other local claims to these lands. CentreVenture became a tool that the dominant regional bloc created and deployed to ensure that possession – which seemed to be more ‘up for grabs’ than at any time since the Red River Rebellion - of land in Winnipeg’s city center would remain outside the reach of local communities.

Not only has the dominant agenda – as manifested by CentreVenture as well as Winnipeg City Council’s half-century long attack on the Main Street strip, and the Jim Crow-style tactics of the 1960s and 1970s – required ‘surplus’ lands be kept out of the hands of local Indigenous communities, it has required the physical removal of large segments of these communities from the city center, as we saw in chapters two, four, and five. The necessity of urban ‘Indian removal’ for urban capital – especially real estate capital – has only grown greater as Indigenous peoples have become a more powerful presence in the city, and as the restructuring of their districts and neighborhoods has become more important to dominant regional development visions.
By the 2010s, the casting of existing inhabitants as threats to the region’s economic future reached new levels. As we saw in chapter five, the threat could no longer be contained within the convenient confines of the Main Street strip; now the strip was everywhere - according to the spokespeople of the dominant bloc - at the St. Regis Hotel one day, Portage Place shopping mall the next, and who knew where it would turn up after that. To address this new set of conditions, the dominant bloc pursued an intensified round of building shut-downs, demolitions, forestalled real estate deals, policing, harassment, and surveillance, crucially assisted in many cases by the new institutional capacities made available through CentreVenture.

As we saw in chapter four, this most recent wave of attacks on Native space was not necessarily experienced as a new agenda – ‘neoliberal’, ‘late capitalist’ or otherwise – but as only the latest instance in a long history of white settlers forcefully taking the land they desire and moving Indigenous inhabitants out of the way.

Given recent events, it may be important to emphasize that this agenda was carried out by politicians and governments openly committed to ‘bridging the gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous urbanites. As I stressed throughout this dissertation, this course of action was viewed as crucial to the province’s economic future by multiple NDP governments with social-democratic roots – governments avowedly committed to social justice, ‘community development’, and ‘reconciliation’ with Indigenous peoples. Moreover, Bowman’s predecessor Sam Katz another “fiscally conservative” Chamber of Commerce candidate, and the city’s self-appointed Secretary of Urban Aboriginal Affairs endorsed it whole-heartedly.

As I have shown, the state has always willingly committed itself to Indigenous dispossession and displacement in so far as the dominant regional bloc has deemed these processes necessary for the survival of capital accumulation in the region. To the extent that state
development agendas are dominated by this single objective - the attraction and ‘protection’ of capital investment – all other objectives are excluded from consideration, including but not limited to goals of Indigenous reconciliation, resurgence, or decolonization. When these goals conflict directly, the underlying struggle surges to the surface, and we see a dramatic confrontation such as the one over Youth For Christ.

While the goal of capital accumulation has remained at the center of dominant development visions for the Prairie West for centuries, I have shown how changing global political-economic conditions have prompted different arms of the state to formulate altered development agendas. In chapter one, we saw how a global economic crisis of overaccumulation and a coercive dynamic of inter-imperial competition prompted the Canadian state to invade the Prairie West and systematically dispossess and displace its Indigenous inhabitants in the late nineteenth century. In the following chapters we saw how processes associated with the ‘globalization’ of the world economy – namely, the deindustrialization of the global north and the increasing mobility of capital in general – intensified the coercive dynamics of inter-urban competition. This put intensified pressure on the local state to keep and attract capital investment at any cost. Increased mobility allowed capital to hold local places hostage all over the world, requiring payment in the form of money, land, infrastructure, ‘site preparation’, or loosened restrictions. Under this dynamic, the local state seemingly has little choice: inter-urban competition “coerces” pro-business policies out of the state. Create a friendly ‘business environment’ for footloose capital, according to this logic, or lose out on a tax base sufficient to provide necessary infrastructure and services. In Winnipeg, this logic was used not only – or even predominantly - to lure capital away from other regions, but to lure it to the city center away from the suburbs. This was pursued in order to boost the profitability of existing city-center
capital investments, and to create a new avenue of accumulation for suburban capitalists after building up the suburbs for the past fifty years.

My analysis does more than compare these two moments; through the periodization of the four dominant development visions, I show how material interests, power dynamics, alliances, and cultural formations forged through late nineteenth century geopolitical conquest have shifted and endured into twenty-first century regional politics. This method of conceiving history goes against dominant accounts that break apart imperial conquest from urban history. This historical view, I suggest, has important political effects. First, and most obviously, it disempowers settler calls for Indigenous peoples to come to terms and move on from past colonial trauma - whether combatively articulated by calls to ‘get over it already’, or more diplomatically voiced as a desire for Indigenous peoples to ‘reconcile’ themselves to dispossession and settler domination. Perhaps more interestingly, this conceptualization also calls into question recent well-meaning contemporary scholarship on urban Indigenous experience.

In their 2013 book on urban Indigenous street gangs, Indians Wear Red, Comack et al describe Winnipeg’s city center as a “colonized space”, a term they do not directly define. Passages such as this one stand in for a definition: “The continuing legacy of colonialism permeated and defined the space” Comack et al write of Winnipeg’s North End in the midst of late twentieth century Indigenous urban migration, “the damage done to Aboriginal people had, in many cases, taken on a cumulative and inter-generational character. This damage – which includes the internalization of the colonizers’ false claims of Aboriginal inferiority, leading in so many cases to a lack of self-esteem and of self-confidence, and a sense of worthlessness and even hopelessness about the future – is constantly reinforced by the ongoing impact of racism, in
its various forms, and by the difficulty of finding well-paid employment to make ends meet.” As such, we are left to understand that the term “colonized space” in reference to space in which a large segment of inhabitants have experienced colonial trauma in the past, or have experienced the transmission of such trauma from their parents or grandparents. Contemporary processes, in this formulation, are not “colonial”, they “reinforce” past colonial trauma. This formulation of “colonized space” does not attribute very much power to contemporary processes or politics; “colonization” remains primarily a past trauma from which urban Indigenous peoples must recover. Comack et al stop short of asserting that this process occurs in a political-economic vacuum – they repeatedly reference contemporary dynamics of deindustrialization and neoliberalism – but they consistently imply an historical break between a colonial past and a present space-time in which colonialism is supposedly absent. This framing, I suggest, hampers our ability to understand contemporary processes of Indigenous dispossession, displacement, and policing in connection to and comparison with past dynamics.

As I have stressed, the endurance of these dynamics is far from inevitable. Starting in chapter three, I asked how, in an age of reconciliation and after decades of growing Indigenous resurgence, was the dominant bloc able to achieve yet another round of Indigenous dispossession and displacement? To answer this question, I showed how specific geographical frameworks were rolled out during the CentreVenture planning process that made it easier for the dominant regional bloc to monopolize the ‘solution’ to a regional crisis of uneven development. Most essentially, the city center was positioned as an avatar for the entire region’s future. The assertion – written and spoken over and over again - that the future of the city center contained the hopes, dreams, and economic well being of the entire regional collective justified a depoliticized and revanchist development agenda. The benefits of redevelopment would be
regionally universal, not particular to a given class or group; and the area rightfully ‘belonged’ to everybody – the people who actually lived there could not claim a special right to it.

The power of this geographical imaginary is demonstrated clearly, as we saw in chapter three, by the fact that urban pioneers – or those who claim urban pioneers as their antecedents – themselves do not view their lucrative participation in incursions into Native neighborhoods as contributing to the contemporary unfolding of settler colonial dynamics or relationships. The dominant bloc has been so successful in erasing Indigenous claims to urban space that luxury condo owners see themselves as enlightened and progressive simply for tolerating their Indigenous neighbors. The possibility of conceiving urban pioneers as winners in a contest over urban space in which poor Indigenous peoples have lost out has been circumscribed to an impressive degree.

Moreover, as the views of urban pioneers and their allies in the dominant bloc attest, the ‘taking back’ of the city was scripted as - and widely felt to be - progressive, responsible, and proper. The urban wing of the dominant bloc fostered a collective sense of shame – often citing the ideas of Jane Jacobs, Richard Florida, and the ‘new urbanists’ - among the city’s more economically secure, largely white population, in having abandoned the city center and an ‘urban’ way of life. This narrative concluded that moving to the suburbs had been a mistake for several reasons: it created a dull, characterless city; it irresponsibly wasted public resources in an inefficient, sprawling manner; it made everybody dependent on cars, which enlightened people know is both socially and environmentally catastrophic; and most of all, it hampered the capitalist competitiveness of the city. The consequence of this attitude is the implicit assumption that affluent whites shamefully allowed poor Indigenous peoples to dominate – at least demographically - the city center, and that in order to regain ‘vibrancy’, economic
competitiveness, and the moral, social, and physical health of the community, affluent whites must no longer cede the area to poor Indigenous peoples.

Perhaps most insidiously, capitalists seized this post-industrial ‘back to the city’ moment to appropriate urban Indigenous activism to secure state resources for themselves. Dominant bloc discourses conflated city-center poor, working class, and Indigenous struggles to meet human needs with their own struggles to maximize profits in the city center. Anti-poverty activism was translated by the dominant bloc as resistance to ‘deteriorating conditions’, conjuring images of abandoned buildings and paving the way for the production of profitable luxury retail, entertainment, and condominium development that only deepened local needs for food and shelter. As we saw in chapter two, community resistance to this appropriation during the CAI era was swift, and eventually secured increased funds for locally controlled planning processes – which lead to local development visions such as the Neeginan plan for Main Street. But as we saw in chapter four these plans were jettisoned by CentreVenture when it took the reigns of state-led city-center redevelopment from the CAI.

Beyond discursive framings, I showed how concrete tactics – specific institutional formations and taxation schemes, for example – usually attributed to the “neoliberalization” of the city have been crucial to the achievement of this new round of Indigenous dispossession, displacement, and policing. In other words, I have shown how Indigenous dispossession in the early twenty-first century required “neoliberal” city-making tools such as CentreVenture. Simply put, one of the most crucial ways to eliminate any local claim was to divert decisions about the redistribution of state-owned lands through a ‘private’ corporation – CentreVenture – the decisions of which would not be subject to any democratic process. Instead of privatizing public lands piece-by-piece - and subjecting every decision to potential neighborhood claims – the
creation of CentreVenture privatized all parcels of land in a single move. This was never more clear than when one city councilor told neighborhood activists at the Youth For Christ hearing, “We’ve already given these lands over to CentreVenture for development…the idea that we need to go and somehow revisit that now…is not germaine”.

Moreover, CentreVenture created institutional capacity for the dominant bloc that it used to pressure governments for additional public resources. One of the most important examples is CentreVenture’s aggressive pursuit of TIF – state grants to developers – which resulted in a staggering infusion of public money into the bank accounts of powerful developers including CentreVenture itself. This process relied on the logic of “leveraging” private investment through public gifts to investors and scripting the latter as a ‘good deal’ for the public. Upward redistribution was thus further entrenched by CentreVenture as the key to a more prosperous future for everybody in the region.

The neoliberal, market-centric logic of the dominant development vision rendered grassroots Indigenous and all other local people-first claims to land in Winnipeg’s city center illegitimate and therefore disposable. CentreVenture and the dominant agenda were systematically unable to register any claim to land and public redevelopment resources that did not bring significant new amounts of private capital to the area. When communities openly and directly made such land claims, government and CentreVenture officials dismissed them since they did not qualify as legitimate under the capital-centric rubric. The only claim to public land and redevelopment money – earmarked broadly for the ‘social, cultural, and economic’ revitalization of the city center - with any legitimacy, in the eyes of the dominant vision were those claims backed by large sums of money. Land claims backed by a spirit of social or
economic justice, reconciliation, or Indigenous self-determination were systematically cast as without value.

As we saw in chapters four and five, this process of making-disposable also targeted many of the actual human beings systematically excluded from the public resources available in the name of regional revitalization – anybody who could be described as a “troublemaker”, “panhandler”, “drunk”, or “vagrant”. In the minds of many – government planners, for example – this population significantly overlapped with the city’s “Aboriginal population”, which was understood to be inherently unstable, unhappy, and problematic. Thus, the longtime construction of the “Urban Indian” as a category of white analysis and intervention was rolled into a project of urban waste-removal writ large. CentreVenture and the provincial government – with the help of the WPS and private consultants - obsessively stalked “troublemakers” from place to place, anxiously mapping their location, treating them as contaminants to be removed, blaming them for the demise of the city, and worrying over where they would go next and how they could be permanently kept out of the new city. In this way, capital accumulation – and a dominant development agenda based around it – required a new kind of Indigenous disposability. This logic was updated for the twenty first century, as human disposability was described as the consequence of chronic, inappropriate personal conduct – often described as stemming from health problems such as addictions or mental illness – rather than cultural or biological inferiority. If the Indigenous peoples threatening real estate capital in Winnipeg’s city center were viewed as other than disposable, investment in luxury space – according to the dominant logic - would be impossibly risky and the region would be denied the prosperous, exciting, post-industrial urban future it desperately desired.
In this way, we can see that Indigenous disposability under settler colonialism has a dynamic history, geography, and political economy. With this dissertation I suggest that an historical materialist understanding of where, when, and how settler-colonial dispossession and productions of Indigenous disposability happen can be traced by mapping and dissecting the development visions that gain prominence in particular times and places. Moreover, following Clyde Woods, we can see that dominant development visions are the products of dominant regional blocs, which persist over time and space in modified formations. Thus, we can understand the material links between past and present not only as the extension and deepening of Indigenous dispossession, but as the protection and expansion of the power and possession of settler-dominated alliances. This historical method shows us that, just like the nineteenth century frontier, the twenty-first century city is not simply a neutral or static time-space in which white settlers simply happen to be better equipped to survive and thrive, but an active process of domination perpetrated through the making of urban space.


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