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Manufacturing decline: how racism and the conservative movement crush the American Rust Belt, *Jason Hackworth. Columbia University Press, New York, 2019. 336 pp., ISBN 978-0-231-19372-6, $30 (paperback)*

In *Manufacturing Decline*, Jason Hackworth masterfully pinpoints and unravels a shifting web of social, historical, and economic relations that have been purposefully spun by factions of the US conservative political movement to produce the *trope* of the deprived Rust Belt city, reinforced by the representations and reality of postindustrial urban decline. This trope, extending across rhetorical and material dimensions of policy making at multiple scales including the municipal and federal, is a 'pathologized' product of particular socio-historical and economic forces that has been mobilized by and through the conservative circuitry to govern Black cities. Hackworth's text—one that unfolds through an interdisciplinary swathe of literatures, including urban political economy, critical race theory, sociology, and ideational and institutional politics, together with mixed-methods analyses—is equal parts fascinating and terrifying. It is fascinating because Hackworth so compellingly dismantles and denaturalizes five decades of anti-Black machinations and politics of the conservative movement that have successively imposed a punitive slate of measures on the Rust Belt urban landscape; terrifying because Hackworth also convincingly illustrates how these measures were planned as such, organized from above and frequently from afar. In other words, *Manufacturing Decline* shows readers how urban decline has been orchestrated systemically and structurally around anti-Black racism and exclusion. Conservatives, Hackworth argues, have planned for failure all along. In his words, such orchestrations culminated in a state of 'organized deprivation,' a widespread, coordinated stagnation of policy and possibilities of living for Black populations in the Rust Belt.

The overarching contribution of *Manufacturing Decline* is that it explicitly foregrounds the significance of race and racial exclusion—in all their ambivalent yet sharply-lived realities—as causal factors which have previously been underappreciated in explanations of urban decline, especially mainstream ones. White supremacy and the pathologization of Blackness are two sides of the

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same coin that have been made to reinscribe and reinforce each other. Because *Manufacturing Decline* centers race at the very start of the 'case,' it also becomes a historical excavation of the social crises in the US of the 1960s that now crucially *predate* the more frequently discussed economic shocks of the 1970s in accounts of postindustrial urban decline as causal factors. This is explicated through the reinforcing causal linkages of organized deprivation that bind the triptych of urban decline, racial threat, and the conservative movement in a historically successive fashion (12). Over the course of *Manufacturing Decline*, Hackworth disassembles for readers the false logics and equivalences enacted by and across architects and audiences, culminating into an account of how anti-Black urban deprivation came to be. This had—and continues to have—the effect of constraining municipal finances, socio-economic possibilities, and political imaginations across the board, sharply contrasting the 'mythos of local control' (xx) that runs rampant in certain circles of liberals and conservatives alike under the reign of neoliberal capitalism. These function as blinkers, or as the 'organized deprivation policy filter' (189) to restructure, and in this case *tighten*, the very parameters of policymaking (ambition) itself.

In this vein, *Manufacturing Decline* also poses a necessary addition and counterpoint to the emergent literature on the urban politics of policy 'failure,' for it demonstrates how failure can be 'rhetorically [and materially] be weaponized for political gain' (Temenos and Lauermann 2020, 1111), in the form of loaded images and policy agendas of decline, but also that failure in some contexts is more intentional than inadvertent. In other words, *Manufacturing Decline* reinforces the assertion that failure is political, and that the 'manufacturing of decline' *is* urban governance in and of itself. It is only by critically examining how the definitions and categories of policy 'failure' are inescapably racialized, as Hackworth does, that one can begin to understand the perplexing persistence of failure. Elsewhere, Hackworth (2021) argues that critical urban studies should take into greater consideration the black political economy tradition (see also Immergluck et al. 2020). *Manufacturing Decline* is thus situated in the company of other work in critical urban studies in North America and beyond that have also illustrated the importance of explicitly centering analyses of the 'urban' on the different yet intersecting historical legacies and social formations of race, racialization, and racial exclusion (e.g., Kimari and Ernstson 2020; Ponder 2021; Wright 2018).

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Manufacturing Decline* lies in its treatment of the 'impermeability to evidence of past failure,' or the durability of deprivation in the face of ostensibly unpopular neoliberal policies of the conservative movement, at least on the face of it. To address this, Hackworth conceptualizes the idea of 'conservative bonding capital' in Chapter 2, a strategy that threads together different facets of the conservative movement around issues of race (see also Hackworth 2019), in this case mobilizing the 'vehicle' of the 'pathological inner city' (77). Somewhat similar to Hall's (2017) idea of 'chains of equivalence,' following the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe, conservative bonding capital forges (strategic) linkages between racial resentment and racial anxiety, elements which have 'no necessary correspondence between them' but contribute to 'mak[ing] race function discursively as a system of representation' (Hall 2017, 57). In *Manufacturing Decline*, this has resulted in

the production and deployment of 'distressed urban space' as a national strategy of conservatives to justify the makings of a 'deprivationist policy agenda' (xiii).

This idea of durability follows in the spirit of scholarship on the ideational politics of policymaking. Blyth's (2013) noteworthy work on austerity famously seeks to explain why a 'bad idea' became so popular and impervious to failure in the west. *Manufacturing Decline*'s intervention here explains how the durability of deprivation also expresses itself in the form of an 'austere, penal' (3) space of policy 'innovation,' a contemporary watchword towards which city actors have gravitated in droves. Here, Hackworth does vital work in again countering the 'invert[ed] causation' undertaken by architects of policy to highlight a systemic dearth of ambition in the urban policymaking sphere. This dovetails, retrospectively, with the introduction to *Manufacturing Decline* that uses the 1968 Kerner Commission Report as a window into policymaking five decades ago, 'big, bold, and unusual' in its remit of ambition and desire for change. In marked contrast, many of the policy innovations discussed in *Manufacturing Decline*, as Hackworth points out, are small and ineffectual in both imagination and implementation, in the shadow of the rollback of the US federal welfare state. These piecemeal 'innovations' can be characterized as policy fixes; they are 'often funded with foundation grant money, assisted by volunteer labor, small in scale, and temporary by design' (223). Genuine solutions are often crippled by the chokehold of structural incapacitation in the form of austerity urbanism, regional political divides, and state-level preemptions. In the problem-solving ethos of policymakers in *Manufacturing Decline,* this reveals a fundamental, and in many cases insurmountable, slippage between small-scale solutions and systemic problems.

There are connections here to recent commentaries on Harvey's (1989) initial conceptualization of entrepreneurial urbanization (see Peck 2014) and what 'entrepreneurial urbanization 2.0,' so to speak, reflects about the structural operating conditions for cities within the Rust Belt and beyond in the wake of Fordist-Keynesian restructuring globally, within the 'competitively hollowed-out innovation vacuum' of neoliberal capitalist urbanization itself (Peck 2014, 399). Where *Manufacturing Decline* provides a complementary corrective to many such accounts lies in its insistence on foregrounding the racialized logics of the production of urban space in political economic accounts. Anti-Black racism here is not just a side-effect operating at certain levels of abstraction of theory; it has been historically baked into the policymaking terrain to be mobilized as a policy toolkit of evolving false rationales, motivations, and metrics that constitute what now counts as 'necessary,' (a term that is repeated throughout *Manufacturing Decline*) hegemonic 'common sense.' More perniciously, the now banal slate of tactics recursively deployed across interurban entrepreneurial relations also ensure that half-baked 'lessons' from Detroit, MI have the propensity to be transferred to other Rust Belt cities. Most of the case-study material in the book comes from Detroit, a city positioned by those of the conservative movement (but also including liberals such as creative-class architect Richard Florida) in the fashion of what Gieryn (2006) calls a 'truth spot.' Gieryn never explicitly delved into the linkages between what is taken as 'truth' and what is mythologized as 'myth,' but much of the discussion in *Manufacturing Decline* highlights the discursive work of using particular places

to craft narratives that seek to dismiss certain policy paradigms (Keynesian-welfarism) and to embolden others (neoliberalism), in so doing performing a 'unifying force' across the conservative moment that is constituted through racialized (anti-)claims to space. Detroit has been mobilized as a truth- and myth-making spot for the Rust Belt and beyond; in Chapter 6 ('Demolition as urban policy') Hackworth is suggestive about such (causal) connections of relational comparison and coercion. I thought there was interesting potential here for *Manufacturing Decline* to consider the historically specific relational logics of equivalence and commensurability across and beyond Rust Belt cities, with Detroit perhaps standing as a 'center of calculation' for these interurban relations.

I offer three short comments in conclusion. First, I wonder if *Manufacturing Decline* might have done more to discuss the deeper historical antipathy towards cities in the US. Hackworth acknowledges that political figures, under the 'right' circumstances, have reaped benefits from imposing restrictions on cities. In *Americans Against the City*, Conn (2014) elaborates on the peculiar relationship between society and cities in the US—a longstanding rejection of city and 'urbanness.' I did wonder how Hackwork's focus of race was related to what seemed like a more sustained, widespread strain of US-specific history and culture of (conservative) anti-urbanism that is both intertwined with and arguably exceeds dynamics of race in certain contexts.

Second, *Manufacturing Decline* would have benefitted from a more consistent and deeper discussion of specific figures of the conservative movement. While the names of public figures, think tanks, foundations, and nonprofits are mentioned throughout the text, the individual figures and institutions are not always distinctive, especially in the ways they perceived and related to each other. I enjoyed the discussions of figures such as Mike Duggan, Dan Gilbert, and Ed Glaeser, but many of the institutions risked blending into the background. Perhaps this could have been bolstered by devoting more attention to the specific institutional mechanics of think tanks, (e.g., the Cato Institute and the Manhattan Institute), following the ideational tradition of constructivist political economy, through a deeper examination of influential policy reports, speeches, and conference documents. The earlier sections of *Manufacturing Decline* would have benefitted from a sustained engagement with think tank outputs, such as *Detroit Future City* in the way that Hackworth did so in the penultimate chapter of the book. Doing so would also draw out more explicitly the contradictions, disjunctures, and (strategic) misalignments within the apparent cohesiveness of the conservative movement to reveal a range of possibly divergent positions towards Rust Belt cities, together with potential fault lines for change. In other words, what are the limits to the 'unifying forces' that bind the conservatives?

Third—as one is wont to ask at the end of a policy and planning text as stimulating as this one—where do policy makers go next? Hackworth acknowledges their very real limits, especially in the concluding chapter on 'unplanning' decline, observing that these limits are in part produced by the very nature of public policy itself, and are even more pronounced in the case of *urban* public policy. At the beginning of *Manufacturing Decline*, Hackworth observes, worryingly, that '[t]oday, there is no equivalent on the Left to the

Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, Manhattan Institute, and American Enterprise Institute, or Fox News,' (10) a comment that continues to haunt me. If the struggle over urban decline is in part an ideational battle waged by the conservative right, then how is the left to respond in equal measure? This is where taking into account the efforts of progressive grassroots movements, as others such as Kimberly Kinder (Immergluck et al. 2020) and Akira Rodriguez (in this forum) have suggested, could have helped to provide a more nuanced picture of the fractures in which people continue to fight. After all, at the end of *Manufacturing Decline*, Hackworth reminds us that 'the Right was not always this politically powerful' (225).

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