



## Write in Duggan for Mayor, but not on City Walls: Revanchist Responses to Graffiti in Detroit

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### Abstract

*What similarities do zero-tolerance graffiti management policies share with aestheticization efforts that co-opt graffiti artists into creating sanctioned murals? Existing literature views the former category of policies as revanchist, aiming to retake the city from those considered to be undesirable. In contrast, it regards the latter category as policies that catalyze gentrification through place-marketing. I posit that in cities with high degrees of fear about crime and the safety of investments, the goals of these policies can overlap. Specifically, using the case study of Detroit, I hypothesize that while these policies erase graffiti in different manners, they share the same aim: retaking Detroit from “undesirable elements” to attract middle-class residents and encourage urban revitalization. To support my hypothesis, I conduct a case study of Detroit’s graffiti management policies under Mayor Mike Duggan. I find that government officials and local newspapers frame zero-tolerance policies and beautification efforts in the same way. Specifically, they use these policies to reassure potential investors and middle-class residents that Detroit is safe.*

*Keywords:* graffiti, street art, moral geography, revanchist city

During Mike Duggan’s 2013 campaign to become the Mayor of Detroit, a grassroots effort aimed to draw attention to his write-in candidacy by placing tags around Detroit that read “Write in Duggan for Mayor” (Ikonomova, 2017). Duggan disapproved of these tags, stating: “the last thing I need is people helping

me out by doing graffiti” (McGraw & Schmitt, 2013). He stressed his strong anti-graffiti stance by personally painting over graffiti supporting his candidacy (Ikonomova, 2017). Since taking office, Duggan has codified his anti-graffiti stances into revanchist policies that aim to retake the city from those detracting from its sanitized image. In an effort to prevent illicit graffiti from being written within city limits, the City of Detroit under Mayor Mike Duggan has implemented two graffiti management strategies. First, Detroit has consistently followed a strict zero-tolerance policy, spending millions of taxpayer dollars to remove evidence of “broken windows.” Second, due to the high annual costs associated with graffiti removal, the City of Detroit has begun to pursue a secondary policy of city aestheticization through a mural painting project, City Walls. Under this program, the City of Detroit has co-opted graffiti writers as middlemen to paint murals on properties that are the repeated targets of graffiti. In this paper, I use Detroit as a case study to examine the similarities between managing graffiti with zero-tolerance policies and aestheticization efforts. The existing literature emphasizes differences between zero-tolerance and aestheticization policies, framing the former as revanchist while viewing the latter as catalysts of gentrification. In contrast, I hypothesize that while these policies erase graffiti in different manners, they ultimately share the same aims: retaking Detroit from “undesirables” who write criminalized graffiti and creating an image of safety that encourages urban revitalization by attracting middle-class residents, investment, and development.

I begin by outlining three lenses through which to examine graffiti and street art: first, graffiti as “broken windows” requiring a revanchist response, second, street art as a catalyst of gentrification, and third, street art as a means of building community. I then describe my method of using newspaper articles to examine whether responses to graffiti in Detroit are consistently revanchist in form. After a brief discussion of my methods, I analyze my data, finding that government officials and local newspapers consistently frame both zero-tolerance policies and aestheticization efforts as means to reassure potential investors and middle-class residents of Detroit’s safety. I conclude by discussing opportunities for further research and outlining the policy implications of my findings.

## **Literature Review**

Scholars of urban political economy employ three major lenses when depicting graffiti and street art. In some instances, they examine graffiti as “broken windows” requiring a revanchist response (Cresswell, 1992; Hasley & Pederick, 2010), where Smith (1996) defines revanchism as a “reaction against the supposed ‘theft’ of the city . . . cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values, and neighborhood security” (p. 211). Phrased differently, revanchism represents an attempt by dominant classes to retake the city from poor residents who perpetuate its blighted image (Swanson, 2007). In other instances, scholars describe street art a catalyst of gentrification (Bloch, 2016; Cameron & Coaffee, 2005; Young, 2010). While these two frames focus on the impact

of graffiti and street art on exchange-values, defined by Harding (1995) as the financial gains made from selling property, the third lens employed by scholars is more concerned with the use-values of land, defined as a community's day-to-day experience of property. In resistance to the growth machine—a coalition of actors who benefit directly or indirectly from development and unite around their shared goal of increasing the exchange-values of property within a city—communities focus on improving the use-values of their land. This leads scholars to discuss street art as a means of community-building (Delgado & Barton, 1998; Dovey et al., 2012; Sieber, Cordeiro, & Ferro, 2012; Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, & Anderson, 2010). Before considering each of these lenses, I first contextualize them by defining graffiti and street art, explaining how a city might regulate these forms of expression, discussing the application of moral geographies to graffiti and street art, and considering the dual role of graffiti writers.

The distinction between graffiti and street art in existing scholarship is ambiguous, with debate over whether each medium fits the category of art or crime (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011). Ferrell (1996) distinguishes between the two mediums by contending that graffiti is relatively illegible to passersby, making it a form of private communication between graffiti writers, while street art aims to reach a wider audience with readable text and recognizable images. Not only do scholars debate what distinguishes graffiti from street art, but they also note the existence of distinct types of graffiti and street art. While the most recognizable form of graffiti takes the aesthetic form of what Ferrell (1996) terms “hip-hop graffiti,” graffiti can also act as a message of political resistance, a commercial advertisement, a marker of a gang's turf, or hate speech (Brighenti, 2010; Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974). There are also multiple categories of street art, with different murals providing decoration, conveying messages of social justice and political resistance, serving as advertisements or signs, and exploring ethnic and racial heritage and representation (Brighenti, 2010). For the purposes of this paper, I will use McAuliffe's (2012) definition of the two categories. He defines graffiti as stylized text, taking the simplistic form of a tag or the more elaborate form of a piece, that attributes the writer. Meanwhile, he sees street art as a larger category of artistic practices. McAuliffe considers the real distinction between the two categories to be that while local governments criminalize graffiti, they embrace street art.

Cities employ street art as a solution set to graffiti. Bachelor (1998) defines solution sets as one city's replication of another's policy solutions without tailoring these solutions to that city's particular policy aims. She focuses on stadiums and casinos as infrastructure-based solution sets; however, cultural solution sets have become increasingly important in the post-Fordist city, where, according to Zukin (1995), “culture is more and more the business of cities” (p. 2). The term post-Fordist city is used to characterize post-industrial and post-welfare cities in technologically developed countries since the early 1970s (Marcuse, 1997). Jessop (2011) argues that post-Fordist cities respond

to the globalization of markets by subordinating social policy goals of reducing inequality to the constraints of international competition. Led by growth machine elites, including developers, real estate brokers, financiers, media publishers, and, more generally, those who benefit from development (Logan & Molotch, 1987), cities compete for middle-class residents and investors by designing cultures attractive to these groups. Previous scholarship has fervently studied large-scale cultural solution sets, including the development of flagship museums (Hamnett & Shoval, 2003); however, small-scale solution sets remain relatively unexamined. Meanwhile, cities have increasingly turned to small-scale solution sets, such as the creation of street art as an inexpensive and effective means of promoting urban revitalization or changes to the physical environment of impoverished neighborhoods that encourage reinvestment from businesses and middle-class residents (Hudson, 1980). Further examination of small-scale cultural solution sets is necessary, because these solutions are increasingly being used by cities but have received limited attention from scholars.

In order to understand why local governments criminalize graffiti at the same time that they accept street art, it is necessary to consider who defines a city's moral geography. The concept of moral geographies, conceived of by Driver (1988) and Smith (1997; 2000), is defined by Shapiro (1994) as "a set of silent ethical assertions that reorganize explicit ethico-political discourses" (p. 482). According to McAuliffe (2012), a moral geography distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in a particular environment. When discussing graffiti, many scholars of urban political economy utilize the concept of moral geographies without explicitly naming it. In this literature review, I expound how moral geographies shape discussions of the criminalization of graffiti to demonstrate the utility of this concept for future scholarship.

Moral geographies are defined by those with requisite cultural and political capital, namely the growth-machine elite and politicians. Politicians possess the cultural and political capital necessary to determine a city's moral geography, because their election gave them the power to govern. Growth-machine elites similarly possess this cultural and political capital because of the domination of the neoliberal order in the post-Fordist city, which minimizes the state's role in governance in order to maximize market domination (Medvecky, 2010). Growth-machine elites therefore regulate not only the market, but also the acceptability of social behaviors. Along with elected officials, they define a moral geography that encourages the sanitization and homogenization of the city's culture. To encourage urban cleanliness, they utilize evocative imagery that condemns urban features contradicting their moral geography (Ferrell, 2016). For example, they describe graffiti using images of dirt, disease, and anarchy (Cresswell, 1992). They also condemn the writers of this graffiti, portraying them as aggressive, animalistic youth acting out of a lack of respect for the city (Bloch, 2016). To promote homogeneity, growth-machine elites and politicians punish difference and defiance with punitive criminal justice policies (Ferrell, 2016).

Growth-machine elites and politicians acknowledge that street art has value so long as it fits into their moral geography. As the creators of this moral geography, they have the power to determine both the style and location of acceptable street art. The correct type of street art is a sanitized form of graffiti that gains legitimacy from fitting into the category of either art or advertisements. Wall murals serve as a form of art that can be legally commissioned, and pieces of graffiti can be incorporated into advertising campaigns that appeal to youth culture. The incorrect type of street art infringes upon the moral geography by damaging the homogenous image of a neighborhood and violating property rights (Dovey, Wollan, & Woodcock, 2012). These moral judgements of acceptable and unacceptable street art are also dependent upon place. The same mural might be embraced in a bohemian commercial district but erased in a financial district. According to Millie (2017), promoting approved street art and removing illegal graffiti improves “the ‘feel’ and vibrancy of the city . . . in ways that have the aim of achieving economic benefit” (p. 7). The forms of street art condoned by the growth machine-created moral geography predominately benefit elites.

While the dominant moral geography, defined by politicians and growth-machine elites, frames graffiti as immoral and destructive to the city, alternative framings of graffiti exist. Notably, writers of graffiti and marginalized communities view graffiti as a form of resistance to urban governance. Keith (2005) contends that graffiti provides representation to populations who are marginalized from urban governance. This perspective results from the growth machine’s framing of graffiti as blight. McAuliffe (2012) argues that the growth machine’s universal criminalization of graffiti prompts graffiti writers to continue writing, “as fame and respect are accrued among peers through the brazen transgression of laws and social norms” (p. 189). Graffiti writing provides legitimacy to those looking to subvert the growth machine’s moral geography. It does so by enabling free expression and transmitting messages about political resistance.

A second alternative framing of graffiti challenges its universal criminalization, examining whether certain forms of graffiti promote the image of a city as attractive to the creative class. The creative class, conceived of by Florida (2002), is a highly mobile group composed of artists, musicians, educators, engineers, and others “whose creative function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content” (p. 8). Florida argues that members of the creative class decide their location of residence based on their options’ reputations for promoting artistic expression and tolerance. Developers can accordingly revalue graffiti by framing it as an indicator of artistic expression and tolerance to attract the creative class. As argued by Zukin and Braslow (2011), the presence of graffiti within a neighborhood looking to attract the creative class can be viewed as “both a sign and a medium of a district’s upwardly mobile reputation” (p. 133). Not only does a city focused on its cultural branding revalue graffiti, but it also provides graffiti writers with new opportunities to gain recognition for their work. Graffiti writers can commodify their work by creating advertisements or entering

the art marketplace. In addition, their legitimized reputation enables them to find jobs in the creative sector (McAuliffe, 2012).

In spite of these alternative framings, the growth machine's perception of graffiti as immoral and destructive continues to dominate media discourses, given that local media serves as a key element of the growth-machine elite. Therefore, graffiti writers and street artists must effectively navigate ambiguity regarding what the elite-defined moral geography considers to distinguish art from crime. While doing so, these writers fulfill a dual role. They simultaneously work as middlemen for the city's elites and politicians by creating authorized forms of street art and maintain their legitimacy in this role by writing illegal graffiti pieces. As middlemen, they create authorized street art to cover walls frequented by graffiti artists, who are disincentivized from writing over another local artist's work. Therefore, according to Hasley and Pederick (2010), "the 'best' graffiti, bureaucratically speaking, is that which functions as its own form of erasure" by preventing further writing on a wall (p. 82). However, to disincentivize other writers from vandalizing their legal murals, graffiti writers must maintain their community's respect and strengthen their reputation by continuing to create illicit pieces. In this manner, graffiti writers simultaneously support and undermine the neoliberal moral geography (Ulmer, 2017).

### **Graffiti as "Broken Windows"**

Having distinguished graffiti from street art, discussed elite participation in the creation of moral geographies, and described graffiti writers' role in simultaneously serving and undermining the neoliberal order, I now examine the three lenses through which scholars frequently view graffiti. The first lens portrays graffiti as "broken windows" requiring a revanchist response. In the article that popularized this concept, Kelling and Wilson (1982) define "broken windows" as signs of public disorder that cause passerby to fear that these transgressions will escalate into crime. They argue that this fear stems from the inextricable link between disorder and crime (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). Kelling and Wilson use graffiti as an example of "broken windows" that provoke fear of crime in passerby. They do so by quoting sociologist Nathan Glazer, who contends that the presence of graffiti gives passerby the impression that the urban environment "is uncontrolled and uncontrollable, and that anyone can invade it to do whatever damage and mischief the mind suggests" (Glazer, 1979, p. 4). Kelling and Wilson imply that while one broken window does not necessarily catalyze crime, a preponderance of untended "broken windows" leads to the breakdown of social order within a community. In order to re-establish social order within these communities, cities employ revanchist policies that aim to retake the city from "broken windows" and their perpetrators.

Revanchism entails a dismantling of the Keynesian welfare state and, according to MacLeod (2002), a "transformation from urban managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism" (p. 256). Urban entrepreneurialism allows growth-

machine elites to control strategies of urban revitalization and criminalize “broken windows” that contradict the city’s elite-defined moral geography, endangering economic growth. Therefore, urban entrepreneurialism is synonymous with neoliberalism because it focuses on encouraging unbounded economic growth through urban revitalization instead of providing a Keynesian social safety net. Growth-machine elites benefit from this focus on improving exchange-values through unfettered growth.

Growth-machine elites and politicians frame graffiti as “broken windows” because it contradicts the homogeneity and sanitization of the urban moral geography. They feel a need to erase this graffiti because these “broken windows” threaten the success of urban regeneration by decreasing property values and discouraging the opening of businesses in a visually blighted area (Cresswell, 1992). Additionally, from the perspective of growth-machine elites and politicians, a failure to remove these “broken windows” leads urban “undesirables” to commit more serious crimes (Dovey et al., 2012). For example, Cresswell (1992) argues that politicians in New York felt the need to remove graffiti from subway cars because the presence of it reminded commuters “that anyone can invade [the car] to do whatever damage and mischief the mind suggests” (p. 335). The presence of graffiti prompts commuters and potential investors alike to consider the fact that if the city cannot control this illegal writing, how can it claim to protect them against the possibility of more severe crimes?

Instead of resolving the underlying structural issues that partially account for graffiti and more serious crimes, politicians focus on using revanchist tactics to repair “broken windows” and aestheticize the city. To regain a graffiti-free community, they either implement zero-tolerance policies similar to those employed by New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani or encourage graffiti writers acting as middlemen to create murals. These murals conform to the growth machine-determined moral geography and deter other graffiti writers from covering their fellow writers’ work. Both zero-tolerance policies and murals are quick fixes that aestheticize the city, making it look more orderly and attractive to potential investors. When these investors visit, rather than seeing dirty, disorderly graffiti, they instead see clean walls or a colorful mural (Hasley & Pederick, 2010). In this manner, revanchism can act as a form of place marketing, encouraging capital investment in cities or neighborhoods that were previously considered to be blighted.

### **Street Art as a Stimulus of Gentrification**

While some scholars view graffiti as “broken windows,” others regard street art as a stimulus of gentrification. Mathews (2010) defines gentrification as a process of neighborhood transition, where reinvestment causes a shift in a neighborhood’s social demographics. Scholars have emphasized the importance of graffiti writers and street art in two major theories of gentrification, which focus on how culture and public policy incite gentrification, respectively (Cameron &

Coaffee, 2005). The first relevant theory of gentrification, outlined by Ley (1996), focuses on culture as a catalyst of the first wave of gentrification. This theory proposes a gentrification cycle, wherein gentrifiers with high cultural and low economic capital are eventually replaced by those with high economic capital as a neighborhood revitalizes (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005). According to this theory, artists are the initial “expeditionary force for the inner-city gentrifiers” (Ley, 1996, 191), serving as the creative class that first moves into low-income neighborhoods in the central city. Low-income neighborhoods attract artists because the cost of living is low and more expensive neighborhoods are comparatively conformist, homogenous, and bland (Bain, 2003). Additionally, graffiti writers often reside in these neighborhoods, serving as an indigenous creative class that makes these neighborhoods feel particularly authentic, unique, and therefore attractive to non-indigenous creative classes (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005).

Indigenous graffiti writers resist the entry of a non-indigenous creative class because these non-indigenous groups “displace low income groups and initiate gentrification that benefits land speculators, developers, realtors, and ultimately the upper middle class” (Bain, 2003, 305). Members of the non-indigenous creative class act as middlemen who unintentionally support the gentrification goals of growth-machine elites. Rather than resisting the growth machine’s interests of raising exchange values through inner-city gentrification, indigenous artists fight the non-indigenous creative class, which is also displaced as a result of gentrification. Ultimately, the growth machine receives concentrated benefits from gentrification, while both indigenous and non-indigenous creative classes pay the distributed costs of being displaced from their neighborhoods.

The second relevant theory of gentrification focuses on local public policy as a cause of the third wave of gentrification. This theory specifically examines the role of direct state involvement in initiating urban regeneration that aims to make cities attractive to potential investors and middle class residents (Hackworth & Smith, 2000). Regarding street art, this theory argues that local governments recognize art’s potential to promote urban regeneration, having seen other cities undergo arts-driven gentrification. Accordingly, local governments use art as a solution set to attract investors into previously blighted neighborhoods (Mathews, 2010). On a small scale, they develop recognizable public art projects, such as murals painted by graffiti artists, to promote the city’s image as a cultural city attractive to the creative class (Bloch, 2016; Florida, 2002). This street art can become renowned both domestically and internationally, as has occurred in Melbourne, where preponderant street art attracts visitors to the city (Young, 2010). Therefore, street art that conforms to a city’s moral geography can serve as a form of place-marketing, attracting both capital and tourists. On a larger scale, local governments engage in public-private partnerships to invest in cultural flagships, such as museums (Mathews, 2010). Notably, the development of a Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, has revitalized the image of previously derelict neighborhoods, in the process putting Bilbao on the map as a location for



investment and tourism (Vicario & Monje, 2003). In both cases, local governments promote the solution set of public art in an attempt to alter elite and middle-class perspectives on the viability of development, investment, and tourism in previously blighted neighborhoods. However, a growing interest in developing these neighborhoods is detrimental to low-income urban residents, who are often pushed out as the city is recaptured by middle classes and growth-machine elites in an act of revanchism (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005).

### **Street Art as a Means of Community-Building**

The preceding discussions of graffiti as “broken windows” requiring a revanchist response and street art as a promoter of gentrification utilize a neoliberal growth machine framework. However, there is an entirely different lens through which to see graffiti and street art: namely as a form of community-building and pluralism. From this perspective, graffiti expresses the writers’ right to free expression and serves as a community-building tool (Dovey et al., 2012). Regarding the use of graffiti as a form of free expression, there is a substantial precedent for art serving as free speech. Under Keynesianism, federal, state, and local governments encouraged artists to express their ideas, even if they were unpopular. At the federal level, for example, the National Endowment for the Arts promoted free expression through art (Medvecky, 2010). Graffiti writers continue to practice this free expression, using their works as a form of critical, not criminal, nonviolent civil disobedience. In their works, they challenge the city’s promotion of gentrification and revanchism at the expense of low-income residents and people of color. These works show the remnants of pluralistic democracy that the growth machine’s neoliberal policies seek to erase (Ulmer, 2017). Such graffiti is risky to create, though, because it is criminalized by the neoliberal order, which considers dissent and heterogeneity as a challenge to its moral geography that requires a revanchist response.

Concerning graffiti and street art as a tool of community-building, public art can be used to help communities develop identities and organize. While many forms of murals exist, some of which are produced by individuals or institutions (Sieber et al., 2012), community murals are characterized by the community-driven process that creates them (Delgado & Barton, 1998; Visconti et al., 2010). The association between collaboration and community murals stems from the rich history of street art projects, which have long provided marginalized populations a forum for expression in periods of social crisis (Conrad, 1995). Community murals became an especially prevalent form of expression and resistance in major cities following widespread disinvestment from urban areas in the 1960s (Sieber et al., 2012). These murals probed themes of ethnic heritage, social justice, and neighborhood identity, taking inspiration from influential murals such as William Walker’s *The Wall of Respect* in Chicago and Judith Baca’s *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* (Delgado & Barton, 1998; Sieber et al., 2012). In addition, these murals aimed to redefine their communities by counteracting “the stigmatization

of the neighborhood in local media and popular perceptions” (Sieber et al., 2012, p. 268). The representations of neighborhoods presented in community murals stood in sharp contrast to those presented by politicians and the growth machine, especially in local media outlets (Delgado & Barton, 1998).

Communities continue to create murals collaboratively with the aims of stimulating community pride and providing outsiders with alternative definitions of areas considered by the growth machine to be blighted. By seeking the input and participation of communities that are traditionally marginalized from political decision-making processes (Keith, 2005), street art projects can empower local residents by creating social capital, which is defined by Putnam (1995) as “features of social organization . . . that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p. 67). Social capital bridges divisions within communities by creating connections among neighborhood residents across the divisions of age, race, ethnicity, and gender (Sieber et al., 2012; Visconti et al., 2010). These connections can catalyze further advocacy around common causes such as resisting gentrification and displacement. While street art projects primarily aim to enfranchise members of the neighborhood, they also educate outsiders about the neighborhood’s heritage and struggles, stimulating multicultural interactions and understanding (Conrad, 1995).

However, even pluralistic strategies that generate social capital can be co-opted to promote growth-machine interests. Community mural initiatives are often coordinated by middlemen; as Patrick Dougher, the program director of a community mural organization in Brooklyn, mentions: “residents know what they want, but often don’t have the tools and resources to bring . . . [their goals] to fruition” (Tianga, 2017). Gaining the momentum to create a street art initiative that brings the community together may require the organizational skills of an outside middleman, frequently taking the form of a non-profit organization. These non-profit middlemen are easily co-opted by developers who can offer them money to develop specific programming. Needing funding to operate their programs, these non-profits might accept these offers; accordingly, their interests do not exactly align with those of the community. Therefore, street art programs that intend to nurture community identity but involve middlemen might not entirely represent local interests, diminishing their efficacy in creating local, pluralistic resistance to growth machine-driven agendas of revanchism and gentrification.

## **Methods**

I have reviewed three approaches to discussing graffiti and street art. To analyze how the growth machine employs these frames, I examine Detroit media organizations’ perceptions of graffiti and street art. I investigate media perceptions because the local media plays an essential role in promoting city-wide development and elite-defined moral geographies as a key element of the growth machine alongside businesses that profit from development and agencies with local ties (Harding, 1995; Logan & Molotch, 1987).

In contrast to some businesses participating in the growth machine, local media organizations are place-based, which means that the majority of consumers live in the same city as the media organization. Due to their place-based nature, local media organizations' primary interest is to promote the aggregate growth of their city. This is the case because as a city grows, so does a media organization's financial status. As described by Molotch (1976), ". . . as the metropolis expands, a larger number of ad lines can be sold on the basis of the increasing circulation base" (p. 315). Not only can more advertisements be sold, but they can also be sold at higher prices (Logan & Molotch, 1987). The local media accordingly strives to attract mobile capital by curating a favorable image and creating a business climate that is attractive to development (Harding, 1995). It is indiscriminate in its support for development and indifferent to the geographic patterns of growth within a city (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Molotch, 1976). In other words, the local media is apathetic toward whether development occurs in a financial district or a bohemian neighborhood; it simply cares that development is occurring. It is unique in taking this stance; as a result, media publishers often serve as arbiters of internal bickering among business elites, directing the growth machine toward long-term growth instead of the short-term whims of potentially mobile capital (Molotch, 1976).

I hypothesize that Detroit's street art policies catalyzing gentrification and zero-tolerance graffiti policies focused on revanchism share the same aim: retaking the city from those considered to be undesirable elements. I predict that Detroit's graffiti and street art policies share the aim of revanchism because of high levels of fear about crime, violence, and the safety of investments, especially following Detroit's declaration of bankruptcy in July, 2013. Due to this extreme degree of fear, the city consistently uses strict revanchist policies to encourage reinvestment into the city.

To trace the intent behind Detroit's evolving graffiti policies, I analyze the content of articles from a variety of local news sources between 2003 and 2018. My analysis begins in 2003 because in this year, then-Wayne County prosecutor Mike Duggan began advocating for anti-graffiti policies. However, the majority of articles I examine were written in or after 2013, when Duggan was elected Mayor of Detroit. I initially searched for articles from the two largest circulating daily newspapers in Detroit—namely, the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News*—along with the *Detroit Metro Times*, which is the largest circulating weekly newspaper in Detroit. To include a broader range of opinions, I also searched for articles from *Crain's Detroit Business*, which has a target audience of "business influencers and decision makers" (Crain's Detroit Business, n.d.), and *Deadline Detroit*, which claims to provide "irreverent views" on local news (Deadline Detroit, n.d.). Aiming to achieve consistency in my selection of articles from each newspaper, I used the same keywords to search across all sections using each newspaper's archives. Specifically, I searched for the following exact phrases in each newspaper: graffiti, street art, and murals. I also searched for two city

agencies: the General Services Department, which is responsible for managing graffiti, and City Walls, which promotes the creation of street art. Finally, I searched for Mayor Mike Duggan because his commitment to revanchism is inextricable from his mayoral platform. To inform my case study, I selected the eleven articles with the highest frequency of references to these keywords. I supplemented the information in these newspaper articles with academic articles describing the Detroit growth machine and its relations to graffiti and street art.

I was able to analyze each article closely for how local media sources frame graffiti and street art policies because of my small sample size. However, my analysis has significant methodological limitations. Specifically, the reliability of my analysis is constrained by the fact that only one coder examined each article. This limits the reproducibility of my analysis, as another coder could interpret these ten articles differently from how I did. This limitation could partially be overcome by conducting a more formal, quantitative content analysis to compare how frequently local media sources employ specific frames. At the same time that it examined rhetoric discussing graffiti and street art, this content analysis could also examine biases in how each media source frames these forms of expression. While only one coder would examine each article, I could supplement my coding with computer-aided content analysis. Given that computers apply the rules of coding in a manner that is perfectly replicable, if this analysis corroborated my findings, my content analysis would have a greater degree of reliability than my current methodology.

## **Data Analysis and Discussion**

### **Initial Revanchist Responses to Graffiti in Detroit**

As defined in the Detroit Municipal code, graffiti is a criminal act consisting of “. . . unauthorized drawings, lettering, illustrations or other graphic markings on the exterior of a building, premises or structure which are intended to deface or mar [its] appearance” (Haimerl, 2014). Detroit’s code considers graffiti to be something that defaces a building’s appearance and therefore serves as a “broken window” or an indicator of blight. Detroit began combating these “broken windows” in 2002, when city-funded crews began painting over graffiti on buildings. This erasure was only temporary, as graffiti quickly reappeared. Johnny Northern, a City of Detroit employee tasked with overseeing efforts to clean graffiti at the time, reported that the resurgent graffiti “multiplied and [was] much more dense that it was before” (Montemurri, 2003). Graffiti became even more prevalent in Detroit; according to the *Detroit Free Press* in 2003, highway bridges, upper floors of vacant buildings, and water towers were covered in graffiti. One of the areas with the highest concentration of graffiti was the Dequindre rail tracks near Eastern Market, which were “filled with debris, packs of dogs and squatters,” along with murals (Montemurri, 2003). Graffiti coexisted with other signs of blight, including illegally dumped trash and homelessness. The city’s

attempts at combatting this blight were not concentrated enough to succeed.

In 2003, graffiti management came to the forefront of city discussions when Mike Duggan, then Wayne County's prosecutor, charged two out-of-town artists with felonies for "conspiracy to commit malicious destruction of a building," a crime punishable by up to five years in prison (Hooper, 2017b). Duggan also offered a \$1000 reward for information about the identity of TURLT, a graffiti artist who had painted turtles on hundreds of buildings in Detroit (Montemurri, 2003). He threatened to imprison TURLT with the maximum possible sentence. Duggan wanted to make an example of graffiti artists to demonstrate his commitment to cracking down on quality-of-life issues like graffiti, prostitution, drugs, and illegal dumping. He argued that failing to address these issues would engender an escalation of crime rates in Detroit, as quality-of-life crimes would "have a ripple effect on other crimes" (McGraw & Schmitt, 2013). In this manner, he used rhetoric employed by those advancing revanchist policies. Officials like Duggan who champion revanchism argue that failing to address small-scale crimes will highlight a city's lack of control, emboldening perpetrators to commit more serious crimes. To curb quality-of-life crimes, Duggan imitated Rudolph Giuliani's policies of prosecuting low-level crimes with zero tolerance (Chronopoulos, 2011). Giuliani is well known for his use of revanchist policies; therefore, Duggan's focus on combating graffiti directly fits into a revanchist framework of attempting to take back the city from criminal "undesirables," including graffiti writers.

Detroit residents protested Duggan's revanchist graffiti management policies. They argued that he should not focus on removing illegal tags when more serious crimes were committed daily in Detroit. Due to widespread protests, the out-of-town artists were ultimately charged with a lesser misdemeanor. Their jail sentence was reduced to sixty days under the stipulation that they would erase graffiti from a dozen buildings with their tags (Hooper, 2017b). In 2005, after Duggan left the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, his successor relegated graffiti to a low priority, arguing that law enforcement should primarily focus on fighting violent crime (McGraw & Schmitt, 2013). Initial attempts at implementing revanchist anti-graffiti policies were accordingly short-lived in Detroit.

### **Mayor Mike Duggan's Zero-Tolerance Policies**

However, following his election as Mayor of Detroit in 2013, Mike Duggan re-implemented revanchist anti-graffiti policies. He enacted zero-tolerance measures that focused particularly on reducing graffiti along commercial corridors and major thoroughfares (Hooper, 2017b). Specifically, he devoted \$520 million of the city's budget to blight eradication between 2014 and 2020 (Ikonomova, 2017). With this revanchist policy, Duggan aimed to portray the neglected city of Detroit as a safe place for middle-class residents. He hoped to cover up Detroit's "broken windows" by means of aestheticization and, in doing so, take back Detroit from the criminal underclass who made it an undesirable

city in which to live. Duggan also wanted to discourage “undesirables” from thinking that because the city had not erased graffiti, they could participate in other crimes like prostitution, drug trafficking, or illegal dumping. According to Doug Baker, the chief of criminal enforcement for Detroit’s Law Department, the City of Detroit wanted to eliminate the mindset that, “hey, you can get away with it in Detroit” (Ikonomova, 2017). In other words, Duggan wanted to prevent an escalation from preponderant “broken windows” to increased violent crime rates.

In particular, Duggan hoped to alleviate residents’ fear that graffiti, which stereotypically serves as a territorial marker for gangs, could signal an escalation to violence. Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) provide an example of this link by describing graffiti as a means for gangs to delineate their territory. Their influential rhetoric, in addition to press about gangs marking territory with tags in other cities (Phillips, 1999), led to the widespread association of graffiti with gangs. This idea caused local media sources in Detroit to occasionally identify graffiti with gangs, notably describing gangs’ tags as an example of blight and a catalyst of fear. This association is somewhat misleading, given that only “. . . a small portion of graffiti in Detroit is gang-affiliated” and that gang-affiliated graffiti is easily distinguishable from other forms, because “. . . often no more than one color is used” (Terry, 2018). Nonetheless, the association of tags with gang violence caused the public to essentialize graffiti as a narrow category of tags that could escalate to violence. Duggan therefore justified his revanchist policies by arguing that they would lessen concerns about safety in Detroit.

Zero-tolerance policies required not only that the City of Detroit remove graffiti from public and private spaces, but also that building owners take responsibility for erasing tags on their property. Under Duggan’s policies, the city’s Building, Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Department was responsible for ticketing privately-owned properties that had been tagged. If ticketed, property owners had 7 days to remove the offending graffiti. If they failed to do so, property owners owed the city a fine of \$130 (Hooper, 2017b), in addition to the cost of the city removing the graffiti, which ranged from \$200 to \$16,000 (Ferretti, 2017). Between the policy’s implementation in 2014 and September 2017, the city handed out over 3,900 tickets and received more than \$1.2 million in fines from property owners for failing to remove graffiti in a timely manner (Ikonomova, 2017). The city was overly vigilant in handing out blight violations, ticketing legal murals commissioned by property owners in addition to illegal graffiti (Haimerl, 2014). Notably, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit was given a ticket for one of its exhibits, an outdoor tribute to local street artist NEKST (Ikonomova, 2017). The city’s confusion over which art was acceptable and which was unacceptable according to its moral geography demonstrated the ambiguity between criminal graffiti and legal street art. The city resolved this ambiguity by requiring property owners to register murals that they had commissioned with the Building, Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Department (Hooper, 2017b). As part of this registration process, property owners had to submit a photo of the completed

mural and list the names of its creators, which helped the city find creators' illegal works elsewhere in the city (Ikonomova, 2017). By having writers register their authorized works, the City of Detroit exploited the dual role of graffiti writers. The city required these writers to identify their street art, which was authorized because it erased criminalized graffiti. To dissuade peers from tagging their murals, these writers maintained their reputations by creating criminalized graffiti. Given that the city had examples of writers' legal work, it could more easily identify and penalize writers for creating unauthorised graffiti, regardless of the fact that without doing so, their street art would have failed to achieve its aim of preventing tagging. This complicated relationship demonstrates the ambiguity of the elite-defined moral geography that graffitiwriters must navigate when creating graffiti and street art (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011).

The City of Detroit did not exempt famous street artists from its zero-tolerance policies. Notably, in May, 2015, Detroit police issued a warrant for the arrest of Shepard Fairey, best known for his "Hope" poster of President Obama (Stryker, 2015). Real estate mogul Dan Gilbert had hired Fairey to paint an 18-story mural on the North side of One Campus Martius, which is shown in Figure 1. While he was in Detroit to create this mural, Fairey also painted 7 illegal works, one of which is depicted in Figure 2. For these illegal works, Detroit police charged Fairey with one count of malicious destruction of a building, with a maximum 10 year sentence, and two counts of malicious destruction of a railroad bridge, each with two year sentences. They also demanded \$24,000 for cleanup and restoration (Hooper, 2017b). Although a Wayne County Circuit Court judge dismissed this case in 2016, in charging Fairey, the City of Detroit attempted to prove that it controlled the spread of graffiti by showing that not even an internationally acclaimed artist was above its laws.

*Figure 1.* (on left) Shown at the right side of the image is Shepard Fairey's commissioned mural on the North side of One Campus Martius. Source: Kim, 2015.



*Figure 2.* (on right) Fairey's illegal "Obey" tag in Detroit. Source: Boeing, 2015.

Spending almost \$100 million on blight eradication programs annually

meant that Duggan's revanchist zero-tolerance policies were relatively successful at erasing graffiti (Ikonomova, 2017). Between 2014 and November, 2017, the Graffiti Task Force removed 50,000 graffiti tags in its aestheticization effort. This was a significant proportion of the graffiti in Detroit; when Duggan implemented the zero-tolerance policies in 2014, the city estimated that between 75,000 and 100,000 illegal tags were painted on Detroit's walls (Ferretti, 2017). Additionally, during this time, the city charged 50 graffiti writers with felony charges for malicious destruction of property. Their punishments ranged from community service to jail time, and they paid thousands of dollars in restitution for the property damage that they had caused (Ikonomova, 2017). Due to the quick removal of tags and an increased frequency in sentencing writers with the destruction of property, graffiti writers began to lose motivation to retag. According to the director of the General Services Department, Brad Dick, retagging rates in high tagging areas decreased from 50 to 60 percent in 2014 to 30 percent in 2017 (Ferretti, 2017). The local government was reclaiming Detroit from graffiti artists by using zero-tolerance policies to achieve aestheticization. It aimed to revise Detroit's image from graffiti capital of the United States to a desirable city for middle class residents.

At the same time that Duggan enforced revanchist graffiti policies limiting the free expression of writers, a group composed primarily of low-income people of color, he continued dismantling Detroit's Keynesian social safety net. He specifically limited the provision of essential services by agreeing to implement the Detroit Future City (DFC) framework, which was formulated by a public-private partnership and initially enacted by his predecessor in response to the city's declaration of bankruptcy in 2013. This framework downsized the city to increase the efficiency with which municipal services could be provided (Clement & Kanai, 2015). It proposed doing so by phasing out the provision of essential services—namely, road and sewer maintenance, trash collection, street lighting, and public transportation—in particularly derelict neighborhoods. The DFC framework's designation of blighted neighborhoods was relatively broad; approximately 1 in 5 Detroit residents lived on a city block designated as blighted (Clement & Kanai, 2015, p. 379). Individuals living on an affected city block were more likely to be unemployed, living below the poverty line, and people of color than the average resident of Detroit (Clement & Kanai, 2015, p. 378). Once residents were forced out of these neighborhoods, the city planned to rezone them for agriculture and parks with the understanding that outside investors could redevelop them in the future (Pedroni, 2011). The DFC framework entirely disregarded the provision of essential services to a large proportion of the city's low-income people of color and instead focused on growth-machine goals of attracting investment and middle-class residents. It specifically did so by increasing the availability of social services within revitalizing areas and establishing unused land for future development and investment. In addition to implementing the DFC framework, Duggan also reduced city services by continuing to close schools that were predominantly attended by people of color in low-income neighborhoods



(Pedroni, 2011). Much like Duggan's zero-tolerance graffiti policies, these policies excluded low-income people of color from Detroit.

### **Private and Public Uses of Street Art as a Solution Set to Aestheticize Graffiti**

The growth machine has a long history of dominating urban politics in Detroit. Scholars generally agree that the growth machine's ascendancy began under Mayor Coleman Young, who was elected in 1973 and was Detroit's first African-American mayor (Clement & Kanai, 2015). Specifically, Young used federal funds earmarked for low-income communities to provide corporations with land and tax incentives (Darden, Hall, Thomas, & Thomas, 1987). Following Detroit's declaration of bankruptcy in 2013, recent literature suggests that the city has had to move away from its goals of growth to repay debt and downsize city operations (Peck & Whiteside, 2016; Schindler, 2016). Despite the fact that the city's goals have evolved, growth-machine elites are still intimately involved in Detroit politics. By eliminating the provision of essential city services from blighted neighborhoods predominantly occupied by low-income people of color, these elites can continue to focus on attracting investment and development in the city's revitalizing areas.

The continued power of the growth machine over Detroit politics is demonstrated by the prevalence of public-private partnerships and the existence of large-scale redevelopment projects involving the city and Detroit's business elite. Regarding the pervasiveness of public-private partnerships within structures of Detroit's governance, two partnerships exert a significant degree of influence over urban policy. The first partnership is the Detroit Works Project (DWP), which formulated the Detroit Future City framework and aims to use market principles to make the city more competitive nationally and globally. This public-private partnership is led by a steering committee that includes four members from each of the corporate, non-profit, and government sectors, along with one representative from the religious community and one leader in education (Clement & Kanai, 2015, p. 376). The latter two representatives are not necessarily members of the growth-machine coalition; however, given that they are significantly outnumbered by members of the growth-machine elite, they fail to provide substantial representation of alternative interests. The second partnership is One D, a coalition of non-profit organizations and philanthropies that aims to elevate Detroit's status to that of a creative city. As Pedroni (2011) argues, the foundations that compose One D provide funding that enables the growth machine to exert significant control over urban governance.

Concerning Detroit's involvement in urban redevelopment projects, the city has provided corporate elites, such as Quicken Loans founder, Dan Gilbert, and Little Caesar's owner, Mike Ilitch, with incentives for major development initiatives. Gilbert relocated his company's headquarters to Detroit's central business district and has invested over \$1 billion in purchasing property

downtown (Clement & Kanai, 2015, p. 374). To offer incentives for Gilbert's continued investment, the City of Detroit curates an image of safety in the areas directly surrounding Gilbert's buildings by rapidly removing "broken windows" (Gottesdiener, 2014). Additionally, when Ilitch, who owns two of Detroit's professional sports teams, proposed building a \$650 million hockey stadium and entertainment district, the city agreed to finance 58 percent of the development (Schindler, 2016).

Members of the growth-machine coalition have been intimately involved in revitalizing and aestheticizing Detroit through the creation of street art, especially in the form of murals. By doing so, they have applied the universalizable solution set of street art as a means to manage graffiti. Privately commissioned murals have attempted to reclaim and beautify public spaces by eradicating graffiti, as other graffiti artists are dissuaded from writing over their fellow artists' commissioned work. Most notably, businesses and foundations have invested in the creation of murals in Eastern Market, a burgeoning farmer's market that attracts over 40,000 visitors on peak Saturdays and is a growing restaurant and retail area (Hooper, 2017c). Since 2011, Inner State Gallery, an art gallery in Eastern Market, and 1xRUN, an Eastern Market-based publisher of fine art prints, have worked with building owners and the Eastern Market Corporation to create 30 murals in the market (Stryker, 2015). Their aim is to beautify the Eastern Market and make it more attractive to visitors. In addition, since 2007, the GreenWays Initiative of Southeast Michigan has attempted to connect Eastern Market to the riverfront with the Dequindre Cut Greenway, a 1.35 mile railroad-turned recreational path (Kavanagh, 2017). One of the first priorities of this project was to install security cameras and lighting along the path to curtail crime. Previously, both Eastern Market and the Dequindre Cut Greenway were filled with illicitly dumped waste, graffiti, and homeless residents (McGraw, 2007). Revitalization efforts have focused on reclaiming the Eastern Market and its surroundings from these "undesirable" items and people, in the process, making the market more accessible to middle-class residents of Detroit and its suburbs.

One of the most concentrated efforts to revitalize and aestheticize Eastern Market is Murals in the Market, a nine-day annual festival that began in 2015 and includes mural painting by artists, block parties, and mural tours. The festival's creators are the Eastern Market Corporation and 1xRUN. According to Roula David, Murals in the Market's project manager and the Chief Operating Officer of 1xRUN, the festival's goal is to "enhance the experience of the market" by beautifying it and attracting more visitors (Stryker, 2015). In its first year, Murals in the Market succeeded in both aestheticizing Eastern Market and attracting visitors to the farmer's market and its surrounding commercial strip. The festival commissioned 45 artists, half of whom were locals, to create authorized street art pieces (Stryker, 2015). These artists doubled the number of murals in the market from 50 to 100 (Stryker, 2016). 75,000 people attended the inaugural festival (Stryker, 2015). In 2016, Murals in the Market aimed to expand Eastern Market

by painting murals in areas pedestrians might be reluctant to explore (Stryker, 2016). Murals in the Market is reclaiming an ever-increasing swath of territory in Detroit from “undesirable elements” and blight, transforming it into a retail space that appeals to middle-class interests.

Although data limitations preclude a thorough investigation into how the content of graffiti and street art on Detroit’s walls has changed over time, it is possible to examine the content of street art created for Murals in the Market. Generally, it seems likely that the content depicted on the city’s walls has shifted as the concentration of graffiti dwindles and street art becomes increasingly prevalent. Both graffiti and street art can highlight social-justice issues, serve as forms of political resistance, and celebrate ethnic and racial heritage. However, because the aforementioned messages can contradict elite-defined moral geographies, they are more likely to be conveyed using criminalized graffiti instead of sanctioned street art (Ulmer, 2017). I corroborate this claim using the comprehensive visual database of murals in Eastern Market created for Murals in the Market. Classifying murals by their primary content category, I find that approximately 80 percent of the 158 murals created between 2015 and 2018 are decorative in form, while the remaining 20 percent probe issues of social justice or racial representation (Murals in the Market, n.d.). Figures 3 and 4 provide an example of each type of mural. This result provides preliminary support for the idea that as street art supersedes graffiti, aesthetic images take the place of potentially confrontational free speech that might repel middle-class visitors.

*Figure 3.* A mural created for Murals in the Market that is primarily decorative in form. This mural was created by German art collective “The Weird.” Source: Etx313, 2014.





Figure 4. A mural painted for Murals in the Market that focuses on themes of social justice and racial representation. Source: Ward, 2018.

Private businesses with direct links to the growth machine have similarly promoted the creation of murals to erase graffiti. Quicken Loans' Small Business Murals Project has placed six local artists' murals throughout Detroit's neighborhoods, showing the direct intervention of growth-machine elites in revanchist efforts to reclaim Detroit from graffiti (Hooper, 2017a). Quicken Loans is a key facet of Detroit's growth machine because it has financially supported the city's revitalization. Therefore, it stands to benefit from economic growth in the downtown area (Gottesdiener, 2014). Another intervention undertaken by growth-machine elites against graffiti was real estate executive Derek Weaver's creation of the Grand River Creative Corridor. Weaver commissioned 100 murals from graffiti artists to create a corridor of murals (Kavanagh, 2017). As a real estate mogul, Weaver aimed to increase the exchange value of his real estate by making it more attractive to potential buyers. His success in doing so is marked by the fact that the Grand River Creative Corridor has become a downtown tourist destination.

More recently, having noted the success of private efforts to aestheticize and revitalize Detroit using street art, the City of Detroit has adopted the same solution set. In 2017, Detroit announced City Walls, an effort that employs local street artists to paint murals on public and privately owned properties that are frequent targets of graffiti. According to Duggan's media relations director, City Walls is an "evolution" in Detroit's graffiti management policies that aims to make graffiti removal less expensive while continuing the revanchist aim of retaking Detroit from undesirable graffiti (Hooper, 2017b). Brad Dick, director of Detroit's General Services Department, corroborates this mission, stating that City Walls aims to decrease the cost of graffiti removal while also ". . . trying to make the city look better and bring some beautification to the city" (Hooper, 2017b). It is modeled after Philadelphia's Mural Arts program. When this program fell under

the City of Philadelphia's control in 1997, it had five employees and a \$100,000 annual budget. Its success in preventing graffiti writing is evident in its rapid growth; Mural Arts now employs 53 artists and staff members and has an \$8 million annual operating budget (Hooper, 2017b; Melamed, 2016). Approximately 60 percent of this budget comes from corporate donations from growth-machine elites who see the value in combating graffiti, while under 40 percent comes from the City of Philadelphia (Mural Arts Philadelphia, 2018). The City of Detroit hopes that corporations will similarly commit to establishing a public-private partnership that combats graffiti using street art. Detroit has, therefore, copied the solution set of using murals to counter graffiti not only from private efforts within its city limits but also from Philadelphia.

The City of Detroit has initially allocated \$50,000 for City Walls to develop three graffiti eradication efforts: namely, creating a Blight Abatement Artist Residency Program (BAARP), aestheticizing viaducts in Southwest Detroit, and providing property owners with alternative responses to blight tickets. To create BAARP, the city has commissioned murals in locations that are frequent targets of illegal graffiti (Hooper, 2017b). Specifically, it has chosen three fellows with the aid of Roula David, the founder of Murals in the Market (Hooper, 2017b), whose task is to create nine installations on walls hit the hardest by graffiti writers (City of Detroit, 2018). Concerning viaduct beautification efforts in Southwest Detroit, the city has worked with the Southwest Detroit Business Association to paint murals on three viaducts (City of Detroit, 2018). The viaduct project claims to celebrate the identity of Southwest Detroit by creating murals that reflect residents' values. However, considering that growth-machine interests in the form of a business association are involved in the project, perhaps the murals represent only a sanitized, homogenized identity of Southwest Detroit approved by an elite-determined moral geography. Finally, regarding providing property owners with alternative responses to blight tickets, the city has begun to allow property owners to commission a mural to correct their tickets instead of paying a fine (Hooper, 2017b). All three of these efforts are revanchist in that they aim to eliminate graffiti and aestheticize Detroit through the solution set of street art.

Private and public groups in Detroit have created murals as a solution set to prevent the re-emergence of graffiti "broken windows" for over a decade, resulting in a new preponderance of murals in Detroit. The City of Detroit has begun promoting its newly-aestheticized public space, with the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau calling Detroit a "city turned canvas." In its promotional flier on street art, The bureau mentions that in Detroit, "you don't have to park your car to see breathtaking beauty, it's available—free of admission—on buildings, down alleyways, and from 55 miles per hour" (Kavanagh, 2017). Revanchist anti-graffiti policies hope to attract middle class residents, who can assure themselves that Detroit is safe by being able to see the city without having to leave the security and comfort of their car. Potential residents can see that Detroit has fixed the "broken windows" of graffiti by using strict zero-tolerance

policies and commissioning middlemen graffiti writers to create street art. Both policies focus on not on remedying the structural issues that cause these “broken windows,” but instead on revanchism, aiming to reclaim Detroit from graffiti writers and other “undesirable” residents and attract the middle class.

Having summarized the revanchist goals of Duggan’s graffiti and street art policies, I briefly examine how local media sources frame their discussions of graffiti and street art. When the articles I examine mention graffiti, they generally equate it with blight. For example, Hooper (2017b) represents graffiti as an “unwelcome eyesore” and a signal of a “decayed neighborhood.” Ferretti (2017) corroborates this framing, describing how graffiti and other “broken windows” “plagued [a subject’s] neighborhood.” In contrast, these articles portray street art as a tool for deterring graffiti and other “broken windows.” Hooper (2017b) mentions that murals deter vandals and promote revitalization, and Ferretti describes street art as the cause of neighborhood beautification. By employing these framings, local media sources largely ascribe to the growth machine-defined moral geography, as is expected, given that local media sources are a key element of the growth coalition.

As demonstrated by these local newspaper articles and an overview of Detroit’s evolving graffiti management policies, the continuity between Mayor Mike Duggan’s policies is that they have all been strictly revanchist in form. Although City Walls and its private equivalents appear to engage with graffiti writers, in practice they co-opt them into becoming middlemen for the neoliberal, growth machine-dominated city. The city and its private partners pawn off their job of erasing “broken windows” graffiti onto middlemen graffiti writers, whose murals accomplish the same task at a lower cost. Therefore, City Walls and its private counterparts are revanchist, zero-tolerance aestheticization policies disguised as pluralistic programs that build community identity. In actuality, the only community cultivated by these murals is that which the city’s moral geography desires: a middle class community that disproportionately excludes low-income people of color and attracts investors and developers to Detroit.

Detroit employs particularly revanchist anti-graffiti policies because the level of fear about crime, violence, and the safety of investments is acute and the city’s desire to fix these problems is high, especially following the city’s declaration of bankruptcy in 2013. Nonetheless, the case of Detroit is externally valid in that it demonstrates the importance of studying how cities use small-scale cultural solution sets like street art to promote their moral geography at the expense of those who do not conform. It is clear that other cities have used similar small-scale cultural solution sets and would serve as interesting comparative case studies. One possibility for future research would therefore be to complete a case study analyzing Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program, which aims to create murals that prevent the appearance of graffiti (Mural Arts Philadelphia, 2018). Another possibility for future research could examine how revanchist anti-graffiti policies affect gentrification in Detroit. In the scope of this paper, I focus on Detroit’s

revanchist policies because they are a severe example of a city trying to fix its “broken windows.” A natural continuation of this project could investigate the effects of revanchism in gentrifying areas like Eastern Market, elucidating the question of who benefits from these revanchist policies.

Analyzing graffiti and street art in Detroit yields broader implications for urban policy and politics. Detroit exemplifies how cities employ street art as a neutral policy tool that can be adapted to meet different actors’ interests. While growth machines use street art to erase graffiti, communities create murals to bridge divides of gender, race, ethnicity, and age. Additionally, this case study of Detroit suggests that the political goals of revanchism and the creative city cannot be achieved simultaneously. The revanchist aims of Detroit’s graffiti and street art policies stem from the city’s particular political context, namely, an acute fear of crime and safety. Even as Detroit’s growth-machine elites employ place marketing in an attempt to attract the creative class, according to Florida (2002), many creatives oppose revanchism because it symies free expression. Lacking serious concerns about safety, other cities’ moral geographies might allow graffiti as an expression of tolerance that attracts the creative class. Even in Detroit, to continue promoting growth after assuring potential residents and investors of their safety, it seems likely that the growth machine will guide the city away from employing revanchist policies to instead attracting the creative class.

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