Industrial Imaginaries:
Local Voices on Carrier Corp., Tesla Motors, and Unevenly Developing Capitalism

by
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Abstract

This historically-conscious dissertation examines two main case studies representing different positions in the capitalist process of uneven development. Inspired by Gramscian theory, it captures the common-sense beliefs expressed through various communication channels when cities face either job losses or a new corporate opportunity. Among the key questions are: Who do those affected by layoffs think is to blame? And what criticisms, if any, surface in local media when public money is used to attract jobs? The first case study centers on an imperiled Carrier plant in Indianapolis, IN, which during the 2016 campaign season became the site of a national conversation on offshoring and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Management announced that 2,100 jobs would ship to Mexico, while a related factory in Huntington, IN, also faced closure. The second case study examines Tesla and Panasonic’s Gigafactory 1 outside of Reno and Sparks, NV, since its siting in 2014. A $1.25 billion tax-abatement deal with Nevada made their project possible.

The primary methods I use are media discourse analyses and interviews with workers and city councilmembers in four cities. Among the findings are several explanations circulated for Carrier’s decision that often differed given their source; these included shareholder interest, NAFTA, undue taxation, greed, and ineffectual workers and unions. I analyze these through lenses of common-sense ideology and journalistic practices, and I argue that the criticism mostly addresses symptoms of capitalism only. For solutions, Indianan officials mostly pushed for attracting new businesses and upskilling the workforce, which are neoliberal presumptions. Those in marginal positions typically pushed for organizing, voting for Donald Trump, or boycotting Carrier, which I unpack ideologically and materially. In the Tesla case, I argue that a media spectacle surrounding Elon Musk and his brand helped sell the Gigafactory as a boon to all Nevadans despite a small group of elites benefiting. Criticism of the deal in local media was largely limited to bourgeois procedure and legislative tinkering. Capitalist image, spectacle, and the lack of material follow-through link the case studies. Additionally, I show how officials view their cities and how they hope to move them forward.

Keywords: Carrier; Tesla; uneven development; local media; spectacle; ideology
Dedication

To Robert W. Weber (1922-2014) and David and Bethany Nichols.
Acknowledgements

As with any major academic undertaking, the completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the generosity, time, and commitment of many others. I am very fortunate to have the following people in my life. They believed in me and/or came to my assistance as I reached for an academic goal.

My parents, David and Bethany Nichols, have been tireless supporters not only during my early pursuit of a PhD, but during the dissertation research stage. They financed a moving truck to get me from Wisconsin to Vancouver, B.C.; they took care of my cat until I got settled; they helped with tuition if my checking account was lean; they were available to chat on the phone if a problem arose; they helped me with a snag involving my Canadian study permit renewal; and overall they were committed to my success as a doctoral student. I also took to heart some advice my dad once imparted to me, namely that success in a PhD program hinges more on a strong work ethic than on natural smarts. They deserve a major thanks.

I also need to thank my best friend, Dane Haman, whom I’ve known since high school. I’m not sure how to begin distilling our time as friends together, but any account would have to include skateboarding, making zines, playing music, arguing about art, nurturing anti-Bush sentiments during that era, speculating on the paranormal, and tending to a deep well of inside jokes. Not only is he an endlessly interesting and amiable guy, but he also stepped up to assist my dissertation research. A repository of primary sources—the Reno Gazette-Journal—does not accept Canadian credit cards, so he offered his own to grant me access, later refusing my attempts to reimburse him. He also let me stay on his living-room couch for nearly three weeks in Reno, Nevada, as I conducted fieldwork in July 2017. His roommate, Scott Bates, never said a disparaging thing about the temporary living arrangement and offered nothing but support. He is a great friend as well, and I am lucky to know them both.

My older sister Meredith is brilliant, strong, and independent. Long ago she instructed me to know about the 1960s (a period of crucial importance). Today I appreciate her enthusiasm to connect, chat, or help me out if things get difficult. She is generous with her time, although this has not always been easy for her. She not only has a family but has lived on a different continent than me for the last 10 or so years.
Graduate school would have been exceedingly difficult without her material and psychological support. The same goes for my older brother Justin, who during my formative years was, in my eyes, the paragon of astute social analysis. His penchant for wanting to “know two things about everything” was a big inspiration for me. And despite having a university degree himself, he has in later years referred to me, humorously and pejoratively, as “College.”

My friend Dave received a female tabby kitten as a gift from a girl he dated in 2006. He already owned a dog, though, and several months later he asked me if I would adopt the cat. I named her Robot. Since then, Robot has developed an amazing temperament, providing countless and continual moments of humor, joy, and companionship. She was a regular and nearby fixture all throughout graduate school: sitting on my lap while I read or typed; or staring at me until I dangled a shoelace her way (or filled her food dish). A true highlight of my life, Robot makes me hold out hope for an afterlife, so that we might one day meet up on the celestial other side.

I have also met some great people during my time in graduate school. As an MA student in Milwaukee, I got to know Jon Anderson and Alex Marquardt from frequent chats in the TA office. This was where they politely listened to my contempt for casual greetings and my pitches for pizza-flavored pretzels. It was during this time I tried selling Alex on the idea for a sitcom titled T.A. Par-tay. I continue to appreciate their friendship and support. Thanks to Rick Popp, Elana Levine, and Mike Newman for their mentoring and guidance. In reading Wright (1985), I learned that sociology uses the term “reference group” (p. 1) for “the circle of people whose opinions and evaluations are in the back of [your] mind” (p. 1). Two friends who stand out in this regard are Blaze and Bob, whom I met in Vancouver. I also must thank Blaze and his partner Pen Pen for storing my things while I moved between apartments during fieldwork in 2017, and for letting me stay at their place while finishing up the dissertation in 2018.

I also want to thank the Vancouverites, Marlene, Barb, and Frank, for their support, as well as SFU Communication colleagues, Darren Fleet and Jennesia Pedri. Darren introduced me to the Adbusters Magazine office, where I pitched in some radical writing and proofreading; Jennesia provided not only encouragement and friendship, but also her research skills on an article we sent to the Canadian Journal of Higher
Education (co-authored with lecturer Daniel Ahadi). Thanks is also owed to Camille from the University of Toronto.

There are several other names I must mention on the topic of SFU’s School of Communication. A “thank you” is owed to: Richard Smith, for his kindness and for sending course-design contracts my way; CMNS Librarian Sylvia Roberts, for fielding my research-related questions; office staff Jill Baryluk and Amy Soo; manager Lucie Menkveld, for her assistance with all things administrative and financial; Grad Chair Kirsten McCallister, for springing into action when I experienced a Kafka-esque dilemma during my study permit renewal; and Daniel Ahadi, for general support and inviting me aboard a substantial research project. I always enjoyed talking to Graduate Coordinator Jason Congdon; thanks for your consistent help. Thanks also to my friend, Gonen, and to Matt for perhaps being the first I heard use the term “imaginary” in the way I intend to here.

I want to extend a “thank you” to the interview participants in various union and city positions who agreed to share their time for this project. Above all, I was moved by their generosity, and I can’t thank them enough for their willingness to help on this intellectual journey. And, in addition, their voices breathed life into the text.

I also wish to thank one of the warmest and most welcoming groups of scholars I encountered in grad school: the attendees of the 2016 Union for Democratic Communication Conference in Detroit. It was here I presented an early version of the Carrier Corp. chapter. Attendees offered sincere support for the project. Thanks to my internal and external examiners as well.

A major thanks is owed to my advisory committee: Rick Gruneau, Stuart Poyntz, and Enda Brophy. I learned a great deal from them. Acting as teaching assistant for Rick’s “Media and Modernity” course in Fall 2012 was a giant step forward for me intellectually. I enjoyed the style, content, and breadth of these lectures, as well as those of his “Media and Ideology” course. Stuart is a brilliant guy who encouraged my ideas with outward enthusiasm. During my time as TA for his 221 course, I got further interested in critical perspectives on spatiality. Enda’s political economy of media course was among the best TA experiences. I appreciate all of his advice and the time we book-clubbed Anna Tsing’s *Friction*. These three were supportive all throughout my PhD
pursuit, and their ongoing availability and problem solving while I was in the field was especially heartening.

I’ve been close with Madison Trusolino for nearly the entire course of my PhD. She is one of the most selfless and compassionate individuals I know, both towards animals and the people she cares about. In addition to her radical politics and scholarly ambition, she possesses an impressive skillset in areas I find myself inept (e.g., interpersonal, administrative). Major thanks is owed for her unending encouragement, her commiseration regarding the bad news, and her dependable excitement regarding the good. Thompson (1963) once described a nineteenth-century “penniless” (p. 666) Briton walking from “Sutton to Derby” (p. 666) to visit a loved one imprisoned after a botched worker uprising. This is something I believe we’d do for one another.

I reserve the final acknowledgment for my grandpa, Robert W. Weber, who passed away in 2014. He saw me begin the PhD and cheered me on throughout, always wanting to hear the news and what I was up to. He put me through college, encouraged me to write, and supported me as I went back for a post-baccalaureate in journalism—which ultimately led me here. He was a great man who had good politics. For these reasons and more I dedicate this dissertation to his memory.
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

This doctoral thesis is a study in urban communication, regional political economy, uneven development, city boosterism, ideology, and the changing face of industrial work in the United States. I analyze two central case studies that in my view dramatically reveal the local consequences of mobile corporate capital: the Carrier Corporation’s imperiled furnace plant in Indianapolis, and Tesla Motors’s move to the Reno-Sparks area of Nevada. I chose these two because, at the time I began the research, they seemed illustrative of both ends of an uneven-development spectrum (Smith, 2008) that highlight the challenges now facing U.S. cities after more than 40 years of neoliberal economics and, in particular, fallout from the financial crisis of 2008.

My research brought me on a materially consequential journey: during six weeks of field research and interviews, I visited pertinent places, analyzed local media coverage, and spoke with public officials and workers; I drove west on the I-80 corridor, so important to Reno’s economy, and saw the dusty hills turn verdant on the California border; I sat in a smoky union hall as steelworkers convened a meeting; I stumbled upon the dormitory Tesla had rented for employees on the University of Nevada-Reno campus; I saw in person the embattled Indy Carrier plant that had made national headlines; I drove through pastoral farmlands into Huntington, Indiana, a small town facing big job loss amid the Carrier imbroglio; and I was refused entry to the Gigafactory, the largest building in the world by area. In having the privilege to be peripatetic—thanks to advisors, friends, and family—I hope my research will reveal a quality a dissertation written entirely within the confines of a library would lack.

As implied above, the most powerful actors in globalized capitalism—corporations—play a central role in the dissertation. Corporate capital comes and goes, often irrespective of political and physical boundaries. Known occasionally as the “runaway factory’ phenomenon” (Robinson, 2004, p. 7), this can levy lasting consequences on the working class and the regions that capital jumps to and from. With people’s livelihoods in the balance, the built environment changes to suit the needs of capital in a political-economic process referred to as the uneven development of
capitalism. This process, to be detailed later, involves the problematic, inequitable usage and production of space in the interest of maximizing growth and profits for powerful entities.

This dissertation comprises a comparative account of two positions involved in such a spatial dialectic. First, it examines the civic fanfare accompanying the arrival of a factory near a small town and mid-sized city; second, it highlights and contrasts this with a company’s threat to move its American production apparatus to the Global South—which, in addition to class, brings with it racial and gendered dimensions. A key point of this study, and a question motivating me at its early stages, is how various people caught up in the dramatic, eminently material transformations of capitalist modernity make sense of a world in flux. In the minds of city officials, journalists, readers, and workers, *who is to blame*, and *who is to thank*, for the spatial manifestations of capitalism’s drive for profit?

Answering such questions requires attention to the following considerations: ideology, common-sense thought, local and national news media, contemporary mainstream politics, working-class cultures, and political-economic history—to name a few. My goal for the following work is to make intelligible the reproduction of ideas that serve to protect, promote, and sometimes challenge capitalism—a system precisely not organized to give priority to the needs of some of the people I spoke to. It will be helpful at this point to say a bit more about the case studies, followed by additional discussion of the background and aims of my project.

### 1.1. Case Studies

Carrier Corporation and Tesla Motors¹ represent two sides of a spatial dialectic, with one space gaining an incoming major business venture, while another space loses such a venture. I also include sidebar discussions of related peripheral places and phenomena associated with Carrier and Tesla. Among these are the United Technologies Electronic Controls (UTEC) facility in Huntington, Ind., and the relationships between Reno, Sparks, and neighboring Storey County in Nevada. While a

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¹ In 2017, a few years after the Gigafactory deal, Tesla Motors officially dropped the second word in its name (Lopez, 2017).
number of factors link these examples thematically, perhaps the most fundamental regards the bottom line—profits—and the strategies that urban boosters and capitalists employ to maintain them in a business world of what Heilbroner (1980) has called “anarchic rivalry” (p. 38).

Carrier Corporation’s attempt to shutter its plant in Indianapolis would have left around 1,400 factory workers jobless. At the time of the announcement, as one of my respondents (Participant 7) noted, the facility was “a staple on the west side of Indianapolis” (personal communication, 2017), and the projected move shocked and concerned many Hoosiers. But, to be sure, the prospect generated a much broader buzz as well during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, with a CNN commentator calling the Carrier story “the allegory of the [2016] campaign trail” (LoBianco, 2016, para. 1). It was the company’s intent to produce its equipment in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, where it could pay a workforce $3 an hour as opposed to $26 an hour. The controversial decision struck a nerve during the 2016 presidential primaries, with Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump often being the loudest political voices on the issue—though they interpreted the situation differently.

Willis Carrier, the inventor of “modern air-conditioning” (“Willis Carrier,” n.d., para. 1), founded Carrier Engineering Corporation in 1915. Carrier belongs to the aerospace corporation, United Technologies, in the UTC Climate, Controls & Security unit (“Carrier to Relocate,” 2016). Employing about 45,000 people today, Carrier bills itself as the “world’s leader in high-technology, heating, air-conditioning, and refrigeration solutions” (para. 1). The company has had a presence in Indianapolis for nearly 90 years, although the factory in question opened on the city’s west side in the early 1950s (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017). The plant allowed a generation of well-paid steelworkers to experience middle-class living. As one reporter states, the company “spurred economic growth in the city, especially in the area near the plant” (Turner, 2016a, para. 19). Even today, Carrier workers enjoy better pay than Indianapolis residents in other jobs not requiring a degree; about 75% of the factory’s workers earn around $26 an hour, which equals $55,000 a year, or closer to $70,000 when

2 The nickname Hoosier denotes Indianans or phenomena related to Indiana. According to Wilson (1966), the origins of the word are varied and date back to the 1800s. In 1825, for example, a Kentuckian man named Samuel Hoosier built a canal and preferred Indianans to other workers. This is one explanation.
incorporating overtime pay (Turner, 2016c). Franklin (2018) cites an employee facing a layoff who describes camaraderie at the plant as “a huge, multicultural, multigenerational family: some Democrats, some Republicans, some who never voted” (para. 6) Another said: “We were really a family” (Bethea, 2018, para. 5).

In contrast to Carrier, construction of Tesla Motors’s pridelful $5 billion Gigafactory, east of Reno and Sparks, Nevada, was not begun until 2014 (“Tesla Gigafactory,” n.d.). The company expects to employ around 6,500 people there by 2020 while becoming “a net zero energy factory upon completion” (para. 2)—to rely mostly on solar power. Company material claims that Tesla’s mission is to “accelerate the world’s transition to sustainable energy” (para. 1). The megalith is an impressive feat of engineering. At the size of 100 or so football fields, it is the largest building in the world, and it is expected to produce more lithium-ion batteries in that one location than all lithium-ion batteries produced around the world in 2013.\(^3\) In CEO Elon Musk’s words: “[T]he exit rate of [battery] cells will be faster than bullets from a machine gun” (Heisler, 2016, para. 10). Since the manufacture of batteries will be “heavily automated” (Ballaban, 2016),\(^4\) the necessity for human workers (or variable capital) in production is minimized, and at this writing Tesla plant workers are not unionized. To put this in perspective: General Motors’ Willow Run plant at the height of Fordist production took up a mile of space (Sennett, 2005) and employed upwards of 40,000 unionized workers.\(^5\) The Gigafactory, by contrast, is five times the size of Willow Run with only 16% of the workforce, and with no unionized workers outside of local construction and maintenance trades. Likewise, before the Ford Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan, closed down, it employed 100,000 mostly unionized workers, in one-fifth the size of Tesla’s desert venture (Clemens, 2012, p. 23).

\(^3\) Content appears to have been edited over time on this webpage and no longer contains some references.

\(^4\) Quote appears in the caption under the 13\(^{th}\) picture on the webpage.

\(^5\) Fordism is a postwar production paradigm marked by: mass production and consumption (Harvey, 1990, pp. 125-126); “economies of scale” (p. 177); a “spatial division of labour” (p. 178); a “homogenization of regional labour markets” (p. 178); and a “world-wide sourcing of components and sub-contractors” (p. 178), among other features.
1.2. Methods and Approach

My approach to researching these case studies was twofold: I began with an extensive review of writing and research on concepts and theories useful for framing the analysis of case study material, as well as undertaking a review of historical and sociological factors associated with the making of industrial capitalism in the U.S. Midwest and Southwest. Following this, I undertook more specific research for the case studies, involving field work and formal interviews with officials and workers in the locales I had chosen, along with a review and analysis of accounts of key events in a variety of media sources.

Major differences between the Carrier and Tesla cases required slightly different emphases in research. While I was interested in media coverage and local political reactions to layoffs at Carrier, I was particularly interested in speaking to union representatives and workers who were directly affected by company layoffs. Because the Tesla case involved the arrival of a major new industrial undertaking, I focused my research more on promotional discourses and debates in media accounts, as well as online reactions of audiences and commentaries by local officials.

In each of these locales, I sent out emails in advance to people I wanted to interview: many of the city council members in four cities; Gigafactory affiliates; union steelworkers; union construction workers; journalists; the mayor of Reno; city boosters for Indy and Huntington County; and others. As is often the case when potential respondents receive emails from someone they have never met, many of my requests were either refused or ignored. However, in the end, I was able to arrange extensive interviews with 12 individuals connected in one way or another to the events at Carrier in Indianapolis and Huntington, and Tesla/Panasonic in Reno and Sparks. Not surprisingly, civic officials were the group who were most willing to conduct a formal interview, although I was also able to arrange formal interviews with a Gigafactory technician and two United Steelworkers Local officials. However, I’m a little disappointed in the journalists I contacted. Their own job greatly hinges on interviewing people, and I expected that they would pay that forward by talking to me. But this did not pan out. In addition to interviews, I gleaned insights from participant observation, occasional casual interactions, and conversations with workers in less formal situations, such as when I helped move chairs for a Bernie Sanders jobs rally in Indianapolis.
Those willing to sit for formal interviews are identified below, listed in the chronological order I talked with them, as well as the way I refer to them throughout the dissertation. I conducted all interviews between July and August of 2017.

- **Participant 1:** Reno, Nev., City Council Member. A white woman; phone interview.
- **Participant 2:** Sparks, Nev., City Council Member. A white male; phone interview.
- **Participant 3:** Reno, City Council Member. A white male; in-person interview at his office.
- **Participant 4:** Former Gigafactory technician. A white male; in-person interview outside of a café in Reno.
- **Participant 5:** Sparks, City Council Member. A white male; in-person interview at a café in Sparks.
- **Participant 6:** Huntington, Ind., City Council Member. A white male; in-person interview at a diner in Huntington.
- **Participant 7:** Indianapolis, Ind., City-County Councillor. A white male; in-person interview outside of a café. (Note the spelling of “councillor” with two I’s, which is how Indianapolis representatives are referred to).
- **Participant 8:** USW Local 1999 official (Indianapolis). A white male; phone interview.
- **Participant 9:** Huntington educational leader. A white woman; phone interview.
- **Participant 10:** Indianapolis City-County Councillor. A Black male; phone interview.
- **Participant 11:** Huntington City Council Member. A white male; phone interview.
- **Participant 12:** USW Local 1999 official (Indianapolis). A Black male; phone interview.

To prepare for interviews I drew on the book, *Qualitative Interviewing*, by Rubin and Rubin (1995). Despite having familiarized myself with this material beforehand, it is difficult to say how effective it was during the actual interviews. When you are in the moment, you find yourself juggling a lot at once and trying to think one step ahead of your interviewee. I worried more than once about whether the audio was even registering on the recording device I was using. I also did not want to come across to my interviewee as ignorant, bothersome, opinionated, or someone who was there to dispassionately collect information for his own benefit and then disappear. Given this, while I went into interviews with a rough protocol of questions, a more organic flow got
established in the heat of the conversation that arguably arose irrespective of the tips and tricks I read ahead of time.

Because this is a dissertation in communication, I used discourse analyses of news reportage to complement my interviews and observational analysis. My goal in studying media discourse, and the online reactions to media posts, was to get a somewhat different understanding of accounts, explanations, and criticisms of issues associated with Carrier layoffs and Tesla’s move to Nevada. I looked for these accounts in both local and national media sources. I liked the idea of combining content analyses with in-depth discourse analysis—a multimethod strategy endorsed by Fairclough (1995). By combining interview material with discourse analysis I mean to insert subjective opinions into this materialist focus, with a view to revealing the constitutive role they play in reproducing or opposing dominant economic and social relations.

I drew conclusions from an array of primary data. Since my interests included urban communication and boosterism, I decided the most significant objects of analysis were articles from the Indianapolis Star, Reno Gazette-Journal (RGJ), and reader comments associated with certain stories. Peripheral data came from reader comments posted below news broadcasts available on YouTube (one from The Indy Channel and another from ABC). In Chapter 4, much of the data from discourse analyses was marshaled into explanations of who those involved with Carrier thought was to blame for factory closures. I used this data to explore and make sense of what solutions were being offered to the problem as well as where concerned individuals saw their cities in the future. While I analyzed this data qualitatively based on guidelines in Fairclough’s work, I also counted the number of times certain words appeared in a source—thus overlapping a qualitative form of media discourse analysis with a more quantitative approach to content analysis. I intended for the precise counts to act more as a general illustration of my qualitative points. This is because I am less interested in the exact numbers themselves.

There are a number of other nuances within the broader term “media discourse analysis” that I drew on. For instance, I critically read news articles from the Indianapolis Star and Reno Gazette-Journal; tried to determine what the texts were implicitly saying, categorized themes, and performed some elementary counting. I also drew from a
handful of methodological sources before conducting the research. Broadly speaking, I took much of my inspiration from the work of Fairclough’s book, *Media Discourse* (1995). I found this useful given its focus on the “representations, identities, and relations” (p. 5) endemic to news stories. In addition to such stories I also analyzed online reader comments—the contemporary equivalent of written letters to the editor.

The idea of incorporating both journalistic text and letters to the editor (i.e., the forerunners to today’s online comments) in my analysis was strongly influenced by the methods used by Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (2013) in their book, *Policing the Crisis*. This is because I tried to follow a similar strategy to theirs when building an understanding of common sense surrounding Carrier and Tesla. Including news stories and readers’ reactions to them not only allows for a more holistic account, but it evidences a dialectic between the producers and consumers of news; in the latter case, I am thinking here of a celebratory *RGJ* story that featured people’s enthusiastic tweets. Yet another book I picked up with the intention of lending legitimacy to my approach was McKee’s (2003) post-structural work, *Textual Analysis*. I cite this book in Chapters 4 and 6.

I also drew on Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter’s (2000) compendium of textual strategies, titled *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*, I was most assisted by their chapter on quantitative content analysis, and the following 1968 quote from Holsti, which states that “Content Analysis is any research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p. 57). Such “specified characteristics” (Titscher et al., 2000, p. 57), for example, would be the number of times the word “Panasonic” appeared in *RGJ* coverage on the Gigafactory between 2014 and 2016. Additional discussion of methods employed in this study is available in Appendix A.

### 1.3. Case Study Timeline

To help orient the reader to major events within the case studies described earlier, I offer the following chronology:

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6 I also concluded Chapter 6 with a reading of Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center space based on Lefebvre’s (1998) theory on the social production of space.
• **September 4, 2014**: After months of speculation, Elon Musk and Governor Brian Sandoval reach an agreement on building the Gigafactory in Nevada.

• **September 11, 2014**: The Nevada Legislature approves four Tesla bills amounting to $1.25 billion in incentives for the company.

• **January 2016**: Tesla fails to meet expected job-creation numbers.

• **February 2016**: United Technologies announces that plants in Huntington and Indianapolis will close, and that the jobs will relocate to Mexico.

• **November 2016**: President-elect Trump confirms he has reached a behind-the-scenes deal with Carrier Corporation to keep some of the jeopardized manufacturing jobs in Indianapolis.

• **July 2017**: The first round of Carrier layoffs takes place.

• **July 2017**: Tesla Motors releases its first Model 3 cars, which the batteries produced at Gigafactory 1 were partly intended for.

• **August 2017**: Good Jobs Nation, along with Bernie Sanders and former USW Local 1999 president, Chuck Jones, hosts a rally at Indianapolis’s Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument in part to postpone a round of Carrier layoffs (which were scheduled just before Christmas 2017).

• **December 2017**: The UTEC plant in Huntington closes, leaving 700 workers jobless.

• **January 2018**: The second round of Carrier layoffs takes place.

• **October 2018**: The Gigafactory ends up employing roughly 7,000 workers.  

1.4. **Project Background**

This project sits at the crossroads of several academic disciplines. Since it is concerned with socioeconomic justice and the antecedents of our current social conjuncture (Hall et al., 2013, p. x), chief among these disciplines is radical political economy. It is through such a critical lens that I will examine the American capitalist order, uneven geographical development, the fraught state of Fordist manufacturing, and class consciousness vis-à-vis the two case studies I have chosen.  

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7 Timeline inspired by Palmer’s (1994) usage in *Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry*.

8 I did not always have these case studies in mind; they came about developmentally. While visiting a friend in Reno in 2015, I learned from a conversation that the town was warmly receiving Tesla
Broadly speaking, I attempt to answer the following questions: Is the mobility of capital assisted and abetted by how officials, news consumers, and workers think about it? And if so, what shape does this acceptance of capital’s mobility—or uneven development—take? As I explain in the following chapters, such attitudes can manifest positively as common-sense support for capital and growth. In other cases, I find that negative attitudes expressed toward corporate executives fail to identify the root causes of uneven development, and are thus unable to confront it. Given this, I argue in later chapters that findings from these case studies show support for the tenacity of capitalist hegemony. My dissertation (in a de facto manner) attempts to follow Thompson’s (1984) three steps or “principal phases” (p. 10) that he recommends for the study of ideology. The first step entails a “social analysis” (p. 10.) focused on “the social-historical conditions within which agents act and interact” (pp. 10-11). The second step involves a “discursive analysis” (p. 11) and the third an “interpretation” (p. 11) that suggests how “discourse serves to sustain relations of domination” (p. 11).

There are a number of other important implications regarding the two cases explored later in this text. For instance, the Carrier announcement underscores the various racial, gendered, spatial, and economic crises that epitomize our current conjuncture across the United States. Identifying the elements that comprise the conjuncture is a lesson in taking stock of our “totality of social relations” (Mosco, 2009, p. 3) one of the four pillars of political-economic analysis. In my view, comprising the current conjuncture are such pertinent phenomena as globalization, the flexible workplace, the knowledge economy, neoliberal governance, neoliberalism’s relation to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, deregulation, ghettoization, police brutality, concentration of wealth in the top 1%, and all of the dialectical effects these conditions have on working women and men who around the planet are increasingly experiencing their subjectivities as “a class-in-itself” (Robinson, 2004, p. 43).

What I find especially interesting is the mainstreaming of racial and economic justice that took place in 2016—on account of Black Lives Matter and Bernie Sanders—and how this interacted with various strains of conservatism over the consequences of

Motors, which alluded perfectly to Palmer’s (1994) analysis of Goodyear Tires’s own arrival in Napanee, Ontario, in the late 1980s. Wanting to craft a comparative study, I was unsure of where to look next until 2016’s presidential campaigning made significant hay about Carrier’s relocation from Indianapolis to Mexico.
capitalism. For example, in a later chapter I discuss how ideologues on both the left and right, and from different class positions, interpreted the Carrier announcement differently and how they forwarded contrasting solutions. For example, Sanders supporters could look to Carrier as an embodiment of greed and something that must be rectified. With one in two Americans estimated to be living in poverty or at near-poverty (Smiley & West, 2012), and with about 100 factories closing or going bankrupt each month (Clemens, 2011), lost jobs are a real material concern for struggling people. The political right, meanwhile, could maintain another ideological premise regarding either the power of Trump to foreclose America’s bad trade deals (which is not to say that figures on the left did not also despise Clintonite policy).

The Tesla Motors case in contrast highlights the financial sacrifices regions will make to attract business and investment, such as those made by Nevada’s governor and State Legislature. Gibson and Lowes (2007) refer to such measures as “place wars,” “place marketing” (p. 4) and “urban branding” (p. 4). These measures have become essential in an age of shrinking federal funding for city budgets (Davis, 2002), “urban redevelopment” (Gibson, 2004, p. 90), and “new construction of government-subsidized housing” (Gotham, 2014, p. 147). The dearth of funds ties back to policy. Harvey (1989) notes that the federal government ramped down its redistribution of money to urban areas around 1972, under President Richard Nixon. Judd (2011) shows the same position of the following decade in quoting President Ronald Reagan’s 1981 National Urban Policy Report: “[S]tate and local governments will find it is in their best interests to concentrate on increasing their attractiveness to potential investors, residents, and visitors” (p. 248). This effectively establishes the neoliberal, competitive city and thrust of officials into roles of boosters and brand curators. Harvey (1989) comments on this change as moving from the 1960s style of “managerial” (p. 4) city leadership to a more “entrepreneurial” (p. 4) style of governance in the 1970s and 80s.

The Tesla case is notable for an additional reason. In contrast to the readily recognizable tragedy of Carrier, the Gigafactory is exciting and easily sold by its backers as positive. Analyzing a case study that on its face seems to be a good thing is important. This is because we can find fault with capitalism’s solutions even when they are ostensibly working and doing the right thing. In other words, in what ways can one apply critical theory when the status quo can rest on its laurels and point to a big job-creator? What comes to mind here is British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan’s 1957
political slogan, which went: “Never had it so Good” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 227). When Reno and Sparks got the Gigafactory next door, Nevada officials could have said the same thing. But Tesla’s presence there should not preclude a critical analysis.

1.5. Chapter Organization

The discussion that follows is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed literature review that sets up the general social, economic, and political milieu that the two case studies exist in. The chapter provides a broader, abstract description of twenty-first-century post-Fordist capitalism in an American urban context. Chapter 3 offers a historical discussion of the major trajectories of U.S. capitalism. I trace the capitalist system as it moved to America, and then historicize the two regions in question: select parts of Nevada and Indiana. I explain the effect that contemporary capitalism has had on these areas, with attention paid to the 2008 financial crisis due to officials and news media oft citing it as a cogent motivator for recent policy. The chapter closes with an assessment of the presidential politics of 2016, looking at how the state, market, news media, and labor interacted during the campaign season. Taking into consideration these broader political sentiments involving Trump, Sanders, and the working class is relevant for understanding the role of ideology in my project.

Chapters 4 through 6 begin with research questions that serve as guides throughout the text. Chapter 4 examines the responses of Indianan workers, city officials, and online commentators regarding opportunity and strategy after Carrier made the dreaded announcement that it would close and send jobs to Mexico. I make use of interview data to authentically describe the conditions on the ground in both Indianapolis and Huntington. In terms of original findings, I offer a detailed list of who or what class subjects involved in the Carrier decision think is to blame for the jobs being threatened. To do so I refer to sentiments and statements made in news articles, online reader comments, and interviews. I problematize the critical perspective from the United Steelworkers Local 1999 representatives—and others—that “corporate greed” is the culprit (which is not to say that I disagree). I also identify a distinction between the solutions offered for how to move forward; interestingly, boycotting Carrier was a predominant strategy cited among online commentators, who I imagine lack political and economic power, but not among city officials, who I imagine to have more. The latter
group instead endorsed the upskilling of the existing workforce and a better job at attracting businesses, which I also problematize for their neoliberal undertones.⁹

Chapter 5 details what happened in northern Nevada once it was chosen as the site for the massive battery plant dubbed Gigafactory 1. Here I report on and analyze sentiments I gathered from interviews, local media, and local commentary. The findings (touched on above) contribute to our understanding of the hopes and fears surrounding industrialism and the city’s fate in an America moving toward the dream of “advanced manufacturing” and tech work. I try to identify common-sense ideology related to this case, such as the idea of a “fair wage.” The media spectacle thesis advanced by Kellner acts as a lens for analyzing media hype—of which there was a lot in *Reno Gazette-Journal* reportage. One of my arguments is that Musk and Tesla commanded the media attention and spectacle, despite Panasonic investing more capital than Tesla in the Gigafactory, owning the actual battery technology, and hiring the first permanent employees. The preoccupation with promotional imagery here sets up the theme for the following chapter.

Chapter 6 appraises results from both case studies and offers a comparative reflection. A key issue here follows up the spectacle thesis and involves the clash between pro-capitalist development and its accountability, which I argue has happened in both case studies. There we find examples of what Hedges (2009) would denounce as misleading spectacles, or in his language, the “flickering shadows of celebrity culture, the spectacle… of the airwaves, the lies of advertising, [and] the endless personal dramas… that have become the staple of news…” (p. 15). I outline, for instance, a rapturous press event that U.S. President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence held in the Carrier plant in late 2016; they implied that everyone’s job at Carrier would be safe, despite some 550 workers still facing layoff. It was the responsibility of the Steelworkers Local to break the (real) bad news to employees the following day. Another incident entailing the lack of follow-up unfolded in Storey County, Nevada. The State Legislature tasked the county with keeping tabs on the Gigafactory as it was being built, which the county failed to do. Chapter 7 concludes the project; here I summarize the dissertation’s findings and propose new avenues for related research.

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⁹ Not every official enthusiastically embraced these options however.
These findings, some of which I briefly cover above, involve the consequences of class, power, and ideological dynamics in the face of capitalist spectacle and the spectacle’s lack of material follow-through. I also conclude how often only the symptoms of the capitalist mode of production were grasped in the Carrier case, and how the criticism marshaled in the Nevada State Legislature against the Tesla deal was mild and technocratic. The new voices I discuss in the conclusion, who spoke out against the siting of and incentives offered to Amazon HQ2, Foxconn, and Micron represent promising alternatives to the paradigm of growth and the neoliberal competition between cities for businesses.
Chapter 2.

The Urban, the Media, and the Social Production of Ideology

Mattelart and Mattelart (2004) argue that the field of Communication falls at “the crossroads of several disciplines” (p. 1). More specifically, the field has “aroused the interest of sciences as diverse as philosophy, history, geography, psychology, sociology… economics, political science, biology” (p. 1) and so on. Throwing open such disciplinary boundaries has strengthened Communication scholarship, allowing it to better account for the “social totality” (Mosco, 2009, p. 28)—an essential element of the radical political economy perspective that has guided research for this dissertation. The political economy of communication perspective takes its inspiration from the breadth of Marx’s research in the nineteenth century, which included syntheses of everything from history, philosophy, and literature, to political and economic analysis (Harvey, 2010). But it also draws from the spirit of the critique of oppression in Marx’s work. This chapter sets the stage for later chapters by outlining theoretical and conceptual starting points and assumptions that have influenced my work.

2.1. Radical Political Economy, Space, and the Critique of the Urban

Social science has often given lower priority to space (Schmid, 2008, p. 27) in contrast to time or to major aspects of culture and social organization. This is true even within radical traditions that focus on a critique of political economy. For example, in the case of Marxism, Katznelson (1992) argues that it “had relatively little to say about cities” (p. vii). However, beginning in the early postwar era, there was a “spatial turn” in academia. The “remarkable renaissance” (Schmid, 2008, p. 27) of interest in the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (active in the 1960s-70s), was a major contributor to this change. Lefebvre’s scholarship required understanding capitalism as having penetrated everyday life and people’s prosaic experiences of space (Merrifield, 2002, p. 79). In the past thirty years, Lefebvre’s work on spatiality has split in two directions: one pioneered primarily by Edward Soja, the other by David Harvey. The former focused on
“postmodern” (Kipfer, Goonewardena, Schmid & Milgrom, 2008, p. 3) readings of space, while the latter worked in an “urban political-economic” paradigm (p. 3). An example here would be Harvey’s (2013) surplus-absorption explanation for Paris’s cultural origin as “the city of light” (p. 8). Here he argues that the “café’s, the department stores, the fashion industry, the grand expositions all changed the urban way of life in ways that could absorb vast surpluses [generated by capital] through crass consumerism” (p. 8).

Both traditions have prompted important research, but my interest here is more in the direction followed by Harvey than Soja, particularly insofar as Harvey’s (2010) work deals extensively with social and economic patterns of “uneven development” (p. 5). According to Smith (2008), one of Harvey’s students, to historicize the term would take us back to Lenin, the first person to examine it “in any depth” (p. 5). Smith writes that “[u]neven development is the concrete manifestation of the production of space under capitalism” (pp. 122-123). For an example, one could look to countries with a colonial past, because uneven development can result in a massive, sprawling countryside broken up by a couple of gigantic “primate cities” (Gottdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 105) such as Bangkok, Thailand—with no small or mid-sized cities around. But uneven development is both varied and nuanced, requiring more detail. In his analysis of real estate, blockbusting, and redlining in Kansas City, Gotham (2014) writes that uneven development is “a multifaceted process of socio-spatial transformation involving a relentless effort by private and public actors, organizations, and agencies to transform particular regions and places into spaces of profitmaking and economic growth” (p. 1). Gotham (2014) also highlights the fact that uneven development is dialectical, for “inner cities lose population, wealth, and jobs, while suburban areas experience economic development and residential segregation” (p. 4).

The critical analysis of space in capitalist production allows us first to see it as produced, as laden with “relations of power and discipline” (Soja, as cited in Daylight, 2008, p. 5). As Schmid (2008) reminds us, space is not an empty container in which events take place, but rather a “(social) product” (p. 28). In Lefebvre’s (1998) view, all spaces are subject to a “conceptual triad” (p. 33), which means that space is at once “perceived” (p. 38) by society’s needs, “conceived” (p. 38) by planners and experts, and “lived” (p. 39) by “inhabitants” (p. 39). In summarizing this argument, Mosco (2009) emphasizes that space exists in dialectical relation with the people encountering it, influencing them and becoming influenced by them. In radical political economy, much of
the debate on space has been about the way space has become commodified, and how unevenly commodified spaces are experienced and represented (Harvey, 1989).

The extension of capitalist logic into different spaces and how these spaces are remade, represented, and experienced figures prominently in a number of studies that have influenced research for this dissertation. Examples include Blomley’s (2004) attention to disputes over the meaning of land use and property rights in Vancouver; Dandaneau’s (1996) study of three vestigial ideologies in the wake of deindustrialization in Flint, Michigan; Gibson’s (2004) study on pro-development forces hoping to ban services for the poor in a gentrified Seattle neighborhood; Gotham’s (2014) analysis of Kansas City’s real estate boards and their plan to stoke racial antagonism to inflate home values; Mitchell’s (2004) look at foreign capital and xenophobia in Vancouver after Expo 86, as the city began reinventing itself as a Pacific Rim “gateway” (p. 43); and Palmer’s (1994) analysis of Goodyear Tires’s descent on Napanee, Ontario.

Other notable examples include Davis’s (2006a) pioneering study of both Los Angeles and nearby Fontana, an area that experienced three major economic instantiations over time (as orange grove, steel mill, and suburban property market). In the course of my research, I also examined Davis’s (2006b) analysis of worldwide slum production; Davis and Monk’s (2007) edited volume of global case studies reporting on special economic zones, building booms, and “Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism” tailored to the superrich, such as the amenities of Dubai; Hedges and Sacco’s (2013) brutally honest tour of impoverished locales around the U.S., from a destitute Dakotan reservation to the poorest city in the nation: Camden, New Jersey; Tracy’s (2014) account of neoliberal policies, gentrification, and insufficient public housing in San Francisco; and Gruneau and Horne’s (2015) edited volume on the conceit of cities to promote “mega-events” (p. 10) to the detriment of urban life and the poor.

All of this work foregrounds the way capital organizes space in repressive ways, while noting the realities and voices of subordinated urban groups that often do not find their way into mainstream communication channels. Most of these studies also expose the myriad ways that the nexus of developers, corporations, neoliberal leadership, and financial institutions come to disempower those groups—a process which makes its mark on the landscape. This could manifest as the blasted moonscape of coal country that Hedges witnessed by helicopter, the orange trees that Fontana’s steel mill killed off
during wartime production, or the dearth of affordable housing in San Francisco at the arrival of Web 2.0 startups.

In my view, the most compelling of the critical studies noted above are those that offer historical analyses of the changing political-economic features and experiences of urban spaces. Ollman (2001) writes that “[f]or Marx, man’s senses only bring him into contact with appearances” (p. 87), whereas only “lengthy investigation and study” (p. 87) can discover the “essence of any thing” (p. 87). The more important essence of an object is “the major relations out of which it is composed” (p. 87.). Identifying the historical make-up of a place is to get a step closer to penetrating essence as opposed to accepting its surface appearance. And this is in fact what Marx succeeded in doing for the history of capitalism itself, discovering through “socioanalysis” (Heilbroner, 1980, p. 17), “an unsuspected level of reality beneath the surface of history” (pp. 16-17).

Historical analysis provides the critical scholar of material life with conceptual tools to challenge dominant ideological fantasies. One of the most notable applications of this in Marx’s writing appears in Part VIII of Capital: “The So-Called Primitive Accumulation.” In this section, Marx (1967) mockingly characterizes bourgeois philosophy, which posits that “[i]n times long gone by there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent, and… frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance… in riotous living” (p. 713). The consequence here is that the former would rightly come to enjoy wealth while the latter had “nothing to sell except their own skins” (p. 713.). What Adam Smith and the Political Economists had ignored was England’s historical reality of “conquest, enslavement, robbery, [and] murder” (p. 714) which first handed capitalists their economic power, and which found “agricultural people… forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system” (p. 737).

Of the work cited thus far, Davis’s (2006a) City of Quartz stands out for me as a particularly exemplary study. Davis examines “the contradictory impact of economic globalization upon different segments of Los Angeles society” (p. vi) and how it is unevenly experienced. His analysis includes different manifestations of both capital and racial divisions, such as urban “market forces” (p. 23); downtown growth politics; developers; homeowners’ associations; nimbyism; gang violence; police overreach;
immigration; “ethnic family capitalism” (p. 104); “power elites” (p. 105); surveillance architecture; and “Lakewoodism”—a scheme concocted by white wealthy sectors in L.A. County to incorporate, avoid property taxes, shut out Black residents from their neighborhoods, and discourage renting, among other things (p. 168). He also defines the blocs of powerful intellectuals responsible for the cultural shape of the city. There are technically four of these blocs, which he classifies as “the Boosters, the Noirs, the Mercenaries” (p. 22), and “the Exiles” (p. 22). A Booster would be an early University of Southern California president who had white-supremacist hopes in mind for the city; Exiles would be Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* there during World War II, and who, according to Davis, saw in L.A. “the crystal ball of capitalism’s future” (p. 48).

Toward the end of the book, Davis (2006a) recounts the evolution of an “affordable suburb” outside of L.A., in Fontana, stating, “If violent instability in local landscape and culture is taken to be constitutive of Southern California’s peculiar social ontology, then Fontana epitomizes the region” (p. 376). One of the important lessons here is that the history of a place is never fully eradicated, despite, as Davis says, postmodern claims of a “depthless present” (p. 376.). Fontana has seen two major transformations since its origin as a site of orange groves and poultry ranches in the early twentieth century. At the advent of World War II, industrial magnate Henry Kaiser built a steel mill there in 1943 to supply the war effort, attracted by various natural qualities of the landscape. The mill was greeted with much fanfare at its opening, with an odd cadre of movie stars and military bigwigs in attendance. However, it became immediately clear that the promises intimated by Kaiser regarding the boon the mill would be for the region were false—for both environmental and tax reasons. As Davis laments, pollution caused local farmers to pick their last grapefruits in late 1942. When Japanese factories ultimately outperformed Kaiser Steel, Fontana declined. This would remain the pattern until its revitalization under the Reagan era as a viable suburban real estate market, despite lacking the necessary tax implementation to support what suburbs need to thrive (p. 425).

It is exactly this promise from CEOs or top municipal brass to residents—that private market forces are in their best interest—that I wish to consider in this dissertation in respect to the Carrier plant in Indianapolis and Huntington, and the Tesla Gigafactory’s arrival in Nevada. Sometimes corporate promises *do* pan out profitably for
decades, as in the case of the combined Subaru-Isuzu plant in Lafayette, Ind., built in 1988 but expected to add jobs and investment into 2017 (Ketzenberger, 2015). Privately-owned factories arguably still leave themselves open for criticism over worker alienation and the exploitative extraction of surplus-value.¹ That these promises often crumble and translate into dire consequences for struggling people is why I am fascinated both by their seeming believability and their pervasiveness in urban regions.

Capitalist fanfare and celebration play a particularly important role in Palmer’s (1994) record of a “corporate settler” (p. 35) arriving in the small town of Napanee, Ontario, in the late 1980s. He recounts the lengths various players in the region went to in order to ensure Goodyear would agree to build a plant there. Some of the company’s promotional efforts and statements made by mayors, developers, an industry minister, high-school principal, and clerk-administrator proved to be excessive, to say the least, and many promises went unfulfilled, particularly if one uses the metric of actual jobs created. For instance, 2,500 job applications inundated the Canada Employment and Immigration Office for Goodyear positions, despite there being a mere 400 openings (p. 66). What’s worse, the “bulk” (p. 136) of those ultimately employed did not live in Napanee anyway.

An early observation of Palmer’s (1994) points to the contradiction of the Goodyear timeline in Napanee: the company received wall-to-wall coverage and attention in the early stages, culminating in a grand festival of “corporate familialism” (p. 119), and yet this was belied by the fact that the edifice itself was built out of the way, hidden, “not really meant to be seen” (p. 11). What happened in between evinces the desperation that “countryside” (p. 16) towns face after experiencing deindustrialization and rising unemployment.

After first offering a background on the familial ethos of Goodyear, Palmer (1994) discusses the inclination of Napanee’s mayor to ensure the company’s agreement to build—especially as he had been sour on the idea that Toronto acts as a magnet for jobs (p. 33). A recurring argument was centered around job creation, and particularly job

¹ Shapiro (2008) makes clear Marx’s discoveries in Capital, such as solving the “puzzle of profit” (2008, p. 61). It comes not from buyers cheating sellers, because the bourgeois class “taken as a whole, cannot defraud itself” (Marx, as cited in Shapiro, p. 61). Rather, profit stems from surplus-value (i.e., exploitation), linked to capitalists paying workers below the “value of her or his labour-power” (p. 67).
creation for posterity’s sake. The population of Napanee was projected to increase exponentially with the tire plant acting as an anchor for other businesses and housing development. Editorials in the Napanee Beaver, the local community paper, helped whip up support for the company, as did the Napanee District Secondary School’s student council, its principal, guidance counsellor, and technical director. The latter took place at the most sensitive part of the timeline—December 1987—when it was unclear whether Goodyear would choose the city. It was the same month that a family farm initially precluded Goodyear from acquiring the property it needed for its complex; when the Milligans refused to sell for $800,000, Palmer writes that “the full weight of local officialdom was mobilized” (p. 37). Ultimately these factions won out, but as Palmer describes, the victory was little more than a mixed success.

Most importantly for the analysis I develop in later chapters, Palmer (1994) writes that his “purpose is to present a moment of contemporary history as it was visualized by (or, perhaps, presented to) those who lived it, and then to ‘read’ that vision against its constructed purposes” (p. 17). Palmer’s strategy, as well as that of Davis, is to provide a material position from which to gauge the opinions and assessments made by my interview participants. I adopt a similar strategy, although this is tricky. I say this because, as Eagleton (1994a) writes, a “turmoil of competing creeds” (p. 192) twisting about in our society can lead to “philosophical scepticism and relativism” (p. 192) and the notion that “no single way of thinking can claim more validity than any other” (p. 192). Still, in my view, there can be no adequate starting point for critical analysis outside of the lived material conditions that affect people’s lives, livelihoods, and identities.

2.2. Urban Communication and Spectacle

Gibson and Lowes (2007) characterize urban communication as “a growing community of urban studies and communication scholars who... [explore] the crucial intersections between critical theory, cultural studies, and contemporary urban political economy” (pp. 4-5). They add that typical objects of analysis are “how urban revitalization and promotional strategies are forged, circulated, lived, and contested within the contemporary urban landscape” (p. 5). Their edited volume on the subject provides a number of concrete examples, from Gibson’s (2007) look at the semiotics of Washington D.C.’s urban branding, to Vincent Mosco’s (2007) historical analysis of the
World Trade Center—which “was built to establish Lower Manhattan as the capital of a post-industrial America and the icon of a world economy increasingly based on the production, distribution and exchange of data, information, and knowledge” (p. 199). Again, it is in the best interest of cash-strapped cities to market themselves and play up—in the words of the Reagan urban report—their “attractiveness” (Judd, 2011, p. 248). Place marketing, the promotional “representational” uses of space, to use Lefebvre’s terminology, is thus one of the most significant features of urban communication.

The point is, urban boosters in various public or private positions typically promote the entrepreneurial success of cities in positive and often exaggerated ways. In the 1980s, for example, L.A. branded itself as a “world city” (Davis, as cited Gibson, 2004, p. 49). In the 1990s, Seattle billed itself as a “digital Paris” (Gibson, 2004, p. 1). New Orleans advances a “hedonistic” (p. 266) brand, and Orlando “trades on family fun” (p. 266). Austin, Texas, and San Francisco meanwhile enjoy the label of “creative” (Hannigan, 2007, p. 68) cities. But, to be sure, negative connotations haunt city semiotics too. The nickname of “Sin City” (Kristof, 1985) has made things difficult for Las Vegas. Reno, as noted, sometimes catches stigma for being a “[d]ownmarket Vegas” (Hull, 2015). But regardless of the specific signifier, whether positive or negative, urban branding leads to what Rubenstein (2015) refers to as a distinctive “sense of place” (p. 16). This is similarly reflected in Hodgetts, Drew, Sonn, Stolte, Nikora, and Curtis’s (2010) book on social psychology. There the authors state that places are “bounded locales imbued with personal, social, and cultural meanings… [and] provide a significant framework in which identity is constructed, maintained, and transformed” (p. 156).

Such dimensions of place play a particularly significant role in Gibson’s (2004) book, Securing the Spectacular City. Gibson looks at two cases of gentrification that were occurring in downtown Seattle in the 1990s, and he identifies the exact “metaphors and narratives” (p. 124) marshaled in the service of the renovations—and in the service of those resisting the changes. One of these discursive tactics was the “organic city trope” (p. 131) employed by the Citizens to Restore Our Retail Core (CRORC), which held that urban space was a “living but fragile entity” (p. 131). Gibson writes that this comports with a finding of Lakoff and Johnson’s: due to the metaphorical nature of “human linguistic systems” (p. 134) they say, concepts turn into “entities” (p. 134) which allows “speakers to concretely grasp the abstract as concrete” (p. 134).
Gibson (2004) writes that cities undergo “spectacular revitalization” (p. 49) in various ways. He describes Seattle’s “spectacular retail-cultural urban revitalization” (p. 258) priced at $1.4 billion, stating that in the process of creating this spectacle “city leaders have embraced a very narrow and one-dimensional definition of what exactly constitutes a ‘healthy’ or ‘vital’ city” (p. 9). One of Gibson’s scholarly sources is David Harvey, who refers to the “mobilization of spectacle” (p. 48) that cities employ for tourism and the sake of business. Indeed, Harvey (1990) writes that spectacles align with deeper changes in the political economy, namely the shift from a Fordist to post-Fordist one and the shift to consumption of more and more services over goods (p. 285). As noted above, cities are at the same time run entrepreneurially in comparison to how they were in the past (Harvey, 1989). In Gruneau and Home’s (2015) edited volume, *Mega-Events and Globalization*, Compton makes a compelling argument that “global sporting spectacles” (p. 49) link to the need of capitalism to “accelerate the processes of production, circulation, and consumption” (p. 49). Broudehoux in the same book describes how the “spectacularization of the urban landscape” (p. 118) leads to “physical” (p. 118), “legal” (p. 118), and “visual” (p. 118) exclusions in the forms of “forced evictions” (p. 118), “concealment” (p. 118), “disciplining” (p. 118), and “symbolic erasure” (p. 118).

In other words, these and other scholars are more than aware that the glitz of the spectacle covers up the reality experienced by vulnerable people. This is true whether its Seattle’s homeless (Gibson, 2004) or the 1.25 million Beijing residents evicted before the 2008 Olympics (Broudehoux, 2015). Urban boosterism and place marketing are thus interwoven with the politics of spectacle.

In recent years, Kellner has emerged as one of the most contemporary theorists of spectacle, through such works as *Media Spectacle* (2003) and *American Nightmare* (2016). Kellner (2003) argues that media spectacles are meant to “seize audiences and increase the media’s power and profit” (p. 1). Significant social and cultural spectacles that Kellner analyzes include the phenomenon of McDonald’s global popularity, the O.J. Simpson trial, and Michael Jordan’s illustrious career—which, he argues, emerged as “the US passion play” (p. 64), evincing “the quintessential capitalist ideal of competition and winning” (p. 64). Taking cues from the mid-twentieth century French social theorist, Guy Debord, Kellner argues that the spectacle equals “pacification and depoliticization”
In terms of recent politics, Kellner (2016) writes in *American Nightmare* that Donald Trump’s popularity, like Barack Obama’s and Ronald Reagan’s (p. 4) before it, is tied to command over “*media spectacle*” (p. 1). Indeed, Kellner argues, Trump’s victory was only made possible by the power that media spectacle has now acquired in politics (pp. 4-5). One of these spectacles took place in the media coverage of Trump’s arrival by private jet and helicopter to the 2016 Republican National Convention in Cleveland, with Kellner comparing it to Hitler’s Nuremberg descent in *Triumph of the Will* (p. 45). Donald Trump figures prominently in later chapters, but the concept of spectacle and its analysis, drawing on some of Kellner’s ideas, will prove especially important in my later discussion of Elon Musk and the arrival of the Tesla battery Gigafactory in Nevada.

### 2.3. The Political Economy of News Media

This subject is important to note here because media certainly have “[*]he power to influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations, [and] social identities” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 2). And this extends to the idea that local media shape opinions and positions on development and the job market too. While the political economy of media is not a centerpiece of the project, it warrants discussion, because commercial media operate in a realm where, according to Dallas Smythe’s thesis, audiences are “sold as a commodity to advertisers” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 86). This makes them vulnerable to pressures and limits arising from the contours of capitalist social relations, often with notable ideological effect. Murdock and Golding (2005) point out that cultural studies focused on identity and personal meaning are certainly important, but insufficient for a complete understanding. Mosco (2009) provides a useful outline of the other half required for a more developed political-economic analysis.

Mosco (2009) defines political economy as “*the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources*” (p. 2). Following a point made by Fairclough (1995, p. 5), I will argue in a later chapter, for example, that media coverage of Tesla Motors’s move to Nevada largely assumed a taken for granted
relation between journalists and an intended audience of investors or stock watchers. In this relation, the reader/viewer tended to be positioned as an economically self-interested consumer, even if she or he has no interest in finance. To contextualize and analyze this sort of reader/viewer positioning, Mosco (2009) goes on to add that four elements constitute political economic research: “history, the social totality, moral philosophy, and praxis” (p. 3). I try to address all four of these elements in the chapters that follow, though not necessarily in equal measure. Here I am particularly concerned with examining the ways changing social relations shape media influences in ways that influence, and produce contradictions in, ideology.

On this point, Murdock and Golding (2005) note that political economy maintains a concern with economics dictating social discourse by promoting particular aspects of culture. There is a parallel in Fuchs’s (2014) work that provides a useful illustration here. He juxtaposes Fox News and Democracy Now! and their respective views on Occupy Wall Street, noting that the former news outlet is the 156th most viewed website, while the latter is the 17,369th (p. 342). Consequently, the right-wing network “has the power to reach more viewers in one day than a citizen journalist’s clip reaches on YouTube during a year” (p. 343). This means “that the right-wing comments and manipulated videos that Fox News showed about Occupy reached a broader viewing” (p. 343). The economic powerhouse has the capacity to show more viewers more pro-business content.

These sorts of considerations lead to a question explored in later chapters: what kind of ideological and cultural assumptions are promoted in local media in Indianapolis and Reno, and what “economic dynamics” would explain why? To gain understanding we need to consider what factors constitute the material constraints of the typical local news outlet. According to Firmstone’s (2016) study on media in Leeds, United Kingdom, local news production faces “[f]ragmenting and declining audiences, resource cut backs in… most notably newspapers, increased competition, and the requirement to communicate news 24 hours a day via a multitude of platforms” (p. 929) although the author adds that the “narrative of crisis” (p. 929) regarding journalism is misleading. Studying German cities, Leupold, Klinger, and Jarren (2016) concur, writing that local journalism suffers from “dwindling readership, media concentration, and economic crisis” (p. 960). Questions that will come up vis-à-vis the Reno Gazette-Journal and Indianapolis Star in my own study will address these kinds of constraints, along with the papers’ inclination towards regional boosterism.
The type of themes one would expect to encounter in privately-owned local media would include something like the following: The virtues of entrepreneurialism and capitalism; the values of liberal pluralism; the illusion of freedom; the virtual erasure of racial politics; and local boosterism. And research on local media bears some of this out. Castelló (2010) for example found that a majority of local news articles on the petrochemical industry in Spain were “framed positively” (p. 463). The positive stories approximated almost 74% of the coverage, although Castelló writes that nearly one out of four stories having a negative slant—typically about “pollution and environmental damage” (p. 472)—is not negligible (p. 471). Gurun and Butler (2012) affirm that “[w]hen local media report news about local companies, they use fewer negative words compared to the same media reporting about nonlocal companies” (p. 561). This prompts them to attribute the role of media in this context as “cheerleaders” (p. 562) as opposed to “watchdogs” (p. 562). They put forth three explanations of varying empirical support for why local news outlets may do this, which they refer to as the “catering hypothesis, the constrained reporting hypothesis, and the advertising hypothesis” (p. 562).

The catering hypothesis suggests that local media publish fewer negative articles because the readership prefers positivity; in fact, some people among the very readership may be employees of local companies being reported on. The constrained reporting hypothesis entails journalists using press releases as opposed to original reporting, which could be the result of “constrained budgets for investigating and reporting critically on companies” (Gurun & Butler, 2012, p. 562). The strongest explanation for the authors’ findings is the advertising hypothesis, which suggests that “positive slant about local companies is... positively related to the local advertising budgets of those companies” (p. 563). This would accord with Herman and Chomsky’s (2002) five “filters” (p. 2) they argue constrain the production of news, particularly the imperative for reportage to foment a “buying mood” (p. 17) by placating advertisers and running apolitical content.

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2 In this sense I refer to Theodor Adorno’s note on the “non-identity of thought and reality” (Eagleton, 1994a, p. 201). As Eagleton writes of Adorno’s claim about freedom, “To suppose that the idea of freedom is identical with the poor travesty of it available in the capitalist marketplace is to fail to see that this object does not live up to its concept” (p. 201).
Other notable research findings about local journalism include the news audience in a northeastern US state that expects the news to be more of a “good neighbor” (p. 111) than a “watchdog” (p. 111), which would mean more emphasis on “caring about [their] community, [and] highlighting interesting people” (Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, as cited in McCollough, Crowell, & Napoli, 2017, p. 111). It may be important to keep in mind as well that newspapers are not exactly monolithic capitalist mouthpieces at the ready for Corporate America. Rennhoff and Wilbur (2012) write that “the entry of a newspaper into a local market increased voter turnout” (p. 232) and that it is radio and television—not newspapers—that tend to ratchet up media consumers’ fears regarding crime.

2.4. Policing the Crisis and Discourse Analysis

These comments on local news point to the significance of discourse or textual analysis. Hall et al.’s (2013) Policing the Crisis, originally published in the 1970s, is highly relevant here. Policing the Crisis is a celebrated work from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies that borrows from Marx, Gramsci, and Louis Althusser. While broaching sociology, criminology, and “the novel for its time” (Dworkin, 1997, p. 116) cultural studies, it covers the tangle of news media, the state, crime, capital, ideology, and race in the wake of a mugging in 1970s Britain. The book makes hegemonic discourses intelligible by way of demystifying the cogent forces of capital and the state. It argues that, through consent, Britain had maintained hegemonic dominance up to this time, which entailed a “ruling class alliance… [that] protect[ed] and extend[ed] the needs of capital, [led] authoritatively in the civil and ideological spheres, and command[ed] the restraining forces of the coercive apparatuses of the state in its defence” (Hall et al., 2013, pp. xiii-xiv). But in the 1970s, Britain experienced a crisis in this consensual form of governance and necessarily implemented a coercive form.

The authors begin their analysis at a specific historical moment, or what some scholars in the Marxian tradition call a “conjuncture.” This is a moment rife with

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3 The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was initially affiliated with an English department in the 1960s, and its “original goal was to use the methods of literary criticism to understand popular and mass culture and to develop criteria for critically evaluating specific texts” (Dworkin, 1997, p. 116).
contradiction, comprised of socially-determined historical accretions, and representative of a shift (Davis, 2006a; Hall et al., 2013). Conjunctural analysis traces back to *Capital* where Marx’s socioanalysis begins with the peculiar commodity—a dually abstract and concrete unity of value and use value that underscored the much greater instability of capital (Jhally, 2014). The conjuncture for Davis (2006a) in *City of Quartz* included the twentieth-century factors that made Los Angeles the embattled global city it is today. The conjuncture for Hall et al. (2013) was the harsh sentence handed down in the wake of a Black-on-white crime in the poor Handsworth neighborhood of Birmingham (Jhally, 2014). Henceforth, the methodological technique for these authors is to peel back the layers that occasioned the conjuncture, or in Hall et al.’s (2013) words, it “deploys a type of periodisation” (p. xv). I will return to what it is these authors are periodizing later on. I recognize the importance of conjunctural analysis and wish to ground my dissertation in this fashion.

After zeroing in on the Handsworth mugging, *Policing the Crisis* goes on to argue that the panic following the crime evinces “the general ‘crisis of hegemony’” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 2) in the country, of which racism and xenophobia were symptoms. Other symptoms included anxieties around the following: postwar affluent youth cultures; West Indian immigration; and the British perception that the dominant culture was becoming relativistic and permissive. Furthermore, there existed a fear around the perceived moral collapse of America—a country Britain viewed as an embodiment of its own potential and dismal future (p. 24). But what’s important methodologically is that the authors’ data on Britons’ “lay’ attitudes” (p. xiii) came from analyzing the press: editorials, news stories, official statements, and letters to the editor. I argue that it’s chiefly important to interpret these sorts of news media in the cases of Carrier, UTEC, and Tesla. A look at online reader comments posted below editorials and stories is also important. My goal is to identify iterations of common-sense thinking vis-à-vis Carrier and Tesla, such as that found in *Policing the Crisis*, which is then supplemented by interview data.

Arguing along somewhat similar lines, Fairclough (1995) writes that studying media texts can lead us to understand the “*representations, identities, and relations*” (p. 5) embedded in news stories. More specifically, he says we should be asking: “How is the world… represented?” (p. 5). “What identities are set up for those involved in the programme or story (reporters, audiences, ‘third parties’ referred to or interviewed)?” (p. 5). And “What relationships are set up between those involved (e.g. reporter-audience,
expert-audience or politician-audience relationships)?” (p. 5). His work provided a useful framework for my own analyses of local media conducted in later chapters.

2.5. Work, Social Class, and Labor Cultures

Social class is a dauntingly multifaceted subject, with conflicting interpretations and different traditions for approaching it. As Wright (1985) states: even within Marxism, “there is hardly a consensus among Marxists as to what constitutes the general Marxist theory of class relations” (p. 27). It is simply not possible to review this literature in any detail here without risking an extensive digression. However, I believe it useful to briefly discuss understandings of class both as a “social position” (Wallace & Wolf, 1999, p. 5) and a “relationship” (Thompson, 1963, p. 11), as well as the shifting dynamics of American class and labor in a period that has variously been labelled postindustrial, postmodern, or post-Fordist.

These terms describing work and society are variously said to include a number of features: the rise of labor considered to be “contingent” (Greenwald, 2012, p. 112) or “flexible” (Benner, 2002, p. x); the rise of internships; the greater inclusion of women into flexible job markets (Webster, 2006, p. 81); the erasure of union membership in major companies such as Wal-Mart (Ehrenreich, 2001, p. 145; Lichtenstein, 2012, p. 272); the decline of manufacturing jobs, such as the 4 million lost in the U.S. since 1999 (Clemens, 2012, p. 7); the “International Division of Digital Labor” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 5) comprised of mineral-mining slaves in Africa, assemblers in Shenzhen, China, call centers in India, and Google workers in Silicon Valley (pp. 288-293); the “globalization of production and finance” (Sassen, 2001, p. 35); and the exertion of “mental labour for capital accumulation” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 140), as described by Antonio Negri’s “cognitive capitalism” (p. 140), Franco Berardi’s “semio-capitalism” (p. 140), and Hardt and Negri’s “immaterial labor” theses (p. 140). This is the holistic backdrop in my study of the Gigafactory and Carrier plant.

Such differences of opinion extend into the very meaning of the concept of class. For example, class can mean power for some (Sennett & Cobb, 1973, p. 76), and for others it can mean income (Edgell, 1993). Mainstream sociologists often see class simply as a means of classification, say by income, occupation, or education. Others
argue that class is a complex set of shifting relations that can only be understood historically (Thompson, 1963). Marxism is perhaps the most famous perspective on class analysis. Indeed, Edgell (1993) argues that “Marx was responsible for the first and one of the most important sociological theories of class” (p. 2), adding that the theory argues that “two great hostile camps” (Marx & Engels, as cited in Edgell, p. 2) exist in capitalist society in a fundamentally asymmetric and exploitative manner. Due to capitalist society’s “economic relations” (p. 3) predicated on “private property” (p. 3) the bourgeoisie owns the means of production, and the proletariat has no option other than to sell its labor-power to survive. Mainstream sociology has tended to categorize Marxism as a “conflict theory” (Wallace & Wolf, 1999, p. 9) which means it is “deductive” (p. 9), “[p]redictable” (p. 11), takes a “[m]acro” (p. 11) approach to societal relations, and interprets people as motivated by their “[i]nterests” (p. 11) not by “[v]alues” (p. 11). But there is also a strain of historical Marxist theorizing that provides a more localized and historicized focus, not only on macro structural conflicts, but also on shifting class solidarities and modes of class cooperation. Even here though, in the Marxian tradition, conflict provides much of the narrative arc of history, a “motor of social change” (Edgell, 1993, p. 4). Indeed, as Marx and Engels (1994) declared famously, “The history of all hitherto existing society… is the history of class struggles” (p. 158).

It is important to note here that class for Marx was far more complicated than a category that merely denoted the two main capitalist classes—bourgeoisie and proletariat. Marx understood there are numerous class fractions among these as well as within the “middle classes” (Edgell, 1993, p. 9) (e.g., journalists, church figures, academics, lawyers, military higher-ups). In the 1920s, Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci recognized the need for a more complex and dynamic analysis, and he demonstrated the complexity of Italian labor and how it variously included industrial workers in the North, farmworkers in the south, and drew from different ethno-cultural groupings, from Lombards to Sardinians. Moreover, from the 1960s through the 1990s, there has been a strong tradition of labor historians who draw on the legacy of E.P. Thompson, such as Bryan Palmer, who have emphasized the dynamic character—the shifting character of social class relations in capitalist societies, including the making and unmaking of class formations.

In contrast, the doyen of statistical class analysis, Wright (1985) states that in Marx’s analysis “non-polarized positions are occasionally referred to… [but] are never
given a rigorous theoretical status and are generally treated as having strictly peripheral importance" (p. 7). Believing Marxism to be too theoretical, Wright has sought to “expand the basic Marxian dichotomous class model to include” (Edgell, 1993, p. 17) other categories, a point that most Marxian labor historians arguably take as obvious. Still there is some utility in Wright’s statistical analyses. Focusing on the “modern workforce” (Wallace & Wolf, 1999, p. 90) for example, he finds that “only about 1 or 2 percent” (p. 90) constitute the bourgeoisie and that around half of all workers fit into “‘contradictory’ class locations” (p. 90): managers, “semiautonomous employees” (p. 90), and the “small employers… with ‘minimal’ control over labor” (p. 90). About 40 percent of the workforce is “working class” (Wright, 1985, p. 194), judging by the studies Wright did of the U.S. and Sweden. This conclusion comes as no surprise to Marxists who view class primarily in respect to the buying and selling of human labor power, where the sellers of labor power in exchange for a wage inevitably outnumber those in a position to buy it. This resonates with Le Blanc’s (2011) view, for example, that “the working class” (p. 2) is comprised of “(those who sell their ability to work for a paycheck, and those who are directly dependent on that paycheck) [and] is the majority of people in the United States” (p. 2).

Because my project is not meant to question these categories, I do not want to get sidetracked by debates about how to define class within the Marxian tradition, let alone explore how understandings of class by writers such as Max Weber, Anthony Giddens, or neo-Weberians contrast or compare (e.g., Edgell, 1993, pp. 16-37). What may be more helpful to me is to glean from writers as varied as Palmer, Davis, Wright and others some insights about the phenomenology of labor and class consciousness as these pertain to issues of lifeworld, intersubjectivity, and common sense. It will be useful to consider how the sentiments of workers at the UTC-owned plants in Indiana, for instance, stem primarily from common class experience—a definition proposed by E.P. Thompson (Le Blanc, 2011, p. 11)⁴—or if they are fractured or contoured by other factors. In a broad view, in the Marxist tradition, there seems to be agreement on the

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⁴ Le Blanc (2011) quotes Thompson’s *Customs in Common*: “Class happens when some men [and women], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which… [people] are born—or enter involuntarily. Class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms” (p. 11).
argument that there are degrees of correspondence between consciousness and class. This is true even in Wright’s (1985) survey data, which contained prompts for survey-takers to evaluate—such as “Corporations benefit owners at the expense of workers and consumers” (p. 278)—and indeed suggest that the “underlying structure of class relations shapes the overall pattern of class consciousness” (p. 278).

There are also numerous texts that seek to explain working-class sentiments and labor cultures, such as Thompson’s (1963) classic analysis of The Making of the English Working Class and well-known works undertaken in the Birmingham School of cultural ethnography associated with writers such as Richard Hoggart and Paul Willis (Smith, 2006, p. liii). However, this tradition has an even deeper lineage in working class and labor history, arguably beginning with Engels’s (1952) journalistic account in The Condition of the Working-class in England in 1844. In the words of Engels (1952):

I wanted more than a mere abstract knowledge of my subject; I wanted… to observe you in your everyday life, to chat with you on your condition and grievances, to witness your struggles against the social and political power of your oppressors (p. xx).

Merrifield (2002) in fact comments on this strategy, saying that “Engels was smart enough to realize that the actual firsthand observation was politically and intellectually indispensable” (p. 33). Of Engels’s (1952) findings are: the term “social murder” (p. 25) which workers accuse the “whole society” (p. 25) of waging by letting people die of starvation; that almost all 350,000 workers in Manchester live in “filthy cottages” (p. 63); that the working-man’s education results in “quiet obedience, passivity, and resignation to his fate” (p. 239).

In the twentieth century, there have been many studies of the changing nature of work and its effects on solidarities and fissures in class consciousness, the most notable of which is arguably Braverman’s (1974) classic study of “the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century” in Labor and Monopoly Capital. These studies have revealed various degrees of resigned or passive workers, with some focusing more on the ideological incorporation of workers and others highlighting workers’ resistance and opposition; these works include Aronowitz’s (1973) False Promises, Edwards’s (1979) Contested Terrain, and Burawoy’s 1979 book, Manufacturing Consent (Leidner, 2001). Among more recent studies, Clemens (2012) writes about the coexistence of pro- and anti-union workers in Detroit, saying they “can be as difficult to distinguish… as Shia and Sunni” (p. 32).
Katz (2012) adds an additional dimension when he discusses the history of racial tensions in the labor movement, and the ideological construction on the part of “conservatively charged sources like the New York Post, Howard Stern, and Fox News, reinforced informally by family members and the culture on the job” (p. 38). Sennett and Cobb (1973) also offer nuanced accounts of workingmen’s attitudes in The Hidden Injuries of Class, such as workers’ paradoxical views of educated people, whom they believe can and do “cheat” (p. 22) given their status.

2.6. Ideology

Questions of class consciousness, class solidarity, compliance, opposition, and resistance inevitably connect to questions of ideology. Williams (1994) defines ideology in the Marxian sense in three ways: as “a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group” (p. 175); as “a system of illusory beliefs” (p. 175) which can be dispelled through “true or scientific knowledge” (p. 175); and as “the general process of the production of meanings and ideas” (p. 175). An important manifestation of ideology derives from Marx and Engels’s famous argument in The German Ideology and later in the “Communist Manifesto,” which posits that “[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (Marx & Engels, 1989, p. 62). This is attributed to the ruling class’s ownership of both the means of material production and the means of “mental production” (p. 62). It would stand to reason that media owned by profit-seeking capitalists would not typically champion defenses of communism.

As laid out by Marx early in Capital and reiterated by the Hungarian pioneer of Western Marxism, Gyorgy Lukacs—commodity fetishism is central to the ideological mystification in capitalist society, as is Lukacs’s enemy, “reification,” which “fragments and dislocates our social experience” (Eagleton, 1994a, p. 181) and keeps the bourgeoisie from “grasp[ing] the structure of the social formation as a whole” (p. 181). Berman (1988) describes the commodity fetish as “a mystique that disguises the intersubjective relations between men in a market society as purely physical” (p. 116). The commodities we see on a daily basis seemingly have the power to interact with other commodities of their own volition, even though it is human beings interacting with other human beings through the market. What’s more, workers become fixated “on the acquisition of commodities as an end in itself rather than on their usefulness” (Edgell,
So it is important to see ideology in capitalist society as a mystification of some sort, or in Marx’s words, “illusions of the epoch” (Merrifield, 2002, p. 159) in the interest of the capitalist class. An example here would be the capitalist illusion of freedom, which we still see touted today in mainstream political discourse (p. 159). As Harvey (2010) writes in his exegesis on Capital, freedom is “a fetishistic illusion” (p. 42). This is because “[u]nder capitalism, individuals surrender to the discipline of abstract forces… that effectively govern their relations and choices” (p. 42). To be sure, however, the Marxian notion of ideology has been expounded on and problematized since Marx’s time in ways germane to my project.

Marx and Engels’ theory as regards ideology has experienced dogmatically economistic readings over time, such as in the hands of V.I. Lenin—who “vehemently defended” (Hawkes, 2003, p. 107) the notion that the “material world… causes the mental activity” (p. 107) of the subject. Antonio Gramsci argued for a less reductionist view by insisting that ideology is only one facet of the larger paradigm of “hegemony.” Hegemony refers to “the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates” (Eagleton, 1994a, p. 195). That governing power, for Gramsci, is a more complex construct than the traditional Marxian conception of a class that rules by virtue of its ability to own and control the material means of production. Further, for Gramsci, hegemony involves ideology “but is not reducible to it” (p. 196). Gramsci saw cultural forms and influences, such as ethnic nationalism, as often having an independent role in hegemonic struggles. The struggle to articulate and define “common sense” was often a key aspect of such struggles.

Gramsci developed his observations in Italy during the early 1920s when the proletarian revolution never came, and certain groups of workers were drawn to fascist political parties instead, “despite the fact that the ‘objective’, material conditions for its success had been in place” (Hawkes, 2003, p. 113). The thinking he pioneered in this area relates the idea that ruling classes provide a core fraction within a hegemonic

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5 Mosco (2009) also offers a distinction between ideology and hegemony, calling the latter “more valuable… because it is not simply imposed by class power, but constituted organically out of the dynamic geometries of power embedded in social relations and social organizations throughout society” (p. 206).

6 Although Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is also useful to consider, which is defined as “the inculcation in men and women of a set of durable dispositions which generate particular practices” (Eagleton, 1994a, pp. 222-223).
“historical bloc” (Sassoon, 1982a, p. 14),7 and that ruling classes “ha[ve] to represent more than [their] narrow corporate interests” (Sassoon, 1982b, p. 10). This would necessarily mean that the ruling class when influencing other groups must make “certain compromises with them in order to gain their consent” (p. 13). Gramsci’s argument in support of hegemony is compelling for my work, because it challenges a “cultural dupe” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 61) approach to ideology, which cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg has accused political economists of erroneously abiding by. In this interpretation we might see ideology as obfuscating people’s “real interests” (Wallace & Wolf, 1999, p. 87), meaning “they have been deceived” (p. 71) and “suffer from false consciousness” (p. 87). This is not to say that underclass members always understand their situations accurately or act in their best interests, only that the struggle for hegemony and counter hegemony suggests that ideology is always contingent in some way.

This perspective is evident in Cairns’s (2015) findings on the reactions to neoliberalism among Canadian university students—a study that has also informed my research design in this dissertation. Cairns broaches a question that critical thinkers from Theodor Adorno to Barbara Ehrenreich have grappled with in one way or another, which essentially is: Why do the mass of people consent to their own domination? Ehrenreich (2001), after embedding herself as a waitress, maid, and Wal-Mart associate for a journalistic experiment, asked in her subsequent book, for instance: “Why does anybody put up with the wages we’re paid?” (p. 178). The same point is echoed early on in Cairns’s (2015) article when he writes that “masses of people whose lives are made worse by the inequities of capitalism consent to the system, enabling its vitality through their ongoing participation in it (p. 125).

There is a twist here, however, in that people no longer express the “trust and optimism” (Cairns, 2015, p. 125) characteristic of the postwar era. This was a time when an “orthodox consensus” (Hall, as cited in Zhao, 1993, p. 70) organized social science and class conflict was “normatively regulated” (Giddens, as cited in Zhao, 1993, p. 70). By contrast, those exploited by capital today express a sort of “disaffected consent” (Cairns, 2015, p. 125). Thus the relationship that young people have to neoliberalism

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7 Sassoon (1982a) defines the “Historical bloc” (p. 14) as “the complex way in which classes and factions of classes are related in society and the complicated relationship between economic, political and cultural aspects of reality” (p. 14).
and the “austerity agenda” (p. 125) can be made more complex, for austerity is simultaneously accepted into “common sense” (p. 125) and opposed at the same time.

Hall et al. (2013) utilize a similar term when describing the British working-class attitude towards “the very wealthy, or those who live on unearned incomes… or about the unequal distribution of wealth” (p. 141). Like Cairns’ (2015) “disaffected consent” (p. 125), Hall et al. (2013) call it “pragmatic acceptance” (p. 141), which indicates that despite the existence of great disparity in wealth, there remains a sense “that there is something intrinsically wrong and exploitative about it” (p. 141). This ideological conflict is in fact reflected in Cairns’s (2015) own interview data. He writes, for instance, that although university students shared a “taken-for-granted sense that responsibility for improving living conditions” is up to “individuals” (p. 127), there is a “widely” (p. 129) shared sentiment that “life is tough and getting tougher because of state and private-sector policies driven by the needs of profitmaking enterprises” (pp. 129-130). The common sense elicited by students was in their assessment that they themselves must “develop strategies for adapting to the brutalities of austerity” (p. 132).

So what does “common sense” thinking mean for the Gramscian? Gramsci (1988) describes this as a view of reality that is “fragmentary” (p. 343) and “like folklore… takes countless different forms” (p. 343). Indeed, Sassoon (1982a) writes that this feature of our social world denotes “[t]he incoherent and at times contradictory set of assumptions and beliefs held by the mass of the population at any one time” (p. 13). Harvey (2005) likewise states that “[c]ommon sense is constructed out of long-standing practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional or national traditions” (p. 39). The danger that common sense poses from a revolutionary standpoint is that, combined with “bourgeois self-interest” (Smith, 2006, p. lii) it strengthens the “hegemony of the capitalist class” (p. lii). This occurs when workers accept “the inevitability of capitalism… [and] resign themselves to endless wage labor” (p. lii).

Just as “lengthy investigation” exposes historical truths for Ollman (2001)—and Marx—Harvey (2005) adds that Marxian “good sense” (p. 39) dispels common sense through “critical engagement with the issues of the day” (p. 39). So what a sizable part of my research was thus designed to discover is the relation of common sense to geographical uneven development. Who do employees and elected officials experiencing the “runaway factory” (Robinson, 2004, p. 7) blame for job loss? Do they in
fact express “disaffected consent” and “pragmatic acceptance,” wise to the fact that capitalism itself is inherently exploitative no matter how many well-meaning liberals tinker with its excesses or authoritarian demagogues muscle CEOs to the bargaining table? Or are their frustrations directed elsewhere? There were many contradictory responses that I explore in Chapters 4 and 5.

On the subject of ideology and contradiction arises a question about poor conservatives in red-state America—a more specific manifestation of the question above: Why do people consent to their own domination? So the question now becomes: Why would struggling Carrier workers support the billionaire Trump for president, or related antiunion positions for that matter? There has been a spate of recent research on the background of this subject that discusses similar ideological phenomena in politics. Frank’s (2005) What’s the Matter with Kansas?, for example, is about a state containing the poorest county in America that also happened to vote 80% for George W. Bush in 2000 (p. 1). Frank goes on to discuss the “backlash imagination” (p. 13) that sees the country in a warlike state between “the unpretentious millions of authentic Americans” (p. 13) and “bookish, all-powerful liberals who run the country but are contemptuous of the tastes and beliefs of the people who inhabit it” (p. 13).

Another useful source, albeit from a more conservative position, is Vance’s (2016) recent autobiographical account of his upbringing in poverty between Kentucky and Ohio, where he expresses that “irrational” (p. 146) behavior such as buying too-expensive homes and electronics contributes to people’s poor subjectivity. Other insights include Vance’s grandfather adopting a pro-worker position yet voting for Reagan in 1984, because he believed Walter Mondale was a “son of a bitch’…. well-educated Northern liberal” (p. 47). Still another useful resource for red-state thinking comes from my home state of Wisconsin in the form of Cramer’s (2016) The Politics of Resentment. Like Ehrenreich’s question, she too asks why “in times of increasing economic inequality, have the preferences of the lowest-income voters moved in a conservative, rather than liberal, direction?” (p. 5). This is indeed becoming a vexing question. Among Cramer’s findings are that Wisconsin’s rural folks disparage city folks because they feel ignored, and that city residents absorb rural money while dismissing life outside urban areas. These sources will reappear in later chapters.
The object of this chapter was to review the pertinent literature I think is necessary to understand the events surrounding the Carrier and Tesla cases. It has borrowed from a broad swath of theory; critical political economy serves as the key approach I borrow from, and in particular its application to matters such as spatiality, communication, and ideology. The following chapter will continue to take cues from political economy by historicizing the regions of Indiana and northern Nevada while foregrounding the material and productive changes that have taken place there over roughly the last 200 years.
Chapter 3.

Capitalism in Rust Lands, and Dust Lands

By Rust Lands and Dust Lands, I simply mean an evocative and material way of denoting Indiana (the Rust Belt) and northern Nevada (the desert). The reader may wonder why, of all places, these two comprise the major focus of the dissertation in the first place. Why not two other locales? To some extent the choice of case studies was serendipitous. I had inadvertently heard of Tesla’s move to the U.S. Southwest in the summer of 2015 while visiting a friend in Reno. Tesla seemed to be a great fit for my research interests, as the fanfare surrounding the Gigafactory reminded me somewhat of the activities of Napanee residents that so interested me in Palmer’s (1994) excellent book, Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry. While the Tesla decision was somewhat organic, I struggled to find a case that represented an opposite pole in uneven development until Carrier made international news the following year.

The goal of this chapter is to provide historical context to the two localities I have chosen to research. It begins with a brief discussion of the historical trajectory of capitalism in North America and then moves to a more detailed consideration of capitalism’s role in the making of economic, political, and social life in Indiana/Indianapolis and northern Nevada. Indianapolis and Huntington represent the Rust Belt, the semiotics of which connotes traditional centralized manufacturing, deindustrialization, and decline. In contrast, Reno and Sparks represent the sunny Southwest, where many businesses migrate for the loose regulations, low unionization, and low taxation (Davis, 2002; Harvey, 2005).\(^1\) The selection of these two places provides a comparative snapshot of regions that fit a significant classification in the study of political economy. The selection can also represent a panoramic map of capitalism’s mobility; as major opportunities drop away, new ones appear elsewhere. The two regions also feature unanticipated similarities. Both Indiana and Nevada developed as crossroads—places where goods must pass through (or be warehoused) on their transit elsewhere. Indiana’s branding heralds the state as “The Crossroads of America” (Gray, 

\(^1\) Although, to be fair, Reno is more west than south, given its close proximity to San Francisco and significant distance from Los Angeles.
coined in 1937. For Nevada, the “elsewhere” that goods usually ended up is California—a state Nevadans have long had a contentious relationship with.

3.1. The Origins of Western Capitalist Social Relations

There is an extensive literature, featuring debates, about the decline of European feudalism and the origins of capitalism (Brenner, 1977; Comninel, 2000; Hilton et al., 1976). I see little point in going over this very well tilled ground now. It is useful, however, to sketch out a few dynamics of capitalist growth in Europe and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a prelude to a more specific discussion of Indiana and Nevada. In this regard, I have been particularly influenced by Moore’s (1968) description of how English manorial lords in the sixteenth century began fancying the profit to be had in selling wool or renting their land to others involved in that trade (p. 9). The commercial activity resulted in the expropriation of peasants from common lands and the establishment of enclosures (pp. 12-13). Because the land was converted into “sheep walks” (Mandel, 1971, p. 35) for wool production, author of Utopia, Thomas More (lived 1478-1535), described the arrangement as “Sheep hav[ing] eaten men.” Marx (1967) discusses the displacements of English peasants in the first volume of Capital, Part VIII, which he terms the “so-called primitive accumulation.” The process entailed the “forcible usurpation” (p. 724) of “common property” (p. 724) and ultimately led to “the original creation of the classes of capitalist society through the imposition of work and commodity exchange” (Cleaver, 1979, p. 75).

In the contemporaneous legislative context, Wordie (1983) writes that the wealthy had parliament to assist them in the enclosure endeavor, which would oversee 5,265 acts toward this cause (p. 487). He notes that, by 1760, England had enclosed about 75% of its land, and that the efforts would continue until the early twentieth century (p. 486). Also occurring politically were a series of “bourgeois” (Ilyin & Motylev, 1986, p. 178) revolutions in England and elsewhere that facilitated the rise of the capitalist class over the old order. Shapiro (2008) notes that the end of Capital reveals the “primitive accumulation” (p. 159) “secret” (p. 159) of capitalism’s violent origins, thus torpedoing the bourgeois political economists’ explanation that some people in society were thrifty and industrious, leading to their economic supremacy.
Meanwhile, something had to happen to a displaced peasantry stripped of its traditional livelihood, and who either abandoned the feudal estates due to their “over-exploitation” (Sweezy, 1976, p. 37) or who found the enclosures barring them from places they were once free to access. Without question, the emerging industrial society did not show much sympathy to the newly ordained proletariat. Coerced or lured into the developing cities, the industrial working class would come to experience the anxiety, pain, and tumult of the modern era, of which urbanization, industrialization, isolation, fragmentation, and “chaotic change” (Harvey, 1990, p. 11) were commonplace.² From the perspective of capital, the proletarians were subject to disciplinary tactics in order to shape them into a viable workforce—one that could maintain efficacy during a 12-hour workday, which Britain had originally mandated in 1349 (Harvey, 2010, p. 147). These tactics involved the lash and the stocks (Harvey, 2010), the clock and the bell (Harvey, 1990, p. 228), and, by at least 1700, the “time-sheet, the time-keeper, the informers and the fines” (Thompson, 1967, p. 82).

Some of these expropriated European peasants, along with African slaves, ended up on boats bound for the New World. As a result, they became involved in the Atlantic colonial projects of the early 1600s, which Linebaugh and Rediker (2013) say comprised “expropriation, the struggle for alternative ways of life, patterns of cooperation and resistance, and the imposition of class discipline” (p. 15). Workers in the eastern coastal colonies of the New World suffered unenviable fates as “hewers of wood and drawers of water” (p. 41), meaning that they cut down forests, drained swamps, raised hedges, and by virtue of this, destroyed “the commoning habitus” (p. 43) of early America. In the Caribbean, and Southern colonies in the U.S., enslaved workers in particular were disciplined by the lashes of their overseers as they worked in fields producing sugar and cotton. Linebaugh and Rediker note how history was unkind to these workers, because they toiled largely anonymously despite their monumental labors (p. 42).

Such monumental labors conducted in the interests of capitalist production and trade were the object of both “praise” (Berman, 1988, p. 92) and expert criticism by

² Palmer (2000) writes that the number of proletarians in Europe reached about 200 million (p. 236).
Marx, who lived circa 1818-1883. In Marx and Engels’s (1994) “Manifesto” (written in 1848) we read early on of the bourgeoisie’s successful and airy visions: They have “created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together” (p. 163), such as the “Subjection of Nature’s forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, [and] whole populations conjured out of the ground” (p. 163). Marx’s lifespan is significant because the nineteenth century witnessed not only the creation of a global working class, but also the “phenomenal rise of the city” (Palmer, 2000, p. 236) (in places such as Paris and New York City) and the rapid growth of North American “settler economies” (p. 236).

During the 1800s in the United States we can imagine what capitalist development, improvement, and creative destruction must have looked like as it moved inexorably westward across the Plains. We can do so particularly with the help of Brown (2000), who writes from the perspective of the Native American confronting modernity: “Omaha… was a beehive of white people, and Chicago… was terrifying with its noise and confusion and buildings that seemed to reach the sky. The white men were as thick and numerous and aimless as grasshoppers” (p. 182). He adds that the Cheyenne in 1868 saw “that the Plains were changing, filling up with railroads and fences and buildings everywhere” (pp. 333-334).

Enclosure, exploitation, displacement, genocide—these projects of destruction in the interest of accumulation defined capitalist advancement across the American West, sometimes leading to direct confrontations with Indigenous peoples, other times with workers affiliated with organizations influenced by Marxism and the international workers’ associations that were forming in Europe. In the late nineteenth-century U.S., the Industrial Workers of the World is arguably the best example. The construction of roads, living spaces, factories, and the transformation of the desert into exposed mining operations and boomtowns, were all material consequences of the capitalist project Marx and Engels identified in their day: the widespread, virtual enslavement of aboriginal peoples (Marx, 1967) and their nations’ coercion, “on pain of extinction, [into]… the

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3 Berman (1988) cites Marx, who said that bourgeois members have “been the first to show what man’s activity can bring about” (p. 92).
bourgeois mode of production” (Marx & Engels, 1994, p. 162); the commodification of human labor power more generally (Harvey, 2010); the universalization of the commodity form into other areas, such as space (Harvey, 1990, p. 254) and time (Harvey, 2010, p. 142); the relentless quest for free trade and the means to circulate and regulate capital quickly and more effectively (Marx & Engels, 1994), akin to what Marx called “value in motion” (Harvey, 1990, p. 107).

3.2. Rust, Race, Rubber, Resentment: Historicizing Capital in Indiana

Indiana’s European-American history begins with French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle and later intersects dramatically with the American Civil War—a sacrifice recorded in limestone upon the impressive Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument in Indianapolis. It then continues through the Midwest’s industrial crises and Indianapolis’s hi-tech posturing of today. Through most of the twentieth century Indiana was depicted as part of the Rust Belt (whether this is an ignoble status will be discussed in Chapter 6), but there is much more to the State’s history than this designation suggests.

For example, Indianapolis hosts a Black community unique among Midwestern cities, to be discussed shortly. Indianapolis also organized the Speedway to compete with Detroit’s auto supremacy and to lay claim as a site for staging spectacular entertainment. Hoosiers further maintain a preternatural fixation on basketball (Pierce, 2005); and, lastly, the state hosts the demographic group often seen as key to Donald Trump’s victory at the polls in the 2016 U.S. presidential election—a resentful white working class who felt alienated by “corrupt” (Allen & Parnes, 2017, p. 178) leaders advancing the interests of people of color. On this last point, Davis (2017a) claims that

4 Harvey (2010) quotes Marx’s comment that “Moments are the elements of profit” (p. 142) and adds “Capitalists do not simply buy a worker’s labor-power for twelve hours; they have to make sure every moment of those hours is used at maximum intensity” (p. 142).

5 The Speedway hosts the famous auto racing event known as the Indianapolis 500; Zirin (2008) comments that auto racing grew in popularity in the 1990s and attracts predominantly white male fans.

6 Pierce (2005) writes: “Why basketball means so much to Indiana residents remains unclear, but the game has become central to the identity of many of the state’s residents” (p. 11).
the white-working-class demographic group is of fading political importance, and that the future belongs to “working-class and immigrant” (p. 7) graduates, with the chances for transformation lying with Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. But for now, Davis’s prognosis still seems somewhat distant. In that regard, I think it important to try to capture the political, demographic, and class realities of contemporary politics in their current incarnations.

Involved in the early ethos of the state were pioneer ruggedness, the exploits of intrepid explorers, and the crassly opportunistic manipulation of “Indian” tribes for loyalty against a competing power. Indiana derives its name from this collectivity of Indigenous groups, including the Delawares, Kickapoos, Miamis, Shawnees, and Weas (Wilson, 1966, p. 26). These were of course the first peoples occupying the space whom the whites displaced; the displacement was to such a large degree that in the mid-1960s only around 4,000 persons of Native American descent still lived in the state (p. 14). I will revisit this issue below in regard to Nevada and Manifest Destiny, but it is important to keep in mind that across the entire country, by 1900, 2 million Native Americans “were reduced, through slaughter, starvation, and disease, to less than a quarter million people” (Hedges & Sacco, 2013, p. 11), and that Washington DC annexed 3 billion acres of Indigenous land (p. 13).

The land grab in Indiana was certainly stunning. The first European man to lay eyes on Indianan land in the winter of 1669-1670, de La Salle, wrote the following back to the French king (Wilson, 1966, p. 41): “They are almost so beautiful and fertile, so sparsely covered with forest and so well adorned by prairies, streams, rivers, fish, game, and venison that one can find there… everything necessary for the maintenance of powerful colonies” (p. 43). de La Salle was thus a talented booster, for historian Wilson writes that “[n]o perfervid Hoosier Chamber of Commerce has since excelled him in praise of the Indiana scene” (p. 43).

The French later built the first settled area in Indiana at Vincennes in 1732, which is today situated in the southwestern corner of the state (Wilson, 1966, p. 13). Of course, the land did not yet compose an American state and would pass through various claims by empires and various iterations of names. During the American Revolution, the Vincennes military post was the site of an unlikely coup by a ragtag American band in
Indiana Territory was then formed in 1800, with Vincennes as its capital (p. 13). Modern-day Indiana later achieved statehood in December of 1816 (Gray, 1994, p. xiii).

Coincidentally, this was the same year that Abraham Lincoln’s father, Thomas, single-handedly blazed his way from Kentucky through the Indiana wilderness to build a new home for his family. The elder Lincoln’s solo trek bespeaks the desperate condition of the rugged pioneer (to be expounded on later in the case of Nevada). He cut “his way through the undergrowth of sumac, dogwood, and grapevines, which were matted so thick that the ax or the knife slipping from his hands might easily have been lost in them” (Wilson, 1966, p. 154). Wilson adds that Lincoln relied on “instinct for direction instead of a compass, which he lacked, or the fall of shadows, which did not exist in a forest where all was shadow, or the guidance of stars, which were hard to distinguish through the… branches” (p. 154). Wilson writes that this dramatic quest was “more or less typical” (p. 153) of the lives of the 64,000 Indianans living there in 1816, as forest clearing and modest farming were common.

More importantly, Wilson also discusses early settler subsistence and town life that was a long way from the consumer-goods economy of the following century. “[M]ost of the early pioneers,” Wilson (1966) says, “made or grew almost everything they used” (p. 159). The two main options for living spaces were in isolation, like the Lincoln’s cabin, circled in the darkness by panthers and wolves (p. 155), or in small towns, where Wilson states life was sometimes worse than life on farms (p. 160), since trash would pile up until a strong enough rain came through, there were no sewers, muddy streets could be a hindrance, and animals milled about wherever they pleased (p. 160). An additional but often unattainable option was living luxuriously like William Henry Harrison did, the governor of Indiana Territory and later U.S president (p. 161). Harrison built the first brick house in the region, Grouseland, at Vincennes, which still stands (“History,” n.d.). Another uncommon way to get by was amidst the faux-utopian colony of industrialist dreamer Robert Owen at New Harmony, Indiana. In 1825, after Owen established the

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7 This was a successful raid conducted by George Rogers Clark, age 26, along with 70 “Kentucky woodsmen” (Wilson, 1966, p. 53) and 60 “French allies” (p. 53) across “[t]wo hundred and forty miles of flooded land” (p. 52) to the fort at Vincennes. Leaving in early February from Kaskaskia, Illinois, it took them 19 days of strenuous hiking (p. 55), sometimes in “shoulder-high” (p. 54) water, and at one point with only a single deer to feed all 130 men.
working-class living experiment at New Lanark, Scotland, he purchased the land and existing buildings at the locale. The spot on the Wabash River had already been cultivated and supplied with infrastructure by a German religious sect known as the Harmonists. Owen’s open call for residency drew around 1,000 people interested in living the “socialist millennium” (Wilson, 1966, p. 70) though the town would experience ups and downs as well as Owen’s eventual loss of interest.⁸

3.3. Internal Development, the Civil War, and Industrialization

One of the icons of modern development listed in the “Communist Manifesto” is the canal (Marx & Engels, 1994, p. 163), the massive earth-moving project that instrumentalizes the waterway, facilitating boat traffic to move easily between ports and bodies of water elsewhere in the region. In keeping with other modes of transportation construction, including railways and gravel or paved roads, the canal assists the bourgeoisie in moving commodities and realizing surplus value. One cannot glance at Indiana’s history without acknowledging the central place of the canal, either in General Assembly members’ heads or in the material practice gruelingly carried out by private industry. Not only were there legislative pushes for canals to be built, but Indiana along with Ohio and Illinois considered the importance of clearing out existing rivers of “sandbars, snags, sawyers, planters, and towheads” (Wilson, 1966, p. 167).

Wilson (1966) writes that before the advent of railroads, rivers were the typical means of transportation in the state (p. 163). One problematic area however was the Falls of the Ohio, “a drop of twenty-three feet in three miles” (p. 166) on the Ohio River, located between Indiana and Louisville, Kentucky. In 1817, state assemblymen allocated stock for the Ohio Canal Company to address the problem by building a canal, but funds dried up after a ditch of over two miles was dug (p. 167). The solution would not be found until “private promoters” (p. 167) from Louisville finished a canal in Kentucky in 1829. In 1836, the Indiana General Assembly passed the Mammoth Internal Improvement Bill, budgeted at $10 million for canals, a railroad, a turnpike, the surveys of land for new construction, and the removal of obstacles in the Wabash River. Again,

⁸ Socialist hero, Eugene Debs, who famously ran for president from a cell, was also born a Hoosier.
this titanic project, predating the “Manifesto” by 12 years, certainly evinces what Marx and Engels had in mind when describing modern developments undertaken for the sake of capital. Nicknamed the “system” (p. 174) the fruits of the bill did not extend beyond two out of the eight overall proposed projects. One of the two was the extension of the Wabash and Erie Canal to 468 miles by 1853, making it the longest canal in the country (p. 174). This canal would contribute to the growth of the county that hosts Huntington, the other city central to my case study (Wickersham, 2008, p. 1). While the fixation on canals delayed Indiana’s full embrace of the railroad (Wilson, 1966, p. 184), about 100 years later Indiana would have “the sixth largest concentration of railroad lines” (pp. 188-189) in the country as well as “more interstate highways than any other state of comparable size” (p. 190).

Another significant event brewing on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River was the secession of the South. Indiana had never permitted slavery and would side with the Union when the Civil War began; Kentucky was a different story. At the same time, Indiana has long maintained not only a “folksy, rural image” (Gray, 1994, p. xiii) but also a “southern orientation” (p. xiii), especially, as one would guess, in the southern part of the state. In fact, most Indianans in the mid-1800s were of “Southern ancestry” (Wilson, 1966, p. 136) or still claimed family down there. Yet many emigrants out of the South left those states precisely because they disagreed with the institution of slavery (p. 107). Indiana continued to host Democratic politicians unfriendly to Lincoln, as well as a population of “Copperheads” (i.e., northerners sympathetic to the Confederacy).

Incidentally, the Civil War, as well as Marx’s views on it, make selecting Indiana for a Marxian inspired case study particularly appropriate. Marx was employed as a journalist for the New York Tribune and Vienna’s Die Presse during the early 1860s, although, ironically, it was the war itself that would cause Marx to be let go as a contributing writer for the Tribune (Schraffenberger, 2011). The paper shed all of its European correspondents by March of 1862 because the fight to hold the United States together warranted so much attention (Schraffenberger, 2011). Marx’s employment aside, he shared the feeling with Engels that the Civil War was “a revolution that ended slavery and destroyed the slave-owners’ power as a class” (para. 1). Southern states had become economically empowered by selling cotton to England, thus supplying the extant Industrial Revolution and booming textile market. Pro-slavery politicians in Congress were keeping the institution lawful, and many poor Southern whites supported
slavery despite it conflicting with their apparent class interests. This was because, as Marx said, the poor folk thought they could one day own and profit from slaves too, according to Schraffenberger’s article. An important distinction needs to be made that, while neither Marx nor Engels believed the war would result in a revolution for socialism, they nonetheless thought that “it advanced the cause of all workers, both white and Black, by destroying chattel slavery” (para. 3). A workers’ revolution, in their view, would come later. As Marx wrote in Capital, “The first fruit of the American Civil War was the eight hours’ agitation” (para. 3).

In the meantime, Indiana assumed a unique role during the Civil War for several reasons. Perhaps most important was the fact that Indiana was second in the “percentage of men of military age who served in the Union army” (Wilson, 1966, p. 148). Delaware was technically number 1, but looking at the comparison (74.8% to 74.3%), the states were basically tied (p. 148). Of the 129 regiments, cavalry, light artillery and heavy artillery soldiers from Indiana, the war claimed over 7,000 Hoosiers due to combat and over 17,000 due to disease (p. 147). Indiana also contributed to the war effort by way of agriculture, in particular the raising of corn, wheat, and pigs, which made the state “a principal source of food for the Federal army” (p. 138). The state historically produced a lot of corn and raised a lot of hogs, ranking in the country’s top three producers along with Illinois and Iowa (p. 9).

By the later nineteenth century, Indiana would become a leading industrial state based on this “diversified agricultural crop and livestock production” (Gray, 1994, p. xiv) but also due to a massive natural gas discovery in the state in the 1880s. Northern cities in Indiana became the sites of massive steel factories (p. xiv). Until the end of WWII, southern Indiana’s economy consisted largely of agriculture, coal, and limestone mining, but would soon welcome factories for Whirlpool, General Motors, General Electric, and Otis Elevator (Varga, 2013, p. 432). In the early twentieth century, dozens of towns across the state began producing their own automobile models with a focus on quality (Wilson, 1966, p. 195). Indianapolis for example was building the Stutz Bearcat and Duesenberg (Pierce, 2005, p. 87). Indy in fact became the “heart of the automobile industry in the nation” before losing that title in 1937 to Detroit manufacturers who

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9 Located in paragraph second from bottom.
10 At least at the time of Wilson’s (1966) writing.
capitalized on mass production (Wilson, 1966, p. 195). By the mid 1960s, Indiana’s major industries included steel mills, “primary metal products” (p. 191) machinery, and gear for transportation. This was the same period that Carrier and Rexnord established their large factories in Indianapolis.

3.4. Indianapolis Race Relations, Unigov, and Hoosier Fordism

Indianapolis was plotted out in the center of the state in 1824 for the express purpose of serving as the new capital city (Wilson, 1966, p. 97). The site was more accommodating to Hoosiers occupying northern parts of the state than the existing capital at Corydon, which is tucked away down by the Kentucky border (p. 168). A quirk in the state’s history is that not only did Hoosiers’ penchant for canal building delay the adoption of railroads, but the railroads expected by Governor James Ray to help the state (p. 170)—and by Indy’s “promoters” (Pierce, 2005, p. 87) to propel Indianapolis into the economic stratosphere—ended up being less important than highways.

Further to the promotion theme, Indianapolis would end up generating a surplus of nicknames: The Gracious Lady of the Midwest, Monument City, Home of the 500, the Crossroads of America, Naptown, Indy (Kalp, 1970, p. 5), and “the city of homes” (Pierce, 2005, p. 59). It went through a few publicity campaigns launched by city boosters as well, such as the “greatest inland city in America” (p. 10) and the “great manufacturing city of the country” (p. 10). According to one poetic commentator, the city would also come to straddle a few different geographical affects: “Always your own, your odor was partly coal-soot and snowy nights, And lilacs blooming surely… None of these being entirely Western, or Eastern Seaboard or Deep South, but always you – Midland purely” (Eads, 1970, p. 61). The Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Edna St. Vincent Millay had a different place in mind on a visit to the city, exclaiming that the statues at Monument Circle reminded her of Paris (Howard, 1970, p. 8).

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11 The other town I consider for the case study is Huntington, Ind., nicknamed “The Lime City” (Wickersham, 2008, p. 1) for the limestone quarried in the area. The county Huntington occupies was named for Samuel Huntington, signatory to the Declaration of Independence and president of the Continental Congress (p. 1). The city resulted from the smaller towns of Drovertown, Ubee, and Huntington merging. It is still a small city with less than 20,000 people today.
Pierce (2005) notes that this “sleepy burg in the middle of nowhere” (p. 10) started out struggling economically because a lot of the agricultural trade went through Cincinnati and Chicago, and because Indy lacked access to a major waterway. It was not until the Civil War that Indy began to develop and urbanize in a “profound” (p. 10) way. Soldiers and supplies began deploying to the city, facilitated by the flat landscape; said one individual at the time: The number of railroads here “will increase to fifteen before the end of the year” (p. 10). Pierce adds that at the close of the war, a good number of soldiers who had seen Indianapolis returned and called it home. At the same time, “farmers and industrialists saw the economic advantages of a centrally located city with a vast railroad network that could easily transport their goods anywhere in the country” (p. 10).

Race in Indianapolis is a factor I want to foreground here, not only because it is impossible to talk about the city’s growth without referencing the subordination of “Indians” as part of the process of “settling” the area and building its industry, but also because of the condition of African Americans in the city. In this regard, Pierce (2005) writes that African Americans in Indy faced the same segregation in “spatial, economic, social, and political structures of the city” (p. 11) as Black residents of Chicago, Detroit, and New York City did. He also says that the inequalities they faced in housing, employment, and education would be “familiar to students of African American urban history” (p. 9). Certainly this rings true for me in thinking about Camden, New Jersey (Hedges & Sacco, 2013), Kansas City, Missouri (Gotham, 2014), and my own earlier writing on Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Pierce (2005) mentions the “White Supremacy Dead Line” (p. 59) at 27th Street—beyond which Black residents were unable to rent or buy houses—in the same way Gotham (2014) describes Troost Avenue in Kansas City (p. 24). On the subject of streets, Pierce (2005) further details how the laying of interstates I-465 and I-65 disrupted the Black community established along the “Avenoo” (p. 82) or Indiana Avenue, from 1960 to the mid 1970s. As is typical in stories of white flight, the highways facilitated access from the newly established suburbs to the business sector in downtown Indy (p. 82).12

12 The highway plays a key role in the inception of modernity, from Georges Eugene Haussmann smashing through Paris’s old slums to build boulevards for Napoleon III in the 1860s (Berman, 1988, p. 150), to Robert Moses carving through New York City to build the Cross-Bronx Expressway
At the same time, the Black experience in Indy differed in comparison to many other northern cities. African Americans have lived in Indianapolis since the city’s founding, and Pierce (2005) argues that a dialectic long existed between the city itself and its Black population (p. 2). In 1827, 55 African Americans lived in Indy; by 1900, that number rose to 15,931, or 9.4% of the city’s population (p. 3). This means that Indy’s significant Black population predated the Great Migration and the Black population booms of “the World War eras” that other Northern cities experienced (p. 3).

Historicizing race in relation to the Carrier plant is important because in the early twentieth century, the U.S. Commerce Department found that working in iron and steel was one of three occupations in which African Americans had greater representation than white workers in Indianapolis; this was true even though many more whites belonged to the overall workforce than Black workers (Pierce, 2005, p. 86). Production of steel in Indianapolis has long intersected with Black experience in the city and this nuance of the local area requires special attention. For example, when Black and white Carrier workers—both men and women—appear in local news photos, the decision to offshore jobs arguably stings one community harder than the other. This would be true not only economically but, through Unigov [see below] politically as well.

Indy’s inner-city Black population was rising in the mid-twentieth century as white families moved out to the suburbs. By 1960, 130,000 African Americans lived in the city, composing 27% of the population, and this was expected to rise to 40% by 1970 (Pierce, 2005, p. 120). Enter a plot by Indianapolis mayor and later U.S. senator, Dick Lugar, packaged as Unified Government, or Unigov, which was sold on the pretense of efficiency and cost (p. 52). The plan was implemented under questionably democratic means, as no referendum was held and the opinion poll conducted beforehand restricted who could participate (p. 115). What the plan did was merge the city and county under one centralized form of governance, which meant that white and mostly Republican residents of the suburbs could vote for Indy city officials. This simultaneously dropped the growing Black electoral power in the city to a level not seen since 1945, with the Black population now comprising only 18% (p. 120). Another consideration for Republican lawmakers during white flight was to continue generating a lucrative tax base for Indianapolis so as to “undertake the expensive urban renewal” (p. 114) required to

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in the twentieth century (p. 291). In these cases the result is displacement of vulnerable people for the sake of improving business.
draw new ostensibly higher status residents and businesses to the city. This pretense towards boosterism (the communicative, imaginary, and economic) will emerge as a main theme of my project.

A notable instance of Indianapolis boosters attracting corporations occurred around the same time that President Reagan’s *National Urban Policy Report* advised state governments to make themselves appealing—to market themselves—to outside businesses and tourists (Judd, 2011, p. 248). Indiana governor, Robert Orr, had begun wooing Asian companies to invest in the state after the 1981-1982 recession had hit Indiana’s auto manufacturers hard, and it was Governor John Mutz who followed this up with several trips to Japan (Ketzenberger, 2015). Initially attempting to wrangle Mitsubishi (which chose a plant in Illinois instead), Mutz succeeded in landing a joint operation between Subaru and Isuzu. Aggressive marketing was accompanied by aggressive financial inducements. Indiana offered corporations “$98 million in state and local incentives” (para. 7) to locate there. They finished building the Subaru-Isuzu plant in Lafayette in 1988 and hired 2,000 Hoosiers. The plant is still active and growing, projected in 2015 to add 1,200 new jobs and $140 million in investment within two years (para. 7). The plant however is nonunion (Payne, 2016).

The nonunion trend in the post-Reagan era conflicts with the Indiana of the 1960s and 70s, which saw a very high rate of industrial union membership (Varga, 2013, p. 430). This occurred despite the enactment of a right-to-work law in the state as early as 1957 (p. 444). As in other industries governed by Fordist arrangements, working Hooisers at this time enjoyed a “relatively stable regime of labor laws and job security” (p. 434). For reasons discussed earlier, and in a multiplicity of other critical texts, the stability of Fordism started to crumble in the 1970s, initiating the advent of neoliberal economics that was discussed in the previous chapter.

Indiana began losing manufacturing jobs in the 1980s, and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement into law in 1994 expedited the trajectory (Varga, 2013, p. 434). These were a few of the seeds of deindustrialization, leading to the Rust Belt as it is known today. Similar to the fate of Wisconsin in 2010—which saw the ouster of Democratic senator Russ Feingold and the rise of the antiunion governor Scott Walker—Indiana also elected a rightwing majority in the State Assembly at this time, the result of a “backlash against the Affordable Care Act” (p. 435). These lawmakers passed
another right-to-work law in 2012—the 23rd state in the U.S. to do so—which “criminalized mandatory representation fees in unionized workplaces” (p. 431). One of the consequences of this legislation was evident in the posted “scab” list I saw at the Local 1999 union hall (i.e., an account of workers at Rexnord, Carrier, and elsewhere who were withholding their union dues). The law along with a “tiered wage contract” (p. 437) adopted in 2010 have been helping destroy worker solidarity in the state. The result, according to Varga, is the rise of a precarious workforce in Indiana that is losing its “rights” (p. 430), “worker power” (p. 430), and “security” (p. 430) on the job—jobs which happen to belong more and more in the service industry and in high-tech manufacturing (p. 440).

3.5. Reshaping the Wasteland: Capitalist Growth in Nevada

Nevadan history is one of precarious travel, frontier railroads, boom-and-bust cycles, livestock, sheepherding, gambling, and mineral extraction. Therefore, the saga of the Silver State neatly reflects the oft-repeated American value of “rugged individualism.” The image of the “desert rat” (Hulse, 1969, p. 154), a desperate prospector leading his donkey across the hot wastes, seems to quintessentially embody this value—as do the fin de siècle immigrants employed in the Nevada sheep trade. Herding in isolation from June to October—save for a dog—these men were known to carve lonely “arborglyphs” (Vagner, 2017, p. 16) on the white bark of aspens, sometimes depicting symbols of their Basque homeland, other times the provocative visage of a woman.

Both John Muir and Mark Twain visited and wrote about the challenges of working and living in Nevada. For example, in 1862 Muir wrote his book Roughing It after his experiences in the state (Elliot, 1987, p. 383). Muir was struck by how many “dead towns” (Hulse, 1969, p. 153) he saw in the area, and wrote that Nevada “is already strewn with ruins that seem as gray and silent and time-worn as if the civilization to which they belonged had perished centuries ago” (p. 153). Regarding miners, in 1879, he observed: “The prospector is no longer the raving, wandering ghoul of ten years ago, rushing in random lawlessness among the hills, hungry and footsore” (p. 153).

Still, Muir’s initial view of Nevada as strewn with “gray and silent” remnants connotes the word “wasteland” used in the heading above. Hulse writes (1969), for
instance, that “[m]ost of Nevada is life-threatening desert” (p. 1), and that “[t]he dry
cclimate makes living conditions trying, and the extremes of temperature further restrict
the varieties of life which can exist [there]” (p. 10). A significant portion of the land
(upwards of 85%) falls under federal government domain, used only intermittently over
time by the likes of miners, rustlers, and tourists (p. 2). Nevada also hosted the Donner
Party excursion of 1846-1847, which infamously claimed the lives of 40 emigrants
across the state and into California, and which deterred others from traveling west for at
least two years (pp. 55-58). Further to the wasteland theme, Nevada was home to
nuclear testing in the mid-twentieth century, as well as the digging of disposal pits for
livestock that had subsequently died from strange causes (Davis, 2002, p. 35). One
photographer, setting out to document these sites in the 1980s, had heard stories from
“angry ranchers” about odd military raids and bombings conducted in the desert night,
resulting in destroyed historical buildings and “laser-burned cows” (p. 36). When asking
a Paiute local where he could find these disposal pits out in the wasteland, he was told
to “drive into the desert and watch for flocks of crows” (p. 36). Davis quotes the
photographer calling Nevada the “heart of the apocalypse” (p. 37).

But I do not want to depict the state merely as a setting for a Mad Max sequel.
Davis (2002) for example mentions Las Vegas’s Wynn’s Mirage Resorts building a
“super-resort with lakes large enough for jet-skiing” (p. 85) at $1.25 billion. However, it is
true that the state has never been very populous. The most recent U.S. Census reported
only about 2.9 million people living there, which ranks it 34th in the country. Indeed,
Nevada has witnessed dips in its low population throughout its history, for instance
dropping from 62,000 in 1880 to 42,000 in 1900 (Hulse, 1969, p. 152). It also faced the
municipal problems of servicing a rapidly growing population in the mid-twentieth
century, when it jumped from 160,083 people in 1950 to over 800,000 in 1980 (Elliot,
1987, p. 325). While small towns sit scattered across the landscape, the two largest
metropolitan areas include Reno-Sparks in the north and Las Vegas-Henderson in the
south. The regions are separated by an 8 or 9-hour drive, despite the common
misperception by outsiders that the former is a suburb of the latter (Participant 3,
personal communication, 2017).

Nevada is a consequence of the westward mobilization by European Americans,
first across an ocean and then the face of a continent. This historical push is highlighted
by both Hulse and Elliot in their histories of the state. Perhaps, more notably, the often
atrocious crimes of the first European explorers and later promoters of Manifest Destiny are criticized by Howard Zinn in *A People’s History of the United States*.\(^{13}\) But I do want to highlight a point with regard to direction. The view of westward push as heroic is widely taken as gospel in the American imaginary, although Brown’s (2000) record of the Native American experience in modernity deliberately challenges it—along with myriad other sources in media, from Zinn to *Dances with Wolves* to Iron Maiden’s song, “Run to the Hills.” In *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*’s foreword by Sides (2000), we learn that “If the Eurocentric view of the saga had always looked toward the Pacific, then Brown would write the book facing east, toward the Atlantic…. [as] To Indians, after all, east was the direction all the trouble had come from” (pp. xvi-xvii). West (2004), meanwhile, writes that the westward movement by whites across both Canada and America contradicted “thousands of years of cultural patterning and historical momentum” (p. 6) that existed in a vertical fashion (north to south) instead of a horizontal one. The makings of a settler state thus disrupted these long established geographical and cultural paradigms that followed up and down the mountain chains.

West (2004) goes on to identify three chief engines of the development of the American and Canadian nations; the first entails “a market-driven capitalist economy [that] sent the earliest agents, fur traders, and explorers… to chart the way across the north-south barriers and to begin the inventory of resources” (p. 6). The first white explorers to what is now Nevada were indeed fur traders—along with “mountain men” (Hulse, 1969, p. 30) and “government agents” (p. 30)—reaching the area in 1826. Stories intimated back east told of “abundant land” (p. 49) in California and inspired many to venture out that way. And Hulse notes that in the period from 1845-1850 “none of the white men who crossed Nevada… wanted to stop [there]” (p. 54) adding that “[t]he common goal was California, which was known as a place of verdant promise” boasting good climate and game (p. 54).\(^{14}\) He adds that “the farmers, traders, and miners of the 1850’s had for the most part been only temporary residents, coming and going and providing little basis for a permanent society” (p. 83).

\(^{13}\) Manifest Destiny was a guiding justification for the settlement of the American West in the nineteenth century.

\(^{14}\) A similar situation occurred in northern Indiana. Gray (1994) writes that the “swampy terrain” (p. xiii) dissuaded many New England and Pennsylvania travelers from staying there, so they moved west into states such as Wisconsin and Illinois.
What the Nevadan frontier did boast, however, was “vast stores of mineral wealth” (Elliot, 1987, p. 90) that not only established thriving towns in the nineteenth century but later became important to the U.S. government’s war effort. Such reserves are still significant to this day, as Nevada claims the only active lithium mine in the country, which of course yields the essential element needed for the production of lithium-ion batteries for Tesla’s cars and home power units (Wroldsen, 2017, p. 5). But it was the discovery of the famous silver-bearing Comstock Lode in June 1859 by two Europeans that ensured Nevada’s place in national and international consciousness. According to a map posted outside of an old mine in Virginia City, Nev., depicting the 236 mills on the Comstock, the Lode is shaped like a lazy letter “C” that stretches maybe seven miles north to south. Like the mining and milling operations themselves, Virginia City is a shadow of its one-time glory. Now it is a tiny tourist novelty, featuring, among other curiosities, an aging country band fronted by a singer with pistol on his waist. But this place once thrived, attracting both hard-living yahoos and a who’s-who of nineteenth-century celebrities (Hulse, 1969, p. 125).

Elliot (1987) writes that from the 1859 founding until 1880, “the history of the Comstock is the history of Nevada, for economic growth and settlement within the state were directly stimulated by Comstock activity” (pp. 90-91). Gold and silver worth several millions of dollars would be dredged from the lode (Hulse, 1969, p. 82). According to other historical signage in Virginia City, the man made richest by the mining exploitation was John Mackay, who along with James Fair, James Flood, and William O’Brien became known as the “Silver Kings” or “Bonanza Kings” of the Comstock. George Hearst, father of newspaper baron William Randolph Hearst, was also an early investor in the mining concern and spent some time in the town.

The Comstock is significant as a generator for the technological, political, and urban development for the state. As Hulse (1969) notes, the successful exploitation of the lode “required special engineering skills” (p. 83) and as miners arrived too late on the scene in Virginia City, they naturally radiated outward, “incidentally giving shape to the future state of Nevada” (p. 83). Hulse further writes that 1860s Nevada started to witness not only “an industrial and social revolution” (p. 83) but the actual formation of the state in 1864. One of the cities central to this dissertation, Reno, served as a “major supply center for the Comstock” (Elliot, 1987, p. 113) after its founding in a crucible of railroad-related activity in 1868. The city of Sparks, named after longhorn cattle herder and later
governor, John Sparks, also began as a railroad town around this time (Hulse, 1969, p. 163). As for the Comstock, output declined—along with Virginia City itself—by the 1880s, as investors encouraged the construction of shafts penetrating around 3,000 feet below the surface, “[C]hasing” (p. 154), some said, “a dollar to the gates of hell” (p. 154).

### 3.6. Corporations, Laborers, and Unrest

Prefiguring the generous tax incentives and general coziness expressed toward corporations over the next 150 years—which would include Gov. Sandoval’s special session called for Tesla in 2014—Nevada legislators clashed over taxation as it became codified in the state constitution. One intrepid lawmaker in 1863 fought for an important item in the initial constitution: Only tax the minerals taken from the mines, not the mines themselves. A number of companies saw this in their interest and backed the man, William Stewart, who eventually succeeded with the item’s implementation during the second convention in 1864 (Hulse, 1969, p. 104). Hulse notes that the period of 1864-1881 represented a “reckless” (p. 105) political environment whereby rich mining entrepreneurs became politicians, leading to shameful corruption and the familiar story of big money compromising democracy (p. 118). In a Marxian sense, the condition of Nevadan politics at this stage represented “the modern State as… an organ of class-dictatorship” (Cole, 1964, p. 181), especially given the presence of federal troops called in to discipline striking miners—to be discussed later. The Central Pacific railroad corporation would likewise take advantage of state policies by the 1870s, not only reneging on taxes but overcharging for freight destined for Nevadan towns. Lastly, the nuances of the “governmental apparatus” (West, 2004, p. 7) here aligns with West’s third engine responsible for creating the American nation.

The second engine of western state development that West (2004) notes is a “technological revolution” (p. 7) whereby the extraction and production of “copper, timber, coal, and iron” allowed for new “industrial innovations” (p. 7). In Nevada’s case, this most likely corresponds to the aforementioned period in the 1860s—also a time of railroad expansion throughout the state, which Nevadans, at least in the beginning, saw

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15 A Labour MP in 1942, Aneurin Bevan, probably has the best line about this sad reality: “Either poverty must use democracy to destroy the power of property, or property in fear of poverty will destroy democracy” (as cited in Linebaugh & Rediker, 2013, p. 107).
as a “great blessing” (Hulse, 1969, p. 126) given the trains’ ability to quickly haul supplies. But, again, this attitude would sour by the following decade as the industry proliferated and effectively scams the state; in fact, the state’s lone congressman to Washington lamented: “Nevada is an orange which for ten years these railroad vampires have been sucking in silence” (p. 128).

I would argue that these stories are an American testament to the veracity of Marx and Engels’s contemporaneous writings about the capitalist mode of production. The Nevadan experience with capitalism squares with the depiction of the bourgeoisie in the “Manifesto,” and also with the archetypal tale of development in the modern age, Goethe’s Faust (Berman, 1988). Moreover, the exploitation that ground Nevadan workers down reflected Marx’s enduring hopes that the working class would unite, becoming a class “for itself” (Bakan, 2008, p. 248) as opposed to simply a class “in itself” (p. 248). In an interesting dialectic, the same railroads associated with both civilizing development and corporate malfeasance were the same communication channels by which radical union ideas were spread in the 1800s (Herod, 2012).

Hulse (1969) and Elliot (1987) do reference recurring union disputes early in the state’s history, such as the 1869 clash between two unions and William Sharon, who had been hiring Chinese workers to build the Virginia and Truckee Railroad in Virginia City and Gold Hill, and who was forced to abstain from the practice (Elliot, 1987, p. 143). The “most serious” (Hulse, 1969, p. 179) clash between capital and labor however took place in Goldfield, Nev., between 1907-1908, involving the Western Federation of Miners (W.F.M.), the I.W.W., and mining investors such as George Wingfield. It is worth discussing here for what the case illustrates.

Goldfield, originally called Grandpa due to a Shoshone term, grew out of three mining claims made in 1902 (“The History of Goldfield,” n.d.). Town leaders changed the name in 1903 for better promotional potential (“The History of Goldfield,” n.d.), an act that prefigures the booster role city council members assume in Nevada to this day. Wingfield would profit from these mines shortly thereafter, netting around $25 million from investing both here and in Tonopah—a site less than 30 miles away (“Wingfield,” n.d.). By 1914, Wingfield moved his enterprise 255 miles northwest from Goldfield to Reno, where he ran the Reno Securities Company and by extension a number of
“hotels, ranches and mines in the area” (para. 6). Wingfield turned down a senate seat in 1912, spending the next 47 years devoted to Nevada “interests” (para. 5).

In 1906, George Wingfield brought together six successful mining companies under the banner of the Goldfield Consolidated Mining Company (“Wingfield”). In that same year, the I.W.W. had secured a $4.50 minimum wage for many jobs in Goldfield, as well as a “universal” (“Struggles of the I.W.W.,” n.d., para. 8) eight-hour workday. By the time of the labor unrest in 1907, radical union activity had created a buzz in other cities, and miners in the town were joining those same ranks.

The W.F.M. had a militant reputation built both in the American West and in British Columbia. Two years before the dispute in Goldfield, the union helped found the I.W.W. The famous “Big Bill” Haywood—W.F.M. member and first chairman for the Wobblies—was familiar with the exploitation of his fellow men, his quote about mine magnates evincing the position well: The owners “did not find the gold, they did not mine the gold, they did not mill the gold, but by some weird alchemy all the gold belonged to them!” Fearful of what organized labor might do, such as setting dynamite in the mines, the bourgeois owners had reached out to then-governor, John Sparks, who in turn sought assistance from President Theodore Roosevelt (Hulse, 1969); in a scenario sadly familiar to many chapters in labor union history, the president dispatched troops to the area, which emboldened the capitalist owners and made it a victory for capital.

After suffering severe losses on account of the Depression, Wingfield filed for bankruptcy in 1935 (“Wingfield,” n.d.). He would emerge again as an important figure for the U.S. government’s war effort during the mid-twentieth century, involved in processing tungsten from a site known as the Getchell Mine. This case highlights the larger role that Nevada played as customer to the resource-strapped government during wartime. During WWII, magnesium was in high demand for its use in constructing planes and rockets, so in 1941 the government contracted construction of Basic Magnesium—a plant in the Nevadan frontier powered by electricity from the Hoover Dam (Hulse, 1969, p. 230). So much of the element was produced that the government stopped buying it in

16 Some of the information from this paragraph on the W.F.M. is borrowed from the Marxists.org entry: “Western Federation of Miners” (n.d.).
1944 (p. 230), which would be the case for tungsten output in 1956 and manganese in 1962 (p. 200).

3.7. Diversified Economy, Citicorp, 2007-2009 Recession

In case it is not obvious by now, mining represented a central industry for the state, and it has been responsible for the shape of the landscape and the material well-being (or lack thereof) of its residents. But, as Elliot (1987) notes, “Not a single town based on mining” (p. 373) developed as successfully as Reno or Las Vegas had, which thrived as transportation hubs and “supply towns” (p. 374). Moreover, other industries had gained traction alongside mining in the state, becoming significant both for economic and cultural reasons. These alternative exploits include: gambling; a fast-track divorce industry; and prizefighting—legally permitted in 1897 as a “first attempt to attract the tourist dollar” (p. 200). But gaming soon became king. As Hulse (1969) writes, the tourism drawn to gambling had succeeded mines, ranches, and railroads as the premier industry for Nevada by 1945 (p. 254). In the 1950s, lawmakers’ recognition of gambling’s importance caused them to defend arguments for “states’ rights” (Elliot, 1987, p. 393), lest the federal government influence the industry—yet this contributed to the state’s reputation as the “Mississippi of the West.” In the 1980s, Elliot posits that the millions of tourists seeking out Nevada’s gaming amenities made possible the growing, permanent population of the state (p. 326).

Yet economic staples such as gaming and easy divorce, along with legalized prostitution, have left Nevada in a culturally contradictory position with interesting effects still being negotiated today. First, the stereotypically looser morals associated with the above industries persist despite the “powerful conservative elements [that] dominate the state’s politics” (Elliot, 1987, p. xiii). Indeed, while Elliot notes that the state has Democratic tendencies in voting (p. 363), between 1950 and the 1980s Nevada has maintained “a strong fiscal conservatism that crosses party lines” (p. 350). Hulse claimed in 1969 that Nevadans gravitate toward adventurism and experimentation, as well as “the exciting or the unusual” (p. 250) over “the quiet and predictable” (p. 250). The trend continues today, not only in the expansion of simulated architecture and amusements in Las Vegas, but also in respect to recent industrial initiatives. For example, Lance
Gilman, the Stetson-donning character instrumental in landing the Tesla Gigafactory, co-owns the industrial land at TRI Center and a brothel (Hagar, 2014a).\footnote{Incidentally this dual ownership spelled contradiction for Nevada senator, Harry Reid, who argued in 2011 that legal prostitution deterred businesses from operating in his state (Hagar, 2014a).}

This contradiction arises during a mental game of cognitive dissonance that residents of Reno and Las Vegas typically play. Writing in the 1980s, Elliot (1987) says that this involves residents “insisting on separating the gambling city from the stable city of schools, homes, and churches” (p. 147). A Reno city official (Participant 3) confirmed that this contradictory philosophy still exists, to some extent, when I asked him about it in the summer of 2017 (personal communication, 2017). It is clear that Nevadan cities are cognizant of their image and want to manipulate it or improve it in the public imaginary. This is especially the case for Las Vegas, which has historically looked to augment its “Sin City” (Kristof, 1985, para. 2) reputation and inject prestige into its University of Nevada campus, ignominiously dubbed “Tumbleweed Tech” (para. 8).

The political economy of the state from the late twentieth century to the 2008 financial crisis and recession is important to describe next. These considerations factor in squarely with the discourse I encountered while conducting research in the state. First, I heard about the need for Nevadan cities to diversify their economies in the wake of tribal gaming taking off in popularity and New Jersey promoting Atlantic City. Secondly, the 2007-2009 Recession often came up in interviews with Reno and Sparks officials in one way or another. I discuss these issues in greater detail in Chapter 5, but first it is useful to trace the context for the Tesla Gigafactory’s eventual siting at the TRI Center with events that took place in the 1980s.

On top of a 1981-1982 recession that cut into gambling revenues (Kristof, 1985), a 1982 study claimed that Nevada was unattractive for incoming businesses (Elliot, 1987, p. 347). That same year, Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Richard Bryan, advanced “economic diversification” (Kristof, 1985, para. 2) as one of his campaign themes and subsequently won the election. The following year, the state legislature commissioned a report that found Nevada failing as a competitor among states for attracting business for three reasons: (1). It lacked a “trained labor force” (Elliot, 1987, p. 346) (2). It had high utility bills and (3). It “had a less-than-satisfactory image” (p. 346).
The final point is reflected in the governor’s later statement that “Image is Nevada’s greatest liability” (Kristof, 1985, para. 2). This would prove to be true in a scheme concocted by New York-based Citicorp when it opened a credit-card facility in Las Vegas in 1985. Instead of using “Las Vegas, NV” (Segall, 2015, para. 39) as part of its mailing address—which would be normal and expected—the *Wall Street Journal* claimed the firm “secretly obtained permission from the U.S. Postal Service” (para. 40) to change its address to “Lakes, NV” (para. 39)—the name of the *development complex* it occupied. Some locals, including the mayor, saw this as a deliberate sting.

The Citicorp case is instructive for understanding the dynamics involved later for Tesla Motors. First, as I noted with regard to prizefighting’s legalization and the change from “Grandpa” to “Goldfield,” regional promotion boasts a long history in Nevada. But it so happens that state efforts to land the Citicorp facility occurred during the Reagan administration’s cuts to urban spending, as referenced in Chapter 1. This also took place at the dawn of neoliberalization in the U.S., an economic and cultural shift that codified personal responsibility, market solutions, deregulation, entrepreneurialism, and cutbacks on social welfare (Harvey, 2005). In 1981, around the same time Indiana was attracting the Subaru-Isuzu factory, Citicorp opened a processing center in South Dakota, because that state’s legislature removed the cap on interest rates that credit-card companies could charge customers (Segall, 2015). Nevadan advocates for the next Citicorp siting were enticed by the 500 to 1000 potential jobs, the diversification, and the image boost, although it is confusing to see why executives in real estate, media, casinos, and the art world would associate “prestige” (para. 11) with a credit-card processing center. Nevertheless, the governor moved quickly on the prospect and arranged a “shotgun” (para. 6) legislative session to expedite new laws to the company’s benefit.

What is interesting, however, is that there was a certain skepticism or lack of desperation on the part of New Mexico lawmakers, who had been approached by Citicorp before Nevada but rejected the proposal (Segall, 2015, para. 6). In 2014, Arizona found itself in a similar situation when the state legislature rejected a bill permitting Tesla to sell their cars directly to consumers (Hidalgo & Damon, 2014). Given this, one might do well to remember Logan and Molotch’s (2007) claim in *Urban Fortunes*. The citation I have in mind tempers my own characterizations thus far, as the authors critique Marxist theory for depicting development as “inexorable” (p. xxvii) and
capitalists themselves as “invincible” (p. 11). This is a point worth returning to in Chapter 5.

I shall argue in later chapters that variations on these 1980s events and sentiments resurfaced in 2014-2015 as Tesla pondered and eventually chose between the competing states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas. One of the most significant entities to emerge at this point—at least in terms of this dissertation—was the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN), founded in 1983. I say this because current CEO Mike Kazmierski was a constant source for local reportage on the Gigafactory. EDAWN was a tireless presence during the uneasy months of Tesla’s decision making, and apparently it has been instrumental in other cases throughout its history too. As Elliot (1987) describes, EDAWN pushed for “the location of distribution centers for manufactured items” (p. 346) in Nevada, partnering with businesses and state government to land a Porsche distribution center for Reno.

The 2007-2009 recession came up frequently during my interviews, which makes sense given that Nevada and the other “sand states” (Krugman, 2012, p. 111) (i.e., Arizona, California, and Florida) were ground zero for the mid-2000s housing boom and bust. As one Reno official (Participant 3) put it “anecdotally, when you’re running for office…. It’s an exercise in…. walking as much of your district as possible and knocking on doors and talking to people, and… I will always remember… the ‘10 election, the ‘12 election, going from door to door—particularly the 2010 election—you know, it was like every third house was vacant, with a foreclosure sign on it” (personal communication, 2017). Reckless home loan activity led to the 2008 financial crisis, meaning that “the collapse of a vast pool of ‘securitized’ mortgages in the US” (Mann, 2013, p. 100) threw the economy into a tailspin and millions of people into foreclosure (Wargo, 2009). The important context for later in this dissertation is that, in 2008, Nevada was the No. 1 state, and that Las Vegas was the No. 2 metropolitan region, for foreclosures in the country (Wargo, 2009). Foreclosure notices came down on 7% of the state’s homes, which translated to over 77,000 properties (Wargo, 2009). In an ironic twist, Citigroup made 30,000 Federal Housing Administration loans from 2004-2012 (30% of which

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18 There is a lot more to this story of course, such as decades of deregulation in banking, the advent of new financial products (e.g., credit-default swaps), and the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP), which was the government bailout of $700 billion advanced in October 2008 (Riley, 2017, p. 25).
defaulted), and the Justice Department found that the lender gave the green light for “mortgages that failed to meet government guidelines” (Gallagher, 2012, para. 8). Due to Citigroup’s investment in “bad mortgages” (para. 25) the government also bailed the bank out at a cost of $45 billion during the financial crisis (para. 25). This stands as a further stain on the legacy of corporate welfare legislation in the state.

3.8. Presidential Politics 2016: Contradictions in the Capitalist Class

In the case of Indianapolis, Carrier Corp. was brought to the forefront of public attention during Donald Trump’s campaign for the U.S. presidency in 2016. Trump’s popularity requires the same sort of historicizing I provided above for early capitalism and the growth of Indiana and Nevada. This is because Trump and the Carrier story are deeply imbricated.

Many called the 2016 campaign season an interminable slog (McManus, 2016). The same year also involved: the abject failure of election forecasters to project the winner (Allen & Parnes, 2017, p. 369);19 the unapologetically crass behavior of a U.S. presidential contender and president-elect; the sentiments by casual observers declaring 2016 “The worst year ever” (Tolentino, 2016); and even Elon Musk’s fringe theory that it is possible we are living in the Matrix, because there is “a ‘one in billions’ chance that our reality is actually real” (Waugh, 2017, para. 6).

Such arguments, running from the plausible to the bizarre, require some grounding in material analysis. Political-economic forces and the dialectical struggles of history are bigger than any single person, Trump included. My point is simply, to paraphrase Mills (2000), that history and biographies are always inextricably linked. Trump in this sense is surely more a symptom of a particular conjuncture than its cause.

There are a multitude of reasons to doubt the integrity of an American democracy corrupted by capital, from the 2010 Citizens United decision, to state voter-ID laws

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19 Allen and Parnes (2017) write that “The New York Times’ Upshot, Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight, and other election prognosticators rated Hillary as the overwhelming favorite—though Silver’s projection wasn’t quite as rosy” (p. 369).
(Davis, 2017b), to felons losing the privilege to vote. But, to the extent that democratic 
modicums do exist in the U.S., the 2016 presidential race featured a political maelstrom. 
This included neoliberalized identity politics;\(^\text{20}\) traditional shoe-leather politicking versus 
a new-school reliance on Big Data;\(^\text{21}\) a shameless lack of decorum; democratic socialism 
versus liberal-centrism versus mainstream conservatism versus the alt-right; and many 
contradictions, such as a one-time whistleblower on Iraq War crimes—WikiLeaks— 
coming to aid the GOP.\(^\text{22}\) Added to all this was a different and palpable energy coursing 
through the electorate, according to both lay and professional commentators. Allen and 
Parnes (2017), authors of a book on the failed Hillary Clinton campaign, described the 
sentiment as a “populist renaissance” (p. 38). 

The authors further purport that this energy suited Bernie Sanders on the left and 
Trump on the right, with the former railing against corrupt bankers, the latter against 
Mexican immigrants, as sources of society’s woes (Allen & Parnes, 2017, p. 39). Clinton, 
despite controversially winning the Democratic primary and later the popular vote,\(^\text{23}\) was 
never able to capitalize on that same energy. Allen and Parnes depict Clinton as 
\textit{routinely} failing to understand the ire of an electorate that had suffered the 2008 financial 
crisis, “watching the wealthy rebound quickly… while their families struggled through a 
slow recovery” (p. 129). Whereas Sanders and Trump criticized unfair trade policy that 
hurt the white working class (a fateful demographic in the 2016 outcome\(^\text{24}\)), Clinton 
meanwhile \textit{worked on} the Trans-Pacific Partnership as secretary of state, making it 

\(^{20}\) Here I mean that a pro-capitalist female politician could bank on her gender at the expense of 
any real improvement in the material lives of, say, working-class and poor women—i.e., women 
who might benefit more from a male democratic socialist’s policies.

\(^{21}\) Allen and Parnes (2017) write that the Clinton headquarters in Brooklyn employed “data 
technicians [who] concentrated on how analytics could maximize delegate numbers” (p. 172).

\(^{22}\) CNN has meticulously and chronologically detailed the odd relationship between the Trump 
campaign, Russian hackers, and Julian Assange of WikiLeaks. Parts of the story include: 
WikiLeaks starting to disclose John Podesta’s private emails, “creating waves of negative headlines 
for the Clinton campaign” (Cohen, 2017, para. 44); and three days later, Donald Trump exclaiming, 
“I love WikiLeaks” (para. 45) at a Pennsylvania rally.

\(^{23}\) As media commentary would later evaluate, the relationship between the Sanders campaign and 
the Democratic National Committee was chilly. Allen and Parnes (2017) describe the DNC 
chairwoman, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, as refusing to provide Sanders a room at the DNC HQ 
to announce his presidential run (p. 46). The DNC also refused to organize as many debates as 
Sanders had wanted (p. 265). Meanwhile, the Clinton campaign was “in close communication with 
Wasserman Schultz throughout” (p. 217). Although Sanders did refuse other “assistance” (p. 217) 
from the DNC, according to Allen and Parnes (2017).

\(^{24}\) Mike Davis (2017b) argues that the numbers of Midwestern and Appalachian workers who voted 
Trump and delivered him a victory are overhyped, however.
difficult to distance herself from this negative buzzword on the campaign trail (p. 86). Trump also made sure that 1994’s NAFTA, signed into law by Bill Clinton and responsible for offshoring jobs, was on people’s minds while he ran (p. 332). Further, Sanders’s forceful appeals for a respectable living wage and help with university tuition made Clinton look “cautious, conservative, and very much a creature of the establishment” (p. 88)—which, again, was anathema for success in a year with so much “volatility” (p. 235) among voters.

In the end, there was no shortage of commentators providing their own autopsy on the election, with Clinton herself blaming FBI director James Comey, the Russians, and the KKK (Allen & Parnes, 2017, p. 394). Without a doubt, atrocious sexism, nativism, racism, and nationalism were involved in Clinton’s loss. But the point here is to understand Trump’s success in positioning himself as a populist leader. Critical scholars are split on the final analysis of Trump and “Trumpism.” Some, such as the Italian autonomist Marxist Bifo Berardi, argued that Trump’s apparent populism disguises a reactionary core. For example, in a Verso YouTube interview Berardi argued the president uses the “same talk” (Verso Books, 2017) as Hitler when addressing “white workers” (Verso Books, 2017). Berardi then asks and answers in the same interview: “Is it populism? No, it’s fascism.” Arguing on somewhat similar lines, Kellner (2016) argues that while “Trump is not Hitler” (p. 20), it is still appropriate to use the term “neo-fascism to explain Trump and his supporters” (p. 20).

Other critics offer differing characterizations. For example, in a recent New Left Review issue, Riley (2017) asserts that Trump is not fascist given his lack of “party organization, a militia and an ideology” (p. 21) needed to satisfy the requirements of classical fascism. Riley offers the label of “neo-Bonapartism” (p. 21) in its place, a governance contingent on a “charismatic leader” (p. 21) at the expense of a “coherent hegemonic project” (p. 22). A neo-Bonapartist economy further features “state-dependent capitalism” (p. 22) whereby profits hinge more on “political connections and interventions” (p. 22) as opposed to regular “productivity” (p. 22). Certainly, the Trumpian intervention in the Carrier case seems to reflect this. Riley also helpfully adds that the
Trump presidency “is linked to a crisis of hegemony” (p. 22) arising from the inability of capitalists to disguise their own interests as “those of society in general” (p. 22).  

Writing in *triple C*, meanwhile, Fuchs (2017) offers his own view regarding Trump and fascism. Citing Roger Griffin, he writes that “You can be a total xenophobic racist male chauvinist bastard and still not be a fascist” (p. 32), and that so “long as Trump does not advocate the abolition of America’s democratic institutions, and their replacement by some sort of post-liberal new order, he’s not technically a fascist” (p. 32). What are perhaps more important than this debate over labels are the contradictions among the capitalist class that a billionaire’s ascendance to the White House engenders. I will detail these in the final section.

After an evening panel at an academic conference that took place two months before the 2016 general election, an attendee provided me with an astute synopsis of the televised debates between Clinton and Trump. They can attack one another as individuals, but as wealthy representatives of the same capitalist class the debate cannot go much deeper than that. Clinton in fact felt eager to smear Sanders during the primaries, because the senator claimed he was a democratic socialist, and not a capitalist, during an interview (Allen & Parnes, 2017, pp. 89-90). What Americans were left with going into the general election was a very narrow range of topics to be addressed, and little material daylight between the opponents. A virally spread image of the Clintons at Trump’s wedding on social media seemed to visually verify the idea that the two candidates running against each other did not have much economic incentive to do so. Trump is an apparent billionaire; Clinton once said that her and her husband’s wealth made “her ‘kind of far removed’ from the experience of ordinary Americans” (Freedland, 2016, para. 9).

Elon Musk, meanwhile, is also tremendously wealthy and a member of the billionaire capitalist class. Yet his interests can still be a mismatch with other members of the same class: a feature Marx recognized about capitalists long ago (Edgell, 1993, p. 3). Though it is a bit more complex given the political dimension involved, Musk came to disagree directly with Trump’s policies in mid 2017. After Trump’s election, Musk had at

25 Riley (2017) states that “[b]ecause profitability is the main determinant of economic growth in capitalist societies, capitalists can plausibly present the gratification of their own requirements as being essential for the country as a whole” (p. 22).
first opted to join both an 18-member “business advisory council” (Horowitz, 2017, para. 5) referred to as the Strategic and Policy Forum, as well as a “manufacturing jobs initiative” (para. 5). Both endeavors fell under the auspices of the Trump White House. However, when Trump declared the U.S. would bow out of the Paris Agreement on global climate change, Musk vowed to depart both councils, stating: “Climate change is real” (Garber, 2017, para. 3) and “Leaving Paris is not good for America or the world” (para. 3). Marx was suspicious of appearances, as we should be, too. What looked like a valiant gesture from Elon Musk could easily be picked apart as a “transparent” (para. 6) act, because “Tesla’s electric vehicles don’t produce carbon and anything that encourages people to turn to renewable energy would benefit the company” (para. 6). Musk’s stand comports nicely with his company’s ethos and profit structure. Capitalism itself, meanwhile, is as safe as ever given that it has never needed to rely on one industry to thrive, but rather on the constant revolutionizing of technologies and the means of production, which Musk here embodies.

Trump’s relationship with blue-collar workers is a more crucial issue for this dissertation. I don’t think the irony has escaped even the most passive of critical observers that Trump, a billionaire plutocrat, styled himself over the campaign as a man of the people and champion of the working class. In one amusing example from May 2016, Stephen Colbert’s Late Show poked fun at Trump’s awkward posturing in a talk with coal miners, where he briefly donned a helmet at the podium (Weber, 2016). The posturing is especially vexing given that Trump did not campaign for a “living wage” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 44) for raising the minimum wage, or for strengthening unions. And though he is critical of trade deals and international organizations understood as harmful and mendacious to the U.S. working class, such as NAFTA and the World Trade Organization (p. 41), his support for low-tax deregulated capitalism is self-evident (p. 22). Moreover, even Trump’s vaunted support for the workers is steeped in reactionary racial overtones. For example, while Trump railed against the threat of international trade agreements to the white male industrial working class, he failed to acknowledge the devastation NAFTA has wrought on Mexican farmers and workers since its implementation in January 1994. Indeed, this very point of the Mexican worker not being “our enemy” was stressed by former USW Local 1999 president, Chuck Jones, at a summer 2017 rally with Bernie Sanders and Good Jobs Nation. Sanders’s social media profiles continuously hammered the president throughout his first year in office for
reneging on promises and for consulting the same old corporate playbook for his administration. This would involve appointing the wealthiest presidential cabinet in history (Goldman, 2016), including “foreclosure king” Steven Mnuchin as treasury secretary (Borak, 2017, para. 1).

One would think that Trump’s class status would unite workers everywhere against him. But for these people he had a resonant message based on “magical nativism and [the] promise of a world restored” (Davis, 2017b, para. 41). As I will argue in the next chapter, the situation is muddied even among Carrier workers in Indianapolis. There are even some critical of Trump who still begrudgingly credit him for saving a few hundred jobs, as was the case for some of my interview participants.
Chapter 4.

Heroes and Villains to the Post-Fordist Hoosier

It is appropriate to now turn to a more specific case of corporate capital uprooting from the American Midwest and relocating its production facilities to Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. I am referring of course to the partial offshoring of jobs from the Indianapolis Carrier plant and the complete closure of the United Technologies Electronic Controls (UTEC) factory in Huntington, Indiana.¹ These decisions translated to 1,400 layoffs originally slated in the former (Turner, 2016a) and 700 layoffs declared in the latter (Turner, 2016c). In late 2016, the number of lost jobs in Indy would drop to roughly 500 (Bethea, 2018). As suggested by the shifting numbers, this case study features a confusing chronology, with numerous timelines becoming possible as management, the United Steelworkers (USW), and Trump-Pence negotiated. It will be important to establish what these actors agreed to, and when, to make sense of the issues discussed later in the chapter.

These issues touch on considerations of race, class, and employment in Indy, as well as how various partisans and others appropriated the narrative of job loss to fit their own preferences. I am primarily interested in workers’ and city officials’ reactions to management’s decisions; these groups’ thoughts on how to best solve the problems of closure and outsourcing; and lastly what these reactions can tell us about common sense in American capitalist society. More specifically, the chapter adopts three main questions as guides for analysis:

(1). Who or what do workers, city officials, and online commentators think is to blame for the Carrier/UTEC decisions to relocate and close?

(2). What do these same people think is the best course of action to deal with the problem (individually, socially, politically)?

¹ While UTEC is losing 700 manufacturing jobs, some “engineering and sales staff” (Participant 6, personal communication, 2017) are remaining in the building.
(3). Collectively, do these sentiments tell us anything about hegemonic common
sense in a capitalist society?

Through news article analysis, online reader comment analysis, content analysis,
and qualitative interviews, I explore how these groups explain, justify, naturalize,
negotiate, and/or resist the needs of capital in Indiana. They do this through meetings,
demonstrations, and proposed boycotts, but also through language, which to Thompson
(1984) is the key to studying ideology, and also where “meaning is mobilized in the
defense of domination” (p. 35). By “domination” in the context of this chapter I mean the
powerful elements of capital that exploit Indiana’s workers and the apologists who
benefit. Finding answers to these questions about ideology is furthermore important for
the study of urban communication and is a central concern of this dissertation. This is
because, on the one hand, reactions to a big corporate departure reveal something
about relations of power in local communities, as well as what the concept of place
means to the people involved. On the other hand, the marketability and branding
potential of an area may change, stay the course, or be reckoned with in differing ways.
Attention to how city officials from Huntington, Indianapolis, Reno, and Sparks see their
respective cities and how to best grow them will be a subject for Chapter 6.

For now though, while keeping the three main questions just outlined in mind, I
will first introduce the nature of deindustrialization and UTEC/Carrier’s fit within it. Then I
will record the various impressions that workers, union members, and city leaders had of
the closure prospects. I have gathered these impressions both from my own interviews
and from Indy Star reportage. Next I will incorporate the few hundred online reader
comments to two news sources to try to establish “‘lay’ attitudes” (Hall et al., 2013, p. xiii)
towards the exploitative measures taken by capital. I will then enter a discussion about
what the array of thoughts provided by social class actors in Huntington and Indy can tell
us about common sense under capitalism. I close by exploring two solutions proposed in
the wake of closure and outsourcing that seem to break along class lines, namely
upskilling versus boycotting.
4.1. American Deindustrialization

Carrier and UTEC represent one pole of the dialectic of uneven development, when a big employer leaves and with it certain opportunities for growth. The case furthermore fits into the trend of many American plants having closed or relocated since the 1970s and 80s—a trend discussed in the previous chapter with regard to neoliberalism. The same period also represents major declines in union membership, as well as scholarly debate on the nature of changing factory work. More recent data indicate the trajectory of manufacturing jobs in the United States; since 1999, the country has lost 4 million positions in this sector (Clemens, 2011, p. 7). From 1969 to 2014, Indiana alone lost 235,058 manufacturing jobs (Turner, 2016e). Meanwhile, U.S. factory closures now average around 100 per month, according to Plant Closing News (Clemens, 2011, p. 8). Deindustrialization became so serious that it caught the attention of the National Intelligence Agency Director under President Obama, who “started the process to assess the security implications of America’s diminishing manufacturing activity” (Smiley & West, 2012, p. 186).

Facilitating the process of wealthy countries outsourcing production are designated zones scattered across the planet, sometimes labeled Special Enterprise Zones or “Free Trade Zones” (Davis, 2006b, p. 158) where millions of workers report to assembly lines for brutally low pay. Describing North American and European contexts, Gotham (2015) writes that such neoliberal “enterprise zones” (p. 34) benefit corporations through tax exemptions and deregulation. Klein (2002) has provided first-hand accounts of the inhuman conditions found in these zones, and Federici (2012) has documented how SEZs distinctly exploit and physically harm the women who by a large majority staff them.

Factories may also leave inner-city areas for the suburbs given the latter’s proximity to highways and airports (Logan & Molotch, 2007). Since trucks now transport “most inputs and products” (Rubenstein, 2013, p. 261) locating near a highway is

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2 As noted earlier, Lichtenstein (2013) argues that the so-called “post-industrial” (p. 221) era is not taking place. While citing Stephen Cohen and John Zysman, he claims that although only 20% of Americans work in manufacturing, “Services are complements to manufacturing, not potential substitutes or successors” (p. 221).

3 Davis (2006b) is here quoting from the Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights.
significant. In fact, a Huntington official (Participant 6) I talked to stated that his rural hometown should appeal to businesses for just this reason: “We’re close to transportation, the interstate” (personal communication, 2017). Large-enough companies can engage in “industrial blackmail” (Marable, 1983, p. 50) as well, whereby they merely threaten to move to get what they want from local government. Tracy (2014) aptly characterizes this tactic as a “hostage situation” (p. 13) with the corporation effectively saying: “[G]ive us the money or we’ll kill the jobs” (p. 13). An Indy councillor (Participant 7) recognized the importance of giving Carrier a subsidy, but at the same time he feared the start of a “dangerous precedent” (personal communication, 2017) whereby Indianapolis companies simply threaten to leave to secure greater benefits.

Factory closures, relocations, worker obsolescence, and job loss can have destructive effects on a neighborhood or city. An extreme example is Detroit, Michigan, which experienced its population of roughly 2 million in the 1960s drop to 700,000 over the years (Heßler, 2013, p. 173), and which is routinely held up as the archetype of urban decline (Gibson, 2004; Harvey, 2013; Logan & Molotch, 2007). Cultures of deindustrialization can entail such problems as: “food banks” (Bensman, as cited in Dandaneau, 1996, p. 120) and “unemployed movements” (p. 120); the rise of “urban prairies… dilapidated buildings, wood-strewn borders, desolate factory works, [and] boarded up houses” (Gunn, 2013, p. 39); a lack of public amenities; and areas turned to “dumping ground[s]” (Hedges & Sacco, 2013, p. 77) for noxious civic projects, like “sewage treatment” (p. 77) and “trash-burning” (p. 77) plants. A perhaps less dramatic outcome is the encouragement of education and training initiatives for laid-off and incoming workers, which we will see not only in this chapter but in the one that follows on Tesla. Such initiatives entail consultations, job fairs, partnerships between learning institutions, and a commitment from local leaders. As will become clear, Indy and Huntington would see their share of hand-wringing over the consequences of closure.

4.2. Carrier Corporation: The Lead-up and the Announcement

Even though Carrier and its parent company opted to relocate, they had not been strangers to state support. In 2011, for example, they received a six-year abatement that saved the enterprise $1 million in property taxes (Downing, 2016). Since 2013, Carrier
has also received around $200,000 from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation to train its employees. The federal government also awarded the company a $5.1 million Advanced Energy Manufacturing Tax Credit, though in wake of the closure the company refused to claim it (“Carrier Indianapolis Statement,” 2016). According to another report, Carrier and its related enterprise UTEC received over $500,000 in other economic incentives from the state as well (Turner, 2016g). The biggest pay out yet, however, comes courtesy of the federal government to parent company, United Technologies, which totals $5.6 billion a year, or about one-tenth of its annual revenue (Cook & Briggs, 2016).

At the same time Carrier was enjoying state support, its 1,200 or so USW-backed steelworkers were excelling in production and making what one of my respondents emphasized were “good quality products” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017). In fact, “they were getting every quality award… for manufacturing furnaces that you can get,” he added. A union rep (Participant 12) described these as “gold awards and different things of that nature” (personal communication, 2017). Along these same lines, a Carrier employee laid off in January 2018 said: “We can understand companies having to go overseas if they’re losing money…. But Carrier is the top A.C.-and furnace-making company in the nation, getting money hand over fist” (Bethea, 2018, para. 4). The company’s profits the preceding year, in fact, totaled more than $7 billion (Lange, 2016). Regarding UTEC and Carrier, a Huntington official (Participant 11) likewise said that people with whom he talked to directly “knew they were delivering” (personal communication, 2017) which made it all the more difficult to process the announcement from management.

Despite all of these factors—the state support, worker productivity, and high profits—Carrier released its statement about closing and relocating on February 10, 2016, a date some employees called “D Day” (Bethea, 2018, para. 2). The closure, which according to many came out of the blue, was planned in stages; steelworkers would begin losing their jobs in one year, and, by 2019, employment would be terminated for all 1,400 workers. What I imagine was added to preempt the animosity that would ensue, the initial press release included these words by Chris Nelson, president of HVAC System and Services North America: “This decision is difficult and we recognize the impact on employees, their families and the community. We are committed to ensuring that our employees are treated respectfully” (“Carrier to Relocate
Indianapolis Manufacturing Operations,” 2016, para. 4). Shortly after the initial announcement, Carrier released another statement outlining the “factors” (“Carrier statement on meetings with Indiana senators,” 2016, para. 2) influencing the tough decision; these included “the steady migration of the company’s competitors and suppliers to Mexico” (para. 2) and “ongoing cost and pricing pressures in part by evolving regulatory requirements” (para. 2). These two explanations entail what I shall call: 1) the “shareholders/maximizing profit/staying competitive/business decision” reason, and 2) the “onerous taxes” reason. During my interviews I was reminded that the devastating move came on the heels of other closures in Indianapolis over the last fifteen years: Rexnord, Bridgeport Brass, the General Motors plant, Ford factory, Navistar, and the Chrysler foundry (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017).\(^4\) The company did affirm, however, that something was staying behind: its HVAC headquarters. Carrier also expressed that 400 other headquarters would remain in the U.S., as well as 6,000 other American jobs.

4.3. Carrier Corporation: Early Reactions and Concerns

Regarding the Indianapolis closure, a city-county councillor (Participant 7) informed me that “just about like everybody else out here” personal communication, 2017), he heard about the Carrier announcement through social media. “Somebody had recorded a video inside the plant and posted it, and it spread like wildfire pretty quickly,” he added. This may have been the video that LaKeisha Austin posted to Facebook, which was later shared over 13,000 times (Carter, 2016).\(^5\) Although a YouTube video posted by user “Joe Brunner,” viewed almost 4 million times by January 2019, depicts the same scene. The Brunner video is shot in a large room from behind a crowd of

\(^4\) According to its websites, Rexnord makes products such as industrial ball bearings and gears, and Navistar makes large trucks and engines. The participant mentioned that Bridgeport Brass shuttered; from what I could find, however, the building was originally operated by Bridgeport in the early twentieth century before being run by Olin Brass in 2002. Olin closed in 2002, resulting in 310 layoffs (Kasey, 2016).

\(^5\) The Austin video no longer appears to be available, but the *Indy Star* story cited above describes the same scene as depicted in the Brunner video (still available on YouTube).
Black, white, male, and female workers; an executive delivers the news to the dejected and angry crowd which groans loudly and vocalizes back.6

The councillor (Participant 7) was shocked at the time, saying “I couldn’t believe it” and “Wait… this Carrier plant?” (personal communication, 2017). A union rep (Participant 12) I spoke with said he had received news of the announcement through a 3:30 a.m. text message, though he would later hear it for himself when management reiterated its plan to workers on “second shift” (personal communication, 2017). He added that the news “instilled fear [and] worry” especially because of his wife’s ill health, and with his healthcare coverage on the line, this was a more than understandable feeling. Another union affiliate (Participant 8) said he did not “know what [his] exact words was… something about ‘You got to be kidding me’ or ‘You gotta be shitting me,’” and that “there was some profanities in there I’m quite sure” (personal communication, 2017). The UTEC announcement struck the same chord in Huntington, though I will discuss the case more closely in a separate section below.

In the press, several workers expressed anxiety over finding new jobs with comparable pay. In contrast to the $25 dollar an hour union wage at Carrier, an Amazon warehouse built next to the plant in 2011 offered only $15 (Schwartz, 2016). One production leader at Carrier noted he expected to take a pay cut of eight or nine dollars an hour (Turner, 2016c). Franklin (2018), laid off in July 2017, is quoted as saying he was “lucky” (para. 15) to have found a hospital job at only $6 less than he made at Carrier. Then-president of the USW Local 1999, Chuck Jones, captured people’s apprehension in local coverage: “People are very uncertain, not knowing what the future is going to bring” (Turner, 2016a, para. 12).

Other Carrier employees, nearing retirement, worried that their age precluded them from retraining. Such problematic arrangements speak to a reality of the flexible economy, whereby workers must maintain more than one job to get by—an especially troubling prospect if one’s family has medical or otherwise inordinate expenses (Ehrenreich, 2001). The fact that workers should expect low pay at a new job supports a union rep’s (Participant 8) statement that I recorded 18 months after the initial announcement: He said that “Indianapolis [would] bounce back,” but “the people… most

6 The Brunner video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3txGMQOrY&t=1s.
likely won’t" (personal communication, 2017). He further described a melancholy chain of events that could befall the laid-off worker, one that involved a foreclosed house, “repo’ed” car, an absent spouse, a turn to drugs or alcohol, and possible suicide. I experienced some of the gravity of this sort of crisis when two men from a drug clinic came to address a meeting at the USW local in late August 2017.

4.4. Organized Labor and the Trump-Pence Intervention

A generous and garrulous representative (Participant 8) I interviewed from the USW local laid out the main arc of the story as he saw it. First, management announced 1,400 layoffs in Indianapolis. Then Trump capitalized on this as a political tactic; he made a promise to save the jobs; but he lied about how many jobs were saved. The unforgivable problem in the minds of some of the USW reps was that the Trump-Pence dealmakers took credit for jobs that were staying behind anyway, which prompted many in the plant to assume they were safe. In reality, about 550 people would still be receiving a pink slip. But it is more enlightening to hear the union rep tell it from an insider’s perspective. The following excerpt from my interview with him is about Carrier and the build-up to Trump and Pence intervening:

[A]t the bargaining table they said, “We’re closing the whole plant down,” with the exception of… the research and development… facility that… uh do research on um furnaces and other… things. They try to come up with different ways to make em more efficient and all that. So, anyway, there’s about… three to four hundred people employed there—and they announced we’re gonna keep the research and development jobs here in Indianapolis, m’kay?... That was a given…. But you know, once again… that’s good, you’re keeping jobs but, you know, our people that we represent are losing their jobs…. So, we went in and we bargained, m’kay, and uh you know… it wasn’t easy, because what you’re doing – the company’s not obligated to do anything. They can basically say: “Kiss our ass… we’re gonna close the plant… and you’re gettin’ nothing.” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017)

This union official later recounted his experience of first learning of Trump’s involvement:

Thanksgiving Day [of 2016], uh, I’m at family’s house and my phone starts going off. And, you know, it was the local news media and some of the national news media: “What do you know about Trump and UTC working out a deal?” Said “I don’t know nothing about any of it.” “You haven’t been contacted?” I said, “No, I been contacted on nothin.” Supposedly, they’re in the process of working out a deal. I said, “Well, that’s news to me.” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017)
He then described Trump visiting the plant a few days later. This interview excerpt is important to consider for understanding the chronology, the promises made and broken, and the primacy of image in this dissertation’s argument about spectacle and imaginaries:

[W]e hear Trump and Pence are coming into town and they’re... gonna give a speech here at Carrier, and we can’t find out from uh the management at Carrier what the deal consisted of. Now, we were involved in nothing. Now, we knew they couldn’t just arbitrarily change the labor agreement, because, you know, we got a binding labor agreement.... [Then, after agreeing to meet with the company], we go in the room and they brought the corporate people in and then they said “Okay, this is what the deal is. Donald Trump uh made a deal... and um, we’re gonna keep uh 730 jobs here in Indianapolis... of... the bargaining unit jobs... then another 70 supervisory, clerical, type jobs... so they worked out a deal, they're gonna save 1100 jobs. Well, you know, aw hell, I ain't real good on math, but I know that 730 and... 70 sure as hell don’t equate to uh 1100. So you know... I said, “Uh, 1100? Where the hell you get 1100 at?” They said, “Well the research and development jobs.” I said, “Wait a minute, they weren't leaving anyway.” “Yeah, yeah, you’re right...” I says. “So, you know, they worked out a deal to save 800 jobs?” “Well, you know, however you want to phrase it.” I said, “Well, I’m just phrasing it like it is, you know – uh, the other jobs never were leaving, right?” “Well no, they weren’t leaving.” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017)

This was the confusing pivot in the story, or, in the union rep’s words, when the dealmakers “put a twist on something.” Trump publicized the negotiation as if 1,100 jobs would remain as part of his intervention when those 300 research-and-development employees were never imperiled to begin with (nor, as far as I understand, were they USW members). The union rep explains why the sensational—and furthermore, incorrect—publicity around this numbers trick was so problematic. After Trump and Pence toured the plant in early December 2016, they gave speeches to an assembly of 100 or so workers, exclaiming that all of 1,100 jobs were staying. My interview participant described the event as rapturous and hysterical, complete with some workers in the back yelling “Build the wall! Build the wall!” Afterwards, those 100 workers spread the news to “the other 500 that’s workin’ that day,” which then spread to the “nightshift,” he said. Everyone thought they were safe until USW reps put fliers in the plant the next day which explained that 550 jobs were still bound for Mexico. A later story puts this

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7 On this matter, a city official said: “So, how that deal was made we’ll never fully know with President Trump and [Pence], and what the details were. But I think it was more a line of: ‘We’re gonna rollback... regulations which will save you money, and, if you keep these here...’” (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017). Participant 7 added that such an agreement is “not good either” (personal communication, 2017).
number at over 600 (Franklin, 2018). Regardless of the exact figure, the union interview participant (Participant 8) I talked to expressed anger that neither Trump nor Pence mentioned that hundreds of layoffs were still in store, which he attributed to Trump’s “big fuckin’ ego” (personal communication, 2017). As of 2018, only 730 workers remain in the Indy plant producing furnaces (Isidore, 2018).

4.5. On the Ground in Huntington

The UTEC factory was a “major employer” (Participant 11, personal communication, 2017) in the tiny city of Huntington, historically providing “good-paying… manufacturing jobs” in “a clean, safe work environment.” Interviewees told me that this facility produced “fan coils” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017) and “air-conditioning components” (Participant 6, personal communication, 2017)—although a news source describes the products as “microprocessor-based controls for the HVAC and refrigeration industries” (Turner, 2016f, para. 3). In one local councilor’s (Participant 11) opinion, UTEC was “symbolically” significant in that it permitted folks without advanced education to aspire to “that American story…. and do just fine by your family” (personal communication, 2017). In this way, the plant was important both for the “psychology” and “the very tangible benefits” it provided employees, he said. Also committed to the workers’ wellbeing—at least ostensibly—was the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), which had a presence in the plant.8

In an August 2017 interview with that city councilor (Participant 6) I had learned that “the community ha[d] been concerned…. [and] [r]ightfully so” (personal communication, 2017). This was not surprising given that the closure of the UTEC facility would take place in December of that year, along with the laying off of 700 workers. On this point, another councilman (Participant 11) there told me: “You bump into constituents who work there or know somebody who works there… at the post office… the grocery store…. [and] there’s an element of it that’s just sympathizing with them… what they’re experiencing right now with their family… allowing them to kind of vent hurt

8 I say “ostensibly” because I learned that the IBEW affiliates there failed to return calls placed by the Indianapolis USW leadership at the time of the crisis (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017). Coordinating on cross-union demonstrations together was thus stymied, which one union rep (Participant 8) considered “ridiculous” (personal communication, 2017) and perhaps attributed to some agreement or contract between the IBEW and management.
and frustration” (personal communication, 2017). Thus the city leadership clearly acknowledged that the citizens involved would be shocked, fearful, or angry at this larger economic situation unfolding beyond their control.

The dynamics of closure were different in this small venue as compared to Carrier in Indy. First, the IBEW was less animated in organizing protests or demonstrations as was the USW Local 1999 (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017). Whereas the Carrier employees could expect a severance and several months of medical benefits, the UTEC folks “didn’t get nothing” (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017). Whereas Indy would have a much better chance at absorbing any single business loss, some suspected that Huntington would be considerably hurt, with one union rep thinking the city would likely transform into the next Flint, Michigan (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017). Granted, Huntington had recently lost a K-Mart, a Bob Evans restaurant, a Marsh grocery store, a JC Penney, and of course the UTEC plant (Participant 11, personal communication, 2017), but at the same time an industrial rejuvenation was expected to take place in the same closing UTEC facility. A plastics company was interested in the location, although the decline narrative eclipsed the development (Participant 6, personal communication, 2017).

4.6. Summarizing Local Interpretations of the Carrier Announcement

So, did workers assign any blame for layoffs at Carrier? And if so, who or what did these workers blame for their uncertain times ahead? Was there a consensus among them to explain their current situations? More specifically, was any blame attributed to Carrier and/or its parent company, United Technologies? If yes, did employees understand the move as simply a reflex of the incessant quest for greater profit? Furthermore, to what extent did they view the quest for unlimited profitability a “problem?” Was what makes a job creator “bad” in the eyes of community members and/or employees only its decision to relocate a plant, and not something else?

Answers to these questions have significant import on the reproduction of capitalism, since we all participate in the process of capital and therefore must maintain thoughts that aid and abet its perpetuation. Following Gramsci, Mann (2013) puts it this
way: capitalism’s hegemonic power creates a “common sense” (p. 52) held by people who view “the state, the ruling classes, and their power” (p. 52) to be “natural” (p. 52) and “necessary” (p. 52). For example, assigning blame to Carrier alone (a symptom) would underplay a critique of larger economic and social systems that put profit ahead of everything else.

In order to supplement my findings from interviews with union members and Indiana city officials, I also reviewed general sentiments from sources interviewed by the *Indianapolis Star* about who or what is to blame for the Carrier decision. The object of this exercise was to find fragments of common-sense views in the local press about the uneven development of capitalism. I also examined online reader comments posted in response to a national and a local news source about the Carrier closure. My rationale for examining these latter two sources derived from the fact that there were very few reader comments added to stories in the *Star*.

My research revealed that amidst attempts to explain the layoffs, community members felt there was plenty of blame to go around. Among the main culprits identified were: company prerogative (involving profit maximizing, shareholder interest, competitiveness, etc.); undue taxation of companies; corporate greed; ineffectual unions; and unproductive workers. Online reader comments leaned more toward blaming the following: in the case of the RTV6 story, readers mostly blamed NAFTA and greed [see Table 4.2]. In the case of the ABC story, readers found fault with company prerogative and greed [see Table 4.3]. To be sure, some support for Bernie Sanders and critical remarks about Corporate America circulated as well.

I will introduce the main categories of blame first and later provide more detailed analysis of how the actors involved view them. I will also provide an analysis of the solutions proposed. As a reference point to begin with, listed below is a table of targets of blame appearing in *Indy Star* stories from the date of the Carrier announcement to late November 2016 (when Trump declared he had reached a deal with management).³⁹

³⁹ To compile this table, I found *Indy Star* stories by searching “carrier” on the website’s search engine. I read the stories on the Carrier decision and fallout between February 10 and November 30, 2016, looking for evidence of blame. The numbers may be inexact, but close.
Table 4.1  Attributed Responsibility for Job Losses in *Indianapolis Star* Articles (Feb. 10 – Nov. 30, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Culprit for Carrier decision</th>
<th>Number of sources attributing blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shareholders/maximize profit/stay competitive/business decision</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America’s trade deals</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate taxes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recurring explanations for the Carrier announcement basically entailed the company’s prerogative (whether regrettable or not) to maximize profits, stay competitive, deliver a return to shareholders, and the like. I made the decision to bundle these explanations together because they involve how the company is run. From a critical perspective, however, one might say that these explanations more or less couch greed in staid economistic discourse. For example, one city official (Participant 10) said that Carrier wanted “to maximize… their investments” (personal communication, 2017). Another official (Participant 11) said that “if you take… UTEC at face value … and Carrier Corporation at face value with what they said… they’re concerned with… remaining competitive by maximizing their profit margins” (personal communication, 2017). Mainstream news coverage was also inclined to present the situation in a more neutral way, which would account for the top placement of the “competitiveness” rationale. Journalists for instance quoted the Carrier press release repeatedly, which safely conveyed the optimal message that corporate PR persons had tailored. Although, this is not to say that interviewees, journalists, and other class actors involved could not switch between the two styles. This in fact did happen, as Participant 10 in my interviews also referred to the Carrier move as “greedy” (personal communication, 2017) in addition to his statement about Carrier maximizing profit.

Corporate greed, or greed more broadly, were notable explanations and/or attributions of blame. Implicated in this charge is the company, parent company, management, and/or the shareholders. The term “greed” as used here, I would argue, has a morality behind it perhaps faintly related to Biblical teachings of right-and-wrong. One of the factors informing unexamined common sense in Western capitalist societies is in fact religion—a contradictory wellspring that the working class routinely dips into when making sense of the world. As Manders (2006) notes, religion comprises “‘judgments’ that ‘identify the exact cause… ‘simple and to hand’ of all manner of daily
life problems” (p. 19). In any event, the greed narrative touches on existing working-class cultural norms other studies have picked up on, and which I discuss later in the dissertation (Hall et al., 2013; Hoggart, as cited in Smith, 2006). Use of the word “greed” does get the union’s point across without prevarication, but is it a powerful enough narrative?

Part of the problem here is the greed explanation only tells part of the story for why capitalism is so damaging towards working people. David Harvey offered an illustrative parallel in a talk about the determinants of the 2008 financial crisis and the “explanatory formats” (The RSA, 2010) people have used to make sense of it. The first of these formats he mentions happens to be “human frailty” (The RSA, 2010) and its nuances, including “predatory instincts,” “instincts for mastery,” “delusions of investors,” and of course, “greed.” Harvey admits that while there is some truth to the greed explanation, the “internal contradictions of capital accumulation” (The RSA, 2010) themselves go further in explaining the economic reality of inequality, which since the 1970s has resulted in extremely wealthy and powerful financiers, and have been born out of capitalism moving its contradictions around instead of solving them. An example he gives is, after workers have faced decreasing wages, “effective demand” was created by issuing credit cards and going into debt.

Nevertheless, the greed perspective became a centering point for demonstrators and dissenters. One of the most outspoken on this matter was then-president of the USW Local, Chuck Jones, who indicated he would agree to interview requests from the media as much as possible (Schwartz, 2016). Not one to mince words, he said that people had “lost their jobs through no fault of their own due to pure and simple corporate greed” (Turner, 2016d, para. 5). It would be a sentiment repeated by a number of other Carrier workers early on. Employee of many years, Tammy Decker, stated in the press that the company’s decision was based on greed as well (Adams, 2016). Jarvis Hagger, a production leader at the plant, also blamed “corporate greed” (Turner, 2016c, para. 7). Adds a Carrier forklift driver and union rep (Participant 12) I interviewed: “When a company makes an announcement and says that… they’re uh shutting a facility down due to… no fault of the employees, then… things become uh obvious that this was about corporate greed” (personal communication, 2017). One city-county councillor

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10 Although Sassoon (1982a) states that common sense stands apart from religion.
(Participant 10) in Indy told me: “I think we looked at it as… these are some greedy guys” (personal communication, 2017), before rhetorically asking: “[W]hat kind of company reneges at this level? “A Huntington official (Participant 11) brought up “corporate greed” (personal communication, 2017) vis-à-vis those he talked to about UTC. Even Bernie Sanders had a message for UTC’s CEO to “stop the greed… [and] stop destroying the middle class in America” (LoBianco, 2016, para. 13).

But in what sense specifically do Carrier and UTC embody the role of the evil business? One respondent (Participant 8) noted it is very easy to determine when considering the money Carrier stood to save from “the wage difference” (personal communication, 2017) after relocating to Mexico. During the time union officials went into “effects bargaining” about six months after the announcement, they tried to keep the jobs in Indy by proposing vacation cutbacks, a wage and pension freeze, and the implementation of unpaid supervisory work that would relieve paid “company supervisors” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017). Yet with all of these “givebacks” calculated and summed, the company would have saved only $22 million a year. According to my respondent, the dollar amount simply could not compete with the annual $65 million Carrier expected to save by outsourcing production. Then, if you combine the attempt at effects bargaining with the repeated reminders that Carrier had big profits and public subsidies in its pocket, the conclusion that critics reached on greed certainly makes sense.

Yet another target of blame for Carrier’s decision was the USW Local itself. This would come up from time to time in online reader comments. An interviewee (Participant 8) also reminded me of Trump’s polemical tweet in late 2016: “If Steelworkers Local 1999 was any good… they would have kept those jobs in Indiana…. [S]pend more time working, less time talking. Reduce dues” (personal communication, 2017). As I will discuss below, this taps into a longstanding conservative trope of deriding unions as protectors of freeloading workers and as impediments to efficiency, growth, and well-meaning business owners. What is perhaps a more interesting target that emerged from my findings was an insular blame from some workers in the plant towards their colleagues. This had to do with internal allegations of perceived poor performance or shiftlessness.
This form of critique was relatively limited and had difficulty breaking into the larger conversation locally about Carrier. For example, *Indy Star* reportage never broached the allegation that workers were at fault. I learned about this subtext during an early interview I conducted in Indiana, where a city-county councillor (Participant 7) told me: “I also think I heard people talk about… ‘Well, of course this was gonna come; I knew this would happen. We have employees who are lazy’” (personal communication, 2017). According to this councillor, those who held this opinion also suspected their colleagues “weren’t getting their jobs done. Weren’t showing up…. weren’t working hard or, you know, taking off… [or] didn’t get fired for messing up.” But, the official also revealed he didn’t “know how true that was” and that “It didn’t really seem to make the… cut.”

One of the union members (Participant 8) I interviewed linked this rumored evaluation to the FMLA, or the Family and Medical Leave Act, which “quite a few” (personal communication, 2017) at Carrier were able to access. Federally mandated, the FMLA applies to public workers and businesses that employ more than 50 people, allowing 12 weeks’ leave for employees attending to personal health issues or those of a loved one (“FMLA (Family & medical leave),” n.d.). The rep saw this as a determinant for workers taking days off while their colleagues were vexed by the absences. However, the rep (Participant 8) also said that in his thirty years he did not see Carrier employees as “any different than any other workers that I’ve dealt with” (personal communication, 2017). He later added that even with “FMLA, you don’t get paid,” which undercuts the argument that these FMLA recipients approximate that *bête noire* of the conservative imaginary: the welfare cheat. Two other city officials I asked about the worker-blaming ideology, one from Indy and the other from Huntington, stated that they never heard this over the course of the UTEC/Carrier events. Nevertheless, the fact that this narrative circulated at all speaks about the depth and resilience of the entrepreneurial ethos in American society.

Table 4.1 also lists the perceived culprits of corporate taxation levels and America’s trade deals—in particular the North American Free Trade Agreement that Bill Clinton signed during his presidency, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which Barack Obama had signed during his own (Eason & Schneider, 2016). Both of these agreements would inexorably haunt Hillary Clinton when she ran in 2016, and they were deeply unpopular among many working-class respondents. Burdensome corporate
taxes, meanwhile, represented the rationale for Carrier’s decision in the minds of many, ranging from random online commentators to important players such as Mike Pence (Turner, 2016).

During the course of my Indiana fieldwork, I came across another pro-market perspective regarding the Carrier announcement. The major exponent of this view was a self-described “businessman politician” (Participant 6, personal communication, 2017) that I interviewed. Given his background, I am able to extrapolate a bit about the modus operandi of the company mind, which was important because I did not set out initially to interview businesspeople for this project. In direct opposition to the union reps I spoke with, this official believed that labor costs were not the primary factor driving Carrier and UTEC to leave. His theory invoked a nebulous amalgam of reasons. As he explained: “[T]here’s so many dynamics that go into a decision for a company to relocate, ‘cause it’s not a… casual decision that they make; ‘cause it’s expensive any time a company relocates.”

This fuzzy explanation for the Carrier announcement was not repeated much elsewhere, but it is worth saying a bit more about it here (and for future business apologia in other cases). Taking a cue from Fairclough (1995), I find that the official in question utilized some of the vagueness endemic to media language specifically around “who did what to whom” (p. 7). For instance, the official (Participant 6) more or less characterized the process of deindustrialization as a natural part of the economic landscape, saying: “[B]usinesses relocating is a fact of life. I mean, it’s happening; it’s been happening in America for a long, long time” (personal communication, 2017). This bespeaks Fairclough’s (1995) discussion of the five “process types” (p. 110) of English grammar, the two in question here being “Action” (p. 110) and “Event” (p. 110). In the Action type, an “Actor does something to” (p. 110) someone, such as “police kill[ing] 15” (p. 110). In contrast, the Event type would read that “15 die” (p. 110). A few pages later, Fairclough applies this to a news account that obfuscates the Actor behind the raising of rice prices—which then leads to a peasant uprising (pp. 111-113). The idea of course is that the cause behind the rising prices is mystified, which I find similar to my interviewee’s explanation of deindustrialization. In Thompson’s (1990) assessment, this would amount to a specific mechanism of ideology called “passivization” (p. 66), which works to “delete actors and agency and… tend to represent processes as things or events which take place in the absence of a subject who produces them” (p. 66). We can
work towards a more complete answer by retooling this Event into an Action: “American business owners choosing to relocate has been a fact of life for a long time.”

But I do not intend to sit here and pick on any way of thinking that strikes me as undialectical and mystifying. Rather, I go back to the first question I posed in the chapter: Who do people think is culpable? As is clear so far, there was no consensus despite the prevailing theories having to do with greed or the normal way to conduct business. This more or less aligns with Thompson’s (1984) contention that society functions not through a “dominant ideology” (p. 63) or “dominant values… shared by all members of a society” (p. 63).

4.7. Assigning Blame – Letters to the Editor 2.0

How did online reader comments interpret Carrier layoff stories? I derived a first data set from a YouTube news broadcast video uploaded the day of the Carrier announcement, February 10, 2016 (RTV6 The Indy Channel, 2016). As of mid-December 2018, it accrued over 34,000 views and 186 comments.11 The second data set comprises the 101 comments posted below a February 16, 2016, ABC News story about Carrier’s decision (Francis, 2016).

Before introducing my findings from this exercise, I want to briefly historicize the medium that is the online reader comment.12 The ability to post your thoughts below articles typifies one of the affordances of the “read-write Web” (Flew & Smith, 2014b, p. ix), or, as it is more typically known, “Web 2.0” (p. ix). Embodying one element of the dream of early Internet celebrants, users can break down the rigidity of the one-to-many media paradigm and add their voices to a story. Nagle (2017) associates such “cyberutopianism” (p. 10) with the 1990s, “before the dot-com bubble burst” (p. 10) and then again with the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street protests of the early 2010s. Ironically, however, the online and “leaderless” (p. 10) public sphere envisioned by left-leaning cyber-utopians has resulted not in liberation but rather in a dramatic ascendance of the far right. Termed the alt-light and alt-right, a significant portion of this new

11 At the time of my analysis in mid-April 2018, 193 comments appeared.
12 I am not alone in making this connection between traditional letters to the editor; in a related way, for instance, Pontefract (2011) associates social media with the ‘letter to the editor’ (para. 9).
conservative vanguard grew out of an online community built up on the 4chan Web forum (pp. 96-97). These irreverent and racist groups tend to exalt President Trump and commit sustained discursive attacks on women and causes associated with feminism. This history bears mentioning because the Indiana closures feature Trump as a key player, and one might expect voices out of the alt-right demographic to contribute to the comment sections.

The equivalent of lay commentary back in 1973 would have been the more laboriously composed letter to a newspaper editor. *Policing the Crisis* debuted that year, and one of the methods the authors utilized in that study was the textual analysis of letters that pertained to law and order in Britain. The authors’ rationale for this method was that questionnaires and interviews were “too blunt as research tools” (Hall et al., 2013, p. xiii), and that letters could “catch public opinion, as it were, unawares – in the very moment of its formation” (2013, p. xiii). Attention to these letters originating from the public is a precursor to contemporary analysis of online comment sections.

Hall et al. (2013) examined, in total, 26 letters in the press that dealt with a Black-on-white mugging in the Handsworth neighborhood of Birmingham. Of the 14 “traditionalist letters” (p. 124) that supported the muggers’ punishment, key themes that emerged included protection for citizens, discipline for criminals, and references to “ordinary personal experience” (p. 124). Such references had the potential for “undercutting soft-hearted, do-gooding liberalism” (p. 124) since the “first-hand experience of crime… would provide the cold touch of realism… missing from the abstract, distanced ‘intellectualising’ of the [opposite] liberal position” (p. 124). I will return to these sorts of ideas in the next section, but the point here is to establish that reading such material is a productive way of gathering “public” sentiment on a controversial issue—even, as the authors’ suggest, in a way more telling than data from an interview.

It is not always easy to tell exactly when these comments appeared below the two news stories, but I suspect many were very close to the date of the Carrier announcement, when tensions were still high. Table 4.2 represents a quantitative recording of explanations of the Carrier layoffs in the comment section of the RTV6 news broadcast. Many of the nearly 200 online comments were difficult to evaluate or categorize around any significant theme, but I was able to identify 38 comments which, in my view, were specifically related to blame.
Table 4.2  Attributed Responsibility for Job Losses in Online Comments to RTV6 News Post

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Culprit</th>
<th>Mentions out of 193 online-reader comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton/Obama trade policy/NAFTA/TPP</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shareholders/maximizing profits/staying competitive</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Workers</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
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When I focused on counting the RTV6 comments that directly tried to explain and/or attribute blame for the Carrier layoffs, I noted particular disdain for the Clinton-era NAFTA deal in 1993. For example, commentator David Brown said the Carrier layoffs provided “A glimpse into a Hillary led america.” A commentator who signed as TheVoice ofReason invoked billionaire and former third-party candidate Ross Perot: “The giant sucking sound that is NAFTA continues, Ross Perot was knocked off by the establishment for predicting it exactly this, Now their (sic) trying to do it to Trump.” The “sucking sound” this commenter refers to is a famous quip of Perot’s from the 1992 presidential debates with George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, wherein he described all the jobs scooting to Mexico as making this noise. The disdain for Clintonite policy, continuing from NAFTA to TPP, matches a simple count I undertook of supportive plugs for 2016 presidential candidates throughout the comment thread. Pro-Trump mentions equaled 24; Pro-Sanders mentions were 4; and pro-Hillary mentions were 0.

A caveat is required here. As is the case with any analysis of online commentary, it is not at all clear what this count actually measures. A strong anti-Clinton sensibility among online commentators to the RTV6 Indy Channel video may indicate a significant presence in local public consciousness or perhaps, even more likely, a better organized right wing online troll army in support of Donald Trump’s campaign. In either case, the key point is readers of the comments were exposed to a clear perception that the causes of the Carrier plant layoffs lay with the legacies of Clinton/Obama trade policies.

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13 A YouTube video posted by TheFedBites (2009) depicts these exact comments from Perot as he is flanked on either side by Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush.
Taxes were also one of the targets for blame in online comments to the RTV6 post. One person wrote, for instance, “Blame the government regulations people.” At the same time, however, there existed a healthy amount of skepticism toward the company itself, which reinforces the “greed” narrative noted in the tables and in my interviews. An online commentator called ValeaBarcaului scoffed: “Greedy CEOs and executives.” Commentator Paul DeLay likewise wrote: “That Company had been making record profits. The move is all about greed.” eidesmond commented: “Good thing the former UTX CEO, who didn’t show up to work for months at a time, got a 50 million dollar parachute when he was fired last yr.”

Additionally, however, the USW Local certainly caught some flack. Ed wrote: “Dump the union maybe they will stay. Another company gone because of union GREED!” A note from “GermantownFamily” admonished: “Union leadership needs to take responsibility.”

A review of online commentary to the ABC News story echoed some of these same themes, including taxation and trade policies. Out of 94 posts I found 27 comments where there was some mention of blame for the Carrier layoffs. The theme of corporate greed resonated more strongly in the online responses here, however.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Culprit</th>
<th>Mentions out of 94 online-reader comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shareholders/maximizing profits/staying competitive</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
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<td>Clintonite trade policy/NAFTA/TPP</td>
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<td>Unions</td>
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<td>Republican governor</td>
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4.8. The Common Sense of Culpability

Trump carried Indiana in 2016, beating Clinton by over 500,000 votes and claiming 57% of the total vote (Indiana results, 2016). Huntington County was overwhelmingly pro-Trump (73% to 22%), while Marion County, containing the more
liberal and racially diverse city of Indianapolis, went the other way: 59% Clinton and 36% Trump (Indiana results, 2016). Nevertheless, the union insider (Participant 8) I talked to recounted a desperate situation taking place after Clinton won the Democratic nomination: he said he had “numerous people come up to [him] and say, ‘Hey… I’m a… lifetime Democrat, uh, I voted Democrat all my life, but I’m voting for Donald Trump” (personal communication, 2017). This interviewee also expressed personal dejection at the time, especially because not in his thirty some years in steel had he seen such enthusiasm for a candidate as there was for Senator Sanders. Alongside frustrated and Democratic-leaning steelworkers were of course their peers who had “believed” (Bethea, 2018, para. 3) in Trump—which, according to one source at least, had comprised the majority of those in the plant.

Still, even though Marion County, where the Carrier Plant is located, went blue in 2016, this doesn’t mean we should ignore the role of conservative contributions to the common sense of culpability. This is especially so given recent disclosures of the roles played by right-wing and Russian trolls in contributing to the common sense that sealed Trump’s electoral victory in 2016 (Shugerman, 2018)\(^\text{14}\)—and given the extent of the positive energy in the room at the time of Trump’s speech to the 100 or so Carrier workers. Moreover, understanding conservative common sense is essential in the task of interpreting the online reader comments from ABC and RTV6, some of which were also supportive of Trump.

What does the alleged culpability assigned to wayward workers, greedy unions, and onerous taxes and so forth by some online commentators say about common-sense belief in American daily life? Also important to question here is the perennially puzzling situation of poor people voting for politicians and/or policies that arguably act against their own interests. The idea is to get inside the intermittently angry American working-class’s mindset when job losses loom on the horizon and some turn to right-wing, worker-blaming, and racist tropes, drawing them into support for a reactionary populist leader such as Trump.

\(^{14}\) An example is the claim that “Russian bots retweeted Donald Trump nearly 500,000 times in the 10 weeks leading up to and directly following the US presidential election – 10 times more than they retweeted his rival, Hillary Clinton” (Shugerman, 2018, para. 1). It is difficult to know how effective these campaigns were on the common sense of voters, particularly as certain leftists downplay the significance of Russian influence in 2016.
4.9. The Workers are at Fault?

Discourses that cast blame, directly or indirectly, on workers themselves is a good place to think more deeply on such tropes. One example, whether a groundless rumor or a distortion of real events, is the comment I noted earlier by an Indianapolis city leader, suggesting that blame toward workers started emerging from their own peers. Although, to be sure, this doesn’t limit the allegation to Carrier workers alone; outside observers contributed as well to a “blame-the-worker discourse,” saying such things as “the 1,400 workers that are constantly asking to be overpaid for work they increasingly prefer to avoid” (online comment by Sam R, in Francis 2016). In a letter to the *Indy Star* editor, Bean (2016) likewise argued that “the workers put themselves out of work” (para. 4), claiming that their $70,000-a-year salary was too high for “assembling] parts into a metal cabinet” (para. 1) and that they want to buy “American Dream” (para. 2) accoutrements for cheap. It is hard to discern how deeply this belief permeated workers’ culture but there is little doubt that this was promoted online by right-wing pundits and trolls. For these reasons “blame-the-worker” discourses warrant attention in the larger question of the common sense of unevenly developing capitalism.

In a time when the Trump regime has promoted the idea of “alternative facts” (Seaton, 2017), it is important not to slide into a fully relativistic position that denies the possibility of in-depth knowledge of the character of either material life or mental life. Yet, it is also important to acknowledge Fairclough’s (1995) assessment that truth “in an absolute sense is always problematic, and a source of much fruitless argument” (p. 47). What is more important surely is to try to explain why and how certain beliefs emerge and gain purchase. In this regard it seems reasonable to assume that “lazy workers” is a far less cogent reason for Carrier to pack its bags than is the money saved by paying a Mexican workforce a dramatically lower wage. Fairclough notwithstanding, there is much in Marx’s statement that “In short, truth is ‘class truth’” (as cited in Bell, 1967, p. 397) which suggests that “the ‘test of truth’ of a doctrine is to see what class interests it serves” (p. 397). Blaming workers therefore reveals a truth in the interest of the capitalist class.

Resentment is an emotion that comprises one of the engines of common-sense belief, according to Manders (2006), along with “patterns of submission to authority,
apathy, cynicism, powerlessness” (p. 45) and “denial, periodic rebellion, and self-doubt” (p. 45). It is further an emotion that my interviews and media analysis suggest is somewhat at play in the Carrier case. Working class cultures have never been monolithic, divided as they are by race, status, and ideological differences. So it should not be that surprising to find a degree of finger pointing on the part of coworkers on the shop floor. To the degree that this may occur it underscores the deference to authority, because it absolves the moneyed CEO, executives, and shareholders from wrongdoing. If disruption and layoffs are the workers’ fault, then corporate leaders had no choice but to look for a better crop of go-getters elsewhere.

In my view, negative attitudes toward an imagined lazy or entitled worker are taken-for-granted aspects of an ideological system in American society geared toward privatized individualism, set within an imagined context of near universal opportunities in U.S. society. You can expect to receive very little sympathy in the larger American political conversation if you “choose” to eschew work. In her study of ideology in rural Wisconsin, Cramer (2016) writes that “[m]any Americans value hard work” (p. 72) adding that members of the working class are inclined to stress it even more than those with higher incomes. Or, as Frank (2005) states in his assessment of red-state Kansas: “working-class heroes are even more Republican than their bosses” (p. 106). So ingrained is hard work in the conservative worldview that it even permits some conservatives to look back rosily on Franklin D. Roosevelt’s publicly subsidized and near socialist work outfits, the CCC and WPA (p. 153), seeing the hard work as part of “what made America great” more than the institutional arrangements that supported it. The “job creator” (Szetela, 2016, para. 3) is another vaunted fixture in the American economic imaginary that conceivably takes away from the importance of workers, consumers, and the government.  

\[15\] Quoting Max Scheler, Bell (1967) writes that “Resentment… is among the most potent of human motives” (p. 31).

\[16\] Szetela (2016) explains the “myth” (para. 6) of the role of job creators in society this way: “[D]espite the fact that the rich have accumulated more economic power, job creation has not returned to its early Carter years, and the US has not seen a watershed of entrepreneurs taking advantage of low tax rates, which would supposedly result in a ‘trickle-down’ benefit for all. In other words, capitalists have not invested their new capital in a way that would validate the job creator narrative” (para. 4).
At this point it is worth noting that direct attacks on workers were not exactly present in presumably external commentary appearing below the RTV6 and ABC News stories. By “external” I mean that there is a greater chance the commentators were not also Carrier employees. My research showed that attacks on workers were rare or muted, which contrasts with the blame-the-workers narrative espoused by some in local government or the factory.

I argue that the lack of sustained antipathy towards workers in these commentaries is attributed both to socio-cultural politics and the bias of spatiality in the minds of outside observers. For example, the Carrier employees do not embody a favorite bête noire in the conservative imaginary: i.e., the “bookish, all-powerful liberals who run the country but are contemptuous of the tastes and beliefs of the people who inhabit it” (Frank, 2005, p. 13). In my interviews, and in numerous other accounts, workers view themselves simply as salt-of-the-earth, “unpretentious” (p. 13) folk who call a “red” state their home (p. 13). This corresponds to Frank’s (2005) assertion that the perceived qualities of red-state denizens are that they are “reverent” (p. 22), “loyal” (p. 23), and “above all… regular, down-home working stiff[s]” (p. 23).

Put another way, red-state Carrier workers in the conservative imagination had these “honest” connotations going for them and as a consequence were probably immunized from a lot of negative comments. In fact, one Indy councillor (Participant 7) I interviewed said that if the Carrier employees had locked themselves in the factory, “They certainly would’ve had the American people’s support in doing it” (personal communication, 2017). “Hard work” equals valuable cachet indeed. Indianapolis mayor Joe Hogsett said that his top priority after the announcement was the “well-being of the hardworking families affected” (Turner, 2016b, para. 15). The governor at the time, Mike Pence, likewise stated his disappointment over the decision that would cost “hard-working Hoosiers more than 2,100 jobs” (Turner, 2016g, para. 3). This highlights an important point regarding when it is appropriate and justified for society to show vulnerable persons sympathy. Blomley (2004) has pointed out a similar phenomenon with respect to Vancouver apartment evictions in preparation of Expo 86. One case that drove the arguments against displacement was that of Olaf Solheim, an 87-year-old retired logger who lived in the same downtown hotel for decades before facing eviction. Blomley writes that the combination of Solheim’s former work, “the heartless landlord,
and the attachment to place” (p. 52) is a “powerful” story that has had a “successful” impact on policy and “general public discourse” (p. 52).

The juxtapositions here between worker’s industry and deserved well-being and rumors or floating accusation online about lazy Carrier workers, or trade policies that allegedly support coastal elites at worker’s expense, are each very interesting. In the first instance, the discourse of hard work gets connected to well rooted common-sense obsessions with welfare cheats—which Sennett and Cobb (1973) argue are “out of proportion to the [actual] number of ‘chiselers’” (p. 136) anyway. What I gained from my own interviews was that there was certainly some talk of workers not “getting their jobs done” (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017), or “[w]eren’t showing up” or were “taking off,” or in general “weren’t working hard.”

Of course, it is necessary in all of this to address the subject of race, I explicitly asked a city official (Participant 7) about the factory’s racial dynamics. He replied:

A large proportion of those jobs were Black. I don’t know what the number is. I’m leaning toward like a fifty percent mark.17 It seemed like a lot to me…. There were Latinos as well…. [and] a lot of women as well worked there, so um, this was not just your, you know, blue-collar white-boy manufacturing facility. This was uh real representative of the community. (personal communication, 2017)

And yet, at the same time, the Indy Star’s discursive references to race in the Carrier story were basically nonexistent. This is at least true for Indy Star stories found with the search term “carrier” and published between February 10, 2016 (the day of the announcement), and November 30, 2016 (when news broke about Trump’s deal with executives). Among stories I consulted, there was neither explicit mention of African-American workers at Carrier nor reference to manufacturing positions as a crucial source of income for Black west-siders. This is a striking textual oversight, particularly if we agree that “[t]exts are the material traces… left of the practice of sense-making – the only empirical evidence we have of how other people make sense of the world” (McKee, 2003, p. 15). This assessment from McKee would suggest that Indy Star news producers followed suit in a perceived pre-Trump “era of colorblindness” (Alexander, 2012, p. 2), which ameliorates discrimination African Americans once faced, but reproduces it in insidious new ways. In noting why such silence is problematic, Marable

17 This is most likely an accurate statistic given the racial makeup of Indianapolis; it is also supported by Aronowitz’s (1973) note that in the early 1970s Blacks comprised one-third to two-fifths “of the workforce in the auto and steel industries” (p. 260).
(2002) writes, “To be ‘color blind’ in a virulently racist society is to be blind to the history and reality of oppression” (p. 15).

The absence of race in the Indy Star’s version of the Carrier story thus denies exposure of a distinct dimension of Black working-class struggle—not only confined to unionism itself but in the wider society (West, 1988). Beyond that, I think that no matter how “fair” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017) the press was to the USW Local at the time, colorblind coverage, which I discerned, fails to make connections in a society marked by police shootings and acquittals, disproportionate drug incarcerations, ghettos, the mounting white resentment that would later explode at Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017—and the trouble President Trump had in disavowing it.

4.10. The Union is at Fault?

Related to the claim that steelworkers themselves may be culpable is the allegation that the USW Local is at fault. One of the more forceful and prominent attacks on this particular Local came from then president-elect Trump in early December 2016. His tweet that Participant 8 invoked (“If Steelworkers Local 1999 was any good… they would have kept those jobs in Indiana…”) (personal communication, 2017) received over 54,000 “Likes” and over 13,000 “Retweets” as of mid-April 2018. Trump may or may not believe this, as it could merely be a vindictive quip meant only to delegitimize his naysayers. And we simply do not know how many retweets were the result of bots and trolls. Certainly, the level of apparent support for the tweet could be a reflection of pro-Trump attitudes irrespective of the textual content and the existence of the apparent volume of support, no matter what the source, lent Trump’s comments greater legitimacy. Talking about labor unions no doubt sets off alarm bells in the conservative imaginary. Belonging to a union, for instance, has been found to shift voting habits to the left (Frank, 2005, p. 246). Unions give workers collective power to negotiate with owners, a reason why right-leaning business owners have historically sought to weaken the power of organized labor. Right-wing governors across the U.S., including Pence in Indiana, have signed right-to-work legislation that hobbles unions. The former governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, smashed public unions in early 2011 before a spectacle of protest descended on the state capitol building.
Unions are certainly multidimensional. On the one hand, the right attacks them for obvious, if often caricatured reasons. On the other hand, Marx himself said that trade unions sap their own potential if they only conduct “guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it” (Marx, as cited in Jackson, 1982, p. 133). Meanwhile, other critics have seen unions as: huge bureaucracies (Dandaneau, 1996, p. 3); too chummy with “Big Business” (p. 89); sexist and racist (Marable, 1983, p. 32); “conservative” (Bell, 1967, p. 212) and safe rather than radical or socialist; one of capitalism’s “‘socializing’ institutions” (Manders, 2006, p. 32); and one of Althusser’s “Ideological State Apparatuses” (1994, p. 90). Some ethnographic-style studies in the workplace bear these complaints out. Gouldner (1953) found that workers at a gypsum plant felt “a mixture of hostility and suspicion toward those in the upper regions of the union hierarchy” (p. 41), but were often divided internally, especially when members acted against the dictates of union organizers through actions such as wildcat strikes. In talks with a trucker out of Detroit, Clemens (2012) heard that “a union will break a company in a heartbeat” (p. 206). But, Ehrenreich (2001) found little radical fervor in her undercover employment at various low-wage jobs.

I found that comments below the RTV6 and ABC News content revealed some of this antipathy, although perhaps less than I expected. As noted above, a couple of commenters tied the Carrier problem to greedy or ineffective unions (e.g., “Unions can kill you or save you. In this case they killed you”\textsuperscript{18}). But this was not the reigning message throughout. The fact that Carrier and UTEC workers were employed at an honest job (and that they were not East Coast elites) appeared to immunize them from outward accusations against their productivity and their union. For example, local union president Chuck Jones made a statement to the press to this effect: “We didn’t want a handout or a giveback or anything. We wanted an opportunity to work” (Mack, 2016, para. 20). That they were working hard, and not grifting the welfare system, is enough to warrant them some sympathy regarding their predicament. Further, it does not appear that either online venue (RTV6 or ABC News) invited the bafflingly crude alt-right language usually provided by reactionary trolls or encountered in other online fronts of the contemporary culture wars. This may be due to the absence of perceived feminist,

\textsuperscript{18} Comment by Chris Zyyyz (2016) below the RTV6 YouTube broadcast.
racial, or LGBTQI themes involved in the story (despite, for instance, a large number of women and POC employees at the factory).

The narrative that the union was at fault never picked up steam in the interviews I conducted either. On this point, Thompson (1984) argues that studying ideology is “to study language in the social world…. from the most mundane encounter between friends and family members to the most privileged forums of political debate” (p. 2). I bring this up because one interview with a city-county councillor revealed a glimmer of common-sense ideology with regard to unionism in the abstract, and I found it to be deserving of a mention. The councillor’s (Participant 10) statement was revealing in its matter-of-fact delivery. First he asserted that blame “was not directed towards the quality of the workers” (personal communication, 2017) and he later admitted that UTC seemed to harbor “some greedy guys.” In between, however, he said that “these were unionized workers, and, for whatever people… may or may not say about unionized workers, these guys, you know, knew their stuff and were good.” Even though this official paid a compliment to the USW Local 1999, he at the same time cryptically intimated that: there is justification to doubt the necessity of organized labor; and/or, that the existence of unions is a justly controversial topic that other social actors question.

4.11. Onerous Taxes are at Fault?

Regulations, laws, tax codes, and policies sit at the center of this explanation for Carrier’s move. In yet another very American common-sense belief, the advocates here link up with existing right-leaning and/or libertarian thinkers who argue that the government acts as a gadfly and unreasonable bane on business. One of the Huntington legislators (Participant 6), for instance, lamented the overly cautious environmental laws companies must follow in the U.S., saying that “engineering purists” (personal communication, 2017) under Obama committed to finding “those last few parts per trillion,” whereas Mexican officials would not bother. Several voices likewise chimed in about government overreach below the RTV6 YouTube post:

- “Blame the government regulations people”
- “Regretfully the US government-Congress-has fixed the playing field so moving facilities overseas is more profitable than keeping production here at home. All sorts of
restrictions, the highest corporate tax rates, and other meddlesome rules make going overseas more favorable than staying in the USA”

- “Cant blame them for moving amerikas taxes are nuts we spend in the wrong places thats why we are broke”

Similar online opinions appeared below the ABC News story:

- “Companies in this country are at a competitive disadvantage in a global economy. With the second highest corporate taxes in the Western World… and a myriad of high cost regulations… States ought to get the message that General Electric gave to Connecticut. It’s too expensive to do business there!”

- “We taxed the crap out of US companies for decades, crammed Unions down their throats, vilified their executives and successful leaders”

Akin to the explanations finding fault with workers and unions, this common-sense belief absolves corporations of wrongdoing while implying that small government is a desirable system to abide by. This train of thought suggests all sorts of other racial, classed, gendered, and spatial consequences having to do, for instance, with damaging the social safety net, endangering minorities, ensuring privileges, and supporting segregating policy, etc. Sometimes these consequences are explicitly nominated in calls for smaller government, while at other times they remain implicit or coded (e.g., “states’ rights” has long been a dog-whistle term for white supremacy). In any case, the broader implications of the anti-tax agitation recall Bell’s (1967) albeit somewhat caricatured discussion of ideology vis-à-vis Marx: In the latter’s opinion, the “unmasking’ of ideology… is to reveal the ‘objective’ interest behind the idea and to see what function the ideology serves” (p. 397).

Talking about taxes necessarily requires consideration of the state. Like unions, the state does not have a unified character. Government action may very well provide

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19 Zirin (2008) writes how Ronald Reagan announced his campaign for president in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where “three civil rights workers were murdered in 1964—with the rallying cry of ‘states’ rights” (p. 213).

20 Further to Chapter 2’s retelling of capitalism’s history, McLellan (1980) writes that “Marx traced the origin of the state… to the division of labor” (p. 60), adding that “the state was opposed to the real interests of all members of society since it constituted an illusory sense of community serving
a backstop to capitalism’s voracious nature, but the state simultaneously facilitates the capitalist system, ultimately making it possible. It is for this reason that Miéville (2007) writes that—despite some wealthy acolytes—“libertarianism is not a ruling-class theory,” adding that “untepered by the realpolitik of Reaganism and Thatcherism, the antistatism of ‘pure’ libertarianism is worse than useless to the ruling class” (p. 255). Yet while wealthy bankers and corporate executives need government protection, sometimes the government looks out for the little guy. One example that comes to mind occurred in the early 1990s when the Internal Revenue Service caught wind of Microsoft marginalizing flexible temp workers to avoid paying payroll taxes (Klein, 2002, p. 250).\footnote{In this case, the IRS first caught on to Microsoft’s actions to avoid taxes in 1990; three years later, Microsoft contractor-employees brought a lawsuit against the company (Klein, 2002, p. 250).}

In liberal democracies, the capitalist state is therefore slightly autonomous.

For some, calls for less regulation and lower corporate and capital-gains taxes, however, create the perception of a scam run by the feds on honest businesspeople just looking out for their customers. Considering the actual strategies made possible for the rich under neoliberalism, however, we see that American corporations have stowed away several trillions of dollars in offshore tax havens, meaning that the U.S. government cannot collect and redistribute this money (Davis & Monk, 2007, p. x).\footnote{The number Davis and Monk cite in 2007 is $11.5 trillion stored in these havens, which is ten times the United Kingdom’s GDP (p. x).} We can also refer to companies’ annual submissions to the Securities and Exchange Commission, such as Amazon’s. This behemoth corporation makes several billion dollars in profits, and yet for 2017, it paid no federal income tax and qualified for a $137 million refund from the government (Tobias, 2017). Looking back even further, we can reference Mills’s (1957) astute comment that “the private industrial development of the United States has been much underwritten by outright gifts out of the people’s domain” (p. 100), which includes every level of government having “given land free to railroads, paid for the cost of shipbuilding… [and] for the transportation of important mail” (p. 100), as well as subsidized the roads that made Henry Ford a billionaire. But aside from the
ultimately sketchy claim that taxes caused Carrier to relocate, how does the claim align with existing common sense?

Imbricated in antigovernment rhetoric is the notion of anti-intellectualism that Frank (2005) traces back to the 1930s, when President Roosevelt entrusted professors and intellectuals with crafting the New Deal (p. 192). In the conservative mindset, or what Frank terms the “backlash” (p. 191) ideology, intellectuals in government and professional positions represent those “who call the shots” (p. 191)—and not capitalism or “market forces” (p. 191). Anti-intellectualism is not limited to the United States, of course. Hall et al. (2013) discuss the phenomenon in Britain, writing that it is “a class response to that unequal distribution of knowledge: a response from a class which emphasises practical knowledge, first-hand experience of doing things” (p. 151). This definition arguably helps to explain the common-sense solution of boycotting explored below.

In the American political context, Cramer (2016) writes that while Americans have not completely supported small-government views, the suspicion towards government is nonetheless familiar to U.S. history (p. 151). She also notes an uptick in this philosophy after the election of Barack Obama, leading to right-wing populism in the form of the Tea Party movement (p. 151). Whether or not the online commenters consciously consider, for example, FDR and the New Deal when talking about corporate taxes today is less important than the fact that the collective sentiment links up with deeper trends in common sense. Such trends go on to exonerate authority and the powerful.

While “submission to authority” (Mander, 2006, p. 45) is endemic to common sense, so is the quality of contradiction. For this reason, I want to highlight one of the online comments quoted a few pages above before moving to the next section. This would be the remark by a poster called FUCKTHESYSTEM70, who says that we “can’t blame [Carrier] for moving americas taxes are nuts we spend in the wrong places that’s why we are broke.” There is enough flagrantly contradictory or otherwise vaguely insinuating content in this one little fragment to give any discourse analyst pause. First is the fraught user name reminiscent of 1960s counterculture and slogans like the Black Panthers’ “off the pigs!” (Self, 2000, p. 762). Decrying a “system” also recalls the heady
language and influence of 1960s leftist gurus, such as Roland Barthes (Eagleton, 1994b), Jurgen Habermas (Sayer, 2001), and Marcuse (1991).

But I think we can assume that this is not the tradition \textit{FUCKTHESYSTEM70} is tapping into. As Nagle (2017) reports, the left countercultural ethos of the 60s has become the domain of the right in the Trump age, which, she argues, reveals that abstract transgression is politically neutral—as it is available to both sides. This is to say that raging against a system no matter how loose one defines it is not an activity monopolized by the left. The “system” this online commenter imagines is probably closer to the conservative responses given by rural Wisconsinites to Cramer (2016). Many of these respondents decried public employees, whom they saw as receiving “exorbitant benefits and salaries paid with hard-earned taxpayer money” (p. 143). In addition, they saw this system of taxation as disproportionately taking from them without reinvesting in them personally or in their communities (p. 146).

But let me return to the racial semiotics of the online comment. Invoking the Panthers makes sense, especially because this individual spells America with a “k.” I do not know for certain, but this stylized spelling may intend to connote that the country is white supremacist, as the “k,” of course, would signify the Ku Klux Klan. There is precedence for spelling the country in this fashion, such as Ice Cube’s 1990 gangsta-rap album, \textit{Amerikkka’s Most Wanted}. But law enforcement, a pillar of the conservative worldview, represents one of the more spectacular fronts where white-on-Black racism is brutally actualized. So what is peculiar and contradictory here is that the insinuation that America and its police agencies are racist would imply a more fulsome leftist ideology—perhaps one that would condone wealth redistribution or fixing up ghettos. Yet the commenter gives Carrier Corporation a pass, and instead she or he blames the means that would redistribute wealth or fix those ghettos: taxes. This shows a common-sense capitalist support. I could be wrong in my assessment however, given that the user could be referencing a 1987 TV miniseries called \textit{Amerika: The Triumph of the American Spirit}. The show depicted a Soviet coup in the U.S., which would align closer with the user’s conservative leanings.\footnote{I inadvertently ran across the Wikipedia page for this TV production I was initially unaware of.}

\footnote{\hspace{0.5cm}}
Compounding the confusion in the statement is the slippery use of the word “we,” which I explore more in-depth in Chapter 5.\textsuperscript{24} In this case, it is unclear as to whom \textit{FUCKTHESYSTEM70} is referring to. Who are the “we” doing the “spend[ing] in the wrong places,” and who are the “we” that are broke? Come to think of it, what are the wrong places anyway? In any event, what I wanted to show through this one quote is the contradictory nature of common sense whereby an online user can freely adopt the signifiers of a racially-conscious left to espouse fairly pat right-wing talking points.\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{4.12. Clintonite Trade Policy is at Fault?}

As one might have guessed, neither of the Clintons, and to a lesser extent Barack Obama, emerge as heroic characters in the Carrier story. One of the union reps (Participant 8) I interviewed thought that Hillary cheated in the Democratic nominee race (personal communication, 2017). He also suspected that women USW workers involved in the “Women of Steel groups” would back Hillary, yet to the contrary he found that “the vast majority of ‘em was Bernie.” Likewise, no comments supportive of Clinton appeared below the RTV6 and ABC News stories; these were pro-Trump by a wide margin, save for a few Bernie endorsements.

In a Huntington official’s (Participant 11) reflection, some people in town cited NAFTA as a determinant for local job loss (personal communication, 2017). This political buzzword denotes the agreement that went into effect on January 1, 1994, to facilitate commerce between Canada, the US, and Mexico. It was punishing to the Rust Belt, inseparable from Bill and Hillary, and a great liability to the latter’s 2016 campaign. The Trans-Pacific Partnership deal functioned in much the same way; the TPP was a proposed twelve-country agreement that President Obama worked toward during his tenure (BBC, 2017). Its ostensible objectives were to remove tariffs and create a “single

\begin{footnotes}
\item[24] I explain in the following chapter Fairclough’s (1995) analysis of Margaret Thatcher’s vague usage of “we” (p. 181) in one of her statements about the Conservative Party.
\item[25] But this is not the only flagrantly contradictory user comment; below the ABC News story for instance we read: “Americans now buy on price and don’t seem to care much where the products come from. These are the same people who are losing their jobs. And by the way, it wasn’t only Henry Ford who created the middle class. Private unions had a significant role! But that was back before we became a socialist country!” Posted by Pilgrim1620, this commentary is all over the map! (The username “Pilgrim1620” also strikes me as aggressively white, masculine, and conscious of white heritage).
\end{footnotes}
market” that approximated the European Union (para. 5), yet opponents on the left and right saw the TPP as “secretive” (para. 11) and damaging to “American jobs and national sovereignty” (para. 11). Hillary Clinton’s once-approving remarks on the partnership came back later to haunt her. The objective consequences of America’s shuttered manufacturers suggest Clinton critics are not wrong on maintaining a kneejerk reaction to free-trade proposals.

We read such user comments as: “TPP and other free trade agreements are nothing but a sell out of American jobs”; “and that tpp deal which your (sic) dancing around do what your husbands nafta deal did to 1400 carrier employeees (sic)?” (RTV6, 2016); “NAFTA: the perfect example of our politicians being bought and paid for!” (RTV6, 2016). What I find interesting in this diagnosis of the Carrier problem is an already established observation having to do with a right-wing appropriation of the job-loss narrative. In such an appropriation, the answer to outsourced opportunities is not agitation against capitalist uneven development or globalization facilitated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund—processes especially exploitative of the world’s low-income women (Federici, 2012, p. 87). Such a response would be the bailiwick of leftist anti-globalization movements, or the rebel group of Mexican Zapatistas. Neither is the right-wing solution found in establishing economically-democratic worker collectives, which Bernie Sanders has advocated (Fuchs, 2017, pp. 23-24).

What appears instead is the implementation of the following policy. Fuchs (2017) explains Trump’s initiative on such matters as “national capitalism” (p. 23) which entails American companies making things in their home country through domestic exploitation of workers and later international export. Making this vision possible would be a lowered corporate tax from 35% to 15%, which during a debate Trump said would entice the “hundreds and hundreds of companies” (Trump, as cited in Fuchs, 2017, p. 23) fleeing the U.S. to stop. This is to say that solutions lie in the reworking of the U.S. capitalist state and increasing the profit-earning potential of wealthy corporations. American workers are hoodwinked in the process, because the concern is not for their wellbeing or the establishment of their “good earnings” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 19) but rather for the growing

26 In just one example of the exploitation faced by Third World women in hazardous work environments, Federici (2012) describes the Kenyan and Colombian flowers industry that leaves young women either blind or with a disease from “constant exposure to fumigation and pesticides” (p. 87).
of companies’ profits. Mexican workers also suffer exploitation, which bears witness to the lie foisted by Trump’s philosophy on all elements of the international working class, namely that the problem remaining unaddressed by conservatives in these solutions lies in the cross-border exploitation of class. As Fuchs states, Trump sees the NAFTA problem “as an issue of nations, whereas it is in reality an issue of class” (p. 43). As Kiernan (1983) reminds us, the “Communist Manifesto” stated that “the working men have no country” (p. 344) which would be a good philosophy to maintain while building international solidarity.

Typically there is no grand call for solidarity with Mexicans among those online commenters I examined bemoaning NAFTA and TPP. This was not Trump’s priority either. International solidarity awareness was reserved for more conscientious union reps (Participant 8), such as one I interviewed who said: “The Mexican workers: they’re not our enemy… they’re being exploited too, just like we are” (personal communication, 2017).

But I want to explore a final point about mainstream Democrats and the Carrier case. This point came up in my interviews, but it is also necessary to address given the anti-Clinton prevalence in online commentary. First it is important to establish the eroding perception that Democrats represent “the party of workers, of the poor, of the weak and the victimized” (Frank, 2005, p. 1). Before his turn to avid Bush supporter, for example, politician Zell Miller said in 1992 that “Not all of us can be born rich, handsome, and lucky, and that’s why we have a Democratic Party” (p. 258). Since the 1930s, moreover, labor unions have associated with the Democrats (Riley, 2017, p. 23); between 1948 and 1964, Lichtenstein (2013) writes that “every Democratic candidate for president launched his campaign with a Labor Day rally in Detroit’s Cadillac Square” (p. 105). Vance’s (2016) autobiography describes his grandfather’s view of the party as that of “the workingman” (p. 47).

But the faith that the party would do right by these vulnerable populations wore thin over time. Wright (1985) has described this erosion in terms of parties (and unions themselves) having “undermined working-class consciousness” (p. 279), adding:

The Democratic Party has systematically displaced political discourse from a language of class…. [with] the general tendency… to organize social conflicts in non-
class ways and to emphasize the extremely limited range of alternatives for dealing with problems of power and property. (pp. 279-280)

To this point, Frank (2005) writes that the Democratic Leadership Council “has long been pushing the party to forget blue-collar voters and concentrate instead on recruiting affluent, white-collar professionals who are liberal on social issues” (p. 243). This is a crucial history lesson for the 2016 election especially, as the Democrats’ neoliberal centrum had no solution for the crises after 2008 that poor and working people faced.

In this milieu was something that came up in my first interview with an Indianapolis city-county councillor (Participant 7): a begrudging acknowledgment of Trump and a bitterness toward Obama. He pointed out that Obama “never said a word” (personal communication, 2017) about the Carrier crisis or even cared “about what was happening with those people.” He also indicated that these facts should shield him (the councillor) from any criticism that, despite supporting the Carrier workers, he never really came out and verbally “attacked” Trump. He added: “And at least President Trump’s case, he saved half those jobs.” The two USW reps I talked to had to perform a similar mental contortion, namely that they felt angry at Trump’s lies but still had to “give the man… credit” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017) and feel “appreciative as to what took place there” (Participant 12, personal communication, 2017). There are some interesting takeaways from this attitude that I think expose the general failures of Obama/Clinton neoliberalism for working people, and the dearth of equitable solutions that that doctrine and policy has.

4.13. Company Imperative (Greed or Otherwise) is at Fault?

The perception that Carrier moving was a decision resting entirely within the corporation, or on account of its shareholders, was clearly a major, if not the major, theme that emerged from my field interviews. For example:

• “Shareholders…. [although] it’s hard to even blame like the executives of Carrier, because they’re hired to do a job, and they’re hired to make their shareholders profitable” (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017).

• They moved “because… of the wage difference” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017).
• “Uh, it was Carrier…. you know, wanting to uh, you know, wanting to maximize their investment…. It didn’t come from our side. It didn’t come from, you know, state side or local side” (Participant 10, personal communication, 2017).

One of my more formative questions when I began this scholarly project involved this sentiment on company imperative. I wondered whether Hoosiers saw United Technologies and Carrier as a couple of bad apples in an otherwise generally sensible (if well-managed) system of capitalism. Or, on the contrary, whether the tendency to shed jobs and leave town was endemic to all companies, which would force everyone to confront a much larger problem: that capitalism and its contradictions are inherently unsolvable no matter how conscientious and caring those in charge are. Put another way, were the Hoosiers affected more inclined to believe that Carrier was greedy, or that all companies are greedy?

I did ask a USW rep (Participant 12) this question: whether he thought all companies are greedy or if the trait was limited only to some like Carrier. He started his answer with a chuckle and then said “they all can be” (personal communication, 2017). While his main explanation for the Carrier decision was “corporate greed,” he left the door open for the possibility that any company can sell out its workforce. Then he continued with an explanation I encountered in several other places and which started to shed light on how employees were rationalizing the lost jobs. The rep said: “when you have companies that are… that have won all the awards that they can possibly win…. gold awards and different things of that nature…. If you’re up there like that, I mean, you can’t get any other understanding of uh their decision other than greed.” This sense of the exclusiveness and uniqueness to Carrier’s success became important to understand the thinking behind this category of blame.

Some online reader comments also bemoan the corporate greed of Carrier. One commenter in the RTV6 account was a Bernie supporter who described the situation as capitalism at its “worst.” However, it is important to resist any temptation to extrapolate from this or similar comments online as evidence of an incipient upsurge in political opposition, especially given the often parallel presence of antiunion rhetoric online and pro-Trump advocacy. In this regard, it is useful to recall one of Hall et al.’s (2013) arguments about working-class perceptions—in England at least—of the very rich. At the core of this perception is the proletarian truism that “everyone should earn what he gets
by working for it” (p. 141). When directed at the “very wealthy” (p. 141), common-sense abiding workers tend to feel that “there is something intrinsically wrong and exploitative” (p. 141) about the “unequal distribution of wealth” (p. 141). Still, in the American Carrier case it is likely that antagonism against greedy CEOs and executives could be absorbed within another common-sense trope: what Hall et al. have called “pragmatic acceptance” (p. 141) of an unfair social world. The tension between the idea that people should earn what they deserve through hard work and a pragmatic but cynical acceptance of unfairness, seems particularly evident in eidesmond’s aforementioned comment about the CEO of the company claiming $50 million dollars despite failing to show up for work regularly.

What I find interesting in the “corporate greed” interpretation is that in at least some employees’ minds, a company has more of a license to mistreat labor and threaten local government if that company is struggling financially. Management gets more of a pass because it is trying to survive in an unforgiving, dog-eat-dog market that is awash in relentless competition. Another union rep (Participant 8) stated: “If in fact the company [wasn’t]… making a good quality product and we couldn’t help em fix it—I wouldn’t like it, [but] I’d understand them leaving this country” (personal communication, 2017). Meanwhile, an employee quoted in the New Yorker said: “We can understand companies having to go overseas if they’re losing money. We get it” (Bethea, 2018, para. 4). An online commenter below the ABC News story similarly wrote: “I can understand expanding. Would I prefer companies to expand in the U.S.? Sure. I just didn’t like the fact that 1400 Americans were put out of work!” This sort of statement also backs up my claim from earlier about the workers themselves being largely immunized from direct criticism, as they after all abided by the proletarian code of working hard for what’s owed you.

I find these begrudging acceptances to mean that job loss and company relocation are just the “reality” workers must accept about the economy. When an embattled company downsizes, it’s just the “way things are” or a natural part of life. In Thompson’s (1984) formulation, this evinces the “reification” (p. 131) quality of ideology, which depicts a “transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time” (p. 131). Or as a Carrier worker put it: “It’s just life. It’s business. I don’t take it personal. You’ve just got to find another way to make ends meet” (Mack, 2016, para. 16). Such a view reflects the Huntington official quoted above who naturalized
deindustrialization as something that has been happening for decades. The view also points up those concepts posited by Hall et al. (2013) and Cairns (2015), namely “pragmatic acceptance” (p. 141) and “disaffected consent” (p. 125) respectively. In other words: “The company is skipping town, and it’s regrettable, but there’s nothing we can do about it.”

But as soon as a corporation is “up there” (Participant 12, personal communication, 2017), as the union rep said about UTC, then the business loses any good faith its employees had been allotting it. When its profits are in the billions, and it is receiving big government contracts, the company is no longer forgivable in its actions to maximize those profits. Yet the problem here is that believing this brings one to a circumscribed agitation—one that, as Fuchs (2017) discusses about the Trumpian worldview, does not acknowledge the structural contradictions of capitalism. The working class leaves the bourgeoisie as a whole unshaken and unchallenged by directing an idiosyncratic ire. What stands in for the bane of working women and men is instead a shifting array of isolated events, an array of greedy execs who embody the symptoms of a much larger disease.


As suggested earlier, when asked what to do about industrial relocation, my respondents’ offered a wide variety of responses from establishing worker collectives to dropping corporate taxes by 20 percentage points. The former idea is meant to resolve a contradiction in the capitalist mode of production: i.e., the socialization of production and the privatization of wealth; the latter idea marshals the state in to once again prioritize capitalism’s powerful entities and play along with companies as they take localities hostage. But there also exists a handful of solutions in between.

These solutions vary in terms of where the agency is placed and which social actor or actors need to do what. More specifically, from my interviews I heard the following: a city-county councillor (Participant 7) said that a U.S. president should withhold contracts for companies that offshore and relocate (personal communication, 2017). “[I]t’s real easy” he added. He also suggested that the union and workers should have occupied the endangered plant to make a big statement. Another Indianapolis
councillor (Participant 10) stated that his government body should help with job training and “preparedness” (personal communication, 2017) and that the council should also try to foster a “favorable environment” to attract new companies. A Huntington official (Participant 6) concurred with the sentiment on attracting new businesses and job opportunities (personal communication, 2017). Another solution was suggested in the form of educational partnerships that could help adults “upskill or… gain the skills they [need] to change career paths” (Participant 9, personal communication, 2017).

Meanwhile, the laid-off employees could move into logistics, such as Amazon warehousing (Participant 10, personal communication, 2017).

The union reps’ solutions involved trying to save the jobs, holding demonstrations, and lobbying Trump to sign an executive order prohibiting companies from outsourcing. Voices more associated with officialdom were keen on retraining/upskilling and communicating their cities as attractive places to invest and open up businesses. The former case asks a lot of laid-off workers—some of whom, as has been recognized by more than one interviewee, may have been outside the classroom for over 20 years. This is an especially vexing prospect for older Carrier workers still too young to retire, such as those in the over-40 range (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017). Officials’ other solution represents one of the core objects of analysis for the urban communication field, as stoking publicity is no doubt a standard strategy across urban areas. According to a Huntington legislator (Participant 6), “That’s always happened…. Bluffton’s done it. Wabash has done it. Uh Whitley County’s done it… Fort Wayne. Everybody’s marketing themselves, doing the best they can to attract business” (personal communication, 2017).

The prevailing solution among online commenters below both the RTV6 and ABC News stories was to boycott Carrier. It is interesting how prevalent this refrain of consumer activism was (although I am reproducing only a few of the many quotes here). Below the RTV6 YouTube broadcast appeared:

- “AMERICA Do not buy this companies (sic) products anymore”
- “Not that it will change anything but I’m doing renovations on my home and I told my contractor not to order any carrier products for the central AC”
• “This will ruin their company as more and more people boycott them as a result of this heartless attempt at saving money”

• “They are nothing but traitors. I for one will never buy a Carrier again”

Below the ABC News story:

• “I will need a new heat pump and I will not buy it from Carrier”

• “If you want to fight back, boycott all products from companies that export jobs…”

• “Buy Trane or York”

• “Boycott them and put a 50% surcharge on anything that carrier sells in the US”

Aside from a few commenters expressing the suspicion that boycotting will not work, this solution was among the less controversial and most repeated. Other recurring solutions proposed by online users included: voting for Trump, although this too received some pushback by others; levying harsh taxes and tariffs on companies that leave the U.S.; a couple of proposals to get the steelworkers to either buy the plant themselves or produce furnaces in a new business venture; and a smattering of other tactics, such as moving the Hoosier steelworkers to Mexico or allowing consumers to pay more for a product made in America.

The solution of educating oneself and learning a new skill was suggested infrequently among the online user comments. For instance, below the RTV6 post appeared: “Wish you guys in Indiana the best, been in your spot before, the only way stop this vicious cycle is educating yourself and changing jobs.” And below the ABC News story, Cbock said: “If you don’t invest in yourself, don’t expet (sic) to bring much in pay.” Doing so of course places the onus on the individual subject, which, as established above, is not at all easy or practical for some of the laid-off Carrier and UTEC workers. I think there is a lot to make of the comparison between the readiness of officials and the muted enthusiasm of (what I am assuming are) working people toward this solution.

Bound up in these different approaches to upskilling are the determinants of social class and the expectations of the subject in a neoliberal economy. The boycotting solution, which was popular among online commenters but not endorsed by officials I
interviewed, likewise makes assumptions in a neoliberal economy having to do with the primacy of individual choice.

It is worth exploring the common-sense tensions endemic to the two popular proposals described above about what to do when regions suffer the consequences of capitalist uneven development. First, consider the issue of specific educational measures, such as retraining, as a response to the situations in Huntington and Indianapolis. A Huntington legislator (Participant 6) described to me his time on the local school board some fifteen years ago, when he advocated for the training toward “blue-and-white-stripe-collar jobs” (personal communication, 2017). By this he meant jobs requiring a blue-collar physical aspect and a “white-collar intelligence” with grasp of “calculus and trigonometry.” Today this legislator feels that—not only in his area but nationally—there is a lack of persons with “a good work ethic and the skill set to do skilled labor.” In fact, Indiana is expected to add one-million new skilled positions in the next ten years—without the women and men to fill them (Kenney, 2017). One of the ways to solve this problem in the legislator’s community was the recent founding of the Huntington County Community Learning Center. In this space, adults are able to “‘upskill,’ ‘reskill,’ or change career paths” (About the LC, n.d.). In collaboration with Ivy Tech Community College and other organizations the Center also provides “current certification-based class offerings for high school students and adults” (About the LC, n.d.).

In Indianapolis, a seemingly natural fit for laid-off manufacturing workers is in logistics or warehousing. The problem, as more than one interviewee recognized, was that the wage rate was automatically lower by several dollars an hour. A councillor (Participant 7) there did mention that local Vincennes University offers a warehouse training certificate that can help graduates make an extra dollar or so an hour compared to fellow workers without the same training (personal communication, 2017). Although this councillor did maintain a suspicion that, no matter what, these jobs will always be “short-lived” as they become automated. Another Indy legislator (Participant 10) cited the importance of his council in fostering worker retraining (personal communication, 2017). Both councillors also expected that Indy’s tech sector would continue growing, which suggests that those with the right training could begin a career in that direction. Almost $6 million in federal grant money went to Indiana in 2016 in order to train “disadvantaged workers” (Groppe, 2016, para. 1) for “technology-related jobs” (para. 1) and to teach
“advanced manufacturing technical skills” (para. 3). This was in addition to the Obama White House’s nominating Indianapolis as a “TechHire community” (para. 5) in March. Potential jobs in the field include “cybersecurity” (para. 19) and “software development” (para. 19). The state’s WorkOne program also stepped in as a solution to the Carrier fallout by providing free training (Turner, 2016c).

What did not arise as a viable possibility among officials was a boycott. The front cover of USW Local 1999’s “Steel Voice” newsletter bears a logo reading: KEEP IT MADE IN AMERICA. The declaration was also emblazoned on protest signs at USW rallies. This is not exactly a boycott endorsement of foreign-produced goods, but the logic is similar. The boycott refrain rang repeatedly in online commentary, however. Aside from the minimal admonitions to seek out education, and the few simultaneous acknowledgements that boycotting probably would not change anything, I would argue that this strategy represented a common-sense reflex of working-class commentators. This gels with Hall et al.’s (2013) claim that the “traditionalist” (p. 127) letters to the editor they analyzed included “appeals to “personal experience” (p. 127) in addition to “common-sense realism” (p. 127). What could be more common in a consumer society than choosing what to purchase at the store? The obvious deficiency with the Carrier case in particular and consumer culture in general is noted in Dean’s (2005) work on “communicative capitalism,” whereby she argues that “the market, today, is the site of democratic aspirations… the mechanism by which the will of the demos manifests itself” (pp. 54-55). But, she argues, the promise of democracy through the market in communicative capitalism, and especially through online communication, reveals itself to be little more than a series of “fantasies.” In my view, the boycott reflex regarding Carrier certainly bears this out.

The important distinction I want to make between the solutions under discussion to address the manufacturing jobs crisis breaks down along class lines. On the whole, it seems like the upskilling solution is prescriptive and vocalized mostly by powerful figures. The implicit message is: “The workers need to get in shape!” And although Carrier subsidies and government grants exist for workers looking to retrain, the solution still hinges on a neoliberal expectation of the individual comporting oneself to capital’s needs (Not to mention public coffers replenished by taxpayer money are used in the interest of capital’s ever-changing workforce requirements). This prescription is somewhat condescending. This is because neoliberal economies require the individual
workers to shoulder a new burden at an advanced age and with familial commitments after their jobs vanish “through no fault of their own” (Jones, as cited in Turner, 2016d, para. 5). Laid-off workers going back to school or those looking to upskill face a lot of challenges in this pursuit. These include divorce, a situation that leaves them as the “primary caregiver” (Kenney, 2017, para. 21) transportation to school, a computer with Wi-Fi, care for their kids that is affordable, as well as any tuition not covered by a grant. Tuition at Vincennes University, for instance, is over $2,000 a semester. With all of these challenges afoot, it would make sense for those experiencing job instability to look at upskilling somewhat discouragingly.

Meanwhile, less powerful voices seem to quickly posit boycotting as a solution, because this accords with where they draw their own limited power from: their subjectivities as consumers.27 Prohibited from making bigger decisions in their collective lives by economic “abstract forces” (Harvey, 2010, p. 42) the fetish of choice between commodities in the marketplace seems natural and at the ready. Yet, as some of the very exponents of the boycott have acknowledged, this action will most likely fail to accomplish anything because Mexican, Chinese, and other countries’ workforces produce so many commodities already available in the U.S. Those who come to this defeatist conclusion, and say they will boycott Carrier anyway, are truly illustrative of the contradictory nature of common sense.

There is another fundamental contradiction I realized after assessing the Huntington data. This one involves the apprehension felt by workers and the official solutions proposed to assuage it. As noted above, two Huntington legislators explained that the community was understandably rattled, one expressing sympathy for fellow citizens at the post office and grocery store. Compounding this unease was a news-media narrative that recited familiar tropes about urban decline. This is probably a compelling angle because it activates journalists to tell human-interest stories with appeals to pathos.

27 Trump, however, encouraged a boycott of Apple after the company refused “to unlock the phones of the shooters in the San Bernardino massacre” (Cook, 2016, para. 20). He also said he was “never eating Oreos again” (para. 16) after Nabisco opted to close a Chicago factory for production in Mexico.
The problem here, however, was that one councilor (Participant 11) did not think the narrative quite addressed “some of the really good things… that are going on [in Huntington] too” (personal communication, 2017). The other councilor (Participant 6) thought the negative narrative was unsurprising, but also “interesting” (personal communication, 2017) in what it left out. He said that a development that was “totally drowned out when UTEC announced they were leaving” was the fact that Continental Structural Plastics spoke in Huntington’s city council the day before the announcement about “expanding their factory and adding several hundred jobs.” This “behind-the-scenes” information that a city official is privy to is not typically shared to the public until the matter is “firmed up” (Participant 11, personal communication, 2017). As it was described to me: “[A]s a city official you… want to empathize folks and walk with them and assure them things will be okay, but there’s information that you know that you can’t share publicly yet about what might come” (Participant 11, personal communication, 2017).

The contradiction is that the Huntington officials think that workers should be concerned and not concerned at the same time. For example, in addition to understanding the community’s unease, one official (Participant 6) said: “People losing their jobs: it’s tough. I’ve been laid off. It’s not a fun proposition… and that’s why people get concerned, and… they’re all legitimate concerns. But you have to take a deep breath” (personal communication, 2017). The officials’ perspective on this issue seems to be “subjectively” (Manders, 2006, p. 77) true and “objectively” (p. 77) false at the same time, which Manders (2006) has said comports with Gramsci’s theory on common sense. This happens when common sense “fits’ life’s problems” (p. 76) in the immediate and yet is “false in the long run, as it has not induced working people to overthrow the political-class-ideological conditions that require… common sense” (p. 76). When considered in a larger context, to paraphrase Hawkes’s (2003) explanation of Hegel’s insight, the “fact” (p. 133) of the officials’ prescriptive can “only [be] meaningful when… [it is] ‘mediated through the totality’” (p. 133). The community is right to be concerned that industrial jobs are leaving, but members are also wrong because there is inside information they do not have about jobs coming back (e.g., Continental Structural Plastics). In terms of the officials’ perspective, they are right that new jobs will come back, but they are wrong on this in that the opportunities (at least in terms of warehousing in Indy) will either pay less, hire less, require a delayed preparation or
training period, or will simply take a long time to replace the old positions. The only constant in this confusing state in my view is the “class truth” (Marx, as cited in Bell, 1967, p. 397) of the workers who have to materially experience all of these vicissitudes as they happen, and who do not have the privilege of dispassionately commenting on it from the outside.
Chapter 5.
The Tesla Spectacle in Nevada

Discussions of Tesla have tended to draw strongly on futuristic themes associated with 21st century technology and its impacts on capitalist enterprise. Such discussions reflect a well-known current in academic literature. But, as a recent article in the Guardian suggests, identifying Tesla Motors too closely with high technology misses something fundamental. Rather, the author views Tesla Motors as straddling a “juncture” (Wong, 2017, para. 11) between its identity as a “tech startup, untethered from the rules of the old economy, and a manufacturer that needs to produce physical goods” (para. 11, emphasis added). Like Goethe’s Faust, “Two souls, alas, do dwell within [Tesla’s] breast; [and] The one is ever parting from the other” (Harvey, 2010, p. 258). While the company can tout its sexy high technology image, it must also physically do the advanced manufacturing on the shop floor. The point is, despite broader economic, social, and cultural changes associated with late twentieth and early twenty-first century capitalism, factories still exist, workers still work in them, and governments still give tax and regulatory benefits to manufacturers to build factories in their regions. This is as true of “tech” based industries as other forms of manufacturing.

Still, Tesla differs substantially from the case of the Carrier plant in Indianapolis, because whereas Carrier was an established and unionized plant negatively influenced by corporate deregulation and globalization, Tesla provides an example of a major, nonunion industrial manufacturer moving into a new region, raising rather different issues and debates and prompting somewhat different research strategies. In this chapter I follow up on the importance of technological/ideological themes in respect to

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1 For useful surveys, see Dyer-Witheford (1999) and Webster (2006).

2 Harvey (2010) notes that Marx uses this quote in Capital to describe the condition of capitalists, who need to “accumulate and reinvest” (p. 258) to compete but are “plagued by the desire to consume” (p. 258) as well. I am using it somewhat differently here.

3 Advanced manufacturing in Nevada would seem to fit with Marx’s comments in Grundrisse’s “Fragment on Machines” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 38) whereby “the development of capitalism’s productive forces results in an increased role of technology… and thereby historically increases the importance of science and knowledge work in the economy” (p. 38).

4 As Wroldsen (2017) says, “Despite all its hi-tech components… the Gigafactory is still just a supply factory” (p. 5).
the current persistent allure of informationalism and high technology capitalism, and I explain how media spectacle intersects with these issues. My discussion here is focused primarily around a pursuit of answers to three related questions:

(1). To what extent do accounts of Tesla Motors intersect with media spectacle?

(2). What do local government policy makers, media accounts, audiences and workers think of Tesla’s Gigafactory, and what explains the criticism that was directed towards its construction?

(3). What else can textual analysis of local media coverage and interviews tell us about this ongoing event?

In addition to interviews compiled during my research in the Reno/Sparks area, the bulk of my research into these questions comes from analyses of local media. News media act as a potent source for research data, because on a given issue they “provide the base-line interpretations, influence ‘lay’ attitudes, mould the ideological climate and are instrumental in the orchestration of political and public responses” (Hall et al., 2013, p. xiii). Put simply, the “power of the media” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 2) lies in their ability to “influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations, [and] social identities” (p. 2). I recognize this power and will explore its relation to the Tesla case below.

5.1. Tesla versus Goodyear as New Corporate Neighbors

Before jumping directly to these three questions it is useful to highlight with some examples of what the corporate playbook entails, and how local business owners, officials, and residents might react to this sort of news in future corporate endeavors around North America. In this regard there are both striking similarities and notable differences between Tesla Motors’s arrival in Reno and Goodyear’s arrival in Napanee, Ontario, in the late 1980s. For example, in his discussion of Goodyear, Palmer (1994) explains how capital “extend[s] its needs into the realm of universal need” and “bur[ies] its own interests in an avalanche of ‘benevolence’” (p. 17). This aptly describes what happened in northern Nevada, because here a corporate “invasion” (p. 121) was able to draw on and extend a similar “ideological hegemony” (p. 121). Despite the fact that Palmer’s case study is from a different time and place, focusing on a small town in
Ontario, Canada, and my case study involves a city with a population ten times greater than Napanee, several similarities between the two events stand out.

The tactics used in official discourses supporting the Goodyear plant parallel discourses supporting the Gigafactory. For example, the 2008 crisis and recession had disproportionately harmed Nevada, and Tesla’s purported 6,500 jobs and injection of billions into the local economy were the solutions proposed to move forward. It was not hard for state officials in the Legislature and governor’s office to pitch this story as a universal truism for all Nevadans. The press also reproduced this message. And then came the subsidies. The economic milieu in 1980s-era Napanee had a similar ring to it: the town of under 5,000 maintained a slightly higher unemployment rate than the province’s projected average (Palmer, 1994, p. 33). Ontario had seen recent Goodyear and Firestone plant closures in Toronto and Hamilton, which the province’s industry minister attributed to “the global restructuring of industry” (p. 36). Napanee’s mayor was clear: “We need the jobs” (p. 34). A Ministry of Finance representative justified Goodyear’s tax break by pointing out the projected “$320-million investment and 800 jobs” (p. 71).

In terms of early stirrings, Palmer’s (1994) observation of Goodyear’s “Cloak and Dagger” (p. 35) activities while staking out a site is similar to what happened with Tesla Motors. Napanee experienced rumor-mongering of a new multinational corporation looking its way, as well as two representatives of the “mystery company” (p. 35) appearing in town. Palmer explains that the secrecy was meant to keep property prices low and to manage Goodyear’s image, should the company back out of the deal (p. 35). Similarly, those affiliated with the one-time secret Tesla deal, such as Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center (TRI Center) co-owner Lance Gilman, had to sign non-disclosure agreements with the company (Hidalgo & Damon, 2014). When work at the massive earth-moving project began, contractors installed fences around the perimeter to keep onlookers at a manageable distance. The activity fell under the codename “Project Tiger” (O’Driscoll, 2014c, para. 4) before the revelation it was Tesla Motors.

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5 The Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center is a massive industrial park located in the desert east of Sparks, Nev. It is the site of Gigafactory 1, along with other corporate presences, such as data centers and warehouses. I discuss TRI Center through a Lefebvrian lens in Chapter 6.

6 Gilman also said he regularly signs these NDA’s and that he “worked with Walmart for a year and a half before they told us who they were” (Hidalgo & Damon, 2014, para. 17).
Other similarities abound vis-à-vis housing, welcoming, and educating. Goodyear’s March 1988 announcement led to a focus on “rising housing prices, condominium developments, and brisk sales in residential lots” (Palmer, 1994, p. 39) in Napanee. Likewise, a developer in Nevada said that the Gigafactory could influence housing “into downtown Reno, where condominium high-rises have become more popular with the area’s post-recession housing recovery” (O’Driscoll, 2014i, para. 12). “Welcome Goodyear” (Palmer, 1994, p. 46) signs sprouted up around town in Napanee. In Reno, developer Blake Smith adorned the top of one of his downtown buildings with a large sign reading: “TESLA Welcome to Nevada” (O’Driscoll, 2014a, para. 3). Regarding education, Goodyear showed the Napanee high-school principal a factory and high school in Lawton, Oklahoma, which gave him the idea for how to better integrate his own school with Goodyear’s job-training needs (Palmer, 1994, p. 56). In Nevada’s case, criticism emerged about the dearth of skilled labor available in the state needed to fill “advanced manufacturing jobs” (Hidalgo, 2014d, para. 11). This was a problem before Tesla’s arrival, but the Gigafactory compounded it. Mike Kazmierski of the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN) remarked that “The education system has got to be in sync with employers’ needs” (Hidalgo, 2014f, para. 18).

Consciously or not, local University of Nevada-Reno students felt this way too. In early 2015, at least 300 of them waited for hours at a campus job fair “to pitch themselves” (McAndrew, 2015, para. 3) to the company.

The most obvious difference between the cases can be simply attributed to time. This involves the access to participatory media that journalists and locals had in the Tesla case. The significance of Web 2.0 platforms will become apparent below, but in one instance they allowed the RGJ to publish a story based on Twitter users’ supportive tweets about Tesla. Social media also permitted journalist Jason Hidalgo to live-tweet Tesla’s release of the Model X SUV in late September 2015. In this way, Web 2.0 helped contribute to the spectacle more readily and through more devices than was the case in the late 1980s. Additionally, the commenting system installed on RGJ’s website (a product of Web 2.0’s design) further allowed news consumers to share their thoughts on the Gigafactory (and other stories).

Parallels between these two cases provide important information about what to expect when large-scale corporations come to town, such as recent announcements by Amazon HQ2 and Foxconn about their prospective moves to New York/Virginia and
Wisconsin, which I consider further in Chapter 7. But now I will move to the specifics regarding Tesla’s move to northern Nevada, beginning with local council members’ views regarding the initial stages.

5.2. Early Impressions of Tesla’s Announcement

The two points worth highlighting with respect to council members’ statements are: the absence of city-level participation regarding Tesla; and the nature of the local buzz about town. The first Reno councilmember (Participant 1) I talked to said that the city itself had very little to do with the decision-making involved—even though a huge factory was going to sprout out of the desert next door. “Cities are creatures of our state government, so we don’t have a whole lot of influence over them” (personal communication, 2017), she said, adding, “They have influence over us.” The same was true for Sparks. A councilmember (Participant 2) there reported that discussions in an official capacity centered around “[W]hat are we gonna do to prepare for… that uh area to grow like it is, and… we’ve got so many jobs, so that means new housing and everything else. That’s our level” (personal communication, 2017). Thus, Sparks’ city council was more or less waiting on this extremely weighty decision at the state level, then “kick[ing] into gear” after it had been made, according to Participant 2.

Another city councilor (Participant 3) told me that in the spring and summer of 2014, “There was sort of a general community buzz about the possibility that Reno was being looked at,” and state legislators “were getting some updates that… yes, the economic development authority… [the] governor’s Office of Economic Development, is in conversations with Tesla” (personal communication, 2017). He added that, “[I]t was this big kind of fantasy thing of… ‘Is this going to happen or not?’” Another councilmember (Participant 5) from Sparks said that “Most people here… that I… saw – it was talked about all the time” (personal communication, 2017). Or to put another way, the Tesla momentum was “the worst kept secret in Reno” (Participant 3, personal communication, 2017). At the same time, there was a local doubt persisting that the deal would actually break down and fail; as a councilmember (Participant 5) said jokingly: “[I]t was this ‘It wasn’t gonna happen.’ Even… when they started building, people were thinking, ‘They’re not gonna do it.’ I think even now there’s people who would tell you, ‘Oh, they’re gonna… go away.’” (personal communication, 2017).
Fantasies, secrets, drama, buzz… these sentiments from my interviews segue nicely into the first main question on media spectacle. I borrow from Kellner’s (2003; 2016) research in this area as a guide, to which I go into more detail below. He defines media spectacles as those “phenomena of media culture that embody contemporary society’s basic values, [and] serve to initiate individuals into its way of life” (2003, p. 2). Such spectacles include “media extravaganzas” (p. 2) sensational stories, and events that capture people’s attention. While it is obvious that the Gigafactory became a local sensation endemic of capitalistic values (with certain Nevadans wanting to compete for and win Tesla’s project), it is also clear how the spectacle worked to bring viewers into a “way of life,” as Kellner would put it, which included: clicking through the Reno Gazette-Journal; potentially buying a subscription; reading its “Tesla Tidbits” puff pieces; identifying with billionaire Elon Musk through his self-deprecation and everyman millennial speech; identifying as an investor who might support Tesla Motors; and of course buying an actual Tesla car or SUV. Kellner also notes that celebrity comprises a major part of the media spectacle, which we see in the coverage of Musk.

In relation to the discussion of local media in Chapter 2, the Reno Gazette-Journal (RGJ) helped promote the Gigafactory and its 6,500 jobs—especially in the early days. Given this, I claim that the local press helped sell the factory to northern Nevadans. Secondly, if we understand that media “[construct]… and [are] constructed by and in society” (Hodgetts et al., 2010, p. 282) and that they “both [reflect]… and [create]… social ‘reality’” (p. 282), press accounts can be seen to place a localized ideological salve over an impoverished, neoliberal America by way of the Tesla spectacle, sometimes referred to locally as “the Tesla effect.” In other words, if the early accounts by the RGJ recurred around the country in different contexts, readers would encounter the “reality” that, despite their occasional faults, job-creators are exciting and in need of our support. This is despite the fact that we do not always know who the job-creators are.

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7 Kellner (2003) writes that “society’s deepest values” (p. 4) include “competition, winning, success, and money” (p. 4), which also ties sporting events so intimately with the spectacle.

8 In one example of this last point, RGJ reporter Hidalgo (2015q) wrote a “Tesla Tidbits” article informing readers that if you own a Tesla Model S and refer someone who buys another Model S, you will receive $1,000, and the new buyer gets a $1,000 discount. The rewards increase if you can refer more people. One of the rewards was attending a Tesla party for the Model X SUV debut; this opportunity again illustrates consumers conflating with the spectacle, and also how it is important for businesses to make their interactions with customers an “experience” (Kellner, 2003, p. 3) as opposed to a rote transaction.
creators are benefitting when we support them. In any event, as I argue below, the local paper helped to normalize a highly contradictory and problematic affair that goes beyond the single case of Gigafactory 1.

The 2014 coverage of the Tesla plant featured dominant themes of local pride, the positive reinvention of the local economy, and a general sense of enthusiasm for the massive project. One RGJ article was little more than a collection of enthusiastic tweets (Staff report, 2014). @4kLED said, “Reno may have hit jackpot with Tesla Gigafactory lottery” (para. 6); @GeneralGCuster commented, “That will be a great employer for this whole great area” (para. 7); @JuiliaAWillmott said, “Reno is the best option for Tesla’s Gigafactory…and the best place to live!” (para. 9); and @Mikki2222 excitedly exclaimed, “GIVE THE DARN TAX INCENTIVE… LETS DO THIS!!!” (para. 10).

At the same time, a caveat needs to be introduced here. The press is not a monolithic outlet that takes direct marching orders from an outside company. As Hall et al. (2013) state, media are “formally and structurally… independent both of the sources to which they refer and of the ‘public’ on whose behalf they speak” (p. 66). The point in bringing up this caveat is that there was room in RGJ reporting for blunted criticism of the Tesla deal. RGJ’s pro-growth theme was still apparent, but cracks would start showing in the celebratory Tesla discourse as local tensions rose, state Democrats cautioned, and people started tracking the money.

5.3. The “Tesla Effect” and the Missing Panasonic

In June 1908, a mysterious blast leveled over 700 square miles of Siberian wilderness in an event known as the Tunguska explosion (“Mysterious Tunguska Explosion of 1908 in Siberia,” n.d.). Knowledge of what happened was mostly limited to the Soviet Union until the 1970s, and up to today there is still some debate as to its cause. For what was probably an asteroid-related event, one of the zaniest explanations put forward was that scientist Nikola Tesla accidentally caused the blast with an experiment into wireless energy. This Tesla, a pioneer in telecommunications who nurtured pet theories about lighting up the oceans by electrifying the ionosphere, is of course the namesake of Tesla Motors. That Nikola Tesla be attributed in a conspiracy

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9 One of my former advisors brought this case to my attention.
theory to an event of devastating impact is only appropriate given the surplus of spectacles linked to Tesla and its leader Elon Musk. These spectacles include: Tesla Motors itself, along with the commodity spectacle of its cars (especially the Model X SUV); Elon Musk the man, his actions, his proposals, and his company SpaceX; and the Gigafactory, the largest building by area in the world.

Nevadans engrossed in the Tesla decision arguably understood the spectacle as the “Tesla Effect.” Says Robison (2014b), a journalist, “Tesla, Tesla, Tesla. Is that all anybody in Reno wants to talk about?” (para. 1). This appears in an article on the company’s “ripple effect,” purported to potentially affect “everyone’s lives in Northern Nevada” (para. 2). Benefits of Musk’s Nevada gambit were suspected to include “higher home values, more investment capital, [and] an improved Reno image” (para. 8). According to Mike Kazmierski, the buzz translated to other companies having heard about Tesla moving in and deciding to relocate near Reno (Robinson, 2014). The buzz also resulted in: out-of-state construction workers enthused about working on the Gigafactory project (Hidalgo, 2015g); a change in flight schedules at Reno’s airport to better accommodate travelers from San Jose, California—a Silicon Valley hub (Hidalgo, 2015h); economic potential for neighboring Fernley, Nevada (Bessette, 2015); and a boost in the local housing market for Sparks (O’Driscoll, 2014k).

The “Tesla Effect” greased the way for development in the interest of a small minority of stakeholders while helping to foreclose critical thinking for the other social actors reading the coverage. Aestheticization of this economic issue played a role in such a foreclosure. Terms such as “we” were bandied about in regard to who would benefit from the factory—a term that should send up a red flag from any textual analyst’s standpoint. My argument is further supported by the nature of RGJ reportage that positioned the reader as a Tesla Motors investor. Indeed, the more I read the articles the more I found myself Googling terms and questions that led to sites such as Investopedia.com.

10 This quote appears in article’s title.
11 In this last instance, a Beverly Hills-based property group was reported to have bought an apartment complex in Sparks for $27.5 million.
12 An example here would be an RGJ story that expresses the rising stock valuation of Tesla (Staff reports, 2014b).
The spectacles commanded more attention than the related problems and contradictions in the material worlds of the factory and region. I am also nearly certain that the press attention devoted to Tesla most likely directed more internet traffic to the RGJ, thus expanding their readership and revenues. If the subscriptions did in fact rise, and the Web traffic to the RGJ website increased, this would certainly accord with Kellner’s definition of media spectacle as a revenue booster.

That this phenomenon remained the Tesla Effect even after Musk’s company teamed up with Panasonic, though, is significant. Tesla was riding the wave of hype and spectacle despite the reality that Panasonic would end up comprising 80% of the actual Gigafactory (Participant 4, personal communication, 2017). While Panasonic would come to assume more of a substantive role in the plant, taking responsibility for most of the mundane operations and routine formalities—such as job postings—the hype was reserved for Tesla, billed as the “NEW COMSTOCK LODE” (Damon, 2014c).

This situation underscores comments by Klein (2002) about brand management’s primacy in the knowledge economy. She writes that “Many brand-name multinationals… are in the process of transcending the need to identify with their earthbound products…. dream[ing] instead about their brands’ deep inner meanings” (p. 195). Instead of fixating on the production of things—to be “[l]umpy object purveyors” (p. 199)—successful companies in the new economy must cultivate “the sleek ideas of brand identity” (p. 199). Failing to do so can come at the price of devalued stock in Wall Street financial markets driven by “spiritual goals” (p. 199) on top of economic goals. Sure enough, Tesla’s stock value rose by over a point the day after the Nevada State Legislature approved the deal (Staff reports, 2014b).

How does this work exactly for Tesla and Panasonic? Panasonic turned 100 years old in 2018; it has been through more than one “regime of accumulation” (Webster, 2006, p. 64) in its time, filling American households for decades with by-now prosaic electronics. In other words, there is nothing new about the aging company, and its brand lacks high technology hype and sexiness. Tesla Motors, by contrast, is a

13 I tried to get confirmation on this by contacting the RGJ, but I was informed the outlet does not share subscription rate information.
14 Quote appears as a title to another article below para. 3.
15 Klein (2002) attributes this quotation to Tom Peters.
twenty-first century, digitally savvy, image-rich corporation.\textsuperscript{16} Tesla named its factory robots after X-Men characters at the Fremont plant (Hidalgo, 2015i). It shared footage of its “robosnake” (Hidalgo, 2015s) car-charger device on Instagram. It added a speed feature to cars dubbed “Ludicrous Mode” (Hidalgo, 2015k, para. 6). Musk tweeted he would release Models 3 and Y on top of the existing Models S and X—or in other words, he would offer the “S3XY” (Hidalgo, 2015r, para. 6) lineup.\textsuperscript{17}

A content analysis I conducted of RGJ news articles from 2014-2016 illustrates how Tesla represents not only the spectacle but the virtually unleashed flight of the sublime brand in a greatly financialized economy. I searched the articles in RGJ with the intention of finding how often Panasonic is mentioned in stories about the Gigafactory. Secondly, I wanted to discover some of the context used when the company is mentioned. Using the search term “gigafactory” in the news outlet’s online database, I pulled up articles for each year and word-searched for Panasonic.\textsuperscript{18} Findings are presented in Table 5.1 below.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & \textit{RGJ} articles consulted & Articles that referenced Panasonic & Percentage of articles that referenced Panasonic \\
\hline
2014 & 69 & 10 & 14.5\% \\
2015 & 48 & 15 & 31.3\% \\
2016 & 30 & 14 & 46.7\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{References to Panasonic in \textit{Reno Gazette-Journal} Articles Referencing “Gigafactory”}
\end{table}

The data in Table 5.1 show that references to Tesla’s corporate partner Panasonic were minimal during the first year of Gigafactory coverage, only to rise in prominence.\textsuperscript{19} In the 2014 stories, journalists mention Panasonic only once or twice per

\textsuperscript{16} Although one report states that Musk has a “tendency to promise Mars and deliver the moon” (Wong, 2017, para. 38).
\textsuperscript{17} I should mention that we can learn about all of these factoids from reading news articles ostensibly unconnected from Tesla’s marketing department.
\textsuperscript{18} Some articles were photo slideshows or videos, so I did not search every single hit. The numbers should be taken with a grain of salt, because occasionally the term “Panasonic” would appear in an article as a hyperlinked title for another article, not as a term in the text itself. But the point I am illustrating is more important than precise arithmetic.
\textsuperscript{19} In researching the comparison, I even compensated for the fact that Tesla had not mentioned teaming up with Panasonic until later 2014. The official Tesla press release mentioning the Panasonic partnership went out on July 30; it was after this point that I began tallying the \textit{RGJ} references to Panasonic.
story—save for one article about job postings where it appears three times (Jacobs, 2014). To give context here, the first article I found that mentioned Panasonic even once contains about 23 references to Tesla (O’Driscoll, 2014). Panasonic’s comparative lack of importance in local media coverage is reinforced by the fact that so many other stories never mention the Japanese corporation once. While it is true that the idea for the Gigafactory originated on the Tesla side, and that Tesla opened up the bidding for the partnership, Panasonic should conceivably warrant more attention given that it now makes up 80% of the plant.

While Tesla and Musk were enjoying the airy attention in RGJ, Panasonic was the first to actually post job opportunities for the Gigafactory, which took place in mid-October of 2014 (Jacobs, 2014). The appearance of this story is a sober reminder that someone needs to be in charge and actually doing something at the plant, not just making conference calls to shareholders, as Musk is often reported doing. In Klein’s (2002) words, “[P]roduction has a pesky way of never quite being transcended entirely: somebody has to get down and dirty and make the products” (p. 202). What’s more, Panasonic also developed the very lithium-ion technology that makes the Gigafactory batteries function (Hidalgo, 2015a). This was an especially surprising discovery for me given all the Tesla hype about its high-performance cars, as well as Musk’s own quote about the factory’s battery output being “faster than bullets from a machine gun” (Heisler, 2016, para. 10). These banal and “earthbound” (Klein, 2002, p. 195) realities contradict and clash with the credit, cachet, and idealistic spectacle awarded to Tesla, meaning that Panasonic experienced the antithesis of a dramatic “Effect.” An interview with a former Gigafactory service technician further illustrates the disconnect between spectacle and reality surrounding this case.

I met the worker (Participant 4) outside of a Reno café in July 2017. Friendly and helpful, he would say of his work experiences that “what [he’d] always done” (personal communication, 2017) was “repairing things.” He had recently quit at the Gigafactory, explaining that were he to stay somewhere, the “kinks [have to be] worked out.” Clearly, this was not the case for the battery plant, which he described as “an octopus… whereby] no tentacle knows what the other one’s doing.”

The technician (Participant 4) explained that Panasonic billed the Gigafactory as a “startup” (personal communication, 2017), which seemed sort of strange given
Panasonic’s entrenched history as a 100-year-old conglomerate. While he suspected the company used the term to seem “hip,” there was an ironic veracity to it too; this was because of the “disorganized” nature of the worksite and the aforementioned “kinks” that he saw as endemic to startups—hence the seemingly inefficient octopus. It did not help that his own position with the company was a “voiceless” one, either, as he put it. But in the interest of a counter-narrative to the local media hype: what were these organizational problems?

In one odd arrangement, the technician (Participant 4) explained that the machines he and others were supposed to service still fell under warranty, which meant that they “weren’t allowed to touch anything” (personal communication, 2017). At the same time, however, management required these employees to come to the plant every day to do very little—or, as the technician worded it, “To just more or less hang out.” He further explained that within a three-month period, he performed just four hours of work(!), in the meantime watching a lot of television inside the plant. After learning about these working conditions of machine repairers in the soon to be solar-powered Gigafactory, I considered that William Blake’s (1757-1827) “Satanic [Mill]” (Linebaugh & Rediker, 2013, p. 250) where workers toiled from sun-to-sun (presumably), is now powered by the sun—and that the workers, or at least those hovering around robots, seemed to toil little if at all.20

There are interesting ramifications to this arrangement. The first is that leisurely channel surfing at the Gigafactory grossly contradicts the ghastly stories coming out of Tesla’s car factory in Fremont, California. According to one report, the Fremont plant was host to more than a hundred ambulance calls between 2014-2017 for employees with “fainting spells, dizziness, seizures, abnormal breathing and chest pains” (Wong, 2017, para. 3). A production technician there also recounted a time when a coworker passed out, only for supervisors to send people “to work around him while he’s still lying on the floor” (para. 8). Up until October 2016, workers there also reported 12-hour days and six-day workweeks as standard fare (para. 28). In addition, Hepler’s (2018) reporting in the New York Times shows a considerable number of racist and sexist incidents on the workplace in the Fremont factory. The positions and places technically and spatially

20 This chiasmus is meant to be stylistic rather than historically accurate. The “sun-to-sun” comment is gleaned from an old Media History course.
differ, with the Fremont examples involving workers on the line (as opposed to service technicians), yet the contrast between the accounts is still striking. Although, to be fair, the technician (Participant 4) I spoke to did make clear that friends who were Gigafactory “operators or shift leads” (personal communication, 2017) experienced labor discipline through “high volume” and “[a]utomated manufacturing” that were the “[s]ame like anywhere.” So it is reasonable to assume that workers on the production line would find similarities to at least some of the Fremont conditions in a way the technicians who were not doing anything would not.

My respondent (Participant 4) also noted that Tesla and Panasonic personnel experienced some mild tension between each other, with what he called “groupthink” (personal communication, 2017) taking place that was based on nothing “other than… they’re them and we’re us.” He didn’t intimate that this antagonism was all that serious, however. He also did not see a union presence in the plant beyond that of the construction workers’ union representation; this was because there was none for inside the plant, as noted above, which I did not know at the time of the interview.

On this point, Felton (2017) advanced claims made by the United Auto Workers about worker intimidation occurring inside the Gigafactory. The UAW stated that workers there faced “heightened supervisory scrutiny” (para. 1), surveillance, and interrogations over the prospect of their unionization. After the UAW filed two complaints to the National Labor Relations Board over conditions in Tesla’s Fremont, California, plant, it filed a third one to the NLRB regarding the Gigafactory for violations committed against the forming of a union.

When asked about it, my interview respondent (Participant 4) also had the impression that Tesla attempted to cultivate a corporate familial attitude among its employees (personal communication, 2017); he based this on the way Musk had spoken at an event once (although he added that Panasonic may have operated similarly and that he simply did not pick up on it). Further to the point on morale, I had asked whether the clichés of the Silicon Valley workplace had penetrated the Gigafactory at all, such as onsite batting cages, video games, food trucks, or similar types of amusements. He responded that the Gigafactory contained gyms on each floor, and that the food trucks outside mostly catered the construction workers, but also that Tesla, not Panasonic, was more inclined to promote a Silicon Valley-modeled “fun” philosophy.
Similar to insider counter-narratives, journalists and officials started asking inconvenient questions when the Gigafactory proposal went to the special session in September 2014. These would continue into 2015 and beyond. I take up these issues regarding accountability in Chapter 6.

5.4. Tesla: Larger than Life

The most egregious and perhaps humorous case of media spectacle surrounding Tesla was an RGJ story dated August 1, 2014, titled, “Reno contractor: Nevada’s Tesla site work ‘biblical’” (O’Driscoll, 2014d). The semiotic connotations here point to such gargantuan and historically arresting projects as the Great Pyramid or Solomon’s Temple—Old Testament edifices which also rose out of desert terrain. The reference is used here to illustrate the three million “cubic yards of dirt and brush” (para. 10) F and P Construction cleared at the TRI Center to make a foundational pad for the factory. Co-owner of the Center, Lance Gilman, used the term “biblical” (para. 19) to describe what the construction crews made up of 250 people working 24/7 accomplished in a matter of weeks.21 Meanwhile, F and P’s co-owner, Cindy Pitts, commented: “We told our men and women they were making history” (para. 17). This hyperbole blasts Tesla’s alleged importance into the stratosphere like a SpaceX rocket, putting the work at TRI Center on par with great struggles of historical magnitude. This begs the question if the production of car and home batteries even warrants a claim of such historical significance, or if it falls more along the lines of Marx’s “dull compulsion of the economic” (Marx, as cited in Eagleton, 1994a, p. 196), meaning that there is a market to exploit, so an entrepreneur is doing just that, and people need to work in it to live.

Another story signifying the magnitude of the project appeared a month later, this one titled, “Plant gets Tesla closer to electric car for masses” (Pritchard & Sonner, 2014). An Associated Press story, this appeared on the RGJ site and discussed the now-familiar conditions that had been leading up to Tesla’s decision to build the plant. Clearly there is nothing new about the term “mass production”; however, I think the phrasing, “for [the] masses,” is loaded in that it puts Musk and Tesla on par with larger-than-life figures such as Henry Ford. This phrasing imbues Musk with agency while robbing that

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21 Another article by O’Driscoll (2014j) that year described the “dirt pad” (para. 29) as “mammoth” (para. 29).
same agency from a large consumer base which must wait for tech visionaries to alter history and fix the environment. This arrangement bespeaks Debord’s point about a society of the spectacle based upon “pacification and depoliticization” (Kellner, 2003, p. 3). In “submissively consuming” (p. 3) the Tesla Effect, as in all spectacles, “one is estranged from actively producing one’s life” (p. 3). The spectacle alienates individuals from the fact that they are social actors within history—not mere spectators with front-row seats to the Biblical dirt pad.

5.5. The Elon Musk Spectacle

There are many more indications of spectacle and hype that I identified through textual analysis of articles referencing Musk in the RGJ. Here I will highlight additional examples first about Musk the man. In March of that year, we learn about Musk’s “pizzazz factor” (REN, 2014, para. 8). After Tesla and Nevada shook hands on the deal, Governor Sandoval and Musk held a press conference in front of the capitol building in Carson City; this was where Musk enjoyed “two rock-star like standing ovations” (O’Driscoll, 2014j, para. 16) from those in attendance. Sandoval also said that Musk had the reputation for “convert[ing] the unthinkable to reality” (para. 15). A journalist again associates Musk with “rock star status” (Hidalgo, 2017, para. 2) in an article that informs readers Robert Downey Jr. supposedly based his Tony Stark/Iron Man character off of this real-life billionaire. He is later characterized as “[p]art Willy Wonka and part salesman” (Hidalgo, 2015w, para. 5). Meanwhile, the local press showed him performing a “wing walk” (Musk, as cited in Hidalgo, 2015s, para. 5) on a mid-flight bi-plane in 2015, a feat he also shared on Instagram.

In even more examples of this embodiment of spectacle, Musk’s daydreams include dropping thermonuclear bombs on the poles of Mars (Hidalgo, 2015c), and discovering whether humanity exists inside an elaborate computer simulation. It is easy to understand why others have commented on Musk’s towering media presence, either positively or negatively. Germane to this study is the comment made by an online Musk critic recorded in Kozinets’s (2019) article on reactions to future capitalist dream-worlds and their visionaries. This commenter calls Musk a “symbol, or puppet’ that the Tesla

22 In the roughly 170 RGJ articles consulted, Musk was often discussed.
corporation sells” (p. 78), as well as “links the spectacle, the consumption of image, with the entrepreneur” (p. 78).

In his book, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*, Hedges (2009) provides useful insight on the problematic nature of spectacular celebrity. Hedges has a somewhat different celebrity archetype in mind than Elon Musk, but what he says is nonetheless resonant. After establishing that celebrities are worshipped as the substitutes for gods in American culture (p. 17), he makes a point that fits the Musk-as-embodied-spectacle argument pretty well, stating that “Celebrities are skillfully used by their handlers and the media to compensate for the increasingly degraded and regimented existences that most of us endure in a commodity culture” (p. 37). I found this repeatedly in *RGJ* accounts of Tesla as glorious vision and Panasonic (and its workforce) as lowly footman in the Gigafactory project. Exciting civic prospects of growth supplant working-people’s prosaic issues in local reportage.

But there is more to the personal side of the story. One thing I noticed repeatedly in the coverage was a conspicuous discursive trait of Musk’s. Oftentimes, when quoted, he spoke in not just a colloquial or everyman way, but also in what I would call a *millennial vernacular*—despite his age of 46. But I am not alone in singling out Musk’s cadence and delivery. Zetlin (2017) writes that in speaking situations Musk is “awkward” (para. 2), “sub-par” (para. 5), “approachable” (para. 9) and “unassuming” (para. 9). Kozinets (2019) points out that Musk is seen as possessing a “low-key and matter-of-fact self-presentation” (p. 78), as well as an “imputed humility” (p. 78). I noticed the following in *RGJ* reportage:

- Regarding the design of the mass-market Model 3 car: he said “We won’t go super crazy with the design of the initial version” (Hidalgo, 2015b, para. 3).
- On stationary storage: it’s “off the hook” (Hidalgo, 2015e, para. 6).
- On batteries: “The issue with existing batteries is that they suck” (Hidalgo, 2015f, para. 7).
- He described a kebab he ate in Berlin as “super good” (Hidalgo, 2015p, para. 7).
• On production: the "production line is humming and suppliers mostly have their (expletive) together" (Spillman, 2016c, para. 16).

• On Fremont factory conditions: "It’s going to get crazy good" (O’Donovan, 2017, para. 10).

Musk’s language taps into the “faux intimacy” (Hedges, 2009, p. 46) that celebrities often share with the public and that politicians seek to cultivate by way of “political spin machines” (p. 46). The overarching goal here is for famous figures to convince listeners they are “one of us” (p. 46). Whether deliberate or not, this sort of posturing was especially apparent during the Carson City press conference when Musk mispronounced “Nevada” as “Ne-vah-da” before quickly correcting himself. Those in attendance loved it. Along the same line, Musk can also be self-deprecating, claiming that “starting a car manufacturer from scratch was likely ‘the worst way to earn money’” (Wong, 2017, para. 38) and that “maybe rockets are a bit worse” (para. 38). As mentioned above, the everyman, millennial speech and self-deprecation also work to bring people into the spectacle’s “way of life” (Kellner, 2003, p. 2).

Incidentally, Musk’s informal and millennial discourse complements an ongoing project in the media that Fairclough (1995) has identified. He writes that two tensions with two tendencies are “affecting contemporary media language” (p. 10); these include the tensions between “information and entertainment” (p. 10) and between “public and private” (p. 10), and the tendencies of “public affairs media to become increasingly conversationalized” (p. 10) and to “become more marketized” (p. 10). This formulation all seems to fit with the larger analysis of Tesla coverage in northern Nevada, given that a large part of the project is Musk and development officials “selling” the idea of the factory, and, in my estimation, the RGJ selling Gigafactory enthusiasts to advertisers. Just like Musk’s conversational cadence, RGJ reporters could be seen writing informally in a way Fairclough would flag. For instance, a story about Tesla owners getting discounts through recommending Tesla models to friends had in its title: “Friends with benefits…” (Hidalgo, 2015q).

This aggregation of friendly articulations also hides a rather ruthless anti-unionism professed by Musk, as well as a pervasive culture of sexism in the Silicon Valley-inflected company. The same phenomenon could be said to occur around the
professed futuristic fun of the Fremont Tesla plant, which acts as a cover for a vexingly high “total recordable incident rate” (Musk, as cited in O’Donovan, 2017)—or TRIR, which records the rate of on-site injuries. Like Musk himself, his factories too become spectacles where image has a tendency to iron over material problems.

5.6. Gigafactory Hype

The Gigafactory is described early on as almost “Godzilla” (Hidalgo, 2014b, para. 7) sized. The size and efficiency of constant capital (e.g., a factory) is an important consideration for capitalists looking to ensure profits, which are made possible by the surplus-value stolen from labor. To explain this concept will require a brief aside, but one that I think is important in understanding the rationale behind the Gigafactory’s architecture—or in other words its titanic frame that helps make it a spectacle.

In critical political economy, constant capital and variable capital are the necessary factors capitalists need to generate surplus value. Constant capital is thus one of the means by which capitalists arrive at their profits and, when added to variable capital and surplus value, one of the components of the value of a commodity (Harvey, 2010, p. 130). Marxism defines constant capital as “past labor already congealed in commodities that are used as means of production in a current labor process” (p. 128). As Marx (1967) says, constant capital “is represented by the means of production, by the raw material, auxiliary material and the instruments of labour” (p. 209). Variable capital, by contrast, entails the laborer her or himself who “reproduces the equivalent of its own value, and produces an excess, a surplus-value, which may itself vary” (p. 209). Capitalists look to exploit the “surplus-labour” (Ilyin & Motylev, 1986, p. 211) of their workers, which is labor time during the workday that goes beyond the length of time needed for the workers to reproduce themselves. One tactic to exploit and increase this would be simply making the workday longer, which in Marxian theory generates absolute surplus-value (p. 211). Another method is to generate relative surplus-value, made possible by “increasing social labour productivity in branches producing means of subsistence for the workers and in related branches” (p. 212). As Marx says (1967),

23 Quote appears in Musk’s reproduced email to employees (O’Donovan, 2017, para. 9).

24 Critical political economy understands profits as the result of surplus value divided by the sum of constant and variable capital (Eaton, 1966).
there is a recurring factor of capitalism to “heighten the productiveness of labour, in order to cheapen commodities, and by such cheapening to cheapen the labourer himself” (p. 319).

It is no surprise to anyone that Musk wanted to build an efficient and highly productive plant that would shoot out batteries rapidly. He further claimed that the Gigafactory, or the “machine that makes the machine” (Spillman, 2016c, para. 26), would be more efficient than existing factories which use space wastefully. Musk has also stated: “People need to think of the factory as more important than the product itself” (Spillman, 2016a, para. 5), and that “most of our engineering team [is] working on” (Spillman, 2016d, para. 5) the Gigafactory design. In fact, the employee (Participant 4) I interviewed was subjected to this promotional discourse, as he recounted an early December 2016 event where Musk orated to those gathered. The interviewee noted that “what people don’t realize about [Musk] is that he’s not trying to build like the best car…. [But rather] he’s trying to build the best factory…. the world’s greatest factory” (personal communication, 2017).

Musk “sought to impress those assembled [at the September 4 press conference] with not just the size of his proposed battery gigafactory, but also its aesthetics” (Damon, 2014e, para. 1). The spectacle here is not just the scope but also the surface appearance of the building. Moreover, the point of the Gigafactory was to be seen after all, or at least in theory. Musk said in Carson City that “We’ll make sure people can visit it…. It will be worth seeing” (O’Driscoll, 2014l, para. 5). What is interesting about this remark is not just that I was turned away at the Gigafactory security kiosk, unable to see it for myself, but how reminiscent this was of Palmer’s evaluation of the Napanee Goodyear plant. He pointed out that the spectacle of Goodyear originally moving in contradicted the factory’s eventual tucked-away placement.

But maybe it does not matter for developers whether the factory is seen in person or not, as long as it is represented in media in spectacular form; seen on its own terms, and framed by its own promotional discourse. My sense of Musk’s statement about visiting is that it was lip service about transparency paid to the community helping him build the factory. In this regard, the spectacle of visible scale is arguably more important than the openness of the facility to members of the local community. Chris
Baum of the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority asked: “What’s hotter news in the corporate world than the biggest development in the country landing in [our] own backyard?” (O’Driscoll, 2014, para. 31). In a weak chiasmus he added that Tesla is a “powerful marketing tool” (para. 33) that can give the area the “credibility and leverage that this is not a dying resort town, but a high-tech town that’s also a resort” (para. 34).

Yet despite the shiny PR, Marxian theory would hold that Musk cannot overcome all the nagging dilemmas and contradictions that capitalist factory owners face. It is not possible in the long term to cancel these out through physics, cleverness, algorithms, or utopian technology. On this last point, Harvey (2010) writes that “[c]apitalists fall in love with machines because they are a source of surplus and relative surplus-value” (p. 211), adding that this “fetish of a ‘technological fix’ becomes ingrained in their belief system” (p. 211). This is certainly true for Musk, as his comments about the speed of battery production and the glory of the Gigafactory attest.

Machines can increase the rate of surplus value only by “cheapening commodities” (Mohun, 1983, p. 297), thus “reducing the value of labour power” (p. 297) and dropping the “number of workers employed by a given amount of capital” (p. 297). But this poses a problem for capitalists, because workers are the “real value producers” (Harvey, 2010, p. 211) now being discarded from production. As pointed out by a number of Marxists, one of the consequences of this contradiction is known as the falling rate of profit, which relates to crisis tendencies within capitalism (Mohun, 1983, p. 297). This dwindling rate may or may not be inevitable, with Shaikh (1983) for instance writing that certain factors can “slow down and even temporarily reverse the falling rate of profit” (p. 160) though it is still the “dominant tendency” (p. 160). Harvey (2010), by contrast, is less convinced of this (p. 267). Inspired by the Grundrisse, he points to a series of obstacles or “potential points of blockage… each of which can slow down or disrupt the continuity of capital flow and thereby create a crisis of devaluation” (p. 337). In any event, the object of this digression is to show how Musk fits into a rut repeatedly worn down by existing capitalists and his capitalist antecedents—and that the Gigafactory may represent the dream of the world’s largest technological fix.
5.7. Sleek Cars

Kellner (2003) makes the point that spectacle also fuses with the commodity (p. 4). Any of Tesla’s cars could probably fit the profile of what Kellner terms the “commodity spectacle” (p. 4), because they are eye-catching. It is interesting to note that at the time the governor called the special session to announce the Gigafactory project, Tesla invited state legislators out to the site at TRI Center, where they “each got to drive a Tesla around the gravel parking lot” (Participant 3, personal communication, 2017). Parked outside the lobbyist building—adjacent to where the legislature was meeting for the special session—were two Model S cars (Damon, 2014a). The five Tesla lobbyists present encouraged legislators to drive them around Carson City at that time too.

But I want to focus on the Model X sport-utility vehicle, which Musk has called “probably the hardest car to build in history” (O’Donovan, 2017). Referencing Kellner (2003) here is apt, given that one of his own commodity spectacle examples is a car, which happened to be O.J. Simpson’s Bentley (p. 99). However, Kellner talks about the concept in relation to Nike footwear too, which situates the consumer into a spectacle of “cool” (p. 82). Kellner is aware that certain commodities carry “sign value” (p. 82) or “prestige value” (p. 82) which effectively bestows a “mark of social status” (p. 82) on the buyer.

This sort of value is in store for drivers of the Model X SUV. At the time of release, the model went for about $132,000, or upwards of $147,000 with “towing package” (Hidalgo, 2015k, para. 6) and “Ludicrous Mode” (para. 6) which makes the vehicle go zero-to-sixty in 3.3 seconds. Probably the most arresting features of the car are the two gullwing doors in back, which open in an upward direction. With the doors open, the car looks winged—certainly an unusual design. Moreover, Kellner (2003) writes that supporting commodity spectacles are “advertising, marketing, public relations, and promotion” (p. 4). Tesla enjoyed free publicity in this capacity from the Model X launch party at the Fremont plant in mid 2015. Hidalgo (2015r), an RGJ journalist, enthusiastically covered the event, which he live-tweeted and described as featuring “a DJ on Mount Sinai” (para. 12).

25 Located in para. 15 in Musk’s reproduced email (O’Donovan, 2017).
5.8. Undermining Spectacle? Early Tesla Criticisms

Of the approximately 170 RGJ articles (published between 2014 and 2017) that I found by searching “gigafactory” on the news outlet’s website, I went back and did a close read of the 29 articles that spanned the first mention of the Gigafactory in February 2014 to the start of the special session on September 10.26 The object of this exercise was to discern if people were expressing concerns about the Tesla deal, and, if so, to identify what the concerns might be. My rationale for the timeframe chosen was that this period signified the most amount of flux vis-à-vis the state government and corporation’s decision making. I did not expect there to be much criticism, because the governor, his economic development officers, Lance Gilman, and EDAWN etc. were deeply committed to landing the plant. Plus, I’d expect that RGJ would benefit financially from the injection of capital into the area and from the delivery of more readers to advertisers via the media spectacle. This is precisely because news media are “pre-eminently profit-making organizations” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 42) that gain profits “by selling audiences to advertisers” (p. 42).27 In my estimation there wouldn’t be real incentive for RGJ to fault capitalist Tesla in the style of, say, the British Daily Worker’s instructions to editors on depicting car accidents: “Class-angle that, comrade” (Eagleton, 2011, p. 152).

But there was criticism nonetheless, and perhaps more than I suspected. The sources for criticism varied, but overall I did not find the critiques very damning. They had more to do with sensible tweaking and technocratic adjustments of the law than something akin to class antagonism. In fact, even those Democrats who exhibited mild hesitance generally supported the factory anyway. Among these, Assembly Speaker Marilyn Kirkpatrick of North Las Vegas, for instance, said that tax incentives that harmed educational funding were a problem, but on Tesla she agreed that the state “should be looking at it” (O’Driscoll, 2014h, para. 2). Senate Majority Leader Mo Denis likewise said he would need to “see all the specifics” (para. 4) of the deal, despite his other statements that “new business is good for the state” (para. 4) and that Nevada should

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26 Some of these stories were written earlier than Sept. 10, 2014 and were updated on that day. Likewise, there existed other stories written before the special session but updated afterward, such as on Sept. 16. To limit the sample I did not include the latter. For more details on method, see Appendix A.

27 Media spectacle leading to higher revenues comes from Kellner’s (2003) thesis, as influenced by Debord.
“diversify [its] economy… [and] attract good projects to come here” (para. 4). But there are other examples of legislative capitulation to corporate interests. The Building and Construction Trades Council of Northern Nevada (BCTNN) for instance asked lawmakers to include in the deal the requirement that Tesla hire a 100% native Nevadan workforce (Korosec, 2016). They were denied the request.

As one can see from the Democrats’ mild equivocation, negative sentiment towards Tesla in media accounts was somewhat difficult to categorize. There were also thematic overlaps between stories (i.e., one critical comment shared by more than one source). Deciding what even constituted legitimate negativity, suspicion, frustration, or the like was also a challenge. Given this, the exact number of themes I picked up on is not the crucial part of the analysis, and I do not claim to have exhausted every utterance either. Thus, I would argue that my objective is not to do a precise quantitative content analysis here but rather a workably broad identification of local qualms to unpack apparent common-sense thinking.

The number of criticisms hovers at around 27, which I took from the 29 early stories mentioned above. Some news stories (eight or so) contained no discernible criticism, and around 11 had more considerable and multiple instances of criticism. The following is the list of 27, referenced in rough chronological order, the first appearing in mid-March 2014 and extending to September 10, 2014.28 I will first present these in Table 5.2 and then analyze certain selections. I am interested here in the harsher critiques akin to those levied by democratic socialists and progressives toward public investment in job creation (explored more in Chapter 7), as well as what several of the critiques can tell us about the persistence of common sense.

Table 5.2 Summary of Critical Comments Regarding Tesla in Reno Gazette-Journal Articles (Mar. – Sept. 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criticism</th>
<th>Attributed to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tesla plays regions off of each other to get the best deal</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesla’s site selection process is “unusual”29</td>
<td>New Jersey site expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax incentives that ignore needs of education are bad</td>
<td>State Legislature Democrat, Marilyn Kirkpatrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special sessions are expensive</td>
<td>Marilyn Kirkpatrick</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28 Rough because some criticisms appeared in more than one story.

29 (Hidalgo, 2014g, para. 3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislator wants to see the specifics before approving the Tesla bills</td>
<td>State legislature Democrat, Mo Denis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesla’s incentives package is “sizable”</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada should still commit to small and medium-sized companies</td>
<td>Representative of Reno industrial firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislators are “divided”</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m not sure they [i.e., Tesla] aren’t playing us”</td>
<td>Senator Harry Reid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesla lost $50 million at start of 2014</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Republicans call Tesla a “loser” corporation</td>
<td>Mitt Romney and Sarah Palin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesla cars had problematic incidents in national news and on TV’s Top Gear</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesla must hire local workers first</td>
<td>State Legislature Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesla must pay prevailing wage to Gigafactory construction workers</td>
<td>State Legislature Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislator wants to hear from constituents if the deal is worth it</td>
<td>State Legislature Democrat, Debbie Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t benefit southern part of state</td>
<td>Southern Nevada Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRI Center entrepreneur Lance Gilman involved in unrelated legal trouble</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special session should not be quickly zipped through</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home prices will rise</td>
<td>President of Reno/Sparks Association of Realtors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxpayers and NV Energy customers need to foot some of the bills for Tesla</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other companies won’t get the NV Energy discount</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithium-ion battery could obsolesce before Tesla’s 20-year tax abatements are up</td>
<td>New York Times story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxpayers will pay extra $1.52 a year in energy bills for Tesla</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film industry representatives protest outside of the special session</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losers in the Nevada-Tesla deal: Filmmakers, insurance companies, car dealers</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague reference to “smoke and mirrors” vis-à-vis the deal between Tesla and the state</td>
<td>RGJ journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties may not see a fiscal benefit from Tesla for at least ten years</td>
<td>Moody’s analyst</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30 (O’Driscoll, 2014c, para. 11).
31 (O’Driscoll, 2014b, para. 18).
32 (RGJ Staff, 2014, para. 11).
33 (Hidalgo, 2014e, para. 20).
34 (RGJ, 2014, para. 4).
The first consideration is that the aggregate of local news articles is not uniformly celebratory. This brings to mind two very basic concepts in media studies, namely the notion of journalistic “fairness” (Stovall, 2009, p. 49) and the consequences of daily news-production routines. In the former case, journalists try to “give all people involved in a news story a chance to tell their sides and offer their opinions” (p. 49). Fairness leads to balanced stories, which are often referred to as objective, although the unattainable standard of pure objectivity has seen pushback from journalists and outside commentators alike (p. 49). While fairness still resonates as an ideal in much news coverage, the removal of the Fairness Doctrine by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission in the 1980s has been accompanied by a steady retreat from older standards in favor of “news” coverage that is more highly opinionated, ideologically charged, evaluative, and tailored to ideologically specific target groups. That is why, for example, reading the New York Times and watching Fox News can sometimes feel like two different realities.

The commodification of news and its more distinct association with differing target audiences has also been accompanied by an ongoing personalization. Personalization within news stories has risen alongside the magnitude of non-professional journalists now writing content for various outlets (Stovall, 2009, p. 50). In the latter case, many critics argue for how and why the media embody biasness and advance the agendas of dominant interests in the dissemination of news. One of the points of contention is journalists’ reliance on “official sources” (p. 50). When Hall et al. (2013) wrote about the moral panic of mugging in 1970s Britain, they noted that “the press tended to orientate itself to court proceedings and the judicial process” (p. 36) and would “treat, as a privileged point of departure, what the judges said in court” (p. 36). They add that the “professional rules” (p. 61) that journalists follow require their writings to be “grounded in ‘objective’ and ‘authoritative’ statements from ‘accredited’ sources…. [which] means constantly turning to accredited representatives of major social institutions” (p. 61). While clearly not a court case, the journalistic procedures in the Reno-Sparks area around Tesla saw reporters orientate to a select few who had material interests in development, which is why TRI Center co-owner Lance Gilman

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35 My M.A. thesis discussed this exact topic in relation to the handling of conspiracy theories in mainstream media. Among the useful books I cited there were Herman and Chomsky’s Manufacturing Consent, Mark Fishman’s Manufacturing the News, Todd Gitlin’s The Whole World is Watching, and Gaye Tuchman’s Making News.
appears as a frequent source, and CEO of EDAWN, Mike Kazmierski, appears in seven of the 29 early articles I cited above. He would go on to grace 2015 and 2016 reportage as well. But if these folks supported the deal, then what explains the negative sentiments?

We can dispense with some of the faintly critical remarks I pointed out in the table: the “sizable” (O’Driscoll, 2014c, para. 11) adjective, the “smoke and mirrors” (RGJ, 2014, para. 4) comment, the note on “unusual” (Hidalgo, 2014g, para. 3) site selection, etc. Only in the most caricatured Communist communication channels would we expect a complete lack of suspicion regarding a project the dominant powers-that-be support. Additionally, the mention of Gilman’s lawsuit accords with journalistic routines and attention to “news values” (Stovall, 2009, p. 49). Similar cases could be made for the Romney/Palin remark and bad publicity on Top Gear.

What may be more fruitful to tackle would be reservations by Democratic members of the Nevada State Legislature, as well as related comments by local journalists on the special session, in order to explain how they reinforce common sense beliefs about wages, competition, and democracy. Of the Democrats’ concerns are: The specifics of the bill; the expense of a special session; feedback from constituents; a prevailing wage; local hiring for construction and factory work; and support for education. I will save Harry Reid’s cautious statement for later. Related comments from journalists are that legislators are “divided” (O’Driscoll, 2014b, para. 18), which most likely refers to the very Democrats I am discussing, and that lawmakers should not whip through the special session without understanding the bills. It is interesting first that, despite the reservations, all Tesla legislation passed unanimously in the Assembly and in the Senate in 48 hours’ time—save for two legislators who excused themselves (Damon, O’Driscoll, Hagar, & Marcus, 2014). That vote translates to 39-0 in the Assembly and 21-0 in the Senate (“Read Tesla Bills Here,” 2014).

Whatever personal or constituent-related qualms legislators may have had, the vote tallies suggest a pervasive and cogent motivation being involved. I would argue that the motivation sprung from both structural and cultural compulsions, or, in other words, from the optimal role of the state under capitalism, and the ideological phenomenon known as “common sense” thinking. This evinces a form of hegemony at work.
5.9. Discussion of Early Tesla Events: Criticism and Calling the Special Session

This section is meant to explore some of the qualms and apprehensions certain actors felt at the prospect of the Tesla legislation. Among these actors are: Democrats in the State Legislature who pushed for a prevailing wage for construction workers; and representatives of the film industry who faced losing a significant portion of tax credits from the state, and who protested over it. What I argue in these cases is that these intimations of negativity toward the Tesla deal only continue to strengthen the larger issue of common-sense ideology, which is itself a “win” for capitalism. I then move on to problematizing Governor Sandoval’s pitch for a legislative special session to consider Tesla, in which he invoked the 2008 financial crisis.

The first point I want to address is the recommendation that Tesla pay a prevailing wage for workers building the plant at TRI Center. I should quickly add that I do not want to simply chastise Democrats for what is a commendable request. I am not making them the “bad guys” especially when Senator Pat Hickey, a Republican, pushed back on the measure. My objective is rather to show the limits of common-sense ideology in capitalist society and how mediated statements appearing as criticism are not as damning as they seem. This argument goes some way in explaining how the press on the whole supported the Tesla prospect in the early stages.

To put the Legislature’s actions in context, I wish to keep the notion of hegemony and the work of Hall et al. (2013) Mann (2013), and Marable (1983) in mind. The key emphasis here is upon the formulation of consent and coercion, or what Marable (1983) describes as “fraud and force” (p. 106), as the basis for hegemony theory. The wage issue is interesting to unpack because it shows that criticism of the Tesla deal remains safely contained as a hegemonically common-sense truism within a pro-market horizon. The Democrats’ call for higher wages highlights the premise of “free labour” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 198) in Marxian and Gramscian critiques of capitalism.36

36 This refers to workers selling their labor-power on the condition they are “the free proprietor[s] of [their] own labor-capacity” (Marx, as cited in Shapiro, 2008, p. 64). They cannot be serfs or slaves in the traditional definition in order to do this. Wage-laborer freedom is underwritten by “invisible threads” (Marx, as cited in Mepham, 1994, p. 220) as opposed to slavery’s “fetters” (Marx, as cited
I understand that the workers in question were to build the Gigafactory, a megalith that constitutes “constant capital” (Giddens, 1971, p. 50) and does not produce value for Tesla. Construction jobs entail a different economic situation than the one in which later employees would produce the batteries, not least because many of the Gigafactory construction workers were unionized whereas later plant workers were not. Still, regardless of the condition of employment, the implicit message in news media coverage was that wages in the abstract are the acceptable factor in which to quibble, not the eradication of wages themselves.

Drawing on E.P. Thompson, Smith (2006) writes that the expression, “[A] fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work” (p. xxix) grew out of an 1825 textile workers strike in Bradford, England, and it has become “one of the most familiar themes in working-class culture” (p. xxix). Also aware of the contradictory theme is Mepham (1994), who elucidates how workers’ qualms limited to the paycheck serve an ideological role in the interest of capitalists. His discussion prefigures what happened in northern Nevada very closely, because he demystifies wages while explaining how their ideological construct becomes normalized through “discourse and practices” (p. 223). He describes a political party championing the “fair day’s wage…” slogan (p. 223), which is here akin to the Nevada Democrats’ recommendation. The contradictory slogan then wends its way to a court “empowered to arbitrate and suggest ways of reaching a ‘just settlement’” (p. 223). Problematically, workers will then “freely” (p. 223) agree to such arbitrations within the limited definition of a fair day’s pay. While Mepham nonetheless says it is important for workers to continue the struggle, the reality is that the ideological construct around pay and the apparatus supporting it remains a “mystification… systematically exclud[ing] an understanding of real social relations” (p. 223).

Given that the mild Democratic resistance to corporate power through the vehicle of prevailing wages actually strengthens a common-sense view on the wage-relation, I would argue that these mediated statements do not constitute viable criticism of Tesla in

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the press. This also goes for calls by Democrats to privilege local workers first, which translates to local people being exploited first. Moreover, the construction workers would be under the employ of contractors and local businesses (e.g., F and P Construction), which further removes Tesla’s agency in the employment matter. They are off the hook, in a way. Moreover, any calls for higher pay and local workers in RGJ reportage—and the claim that small and mid-sized businesses need attention too, for that matter—hardly militate against the Tesla spectacle. The calls are far outweighed by the factors I mentioned above: the futuristic factory, the celebrity of Musk, a whole new Reno, and the like. Moreover, the mystification of wages cuts in both directions. What I mean here is that RGJ repeatedly touted the 6,500 high-paying Gigafactory jobs in its stories. Celebratory statements about high pay also strengthen the common sense around wages as natural and normal. The material implementation of those actual jobs, moreover, could represent a ruling bloc’s tactic to make a well-off segment of workers “politically quiescent” (Eagleton, 1994a, p. 196).

We can extend this assessment on common-sense reinforcement to other negative remarks regarding business and state law. Take for example the reputed “losers” (Damon, 2014d, para. 1) of the Tesla deal mentioned in certain articles: filmmakers who could access state benefits; insurance companies taking advantage of a $27 million a year tax break for headquartering in Nevada; and car dealers now forced to compete with Tesla selling factory-direct. In the first two cases, the governor and Legislature were redirecting those abatements to the Tesla package ($70 million from film and all of the money from insurance). In the latter case, car dealerships would face a new competitor with a business model designed to undercut their own.

It would be stating the obvious that these groups simply represent three heterogeneous industries operating under capitalism, some of which were able to take advantage of government policies. In this context, they are losing out to a futuristic and environmentally sound new industry contingent on the sale of electric cars. Common-sense ideology prevails when we consider two of Harvey’s (1990) criteria for the maintenance of capitalism: growth and technological development (p. 179). The constant overturning, reinvention, and instability of markets is expected. That the industries sought help from government and got it also aligns with American capitalism since the end of the Civil War, when the state assisted in private companies’ industrial success (Aronowitz, 1973, pp. 264-265). Such massive subsidies are thus built into the system.
Consider the industries. Filmmaking is interesting to take into account, because one could argue that this creative work connotes less masculinity—and therefore gravity—than something like factory production. Enhancing this reading is the fact that it was the Nevada Democrats who fought to get this $80 million tax credit passed in 2013 (Damon et al., 2014). On the national stage, the Democratic Party has long faced accusations of weakness and femininity in American political history. As I show below in the 2014 RGJ reader comments, Democrats emerge negatively in a pro-job, anti-tax discussion about the Gigafactory. My point about the Democrats here is meant to echo Hall et al.’s (2013) reference to Gramsci’s “traces,” (p. 164) whereby people explain things by way of “fragments of other, often earlier, more coherent and consistent theoretical elaborations which have lost their internal consistency over time” (p. 164). These traces are what nurture common sense, and I think many exist for the more recent formation of the Democratic Party as they do for the much older formation of femininity itself. Femininity as negative traces all the way back to the “original purpose of the binary opposition” (Hawkes, 2003, p. 149) in ancient Greek society, which split life into the “privileged” (p. 149) category of male aristocrats and the “others” (p. 149) (e.g., women and slaves). The modern era, and even the “entire leftist tradition” (Federici, 2012, p. 29) continued to marginalize the role of women in society, which makes connecting the Democratic Party to it a delegitimizing tactic. This is to say speculatively that the filmmakers’ loss might appear more a passing curiosity than tragedy to a readership anticipating Tesla’s arrival and probably unaffiliated with the industry. The insurance company tax hike and factory-direct selling both naturalize competition, which Manders (2006) identifies as a deeply rooted “ethic” (p. 38) and lists as one of the features of “hegemonic American ideology/culture” (p. 36).

The criticism regarding the special session and state policy fall under another common-sense paradigm hinging on discourses of freedom and democracy mobilized by ruling class blocs at the state and national level. The comments in this classification include the filmmaker protest, the legislator wanting to see specifics, the “divided” (O’Driscoll, 2014b, para. 18) legislators, the legislator who wants to hear from

37 Moreton and Voekel (2012) write that “the old heroic narrative” (p. 28) of productivity was “masculine” (p. 28) when compared to the “feminization of work” (p. 28) that requires “traditionally female ‘people skills’” (p. 28). This characterization differs from my claim about film (as they are talking about Wal-Mart work), but the point is to suggest how factory production is masculinized.

38 Hawkes is reiterating points made by Nietzsche here.
constituents, the expense of the session, failure of support for public education, and that the session is not to be zipped through. Manders (2006) reserves the top spot of ideological elements of American hegemony for “The Ideals of Freedom, Democracy, Equality” (p. 36), which entail the “collective belief” (p. 36) that democracy has been the foremost political engine since the days of the Founding Fathers. Under critical examination, however, the realities of bourgeois democracy come to light in the form of “compulsion” (p. 43) and “exploitation” (p. 43). We might see compulsion in the northern Nevada case as having to do with those “abstract forces” (Harvey, 2010, p. 42) that Marx says govern people’s lives despite all the bourgeois clamoring about freedom and liberty. The abstract forces governing the Nevada Legislature, and by extension the constituents themselves, would have to be attributed in part to the 2008 housing crisis and recession, which was discussed in each interview with Sparks/Reno city officials. The recession, crisis, or downturn language also appears in RGJ coverage. But most importantly it served as the pretext for Governor Sandoval’s call for the special session to begin with.

Sandoval’s September 9, 2014, official proclamation on the session purports that “Nevada continues to feel the effects of the worst economic crisis in the history of the state” (Damon, 2014f) and that in order “to continue to emerge from this crisis, Nevada must expand its economic opportunities and provide greater diversification in the workforce.”39 One official from Reno (Participant 3) provided rich and subjective drama to supplement the abstract condition referred to in the governor’s proclamation; regarding his attempts to meet constituents before the 2010 election, the councilman lamented that nearly “every third house was vacant, with a foreclosure sign on it” (personal communication, 2017). He added that “economic distress” was evident during these walks, where the “husband had been out of work for six months” with a “foreclosure notice… on the window.” Meanwhile, he said, the state “budget revenues had just crashed out” and the Legislature was making “drastic cuts across the board on all kinds of services and education and everything else.” In fact, Moody’s Ratings said Nevada’s experience with the recession was “the worst of any state” (Wroldsen, 2017, p. 2).

39 Quotes appear in an embedded document within the article (Damon, 2014f), in para. 2 and 3 respectively.
Such was the urban and legislative milieu shortly before the Tesla prospect, which again as an abstract force no doubt influenced how the deal would play out and what incentives would be floated. It is interesting to furthermore note that despite the neoliberal austerity measures taking place in the Legislature (i.e., the cutbacks), lawmakers were nonetheless inclined to move on giving the largest corporate incentive package in Nevada’s history.

Under the pretext of economic crisis, the governor brought this deal to the Legislature by way of the special session, and in turn this helped compel all northern Nevadans to consider supporting the measure. The point is that private-sector malfeasance, engendered by Wall Street’s esoteric financial products and banks’ predatory lending of adjustable rate mortgages—which are far removed from regular Nevadans and their state government—swooped down upon their lives, limiting the freedom and horizons of thought of their representatives. That the representatives welcomed the Gigafactory into Nevada under the pretense of a crisis exhibits Klein’s (2007) premise of “disaster capitalism.” By this definition she means the “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities” (p. 6). Among her case studies was the militant privatization of New Orleans’s public schools in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, resulting in the rise of charter schools, the laying off of a few thousand teachers, and reduced pay instituted for many others. What happened in Nevada was the public use of funds (through directly handing over money in some cases, and abstaining from collecting money in others) to facilitate the welfare of a massive corporation as a way out of a crisis.

5.10. Additional Tesla Criticism and Pre-Special Session Reader Comments

Tesla faced additional and substantive criticism in local media during its arrival. I found a handful of negative remarks in reports leading up to the special session that touch on the material consequences of those presumably not under the employ of construction companies, the film industry, Panasonic, or Tesla. The presence of this criticism is expressive of the slight autonomy that media in their watchdog role experience under the capitalist state.
These negative remarks expose the material sacrifice northern Nevadans will have to make,\textsuperscript{40} question the viability of not just the deal but Tesla’s products, and provide a trenchant identification of geographical uneven development (though not in that language).\textsuperscript{41} These remarks are listed in Table 5.2. First, taxpayers will have to foot some bills for Tesla, and NV Energy customers will have to pay an extra $1.52 a year to subsidize Tesla’s energy bill. This means that a large demographic is on the hook for the success of Tesla. Next, lithium-ion battery technology could obsolesce before the twenty-year abatements expire, which means that the massive public investment that the state made might not “pay off”; likewise, counties may not see a fiscal benefit from Tesla for ten years, which again begs the question whether the abatements were on the whole worth it. Harry Reid meanwhile said that Tesla was perhaps “playing” Nevada (RGJ Staff, 2014, para. 11). Then there was the keen assessment that Tesla is playing regions off of each other for the best deal. The attempts to get all of these workers and residents onboard with the Tesla deal, despite a smaller contingent directly benefiting from it, evinces trends in regional capital accumulation identified by Harvey (2006). “Local bourgeoisies” (p. 103), he says, try to enlist the support from workers for a “local class alliance” (p. 103) under the pretense that “the welfare of the region will provide spillover benefits for them” (p. 103).\textsuperscript{42}

Critics in the Legislature may have felt the deal was excessive, but at the same time they must have recognized the same “disaffected consent” (Cairns, 2015, p. 125) vocalized by Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor Lucy Flores. When asked by \textit{RGJ} publisher John Maher what she would have done differently vis-à-vis Tesla after the fact, she said she understands “the enormous amount of pressure that leaders have to create jobs for the people” (Hagar, 2014b, para. 13) although her “demands would have probably been more in favor of the everyday working Nevadans” (para. 13). Yet she also

\textsuperscript{40} I understand that car dealers, insurance industry workers, and Nevada filmmaking creatives also had to make a material sacrifice after the Tesla deals passed, but my point for distinguishing this section is to broaden this sacrifice to the rest of Nevada’s workers, residents, and unemployed.

\textsuperscript{41} Some of these remarks echo those made by democratic-socialist political figures Lee Carter and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the case of Micron in Virginia and Amazon in New York, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7.

\textsuperscript{42} Harvey (2006) also notes that these alliances in the interest of growth can fail or “shift” (p. 103). This might explain why the business entities hurt by the Tesla deal did not always support their own sacrifice. The filmmakers were upset and protested; insurance agreed to the deal but expected the Legislature return to help them later; while the car dealers, by contrast, apparently welcomed the law allowing Tesla to sell direct.
disaffectedly capitulated by saying that they “did get a good deal” (para. 15), which in my view must be the watchword of every legislative naysayer’s internal debate at the time.

It would be worthwhile knowing how far support penetrates into the NV Energy customer base and taxpayer base subsidizing the state’s gambit with Tesla. There is some scant evidence in the form of online reader comments on the RGJ website. But it is hard to know how reflective the comments are of a wider demographic group. In any case, I will list what I consider appropriate online reader comments attached to the 29 stories preceding the special session (see Table 5.3). The table below contains the online reader comments associated with eleven articles appearing on the RGJ site between August 1 and September 10, 2014. (Each row after the heading in bold represents one of these articles). The object is similar both to Chapter 4’s findings and discussion related to Hall et al.’s (2013) “letters to the editor” in the Handsworth mugging case. As you will see, the reader comments are quite provocative and can lead down other peripheral paths regarding common-sense, such as the perennial controversy in America over the principle of taxation.

Table 5.3 Reader Comments on Reno Gazette-Journal Gigafactory Articles (Aug. 1 – Sept. 10, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting vs. opposing comments following individual article</th>
<th>Supporting example</th>
<th>Opposing example</th>
<th>Facebook “Likes”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support: 1 Oppose: 2</td>
<td>“Passing the margin tax will drive Tesla right out of Nevada”</td>
<td>“I don’t like the fact that it may cost the taxpayers of this state half a billion bucks to bring this plant here”</td>
<td>Supporting Likes: 0 Opposing Likes: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support: 1 Oppose: 0</td>
<td>Commenter’s son “wants to work for Elon Musk at Tesla and/or SpaceX…he also looks forward to driving a Tesla one day”</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Supporting Likes: 2 Opposing Likes: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support: 1 Oppose: 0</td>
<td>“Thanks Tesla for your confidence in the Patriotic Freedom-Loving Americans in Nevada”</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Supporting Likes: 0 Opposing Likes: 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Support: 3  | Oppose: 1 | California resident: “[W]ith a deal this big that our… self-important politicians went ON VACATION and lost the state BILLIONS in future revenue is irresponsible and a firing offense” | Is Tesla “concerned about being a good custodian of our human resources, or do they only concern themselves with profitability?” | Supporting Likes: 13  
Opposing Likes: 0 |
|------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Support: 1  | Oppose: 0  | “I think this sounds like a win-win. Kudos to Nevada and Gov. Sandoval for pursuing this” | N/A | Supporting Likes: 0  
Opposing Likes: 0 |
| Support: 2  | Oppose: 1  | “Tesla is one of the the most important companies in the world today. Even if you never own one of their products, you will be affected by their game-changing technologies” | “The mass market appeal of electrics is very much in doubt” | Supporting Likes: 2  
Opposing Likes: 0 |
| Support: 3  | Oppose: 0  | “Tesla should absolutely be required to have some performance parameters in exchange for the incentive package… However, I’m not thrilled that some legislators want to dictate whom Tesla is going to hire and how much their wages are going to be” | N/A | Supporting Likes: 5  
Opposing Likes: 0 |
| Support: 1  | Oppose: 0  | From Gigafactory Reno: “The amount of research and development required to stay at the forefront of renewable energy will lead to new educational opportunities at UNR, UNLV, TMCC and beyond” | N/A | Supporting Likes: 7  
Opposing Likes: 0 |
| Support: 0  | Oppose: 4  | N/A | “Why not include in the deal that all northern Nevada taxpayers become shareholders in Tesla, since we will pay the investment cost” | Supporting Likes: 0  
Opposing Likes: 1 |
Again, it is difficult to say how representative these numbers are of northern Nevadans reading about the Tesla spectacle in the summative data. I found 18 comments in support of the Gigafactory deal, and 10 opposing comments. Associated with these comments were Facebook “Likes.” Likes for supportive comments totaled 36. Likes for opposing comments totaled seven.43

What I wanted to accomplish by invoking these numbers is to place a finger on the pulse of the layperson readership. While the evidence is far from perfect, it can tell us a little about what was going through the minds of commentators who felt affected by the massive deal at its earliest stages. More importantly, we can extract some themes from this media analysis both for and against the deal. On the supportive side, there is an irritation toward Democrats, unions, and taxes for education, as well as evidence towards my thesis of spectacle. In the latter case, one commenter says that “Tesla is one of the... most important companies in the world,” and that “Even if you never own one of their products, you will be affected by their game-changing technologies.” I would say the spectacle is again advanced by the enthusiastic commenter whose physicist son wants to work for Musk at Tesla Motors or SpaceX. Themes among the opposing comments include: skepticism about the viability of electric cars; one environmental concern; and the incisive opinion that taxpayers should not be required to subsidize the Gigafactory. This last theme I would associate with the stronger criticism I have been

43 The number of supporting “Likes” may be inflated by the 13 given to an apparent resident of California who had simultaneously celebrated Tesla and ragged on his own state. This may have satisfied readers proud of their own state. Also, reader comments that were unclear or tangential were omitted.
examining in this section. Although, as the numbers show, the supporters still outnumbered the critics in this sample of articles.

We can move back now to addressing the stronger criticism I began identifying in various news article text. Given the high turnover rate of lithium-ion technology, Tesla and Panasonic’s production could end up as valuable as “floppy disks” (Damon, 2014c, para. 30) before twenty years’ time is up. Such a possibility would render moot the extent of the generous abatements. It is interesting to note that this skeptical estimation, while appearing in RGJ reportage, is attributed to an outside source on the matter: a New York Times story. It could be that the obsolescence angle received more play outside of the context of local pride. The same could be asked about the remark that Tesla is playing regions off of each other. While it is true that one source for this assessment was a local Colliers International representative, the other source was a Los Angeles Times story—again an outsider. The sentiment aligns with the cautious sounding Harry Reid. Although similar to the case in Chapter 4, I would question here whether comments directly suspicious of Tesla naturalize common sense in that the capitalist system is sound and only a few bad apples go rogue from time to time. The key criticism, and one I would advance myself, would have to do with the “race to the bottom” and taxpayer subsidy directed to massive corporations. Some online readers and legislators lamented this, and some journalistic text exposed it, but I would say that the narratives of growth, jobs, and winning were more appealing.

Although I find RGJ journalists who took the initiative to invoke criticism commendable and responsible, the point of this section was to suggest how local media support local business (despite the dissent). Textual analysis suggests that the RGJ perpetuated common-sense thinking in support of capitalist growth, legislative tinkering, and bourgeois democratic procedure. While it is true that RGJ’s rote commitment to objectivity led to the representation of problems, frustrations, and negativity in the first place (as voiced by various stakeholders and journalists themselves), most of the representation was safely contained within a common-sense paradigm. These are reasonable questions one would expect for any huge undertaking, and the pragmatism espoused by my interview participants reflect elements of the reportage. Sure, there may be room for celebration in the press, but it is not possible that a pro-Tesla ruling class bloc was able to completely brainwash a population of self-thinking social class actors. I further do not think the negative publicity could contend with the Tesla Effect because of
the currency of image Tesla deals in. Any watchdog reporting—at least in early 2014—
withers in the bright lights of a spectacle with gullwing doors. My findings gel in some
ways with Castelló’s (2010) study, mentioned in Chapter 2, given that the Spanish
petrochemical industry was framed positively despite around 25% of stories discussed in
that study containing criticism. Similarly in the case of Tesla, while most online
comments were supportive of the Tesla deal in Nevada, there nonetheless appeared
astute critical thinking that questioned the pro-Tesla wisdom.

The second main question guiding this chapter involved what officials and local
citizens saw as the right path forward for Nevada as well as what they perceived as
obstacles on that path. The statements I have drawn from officials and online
commenters suggest the presence and wellbeing of some ideological sacred cows.
Foremost among these is the primacy and importance of jobs, long an alibi for corporate
malfeasance. Jobs and good pay for good work were certainly vaunted by stakeholders.
Closely related to these considerations is the fate of taxes, which are all but obliterated
in the state of Nevada and looked at disparagingly by Republicans when directed
towards social provisions.

Some useful concepts that can help reconcile the dissatisfaction but ultimate
acceptance of Tesla include: Cairns (2015) on the “disaffected consent” (p. 125) toward
neoliberal austerity; Hall et al. (2013) on “pragmatic acceptance” (p. 141) of societal
unfairness perceived by the working class; and Richard Hoggart’s record of working
people’s “dull fatalism” (as cited in Smith, 2006, p. xxvii) toward “life [being] hard, with
nothing to be done about it” (p. xxvii). Cairns (2015), Hall et al. (2013), Smith (2006), and
Hoggart link these attitudes to vulnerable populations of students and the working class.
As we know from Bell (1967), there is no “one-to-one correspondence between a set of
ideas and some ‘class’ purpose” (p. 397), which suggests the petit bourgeois are free to
express similar sentiments as the working class does. So it is with what I would deem
the “pragmatic acceptance” of the overly generous Tesla deal among some “naysayers”
(Participant 3, personal communication, 2017) in the State Legislature. The naysayers
had “objections based on principle” and asked themselves, according to my respondent:
“Why are we giving tax breaks to Elon Musk who’s worth a gazillion dollars?” This group
further had the idea that this was a “race to the bottom game.” But, in support of the
pragmatism thesis I have described, the pro-Tesla votes were still unanimous despite
the grumblings of naysayers.
5.11. Additional RGJ Themes: The Investor Presumption and the Mysterious “We”

Something I found myself wondering as I read through dozens of stories on the Gigafactory was: “Who is this plant really for?” The answer, I would argue, is not as obvious as it seems. Furthermore, an exploration of the question will take us to some of Norman Fairclough’s broader insights on media discourse analysis. I will first recount some of the responses to the question of whose interests the Gigafactory satisfies; then I will connect this discussion to Fairclough’s (1995) notion of “representations” (p. 5) and “identities” (p. 5) in the context of textual production.

Regarding the question of “Who is this plant for?” we find a selection of answers from stories throughout 2014. For example, readers learn that the Gigafactory “would mark a huge catch for the state’s economic development officers” (REN, 2014, para. 9). Another article states that the plant “is considered a top prize in economic development circles” (Hidalgo, 2014g, para. 8). Other articles say the factory is “coveted by officials in several states” (O’Driscoll, 2014c, para. 5), and that Tesla has “changed the perception in the (venture capital) community – and that’s huge for the entrepreneurs in the area. It’s huge for investors” (Robison, 2014b, para. 62). A journalist reports that “Tesla should especially help economic development authorities” (para. 38).

Pair these comments with the revelation that the Gigafactory announcement “sparked a 10 percent jump in asking prices for some large for-sale industrial buildings in the region” (O’Driscoll, 2014f, para. 2) and you start to see a picture forming. What if the appeals to the Nevada working class—or “public”—about jobs and prosperity are little more than veiled alibis for a wealthy-developer elite set to clean up from a huge deal? It seems to me the people who stand to gain most are these anxious sources appearing in the backgrounds of stories: economic officers, developers, entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, real estate tycoons. Developer Lance Gilman was persistently showing up to the special legislative session, which is telling; who else should care that much? For the alibi thesis to work, there would need to be attempts in local media to conflate the capitalist class’s interests with everyone’s interests in Nevada. And we do in fact see this.
The conflation occurs when various figures trot out “Nevada” in the reportage. Hidalgo (2014e) writes, “Congratulations, Nevada, you just landed Tesla Motors’ Gigafactory” (para. 1). Governor Sandoval says in another article: the “Tesla deal is going to be a big boost to all of Nevada” (Hagar, 2014c, para. 5), exclaiming also that this was a “Nevada victory” (O’Driscoll, 2014j, para. 2). The co-owner of F and P Construction was quoted saying: “We wanted it so bad. We wanted it for Nevada” (O’Driscoll, 2014d, para. 5). Meanwhile, Ray Bacon of the Nevada Manufacturer’s Association said that “[e]verybody’s going to benefit” (O’Driscoll, 2014g, para. 5). Tim Ruffin of Colliers Reno location likewise claimed that “As the overall economy grows, all segments will be positively impact[ed]” (O’Driscoll, 2014e, para. 6). But this begs the question: “Who is Nevada?” Certainly not every Nevadan occupies the same social class position and will share equally in the bounty of the Gigafactory’s surplus-value. To think otherwise would be absurd, but a lot of the language in local media intimates as much.

If it were not for the (obligatory?) appeals to the 6,500 direct jobs, 22,000 indirect jobs, and $5 billion investment in the region (including $37.5 million invested in education), it would be much easier to see the Tesla deal as more of a bamboozle. In any event, references to the job and investment bonuses certainly appear in the coverage (Hidalgo & Damon, 2014; Staff Reports, 2014). I do not want to misrepresent the narratives taking place. One report claims that Nevadan truck drivers will now have the option of working locally rather than long-haul (Robison, 2014b). The same report further claims that workers can expect to make $60,000 a year, which is $10,000 more than comparable and nearby jobs. Steve Hill of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development made two remarks on the issue, stating that the Gigafactory “will allow every under employed person to reach full employment” (Damon, 2014b, para. 6), and that “the goal for us really… is the creation of all these great jobs” (Hidalgo, 2014a, para. 72).

While construction workers and random community commentators sometimes factor in as sources (e.g., Hidalgo, 2015g), most of the authorities quoted in the RGJ are associated with real estate and economic development. This is telling in that the Tesla

44 As I explain in Chapter 7, even this gesture towards educational improvement is misleading, because the $37.5 million is going to STEM-related programs that will conceivably benefit Tesla (Spillman, 2018a). The University of Nevada-Reno also collaborated with Tesla to arrange “a minor in Batteries and Energy Storage Technologies” (Wroldsen, 2017, p. 6).
transformation of northern Nevada is conveyed through the eyes of powerful and wealthy figures. To answer one of Fairclough’s (1995) questions about media discourse, the world is represented in a mostly pro-business fashion (p. 5). I understand that the same reportage I refer to cites the benefit of the Gigafactory to the developer class, the working people who need jobs, and to Nevada as a whole. For this reason I am not arguing that the press is conspiratorially covering up the fact that a small elite will benefit, but rather that common-sense seems to purport that the Tesla deal will result in prosperity for everyone, with sources contacted by way of rote objectivity. This is due to many years of the capitalist class fashioning a perspective that there are no classes at odds with one another, but rather a mere public that critical thinkers would consider fictive.45 This goes back to Palmer’s (1994) quote at the beginning of this chapter, that capital “extend[s] its needs into the realm of universal need” (p. 17) and “bur[ies] its own interests in an avalanche of ‘benevolence’” (p. 17). The only problem left to deal with, again, are those technical tweaks flagged by Democrats, journalists, and the occasional online news reader.

A comparable situation occurs in the coverage over the use of the loaded term “we,” which again insinuates that all Nevadans feel a certain way or will benefit equally from the Tesla prospect. Take for example Kazmierski’s claim before Tesla made its decision: “We will win regardless of the outcome as we are now considered a viable option for businesses and manufacturing in the West” (O’Driscoll, 2014h, para. 41). By “we” does he mean EDAWN? Developers associated with EDAWN? Republican legislators? All of Nevada? Only northern Nevada? It is unclear. Lance Gilman likewise said “We’re going against some of the largest economies in the world…. And here we are and, by God, we’re in the fight” (Hidalgo, 2014f, para. 5). He also exclaimed that “We’re holding our heads up. We’re a strong people, a strong state. All across the globe, they’re noticing” (Damon, et al., 2014, para. 31). These are problematic for similar reasons, because “we” conflates the interests of Gilman with that of all Nevadans. Fairclough (1995) is more than aware of such slippery usage, commenting on a Margaret Thatcher line that “we” (p. 181) can be used “inclusively to include the audience and people generally” (p. 181), “exclusively” (p. 181), or “ambivalently” (p. 181). On this last point, Thatcher’s statement “if we played our cards right” (p. 181)

45 As Kellner (2003) puts it, society is “a matrix of hierarchical groups existing in relations of opposition, inequality, and subordination” (p. 108).
impels Fairclough to ask if this means “the Conservatives? the government? or the nation?” (p. 181). Thompson (1990) would describe the “we” problem vis-à-vis Gilman as one of the “five general modes” (p. 60) of ideology, namely “unification” (p. 60), which entails the “symbolization of unity” (p. 60).

Attention to “representations” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 5) helps illuminate another of Fairclough’s (1995) questions about media texts—this one about the “identities… set up for those involved in the… story” (p. 5). Among these identities is that of the audience, or in this case the readership of the RGJ. A close analysis of the text, in my view, suggests that the implied reader be an investor or entrepreneur who stands to benefit from the Tesla deal. In the Althusserian formulation, the RGJ thus “hails or interpellates” (Althusser, 1994, p. 108) people as subjects, and in this case the “subject-position” (Hawkes, 2003, p. 119) approximates that of investor or financial analyst. Supporting my argument here is the pro-business angle of reportage and the sources appearing in articles.

For example, we can look at the celebratory piece, “Industrial strength: Amazon leads industrial surge in Reno-Sparks real estate,” which focuses on the “Leasing and sales activity” (Hidalgo, 2014c, para. 2) in the region. We can also refer to “Report: Reno-Sparks office market improving” (O’Driscoll, 2014e). The titles for these stories may as well be swapped for “A good time to invest your money here!” To be fair, though, the texts fall under the Money and Business sections, but I still found them through the search term “gigafactory.” This means that anyone wanting more information about the plant becomes hailed a certain way.

A related style of RGJ text is what I labeled in my notes as “effectively just a report for [Tesla] shareholders.” Written by Hidalgo (2015l), one article’s title expresses the point: “Tesla posts 4th quarter loss, misses analyst estimates.” Another article title: “Tesla sales jump 52% for 2nd quarter of 2015” (Hidalgo, 2015n). An additional article states that “For stock watchers, the Tesla batteries’ ability to store energy for powering homes and businesses adds another line in the company’s list of potential moneymaking opportunities” (Hidalgo, 2015a, para. 4). These stories are section appropriate, but listed under searches for “gigafactory.”
Local Nevada pride aside, the RGJ texts are less concerned with people who sell their labor for a paycheck and resign themselves to the “dull compulsion of the economic” (Marx, as cited in Eagleton, 1994a, p. 196) Why should the RGJ concern itself with these dull lifestyles anyway when it is the spectacle that sells subscriptions? What seems to be left mystified in these stories is the extent to which someone like Lance Gilman will profit much greater from Tesla than a line worker at the plant.

By taking the investor’s subject-position, a reader is dissuaded from seeing the world from a working-person’s perspective. I am reminded of the start of Berman’s (1988) book on modernity, where he relates Dostoyevsky’s *Underground Man* to the “dismal” (p. 6) actualization of the city of Brasilia. The idealistic architects Costa and Niemeyer held out earnest hope in planning this city in the 1950s, but the “great gulf between these hopes and their realization” (p. 7) highlights one of Dostoyevsky’s points. As Berman (1988) says, “it can be a creative adventure for modern men to build a palace, and yet a nightmare to have to live in it” (p. 7). Relatedly, it can be amazing to build a futuristic factory, and yet underwhelming to work in it. As Lance Gilman’s net worth increased by millions and the Biblical dirt pad took shape at TRI Center, the Tesla project must have looked very creative and adventurous to the investor class. From below deck, though, where the folks actually make the goods on the shop floor, the view was arguably obstructed by a robotic arm.
Chapter 6.

Image versus Accountability in the Becoming of Two Regions

In the last two chapters, I have argued that explanations of the lived experiences of civic officials, plant workers, and broader media audiences in Indianapolis and Huntington, Reno, and Sparks are complicated by a range of often contradictory promotional and critical discourses. Backgrounding these is the material reality of a racist and sexist socioeconomic and political system deeply inscribed with logics of largely unfettered economic rationality, individualism, and imagined meritocracy. Entrepreneurs, corporations, and politicians seen to bring jobs to communities, or at least promise to keep them there, tend to be cast as the spectacular heroes in this system, with Musk as an entrepreneur archetype. Workers along with many other local residents are rarely cast in such a light.

In this chapter, I compare the hype, hope, and spectacle associated with corporate and civic promotional discourses, as well as reactions in media accounts to the lived reality of “what happened” in these places. During the background conceptual, historical, and field work I undertook for this project, it became increasingly clear to me that it is the vulnerable people in these communities who least benefited after official plans came to fruition. More specifically, the Tesla deal presented itself falsely as a universal boon for all Nevadans, and Trump and Pence misleadingly implied that everyone’s job at Carrier was safe, as they situated the factory layoffs in the so called “America First” discourse of the 2016 presidential campaign.

Beyond the comparison between image and accountability, I also devote this chapter to the meanings that Sparks, Reno, Indy, and Huntington have to the people who live there, and in particular how place marketing influenced these meanings. In the context of boosting their respective cities, for instance, what do officials foresee taking place economically in the future, and what do they think should take place? Having examined the case studies individually in the previous chapters, now I look to a future
regional imaginary grounded in the history and becoming of Indiana and Nevada. This chapter draws on Lefebvre's (1998) thinking to explore links more deeply between communication, radical political economy, and critical urban studies.

To structure the discussion, I primarily address two issues in this chapter:

1. The way promotional discourses and spectacle appeared to complicate local understanding and disguise what actually took place in Reno/Sparks and Indianapolis/Huntington.

2. How residents imagined and debated their situations and struggled for the best way to chart a course for their futures.

In respect to the first issue, I want to begin by revisiting the Trump/Pence announcements after the Carrier decision, and follow up by describing the actual void left behind after Trump and Pence moved on from Indy—where, as Berman (1988) or Dostoyevsky might say, people “have to live in it” (p. 7). I then provide a similar analysis with regard to the legislative run up to the four incentives bills passed for Tesla. As part of this discussion I offer a more developed account of what these cities mean to the people who live in them, as well as how these interpretations influence their hopes for what the cities will become.

6.1. Contradictions and Limits of Capitalist Political Spectacle in Indiana

Hedges’s (2009) cynical assessment of America’s celebrity culture is a useful place to start when assessing the events at the Carrier plant, including local and political reactions to them. Trump’s wildly popular speech delivered at the Indy Carrier plant in late 2016 was a notable part of his self-presentation as a populist leader. This was the event a union leader (Participant 8) I interviewed described as so rapturous as to be “sickening” (personal communication, 2017) with fellow employees around him cheering, crying, or yelling, “Build the wall!” The rhetorical dimensions of the event are important to

1 Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus claimed that “Everything flows, [and] everything is becoming” (Heraclitus, as cited in Merrifield, 2002, p. 25), a concept that embodies the “Greek root of dialectical thought” (Heilbroner, 1980, p. 32).
consider for a couple of reasons; the first is that the president-elect either did not know, or did not care to know, what workers in the factory actually produced. Trump would intone: “You guys will be building more air conditioners than you ever have” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017).

But this was a mistake; a plant in Tennessee makes the air conditioners. The factory Trump spoke in only made furnaces. After Participant 8 heard that his fellow members would be “building more air conditioners than [they] ever have” (personal communication, 2017), he took the opportunity to tell a nearby corporate executive: “Yeah, that fuckin’ number is one.” Although the executive “didn’t think it was too funny…. [The union official] thought it was funny as hell.” It would have been the first air conditioner to roll out of the plant after all. While the workers knew that Trump was wrong on this, the reality of the situation mattered less than the deal he was selling them; and the audience was still enthralled.

Much more misleading than the negligible misconception of the factory’s chief commodity was Trump and Pence’s intimation that all factory jobs were safe. It was a lie of omission that the union reps I talked to found inexcusable. The reps (Participants 8 and 12) referred to certain scenes as a “dog and pony show” (personal communication, 2017). As I recorded in Chapter 4, the rah-rah event convinced the dayshift and later nightshift employees that their jobs were secure, despite the fact that several hundred layoffs were still to come. The union local had to urgently respond to the situation by getting corrective fliers in the plant. The Trump-Pence promise was simply a sleight of hand that mystified the continued presence of layoffs.

Staying with the Trump example, then-president of USW Local 1999, Chuck Jones, told a journalist that Trump “wraps himself in the American flag…. But he doesn’t practice what he preaches” (Cook, 2016, para. 10). Not only was there a clear understanding among many that Trump was unaccountable for his statements, there was a financial contradiction underscoring them as well. The fact that Trump reprimanded Carrier was profoundly contradictory, given his own investments in Carrier’s parent corporation that this article exposes. Trump has been caught criticizing other corporations he has invested in too, such as the Ford Motor Credit Company and Nabisco’s parent company (Cook, 2016). There is little material substance backing this affective and empty use of language to whip up support from discontented members of
the working class. How do we explain then the support that Trump was able to drum up among some members of the Indiana working class? The reasons are complex, and are in no small way due to the complexity of the Carrier situation and the mixed feelings of pragmatism and helplessness among the communities affected.

Carrier Corporation never clearly elucidated which federal regulations were the allegedly burdensome ones forcing it to vacate Indiana and the United States (Turner, 2016). Nor was there any legal imperative that they do this. The absence of accountability brings with it an expectation of impunity fostered perhaps by the celebratory treatment politicians and media figures typically bestow on “job creators.” All Carrier thought it had to do to justify its layoffs was serve up a hackneyed chestnut about excessive laws and regulations from the common-sense neoliberal corporate playbook. This was until Senator Joe Donnelly called the executives out for their inability to name these alleged, onerous regulations.

And yet, ironically, Donnelly would find himself at the center of a similar controversy. This would show that Corporate America and the Republican Party do not have a monopoly on hypocrisy and the lack of accountability. Democratic senator Donnelly, despite his criticism of Carrier, nevertheless owns $50,000 worth of stock in a family business (i.e., Stewart Superior Corp.) that sends raw material to a Mexican plant for production (Slodysko, 2017). The company then ships the finished products—“ink pads” (para. 1) and other arts and crafts supplies—to a Californian facility. At least one commentator on Latin American trade decried the “hypocrisy” (para. 8) of Donnelly’s actions, along with Stewart Superior’s and other companies’ contributions to the poverty of Mexican workers. Former Democratic president Barack Obama, meanwhile, never deigned it important enough to visit Indianapolis or the plant, despite visiting a different troubled plant in Elkhart, Indiana, during his own run for office (Bethea, 2018)—when the image was more critical to his campaign aspirations.

In addition, while Trump may have presented himself as an unambiguous friend to Hoosier factory workers during campaign season, it was Bernie Sanders who was the political figure doing so with the actual endorsement of many of those workers (Eason, 2016). Trump has repeatedly shown he cares little for the welfare of unions and those living hand-to-mouth anyway, tacitly supporting Republican initiatives to limit union power, and neglecting to even mention raising the minimum wage, which Sanders
championed (and Hillary Clinton hedged). The group, Good Jobs Nation, having partnered with Chuck Jones, hosted an August 2017 rally at Indy’s Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument with Bernie Sanders as a speaker. One of the impetuses there was to urge Trump to continue taking action on job loss. While Trump did keep several hundred employed in Indianapolis, there was still more the alt-right champion could do for workers across the country—and it would not take much effort either. What action could he have taken? The answer happened to be emblazoned on pickup trucks parked opposite the podium during the rally. On the doors and side panels were the demands: “Keep your promises!” and “Pick up the pen!” The former message illustrates this section’s theme on accountability, and combined with the latter it means that—if Trump wanted to—he could sign an executive order freezing any federal subsidies going to corporations that offshore jobs.

But this action by Trump has not been forthcoming. Instead he followed a path of tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy that have done little to generate employment for laid-off factory workers or raise the wages of those who remain employed (da Costa, 2018). As noted earlier, while a few hundred Hoosiers were able to continue working at the Carrier plant, around 550 weren't saved at all—nor were the 700 workers at Huntington’s UTEC. Meanwhile, it was the USW keeping the pressure on, forming demonstrations, organizing rallies, attempting to network with the IBEW, doing what they could to not only cushion the blow by management but advance their story in the media. In light of all that work, I asked a union official (Participant 8) if he thought that the dominant narrative about Carrier in Indianapolis would nonetheless become, “Trump saved the jobs.” He said that, yes, “I think [that’s] probably going to happen” (personal communication, 2017), but also that he did not worry about it.

But perhaps it is worth worrying about this more than the union rep believes necessary? The Carrier situation at the very least demonstrated the comparative powerlessness of local places and their workers when confronted with corporate economic prerogatives. Trump arrived in this atmosphere of seeming powerlessness to identify a clear villain—the so called liberal elites of the Clinton/Obama eras—and offer promises of economic salvation that many were simply desperate to believe. Union opposition, with local support for Bernie Sanders, was unable to offer an effective counterpoint to the Trump/Pence discourse after the primaries. Media narratives
contributed to the cascade of contradictions and illusions associated with the Carrier story and related political spectacle.

In Chapter 1, I argued that the Carrier announcement went out during a historical moment when the working class seemed especially well positioned to view the offshoring of jobs with more furor than in the past. There is some evidence to support this. For example, Allen and Parnes’s (2017) note there was a “populist renaissance” (p. 38) animating the 2016 electorate. Yet, Trump, media figures, Hoosier steelworkers, and observers across the country were also buying into a populist narrative about job loss as a result of policies developed by Democratic party urban elites.

Trump’s success hinged on a range of factors, including gerrymandered electoral districts, voter suppression, and an electoral college system that allows presidents to win even while losing the popular vote. But he did seem to achieve a modicum of success in redefining common sense to align with his preferred discursive reality. As Hall et al. (2013) write about common sense: “We work with the elements of explanation which are already available, which lie to hand, which seem to have some relevance to the problem at hand” (p. 164), adding that these “pieces are really the fragments of other… more coherent and consistent theoretical elaborations which have lost their internal consistency over time… [and] become sedimented in ordinary ‘common sense’” (p. 164). They add that Gramsci dubbed these as “traces” (p. 164). I like the claim that energizing common sense are these traces that “lie to hand” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 164), waiting around for eventual deployment into interpretations that lay people have of the world. Trump had a degree of success in shaping such traces into common sense. This certainly seemed to occur whenever NAFTA or TPP emerged in news reportage during the election—and especially when they emerged in online reader comments.

Indeed, in the alt-right neoconservative discourse championed by Trump, “NAFTA” became more or less shorthand for: “The Clintons have an inexcusable sin hovering over their heads.” This term was also lying “to hand” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 164) and it “seem[ed] to have some relevance to the problem at hand” (p. 164)—the problem here being a dejected white working class and its forthcoming president. NAFTA also became shorthand for “our jobs are leaving.” The Mexico-as-primary-problem angle was a simple story, easily digestible, and suitable fodder for one-panel political cartoons. I would also say the NAFTA/Mexico story activated long simmering traces left over from
the 1990s that are probably unexamined and may or may not recall the third-party populism of Ross Perot. And yet it stands in as just one policy manifestation of the much broader evils of the capitalist mode of production.

Given this, pointing to NAFTA as the origin for the white working class’s misery is only partially true and is thus an ideological, common-sense conclusion. The local media fixation on Mexico made sense (after all, it is where Carrier was relocating), but I think in its rehashing of traces it nonetheless contributed to a misconception too. As Harvey (2010) explains, despite “[t]he tendency… to blame outsourcing and competition from low-wage labor in Mexico and China for the ills of the US working class… studies show that about two-thirds of the job losses there are due to technological change” (p. 220).

But the Trump/Pence discourse also physically and hegemonically muscled out what could be a counter-narrative or inconvenient presence at the Carrier rally. This incident has to do both with the reportage done in Monterrey for local Indianapolis consumption, as well as with the positioning of Mexico as an “alien” villain. On the first point, a union official I interviewed had described a harrowing situation involving Rafael Sanchez, a broadcast reporter from RTV6 – The Indy Channel:

[T]here’s a reporter from WRTV Channel 6, Rafael Sanchez. Rafael went, when Carrier announced the closure, the station sent him over to Monterrey, Mexico. He went over there to observe the plant. He ended up [and] the cameraman flying their drone over the facility so they could show what it looked like. Armed guards put a gun to his head and held him at gunpoint for an hour, and [they] finally released him. (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017)

I was not entirely clear on this, but, according to this respondent, the day of Trump and Pence’s big speech at Carrier, Sanchez’s credentials were “pulled” (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017) meaning he was barred from covering the event. I find it significant that a journalist who had seen with his own eyes the opposite pole of unevenly developing capitalism (i.e., the Mexico plant) was restricted from covering a promotional event that had nothing but good connotations toward Trump, Carrier Corp., and the market. In addition, given Trump’s racist comments about Hispanic immigrants as “rapists” (Ferreras, 2018, para. 6), criminals, and drug peddlers,²

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² When Trump announced his presidential ambitions on June 16, 2015, he said: “They’re sending people who have lots of problems and they’re bringing their problems with us. They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime, they’re rapists, and some, I assume, are good people” (Ferreras, 2018).
one might even think Sanchez’s presence was viewed as undermining the intended promotional connotations. The main takeaway in my view is the continuation of certain pro-capitalist fantasies (the rally) at the expense of accountability (someone who had seen the uneven development’s opposite pole).

On the subject of technological fixes, machines, and image, the last point I want to make in this section involves the predictions of one of my union interviewees. Despite the laudatory response to Trump and Pence at the Carrier event, and the begrudging acceptance of Trump’s incomplete accomplishment by some interviewees, the union rep had this unsettling possibility to express. In August of 2017, he said that for the next 18 months, $16 million would be invested into the Indy Carrier plant, with the CEO claiming it would be for automation. “So,” Participant 8 said, “we got 730 people… and they’re gonna bring some robots in” (personal communication, 2017), adding that “Some point in time they’re gonna have everything… automized for the most part.” From here he arrives at the logical conclusion:

I hope I’m wrong [but] that plant won’t be there in five years…. they’ll move…. The big facility in Monterrey that they’ve built to move the whole facility – they’re not gonna leave that damn thing uh partially utilized. So the rest of it’s comin. It’s just a matter of when they get the automation completed…. Now they’re not gonna admit to this, but you know, if anybody thinks they got a long-term uh job at Carrier uh I hope they’re right…. they’re probably wrong³

6.2. Contradictions and Limits of Capitalist Spectacle in Northern Nevada

The Carrier case is rife with discursive mismatches and rhetorical hegemony. The same is true for the Tesla Motors spectacle. In order to show how, I want to briefly revisit the technician’s interview and Marxian interpretation of Musk’s sentiments on the Gigafactory that I explained in the previous chapter.

An important point to invoke here from the Gigafactory technician interview involves the explanation for the peculiar leisure time he and some colleagues claim to

³ An Indianapolis city-county councillor echoed this point, saying, “I don’t think we feel safe that [the jobs are] gonna be here much longer either. It may not be that they get uh necessarily laid off, but that they may just through… the process of… you know, people retiring and things… they’re not gonna replace em” (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017).
have enjoyed at the plant. He suggested that the leisure was attributed to Panasonic’s (and I would add Tesla’s) deal with the state regarding benefits received (Participant 4, personal communication, 2017). In other words, the technician presumed that the legislators may have threatened to cancel the tax abatements if the employer missed the hiring quota by a certain date. This means that my interviewee may have experienced a hiring gambit without real foresight from the company. By this I mean that Tesla and Panasonic might have wanted to make good with state government at the cost of some hasty staffing. This is important because the story contradicts with a Tesla spokesman’s PR spin on the same subject; he told reporters in late March 2016 that “It doesn’t make sense to just hire a bunch of people all at once to look good in the press” (Damon, 2016b, para. 19). Well, maybe it doesn’t make sense, but perhaps the companies did it anyway?

In weighing these claims, all I have to go with are Tesla’s comments and my interviewee’s. However, the spectacle thesis I have advanced suggests that the latter suspicion is more credible. I say this especially because of the technician’s (Participant 4) comment that, while it was “normal” (personal communication, 2017) for the machines to be under warranty, it was “weird” that the company hired him and others so soon, before the warranty expired. The technician felt his expertise and very presence in the factory was moot.

Limited inside commentary (or counter-narrative) like this is not “representative” in the sense of mainstream empirical social science, but it provides clues that counter the spectacular images, and positive PR spin often permeating the press. The presence of such pro-capitalist voices in media plays a role in the discursive construction of reality associated with business, investing, and uneven development as natural. But alternative voices can expose and partially subvert the hype (which other commentators, in the case of Tesla Motors, have also done to varying degrees).

Further to capitalist PR, I had asked the former employee (Participant 4) if he felt encouragement from the company to see the Gigafactory as the epicenter of technological advancement, and to feel proud to work there. He replied “No, not really” (personal communication, 2017), adding that Panasonic was already “kinda scraping the bottom of the barrel” with its 1,000+ employees. One of the reasons he felt this way was because the “bathrooms are being vandalized.” Another was that the job fair he went to
featured “a panel of people” who he felt “really [weren’t] qualified,” and who “really had no business interviewing” him for the job. This was due to the panel’s oversight of “the most impressive parts of [his] resume.” I see this as one small part of the deficit between “daily reality” (Manders, 2006, p. 43) and “capitalist ideology” (p. 43), an idea Palmer (1990) describes as material conditions failing to meet up with subjective interpretations (p. xi).

We can do a similar reading with attention to the “hidden abode of production” (Marx, as cited in Shapiro, 2008, p. 71), that constitutes the futuristic Gigafactory. Musk had evangelized the plant in multiple venues, but I have argued that a materialistic grounding contradicts the utopian color of his statements in the press. No doubt his corporate spin is related to the viability of Tesla’s stock price, which could lead to deeper discussions of “fictitious capital” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 120) and “overvalued” (p. 120) stock, both issues that fall outside the direct objective of this chapter.


Without having to speculate on the future, I suggested in the previous chapter that problematic developments took place in the years following the 2014 Gigafactory deal—developments that in some cases betrayed the hype. Although I should first clarify that local hype for Tesla did not totally abide. In January of that year, the project at TRI Center was described as “jaw-dropping in scale” (DeLong, 2015, para. 2). A story on Tesla’s ambition to bring aboard 350 interns notes that “anticipation” (Hidalgo, 2015j, para. 14) for jobs “gets jacked up higher... when a company with the name recognition of Tesla comes in” (para. 14). Familiar figure Mike Kazmierski says in the same article that Tesla “is a hot name with millennials” (para. 17). Other stories from that year state: that the “hot topic in town is Tesla” (McAndrew, 2015, para. 4); and that construction workers referred to building the Gigafactory as a “glamour job” (Hidalgo, 2015d, para. 17). When we read that Tesla is “winning the image war among consumers” (Hidalgo, 2015a, para. 45), and that the Gigafactory has a “wow factor” (para. 46), it is difficult to imagine arguing for the absence of hype. I should also make clear that Tesla did in fact boost the local economy by requiring construction crews and by indirectly motivating
other businesses to consider moving to Nevada. Again, I do not want to misrepresent the picture forming around this case study.

But after some muted ambivalence in 2014 (Robison, 2014a), the tenor of stories seems to change a bit from 2015-2017 as a few unsavory incidents occurred and the *RGJ* exposed local government inaction. Some of these were noted in the last chapter as factors that for some brought the Tesla honeymoon to an end, including: tension with the local press; a clampdown on press exposure of the plant; a physical altercation with journalists and private Tesla security guards; the sudden request from Tesla for 350 (presumably unpaid) student internships; the failure by local government to file audits, reports, and analyses on the Gigafactory as it was being constructed; and the complete failure of GOED-hired economists to correctly project the number of hires for, and dollars invested in, the Gigafactory—which were both much lower than expected in their 2014 calculations. Although, these numbers later improved.

A Sparks city councilor (Participant 5) told me that “[M]any times what our state seems to do is make a decision and say that everything will just work out, and not put the pieces together as well as they should” (personal communication, 2017). Roughly the same sentiment appeared in the reporting of Damon (2015b), who noted that: Nevada’s been “[b]urned in the past by tax incentives that weakened the state’s ability to deliver services for an economic promise that wasn’t met” (para. 11); and also that the state has seen tax incentives go “to companies that never really had to prove they’d deliver on their economic impact numbers” (para. 3). This Tesla deal was supposed to be accountable. But to what degree was it?

For all the built-in media spectacle that Tesla could capitalize on before the special session, less flattering incidents nevertheless took place in the ensuing timeframe; although, to be fair, some of these did not involve the Gigafactory. One of these, for instance, was the 2016 vehicular death of a man who had been using the “Autopilot” (Bomey, 2016, para. 1) feature of his Tesla Model S in Ohio. This prompted

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4 In this “Fact Checker” article, Robison (2014a) writes that “Some say the multiplier touted by Gov. Brian Sandoval’s economic development office is overblown and not nearly so many jobs will be created” (para. 2). It turns out those people were sort of right. However, the article concludes by stating the Governor’s Office of Economic Development did not exaggerate the numbers.

5 To be fair, the numbers were rosier and on track at the end of 2017, though there was still criticism of Tesla to go around then, too (Spillman, 2018a).
Consumer Reports to call on Tesla to dismantle the quasi-self-driving feature, which Musk and the company in turn refused to do (Bomey, 2016). Some then saw Musk as handling the fallout on the Autopilot death inelegantly, as he decided to cite all the millions of miles of safe driving attributed to his cars. Another controversial event during this timeframe, but relatively irrespective of the Gigafactory, was Tesla’s $2.5 billion acquisition of SolarCity—a solar panel company whose CEO is Musk’s cousin (della Cava & Swartz, 2016). This business decision put investors on edge, according to della Cava and Swartz (2016). But more important for this chapter is examining the questionable events related to the huge Tesla subsidy and factory in order to determine how reliable the Tesla spectacle actually was.

First were some growing pains regarding Tesla’s footprint in northern Nevada. In early March 2015, for instance, a mild dispute arose between the IBEW and Tesla; a post on the former’s local and national websites claimed a temporary cutback in labor (Hidalgo, 2015v). The company contradicted the claim, saying no such thing occurred. The RGJ reported on the matter, and Reuters, Bloomberg, and the Wall Street Journal subsequently ran the story. Apparently one to take this personally, Musk tweeted about the incident with angst: “Media reporting solely off random job ads board in Reno that we didn’t even know existed…. That is as dumb a[s] it sounds” (para. 16). As I will explain later, casual disdain for media is typical of Musk and Tesla executives.

RGJ tech journalist and “self-professed geek,” Hidalgo (2015o), later justified the original report. He admitted that journalists have few sources to go on when writing about the Gigafactory, which he said is “shrouded in secrecy” (2015v, para. 3). With nondisclosure agreements pervading the relationships of Gigafactory insiders, and Tesla’s public filings the only real accessible resource, Hidalgo (2015v) said “the information contained in the job board notes provided a rare peek for the public into what potentially goes on behind the scenes at the gigafactory” (para. 3). Any corporate undertaking at this scale will encounter unexpected problems. Many moving parts are required for the Gigafactory’s success, from construction to supply chains to permanent hires to subcontractors to local and state officials, etc. But I mention this incident to illustrate the emergence of strained relationships regarding Tesla Motors, and that there

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6 Quote is located in the italicized first paragraph.
are consequences to the Tesla spectacle that either the company or economic development officials are eager to downplay.

In addition, I want to return to an issue raised in the last chapter about a contradiction between Musk’s Carson City statement that the Gigafactory would be “worth seeing” (O'Driscoll, 2014I, para. 5) and the lengths the company has gone to keep a lid on its operations. I am not the only person who has been turned away from the Gigafactory. The irony is that this is a massive, publicly subsidized megalith that is effectively closed to the public who subsidize it. Media tours of the Gigafactory attended by RGJ staff were sanitized, staged, and micromanaged, with photography banned almost everywhere inside the plant, and the spokespeople insisting on their anonymity in the press (Damon, 2016b). Perhaps comparing these actions to behaviors familiar in a cult compound is going to o far, and to be fair, these measures no doubt owe to Tesla’s image for investors and the fear of proprietary technology being exposed. But the “shrouded in secrecy” (Hidalgo, 2015v, para. 3) characterization certainly belies Tesla’s exposure in the press and Musk’s own invitation for others to see the “machine that makes the machine” (Spillman, 2016c, para. 26). This is a contradiction.

The Gigafactory clampdown on exposure reached its apotheosis in October of 2015. While geek reporter Hidalgo did report on the IBEW jobs dispute, for instance, he was oftentimes sycophantic towards Tesla. For a short period in 2015 he spearheaded “Tesla Tidbits” stories, which essentially served as puff pieces for Musk and the company. The tone was in general very celebratory and dorky, especially when considering lines like these: “Like a rare, electric Pokemon, Tesla’s Model X has been recently causing a stir thanks to some recent sightings in the wild” (Hidalgo, 2015p, para. 8). Tesla also sent the reporter an invite to the Model X launch party at the Fremont plant on September 29. So it was shocking that only about a week after this launch event, Hidalgo and RGJ photographer Andy Barron would be accused of trespassing on private Gigafactory property while attempting to get shots of the facility. Beyond that, they actually found themselves in a physical altercation with private security guards, resulting in a guard smashing their vehicle’s driver’s-side window with a rock, slashing the seatbelt with a knife, and heaving Barron out of the car—at least according to one side of the story (Damon, 2015a). Afterwards, Barron was “booked on a charge of battery with a deadly weapon” (para. 2) for attempting to drive away recklessly. The encounter led to wildly divergent statements of what happened between the RGJ’s
attorney and Tesla’s press release ("Journalists Trespass, Assault Tesla Employees," 2015). Yet it also led to Hidalgo’s apparent dismissal from Gigafactory coverage thereafter.

There are a few additional revelations from 2015-2017 that are more damning in terms of how reliable the Tesla spectacle and its promoters were. I say this because at least there was no foresight or anticipation of the RGJ trespassing debacle when the Legislature passed the Tesla bills in 2014. In the following examples, by contrast, there occurs a more questionable and premeditated tweaking of the truth.

An April 2015 RGJ story disclosed that Tesla and Nevadan officials, including the governor himself, puffed up the average wage rate that Gigafactory employees could expect to receive. Submitted to the state in October 2014, Tesla’s benefits and abatements application estimated the average wage at $26.16 an hour (Hidalgo, 2015m). During his Carson City victory speech following the special session, Governor Sandoval likewise said the factory would provide “an average wage in excess of $25 per hour” (para. 4). Yet when the RGJ later cited that estimate for a story, Tesla contacted the outlet and “push[ed] back on the $25-per-hour number” (para. 11) to something closer to $22. When asked about it, Steve Hill from the Governor’s Office of Economic Development (GOED) saved face and depicted the discrepancy as a nonissue, while Tesla forwarded a corporate platitude: “We offer a package of competitive wages, great benefits, and equity; our employees are company owners…. [and] We couldn’t be more excited about Tesla’s future in Reno” (para. 15). The company also explained that the initial wage figure was “based on the best wage information it had at the time” (para. 9). Maybe. But the ”actually existing” conditions following the 2014 hype was nonetheless a mismatch.

Another incident involves the oft-repeated “6,500 jobs” figure that went wall to wall in the Tesla stories of 2014. It was surprising to see a February 2015 RGJ article on Tesla’s attempt to bring aboard 350 students for summer internships (Hidalgo, 2015j). A critic might legitimately ask: Why prioritize internships when you are supposed to be committing to full-time hires? The first article I read on the call for interns failed to mention whether these are paid or unpaid positions. I checked the company website’s official description of its internships, which lists many positions as affiliated with co-op programs. This would suggest that students at least receive college credit for their work,
but Tesla’s scheme should still raise eyebrows because nowhere in the local 2014 Gigafactory coverage promising 6,500 jobs was there a mention that at least 5% of these would be internships.⁷

More notable is that while Tesla hoped to convince 350 university students over summer 2015 that they “could get a fast track to a position” (Hidalgo, 2015j, para. 2, emphasis added), the Gigafactory only listed 82 permanent Gigafactory workers in September 2015, some of whom were Panasonic’s (Damon, 2016c). Because job promises were important in cementing a historical bloc composed of capitalists and business-friendly politicians to hype the Gigafactory as an undisputed job-creator—as they did in 2014—this is scandalous. The RGJ also covered an intern hiring event at the University of Nevada-Reno in a conversational, uncritical, and celebratory way. To borrow from Alan McKee’s methods for textual analysis, given the story’s subjects involved young adults, it should not be surprising that the writers often worked with a less serious tone.

The last two cases I want to point out involve local government officials failing to answer for the image and promise of the Gigafactory by: neglecting to perform rote analyses and audits of the project as it moved forward; and greatly overestimating the Gigafactory investment and the number of full-time Tesla hires for 2015. Damon (2015b) reported that, despite the law mandating it, Storey County had not yet produced a “complete analysis on the cost to the tiny local government of meeting the addition[al] service demands created by the project” (para. 8). The county missed two deadlines for reporting this, and it only followed through after a journalist checked in with the Legislative Counsel Bureau to locate copies. When the reports eventually came through, they totaled half a page in length and “contained few details required by lawmakers” (para. 27). Meanwhile, an audit due from Tesla on the number of hires and dollar amount invested was due on October 1, 2015, but the GOED gave the company an extension. Likewise, the Legislature mandated that GOED submit reports on “the dollar value of the tax abatements” (para. 15) and while the office had filed some quarterly reports, they had not at that point expressly recorded “a dollar figure on the tax abatements awarded to Tesla” (para. 15).

⁷ By late October, roughly 7,000 people worked at the Gigafactory, which shows that the job numbers did come around (Spillman, 2018b).
Early the following year, that same *RGJ* reporter claimed that the Gigafactory was “falling far short of the economic impact projections on jobs and capital investment” (Damon, 2016c, para. 1). Of the different metrics used to measure the Gigafactory’s success were jobs created, payroll, and money invested in the project—all of which failed to meet the expectations of GOED-hired economists in 2014. Economists had projected that at the close of 2015, Tesla would have hired 700 people, invested $1 billion in the project, and overseen a payroll of $40 million. In the “actually existing” conditions, however, these numbers stood at 272 hires, $374 million invested, and a payroll of only $4.3 million (Damon, 2016a).

It is hard to know whether GOED officials truly believed in the inflated numbers the previous year, or if the economists’ study was mostly a public-relations conceit. Would any negative consequences befall GOED officials if it was the latter case anyway? Given the overall inaction vis-à-vis local government, probably not. The lowly yet factual numbers betray the wave of ideological hype seen in 2014, and in a way they also reinforce Klein’s (2002) statements from the previous chapter on ideological branding versus physical products. A successful enterprise cannot simply be *all* talk; eventually someone has to roll up their sleeves and do something. This “something” can either entail making actual products, or in this case, government representatives holding accountable the “sleek ideas of brand identity” (p. 199).

One other point that bears mentioning on media hype and image involves the repeated disdain Elon Musk and his associates show toward the press when it obliquely questions the company. I find Musk and Co.’s disdain contradictory. On the one hand, the press has been Tesla’s best friend as a medium for spectacle. On the other hand, those same sources can become a major pain if the story is even marginally negative. I am not the only person to make the observation of Musk’s anti-press proclivity and its contradiction. In any event, the following examples of the sentiment come from my own reading:

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8 Writing for CounterPunch, for example, Anderson (2018) makes note of Musk’s recent idea for “a website ‘where the public can rate the core truth of any article and track the credibility score over time of each journalist, editor, and publication” (para. 4). Anderson continues: “There’s concern that [the website]… could be used to undermine journalists who critically cover Musk’s business interests” (para. 5). He then cites a case involving *Reveal*, an arm of the Center for Investigative Reporting, which outed Tesla for poor working conditions; Tesla released a subsequent statement indicting *Reveal* as an “extremist organization” (para. 7).
• On the case above about IBEW job postings: “Media reporting solely off random job ads board in Reno that we didn’t even know existed…. That is as dumb as it sounds” (Hidalgo, 2015v, para. 16).

• Tesla VP of Business Development Diarmuid O’Connell: “We are well covered but not always accurately…. Sometimes, it’s really good coverage, sometimes it’s not so great” (Hidalgo, 2015u, para. 14).

• Regarding where the Gigafactory would obtain lithium, Musk tweeted: “Lithium deal is not exclusive & has many contingencies…. The press on this matter is unwarranted” (Hidalgo, 2015t, para. 13).

• After the Gigafactory trespassing debacle, a press release from Tesla Motors said it “appreciate[s] the interest in the Gigafactory, but the repeated acts of trespassing, including by those working for the RGJ, is illegal, dangerous and needs to stop” (“Journalists trespass, assault Tesla employees,” 2015, para. 7).

• On the generous incentives from Nevada, Musk said, “[T]ax incentives have been overemphasized” and “It is really annoying to see this stuff misrepresented in the press” (Damon, 2016a, para. 8).

• On the same point, Musk reiterated: “I try to belabor this point ad nauseum because some of the articles that have been written give the impression that Tesla got this $1.3 billion check from Nevada. No…” (Spillman, 2016b, para. 5).

• Regarding news coverage of Fremont factory layoffs, Musk said reporters “should be ashamed of themselves for lacking journalistic integrity” (Spillman, 2017, para. 21).

In at least two places, Jason Hidalgo responded that the Gigafactory’s secrecy and opaque business operations result in this type of coverage and that irks the Tesla top brass. With Tesla’s stock valuation a constant concern, there is certainly a monetary impetus for Musk’s vigilance for any stories that give his company a sideways glance. But disdain for democratic procedures from a billionaire places Musk in a category occupied by Trump. The two men may not see eye-to-eye on much (e.g., climate change), but their net worth makes them share a class category apparently inclined to scorn the rabble from peeking into its dealings. One of Trump’s enemies here would be
CNN, for instance, which he denigrated as “fake news” during his presidential run (Slack, 2017, para. 1).

6.4. Living, Perceiving, Hoping in Indianapolis-Huntington

The genesis of Indianan enterprise is found in the hacking away of brush and forest, the laying of railroads, the carving of canals, and the establishing of a strong industrial tradition, with “a foundry in every small town” (Participant 6, personal communication, 2017)—from Wabash to Bluffton to Huntington. This industrial tradition, as Participant 6 explained to me, owes to German, Polish, and Eastern European immigrants inhabiting the area in the 1800s, bringing with them the skills of “iron-working, metal-working, machining, [and] tool and die” (personal communication, 2017), and finding the geography and climate suitable because of their similarity to home. Historically, this provided a reliable labor pool of machinists to fill Indianan factory jobs, with a skillset embedded in the state to this day, he explained. But, in both the cases of Indianapolis and Huntington, there exists concern amidst officialdom over how sustainable this traditional model can be. Big chain stores are closing, plants are shuttering, hundreds are being laid off, and lower-paying jobs are supplanting the old ones. Or, in the words of a union rep ( Participant 8): “[T]he vast… majority of manufacturing… [has] been wiped out here in [Indianapolis]” (personal communication, 2017).

Before explaining how interviewees hope the Hoosier future is forged, I will share their impressions of this region of Indiana as it stands today. I understand it is not possible to generalize beyond the subjective sentiments of my interviewees, but their comments nonetheless provide a degree of insight into how local people interpret their current conditions. To help frame the discussion it is useful to recall Lefebvre’s (1998) “conceptual triad” (p. 33) of space; this is made up of “spatial practice” (p. 38), “representations of space” (p. 38) and “representational spaces” (p. 39). Spatial practice is “perceived” (p. 38) and “slowly” (p. 38) produced. Representations of space are “conceived” (p. 38) and represent the “space of scientists, planners, urbanists” (p. 38) etc. and “tend… towards a system of verbal… signs” (p. 38). Lastly, representational

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9 These factors are in addition to the antecedents of Indianan industry described in Chapter 2.
spaces are “lived” (p. 39), constitute the spaces of “inhabitants” (p. 39) and “users” (p. 39), and involve “non-verbal symbols and signs” (p. 39). Ng, Tang, Lee, and Leung (2010) write that lived spaces are “appropriated by citizens for use values” (p. 411) and represent the site of “concrete daily activity” (p. 414). “Space is at once perceived, conceived, and lived” (Schmid, 2008, p. 43) and “none is privileged” (p. 43).

With these considerations in mind, I wanted to ask if “Rust Belt” representations of space in the Indianapolis-Huntington area are derisive. And if so, do local residents believe this has a negative effect on new investment opportunities for the region? According to one Indy official (Participant 10), at least, this does not seem to be the case; he stated that the Rust Belt descriptor “sums us up pretty well, ’cause it is a kind of it is what it is” (personal communication, 2017). The expression “it is what it is” mirrors a Huntington official’s similar reaction to that term, namely that “a lot of manufacturing has left and there are a lot of holes” (Participant 6, personal communication, 2017). He added a historical dimension as well: “Will you ever go back to that glory? Pretty much guarantee that’s not gonna happen.” Another Huntington councilor (Participant 11) added a geographical dimension that could spell out the significance for outside investment moving in, saying “it probably is a lot more negative to folks from outside of here than those of us who live here” (personal communication, 2017), and that he suspects “most of us [in the region] would identify with that as a… proud blue-collar.” I offered that perhaps the Rust Belt descriptor could be seen as a badge of honor, to which he agreed. But regardless of the impression management surrounding the term, what material conditions do these officials see as affecting their cities?

I have covered the Indianan closure narratives quite extensively so far. According to an Indy official (Participant 7), for instance, his city is “like number one or number two based on per capita in manufacturing job loss” (personal communication, 2017). So it would be appropriate to now focus on the future and Indianapolis’s survival as “a growing city” (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017) in more ways than one. In this official’s estimation, the biggest growth area resides in both restaurants and warehousing—especially, he says, on the west side of Indianapolis. The west side houses both the Carrier and Rexnord plants, the latter of which is laying off 300 Hoosiers for its own move to Monterrey, Mexico (Participant 8, personal communication, 2017). This is also where many manufacturing workers live, some of whom will doubtless suffer from the relocations (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017). But in terms of
growth, another councillor (Participant 10) concurred, saying that “The logistics sector is pretty big here” (personal communication, 2017) and that Indy has “the Amazons of the world.” Warehousing work seems to serve as a promising solution and alternative to the manufacturing crisis. However, it is probably not an altogether viable one for workers used to making $20-25 an hour (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017).

The tech industry stands as the other seemingly promising sector for growth. Indianapolis, at least, can feel proud of its potential distinction as “the number one Midwest city for tech growth” (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017)—or, if not number one, at least within the top five. This is according to a Forbes Magazine ranking that describes the city as number one in terms of tech “growth” (Participant 10, personal communication, 2017) but not “tech sector jobs.” InfoSys, an Indian corporation operating in this sector, has chosen to make Indy a “hub” (Participant 10, personal communication, 2017) for its operations, for example, committing to “a few thousand jobs.” How many of these jobs will be precarious call center type jobs in contrast to relatively secure and higher paying union factory jobs is worthy of a future study.

What normative arguments do leaders of Indianapolis and Huntington have for how best to coordinate this region’s economic future? Some of the sentiments I recorded among city officials and workers align quite closely with major themes in the urban-communication literature, as well as with what we saw in the Tesla case. At the same time, there exists a diversity of opinion. A Huntington rep (Participant 6) stated that the “Best thing that we can do as a community is provide an environment that attracts business and retains business” (personal communication, 2017). Similarly with an Indy rep (Participant 10), we hear: Carrier’s relocation “doesn’t deter us… from um working to create a more… favorable environment for a company to move into our community. Or to expand in our community” (personal communication, 2017). In respect to what businesses these leaders expect to be coming, there is an awareness of “advanced manufacturing,” a recurring buzzword both in the Indiana and Nevada cases. Depending on the attitude of the official, however, this was either for good or for ill. One official from Indy (Participant 7) said that, “I think we’re trying to move toward that… individual companies moving more toward that advanced manufacturing, which again means less

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10 Though this councillor suspects that wages will rise in the “warehouse area” (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017).
jobs” (personal communication, 2017). The Huntington rep above (Participant 6) laid out his vision for new manufacturing jobs that will be more technically demanding than those in the past, saying “[W]hen you’re working on a pattern or a mold and you’re…
calculating the rate of shrink of a metal around the radius of a part… you don’t do that with simple math” (personal communication, 2017). What that workforce needs, according to this official, is “calculus and trigonometry.”

By contrast, another Huntington rep (Participant 11) expressed skepticism with the work of his county’s economic development organization due to its fixation on primarily attracting industry. He remarked: “[E]conomic development is much broader than the focus area that [Mark Wickersham’s] board has been working on, which is more industrial development: the manufacturing jobs specifically” (personal communication, 2017). After mentioning the importance of small business, he continued on with a quote worth repeating at length for its illustration of urban officials’ push for capturing youthful entrepreneurialism as a growth area (similar to Richard Florida’s thesis):

[K]ind of this rebuilding of the American infrastructure gone on economically and a lot [of] places and um, you know, whether it’s a walkable city or it’s a place where it’s farm to table… there’s this drive toward local right now and… I know that the conversation that we’ve been having about, ‘Okay, we’ve… put a lot of our time and energy and effort into industrial attraction. Is there anything we can do in terms of economic development to help facilitate small business ownership here in Huntington’… because, you know, again, one of the broader challenges for any Midwestern community, but especially those of us that are rural, is brain drain. It’s it’s young people moving away… to Chicago, to Detroit, to New York, to the coasts… It’s tough for us to compete with that on quality of life…. these other places have mountains and oceans and uh public transportation. (Participant 11, personal communication, 2017)

The councilor (Participant 11) then said “it seems like the… younger generation of millennials and those coming after have this real entrepreneurial buzz… and so one way to keep them in your community is to help em start business” (personal communication, 2017). While he differs with some of his colleagues, the representative nonetheless prioritizes the facilitation of business. In his view, however, the emphasis should be

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11 Florida cites a “significant positive relationship” (Rubenstein, 2013, p. 283) between “cultural diversity” (p. 283) and “relatively high percentages of talented individuals” (p. 283) in large cities, and he claims that city rejuvenation can take place with an “emphasis on the creativity of the people” (Gotttdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 9) who live there.
placed outside of the traditional industrial paradigm and re-centered more on the pursuits of a youthful creative class.

I noted back in Chapter 2 that this tension between a desire or hope for new industries, or for revitalization of older factory production, and an imagined urban future built through high-tech investments, creative industries, or tourism, is evident across North America. In this sense, it should not be surprising to find this tension in Indianapolis and Huntington. On the one hand, for example, my interviews revealed a strong endorsement of diversity and youthful entrepreneurship. But on the other hand, while others acknowledge that diversity is all well and good, they place great importance on Indiana’s historical strengths. Thus one of my respondents (Participant 6) noted that: “The temptation or the urges to try to diversify and I… think that’s a great thing—is try to diversify, but at the same time I think we can also capitalize on our strengths” (personal communication, 2017). For him, Indiana’s identity as industrial powerhouse is not an accident, an image, or a dispassionate statistic. Rather, he sees the manufacturing aptitude embedded in the Hoosier population, claiming that employers looking for the right candidates will have an easier time in Indiana than they would in, for instance, Dallas, Texas, or Miami, Florida.

These “sense[s] of place” (Rubenstein, 2013, p. 16) espoused by city officials evince the “conceived” (Lefebvre, 1998, p. 38) production of space in the Lefebvrarian conceptual triad. This is the space of overseeing “planners” (p. 38). Judging from these officials’ visions of their cities’ future, we can imagine the construction of call centers, a re-invigoration of traditional manufacturing, an incubation of archetypal creative ventures for young Hoosiers.

Yet these higher-order conceptions exist alongside the “lived” (Schmid, 2008, p. 43) space as it is experienced by workers impelled to occupy job sites. Just such a scene was evocatively described by a Carrier worker, and I think serves as a valuable counterpoint to the representations of space above. In talks with a couple of Carrier workers facing the pink slip, a New Yorker journalist captured the words of 45-year-old Renee Elliot. She said:

The Chinese restaurant on the corner…. The Quick Stop. This place, Sully’s. After a shift, especially on the nights, it looks like a ‘Gin and Juice’ video, a Snoop Dogg
video here: we’re all outside shooting dice, playing cards, drinking, visiting, commiserating. We were really a family. (Bethea, 2018, para. 5)

I find the juxtaposition of these spatial conceptions to be an apt retelling of Chapter 4’s findings on the differing solutions put forward for how to deal with the Carrier decision—those from the top-down and bottom-up. An elected official can levy the order for the working class to upskill, but that sort of abstraction does little justice to the material lives and circumstances that class experiences.

6.5. “Sparks is Going… 70 Miles an Hour, and Reno Passes Us Doing 85”: Urban Visions and Branding in Neoliberal Nevada

One of my earlier observations during the research stage of this project was reading that Tesla would improve Reno’s connotation as a “downmarket Vegas” (Hull, 2015). This is an unflattering “place image” (Granzow, 2017, p. 347) indeed. On this point, Wroldsen (2017) writes that Reno “anxiously aspires to bigness, yet humbly knows its smallness” (p. 1). I asked city councilors about their impressions on the “downmarket” issue, which inevitably broached the topic of gaming and casinos. In fact, it is difficult to speak of the culture and economy of Reno and Sparks without reference to gaming. So this seems a sensible place to start a conversation about the branding of the region and its economic future.

A Reno councilor (Participant 1) stated that, while gaming is a unique quality of Nevada, “tribal gaming” (personal communication, 2017) and Atlantic City, New Jersey, worked against the state’s advantage over time. She said what used to be a reliable “economic driver” for Reno began to falter, adding that Las Vegas, by contrast, was able

12 This quote is borrowed from Participant 2, a Sparks city official (2017).
13 This quote is located in the article’s title.
14 Granzow (2017) quotes Shields in his definition of “place image” (p. 347) as the “various discrete meanings associated with real places or regions regardless of their character in reality” (p. 347).
15 Wroldsen (2017) says that Reno is building its future by neglecting to capitalize on the exciting and “glitziest” (p. 4) tech developments, and rather focusing on “a core of technology-oriented support businesses in relatively unexciting areas like e-commerce fulfillment centers, warehouses, data centers, and manufacturing facilities” (p. 4).
to weather that storm given its status as a “world… destination” in a way Reno was not. Another rep (Participant 3) concurred, saying that the “high-water mark” (personal communication, 2017) for Reno gaming took place sometime around 1991 or 1992, as Indian gaming started to save northern Californians from having to make the “grueling trip over Donner Summit in the wintertime” to come to Reno and gamble. He added: “[T]hrough the 90s there was finally this realization that, 'Oh yeah, we need to get beyond this gaming thing.'” The idea that Reno had “slumped” (Participant 1, personal communication, 2017) where Vegas had not, and that Reno was dealing with “the leftovers of having been… a casino town” (Participant 3, personal communication, 2017), explains the “downmarket” (Hull, 2015) comment and establishes a “sense of place” (Rubenstein, 2013, p. 16) among Reno residents. This aligns with Wroldsen’s (2017) commentary on the five features of “Reno’s emerging entrepreneurial ecosystem,” which includes economic diversification (p. 1).

One of the questions I posed to Nevada councilors involved the influence of Silicon Valley (SV) on Reno and Sparks, if any. To give a geographical sense: San Jose, California, a major population center and hub of SV, lies 251 miles west of Reno, Nevada. Driving there takes about four hours, with I-80 serving as the main route. The region is home to the headquarters of Apple, Intel, Google, Tesla, and other trendy corporations. With Tesla building a factory at TRI Center, I wanted to know how officials interpreted the sway of this high-tech region on their towns. Speaking more abstractly and synonymously, my participants would refer not only to SV but to the influence of northern California, the Bay Area, or California more generally. I would learn that Nevada and California maintain a relationship not without a little acrimony.

For background context, Silicon Valley industries comprise semiconductor production, disk drive production, software development, computers, “biotechnology” (Benner, 2002, p. 51) biopharmaceuticals, and the like. An “extremely individualistic

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16 During the interview, the city official pointed out one of Reno’s casinos built during this heyday, which was still standing. Las Vegas, by contrast, had been regularly dynamiting theirs to make way for new investment.

17 The other four are “business-friendly” (Wroldsen, 2017, p. 1) policies, the cultivation of Reno as “a regional hub for logistics, manufacturing, and storage” (p. 1) the Gigafactory, and a “revitalize[d]” (p. 1) downtown.

18 I also heard from a friend that Reno was hoping to legitimize itself by associating more with the Valley.
culture” (p. xi) permeates the region. Radio development sparked in the Bay Area due to San Francisco’s status as “one of the largest seaports on the West Coast” (Lécuyer, 2006, p. 16) and the fact that the city hosted a number of military bases. Critical political economy finds Silicon Valley to be a scandal, with Fuchs (2014) even calling it the site of “a story of nightmares” (p. 213), complete with “exploitation, racism, toxic workplaces, toxic soil, toxic air… [and] high levels of stress and overtime” (p. 213). Citing Benner, he goes on to describe the Valley as rife with “nonstandard employment” (p. 218) which entails temp, part-time, and contract labor, as well as a racial hierarchy that places whites in professional positions and Latinos and Asians in “unskilled production” (p. 220). This is ironic given San Francisco’s extremely strong union presence in the late 1930s and early 1940s (Lécuyer, 2006, p. 40). Lécuyer documents how management sought to dissolve solidarity over time, with one plant mimicking the “managerial techniques” (p. 40) of Eastman Kodak and Sears, among others, which included instituting profit sharing and redefining the employee-employer relationship as one of cooperation and “mutual obligations” (p. 41).

A Reno official (Participant 1) noted that after the 2008-2009 recession, the city’s “economy has become much more… integrated and influenced… within the sphere of influence of the northern California economy” (personal communication, 2017). A Sparks city rep (Participant 2) said that the SV connection “always has been” (personal communication, 2017) there, and that his region attracts “more businesses from California than anywhere else.” Another Reno official (Participant 3) similarly cited the latter situation as “the classic frame” (personal communication, 2017) or “model” between the two states, i.e., “poaching businesses out of the Bay Area to come to northern Nevada.” Considering the twenty years this participant has lived in Reno, he said “[T]here’s always been this ‘Hey, come to Nevada from California,’ you know, lower taxes, less regulatory burden,” and that “[W]e still have people from the Bay Area coming over and wanting to locate here because of that.” Further, he visualizes a “mega-region” composed of Reno to the Bay Area along the “80 corridor” much the same way Las Vegas exists as “a satellite of Southern California.” This geographic formation may be to the chagrin of Nevadans who “will profess to dislike California and all things California” (Participant 3, personal communication, 2017). In his estimation, the mega-region features “network nodes [that] have increased… tremendously… in recent years”
that are facilitated by “teleworking and all the tools available now for being able to… remotely collaborate.”

In setting the competitive and external dynamic of California aside, we find that Reno and Sparks have their own internal agitation worth exploring. Reno and Sparks sit directly next to one another; Sparks, further east, is also closer to the Gigafactory despite much news coverage associating the plant with Reno. When I first asked a Sparks official (Participant 2) about this, he expressed that his city has an “identity problem” (personal communication, 2017) despite the bang-up job Sparks does with “special events.” An example he gave is the annual “Best in the West Rib Cook-off” that draws half a million people to Sparks, where it is held. Yet despite this geographical truism, the advertisement states: “Come to the Reno Best in the West Rib Cook-off.” The city rep admitted that, while “people can relate more to Reno and... the… Biggest Little City in the World” branding, Sparks is “gaining on that.” In his words: “I always say this that Sparks is going down a three-way at 70 miles an hour and Reno passes us doing 85, and they get all the attention, and we’re good with that.” Another Sparks councilor (Participant 5) emphasized a similar point, saying that while sometimes he gets “frustrated when Sparks isn’t mentioned... and that Reno gets... notoriety for things” (personal communication, 2017), the absence of Sparks from media attention has its affordances. “So when we’re not in the paper, we’ve kind of... adopted the attitude of ‘Good,’” he says, “We get to do our thing, people don’t mess with us, and we’re strong.” He also jokingly referred to Reno as “West Sparks.”

Some of the prescriptions these leaders advocate for their cities echo those seen in Indiana (and elsewhere around the country) in the neoliberal era. These include the continued use of city and county-subsidized economic development organizations (Participant 2, personal communication, 2017), which implicitly and explicitly entrench the idea that urban locales are locked in a winner-take-all competition. EDAWN, headed by Mike Kazmierski, is in the words of a Sparks rep (Participant 2), “constantly recruiting outside companies, which is good for us” (personal communication, 2017). As in other cities, Reno must also remain conscientious of its “brand positioning” (Participant 3, personal communication, 2017). Mirroring the concern over a skilled workforce deficit that Hoosier leaders hoped to combat through upskilling and educational partnerships,
Nevadan officials likewise pointed out a dearth of locals needed to fill Gigafactory jobs. This came out in news reportage, with Kazmierski stating rather condescendingly: “We have a workforce that will have to be upgraded” (O’Driscoll, 2015, para. 24). It seems the head of EDAWN was excited over the boost in attention northern Nevada was getting from “technical” (para. 23) businesses but in turn worried about the dialectical consequence of needing skilled workers to actualize the EDAWN model. Tesla Vice President of Business Development, Diarmuid O’Connell, likewise said at a gathering that “Advanced manufacturing is not just about banging on metal. It requires a high degree of training and we need to invest in community colleges and universities to do that” (Hidalgo, 2015u, para. 57).

To complement the above analysis regarding representations of space in Indiana, let’s take a look at the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center with Lefebvre in mind; Lefebvre (1998) says that capitalism came upon the “pre-existing space… of the earth” (p. 326) and produced its own space by way of “urbanization, under the pressure of the world market” (p. 326) and “by abolishing spatial and temporal differences, by destroying nature and nature’s time” (p. 326). TRI Center represents an appropriate place to analyze in this regard. At 30,000 buildable acres, it is reputed to be “the largest industrial park in the world” (“TRI – The New Home of Blockchains!,” n.d., para. 1). It contains warehouses for “flowers, pet food, [and] construction materials” (Wroldsen, 2017, p. 4). Its manufacturers make guns and refine “petro-chemical[s]” (p. 4). It has “fulfillment centers” for Amazon, “Wal-Mart, Barnes & Noble, eBay, Zulily, and PetSmart,” and it is a data-center bastion (p. 4).

From start to finish, there is no question about the Center’s functional role and purpose as a facilitator of corporate capitalism. The website’s front page trumpets the following attractions for new investors: “Building permits issued within 30 days of application Yes, you read that right! Just imagine, you could have your site graded, built and open for business within 180 days following close of escrow (“TRI – The New Home of Blockchains!,” n.d., para. 6)”; and “see the largest, most dynamic hotbed of tech, manufacturing and distribution companies in the country!” (para. 13). The Center

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19 A Sparks rep commented that “[T]he biggest concern we have is the labor force to build these projects that we needed to get done—they’re just not here” (Participant 2, personal communication, 2017).

20 Available by clicking on the “WELCOME” link on the webpage.
supports more traditional forms of enterprise along with the new facilities required by “cognitive capitalism” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 275) or the “knowledge society” (p. 275): the Switch data center and forthcoming Google data center.

TRI Center is thus completely committed to the spatial practices Lefebvre (1998) identified as those extant under “neocapitalism” (p. 38). It is a place of hyper-commerce attuned to the logistical needs of big business, and its very geographical position ensures that it complements the “routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work” (p. 38). According to its website, it is “Adjacent to Interstate 80, the major east-west trucking artery” (“FAST FACTS,” n.d., para. 12) near Union Pacific and BNSF railroad lines, and only “15 minutes from Reno-Tahoe International Airport” (para. 13).

The spatial practices established by capitalism make the Center natural and sensible. Citing Lefebvre, Ng et al. (2010) write that spatial practice implies “cohesion” (p. 413) and a “guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance’ of every society member’s social relationship in space” (p. 413). I think this can characterize the business dealings associated with TRI Center from the permanent employees who drive in everyday, to the construction workers who drive in until the job is done, to the zoning ordinances and other governmental treatment of the site.

Yet it is important to clarify that a “conceived” (Lefebvre, 1998, p. 38) space was initially necessary to make the TRI Center what it is today. Like the different iterations of Fontana, California—orange grove, steel producer, real estate hub (Davis, 2006a)—the TRI Center also went through stages. Planners conceived to turn the land into an industrial park after having bought it from Gulf Oil Co. in 1998 (“TRI-Team,” n.d.); Gulf had intended to develop a “corporate hunting retreat” (para. 2) before a shaky 1990s economy dissuaded executives from the project. The Nevada Department of Transportation also (and more recently) conceived of a north-south highway linking U.S. 50, near Silver Springs, to I-80, near Clark and Sparks to the north (Corona, 2016). This publicly subsidized $75 million project, dubbed the USA Parkway and State Route 439, was plowed through the high desert (Corona, 2016), or what Lefebvre (1998) might see as “nature” (p. 326), with the use of “underground dynamite” (Champagne, 2016, para. 4). The four-lane highway is 18 miles long, running east of the TRI Center where no such route existed before, making it much more convenient to access the site.
Beyond a few subjective observations from my interview with a former Gigafactory employee, it is more difficult to determine the contradicting force of “lived” (Schmid, 2008, p. 43) space at TRI Center, the space of “concrete daily activity” (Ng et al., 2010, p. 414) that tends to get “boxed in, disrupted, forgotten, if not fragmented and destroyed” (p. 414) by conceived space. At the Gigafactory the bathrooms had been vandalized, unionization is intensely discouraged, Tesla and Panasonic workers are maintained in a mild “groupthink” (Participant 4, personal communication, 2017) focused on a “fun” but paternalistic familial model of corporate governance, and othered to those in different labor pools, such as outside construction and maintenance contractors. As one of my respondents (Participant 4) noted, employees probably did not stray too far from the worksite during their a short lunches. (personal communication, 2017). In any event, I hope to have offered a preliminary look at the production of space as it continues to unfold in both case studies.
Chapter 7.

Concluding Remarks and New Voices

I began this project by reviewing an array of concepts and historical arguments to frame two case studies of differing local conditions, perceptions, and consequences of mobile corporate capital. While I understood that the concepts I reviewed and the sources I consulted would orient my analysis in a critical political economic direction, I did not know precisely what I would find at the local level through primary research.¹ This concluding chapter summarizes and offers concluding observations from my participant observation, qualitative interviews, discourse and content analyses of local media, and online commentary.

One of the impetuses for pursuing this project was to gain insight into the dynamics of capitalist development that privilege mobile capital in ways that take advantage of public sector subsidies yet still exploit vulnerable populations. I was also interested in exploring how media and ideology work to frame, contain, or redirect opposition and dissent. Corporate capital not only exercises power through the necessity for people to earn a living through wage labor but also through the threat or promise of economic development and the framing, containment, and redirection of opposition and dissent. I have argued that these latter processes take place through language, common-sense thought, and the production and consumption of spectacle. One of my ambitions was to see the effects of the international imperatives of capital through class actors’ own eyes. I wanted to know how workers and local officials understood how the mobility of corporate capital affected them and who, if anyone, they blamed, especially on the national and political stage in 2016. The moral philosophy that guides my work is rooted in a respect for working people and those struggling to get by in an America that Hedges and Sacco (2013) depict as on its knees.

In the first case studied in this project, members of the racially-diverse working-class contingent at Carrier/UTEC saw many of their jobs go to Mexico, making them obvious casualties of economic globalization. It is fitting then that the Mexican Zapatista

¹ A former advisor once told me that going where the research takes you is what separates scholarly writing from polemical journalism and opinion pieces.
movement at the advent of NAFTA called globalization a “‘modern war’ of capital ‘which assassinates and forgets’” (Harvey, 2011, p. 357). I found that the discursive field surrounding the layoffs at Carrier was complex and was filtered through the lens of “pragmatic acceptance” (Hall et al., 2013, p. 141). Still, “corporate greed” emerged as a major theme in interviews and media analysis, with proposed boycotts as the primary response for those presumably unaffiliated with positions of governmental power. In the USW union hall and among many Carrier workers, there was also notable support for Bernie Sanders’ left leaning critique of NAFTA and the Obama/Clinton TPP. Here the critique of mobile corporate capital was incorporated into a broad set of social democratic redistributive policies. But, especially following the Democratic Party’s choice of Hillary Clinton as their nominee, a significant number of Carrier workers became attracted to Donald Trump’s anti-globalization brand: “Make America Great Again.”

I wanted to assess if people in Indianapolis and Huntington more broadly blamed anyone for layoffs, and, if so, who they thought was the “culprit.” In local media, Indy Star stories covering the Carrier case most often attributed the decision to shareholders, the drive to increase profit and/or stay competitive as a simple business decision. The second most frequently noted factor of blame was America’s trade deals; third was greed; and fourth, corporate taxes. None of the aforementioned Indy Star stories indicated that any responsibility for the closure debacle lay at the feet of workers or their union.

Even so, there was some talk of a counter-narrative that Carrier workers brought the closure upon themselves by not working hard or by taking too much time off. I found that this “blame-the-worker” discourse did not have a central place in the larger media conversation, and two interviewed city officials claimed that they had never heard of employee-blaming incidents. Nonetheless, rumors and discursive traces to this effect were strengthened and given legitimacy by a tweet from the President of the United States. I argued that Trump’s tweet touched on both bourgeois suspicion of organized labor and the embeddedness of entrepreneurial values as key aspects of common sense in the contemporary United States. A survey of online user comments below two news stories yielded findings more consistent with several themes in Trump’s campaign. Here voices were more inclined than the Indy Star to nominate the Clintons, NAFTA, and TPP as significant contributors to the closure paradigm. Whether the result of organized trolling or references to prevailing sentiments at large, I felt there were suggestions of
the suspicion, noted by numerous commentators, after the election about the antipathy in red-state America towards alleged East-Coast liberal and technocratic “elites.”

Sorting through representations and interpretations of the lived experiences of layoffs and corporate carpetbagging at Carrier necessarily draws in the question of racial difference. Despite the direct presence of racial difference among employees, the city, and accompanying news photography, I was struck by the *Indy Star’s* complete silence on the issue. While I was unable to explore the issue in detail in interviews, I would assume the greater likelihood of Black Carrier workers to be line employees, versus R&D personnel, and it was line workers who were most affected by the layoffs.

Still another question I explored was the comparative levels of antagonism and support revealed in interviews and media analysis towards all corporations, and not just those threatening to leave. Critics in local media, the union, and online commentary often measured Carrier’s egregiousness with the yardstick of company success. In other words, Carrier stood out as *especially* nefarious, because it was making so much money, winning “gold awards” (Participant 12, personal communication, 2017) and being “up there.” In a number of cases, disempowered workers admitted that they could understand a corporation’s decision to move production overseas if it were actually struggling to stay in the black.

Ideology often works though combinations of misrecognition and confusion of the part with the whole. For example, across capitalist societies there is a tendency to confuse “profit” which might be won or lost through smart or poor business decisions with the production of surplus-value which, according to Marx, is a structural condition of capitalist organization. The point is that criticism of Carrier alone, and not of private property, the wage system, or the exploitation of labor by extracting surplus-value, fall short in contrast to criticism of how capitalism actually works and what strategies are necessary to challenge it. One needs only a cursory look at everything from antiunion Walmart to migrant fruit-picking in Florida to understand that Carrier executives are only one part of a larger system of exploitation. And yet such partiality informs the solution to the Carrier closure advocated by many online commenters: i.e., the boycott of Carrier products.
City officials meanwhile wished to tailor their localities for business appeal and prescribed the upskilling of the workforce as one of the solutions to Carrier layoffs. This finding on the appeal to business should not be surprising given its accordance with the critical urban-communication literature. The push to upskill the workforce aligns with the recent $6 million in federal grants going to Indiana to “help disadvantaged workers land technology-related jobs” (Groppe, 2016, para. 1). The goal is still to condition workers to participate in a system that fails to give priority to those same workers. Such initiatives place the burden of “improvement” on policies directed toward an idealized working individual who may have other responsibilities in addition to losing her or his job, from personal medical conditions to raising kids. Public officials in both Indiana and Nevada operate within the pressures and limits of neoliberal discourses espoused by political figures of both major parties that perpetuate and normalize capitalist social relations and the fallout that sometimes arises from uneven capitalist development.

In contrast to the Carrier case, I considered local reactions to the $5 billion Gigafactory in Reno in order to gauge if people felt that promises made by various officials and VIPs had been worth the investment. At the same time, given the significantly different economic and political conditions surrounding Tesla’s arrival in Reno/Sparks—in contrast to those surrounding the plants in Indianapolis and Huntington—I considered the Tesla arrival from the standpoint of media spectacle. While we have not seen the end of Tesla’s becoming at TRI Center, we can infer what its presence has so far meant.

The case of Tesla raises different issues in respect to class and ideology. This is partially due to the different histories and spatial relationships in Nevada that were outlined in Chapter 3, and partially due to the fact that this was a situation where a new plant was arriving in contrast to a much older industrial plant relocating to save on labor costs. Equally significant, the buzz and speculation surrounding the plant’s arrival seemed to require a different analytical framework and set of exploratory questions than Carrier. In this regard, I found it useful to view Tesla’s move to Nevada as a form of spectacle, with distinctive ideological undercurrents and consequences. Certainly the mystique of Musk and Tesla helped sell the idea of the Gigafactory to northern Nevadans. This bore out in my analysis of social-media commentary.
The power of the Tesla brand in the spectacle of the arriving Gigafactory was evident, for example, in the way Tesla commanded more attention and media hype, despite Panasonic investing more money into the Gigafactory, comprising 80% of the plant, hiring the first employees, and adding their own battery technology to the project. Yet, as I noted in Chapter 5, the *Reno Gazette-Journal* mentioned Panasonic very infrequently in 2014—the year of Tesla’s announcement and the later special session. Panasonic references increased in 2015 and 2016. My rationale for performing these counts was to provide evidence for Tesla and Musk’s embodiment of spectacle. While it was not possible to gain confirmation from the RGJ (I asked and was declined), it is probably the case that the presence of the Gigafactory spectacle and the attendant stories about it helped increase subscription revenue for the news outlet.

The Tesla spectacle seemed to unfold through four modalities: the brand name, Musk’s life, the Gigafactory itself, and the futuristic cars. The spectacle helped secure economic benefits for a small minority of developers, owners, and businesspeople. Yet, the fact that this group stood to gain far greater than average taxpayers and residents in need of public services was obfuscated by discursive reminders that the Gigafactory was good for *all* Nevadans. This seemed a rather bald-faced instance of capital pushing “its needs into the realm of universal need” (Palmer, 1994, p. 17) in the case of Goodyear in Napanee. After reading accounts such as, “Congratulations, Nevada, you just landed Tesla Motors’ Gigafactory” (Hidalgo, 2014e, para. 1) one is inspired to ask: “Who is Nevada?” Mike Kazmierski of EDAWN, in a quote that appeared earlier, adopted a similar form of universalism that confuses the interests of the part with that of the whole: “We will win regardless of outcome as we are now considered a viable option for businesses and manufacturing in the West” (O’Driscoll, 2014h, para. 41) But, not everyone can own the TRI Center, and not everyone will collect on certain major deals, either.

Despite missing its benchmarks shortly after Gigafactory construction began in 2015, Tesla and Panasonic nonetheless provided “glowing state audit figures” (Spillman, 2018a, para. 20) at the end of 2017, boasting 3,249 employees and an investment of $3.7 billion. Yet this was not enough to stop critics, however. Even the spokesperson for

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2 These reports also indicated that 93% of Tesla’s employees (and 98% of Panasonic’s) were native Nevadans (Spillman, 2018a). In October 2018, the Gigafactory employed around 7,000 people, and expects to hire some “thousands more” (Spillman, 2018b, para. 4).
a conservative Nevadan think tank grumbled about the factory at this stage, saying: “Tesla gets special deals from government that the rest of us simply don’t have access to” (para. 19). Bob Fulkerson of the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada likewise said: “We can want Tesla to succeed and we can want them to pay their fair share of taxes and not get away with robbing the store, which is what they are doing” (para. 15) adding that Nevada taxpayers are on the hook for paying the costs of Tesla and Panasonic’s development, and that workers struggle to afford housing in the meantime (para. 15).

Given these developments, there is little evidence, despite the high tech and pro environmental hype, that the plant will extend its benefits in the community beyond a small echelon of business and political leaders. Indeed, as Chapter 5 concludes, the Tesla spectacle, and the spectacle of Elon Musk’s persona, had the effect of blurring consideration of the public costs to Nevadans in tax dollars and lost services, not to mention the legacy of misleading appearances that I unpacked in Chapter 6.

I believe this is fully consistent with the broad historical-materialist perspective on the production of capitalist spaces and changing aspects of work in Indiana and Nevada that were outlined in Chapter 3. There I detailed some key aspects of the early stages of Western capitalism, the settler expansion into Indiana and Nevada, the nuances of the local economies, race relations in Indianapolis, the hard-hitting crisis of 2008 for Nevada, and the lead up to the 2016 election with Clinton, Sanders, and Trump’s worldviews, among other issues. Mapping these histories was necessary to situate the “place images” and struggles involved in the case studies—such as Hoosier reactions to the term “Rust Belt”—as well as certain discursive throwbacks—such as the Gigafactory being heralded as the latest Comstock (Damon, 2014c). Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that it is possible to find threads in all of this that help understand the complex way that ideologies are reproduced, challenged and transformed.

The case studies of Carrier and Tesla made me more aware of the complex and contradictory conditions that shape the reality of working people’s lives. Despite often strong criticisms, the sense I got when talking to workers and public officials, either casually or in formal interviews, was that “pragmatic” yet sometimes cynical emptiness carried the day. I see this sort of emptiness as roughly similar to charlatanism, financial swindles, the loss of satisfaction after buying a much-wanted item, and the fixation on
short-term returns over long-term sustainability. An Indianapolis official (Participant 7) captured the theme poignantly, saying: “You know, nobody seems to stand for anything in this country” (personal communication, 2017). If anything my research has reinforced the conclusions of critical and radical variants of urban studies, labor studies, and political economy: that capitalism’s tendency to generate contradiction, division, and diversity fail to reconcile such feelings of disenchantment in anything close to a satisfactory manner.

There are several other points to consider regarding capitalist spectacle in the age of so-called “alternative facts” and continued aestheticized rhetoric in the service of political power. That Trump would lie or embellish the facts, as in the case of the Carrier rally, is not a newsflash. A cursory engagement with liberal media sources will doubtless tell you this. In fact, hosts of the media critique podcast, Citations Needed, claim that “[h]ypocrisy takedowns – which reached peak popularity during the heyday of The Daily Show – have been the bread and butter of liberal discourse for years” (Citations Needed Podcast, 2018, para. 1). But the hosts further argue that the “outright lying” (para. 3) that characterizes the Trump phenomenon makes the fixation on flagging instances of hypocrisy “lose any remaining purchase” (para. 3). My own exposure in this dissertation of Trump’s misrepresentations is not new terrain, but it is certainly meant to be more meaningful than fodder for a Stephen Colbert Late Show joke. I say this because Trump’s ignorance of the Carrier factory’s products fits into the overarching theme I found that links the case studies in Chapter 6: appearance and authority flouting accountability. Trump did not have to stay in Indianapolis and pick up the pieces. Making these types of connections about the nature of capitalism can further empower liberal discourses beyond the criticism of just Trump.

Consider another instance: Storey County’s inaction following the siting and early construction of the Gigafactory. The state legislators had ostensibly put in place assurances that the benefits touted in the Tesla deal would come to pass. But without any governmental personnel fastidiously keeping up with monitoring, you again encounter a repeat of promising, satisfying, and exciting capitalist PR that gives a damn how things shake out in the end—as long as income is distributed to the top. In this

3  They relent that there is still a place for this criticism; but it is certainly not the powerful tactic liberal media seem to bill it as.
respect, I believe Trump and Musk are two sides of the same coin, as much as Musk might not like to admit (given the former’s stance on climate change). Their class interests and scorn for a democratic press link them as much as their bluster, which can be exposed through counter-narrative. For example, while Musk was projecting epic efficiencies in the factory of the future, the Gigafactory technician I interviewed explained he was paid to do next to nothing, because the robots were still under warranty at the time of his hiring. His early hiring may have been on account of the company needing to meet a certain quota so as to remain eligible for state benefits. He also reported accounts of daily life at the plant that Musk would find unflattering, including dubious employees, tension between Panasonic and Tesla workers, and vandalized bathrooms. Later reportage reveals even worse whistleblower claims at Gigafactory 1. A former worker there, Martin Tripp, accused the company of knowingly shipping out defective batteries (Spillman, 2018a). An erstwhile Tesla security guard “accused the company of improperly spying on employees” (para. 30.).

A final similarity to note here between case studies was the “advanced manufacturing” buzzword, which ties directly to concerns over qualified employees. The buzzword stood in as a solution for some\(^4\) in Indiana—a deindustrializing space—and in Nevada, whose officials feared a dearth of suitable job candidates. This work category is contingent on an educational overhaul, with pro-growth champions such as Mike Kazmierski calling for more training in science and engineering in northern Nevada. Gigafactory hiring began in 2015; as late as August of 2017, a Sparks official (Participant 2) was lamenting that the workforce needed just wasn’t there (personal communication, 2017). Incidentally, even the $37.5 million promised by Tesla for educational investment in Nevada is besmirched as the gesture is found to be self-serving. As Paul Anderson of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development stated, the “pledge [was] in support of science and robotics programs at our schools” (Spillman, 2018a, para. 11).

A couple of my interview participants from Reno and Sparks, respectively, answered in the affirmative when I suggested that they looked at the Gigafactory deal pragmatically. Along the same lines of pragmatism, an Indianapolis councillor (Participant 7) commented on government attempts to mollify the Carrier problem. While

\(^4\) An Indy councillor expressed skepticism of advanced manufacturing because it by definition means fewer jobs available (Participant 7, personal communication, 2017).
companies playing cities off of each other is wrong, he admitted, the use of public money to subsidize Carrier so as to keep 700 jobs in the state was still the right thing to do (personal communication, 2017). The significance of these vacillating decisions, I think, is that not all city officials immediately become capitalist automatons, at least not ideologically. Whether knowingly or not, even when faced with powerful outside economic forces (especially in the form of the 2008 crisis and recession), conflict exists in local decision-making that sometimes requires significant attention to criticism. Interviews can personalize an understanding of major development processes like this in a way that merely looking at the statistics cannot (e.g., when the four Tesla bills passed unanimously in the State Legislature).

Gramscian theory is especially useful here. These members of a historical bloc of government and business entities are not immune to the contradictions of common-sense thinking. The contradictions can be obvious at times. When asked whether cities are in competition with each other, a Sparks rep (Participant 2) said for instance, “You know, I don’t think so” (personal communication, 2017). And yet shortly afterward he answered a question about Silicon Valley in this way: “I think that uh we’re like any other city or region; we’re trying to get those jobs here.”

Another contradiction is evident in an Indianapolis official’s response in one of my interviews. The councillor (Participant 10) was certainly keen on the standard civic boosterism and job-growth ideology, something one would imagine goes hand-in-hand with a local press regularly boosting and extolling the city (personal communication, 2017). Yet when I asked whether he thought the media attention afforded the Carrier story could have produced negative depictions of Indianapolis, his response was couched with slight surprise: “Interesting question,” he began. Despite his role and position on Indy boosting, I got the distinct impression he never lost sleep over media’s role in delivering positive (or in this case, negative) spin on the city. The councillor’s inattention given to national and/or local media in this sense contradicts the councilmembers’ presumed subjectivities as city boosters. One would expect councillors

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5 To be fair, this official may have been speaking specifically about northern Nevada, Reno, and Sparks not being in competition with each other regarding the first question, since he would go on to mention EDAWN’s role as a collective booster that “the cities and the counties pay into” (Participant 2, personal communication, 2017). But even then, Reno and Sparks are autonomous places that generate friction between one another.
to stay apprised of local media influence, because, after all, where else is an outsider going to learn the latest about their town? Whether or not my assumption is true, he provided an interesting response regardless, saying that the negativity could be there, but it would have been worse “if Carrier had pulled up stakes and moved to a… neighboring state.” This would have indicated that Indy’s “environment is not conducive for… good expansion and good growth” (Participant, 10, personal communication, 2017). That it went to Mexico gets Indiana off the hook.

What my interviewees choose to look or not look at segues into another point, this time about a compartmentalization taking place in the minds of some of the officials. This is not a contradiction per se, but I noticed in a few cases an unwillingness to confront political issues taking place at higher or different levels of government. After asking a Sparks rep (Participant 2) about the Tesla incentives, I heard: “[T]hat’s above my paygrade…. that would be to the governor’s office” (personal communication, 2017). While he felt that these deals were “pretty common,” he also added that he doesn’t “have any thoughts on it one way or the other.” A faint unwillingness or inability to engage with bigger-picture issues seemed to play a background role in some of the interviews. A Reno councilmember (Participant 1), for instance, did provide a more detailed answer to a question I had about Silicon Valley, but prefaced it by saying: “Hmm, not really that informed about really, you know, the term Silicon Valley and what that means” (personal communication, 2017). This sort of intimation could again evince the priority with the practical, pragmatic, and immediate problems of the micro over the macro.

7.1. Thoughts on Future Research

The above comments suggest that subsequent research should try to forge better links between the analysis of the local governments, corporate agendas, and regional and federal state structures. In future research I hope to examine such links as well as undertake a more focused and deeper analysis of worker’s culture in the U.S. and how worker’s family lives and cultures are influenced ideologically and politically by race, gender, and the consumption of popular media discourses. This will require a number of individual studies, rather than the kind of broad case studies undertaken in this dissertation. In this future work I hope to develop a more robust political-economic analysis as well as speak to a more focused and greater number of workers in industries
currently being strongly affected by economic globalization, and by moves by the U.S. political right to deregulate U.S. industries.

Qualitative research strives for insight over representativeness, and there are obvious limitations to the analysis I have developed here. For example, I only conducted depth interviews with 12 people. I conceived this study as a step forward in personal and intellectual growth and I don’t claim that my field experiences and interviews are definitive or necessarily represent the views of all workers or public officials who have to deal with factory closings or the possible arrival of spectacular “mega-projects.”

This brings me back to what emerged as a key issue in the dissertation that I expect to continue in future research, namely the study of job creation from my perspective, which is firmly ensconced on the side of working people. I am reminded, however, of Proudhon’s quote about (implicitly effete) intellectuals inserting themselves into the revolution: “No white hands, only hands with callouses” (Merrifield, 2002, p. 44). But at the same time, and in contrast to Proudhon—whom Marx criticized—the Marxian tradition has always valued theory, some of it from intellectuals such as Marx himself, as an integral part of political practice.

In this regard, radical political economy and critical urban studies have provided important theoretical interventions useful to help understand how companies looking to exploit cities, states, and regions for the incentives and tax abatements—along with cities and regions themselves looking for creative ways to market themselves—are now such evident features of the neoliberal landscape. Having spent time on a city board dealing with such issues, an Indianapolis councillor (Participant 7) lamented how common the impulse is for companies to make these threats (personal communication, 2017). This is the “race to the bottom” (Participant 3, personal communication, 2017) referred to earlier. Consider some prominent recent cases which raise issues similar to those surrounding Carrier and Tesla discussed in this dissertation: Gigafactory 2 in Buffalo, New York; Foxconn in Wisconsin; and Amazon’s HQ2 in New York City and Northern Virginia.

Tesla and Panasonic conceived of Gigafactory 2 in December 2016, and the building sprung up in Buffalo, New York, in December 2017 (Pyper, 2018). Similar to the arrangement at TRI Center, Tesla agreed to pay Panasonic for its “custom-
manufactured solar products” (para. 2) while the latter put up the capital for factory construction. Also similar to the cases of northern Nevada and Indiana, a vice president with Panasonic expressed concern over “getting the right talent if it really starts growing fast” (para. 25) given that the necessary skills are not “typically taught in programs for universities” (para. 25). It would be interesting to see if data from local media and local official interviews would reveal similarities to what I have found in my two case studies. My hunch is that significant similarities would be found.

The Foxconn/Wisconsin case is especially interesting for me considering my Wisconsin upbringing. The deal is drawing praise from business voices but, more importantly, criticism from watchdogs as well. It is an unfolding case in desperate need of a fulsome and holistic analysis that places special emphasis on Scott Walker’s 2010 gubernatorial win and his subsequent war on public employees. What is especially serendipitous, and, frankly, strange, is that over the course of my research on Tesla, the Racine Journal Times (of my hometown) published an article quoting none other than Mike Kazmierski of EDAWN. Kazmierski was unsurprisingly extolling the benefits of a corporate behemoth coming to town, saying to Racine County officials, “You’ve got a tiger by the tail and you don’t even know it” (Torres, 2018, para. 1).

While the company has committed to “200 high-tech jobs” (Thomas, 2018b, para. 20) in Green Bay, most of the action is taking place right near where I grew up: southeastern Wisconsin. Foxconn built an “advanced manufacturing campus” (Hogan, as cited in Thomas 2018b, para. 22) in Mt. Pleasant, as well as a headquarters and “innovation center” (para. 20) in Milwaukee. In fact, Foxconn refers to Milwaukee as its “North American headquarters” (Thomas, 2018a, para. 1). According to a company statement, “there will be a mix of employment opportunities, [but] the majority of our employees in Wisconsin will be knowledge workers focused on high-value production assignments and research and development” (Buck, as cited in Thomas, 2018b, para. 16).

In addition, Gigafactory 2 went up in Buffalo, New York, which is near to where I moved in early 2018 (Toronto) and where I applied to some teaching jobs. These strange coincidences seem to be a trend of sorts. In 2011, I was writing my Master’s thesis. It was a critical cultural studies approach to the 9/11 Truthers and the Obama birthers (those folks who believed Obama was born outside of the United States). In the same week, while writing, the U.S. military assassinated Osama bin Laden, and Obama released his long-form birth certificate.
While former Governor Walker could tout this prospect as a huge victory, any reader of this dissertation should expect egregious realities lurking behind the pomp-and-circumstance of the press conference. First, Wisconsin gave Foxconn a $4.1 billion subsidy—"and counting" (Murphy, 2018, para. 14)—which equals the biggest subsidy "ever given in America to a foreign company" (para. 3). This cost to taxpayers calculates out to "$1,773 per household" (para. 14). What is especially questionable here is that the state required Foxconn to pay an average wage of $53,875 a year to be eligible for the subsidy, and yet it moved the upper salary cap to $400,000. This means that Foxconn can pay 93% of its workers $30,000 a year (or $15 an hour) and still be eligible for the subsidy. As one critic writes, “that’s a low enough salary [for workers] to be eligible for federal food assistance” (para. 2) and that it “is anything but a family-supporting job” (para. 2). Walker permitted the company to breach existing environmental laws and extract millions of gallons of water a day from Lake Michigan (Brandom, 2018).

The Foxconn case—at least from my cursory observation—raises questions that are apropos for my discussion in the sixth chapter of this dissertation. There I argued that image, spectacle, good PR, and the like trumped (no pun intended) accountability and the ugly realities of implementation. This point relates to reports on the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation—an entity that I imagine emulates organizations such as EDAWN and Huntington County Economic Development. According to a post on Wisconsin political figure Kathleen Vinehout’s website, the “WEDC authorized hundreds of millions in tax credits, grants and loans since… 2011” (“AUDIT,” 2017, para. 10); but at the same time, it “cannot be certain about the number of jobs actually created or retained as a result of any awards that ended” (AUDIT, 2017, para. 2).

Amazon’s HQ2 headquarters was recently up for grabs, with cities across North America vying for the win of 50,000 jobs over the course of ten years (Halkias, 2018). Before the company announced a split location for HQ2 at Long Island City, New York, and northern Virginia (DePillis, 2018a), there existed a short list of 20 potential cities that included Austin, Dallas, and Newark. As expected, city councils were eager to woo the massive corporation. The council in Newark, for instance, voted “to eliminate a 1 percent payroll tax for Amazon employees who live in Newark and grant a 50 percent cut to HQ2 employees who don’t live in Newark” (Halkias, 2018, para. 2). While this equals a $1 billion tax exemption, the council was also mulling over a “$3 billion long-term tax abatement” (para. 2). One of the two “winners,” New York, has pledged $1.525 billion so
long as Amazon creates 25,000 jobs (at an average $150,000 salary) and uses a designated footage of office space (DePillis, 2018b). This is of course all in accord with the literature cited in this dissertation.

But it does not stop with mere retailers and manufacturers, of course; Gruneau and Horne’s (2015) recent edited volume shows how “mega-events” absorb “huge amounts of public investment” (p. 2) in “civic and national ambitions” (p. 2) for the “recognition, visibility, political leverage, tourism, foreign investment, or economic development” (p. 2).7 What’s more, “[u]rban elites” (p. 11) mostly support these projects despite the fact that “little evidence… suggest[s] that the wealth they create trickles down to urban underclasses” (p. 11). We of course saw similar discursive tricks taking place in northern Nevada.

Behind every scheme to tap public funds for corporate relocation is an opportunity to expose the common-sense expectations that X, Y, or Z development will benefit all impacted citizens.8 There will no doubt be future corporate exploits in need of interpretation and a critical eye, lest companies and neoliberal governments continue the ploy unabated. What is refreshing however is the growing presence of critical voices who have caught on to this major public investment for jobs sham, although I am hesitant to describe this discursive resistance as mainstream. It is still butting up against common sense. The socialist state senator in Virginia, Carter (2018), for instance, stood against a $300 million incentive package offered to Micron for its creation of 1,100 jobs in Manassas. Among his claims were that “Home prices can be expected to increase, and so will rent for the 38 percent of Manassas residents who don’t own their own homes” (para. 7), and that the deal will “turbocharge the process of gentrification” (para. 7). Most importantly is his broader assessment, namely that such deals almost always invite “[b]ipartisan support” (para. 2), receive “unanimous praise from the media” (para. 2), and that one can “pretty much copy-paste this critique and apply it to thousands of similar deals made in every state each year” (para. 5). Speaking of deals in other states, the

7 These events include the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, various Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, World Cups, and the like (Gruneau & Horne, 2015).
8 The media-criticism podcast, Citations Needed (2017) produced an episode doing just this in a December 2017 episode about NOlympics LA, a group fighting off Los Angeles’s bid for the 2024 Olympic Games.
Wisconsin governor who unseated Walker, Tony Evers, likewise expressed skepticism over the Foxconn deal (Brandom, 2018).

Democratic-socialist phenom Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, similarly, broke ranks with corporate Democrats (such as New York Governor Andrew Cuomo) in her tweets against Amazon HQ2 (DePillis, 2018b). The Congresswoman-elect wrote after the announcement that “Amazon is a billion-dollar company…. The idea that it will receive hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks at a time when our subway is crumbling and our communities need MORE investment, not less, is extremely concerning to residents here” (para. 2). She was joined by other NYC locals in her frustration (Wolf, 2019). Amazingly, Amazon later balked at the proposed siting of HQ2 in New York due to pushback from such politicians and activists (Wolf, 2019).

Such criticisms suggest the relevance of more scholarly pursuits in the manner of this dissertation—ones that broach Thompson’s (1990) “interpretation of doxa” (p. 279), or rather “an interpretation of the opinion, beliefs and understandings which are held and shared by the individuals who comprise the social world” (p. 279). I have tried to do this with respect to Carrier Corp., Tesla Motors, and local voices on unevenly developing capitalism. But, as indicated above, there are other case studies and their endemic ideologies to examine as they stand and as they come down the pike. Any future studies should heed a further principle of Thompson’s (1990), namely that “the interpretation of ideology may elicit strong reactions” (p. 325), as “it touches the nerves of power, it highlights the positions of those who benefit and those who suffer from social relations that are structured asymmetrically” (p. 325).

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Cuomo once told reporters “he would change his name to ‘Amazon Cuomo, if that’s what it takes’ to lure the tech behemoth” (DePillis, 2018b, para. 4).
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Appendix A.

Methodological Issues

Field research is often a daunting prospect, especially if the researcher needs to occupy unfamiliar spaces and arrange to contact and interview unfamiliar respondents. I negotiated a travel schedule contingent on limited funds as well as the whims and availability of others—especially my research participants. Being accountable to the schedules and good will of strangers also felt odd much of the time. One case, for instance, led to a country drive at dawn to meet a participant when I had little or no sleep; another had me sheepishly poking around the United Steelworkers office without a clear plan. But there were other times when the research became a fascinating and exhilarating exercise, when I felt a rapport with the interviewee, laughed with them, and enjoyed exchanging thoughts. Additionally, knowing my goals and what I wanted to do with my life helped me overcome feelings of discomfort during the research process.

Formal Interviews

“Contacting in” to situations or groups you want to understand is never easy, especially if you don’t have an already existing conduit to access interviews in the locales chosen for research. Anthropologists will often take a lengthy time when visiting a new place to simply to make contacts that lead to depth interviews, but tight research funds meant that I was on a very tight timeline. Of course, before even attempting to arrange any interviews I had to obtain clearance from SFU’s Office of Research Ethics. This process took several months to officially complete because I had to engage with an online “course” of sorts, where I read about ethical debacles attributed to past research (e.g., the Stanford prison study) and answer questions about the material. Following the ethics protocol, I wrote several consent forms for various potential interviewees and later ran them by ORE, which again took time for personnel to review the drafts. Some of these drafts went through multiple iterations. ORE also requires that you submit email and phone-call scripts intended to solicit interviews. Ultimately, the office designated my study to be “low-risk” and approved the research.
At the initial planning stages, I was hoping to conduct around 20-25 separate interviews—a number similar to Gibson’s (2004) Seattle research for his book, *Securing the Spectacular City*. However, many potential respondents never emailed back and others who agreed to an interview did not follow through. Of course I understand that the interviews primarily benefit me, and that the participants get little if anything in return. In fact, ORE asks that you explicitly inform potential respondents what, if any, benefit they will receive in participating, and I cannot say my pitch was entirely enticing.¹ As my supervisor said to me just before I left for Reno: don’t come across as someone just looking to advance his career and “feather [his] own nest.”

Following that advice was not difficult given my own background and upbringing. I felt a genuine kinship with the workers I talked to, especially at Carrier, and was extremely interested in what they might say about who, if anyone, they blamed for Carrier’s move to Mexico. One problem that was brought to my attention early in the fieldwork was that steelworkers more affiliated with the union were likely to have more radical views on the layoffs than the larger worker population at Carrier. However, in addition to workers, I wanted to interview city representatives who face pressure to market their locales and act as boosters for growth and business.

I was also less interested during interviews on fact-checking or “getting the facts straight” about the chronologies and nuances of the two case studies. This was because a lot of that work had been done already by journalists, many of whom I cite in the dissertation as secondary sources. In addition, I did not feel that the respondents needed to be the most qualified expert in the city on matters of jobs and development. I was more interested in recording and compiling various personal accounts of the events affecting the Carrier plant and Tesla spectacle, even official ones. But I also wanted to get some sense of people’s feelings, instincts, and reactions with a view to understanding arguments that might be viewed as common sense. It was interesting, however, in that a handful of respondents or potential interviewees felt like directing me

¹ I explain in my Carrier consent form, for instance: “While you will not benefit directly from participating, the benefit of the project will be an increase in our understanding of an area that greatly affects American working people’s material wellbeing—job loss and corporate attempts to lower wages.”
to the “correct” person to consult (or warned me to fact-check a comment of theirs) as opposed to simply expressing their personal feelings.

After conducting the interviews, I transcribed them without indicating anywhere who the voice on the digital recorder belonged to. As per ethics protocol, I dutifully deleted the audio recordings and stored the transcriptions on SFU’s Vault database. I used the transcriptions to sharpen and sometimes rethink some of my initial assumptions about hegemony, ideology, common sense, and urban issues. I also blended insights and ideas in the interview transcripts with findings from discourse analyses of news and commentary.

Media Discourse Analysis

Results of my qualitative and quantitative discourse analyses appear in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4, the first sets of quantitative data involve Indianapolis Star stories dated between February 10 and November 30, 2016. This represents the time frame between the date of the initial Carrier closure announcement and the day Trump claimed he had reached a deal with management. I found the set of stories by searching the news outlet’s online database with the term “carrier,” which yielded dozens of hits. Within this span, I looked for what sources and voices in the individual stories attributed the Carrier decision to. This was a matter of carefully reading each news story and identifying and noting when a journalist or someone she or he quoted offered their opinion on a culprit for the closure. I understand that this was a subjective reading on my part, for I did not conscript a second coder to help with this or any other aspect of my quantitative work. For this exercise, I found that 17 sources blamed an aspect within a nexus composed of shareholders, profit motives, the need to stay competitive, and that it was a business decision. I thought it was appropriate to bundle these alleged culprits together because they were so closely related. Another 10 sources blamed America’s trade deals; six more implicated “greed”; five implicated corporate taxes. Nowhere in the span between February 10 to November 30, 2016, did any source in the Star’s Carrier stories blame the workers or unions for the closure decision.

The second set of quantitative tables in Chapter 4 shows findings derived from a few hundred reader comments posted below two news broadcasts on YouTube. A local source ran one Carrier story, and a national news outlet ran the other. Similar to my
approach above, I was looking for whom or what these viewers attributed the Carrier decision to; also similar was my method of looking for hints of blame and making tallies. The tables listed in Chapter 5 present different phenomena but were similarly based on simple tallies. The first table illustrates how many times “Panasonic” was listed in RGJ stories about the Gigafactory from 2014-2016. I determined this by searching RGJ’s online database with the term “gigafactory.” I organized the news articles by year. From this point, I conducted a word search command on my laptop (Command key + f) for “panasonic” and tallied the results.

The following set of data was much more intuitive and subjective than the process of simply counting how many times a word appeared in an article. I scoured the RGJ coverage of the Gigafactory deal before the State Legislature passed the pro-Tesla bills in September 2014. This coverage amounted to 29 stories, which I found through an RGJ database search. The goal here was to identify the nature of criticism against the Tesla prospect and its supportive legislation. While I do not claim to have exhausted the nuances of criticism against the Tesla prospect, I managed to outline 27 different disparaging themes and discussed some of them in terms of their relation to common sense.

The last sets of data in Chapter 5 parallel my method in Chapter 4 of recording the thoughts of readerships and laypersons, which again overlaps with Hall et al.’s method of consulting letters to the editor in the early 1970s. Instead of analyzing YouTube comments below a local and national news outlet’s broadcast, I quantified comments posted alongside RGJ stories within that timeframe of 29 stories mentioned above. I acknowledge that the evidence was quite limited here given how infrequently reader comments seemed to be posted to RGJ stories, but this was the best I had to work with. The subjective requirement on my part was classifying the reader comments into support or opposition to Tesla and then adding the accompanying Facebook “Likes” together.

A problem due to the ephemeral nature of Internet content developed after I conducted this analysis in early-to-mid 2018. For an unknown reason, the RGJ reader comments I looked at have disappeared, and at this time they are no longer viewable on the news outlet’s website. I sent an email to an RGJ representative asking why, but I
received no response. This bothers me because I cannot check my work, nor can anyone else who is interested.

Learning from Limitations and Mistakes

I often felt like an oddity during the course of the research. I was after all in unfamiliar places talking to people I did not know, trying to merge my concrete experiences with the theories, abstractions, and work of other scholars on urban issues. To give a specific example, I expressed to one of my advisors, Enda Brophy, that I felt like I had to move through interviews quickly so as not to waste participants’ time. While he understood this, Enda also said that there is value for the interviewee herself or himself in thinking about and answering my questions.

One limitation involves a point Enda brought up at a meeting, namely that Fordism is a way of life. Given this, it would be valuable for our understanding of my topic to have interviewed the spouses of workers. I was unable to do this however, and I had trouble even getting workers themselves to agree to interviews. The project would have been more fulsome with these voices included.

Another more particular mistake I made was especially gratifying in hindsight, and it has to do with interpersonal cues. I may have made this error in more than one interview, but an especially egregious case happened with a Reno city councilmember, Participant 3. I kept pronouncing the word “Nevada” incorrectly, saying “Neh-VAH-duh” throughout the interview. This is decidedly not how locals say it. As I mention in Chapter 5, this is the same thing Elon Musk did at the Carson City press conference before stopping to correct himself. There is a lesson here in taking time to acclimate oneself with local vernaculars in any field research exercise. I plan to learn from this mistake in future research projects.

Two final regrets involve the consent forms I emailed to potential interviewees. The ORE requires that you attach these forms to each email that goes out, which means that whether a participant agreed to an interview or not, they have the opportunity to see the attached PDF explaining my study. The ORE explicitly recommends that you purge these forms of jargon, thus making the language accessible to the layperson. In more
than one case, I suspect that my wording was still too arcane for some, which may have turned some people off from participating.

Secondly, it is also more than likely I was politically further left than many of the folks I emailed with the attached forms. I was conscious of a need to eliminate any overtly leftist language from the forms I sent out in order to make participants feel welcome—and not like they were going into a debate. After having sent the forms out, however, I noticed that I had included a statement about employers tending to depress the wages of their workers. This statement is reproduced in footnote 1 of this appendix. On the one hand, this line indicated at the outset that I am not a budding entrepreneur, which may have appealed to some of the workers I contacted. But, alternatively, it may have put off others and especially some of the civic officials I contacted. In the future, I hope to be even more careful in crafting contact letters.

2 The Office of Research Ethics asks that you not include jargon in the recruitment letters.