Race, Poverty and Narcocapitalism on *The Wire*: A Political Economic Analysis¹

This chapter will critically examine how poverty, race, gender and sexuality all function within the narrative world of HBO's award-winning series, *The Wire*. I will analyze the series across its five seasons with a special focus on the series' interpretation of the intersections of poverty, race and Narcocapitalism, as well as the upwardly mobile economic aspirations of many of its characters. The Wire's Baltimore setting also offers viewers an interpretation of a contemporary American urban metropolis populated with African American and Latinx citizens who occupy the bottom of the socioeconomic spectrum, while city politicians, judicial officers, and businessmen occupy the highest echelons of that hierarchy. Using textual and discourse analysis, I critically analyze the messages the series offers to its audience in keeping with a political economic theoretical framework. Thus, this chapter's analysis will attempt to answer the following three questions. *First*, how is the socioeconomic hierarchy defined within the series and in what discrete ways is poverty defined? How are those definitions contested or reaffirmed against its inner city setting, and by whom? *Second*, what influence, if any, does the narcocapitalist system of drug production, distribution and consumption have upon the characters' lives? And *third*, how is wealth and success characterized and by whom? What justifications (if any) are offered for the methods by which their economic successes are achieved, and what costs if any appear to that success?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The use of textual analysis focused on discursive forces present in a text is an important means of understanding how individuals and society constitute themselves and make sense of the larger world in which they live. Textual analysis can usefully interrogate how mass mediated commodities create identities and "construct authoritative truths" (Saukko, 2003) for those who use them, thereby illuminating the participatory (or non-participatory) role social actors possess in the creation, reflection and consumption of those truths. The multiple interpretations of a given "text" frequently look different when examined in relation to other texts or social sensibilities, thus the task of analysis is not to ascertain *the most correct* but rather, to explore some of the possible and undiscovered interpretations embedded in the targets of textual analysis. This paper's *political economic framework* is employed to examine how exchanges of both financial and social capital, along with socioeconomic labor practices give rise to, or undermine, different forms of social relations between consumers, employees and business owners on the series. Additionally, I utilize some basic premises of *critical race theory* to augment my political economic analyses. This chapter adopts as axiomatic that institutional racism is "original and not aberrational" and is the "usual way society does business, the common everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7). Moreover, I also integrate the belief that our socioeconomic systems adopt a "white-over-color" partiality that "serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group" because such institutional racism manifests itself by advancing the interests of "both white elites (materially) and working class Caucasians

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(psychically)” whereby the majority of American society have little incentive to eradicate such a structure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8). Finally, I also utilize the concept of “color blind racism” whereby conceptions of equality are “expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is same across the board, can thus remedy *only the most blatant forms* of discrimination” [my emphasis] (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8). Together, these tools offer a robust mixed methodology that will hopefully yield informative, sound conclusions about the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations of the characters and their actions within a much larger, multiple season narrative filled with a complex cast of characters unlike most police procedurals previously found on American television to date.

Race, Poverty and Baltimore’s Socioeconomic Hierarchies

From the very first episode of the series, audiences are confronted with a stark and unavoidable fact; And that is that Baltimore is a city defined by three things – drugs, minorities, and economic inequality, though not necessarily in that order. From the very first scene, of the very first episode of the series (S01E01 “The Target”), we find a crime scene of a bloody inner-city street, where a discussion about a murder of an anonymous black man by the name of Omar Bets, shot upon a landscape in the background of abandoned and boarded up brick row houses (1:16). Only a few moments later viewers are transported to the marble lined hallways of a courthouse and the wood paneled walls with frosted glass chandeliers of a Baltimore City Circuit courtroom, resplendent with the suits and ties of attorneys, and the muted color attire of solidly respectable middle-class jurors (5:50). Even in these very first, but formative few minutes of the very first episode, the racial politics are as equally visible as its socioeconomic moments. Both on the streets and in the courthouse we see the Irish American Detective Jimmy McNulty, along any number of a cast of white characters who occupy the middle and upper class echelons of the series society to include: Jewish defense attorney Maurice Levy (04:49), a judge Daniel Phelan (05:06), assistant district attorney Rhonda Pearlman (05:33), the State’s Attorney Steven Demper (08:57), Homicide Sergeant Jay Landsman (21:02) and Police Department Major William A. "Bill" Rawls (22:00) are conveniently contrasted against the homogenous African American criminal characters of the series in the form of D’Angelo Barksdale, Stringer Bell, and their gang associates (12:50 – 13:10) who repeatedly make their appearances throughout the episode in not nearly as prestigious settings like strip clubs (26:30), street corners and housing projects (34:50). Thus, the series establishes its socioeconomic settings early on by drawing very visible distinctions that closely parallel racial lines with the generally white hierarchies of socially respectable careers like law enforcement and the judicial and legal professions, against those of the nearly hegemonic African American narcocapitalist criminal enterprises of inner-city Baltimore. According to Martha Nochimson, McNulty’s story is only peripheral to the narrative of Season One’s story and he’s only “one element of a big collage composed of juxtaposed stories and points of view. McNulty’s striving to be a hero is part of a live mosaic of perspectives emanating from the essentially white middle/upper-class community and from the essentially black poor/lower-class community” (2019, pp. 95-96).

David Simon, the primary show runner and producer of the series made decisions that “...reflect a conscious desire to choose individuals to play specific characters based upon the

conformity of the actors phenotypical appearance and congruence with the idea of who those characters were and how they should appear, behave, and exist within *The Wire*'s story world" (Johnson Jr., 2013). In fact that realism is so persuasive that Brian Rose notes that Simon, in a type of self-congratulatory way, "fondly notes a strong following among both cops and criminals who admire the show's faithful recreation of their lives" (Rose, 2008). These characters reflect a conscious decision about how the series wishes its story to be told – and that's in keeping with a *very specific agenda* to convince audiences of its realism. It's realism relies upon a number of racial (Dixon, 2008; McDermott, 2006) and socioeconomic (Kendall, 2011; Murphy, 2014) stereotypes that are repeated from the very beginning. And, as Rabia Belt poignantly observes, that while the series is "rightly praised for its faithful and respectful treatment of urban poverty, we should however remind ourselves that *The Wire* is a created domain and does not show a comprehensive picture of life as a citizen of Baltimore" (2012, p. 3). Moreover, the series strength lies in its ability to "question, among other things, the comforting formulaic expectations that TV has associated with both heroes and science... (Nochimson, 2019, p. 94). And as I've previously noted the series "...is as much about the narco-capitalist drug economy as it is about that economy's participants. The class-based politics embedded in the series plots and dialogue, expose an important area for discussion insofar as urban criminality is related to race" (2013).

Without the Barksdale narcocriminal enterprise central to the series, many other adjacent businesses (like the strip clubs and entertainment sectors) and government agencies (like law enforcement, judicial and harbor transportation industry) would find themselves struggling to exist (or at least remain socially relevant). *The Wire* points to Baltimore's real world transition from an economy "based on physical labor and tangible products to one based more on information, technology and services as the displacing agent that turns drug dealing into a logical occupational decision" (Long, 2008). The socioeconomic class structure, established very early in the series first Season, is reinforced in later episodes (and not *just* in terms of its characters of color), but also for the series working-class immigrants and wealthy Caucasian and Jewish characters as well. Audiences are introduced to the ubiquity of institutional dysfunction that permeates *The Wire* narrative, and that relies upon equally potent socioeconomic inequalities. Nochimson notes that,

The early episodes introduce us...[to] a city too poor to conduct police and court business properly; a drug trade well organized by Barksdale and Bell; large numbers of hopeless people in the drug scene caught up in addition; police, underpaid, demoralized, and lacking [financial] resources; and careerists, daunted by an impossible and racist economy, fighting for a foothold on the professional ladder, whether or not their efforts run counter to the job they were hired to do (2019, p. 96).

What's significant about this first Season is the ubiquity of the poor within the inner-city confines of the series. They exist and are seen against the landscape and form the background against which the narrative's action takes place. Whether they're seen in the high-rise apartment projects or the low-rise ghettos, alleyways and streets, the impoverished are everywhere. However, few truly *homeless* characters ever appear for any significant length of time in speaking roles – and none (with one notable exception) over the course of the series 5 seasons. Thus, the poor are both everywhere, but also remain for the most part, as a voiceless component of the background. The

only exception to this comes in the form of Reginald “Bubbles” Cousins, a “lifelong drug user who has miraculously maintained an active sense of responsibility despite his dependence on drugs...[he] is a police informer, and the police he works for promise him protection...but [financial] pressures on the police keep them from coming to his aid when he needs them most” (Nochimson, 2019, pp. 106-107). And even Bubble’s isn’t technically homeless as many drug addicts of the series are housed in a state of semi-permanency, within the innumerable abandoned rowhomes that populate the landscape of the inner city where most of the episodes occur. Indeed, even he acquires housing later in Season 5, so that even the one truly poor, homeless person who audiences hear from (and aren’t killed off in earlier seasons) ultimately finds shelter.

Despite this fact, the homeless, due to their drug addiction, inadvertently become an indispensable part of the narcocapitalist system of commerce. Except for Bubbles, these overwhelmingly African American, homeless drug addicts, are uniformly “...invisible, except when presented as faceless statistics or as ‘problems’ to be dealt with in a community” (Kendall, 2011, p. 82) but their framing by Simon et al follow a predictable pattern by which the poor are depicted “in terms of personal experience; where the viewer is provided with a particular [episode] of an individual or family living under economic duress” (Gilbert, 2011). Bubbles story follows this pattern, but is an important component of the narrative although Simon’s attentiveness to this demographic of society follows a framing of the issue of that “...gives poverty a human face but often ignores the larger structural factors...” (Kendall, 2011, p. 83). Fascinatingly drug addiction, the subtext of the entire series isn’t investigated with any longevity (given the series multiple seasons) although its *socioeconomic effects* that such drug consumption produces, *are* central to the narrative. The Wire’s success comes from its ability to offer up characters with whom we might identify or to whom we are attracted and invested in seeing more off. But these same characters might also disappoint us, and sometimes characters whom we dislike will surprise us. The Wire’s success can also be attributed to its refusal to provide “easy answers to complex problems and to acknowledge how complex they are even if we cannot find the answers that we and the characters so desperately want” but characters like Bubbles – because he serves as the most visible proxy for the truly poor – run the risk of mischaracterizing poverty as an individualized problem and whose drug addiction is a personal failure, rather than a systemic problem. Moreover, when only one character like Bubbles, with a consistent speaking role, survives the five Seasons of the series audiences run the risk of interpreting such characters as sympathetic exceptions, thereby creating the impression that anyone in a similar situation can escape poverty (Kendall, 2011, p. 111).

The much more common depiction of poverty on the series take the form of the *working-class poor*, whose existence is often frame in the media as “low-skill manual workers, people employed in routine white-collar jobs (such as bank clerks, cashiers, and retail sales) and in the rapidly growing service sector (for instance home health care workers, and employees in fast-food restaurants)” (Kendall, 2011, p. 123). These *working-class poor* appear on the series but often do not follow Kendall’s definition because they’re uniformly employed in occupations that typically require advanced skills, knowledge and abilities or college degrees (as is the case in Seasons 4 and 5 where secondary school teachers and journalist appear). Their impoverishment isn’t defined by occupation but rather, their atypically low compensation that accompanies their underfunded or economically unprofitable institution – in this case the Baltimore City Police Department, Baltimore City Public School System, or the Baltimore Sun Newspaper. To all appearances the

working-class poor of the series includes low level police officers, high school teachers and print journalists – all of whom normally would occupy a solidly *middle-class status* according to most definitions like those articulated by Kendall:

Even under the best of circumstances, the working poor hold low-wage positions with little job security, few employee benefits and no chance to save money. Their work conditions are frequently unpleasant and sometimes dangerous” and significantly, they are also “only a step – or a second family income – away from poverty (2011, p. 124).

By Season 2 the series confronts the economically decaying Baltimore harbor whose livelihood as an engine of profit has nearly reached its end and is described by Richard Vine as “a meditation on the death of work and the betrayal of the American working class ... it is a deliberate argument that unencumbered capitalism is not a substitute for social policy; that on its own, without a social compact, raw capitalism is destined to serve the few at the expense of the many” (2010). While similar to the integrated composition of the Baltimore Police Department in Season 1, the leadership of the longshoremen’s union is comprised of solidly working-class Polish and Greek Americans. And this fact is intrinsically linked with the stereotypical depictions of working-class immigrant communities and their internalized perceptions of impoverishment and social disenfranchisement.

Much of the second season is dedicated to the complicated (and ongoing) racial and economic politics in which this working class immigrant community must negotiate its position vis-à-vis their African American neighbors on one side of the economic hierarchy, and the more well assimilated Caucasian and Jewish demographics whose financial success is more stable, and significantly more visible. And though the season’s white immigrant characters hold both wealthy whites and impoverished Blacks in contempt, much of their antagonism is often directed to the African Americans relative success in their narcocapitalist enterprise. As Monica McDermott makes clear, such circumstances are not entirely without precedent in real life where those who “identified themselves as working-class or as a member of an ethnic group with European roots...[believe] being white conferred certain entitlements to ‘their’ neighborhoods, schools or jobs” and in such “all white settings, provide[d] fertile ground for the articulation of racial stereotypes and antiblack opinions” (2006, p. 2). In many ways this racial animosity has roots in the perception of socioeconomic competition with other minorities of color (Bonacich, 1972), and according to Pinderhughes,

As economic opportunities for those without a college education began shrinking in the wake of a reduction in the size of the manufacturing sector, [as is the case with *The Wire*’s Season 2 longshoremen] feelings of racial competition rooted in economic fears began to characterize the perceptions of the younger (male) members of the working class...not only were racist fears revived, but the white youths felt that they were *disadvantaged* by their white skin (1993).

In Season 2, Episode 1 “Ebb Tide” audiences are introduced to this phenomena through the characters Frank Sobodtka, his son Ziggy, and his nephew Nick (10:58) who are pursuing payment

for a clandestine container being smuggled through the port which is later discovered by Baltimore harbor patrol to be filled with over a dozen dead young women (55:30). The underlying ethnic tensions are later exacerbated by Episode 10 “Storm Warnings” when the death of a young Greek employee and Glekas (another working class Greek) produce intra-ethnic white conflict for Frank Sobodtka in his leadership capacity as the Longshoremen Union leader. By the next episode, number 11, “Bad Dreams” Frank has been arrested, as has his son and nephew and only through his cooperation with the police, do his younger relatives find reprieve.

The ultimate consequence for his cooperation results in the Greeks leaving Baltimore for good in fear of FBI arrests, though this costs Frank his life by the last Episode of the season “Port in a Storm”. And in fulfillment of an earlier foreshadowing by Nat (S02,E01 @11:58), during this final episode of the season, the longshoremen’s union is decertified and the Baltimore docks undergo an “urban renewal project” of condominium construction, which ultimately destroys the port’s utility as a transportation hub for shipped goods, thereby sealing the fate of these two demographics of working class white immigrants in Baltimore. This chain of events closely parallels similar real-life circumstances by which the working-class (and working poor) are systematically deprived of the very mechanisms by which they can escape their inferior position within the socioeconomic hierarchies of American society. Notably, the World Bank definition of poverty is “...hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to go to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time...Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom” (Lang, 2007). And in many respects the African American members of the series experience a multiplicity of these characteristics, especially when reviewing characters in the decrepit housing projects and crumbling inner-city streets of Season 1.

However, by Season 2 we see another definition of *working-class* poverty mobilized. Its definition, according to Kristian Niemietz, is used to refer to low-wage workers who struggle to meet their basic needs. *Working class poor* “are characterized by marginal living environments, insecurity and powerlessness stemming from unsustainable or unstable livelihoods” (2011, p. 43). In terms of the *working-class poor* many of the lower level police of Season 1 are heavily dependent upon overtime – a financially lucrative incentive whose cost are a frequent issue of discussion by the majority white upper management; while the Polish and Greek longshoremen of season two are equally dependent upon their acquisition (and trade in) illegally shipped goods. A common theme for both groups, however, is their perilously close proximity to being actually poor (and thus stigmatized for what is perceived as a social failing by both themselves and the upper-class whites of the series). Both the lower-level, racially integrated police force *and* the Polish and Greek immigrants of the series, are preoccupied with the constant instability that accompanies their respective careers in the Baltimore city economy. However, this precarity is notably absent for those members of the legal profession and the higher-level police administration like the white Major William Rawls or, white FBI special agent Terrence ‘Fitz’ Fitzhugh who first appear Season One, and, who possess either a college education or advanced degrees in the law. Season three is a departure to some degree from this formula as it takes place primarily in the confines of Baltimore City Hall, where the racial and economic conditions of the series characters deviate. From the (white) Councilmen Thomas Carcetti who audiences are introduced to in Episode 1 of Season three (11:50) to the (white) State Attorney Steven Demper (S3E3 @32:00), to the (white)

ADA Rhonda Pearlman (S3E4 @ 17:30), to anonymous (white) real estate developers (S3E3 @ 37:33), the majority of the (white) characters of this season occupy the upper echelons of the socioeconomic strata, and thus are relatively free of the insecurity and precarity experienced by the racially mixed “underclass” (Katz, 2013) found in the preceding seasons.

These solidly middle-class characters reflect many of the characteristics and traits one expects to see: They appear to earn between 40k and 62k based on appearances, and possessions like home ownership, clothing choice and possessions (Kendall, 2011, p. 165). Many of these characters reflect the kinds of cosmopolitan values, egalitarian expectations and upwardly mobile aspirations of that socioeconomic strata of society as indicated by their behavior (and reaction) to many of the systemic institutional and cultural problems they regularly face. And in keeping with prevailing class distinctions in America, they generally consist of characters who “...have some college education or significant skills and work under loose supervision, and the upper middle class consisting of highly educated professionals and corporate managers” (Gilbert, 2011) with some in the upper middle class or wealthy demographic whose social life reproduce the kinds of adaptability in shifting cultural norms of propriety, by demonstrable evidence of social cultivation, workplace social interactions, dress, appearance, grooming and the accoutrements of social sophistication. Throughout the series they reproduce the traits and values that are “associated with the middle class such as “punctuality, a certain minimum of reliability and accountability (if not responsibility), as well as a minimum of orderliness and a certain amount of postponement of instant gratification” (Ehrenreich, 1990) as well as the values of individualism, achievement and success, progress and material comfort and freedom of liberty (Williams Jr., 1970). These depictions are rendered visible in the cases of many characters like the (African American) Lt. Cedric Daniels and his girlfriend the (White) Assistant District Attorney Rhonda Pearlman; (African American) Major Howard “Bunny” Colvin; (White) Major William Rawls; (White) Mayor Thomas Carcetti, and many others. All of them share in the expectations of economic security, safety, protection strongly associated with this demographic and poignantly illustrated by a recent report by the Obama Administration’s *Middle-Class Task Force* (Blank, 2010) that persuasively argues that these values include:

1. Strong orientation towards planning for the future;
2. Control over one’s destiny;
3. Movement up the socioeconomic ladder through hard work and education
4. A well-rounded education for one’s children
5. Protection against hardship, including crime, poverty and health problems
6. Access to home ownership and financial assets such as a savings account

In every case, in the preceding characters we find that they all are uniformly preoccupied with future advancement, and they actively pursue a future with discrete goals in mind. They are equipped with the ability, due to their positions in their respective careers, to exercise some degree of control over their future, and by the end of the series they have all moved up within their respective occupations. They all have generally enjoyed protection from hardship in the form of crime, poverty and health problems and they all own their own homes (or are perceived to through indirect dialogue that suggests this fact). And though they may not all have children, they are

consistently preoccupied with the quality of education of either their own children or the children of the Baltimore community.

Thus it is with no surprise that by Season four, the series' theme "looks at schools as a porous part of the community that are affected by problems outside of their boundaries" (Nochimson, 2019) as well as the educational process of indoctrination into the narcocapitalist organizations for young impressionable youth, who in *The Wire* story world attend a dysfunctional and deteriorating Baltimore City School System. Thus, Simon sees this theme as "an opportunity to explore how individuals end up like the show's criminal characters" (Frazier, 2020) given the centrality of education to the myth of meritocracy (McNamee & Miller Jr., 2014) and potential advancement in America's socioeconomic hierarchy. Two members of the Baltimore City Police Department transition to work in the Baltimore City School System and their lives and careers as employees there ultimately come to reflect many the institutional challenges the school system faces. Both Detective Roland "Prez" Pryzbylewski (Polish American) and (African American) Major Howard "Bunny" Colvin ultimately retire from the police force to pursue positions in the school system. Pryzbylewski as a Math teacher at the Edward Tilghman Middle School and Colvin as a grant researcher and school counselor, respectively. Pryzbylewski, initially seen as an inept detective soon finds redemption as a code breaker and fraudulent document examiner before retiring with the police force. He becomes a math teacher by Season 4 despite a \$54 million dollar shortfall in the Baltimore City Department of Education, and in this capacity sees first hand the innumerable challenges that accompany this literal impoverishment of the educational system responsible for eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline for Baltimore's poor youth of color. The series exposes many of the obstacles he faces in this capacity like deteriorating physical facilities, antiquated textbooks and reading materials, poor academic preparation and performance by students; lackadaisical or complete indifference by traditionally educated teachers; careerism and benign neglect from school administrators; hostility by students of color towards white faculty; etc. etc. etc. (S4E3 @ 46:04).

All these factors conspire together to eviscerate the educational systems objectives to educate the youth of city from the beginning of their entry into school. And when students, not entirely unexpectedly, find themselves unequipped to continue or disruptive to the point of expulsion their white savior figure arrives in the form of University of Maryland Professor David Parenti whose grant funds a pilot project for "at risk West Baltimore youth". He enlists Colvin as a research assistant and intermediary to solicit "corner boys" 18-20 who have failed to succeed in the traditional school environment. This project utilizes a radical new approach that prohibits expulsion as an easy vehicle by which such students can escape school, and instead Colvin become a mentor to a small group of these youths, in an experimental school setting outside of the traditional curriculum. Unfortunately by the end of the season the project is cancelled due to the ensuing budgetary deficit, despite Colvin being "deeply involved in the relationship...[in the] program, while Parenti is a visitor from the detached world of academia" (Nochimson, 2019, p. 104) and Professor Parenti quickly abandons the project when it fails to achieve any measurable success. The failure of the project is solidified when the hopelessness of the ghetto is manifested in Colvin's fateful attempt to expose his cohort of at-risk youth of color, to middle class suburban life. Colvin takes the children to "a very nice restaurant in an attempt to move the kids past the limits of their own neighborhoods and see life with the larger context of the city. The kids get all

dressed up, but in ghetto style. They are treated with respect at the restaurant, but the diners there, although an integrated crowd, are not their people, and the food is not their food” and the experiment ends in disaster with the children suffering from the self-imposed humiliation at the stark class differences from which they’re scrutinized in the unfamiliar setting. Thus, budgetary obstacles, social class distinctions, and racial politics all play a role in the slow, inexorable end to the season’s allegory of disinvestment and abandonment of the Baltimore City School System.

The Wire’s final, 5th Season investigates the increasingly commercialized Baltimore Sun Newspaper and its owners’ disassociated concept of its journalistic mission to circulate the “official story” of the city. The final season of the series finds the Baltimore Sun under the leadership of its new neoliberal CEO James C. Whiting, III who decides to redirect the paper’s employees towards an explicitly profit-motivated reporting on narrowly focused reporting. Whiting’s policies “have major consequences for the war on drugs” because in depth, complex, investigative journalism requires extensive time to research and does not produce the kinds of immediately visible, short-term profits, for which Whiting’s neoliberal obsession of financial productivity (Steger & Roy, 2010) is most important. Indeed, such investigative journalism does the very opposite, as it requires a heavy financial investment in salaries, benefits, overhead and expenses over the course of many weeks and months, ultimately culminating in a very detailed but factually rich story. Whiting’s imposition of short term profits over longer term investment is motivated in part by “shrinking circulations of print news outlets, competition from electronic news sources, a shrinking pool of jobs for journalists, and the tendency for awards to be garnered by Dickensian reporting” (Nochimson, 2019, p. 112). The consequences are dire for the newspaper’s staff due to what the audience is told were a recent round of early retirement “buy-outs” (S5E1) that have resulted in short staffed newsroom under-equipped in personnel who ironically are seen watching a blazing inferno on the Baltimore horizon, but unable to report on the event due to the lack of staff. The (African American) Editor Gus Haynes remarks about the absurdity that the economic obsession has created for traditional journalism when he notes that “It’s like you’re up on the corner of a roof, and you’re showing some people how a couple of shingles came loose, and meanwhile a hurricane wrecked the rest of the damn house”.

Whiting’s policies ultimately culminate in the decision by (White) Scott Templeton, a city desk reporter seeking to make a name for himself, to intentionally falsify stories he submits to the paper. This lack of journalistic integrity and ethics is coincidentally complimented by Detective McNulty’s decision to fabricate a sexualized serial killer, in order for his unit to get the financial resources to investigate the actual target of his unit’s interest – the narcocapitalist Barksdale drug distribution coop. Detective McNulty is called to the corpse of a homeless man who has clearly died a natural death, but McNulty frustrated by the lack of manpower and financial support by the police administration decides to strangle the body postmortem and arranges it that the man’s corpse appears to have been sexually molested. Templeton seizes the opportunity to report on this thoroughly falsified crime, which also produces for him great acclaim. Notably Templeton’s reporting is “neither investigated under Whiting’s regime nor generally suspected” (Nochimson, 2019, p. 111) because of an explicit disregard for factchecking due to the costs in terms of manpower, and the creation of a corporate culture of reporting before other competing news outlets can on a story to reap the financial consequences of being first. Nochimson observes that both of these shamefully unethical decisions produce results “a Pulitzer for Templeton and unlimited

money to do real police work for McNulty” (2019, p. 111) so that by the conclusion of the series Simon’s polemic about the confluence of competing and intersecting, institutionally dysfunctional components of the city merge in this final Season.

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