

SHORTER RICK SNYDER: BLACK PEOPLE CAN BE CUSTOMERS, NOT CITIZENS

As Rick Snyder was announcing the takeover of Detroit's government, paving the way for an Emergency Manager for the city, his staff tweeted out this:

"Citizens of #Detroit are the customers of the city, not just the citizens. We need to figure out how to provide them great service."

It might be a nice sentiment (if many public services under Rick Snyder, especially education and services helping the poor, hadn't already been cut to make way for tax cuts for businesses, and if the entire point of an EM weren't to make further huge cuts to services).

Except that if and when Detroit officially gets an EM (there is an appeal process that will roll out over the next couple of weeks), the people of Detroit will, temporarily at least, lose their ability to elect representatives to run their city. Down the road, after Detroit has continued to disintegrate for 18 months (EMs have never turned around a city), elected representatives will be able to get rid of the EM. But until then, local democracy in Detroit will be dead.

And so at precisely the moment when Snyder moved to locally disenfranchise 40% of Michigan's African Americans – leaving half of Michigan's African Americans locally disenfranchised – he relabeled those African Americans (and Latinos, and remarkably few whites) "customers."

Black people, Rick Snyder seems to be saying, can be customers, but they can't be citizens.

We have spent the week talking about whether or

not we still need a Voting Rights Act. Given the cynical new ways politicians are using to disenfranchise people of color, I say it's time to expand it, not end it.