

USING NEW EMERGENCY FINANCIAL MANAGER LAW, THEY START DISSOLVING GOVERNMENTS IN MICHIGAN

✘ In what is likely to be just the first of several dissolutions of democratically elected city governments and school boards in Michigan, the Emergency Financial Manager of Benton Harbor, Joseph Harris, just took away all authority from the city's elected government.

I, Joseph L. Harris, the duly appointed Emergency Manager for the City of Benton Harbor, Michigan (the "City"), pursuant to the power and authority granted by Act 4 of the Public Acts of Michigan of 2011, being MCL 141.1501 et seq (the "Act"), do hereby resolve and order as follows:

WHEREAS, Section 19(ee) provides that the Emergency Manager may exercise any power or authority of any office, employee, department, board, commission or similar entity of the City, whether elected or appointed;

WHEREAS, the power of the Emergency Manager as set forth in Section 19(ee) of the Act is superior to and supersedes any such officer or entity; and

WHEREAS, now, no City Board, Commission or Authority has authority or power to act on behalf of the City as provided in the Act.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

1. Absent prior express written

authorization and approval by the Emergency Manager, no City Board, Commission or Authority shall take any action for or on behalf of the City whatsoever other than:

- i) Call a meeting to order.
 - ii) Approve of meeting minutes.
 - iii) Adjourn a meeting.
2. That all prior resolutions, or acts of any kind of the City in conflict herewith are and the same shall be, to the extent of such conflict, rescinded.
 3. This order shall be effective immediately.

Harris, the former Auditor of Detroit, was appointed last year under the Granholm administration. After Harris cut cops and firemen last year, local residents started talking about firing him.

There are two things it helps to know about Benton Harbor. First, it has long been almost entirely dependent on Whirlpool for jobs. And as Whirlpool moved manufacturing out of state and country, its operations in the city have shifted from manufacturing to call center and resort work.

Just about all the cities that have EFMs now—along with Benton Harbor, Pontiac, Ecorse and Detroit's schools—or have had EFMs—Hamtramck, Highland Park, Flint, and Three Oaks—have been gutted by the shift of manufacturing under globalization.

But Benton Harbor is particularly notable because of how segregated it is. Here's how CSM described the segregation in a 2003 report on race riots in Benton Harbor (note, the boundary between Benton Harbor and St. Joseph is the river you can see in the map above).

On one side lies St. Joseph, an Eden-

like beach town, brimming with barbered lawns, boutique coffee shops, and summer art festivals. Cross to Benton Harbor, and everything changes. White becomes black, and affluence turns to poverty. Frustrated residents sit on sagging stoops and walk by boarded-up businesses.

When Benton Harbor erupted in violence this week, the trigger was ostensibly a high-speed police chase through a residential neighborhood. It was the second such pursuit in three years, and the second to result in the death of a young black.

But as with most riots, this is a story that goes much deeper than the immediate event that lit the fuse. It's about years of pent-up frustration over that gulf that separates Benton Harbor from St. Joseph. Over the sense most Benton Harbor residents have that a fair trial is impossible in Berrien County, which encompasses both towns, and that the police force engages in practices – like high-speed chases – that would be unheard of across the river. Over the accumulated anger of being pulled over by cops too often, of having job applications rejected before they were glanced at, of the assumptions that if you live in Benton Harbor, you must be a drug dealer, a criminal, a drop-out.

[snip]

The town of 11,000 is 92 percent black. Federal figures show that the average income is \$17,000 a year.

By contrast, St. Joseph (population 8,800) is 90 percent white. Bustling with clothiers and cafes, its average unemployment rate last year was below 2 percent. Indeed, most of Berrien County is white, conservative, and affluent.

Now, Harris is black, and the other cities with EFMs aren't as segregated (Pontiac is 39% white and 48% African American and Ecorse is 52% white and 40% African American, though Detroit is 12% white and 81% African American).

But it is rather telling that the first city in MI to have its democracy taken away under Rick Snyder's EFM law is one that has long suffered under both globalization and racism. Rather than finding real solutions to those long-festered problems, we're just going to shut it down.