

**DETROIT**

**III.1**

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**ARBEITSMATERIALIEN  
WORKING PAPERS  
РАБОЧИЕ МАТЕРИАЛЫ**

**STUDIES PART 1**

**March 2004**

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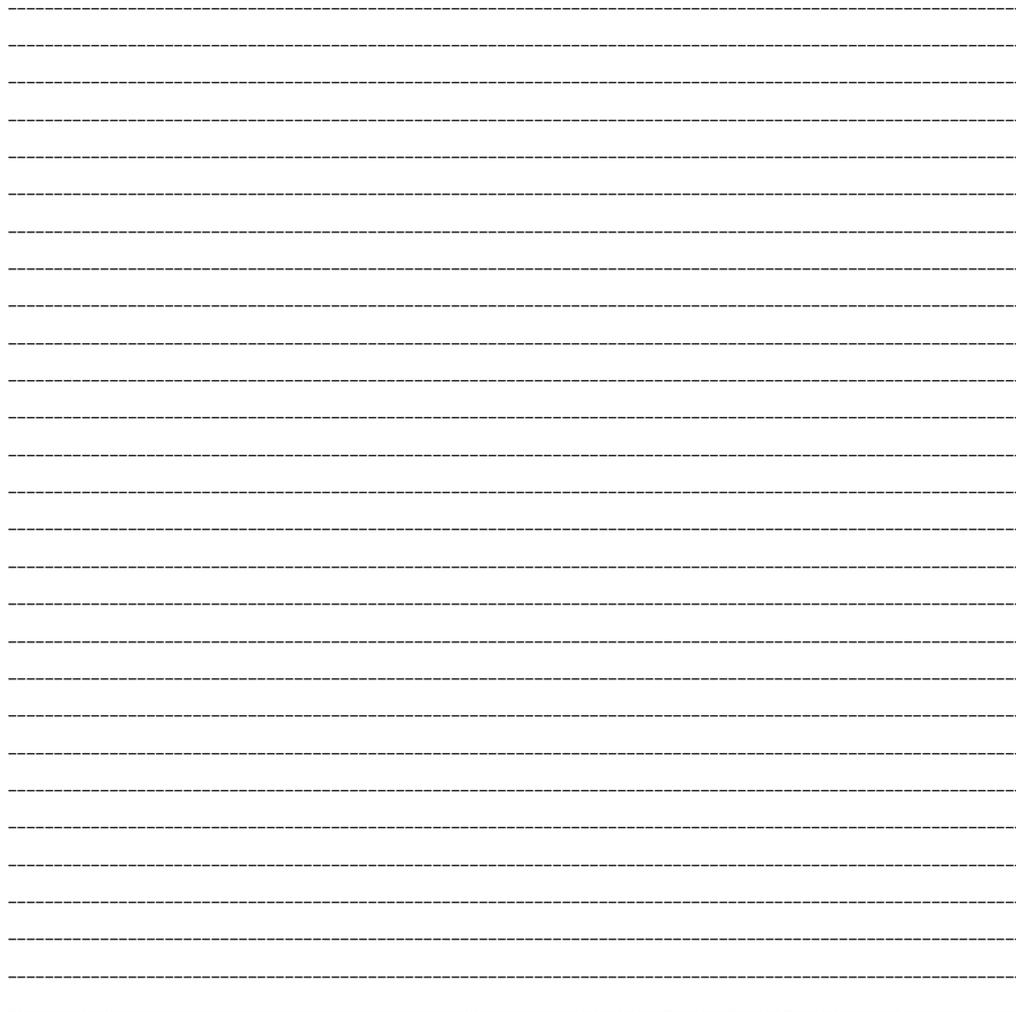
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## SUMMARY

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The 'Big Three'--*Chrysler, Ford and General Motors*--created the ultimate 'Motor City'. It was in Detroit that the first street was surfaced with concrete, and Davison Freeway, the first city motorway, was built here. Detroit was long able to boast unparalleled economic growth. During the 1920s, one skyscraper was built after another; department stores and palatial cinemas lined the streets. It is no wonder that the number of inhabitants rose from 285,700 to 1.85 million between 1900 and 1950. Detroit, as the powerhouse of the U.S., was not just a city. It served as a unique model for a new type of metropolis and a modern society.

After 1950, the boomtown became one of the first to experience the drift of population to the edges of town. The sub-urbanization of Detroit took place against a background marked not only by the rise of the car, but also by racial tension. Between 1940 and 1960, the proportion of blacks in the population grew to one-third. The white middle-classes, full of resentment against the black lower classes, fled to the periphery. In 1998, 78% of those living in the suburbs were white, while 79% of those in the inner city were black. The sub-urbanization of Detroit did not bring a creeping reduction in density, but a dramatic one. Nowadays, one third of the entire city area lies derelict. Countless buildings have been demolished. 4,000 of those still standing are vacant and abandoned: locked, boarded and walled-up. After 1950, the gigantic factories were decentralized, partly for strategic military reasons, partly owing to the drift, especially of white people, to the suburbs. As a consequence of the oil crisis of 1973 and increasing competition from foreign manufacturers, *Chrysler, Ford and General Motors* suffered immense losses. Between 1970 and 1980 alone, Detroit lost 208,000 jobs.

In view of its social problems, Detroit was looked upon as a hopeless case. In such a situation, vandalism can become frequent, as illustrated by the ritual *Devil's Night*: year after year, on Halloween, the night of the 31st of October to the 1st of November, countless empty houses and cars are set alight in Detroit.

For some years now, new investment has been flowing into the center of downtown--modestly, but steadily. Now that the social and political tension between the inner city and the metropolitan area has died down, Detroit can make capital, in individual cases, from its old title of 'Motor City'--but only the downtown is experiencing a slow urban recovery.

The articles collected in the present publication investigate the historical, socio-economic, urban and cultural processes affecting Detroit. The text section is introduced by a chronological outline of Detroit's general history. The essays introduce positions showing different approaches to a city which has faced high degrees of suburbanization, segregation, and urban decline.

Robert Fishman, together with a team of urban specialists, asked urban historians, social scientists, and working planners to rank the influences which shaped and will shape the urban development of America's metropolises. The results show the overwhelming impact of federal programs on the urban crisis affecting American cities during the past 50 years. What will influence the next 50 years? The prognoses diverge between those forecasting a continuation of the urban situation, a 'smart' change in federal policies, and socio-demographic effects.

Jerry Herron examines the 300-year history of Detroit from a distanced but participatory perspective of its history and collective memory. Herron states that Detroit's history is based on forgetting how to remember history. The statement of Henry Ford epitomizes the phenomenon of forgetting: "History is more or less the bunk ... We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today."

The journalist John Gallagher examines the 'city' of Detroit, where the urban landscape has been relocated to suburbia. Recent decades have seen a deep change in the meaning of the term 'urban landscape'. Gallagher states that in Detroit, as in no other city, the suburban landscape "with its spatial orientation, both chaotic and regimented ... has become the dominant model." During the last century, Detroit's image changed from that of the 'Motor City' to that of the 'most

segregated city in America,' in a manner exemplary for the contemporary U.S.A. Which circumstances and events shaped Detroit in these years? Jason Booza and Kurt Metzger offer precise insights into the historical, industrial, and socio-economic developments of the metropolis. Dan Hoffman analyzes Detroit according to criteria of a "Capital of the Twentieth Century". He defines the city as a product of the reciprocal growth of technology in industrial production, and of a multitude of serialized and optimized motions. The *Federal Highway Act* in 1956 is one outcome of the new self-image, as is the slogan: "What is good for *General Motors* is good for America."

In 1996, Charles Waldheim coined the term 'landscape urbanism' as a strategy for dealing with decreasing densities and indeterminate futures in the inner city as well as in the still spreading suburbs. Beyond this, his text expresses his view of Detroit, which has evolved from an intense discourse with positions held by architects, philosophers and city planners like Herbert Greenwald, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Ludwig Hilberseimer, and Paul Virilio.

Detroit's dramatic change from a 'powerhouse' to the worst case of de-industrialization and sub-urbanization in the U.S.-American city is also the focus of the article by Joe Kerr. He focuses on the correlation of economic and socio-political aspects while considering historical facts.

Urban decline and sprawl, unemployment, racial and social conflicts, sub-urbanization--in 1984, this complex of problems led to the inner city of Detroit experiencing the worst night in the history of vandalism: October 30, the annual 'Devil's Night' saw the highest rate of burning vacant buildings, vehicles, and brush or rubbish fires. Toni Moceris's study for *Shrinking Cities* chronicling 'Devil's Night' shows details and facts.

The problems of racial conflict increased rapidly in the 1950s, culminating in the riot of 1967. But its roots go back to the middle of the 19th century. Celeste Headlee's edited radio feature introduces the history of racial segregation in metropolitan Detroit.

June Manning Thomas traces population changes in light of racial disunity and segregation. Beyond this, her article scrutinizes three phenomena of the classification in 'Black' and 'White': disparity between races, discrimination, and regional fragmentation.

James and Grace Lee Boggs are outstanding personalities in Detroit for their involvement in major U.S. social movements like *Black Power*, among others. James Boggs pled in his speech of 1988 for the potential of Detroiters, one obscured by the illusion of a return to the 'good old days'. He appealed to the potential represented by, among others, self-supply through urban agricultural initiatives, as opposed to the new amusement industry which promotes gambling and entertaining consumption. Particularly nowadays, active social initiatives get public attention through their continuity and results. Grace Lee Boggs differentiates currently active projects and collectives dealing with urban agriculture which use vacant buildings and areas to fill them with new ideas.

*Techno Music* grew from a sub-cultural desire to achieve a world-known musical identity, and was later used as a brand name for the city's cultural potential: Detroit as an example of economic and urban processes influencing cultural production. Dan Sisko traces the remarkable history of *Techno*, introducing different labels, positions, and musicians.

Kevin Bingham, gardener and arborist from Detroit, researched social-political activities in Detroit, largely related to urban agriculture. The appendix lists initiatives, network projects, programs, and web links. These organizations and associations show the importance of activists as vital factors in re-activating urban processes in Detroit, currently as well as on a long-term basis.

Doreen Mende and Philipp Oswalt

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## STATISTICAL DATA: DETROIT

Statistics: Anke Hagemann and Nora Müller (*Shrinking Cities*, Office Philipp Oswald)

Data Research: Jason Booza and Kurt Metzger (Center for Urban Studies, *Wayne State University*)

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### REGION AND CITIES

#### City of Detroit

88,641 acres = 359 km<sup>2</sup>, 951,270 inh. (2000), - 8% (1990–2000)

The City of Detroit stayed in its administrative borders while the urban agglomeration was massively expanding. When we speak of the 'City of Detroit' or 'inner city', we refer to the city in these tight borders.

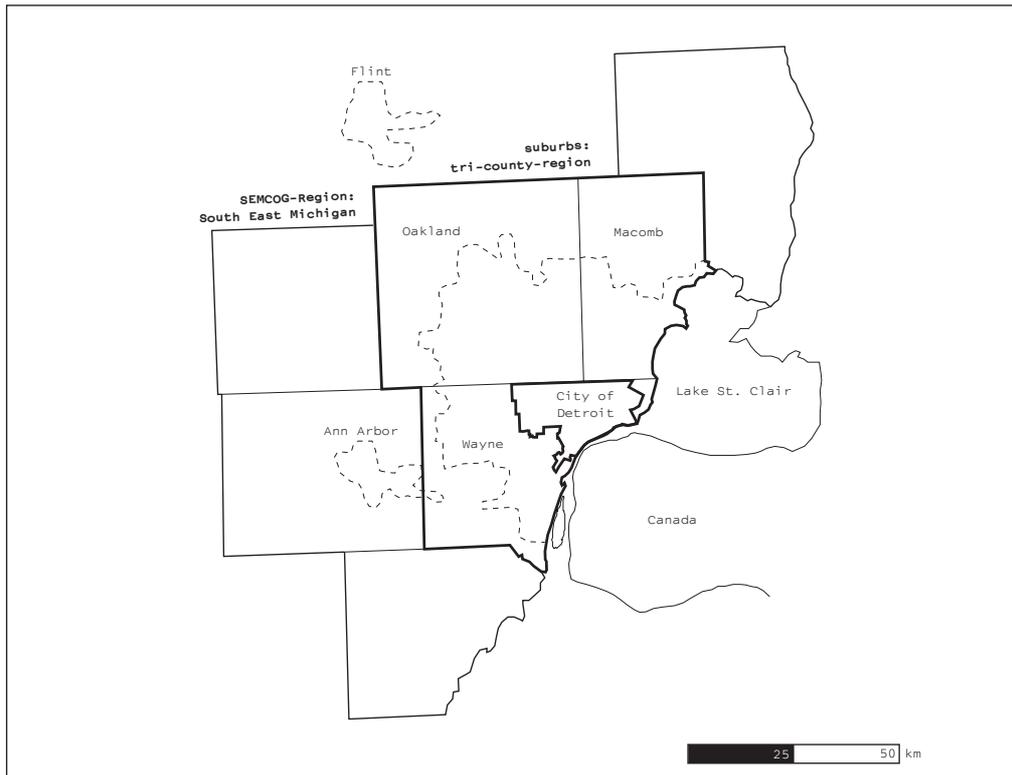
#### City and Suburbs

Macomb, Oakland and Wayne County, 1,283,055 acres = 5,192 km<sup>2</sup>, 4,043,467 inh., + 3.3 % (1990–2000)

When talking about the city with its suburbs or about the metropolitan area, we are referring to the tri-county area (including Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne Counties) for the availability of data before 1970, because these three counties were considered the metropolitan area at that time. While more counties have been added, their impact on and contribution to the metropolitan area is minimal because most of the population and industry still reside within these three counties. When we compare the city and the suburbs, we contrast the development of the city of Detroit and the three counties minus the City of Detroit (which is part of Wayne County).

#### Detroit Region

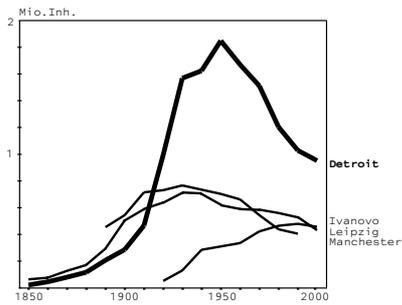
In some cases we refer to the Southeast Michigan Region (SEMCOG: Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) or to the State of Michigan.



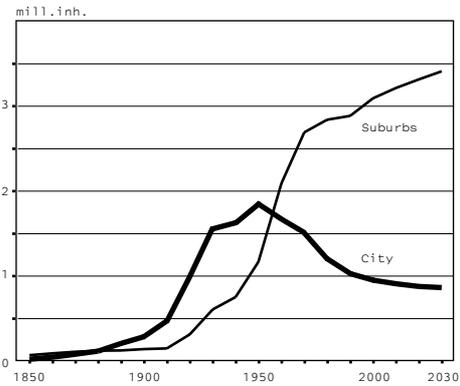
**INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON**

**POPULATION**

01 population development in four investigated cities

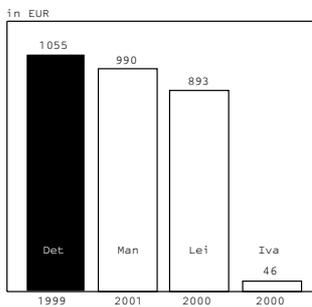


02 population development in the city of Detroit and suburbs



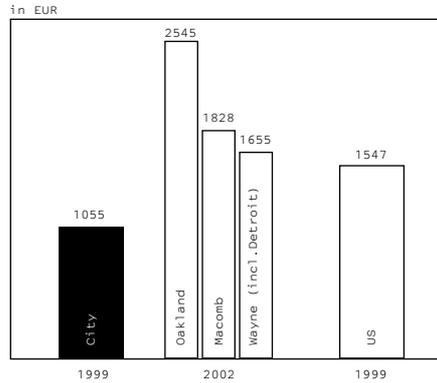
**INCOME**

03 monthly average income per capita in the four locations



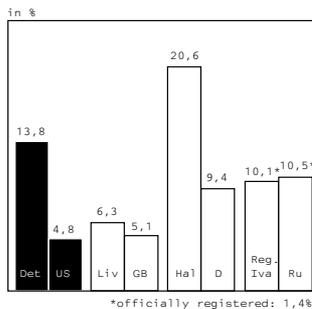
[Note: average incomes are defined differently, cf. notes]

04 monthly average income per capita in Detroit city, suburbs, and U.S.



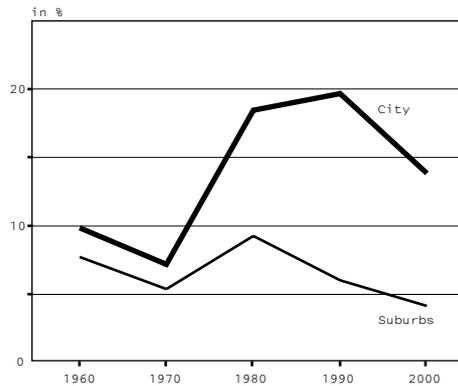
**UNEMPLOYMENT**

05 unemployment rates, international comparison (2000/2001)



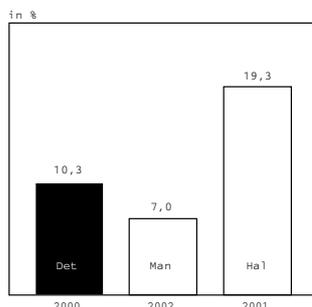
[Note: unemployment is defined differently, cf. notes]

06 development of unemployment rates in city and suburbs

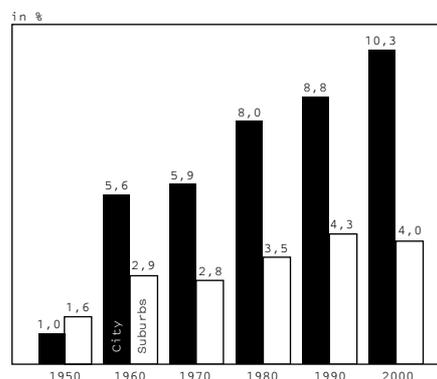


**VACANCIES**

07 estimated vacancy rates in housing, international comparison



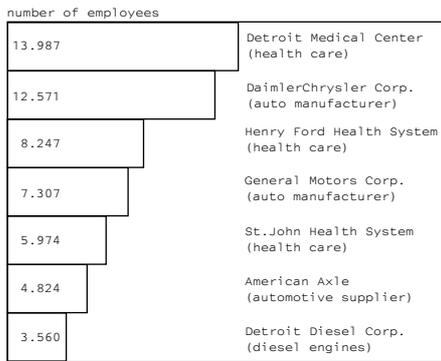
08 development of vacancy rates in city and suburbs



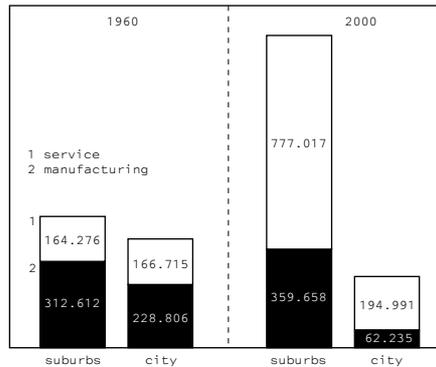
**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**DEINDUSTRIALIZATION**

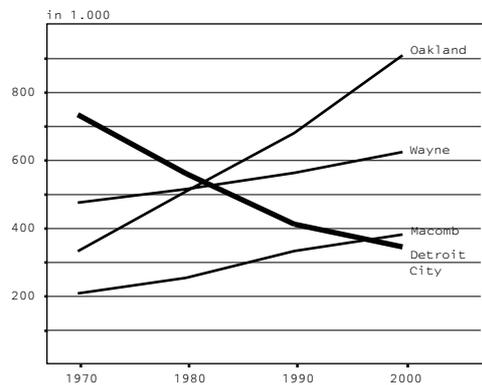
09 largest private employers in the city of Detroit



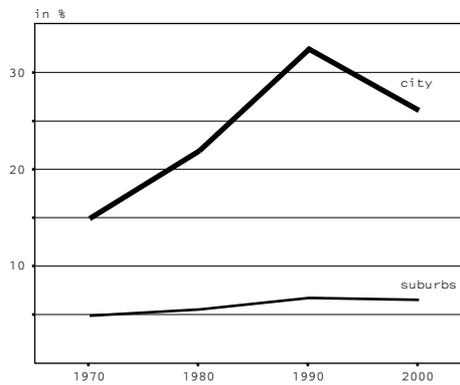
10 persons employed in manufacturing and service-based jobs, 1960 and 2000



11 total number of jobs in Detroit city and suburbs, 1970–2000

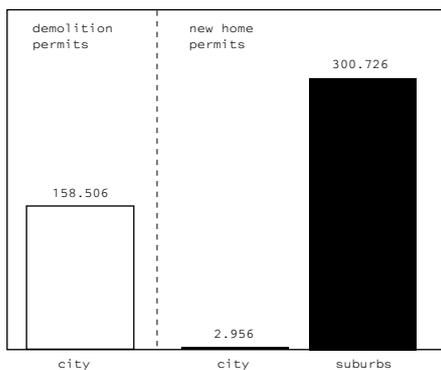


12 share of persons living below poverty line, 1970–2000

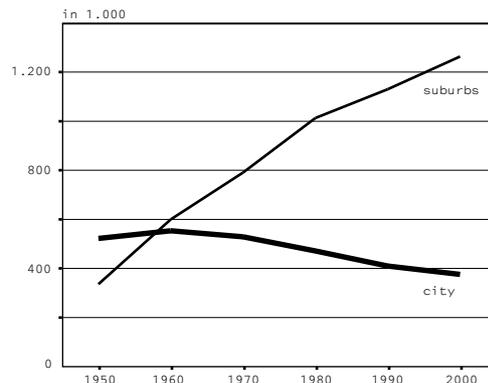


**SUBURBANIZATION**

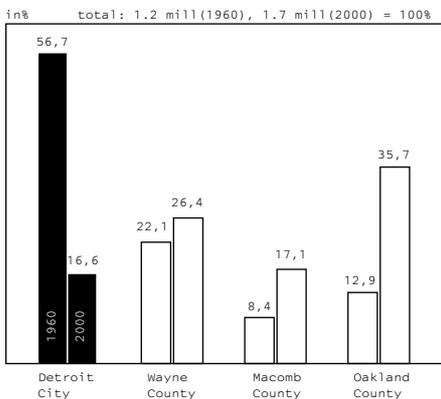
13 changes in housing stock 1970–2000: demolition and new homes



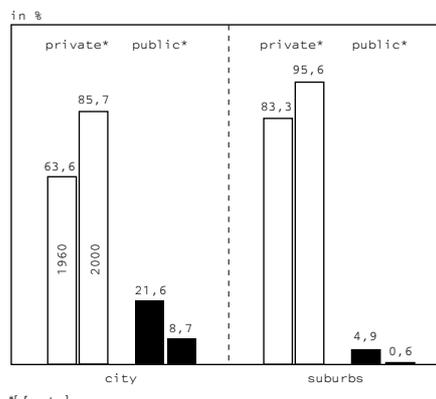
14 development of the number of housing units in Detroit vs. suburbs



15 distribution of jobs in city and suburbs, 1960 and 2000



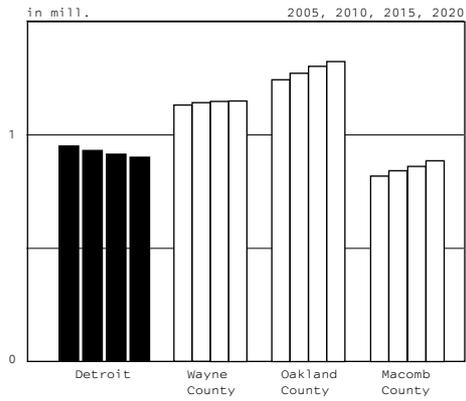
16 means of transportation to work, 1960 and 2000



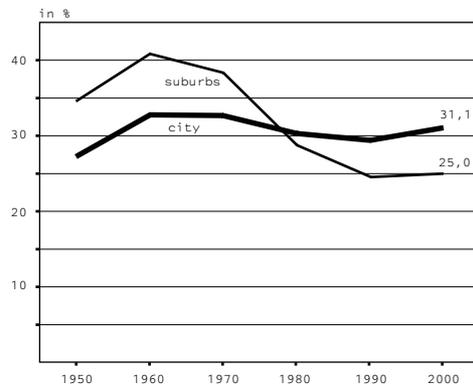
\*[cf. notes]

**DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE**

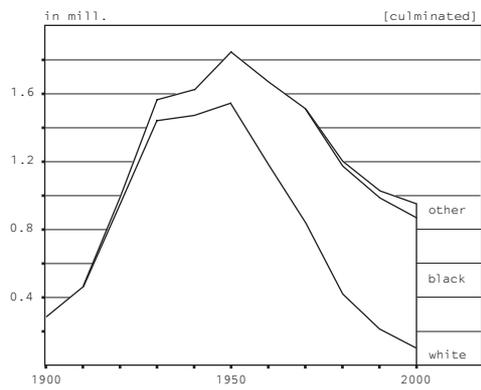
17 population projections for city and suburbs



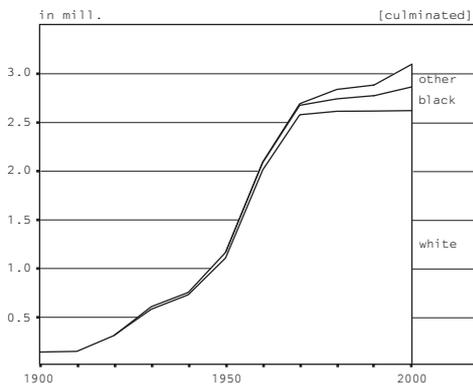
18 youth quotas--population less than 18 years of age



19 development of ethnic population in the city of Detroit



20 development of ethnic population in the suburbs





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## IN DETROIT TIME

Mitch Cope (2004)

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"French continued to be the principal language of the town, Catholicism its dominant religion, and the atmosphere of a French provincial town its pervading aura. It was a paternalistic and easygoing society, which did not enshrine hard work and competitiveness as virtues."  
(Robert Conot, *American Odyssey*)

"Along the way, the pace of change in Detroit has always seemed a beat faster, the tenor of its social life a pitch higher than elsewhere."

"Detroiters still are, as archbishop Edmund put it, 'Rather feisty as a group.' They like to speak up and express their opinion. But that feistiness is a sign of their great strength, their great determination to stick to it out, to weather the storm, to find solutions."  
(Steve Babson, *Working Detroit*)

Throughout history Detroit has been a place of fascination for artists interested in economic, labor and industrial perfection. They have come to Detroit to investigate, and to witness first hand the 'idea of Detroit.' However, the city has gone through many transformations in a short period of time, making for an unstable and unpredictable environment. Detroit has become a symbol of both the *American Dream* and the *American Nightmare*.

Physical labor is extremely important in Detroit's social structures, economy, politics and overall mentality. Built up to be a utopian working class city where you are paid well for your work, setting high hopes for a plentitude of well-paid jobs, has created a level of heightened expectations that proved impossible for many to realize. The mentality of an idealized working city still permeates Detroit's cultural diversity, although the tension this has created has overflowed several times, resulting in some of the most segregated and divided neighborhoods in America. To further complicate things, Detroit is home to some of the richest and poorest communities in the U.S., with some of the largest and wealthiest corporations in the world as well as some of the highest unemployment rates in the U.S.

The Detroit Metropolitan area has become a rhizome, connected in every way, but completely separate all the same. An open grid of abandonment and development. It is like a dysfunctional family whose members refuse to talk to each other, all sharing the same toilet, the same lights, the same house, while each individual lives in his or her own isolated world.

People have left the city to build and occupy a new utopia, the suburbs. In contrast to the city's tall skyscrapers, tight grid pattern, abandoned shops and industrial buildings, the suburbs are a landscape of massive strip mall grids, enormous enclosed shopping malls, parking lots and evenly manicured lawns. Suburban Detroiters live out the new *American Dream* of isolation, segregation and lawn mowers. For the artist, metropolitan Detroit's landscape has become a symbol for the fall of either the *American Dream* or the result of the *American Dream* fulfilled. Artists who come to Detroit today are less interested in the product of American and industrialization, but are now fixated, paralyzed by the discovery of its feces. Detroit is a great American contradiction. The vast population decline in the city has created a scene that looks as if it has never left the year 1968, kept in an eternal freeze frame, while nature grows over it. As the population in the suburbs increases, a scene appears of a perpetual motion outwards, anxiously growing, in an eternally increasing pace, while growing over nature.



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## SHRINKING CITY DETROIT

Kyong Park (2004)

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The urban condition in the first half of the last century could generally be defined as one of expansion—with populations from rural areas becoming concentrated in urban ones—at least for the developed nations of today. However, in the latter half of that century, a different form of expansion emerged, the sub-urbanization of rural territories at the periphery of developed cities, especially in the U.S.A., which, consequently, introduced the contemporary phenomena of urban shrinking in many core cities. A reversal of population movement, from the urban to the rural, creating semi-cities, a hybrid of rural and urban. As the result, the urban dynamic is no longer purely one of expansion, but simultaneously of shrinkage, with metro Detroit as a paramount example, as its center shrinks while its edges continue to expand.

And as more and more shrinking cities emerge in different nations and on different continents, we should expect that shrinkage would accelerate, while expansion would subside, both in scale and speed, globally and within each city. Urban shrinkage appears to be an economic diploma that honors a nation when it becomes fully developed, which typically excels in achieving low birth rates and high production, again in general.

Furthermore, when the migratory behavior of labor and capital is added to this mix, as it captivates more people and corporations, social conflicts occur not just between cities, suburbs and rural areas. Conflict now becomes prevalent between cities and especially between shrinking and expanding ones. And for a city to survive within the conditions of competition between cities, especially shrinking ones, or must adopt the same nomadic behavior that labor and capital have adopted. This may mean that a city has to learn to move itself, physically as well, from one place to another, just like populations and industries now do. And for a city to continue to exist as a place and a space of stability, permanency and heritage, it may, or must, become completely, or at least significant, unstable, temporal and without a history.

This is happening already, and some cities have begun to move physically, because they have become difficult to self-sustain—after pawning their assets while erasing their own histories at the same time—and without a definable future. These cities move by simultaneously developing and abandoning, along the geographical and financial vectors of urbanization, sub-urbanization and re-urbanization. They are also prepared to migrate nationally and internationally, as population, labor and capital shift from one city to another, from one nation to another, and from one culture to another. The slowness of this movement is partly due to the magnitude of this endeavor, in size and scale, of course. Yet there is a feeling of intention, a conspiracy to move a city without us noticing or dissenting, so as to encapsulate the complacency of its citizenry into the prophesy of prosperity forever—the *American Dream*?

Possibly, emanating from one of the most enduring American myths, cities, not just people, are 'pulling up stakes' to move on to another place and try again, following the speculative culture of endless opportunities. Imagine that the frontier caravans and mobile homes, along with the disposable culture of consumerism, reaching their epic dimensions in creating disposable and moving cities. Like a car, here lays no fear of 'turning off' a city, because you could always restart it any time, or simply buy, or make, or get into another one. This recalls a popular phrase among the Detroiters that speaks, "the last one to leave the city, please turn off the light."

In short, the urban condition of the first half of the new century may be defined by moving cities, with metro Detroit as a paramount example, or at least one of the earliest. I hope, the Detroit section of the project *Shrinking Cities* will investigate the contradictions between the mobile elements of cities—industries, economies, labor, culture and everything that is non-physical—with

its immobile elements--buildings, roads, land, infrastructure and everything that is physical. Its central focus could be to question the legitimacy of permanent or static cities, and to ask about the future of theories and practices of urbanism once the reality of moving cities is accepted and normalized. It could also ask if the nomadic cities are unique only to the capitalist economy, and further the inquiry into the biology of capitalism to find if it is the final solution or is now becoming obsolete.

Such shift in our positions and views about the concept of the city may be necessary, simply because we have been unable to stop these cities from shrinking. The solution is urgent, but not readily nor easily attainable. Personally, I believe the project *Shrinking Cities* would best serve us by generating new and more intelligent questions. Perhaps our failure is due to asking the wrong questions. And as a member of this project, I would like to contribute some questions of my own here.

What does it mean when industrial cities return to nature, such as parts of inner Detroit have? Does this mean the end of urbanism as we have known it, and will a new urban formation emerge from these ex-urban spaces? Or is this condition simply the second phase of the same urban dynamics that abandoned the inner city in favor of edge cities, and now is simply restarting the expansion over again from the original site? Will the edges of suburbia suffer the same kind of abandonment and decay the center experienced? Should we imagine and construct entirely different forms of economics, politics and culture if we want to stop the practice of disposable cities? Is the concept of the sustainable city merely a utopian dream or can it become a reality that could produce a better culture and environment than the current one?

Did urban renewal and redevelopment projects fail to save many American cities and their communities because they did not recognize the nomadic tendencies of the contemporary city? Did their belief in the permanency of cities instead produce isolation and containment of a selected population in deadlands, creating a new kind of segregation? Will the invasion of temporal spaces of suburban culture be the cure of the inner city blues, or should that be resisted to prescribe the concept of multiple urbanism instead? Do people currently have the choice of living in a different urbanism, and should the urban option persist and multiply?

Will Detroit and other shrinking cities bring a new kind of preservation method, such as 'storage of cities,' to preserve them at low cost now for more timely and advantaged redevelopments in the future? Is immediate demolition or development really necessary or can cultures and cities live with ruins? Must every building and space be occupied full time at all times? Must these empty buildings and spaces be molded to the existing pattern of use and to existing urban practices? If not, are they really obsolete, and must they be demolished? Is the current demolition of abandoned buildings an appropriate response to the ecology of moving cities, or is it this simply a cultural psychosis about our fears of the end of civilization, like our fear of death?

Can there be mutually beneficiary relations between unoccupied buildings and an unemployed population? Could these empty spaces be given for free to the unemployed population to self-incubate new types of labor and economy in informal, separate or semi-autonomous states? Should the principle of social welfare change from patriarchy to self-reliance, and should we even consider the creation of independent states for them?

Is perpetual growth the only economic model for cities, or are there also benefits from the de-urbanization of cities, such as the affordability of spaces and the increase of open land, as in the case of Detroit. Is the mutual action of shrinkage and expansion driven by the reality of scale? Is the concept of smallness, as opposed to bigness, the more effective scale for urban ecology? Is a new or better economic model possible through the conscious and positive reduction in size of a city, which might involve, for instance, re-designing the city of Detroit to accommodate a population of 500,000 or less?

Do cities age, like all other things, or are they eternal? What are the life expectancies of cities, and what are the elements that allow one city to remain healthier longer than others? Should



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## CHRONOLOGY: DETROIT SINE 1700

Jerry Herron (2004)

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- 1701** French entrepreneur Antoine Laumet comes to the New World to invent Detroit and himself, Antoine de la Mothe, Sieur de Cadillac

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- 1751** Now 50 years old, Detroit languishes for lack of a purpose; population of 483, including 33 slaves

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- 1763** Temporary purpose discovered for Detroit during Pontiac's War, when it becomes valuable as British outpost against encroachment of French troops

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- 1796** Detroit officially becomes part of United States following the American Revolution

---

- 1801** Detroit at 100 still lacks a purpose; population remains about 500, most residents forget to celebrate the *Centennial*

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- 1805** Detroit burns to the ground, inspiring the city's motto (still in use), *spreamus meliora; resurget cineribus* (we hope for better days; it shall arise from its ashes)

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- 1807** *Woodward Plan* adopted for laying out the city, based on circuses, boulevards, and connecting streets

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- 1809** Detroit's first newspaper, the *Democratic Free Press*, folds after one edition

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- 1812** British troops occupy Detroit for over a year during the War of 1812, making it the only major U.S. city since the Revolution to be occupied by foreign soldiers

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- 1815** Detroit is incorporated into a city

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- 1818** *Woodward Plan* abandoned in favor of nothing

---

- 1825** John R. Williams: Detroit's first elected mayor

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- 1833** Detroit's first race riot

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- 1837** Michigan becomes the 26th state; Detroit is its capital

---

- 1841** Detroit oldest cemetery opens: Mt. Elliot

---

- 1847** State capital moves to Lansing

---

- 1850** Detroit finally finds a purpose as manufacturing/transportation center; population increases ten-fold from

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- 1830** U.S. Census, to over 20,000 citizens stove and kitchen manufacturing become Detroit's leading industry

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- 1851** Detroit at 150 has about 26,000 citizens, making it 23rd largest city in the U.S.

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- 1863** Detroit's second race riot; two men killed, 30 buildings burned by mob (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 515)

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- 1896** Charles Brady King takes first automobile ride in Detroit. Henry Ford builds his first car in Detroit: the *Quadricycle* on the site of the future *Michigan Theater*

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- 1900** 68% of tri-county residents live in Detroit; 68% of white residents live in the city (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 289)  
First auto factory in Detroit was built in 1900 by Ransom E. Olds

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- 1901** World's first concrete road is build in Detroit

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- 1902** Ransom Olds becomes first auto millionaire in human history

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- 1902** First auto fatality in Detroit, George W. Bissell, dies when his carriage is struck by an automobile at the intersection of Brooklyn and Lysander

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- 1903** *Ford Motor Company* is established

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- 1908** William C. Durant founds *General Motors Company*

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- 1908** Ford's *Model T* goes on the market

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- 1909** First mile of concrete paved roadway in U.S., Woodward between 6 Mile and 7 Mile Road, at a cost of \$14,000 (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 59)

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- 1911** First painted centerline in the world created by *Wayne County Road Commission*, on River Road, near Trenton (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 59)

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- 1913** Henry Ford introduces the assembly line

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- 1914** Henry Ford announces the *Five Dollar Day*

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- 1915** World's first traffic light

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- 1917–1927** *River Rouge Construction: Ford Motor Company. Mercy General Hospital: first black hospital in Detroit. Current I-75 and I-375 interchange*
- 
- 1921** GM builds *World Headquarters* on Grand Boulevard, world's largest office building
- 
- 1924** *Chrysler Corporation* is established
- 
- 1925–1929** 95% of all downtown Detroit high-rises are completed in a five-year period
- 
- 1928** Grand opening of *Michigan Theater*
- 
- 1930** Detroit ranks above one million citizens for first time in U.S. Census; city stops growing in terms of geographic size at 139.6 square miles
- 
- 1930** Detroit rail system peaks with 30 lines and 534 miles of track inside the city (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 232)
- 
- 1933** Diego Rivera finishes 'Detroit Industry' murals at *Detroit Institute of Arts*, depicting scenes from the *Ford Rouge Plant*
- 
- 1941** Streetcars run every 60 seconds on Woodward Avenue at peak times (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 232)
- 
- 1942** Construction of the world's first urban freeway, the Davison (M-8)
- 
- 1943** Detroit's third major race riot, 34 killed
- 
- 1947** Henry Ford dies
- 
- 1948** First parking meters installed on Detroit streets
- 
- 1950** 65% of tri-county residents live in Detroit; 58% of white residents (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 289). Detroit reaches peak population / 'white flight' begins
- 
- 1953** Detroit reaches its peak population, and immediately begins to shrink
- 
- 1954** Nation's first shopping mall, *Northland*, is constructed
- 
- 1956** Detroit city rail service discontinued. *Federal-Aid Highway Act* begins to build 41,000 miles of interstate highways with 90% federal funds
- 
- 1957** Rosa Parks moves to Detroit
- 
- 1959** *Motown's* first single. I-94 Freeway: Edsel Ford
- 
- 1960** First U.S. Census to register population shrinkage for Detroit. *Motown Records* established in Detroit
- 
- 1961** Southfield Freeway [M-39]
- 
- 1963** Dr. Martin Luther King delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech in Detroit, two months before the national rally at the Lincoln Memorial
- 
- 1967** Detroit's fourth major race riot; 43 killed (begins on 12th Street)
- 
- 1969** I-75 Freeway: Walter P. Chrysler/Fisher
- 
- 1972** *Motown Records* moves to Los Angeles. I-96 Freeway: Jeffries
- 
- 1974** Coleman Young becomes Detroit's first African-American Mayor
- 
- 1975** Jimmy Hoffa disappears from suburban restaurant
- 
- 1976** I-275. 12th Street is changed to Rosa Parks Boulevard
- 
- 1980** 'Urban Farming' begins in vacant spaces
- 
- 1983** *J. L. Hudson's* closes its downtown store, making Detroit the largest U.S. city without a department store
- 
- 1984** Peak number of fires on *Devil's Night* (October 30): 810. *Michigan Theater* is turned into a parking garage
- 
- 1989** I-696 Freeway: Walter Reuther
- 
- 1990** 25% of tri-county residents live in Detroit; 8% of white residents (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 289). Detroit ring-neck pheasants are bred with northern Michigan pheasants to produce a heartier animal
- 
- 1992** Ambassador Bridge, connecting Detroit with Canada, becomes the busiest border crossing in America
- 
- 1995** *First Annual Woodward Avenue Dream Cruise*. (Cruise travels between 8-Mile and Pontiac. It does not enter Detroit.)
- 
- 2000** Detroit population falls below one million for first time since 1930 Census
- 
- 2000** Detroit has 40,000 empty lots, compared with 9,800 in New York; 4-5,000 in Chicago; 8,500 in Philadelphia (*Detroit Almanac*, p. 295)
- 
- 2000** First *Electronic Music Festival* (Memorial Day Weekend)
- 
- 2002** *Eminem* releases movie *8 Mile*
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- 2003** Detroit's newest cemetery: *Guardian Angel*
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## THE AMERICAN METROPOLIS AT CENTURY'S END: PAST AND FUTURE INFLUENCES

Robert Fishman (2000)

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The American metropolis at century's end is vastly different than what many expected just 50 years ago. At mid-century, seers envisioned a clean, rationally planned city of the future, free of long-standing problems such as traffic and poverty. The reality is more complex. We built a new metropolis that addressed some major problems while simultaneously creating a host of new ones. The next 50 years will undoubtedly contain similar surprises. In conjunction with the 1999 *Annual Housing Conference*, which looked at the legacy of the 1949 *Housing Act*, the *Fannie Mae Foundation* commissioned a survey that asked urban scholars to rank the key influences shaping the past and future American metropolis. The 'top ten' lists that resulted are the focus of this article.

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### METHODS

The top ten lists are the result of a two-stage process. First, a group of urban specialists met to offer their ideas on what items should be included in preliminary unranked lists of influences. Next, these lists were mailed to members of the *Society for American City and Regional Planning History* (SACREPH), an interdisciplinary professional organization composed of urban historians, social scientists, planning faculty, and working planners and architects. SACREPH members were asked to select and rank the "top ten influences on the American metropolis of the past 50 years," from a list of 25 choices. They were also asked to rank "the top ten most likely influences on the American metropolis for the next 50 years," from a separate list of 19 choices. (Write-in votes were allowed, but none made the top ten.) Of the 280 surveys distributed, 149--53%--were completed and returned.

Survey participants were asked to pick ten items on each list and assign them a score based on their importance, with 1 being the highest and 10 the lowest. (The same method is often used in coach's polls that rank the top college football and basketball teams.) To calculate the results, the items were weighted according to their rank. In other words, rank 1=10 points, rank 2=9, rank 3=8 points, and so on down to 1 point. Points were multiplied by the number of times an item got a particular rating. For example, if an item ranked 1 on 7 surveys, the item's score at the rating level would be 70 (7 x 10=70). The sum of an item's score (adding up each rating level) equals the total score for that item. The final top ten influences comprised those items with the top ten overall scores, with number 1 having the highest scores, and 10 the lowest.

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### RANKINGS AND SCORES

The top ten influences on the American metropolis of the past 50 years are as follows:

1. The 1956 *Interstate Highway Act* and the dominance of the automobile (906 points)
2. *Federal Housing Administration* mortgage financing and subdivision regulation (653)
3. Deindustrialization of central cities (584)
4. Urban renewal: downtown redevelopment and public housing projects (1949 *Housing Act*) (441)
5. *Levittown* (the mass-produced suburban tract house) (439)
6. Racial segregation and job discrimination in cities and suburbs (436)
7. Enclosed shopping malls (261)
8. Sunbelt-style sprawl (242)
9. Air conditioning (234)
10. Urban riots of the 1960s (219)

**The ten most likely influences on the American metropolis for the next 50 years are as follows:**

1. Growing disparities of wealth (567)
2. Suburban political majority (553)
3. Aging of the baby boomers (517)
4. Perpetual 'underclass' in central cities and inner-ring suburbs (481)
5. 'Smart growth': environmental and planning initiatives to limit sprawl (452)
6. The Internet (415)
7. Deterioration of the 'first-ring' post-1945 suburbs (372)
8. Shrinking household size (353)
9. Expanded superhighway system of 'outer beltways' to serve new edge cities (337)
10. Racial integration as part of the increasing diversity in cities and suburbs (195)

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## **THE TOP TEN LISTS EXPLAINED**

### **The top ten influences on the American metropolis of the past 50 years**

The single most important message of this list is the overwhelming impact of the federal government on the American metropolis, especially through policies that intentionally or unintentionally promoted suburbanization and sprawl. At the top of the list are the two judged most important: number 1, the massive interstate highway program, and number 2, the less obvious but highly influential policies of the *Federal Housing Administration* (FHA). Moreover, the opportunities created by these and other federal initiatives were eagerly seized by private enterprise (number 5 on the list, *Levittown*, and number 7, the enclosed shopping mall), leading to the proliferation of what number 8 on our list designates as Sunbelt-style sprawl.

The unfortunate consequences of these policies are seen in the items that identify the urban crisis that resulted when American cities lost population and jobs to the suburbs. The survey respondents emphasize the racial dimensions of this urban crisis (number 6, racial segregation and job discrimination in the cities and suburbs, and number 10, urban riots of the 1960s), for this was a period when more than four million African Americans left the rural South for cities that were already undergoing a deindustrialization that devastated their economies (number 3 on the list).

In this context, the 1949 *Housing Act* (number 4 on the list) has a strategic and perhaps tragic importance. Unlike the other federal initiatives in this list, the 1949 *Housing Act* sought mainly to benefit big cities through urban renewal: large-scale slum clearances, high-rise towers for new public housing, and downtown redevelopment. But this act not only failed to counterbalance the other, weightier pro-suburban policies of the federal government, the failures of urban renewal itself as a design and social strategy worsened the plight of the cities and thus accelerated sub-urbanization and sprawl.

#### **1. The 1956 Interstate Highway Act and the dominance of the automobile.**

Proclaimed the "largest public works program since the Pyramids," the 41,000-mile *Interstate Highway System* transformed the American metropolis in ways its planners never anticipated. The system was supposed to save the central cities by rescuing them from automobile congestion and also provide high-speed long-distance travel from city to city: "coast-to-coast without a traffic light." But the massive new urban highways, intended to move traffic rapidly in and out of downtown, quickly became snarled in ever-growing congestion, and their construction devastated many urban neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the new peripheral 'beltways,' originally designed to enable long-distance travelers to bypass crowded central cities, turned into the Main Streets of postwar suburbia. Cheap rural land along the beltways became the favored sites for new suburban housing, shopping malls, industrial parks, and office parks that drew people and

businesses out of the central cities. Finally, the interstate system was financed by a highway trust fund supported by the abundant revenue from federal gasoline taxes. Under the provisions of the 1956 act, these funds were available only for highways: The federal government paid 90% of the cost of the new highways, the localities only 10%. By contrast, localities paid a much higher percentage for investment in mass transit. This was a powerful incentive to neglect mass transit and focus a region's transportation investments only on roads. More than any other measure, the 1956 *Highway Act* created the decentralized, automobile-dependent metropolis we know today.

## **2. Federal Housing Administration mortgage financing and subdivision regulation**

Compared with the impact of 41,000 miles of interstate highways, the mortgage policies of this relatively obscure federal agency might seem unimportant. But the experts recognize that post-1945 suburbia was built on the financial foundation of the FHA's low-down payment, long-term, fixed-rate mortgage. This crucial innovation was developed during the *New Deal*, when the federal government was forced to intervene in housing finance after the older mortgage system based on down payments as high as 50% and terms as short as five years had led to massive defaults. By the seemingly simple expedient of insuring against default the long-term, low-down payment, fixed-rate mortgages issued by federally chartered thrift institutions, the FHA created the financial instrument that would help raise American home-ownership from 44% in 1940 to a record 66% today.

Moreover, the power to award or withhold mortgage insurance gave the FHA the hidden leverage to shape the postwar metropolis. The FHA developed standards for both home and subdivision design that quickly became the norm for the home-building industry. More important, FHA-insured mortgages in the two decades after World War Two were limited to race-restricted housing on the suburban fringe, the FHA refused to insure mortgages on older houses in typical urban neighborhoods. This meant that a white home-buyer who wished to stay in his old neighborhood had to seek old-style conventional mortgages with high rates and short terms. The same purchaser who opted for a new suburban house could get an FHA-insured mortgage with lower interest rates, longer terms, a lower down payment, and a lower monthly payment. By contrast, all African American households were excluded from FHA-subsidized suburbs, which meant that they were denied the benefit of better schools, rapid appreciation in home prices, and access to the booming suburban economy. Although the FHA and other federal agencies have tried since the 1960s to eliminate their anti-African American bias, their policies during the period from 1945 to 1965 have had a lasting impact on the American metropolis.

## **3. Deindustrialization of central cities**

In the years immediately following World War Two, American industry was concentrated in northern and mid-western cities whose prosperous factory districts combined state-of-the-art production facilities, the best rail transportation links in the country, and the best access to the skilled urban labor force. But these seemingly permanent advantages were lost as employers were tempted by cheaper labor outside the older urban centers and by tax breaks and other subsidies offered by suburbs and rural areas. Moreover, the urban factory districts lost further advantage as industry shifted from rail to truck transportation and from multistory urban plants to more efficient single-story structures that required more space than most cities could provide. As national corporations shifted production out of the central cities to places where costs were lowest, manufacturing jobs moved first to industrial parks in the suburbs, then to the Sunbelt, and finally out of the country. The hardest-hit industrial cities such as Buffalo, Detroit, and Philadelphia lost nearly three-quarters of their manufacturing jobs. This radical deindustrialization of what had been America's industrial heartland devastated urban economies and municipal budgets. Deindustrialization also destabilized urban neighborhoods, which were based on a

close relationship between work and residence. Perhaps most important, the deindustrialization of central cities meant that the millions of African-Americans who migrated from the South did not find the abundance of entry-level manufacturing jobs that earlier immigrants from Europe had found. Instead, most African-American migrants were trapped in a declining urban industrial economy where good factory jobs were rapidly disappearing.

#### **4. Urban renewal: downtown redevelopment and public housing projects (1949 *Housing Act*)**

The landmark 1949 *Housing Act* enshrined in its preamble the worthy goal of “a decent home and suitable living environment for every American” in federal legislation, but this goal was largely undermined by the urban renewal methods favored by the act. The legislation funded large-scale clearances of blighted urban areas, which were bought up by local redevelopment agencies and then leveled. These areas were then typically rebuilt according to the then-fashionable theories of modern architecture as high-rise towers set in massive superblocks, or, worse, remained vacant for decades. Urban renewal helped rid the cities of some of their worst slums, but the federal bulldozer also leveled many close-knit neighborhoods. The superblocks invariably lacked the vibrant street life of the older districts, and high-rise towers proved to be especially ill suited to the needs of poor families living in public housing. Many local redevelopment agencies used ‘urban renewal’ to mean ‘Negro removal,’ clearing away African-American neighborhoods close to downtown and concentrating public housing in hyper-segregated ghettos. To upgrade decaying central business districts, the 1949 act and its successors also targeted downtown blight, which they sought to remedy with new middle-class high-rise apartments and automobile-friendly shopping areas. But the middle class still opted for suburban single-family houses, and the modernized downtowns were hard pressed to compete with suburban malls. All too often, planners targeted for destruction irreplaceable historic structures and the small businesses that tended to occupy them--the two factors that gave downtown its special character. Urban renewal combined with the impact of urban highways (see number 1) and competition from suburban malls (see number 7) left many downtowns a pedestrian-unfriendly patchwork of highway ramps, empty lots, parking structures, and isolated buildings.

#### **5. Levittown (the mass-produced suburban tract house)**

The 17,000 houses that *Levitt & Sons* built on former potato fields east of New York City on Long Island from 1947 to 1951 have become the enduring symbols of the postwar sub-urbanization of the United States. These simple-looking structures in fact grew out of a highly sophisticated combination of advanced manufacturing and financial techniques that for the first time put the single-family detached suburban house within the budget of most middle-class and even working-class families. The Levitts (father Abraham and sons William and Alfred) pioneered the ‘industrialization’ of suburban tract housing by using the techniques of mass production of standard models to speed production and cut costs. These techniques proved so effective that they were soon used not only by big builders like the Levitts, but by the medium and small builders who in fact constructed the bulk of postwar suburbia. Tied to innovations in home finance introduced by the FHA (see number 2), *Levittown* meant that buying a new suburban house was often cheaper than renting an apartment in the city. The *Levittown* mass-produced house became the defining ‘consumer good’ in our consumer society--the mark of middle-class status in a middle-class society. Ironically, the original *Levittown* houses proved too small for an increasingly affluent society, but their simple flexible design made them easy to upgrade. As a result, very few unaltered *Levittown* houses remain in Levittown.

#### **6. Racial segregation and job discrimination in cities and suburbs**

The more than four million African Americans who migrated from the rural South to northern industrial cities from World War Two through the 1960s encountered an urban world already

defined by the 'color line' and 'the job ceiling.' The color line forced them to live in ghettos whose strict boundaries in the 1940s had usually been drawn during the previous great African-American migration of World War One. In ever more crowded ghettos, African Americans were forced to pay higher rents for inferior housing, and even middle-class blacks who ventured to live beyond the color line in surrounding white ethnic neighborhoods met with hostility and, often, violence. At the same time, the job ceiling limited African-American workers regardless of their skills or seniority to the lowest-paid, dead-end jobs. Although white European immigrant groups had earlier encountered prejudice and exclusion, African Americans suffered from unprecedented levels of segregation and job discrimination, which together put tremendous pressures on African-American families struggling to succeed in the supposed 'promised land' of the North.

Although the civil rights acts of the 1960s outlawed both the 'color line' and the 'job ceiling,' both survived in altered forms. For example, the ghettos tended to expand not by integration at their edge but by 'blockbusting,' in which unscrupulous real estate agents used fear tactics to force white home-owners just outside the ghetto to sell at panic prices; they then resold the houses for a large profit to African-American residents who found themselves still within the now-enlarged color line. These and other forms of racism meant that many black migrants were unable to take the route of assimilation into the suburban middle class that earlier immigrants had followed. They were instead trapped in inner cities characterized by what social scientists call "hyper-segregation": virtually total exclusion from white urban and suburban America, combined with a concentration of poverty, crime, and other indices of social disorganization.

### **7. Enclosed shopping malls**

Suburbia found the definitive equivalent to downtown shopping when architect Victor Gruen synthesized the innovations of many previous developers into the first fully enclosed, climate-controlled shopping mall, which opened in 1956 in Edina, Minnesota. The enclosed shopping mall overwhelmed the old downtown shopping districts, offering the downtown's variety of department stores and specialty shops combined with the easy highway access, ample parking, and climate control that downtowns lacked. The massive scale of an enclosed regional mall meant that American retailing would now be dominated by large development that controlled this total shopping environment as no single landowner could dominate a downtown. This corporate concentration encouraged the growth of national franchise stores at the expense of local Mom-and-Pop retailing. Under the combined influence of the development corporations, the national franchisers, and their design consultants, the enclosed mall has evolved into an ever more elaborate, totalizing environment where shopping, eating, and entertainment are cunningly synthesized to maximize revenues. The mall design formula now virtually precludes the variety and diversity that once marked public spaces—political activities in malls have become an especially contentious legal issue. Nevertheless, revenues from enclosed malls have stagnated in the 1990s as consumers sought to save time by shopping in more convenient strip malls or from catalogs or through the Internet. More than one-quarter of all existing malls are expected to fail in the next decade, and mall developers are frantically seeking newer, more enticing incarnations of the mall experience.

### **8. Sunbelt-style sprawl**

"There is no there there," writer Gertrude Stein famously observed of an early example of Sunbelt-style sprawl in Oakland, California. Where northern and mid-western metropolitan areas had expanded outward from well-defined, long-established central cities, post-1945 development in the Sunbelt very quickly left downtown and all other traditional urban forms behind and sprawled out in all directions. As developers seized any opportunity to build quickly, these Sunbelt metropolitan regions grew into centerless, borderless agglomerations where massive housing developments, regional malls, industrial parks, office parks, and strip-devel-

opment spread out in seemingly random order along the network of highways. Such areas are totally automobile dependent and as resistant to mass transit as they are to limits on growth. Although some observers claim to appreciate the surreal 'pop art' juxtapositions of function and style that these areas inevitably provide, Sunbelt-style sprawl has generated an architectural and planning backlash in the *New Urbanism*, a movement that attempts even amid Sunbelt-style sprawl to bring back the traditional urban values of well-defined town centers and edges, and walkable neighborhoods.

### 9. Air conditioning

The rise of the Sunbelt and the enclosed shopping mall would have been impossible without this now-ubiquitous technology. Invented earlier in the century to improve photographic manufacturing, air conditioning became widespread in homes by the 1950s and 1960s. Air conditioning helped transform some of the most inhospitable sites for human habitation in the country into some of our fastest-growing metropolitan areas. The spread of air conditioning, moreover, has encouraged the cocooning of America, as people learn to move as seamlessly as possible from centrally air conditioned homes to air conditioned cars to air conditioned offices, schools, malls, and entertainment centers, thus minimizing any possible contact with the natural environment. Today, more than 80% of new homes are centrally air-conditioned.

### 10. Urban riots of the 1960s

The full impact of the postwar urban racial crisis remained hidden from most of white America until the urban riots of the 1960s shocked the nation. Fueled by persistent unemployment, poor housing, and racial prejudice, the riots generally ignited at the flash point of conflict between a black ghetto population and a largely white police force. After the Watts district in south-central Los Angeles erupted in 1965, the long, hot summer of 1967 brought even more destructive rioting to Newark and Detroit; this in turn was followed by the riots that broke out after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The 1968 presidential commission headed by then Illinois governor Otto Kerner laid the blame for the riots not on outside agitators, as many believed, but on the structural racism in American society. As the *Kerner Commission* report concluded, the riots showed that the United States was becoming two societies, "one black, one white--separate and unequal" (U.S. Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1). Although the report urged that the riots become the occasion for a concerted attack on racism and social divisions in American cities, the riots in actuality produced few positive responses and mainly accelerated 'white flight' and urban disinvestment. In many cities, areas burnt out by the 1960s riots have remained devastated to this day. The riots thus mark the transition from the overcrowded ghettos of the immediate postwar period to the much larger inner cities marked by depopulation, deindustrialization, and abandoned housing.

### **The top ten most likely influences on the American metropolis for the next 50 years**

Not surprisingly, the respondents disagreed more about the future than the past. Most of those polled foresaw the continuation and even intensification of the urban crisis that has characterized the past 50 years: growing disparities of wealth, a suburban political majority, a perpetual urban underclass, the deterioration of first-ring post-1945 suburbs, and continued automobile-based sprawl into new peripheral edge cities. A smaller group, however, predicted that 'smart growth' policies would help preserve the environment and limit sprawl, this group also believed that cities would overcome racial and class divisions to become more diverse than they are now. Yet another group of respondents emphasized demographic factors: the aging of the baby boomers and shrinking household size. New technology in the form of the Internet made number 6 on the list and might well have ranked higher if the likely impact of this technology on the metropolis were clearer.

### 1. Growing disparities of wealth

The past 30 years have seen increasing concentrations of income and wealth at the top of the income scale, relative stagnation in the middle, and worsening poverty at the bottom. Our respondents expect this trend to continue in the next 50 years, with possibly dire consequences for American cities and regions, for growing disparities in income and wealth lead inevitably to an increasingly divided metropolis. If, as our respondents believe, these growing disparities of wealth will become the most important single influence on the American metropolis in the next 50 years, some of the negative consequences are detailed in the rest of the top ten list: a perpetual underclass in central cities and inner-ring suburbs and the deterioration of the first-ring post-1945 suburbs, as the struggling portions of the middle and working classes find themselves trapped in deteriorating older suburbs. On the wealthier side of the great metropolitan divide, we are likely to see the winners in our winner-take-all society isolate themselves in 'gated communities' or other exclusive preserves at the edge of the region. Other likely trends include a home-building industry increasingly focused on high-end trophy houses or tract mansions, a similar concentration in retailing on the upscale mall, office parks located near the enclaves where top executives live--locations that often leave the bulk of the employees with long, difficult commutes; and increasing disparities between the quality of the school systems and other services in elite suburbs versus less favored suburbs and inner cities. We are also likely to see new building focused not just on the outer edge of a region, but in certain quadrants favored by the affluent: for example, the northwest in Washington, D.C., the southwest in Minneapolis--St. Paul, and the north in Atlanta and Chicago. For the affluent who choose to live in gentrified neighborhoods in central cities, the rule of isolation will also govern, as the wealthy use privatization techniques ranging from private schools to special tax-and-service districts to insulate themselves from the urban crisis around them.

### 2. Suburban political majority

The suburbs rule. The suburbs will continue to rule. The suburbs now enjoy an absolute political majority over both central cities and rural areas. In the 1996 presidential elections, for example, the suburbanites (residents of metropolitan areas outside of central cities, as the *Census Bureau* identifies them) comprised 50.5% of all Americans over age 18, and they cast 52.2% of the ballots because suburbanites register and vote in greater numbers than residents of central cities (who cast 27.8% of the ballots) or non-metropolitan areas (who cast 20% of the ballots). Our respondents believe that this majority will grow and will increasingly determine policy in the next 50 years. If, as many argue, the most important future challenge for metropolitan areas will be to create some kind of effective regional governance for both central cities and their suburbs, this will happen only in ways the suburbs support. Nevertheless, the fact of the suburban political majority leaves many important questions unanswered. In the past 50 years, the suburbs have used their political clout to promote rapid growth for their own communities and isolate themselves and their tax bases from urban problems. Today, many suburban leaders have come to believe that the well-being of their own communities depends on regional cooperation to limit growth at the edge and reinvigorate their central cities. Moreover, if the predicted deterioration of older, first-ring suburbs takes place (see number 7), these less affluent suburbs might form coalitions with the central cities against their more affluent neighbors on the edge. Thus, the suburban political majority could mean continued divisions between the suburbs and the central cities, or it could mean the opposite: regional coalitions and 'smart growth' (see number 5).

### 3. Aging of the baby boomers.

Because of the sheer size of the baby boom generation--the 80 million Americans born between 1945 and 1964 who now comprise 30% of our total population--their needs have determined the most important trends in metropolitan development. This has meant not only the explosion

of Levittown-style tract houses bought by the parents of the baby boom generation, but also the growth of Sunbelt-style sprawl that has been the over-whelming choice of the baby boomers themselves. But this automobile-dependent suburban environment currently offers little provision for the aged. The baby boomers are now at or near the peak of their earning capacity, but by 2030 the estimated 61 million surviving boomers ages 66 to 84 will constitute 18% of our population (compared with 11% for that age category today). Indeed, by 2030 a record 32 million Americans are predicted to be 75 years of age or older, double the number today. Beyond the physical difficulties of driving and home maintenance in the typical suburban environment, the suburban "communities of limited liability" have made few social investments in caring for the aged and dependent. But suburbia has already shown an unexpected capacity to adapt itself to new needs—for example, older people using empty mall corridors each morning as their walking tracks and social clubs. More important, developers are pioneering new forms of suburban assisted-care living that combine elements of condominium apartments and nursing homes. And new kinds of flexible transit that combine aspects of taxi and bus service might ease the mobility problem. If crime rates continue to decline in large cities, empty nesters might increasingly sell their suburban tract homes to move to urban apartments, where a full range of services can be found within walking distance. But most aging baby boomers will probably be forced to struggle with a suburban environment that responds inadequately to their needs.

#### **4. Perpetual 'underclass' in central cities and inner-ring suburbs**

This prediction represents perhaps the most disturbing implication of this survey's number 1 prediction of growing disparities in wealth. If the trends in our winner-take-all society have disproportionately benefited the top 5% who have isolated themselves in elite suburbs or gentrified urban cores, these same trends have left behind an under-class—disproportionately African American and Hispanic—stranded in our inner cities. Although recent government policy—most notably *Empowerment Zones* and the *HOPE VI* housing program—have attempted to reverse past policy errors, there is little evidence that the relatively limited government role can deal with the scope of the problem. Moreover, the full effect of the 1996 welfare reforms that limit eligibility to five years have yet to be felt for the core welfare population. In the past, great cities have effectively combated poverty by providing richer opportunities for education (both formal and informal) than rural areas. But the crisis of the urban school systems has produced a profound mismatch between the skills required in the new urban service economy and the very limited skills most inner-city young people bring to the urban job market. This mismatch virtually guarantees the perpetuation of an urban underclass well into the 21st century.

#### **5. 'Smart growth': environmental and planning initiatives to limit sprawl**

'Smart growth' means essentially planned growth, especially planning initiatives to limit sprawl at the edge of a region and preserve open space. But proponents of 'smart growth' realize that for such measures to be effective at the edge, they require action throughout the region. In the Portland, OR, metropolitan region, the national showcase for 'smart growth', planning initiatives include:

- an urban growth boundary to stop sprawl,
- efforts to focus growth around transit lines and their stops,
- redevelopment of the downtown to give the region a coherent focus,
- a new emphasis on 'infilling' within already developed areas rather than 'greenfield' development at the edge,
- design guidelines developed by the *New Urbanism* that emphasize walking-scale communities instead of automobile-based sprawl,
- an elected regional government to administer these programs and maintain popular support and debate.

As the Portland model shows, 'smart growth' must be backed by a wide-ranging regional coalition that includes good working relationships between the central city and its suburbs, and between urban and rural interests. It also requires good working relationships among the different levels of government: municipal, county, state, and federal. These conditions have rarely been met in American cities and regions. Nevertheless, the grassroots desire to stop sprawl and the loss of open space--combined with the economic imperative that regions with a high quality of life succeed best in the global economy--have made smart growth a movement that politicians and developers must reckon with.

## 6. The Internet

As the English urbanist Sir Peter Hall has observed (1998), the difficulty in predicting the impact of the Internet on our metropolitan areas can be compared with the difficulty observers faced 80 years ago in predicting the impact of the automobile. Intelligent observers then could see that the automobile would change the structure of American cities, but they could not actually imagine Los Angeles or the other automobile cities that would eventually emerge. In the next 50 years, as the exchange of information increasingly replaces the physical production and movement of goods as the primary function of cities, the Internet will inevitably change the structure of our built environment, but we cannot imagine today the new metropolitan areas that will emerge. Perhaps the most that can be said at present is that, compared with previous means of (physical) communication such as canals, railroads, or highways, the information super-highway is radically flexible. While railroads tended to favor the big cities and highways favored the suburbs, the Internet can potentially spur economic development on the most remote mountainside, in the densest downtown, and anywhere in between. Some observers assert that the Internet will doom cities to obsolescence as cyberspace communication replaces the face-to-face contacts that cities used to provide. Others see big cities reborn as hip environments where the art world and other urban-based centers of creativity meet the new technology of communications.

## 7. Deterioration of the 'first-ring' post-1945 suburbs

When Levittown and similar suburbs were built soon after World War Two, they seemed the incarnation of the *American Dream*. But many of these suburbs have aged badly: Houses and lots are small compared with more recent designs, the residents themselves are aging, and even the plywood has started to come apart after 50 years. Where these areas had once defined the outer edge of the metropolis, they now comprise a first ring, too close to the central city and its problems, but now far from the affluent edge. Such first-ring suburbs often lack the tax base and local government agencies to deal with the social problems that have been unexpectedly thrust on them. Yet the well being of the first-ring suburbs is of great concern not only to those who live there, but also for the future of the whole region. If these suburbs deteriorate, this will mean an increasingly divided metropolis as the affluent flee ever farther to the edge, the poor are trapped in increasingly isolated inner cities and adjacent first-ring suburbs, and the middle class divides between those who are able to follow the affluent to the edge and those left behind in deteriorating areas. But if these suburbs are able to use both public and private resources to upgrade their housing stock and take advantage of their strategic location between the core and the edge, they could become new models for adaptive reuse, smart growth, and social diversity. If so, the first-ring suburbs could again incarnate a new version of the *American Dream*.

## 8. Shrinking household size

The size of the average American household has shrunk by 26% during the past 50 years, and experts predict that it will decrease slightly in the next decade. Our respondents believe that this trend will continue for the next half century. Not only are traditional two-parent families having fewer children, but such families make up a shrinking percentage of total households. Over the

past three decades, the proportion of households consisting of married couples with children declined from 40 to 25%. The remaining three-quarters of American households typically consist of smaller, nontraditional single-parent families, couples living without children, and one-person households. As with the aging of the baby boomers, numbers alone cannot predict the role that shrinking household size will play in our cities and regions. Suburban developers have for some time provided non-traditional housing types for non-traditional households, including a wide range of condominiums and rental apartments. The continuing shrinkage will probably mean that the present identification of suburbia with the single-family detached house and the traditional family (already somewhat mythical) will soon seem as outmoded as 'Leave It to Beaver' reruns. A more speculative possibility is that shrinking household size will encourage the revival of central cities, as nontraditional households seek the flexibility, convenience, and diversity that cities provide.

### **9. Expanded superhighway system of 'outer beltways' to serve new edge cities**

TEA-21, the 1998 *Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century* (the latest successor to the 1956 *Highway Act*), allows regions to 'flex' some of the record \$218 billion in federal funds to be spent by 2006 to mass transit and other non-highway uses. But most of our respondents believe that the money will be used in the old-fashioned way: to lay more concrete for more highways. Almost every American region has plans for a massive and expensive outer beltway to relieve the congested inner beltways of the 1956 act. And like the earlier beltways, these will almost surely draw development to an even more remote edge of the region. The consequences of this expanded super-highway system would thus intensify the other pre-dictions on the list: increasing distance between rich and poor, increasing stress not only on central cities but on the first-ring suburbs stuck on the declining inner beltway, loss of open space at the edge of the region, and (ironically) more traffic congestion as drivers are forced to travel longer distances commuting between widely scattered office parks on the expanded outer beltways.

### **10. Racial integration as part of the increasing diversity in cities and suburbs**

This prediction goes against the trend indicated by most of the other items, but enough respondents chose it and the related number 5 ('smart growth') to win them a place in the top ten. If the suburban political majority chooses to use its power to promote 'smart growth' rather than sprawl, and if economic trends reverse themselves to promote economic and racial equality, then central cities and perhaps first-ring suburbs will be able to support genuinely diverse neighborhoods. Already a few areas--Adams-Morgan in Washington, D.C.; West Mount Airy in Philadelphia; Jackson Heights in Queens, New York City; and South Pasadena in Los Angeles--are home to an exciting if bewildering mix of races, languages, cuisines, and cultures. Such neighborhoods could be the proving grounds for a new and vibrant multicultural identity for the whole country. But, as the rest of our list indicates, given other trends, the future of racial integration and cultural diversity remains endangered.

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## I REMEMBER DETROIT

Jerry Herron (2004)

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Detroit is a really old place, as far American places go, and this one has gone about as far as a place can and still continue to exist. But it does. Detroit has existed for 300 years, ever since a deal-maker named Antoine Laumet paddled up an as yet unnamed river one July morning in 1701 with a group of like-minded speculators, cruising for local opportunities—it was the 24th, a Sunday. There were 25 large canoes in all, carrying a hundred some men—50 *voyageurs*, like Laumet, 50 soldiers, two priests (one Jesuit and one *Recollet*), as well as Laumet's nine-year-old son, Antoine. A number of Algonquins accompanied the party as independent contractors. Laumet was 43 years old, a nobody, economically speaking. If he was going to make it in New France, he didn't have any time to spare. He and his party had been surveying the coastline for a couple of days, trying to figure out the best spot to establish an outpost. Finally, they settled on a place where the river narrows and then takes an odd, east-to-west bend, almost doubling back on itself. (Because of that quirk, and because the river would one day become an international border, Detroit today has the peculiar distinction of being the only place in the U.S. where Canada lies to the south.) Think of it this way. If you remember your high school health-class, and if you remember that diagram of the see-through human body, showing the various organs, liver and kidneys, etc., maybe you also remember the duodenum, which is where the stomach skinnies to a narrow tube and then wraps down and up and around before emptying into the intestines. Adults often get re-acquainted with the duodenum because that's one of the places where things begin predictably to go wrong when a person reaches a certain age. Same goes for Detroit. But that's skipping ahead. Like the duodenum, between two bigger things at either end, Detroit's location is similar, on the narrows of a river that connects two of the great lakes, Erie to the south, and Huron to the north. No wonder Laumet liked it. Anything navigating these vast inland waterways, especially anything English, would come within a canon shot of whoever commanded the heights above the strait.

Laumet ordered his company to put in along a stretch of sandy beach on the north bank. It was a great relief for the *voyageurs*, as they were called, rough men, squatty with tree-trunk thighs, tough from carrying boats and baggage overland (their packs weighing 90 pounds or more, not to mention the canoes that they had to carry, whenever the water became un-navigable), men with barrel chests, muscles hardened by paddling. No standing up in those large canoes, 25 feet in length, no histrionic posing, the birch bark delicate and easily punched through—they had to be constantly pulling the canoes ashore to patch the seams with pine gum. No matter what awaited them on land, it had to be better than the punishing life in one of those boats. So they splashed ashore, pulled up their boats, and then climbed a low bluff, about 20 feet high, to see how things looked from up there. The choice seemed ideal, with good sight lines up river and down, so Laumet planted his flag, and knelt to thank God for granting him such bountiful country, claiming everything in sight for his sovereign, King Louis of France. Not that he really needed to. Adrien Joliet had already navigated the Detroit River in 1669, followed by Robert La Salle ten years later. The claims of New France were well established (if not universally respected) by the time Laumet arrived, in other words. But those earlier explorers were only passing through. Laumet was here to stay—or at least that was his plan. He wanted to found a vast, baronial holding, modeled on the great country estates of France.

In keeping with that lofty vision, he decided to invent a better-sounding name for himself—one appropriate for a great lord of the New World. And that's how he's usually remembered these days, if he's remembered at all: Antoine de la Mothe, Sieur de Cadillac. "De la Mothe," he

plucked out of thin air--as to the "Sieur de Cadillac," Laumet was Sire of nothing, except a lot of nerve, his home village in Gascony, St. Nicolas de la Grave, being nowhere near Cadillac. But who was going to say no? Nobody. „Since you have directed me to render an account of it, I will do so," Cadillac began his report to the Sun King, Louis XIV:

" ... the freshness of the beautiful waters keeps the banks always green. The prairies are bordered by long and broad rows of fruit trees which have never felt the careful hand of the vigilant gardener. Here, also, orchards, young and old, soften and bend their branches, under the weight and quantity of their fruit, towards the mother earth, which has produced them ... [O]ne sees assembled by hundreds the timid deer and faun, also the squirrel bounding in his eagerness to collect the apples and plums with which the earth is covered ... The hand of the pitiless reaper has never mown the luxurious grass upon which fatten woolly buffaloes, of magnificent size and proportion. There are ten species of forest trees ... In a word, the climate is temperate, and the air purified through the day and night by a gentle breeze ... None but the enemies of truth could be enemies to the establishment [of the town Cadillac proposed] so necessary to the increase of the glory of the king." (*Detroit Perspectives*, pp. 27–28)

It was a lie, of course, this exigent little rhapsody about a virgin, ownerless paradise, with fruit and wildlife thick upon the ground, and nobody there but Cadillac to gather them in, just like his new name was a lie, with its bogus allusion to noble lineage, which is only to say that Cadillac was a visionary man of his time, neither better nor worse than might be expected, although his town-building scheme was both personally shrewd and also more enlightened than the usual snatch-and-run tactics of colonial exploiters. (He laid out plans for what would become St. Louis and New Orleans, as well as Detroit, although he would not be the one to benefit from this vast scheme.) But this isn't his story, regardless of how indicative that story turned out to be. "This Cadillac is the most uncooperative person in the world," his commander at Port Royal, Louis-Alexandre de Meneval, had written in a dispatch to the king, "a scatter-brain who has been driven out of France for who knows what crimes." Cadillac failed to achieve the preferment he sought, the seigneurie of Detroit. After a rocky, up-and-down career, he'd end up back in France, governor of a provincial wide-spot-in-the-road. Somebody else's problem to solve.

Instructive though this career might have been there wasn't anything unusual about Laumet's troubles. New World speculators often fell victim to their own hype, some much more spectacularly, and lethally, than Cadillac. La Salle, for instance, who had been the first to navigate the Detroit River in a sailing ship, was assassinated by angry co-investors in a failed Texas land venture in 1687, which lends whole new dimension to the idea of a hostile take-over. Nevertheless, there was something special about Cadillac's situation and the way Detroit, even then, began to assert itself. Politics, and greed, absentee landlords and the defeat of ideals, the curdling of expectations artificially sweetened with lies: it's our story all right. The problem with Detroit--from the very beginning--has been figuring out what the place was good for, and then figuring out who to blame when things turned out other than as planned. It's doubtful that any other city has given rise either to so many idealistic propositions, or to so much blaming--or to so much signifying as a result. Detroit was providing a type for this made-up country of ours almost a century before the United States even existed.

Trappers and traders arrived, just as planned, and set up business with the local Indians, whom Cadillac invited to settle near his stockade, making Detroit, on the spot, perhaps the largest minority-run city in the North America. (If he was going to live baronially, he'd need peasants to do the work.) Contemporary estimates place the combined population of Detroit, by 1705, at about 2,500--20% white, 80% minority, just as it is today. (The population of New York City, at the time, was 7,000; Philadelphia 6,700; Boston 4,400.) *Tsugsagrondie*--"where the beaver are more plentiful"--is what the Wyandots called the country Cadillac had claimed as his. All those bountiful meadows and orchards notwithstanding, animal pelts were about the only thing of value that New France had to offer the Old World, at least for the time being: bear, elk, deer,

marten, raccoon, mink, lynx, muskrat, opossum, wolf, fox, and beaver. But the European market became so glutted with product that King Louis tried to close down settlements and limit trapping in order to maintain prices. Cadillac was hauled up on charges in 1705, and acquitted of what we'd probably now call insider trading. In the end, the settlement, like his career, was largely a bust. The population began to shrink, from a high of about 200 settlers who were living here by the time Cadillac left in 1711. (The native population suffered no such decline, but this isn't really their story either.) There were periodic skirmishes, even pitched battles, like the ones with the Ottawas in 1706, during which the town lost its priest, Father Nicolas de L'Halle. In 1712, the Fox Indians put the settlement under siege for 19 days, but to no avail. In 1716 Louis XV revoked all Cadillac's local land grants. By then, half the European population had left. What kept them here--the ones who stayed--isn't clear, really; about as many people as you'd be standing around with at the luggage claim in an airport nowadays, waiting for your bags. That was all the town amounted to. The stockade walls had fallen into disrepair, wild animals wandered the streets. (As to those streets, there were four, Rue St. Joseph, Rue St. Jacques, Rue St. Anne, and Rue St. Louis. The whole settlement was contained within an enclosed square less than 200 feet on a side--an area smaller than a typical high school stadium.) The place looked so forlorn that Peter Charlevoix, a clergyman who visited in 1721, thought the settlement had been abandoned. That was probably the first time, but it wouldn't be the last, when a tourist was led to ask if anybody still lived in Detroit, and if they did, then why?

Just when the place was all but done for, somebody else's troubles turned out to be good business for Detroit. Not the last time that would happen either. By the 1730s, the continental bickering of England and France had spilled over to the colonial frontier. Not until then did Cadillac's outpost seem to be worth much to anybody--anybody except the native people who had lived here for hundreds of years, in numbers far greater than the European late arrivals: Hurons, Ottawas, Cippewas, Sacs, Foxes, Miamis, Potowatomis among them. The Indians had a lot clearer idea than we did what they were about. *Yondotiga*, "great village," is the old Algonquin name for their settlement that existed long before Cadillac's. The *Yondotega Club* on East Jefferson is about the only recollection left today of that earlier residency. (Jefferson is what Cadillac's main street, Rue St. Anne, would come to be called, and it still is.) The choice of name the *Yondotega* was meant to be ironic, I suppose, by the society leaders, a century ago, who founded a club so exclusive, behind its high brick walls and its Georgian façade, that Henry Ford--the original one--was supposedly denied membership, despite his being the world's first certified billionaire. The feeling was that his money was simply too recently made. True story or not, the club is still there, where it's been since 1891 on the water side of Jefferson, and so are a few of the neighboring houses built by Detroit's 19th-century gentry-mansions, some of them, all 'historic.' But no one actually lives there any more. The places left standing have either been built over, or else retrofitted by lawyers or accountants or architects for business purposes, or else they've given way to parking lots, and whatever else has followed.

Next door to the *Yondotega* there's a combination liquor store, beauty supply, ATM, and Chinese carryout restaurant. All under one roof. It's an interesting piece of architecture, with period-look brickwork and a faux-neoclassical façade. The building's twin pediments--replete with lunettes--quote the *Yondotega* architecture back in a way just short of mockery. Or maybe not short at all. The parking lot's full, it's a busy place. You'll need to watch where you walk or drive, since there's plenty of broken glass, old whiskey and beer bottles, discarded cups and wrappers--the material residue of spontaneous sociability. From the parking lot, which sits on a slight incline, you can look down, over the *Yondotega* wall, into their sequestered courtyard, where not nearly as much seems to be happening. There are two entrances to the commercial interior. Walk in the left-hand side, and you're in *Han Beauty* supply (straightener and wigs a specialty--guaranteed "100% human hair"). Take the door on your right, and you're in *Amori's Marketplace*, "liquor, beer, wine, imported & domestic." The store is huge, and immaculate, and unexpectedly

urbane. No bulletproof glass, no high-security apparatus. Two Arab clerks preside over the goods, from *Dom Perignon* in special wooden presentation boxes to half pints of *Mohawk* vodka and a cooler full of 40-ounce malt liquor bottles. Over in the corner, three ancient Chinese cooks are getting the steam tables ready for the lunchtime rush at *Fu Wah Food* and *Deli*. There's probably a little parable here, waiting to be told, about adaptive re-use and making do in the city. But who's going to tell it? That's a kind of parable too, the fact that nobody will, because there's nothing left to say about Detroit. Not any more. At least that's the popular wisdom about the place. It's not just lately that things got to be this way, though, which is the fundamental truth people often get wrong. They imagine they are the first generation to live under conditions of enforced nostalgia, bereft of an idyllic 'before' that we can only long for, now, sentimentally, 'after.'

But the truth is, we've been nostalgic from the very start--all the dreamers who came to America imagining a 'New Jerusalem', or some other version of synthetic paradise. And the future has always looked better, purer, more ideal when contemplated retrospectively, from that moment in the past when we first thought it up, before harsh realities intervened. Before we actually did anything. Nostalgia for the future became the basis for all subsequent American dreaming, even before there were Americans--strictly speaking--to propagate the vision further. It was in the very nature of this place to call forth such imagining. Antoine Laumet would have understood what I'm talking about. "The hand of the pitiless reaper," he rhapsodized, in his letter to King Louis, "has never mown the luxurious grass upon which fatten woolly buffaloes, of magnificent size and proportion." This is not merely a prelapsarian vision, from before the fall. Cadillac has imagined himself *all* the way back--he's there at God's elbow, present at the creation before Adam (or anybody else) had shown up in paradise: "It is in this land, so fertile, that the ambitious vine, which has never wept under the knife of the vine-dresser, builds a thick roof with its large leaves and heavy clusters, weighing down the top of the tree which receives it, and often stifling it with its embrace." (*Detroit Perspectives*, p. 27) He knew enough to know the place wasn't as empty, or as bountiful, as he'd made out. It was not the reality, though, but a paradisaical nostalgia that he was trying to get down on paper. And so he did--for all the good it would do him in the end, which was none at all.

In 1763, France lost the Seven Years War to the English. In the colonies, the conflict became the French and Indian War. At the end of it, Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit quit being French and it also quit being Fort Pontchartrain, the name Cadillac invented to flatter his patron, Count Pontchartrain (King Louis' Minister of Marine), and also to identify the straits, *le détroit*, that made this a strategically appealing location. Cadillac's trading post simply became Detroit (minus the accent). The English colonial village of about 500 citizens would subsequently get Americanized, but not until 15 years after the Revolution ended. It took that long to get the British to give Detroit up. That's an indicative story too about enforced migration and not knowing when to let go. The Brits would be the first, maybe, but surely not the last to quit this place not by choice, but because 'events' had made them go, their nostalgias trailing after them. During the War of 1812, the town became English again for a little while before returning to American hands for good, or ill, depending on the view a person takes. For over a 100 years, the fort continued to be the main reason for Detroit's existence, urbanity having not yet supplanted strategic significance as a reason for being. Cadillac's little stockade gave way to a more substantial enclosure by the mid-18th century. Then came a succession of increasingly modern fortifications. Fort Larnault, built by the British during the Revolution, grew into Fort Detroit when they lost, and then in the War of 1812 that gave rise to Fort Shelby. Finally, in 1827, when forts no longer seemed necessary, and new land close to downtown was, Fort Shelby was dismantled, and the remains were dumped into the Detroit River as landfill. Not until then did the city seem to have sufficient warrant of its own for existing. The population at that point was 2,222. The size of the town was 2.56 square miles, ranking Detroit as the fifty-third largest municipality in the 1830 *U.S. Census*.

Time passed, and along with it--among other things--the *University of Michigan*, which was removed from Detroit to Ann Arbor in 1837. This was followed by the removal of the capital to Lansing in 1847, ten years after Michigan became a state. The change was purportedly for reasons of moral probity, Detroit by then having already acquired a reputation for citified dissoluteness. (The population was 21,019; the size, 5.85 square miles, making Detroit the 23rd largest city in the country.) During the Civil War, Detroit was the scene of various upheavals--draft riots and racial melee, heroic escapes on the Underground Railroad, unprecedented numbers of enlistments and subsequently of casualties. This is where the *Grand Army of the Republic*--America's first veteran's organization--would make its national headquarters, in a great castle on Grand River Avenue. "All quiet on the Potomac," people greeted each other on the streets, at war's end. One of them, Sergeant Wesley D. Pond of the 4th Michigan Cavalry, snatched Jefferson Davis' dressing gown as a war souvenir. He brought it back to Detroit with him, where it was displayed proudly on civic occasions. James Vernor would hang it in the window of his drug store, at 235 Woodward, on the corner of Clifford, with a little hand-lettered card identifying what the hapless garment was. Vernor was a veteran himself, who would profit in an unexpected way as a result of the War. When he enlisted at age 19--also in the 4th Michigan, along with Sergeant Pond--he left some flavoring concoctions aging in his basement, in oak barrels. By the time Vernor returned home, he'd forgotten all about them, but one, at least, he liked the taste of when he tried it. So he used it as the basis for a ginger drink. This meticulous young man (holder of Michigan pharmacist's license no.1) had invented what would become America's first successful soft drink. It was potent. (Hospitals used it as a tonic.) The stuff would go right up your nose: "Vernor's Ginger Ale Deliciously Different! Flavors mellowed in wood 4 years." By 1880, Vernor's modest hometown had a population of 116,340. For 30 years, as the citizenry grew, it would occupy the same rank among U.S.-cities, holding steady at number 17. Then, all at once, life changed in ways that would leave nothing the same, here or anywhere else.

Detroit, the dynamic. City beautiful, city of trees. That's how James Vernor's hometown variously captioned itself. "In Detroit, Life is Worth Living," a vast outdoor billboard proclaimed, above the Campus Martius at the very center of downtown. I have an image of that sign preserved on a postcard. "Mother," the penciled inscription reads, on the reverse side, "I am having a rare old time." It is signed "Clarence," and bears a postmark, June 23, 1912, 7:30 PM. It's hard to imagine what the Detroit that Clarence wrote home from might have become--might have, but didn't. Already something else was on the way that would establish a new purpose for Cadillac's city that nobody previously could have guessed. "Detroit, Capital of the World's Greatest Industrial Empire." That's how the city would be thinking about itself by 1923. (Population 993,695, twice what it had been only ten years earlier when Clarence wrote his mother back in Kalamazoo.) By then everything had changed. Forever. A modest town of lumber barons and stove makers, brewers and locomotive engineers, cigar merchants and seed vendors was on the way to becoming the capital of Fordism and modernity, home of the *Model T*, the *Arsenal of Democracy*, *Motown*. Just the right people, with the right kinds of skills, all showed up here fortuitously, with ample natural resources and plenty of available capital, so the future could be assembled from off-the-shelf elements. That's how it started, anyhow, pretty much a local affair, but before long, everybody--it seemed--would be on their way to Detroit, and from places Detroiters had never come from before.

By 1925, almost half the new citizens of Detroit were foreign born, according to one estimate. That's a larger immigrant influx than any other U.S.-city, then or now. Russians and Poles, Italians and Hungarians displaced the earlier Irish and Germans, English and Scots as latest to arrive. "Nowhere in the world may the trend of the new industrial cycle be perceived more clearly than in Detroit," a visiting journalist, Matthew Josephson, wrote in a by-then typical description of the city, published in *Outlook* magazine, February 13, 1929 (population 1,568,662;

size 139.6 square miles, what it is today): "In this sense it is the most modern city in the world, the city of tomorrow. There is no past, there is no history. Neither traditions nor the accumulated handiwork of man's leisure time or deeply reflective moods obtrude upon the eye. There is primarily the wealth of mechanism and 'turnover.' One day, thousands and thousands of human beings turned themselves over and found that they were in the huge metropolis of Detroit." (*Detroit*, pp. 163–164)

Detroit was the fourth largest city in the country, after New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. It would hold that same rank for the next 30 years and more, with a peak population reaching 1,849,568 in 1950. (Unofficially, the total was said to have exceeded two million by the mid-1950s.) The city has shrunk to half that size today, with 80% of the almost five million residents in this *Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area* (as the *Census Bureau* calls it) preferring not to live in or even enter the erstwhile metropolis that gives a name to our collective address. 3.8 million people live around the city, fewer than a million still in it. And not without reason. The 'City Beautiful' became the 'City of the Riot', where the bottom fell out, the 'Murder Capital' (which it has been, off and on, since the 1970s), the place where 'Devil's Night' happens, last person to leave turn out the lights. "We're talking about Detroit. Once a symbol of U.S.-competitive vitality, and some say still a symbol: a symbol of the future, the first urban domino to fall." That's how Diane Sawyer put it when *PrimeTime Live* came to cover Detroit (November 8, 1990). But hers was a short-sighted view. All the things that seemed to be going so un-precedentedly wrong with Detroit--violence, corruption, racial conflict, abandonment--had been going wrong for the last 100 years, just as they had in every other American city. The only difference is that before there'd always been some larger story to explain those problems away. What was more important, there had been sufficient prosperity--even in the 'Depression,' eventually--to make that story seem believable: recovery, reform, relief just around the corner. Whatever. But not any more. "Most big cities do have the same problems as Detroit," Judd Rose allowed in the *PrimeTime* report, "And in some cases they're worse. Washington has more murders, L.A. has more gangs. New York has more racial violence. America's cities are on a dark and dangerous road. But you come here and you get the feeling this, this is what the end of the road looks like." True or not, that was the version of Detroit a lot of people wanted to believe by 1990. And so they did. This was the exception that would allow the rule of normalcy to remain in force for everybody else.

In sum, a lot has 'turned over' in Detroit since 1929, to use the *Outlook* writer's term, not least the ownership of a city that started out European and white and has ended up America's greatest black metropolis, with 81% of the current population being African American. City of tomorrow: it was and still is. "There is no past, there is no history." If there were, and if the people who live here had ever paid much attention to it, then none of the things that have happened in Detroit would have been possible, good or ill, because some thing or some body would have stopped them. We'd have just known better than to try. No assembly lines and no freeways, no suburbs and shopping malls, all of them invented here. No 'white flight', no 'projects' and urban blight. No *Motown*, no funk, no riot, no crack. No *hip-hop*, no *techno*, no *raves* in vast old warehouses. Detroit is the most abandoned place in America. "Neighborhoods collapsed," Coleman Young explained to Judd Rose, who was taxing the mayor with the "war-zone appearance" of the city, "because half the goddam population left." There was simply no stopping us--any of us who lived here, going in or coming out.

But it's not for all the cliché reasons that Detroit has become a cliché. That's the open secret of this place, and the truth practically nobody credits, for reasons not hard to understand. Detroit is not a fluke, a freak accident that ought to have ended up some other way. Like the writer said, three quarters of a century ago, Detroit is the way it is because it is the city of tomorrow, "a symbol of the future," to quote Diane Sawyer (though she meant no compliment). Detroit is the way it is because of who we are as Americans, all of us together, and because we are the ones who

made this place, and then let the place make us over in return. Detroit took us in, gave us jobs and made us rich, beyond any working man's or woman's wildest dreams. It provided houses and cars of our own, and moved us along in the world, with boats and summer places 'up north' and college for the kids. Wealth unprecedented in human history flowed out of this place on the great concrete rivers of our freeway system. That flood of prosperity carried people and stores and offices and jobs along with it, right out of town.

We're a mobile people, a post-urban people. We drive away from the past, leaving its problems in the rearview mirror. We're an affluent people, in love with our cars, a people wedded to violence, with a boundless appetite for energy. We consume the world's resources without a thought, as if they belonged to us, personally. We murder each other with a casual abandon, 42 of each other per day. We see gun control as a question of individual liberty, and vote it down. We let our history and our freeways fall apart. The rich get richer--a whole lot richer--and the poor stay behind, in the city. Americans consume more goods and services than any humans in the history of our species. Meanwhile, 16.5% of us live in poverty. We're dedicated to self-help. We're individualists. This is the land of opportunity. "Give me your poor, your tired, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free." We believe what it says on the *Statue of Liberty*. We get along by living further and further apart, on bigger lots in gigantic houses, with fewer people in them. Each person has their own TV, and a lounge to sit in watching it. We'd prefer to have somebody just like us living next door, no matter how far away that next door is. We ride alone in our ever-enlarging cars. There are more automobiles than there are licensed drivers to operate them. Half of us are overweight. We're adamant about freedom. To preserve our liberty, we put more of each other behind bars than any other people on earth. We're nostalgic beyond all reason. But not about the past. We treasure a memory of the future that can only be achieved by retroactive means. The conclusion seems obvious: we're all from Detroit, the most fully revealed American spot on earth.

In this country, we came late to cities. The English, for example, were already urban by 1850, at least the majority were, and still are, like the citizens of every other industrialized nation. But it wasn't until the 1920 census that the majority of Americans became urbanized. We wouldn't stay that way for long, though. By the 1970s, we'd hardly got settled in when the city was over, with most of us moving on to something we thought--or had been persuaded to think--was better. Suburbia, I mean, where the majority now live--or else beyond, in states of hyperbolic disconnection that nobody has yet figured out what to call or how to comprehend, except to point out that no people on earth have ever undertaken such a vast emptying-out of their society. Not until us. That's what makes Detroit representative: it's gone so far ahead that it has all but ceased to exist. But this disappearing act is no accident. Everything that's happened is the result of a design built into the nature of things. This is the place that every other American place would be like if those other places had gone all the way like Detroit did. That realization--however dimly apprehended--makes people afraid. It makes them want to believe in some kind of urban exceptionalism, like *PrimeTime Live* was offering. Not to worry, this is a special case. Detroit isn't about you, or what's inside of you, it won't happen to the place where you live. But nobody really believes that, not really, and it makes us afraid.

The city taught us what we needed to know to become the people we thought we wanted to become. Preeminently, it has taught us how not to need it any more, so we put it aside like a worn-out appliance, or a set of old tires that you prop up against the garage wall, or put down in the basement, not wanting for some reason to just throw them away, but not having any real use for them either. The capital of our republic may be in Washington, but the capital of our culture is in Detroit, where the future is all behind us. Americans don't want to go back and live in the city, even the cities that supposedly work--New York or Chicago, say--or else the new sunbelt cities that were never real cities in the first place--Houston or Tucson or Atlanta. They're all just incomplete versions of Detroit anyhow, and most of us choose to live elsewhere. But we

can't seem just get over the city either, like the broken toaster or the old set of tires that every time you pass by it, you say to yourself, I've got to do something about that stuff. But what? The city is the last place we remember being, all together, before everything happened that got us to where we are now. We've prospered, sure, a lot of us did anyhow. But it's a weird kind of prosperity that makes people feel shaky and isolated, or else fills them with rage. The city seems to hold some secret, about not being left alone. It's the last place the future was seen alive before it disappeared into now.

I knew about Detroit long before I moved here. (We all know about Detroit.) And now here I am. I own an apartment in a building where Diana Ross once lived. *Baby love, Oh baby love*. My high school girlfriend in the segregated south whispered that song into my ear at the dance. The white boy band, up on stage, tried to sound like Marvin Gaye or Smoky Robinson. My dad, who sold *Oldsmobiles*, would tell us, at dinner, my mom and me, what "the boys from Detroit" said about the new car coming out each Fall, back when the model change meant something, when cars were real. I walk down the street now, past windows in an old storefront that the Dodge brothers had painted with their sign in 1901: *Dodge Brothers Engineers and Machinists*. The glass is still there, and you can read the faint imprint of the once gold lettering. It thrills me--I'm serious--to see these things, to walk this consequential pavement. The Dodges, John and Horace, were sitting there, behind their pane of glass one afternoon, when Ransom Olds came calling. He wanted them to make the running gear for a new car because his own factory, on Jefferson Avenue, the world's first automotive plant, had just burned down, and his little curved-dash prototype was the only thing he'd been able to save from the fire. The Dodges said OK: "Come away with me Lucille, in my merry Oldsmobile." The song was a hit--the first car song ever to become one--and so were the cars. Olds became the first millionaire in automotive history. His little curved-dash runabout sold for \$625. By 1903 when the total number of vehicles produced annually in the U.S. was just over 11,000, one third of those were *Oldsmobiles*.

I drive past the old Packard plant on East Grand Boulevard, abandoned now, and probably to be demolished. "Ask the man who owns one. *Packard*." The President always drove a *Packard*, and so did my grandfather, who was the *Packard* dealer in the dusty little West Texas town where I grew up. The gypsy king drove a *Packard* too--he'd stop to buy a new touring car every fall, from my grandfather, pay cash for it, no questions asked. And then nobody would see him again for a year, until he came back for the new model. That's how the story got told to me anyhow.

I sat watching TV, the summer before college, with my friend and his dad, who had just offered us boys a beer. I was impressed. He called us "men." Whatever it was we were watching got interrupted. There was live coverage from Detroit. The city was in flames, the army was going in. People were being shot, it looked like a war. "I hope they kill them all," my friend's dad said. I didn't know then what he meant. But I would find out. Two years later he was dead. Stuck a twelve-gauge in his mouth, and blew off the top of his head.

I know things about this place. I know things because of this place that I would never have come to know if I didn't live here. But whether I knew them consciously or not, whether I lived here or not, they'd still be true, those things I know, about what it means to be an American, and what being American has done to us, and for us all who live here in this country. And the most important thing I've found out is that our history is unlike the histories of all the other people who have ever lived. Not that this should come as a surprise, if you pay attention. Exceptionalism, it's called. *E pluribus unum*. That's what it says on the dollar bill, and it's true: from the many, one (though the working out of this ideal is what people usually get wrong, which is where exceptionalism comes by its deserved bad name). It's not that we're special in some holy sense, the one and only people ordained by God, hope of the world, something like that. That's not what I'm talking about. It's that we're the one people whose history is not based on memory, but on forgetting. Which is not the same as saying we have no history at all--a mistaken view held by

many so-called experts. There are too many things we'll never get over, so long as any of us now living is still alive: Vietnam and Watergate, and all the killings, Medgar Evers and Dr. King, Bobby Kennedy and the kids at Kent State, and of course his brother John, and slavery, and Little Big Horn. And good things too, the moon landing, and *I have a dream*--a speech first delivered in Detroit--and *Ask not*, and the *Mustang*, which is also from Detroit, and the *Little GTO*, and the cure for polio, and Elvis and *La Choy Chinese* in cans (also a Detroit original). *And Baby love*, *Oh baby love*. And that's not all, by any stretch, on either side. There's no shortage of memories, in other words, or people to propagate them. Americans are the most nostalgic people on earth, in love with souvenirs. If we have a common culture, then that's got to be it--collecting. And that's what makes us different--the way our collecting tends to obliterate history rather than preserve it. And that's what is so revelatory about Detroit.

"History is bunk," Henry Ford is supposed to have said. What he actually said is a lot more interesting, and also smarter about what keeps us together, as Americans, regardless of the differences that drive us apart. "History is more or less the bunk," Ford told a reporter in 1916, after losing a famous libel suit against a Chicago paper that had called him an "ignorant idealist." "We want to live in the present," he said, "and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today." The problem with a history like that--one being made up fresh each day, on the spot--is that it requires a lot of clearance work, which is where the souvenirs and the culture of collecting come in. You have to constantly be making bunk out of the past--converting historic fixity into transportable souvenirs--if the ground is to be kept free for new construction, whether it's architecture or machines or memory you're talking about. That's what Cadillac was doing, for instance, with his self-invented name, and his 'Garden-of-Eden' version of the landscape, which became the first urban clearance project in Detroit's history. Making it all up fresh, for the occasion. But also making it sound like something old--the prelapsarian geography, his ancient-sounding synthetic name: souvenirs of a nostalgia for the authenticity which his histrionic acts had just obliterated. It worked, for a while anyhow, just like Henry Ford's history worked, better even than anybody might have expected. And that has made Detroit what it is, and it makes Detroit a revelation about America, where our history is not a history straight out, but a history of forgetting how to remember certain things and places and people. That's what makes us who we are. Exceptional.

Five miles east of Detroit, in the rural farm village where he grew up--a place called Dearborn--Henry Ford built the first theme park in U.S. history--or out of history, which is closer to the truth, since getting out of history is what the place is all about. There are two elements to Ford's invention, which he began contemplating in the early 1920s, but didn't get started on in earnest until the 'Great Depression' had begun in October 1929. The *Henry Ford Museum* and Greenfield Village is what the place is called, officially, and those are its twin elements, a museum and a village-based theme park, each carrying out brilliantly Ford's proposition about history and bunk and souvenirs.

Here's how the place works. Start with the museum, which is an outsize replica of colonial Philadelphia architecture, here scaled to the ambitions of its creator. The façade represents three separate historic structures--Independence Hall, Congress Hall, and the Old City Hall--now combined into a single twice-larger-than-life building, with twelve acres of internal exhibition space. The museum's collections are the result of Henry Ford's compulsive enthusiasm for material history: steam locomotives, farm machinery, kitchen implements, old light bulbs, the largest collection of tractors in the world, airplanes, the chair Abraham Lincoln was sitting in when he was assassinated, a vial containing Thomas Edison's dying breath. Ford the compulsive souvenir-hunter had been amassing this stuff for years, and kept at it until the end of his life, shipping endless quantities of things back to Dearborn for the museum. There are unique objects, like the Lincoln chair, but there are also endless repetitions of the same thing, kitchen utensils for example, and farm implements, as if Ford were trying to achieve a certain authority by sheer quantity

alone. The collection, even now, after modern curatorial attempts at organizing and weeding out, still bears the stamp of the creator, and his madman's-attic version of historic preservation. The hoard is so vast, so encyclopedic seeming that it creates a kind of authenticity by intimidation. How could all this real, historic stuff not stand for something? But what? That's the question. And the answer is Greenfield Village, the mid-western hamlet that lies, anachronistically, just beyond the monumentalized copy of Independence Hall. The Museum indemnifies visibly the synthetic version of history being worked out on the ground there. It's the money in the bank, materially speaking, that the village can draw upon, which is a good thing, in terms of credibility. To begin with, there never was a Greenfield Village. The name, like the place, is pure make-believe, a compound of the Dearborn neighborhood--Greenfield--where Henry Ford's wife, Clara, had grown up, together with the village ideal that became Ford's primary device for myth-making. But this is no *Disney* fabrication. At the same time, it's not a meticulous, Williamsburg-like re-enactment either (which Henry Ford was familiar with, and in fact inspired by, but which he rejected because it was inadequate to his purposes.) Greenfield Village is neither fake nor real--instead, it's a real fake, a pure fabrication comprised of historically authentic materials, or at least materials that Henry Ford thought were authentic at the point when he acquired them. For instance, there's the Wright brothers workshop, and homestead--not a copy, but the real thing, brought here--and the birthplace of William Holmes McGuffey, whose Reader Henry Ford thought of as a model of pedagogical excellence. And there's Stephen Collins Foster's home (probably not authentic), and Luther Burbank's house and garden, and Noah Webster's house, and the schoolhouse of Mary Elizabeth Sawyer (also probably not authentic) whose pet lamb became the source of the poem, *Mary had a little lamb*, etc. Henry Ford's own birthplace is preserved here, along with a replica of the rented coal shed where he built his first car. (The original had been torn down before Ford was in a position to preserve it.) But the real prize, so far as Ford was concerned, was the *Menlo Park* laboratories of Thomas Edison, moved here from New Jersey, along with three rail cars full of *Menlo Park* dirt for the buildings, authentically, to sit on. And that kind of documented, fake authenticity is the genius of the place. There never was, nor could there have been, such a place as the one Henry Ford imagined here. Historical facts--about time and place and culture--make the village an impossibility: Stephen Foster didn't, couldn't, wouldn't have lived next door to Thomas Edison, who didn't, couldn't etc., when it came to Mary who had the little lamb. And so on down the line. And that's the genius of the place, its meticulously authentic fakery.

Greenfield Village advances a proposition about history that is powerful precisely because it is impossible. It relocates famous, historical artifacts--the *Wright cycle shop*, Edison's lab where he invented the light bulb--"within the context of no context," to borrow a phrase from George W. S. Trow--a phrase he used to characterize the culture of TV. But the culture of television is merely the self-conscious outcome of the modern life Henry Ford inaugurates here, anachronistically, in the nostalgic past, from which the future that became the 20th century still lay ahead, unsullied, like Cadillac's empty paradise. And that's the place--or the point of departure--from which Ford wanted to examine modernity, so that's where he sited his village, within the context of no context, as if historical cause and effect could be suspended, just as here it visibly has been. Not arbitrarily, though, but always in the name of some vast, higher authority, by which I don't mean God, or even Henry Ford, but the authority of all those real, commonplace pieces of life which are banked in the Museum. All that stuff adds up to something, all right: the inescapable weight of the past, here monumentalized. And just at the spot where that weight is apparently the greatest, that's where Henry Ford levitates his myth of village life free of historic entanglements. He venerates the past, with a wish-fulfilling intensity, by forgetting how to remember that it finally matters, except as a source of souvenirs.

Which is to say this is not about history at all, strictly speaking, but something else--something fundamental to our national character. Now, by *history*, what I mean is a cause and effect relationship with the past. Or rather a consciousness of that relationship, which exists whether a person is aware of it or not. Cadillac, for instance, seems not to have had a clueless about history. But that didn't keep him from getting run around by it. It only made him bitter. He scripted a personal myth for himself about baronial entitlement, and tried to live up to it. But history--the cause and effect relations that brought him here--was not to be so easily outsmarted. He remained a historical actor, in other words, regardless of how clearly he understood his role as one among a host of colonial exploiters who remained useful only so long as their ventures produced a profit for the king of France, whose interest in the New World had more to do with Europe than it did with Detroit. History, then, is a way of asking questions that puts things--beaver pelts, forts, fake titles--back in the context of a specific context. It's a way of asking questions about the past so that memory adds up to something more than personal: who am I, where did I come from, what should I do? It's how *I* begins to turn into we. History places limitations on an individual, then. (Cadillac, regardless of wishes to the contrary, would never be a nobleman.) But it also gives you something to belong to. History is an explanation. What makes Cadillac and Henry Ford different is that Cadillac thought he could simply escape the past--new world new name, etc. Ford knew it was more complicated than that. It wasn't just the past people would have to forget, it was how to remember the past. And not only that. Ford wanted to monumentalize specific acts of forgetting, and to turn those into a new kind of history, a history of forgetting itself: "History is more or less the bunk. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today." So that's exactly what he did at Greenfield Village. He created a model for imagining the past fresh each day so that the nostalgic future could be infinitely replenished.

That was a powerful service, particularly when he started up, in October of 1929. He launched a myth of historical contingency that people were going to want, desperately, to believe in--a lot of them, anyhow. (And a lot still do, for that matter.) But especially then, it must have felt good to be told that there was a future that needn't be polluted by the past. All you had to do was imagine it, and forget whatever bunk made it seem impossible. "We're in the money," the *Gold Diggers* sang in 1933. They were a hit. That fantasy appeals specifically to Ford's version of history as a forgetting how to remember the past. If you forget how to remember to be poor, or a failure, or down on your luck, then you won't be. It's up to you, individually. Of course, not everybody was willing to accept this, any more than everybody could afford to live like Ford's isolated geniuses at Greenfield Village, each modeling an ideal of personal achievement and responsibility, as if that were the way nature intended things. Union organizers weren't so taken with that view, and the 'Red's' weren't. And Henry Ford hated them all. He built Greenfield Village to honor "the real world of folks," and those folks of his didn't want anything to do with organizing, or sit-downs, or history. At least that's what Ford wanted to believe. And the point at Greenfield was to keep all the troublemakers out, which he did.

It's a common observation about Ford to say he wasn't really much of an inventor. He didn't have all that many original ideas, on his own. But he was an off-the-shelf genius when it came to seeing how things might be put together: the moving assembly line, Greenfield Village, his view of history. As to the latter, I'd claim that everything Ford knew about history, he knew because Detroit had revealed itself to him, just like it was Detroit that brought him all the elements he needed to assemble the modern world. Being a genius, he realized at once what he had, although it took him a while to figure out how to set the pieces in order. And that's what it's like, even now, coming to Detroit: it's a matter of getting things in order, to see what's here. The city is empty, sure (as empty as a city of 900,000 people can be), and it looks abandoned (as abandoned as a place would look where half the population and 80% of the jobs just got up and went somewhere else). Right, it's all those things: ruined mansions with crackheads living



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## DETROIT

John Gallagher (2004)

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Let's begin with a fable. One day in Windsor, Ontario, a pleasant Canadian city just across the river from Detroit, Michigan, a father and his young son were sightseeing. The child gazed wide-eyed at all the urban sights he was seeing, evidently for the first time--the skyscrapers on both sides of the river, the traffic rushing by, the busy people, the sun sparkling off the water. Finally he could contain his curiosity no longer.

"Daddy," he cried, "what is this place?" The reply could make one think the battle is already lost. "It's called a city," the father said. "It's sort of like a shopping mall."

Well, yes. What strikes me about this little anecdote is what it says about our orientation toward the urban landscape. The majority of Americans today live in an environment that is urban without being what we normally call a city. We could use the common term for this new form--suburbia--but that doesn't quite capture the revolutionary nature of the change in the urban landscape.

The word 'suburb,' after all, connotes an attachment to some superior place--a city--and subjugation to its more dominant physical, cultural, and moral influence. Perhaps the term dates to when cities for safety's sake occupied the highest ground, and the insignificant suburbs with their less important interests clustered at their feet. To cite a modern illustration, no one would suggest, for example, that the community of Hoboken, New Jersey, which lies across the river from New York City, does anything but draw its economic life's blood and vitality from the metropolis across the Hudson. Until recently, this relationship between cities and their suburbs has always remained clear.

Modern suburban sprawl threatens this basic relationship across America. But in Detroit, as in no other American city, it's the suburban landscape, with its spatial orientation both chaotic and regimented, that has become the dominant model. And as the suburbs in Detroit have thrived and grown, sucking the life out of the older central city, Detroit itself has withered and shrunk.

Today, in Detroit more than in any other big American city, residents have moved so far beyond their urban roots that many of them are almost totally unfamiliar with a traditional city. In many parts of suburban Detroit today, this morphing from an older urban landscape to something entirely new has created a toxic attitude toward the old, deteriorating city at its heart. Many suburbanites boast of never stepping foot in Detroit for years at a time--as though the city and its suburbs were two distinct countries, rather than one unified, if troubled, city state. So different is the spatial orientation of the newer suburbs from the traditional Detroit landscape that the city seems to many suburbanites not quaint or nostalgic, but ugly, dangerous, cramped, and noxious. For centuries, perhaps, rural dwellers have dismissed the crowded cities in much the same terms. What is different today is that those doing the dismissing are themselves urban dwellers, but who live in a type of urban landscape unknown until just a few decades ago. This newer suburban landscape is less densely populated than the city, often by a factor of 50% or greater, and this lower density produces a sensation of endless little pockets of nothingness. To drive alone a typical avenue in suburban Detroit today is to view an endless array of wasted spaces--empty parking lots, lawns that no one walks upon, the desolation of highway median strips, the dead spaces lying beneath and around entrance and exit ramps. In the older cities men and boys used to play handball or bocce beneath the piers of bridges; nobody ever plays beneath a suburban highway overpass. If in a city every square foot must be husbanded, if indeed the very overcrowding of the city's landscape gave birth to the high-rise skyscraper as a way of multiplying space, in suburban Detroit, space is frittered away without a second thought, as if an endless amount of it lay just around the corner.

Incredibly, much of this vast spatial waste, these vacancies between and around individual suburban houses and commercial uses, is not accidental, but planned and, indeed, demanded. In suburban Detroit, words like 'setback,' a term that describes the minimum legal distance a house or commercial business may sit from the street, now define the suburban landscape and its attendant vocabulary. The language of suburban design is the language of emptiness. It is filled with words that describe voids, like the much overused *cul de sac* to describe the empty turnaround at the end of a private residential street. This term virtually defines suburban neighborhoods. How different from the more urban words 'corner' and 'intersection,' which, describing the juncture of two streets, capture the coming together of disparate public elements in the middle of a city. The reigning suburban vocabulary talks of parking lots and setbacks, and it delineates the moat-like distances between one type of commercial use and its nearest residential neighbors. If the city's urban vocabulary teems with words that capture the crowded vitality of city life—words like sidewalk and alley, bus lane and no-parking zone, skyscraper and parade route—the suburban vocabulary is heavy with terms like mall and metro dome that describe, in the memorable phrase of author James Howard Kunstler, a "geography of nowhere".

Again, this is a national, not just a local, phenomena. But it must be repeated that nowhere has the contrast between the spaces in the older central city and the newer suburbanized spaces emerged so clearly as in Detroit, the incredibly shrinking city.

Even successful cities—Chicago, say—lost population to the suburbs in the 1960s and onward. But no city lost so many people as Detroit—the only American city ever to fall below one million in population having previously surpassed that number. Detroit, in fact, once boasted a population of more than two million; today it can barely muster 900,000 for census takers.

Ironically, Detroit itself now offers all the empty space a suburban builder would want. Street after street shows burned-out gaps in the neighborhood fabric; parks sit mostly unused much of the time; the city's magnificent waterfront, offering stunning views of Windsor and the busy Great Lakes shipping trade, is deserted but for a few fishermen and boaters most of the year. Space, then, is wasted both in Detroit and in its suburbs. But the wastage in Detroit reflects a tragic abandonment, while the wastage in the suburbs signals a thoughtless profligacy.

Scholars normally attribute Detroit's flight to the suburbs to white racism and the deleterious effects of deindustrialization. What has been less well studied, though, has been the lure of this newer suburban landscape, so different from the older model left behind in the city itself. Racism and deindustrialization may have propelled many people to the suburbs, but once there, they found a new landscape that exerted a grip all its own.

To put it another way, it was the promise ahead, not just the problems behind that enabled hundreds of thousands of Detroiters to flee the city with a clear conscience. In this sense, the older central city has been not so much abandoned as replaced by a new model. To fully grasp this point, we can examine some of the elements this new landscape, and show how those elements contributed to the shrinkage of Detroit. We begin with that icon of American individualism, the single-family house.

In the years of Detroit's greatest growth—say, 1900 through 1950—hundreds of thousands of houses were built in the city. Many were small, designed in haste for workers at the auto plants springing up all over the city. These houses were crowded into neighborhoods anchored by parish churches, by neighborhood banks, by tightly packed rows of commercial enterprises. A resident might live a whole life in such a neighborhood, emerging just for the occasional outing to a baseball game at *Tiger Stadium* just an easy streetcar ride away, or to a Christmas-shopping spree at the downtown *Hudson's* store. But even the upscale city neighborhoods, such as Detroit's university district and Palmer Woods and Rosedale Park, all featured houses that are small by the standards of new houses being built today in the suburbs. A new house built in 1950's Detroit might measure 1,000 square feet, and sit on a lot measuring as few as 30 by 120 feet, or 3,600 square feet in all. The house next door might be less than ten feet away.

Residents could hear their neighbors' television sets and the doors slamming during family arguments.

Beginning about the same time that Detroit filled out to its borders in the 1950s, a new type of house has evolved on the American scene. Among other things, these new houses are built bigger and bigger each year. The median size of new houses built in suburban Detroit today measure more than 2,000 square feet, or at least 100% larger than a new house built in Detroit 50 or 60 years ago. Moreover, lot sizes have grown to a median size of around 9,000 square feet, as every home-buyer wants his or her own big backyard. Then, too, all the new houses today come with amenities that would dazzle the *Sun King*--central air conditioning, multiple bedrooms and bathrooms even for a family with just one, or no, children; and, of course, that *sine qua non* in a car-dominated culture like Detroit's, the attached multiple-car garage. Most houses built in the city of Detroit don't even have garages, or, if they do, the garage is detached from the house itself and built back in the yard. It would be hard, if not impossible, to find a suburban Detroit housewife today who would even look at a home that didn't provide an attached garage, the better to bring in groceries without being exposed to the elements.

The handful of new houses built each year in Detroit itself exhibit these same qualities, since home-builders have learned their lessons well. But that hardly matters when the hundreds of thousands of houses built prior to 1950 don't have them. Asking home-buyers to purchase a house in Detroit that has none of the features they desire, when the houses in the suburbs are filled with them, is like trying to turn back the tide. It just doesn't work. There are some wonderful houses in the city of Detroit, but their luxury represents the elegance of the 1920s, not the 1990 or early 21st century. Given a choice between a 1920s home, with its leaded glass windows and ornate woodwork, and a 1990s home with its bigger bathrooms and central air and attached garages, most home-buyers will opt for the newer version without a moment's hesitation.

We could examine all the dominant architectural types--factories, retail stores, churches, schools, airports--and we'd find that the defining characteristic of each and every built form in suburban Detroit today is that it requires more land, more space, than the older comparable model in the city itself. Movie theaters are a good example. Most of the old elegant movie palaces built in downtown Detroit in the 1920s, which were tucked tightly into the existing street grid, have been abandoned or razed. The new suburban multiplex theaters sit amid acres of asphalt parking lots and offer 18 screens where the older palace downtown offered one. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the popcorn and drink containers have swelled to gargantuan size, too, and that the theater seats are wider now to accommodate bigger bottoms.

Airports pose another interesting example. Air fields like the old *Detroit City Airport* or *Midway Airport* on Chicago's Southwest side coexist with nearby residential neighborhoods, with houses just yards from the ends of the runways. It would be unthinkable to build a new airport today in so cramped a location. Detroit's *Metro Airport*, the newer, international hub, sits a good 20 miles outside downtown, and each year work crews, like Roman legions conquering another province, demolish yet more houses on the far outskirts of the perimeter of the airport zone.

Even churches in suburban Detroit require vast amounts of parking spaces, as though worshippers needed a sport utility vehicle to sing hosanna. The majestic charm of the older churches in traditional Detroit is that they were set among, and not remote from, the houses and shops of their parishioners, who could walk to them with ease. Driving to church in suburban Detroit today feels much the same as driving to the mall. Indeed, it's striking how the newest American cities, such as Phoenix and Houston, which are places built almost entirely along the newer suburban model, require three or four times as much land as Detroit itself. The older city of Detroit occupies less than 140 square miles. Houston sprawls across some 600.

The greatest urban spaces in traditional cities, the places offering the most majestic vistas and most memorable gathering spots, used to belong either to civic buildings or cathedrals. These,



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## ON SOME SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF DETROIT

Jason Booza and Kurt Metzger (2004)

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The popular image of Detroit is the *Motor City* of the world. In fact, Detroit has had many monikers over the past century including *Arsenal of Democracy*, *Motown*, and most recently *Most Segregated City in America*. While these titles have not always been pleasing, they do tell the story of Detroit's growth and change in history. From its inception as a small trading outpost along the Detroit River, Detroit now boasts a population near one million and remains the core of the largest manufacturing region in the world. Between these periods, Detroit has also been in turn an industrial powerhouse, a textbook case of urban decline and finally a site of urban rebirth and renewal. The following essay will chronicle Detroit's journey over these years, and along the way, readers will get an understanding of the events and circumstances that shaped the city of Detroit and later the region.

The growth of Detroit and the factors that shaped its existence can be viewed through the industrialization process. From this point of view, four distinct eras have had the largest impact on Detroit. The first is the genesis of industrial formation, which takes place from the Civil War up until World War One, which is then followed by Detroit's industrial boom during the World Wars. Both of these two eras signify Detroit's emergence as a national and international industrial center. Following Detroit's industrial climax is its industrial decline and the emergence of a regional dichotomy. The first of these time periods is the suburban flight that followed World War Two up until the 1970s and was characterized by the growth of Detroit as a region. This was followed by the modern growth period in the region, which saw further suburban development as well as continued central city decline and most recently a glimmer of downtown and neighborhood revitalization.

The methodology employed in this paper is threefold. First, the eras of development will be discussed in-depth, not only to provide a context for socio-economic changes, but also to define the important internal as well as external factors that shaped Detroit. This includes the spatial as well as the social structure of the city and the development of the region. Second, the essay will discuss the changes and patterns of socioeconomic changes as they are related to post-industrial development. This includes changes in race/ethnicity, immigration, family structure, occupation and income. These changes and patterns are put into the context of the changing economic structure of Detroit city and region. Altogether, this essay will chronicle the events and facts that led to the growth the Detroit as a city and region.

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### II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since its founding in 1701, the key to Detroit's industrial growth has been the role that transportation has played in political, social and economic affairs. Detroit was settled on the banks of the Detroit River by the French to control the fur trade on the Great Lakes as well as a strategic military outpost. Detroit was easily defensible because it was located 40 feet above water level and the river is narrow and without obstructions (Porembe). As the small trading outpost known as Detroit grew and eventually changed hands from French to English and finally to American control, it also grew in size yet still relied on fur trading and to a lesser extent agriculture as its main source of commerce. During this time, Detroit and the Northwest Territory were considered a frontier in American and travel was limited to waterways and horseback. With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, Detroit's population began to grow, as settlers were able to move

from east to west with much greater ease. Not long after this, railways were built throughout America, which further increased the efficiency of transporting people and goods. Detroit was in a prime location to take advantage of both travel by water and rail because of its strategic location between the ore fields of the lake Superior region and the coalfields of Appalachia. Thus, by the time the Civil War broke out, Detroit was an ideal location to produce the many war materials that were needed by northern forces. This was Detroit's first real boost to its industrial development and signals the beginning of its industrial formation.

### **Industrialization**

The demand for war materials gave Detroit's fledgling manufacturing industry a boost. Factories began developing before the war, but because of Detroit's small population, demand was limited to the region. However as the Civil War raged on, factories, employment and finally population began to grow. The key to Detroit's development during this early industrial formation was centralization (Sugrue). Factory, foundry and steel mill location was determined by access to raw materials and transportation routes. Thus, much of Detroit's industry was centrally located in the city along the river and railways.

Following the war, industry still continued to play a vital role as Detroit was a major producer of pharmaceuticals, furniture, railcars, carriages and stoves. As railways grew along with intrastate road networks, demand for products and services grew. After the Civil War, European immigration to the United States aided in the growth of many cities including Detroit. By 1900, Detroit's population was 285,704 persons and quickly growing. The next important era in Detroit's emergence as an industrial center was its role in the World Wars.

The emergence of the United States into two World Wars created Detroit's industrial infrastructure. Prior to World War One, Detroit automobile companies began to form as a result of access to raw materials, technology and numerous machine and tool shops. Most of all, Detroit had a large stock of immigrant labor from the American South, Canada and Eastern Europe. Detroit's auto industry would not have been as prosperous as it was if it were not for the United States entering World War One. As with the Civil War, Detroit was called upon to supply armaments, tanks, boats and chemicals. However, unlike the civil war, transportation by railway was no longer the most efficient form of transportation. With the advent of the truck and tractor, Detroit was able to produce the means of transportation to get the goods it produced to the East Coast for shipment over to Europe. In fact, Detroit experienced a nine-fold increase in truck production between 1914 and 1919 (Farley). By 1920, Detroit had grown to near one million people making it the fourth largest city in the country. As a result, Detroit experienced severe shortages of housing and transportation as people flocked to Detroit in search of defense industry jobs. After World War One, Detroit's factories switched back over to automobiles and other domestic goods, but production of these goods were limited as a result of the impending stock market crash in 1929. However, World War Two and further industrial growth was just around the corner.

Industrial production for Detroit and most of the country was limited during the depression, but after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entrance of the United States into World War Two, industrial production shifted into an all time high. In fact, the Detroit region led the nation in defense contracts by the end of the war with over twelve billion dollars worth of federal money being pumped into Detroit to supply the military overseas and at home (Poremba). Because space was limited in Detroit to build new factories, companies began setting up new factories around the region to build jeeps, planes and tanks for the war. In addition to Henry Ford's *Rouge Complex*, the *Willow Run* factory which produced planes gave America the infamous image of 'Rosie the Riveter' to symbolize the female contribution to the war effort. The *Chrysler Warren Tank Plant* was dubbed the 'Arsenal of Democracy,' later used to praise the Detroit region for supplying the war. Overall, World War Two represented Detroit's economic and industrial zenith.

### **Post-Industrial Detroit**

Detroit's early industrial development, and much of what followed, was characterized by centralization of factories. When the United States entered World War Two, Detroit began to grow beyond the city limits, and the Detroit region, consisting of Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties, began to develop. This new post-industrial era, which took off after World War Two, is characterized by decentralization. In fact, the region began to deindustrialize, which meant that factories began to close, downsize, or relocate (Sugrue). The following analysis discusses the result of deindustrialization through the suburbanization of the region and the decline of the central city of Detroit.

Much of the suburban flight of both population and industry affecting Detroit occurred between the end of World War Two and 1970. June Manning Thomas found that this era in Detroit city's history was characterized by a deteriorating downtown, transportation congestion, inadequate housing, racial conflict and industrial exodus. These factors encouraged or pushed many families out of Detroit while federal programs pulled them towards the suburbs. Following the war, two federal public policies helped to drive suburbanization. First, the government helped spur new housing construction and purchase through subsidized loans for returning soldiers (Sugrue). Further, government and private home loans were limited to areas that were considered racially homogeneous, which excluded many neighborhoods in Detroit. Thus, the government created incentives for people to buy homes outside of the city of Detroit. With the wealth that was saved during the war, many people were in the market to buy not only homes but automobiles as well. Auto companies rushed to keep up with consumer demand following the war. To alleviate traffic congestion in the city and help create a national transportation system, the second incentive that the federal government created was the construction of a highway system. The *Federal Highway Act* of 1956 set up a fund that paid for up to 90% of highway construction costs in order to build a national system to move goods and people—a system modeled after the German system that America found during World War Two (Sugrue). As a result, Detroiters were armed with wealth to buy homes and automobiles so they headed to the Detroit suburbs to live and work. Much of this process continued through the 1950s to the 1960s as Detroit city's population declined from nearly two million following World War Two to only 1.5 million in 1970. This period of suburban flight ushered in an era of central city decline as Detroit's population continued to fall, going below one million in 2000.

The 1970s through the late 1980s represented slow economic times for the Detroit region, but the city of Detroit was hardest hit. The oil shortages of the 1970s, manufacturing decline of the 1980s and the overall transition in the United States economy from goods production to service provision created problems for many central cities. Detroit was no exception. By 1980, it had the highest unemployment rate in the country (Poremba), as well as increase poverty, crime and mortality rates. The suburban flight of previous decades left Detroit with an aging infrastructure and a mostly minority population that faced recurrent bouts of poverty and unemployment. Along with population decline came neighborhood and downtown deterioration, as homes, factories and office buildings were vacated in favor of suburban locations. By this point in the region's development, much manufacturing and industrial employment had moved to suburban Detroit, but an even greater portion began to move much further away, signaling the entry of the United States into a global economy. As the job market became tighter and more competitive, so did disparities between high- and low-wage jobs. The result for the spatial structure of the region was polarization based on social class and race. Detroit city represented a bulk of the region's minority population, as well as its most impoverished groups, while the suburbs represented the white population, if differentiated by class. When the economy picked up through the 1990s, the trend toward polarization continued, as newer suburbs were being built on the fringes of the region and older cities like Detroit, as well as older suburbs, lost more and more

people. Detroit became not only the epitome of sprawl but also of racial segregation, as the process of sifting and sorting continued along class and racial lines. However, the late 1990s and early 2000s have seen a renewed interest in the birth of Detroit.

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### **III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE**

#### **Educational Attainment**

The educational level of Detroit's residents has always trailed that of the population residing in the remainder of the tri-county area. This fact has had implications for the occupational opportunities available to Detroit's residents, particularly in the 1990s when high-paying, low-skill jobs became increasingly unavailable.

In 1970, 41.8% of Detroit's '25 years old and over' residents had high school degrees. While the last 30 years have seen increases in high school graduation rates throughout the region, the differential between Detroit and its suburbs has remained virtually unchanged. Recently released results for 2000 show that while Detroit's rate has increased to 69.6%, the suburban rate of 85.3% remains almost 16% higher (an insignificant change from the 16.6 point differential of 30 years earlier). Trends in college graduation rates present a very different picture--one of concern to the region. Suburban residents had a college graduation rate of 11.5% in 1970, compared to 6.2% in Detroit. By 1990 this differential had nearly doubled from five percentage points to 11.5 percentage points--21.1 vs. 9.6%, respectively. The 2000 *Census* results show that this gap has continued to widen--now 16.1 percentage points--as Detroit's rate increased to 11% while the suburbs came in at 27.1%. While these differentials present obstacles to breaking down socio-economic barriers between city and suburbs, there is an even more important fact buried in these numbers that must be addressed. While one could easily leap to the conclusion that the differential exists primarily because Detroiters are not attending and completing schooling to the degree that their suburban counterparts are, a second structural issue is of equal concern. Data show that Detroit students are completing high school and that many--more than statistics show--are going on to complete college. The problem is that the City of Detroit is not viewed by college graduates--whether former residents or outsiders--as an attractive place to live. Employment, housing and recreational opportunities beckon in the suburbs and other areas of the country. Detroit must change its image so as to become a destination for a young, educated and diverse population.

#### **Economic Structure and Jobs**

It has been well documented over the last two decades that the United States is moving from a manufacturing economy to a service-based economy. This has certainly been in evidence in the Midwest and Northeast, where manufacturing jobs have either been eliminated or have moved south. The bulk of these jobs have exited the large urban centers of these regions.

In 1970, 201,445 Detroit residents reported that they were employed in the manufacturing sector--35.9% of the total. A large portion of these jobs were those that attracted the large waves of migrants in the early part of this century--relatively high-paying, low-skill jobs in the auto industry. Good paying jobs with unbeatable benefits, created in the early years of the 20th century, continued to be available to those with high school degrees and less. The departure of businesses that had begun in the 1960s continued during the 1970s and 1980s, so that by 1990, the manufacturing industry employed only 69,000 Detroiters and manufacturing accounted for only 19.4% of employed Detroiters. In spite of the improved economy that was in place when the 2000 *Census* was conducted, manufacturing jobs for Detroiters continued their decline--down to 62,235--and accounted for just 18.8% of their jobs. While manufacturing jobs were decreasing, the improved economy did contribute to increasing rates of labor force participation, as previously discouraged workers began to look for jobs again, leading to decreasing unemployment rate. The 14.3% unemployment experienced by Detroiters in 1990 fell to 6.5% in 2000.

In spite of the improved employment climate for Detroiters, the decade of the 1990s did not bring more jobs to Detroit. The new jobs that were developing in southeast Michigan were no longer locating in the city of Detroit. Business owners were not interested in refurbishing older buildings, or dealing with contamination cleanup, when there was plenty of 'green space' available and communities willing to offer assistance. Southeast Michigan has experienced the phenomenon known as 'urban sprawl.' The jobs and the population continue to leave the inner core of the region and move farther and farther out. While population sprawl was covered earlier, employment forecasts from the *Southeast Michigan Council of Governments* (SEMCOG) show that job sprawl is even greater. Between 1990 and 2000, SEMCOG estimates that the City of Detroit lost 67,066 jobs while the remainder of the tri-county area experienced a job increase of 338,871. This has resulted in the abandonment of existing infrastructure and the constant need for infrastructure expansion. This shift in the regional job mix is best evidenced by the changing commuting patterns of workers.

In 1960, 56% of all work trips ended in Detroit. Detroit residents working in Detroit accounted for more than a third of all trips--38%. By 1990, only 21% of work trips ended in Detroit, and Detroit residents working in the city accounted for only 11% of the total. In 1990, 79% of all work trips ending in the suburbs, with 71% of the work trips taken by suburban residents. New results from the 2000 *Census* show the percentage of all work trips ending in Detroit had dropped once more to 17%--evenly divided between Detroit residents and suburban commuters. While the jobs have moved to the suburbs, Detroit residents have not been able to take advantage of the shift, as Detroit residents found 49.7% of their jobs within the city limits and 50.3% in the suburbs. This is a result of two major factors--a large number of households with no automobile available (22% in 2000), and a poorly funded and divided public transportation network. It is important to note, in this context, that the Detroit metropolitan area led the nation in its share of resident workers who travel to work alone by car.

### **Income and Poverty**

Throughout this discussion there has been an acknowledgment of the differences between the city of Detroit and its suburbs. While the city has suffered population losses, the suburbs, to a large extent, have experienced gains. The city and suburbs demonstrate great racial and ethnic differences. While the age structure of each has been affected by the 'baby boom,' the city has maintained population at the ends of the age spectrum while the suburbs have seen large growth in the '25-54 year old' cohort. Households in the city are very different from those in the suburbs, with large numbers of city children being born out-of-wedlock and raised in one-parent families. Educational attainment is much lower in the city of Detroit and the jobs have left for the suburbs. Nevertheless, strong evidence exists that the suburbs still need the city to guarantee their future success.

The *National League of Cities* released a report in 1993 entitled, "All In It Together--Cities, Suburbs and Local Economic Regions." The first paragraphs of this report state the following: "There is a strong economic justification for addressing the needs of central cities and for cooperation among cities and suburbs to meet the mutual economic needs of their local economic region. It can be found in the strong and consistent relationship between changes in central city incomes and changes in suburban incomes. For every one-dollar increase in central city household incomes, suburban household incomes increase by \$1.12. This documentation of the significant relationship between cities and their suburbs is critical to the debate about whether suburbs can prosper and succeed, regardless of the fortunes of their central cities. This finding, however, should not be surprising. Cities and their suburbs are not two distinct economies. They are a single economy, highly interdependent with their fortunes inextricably intertwined."

An analysis of income trends in the Detroit region lends strong support to the above findings. The median household income for the Detroit suburbs was 1.43 times that of Detroit, and the



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## THE CAPITAL OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Dan Hoffman (2003, updated version)

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If Detroit is to be called “The Capital of the Twentieth Century,”<sup>1</sup> it is not because of its architecture, monuments, or great cultural achievements. Detroit is the *Capital* because of its singular devotion to the idea of industrial production, investing its resources into a product that has transformed the face of every modern city. In the process, Detroit has allowed itself to be reinvented time and again, recasting its space, culture, and architecture in the form of the latest production and marketing idea.

“The Capital of the Twentieth Century” is not a place but a product; a new style, a new mode of production, ‘a better idea.’ The identification of this city and its urban fabric with a single industry is confirmed in common speech when we refer to the American automobile industry as ‘Detroit.’ Nowhere else do we find a city so completely dedicated to a single industry and the obsessions of modern technology. Detroit defines itself through the pursuit of material perfection. A new car combines the latest technology and style, reminding us of the possibilities of the new and the liabilities of the old. It encourages us to forget the past in order to make way for greater perfections and pleasures. Perfection is an everyday thing in the *Capital*. New vehicles roll off the assembly line at the rate of five per second, delivering the experience of the new to a willing and wanting public.

Practical ideas are the currency of the *Capital*. They are always simple, offering a way forward, a framework for action. Ford was successful because he had ‘a better idea,’ the division of labor, the assembly line, and the vertical factory. *General Motors* rose to prominence through its corporate division of structure ‘under one roof,’ its horizontal factory production, and annual model changes. The recent success of *Chrysler* can be attributed to the ‘team’ model of design. These practical ideas produce their own economy, reinscribe space and transform the city. Each new idea leaves the past in its wake, rendering vast sections of the *Capital* obsolete.

Assembly line production is reflected in the row upon row of single-family houses which made the *Capital* the first suburban city. Paved roads bring the workers from the houses to the factories in cars, establishing the dominant development model for the century. Like the horizontal factory with its flexible infrastructure of shelter, light and power, the suburban model provides maximum flexibility. Factories pop up on the ever-expanding edge of the *Capital*, spawning suburban neighborhoods of workers complete with schools and shops. The horizontal model allows for the easy separation of one sector (component) of the city from another. Management hierarchies are paralleled by strict economic separation between neighborhoods. The differences are always clear. Separation also allows for maximum flexibility. Like the reconfiguration of the assembly line to accommodate the annual model changes, neighborhoods can come and go, following the migrating factories to the horizon in successive waves of growth and development. Physical traces of the succession of different modes of industrial production register in layers of urban development. In its most direct manifestation the major streets of the city (following the mile square surveyors grid) are all associated with a specific technology. For example at Six Mile Road we find remnants of casting technologies, Eight Mile Road is the focus of analog controlled machining, Ten Mile Road has electronics and plastics and injection molding, and at Twelve Mile Road we see evidence of computer-guided machining and laser cutting. The horizon of technology is always receding, pulling the city along in its wake.

Monuments have short half-lives in the *Capital*. Things move too quickly and survival is more a matter of forgetting than remembering. Rather than being guided by images of the past, citizens invest their beliefs in images that promise a stake in the new. As it is said, there is no future in

the past. Advertisements serve up the latest images, fresh from the frontiers of desire. In 1997 a billboard appeared along one of the major freeways showed an image of the new *Ford Explorer* set in an Arcadian landscape of waterfalls and lush trees. Across the bottom of the image is the phrase "The Best That the World has to Offer." The image is filled with complex messages and useful information. The "Best" is somewhere in nature beyond the edge of the *Capital*, away from its entropic sprawl. The message is that you can get there by the other half of the best that the world has to offer, the new *Ford Explorer*. The way out is the way forward. The *Capital* always points to the future. Advertising succeeds to the extent that it denies the context within which it is placed. The location of the billboard along the tired highways of the *Capital* would certainly support this equation. But there is something more to this image. The pairing of an idealized nature and the technology of the vehicle carries with it a difficult truth that we are just beginning to comprehend, that the *Capital* has extended its reach to the edge of the planet, that nature is no longer just beyond the horizon. The advertisement is a sign that the *Capital* has come full circle upon itself. Maybe it is saying the car itself is a force of nature.

The history of the *Capital* is the history of motion. It begins with the moving assembly line. Historians place its invention in Cincinnati, where pig carcasses were first moved on hooks through various stages of slaughtering and carving.<sup>2</sup> But its application to the assembly of automobiles by Henry Ford in 1913 brings the process its conceptual clarity: moving vehicles produced on a moving assembly line. A moving machine produced a machine that moves. This idea spawns a new world of motion, harnessing labor to the precise demands of the moving line where it is divided into a multitude of serialized and optimized motions. The more efficient the movement, the faster the line moves. The assembly line reduced the time it took to produce a car from twelve hours to one and half-hours. This is Taylorism: the analysis of human motion according to the principles of efficiency. Every little bit helps. The body becomes a component of the machine.

A historic marker outside of the *Ford Highland Park* plant describes the Ford's 1913 innovation of the moving assembly line for automobiles. A nearby plaque marks the location of the first paved mile of concrete in America. Mechanical motion begins to expand itself into the streets of the *Capital*, a process that extends into neighborhoods and the home. They say that the Detroit had the first suburbs, row upon row of single-family homes. As Ford said, "a car for every worker." We assume that he meant a home as well. This simple, democratic ideal masked the epic reorganization of society, the space and resources that were needed to fulfill this pledge. Mechanical efficiency makes possible the mass production of the product, which generates the profits to pay laborers enough to buy that product, which in turn demands a public investment in infrastructure, which creates additional demand, which allows further investment in efficient machines. Efficiency is both an end and means. It works like a machine.

The early factories were vertical constructions with the assembly lines snaking their way through multiple floors. At Ford's 1908 *Highland Park* factory designed by Albert Kahn, pre-manufactured components were brought in by train and lifted to hoppers at the top of the factory and distributed by gravity to stations along the assembly lines below. The top down distribution made a lot of sense, mimicking the highly disciplined and ordered social mechanisms needed to maintain the precise movements along the line. Poured-in-place concrete was the construction system of choice. Strong, cheap and fireproof, it provided a solid ground upon which to anchor the moving line. However, once the structure was established it was difficult to change. Like the plumbing in a building, the lines often remained for years without changing. In the end it was easier to build a new factory than to replace the line. The fact that Ford restricted his cars to a single color, black was more a reflection of the inflexibility of the mechanism than any particular aesthetic choice. The efficiency of repetition was the engine that drove the industry. Value was to be found in the modes of production itself. Order begets order, the acceleration and growth of which is profit.

The new idea was to put the entire line on one floor and deliver parts to the line with motorized vehicles. Used most effectively by *General Motors* at the Kahn designed *Chevrolet Commercial* body plant of 1935, the new factory type featured saw-toothed skylights that allowed light to enter from above permitting unlimited horizontal extension. Multiple assembly lines could be established within the same building allowing modifications to occur without disturbing the pace of production. Another idea introduced during the same period separated the car's drive train frame from the body during the manufacturing process allowing modifications to the latter without requiring changes to the complex drive train, a central structure with changeable parts. This paralleled the emergence of modern corporate structure, vertical management with horizontal applications. The first idea (the moving assembly line) was all about production, the second was about flexibility and distribution.

In the 1930s the *Capital* looks out from its high perch atop *General Motors World Headquarters* and sees a vast, horizontal expanse, beyond the Great Lakes and its procession of ore ships headed to Detroit, beyond the Mississippi the distant mountains and seas. The potential is vast and the car with its smooth lines and interior comforts is ready to traverse the distance at high speeds. The *Capital* has learned that the purchase of a car is the purchase of a personal space between you and the ever-receding horizon, a smooth shell, an organ of speed projected into space. Speed smoothes local differences, transforming the passing landscape into a compressed, horizontal line. The toil of everyday life can now be relieved by the thrill of a quick escape. However, production is still a labor-intensive affair and not all workers can afford cars. Density remains a necessary part of production in the early years and so the *Capital* grows vertically as well as horizontally, importing labor, building skyscrapers and factories. The population of the *Capital* has more than tripled since the introduction of the assembly line. Skyscrapers become part of the skyline as the downtown asserts its influence as the cultural, business focus of the region, creating a counter force to the centrifugal pull of the factories being built at the periphery. Classicism is the preferred style with the austere and repetitive slabs of the *General Motors World Headquarters* leading the way. Government and corporations seem to be cut out of the same cloth. As the saying goes, "What is good for *General Motors* is good for America." Some citizens see this as the golden age, a time when the expansive potential of the automobile is balanced by a dynamic downtown representing the civic realm. The *Capital* boasts the high level of single-family ownership in the country while building theaters, ballparks, department stores and office buildings in the downtown core.

The World War Two, and the focus shifts from cars to tanks. The *Capital* out produces them all. There are problems. Black workers brought up from the south to fill the need for wartime labor are perceived as a threat. Race riots ensue and the dream of the 1930s is over. It turns out that density is difficult to manage. The pay-off for the war effort is the solution to the problem of density; a new idea, build roads instead of cities. It could not have happened at a better time. The Cold War is brewing and the nuclear threat makes density dangerous, the wartime image is of a city in flames. As with all the great ideas in the history of the *Capital*, it moves things forward by leaving something behind. The *National Highway Defense Act* of 1956 solves the problem of density by building a way out of the city. You could say that the Bomb did its work without exploding. The *Capital* escapes from itself leaving behind its tall buildings and busy streets for the quiet isolation of the suburbs. The genius of the *Capital* is its ability to start anew, leave a part of itself behind. Unlike the railroad capitals of the previous century with their grand stations, plazas and boulevards the "Capital of the Twentieth Century" is built upon the promise of the open road. Movement is power.

The second half of the century sees factories all over the countryside, connected by a network of highways, which spawns the suburbs. Cars have become a necessity, an integral part of the national transportation network. Some simple facts tell the tale. From 1950 and 1970 the number of cars in the United States more than doubles and the number of two-car households double

from 13 to more than 29% of households. The United States has over 40,000 miles of new highways. But these changes are not enough to keep up with advances in production. Automation speeds up the line, gradually replacing workers with machines, keeping production capacity ahead of the demand curve. How to fill the gap? Another idea emerges, fabricating desires, transforming the needs of the consumer. The seduction of excess speed and comfort, images of jet intakes and afterburners, glowing lights, precious indicators transcend the practical necessity of car ownership. The car becomes an accessory, one for him and one for her in matching colors. Leaving downtown behind has released citizens from the bounds of civic duty and propriety, releasing a flood of narcissistic energies. The *Capital* directs these energies toward demands for its product.

The expansion continues to the end of the century, filling the continent, crossing the seas, seeding other lands. Meanwhile, back where it all began, we see the results of all this heady success. The factories and skyscrapers stand empty, whole neighborhoods are gone and the land turned back to prairie. Curiously, the headquarters remain along with a few factories built into the emptied stretches of former neighborhoods. In 1992 *Chrysler* builds a one million square foot plant on Mack Avenue five miles from downtown, an ambitious move given the crack-fueled gang violence of the late 1980s in the surrounding in the surrounding, east side neighborhoods. After nearly a century of delirious growth the *Capital* looks back. Is this the beginning of a historical conscience? Maybe so, but as usual it takes the form of an idea that increases production. The idea is simple: history sells. People have fond memories of the cars they or their parents once owned or wanted. The retro *Ford Thunderbird* evoking the classic 1957 model has already been named a classic. The *P/T Cruiser* evokes a double nostalgia, one for the customizing craze of the 1960s and a second for the bulbous, streamlining designs of the 1930s. The idea also works for the redevelopment of the *Capital's* abandoned neighborhoods. The suburb becomes the preferred redevelopment model for the city. Rows of single-family houses with lawns and garages with names like Victoria Park and Brush Park to fill the empty parcels. Home ownership is offered as the answer to urban poverty. Supported by government backed mortgage loan guarantee programs and the low cost of land, developers are finally turning a profit. There is nothing like a monthly mortgage payment to keep one in line.

The new juxtaposition is curious; suburban houses with their manicured lawns adjacent to rundown neighborhoods. The line that once existed between the white suburbs and the black districts of the *Capital* has folded in upon itself making each street an economic and ethnic threshold potential threshold. The intertwining of fear and power is seen in the gates that regulate access to the suburban enclaves like Victoria Park with the bejeweled SUVs sporting chromed-out mags circling ominously outside the walls. This ambivalence also is incorporated into the latest desire images. A 2002 advertisement for the *Hummer*, the largest and most fearsome SUV declares "It's What You Need." Need trumps want when it comes to fear as the militarization of the *gangsta style* is pushed across the suburban threshold.

Need also trumps want when it comes to casino gambling, the new industry at the heart of the *Capital*. Since the legalization of gambling in 1996 three casinos have opened in the city. Importing an idea from another capital, the citizens are looking to increase the tax base shrunk by the loss of factories. The 'temporary' site for the *MGM Grand* is in the former IRS building while the *Motor City Casino* is located in the former *Wonder Bread* factory. Aware of the perceived danger in its downtown location, the *Motor City Casino* publicity boldly states, "The area is not pretty, absolutely no local ambiance. That's alright because all the action is inside." It goes on to say that "... the background décor evokes images of a young and growing industrial city." A young and growing industrial city housed in an area with absolutely no local ambiance. The *Capital* always finds of way of looking beyond itself to the promise of a new idea, even if that idea exists in the form of a historical image. We are reminded that the *Capital* is not a place but a product, the latest marketing idea.



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## MOTOR CITY

Charles Waldheim (2002)

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“The belief that an industrial country must concentrate its industry is, in my opinion, unfounded. That is only an intermediate phase in the development. Industry will decentralize itself. If the city were to decline, no one would rebuild it according to its present plan. That alone discloses our own judgment on our cities.”<sup>1</sup> (Henry Ford)

In the second half of the 20th century, the city of Detroit, once the fourth largest city in the U.S., lost over half its population.<sup>2</sup> The *Motor City*, once an international model for industrialized urban development, began that process of decentralization as early as the 1920s, catalyzed by Henry Ford’s decision to relocate production outside the city to reduce production costs. While similar conditions can be found in virtually every industrial city in North America, Detroit recommends itself as the clearest, most legible, example of these trends evidenced in the spatial and social conditions of the post-war American city.

“Forget what you think you know about this place. Detroit is the most relevant city in the United States for the simple reason that it is the most unequivocally modern and therefore distinctive of our national culture: in other words, a total success. Nowhere else has American modernity had its way with people and place alike.”<sup>3</sup>

In August 1990, Detroit’s *City Planning Commission* authored a remarkable and virtually unprecedented report.<sup>4</sup> This immodest document proposed the de-commissioning and abandonment of the most vacant areas of what had been the fourth largest city in the U.S. With this publication, uninspiringly titled the *Detroit Vacant Land Survey*, the city planners documented a process of depopulation and disinvestment that had been underway in Detroit since the 1950’s.<sup>5</sup> With an incendiary 1993 press release based on the *City Planning Commission’s* recommendations of three years prior, the city Ombudsman, Marie Farrell-Donaldson, publicly called for the discontinuation of services to, and the relocation of vestigial populations from, the most vacant portions of the city:

“The city’s ombudsman . . . is essentially suggesting that the most blighted bits of the city should be closed down. Residents would be relocated from dying areas to those that still had life in them. The empty houses would be demolished and empty areas fenced off; they would either be landscaped, or allowed to return to ‘nature.’”<sup>6</sup>

Until the public release of the survey, the depopulation of Detroit was largely accomplished without the endorsement of, or meaningful acknowledgment by, the architectural and planning professions. What was remarkable about Detroit’s 1990 *Vacant Land Survey* was its unsentimental and surprisingly clear-sighted acknowledgment of a process of post-industrial de-densification that continues to this day in cities produced by modern industrialization. Equally striking was how quickly the report’s recommendations were angrily dismissed in spite of the fact that they corroborated a practice of urban erasure that was already well underway.

While European proponents of modernist planning had originally imported Fordism and Taylorism from American industry and applied them to city planning, it was the American city (and Detroit in particular) that offered the fullest embodiment of those principles in spatial terms. Ironically, while the American planning profession ultimately embraced the virtues of Fordist

urbanism in the middle of the 20th century, they were ill prepared for the impact those ongoing processes would have on forms of urban arrangement as evidenced by the condition of Detroit at the end of that century. Among those impacts were the utter abandonment of traditional European models of urban density in favor of impermanent, ad hoc arrangements of temporary utility and steadily decreasing density.

While flexibility, mobility, and speed made Detroit an international model for industrial urbanism, those very qualities rendered the city disposable. Traditional models of dense urban arrangement were quite literally abandoned in favor of escalating profits, accelerating accumulation and a culture of consumption. This of course was the genius of Ford's conception: a culture that consumes the products of its own labor while consistently creating a surplus of demand ensuring a nomadic, operational, and ceaselessly reiterated model of ex-urban arrangement. That ongoing provisional work of rearrangement is the very model of American urbanism that Detroit offers.

Typical of their peers in other American cities, Detroit's city planners, architects, and urban design professionals clinicalized the dying industrial city to the extent that Detroit came to represent an *urban* failure, as though the responsibility for its viability rested with the techniques of modernist urbanism that shaped its development. This was to mistake effect for cause. As a product of mobile capital and speculative development practices in the service of evolving models of production, Detroit was a clear and unmistakable success. As promoted internationally by the proponents of Fordism, Detroit served as a model of urbanism placed in the service of optimized industrial production. With each successive transformation in production paradigms, Detroit re-tooled itself more completely and more quickly than virtually any other city in history.

What was remarkable about the *Detroit Vacant Land Survey* and the City of Detroit's plan to decommission parts of itself was not its impossibility, but rather the simple fact that it dared articulate for public consumption the fact that the city was already abandoning itself. This fact alone did not make Detroit unique. In the 1990's Detroit ranked a distant 22nd nationally in the percent of its population lost compared with other metropolitan centers, having already surrendered the majority of its citizenry over the previous four decades.<sup>7</sup> The original abandonment and subsequent suburban annexation of central Detroit began well before similar conditions emerged in other major cities. Unlike other cities, however, Detroit began its process of decentralization and urban abandonment sooner and pursued it more completely than any other city in the modern world. Perhaps more importantly, Detroit was the only city that dared to publicly articulate a plan for its own abandonment and conceive of organizing the process of de-commissioning itself as a legitimate problem requiring the attention of design professionals. In a graphically spare document featuring maps blacked-out with marker to indicate areas of vacant land, Detroit's planners rendered an image of a previously unimaginable urbanism of erasure that was already a material fact.<sup>8</sup>

"One last question must now be asked: during a crisis period, will the demolition of cities replace the major public works of traditional politics? If so, it would no longer be possible to distinguish between the nature of recessions (economic, industrial) and the nature of war."<sup>9</sup>  
(Paul Virilio)

Over the course of the 1990's the City of Detroit lost approximately 1% of its housing stock annually to arson, primarily due to 'Devil's Night' vandalism.<sup>10</sup> Publicly, the city administration decried this astonishingly direct and specific critique of the city's rapidly deteriorating social conditions. Simultaneously, the city privately corroborated the arsonists illegal intent by developing, funding, and implementing one of the largest and most sweeping demolition programs in the history of American urbanism. This program continued throughout the 1990's, largely supported by the city's real estate, business, and civic communities. This curious arrangement allowed

both the disenfranchised and the propertied interests to publicly blame each other for the city's problems while providing a legal and economic framework within which to carry out an ongoing process of urban erasure. Ironically, this 'solution' to Detroit's image problems completed the unsanctioned process of erasure begun illegally by the populations left in the wake of de-industrialization. Vast portions of Detroit were erased through this combination of unsanctioned burning and subsequently legitimized demolition.<sup>11</sup> The combined impact of these two activities, each deemed illicit by differing interests, was to coordinate the public display of social unrest with administration attempts to erase the visual residue of Detroit's ongoing demise.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau describes the limits of disciplinary relevance absent the human subjects demanded by professional authority: "... the dying man falls outside the thinkable, which is identified with what one can do. In leaving the field circumscribed by the possibilities of treatment, it enters a region of meaninglessness."<sup>12</sup>

For the architectural profession, the city of Detroit in the 1990s entered a similar condition of meaninglessness precisely because it no longer required the techniques of growth and development that had become the *modus operandi* of the discipline. Absent the need for these tools, Detroit became a 'non-site' for the architect in the same sense that de Certeau's dead body ceased to operate as a 'site' for the physician's attention.<sup>13</sup> As the city de-commissioned itself, it entered a condition that could not be *thought* by the architectural and planning disciplines. As Dan Hoffman put it, in the early 1990s "... unbuilding surpassed building as the city's primary architectural activity."<sup>14</sup> The fact that American cities began to dissolve as a result of the pressures of mature Fordist decentralization came as a surprise only to those disciplines with a vested interest in the ongoing viability of a 19th-century model of urbanism based on increasing density. Free of that prejudice, the development of American industrial cities can more easily be understood as a temporary, ad hoc arrangement based on the momentary optimization of industrial production. The astonishing pliability of industrial arrangement and the increasing pace of change in production paradigms suggest that any understanding of American cities must acknowledge their temporary, provisional nature. The explosive growth of Detroit over the first half of the 20th century, rather than constructing an expectation of enduring urbanism, must be understood as one half of an ongoing process of urban arrangement that ultimately rendered its previous forms redundant.<sup>15</sup> Detroit can be seen as nothing more than the most recent idea about production as manifest in spatial terms. The fact that American industrial urbanism would decreasingly resemble its European and pre-Fordist precedents should come as no surprise. Rather than a permanent construction, one must take American urbanism as an essentially temporary, provisional, and continuously revised articulation of property ownership, speculative development, and mobile capital.<sup>16</sup> Especially for those Modernists interested in mobility and new models of social arrangement, the flexibility and increasing pace of technological change associated with Fordist production served as models for an increasingly temporary urbanism. The most obvious model for this iterative and responsive urbanism could be found at the intersection of industrial production and military infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> For Le Corbusier, the origins of the city itself could be found in the ur-urbanism of the military encampment. Commenting on the architectural myths of the primitive hut, this drawing of a circumscribed martial precinct reveals the essentially nomadic pre-history of urban arrangement in European culture. Ancient rites for the founding of Roman cities were essentially symmetrical with those for the founding of military encampments. In *The Idea of a Town*, Joseph Rykwert describes how performing the precise reverse of those founding rites was used to signify the decommissioning or abandonment of an encampment, thus corroborating their essentially symmetrical status.<sup>18</sup> With his *Co-op Zimmer* project, Hannes Meyer commented on the collusion between the mass consumer products of Fordist production and their replication in the miscellany of modern military nomadism.<sup>19</sup> Meyer's project arranged a petit-bourgeois domestic ensemble of semi-disposable consumer furnishings as the interior of an equally transportable military accommodation.

The most direct critique of modern urbanism as informed by 20th century military techniques can be found in the projects of Ludwig Hilberseimer.<sup>20</sup> Hilberseimer's proposals for a radically decentralized pattern of regional infrastructure for postwar America simultaneously optimized Fordist models of decentralized industrial production and dispersed large population concentrations that had become increasingly obvious targets for aerial attack in the atomic age. Hilberseimer's drawing of an atomic blast in central Illinois renders a clear imperative for the construction of a civil defense infrastructure capable of transporting dense urban populations away from the dangers of the city and toward the relative security of suburban dissolution.<sup>21</sup> This model of the highway as a military infrastructure afforded a form of civil defense through camouflage. Not coincidentally, the depopulation of urban centers in response to the cold war argues quite effectively for precisely the kind of decreasing density that his previous work had been predicated on in the name of efficient industrial production and optimized arrangement. In both modalities, as military encampment and industrial ensemble, the vision of a nationally scaled infrastructure of transportation and communication networks revealed a fundamental sympathy between Fordist models of industrial production and military models of spatial projection.

Much has been written on the military origins of the modern interstate highway system in the U.S. and the impact of military policy on postwar American settlement patterns has been well documented. While the highway is arguably the clearest evidence of Fordism's impact on postwar urban arrangement in America, it is also clear that this most Fordist network is itself an essentially military technology. Given Ford's well-documented sympathy to Nazism, the infrastructural and logistical logics of the German war machine provided an essential case study in the virtues of Fordist mobility.<sup>22</sup> Not simply a model of production, but an essential Fordist precept, mobilization was understood not only as a preparation for the projection of military power but also the retooling of the very industrial process itself toward martial ends. It should come as no surprise that the modern interstate highway, the very invention Ford's success postulated was itself first proven necessary through German military engineering. By witnessing the logistical superiority and civil defense potential of the *Autobahns*, the American military-industrial complex was able to articulate the need for the highway as an increasingly urgent matter of national security.

Not coincidentally, Detroit has the dubious honor of being the only American city to be occupied three times by federal troops.<sup>23</sup> Another evidence of the parallels to be drawn between military encampments and Detroit's temporary urbanism can be found in the symmetrical techniques employed to enforce social order amidst the dense concentration of heterogeneous populations. The history of Detroit's labor unrest documents the various quasi-military techniques employed to render a suitably compliant labor pool to serve the needs of the production line. Detroit's social history has oscillated between periods of peacefully coerced consumption (fueled by advertising and increasing wages) and periods of profound social unrest, largely based on the desire for collective bargaining, improvements in economic conditions, and to redress racial and ethnic inequities.<sup>24</sup>

Ford's famous *five-dollar day* and *five-day workweek* were quite calculated levers intended to fuel the consumption of mass products by the working classes themselves. The volatile concentration of diverse populations of laborers in dense urban centers was among the factors that led Ford to begin decentralizing production as early as the 1920's.<sup>25</sup> The combination of decentralized pools of workers each with sufficient income to consume the products of their own labors produced a new economic paradigm in the 20th century and also helped to fuel the rapid depopulation of post-industrial urban centers in postwar America.

In 1955, at the height of post-war emigration from the city, a uniquely talented team was assembled to renovate one of the city's 'failing' downtown neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup> A federally underwritten *Title I FHA* urban renewal project that would come to be known as Lafayette Park, the work of

this interdisciplinary team offers a unique case study in a continuously viable and vibrant mixed income community occupying a modernist super-block scheme. In light of recently renewed interest in the problems of modernist planning principles, and the continual demolition of many publicly subsidized modernist housing projects nationally, Lafayette Park offers a unique counterpoint, arguing precisely in favor of modern principles of urban planning, and recommending a thoughtful revision of the perceived failures of modern architecture and planning vis-à-vis the city.

Led by the developer Herbert Greenwald (until his untimely death in a 1959 airplane crash) and a team of real-estate professionals, the financial underpinnings of the project included \$7.5 million in FHA loan guarantees (out of a total construction budget of \$35 million) as well as a substantial federal subsidy toward the cost of the land. Originally planned as a mixed-income and mixed race development, Lafayette Park continues to this day to enjoy multiple original family residents, high relative market value, and greater racial, ethnic, and class diversity than both the city and suburbs that surround it. Greenwald's original conception of the neighborhood remains remarkably viable today, as the site continues to provide central city housing to a middle class group of residents with the perceived amenities of the suburbs, including decreased density, extensive landscaping and public parks, easy access by automobile, and safe secure places for children to play.

Greenwald enlisted the professional services of architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe for the design of the project, with whom he had previously worked on the development of the 860–880 Lake Shore Drive Apartments in Chicago. Mies brought to the team Ludwig Hilberseimer, to plan the site, and Alfred Caldwell, to execute the landscape design. Based largely on his previous academic projects in Germany and the U.S., Lafayette Park provided the most significant application of Hilberseimer's conception of the 'settlement unit' as well as the most important commission of his career. Hilbs' settlement unit was particularly apt as an aggregation of planning principals and types appropriate to the decentralizing North American city.<sup>27</sup> Best known for his unbuilt urban design projects from the 1920's (*Hochhausstadt*, 1924 et al.), Hilbs began to work on the notion of landscape as the primary medium for a horizontal and radically decentralized post-urban landscape as early as the 1930's. First evidenced in mid-1930's projects for mixed height housing schemes and the *University of Berlin* campus, these tendencies toward an idea of landscape *as* urbanism are immediately evident in Hilbs' plans for the Lafayette Park site, a portion of the city of Detroit that decentralized first, fastest, and most fully.

Hilberseimer's plan for the site proposed landscape as its primary material element, the commission offering both sufficient acreage as well as an adequate budget for what could have otherwise been an uninspired urban void. Central to this was Greenwald's finance and marketing scheme, which positioned landscape as the central amenity in the form of an 18-acre park bisecting the site and providing a much sought after social and environmental amenity in the midst of Detroit. Lafayette Park removed the vestiges of the obsolete 19th-century street grid, in favor of a lush verdant and extensive green *tabula verde*. By rendering the primary spatial structure of the site in a lush verdant layer of landscape, Hilberseimer accommodated the automobile completely at Lafayette Park, yet rendered it secondary to the primary exterior spaces of the site as the parking is in proximity to units, while zoned to the perimeter of the site and dropped by approximately one meter below grade. To the extent that landscape can be seen as a primary ordering element (in lieu of architecture) for the urbanization of the site, Hilbs' collaboration with Mies at Lafayette Park provides a unique case study for examining the role of landscape in post-war modernist planning more generally.

At the end of the 20th century at least 70 urban centers in the U.S. were engaged in an ongoing process of abandonment, disinvestment, and decay.<sup>28</sup> While most Americans for the first time in history now live in suburban proximity to a metropolitan center, this fact is mitigated by the steadily decreasing physical density in most North American cities. Rather than taking the aban-

donment of these previously industrial urban centers as an indicator of the so-called 'failure' of the design disciplines to create a meaningful or coherent public realm, these trends must be understood as the rational end game of industrial urbanism itself, rendering legible a mobility of capital and dispersion of infrastructure that characterize mature Fordist urbanism as prophesied by Ford himself.<sup>29</sup> In spite of a decade long attempts to 'revitalize' the city of Detroit with the construction of theaters, sports stadia, casinos and other publicly subsidized, privately owned, for profit destination entertainment, Detroit continues to steadily lose population and building stock. These latest architectural attempts to proclaim Detroit 'back' have effectively committed the city to a future as a destination entertainment theme park for its wealthy suburban ex-patriots. Rather than signaling a renewed 'vitality' or life for the post-industrial city, these projects continue to mine the brand name of Detroit, while the city continues to abandon itself to a decentralized post-industrial future. In spite of a massive federally funded advertising campaign and a small army of census takers, the 2000 *U.S. Census* showed Detroit's population continuing to shrink.<sup>30</sup>

As Detroit decamps it constructs immense empty spaces, tracts of land that are essentially void spaces. These areas are not being 'returned to nature,' but are curious landscapes of indeterminate status. In this context, landscape is the only medium capable of dealing with simultaneously decreasing densities and indeterminate futures. The conditions recommending an urbanism of landscape can be found in both the abandoned central city and on the periphery of the still spreading suburbs. Ironically, the ongoing process of green-field development at the perimeter of Detroit's metropolitan region brings up similar questions posed by the incursion of opportunistic natural environmental systems into areas of post-urban abandonment. For these sites, both brownfield and greenfield, what is demanded is a strategy of landscape *as* urbanism, a *landscape urbanism* for Detroit's post-industrial territories.<sup>31</sup>

The decommissioning of Detroit's vacant lands recommends strategies for staging or setting-up reserves of open land of indeterminate status. These reserves of open space necessitate infrastructural strategies for social and ecological arrangement in the context of an indeterminate future. Also needed are collective conceptions of these spaces that are capable of rendering Detroit's post-industrial territories legible to various populations and constituencies. Rather than allowing these spaces to be legislated by brand naming and destination tourism, their future viability as true void spaces depends upon the imaginary and mythic conditions of their founding. Toward this end, the decommissioning of these territories requires the same kind of public participation and rites that attended to their original annexation and incorporation.

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The origins of this essay can be found in the research and design project *Decamping Detroit* co-authored with Marili Santos-Munne in: *Stalking Detroit*, ACTAR, Barcelona 2001, pp. 104–121.

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## TROUBLE IN MOTOR CITY

Joe Kerr (2000)

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“Detroit is seven counties, 233 communities, nearly five million people and 300 years of history, and that’s just since the Europeans arrived. On one block it looks like ground zero of the rust belt, the next, like Jay Gatsby’s front lawn. Burdened by an image of grime and crime, bigger than Madrid, Miami, Saigon and Sydney, beholden to a troubled recent past, metro Detroit is a tough place to figure out.”<sup>1</sup>

There’s trouble in *Motor City*, but then that’s nothing new. Detroit always seems to be in some kind of bother—industrial strikes, civil-rights clashes, race riots, urban depopulation and delinquency, unparalleled crime rates—and all of that in the last of its three centuries of history. To be fair, Detroit has recently looked to be on the way up again—with the city celebrating its tri-centenary in style, and with new construction promising to breathe life into its downtown for the first time in decades—but trouble there undoubtedly is, trouble of a familiar kind for the *Motor City*.

For the car companies are once again in deep financial gloom, signaling the latest crisis in the American economy as it lurches unsteadily from boom to bust. When Ford, the second largest of the ‘Big Three’ American motor manufacturers, says it will shed five thousand jobs and cut production, then its home city starts to worry. And when *General Motors*, the world’s largest corporation, announces a 73% drop in income for the second quarter of 2001, then the whole American economy braces itself for the onset of recession. For as they say in the *Motor City*, ‘What’s good for *General Motors* is good for America’—and vice versa. It is with almost laughable hubris that Wall Street has tried to ignore these recent storm warnings, with one analyst claiming that ‘unless the rest of the economy goes off the end of a cliff, the . . . recession in the auto business is over.’<sup>2</sup> But then that was in August 2001, and the following month the economy did fall over the proverbial edge.

Detroit has shrugged off the consequences of economic downturn many times in the past, and the current recession has actually arrived on the back of a long period of booming sales. But this time around, the long-term prospects are especially ominous, with foreign car companies circling like vultures over the wounded giants of the American automotive industry.

So has *Motor City* finally run out of road? If so, it would bring to a close the most remarkable chapter in the history of American manufacturing. For in the 106 years since the first motorized vehicle took to the streets of Detroit, the city has been at the heart of America’s relentless economic expansion. We may think of New York or Los Angeles as the quintessential cities of modern America, yet Detroit could lay as good a claim to that particular honor. For despite its three centuries of white settlement, the city only assumed its role as America’s powerhouse in the 20th century, when it grew to become the largest industrial site in the entire world. But it is precisely because Detroit was in the vanguard of America’s growing economic dominance in the first half of the 1900s that its subsequent headlong decline into redundancy seems so extraordinary.

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## DRIVING THE WORLD ECONOMY

For the enormous wealth which Detroit’s car plants once generated, and which helped to build it into the third most populous city in the U.S., has long ceased to sustain it. Only a quarter of American cars are still made in Detroit, and those in highly automated plants, with a consequent loss of half the city’s post-war population to the suburbs or beyond. The details of Detroit’s long decline are complex, but the reasons for it are clear, for the *Motor City* and its rustbelt neighbors are the most conspicuous victims in the Western world of the relentless progress of globalization.

In Detroit's case, it is the rise of the Japanese car industry, and the relocation of manufacturing and assembly facilities to cheaper and less unionized labor markets, that has done the damage. The irony of this abject decline is that the *Motor City* was once at the forefront of what economic historians now identify as globalization's first phase, when, in the first couple of decades of the last century, the way the world did business was utterly transformed by an unprecedented expansion in trade. A combination of surplus wealth for overseas investment, improved communications to keep track of those investments, a dramatic improvement in both the speed and the cost of transportation, and the increased mobility of labor created perfect conditions in which the 20th century's new industries could flourish and grow.

Already a successful but modest manufacturing and trading city, Detroit provided a fertile environment for the fledgling automobile industry, replete as it was with the resources that the new industrial barons required: Existing factories forged metal components and constructed wooden car bodies. Machine shops milled tools and parts for automobile production. Most important, Detroit's marine engine makers already knew how to make gasoline engines. Detroit was also the home of highly successful lumber, mining, and shipbuilding entrepreneurs. These people had capital to invest in the emerging car business.<sup>3</sup>

Even so, it is remarkable how rapidly car-making took root there, and how quickly Detroit grew to become not just the most important American manufacturing center, but quite simply the largest site of industrial production in the world. The figures only hint at the extraordinary acceleration of this young industry at the turn of the century. In 1896, Charles Brady King drove Detroit's first horseless carriage down its principal thoroughfare, Woodward Avenue. In 1901, pioneer manufacturer Ransom E. Olds built 425 of his famous *Curved Dash Olds*, the first volume production of cars in America. And in 1913, only ten years after establishing the *Ford Motor Company*, Henry Ford introduced the moving assembly line at his new *Highland Park* factory. Within three years, he was responsible for making 50% of all American cars and 40% of cars around the world. By the time war broke out in Europe, Detroit was turning out 78% of America's cars and had already acquired its famous and enduring sobriquet, *Motor City*. Having had the apparent good fortune to acquire the major new industry of the 20th century, Detroit exploded at a staggering rate, expanding from 23 to 139 square miles in the first quarter of the century. Hordes of European immigrants beat a path from Ellis Island to the Motor City, part of the biggest migration in human history. In 1904, the car factories employed less than 3,000 workers, but by 1919 that number had jumped to over 75,000 in Detroit alone, without counting the thousands who flooded into the new industrial communities--Flint, Hamtramck, Highland Park and Pontiac--that now ringed the city. Even before stricter immigration controls introduced in 1924 cut off that supply of unskilled labor, agricultural workers from the southern states of America began the long trek to Michigan, lured by Henry Ford's famous promise of \$5 a day. As Blind Blake sang in his "Detroit Bound Blues:"

"I'm goin' to Detroit, get myself a good job  
Tried to stay around here with the starvation mob.

I'm goin' to get me a job, up there in Mr. Ford's place  
Stop these eatless days from starin' me in the face."<sup>4</sup>

Ford was one of only a handful of industrial companies that employed significant numbers of black workers. The influx of African Americans from the deep South may have been largely responsible for Detroit's unique musical culture, but it was the tide of immigrants from within and without America, allowed to settle in tight-knit communities, that sowed the seeds for many of Detroit's subsequent woes.

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### COMETH THE HOUR

In these boom years, however, the city fathers paid scant attention to issues such as racial integration, given the pressing need to attract hands of whatever color or creed to work the new production lines. Although more than 350 different makes of car were produced in the area at one time or another, it was not long before a few select manufacturers began to outstrip their competitors, most remarkably Henry Ford.

Although Ford was not the unique innovator delineated by his many apologists, his success stemmed from the successful implementation and integration of many of the new ideas that flowed from the pioneers of the automobile industry. Ford's own most important contribution was to look beyond the luxury market pursued by his competitors and to concentrate his efforts on designing and producing low-cost, reliable and universally affordable vehicles. It was his single-minded ambition to push down unit costs that led to his most significant innovations, such as the moving assembly line and the standardization and simplification of parts.

It was to realize these ends that he built his revolutionary new factory at Highland Park, where his first experiments with mass production were made on the *Model-T* assembly lines in 1913. The benefits--to Ford at least--were instantaneous: the time needed to make a single *Tin Lizzie* dropped from 12-1/2 man-hours to 93 minutes, while the price plunged from about \$850 for a hand-built *Model T* in 1908 to \$298 for the same car rolling off the automated assembly line in 1922. By the time that production of the world's first mass-produced auto ceased in 1927, Ford had made over 15 million of them, and at one time it was said that every other car in the world was a *Model T*. The price paid for these innovations by the assembly workers themselves, and by the workers on every subsequent mass-production line, was extremely high and laid the foundations for Detroit's subsequent history of bitter labor disputes.

By the outbreak of World War Two, Detroit's dominance of the market was complete, and its auto manufacturers had expanded into every corner of the globe. *General Motors*, which became and still is the world's largest corporation, commenced its overseas operations in Canada in 1918, established itself in Europe with a plant in Copenhagen in 1923, in Brazil in 1925, in South Africa, Japan and Australia in 1926, and in India in 1928, opening the first assembly plant there. By 1939, it was also operating in Belgium, Argentina, England, France, Spain, Germany, New Zealand, Egypt, Uruguay, Chile, Java, Mexico and Switzerland, and its overseas sales had exceeded 350,000 vehicles.<sup>5</sup>

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### 'WHERE LIFE IS WORTH LIVING'<sup>6</sup>

In September 1937, labor activist Eli Oliver declared that "Detroit, not Washington, is the capital of the United States today."<sup>7</sup> With a war looming, Detroit could look back on an era of unprecedented growth and prosperity. Not only had it become the forge of America's new industrial empire; the city itself had taken on the guise of a great metropolis.

High-rise offices and hotels had sprouted in the downtown area, transforming the city in the manner of the classic American vision of the *City Beautiful*. By contrast, the enormous automotive factories ringing the city had become celebrated icons of the European Modern movement. For just as the Detroit industrialist Henry Ford had revolutionized the means of production, so the Detroit architect Albert Kahn had pioneered a new form of architecture in which to house the new assembly lines. Most factories of the time were still being constructed on the model established by 18th British mills, but Kahn superseded the standard factory building with something quicker and cheaper to build, and infinitely more fireproof. The system of reinforced-concrete construction he introduced at the *Packard Factory* in 1905, and refined at *Highland Park* in 1908, provided large, uninterrupted spaces between columns, essential for the new production methods, and allowed natural light to flood in from floor-to-ceiling windows.

Detroit became an essential pilgrimage destination for avant-garde artists and architects, eager

to witness the miracle of mass production. Images of Kahn's *Highland Park* factory appeared in all of the pioneering Modernist texts, most famously Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (1923).<sup>8</sup> The German architect Erich Mendelsohn visited Detroit in October 1924, later recalling: "At my first visit to the States in 1924 . . . two things stagger my imagination: Buffalo's grain elevators and Albert Kahn in Detroit."<sup>9</sup> Mendelsohn would undoubtedly have seen Kahn's newest and greatest industrial structure, Ford's *River Rouge* plant built from 1917, which grew in ten years to become the world's largest factory. This 1,000-acre complex, with its 100,000 workers, 14 miles of roadways and 92 miles of railway track, was described by *Vanity Fair* in 1928 as "the most significant monument in America."<sup>10</sup> The *Rouge* plant, universally received as the epitome of modernity, was famously painted and photographed by such progressive artists as Charles Sheeler, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.<sup>11</sup> But Kahn himself was no devotee of the Modern movement, and he was happy to design Detroit's grand public buildings in a variety of classical styles, while for the great mansions of the automotive barons he turned to European domestic styles, most famously for the *Edsel* and *Eleanor Ford House*, designed as a *Cotswold* manor house.

But Detroit did not feel like the center of the modern world for many of its citizens after the stock market crashed in October 1929, an event that hit the industrial state of Michigan worse than any other part of the U.S. Many of the smaller carmakers went under, and even in the larger plants the workers who kept their jobs faced drastic wage cuts. At the *Rouge*, Ford workers saw their hourly wage drop from 92 to 52 cents by 1933. Thus it was that in the 1930s, Detroit again wrote itself into American history books, this time as the center of the struggle for union recognition and workers' rights. In 1932, a march by 3,000 Ford workers to the *Rouge* plant was fired on by security guards, killing five. In 1935, the *United Auto Workers* (UAW) union was formed, prompting a series of bitter and violent disputes that led to nation-wide speculation as to whether revolution was imminent.

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### THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY

Detroit and America were saved from the possibility of insurrection by the outbreak of war, which returned the car plants to full production. The war was a godsend for certain previously disadvantaged sections of the labor force, in particular African Americans and women who suddenly found themselves doing jobs that had not been open to them before, as other autoworkers went off to fight. Even then, only a third of Detroit's defense plants would hire African Americans, and in a telling portent of trouble ahead, the promotion of black workers was a common cause of many labor disputes during the later war years. In July 1943, racial tensions came to head with the worst race riots the nation had seen. Two nights of violence saw 34 people dead and hundreds injured before troops restored order.<sup>12</sup>

The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 may have killed demand for private cars, but this proved no bad thing for the *Motor City*. Far from it; it merely served to underscore Detroit's total dominance of vehicle making. With one former GM President, William Knudsen, co-coordinating national war production and another, Charlie Wilson, later serving as Secretary of Defense, it was perhaps inevitable that the city should prosper during the conflict, as its other famous nickname--*Arsenal of Democracy*--suggests. But even with friends in high places, the scale of the city's contribution to the war effort was extraordinary, for it made 92% of American military vehicles, 87% of its aircraft bombs, 75% of its aircraft engines and 56% of its tanks. Henry Ford's *Willow Run* bomber factory, designed by Kahn and opened in 1941 with the world's longest production line, produced 8,000 warplanes alone, while *General Motors* supplied a total of 12.3 billion dollars worth of war material. As Charlie Wilson famously observed at his Senate confirmation hearings in 1952, "For years, I thought what was good for our country was good for *General Motors*--and vice versa."

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## THE CARS THAT ATE DETROIT

By the war's end in August 1945, Michigan's industries had supplied 12% of all war materials produced in the U.S., far outstripping any other area. But VJ Day did not mark the end of the good years for Detroit. It seemed that Charlie Wilson was right, for as America entered an unparalleled era of prosperity, increased demand for motorcars more than compensated for the cessation of wartime production. Indeed, the 20-year period from 1945 has often been hailed as the golden age of the American auto. High wages and low oil prices fuelled demand for the increasingly extravagant products of the *Motor City*. Harley Earl's flamboyant designs for *General Motors* such as the 1955 *Chevrolet Bel Air* and the 1958 *Cadillac Eldorado* were the last word in consumer-led styling, with their towering tail fins, wraparound windshields and outlandish dashboard gadgets. These supercharged monsters proved irresistible to a generation experiencing a seemingly limitless growth in purchasing power, and in 1955 alone a staggering nine million cars rolled off Detroit's tireless production lines.

Inevitably, there was a price to be paid for this insatiable production and consumption, and it was Detroit that paid it. More cars meant more industrial facilities and more people to work in them—on the face of it, highly beneficial developments for the city. However, the new plants were built at some distance from the center, and around them new communities sprung up with amazing rapidity, acting like magnets on existing populations and new immigrants alike. It is estimated that Detroit itself lost nearly 150,000 manufacturing jobs in the first 20 years of peace. *General Motors'* fabulous new Technical Center, designed by Eero Saarinen in another great act of architectural patronage, opened in the auto suburb of Warren in 1956. Warren became the fastest-growing city in the state during the 1950s and 1960s as a complex web of assembly plants and supply industries developed there, along with huge tracts of new housing. The expanding expressway network facilitated the relentless migration from downtown to the suburbs. The first of these, the Detroit Industrial Expressway, was built during the war to carry 20,000 workers a day from metropolitan Detroit to the new bomber plant at *Willow Run*. By the mid-1950s, 7,000 Detroiters had been displaced by motorways, and many previously flourishing inner-city neighborhoods had been bisected by them, precipitating rapid social decline. In 1954, America's first 'cluster' mall, the *Northland Shopping Center*, opened in the outer suburbs, developed by Detroit's famous downtown department store, *Hudson's*, and planned by the king of the post-war shopping mall, Victor Gruen. It was followed by the *Eastland* and *Westland* centers, forming a noose to throttle the life out of downtown. Ever greater numbers of Detroit's population now drove their new cars along new roads, carrying them from new houses to new factories and shopping malls. The city, like a tree, was dying in the middle as fresh growth sprouted on the outside.

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## 'MOTOR CITY IS BURNING'<sup>13</sup>

The phenomenon of 'white flight' was not unique to Detroit, although few other cities have experienced such a dramatic collapse in their inner-city populations. Between 1955 and 1960 alone, Detroit lost as much as 25% of its population of two million, as those who could headed for cheap housing and low taxes in the suburbs, leaving the inner city with fewer tax dollars and a residual population that was predominantly poor and black. It may have been well-paid jobs that had drawn African Americans to the *Motor City* in the first instance, but it was poor race relations that subsequently alienated them, in the process lighting a powder keg under the city's social fabric.

For while Detroit is justly famous for nurturing a unique black musical culture, it is perhaps less known outside the U.S. as a hotbed of the civil rights movement. When in June 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. first declared "I have a dream," he was speaking not on the steps of the *Lincoln Memorial* in Washington, D.C., but in *Cobo Hall* in downtown Detroit, after leading a 125,000-

strong civil-rights march up *Woodward Avenue*, the largest in America up to that time. And while it is a well-publicized part of Detroit folklore that *Motown* founder Berry Gordy once worked on the Ford production line, composing songs to alleviate the tedium of assembly work, guidebooks to the city generally neglect to mention that at the same time Ford was also employing the future *Nation of Islam* leader, Malcolm X.

It can have come as no surprise to anyone when inner-city Detroit finally boiled over in July 1967, after a police raid on an illegal speakeasy sparked off a week of rioting that left 43 dead and 467 injured, the worst civil unrest in 20th-century American history up until that time. The physical damage was immense, with about \$50 million of property destroyed, including hundreds of homes and thousands of shops looted or burnt, leaving whole city blocks in ruins. But it was the social damage that inflicted the biggest wounds on Detroit. Although segregation was already a fact of life there, the riots left an enduring legacy of extreme polarization that further contributed to the community's social collapse. By the 1970s, Detroit had acquired the thoroughly deserved nickname of 'Murder City.' Its 1974 record of 714 homicides was the worst in the nation, a feat it matched in several other years in the following decade.

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### THE END OF THE LINE?

Detroit's social plight was reinforced by the steady decline and displacement of the auto industry. Many famous carmakers had ceased production or been taken over, eventually leaving just the Big Three: *General Motors*, *Ford* and *Chrysler*. While they continued to maintain a considerable presence—including the world's greatest concentration of research and technical facilities—increased rationalization and automation, and the relocation of production facilities to low-wage economies, massively reduced their dependence on local labor. Added to this was the steady loss of consumer confidence in American-designed and -built automobiles.

In this respect, the *Motor City* was once again the victim of its own earlier success. The outrageous excesses of its annual model updates had so successfully stimulated consumer desires that the manufacturers had devoted themselves more to innovations in styling than in technology. The disastrous consequences of this policy were exposed in 1965, when Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* slammed Detroit for designing and selling cars that were known to be dangerous, allegedly causing untold injuries and deaths on America's roads. The *Ford Mustang* and *General Motors' Corvair* were singled out for particular criticism, with the result that sales of GM's fabled 'muscle' car fell by 93%. The American public was waking up to the fact that what was good for *General Motors* wasn't necessarily good for it after all.

Over-confident from decades of total domination of American markets, the carmakers were still building their unwieldy and antiquated products when the oil crisis hit in 1973. With petrol suddenly expensive and scarce, American buyers shied away from Detroit's lumbering 'gas guzzlers' in favor of smaller, more fuel-efficient Japanese imports—particularly as growing concerns over environmental pollution increased the attractiveness of less ostentatious private vehicles. Throughout the 1950s, American cars had accounted for 95% of the American market, but by the late 1970s imports had risen to as much as 25% of total sales. However, even that diminished market share seems like a strong performance given the parlous state of the industry today. For, as the *Detroit News* revealed on the fateful morning of September 11:

"The once Big Three ... have seen their collective share of the U.S. car and light truck market shrink from the 73% they enjoyed in 1993 at the start of the unprecedented sales boom to nearly 14 percentage points lower last month ... Their share has sunk below 60% for the first time since 1920.<sup>14</sup>

It remains entirely possible that one day soon, cars will finally cease rolling off the production lines of the *Motor City*. *Chrysler* continues to lose money and market share, despite having merged with German car giant *Daimler-Benz*, and is in real danger of being displaced from the Big Three by *Toyota*. Even mighty *General Motors*, the only one of the three to turn in a profit

this year, has seen its market share slip continually, from 60% in the 1950s to 28% today. One can only hope for America's sake that its destiny is no longer so closely tied to the *GM Corporation*.

But where does that leave the *Motor City*? As one drives past its derelict towers and shattered neighborhoods, it might seem that God has deserted Detroit, but the automotive industry certainly hasn't yet done so. The city that witnessed the birth of the mass-produced automobile a century ago is still home to the giants of American car production. *General Motors*, *Ford* and *Chrysler* all maintain headquarters in the area.<sup>15</sup> The very names of the city's streets and buildings read like an almanac of America's most famous carmakers: Edsel Ford, Walter P. Chrysler, Packard, Studebaker, Fisher.

Unfortunately, speeding past downtown Detroit, as opposed to wandering through it, is exactly what most people are keen to do, intent on avoiding unimaginable dangers on the rutted streets of this ruptured urban landscape. Although new buildings are once again rising in the city center, they are overshadowed by the empty shells of elaborate skyscrapers, including such once-famous hotels as the *Cadillac*, the *Madison* and the *Statler*, whose only remaining function is to support microwave aerials for the new information technologies. The fabled department store Hudson's has been put out of business by its suburban progeny and was recently dynamited. Many of Detroit's theatres are destroyed or abandoned, while the grand auditorium of the *Michigan Theater* has been converted into a multi-level parking garage. *The Fabulous Ruins of Detroit* is a website that charts the wreckage of the *Motor City*. With wry native humor, it compares Detroit to ancient Rome; the comparison seems all too plausible as one surveys the jagged skyline of this decaying metropolis.

Moving away from downtown, the ring of inner-city suburbs that once housed the *Motor City's* workers have largely disappeared, creating one of the most distressed urban landscapes in the Western world. Between the deep fissures dug for the urban expressways and the mountainous hulks of the deserted car plants run streets almost wholly devoid of the buildings that once lined them. The charred remains of timber-frame houses in various stages of collapse are interspersed with plots of grass, flowers and trees; the last surviving dwellings sit in semi-rural splendor, with some intrepid inhabitants even starting to cultivate the redundant acres around them. A 1989 survey by reporters of the *Detroit Free Press* counted "15,215 vacant structures, including 9,017 single-family homes, 225 apartment buildings and 3,404 vacant businesses. The city estimated then that up to 200 structures a month were being abandoned in Detroit".<sup>16</sup> Detroit's official motto, *Speramus meliora, resurget cineribus*--"We hope for better days; it shall rise from the ashes"--was penned after a disastrous 19th-century fire. But as the industry that once drove 20th-century American expansion continues its inexorable decline, it is difficult to imagine how Detroit can ever rise from its present ruination. While the *Motor City* will always hold a unique position in the history of America, it now seems less and less likely that it will play a significant part in its future. Given that prospect, Henry Ford's famous dictum, delivered at a time of unbridled optimism in his adopted city, now sounds suspiciously like a verdict on its demise: "History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Detroit Almanac: "300 years of life in the Motor City"*, in: *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit 2001, p. 3

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Gilpin, "G.M. Registers 73% Decline in Net Income for Quarter", in: *New York Times*, August 12, 2001

<sup>3</sup> *Detroit Historical Museum*, [www.detroithistorical.org](http://www.detroithistorical.org)



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## DEVIL'S NIGHT

Toni Mocerri (2003)

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Known in Detroit as 'Devil's Night,' October 30 has become infamous around the world as the day Detroit sets itself on fire. 'Devil's Night' fires began in large numbers in 1983. That year, Detroit had over 600 fires during the three-day *Halloween* period from October 29 to October 31.<sup>1</sup> The following year, 'Devil's Night' fires reached epic proportions and called international attention to Detroit. 'Devil's Night' in 1984 was the worst in Detroit's history: the city experienced 297 fires on 'Devil's Night' and 810 during the three-day *Halloween* period.<sup>2</sup> Former Detroit Fire Department Chief Jon Bozich describes the devastation of 1984: "1984 was our worst 'Devil's Night,' the worst fire scenes I've seen since the riots of 1967. We had fires burning where there were no fire companies available to respond ... It was the worst thing I've seen on a non-riot basis."<sup>3</sup>

**History:** *Halloween* originates from the *Festival of Samhain* among the Celts. As part of the festival, people set bonfires on hilltops for relighting their hearth fires for the winter and to frighten away evil spirits.<sup>4</sup> The Celts also believed that mischievous fairylike beings came out during this period. As a result, people began performing pranks and blaming them on these beings. In the 19th century, large numbers of Irish immigrants came to the United States bringing their *Halloween* traditions with them. By the 20th century, *Halloween* had become an established holiday in the United States. *Halloween's* appeal came from its revelry, masquerading and cultural inversion. Nicholas Rogers notes that people were usually given a "special license" on *Halloween*, which included mischief and pranks. In some parts of the United States the mischief starts the night before *Halloween*. Depending on the area, people call this night 'gate night,' 'trick night,' 'mischief night,' 'cabbage night,' 'goosy night,' 'devil's eve,' or 'devil's night.'<sup>5</sup> Rogers describes some early pranks: It was customary to root up vegetables from backyard gardens, disfigure jack-o'-lanterns on front steps or porches, unhinge gates and shutters, tip over outhouses, pull down signs and fences, and even tear up the wooden boarded sidewalks.

However, the harsh realities of the 20th century began to transform the 'harmless' *Halloween* pranks. For example, David Skal argues that the Great Depression brought out *Halloween's* underlying sentiments of economic disparity, charity and class resentment during the Depression, pranks often resulted in the destruction of private and public property. According to Skal, these pranks included breaking street lamps, smashing windows, overturning cars, and mob beatings. Throughout the second half of the century, authorities have made several attempts to quell *Halloween* related pranks. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, urban areas in the United States were experiencing a severe economic and social crisis. Once again, *Halloween* pranks became a way in which people could express their civic unrest and this time the method of choice was arson.

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## ORIGINS

The transformation of 'Devil's Night' from a night of harmless pranks to one of arson was not spontaneous. Instead, the progression of 'Devil's Night' seems almost inevitable, the result of Detroit's 'ills' converging together with *Halloween* traditions. The 'Devil's Night' phenomenon in Detroit is a complex problem for the city. Through massive anti-arson efforts focused on the three-day *Halloween* period, Detroit has reduced the number of fires that occur during that time. Still, the city has not addressed the sources of the fires. Many of the same problems continue to beleaguer Detroit and contribute to the city's arson problem.

Thomas Sugrue argues that Detroit's decline began in the middle decades of the 20th century. He writes: "The bleak landscapes and unremitting poverty of Detroit in the 1970s and 1980s are the legacies of the transformation of the city's economy in the wake of Two World War, and of the politics and culture of race that have their origins in the persistent housing and workplace discrimination of the postwar decades."<sup>6</sup> In the years preceding 'Devil's Night' 1983, Detroit was bleak. Increased arsons, large numbers of abandoned buildings, cuts in city services and high unemployment plagued the city.

According to the Fire Department, from 1969 to 1979 arsons increased from approximately 1,150 to 2,384.<sup>7</sup> In 1980, the number of arson fires decreased to 2,001 out of 18,051 total fire incidents.<sup>8</sup> Revenge accounted for the greatest number of arson fires, 668 fires or 33%<sup>9</sup>. Other motives included fraud, juvenile arson, concealment of another crime, attempted arson and pyromania. According to Helen Fogel, there were 2,139 confirmed arson fires in 1981 and 2,156 in 1982.<sup>10</sup>

**Arson:** The *Detroit Arson Squad* must investigate a suspicious or incendiary fire to deem it arson. If the *Detroit Arson Squad* does not investigate a fire then it cannot be arson. The Fire Department puts out a 24-hour sheet that lists every fire response in 24 hours. The responding company lists the fire as a probable electrical, suspicious, undetermined, etc. Whether or not the *Arson Squad* investigates a fire depends on the severity of the fire and manpower.

#### **Arson Investigative Priorities**

1. Death
2. Burn injuries
3. Occupied Dwelling
4. Commercial
5. Vehicles
6. Vacant Properties
7. Others

#### **Arson Investigative Techniques**

1. Verify vehicle location.
2. Investigate from least amount of damage to the worst. This determines the area of origin.
3. Investigate the suspected origin to determine the cause:
  - Check for obvious clues (for example: Molotov cocktails).
  - Eliminate accidental sources such as electrical ones.
  - Take samples. Identify the least burned object and mark it for evidence, check for accelerants (flammable fluids).
4. Check to see if the fire started in multiple locations. Chances of multiple fires accidentally occurring in a dwelling fire are slim to none.<sup>11</sup>

## **ECONOMIC STRUGGLES**

Media and officials blamed the increase in arsons on the recession and decreases in fire protection. Brian Flanigan reported that arsons in Michigan also increased in the early 1980s. He quoted State Police Captain William Rucinski, "[In 1981] Michigan reported 8,607 fires of suspicious origin with losses of \$31.2 million and 6,204 arsons with losses of \$24 million."<sup>12</sup> The increase in arsons and their cost was partially due to an increase in fraud. Detroit had increasing numbers of absentee property owners who found burning their properties more profitable than maintaining them. Flanigan also quoted U.S. Attorney Leonard Gilman about Detroit's arson problem: "Arson is definitely a problem in this area, and it's become an even greater problem because of the economy. Individuals are having their business burned down to collect insurance claims."<sup>13</sup> At a time when the economy was causing increased arson in Detroit, it was also affecting the Detroit Fire Department's budget and its ability to protect the city against those very fires. Fogel reported that cutbacks in funding for fire services resulted in 450 fewer fire fighters, 19

fewer fire fighting crews and 18 fewer firehouses.<sup>14</sup> The cutbacks also affected Detroit's arson squad. Fogel quoted an arson detective as saying that his department is keeping up only with big investigations; small fires, like garage fires that trouble residents at the neighborhood level, simply had to go by the boards.<sup>15</sup>

The poor economy and cuts in fire protection were not the only circumstances contributing to 'Devil's Night' arson. Patricia Anstett spoke with over 24 experts and community leaders about reasons for the 'Devil's Night' fires.<sup>16</sup> The reasons include:

- Professional arsonists
- Large number of abandoned buildings
- Unemployment
- Pent-up feelings of urban youths
- Insurance fraud
- Attention placed on the event
- Lack of leadership in the community

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### **ABANDONED BUILDINGS**

Detroit's large number of abandoned buildings is a leading contributor to 'Devil's Night' arson. In general, abandoned buildings are more prone to fire. George Sternlieb and Robert Burchell found that abandoned buildings were four times more likely than other types of structures in Newark New Jersey to have a severe fire.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, according to the *National Fire Protection Agency*, two-thirds of fires in vacant and abandoned buildings were incendiary or suspicious.<sup>18</sup> Kim Heron quoted Young as saying that the city's 5,000 abandoned houses helped fuel 'Devil's Night' arsons.<sup>19</sup> Factors contributing to the Detroit's abandonment problem include:

- Declining population (between 1950 and 2000 Detroit lost almost half of its population)
- Plant closures and companies relocating outside of Detroit
- Falling property values
- White flight
- Aging homes
- Failed HUD program (by January 1975 the federal government owned 16,774 houses and vacant lots in Detroit)

Detroit's problems directly affected its population. Coleman Young describes the affects of unemployment in his autobiography. He states " ... that the high unemployment rate created feelings of desperation and depression among Detroiters."<sup>20</sup> The lack of opportunity in Detroit hit the city's youth especially hard. Grace Lee Boggs writes: "Because of [the] high-tech industry and the export of jobs overseas, young people could no longer drop out of school in the ninth grade and get a job in the plant making enough to raise a family. Then in the mid-1980s crack was invented, creating the basis for the crack economy. All over town young people started saying, 'Why continue going to school in the hope that eventually you'll get a degree and make a lot of money when you can make a lot of money right now rolling?' As a result, turf struggles erupted and our neighborhoods became war zones where children walking to and from school risked being shot and killed."<sup>21</sup>

The growing divide between Detroit and its suburbs compounded the lack of opportunity. Young argues that isolation and racism by the suburbs led to sentiments of self-hate and self-destruction among the city's residents.<sup>22</sup>

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### **THE MEDIA AND THOSE THAT FOLLOWED**

The media frenzy surrounding 'Devil's Night' in Detroit ensured that all eyes focused on the city's fires. After the record-breaking number of arsons during the 1984 *Halloween* period, Detroit had secured the title of *Arson Capital of the Nation*. The arson in Detroit had gained national and international media attention. Both the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* featured articles

on Detroit's 'Devil's Night' and even the Tokyo-based *Asahi-TV* sent crews to document it.<sup>23/24</sup> In 1985, *The Free Press* and *WDIV-TV* had a nationwide poll conducted to assess Detroit's image around the country. The poll showed that two out of three Americans regard Detroit as 'somewhat worse' or 'much worse' than other big cities.<sup>25</sup> Detroit's unemployment and violence were some attributes contributing to the city's negative image. 37% of those polled had heard about the 'Devil's Night' fires while 59% heard about the 1967 riots.<sup>26</sup>

Reporters were not the only group flocking to Detroit to witness 'Devil's Night'. Detroit began attracting a new type of tourist, the 'fire buff'. Bill McGraw reported that the hundreds of fires on the night before *Halloween* had made Detroit a (fire) buffs' Mecca.<sup>27</sup> The exact numbers of buffs drawn to the city each year is unknown, but the article reported fire enthusiasts came from Dallas, Washington, D.C., and New York City. 'Devil's Night' even drew off-duty firefighters to Detroit from the surrounding suburbs, such as Sterling Heights, to observe the fires.<sup>28</sup> The large crowds not only provided an audience for pyromaniacs and attention-seeking youth setting fires, but also made controlling 'Devil's Night' and the city's image more difficult. William J.V. Neill writes: "Hollywood had inflicted the negative *Robocop* image on Detroit in films depicting random urban mayhem, but the local Detroit tradition of 'Devil's Night' was a self-inflicted image disaster."<sup>29</sup>

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## THE CITY RESPONDS

In 1985, Young appointed an *Anti-Arson Initiative Steering Committee* (initially known as the *Devil's Night Task Force*) to achieve the goals of "reduced arson, raised community awareness, and increased community involvement in the fight against arson".<sup>30</sup> The committee included representatives from the mayor's office, Detroit Neighborhood City Halls, city government departments and agencies, public schools, community-based organizations and the private sector. Patricia Edmonds reports that the 'Devil's Night' taskforce compiled data to prepare for future 'Devil's Nights'. Among their findings, they discovered that eight areas of the city, where 16% of the population lives, were responsible for 65% of the fires.<sup>31</sup> All but one of these areas was on Detroit's Eastside. Mayor Young also mobilized a group of approximately 8,000 people including the city's Police and Fire Departments plus of city workers, mayoral appointees, and community volunteers to thwart the 'Devil's Night' activities.<sup>32</sup> The efforts spanned the three-day *Halloween* period, October 29–31. Other anti-arson activities included switching radio frequencies so only police officers and fire fighters could receive them, installing new computer equipment to correlate emergency calls, and launching programs to remove abandoned buildings and loaded trash dumpsters.<sup>33</sup>

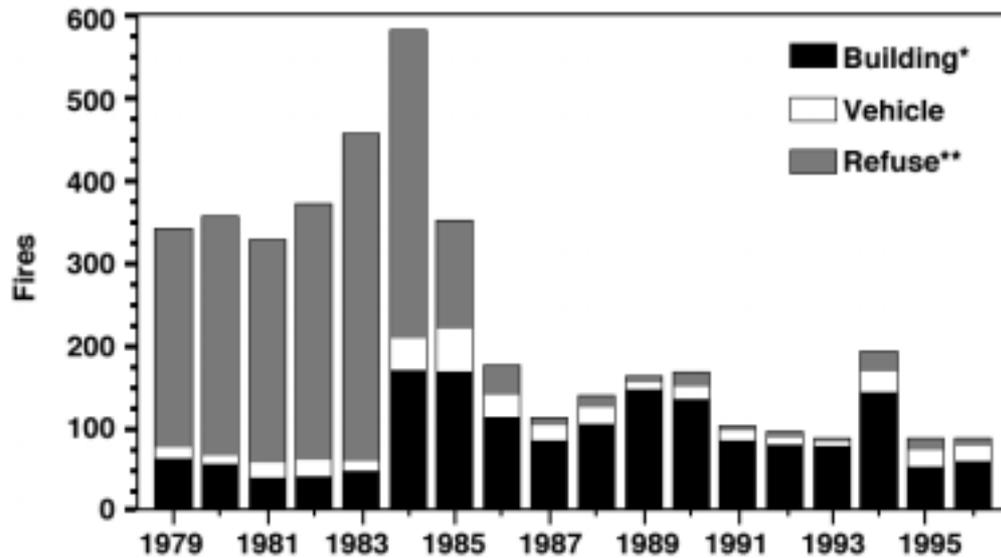
**Fire Net:** *Fire Net* is a multi-jurisdictional effort coordinated by the Detroit Fire Department to catch and arrest arsonists during the *Angels' Night Campaign*. Participating agencies have included *U.S. Marshals, Postal Inspectors, FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Michigan State Police, Michigan State Fire Marshal, and Wayne County Sheriff's Office*. The *Fire Net Command* dispatches the *Fire Net Teams* to locations of 'working fires'. At the fire scene, *Fire Net* personnel must:

1. Block the intersections around the fire scene to prevent unnecessary vehicle traffic.
2. Clear the area around the fire ground of people who do not live in the area.
3. Attempt to locate witnesses who have information regarding the fire.
4. An *Investigative Response Team* is assigned to respond with each *Fire Net Team*. The *Investigative Response Team* will determine the origin and cause of the fire.<sup>34</sup>

In 1986, according to Heron, the *Detroit City Council* approved the emergency curfew measure by eight to one at Mayor Young's request, avoiding public hearings needed to permanently change city laws.<sup>35</sup> The resulting curfew is from 6pm to 6am and affects all minors unless they are accompanied by an adult or provide documentation verifying employment, night school, etc. The article also reported that Young asked television stations to refrain from showing footage of burning buildings until their 11pm newscasts.<sup>36</sup>



Number of confirmed or suspected arson fires reported during the Three-Day *Halloween* period (October 29–31), by type—Detroit, Michigan, 1979–1996



\*Occupied or vacant buildings and garages. \*\*Brush or rubbish fires involving little or no monetary loss. This includes all children with matches fires.

Source: Detroit Fire Department, City of Detroit; Barbara J. Maciak et al., Urban Community Intervention to Prevent Halloween Arson—Detroit, MI, 1985–1996, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 46.14, April 11, 1997

## ANGELS' NIGHT

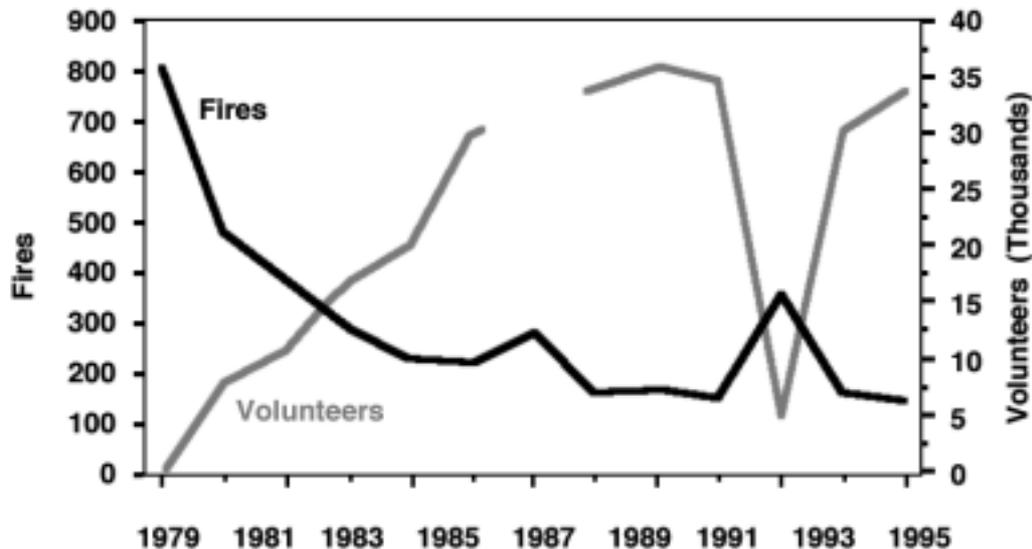
In 1994, Detroit had a new mayor, Dennis Archer. Because of the relatively small number of fires in previous years, Mayor Archer decided that the *Devil's Night Anti-Arson Campaign* was not a priority and did not recruit necessary numbers of volunteers. Less than 5,000 volunteers participated in the anti-arson campaign.<sup>46</sup> As a result, the number of fires during 'Devil's Night' increased significantly to 182.<sup>47</sup>

In 1995, the Archer administration began searching for an alternative name for the 'Devil's Night' period and the *Angels' Night Campaign* began.<sup>48</sup> Mayor Archer renewed the anti-arson efforts and mobilized more than 25,000 volunteers.<sup>49</sup>

**Camden:** Camden is located on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River across from Philadelphia. Like Detroit, Camden experienced a mass exodus of businesses and residents after World War Two. In Camden, the night before *Halloween* is called 'Mischief Night'. In 1991, the city experienced 133 'Mischief Night' fires. Since that time, Camden has successfully reduced the number of fires with an anti-arson campaign modeled off of the Detroit 'Devil's Night' efforts. In 1995, the city only experienced seven building fires on 'Mischief Night' at a time when the city was averaging 20 fires a night.

Barbara Maciak and her colleagues examined the multiple components of Detroit's anti-arson intervention from 1985 through 1996. They argue that both the decrease in annual *Halloween* arson fires after the intervention began and the inverse relationship between the number of volunteers and the number of fires suggests a causal relationship between them.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, they espouse Detroit's anti-arson campaign as a model for community collaboration. The following graph shows the number of fires during the three-day *Halloween* period and the number of volunteers participating in the *Anti-Arson Campaign*. The graph supports the argument that high numbers of volunteers result in fewer fires.

Total number of fires (arson and non-arson) reported during the three-day Halloween period and number of volunteers participating in anti-arson activities--Detroit, Michigan, 1984-1996\*



\*Volunteer data no available for 1990

Source: Detroit Fire Department, City of Detroit: Barbara J. Maciak et al., Urban Community Intervention to Prevent Halloween Arson-Detroit, MI, 1985-1996, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 46.14, April 11, 1997

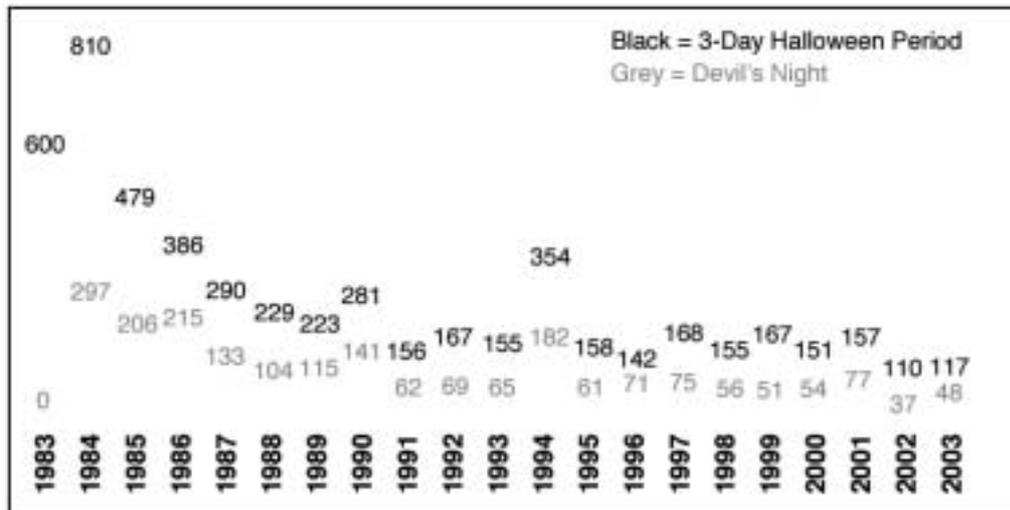
Mayor Archer maintained the vigilance of the *Angels' Night Campaign*. For example, in 1998, leaders of a gang prevention program said leaders of six gangs have agreed to refrain from arson, violence, and vandalism during the three-day *Halloween* period.<sup>51</sup> By 2001, Mayor Archer's last year in office, the city had 32,000 volunteers patrolling the city.<sup>52</sup> Many of the components of Mayor Young's anti-arson campaign continued as part of the *Angels' Night Campaign*. Volunteers could participate in the *Neighborhood Patrol Program*, *Adopt-a-House Program*, *Porch Light Program*, *Eyes and Ears*, and *Orange Ribbon Campaign*. The youth could enter the poster and essay contests or partake in planned youth and teen recreational activities. The city also organized senior activities and enacted the youth curfew and sale of fuel ordinances. Before the Halloween period, the Detroit Police Department and the Department of Public Works both worked to remove possible arson targets. In the days before the 2001 *Angel's Night Campaign*, the Police Department removed 2,060 abandoned vehicles while the Department of Public Works demolished 716 abandoned buildings.<sup>53</sup>

The Kilpatrick administration has continued the efforts of its predecessors. In 2002, Mayor Kilpatrick mobilized over 40,000 volunteers and started an annual *Angels' Night Community Rally*.<sup>54</sup> In 2003, Mayor Kilpatrick sought to get Detroit in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the largest mobilization of volunteers. On the first three Saturdays of October, Detroit employees canvassed neighborhoods to recruit volunteers and increase awareness for the *Angels' Night Campaign*.<sup>55</sup> The efforts mobilized 46,000 volunteers.<sup>56</sup> Mayor Kilpatrick fell short of the world record but he broke the Detroit record for the second year.

**Fire Department Logistics:** The Fire Department calls a reported structure fire a *box alarm*. A *box alarm* run includes three engines, one truck, one rescue squad, and one chief. When the Fire Department experiences a high volume of *box alarms*, they call them *specials* to avoid attention. During hi-lo operations, such as the *Angels' Night Campaign*, extra fire-fighters are put on *x-rigs*. The Fire Department does not document *x-rig* fire service.<sup>57</sup>

The following chart shows the number of fires during the three-day *Halloween* period and the number of fires that occurred only on 'Devil's Night' from 1983 to 2003. Some controversy over the legitimacy of the numbers has existed over the years. For example, in 1989, Mayor Coleman Young did not count trash fires to shrink the total number of fires during the 'Devil's Night' period. Fire officials across the U.S. disagreed with the Young administration's new fire classification standards. According to McGraw, using national standards, the fire count for the 1989 three-day period would have been 412 fire: the first increase in five years.<sup>58</sup>

#### Total Fires 'Devil's Night'/Three-Day Halloween Period Detroit, Michigan 1983–2003.



Local newspapers have reported the average daily number of fires in Detroit as between 60–65 fires. For several years, the number of 'Devil's Night' fires has been under or close to the daily average. The *Angels' Night Campaign's* success in stemming fires is obvious. Law enforcement, fire fighters, city workers and community volunteers saturate the city. Police Sergeant Sherry Keyes and Police Investigator Denise Bilinski argue, "If they didn't do these efforts fires would increase . . . people know that forces are out in greater numbers . . . if curfew ended, we would have more fires . . . these efforts are key."<sup>59</sup>

Eminem: Just as when the infamy of 'Devil's Night' seemed to be fading into Detroit's past, Eminem brought 'Devil's Night' and Detroit's 'practice of setting itself on fire' into the world of pop culture. In June of 2001, Eminem's label *Shady Records* released D12, a.k.a. Dirty Dozen's, debut album, *Devil's Night*. D12 includes Proof, Kon Artis, Bizarre, Kuniva, Swifty, plus Eminem.<sup>60</sup> The album's title references Detroit's annual 'Devil's Night' tradition and seems an attempt to solidify the group's connection with Detroit and the city's violence. *8 Mile*, the film loosely based on the life of Marshall Mathers aka Eminem, includes a scene in which the film's hero, Rabbit, and his friends burn down an abandoned house in Detroit where a young girl was reportedly raped. In March of 2002, the filming of the scene in a Detroit suburb, Highland Park, caused controversy among the city's residents. Although *Universal Studios* offered to demolish two vacant homes, donate \$2,000 to a Highland Park charity, give a lecture about the movie business to high school students and compensate the residents inconvenienced by the location shooting, many residents including the Highland Park City Council were opposed to shooting the scene in Highland Park.<sup>61</sup> Residents argued that the burning of the house would set a bad example for the city's young people and furthered Highland Park's image as a ghetto.<sup>62</sup> Residents held a protest rally, but the city's financial manager, Ramona Henderson Pearson approved the scene. She stated that that Highland Park had 1,600 vacant properties in the 2.9 square-mile city and the demolition of two properties would help the situation.<sup>63</sup>

D12 recently entered the studio to record their second album, *Devil's Night II: Halloween*. The album is set to release in February 2004.<sup>64</sup> The 'Devil's Night' tradition continues ...

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### ORIGINS REVISITED

The truth is that the *Angels' Night Campaign* does not provide long-term solutions to Detroit's problems. The *Angels' Night Campaign* has become a positive tradition in Detroit: it allows Detroiters to invest in their communities and unifies the city through a successful anti-arson campaign. Nevertheless, without the massive community mobilization, the city would burn and does burn. According to the *Detroit News*, in 2002, the number of arson fires in Detroit reached a high of 2,429.<sup>65</sup>

The same 'ills' that plagued Detroit 20 years ago and created an environment ripe for 'Devil's Night' arson still exist today. The isolation of Detroit from its suburbs continues. Ron French and Oralandar Brand-Williams reported that living in such a highly segregated metro area negatively affects Detroiters.<sup>66</sup> They found that Detroiters suffer from higher infant mortality, crime and unemployment than inner-city residents in less-segregated cities. Adding to the social isolation are depopulation, abandonment and limited fire protection. Problems continue to plague Detroit's Fire Department. In 2000, several fire-related deaths prompted the *Detroit News* to investigate the fire department. Some of their findings include:

- In 1999, more than 2,000 of the city's fire hydrants were reported out-of-service, some for more than four years. Moreover, no official count of how many of the city's 30,400 fireplugs are broken exists.<sup>67</sup>
- In 1999, on 286 days, the fire department closed at least one of the city's 71 fire companies because of mechanical problems with trucks. On 49 days, the fire department closed companies because of low staffing.<sup>68/69</sup>
- In 1999, on 365 days the department failed to meet the national standard of assigning at least four fire-fighters to each truck. Detroit routinely sends out trucks with three fire-fighters on board.<sup>70</sup>

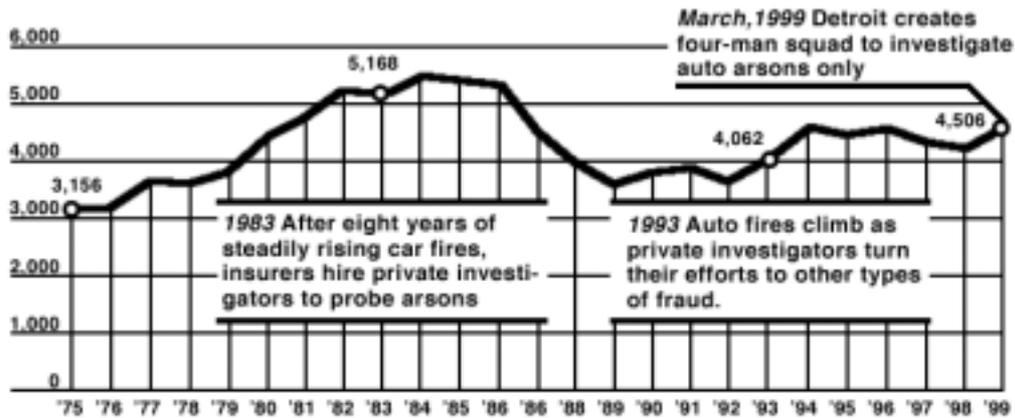
In addition, the fire department's equipment is oftentimes outdated, broken, or in violation of safety laws.<sup>71</sup> Although, limited budgets and problems still inhibit the city's fire department, Mayor Kilpatrick has invested in the Fire Department. He reportedly purchased new fire equipment and increased the number of fire-fighters by 49.<sup>72</sup>

Detroit's continued population loss and abandonment are problems that sometimes seem synonymous. From 1990 to 2000, Detroit lost 76,704 residents.<sup>73/74</sup> The city's vacancy rate increased from 8.8 to 10.3% over the same period.<sup>75</sup> Detroit has maintained a collection of approximately 8,000–12,000 abandoned and vacant buildings. Mayor Kilpatrick and his predecessors have all grappled with the city's abandonment problem. Moreover, both Mayor Young and Mayor Archer acknowledged the relationship between 'Devil's Night' and the city's stock of abandoned buildings. McGraw and Zachare Ball found that two out of every three houses that burned on 'Devil's Night' and *Halloween* in 1987 were still standing; few were barricaded, most are in an advanced state of disrepair.<sup>76</sup> In 2000, Archer stated, "I don't think, at least for the foreseeable future, we can let our guard down. As long as we have abandoned houses in our city, there is also that temptation."<sup>77</sup>

**Auto Arson:** Detroit's auto arson problem ranks as the worst in the nation. In 1999, Detroit had 4,506 auto arsons. Reasons include:

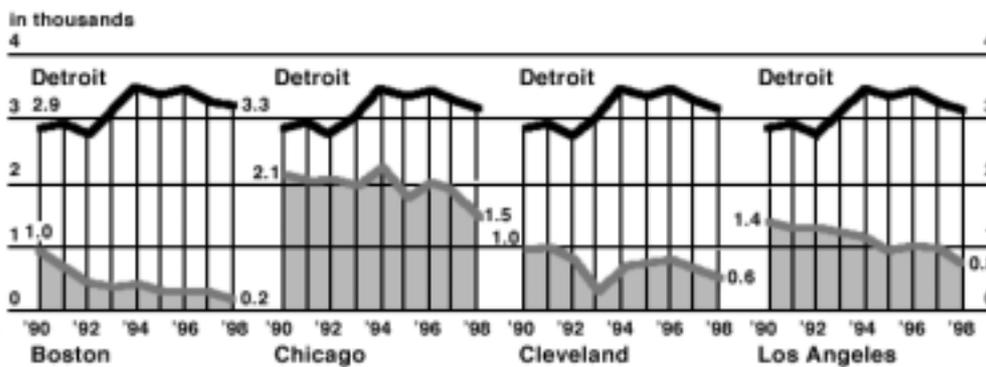
- Insurance fraud,
- Overstretched fire department,
- Ineffective justice system,
- Abundance of deserted lots, back alleys and side streets,
- Concealment of other crimes.<sup>78</sup>

All Detroit auto fires, including arson, 1975–1999



How other cities' auto arsons compared to Detroit's, 1990–1998

Despite a national trend of declining auto arson, Detroit's problem persists.



Auto insurance companies pay out an estimated \$18 million a year for auto arsons in Detroit. Arsonists have a less than 2% chance of being caught. Detroit has had an estimated 19,000 incidents of auto arson insurance fraud in the past decade.<sup>79</sup> In 1999, the Detroit Fire Department created an *Auto Arson Task Force*. There were 4,064 vehicle fires in 2000 and 4,389 in 2001.<sup>80</sup> Nancy Youssef reported that during 2001, auto arsons were up 7% and that the Detroit Fire Department attributed the increase to the sagging economy and consumers' efforts to cash in on the auto companies' 0% financing offer on new cars last year.<sup>81</sup> In May 2001, Detroit began enforcing *Michigan Public Act 413*, passed by the state legislature in January 2001 that enables fire investigators to question vehicle owners about suspicious fires before the insurance company will pay the claim.<sup>82</sup> The law has made the investigators' jobs easier. Because auto arsonists are largely first time criminals, they shy away from talking to the investigators and sometimes even confess.<sup>83</sup>

In his first year in office, Kilpatrick pledged to demolish 5,000 of the city's abandoned buildings by fall 2002. However, the city ran out of money and he fell short of his goal; the city only demolished 2,000 buildings.<sup>84</sup> New Wayne County efforts such as the *Wayne County Board of Commissioners'* adoption of an ordinance to bring nuisance-abatement proceedings against owners of abandoned houses, and the *Detroit and Wayne County Neighborhood Partnership* may help the city.<sup>85/86</sup> In addition, Robert Thompson, a philanthropist, gave Detroit a donation to use in \$1 million installments over the next decade. The money will raze 1,400 buildings this year.<sup>87</sup> However, with an estimated cost of \$7,500 per building, the demolition of any meaningful portion of Detroit's abandoned buildings seems unlikely considering city's budget woes.<sup>88</sup>

### A Message from the Past

The entire village of Detroit was burned to the ground by a massive fire in 1805. Below is the Detroit Flag. The Detroit Seal portrays the city during that time. The fire is shown on the left next to a woman who represents Detroit right after the fire. The Latin inscription above the woman reads, *Speramus Meliora*--'We hope for better things.' The woman on the right represents Detroit's hope. Behind her on the right is a picture of Detroit's rebuilding. The Latin below reads, *Resurget Cineribus*--'It shall rise again from the ashes.'<sup>89</sup>




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### SPERAMUS MELIORA

Overall, little has changed. During Detroit's 20-year history of 'Devil's Night' fires and anti-arson campaigns, the status quo seems to have prevailed. For fiscal year 2003–2004, the Kilpatrick administration projected a budget deficit of \$196 million.<sup>90</sup> With such a deficit, the administration will only be capable of continuing the *Angels' Night Campaign* and managing the arson problem for three days of the year. One day, Detroit will have to move beyond managing arson and truly combat its causes. Until then the 'Devil's Night' tradition will continue. Sugrue remarks: "What hope remains in the city comes from continued efforts of city residents to resist the debilitating effects of poverty, racial tension, and industrial decline. But the rehabilitation of Detroit and other major cities will require a more vigorous attempt to grapple with the enduring effects of the postwar transformation of the city, and creative responses, piece by piece, to the interconnected forces of race, residence, discrimination, and industrial decline, the consequences of a troubled and still unresolved past."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Scott A. Golder et al., *Dialect Survey*--Question 110: What do you call the night before Halloween?, Harvard University, July 25, 2003

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<sup>7</sup> Detroit Fire Department, *Detroit Fire Department Annual Report--1979*, City of Detroit, Detroit 1980, p. 21–22

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## RACIAL DISUNITY

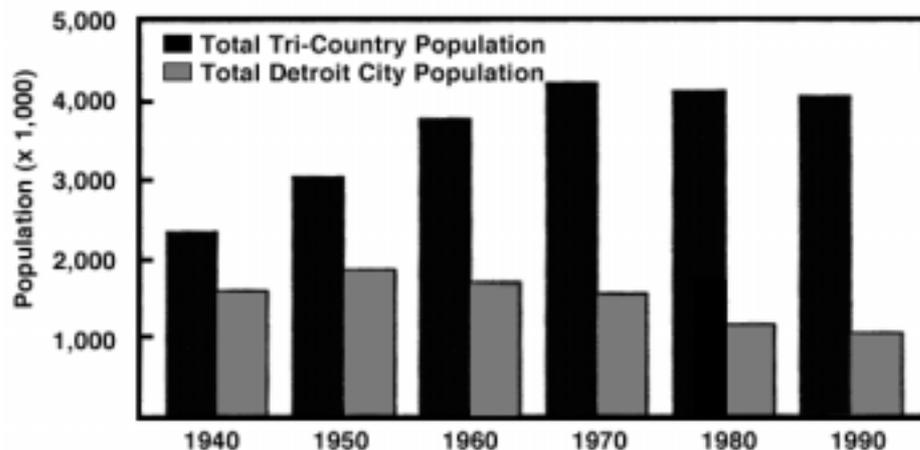
June Thomas (2004, updated version)

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Overview: This chapter is taken from a book published in 1997, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning A Finer City in Postwar Detroit*. The attached chart, drawn from that book, shows population changes in the three counties surrounding Detroit, including its own county, Wayne, from 1940 to 1990. As the chart illustrated, Detroit's population peaked during the 1950s at about 1.8 million; it had declined by the year 2000 to just below one million. Due to high rates of suburbanization, however, the three-county areahas grown to and maintained a population of close to four million.

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**Figure 1: Population Change in the City of Detroit and the Three Largest Metropolitan Areas (Three County-Area), 1940–1990**

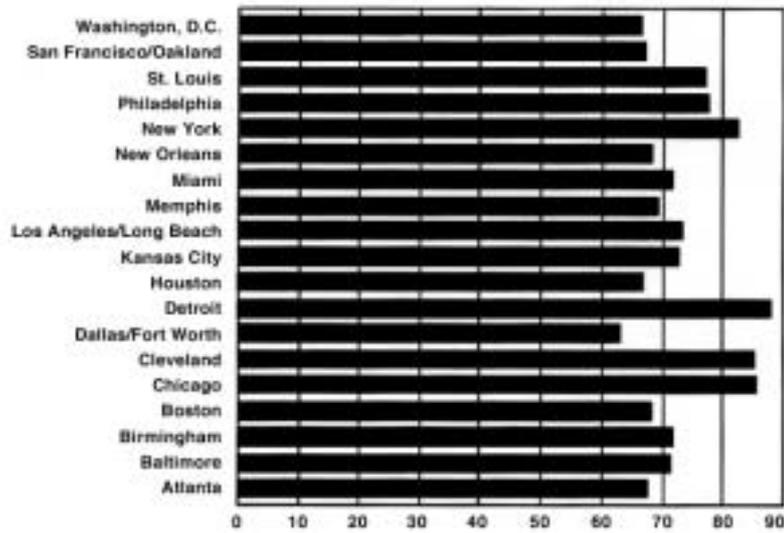


From the original text: Many things could stand in the way of the future well being of cities such as Detroit, which is merely an archetypical example of the problems that confront other U.S. cities. Among the potential barriers to improvement, perhaps the most difficult to resolve will be the lingering effects of racial disunity. One of the most important lessons of postwar Detroit's redevelopment efforts has been that race conflict and change have formed major barriers to city improvement. The Detroit metropolitan area has one of the nation's highest rates of 'racial isolation'. Such rates come from measuring the numbers of people of a particular race who live in a census block composed of at least 90% of their own race. While the amount of racial isolation improved from 1980 to 1990, it has remained a significant problem. Other metropolitan areas continued to experience racial isolation as well, but in the Detroit area it increased to an unusually high extent.

Another way of measuring racial segregation is by using an index of dissimilarity, which measures the minimum percentage of either group that would have to move between census tracts in order to achieve even spatial distribution. By this measure, residential segregation of African Americans was as high in the Detroit metropolitan area in 1990 as in 1980. In fact, black segregation changed hardly at all between 1960 and 1990, standing at high readings of 87, 89, 87, and 87 on a 100-point scale for 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990. As Table 1 indicates, Detroit's segregation index is higher than that of other metropolitan areas, although many of them experience similar conditions.

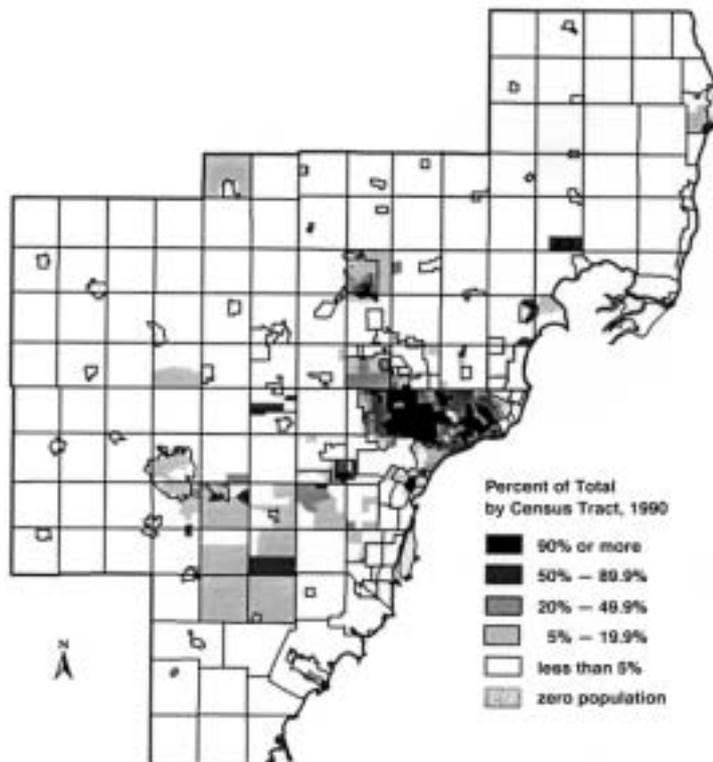


Figure 2: Black Segregation Index, Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1990



If Young's controversial style was indeed the main cause of estrangement, Archer's election should have resolved all such problems. During the 1993 election, Mayor Young endorsed Archer's opponent Sharon MacPhail, a charismatic Afro-American woman who did not hesitate to spar with the white power structure. In contrast, Archer was a natural diplomat. White citizens and institutions would be hard pressed to find capable black mayor more open to negotiation and cooperation than Archer, although Archer also had strength of character and will. Once elected, Archer soon found that his willingness to cooperate did not automatically eliminate suburban non-cooperation. During his first year of office, battles with regional leaders--particularly over a proposed merger of city and regional transit systems--were bruising affairs.

Figure 3: Black Population, Detroit Metropolitan Area



The current dilemma is far broader than personalities or political leadership, which only symbolize the chasm that separates regions and races. The divisions are deep-seated, symptomatic of a virtual spiritual malaise. This racial disunity threatens the future of the city and the metropolitan area. This is evident in the problem of *discrimination*, a major cause of geographic and economic segregation. Racial disunity is also manifest in the lingering problem of *disparity* between the races. Finally, *regional fragmentation* is both a manifestation of, and a barrier to resolving, racial disunity. Each of these three phenomena will have to be overcome before any real revitalization can take place for Detroit.

**DISCRIMINATION**

The problem of discrimination is old and familiar. Residential discrimination is still a live and powerful force within the metropolitan area. Researchers at the *University of Michigan*, administering one survey questionnaire in 1976 and again in 1992, found much higher intolerance among white respondents than among blacks. The survey used picture representations of hypothetical neighborhoods and asked how various racial mixtures of residents would affect mobility. Black respondents were, on the whole, willing to move into racially mixed neighborhoods. When the mixture was half black and half white, for example, 99% of black respondents were willing to enter in 1976, and 97% in 1992. Blacks were also willing, by similar percentages, to move into areas where their race made up 20% of the population. They hesitated only to be the first black person to move into a neighborhood; 38% would do so in 1976; even fewer, 28%, would do so in 1992.

**Table 2: White reaction to mixed neighborhoods, Detroit Metropolitan Area**

	1976	1992
<i>If Blacks were 20% of neighborhood</i>		
Would feel uncomfortable living there	42%	30%
Would try to move out	24%	15%
Would not move in	50%	26%
<i>If Blacks 50% of neighborhood</i>		
Would feel uncomfortable living there	72%	66%
Would try to move out	64%	52%
Would not move in	73%	56%

Source: University of Michigan Detroit Area Study, reported in *Detroit News/Free Press*, October 10, 1992, p.10A, Charlotte Steeh and Reynolds Farley, Detroit: *A Metropolis Divided by Race Report to Respondents*, University of Michigan Detroit Area Study, Ann Arbor March 1993, p. 6

As Table 2 shows, many whites were unwilling to accept residential integration even as late as 1992. Over the 16-year period, tolerance among whites had grown. In 1992, 15% of the white respondents would try to move out of a neighborhood that was 20% black. In 1976, 24% of white respondents would have done so. By 1992, compared to 1976, tolerance has also increased for a hypothetical neighborhood with a half-and-half racial mixture. Even though tolerance improved, two-thirds of the 1992 white respondents would have felt uncomfortable living in a neighborhood where half of the families were black. Over half would move out, and over half would not move in.

This situation left metropolitan neighborhoods vulnerable to racial turnover. Blacks were willing to move to neighborhoods with few blacks, and in real life they opened up several suburban communities. Whites were less willing to move into integrated neighborhoods, and they were quite likely to move out if integration went too far. A common scenario was for a few black families to move into an area, prompting the most intolerant whites to move out. This increased

the percentage of black families. Eventually even the most tolerant whites moved out, or refused to move in, which had much the same result. It took only a little white prejudice to trigger the racial change cycle. In spite of federal legislation prohibiting discrimination, social gatekeepers prevented blacks from moving freely or having free access to home financing. Surveys showed that discrimination against potential renters thrived. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sponsored a series of tests designed to detect such inequitable treatment. The *Detroit Fair Housing Center* found that when it sent white and black home-seekers to the same apartment units separately, the whites were favored in some manner in 50% of the test visits. Snubs could be so subtle that blacks often failed to realize they had been discriminated against. Only questionnaires asking the specifics of their experiences and comparing them by race revealed the truth. Apartment managers gave different information about whether or not apartments were actually available or offered different incentives for moving into them. Many victims successfully filed suit and publicized the results, but this did not deter other apartment managers from discriminating. New bias cases arose to replace the old. The categories 'Black' and 'White' hide great distinctions of class and ethnicity. We can use 'Black' as synonymous with African American in most, but not all, cases. And the 'White' label covers a variety of people. When recent studies have identified respondents by way of more subtle categories, what emerges is pervasive prejudice against other races, ethnic groups, and nationalities as potential neighbors, friends, or co-workers. Among some ethnic groups, tolerance of others is almost non-existent. Table 3 shows this dramatically. When researchers asked parents in two different suburban school systems how willing they were to accept members of other races as neighbors, the results varied widely. The chart reflects responses on a 7-point scale, where a numerical score near 7 reflects a very definite willingness to accept the other group, and a score near 1 reflects a very definite unwillingness to do so, and a 4 reflects neutrality. In Hamtramck, a suburb completely surrounded by the city of Detroit, the mixture of Polish, Arab, Albanian, and African-American citizens lived together in a state of unease. Each group was most willing to live near its own kind. This tendency was especially marked among Arab Americans, who barely tolerated living near Polish, Albanian, or African Americans. Conversely, Albanians were not particularly willing to accept Arab Americans as neighbors, and they were even less willing to accept African Americans.

**Table 3: Mean Social Distance Ratings among Various Parent Groups**

<b>Hamtramck Residents</b>	<b>Most Polish Americans</b>	<b>Most Arab Americans</b>	<b>Most Albanian Americans</b>	<b>Most Black Americans</b>
Polish American	6.55	3.90	4.16	3.58
Arab American	2.67	6.48	2.69	2.33
Albanian American	4.85	2.80	6.77	1.78
Black Respondents	5.54	3.91	3.58	6.05
<b>Pontiac Residents</b>	<b>Most Puerto Ricans</b>	<b>Most Mexican Americans</b>	<b>Most Black Americans</b>	<b>Most White Americans</b>
Puerto Rican	6.90	6.80	6.68	6.80
Mexican American	5.80	6.45	5.20	5.78
Black	5.51	5.58	6.18	5.71
White working class	3.00	2.80	2.50	6.60
White middle class	5.80	5.98	5.68	6.45

Notes: The question was: How willing are you personally to accept these people as a close neighbor in your neighborhood or apartment building? Scale ranges from 1 to 7. Choosing 1 indicated almost definite non-acceptance; 4 signaled neutrality; 7 indicated very definite acceptance. The lower the number, the higher the intolerance. Hamtramck is an inner-city suburb of Detroit and Pontiac, a Detroit-area suburb. Source: Wallace E. Lambert and Donald M. Taylor, *Coping with Cultural and Racial Diversity in Urban America*, Praeger Publishers, New York 1990, pp. 80, 103, 128, 152

In Pontiac, a multi-ethnic suburban city 20 miles from inner city Detroit, but still within the metropolitan area, the racial and ethnic mixture was different but discrete. This included Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Vietnamese, blacks, and whites. Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans showed a fairly high tolerance for neighbors of other races, as did middle class white respondents. Working class whites did not.

The researchers also asked about their respondents' willingness to accept other racial groups as family members through marriage, as close personal friends, and as co-workers at work. Most respondents were unwilling to accept other racial groups into their families. Tolerance of other races as personal friends was a little higher. But respondents indicated surprisingly low tolerance even for "co-workers or partners at work." Tolerance scores were neutral for Polish American citizens, who accepted other groups as co-workers. Even more tolerant were Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, blacks in both cities, and middle class whites. Arab Americans scored near 2, indicating low tolerance, for Polish, Albanian, and African-American co-workers. Albanians scored slightly intolerant of Arab-Americans and African-American co-workers, at 3.20, and white working class respondents were slightly intolerant of Puerto Rican, Mexican, and African-American co-workers.

This study is particularly important because it indicates tolerance levels displayed by Hispanics, fast becoming one of the country's fastest growing minorities, and by Arab Americans, an important minority group within the Detroit metropolitan area. Metropolitan Detroit has one of the nation's primary concentrations of Arab Americans. Already conflicts have risen between this group and inner city African Americans, particularly since Arab Americans own many inner-city grocery and convenience stores.

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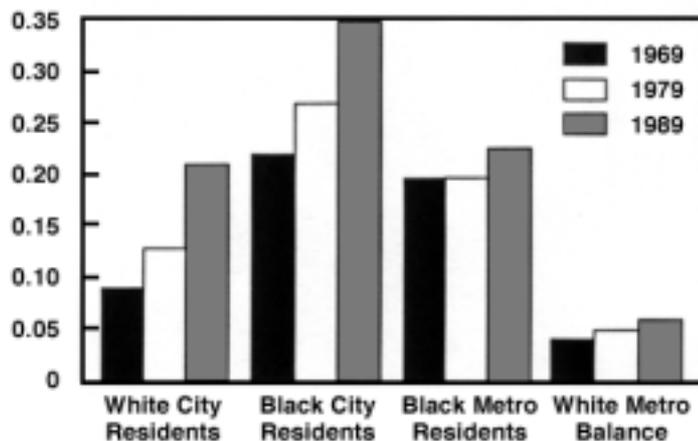
## **DISPARITY**

Another well-known problem of disunity relates to the disparities in life chances and well-being among the races, particularly blacks and whites. The fundamental imbalance that exists creates an inherently unstable environment. Just as lasting peace is not possible within the world so long as some nations have enormous resources and others do not, so prosperity is not possible within the metropolitan area as long as life opportunities and living conditions vary so greatly by race. Disturbing disparities of poverty and wealth exist in the metropolitan area. Poverty affects a wide variety of social indicators, such as lifespan, health, unemployment, income, educational attainment, and crime victimization. For each of these areas, central city populations suffer more than their share. Even within central cities, quality of life varies markedly by race. Those whites who remained in the city, however, reached poverty rates in 1989 that approached those of blacks in 1969.

Health and mortality rates illustrate the reduced opportunities facing inner city blacks. A reliable indicator of health status is the infant mortality rate. While the black infant death rate improved in the state of Michigan from 1970–1990, the differences between blacks and whites rose from 1970 to 1990. In 1970, the number of black infant deaths per 1,000 live births was 30.6, compared to a white rate of 18.5. Thus blacks experienced 1.7 times the number of infant deaths as whites. By 1990, the black-to-white ratio climbed to 2.7, as blacks experienced 21.6 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in the state compared to 7.9 for whites. The black-to-white ratio exceeded 2.4 every year between 1980 and 1990. Data for the city of Detroit for 1990 were also discouraging. In that year black infant death rate stood at 23.0 or 2.6 times the white rate. Even more dramatic have been the falling life opportunities for urban youth. Drug addiction increased sharply in Detroit and Wayne County from 1981 to 1991. Treatment admissions for cocaine—popularized by its derivative, a viciously addictive drug called crack—rose dramatically from 1980 to 1991. In Detroit, 1,233 black women were admitted for crack addiction in 1990–1991, compared with 107 white women. Black men were more severely affected; 2,371 black men were admitted within the city for crack addiction in 1990–1991, compared with 185

white men. Even in the larger Wayne County, white admissions were low. The drug plague that hit inner city blacks contributed to an increased homicide rate, as did an unchecked proliferation of firearms. In what four researchers called “an American childhood tragedy,” homicide rates among 15- to 18-year old black males in the city and suburbs of Detroit climbed far beyond homicide rates for white males. Those rates escalated sharply in the 1980s.

Figure 4: Poverty in the City and Balance of Tri-County Area by Race



Many white suburban residents appear to have inoculated themselves against compassion for the compassion facing inner city blacks. This is most evident in interviews, when suburban residents display the extent of their disengagement. One prominent Oakland County elected official expressed this most succinctly: “In no sense are we dependent on Detroit. The truth is, Detroit has had its day. I don’t give a damn about Detroit. It has no direct bearing on the quality of my life.” The interviewer asked, “What about the quality of life for Detroiters?” The official responded, “it’s like the Indians on the reservation. Those who can will leave Detroit. Those who can’t will get blankets and food from the government men in the city.”

It became easier to hold such attitudes as the social structure collapsed within the city, causing escalating crime rates and falling city services. In part because of this, some observers rejected the argument that racial prejudice continued to fuel exodus to the suburbs. Even the term ‘White Flight,’ such protestors claim, overlooked the influence of the American love affair with suburban life styles and disenchantment with deteriorating inner city life.

The truth is less simple. Flight to the suburbs has differed markedly by race largely because of racial discrimination. Furthermore, racial disparity weaves a circular web. Racial isolation aggravates poor social and economic conditions, which lead to desperation and its manifestations (drugs, crime), which lead to more isolation. As explained most cogently by William Julius Wilson, when society isolates racial minorities and low-income people within inner cities, a “concentration effect” takes hold. When only low-income workers or welfare recipients live in a neighborhood, children have no positive role models. Their isolation in ineffective school systems can make it appear education offers no way out. The lure of drugs and crime becomes irresistible as legitimate means of employment fade. Marriage fragments—or never takes place—as males lose earning power. And all of these problems can cause more isolation.

Yet flight to the suburbs does not divorce suburbia from the city. Those U.S. metropolitan areas with strong and healthy central cities are healthier than other metropolitan areas, because distressed central cities pull their suburbs down. When researchers at the *University of Louisville* looked at the prosperity of suburbs in 1979, as measured by per capita income, the Detroit suburbs ranked sixth. By 1987, however, suburban prosperity had declined in Detroit and other metropolitan areas with high levels of inner city distress.

Furthermore, as Detroit area leaders gradually came to realize, Detroit's bad reputation affects business prospects. As business leaders travel abroad, they find that few foreigners make distinctions between the city of Detroit and *Oakland* or *Macomb Counties*. The city's poor crime image affects all metropolitan areas.

One thing is certain: The chasm separating the well to do from the destitute is determined in large part by race. If citizens allow racial intolerance or disinterest to temper their support of such improvement efforts, the future of the central city is bleak. And if the social and economic conditions of the central city do not improve, the entire metropolitan area will suffer. Improving the social and economic status of inner-city African Americans, therefore, must become part of the race unity agenda.

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## FRAGMENTATION

The third part of the agenda is to recognize the relationship between political fragmentation and racial disunity within the region and to take deliberate steps to overcome that fragmentation.

The regional level is important because the metropolitan area really has become the essential unit of analysis. Many of the problems Detroit faced came from the failure to view the metropolitan area as unified community, where everyone was responsible for the good of the whole. This was the reason that regionalists, planners and labor activists wanted to restructure the region in the 1940s. Yet it was easier for suburban communities to incorporate than for central cities to expand. Local reliance upon the property tax encouraged middle- and upper-income taxpayers to cluster in safe municipalities protected from the masses by restrictive zoning ordinances. The American attachment to local control or 'home rule' could not be shaken.

Mild forms of regionalism exist. As in many metropolitan areas, special regional districts provide several important municipal services. In 1940 the people of five metropolitan counties established the *Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority*, which built and maintained several area parks and recreational facilities. Other special districts provided hospital facilities, trash incineration, and transportation services. Municipalities established cooperative agreements among themselves to provide services. Many area municipalities relied upon the city of Detroit to provide water services, sold on a contractual basis.

Attempts to provide stronger forms of regional governance and planning persisted. The *Ford Foundation* provided the first million dollars to finance the *Metropolitan Fund*, a nonprofit research group that sponsored a number of important studies over the years beginning in the 1960s. Some of these studies led to major organizations, such as the now defunct *Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority* (SEMTA), and the *Southeast Michigan Council of Governments* (SEMCOG).

SEMCOG became the regional planning agency, but it had the same weaknesses as other councils of government and regional planning agencies. Membership for metropolitan municipalities was strictly voluntary, for example. When regional promoters tried to develop a stronger form of metropolitan cooperation, they failed. In 1975 the *Metropolitan Fund* advocated replacing SEMCOG with a stronger regional governing body. Every area unit of government would have been forced to belong to this new regional body, the *Southeast Michigan Planning and Development Agency*, which would have coordinated economic, housing, and transportation development. State Representative William Ryan introduced enabling legislation, the 'Area Unity Bill,' *House Bill 5,527*, in 1975. The bill generated widespread political opposition, however, and did not pass.

For suburbanites, the proposal brought out fears that suburban residents would have to pay to support Detroit. At the time opposition to cross-district school busing was heated, and groups of white housewives staged acrimonious protests against a school desegregation court order. Suburban fears of inner-city blacks ran at an all-time high, making it a bad time to suggest regional governance. The distrust was mutual. Many city residents suspected that the largely

white metropolitan advocates were trying to dilute hard-earned black political power within Detroit. Young verbalized the mistrust borne of decades of grievances: "These people who fled to the suburbs to escape Detroit's problems in the first place aren't going to help support Detroit now ... I'm not willing to deal with people who have refused to deal fairly with me. I'm going to turn over my autonomy to people like that? I have to look askance at this whole proposal."

The fight for regional planning and increased cooperation continued through the years. Periodically proposals arose for improving fiscal cooperation or mass transit in the Detroit area. Regional transportation remained an active effort, as did other forms of regional cooperation under SEMCOG. In general, however, the region remained fragmented. SEMCOG never gained the clout necessary to enforce cooperation. The tension between urban and rural interests remained a persistent problem. Pro and con positions over state legislation affecting Detroit almost always took on racial overtones. It became almost impossible to understand the acrimony of debates over proposals to create a regional water authority independent of Detroit, institute mass transit, change the tax structure, or sever the city from county government without understanding the racial tension that underlay all arguments.

For example, when suburbanites opposed a Detroit subway proposal, one Oakland County commissioner noted that a deep-seated antipathy to Detroit fueled the opposition. As she pointed out, Oakland County residents expressed their anger toward Detroit "by attacking Coleman Young." Indeed they did. The *Oakland Press* published a special anti-subway supplement that included a collection of racist letters, boldly signed by their authors. One suggested that the subway "would be an open invitation for murders and muggings. Who wants any part of black Detroit?" Two letters suggested a "lynching party" for Young, and another that Young dig his subway vertically, straight to hell.

In spite of such feelings, signs appeared that Detroit area leaders were willing to rethink regional cooperation. An important incentive for doing so was the anti-growth movement, which arose because of the increasing economic and environmental costs of suburban sprawl. SEMCOG used federal transportation funds to sponsor a series of public meetings in 1991, under the umbrella of the *Regional Development Initiative* (RDI). The purpose of RDI was to develop proposals to halt sprawl and improve the unevenness of economic development. Forum topics revolved around social impacts, the economy, transportation, the environment, public finance, and management and governance.

The daylong RDI sessions on social impacts frankly acknowledged that social conditions, including crime, education, and racial fragmentation, posed a significant barrier to regionalism. SEMCOG offered participants a series of choices for action strategies, and asked for a 'vote' on each one. One draft strategy attacked discrimination, urging a renewed commitment to fair and open housing practices. Other suggested actions focused on inner-city conditions. Participants identified managing the rampant gun problem and improving drug enforcement as important alternatives. Fairly popular as well was a 'regional attack on poverty,' via a regional sales tax dedicated to job training and creating economic opportunities. To remedy poor race relations, the initiative proposed a strong effort to teach and celebrate multi-cultural education in the schools. This was not a strong strategy, but was meant to join with existing efforts, such as the ongoing programs of *New Detroit, Inc.*

Prominent regional actors were still not ready to accept regional governance. Governance proposals for consolidation or regional government drew little support at the 1991 RDI sessions. But at least those sessions revived the possibilities for more extensive regional coordination. They also identified the negative effects of the lack of such coordination, and highlighted the important role of race in bringing about such reforms. Clearly, according to RDI, greater racial unity was a part of the agenda for regional unity. The reverse is also true: regional cooperation is a necessary component of a race unity agenda, as long as the metropolis remains fragmented by race and class.



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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEGREGATION IN METRO DETROIT

Celeste Headlee (2003)

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Historian Thomas Sugrue grew up on Detroit's northwest side, near Fenkell and Greenfield. Growing up, he saw his city torn apart by racial conflict, so he has devoted years to researching the history of the *Motor City*. He has written a book called *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. A quotation: "Conventional wisdom in Detroit is that Detroit's racial problems date to the riot of 1967 or the rise of black power and identity politics or the election of Coleman Young as mayor in 1973. But to understand what happened to Detroit, to understand the racial divisions that beset our metropolitan area, we have to roll the clock back." (Thomas Sugrue). Years before it became *Motor City*, and Henry Ford lured thousands of blacks to Detroit with the promise of high-paying jobs, the city was already experiencing racial tension. Back in 1890, when there were only about 3,000 in Detroit, experts say it was still one of the country's most segregated cities.

*Duke University* assistant professor Abe Vigdor collaborated on a research project with professors from *Harvard* that sought to measure segregation in American society beginning with the 1890 census. "Detroit has this reputation as being one of the nation's most segregated cities and, according to our calculations, it ranks first in 2000 and first in 1990 as well. But the interesting thing to note is that Detroit is about as segregated now as it was in 1910." (Abe Vigdor). The first race riot in Detroit actually occurred in 1833 when some slave catchers attempted to return two escaped slaves to Kentucky. The Wayne County Sheriff took custody of the couple, but hundreds of blacks from the city and southern Ontario surrounded the jail, demanding the release of the fugitives. *University of Michigan* professor Reynolds Farley says he often takes visitors to the corner of Monroe and Beaubien, where the riot began. So Secretary Cass dispatched troops from the local fort to maintain order here in Detroit and that's the first of four times that the federal military was called out to keep peace on the streets of Detroit.

Question: "Was this the beginning? Do we think of this as the cornerstone of racial tensions in Detroit?"

Farley: "I think it was a very small black population, but there have always been racial tensions in Detroit. And this riot and the Civil War riot in 1863 certainly gave an indication of what was going to come in the 20th century, the kind of racial strife that has typified Detroit for a long period of time."

The riot in 1863 was precipitated by an attempt to lynch a local black businessman accused of molesting two white girls. Federal troops were called in and three people were killed. One of the girls later admitted the allegations were entirely fabricated. By 1900, one in three Detroit residents was born outside the U.S., and the city was composed of many separate ethnic communities. Polish immigrants congregated in Hamtramck; there was a substantial population of Chinese immigrants in 'Chinatown,' at Third and Michigan, and the near west side of the city became known as Corktown because it housed large numbers of Irish families. But as the 20th century began, most black Detroiters lived on the lower east side. The largest neighborhood was called 'Black Bottom' centered around St. Antoine and Hastings Streets. Because of the auto industry and because Henry Ford was actively recruiting black laborers, the African-American population in Detroit grew more rapidly than in any other northern city between 1900 and 1940. "At one point there were 120,000 workers at the *River Rouge* plant. So this tremendous increase in white and black population in Detroit strained all of the city's resources, but those

strains were often played out according to color." (Reynolds Farley). But housing continued to be a significant source of racial tension. Housing was in short supply and all public housing was segregated. The situation only worsened in 1926 when the state enacted strict annexation laws to limit expansion of the city. That law guaranteed that all new growth would occur in the suburbs. Race relations continued to deteriorate. In 1925 and 1926, more than half of the people killed by Detroit police officers were black even though African Americans made up only 8% of the city's population. City leaders actively recruited police officers from southern cities, perhaps looking for men who would be tough on blacks.

There is a wall near Wyoming and 8 Mile that still stands today as evidence of the extreme segregation in Detroit after World War One. A developer wanted to build homes for whites in that area, but the home-owners' loan corporation refused to grant federal approval for mortgages because the homes were too close to a black neighborhood. "He was puzzled and stymied by this, but he had a solution. He decided to build a wall about six feet high extending about a half a mile south from Wyoming. A wall that would designate white occupancy on one side and black occupancy on the other side. So far as I know this is the only place in the United States where the American apartheid system was so physically developed that a wall had to be built." (Reynolds Farley). After the wall was built the developer received his federal mortgage grants.

In 1942, because of the crowded living conditions and tension between the races, *Life Magazine* predicted Detroit would probably explode into racial violence soon, with a headline that read "Detroit is Dynamite." That prediction turned out to be frighteningly accurate. Close to the intersection of Nevada and Fenlon, whites and blacks clashed violently over the construction of the *Sojourner Truth Housing Complex*. The apartments were built in an attempt to provide better housing for African Americans in Detroit. But when the tenants tried to move in, in February of 1942, a large crowd of whites blocked the entrance. Fights broke out and more than 100 people were arrested. All but one were black. This kind of violence was typical when blacks attempted to move into areas outside *Black Bottom*. "Often there was arson. Sometimes there were petty attacks and in one case I documented, the white neighbors poured salt on the lawn of the first black family to move in. In another case, they broke in, turned on all the water faucets and flooded the house. In another case, some folks tied a chain to their truck and pulled off the porch. Again, all these acts intending to signal to blacks that there is a high price to crossing the racial line, to moving into what was considered to be white turf . . . A year later, Detroit's third race riot began. Unlike the riot of 1967, the 1943 riot was largely whites attacking blacks and pitched battles between blacks and whites on the streets of the city. Whites would jump on the streetcars, haul off blacks and beat them up." (Thomas Sugure)

The 1943 riot started on a hot Sunday afternoon in June, when groups of young blacks and whites started brawling on the *Belle Isle Bridge*. Violence spread quickly through the city. There were 34 deaths in a day-and-a-half, most of them African Americans killed by white police officers. City leaders investigated the incident and placed the blame on older black residents who, they said, should have socialized the blacks coming up from the South taught them proper deference to whites. "However, the newspaper reporters here in Detroit and then later an NAACP investigation committee came to a very different conclusion. They pointed out that blacks faced discrimination in almost every area of life in Detroit, that living conditions were really quite horrible because of segregation, that chances for recreation were quite limited because of the segregation in the parks, and that those factors gave rise to the riots, rather than the explanations that the governor and the mayor put forth." (Reynolds Farley). At the time of 1943 riot, Attorney General Francis Biddle suggested that city leaders solve the problem of racial violence by preventing blacks from moving to northern cities. But nothing could stop the flood of African Americans from moving to Detroit, looking for high-paying jobs.

Although many people believe that the riot of 1967 drove white residents from the city of Detroit, experts say the exodus started much earlier. The economic decline of the city began not long

after the end of World War Two. "By 1950, the population had begun to dwindle. And what's happened is, as the population has dwindled, it has left the blacks with the neighborhoods and the whites or those, or even blacks with money, have moved on beyond the city limits." (Nicholas Hood, former Detroit City Council member). At the same time blacks still faced limited choices in the housing market. "You didn't have much choice. You were consigned to certain areas. It wasn't until urban renewal began that you began to get a dispersion of the black population." (Nicholas Hood).

Urban renewal, which many called 'Negro removal,' started in the late 1950's. City officials decided to build the Chrysler Freeway over Hastings Street, right in the middle of 'Black Bottom'. Experts say that route was chosen because it would affect very few white businesses, although state leaders from the time deny that charge. Whatever the reason, the city's largest black neighborhood was demolished to make way for the highway. Although displaced blacks received government money in order to buy or build new homes, their options were yet again limited. Using a technique called 'blockbusting', real estate agents blatantly exploited racial suspicions in order to sell more homes. "In one case, I found an incident where a real estate agent paid an African American woman to walk her baby up and down an all-white block to convey to the white neighbors that blacks were moving in and they'd better sell quick. So then real estate agents would bombard them with phone calls or with mail solicitations sometimes even door-to-door solicitations encouraging them to sell now." (Thomas Sugrue). Within two to five years neighborhoods would change from all white to mostly African American.

This entire history of segregation and racial suspicion had reached a critical level by Sunday, July 23, 1967. About an hour before dawn, Detroit police officers raided an illegal after-hours club on 12th Street, known as a "blind pig." The officers thought they were carrying out a routine raid but as they emerged from the club, the quiet streets gradually filled with dozens of angry people. The crowd taunted the police, then started throwing bottles and rocks. And thus began the riot that would define Detroit for decades to come. Many blacks in the city were tired of struggling to survive while their white neighbors enjoyed better housing, better jobs, and a seemingly better life. And he says they were especially tired of being harassed by the predominantly white police force. "There was a lot of anger built up and it just so happened on a normal police raid, evidently people just got tired of it. It was on a weekend, the police weren't prepared, they figured they could continue doing the thing as they done it before, and it just erupted into a terrible experience." (Nicholas Hood) 43 people were killed in the violence, and 7,200 were arrested. 2,500 stores were looted and burned, and nearly 400 families were displaced by the time the riots ended.

Damage to homes and businesses in the city was difficult to repair after the 1967 riot because of insurance redlining. Insurance companies refused to insure buildings for replacement value, based on the theory of moral hazard. In other words, they said if they insured a house for more than what someone paid for it, the owner would have an incentive to burn it down. So if a homeowner suffered a kitchen fire and lost his appliances, the insurance company would only pay him market value: 50 dollars for a refrigerator, 75 dollars for a stove. "If you're only insured to the market value, if you have a tornado come through your neighborhood, and you have a total loss, you can't rebuild your house. Because 75,000 dollars isn't going to rebuild that house with the oak floors and the woodwork and the plaster walls and the large bedrooms that you had." (Shanna Smith, President of *National Fair Housing Alliance*). Because of redlining, it was impossible for many Detroit residents to rebuild their homes and businesses after the riots. Insurance companies would redline all homes built before 1960 and that meant only homes in the suburbs were fully covered. This situation worsened segregation because affluent whites didn't want to move back into the city, where they saw so many dilapidated homes. "And whites would drive through urban communities and say, 'See? THEY don't take care of their property.'" (Shanna Smith).



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## REBUILDING DETROIT: AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE CASINO

James Boggs (1988)

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Monday night I went to the graduation ceremony for one of my grandsons in Ford auditorium at which Mayor Young was the main speaker. The student who introduced Young said, with a smile, that he was the only mayor she had ever known. Young then went on to say in the same joking vein that maybe some of the students should come back in ten years and run for mayor because by then he would probably have retired. Everyone laughed, but it is no joking matter. The sad truth is that his Honor has been mayor for so long he thinks he owns the town and seems to have forgotten that the people elected him and may one day retire him before his vision of Detroit leads us into even deeper chaos.

Coleman Young was elected mayor of Detroit 15 years ago because the city was majority black and the time had come for a black mayor. Also blacks were furious with STRESS, the decoy system that the Gribbs administration had created to catch street criminals. When he was elected, Young had no program for stopping crime. All he could propose in his inaugural speech was that the criminals should hit 8 Mile Road. But he did have a dream, the dream that he could get the corporations to stay in Detroit by bribing them with tax abatements.

Today Young's dream has turned into a nightmare. Crime has not hit 8 Mile Road, but industry has. *Parke-Davis*, *Stroh's*, the Mack Ave. *Chrysler* plant are all gone. Young promised us 6,000 jobs if we allowed him to bulldoze 1,500 homes, 600 businesses and 6 churches for a new GM plant in Poletown. Today our taxes are still going to pay for Poletown, but there have never been more than 2,500 workers at the Poletown plant and most of those are from GM plants which have been closed down in other parts of the city, creating a wasteland in once thriving communities, especially on the southwest side of the city. At the same time the East Side around the Chrysler Jefferson plant has been bulldozed so that it looks like a moonscape. Despite protests, small businesses have been forced to leave, as in Poletown. The reason Coleman Young's dream has turned into a nightmare is that it was based on the illusion that we can bring back the good old days when Detroit was the auto capital of the world, and hundreds of thousands of workers came to the city to do manufacturing jobs at the decent pay which had been won through the organization of the union. But today cars are being built all over the world, not only in Japan and West Germany but in South Korea and Yugoslavia, and multinational corporations have exported manufacturing jobs to the Third World where they can make more profit through cheaper labor. Coleman Young knows, as we all do, that large-scale industry is not coming back to Detroit. That is why he is now calling *Casino Gambling* an "industry" and trying to force it down our throats, promising us that it will bring 50,000 to 80,000 jobs, as the auto industry once did.

The workers who came to Detroit during World War Two, particularly from the South, had a lot of hope. They also brought with them a sense of family and a sense of community or of people living in harmony with one another. Working in the plant, they developed a sense of solidarity, at the same time earning enough money to buy homes and raise their families. As a result, Detroit became known as one of the best organized and disciplined cities in the United States, with the highest percentage of working class home-owners north of the Mason Dixon line. Today, however, the great majority of Detroiters no longer have any hope or solidarity with one another. Born and raised in the city, they have had no experience of the culture that was second nature to those who had lived close to the land in small Southern communities. At the same time, they can no longer look forward to the well-paying manufacturing jobs which enabled their parents and grandparents to buy their own homes and raise their families. Instead, they accept minimum wage jobs which offer no hope.

To begin with, we have to stop seeing the city as just a place to which you come to get a job or to make a living, and start seeing it as the place where the humanity of people is enriched because they have the opportunity to live with people of many different ethnic and social backgrounds. In other words, we have to see that our capital is in people and not see people as existing to make capital for production or dependent on capital to live.

The foundation of our city has to be people living in communities who realize that their human identity or their Love and Respect for Self is based on Love and Respect for others and who have also learned from experience that they can no longer leave the decisions as to their present and their future to the market place, to corporations or to capitalist politicians, regardless of ethnic background. WE, THE PEOPLE, have to see ourselves as responsible for our city and for each other, and especially for making sure that our children are raised to place more value on social ties than on material wealth.

We have to get rid of the myth that there is something sacred about large-scale production for the national and international market. Actually, our experiences over the last 75 years has demonstrated that large-scale production, because it is based on a huge separation between production and consumption, makes both producers and consumers into faceless masses who are alienated from one another and at the mercy of economic forces and the mass media. Instead, we have to begin thinking of creating small enterprises which produce food, goods and services for the local market, that is, for our communities and for our city. Instead of destroying the skills of workers, which is what large-scale industry does, these small enterprises will combine craftsmanship, or the preservation and enhancement of human skills, with the new technologies which make possible flexible production and constant readjustment to serve the needs of local consumers.

In order to create these new enterprises, we need a view of our city which takes into consideration both the natural resources of our area and the existing and potential skills and talents of Detroiters.

Detroit itself is in the Great Lakes region, so we should think of how we can take advantage of this resource. We can start by developing a fishing fleet. This would mean training young people to fish for a living as they do in New England and along the West and East coasts. It would also mean building docks and cleaning facilities along the riverbank in order to supply fresh fish for the whole area.

Michigan also has the best sand in the world. In this past this sand has been used mostly in the foundries. We can use it to produce glass: glass to replace the broken windows that we can see all around us; glass for the storm windows which will enable us to save energy and cut down on our heat bills in the winter; glass to harness the energy of the sun to heat our homes and our water. We can also use glass for greenhouses, which can be constructed in the many abandoned buildings all over the city, so that we can grow vegetables for the local market all year round. During the spring and summer we should 'Green Detroit' by planting gardens in the thousands of vacant lots all over the city.

Every day on the expressway we see hundreds of trucks and vans equipped with ladders, electrical tools and lumber, bringing carpenters, electricians and other skilled workers into Detroit to do the work of repairing Detroit homes. Meanwhile, inner city youth, black and white, stand around doing nothing and waiting for the dope man. Our community colleges should be organizing crash programs to train our youth to use their hands and heads so that they can be doing this work to improve our communities and our city instead of depending on suburbanites.

Detroit has raised many talented clothes designers, but they have all left for New York or California because we have only been able to think in terms of large-scale industry and haven't recognized that Detroit could become a clothes-producing center for the State of Michigan.

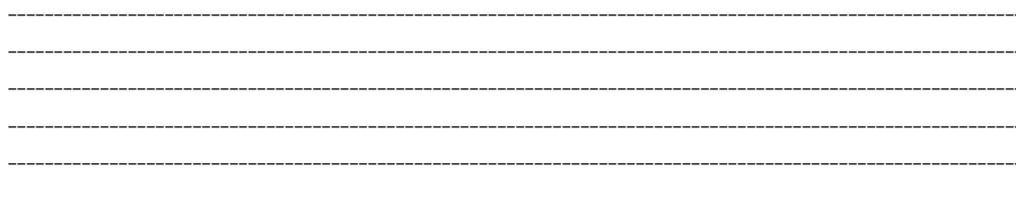
Over the years Detroiters have become locked into the mentality that a party store is the only small business that the average person can create and that shopping malls in the suburbs are

where you go to buy most things. We need to be creating all kinds of locally-owned stores in our communities so that we can not only buy our necessities locally but so that our young people can see stores not just as places where you spend money to buy what you want but as places where local people are working to meet the needs of the community. In every neighborhood there should be a bakery where families can purchase freshly baked bread and children can stop by after school to buy their sweets. In every neighborhood there should also be food shops where working people can purchase whole meals to take home to eat together, instead of living off *McDonalds* and *Kentucky Fried Chicken*. This has been a common practice in other countries.

We also need a fundamental change in our concept of Schools. Since the World War Two our schools have been transformed into custodial institutions where our children are warehoused for twelve years, with no function except to study and good grades so that they can win the certificates that will enable them to get a job. What kids learn from books in schools has little if any relationship to their daily lives. While they are growing up, they are like parasites doing no socially useful work, spending their time playing and watching TV. Then when they become teenagers, we blame them because they have not sense of social responsibility. We have to create schools which are an integral part of the community, in which young people naturally and normally do socially necessary and meaningful work for the community, for example, keeping the school grounds and the neighborhood clean and attractive, taking care of younger children, growing gardens which provide food for the community, etc. Connections should be created between schools and local enterprises so that young people see these as an integral part of their present and future. Our goal should be to make Detroit the first city in the nation to use our schools to support the community rather than as places where young people are upgraded to leave the community.

Because of our declining population, many school buildings in Detroit have been abandoned or are about to be abandoned. These schools can be turned into day care centers to care for the children of working mothers and fathers. They can be developed into political and cultural centers for the community--the place for town meetings or for a local museum where the arts and crafts, the workmanship and the historical achievements of the community are proudly exhibited.

These are only a few examples of the kinds of things we can do to rebuild Detroit once we realize that we can no longer depend upon the corporations or the politicians to save us and begin thinking for ourselves about what we can do and must do. At this point, what we need most to do is to begin discussing how we are going to rebuild our city, in every block club, every church, every school, every organization and every home--because for the rest of this century and most of the next, the major question in this country is going to be "How will we live in the city?" Up to now we have come to the city expecting somebody else, meaning the corporations, to provide us with a livelihood. Now we are stuck here and we can't run or hide any more. We can't go back to the farm, we can't keep running from city to city. We must put down our roots where we are and put our hearts, imaginations, minds and hands to work, so that we can empower ourselves and one another to create an alternative to *Casino Gambling*. Coleman Young's crisis is our opportunity. Let us start the discussion here tonight.



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## ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER: COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

Grace Lee Boggs (2000)

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I am going to talk about Detroit this morning not only because it is the urban community that I know best but because over the years the hopes and fears of Americans all over this country have been closely tied to the rise and fall of the city that has been my home for most of my adult life. Detroit isn't just any American city. As Jerry Herron, head of the *Wayne State University* American Studies Department, put it at last weekend's meeting of the *American Studies Association*, "Washington, D.C. is the capital of American government, but the capital of American culture is Detroit."

Up to a generation ago Detroit was a shining example of the success of American capitalism, encouraging and reinforcing the conventional wisdom that technological progress is the key to social progress. By utilizing the new techniques of mass production, manufacturers like *Ford Motor Co.*, *GM*, *Chrysler*, *U.S. Rubber* and *Parke-Davis Pharmaceuticals* were able to attract hundreds of thousands of workers to Detroit from Europe and other parts of the United States. From the labor of these workers came the wealth that enabled the upper classes to build mansions for themselves and world-class symphony orchestras and museums for the public. And it was not only the bourgeoisie who flourished. A mode of production that concentrated thousands under a single roof made it possible for workers to create the great social movement of the 1930s that established the dignity of labor. During World War Two Detroit was the *Arsenal of Democracy*. After the war Detroiters could boast that they were living in a city with the largest number of working class homeowners north of the Ohio River.

In the last 25 years, however, as global corporations have moved overseas or to the South where they can make more profit with cheaper labor, Detroit has become a wasteland. For the media it has become the symbol of the coming collapse of American urban civilization--"the first domino to fall" as Diane Sawyer put it on a national network special ten years ago. Detroit's population, which was two million in the 1950s, now hovers around or below the million mark. Physically the city is more devastated than Dresden, Berlin and Tokyo after the massive bombings of World War Two. Buildings that were once architectural marvels, like the *Statler Hilton* and the *Book Cadillac* hotels, *Union Station* and the *Michigan Theatre*, lie in ruins, earmarks like the *Roman Colosseum* of the decline of an empire. On city planning maps white spaces now outnumber black ones, reminders of the hundreds of thousands of housing units that have vanished in the last 30 years. Many of the institutional structures that remain are fenced in or gated and in most neighborhoods people live behind triple locked doors and barred windows.

Under these circumstances, it would be easy to abandon all hope for Detroit's future--or to be satisfied with pseudo-solutions like casinos and luxury sports stadia. Yet precisely because physical devastation on such a huge scale boggles the mind, it also frees the imagination, especially of activists/artists/artisans, to perceive reality anew; to see vacant lots not as eyesores but as empty spaces inviting the viewer to fill them in with other forms, other structures that presage a new kind of city which will embody and nurture new life-affirming values in sharp contrast to the values of Materialism, Individualism and Competition that have brought us to this denouement.

This new kind of city can't be built overnight. To create it is going to take time and struggle, including political struggles over opposing policies and directions. It can't be built from the top down by politicians reacting to crises or by developers seizing opportunities to make mega-profits.

It must emerge organically from the initiative, imagination, commitment, passions and cooperation of a lot of different people with diverse skills and gifts, putting their hearts, heads and hands together to make a difference. I can't predict the process by which this new kind of city will become strong and stable enough to be a recognizable social formation, but I suspect that it will be something like the one by which over the last 400 years capitalism slowly but steadily began to take root in Europe and from there spread to the rest of the world because it met deep-seated human or spiritual needs for the individuality and freedoms that had been repressed by feudalism. Analogously, as we enter the third millennium, capitalism's destruction of community and of the biosphere, its denial of social justice and its consumerist monoculture are creating spiritual and material needs for a new culture based on new human values. The movement to create this new culture is emerging organically in Detroit because its physical devastation not only challenges us to begin thinking differently about who we are and how we want to live but also frees up space for new beginnings.

Perhaps the best way for me to convey what I mean by 'emerging organically' is to describe how my own thinking and activities as a Movement activist have evolved over the last nearly 50 years through my immersion in the community in close partnership with my husband, Jimmy Boggs, until his death in July 1993.

I came to Detroit in the early 1950s because as a Marxist I wanted to be part of an American revolution in which the workers in the auto factories would take the struggles of the 1930s to a higher level by struggling for workers control of production in the plant. My main difference with traditional Marxists was my belief that blacks, women and young people, and not only workers, would play pivotal roles in this revolution.

Living with Jimmy, who was active both in the *Chrysler Jefferson* plant and in the community, it wasn't long before I realized that my ideas had come mostly out of books and that my expectations had little or no relationship to the reality that was rapidly changing all around me. The work force in the factories, instead of expanding and becoming more centralized, was being decimated by automation and decentralized by plant relocations. At the same time Detroit itself was becoming predominantly black as middle and working class whites fled to the suburbs, aided and abetted by a federal government providing FHA mortgages and spending billions of tax dollars on freeway construction to help the auto industry expand. As a result, the predominantly white police force began to act like an occupation army and the white city government began to resemble a colonial administration, setting the stage for the *Black Power* movement which we began organizing in Detroit in the early 1960s, long before Willie Ricks and Stokely Carmichael raised their fists and the *Black Power* slogan on the March through Mississippi in 1966.

As we struggled for *Black Political Power* in Detroit in the 1960s, we were not thinking about how we would organize or reorganize the economy. Our main concern was the racism of the white power structure. When whites asked us how *Black Power* would differ from white power, our reply was usually a superficial "It couldn't be any worse."

Therefore, when the 1967 rebellion made *Black Power* inevitable by making it impossible for whites to continue governing Detroit, Coleman Young, our first black mayor, was completely unprepared for the ruthlessness with which multinational corporations were de-industrializing the city. Taking office in 1974, Young could attack racism by desegregating the police and fire departments. But he had no idea how to deal with the massive export of jobs overseas that was making it impossible for young people to leave school in the ninth grade and get a job in the plant making enough money to get married and raise a family. All he could do was react--trying desperately to replace the jobs that had left Detroit--by any means necessary. Hence his decision to bulldoze the Poletown community in 1980, over the protests of residents, destroying 1,500 homes, 600 businesses, and six churches, in order to build a *GM* plant that was supposed to provide 6,000 jobs but has never provided more than 3,000, a fraction of those lost by *GM's* simultaneous shutdown of the *Fisher Body* and the *Cadillac* plants.

Hence also his attempts to bring *Casino Gambling* to Detroit. It was an 'industry,' he insisted, that would create 50,000 jobs. To defeat Coleman's *Casino Gambling* initiative, we formed *Detroiters Uniting*--a "coalition of community groups--blue collar, white collar, and cultural workers; clergy, political leaders and professionals--who together embody the rich ethnic and social diversity of our city."

"Our concern," we said, "is with how our city has been disintegrating socially, economically, politically, morally and ethnically ... We are convinced that we cannot depend upon one industry or one large corporation to provide us with jobs. It is now up to us--the citizens of Detroit--to put our hearts, our imaginations, our minds, and our hands together to create a vision and project concrete programs for developing the kinds of local enterprises that will provide meaningful jobs and income for all citizens."

During the 1960s, Jimmy Boggs had anticipated some of the economic challenges that *Black Political Power* would face. "The ability of capitalists today to produce in abundance," he wrote in *Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come*, "has brought the U.S. technologically to the threshold of a society where each can have according to his needs ... Therefore black political power will have to decide on ... the aims and direction of the economy for the people." Now watching the desperate efforts of Young to create jobs by means that were not only manifestly parasitic and anti-human but ultimately futile, Jimmy began envisioning a Detroit founded on different principles. In a 1985 speech he said we need to go where we have never gone before and focus on 'Creating Communities.' In 1988, in a debate on *Casino Gambling*, he projected a vision of a new kind of city whose foundation would be people living in communities and citizens who take responsibility for decisions about their city instead of leaving these to politicians or to the market place and who create small enterprises that emphasize the preservation of skills and produce goods and services for the local community.

In pursuit of this vision, we organized a *Peoples Festival* of community organizations in November 1991, describing it as "A multigenerational, multicultural celebration of Detroiters, putting our hearts, minds, hands and imagination together to redefine and recreate a city of community, compassion, cooperation, participation and enterprise in harmony with the earth."

A few months later, to engage young people in the movement to create this new kind of city, we founded *Detroit Summer* as a multicultural, intergenerational youth program/movement to rebuild, redefine and respirit Detroit from the ground up. *Detroit Summer*, which completed its ninth season last summer, involves youth volunteers in planting community gardens, rehabbing houses and painting public murals, while also expanding their minds and imaginations through workshops and intergenerational dialogues on how to rebuild Detroit.

*Detroit Summer* brought us into contact with the *Gardening Angels*, a loose network of mainly African-American southern-born elders, who plant gardens not only to produce healthier food for themselves and their neighbors but also to instill respect for nature and process in young people. Getting starter kits of seeds and tilling services from the city's *Farm-a-Lot* program (started by Coleman Young) these elders work closely with 4H youth involving them in all aspects of gardening, nutrition and food preservation.

The *Gardening Angels* stay active and in touch with one another mainly through the volunteer efforts of Gerald Hairston, a master gardener, former auto worker and passionate environmentalist/intergenerationalist whose love for the Land, for oldsters and for youngsters is all of one piece. Gerald has helped countless groups and individuals all over the city to start gardens: neighborhood gardens, youth gardens, church gardens, school gardens, hospital gardens, senior independence gardens, wellness gardens, *Hope Takes Root* gardens, Kwanzaa gardens. He also has close ties with the national and local *Black Farmers* movement which spreads the good news that "we cannot free ourselves until we feed ourselves," i.e., it is only when we can provide for our own basic needs that we are empowered to make our own choices.

About five years ago with the help of the *Hunger Action Coalition of Michigan and Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems* (MIFFS), people from these gardens came together to form the *Detroit Agricultural Network* with the aim of promoting urban agriculture as a way of growing people and communities. In turn, the *Detroit Agricultural Network* has inspired the formation of another coalition, consisting of health providers, emergency food providers, church representatives, and university researchers who are working on a *Food Security Plan* that will combine urban agriculture, food cooperative development in local congregations and youth training programs in agriculture and quality marketing, so that Detroit can develop food self-reliance, create community wealth, better community health and keep dollars circulating locally. The members of the *Detroit Agricultural Network* and the *Food Security Coalition* are ethnically and socially diverse. One of the most versatile is Paul Weertz, who teaches science at the *Catherine Ferguson Academy*, a high school on the west side for predominantly African American teen-aged mothers. Paul is a jack-of-all-trades, an urban farmer, and a house builder who has no use for schooling that is divorced from life. In the deteriorating neighborhood on the east side where he lives, he has remodeled a block of houses and created a Hay and Honey farm. At the *Catherine Ferguson Academy*, which is surrounded by more vacant lots than houses, he has organized a college prep curriculum which teaches math and science through home repair, small animal husbandry and agriscience. Students landscape, raise vegetables and fruit trees, and plant, harvest and bale a two acre alfalfa field in back of the school to feed the small animals that provide eggs, meat, milk and cheese for the school community. Last year Weertz' home repair class spent every day of a whole quarter clearing out a five-bedroom house across the street and worked towards acquiring the site for emergency student housing.

The community gardening movement keeps expanding. Just the other day I read an article about a group of mostly young Detroiters on the east side, calling itself the *Green Team*, that has bought four parcels of city owned land (the city owns approximately 40,000 usable parcels) at a cost of \$100–\$200 a lot, with the aim of “turning them into vibrant gathering places that provide a haven for children, fresh food for nearby residents and beauty where there was an eyesore.” Community gardens also revive neighborhood organizations. For example, the garden that Ashley Klyber, *University of Detroit Mercy* landscape architect, designed for the *Detroit Agricultural Network* on the three acres surrounding Genesis Lutheran Church at the corner of Mack Ave and E. Grand Boulevard just up the street from my house, has re-energized *Mack Alive*, the organization formed by City Councilwoman Alberta Tinsley-Williams that had become dormant in the last few years.

In the last few years, word of Detroit's community gardening movement has spread. Journalists from other countries and cities who come to Detroit to report on its decline go away renewed after being driven around Detroit by Gerald who has given guided tours to countless student, youth and church groups from Detroit and other cities. As a result, two years ago Kyong Park, internationally known architectural and urban theorist who is a frequent visiting lecturer in the *University of Detroit Mercy Architectural School*, decided to move to Detroit to establish the *International Center for Urban Ecology* (ICUE) in Paul Weertz' neighborhood.

In the summer of 1999, the ICUE brought together students, architects and artists in a seminar to explore what an 'Architecture of Resurrection' would look like. Among the participants were Mel Chin from North Carolina and Deborah Grotfeldt from Houston. Mel Chin is a Chinese American sculptor internationally known for his public art works that address issues of habitat devastation, restoration and sustaining the planet's diversity, especially for his *Revival Fields* project which uses the biomass of plants to extract heavy metals from a Minneapolis brownfield so that the land can be re-used. *PBS* will be doing a special on him this year.

Deborah Grotfeldt is an artist and administrator who, with African-American artist/activist Rick Lowe, co-founded the award-winning *Project Row Houses* in one of the poorest African-American neighborhoods in Houston, Texas, transforming an historic one-and-a-half block site

of 22 abandoned shotgun houses into a center that has become a model for a holistic approach to cultural, educational, economic and social needs. Some houses, for example, are used for artist's installations, others for children's after school programs and still others for young single mothers and their children.

Because she was so impressed with the movement already underway in the city Deborah moved to Detroit a couple of months ago to spend a year organizing a project similar to *Project Row Houses* in the *Catherine Ferguson Academy* (CFA) neighborhood. The CFA project will include two houses rehabbed with reusable materials and volunteer labor and a new house, designed by a *UDM School of Architecture* studio, for mothers and children who need emergency or long-term housing. Also in the works are an art garden and space for revolving public art projects by local, national and international artists in a residency program. Mel Chin, who has agreed to be the first artist in residence, has designed a gourmet mushroom/worm growing enterprise to be installed in an abandoned house in the neighborhood.

A studio of Kyong Park's UDM architectural students at UDM has also created a vision of how a five square mile area on the east side of Detroit can be developed into a self-reliant community with a vegetable farm to produce food, a tree farm and a sawmill to produce lumber, schools which include community-building as part of the curriculum, and co-housing as well as individual housing. I have seen the two-hour visual of this Studio several times and am looking forward to showing it to community groups to broaden their imaginations on how they can rebuild and respirit their communities.

I hope I have said enough to give you an idea of the movement that is emerging in Detroit so that you will want to support it, join it, expand it, emulate it, innovate it--because that is what movements are for--to move people.

In conclusion, I need to give you a sense of the political struggle that is heating up in Detroit.

As Dennis Archer enters the final year of his second term as Mayor, it is becoming clear to a growing number of citizens that he is trying to build what he calls a world-class city at the expense of Detroit's people and communities. He has used eminent domain to remove long-time working class residents from desirable locations (like Graitmark and Brush Park) to make room for upscale housing, in the process enriching developers who include members of his family. He is committing the obscenity of building \$200,000 condominiums and half-million dollar McMansions in a city where half the population lives below the poverty level, while at the same time forcing the working poor into the ranks of the homeless by demolishing buildings that could be rehabbed to provide low income housing. He has transformed city government into a deep pocket for private interests and connived with Engler to remove the democratically-elected school board and replace it with handpicked appointees. He is so determined to deface the east Riverfront with three gambling casinos that he has sued to try to prevent residents in the area from exercising their constitutional right to submit petitions they have gathered to block this assault on our senses and on our quality of life. Finally, by these repeated injuries and usurpations he has created an overall climate of such contempt for ordinary citizens that Detroit police now kill people at a higher rate than in any other big U.S. city.

Meanwhile, the majority of the City Council, most of whom have accepted contributions from casino interests, has made these crimes against the people of Detroit possible by their continuing support of Archer's policies.

That is why some of the most respected activists and representatives of community organizations in the city have come together to form the *Committee for the Political Resurrection of Detroit*. We plan to run a slate of candidates in next year's City Council elections on a program of resisting Archer's community-destroying policies and supporting community building as the key to the resurrection of Detroit. One of the main criteria for being on the CPR slate will be refusal to accept corporate campaign contributions. We are running to win, but our main objective is to create a movement so that even if we don't win we will have created something--



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## BUBBLE METROPOLIS: EXPANDING DETROIT'S IDENTITY THROUGH MUSIC

Dan Sicko (2003)

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### I. NEVER CAN SAY GOODBYE

It's 1972. Detroit's population has now shrunk by 19% in a mere two decades. As much as this loss affects the city and its inhabitants, it is the next few 100 people about to leave that will really hurt ...

When *Motown Records* left Detroit for Hollywood, they left more than empty real estate. The sudden and dramatic impact of losing a pillar of the city's identity was hard to measure—at least at first. One thing was certain: Detroit no longer had the music industry it once did. It wasn't dead by any stretch of the imagination, but it certainly was wounded.

And not so much from an economic standpoint as from a symbolic one. *Motown* became one more institution not sharing in the collective ambition of the city. Reinforcing the coastal duopoly of New York and Los Angeles—the bookends of all American entertainment and culture. One more city, lost in-between. Suzanne E. Smith writes:

*"Motown's music ... did make eloquent statements about the plight of black Americans left with the 'empty bag' of urban America. Yet, without Motown's cultural presence and financial profits invested in the city, the songs could only passively speak about, not actively participate in, Detroit's continuing struggle to create itself anew"*<sup>1</sup>.

To add to the cultural blight, the *MCS* disbanded in the same year. Detroit's first (and last?) revolutionary rock *tsunami* were together for a mere eight years, but their influence on music, especially Detroit music, still resonates as strongly as that of Berry Gordy's progeny. And no other band was as intimately involved with Detroit's social struggle—that is, as much as a rock and roll band could be involved. Their fierce intensification of rock clashed with the '1960s movement' and meshed with the realities of their city, creating a thunderclap of expanding air ... the bang of an expanding universe. Along with *Iggy* and the *Stooges*, they populated this new world called 'punk.'

Two monumental forces in music leaving their mark on the world and then abruptly leaving Detroit. However, these absences did leave room for emerging voices. In some ways, it even helped Detroit create a more interesting identity, inclusive of more styles and cultures. But for the time being, in the 1970s and 1980s, Detroit was shrinking, and shrinking fast. To the city's music scene, this disappearing of concrete, sheet metal and hit factories was a problem. What presented a bigger problem was that understanding Detroit became increasingly difficult to grasp. It was increasingly at odds with itself: industrial and post-industrial, old and new, black and white ... a "monumental *Gestalt* puzzle."<sup>2</sup>

To the optimistic, Detroit was boiled down to an idea. Or an ideal. A bubble. It simultaneously became that much easier to forget and infinitely more malleable—open to new creative forces that would shape its destiny. Of course, that's one way of looking at it. Those oblivious to the hope that remained focused on the empty husks of buildings, the plant closings, and the fires. To the outside, and even the inside (if you include local media) Detroit was reduced to even less than an idea—it became a sound-bite. Detroit television news stations were, and to some degree, still are obsessed with fires in the city, arson-fueled or otherwise. It's a poor excuse for a shared cultural experience that the media and its audiences still buy into.

"Ya know, the Motor City is burning people, there ain't a thing that white society can do.  
Ma hometown burning down to the ground, worsen than Vietnam."  
(*Motor City is Burning*, MC5, John Lee Hooker, 1969)

Did it make sense for Detroit's new generation of music-makers to have any other image of Detroit than the mediated one right in front of them? No, but then again, to the outside, it didn't make any sense that a black middle class could produce a new form of modern music that would take the world by storm (let alone the recognition that there was even a black middle class!). *Techno* was, as artist and DJ *Derrick May* is often quoted, "a complete mistake. Like *George Clinton* and *Kraftwerk* stuck in an elevator." Detroit, let alone America, wasn't ready for it. And they weren't ready to hear about *hip-hop* from any other place but New York for 16 years, and when they were, it of course came from Los Angeles. Another east coast/west coast pattern to marginalize everything in-between. Detroit *hip-hop* is just now starting to really get its due, thanks to the odd, but not all that surprising leading role *Eminem* plays in its community. Detroit rock and roll suffered from a similarly narrow outlook on the musical landscape by major labels and radio conglomerates (Seattle being the 'anomaly' that broke the stranglehold on creative expression). Yet, over the course of more than two decades, Detroit's musical underground prevailed and propelled all three of these genres to positions of national and international prominence. All thanks to the smallest sparks of positive forces countering cultural relegation. Conveniently, the biggest one was just as intangible as the city seemed to be at the time. Under so much external pressure, the radio dial was the city's perfect release valve. Being one of the first strongholds of freeform programming, and one of the last holdouts as the corporations consolidated and closed in on its airwaves, Detroit radio was a powerful resource. Now-defunct stations like *WLBS*, forgotten radio shows, and personalities such as *The Wizard*, *Mike Halloran* and *The Electrifying Mojo* were immeasurably important to inspiring, developing, and in many cases, breaking talent on the air.

*Mojo* gets namechecked a lot. He was on the air the longest of these entities, on more stations and with the most personality. Or lack thereof--mysteriously, *Mojo* almost never makes official public appearances or had his photograph published--which only added to his mystique and impact over time.

*Mojo*, like all the others, was trying to open up radio formats at the exact time radio stations and their parent companies were trying to make them strict and foolproof. His show, *The Midnight Funk Association*, would feature R&B virtuosos such as *Prince*, the nascent (and often very electronic) sounds of *hip-hop*, thrown together Düsseldorf's *Kraftwerk*, *Hendrix*, *Tangerine Dream*, *Was (Not Was)* and even a dash of classical. All couched in the exact same combination of positivity and otherworldly trappings that framed a new outlook on Detroit.

Shaking up radio programming on a local level sounds like an easy task, and it was relatively so in the days before *MTV*. Not only did *MTV* siphon off radio listeners, but over time it helped reinforce the increasing segmentation and consolidation within the music industry. However, Detroit's era of 'freeform goodness' was just strong enough to keep the bubble of cultural innovation and exchange permeable, yet protected from the negative stereotypes. The example I like to give is of my junior high experience. Not something people usually look back on fondly. But I remember *Mojo's* influence vividly groups of white kids trying to memorize George Clinton's *Atomic Dog*, and black kids singing the girls' parts in *The B-52s' Mesopotamia*.

Commercial radio simply lacks the will to take chances like that today. So while it lasted in Detroit, readily available variety was treasured. Its radio frequencies were the precious fertile ground where sounds and cultures clashed and offered freedom for the next generation to either build on the bedrock of funk and soul, reject it, or both.

In addition to its unique radio nirvana, Detroit's next step forward was a small, but very important physical one. Especially if you were one of its young residents, Detroit was seriously lacking in

social outlets. Most of the people creating music there today were too young to enjoy what was left of the teen clubs (legal nightclub establishments catering to the underage), and violence had all but extinguished anything more spontaneous happening outdoors. But, as time went on, improvisation prevailed.

The Detroit party club scene of 1978–1982 was a microcosm of Detroit’s ongoing energy and precursor to its importation and interpretation of rave culture. By ‘club’ I don’t mean night club, I mean clique. High-school cliques. Young black students, mostly from Detroit’s northwest side created an entire network of little social cliques, inspired not only by European new wave and post-disco sounds, but by all things seemingly European or sophisticated.

But they didn’t stop at image alone. Even for these predominantly middle-class kids, good, clean entertainment was hard to come by in the wake of all that happened to Detroit in the 1970s. So they became entrepreneurs: they made their own nightlife—rented halls, hired talent, threw parties. Had fun and got paid. Out of this sub-culture came almost all of Detroit’s modern-day DJ talent, or at least the DJs who would teach and inspire everyone else.

As these parties grew and size and influence, a mutual awareness developed among the different ‘scenes,’ as did a kind of connection with the city, its more offbeat venues and historical significance. A connection built on more than interesting juxtapositions and dissociations—the lack of ‘narrative competency’ present in so many hastily reutilized buildings.<sup>3</sup> There was a more genuine feeling of place and even ownership in its culture, even though it was quite obvious that there was a decades-wide gap between the Detroit that was and the Detroit they were imagining.

One great example is the former *Women’s City Club* on Park Avenue, just north of Grand Circus Park. Since the 1920s it had been a sometime meeting place of women’s activist groups, but in the early 1980s one could find a literal cross-section of the city’s subcultures. The growing *techno* and *punk* movements shared a determination and resourcefulness, and now they inhabited the same spaces, alongside people enjoying budding talents from the jazz scene. Three or more scenes and generations in one building on one night. This occurrence could be another sad statement on the scarcity of space within Detroit, but instead it was testament to its slow but steady transformation (unfortunately, *hip-hop’s* niche came even slower).

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## II. THE CITY ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER

“Artists that can live anywhere in the world but choose to live in a city like Detroit are, to me, looking far into the future, because to live in Detroit you can only think about the future. You cannot think about the past or you will suffocate in misery.”<sup>4</sup> (Derrick May)

The next transformative step came as *techno’s* nucleus of DJs and artists began to produce records, all of them living and working in adjoining lofts near Detroit’s Eastern Market area. Derrick May and his *Transmat Records* are still located there, but at one time Juan Atkins and Kevin Saunderson were there. This is where *techno* really became a *movement*, with its three most prominent record labels coexisting and co-creating. The small stretch of Gratiot Avenue between Riopelle and Russell streets has become known as ‘Techno Boulevard.’ In addition to setting up shop downtown (for the most part), Detroit’s new music scenes became defined by their ‘quiet’ revolt against the music industry. In one sense, the mere fact that they had talent, momentum and something each of them knew was unique made them all rebels in their ‘forgotten’ town. But most went one step further, keeping their productions confined to bedrooms, basements and the like—away from the larger studios. Some of this was merely keeping art close to one’s vest, but as time went on, it turned into an aggressive, almost rabid DIY (do it yourself) ethic. It became less about recording space and music technology, and more about personal vision and control. To say the least, Detroit underground music was still very *un*-mediated at this stage.

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### III. THE BEAUTY OF DECAY

"Bands that come up here are perfectly happy to have whatever happens to them locally, and whatever happens to them beyond that is just frosting."<sup>5</sup> (Ben Edmonds)

"It's always been about insight and forward thinking. Also, Detroit is unlike any other city in the transitions it has endured. When your surroundings change, you go through change."<sup>6</sup> (Juan Atkins)

Detroit had every chance of coalescing its creative energies and rising to the top again in the 1980s, if it were not for the internalized 'ghost town' mentality, negative stereotypes and growing media powerhouses like *MTV* marginalizing or ignoring local phenomena. Exciting, world-changing music from Detroit was an idea ahead of its time, but one that could not yet reach escape velocity.

As it began to mature, Detroit music reflected its surroundings in two very distinct and somewhat opposite ways: 1) a very distilled or orthodox approach, sometimes twisted into an extreme, almost parodied version of reality and 2) a future-leaning amalgamations.

The former is from within the bubble, a circumscribe outlook. Perhaps best embodied by Detroit's notorious 'horror-core' subgenre (*Insane Clown Posse* [ICP], *Esham*, etc.), but also including less intense extremes (*Eminem*, *Obie Trice*, etc.) Music of this type often embraces the negative effects of Detroit to the point of wearing them on its sleeve. Equally comfortable delighting in a city's problems and the street credibility that affords as it is defensive of its turf and idiosyncrasies. Interesting, yes, but not exactly an innovation in *hip-hop*. The degree of some of these extremes is, however, fascinating:

"Rich boys think that is shitty  
But I like fucking crackheads with one titty  
And I do it at the drop of a dime  
And I get the scabies almost every time."  
("Bugz on my Nugz," *Insane Clown Posse*, 1994)

The squalor they depict and rhyme about is so outlandish that their fans can't possibly believe it all about Detroit and its inhabitants. But then again, this is the kind of stuff that led to their number three debut on the Billboard charts with no support from *MTV* or radio.

A less obvious inclusion here would be the current crop of 'garage' bands like the *White Stripes* and *Detroit Cobras*, who do not so much rely directly on Detroit's bad rep as a cartoonish backdrop. Rather, they create their own kind of extreme by simplifying the rock sound (what, no bass guitars?) perhaps further than punk ever did. To be fair, one might also include 'hard' *techno* and some of the 'minimal' *techno* variety. The starkness of such records can be equally shocking as ICP to those only familiar with Motown.

Outside the bubble, Detroit's music reaches out to the world, and can verge on escapism: 'Classic' Detroit *techno* that sounds at once mechanical and warm, the so called 'beautiful-ugly' aesthetic of the *Jay Dee/Slum Village* wing of Detroit *hip-hop*, and even the jazz leanings of the *MCS* (quite the contrast given how extreme they were in their time) all share a solid street foundation, but have otherworldly trajectories.

Much of Detroit *techno* is steeped in science fiction and/or Futurism (in fact it is Toffler's concept of the *techno rebel* from which the genre gets its name). One of its earliest record labels, that of Juan Atkins and his *Model 500* material, was called *Metroplex*. A mega city, a "Techno City"<sup>7</sup> that only exists as an idea. *Derrick May* took the name from a *Model 500* song, and began

recording on the *Transmat* label. A sort of imaginary teleportation device that can transcend time and space—two of the realities/humiliations of Detroit. By design, they were making music to take Detroit somewhere it might never go, constructing a city that did not yet exist. Yet, this outlook never really becomes too detached—most of these artists continue to live in Detroit. The hope (or hopeless romanticism) is what fuels them.

And there isn't as much middle ground on this psychographic scale as one would think. You might hear both of these approaches within one song, or possibly one album, but rarely anything Detroit's music either paradoxically projects exactly the image it wants to hold dear and protect, or it transcends the city, ironically raising its profile on the way up and out.

Comparing these two projections of Detroit is a worthwhile endeavor, albeit somewhat problematic. Few of the *hip-hop* lyrics on either side present complete pictures of the city. Detroit's *techno* music is brimming with references and audible cues, but it isn't always apparent to the casual listener. The easiest place to start would be something like the following passages from *The White Stripes' "Hotel Yorba"*:

"Well its 1 2 3 4  
take the elevator  
at the Hotel Yorba  
I'll be glad to see you later  
all they got inside is vacancy"  
I been thinking  
of a little place down by the lake ...  
... stomping our feet on the wooden boards  
never gonna worry about locking the door"

Within that catchy two-minute song are glimpses of a supposedly transient existence, the 'vacancy' of the city and a very-Detroit yearning to head 'up North,' trading in urban life for a cottage on one of the Great Lakes. Whether the *Stripes* actually hold this as a major representation of the city is unclear, but it does feed into the idea of Detroit as a means to an end—the "throw-away city" to which Herron refers.<sup>8</sup> It's interesting how many references there actually are to leaving Detroit behind in music, including *Eminem's "8 Mile"*:

"Sorry, momma, I'm grown  
I must travel alone  
Ain't gon' follow no footsteps I'm making my own  
Only way that I know how to escape from this 8 Mile Road"

And going all the way back to country music looking at Detroit City from the outside:

"You know I rode a freight train north to Detroit city  
And after all these years I find I've been wasting my time  
Think I'll put my foolish pride on a southbound train and ride  
Heading back to the loved ones I left there waiting behind"  
(*Detroit City*, Danny Dill and Mel Tillis, 1963)

Contrast these sentiments with two more obvious techno selections: *Underground Resistance's* "The Beauty of Decay" and "Backroad to Nirvana." Both are at once admissions of Detroit's shortcomings or hardships and the pride and hope that still lingers. This is not a temporary place for those thinking, working and dreaming outside the bubble.

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#### IV. CONNECTION MACHINES

Of course, Detroit's music is not without more tangible connections to the surrounding urban condition. Over the years, there have been many examples, some fleeting, some with more sustainability. In 1988, *The Music Institute* opened on Broadway near Gratiot. It was the first 'proper' nightclub (although an alcohol-free one) downtown where the best of the best from Detroit's house and techno scene could play, week after week. It galvanized the energy in the scene and helped put a public 'face' on Detroit techno. In addition to the added attention it brought, the *Music Institute* brought visitors to the city. Mostly music industry types, artists like *ABC* and *Depeche Mode* but a fair amount of displaced Detroiters who came home to share in the very real context of *techno* in Detroit. It was no longer merely an export. It would be about four years later before the practical, post-industrial aspects of *rave* culture collided with Detroit's modernism. Parties began springing up in fields in the more remote suburbs, but eventually they began to centralize in downtown warehouses. Of course, Detroit had a wealth of such locations. This allowed promoters great freedom to search around for the most interesting spots to throw parties. But after several years they ceased to be completely random. They were increasingly not the „temporal autonomous zones“ described by Hakim Bey. Detroit was building something—perhaps a condition it cannot avoid? Or maybe it was some of the remarkable locations that were reclaimed. Chief among these locations was the former *Packard* plant, in which the *Plus 8* label and others staged increasingly elaborate events. It might be a stretch to say that this generation was picking up where the 'high school' scene of the 1970s and 1980s left off, but Detroit's underground music has proved itself to be very much concerned with continuity. As *Plus 8* co-founder Richie Hawtin recalls, "In retrospect there was something 'historic' and special that we held so many events in the buildings that had been important to Detroit's history and success. I'm not sure that when we were first doing the events that we were aware of this importance, we just found that Detroit was full of old broken-down warehouses that were perfect for parties. As we continued to do them, I think the notion of the irony of the situation, and the passion of the original builders started to become more evident. Maybe it was unconscious and something that could never be removed from the equation." Today, one need not look any further than 3000 Grand Boulevard for a concrete example. Inside the former laundry worker's union hall resides *Submerge*, the collective started by Mike Banks of *Underground Resistance* and Christa Weatherspoon in 1992. *Submerge* banded together several smaller *techno* and *house* labels under an umbrella that offers manufacturing, distribution and management services. While it operates independently within the sliver of capitalism that is the dance music business, *Submerge* did bring some logical collective principles to the table and allowed the smaller label to compete on a much larger scale. The 3000 Grand Boulevard location is a perfect match, in the shadow of the former *General Motors* headquarters and just down the street from Berry Gordy's old *Hitsville U.S.A.* The union theme also finds its way onto the circular yellow labels that adorn the twelve singles on the Local 3000 imprint. The new *Submerge* headquarters, like their old location at 2030 Grand River, is also a sort of unofficial 'welcome center' for visitors to the *techno* scene. Complete with its own museum exhibit to complement the one at the nearby *Detroit Historical Museum* and the *Somewhere in Detroit* record store which occupies most of its basement, the three story building serves as a local meeting place for a global community.

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#### V. THE BUBBLE EXPANDS

"But I don't know what about Detroit it is. It's just, I think it's just a pathetic city. It's just so pathetic when you live there. It's so behind the times and such a not-modern city."  
(Jack White)

"But there's always been a very strong rock 'n' roll scene there. I mean that never stopped. It's been going underground for all this time, so it just happened that it maybe got more attention now. It's always been there though."<sup>9</sup>  
(Meg White)

Detroit *techno* as a culture has been exported to nearly every continent in its long journey to acceptance. Along the way it has been reinterpreted and mythologized in a never-ending cycle-- a big reason for its success. Because of all of the artists, DJs and producers making such innovative music and backing that with their self-styled post-modern/futurist propaganda, Detroit has truly become like Mecca for *techno* enthusiasts. Its street credibility has become much larger than the boundaries of its streets.

The fact that the idea of Detroit has grown in spite of its shrinking physicality, even after so many decades of decline is very promising. It's almost as if the more that is taken away or that people attempt to take, the more important *the city becomes* to residents and to the country as a whole. It's not so much desperation, but rather a self-defensive swell that alchemizes into pride among its citizens. People talk of techno in general now much the way the uninitiated can boast of *The Detroit Red Wings* success.

They're seeing home-grown music on the covers of magazines, on the silver screen, filling up Hart Plaza. It is no longer 'fringe culture.' Of course there are the very real dangers of reinterpretation that *techno* has always had to dodge, that of branding, commodification, etc. What will be more intriguing to watch is the new conflict that has arisen between 'Detroit' on both sides of the bubble (the imagined one and the real street life fueling *hip-hop* folk tales) and the reuse of their cultural spaces. They are no longer the only artists reshaping the city.

But with events such as *Movement 2003* (née DEMF), the *techno* exhibit at the *Detroit Historical Museum* (despite its 'commemorative' aspect) and the depth of the coverage and interest in the rock and *hip-hop* scenes, there are very positive signs.

Signs that both the outside world and (finally) the 'official' Detroit city government are reaching out to these various subcultures and really celebrating them. Perhaps a true *Renaissance* can still occur.

Just as they took pride in throwing parties at YWCA halls and supper clubs, the high school kids that would grow up to form techno's producers, artists and audiences are still acting with *Movement/DEMF* being their crowning achievement. The impact this reunion of Detroit and its homegrown culture is impossible to quantify. Only *Motown* coming back home could top it.

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge/Massachusetts 1999, p. 246

<sup>2</sup> Jerry Herron, *Afterculture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1993, p. 27

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>4</sup> Raf Katigbak, "Motor City Magistrate," in: *Montreal Mirror*, Vol. 19 No. 11, August 28-September 3, 2003

<sup>5</sup> Larry Rodgers, "White-hot Stripes," in: *Arizona Republic*, September 25, 2003

<sup>6</sup> Dan Sicko, "The Roots of Techno," in: *Wired*, Issue 2.07, July 1994

<sup>7</sup> Also a song recorded by Atkins and Rick Davis as the group *Cybotron* in 1984

<sup>8</sup> Jerry Herron, *Throw-away Cities, Shrinking Cities*, October 2003

<sup>9</sup> "White Stripes sticking to the basics," CNN.com, August 14, 2003

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## INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS

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**4-H** clubs are closely associated with the county extension agency of the *State University* in each state. The *4-H Community Center* of Detroit is used for building model rockets, caring for animals, raising crops, building airplanes, and studying for careers, but also provides space for other organizations.

**contact:** Mr. Mills, 4-H Youth Agent and Director, 5710 McClellan, Detroit, MI 48213 and 640 Temple Room 616, Detroit, MI 48201, phone: 313-833-3410, [www.msue.msu.edu/wayne/4-Hindex.html](http://www.msue.msu.edu/wayne/4-Hindex.html)

**ADAMAH** is an organization based on networking that grew from a student project that offered a vision for rebuilding a specific area of Detroit as a self-sustaining neighborhood. Now it provides support and insight into the building and maintenance of a sustainable society. It has been a key source of information as participants keep each other up to date on current projects. The *Detroit Greenmap*, *The Earthwalk*, *Sarvodaya* are other activities related to ADAMAH.

**contact:** Jacob Corvidae, phone: 313-961-0264, [www.adamah.org](http://www.adamah.org)

**Avalon Bakery** " ... we strive to contribute to the rebuilding of Detroit by treating our work, one another, our customers, and the earth with respect." (*Avalon International Breads*). As one of the few actual businesses that is actively involved in the agriculture of Detroit, *Avalon Bakery* plays a unique role. It provides a meeting place, supplies food for meetings and fundraisers for different activities and groups in Detroit like *Detroit Summer*, *Back Alley Bikes*, *Food Not Bombs*, *Trumbullplex*, *F.A.R.M.*, *Catherine Ferguson Academy*, and *Genesis Garden* among others.

**contact:** Ann and Jackie, 422 W. Willis, Detroit, MI 48201, phone: 313-832-0008, open: Tuesday through Saturday 6am to 6pm

**Back Alley Bikes** Although Detroit is the 'motor city,' only 60% of the driving populace own cars. By promoting a recycle the bicycle mentality, *Back Alley* reinforces one of the great strengths of Detroit. It creates enthusiasm for bikes, especially among young people. Beyond this, it offers programs such as *Community Drop Ins*, *Earn a bike*, *Mechanic Night*, *Workdays*, *Adult Earn a Bike* and bike art. BAB was founded as a Detroit Summer program.

**contact:** Lynn Roman and Paul Trombly, 3611 Cass Ave., Detroit MI, phone: 313-832-2904 (*Detroit Summer*)

**Cass Corridor Neighborhood Development Corporation (CCNDC)** The corporation " ... was formed in 1982 as a subsidiary of the *Concerned Citizens of Cass Corridor* (The four C's) a neighborhood-based community organization representing residents and business owners within the Cass Corridor." (CCNDC) The organization has responded to community concerns through partnerships with tenants to acquire distressed buildings from absentee landlords. It is also connected to *Detroit Summer*, *Back Alley Bikes*, *ACA*, *Camp Detroit*, and *SAI (Service Adoration and Illumination)* among others.

**contact:** Patrick Dorn, Executive Director, 3611 Cass, Detroit MI, phone: 313-831 2878, fax: 313-831-2878

**Detroit Agricultural Network (D.A.N.)** The organization is made up of many people and initiatives that face similar challenges with gardening in Detroit and have committed to help each other out, and most importantly, to keep in touch. It regularly holds potlucks where area

farmers meet and exchange ideas and resources, and also holds educational sessions and provides resources such as tilling, seedlings, and raised bed construction.

**contact:** Patrick Crouch, americore volunteer, D.A.N. is currently headquartered at F.A.R.M, 200 Parkhurst, phone: 313-865-7073 and 313-965-8117 (*The Hunger Action Coalition*), [www.geocities.com/detroitag](http://www.geocities.com/detroitag) and [www.boggscenter.org/gardens.htm](http://www.boggscenter.org/gardens.htm)

**Detroit Summer** This initiative is actively involved in virtually every agricultural activity in Detroit; it invites groups from both inside and outside of Detroit to work on projects. Students from the *University of Michigan, Antioch, Santa Cruz, Pomona* and others come throughout the summer. Projects and programming include: turning vacant lots into gardens, community space renovation, public art parks/public murals, park rejuvenation, community bike recycling, progressive hip-hop events, dialogs and workshops, community revisioning, poetry workshops, renovating abandoned houses. Some programs developed within *Detroit Summer* before becoming independent organizations.

**contact:** Detroit Summer Office, 4605 Cass Avenue, Detroit, MI 48201, phone: 313-832-2956, [detroitsummer@hotmail.com](mailto:detroitsummer@hotmail.com), [www.geocities.com/detroitsummer](http://www.geocities.com/detroitsummer)

**Earth Works Garden** The project started in 1999 as a partnership between the *Capuchin Soup Kitchen* and *Gleaners Community Food Bank*. The garden started as a small plot of land in the inner city of Detroit and has grown to 3/4 of an acre on three plots near the *Meldrum Street Soup Kitchen*. Complete with a hoop-style hothouse to extend the growing season, *Earth Works'* primary goal is to educate Detroit area school children in science, nutrition and biodiversity as related to organic agriculture. The project also yields fresh produce to benefit such programs as *W.I.C* and the *Soup Kitchen's* daily meals.

**contact:** Rick Samyn c/o Capuchin Soup Kitchen, 1820 Mt. Elliott, Detroit, MI 48207, phone: 313-579-2100 ext. 211, [www.earth-works.org](http://www.earth-works.org)

**The Empowerment Zone** This federal program, started by the Clinton administration in 1994, has provided funds to blighted inner city neighborhoods. The *Detroit Empowerment Zone*, one of the most successful in the U.S., directs these funds to local non-profits. Different urban areas are targeted for federally supported urban revitalization, designed to create jobs, strengthen families and rebuild neighborhoods. [www.detez.com](http://www.detez.com)

**Farm-a-Lot** Founded under Mayor Coleman Young in the 1970's, the program was supposed to support the city's 4,000 to 5,000 gardens and to establish urban agriculture on vacant lots. In the beginning, there was support from the *Ford Motor Company* and *Michigan Consolidated Energy*, who donated goods. Persistent budget shortages and lack of support from the city council threaten the program's continued existence. Today, it mainly offers workshops at schools and community groups.

**contact:** Mrs. Dent, The City of Detroit, Recreation Department, phone: 313-578-7524 or 313-935-3337

**Gardening Angels** Also known as *Elder 4-H'ers*. These women and men have created some of the finest gardens in the city. Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Elam are examples of the *Gardening Angels* (see section on D.A.N.). Gerald Hairston was a motivating member of the *Gardening Angels* for many years. He was instrumental in the creation of the *Genesis Garden*.

**The Boggs Center** "Our aim is to help grass-roots activists develop themselves into visionary leaders and critical thinkers who can devise proactive strategies for rebuilding, redefining and respiriting our cities and rural communities from the ground up, demystify leadership, and

demonstrate the power of ideas in changing ourselves and our reality." (James and Grace Lee Boggs). The *Boggs Center* has been a central think tank of ideas. It is a space where people can attend meetings, discuss, plan, brainstorm and network.

**contact:** 3061 Field St, Detroit, MI 48214, phone: 313-923-0797 and 313-282-6983,  
[www.boggscenter.org](http://www.boggscenter.org)

**The Foundation for Agricultural Resources in Michigan** (F.A.R.M.) is a non-profit educational organization committed to creating opportunities for youths, families and communities to experience, appreciate and enrich the values of agriculture and of natural resources. John Gruchala and Tris Richardson can be seen almost daily out on the Farm, restoring and remodeling an old auto shop, or working in the field. *Detroit Summer* volunteers spend hours a day during the summer weeding and cultivating. F.A.R.M. is also in a ethnically diverse neighborhood and is one of the epicenters of action in Detroit.

**contact 1:** John Gruchala, Parkhurst 161W, Detroit, MI 48203, phone: 313-867-1244,  
[jsgbase@aol.com](mailto:jsgbase@aol.com)

**contact 2:** Tris Richardson, Parkhurst 200W, Detroit, MI 48203, phone: 313-867-0319,  
[sirtmyson@aol.com](mailto:sirtmyson@aol.com)

**The Greening of Detroit** is one of the more stable and established non-profits on the agriculturescene. *The Greening* has planted over 35,000 trees in Detroit since its founding in 1989 by Elizabeth Gordon Sachs. "*The Greening of Detroit* exists to improve the quality of life in Detroit by guiding and inspiring the reforestation of Detroit's neighborhoods, boulevards and parks through tree planting projects and educational programs." (*The Greening of Detroit*)

**Trumbullplex**, located at Trumbull and Willis, is a cooperative living space that serves as a home, a theatre, a meeting space, an art gallery, and a temporary residence for traveling activists. Residents live in three houses owned by the project, and all are actively involved in community projects. "We support other projects which share our goals of dismantling racism, sexism, homophobia and the oppression of poor people through activities in our theater and housing collective. Through consensus decision-making and full participation in carrying out our decisions, we create the circumstances and expectations for collective empowerment." (*Trumbullplex*).

**contact:** Jesse Waters, 4210 Trumbull, Detroit MI, phone: 313-832-7952

## WEB LINKS

[www.ddc.com/blightbusters](http://www.ddc.com/blightbusters) *Motor City Blight Busters* is a grass-root initiative that activates the revitalization of Detroit. Different kind of events/projects concentrate on the stabilization of housing, on the cleaning-up and renovation of vacant buildings, and on youth education. A main focus lies in coalition building.

[www.detroitcommunity.org](http://www.detroitcommunity.org) *Future Leaders* (2003) is an associated projects of the Detroit Community Initiative. DCI collaborates with other groups to design and implement a comprehensive series of programs in such fields as neighborhood economic restoration, family resource referral assistance, youth employment/leadership development and community education.

[www.detroitenergy.org](http://www.detroitenergy.org) is a "... group of Detroit-area residents who share a vision for Detroit and believe there are thousands of other people who, if given the opportunity, could bring their vision of Detroit alive and awaken the potential of one of the world's most misunderstood metropolises." (web-site)



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Robert A. Beauregard, *Voices of Decline The Postwar Fate of US Cities*, Oxford and Cambridge/Massachusetts 1993

Based solely on statements by participants and observers--meaning texts by contemporaries in newspapers and magazines and quasi-official documents--the author depicts the American consciousness of urban decline. He is also concerned with the influence of often pessimistic and melancholy mental constructs on the reality of urban decline in the U.S.A. Eight central chapters dealing with the period between ca. 1900 to 1990 are framed by four additional chapters that explain and depict the backdrop of 'voices of decline,' shaped by urbanistics and discourse theory.

Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*, Basic Books, Inc., New York 1982  
The 1970s and 1980s were full of newscasts about plant shutdowns, about thousands jobs disappearing from communities, or about the frustration of workers unable to find full-time jobs or earn enough to support their families. In four parts, the book examines the contradiction between capitalism and the community, the extent and consequences of deindustrialization, the Why and How of the process of deindustrialization, and strategies to deal with its symptoms.

Melba Joyce Boyd and M.L. Liebler (eds.), *Detroit Abandon Automobile*, Detroit 2001

The book jacket shows a demolished car against the backdrop of a factory; beneath them is the title, an imperative. A New York critic says the young literature from the jungle of Detroit works with such 'resistance' and such 'humanness.' Many of the authors, supported by *Wayne State University*, come from the confident, combative segments of the working class; their families are often of Hispanic or Slavic descent.

John J. Bukowczyk (et al. eds.), *Detroit Images Photographs of the Renaissance City*, Detroit 1989

The subtitle plays ironically with the idea of a Renaissance city--from which Detroit is far removed--while alluding to the *Renaissance Center*, an office complex built in 1977 that houses the headquarters of General Motors. The photos, however, do not seek the rebirth of the city in the sites of huge investment, but in everyday life on Michigan Avenue or in *Tiger Stadium* and in the potential of abandoned areas and buildings. Two essays introduce the 19 topics and sites: one deals with the economic and political background of the state Detroit finds itself in, another with documentary photography of this city.

Robert E. Conot, *American Odyssey A History of a Great City*, Detroit 1986

With more than 700 pages, this is a voluminous, epic study. Originally published in 1974, it deals with the rise and fall of the city of Detroit in the 20th century. The author places special importance on depicting the interplay between technological and societal changes.

Georgia Daskalakis (et al. eds.), *Stalking Detroit*, Barcelona 2001

The title suggests that the editors want to sneak up on Detroit and hunt it down, while themselves, in turn, feeling pursued by the city. They remind cineastes of Andrej Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*; Detroit is headed for the fate of the 'Zone.' This multi-disciplinary anthology avoids attempting to solve problems. The pictures by Spanish photographers Jordi Bernadó and Mònica Roselló are followed by contributions on the cultural, rather than touristic, appropriation of the ruins; on the influence of automobilism on urban development; and on Fordist and post-Fordist urbanism.

Jerry Herron, *After Culture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, MI 1993

"This is a book about Detroit; it is also, unavoidably, a book about representation because Detroit is the most representative city in America. Detroit used to stand for success, and now it stands for failure. In this sense, the city is not just a physical location; it is the place where bad times get sent to make them belong to somebody else . . . Each essay that follows I intend as just that, literally--an attempt to understand the production of middle-class culture by essaying what has happened in Detroit." (Reprint from: Jerry Herron, *After-culture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History*, pp. 9-10. © 1993. Wayne State University Press, with permission of *Wayne State University Press*)

John A. Jakle and David Wilson, *Derelict Landscapes The Wasting of America's Built Environment*, Savage/Maryland 1992

The authors believe that Americans tend to regard neglected or abandoned architectural surroundings as a natural phenomenon, instead of viewing them as societally produced. They must therefore underscore that the ruin or destruction of urban or rural areas since the early 1970s has been primarily the result of unequal economic development, accepted and even promoted by policy and culture alike. The 'crime' of the waste and decay of space is always based on a 'structuration.' This term refers to the balance between active and passive, between room to maneuver and constraints in the individual's every decision.

Robert H. Mast (ed.), *Detroit Lives*, Philadelphia 1994

In the tradition of 'oral history,' this book narrates the tale of a city that has long struggled for survival. Interviews with participants in and observers of events since the 1930s illuminate the struggle for equality and freedom among the ranks of workers, women, and Afro-Americans. The aim in this struggle, continuing into the 1990s, has repeatedly been to retain educational and training opportunities as well as other social services.

Michael Moore, *Downsize This! Random Threats from an Unarmed American*, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1996

"Moore, whose documentary film *Roger & Me* and television series *TV Nation* have a strong cult following, takes on corporations, politicians and Americana in general in a mordant satire that will leave both conservatives and liberals reeling with embarrassment. *Downsize this!*, Moore's first book, tears into corporations and labor unions alike. He scrutinizes the President, Bob Dole, NAFTA, Cuban refugees and Pat Buchanan. A scathing, funny book packed with facts." (©1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.)

Dan Sicko, *Techno Rebels The Renegades of Electronic Funk*, New York 1999

As an expert in the field, based on his own experiences, the author depicts the development of *Techno Music* from its beginnings in Detroit in the late 1970s, to the leap to *Rave Parties* in Britain of the 1980s, and finally to the worldwide success of the 1990s. *Techno* spans *Chicago House* to *Midwestern Funk* and has ethnic as well as cultural implications. The author says that *Techno Music* is and remains an "underground sound" in the struggle with a music industry dominated by *rock* and *pop*. The volume closes with a discography comprising more than three hundred titles.

Robert Sinclair and Bryan Thompson, *Detroit An Anatomy of Social Change*, Detroit 1977

This sociological study focuses on the 'System Detroit,' with its six spatial units distributed between an 'Inner City' and a 'Metropolitan Area.' It shows the dichotomy between a positive factor, diversity, and a negative one, division. The diversification of spaces and strata has led to



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## FILMOGRAPHY

Antje Ehmman and Michael Baute

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**Grosse Pointe Blank**, Director: George Armitage, U.S.A. 1997

Satirical killer movie filmed primarily in L.A., but still interesting as a depiction of (Detroit) suburbia.

**Exit Wounds**, Director: Andrzej Bartkowiak, U.S.A. 2001, 98 min.

A bad film that cannot be recommended, except possibly for specialized studies: a cop is transferred to the worst district of Detroit. And then the mindless action begins.

**Beverly Hills Cop**, Director: Martin Brest, U.S.A. 1984

Vehicle for star Eddie Murphy. In Detroit, he arrests street-wise drug dealers in broken-down dead ends. Later he investigates on his own in Beverly Hills. The series (*Beverly Hills Cop 2* and *3* followed in rapid succession) uses the contrast between the crime city and the glamour city as the motor of its depiction.

**Detroit Come Back City**, Director: Walter de Bruijn, U.S.A./NL 1998, 48 min.

Television feature about Detroit and its problems as a shrinking city. Very vivid.

**Narc**, Director: Joe Carnahan, U.S.A./CAN 2002, 105 min.

One more Detroit cop story.

**The Sprawling of America**, Director: Christopher M. Cook, 2 parts, U.S.A. 2001, total 120 min.

A documentary TV film (in two parts) on the social and economic background of the decline of a city. It won many prizes in the U.S.A. The first part, *Inner City Blues*, treats Detroit as a case study.

**Polish Wedding**, Director: Theresa Connolly, U.S.A. 1998

Film about Polish immigrants in Hamtramck, a district of Detroit.

**Tucker, the Man and His Dreams**, Director: Francis Ford Coppola, U.S.A. 1988

Capraesque historical film (1940s) about an automobile aficionado.

**Mr. Mom**, Director: Stan Dragoti, U.S.A. 1983

Plays in Detroit, but was not filmed there. Michael Keaton loses his job in the automobile industry and becomes a house-husband--'Mr. Mom.' Comedy, like a chamber play.

**Forgotten Voices, Borderline: The Story of 8 Mile, The Hudson's Building**, Director: Gary Glaser, U.S.A. 1995–1997

These three Detroit documentary films can be downloaded from the net. We (*Shrinking Cities*, Office Philipp Oswalt) have not yet viewed them, but plan to acquire them.

**Gridlock'd**, Director: Vondie Curtis Hall, U.S.A. 1996

Biographical film on the Detroit native, rapper Tupac Shakur; but the film was made entirely in Los Angeles. Interesting for its image of pop culture, here *Hip Hop*.

**Detroit Devil's Night**, Director: Keith Hanley, U.S.A. 1994, 60 min.

A documentary about Detroit's 'Devil's Night.' A camera team drives to all the fires and films the work of the fire department. Fantastic pictorial material.

**8 Mile**, Director: Curtis Hanson, U.S.A. 2002, 106 min.

This film about rapper Eminem is well-known; the relevance to Detroit is obvious.

**Taking Back Detroit**, Director: Stephan Lighthill, U.S.A. 1980, 55 min.

Documentary film about politics in times of deep economic crisis in Detroit.

**Strange Fruit: Destroy All Monsters**, Director: Cary Loren, U.S.A.

This video collects material from interviews with, among other people, the rock promoter 'Uncle' Russ Gibb, R & B musician Andre Williams, underground radio-DJ Dave Dixon, and other Detroit archive material. The soundtrack is from *Destroy all Monsters*.

**Albert Kahn—Architekt der Moderne**, Director: Dieter Marcello, D 1993, 80 min.

Actually a film for those interested in architecture. Not always in good taste, but interesting. Albert Kahn lived and worked in Detroit, too, and shows some footage of the city.

**Renaissance Man**, Director: Penny Marshall, U.S.A. 1994

Contains an opening sequence with realistic establishing shots of Detroit at the time of filming. A feature film about "borderline army recruits ennobled by their exposure to William Shakespeare." With Danny de Vito and Mark Wahlberg.

**Detroit 9000**, Director: Arthur Marks, U.S.A. 1971, 106 min.

A *blaxploitation* movie full of car chases that provides a precise picture of Detroit. As early as 1971, it already looks as if no trains run here and no factory is in operation anymore. The ad campaign at the time claimed: "It's the murder capital of the world--Motortown, where the honkies are the minority race!" Rediscovered by Quentin Tarantino, who used sequences from it in *Jackie Brown*.

**The Purple Gang**, Director: Frank McDonald, U.S.A. 1960, 85 min.

A rather mediocre cops-and-robbers film. We (*Shrinking Cities*, Office Philipp Oswald) have not yet checked out its relevance to Detroit.

**Roger and me**, Director: Michael Moore, U.S.A. 1989, 90 min.

Moore's classic is a genuine shrinking city film. It focuses exclusively on this problematic.

**The Crow**, Director: Alex Proyas, U.S.A. 1994, 120 min.

The young rock musician Eric Draven (Brandon Lee) and his fiancé are brutally murdered by a gang. One year later, Eric, guided by a crow, returns to the earth to take revenge on the perpetrators. The film is supposed to play in Detroit, but the constant rain and gothic gloom render everything unrecognizable.

**RoboCop**, Director: Paul Verhoeven, U.S.A. 1987, 103 min.

**RoboCop 2**, Director: Irvin Kershner, U.S.A. 1990, 118 min.

**RoboCop 3**, Director: Fred Dekker, U.S.A. 1993, 105 min.

All *RoboCop* films play in a Detroit of the near future. A corporation wants to privatize the police. Its police-robot prototype, released before testing is complete, wreaks havoc, but, finally equipped with humane values, becomes a rescuer. A treatment of de-industrialization and automation that works with extreme exaggerations.

**Crimewave**, Director: Sam Raimi, U.S.A. 1985

Cartoonish comedy (script: Joel and Ethan Coen) about exterminators who become hired killers. The movie exploits Detroit's image as a *crime city*.



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*Shrinking Cities: Complete Works 2, Interventionen/Interventions*, a documentation of the second phase of the project, will be published in spring 2006.

WORKING PAPERS is a series of *print-on-demand* publications from *Shrinking Cities* designed to supplement the project's book publications. It provides public access to studies, research, and discussion carried out for the project. These publications are available as hard copy at the project's exhibitions and events and as pdf documents from the homepage [www.shrinkingcities.com](http://www.shrinkingcities.com). Individual issues will be updated as needed and will then appear in a revised and expanded edition. These contributions do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editorial staff. Data and visual representations are published without guarantee; the authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information. Articles, tables, and visual representations may not be reprinted without written permission from the editor.

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**Colophon:**


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**APPENDIX: PHOTOGRAPHS DETROIT REGION**

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Photo 1: Detroit Suburbs from the air



Photo 2: Downtown Detroit



Photo 3: Downtown Detroit



Photo 4: abandoned house in the inner city



**Photo 5:** abandoned house in the inner city



**Photo 6:** overgrown properties



**Photo 7:** burnt out houses in the inner city



**Photo 8:** closed public library (Highland Park)



**Photo 9:** derelict land in the inner city



**Photo 10:** derelict land in the inner city



**Photo 11:** New "suburban" developments near city centre



**Photo 12:** vacant building of Detroit's central station



Photo 13: derelict gas station



Photo 14: urban agriculture in inner city



**Photo 15:** urban agriculture in inner city



**Photo 16:** Renaissance Center, downtown



**Photo 17:** Renaissance Center, downtown

All photographs by Philipp Oswalt.