

Addressing Racial Inequalities in America: A United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Audit of US Black Communities **Detroit, Michigan**

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Image 1: Black Bottom Detroit, 1951¹

¹Sanborn Map Company, "Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: Black Bottom, Detroit (1951)," Black Bottom Digital Archive, 2018, <https://digital.blackbottomarchives.com/historical-map/>.

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Partners

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I. Introduction

Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) Capstone course, "Addressing Racial Inequalities in America: A United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Audit of US Black Communities," was designed to measure the well-being of the Afro-descendent population in Detroit, Michigan and Kansas City, Missouri. The Capstone project worked alongside Black community organizations and members to understand their lived experiences, to deeply explore the impact of historical racial harms, and to gather disaggregated data relevant to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDG targets and indicators were used as a unit of measure to analyze and shed light on structural patterns of inequality that threaten the wellness and sustainability of Black communities in Detroit and Kansas City.

II. Methodology and Conceptual Framework

The research methodology for the Capstone project utilized a review of extent literature, anthropological-like research methodologies including archival research and field work to develop an ethnohistory of the Black Community. This was followed by an impact analysis framed within the United Nations sustainable development goals. Finally, a policy analysis was performed to examine state and local legislative mechanisms with an exploration of possible avenues for reparative policy making.

Ethnohistory. To develop a comprehensive ethnohistory, a review of extant peer-reviewed literature was performed. In addition, several books were recommended by the Black community. These books were read and closely analyzed to respond to the UN SDG framing utilized for the impact study. The ethnohistory provided context for the SDG analysis that examined the long-term consequences of historical harms, as made apparent by current trends in the areas under evaluation. The report for Detroit specifically examined the systemic inequality on food insecurity, housing, education, pollution, and economic inequality as a result of race-based discrimination.

Researchers met with the Detroit Reparations Task Force weekly and from January - April 2024 resulting in extensive field work. Framed within cultural humility and indigenous listening, community engagement was at the forefront of the work. The Detroit Reparations Task Force directed and guided the research team by identifying key members of the Black community, advocacy groups, and service organizations. This resulted in deep engagement with Black community leaders and organizations, including three town hall listening sessions, and three days of Black history tours. This field experience resulted in the first part of the report an ethno-history. Ethno history denotes the study of a specific population within a community.

Community Engagement. Pre-visit community engagement was integral to the project, as it enabled the team to build trust and rapport ahead of the Town Hall. Because the Black community in Detroit has been systematically exploited and surveilled, communication can be rightfully difficult to initiate. As such, the students relied heavily on the connections of the Detroit Reparations Commission and Coalition and their reputation as trusted community members to gain access to leaders and organizations. Additionally, for organizations and people found through the students' research, the students aimed to establish contact through any

connection from within the Taskforce - and if there was no connection, students then engaged without a liaison.

The purpose of these interactions was to build trust and rapport with community members. These connections also served to help the students gain a deeper understanding of issues facing the Black community. This understanding not only informed the pre-visit research, but also augmented the qualitative data collection during the visit. Lastly, these interactions led to more community connections which also heightened engagement for the Town Hall visit.

The timeline of our community engagement proceeded as follows. The students established community outreach email templates, followed by an outreach process with the list of community organizations sent out via Detroit community liaisons. The student team agreed to finish the outreach before *Feb 5th, 2024* EOB. Once the student received responses from organizations, they began to schedule one-on-one meetings with organizations based on their thematic research areas. This process greatly informed the research on the local community concerns, expertise, and further laid the groundwork for establishing relationships leading up to the March town hall meetings. Those one-on-one meetings took place between *Feb 14th to March 6th, 2024*.

Impact analysis. The ethnohistory was followed by an impact analysis. In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) evaluation set out five years ago by *In the Red*, which demonstrated that international frameworks such as the UN SDGs have the potential to demonstrate how racism, inequality, and discrimination decimate the lives of people of color in the USA.² The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, stands in the legacy of people of color and oppressed people calling for an agenda of sustainable development firmly rooted in diversity, equity, and justice. The resulting SDGs accompanied by 169 targets, articulate globally agreed upon standards for living, with recommendations for realizing those standards. Put in the USA context, the SDGs provide a framework for evaluating the progress of American cities against an international standard. Like the study completed five years before this report, this paper assesses these cities against the SDGs and is rooted in the “Leave No One Behind” SDG agenda which has localized accountability for eradicating inequality, racism, and discrimination at the city level.

Using the UN SDG framework, the impact analysis explored the wellness and sustainability of the Black community within Detroit, Michigan. Further, the Capstone sought to democratize data collection in Detroit, Michigan by centering the community’s expertise and autonomy throughout the entire process. The democratizing of data was essential to this study as public datasets often report on the general population, obscuring economic, educational, and health inequity as experienced by marginalized groups. Often Black community organizations are already deeply engaged in assessing the wellness of their community by analyzing criminal justice, housing,

²Lynch, A., H. Bond, J. Sachs, SDSN, and Howard University. 2021. *In The Red: The US Failure to Deliver on a Promise of Racial Equality*. SDSN.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dad6c64073ce72706cd29c6/t/6095554a571d4d08a6edc4d3/1620399440334/In+The+Red-The+US+Failure+to+Deliver+on+a+Promise+of+Racial+Equality-2.pdf>.

access to healthcare and more. This was true in the city of Detroit. This data was utilized alongside public data sets to provide a more holistic understanding of the Black experience in Detroit.

Finally, a policy analysis examined the legislative mechanisms that existed within the city of Detroit to better understand the potential pathways for reparative policymaking. This was performed by doing an analysis of historical laws that may be a deterrent to reparative policymaking. Extant laws were also examined to better understand the potential to build on laws aimed to redress for historical Afrocentric harms that may pave the way for next steps in city-specific reparations. Reparations for this study were based on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a document detailing 30 distinct rights that all individuals possess. These include the right to equality, right to free speech, right to health and education, freedom from discrimination, and the right to personal security.³ Further, according to the UDHR, the state has an obligation to provide remedies and reparations for any gross or serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.⁴ This report served as a basis for policymakers in Detroit to draw from to make a case for reparations for Black Detroit residents.

Ultimately the Capstone sought to link national discussions on inequity and anti-Black racism to global discourse on basic human rights. The SDG analysis feeds into broader analyses on the state of human rights for Black Americans in the USA and adds to the legacy of calls from racial justice leaders on reparations. The SDG evaluation presented another tool for evidencing the need for redress for contemporary harms which can be traced to their historical roots. This report built on a long history of racial justice leaders calling for awareness of the racism and inequality in their myriad representations embedded within the fabric of American systems and structures. Findings demonstrated a history of consistent and constant disinvestment and discrimination in the city of Detroit. Further, the Capstone report demonstrated that over time, this lack of investment in a community resulted in less infrastructure to support a healthy and vibrant community.⁵

III. Ethnohistory

The following historical analysis explores the policies and practices of the City of Detroit during the 20th century. The following areas are explored in the order presented:

- Economic Inequality
- Housing
- Food Insecurity
- Pollution
- Education

³United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948.

⁴United Nations, *General Assembly Resolution 60/147 Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*, March 21, 2006, (UN Doc A/RES/60/147).

⁵“The People’s Glossary for Building a Community-Controlled Housing Movement in the Bay Area and Beyond,” *The People’s Land Trust*, accessed February 22, 2024, <https://www.bayareaclt.org/housing-preservation-glossary>.

This section demonstrates the systematic failure, and indeed intentional disinvestment by the City of Detroit, leading to the denial of health and well being for the Black community. The purposeful actions by the Detroit government to disinvest in the above outlined areas demonstrated a deliberate and legally sanctioned removal of resources for these communities. This finding is in direct contrast to the social contract between government and community, upon which the SDGs rest. This section demonstrates the need and obligation of the city of Detroit to remedy the wrongs incurred by Detroit's Black communities.

Economic Inequality

Between 1910 and 1950, the Great Migration brought 300,000 Black people to Detroit, largely due to the city's booming automobile manufacturing industry.⁶ In those forty years, the Black population in Detroit grew from 1.2% to 16%.⁷ Many of these people were lured by the growing automobile industry: companies such as Cadillac and Ford established multiple factories in and around Detroit.⁸ Ford was well-known for being one of the only companies to hire Black workers, paying a daily \$5 salary that doubled other automobile plants' offers.⁹ By "carefully [cultivating] contacts with leading black ministers," Ford exploited networks to locate individuals for the "dirtiest and most grueling jobs...especially on plant janitorial and maintenance crews, or in hot, dangerous jobs in foundries or furnace rooms."¹⁰ Wartime necessity had increased the employment of Black Detroiters by 103% in 1944, but white workers at dozens of plants responded to Black's labor mobility with numerous wildcat strikes between 1941 and 1944.¹¹

The state's employment infrastructure also entrenched racial division. The Michigan State Employment Service (MSES) disseminated job orders with discriminatory hiring clauses until the 1955 Fair Employment Practices Law banned the practice.¹² In December 1946, 35.1 percent of job orders contained racial preferences, growing to 44.7 percent in April 1947 and reaching 65 percent in June 1948.¹³ That same year, the MSES documented that 75 percent of job postings for unskilled positions explicitly rejected Black applicants despite the fact that 67.5 percent of those who were unemployed and unskilled identified as nonwhite.¹⁴ This labor market gap coupled with the disproportionate representation of Black workers in unskilled and semiskilled jobs across the automotive, chemical, steel, machine, and metal industries derived from constructing differences along racial lines.¹⁵ Between the 1940s and 1960s, Black men also faced cyclical deprivation in the construction industry. Black day laborers "gathered at an informal outdoor labor market" on Eight Mile Road, "known to local whites as the 'slave market,'" where they were temporarily hired without union wages or benefits.¹⁶ The employment tracks for Blacks in

⁶Bill McGraw, "Bringing Detroit's Black Bottom to (Virtual) Life," *Detroit Free Press*, Feb. 27, 2019.

⁷Tim Kiska, "Black Bottom: The Rise, The Fall, and The Rise of a Detroit Neighborhood," Oct. 24, 2021 in *The Detroit History Podcast*; "Black Bottom Neighborhood," *Detroit Historical Society*.

⁸Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of Detroit), personal communication, March 2024.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 25.

¹¹Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 29.

¹²*Ibid.*, 94.

¹³*Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 119.

city government were largely limited to four options: unskilled work as janitors or groundskeepers, transportation jobs as conductors and motormen, low-level clerical work, and primary education.¹⁷

Economic opportunities caused a surge of Black people and families to migrate North. While Black laborers were paid higher wages than previously imagined by working in the automobile industry, this compensation did not protect them from ingrained racism that forced them to work the most difficult, dangerous positions, nor did it protect them from racism among their coworkers or within the surrounding communities where they tried to establish homes and roots.

Housing

As hundreds of thousands of Black people took up work in Detroit's growing economy, they looked for areas to establish homes, but "real estate steering, redlining, and racial restrictive covenants"¹⁸ prevented Black people from living in most areas of the city. At first, racial covenants were utilized as explicit language within a deed or lease prohibiting sale or rental to African Americans and other undesirable races, ethnicities, or religions.¹⁹ In 1936, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) established a grading system that indicated guidelines for providing home loans, also called redlining. FHA's underwriting manuals supported properties with racial restrictions to maintain the "character" of a neighborhood;²⁰ as such, "deeds in every subdivision developed between 1940 and 1947 specified the exclusion of Blacks."²¹ Areas labeled as "hazardous" to home loans suffered from "adverse influences" that included "inharmonious racial groups."²² All Detroit neighborhoods "with even a tiny African American population [were] rated 'D'... by federal appraisers, and colored red" as were areas with "shifting" tendencies or the "infiltration" of an unwanted population.²³

In Detroit, redlining pushed middle-class Black families to three neighborhoods: Conant Gardens, the North End, and the Old Westside.²⁴ Poor and working class Black families resided in Black Bottom and Paradise Valley, where "visible poverty, overcrowding, and deteriorating houses"²⁵ reified acute rent burden and wholesale disinvestment. In 1947, Black Detroiters could only access 47,000 of 545,000 available housing units, and four years later, Black families only had access to 1.15 percent of newly constructed homes.²⁶ In 1960, there was a \$12 difference in the median monthly rent paid by Black and white Detroiters, with the former paying \$76 per month and the latter paying \$64 per month.²⁷

¹⁷Ibid., 111.

¹⁸Jamon Jordan, "A Mighty Long Way: How Black People Moved In & Out and Around Detroit," *New Detroit* (blog), February 23, 2021, <https://www.newdetroit.org/a-mighty-long-way-how-black-people-moved-in-out-and-around-detroit/>.

¹⁹Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of Detroit), personal communication, March 2024.

²⁰Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 181.

²¹Ibid., 44.

²²Michigan Historical Commission, "Historical State Site No. 762," 2021.

²³Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 44.

²⁴Ibid., 40.

²⁵Ibid., 9.

²⁶Ibid., 44.

²⁷Ibid., 54.

Due to layered discrimination and structural inequality, Black Detroiters began to settle in the Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood “because it was their own opportunity, as they saw it, to own their own homes and rear their families.”²⁸ Exclusion from loans and mortgages compelled Eight Mile Road residents to coalesce resources for land contracts payments and building supplies.²⁹ By 1938, this collaborative and incremental approach situated 91.7 percent of Black Eight Mile residents in single-family detached homes, of which 67 percent were owner-occupied, compared to 37.8 percent for Blacks residents in the city.³⁰ In 1941, white real estate developers racially divided the Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood with a “six-foot high, 4-inch thick, half-mile-long concrete wall” to evade a red zone designation in the 1939 Home Owners Loan Corporation Security Maps and to secure financing.³¹ Known as the Birwood Wall, this barrier separated Eight Mile-Wyoming from Blackstone Park, a predominantly white neighborhood.³² The FHA explicitly stated that “artificial barriers” could protect a neighborhood from “adverse influences” that would lower their property values.³³



From 1943 to 1965, white Detroiters established over 192 neighborhood organizations (also known as civic associations, protective associations, improvement associations, and homeowners’ associations)³⁴ to reinforce housing discrimination, often instigated with violent and abusive tactics. To deter and

Image 2: Birwood Wall, 2024³⁵

reverse Black movement into all-white neighborhoods, white Detroiters used “harassment, mass demonstrations, picketing, effigy burning, window breaking, arson, vandalism, and physical attacks.”³⁶ After the Supreme Court’s *Shelley v. Kraemer* case led racial covenants to be unenforceable in 1948, an umbrella neighborhood organization known as the Federated Property Owners of Detroit “called for a citywide network to monitor the selling of homes to Blacks, to harass real estate brokers who sold homes to Blacks, and to keep house prices high to deter Black buyers.”³⁷ White neighborhood residents continued to advance a series of onslaughts against Black newcomers. As an emblematic case, when the Wilson family bought a home on 18199 Riopelle Street in March 1955, white neighbors in the Cadillac Improvement Association “launched a five-month siege.”³⁸ Due to the intensity and frequency of the incidents, the Wilson

²⁸Ibid., 39.

²⁹Ibid., 39.

³⁰Ibid., 40.

³¹Erin Einhorn and Olivia Lewis, “Detroit Segregation Wall Still Stands, a Stark Reminder of Racial Divisions,” NBC News, July 19, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/specials/detroit-segregation-wall/>.

³²Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of Detroit), personal communication, March 2024.

³³Michigan Historical Commission, “Historical State Site No. 762,” 2021.

³⁴Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 211.

³⁵Zhang, Caroline. *Birwood Wall*. Photograph. March 2024.

³⁶Ibid., 233.

³⁷Ibid., 221.

³⁸Ibid., 232.

family's five-year-old son, Raymond, began to have "nervous attacks" in the middle of the night. The Wilson family eventually moved out of Riopelle Street when a psychologist warned that Raymond could become "afflicted with a permanent mental injury because of the relentless attacks."³⁹ At the same time, blockbusting also became a common technique.⁴⁰ As white homeowners began to flee integration to the suburbs, real estate agents would hire poor Black people to walk Blackstone Park with strollers, pretending to be residents. Real estate agents would then use these Black families as evidence of impending racial integration, frightening white families into selling their homes to move to the suburbs.⁴¹

Black renters also faced discrimination and violence. In an attempt to alleviate the severe housing shortage and overcrowding in segregated Black areas, ground was broken on the Sojourner Truth Homes.⁴² The complex was meant to house 200 Black families employed by defense contractors.⁴³ Beginning in June 1941, white residents formed the Seven Mile-Fenelon Improvement Association to oppose the building of a federally-funded housing complex meant for Black people.⁴⁴ When 24 Black families attempted to move in on February 28, 1942, 1,000 white individuals blocked the residents from entering. Black community members mobilized by writing to the President and holding a rally in Cadillac Square.⁴⁵ Six weeks later, the Michigan National Guard offered protection for these families as they entered their rightful homes.⁴⁶ Afterwards, the Detroit Housing Commission chose to implement a policy that perpetuated racially segregated public housing, with city officials promising "not [to] change the racial pattern of a neighborhood."⁴⁷ It took a legal victory for the Detroit branch of the NAACP in 1956 for the city to allow the integration of public housing.⁴⁸



3.3. White residents of the Seven Mile-Fenelon area fiercely resisted the designation of the Sojourner Truth Homes as a "Negro" housing project. This billboard was erected in February 1942, just before the first black families arrived. Notice both the American flags and the sign's bold assertion of whiteness.

Image 3: Seven Mile-Fenelon Improvement Association billboard⁴⁹

³⁹Ibid., 233.

⁴⁰Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of Detroit), personal communication, March 2024.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Michigan Historical Commission, "Historical State Site No. 788," 2021.

⁴³Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of Detroit), personal communication, March 2024.

⁴⁴Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 73.

⁴⁵Michigan Historical Commission, "Historical State Site No. 762," 2021.

⁴⁶"Special Focus: Sojourner Truth Housing Project · Before the Unrest: 1940 - 1967 · 12th Street Detroit," Walter P. Reuther Library, n.d., https://projects.lib.wayne.edu/12thstreetdetroit/exhibits/show/beforeunrest/sojourner_truth.

⁴⁷Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 73-74.

⁴⁸Ibid., 87.

⁴⁹Ibid., 73.

The violent confrontation at the Sojourner Truth Homes was a precursor of the two-day riot in June 1943 that resulted in people being “shot, knifed, kicked, dragged from cars, and pummeled for no other reason than their race”⁵⁰ in the streets close to Belle Isle and throughout downtown. While Black rioters looted white-owned stores and over ten thousand white rioters “rampaged along nearby thoroughfares” of Paradise Valley, Detroit police sympathized with whites and brutalized Blacks.⁵¹ Twenty-five of the 34 people who died were Black, and the 17 people killed by police were Black— underscoring how race was used to unequally apply force and to ultimately regulate life and death.⁵²

The riots of 1943 concerned then-Mayor Albert E. Cobo and white Detroiters, who considered relocating to the suburbs to avoid so-called epidemics of crime and instability.⁵³ This fear led the city to engage in urban renewal efforts that specifically targeted Black neighborhoods; a popular phrase at the time was: “urban renewal means Negro removal.”⁵⁴ The American Housing Act of 1949 catalyzed this change at the national level.⁵⁵ President Truman’s landmark legislation specifically allocated federal funds for localities to engage in “slum clearance and urban development.”⁵⁶ Cobo capitalized on this federal program by designating ‘blighted’ areas that would be razed to make way for new developments.⁵⁷ Blighted areas slated for demolition included the predominantly Black neighborhoods of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley.



The photograph on the left shows an aerial view of Hastings Street, near Mack Avenue, in 1959. Hastings was once the center of commercial activity for Black Detroit. The photograph on the right, while not the exact vantage point, shows the construction of I-75 just north of the interchange with I-375 in 1961. The Michigan Department of Transportation included these photographs in a presentation on its proposal to remove I-375, built in the 1950s and 1960s for what was then \$50 million, and replace it with a boulevard.

PROVIDED BY THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Prior to urban renewal, Black Bottom and Paradise Valley were booming areas of Black entrepreneurship, entertainment, and community. The area was home to over 200 Black-owned businesses, including grocery stores, restaurants, and barbers; “shops occupied its street corners and the business district along Hastings Street.”⁵⁸ Black-owned schools and churches provided spaces for education, culture, and organizing.⁵⁹

Image 4: Black Bottom before and after construction of the I-375 highway⁶⁰

⁵⁰The Detroit History Podcast, “1943, Detroit’s Forgotten Riot,” Season 2, March 3, 2019, <https://detroithistorypodcast.com/podcast/1943-detroits-forgotten-riot/>.

⁵¹Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 29.

⁵²The Detroit History Podcast, “1943, Detroit’s Forgotten Riot.”

⁵³Kiska. “Black Bottom: The Rise, The Fall, and The Rise of a Detroit Neighborhood.”

⁵⁴Ken Coleman, “The People and Places of Black Bottom, Detroit,” *Humanities* 42, no. 4 (2021).

⁵⁵Howard Husock, “The Destruction of Detroit’s Black Bottom,” *Reason*, March, 2022.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Michigan Historical Commission, “Historical Site No. 758,” 2020; Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of Detroit), personal communication, March 2024.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Bill McGraw, “Bringing Detroit’s Black Bottom to (Virtual) Life,” *Detroit Free Press*, Feb. 27, 2019.

By the mid 1950s, 100 acres of Black Bottom had been razed for the development of Lafayette Pavilion (a white-only high-rise), Lafayette Park, and the I-375 freeway.⁶¹ Few homeowners were compensated for uprooting their lives, but no amount of money could compensate for the loss of culture and community.⁶² Announcements for new freeways preceded actual construction by years, so homeowners and shopkeepers were “unable to sell property that would soon be condemned [and], unable to move without the money from a property sale.”⁶³ The Black community eventually dispersed throughout other neighborhoods, losing social ties, organizing and activism circles, and community.⁶⁴ Cobo equated this intergenerational loss to “some inconveniences in building our expressways and in our slum clearance programs” and belittled the devastation and destruction as “the price of progress”.⁶⁵

The construction of I-375 was a particularly devastating aspect of urban renewal, as the highway now runs directly over what used to be the infamous Hastings Street, “central to Detroit’s Black culture and community.”⁶⁶ Where once there were businesses, churches, pharmacies, and pedestrians, only two years later was simply pavement.⁶⁷ Thousands of Black Detroiters were forced to leave as their homes and communities were destroyed “in the name of civic progress.”⁶⁸

Following the destruction of Black Bottom, the development of public housing expanded into Herman Gardens, Jeffries Homes, and the Frederick Douglass apartments.⁶⁹ The latter included six high-rise towers that “were explicitly reserved for African Americans—a policy the former first lady [Eleanor Roosevelt] championed as benevolence.”⁷⁰ They would eventually be destroyed in 2014 because of being “unfit for human habitation.”⁷¹

Policies enacted by the federal government, city of Detroit, and individual homeowners and real estate agents cordoned the Black Detroit community into specific areas that were systematically disinvested. Racial tensions were amplified by white residents wanting to maintain segregation and this tension periodically erupted into uprisings that destroyed Black wealth and community. This disinvestment and resentment was used as a justification for the communities’ destruction under the guise of urban renewal.

Food Insecurity

The decades-long weight of institutional racism and blatant segregation permeated every part of life. A Detroit Urban League survey of the city’s grocery stores in 1954 and 1955, for example, revealed “pervasive discrimination” and “virtually no Black employees.”⁷² Whites owned and

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of Detroit), personal communication, March 2024.

⁶³Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 47.

⁶⁴Michigan Historical Commission, “Historical Site No. 758,,” 2020.

⁶⁵Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 48.

⁶⁶Eric D. Lawrence, “I-375 Construction Decimated Detroit’s Black Communities. Now Activists Want Repayment,” *Detroit Free Press*, Jul. 15, 2021.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸McGraw, “Bringing Detroit’s Black Bottom to (Virtual) Life.”

⁶⁹Jordan, “A Mighty Long Way: How Black People Moved In & Out and Around Detroit.”

⁷⁰Howard Husock, “The Destruction of Detroit’s Black Bottom,” Reason, 2022, <https://reason.com/2022/02/05/the-destruction-of-black-bottom/>.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 113.

operated the chain grocery stores that were prominent in Black neighborhoods, becoming the “most convenient symbol of the systematic exclusion of Blacks from whole sectors of the city’s economy.”⁷³ Black Detroiters’ transversal experience of structural violence, limited economic and housing opportunities, and racial animosity fueled the 1967 uprising, and grocery stores were among the main “targets of young looters.”⁷⁴ A local witness “recalled that the first business to be looted was a white-owned grocery store, while the Black-owned grocery store across the street remained untouched.”⁷⁵

The 1967 uprising resulted in “43 deaths, hundreds of injuries, almost 1,700 fires, and over 7000 arrests” across five days.⁷⁶ In July, civil unrest had been brewing across the country. Detroit’s uprising was catalyzed by police officers raiding an ‘illegal after-hours bar’ in an Black neighborhood, arresting all 85 people inside.⁷⁷ In response, crowds formed and there were insults and rocks thrown between police and civilians.⁷⁸ Eventually, this mob grew to a crowd of 3,000 people, and the Mayor and Governor called the Michigan National Guard to respond.⁷⁹

In the ensuing chaos, more than 1,600 buildings, totalling \$132 million dollars of property and goods, were damaged or destroyed.⁸⁰ The loss to Black businesses, institutions, and community was incalculable. Many residents emphasize that Black institutions in the city never fully recovered from this devastating loss.⁸¹ In interviews after the uprising, the Detroit Urban League and the Detroit Free Press recorded that 54 percent of Detroiters considered “grocery stores as places where they were treated badly more than any other type of establishment.”⁸² Following the uprising, President Johnson developed the Kerner Commission to investigate its origins. The report concluded that the uprising was caused by resentment from deindustrialization due to automation and unionization, which led to massive job loss and heightened levels of poverty,⁸³ racism in policing, segregation, and “frustrations of powerlessness.”⁸⁴ Labor market constriction forced 15.9 percent of Blacks across the city to unemployment compared with 5.9 percent of whites in 1960.⁸⁵ Detroit’s Eastside bore the brunt of industrial transformation, with the closure of ten plants and the elimination of 71,137 jobs from 1953 to 1960.⁸⁶ From 1970 to 1980, the number of high-poverty census tracts doubled as the population in these zones just about doubled.⁸⁷

⁷³Ibid., 114.

⁷⁴Ibid., 114.

⁷⁵Alex B. Hill, “Race, Food, and Rebellion: Detroit’s History and Conflicts over Food Access,” *FoodAnthropology* (blog), March 23, 2018, <https://foodanthro.com/2018/03/23/race-food-and-rebellion-detroits-history-and-conflicts-over-food-access/>

⁷⁶“Encyclopedia of Detroit: Uprising of 1967,” Detroit Historical Society, n.d., <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/uprising-1967>.

⁷⁷Michigan Historical Commission, “Historical Site No. 746C,” 2017.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of Detroit), personal communication, March 2024.

⁸² Hill, “Race, Food, and Rebellion: Detroit’s History and Conflicts over Food Access.”

⁸³Tim Kiska, “The Deindustrialization of Detroit,” Aug. 2, 2020 in *The Detroit History Podcast*.

⁸⁴Michigan Historical Commission, “Historical Site No. 746C,” 2017.

⁸⁵Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. 144.

⁸⁶Ibid., 148.

⁸⁷Ibid., 268.

For Black Detroiters, the procurement of food and income was intertwined with systemic racism and wholesale exclusion. While the 1967 uprising brought these issues to the fore, the parallel violence of industrial transformation and environmental degradation further compounded community devastation.

Pollution

By the early 1920s, Detroit's population and industrial growth coupled with weak pollution regulations made the city ideal for investment.⁸⁸ Although "annual deposition of soot over the city was over six tons per acre" and "'scores of complaints' about property and health damage from smoke" flooded the Recorder's Court in Detroit, judges repeatedly disregarded nuisance cases and failed to penalize repeat offenders of the smoke ordinance.⁸⁹ In 1924, the Detroit Board of Commerce sought to ameliorate the issue with a Smoke Abatement Committee, but its membership composed the "largest smoke-emitting private utilities and manufacturers," which included the Detroit Edison Company, the Ford Motor Company, the Sun Oil Company, and Continental Motors Corporation.⁹⁰ Beyond this conflict of interest, local officials maintained that "the city would pursue a voluntarist enforcement policy, avoiding lawsuits if possible."⁹¹ By the mid-1920s, Ford Motor Company's River Rouge complex emitted over 34 million tons of greenhouse gasses by burning an annual average of 12 million tons of coal.⁹² Automobile workers' daily exposure to chemical vapors, mineral and metal dust, and smoke resulted in life-altering occupational diseases, but the Michigan Workmen's Compensation Act deemed this risk to be a "normal" part of employment, and therefore, largely excluded occupational diseases from coverage.⁹³

The conditions within the foundry industry heightened these pernicious effects, and Black Detroiters composed the majority of the workforce. Between 1933 and 1938, a study at Herman Kiefer Hospital in Detroit found that 73 percent of patients diagnosed with silico-tuberculosis were foundry workers, 87.1 percent of whom died within five years of hospital admission.⁹⁴ When contract negotiations between representatives from the United Auto Workers and Ford led to a mortality study of Rouge foundry workers, the findings revealed that "Black workers in the Dearborn Iron Foundry had a death rate 79.37 percent higher than all workers (16.21 per 100)."⁹⁵ Management at automobile companies also disproportionately assigned Blacker workers to paint shops, where "the introduction of automatic sandblasters... increased the concentration of airborne lead dust in body shops...[and generated] the highest rates of lead poisoning in the industry."⁹⁶ Since the industry dominated toxicological research and impeded public health measures from the 1920s to the 1970s, atmospheric lead pollution from gasoline, dust, and paint enveloped Detroit but more acutely affected neighborhoods inhabited by poor and working-class

⁸⁸Josiah John Rector, "Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015" (Detroit, Michigan, Wayne State University, 2017), 55, https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2737&context=oa_dissertations.

⁸⁹Rector, "Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015." 56.

⁹⁰Ibid., 56.

⁹¹Ibid., 58.

⁹²Ibid., 71.

⁹³Ibid., 71-72.

⁹⁴Ibid., 82.

⁹⁵Ibid., 199.

⁹⁶Ibid., 84.

Blacks.⁹⁷ Housing discrimination and employment discrimination dually jeopardized the life chances of Black Detroiters.

Additionally, the city's longstanding prioritization of commercial interests over residents' well being had simultaneously permeated Detroit's waterways. In 1910, the Michigan Board of Health had determined through 200 bacteriological samples that all the water in the Detroit River, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair River was contaminated and a source of typhoid, and thus unsafe for drinking.⁹⁸ An International Joint Commission report from 1916 urged Detroit leaders to treat the raw sewage discharged into the Detroit River, but the "absence of federal water pollution regulations, limits on municipal bond debt, and inter-municipal political disputes" delayed sewage treatment until 1940 when an additional 315 miles of sewers had been constructed for the growing city.⁹⁹ Between 1946 and 1948, industrial plants released a daily average of 1.1 billion gallons of toxic substances into the Detroit River, which included: "3,690 pounds of cyanide, 4,890 pounds of phenols, 11,010 pounds of ammonium, and 16,240 pounds of oils and oil byproducts."¹⁰⁰ By the late 1940s, thousands of gallons of diluted sulfuric acid had been deposited into the Detroit River each day, causing the water of the Rouge River to appear orange.¹⁰¹ By 1965, industrial waste discharges in the Detroit River were still at 1.1 billion gallons daily.¹⁰²

The City of Detroit's protection of commercial and industrial interests communicated that people were subordinate to profits and economic growth. Alongside rampant pollution, companies dehumanized and belittled Black Detroiters by intentionally employing them in work that shortened and threatened their lives. For elites, the disposability and destruction of Black communities extended from the environment to education.

Education

A 1951 study by the Detroit Urban League discovered that Black children accessed education in the oldest schools of the oldest sections in the city.¹⁰³ Three years later, Detroit's extensive school-building program did not alter the enduring neglect of schools in Black neighborhoods.¹⁰⁴ Instead, the "practices of racially gerrymandering attendance boundaries...overloading classes in Black schools, and offering an inferior curriculum to Black students" perpetuated a "separate and unequal" education system.¹⁰⁵ Arthur Dondineau, Detroit's superintendent at the time, explicitly advanced a policy of segregation by only assigning Black teachers to Black majority schools and admitting, "I know because I put them there."¹⁰⁶ In 1955, when Remus Robinson became the first Black member of the Detroit Board of Education, he denounced the prevailing policy of offering "watered-down" courses to Black students.¹⁰⁷ This lack of parity in education access and quality

⁹⁷Ibid., 116.

⁹⁸Ibid., 60.

⁹⁹Rector, "Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015." 62.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 127.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 127.

¹⁰²Ibid., 157.

¹⁰³Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81, Second Edition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Regional, 1999). 252.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 252.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 251-252.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 252.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 255.

was particularly salient in management decisions and community responses. To address overcrowding in Pattengill elementary school in 1959, administration announced that it would transfer 74 Black students to Houghton, another majority Black school, although two majority white schools were in closer proximity and had sufficient capacity to accommodate new students.¹⁰⁸ A year later, an attempt to transport approximately 300 Black students from overcrowded schools in the central district to three schools in the predominantly white northwestern district resulted in parents instrumentalizing their children's absences to stop integration.¹⁰⁹

In the 1990s, Governor John Engler's administration exacerbated racial and socioeconomic segregation by expanding schools of choice and charter schools.¹¹⁰ Although 80 percent of for-profit education management companies operated from Michigan, a New York Times article in 2016 underscored that Detroit's varied selection of charter schools still provided "no good choices."¹¹¹ The state takeover of Detroit Public Schools (DPS) under Public Act 10 of 1999 resulted in an enrollment decrease of 16 percent across five years while charter school enrollment grew to 200 percent.¹¹² Governor Engler and Mayor Dennis Archer cited "fiscal maleficence and poor management by DPS officials and board of education," while Republican legislators in Lansing claimed unsatisfactory student achievement on Michigan's standardized test, but evidence contradicted both of these reasons.¹¹³

Prior to the 1999 state takeover, "Detroit had the most African-centered schools of any city in the country...[but] Afrocentric schools were the casualties of many rounds of closures and district restructurings."¹¹⁴ From the 1990s to today, the number of African-centered schools in Detroit dwindled from 20 to three: Paul Robeson/ Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey Academy, and Timbuktu Academy of Science and Technology.¹¹⁵ Emergency management also disrupted and halted years-long efforts to transform the curriculum. In 1993, Kwame Kenyatta, a member of the Detroit Board of Education, introduced what was known as the African Senate Resolution, and it required all DPS schools to teach from an Afro-centric perspective.¹¹⁶ Malik Yakini, former principal of the Nsoroma Institute, described that "there were efforts, in fact, successful efforts to have textbook publishers change some of the books and make them much more reflective in content and images of the majority African American population in Detroit."¹¹⁷ DPS also held multi-year staff training, "where all of the top African-centered scholars from across the country were being brought in to do workshops with teachers."¹¹⁸ These system-wide changes, however,

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 258.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 259.

¹¹⁰Shaun M. Black et al., "Impacts of Emergency Financial Management as Governance Reform in Michigan Schools," *Voices of Reform: Educational Research to Inform and Reform* 5, no. 1 (2022): 15.

¹¹¹Black et al., "Impacts of Emergency Financial Management as Governance Reform in Michigan Schools." 15.

¹¹²Ibid., 17.

¹¹³Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁴Bryce Huffman, "Loss of African-Centered Schools in Detroit Hurts Black Children the Most," Michigan Public, February 15, 2019, <https://www.michiganpublic.org/education/2019-02-15/loss-of-african-centered-schools-in-detroit-hurts-black-children-the-most>.

¹¹⁵Huffman, "Loss of African-Centered Schools in Detroit Hurts Black Children the Most."

¹¹⁶Malik Yakini, Interview with Malik Yakini, March 22, 2024.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

reached an abrupt stop during the state takeover, which overwhelmingly deprived Black students in Detroit from an education that celebrated, elevated, and matched their history and culture.¹¹⁹

Dispossession and disempowerment have robbed Black students of the right to fully and freely receive culturally-relevant education and to direct their lives. As explained below, the elimination of democratic self-determination by those in power has also been a routine and discriminatory practice.

Emergency Management

The role of the Emergency Manager was established in Public Act 101 in 1988 to address the emergency in Hamtramck.¹²⁰ Hamtramck was the first in the Detroit metro area to have an Emergency Manager due to budget deficits. The deindustrialization and resulting decrease in jobs in areas that initially benefited from car manufacturing are said to be major contributing factors to the deficit.¹²¹

The Emergency Manager position was created to address the financial deficits present in the city's funding. Under PA 101 a city government can trigger review for failing to pay debts or salaries, or as requested by residents or officials.¹²² The Emergency Financial Manager was appointed to handle all financial matters for the city and public school districts.¹²³ This placed the entire financial decision making authority and process in the hands of one individual. Emergency management is seen as a workaround for bankruptcy. It allows cities and school districts to receive the benefits of bankruptcy without having to receive the negative aspect of ruining a city's credit rating.¹²⁴ Emergency managers have complete power to reduce pay, outsource work, reorganize departments and adjust contracts. The Emergency Manager may sell, lease or privatize local assets with approval from the state treasury. In Detroit, moves toward privatization have included "public water, schools, lighting, and waste collection systems."¹²⁵ The Emergency Manager can also change local budgets *without* local legislative approval.¹²⁶

Thirty Managers have been appointed for the State of Michigan by the Michigan Governors. Eighteen were appointed under Rick Snyder.¹²⁷ Eight were appointed under Jennifer Granholm there, three were appointed under John Engler; one remains unknown.¹²⁸

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰ Michigan Radio Newsroom. 2012. "7 Things to Know About Michigan's Emergency Manager Law." *Michigan Public*, January 23, 2012.
<https://www.michiganpublic.org/politics-government/2011-12-06/7-things-to-know-about-michigans-emergency-manager-law>

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Rector, "Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015." 299.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Wikipedia contributors. 2023. "Financial Emergency in Michigan." Wikipedia. August 30, 2023.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Financial_emergency_in_Michigan.

¹²⁸Ibid.

Under PA 72 a statute allowed Detroit Public Schools to come under an Emergency Financial Manager in 2012.¹²⁹ Detroit Public Schools also had a financial manager in 2009.¹³⁰ Over 6 years, Detroit Public Schools went from a budget surplus of \$115 million to a \$31 million dollar deficit.¹³¹ The school district dissolution provision was passed which allowed school districts that were struggling financially to dissolve. The dissolving district was split into other neighboring districts and taxes were collected through the Intermediate school districts control to pay off debts. The result of this dissolution for citizens is now having to commute to other school districts.¹³²

There was a requested review of the Emergency Management Law in considering the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Congressman John Conyers stated, “In this case, while the law itself may be facially neutral, it would seem that it is being applied in a discriminatory fashion, as the impacted jurisdictions have very high proportions of African Americans and other minorities.”¹³³ Figure 1 below shows that Black-majority cities have disproportionately experienced state takeovers.¹³⁴

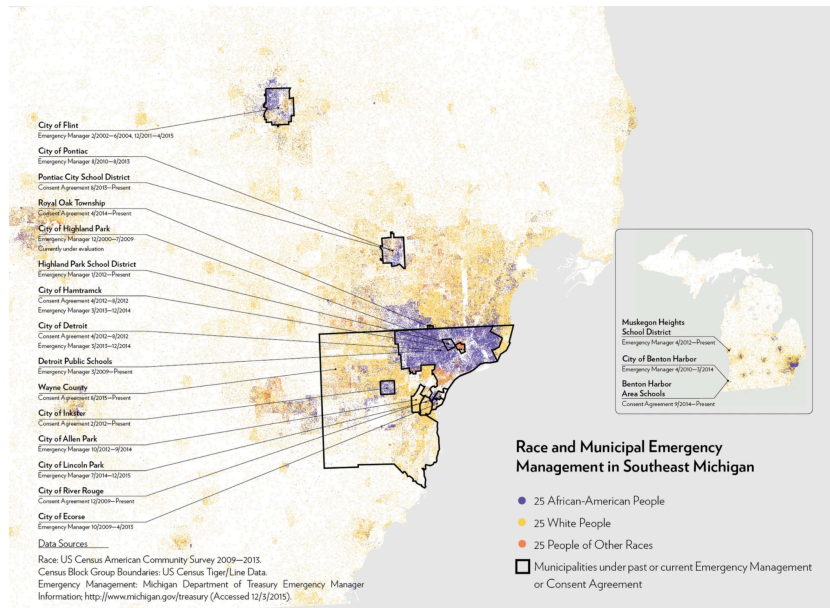


Figure 1: Black-majority cities in Southeast Michigan with emergency management¹³⁵

This ethnohistory demonstrates the pervasive, systematic, and racist policies that segregated and impoverished Detroit’s Black communities. These policies were either explicitly advanced by the City of Detroit’s government or the government was culpable for the success of said acts. Black communities were targeted for destruction and divestment from every angle, through every aspect of their lives including housing, food, education, health, and the physical environment.

¹²⁹Michigan Radio Newsroom. 2012.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴“Thirsty in Detroit: Water Shutoffs and Baptismal Witness,” The Christian Century, May 25, 2016, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/features/thirsty-detroit-water-shutoffs-and-baptismal-witness>.

¹³⁵We The People of Detroit, “Race and Municipal Emergency Management in Southeast Michigan,” We The People of Detroit, 2015, <https://www.wethepeopleofdetroit.com/water>.

The impacts of these policies and decisions are not isolated to the past: they are deeply, tangibly felt today. These historical harms are still impactful to Black Detroit residents through generations as evidenced in the next section, Priority Sustainable Development Goals. This section examines the vestiges of the historical harms explored in the Ethnohistory. Moreover, racist policymaking did not disappear after urban renewal: policies that target Black communities are pervasive today - not always explicitly, but often in more surreptitious, implicit forms, with similarly devastating effects on Black Detroiters.

IV. Priority Sustainable Development Goals

The following section provides an overview of the contemporary state of the Detroit Black community under the five key issue areas of: food insecurity, education, pollution, economic development, and housing. Using the United Nations’ SDGs, this section evaluates Detroit’s adherence to the UN’s standards for human rights in these key areas. The five key issue areas correspond to the following SDGs:

Key Issue Area	Sustainable Development Goal
Food Insecurity	2: Zero Hunger
Pollution	3: Good Health and Wellbeing 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
Education	4: Quality Education
Economic Development	8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
Housing	11: Sustainable Cities and Communities



Zero Hunger

The most recent Detroit Food Metrics Report by the Detroit Food Policy Council identified that 69% of households were food insecure between 2020 and 2021.¹³⁶ While exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the food equity gap in Detroit has its origins in racialized food spaces, housing discrimination and enduring disinvestment, which precipitated “supermarket redlining” or the “flight of higher quality grocers to the suburbs in the 1980s.”¹³⁷ The resulting “food swamp” in Detroit has cultivated a market that is saturated with “high-calorie, low-cost food

¹³⁶Alex B. Hill and Amy Kuras, “Detroit Food Metrics Report 2020 (with 2021 Update)” (Detroit Food Policy Council, 2022), 15,

<https://www.detroitfoodpc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/DFMR20-Report-20221103-CORRECTED.pdf>.

¹³⁷Elizabeth Eisenhauer, “In Poor Health: Supermarket Redlining and Urban Nutrition,” *GeoJournal* 53, no. 2 (February 1, 2001): 125–33, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015772503007>.

selections” at the expense of healthy alternatives.¹³⁸ Despite the prevalence and proximity of fast food restaurants, gas stations, dollar stores, and corner stores, the “selection of food items is exceedingly lacking.”¹³⁹ A 2020 study found that Detroit residents had a negative perception of corner stores due to concerns with food quality, price gouging, and store cleanliness.¹⁴⁰ In 2023, Raphael Wright’s Neighborhood Grocery in the Jefferson-Chalmers neighborhood was the only Black-owned grocery in Detroit; it had converted a liquor store into a health food, “equity crowdfunded store”¹⁴¹ that offered locally produced, culturally relevant, and nutritious food options.

Existing literature has also used the term “food mirage” to describe how Detroit’s neighborhoods may purport sufficient food access but have grocery stores that are “too expensive or culturally unfamiliar...for some minority residents and those with less education and income.”¹⁴² The 2013 opening of a Whole Foods in Detroit’s Midtown serves as an emblematic case.¹⁴³ As one of two national chains in Detroit, Whole Foods retraced racial and socioeconomic divisions by aiming to “appeal to middle-upper-class shoppers and outreach to lower-income shoppers through

nutrition classes and offering space for community gatherings.”¹⁴⁴ Differentiating services based on income relegated Black Detroiters who were experiencing poverty to a position of deficiency and assumed that this community lacked knowledge of nutrition rather than time, transportation, and income to access healthy, desired, and culturally appropriate foods.¹⁴⁵

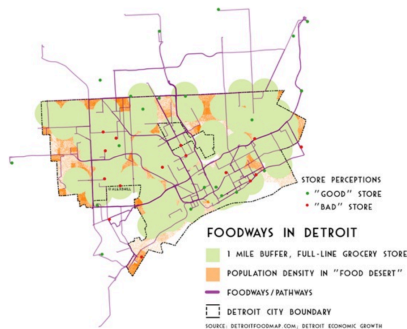


Figure 4: Map of residents “good” and “bad” perceptions of various food retail locations from ethnographic interactions during 2014. Alex B. Hill (2016)

Figure 2: Map of “good” and “bad” grocery stores according to Detroit residents¹⁴⁶

¹³⁸Kylie Scott, “You Are Where You Live: Food Environment and Obesity in Detroit,” *Undergraduate Journal of Public Health* 6 (April 29, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3998/ujph.2315>.

¹³⁹“A City of Detroit Policy on Food Security ‘Creating a Food Secure Detroit’” (Detroit Food Policy Council, 2008), https://www.detroitfoodpc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Detroit_Food_Security_Policy.pdf.

¹⁴⁰Alyssa W. Beavers, Ashley Atkinson, and Katherine Alaimo, “How Gardening and a Gardener Support Program in Detroit Influence Participants’ Diet, Food Security, and Food Values,” *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 15, no. 2 (March 13, 2019): 149–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2019.1587332>.

¹⁴¹Kiara Hay, “Detroit’s First Black-Owned Grocery Store Makes a Difference in the Community,” WXYZ Detroit, October 27, 2023, <https://www.wxyz.com/news/detroits-first-black-owned-grocery-store-makes-a-difference-in-the-community>.

¹⁴²Sara Santarossa et al., “Food Insecurity in Detroit: Exploring the Relationship between Patient-Reported Food Insecurity and Proximity to Healthful Grocery Stores,” *Public Health Nutrition* 25, no. 4 (July 30, 2021): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980021003128>.

¹⁴³Scott, “You Are Where You Live: Food Environment and Obesity in Detroit.”

¹⁴⁴Scott, “You Are Where You Live: Food Environment and Obesity in Detroit.”

¹⁴⁵Hill and Kuras, “Detroit Food Metrics Report 2020 (with 2021 Update).”

¹⁴⁶Alex B. Hill and Maya Stovall, “The Detroitists: Reflections of Detroit Ethnographers at the Anniversary of the 1967 Rebellion,” *Anthropology News* (blog), July 18, 2017.

As such, most food insecure individuals resort to retailers outside of their neighborhoods.¹⁴⁷ Detroit residents with sufficient resources travel outside of the city for groceries, and 60 percent of residents report a preference for chain supermarkets beyond Detroit.¹⁴⁸ With approximately 40 percent of Detroit's residents experiencing poverty, self-designed food pathways that aim to avoid the abundance of unhealthy food options are both layered and taxing.¹⁴⁹ A local food advocate emphasized that “people have found ways to adapt to what they have. It’s not good, just, or fair, but they piece together family food needs in many ways.”¹⁵⁰ A Black female resident of Detroit with a family of nine shared in an interview that she spent, “a significant amount of time combing through local advertisements for deals and traveling between different stores in order to stretch her family’s food budget... shopping at her neighborhood stores were not worth her time because of the prices and quality.”¹⁵¹ Another interviewee stated that she shared her EBT [Electronic Benefits Transfer associated with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] card with family, adding, “We shop together, don’t eat together, but we’ve gotta share to make it work.”¹⁵² This stretching of resources and detailed planning points to the fact that food security is not limited to access but includes the availability, affordability, accommodation, and acceptability of food.¹⁵³ In-store treatment and discrimination also determine how Detroit residents negotiate and reshape their foodways, as evident with the “good” and “bad” categories of grocery stores in Figure 2. An interviewee recounted, “The storeowners disrespected us...they used to talk horribly to the women and children...I’m so glad that they left from here. People used to get sick from the food purchased from that store...Most of the items in that store were expired.”¹⁵⁴ Black Detroiters’ communal concern over quality, pricing, and discriminatory treatment often took form in phone calls and conversations after church services to share food purchasing experiences and to redirect food consumption and procurement decisions.¹⁵⁵

Black Detroiters have also contested and reclaimed the conceptualization of foodscapes. For the last twenty years, the “food desert” label has been a misnomer imposed by the outside and used particularly by “well-funded nonprofits and media outlets to drive a narrative contradictory to what food advocates were seeing in their communities.”¹⁵⁶ Malik Yakini, the executive director of the Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network (DBCFSN), elucidated that people associate “food desert” with a naturally occurring ecosystem,

...[and] we want people to realize that the disparities in the food system are anything but natural; they’re not something that just occurred; they are intentional and the result of intentional policy...Food apartheid helps us to better conceptualize the food conditions

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Alex B. Hill, “‘Treat Everybody Right’: Examining Foodways to Improve Food Access,” *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 10, no. 3 (May 26, 2021): 9–16.
https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=urbstud_frp

¹⁴⁹Hill and Kuras, “Detroit Food Metrics Report 2020 (with 2021 Update).”

¹⁵⁰Hill, “Race, Food, and Rebellion: Detroit’s History and Conflicts over Food Access.”

¹⁵¹Alex B. Hill, “‘Treat Everybody Right’: Multidimensional Foodways in Detroit” (Detroit, Michigan, Wayne State University, 2016),
https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1530&context=oa_theses.

¹⁵²Ibid.

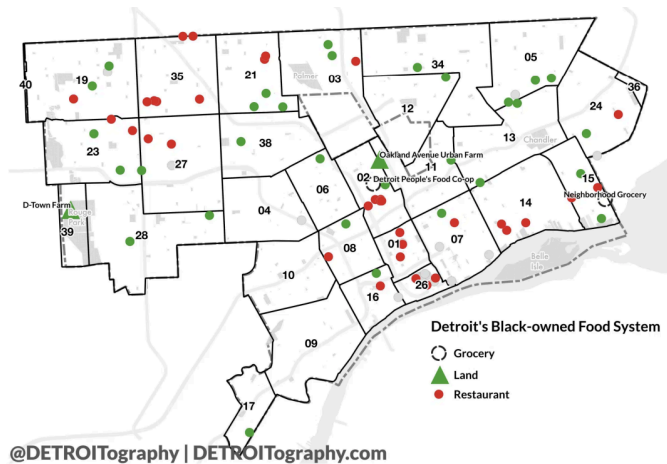
¹⁵³Santarossa et al., “Food Insecurity in Detroit.”

¹⁵⁴Hill, “‘Treat Everybody Right’: Multidimensional Foodways in Detroit.”

¹⁵⁵Hill, “‘Treat Everybody Right’: Examining Foodways to Improve Food Access.”

¹⁵⁶Hill, “Race, Food, and Rebellion: Detroit’s History and Conflicts over Food Access.”

that we often see in Black communities... It's a term that I think is more accurate for Black communities than 'food desert.'¹⁵⁷



Alyssa Rogers, cofounder of the Detroit Community Fridge, further problematized “food desert” because it does not recognize food waste, transportation issues, and price differences as part of the Black community’s relationship with food access.¹⁵⁸ Rogers explained that food apartheid “adequately places food insecurity within the branch of all its related insecurities and systems of oppression.”¹⁵⁹

Figure 3: Black food sovereignty in Detroit¹⁶⁰

As shown in Figure 3, community- centered food sovereignty has functioned as an alternative to an extant system that is exclusionary and extractive. Both Yakini and Rogers’ work have centered Black self- determination over food and agriculture systems. DBCFSN and Develop Detroit Inc, for example, own the building that will house the shared-use Kujichagulia Kitchens, the Mama Imani Humphrey Banquet Hall, and the Detroit People’s Food Co-op, a Black-owned grocery store with 2,000 members that is expected to open May 2024.¹⁶¹ As DBCFSN and Develop Detroit Inc spearheaded the work, they sought to create a “closed loop system” composed of locally grown produce, a Black-led and designed grocery store, and neighborhood employees to build and maintain wealth within the community.¹⁶² Part of this work includes D-Town Farm, a DBCFSN-owned and operated site that is the largest of Detroit’s farms and gardens at over seven acres.¹⁶³ In 2020, Rogers helped to establish several community fridges on homeowners’ properties, each of which are cared for through grassroots networks. To avoid debilitating regulations and policing by the city on the procurement of food and its distribution, Rogers and participating neighborhoods have chosen not to consolidate the community fridges under a single nonprofit organization.¹⁶⁴ Rogers explained that “once you become a nonprofit pantry, then there's some requirements that you need to get from people to shop for food, which

¹⁵⁷Yakini, Interview with Malik Yakini.

¹⁵⁸Alyssa Rogers, Interview with Alyssa Rogers, February 22, 2024.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Alex B. Hill, “Map: Detroit’s Black-Owned Food System,” *DETROITography* (blog), April 16, 2021, <https://detroitography.com/2021/04/16/map-detroits-black-owned-food-system/>.

¹⁶¹“Detroit Food Commons,” Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network, 2024, <https://www.dbcfsn.org/detroitfoodcommons>.

¹⁶²Briana Rice, “Malik Yakini and Detroit’s New Black-Owned Food Co-Op Aim to Build Food Sovereignty,” Michigan Public, February 16, 2024, <https://www.michiganpublic.org/economy/2024-02-16/malik-yakini-and-detroits-new-black-owned-food-co-op-aim-to-build-food-sovereignty>.

¹⁶³“D-Town Farm,” Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network, n.d., <https://www.dbcfsn.org/dtownfarm>.

¹⁶⁴Rogers, Interview with Alyssa Rogers.

often can be like an ID, they need to have a mailing address, you need to actually track who's getting food... and how much.”¹⁶⁵ The localization of food systems, however, is still laden with deep inequity and vulnerability as it relates to land use and ownership. Rogers explained,

“I would dare say more than half of the farmers in Detroit don't actually own the land that they're farming on. Nor is it properly zoned, and recognized by the city. A lot of people, more so, practice what we call guerrilla farming. So there's like an empty plot in your neighborhood and you just took it upon yourself to make active use of that land, and you don't own it. Some random developers may own it. The land bank may own it, who knows who owns it. It's not necessarily zoned for that use, but you saw the need, and you had an idea for a better use of it.”¹⁶⁶

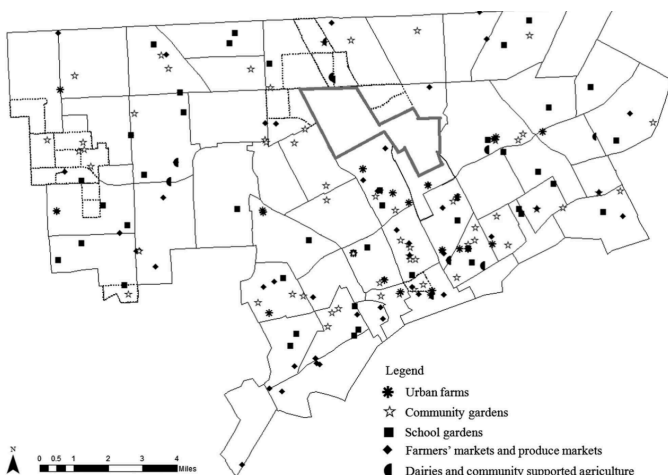


Figure 6. Map of Detroit showing urban farms, community and school gardens, farmers' markets and produce markets, dairies, and community supported agriculture.

In 2017, Black farmers owned 7 percent of farmland and over a third had profits of less than \$2,500 a year.¹⁶⁷ To cultivate a food sovereign ecosystem with land ownership, the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund—composed of members from DBCFSN, Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, and Keep Growing Detroit—has distributed more than 170 land and infrastructure awards to Black farmers since 2020.¹⁶⁸ As a result, 67 Black farmers have become landowners of over 18 acres.¹⁶⁹

Figure 4: Urban agriculture in Detroit¹⁷⁰

The work of these community-led institutions is reflective of how municipal policy making structures have failed to respond to neighborhood needs and the practices of a holistic food and farming system. In 2013, the Detroit City Council recognized community-managed urban agriculture as a legitimate land use and set standards through an amendment of Chapter 61 in the Detroit Zoning Code.¹⁷¹ Figure 4 depicts Detroit's urban agriculture landscape in 2017. At a recent animal ordinance meeting regarding the legalization of chickens and ducks, a friend of Rogers advocated for the addition of goats to the ordinance.¹⁷² The goats fulfill vital needs in her community but are currently illegally and subject to confiscation by the city.¹⁷³ Not only do the goats supply all the dairy products for her neighbors, provide a source of recreational

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Jena Brooker, “Fund Helping Detroit’s Black Farmers ‘Reclaim the Land,’” BridgeDetroit, November 2, 2022, <http://www.bridgedetroit.com/fund-helping-detroits-black-farmers-reclaim-the-land/>.

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹“Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund,” Detroit Black Farmer Land Fun, 2022, <https://www.detroitblackfarmer.com/>.

¹⁷⁰Taylor and Ard, “Food Availability and the Food Desert Frame in Detroit: An Overview of the City’s Food System.” 118.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 126.

¹⁷²Rogers, Interview with Alyssa Rogers.

¹⁷³Ibid.

empowerment for children with disabilities, and fertilize the soil for vegetables, but “they’re the only reason keeping her neighborhood looking unblighted because they’re mowing the lawn way more efficiently than the city ever could.”¹⁷⁴ The city’s inability to beautify and clean its neighborhoods has not kept residents from using resources creatively, and this community brilliance has continually been absent at municipal meetings and subsequent policymaking processes.

Food insecurity and inequity follow from structural oppression in the procurement and production of food, encounters of discrimination, and the challenge of stretching limited resources. The concept of “food apartheid” highlights that racial disparities are ongoing and deliberate. While self-designed food pathways have fostered local agriculture, land ownership, greater accessibility among the Black community, municipal policies have yet to recognize community needs and innovations.



Good Health and Well-Being

Pollution and Exposure to Hazardous Substances

Between 1992 and 2015, community groups’ federal complaints on disproportionate pollution in majority Black neighborhoods largely received minimal acknowledgement or action by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).¹⁷⁵ With current airborne particulate matter (PM 2.5) concentrations at 12 micrograms per cubic meter, impoverished and Black populations’ heightened exposure to air pollution has resulted in “significant premature mortality and morbidity nationwide.”¹⁷⁶ This disparate impact means that Black populations “experience 9% higher PM2.5 concentrations, 3% higher baseline mortality incidence rates, and a 202% higher PM-mortality risk” compared to other racial groups.¹⁷⁷ Estimates suggest that Black Americans aged 65 years or older are three times more likely than other racial groups to have a cause of death related to fine particle air pollution at the existing standard.¹⁷⁸ A 2023 report also indicated that asthma emergency department visits were the highest for the Black population in the Detroit-Warren-Dearborn area, making up 155 of the 292 total.¹⁷⁹ A 2020 study on the Detroit Metropolitan Area further accentuated the nexus between race-based residential segregation and premature mortality by concluding that “lower levels of educational attainment and higher levels of poverty in census tracts with higher concentrations of NHB [non-Hispanic Black] residents”

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Yvette Cabrera, Jamie Smith Hopkins, and Grey Moran, “EPA Promised to Address Environmental Racism. Then States Pushed Back.” The Center for Public Integrity, October 25, 2023, <http://publicintegrity.org/environment/pollution/environmental-justice-denied/environmental-justice-epa-civil-rights-story/>.

¹⁷⁶“Analysis of PM 2.5 - Related Health Burdens Under Current and Alternative NAAQS” (Industrial Economics, Incorporated, March 21, 2023), <https://globalcleanair.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/95/files/2023/03/Updated-IEc-PM-NAAQS-Analysis-March-2023.pdf>.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

are similarly exposed to higher levels of PM 2.5.¹⁸⁰ Elevated PM. 2.5 levels on the southwest and eastside of Detroit have been attributed to “secondary sulfate/coal combustion,” “motor vehicles/combustion,” “refinery/oil combustion,” “iron-steel manufacturing/waste incineration,” “automotive electroplating, and “sewage sludge incineration.”¹⁸¹ Despite these harms, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) has only committed to “conducting a community environmental health assessment if funds allow and providing one low-cost air sensor in the area—so residents have slightly more insight into the toxic substances they’re forced to breathe.”¹⁸² The EGLE further trivialized these deleterious impacts by identifying changes to state law as the condition for the department to “more directly consider environmental justice, equity, and civil rights principles” in its air permitting.¹⁸³

Disproportionate exposure among the Black community also extends to hazardous waste materials. A 2020 research study reported “higher body burdens of Endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs),” specifically brominated flame retardants once prevalent in consumer products, among Black women living in Detroit.¹⁸⁴ These detectable levels of polybrominated diphenyl ethers and polybrominated biphenyls in Black women’s plasma are associated with adverse health outcomes, such as cancer, thyroid dysfunction, and gynecologic conditions.¹⁸⁵

Industrial encroachment has only exacerbated the Black community’s exposure to toxic releases. In 2007, the Kilpatrick administration supported Marathon Oil’s Detroit Heavy Oil Upgrade Project (HOUP) with \$176 million in tax credits over two decades; the HOUP entailed a \$1 billion refinery expansion in the 48217 zip code where 84.46 percent of residents identified as Black.¹⁸⁶ Marathon Oil’s permit application maintained that “future operations of the HOUP are not expected to lead to or cause disproportionate adverse impacts to low-income or minority persons in the vicinity of the refinery,” but proceeded to list “increases in 91 different toxic air contaminants, such as benzene, toluene, and formaldehyde.”¹⁸⁷ Although the EGLE did not monitor or have air quality standards for many of these pollutants, it gave Marathon Oil a permit for HOUP in 2008.¹⁸⁸

Marathon Oil representatives committed to hiring Detroiters for over 50 percent of the construction jobs, but by 2010, only 28 percent of permanent employees were locals.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁰Amy J. Schulz et al., “Independent and Joint Contributions of Economic, Social and Physical Environmental Characteristics to Mortality in the Detroit Metropolitan Area: A Study of Cumulative Effects and Pathways,” *Health & Place* 65 (2020)..

¹⁸¹Davyda M. Hammond et al., “Sources of Ambient Fine Particulate Matter at Two Community Sites in Detroit, Michigan,” *Atmospheric Environment* 42, no. 4 (2008).

¹⁸²Cabrera, Smith Hopkins, and Moran, “EPA Promised to Address Environmental Racism. Then States Pushed Back.”

¹⁸³*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴Olivia R. Orta et al., “Correlates of Plasma Concentrations of Brominated Flame Retardants in a Cohort of U.S. Black Women Residing in the Detroit, Michigan Metropolitan Area,” *Science of The Total Environment* 714 (April 20, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.136777>.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*

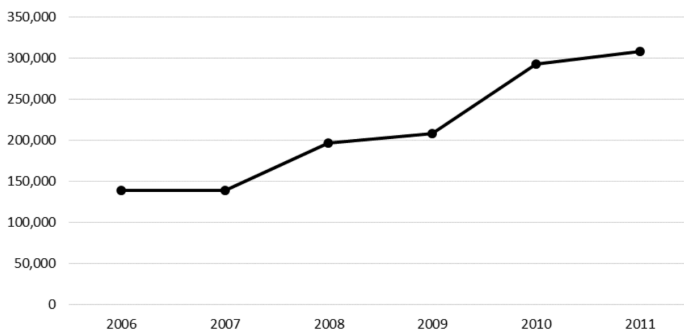
¹⁸⁶Rector, “Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015.” 318-319, 321.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 321

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 321

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 320, 323.

Table 7.2. Airborne Toxic Releases from the Marathon Detroit Refinery (lbs./year)



Source: Emissions data from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Detailed Facility Report: MARATHON PETROLEUM CO LP - MICHIGAN REFINING DIV, 1300 S FORT ST, DETROIT, MI 48217," <http://echo.epa.gov/detailed-facility-report?redirect=page&fid=110000554828> [accessed August 12, 2016].

Marathon Oil had also promised to invest \$260 million in pollution controls; however, the consistent growth of airborne toxic releases, as measured by the EPA in Figure 5, confirmed that 48217 had become the most polluted zip code in Michigan.¹⁹⁰ The words of Theresa Landrum, a native Detroit who has lived in 48217 since birth, sharpen the cumulative impact of premature deaths caused by commercial interests and political rot:

Figure 5: Increasing airborne toxic releases from Marathon Oil's HOUP¹⁹¹

I started to notice various young people were getting cancer. Our neighbor Miss Lucille, she died of cancer. One of our friends, Rita, who was in her 20s, she died of cancer. Then another young lady, Anita, she died of cancer. Delbert, he had a tumor in his neck that grew so big it looked like he had two heads. He was in college and they had to send him home and he eventually died from the cancer...When you came to our community it stunk and we were identified by the smell! And because of the existing smell and overwhelming number of factories, other companies realized that they had fertile ground to move in. Just a few years ago we got a composting facility; we already had Zug Island, which causes odors. We got a cement factory and a glue factory and they both cause odors. We have all these different factories and industries that are causing odors. Now we have two asphalt companies, Cadillac Asphalt and Marathon Asphalt, and we're going to get a third asphalt factory called Great Lakes Petroleum. And all this stuff is mixing into one big gigantic, poisonous, deadly combination. And nobody is monitoring! No state official, no city official, no federal official, regulatory organization or agencies. What is the cumulative impact of all these poisons being emitted into the air? What is their impact on human life? Our quality of life here in southwest Detroit has been greatly, greatly diminished. Our lifespan has been greatly diminished....We're doing our own sampling and sending them to independent labs to be tested. And we have found very high levels of carcinogens in our samples but our own Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Environment is disputing our findings.¹⁹²

Due to Detroit's industries, the presence of brownfields throughout the community have been a salient reminder of pernicious damage to the people, land, and its development. The EPA defines brownfields as "a property the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 320.

¹⁹¹Ibid., 322.

¹⁹²Audrey Fox, "Keystone XL Stories: Theresa Landrum," Friends of the Earth, December 16, 2010, <https://foe.org/blog/2010-12-keystone-xl-stories-theresa-landrum/>.

by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.”¹⁹³ Figure 6 shades census tracts in Detroit by the race or ethnicity with the lowest median income as of 2023, while the dots depict “the locations and dispersion of perceived environmentally contaminated parcels [brownfields] as of 2015.”¹⁹⁴

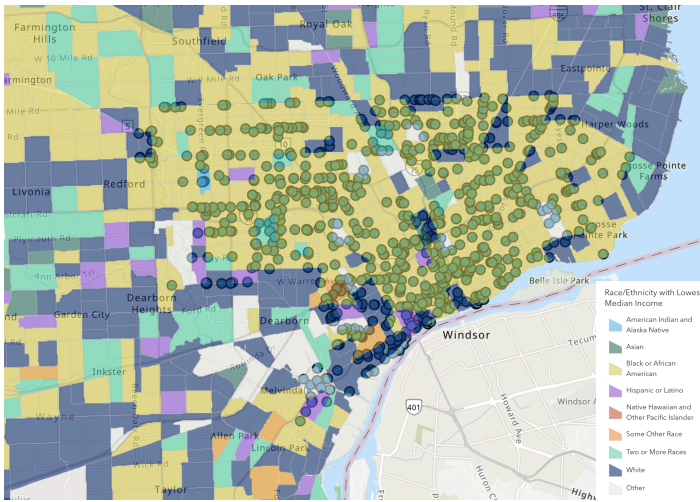


Figure 6: Brownfield presence by race or ethnicity with lowest median income¹⁹⁵

The map demonstrates that brownfields are disproportionately and densely located in census tracts where Black Detroiters with the lowest median income reside. Black Detroiters’ proximity to multiple brownfields that are saturated with pollutants and toxic substances mean that entire communities continue to experience lifelong exposure.

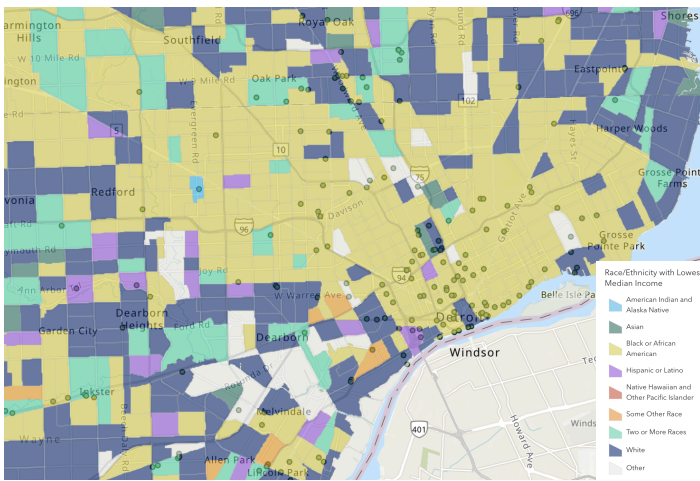


Figure 7: Brownfield redevelopment sites by race or ethnicity with lowest median income¹⁹⁶

The scattered dots on Figure 7 represent brownfield redevelopment sites as of 2023 that have received loans, grants, free environmental site assessments, and tax increment financing from the EGLE’s Remediation and Redevelopment Division.¹⁹⁷ With contributions by the EGLE, the EPA

¹⁹³Office of Land and Emergency Management U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “About: From Brownfields to Land Revitalization,” Overviews and Factsheets, November 4, 2021, <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/about>.

¹⁹⁴Noah Urban, “Brownfields” (Data Driven Detroit, May 1, 2015), https://portal.datadrivendetroit.org/datasets/191098839f4e496aa167d2d600cad9c4_0/explore?location=42.356550%2C-83.100492%2C11.00.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶“Brownfields” (Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, November 15, 2023), <https://gis-michigan.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/8b28cef917b04d3fa4e75d650e06f431/explore?location=42.369852%2C-83.064795%2C12.67>.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

Region 5 Brownfields Program has examined 3,254 properties, cleaned 88 sites, and leveraged over \$2.61 billion as of January 2024 to advance redevelopment in Detroit.¹⁹⁸ The second map shows that the EGLE and the EPA have chosen to fund the majority of revitalization projects to date in greater downtown Detroit at the detriment of other Black communities, a decision that exemplifies continual disinvestment and negligence.

After the October 2023 opening of a new community center at A.B. Ford Park on Detroit's Eastside, the city closed the area in March 2024; an environment assessment report concluded that "contacting the soil [was] dangerous."¹⁹⁹ The City of Detroit publicized the report's findings a month after receiving it, which prolonged unconscious exposure to "excessive levels of arsenic, mercury, lead, barium, cadmium, copper, zinc, volatile organic compounds, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons."²⁰⁰ This is not an isolated occurrence but follows the City of Detroit's attempts to disguise ongoing deprivation and dislocation with markers of progress. In 2013, the city adopted Detroit Future City, a "rightsizing" plan premised on decreasing or eliminating public services, including water, street lighting, and sewage systems in almost half the city.²⁰¹ Resources would revitalize downtown Detroit as a "digital/creative" zone for "new professionals and young entrepreneurs," while "miles of decommissioned neighborhoods" would house large scale commercial farms, stormwater retention ponds, urban forests and prairies.²⁰² The Detroit Strategic Framework plan, a 367-page document that served as the basis for Detroit Future City, instrumentalized terms like "greening" and "sustainability" to condone "the withdrawal of water and other basic services from low-income, predominantly African American neighborhoods, and the infusion of resources into gentrifying, increasingly white neighborhoods."²⁰³ The plan accommodated the physical removal of Black Detroiters and erased their claims to local citizenship but "did not propose any solutions for 'public health, industrial epidemiology, excessive heat events, air and traffic pollution in proximity to schools, brownfields, [and] water pollution.'"²⁰⁴ Dan Gilbert's position as co-chair of the Blight Removal Task Force, a public-private partnership commissioned by the Obama administration in September 2013 with \$150 million in federal aid, is further evidence of how demolition targets and redevelopment designations remain in the suffocating grasp of elites.²⁰⁵

Mental Health

¹⁹⁸U.S. EPA Region 5 Brownfields Team, "EPA Brownfields in Detroit and Southeast Michigan: Redevelopment Success Stories through EPA Funding," EPA, June 15, 2023, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/05c92d897e684f0991562a0881cb162a>.

¹⁹⁹Steve Neavling, "Detroit Kept Residents in the Dark about Hazardous Contaminants at Waterfront Park," Detroit Metro Times, March 7, 2024, <https://www.metrotimes.com/news/detroit-kept-residents-in-the-dark-about-hazardous-contaminants-at-waterfront-park-35660011>.

²⁰⁰Ibid.

²⁰¹Rector, "Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015." 300.

²⁰²Ibid., 300.

²⁰³Ibid., 329.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 330.

²⁰⁵Giacomo Tognini, "Billionaire Dan Gilbert Is Paying Detroit Homeowners' Property Tax Debt," Forbes, January 11, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/giacomotognini/2021/03/25/billionaire-dan-gilbert-is-paying-detroit-homeowners-property-taxes/>.

Cumulative harm and chronic trauma across several spheres of life have engendered adverse effects on mental health for Black Detroiters. In 2000, a probability sample of over 1000 Black and white adult residents of Detroit revealed statistically significant differences in feelings of psychological distress and life satisfaction between both groups.²⁰⁶ Not only did Black Detroiters report higher psychological distress and lower life satisfaction, but they also experienced “more frequent exposure to everyday unfair treatment” and a “greater number of acute life events in the preceding 12 months.”²⁰⁷ Eleven years later, a longitudinal study of Black women residing in Detroit found that an increase in encounters with discrimination across time was associated with an increase in depression symptoms and a decrease in self-reported health status, holding education, age, income, and other variables constant.²⁰⁸ In a 2021 study of Black men residing in Detroit, one respondent shared: “...growing up in certain areas in Detroit, we do live with PTSD and trauma. We lose a lot of people and we lose a lot of things. So, then the way we grow up, we just adapt to the environment. I feel like the environment is so violent because we don't get help for our mental health and emotional health.”²⁰⁹ Race-based traumatic stress coupled with prolonged and unaddressed racial discrimination have only worsened high suicide rates among Black men.²¹⁰ Time poverty, a history of maltreatment in healthcare systems, insurance inequities, and a scarcity of Black therapists further compound challenges to seeking care.²¹¹

Black communities' lifelong exposure to pollutants and proximity to brownfields in Detroit have remained unresolved because of the city's complicity and failure to reverse these pernicious effects. Industrial encroachment has continued unabated, and elite conceptualizations of progress have condoned the displacement of Black communities and the withdrawal of already meager services. This onslaught of injustice has enabled premature mortality and morbidity among Black communities and negatively affected mental health outcomes.



Quality Education

²⁰⁶Amy Schulz et al., “Unfair Treatment, Neighborhood Effects, and Mental Health in the Detroit Metropolitan Area,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41, no. 3 (2000): 314, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2676323>.

²⁰⁷Schulz et al., “Unfair Treatment, Neighborhood Effects, and Mental Health in the Detroit Metropolitan Area.” 320, 323.

²⁰⁸Amy J. Schulz et al., “Discrimination, Symptoms of Depression, and Self-Rated Health Among African American Women in Detroit: Results From a Longitudinal Analysis,” *American Journal of Public Health*, October 11, 2011, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2005.064543>.

²⁰⁹Rebekah D. Montgomery, “Detroit Community Violence and Mental Health Help-Seeking Behaviors of African American Men” (Minneapolis, MN, Walden University, 2021), 73, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2607242486?%20Theses&fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar&sourcecetype=Dissertations%20&parentSessionId=O5Ho37HGcsBiTZcetAYulUPk24yMKdWTxUI1PYOogozA%3D>.

²¹⁰Duante Beddingfield, “Mental Health Event Saturday at Wayne State to Focus on Issues Facing Black Men,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 27, 2023, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/health/2023/10/27/mental-health-event-at-wayne-state-to-focus-on-issues-facing-black-men/71333723007/>.

²¹¹SaMya Overall and Koby Levin, “The Struggle to Find a Therapist Who Looks like You in Detroit,” *Outlier Media*, August 17, 2023, <http://outliermedia.org/diverse-therapists-detroit-mental-health/>.

Literacy and Numeracy in Detroit

Within the educational sector of Detroit, the struggle for literacy presents a complex challenge, particularly among minority students. The Information Literacy Association underscores a critical functional literacy rate of 47% amongst the adult population, indicating significant educational disparities that trickle down to younger demographics²¹². Cook et al.'s²¹³ research aligns with this finding, illustrating through Figure 1 that under the enforcement of the Third Grade Reading Law, 14.5% of third graders, predominantly from Black communities, are at risk of being held back due to insufficient reading proficiency.²¹⁴ Figure 1 clearly shows the discrepancy in reading proficiency levels between Black students and their peers, highlighting the stark contrast and the urgency of addressing this gap. The data points from economically disadvantaged and special education categories further compound the complexity of the challenge, showing that these students are facing even more pronounced setbacks in literacy.

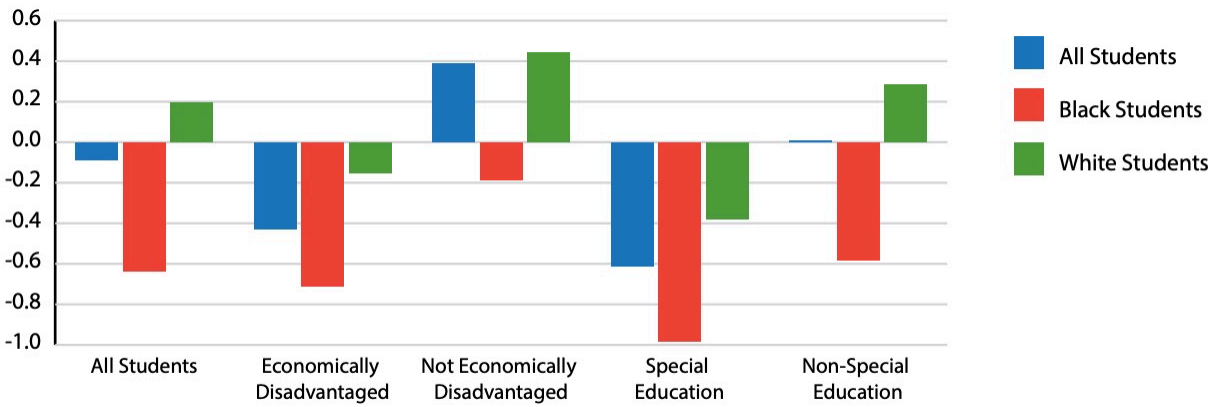


Figure 8: Mean Third Grade Reading Z-Score by Demographic Subgroup²¹⁵

The 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report underscores this issue, showing Detroit's fourth graders lagging significantly in reading proficiency compared to their counterparts in larger cities, illuminating a persistent achievement gap.²¹⁶ By 2022, there was little to no improvement, with eighth graders in Detroit still trailing behind, as detailed in the subsequent NAEP report²¹⁷

These literacy and numeracy deficits in Detroit, particularly among Black students, underscore a broader narrative of educational inequality. The data not only reflect the city's struggle with

²¹²Anghelescu, H. G. B. (2023, October 17). Alarming literacy rates in one of America's largest cities: What can be done in the City of Detroit? Information Literacy Association. <https://inlitas.org/alarming-literacy-rates-in-one-of-americas-largest-cities-what-can-be-done-in-the-city-of-detroit/>

²¹³Cook, W., Lenhoff, S. W., Pogodzinski, B., & Singer, J. (2021). Third grade reading and attendance in Detroit. Detroit Education Research Partnership, Wayne State University.

²¹⁴Cook, W., Lenhoff, S. W., Pogodzinski, B., & Singer, J. (2021). Third grade reading and attendance in Detroit. Detroit Education Research Partnership, Wayne State University.

²¹⁵ Wayne State University. (2021). Third grade reading and attendance in Detroit. Wayne State University. https://education.wayne.edu/detroit_ed_research/9third_grade_reading_and_attendance_in_detroit.pdf

²¹⁶National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2019). 2019 Reading Trial Urban District Snapshot Report. National Center for Education Statistics.

²¹⁷ National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2022). 2022 Reading Trial Urban District Snapshot Report. National Center for Education Statistics.

quality education but also highlight the racial and economic disparities that perpetuate the cycle of educational disadvantage. Addressing these gaps is crucial for fostering equitable educational outcomes and ensuring all children in Detroit have access to the quality education they deserve.

Student Mobility and Educational Accessibility

In the Metro Detroit area, the racial composition and student mobility patterns paint a compelling picture of the educational landscape. Figure 2 illustrates the racial demographics within Metro Detroit and the movement—termed 'Detroit exitters'—of students from the city to suburban districts during 2015 to 2016²¹⁸.

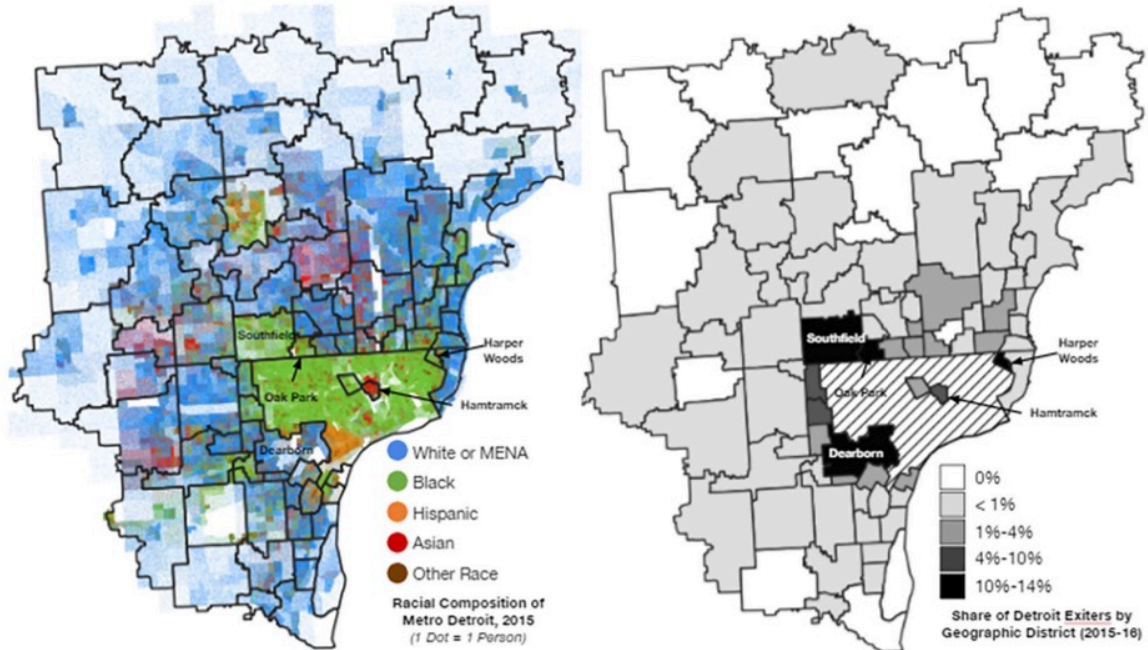


Figure 9: Racial composition of metro Detroit and concentration of Detroit exitters in suburban districts, 2015–2016²¹⁹

The majority of these students transition into bordering districts, with the proximity to schools playing a significant role in their choice (See Table 1). It's clear that Black students, in particular, are often the ones moving to these suburban schools. They usually have to travel a bit farther than students who already live in the suburbs, around 3.8 miles on average, which we can see in Table 2.

²¹⁸Singer, J., & Lenhoff, S. W. (2022). Race, geography, and school choice policy: A critical analysis of Detroit students' suburban school choices. *AERA Open*, 8, 23328584211067202.

²¹⁹ Singer, J., & Lenhoff, S. W. (2022). Race, geography, and school choice policy: A critical analysis of Detroit students' suburban school choices. *AERA Open*, 8, 23328584211067202.

TABLE 1
Suburban District Location and Share of Detroit Exiters, 2015–2016

Distance from Detroit border	N districts	N (%) of Detroit exiters, 2015–2016	Mean distance to school for exiters (miles)
Bordering Detroit	19	18,245 (82)	3.8
0 to 1 miles	1	281 (1)	3.7
1 to 2 miles	10	825 (4)	6.0
2 to 3 miles	7	1,969 (9)	7.0
More than 3 miles	29	848 (4)	12.8

TABLE 2
Distance to School for Detroit Students, Detroit Exiters, and Suburban Students, 2015–2016

Students	Mean distance to school (miles)	Median distance to school (miles)
Detroit students	2.3	1.3
Suburban students—All	2.0	1.4
Detroit exiters—All	4.5	3.7
Suburban students—Districts bordering Detroit	1.5	0.8
Detroit exiters—Districts bordering Detroit	3.8	3.1

Note. Detroit students refers to students who live in and go to school in Detroit. Detroit exiters live in Detroit but go to a suburban school. Suburban students live in and go to school in the suburbs.

Figure 10: Distance to School for Detroit Students, Detroit Exiters, and Suburban Students.²²⁰

It also shows how, especially for Black families, finding a good school can mean a longer trip every day. This fact points to deeper issues like the quality of schools in different areas and what choices families have based on where they live. It's a pattern that creates different chances for students based on race, with Black communities often having to work harder to find a good education for their children.

Completion Rates

In Detroit, the challenge of achieving equitable high school completion rates is starkly reflected in the city's statistics. A 2024 Chalkbeat report indicates that Michigan's overall high school graduation rate was 81.77%, but Detroit's rates lagged significantly, particularly for Black and Hispanic students, who face an even greater challenge in reaching this educational milestone.²²¹ The "High School Graduation Rates in the Metro-Detroit Area" study underscores that socioeconomic variables like poverty and crime play a substantial role in these lower rates, emphasizing a systemic issue that requires multifaceted solutions.²²²

Furthermore, the Detroit Regional Chamber's 2023 State of Education report offers insights into the complexities of educational attainment in the region, revealing that Detroit's high school graduation rate saw a modest increase to 73% in 2022, yet this figure still falls behind the

²²⁰ Singer, J., & Lenhoff, S. W. (2022). Race, geography, and school choice policy: A critical analysis of Detroit students' suburban school choices. *AERA Open*, 8, 23328584211067202.

²²¹ Lohman, I., & Higgins, L. (2024). Michigan's high school graduation rate increases for the second year in a row. Chalkbeat Detroit.

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/detroit/2024/02/23/michigan-high-school-graduation-and-dropout-rates-release/>

²²² Wilk, T. A. (2009). High School Graduation Rates in the Metro-Detroit Area: What Really Affects Public Secondary Education. *Undergraduate Economic Review*, 5(1).

regional and national averages, signaling ongoing disparities.²²³ The report from Cook et al. on third-grade reading proficiencies also contributes to understanding the long-term impact of early education on graduation rates, highlighting that retention risks due to insufficient reading skills are disproportionately higher among students from minority backgrounds.²²⁴

Childcare and Early Education

The lack of early childhood education services, especially in impoverished areas of Detroit, is alarming. The 2015 IFF Detroit report emphasizes a severe shortage of quality childcare options for children under three, a deficit that not only affects immediate family stability but also has long-term educational consequences. The absence of robust early education programs exacerbates the city's educational challenges, underscoring the urgency for targeted investment in early learning facilities and programs to bridge the gap.²²⁵

Teacher Qualifications

The mismatch between the racial demographics of students and teachers in Detroit's schools raises significant concerns. As reported by the Detroit Free Press, while 81.9% of the student population in Detroit Public Schools are Black, there is a considerable discrepancy in the racial composition of the teaching staff, indicating a lack of representation that could affect the educational experience and outcomes for students of color.²²⁶ This disparity highlights the critical need for initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining a more diverse and qualified teaching workforce to reflect and meet the needs of the student population.

Infrastructure Upgrades

The state of Detroit's school facilities underscores a pressing need for upgrades to ensure they are inclusive, safe, and conducive to learning for all students. Reports from the IFF Research Department call attention to the necessity of significant investments in school infrastructure. Such upgrades are essential to create learning environments that are not only physically accessible but also supportive of the diverse educational needs of students, including those with disabilities, thus fostering a more equitable educational landscape.²²⁷

Furthermore, Figure 3 shows that there's a significant gap in resources that affects African American students profoundly. It illustrates a striking disparity in a key area of student life that impacts African American youths, especially males, at a much higher rate compared to the average across all races. This evidence supports the calls for investment in the infrastructure of Detroit schools. Building and upgrading facilities to meet the needs of all students, particularly those from African American communities, are not just about physical structures but about

²²³Detroit Regional Chamber. (2023). State of Education Report. Retrieved from:

<https://www.detroitchamber.com/state-of-education-and-talent-press-release/>.

²²⁴Cook, W., Lenhoff, S. W., Pogodzinski, B., & Singer, J. (2021). Third grade reading and attendance in Detroit. Detroit Education Research Partnership, Wayne State University.

²²⁵IFF Research Department. (2015). The System We Need: A Neighborhood Snapshot of Early Childhood Education in Detroit. IFF.

²²⁶Wisely, J. (2019, June 17). Michigan schools face huge racial disparity — and it's hard to fix. Detroit Free Press. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/education/2019/06/17/racial-disparities-in-schools/1333607001/>

²²⁷IFF Research Department. (2010). State of the Detroit child: 2010. IFF.

fostering an environment that promotes equality and supports every student's potential.

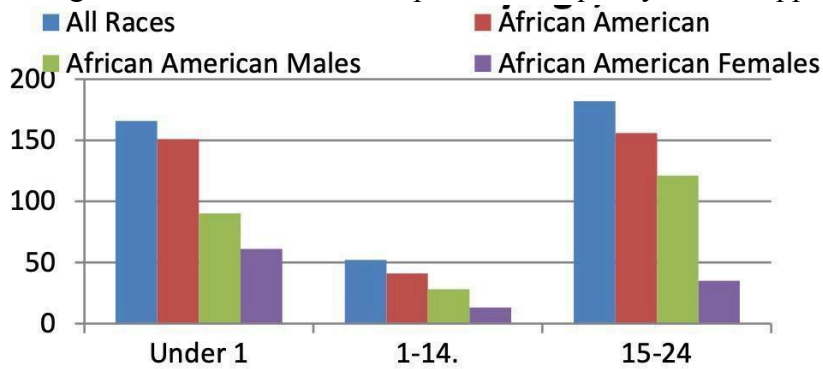


Figure 11: Deaths in Detroit by Age, 2009²²⁸



Clean Water and Sanitation

Water Shutoffs

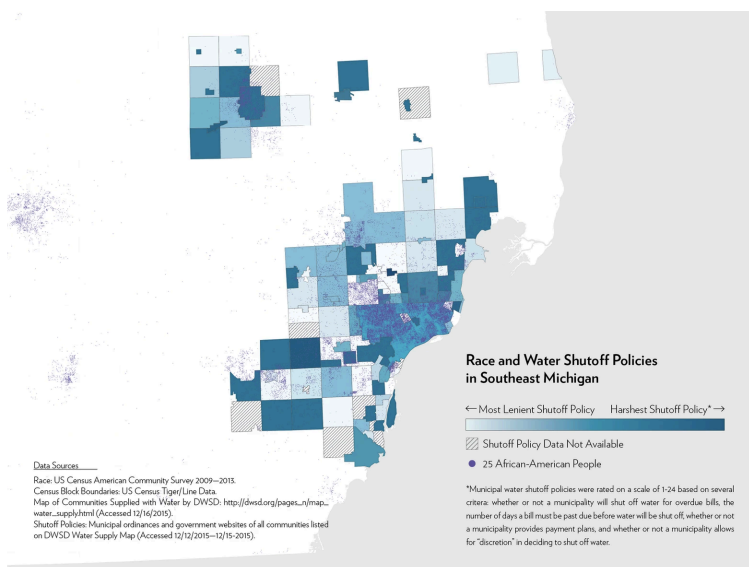


Figure 12: Shutoff policy enforcement by race in Southeast Michigan²³¹

Following municipal bankruptcy in 2013 and state-directed emergency management, the City of Detroit has proceeded to cut off the water supply for over 130,000 homes of predominantly Black and poverty-stricken residents with delinquent accounts (see Figure 12).²²⁹ In 2014, the Detroit Water and Sewer Department sought to elicit payment “efficiently” with water shutoffs across entire blocks, reaching about 3,000 households a week.²³⁰

²²⁸IFF Research Department. (2010). State of the Detroit child: 2010. IFF.

²²⁹Kelsey Mesmer, Darryl Frazier, and Scott Burgess, “Government Failure or Irresponsible Residents? Framing Detroit’s Water Shutoffs before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 43, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 65–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07395329221077247>.

²³⁰Jessi Quizar, “A Bucket in the River: Race and Public Discourse on Water Shutoffs in Detroit.,” *Social Identities* 26, no. 4 (2020): 429–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2020.1767054>.

²³¹We The People of Detroit, “Race and Water Shutoff Policies in Southeast Michigan,” We The People of Detroit, 2015, <https://www.wethepeopleofdetroit.com/water>.

When residents massively decried the water shutoffs and sought a restraining order, Judge Steven Rhodes rejected the appeal and asserted that “there [was] no constitutional right to water and that not continuing the shutoffs would be financially detrimental to the water department.”²³² Public officials’ partiality over municipal finances and entities adhered to a “larger racial logic of Black disposability”²³³ that dehumanized Black Detroiters and belittled their well being. By 2015, nearly 40 percent of Detroit residents had already experienced a water shutoff or were at risk of losing their water, a number which matched the proportion of Detroiters living under the poverty level.²³⁴ This deprivation of water has frequently been inflicted during “the middle of the summer months,” with some residents going “without running water for a year or more” and feeling “‘less than a person’... [as they endured] increased cases of water-borne illness.”²³⁵ For families with children, a water shutoff introduced the fear of impending custody loss because the Michigan Department of Child Protective Services classified the absence of running water as a cause for removing children from their home.²³⁶ Homeowners’ past due water bills also accumulated on their property tax bill, increasing the risk for a tax foreclosure.²³⁷ Monica Lewis-Patrick, President and CEO of We the People of Detroit added:

In 73 hours, if you don’t have running water, you lose custody of your children and you can also lose your property. To get your water shutoff in the City of Detroit, you only need to owe a bill of \$150 or more and be 30 days in arrears...but you’ve got corporations that owe millions of dollars. For instance, the state of Michigan owes the City of Detroit \$5 million just on the state fairground properties alone. [Then] \$2 million on Dexter-Elmhurst Recreation Facility. So just on two properties, they owe Detroit \$7 million and they were able to have their debt renegotiated and much of it forgiven during the bankruptcy.²³⁸

When the COVID-19 moratorium on water shutoffs ceased to apply on January 1, 2023, approximately 170,000 Detroit residents faced the renewed risk of water insecurity and accompanying psychological distress.²³⁹

In the last ten years, water costs have also ballooned by 119 percent.²⁴⁰ While the EPA set a standard for water affordability at 2.5 percent of income in 1972, Detroit residents paid double the national average for their water bill in 2016.²⁴¹ This has been the result of deliberate, inequitable, and systemic changes. That same year, the water system restructuring that Kevyn Orr had envisioned in his fiscal program as Emergency Manager came to fruition.²⁴² The Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) subsumed the Detroit Water and Sewer Department (DWSD)

²³²Quizar, “A Bucket in the River: Race and Public Discourse on Water Shutoffs in Detroit.”

²³³Ibid.

²³⁴Ibid.

²³⁵Mesmer, Frazier, and Burgess, “Government Failure or Irresponsible Residents? Framing Detroit’s Water Shutoffs before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

²³⁶Quizar, “A Bucket in the River: Race and Public Discourse on Water Shutoffs in Detroit.”

²³⁷Ibid.

²³⁸ *How We the People of Detroit Are Fighting Water Injustice*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3aBDmM7TnM>.

²³⁹Nadia Gaber et al., “Water Insecurity and Psychosocial Distress: Case Study of the Detroit Water Shutoffs,” *Journal of Public Health* 43, no. 4 (December 1, 2021): 839–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdaa157>.

²⁴⁰Gaber et al., “Water Insecurity and Psychosocial Distress.”

²⁴¹“Thirsty in Detroit: Water Shutoffs and Baptismal Witness.”

²⁴²Quizar, “A Bucket in the River: Race and Public Discourse on Water Shutoffs in Detroit.”

and reduced Detroit's representation on the board to a mere two out of six members.²⁴³ While the City of Detroit leased the DWSD to the GLWA for 40-years in exchange for an annual \$50 million, GLWA benefits by extracting unequal payments based on residence.²⁴⁴ The GLWA charges suburban residents, the majority of whom are white, wholesale rates while Detroit residents, the majority of whom are Black, pay higher retail rates. The 1999 Rate Settlement Agreement compounds disparities by unequally dividing the cost burden for the "systems' combined sewer system into an 83/17 split—meaning Detroiters are responsible for 83% of sewer system costs even if the system serves...suburban residents [who are only then] responsible for the remaining 17%."²⁴⁵ The low-income residents who are eligible for the Water Residential Assistance Program, which offers a \$25 monthly water bill credit and freezes outstanding water debt, often confront a backlogged system that fails to prevent looming shutoffs.²⁴⁶ In 2007, this ineffective assistance program replaced an income-based Water Affordability Plan, developed by the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization.²⁴⁷ Using the federal poverty line as the benchmark, the Water Affordability Plan capped water bills at 2 percent, 2.5 percent, and 3 percent of household income for Detroit residents who earned below 50 percent, between 50 to 100 percent, and above 50 to 100 percent of the federal poverty line, respectively.²⁴⁸ When the Detroit City Council passed a resolution in 2006 charging DWSD to implement the Water Affordability Plan, the Kilpatrick administration and DWSD did not act upon it and introduced the Water Residential Assistance Program instead.²⁴⁹

Waste Disposal

The Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Facility (GDRRF), the largest municipal trash incinerator in the United States, is a salient example of the City of Detroit's callous disregard for Black residents when an economic imperative is present.²⁵⁰ In May 1991, the City of Detroit sold the GDRRF to Philip Morris, USA and General Electric for \$54 million "to meet an immediate deficit shortfall."²⁵¹ Philip Morris gained 70 percent ownership of the incinerator for 17 years and \$200 million in federal tax credits for the waste-to-energy facility, while the low-income Black neighborhood surrounding the incinerator on Detroit's East Side received an onslaught of illness.²⁵² Since the GDRRF also processed waste from Southeast Michigan and Southwest Ontario, it "emitted tens of thousands of pounds of fine particulate matter per year, along with hundreds of pounds of lead and mercury and unknown quantities of dioxins."²⁵³ By the turn of the century, zip code 48211, which bordered the incinerator and also contained abandoned

²⁴³We The People of Detroit, "The Great Lakes Water Authority Takes Control of the Regional Water System," We The People of Detroit, 2015, <https://www.wethepeopleofdetroit.com/water>.

²⁴⁴Rector, "Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015." 339.

²⁴⁵Edward Helderop, Elizabeth Mack, and Tony H. Grubestic, "Exploring the Invisible Water Insecurity of Water Utility Shutoffs in Detroit, Michigan: *GeoJournal*," *GeoJournal* 88, no. 4 (August 2023): 4175–88, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-023-10863-0>.

²⁴⁶Marian Swain, Emmett McKinney, and Lawrence Susskind, "Water Shutoffs in Older American Cities: Causes, Extent, and Remedies: *Journal of Planning Education & Research*," *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 43, no. 4 (December 2023): 758–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X20904431>.

²⁴⁷Rector, "Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015." 309.

²⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 309-310.

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 310.

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 259.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*, 259.

²⁵²*Ibid.*, 260.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 260.

industrial sites and peeling lead paint in homes, had the highest rate of asthma-related hospitalizations and childhood lead poisoning in Detroit.²⁵⁴

When the Michigan Air Pollution Control Commission (MAPCC) approved the permit for the incinerator in 1984, the document referenced the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' (MDNR) inaccurate calculation, which gravely undermined the cancer risk from dioxin emissions at 0.7 per one million residents.²⁵⁵ Although the MDNR informed the MAPCC of this error in 1986, it took a five-year legal battle with the Canadian government, the EPA, and local environmentalists to force the City of Detroit to install adequate pollution controls.²⁵⁶ During this period, dioxin emissions exceeded the recommended EPA limit by 1,000 times, and actual cancer risk was estimated at 36 per one million residents.²⁵⁷ The chosen site for incinerator ash dumping in 1989 was the “more ‘rural and African American’” part of Sumpter Township, where a Black Korean War veteran with disabilities shared, “the smell has gotten progressively worse in the four years I’ve been living here. Sometimes it smells like chemicals, and then at other times it smells like rotting garbage.”²⁵⁸ Racial discrimination and political maneuvering undergirded the incinerator’s profit-making activity—from its location, emissions, and waste dumping—to generate cumulative and devastating harm against Black communities.

The City of Detroit’s response to bankruptcy and state-directed emergency management has deprived thousands of Black residents of water access and has introduced layers of precarity through the loss of custody and property. Inequitable water costs and waste disposal burdens between suburban and Detroit residents have also accentuated racial disparities and environmental injustice. Legal pursuits and community protests continually go unheard as the City of Detroit remains preoccupied with its own deafening economic imperatives.



Decent Work & Economic Growth

Black workers continue to face high unemployment in Detroit. In 2021, the Black population in the region was 9.1 percentage points higher than the national average (6.3%).²⁵⁹ Since 2016, all races and ethnicities have seen an increase in the annual unemployment rate. Unemployment rate measures the percentage of people over the age of 16 who aren’t working but are available and actively looking for work. In 2021, the Black population had the highest unemployment rate (15.4%).²⁶⁰ This section will discuss further the implication of limited economic opportunities and unequal employment events for Black communities in Detroit.

²⁵⁴Ibid., 282.

²⁵⁵Ibid., 265.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 266-267.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 283.

²⁵⁸Ibid., 275.

²⁵⁹“Composition of the Labor Force.” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 1, 2023. Accessed Feb 2, 2024 <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/2021/home.htm>.

²⁶⁰Ibid.

Although the unemployment rate is an important indicator of economic hardship in the Black population, the severity of the Great Recession was compounded by the collapse in stock prices (mid-2008), and in housing prices (beginning of 2006). As housing values dropped, interest rates of mortgages rose, forcing many homeowners to be unable to stay on top of their payments. Among Black and white individuals with similar credit scores, Moreover, those who lived in predominantly Black communities had higher risk of foreclosure after falling behind on their mortgages than those who lived in white communities²⁶¹. One-fourth of American households lost at least 75 percent of their net worth and half lost at least 25 percent between 2007 to 2011.²⁶² Since Black communities have a larger proportion of their wealth composed of housing assets relative to whites, their losses were disproportionately greater as well²⁶³.

Racial disparities are also apparent when considering the difference between the share of the Black population in Detroit and the share of Black-owned businesses. This deep contrast highlights how less business revenues are going back into Black communities, which is concerning considering the substantial population of Black communities and other racial minorities in Detroit.

At the same time, community organizations who have been working in Detroit on Black economic empowerment have outlined challenges that they are facing as a whole. Firstly, it is worth noting that the economic and business development issue itself does not stand alone. As an issue area that concerns the livelihood of Detroit, economic issues have been manifested and transformed into every aspect of life. During an interview with Eric Williams, a lawyer who works on economic issues in Detroit, he stated that the housing issue in Detroit is particularly salient against the chronic lack of economic opportunities that hinder development.²⁶⁴ Because of the property development in downtown Detroit, this action has driven many businesses out of the operation through higher rent and taxes. This has pushed Black business owners to the suburbs, where the property conditions are poor and lack footprints and traffic of customers. This has been fed into the long term fatigue and lack of competitiveness of Black owned businesses.

The second aspect is the challenge of starting a business because basic infrastructures and start-up support are largely absent. A key point reflected in the interview with Williams was that before the end of segregation Black communities had their own black accountants, hairdressers, and people across several professions. However, after the fall of segregation, those professions began to be dominated by the influx of white residents in Detroit. Without any protective policy measurement in place, the living space and practices of Black professionals greatly shrunk. To

²⁶¹“UM Study: Detroit’s Black Homeowners Gained Nearly \$3b in Real Estate Wealth from 2014-22.” Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. Accessed May 1, 2024.
<https://fordschool.umich.edu/news/2024/um-study-detroits-black-homeowners-gained-nearly-3b-real-estate-wealth-2014-22>.

²⁶²Pfeffer, Fabian T et al. “Wealth Disparities before and after the Great Recession.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* vol. 650,1 (2013): 98-123. doi:10.1177/0002716213497452

²⁶³“UM Study: Detroit’s Black Homeowners Gained Nearly \$3b in Real Estate Wealth from 2014-22.” Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. Accessed May 1, 2024.
<https://fordschool.umich.edu/news/2024/um-study-detroits-black-homeowners-gained-nearly-3b-real-estate-wealth-2014-22>.

²⁶⁴Eric Williams, Interview with Eric Williams, February 22, 2024.

this day, it is difficult to find a Black professional who works in financial sectors that has connections with Black communities in Detroit.

Consequences for these impacts are at multiple levels. First, the absence of Black finance professionals makes it difficult for Black entrepreneurs to have immediate access to capital within their communities. The nature of financial work requires start-up funds as well as a close-knit network of people who work to support and nurture the newly established business. However, such a network or funding is greatly absent in Black communities, setting them at an unfair disadvantage compared to their white counterparts. Secondly, the absence of those professionals and expertise has a long term negative impact toward Black youth in their communities. Unable to see those role models growing up has likely decreased their willingness or increased additional barriers for them to step into financial business and economically empower themselves.



Sustainable Cities & Communities

Detroit is one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States.²⁶⁵ Redlining, racial covenants, and systemic disinvestment have contributed to a city that is suffering from a declining housing stock, vacant and substandard homes, and severe rent burden. Policies directly perpetuated by the City of Detroit both in the recent past and in the present have contributed to a disproportionate, devastating impact on housing for Black communities. Black families have been systematically prevented from homeownership and the ability to build intergenerational wealth. Housing justice is absolutely paramount to reparations for Black Detroiters, particularly because of the city's neglect and racialized housing policies.

This section provides an outline of the key housing challenges facing Black communities in Detroit. Redlining is not a relic of the past; this section explores how redlined neighborhoods suffer clear, tangible, and quantifiable adverse impacts today. Following, this section explores the outcomes of Detroit's rampant, illegal over-assessments of home values that caused between one quarter and one third of Detroit's homeowners to foreclose. Next, this section brings to light the dubious, secretive practices of the Detroit Land Bank Authority - touted as a solution to 'blight' but in fact perpetuating racism in housing. This section makes the case that the city of Detroit's housing policies are causing direct physical harm to Black residents through the exposure to lead and dangerous buildings. Lastly, the nature and outcomes of the Community Benefits Ordinance and corporate tax abatements are explored as a method of pacifying Black communities in response to corporate developments.

Overview of the State of Black Housing and Homeownership

Black Detroiters have both lower homeownership and lower housing wealth than white Detroiters. In the Detroit Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), as of 2015-2019, approximately

²⁶⁵“Most to Least Segregated Cities.” n.d. Othering & Belonging Institute.
<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/most-least-segregated-cities>.

78.1% of white families owned their home, compared to 42.3% of Black families.²⁶⁶ Black Detroiters are more likely than whites to be rejected for mortgages, have lower home values, and live in older homes.²⁶⁷

Black people also face worse renting outcomes. Despite that Black families have a median household income about \$16,000 less than that of white families, Black and white families tend to pay a similar amount in rent.²⁶⁸ Black Detroiters also face the highest cost and rent burden among races - which is when 30% or more of household income goes towards mortgage, property taxes, insurance, utility payments or rent.²⁶⁹ A shocking 56.1% of Black Detroiters are rent burdened, compared to 44.4% of white and only 28.7% of Asian Detroiters.²⁷⁰

Housing Cost Burden among Renters, by Race or Ethnicity

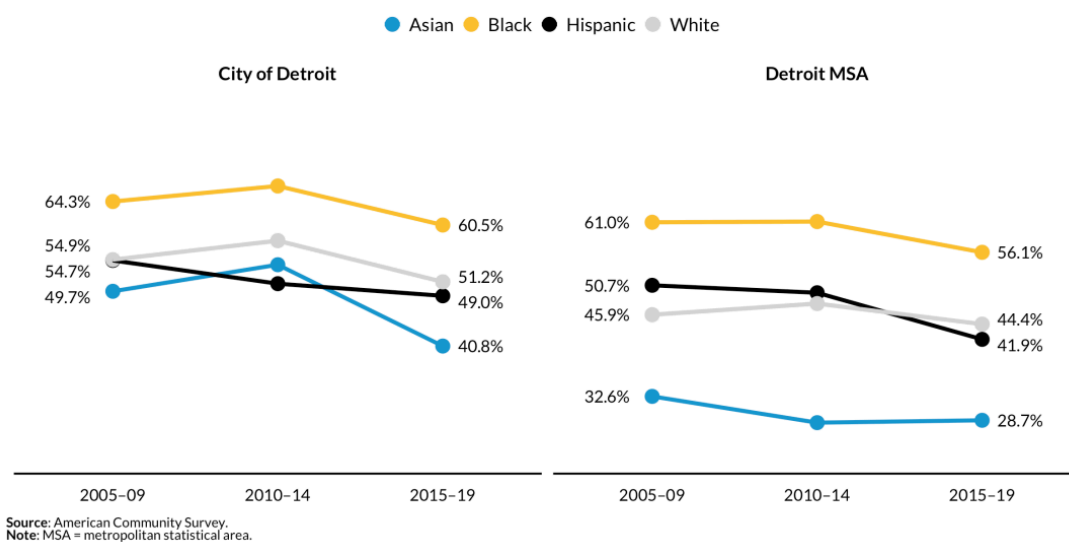


Figure 13: Housing cost burden among renters by race/ethnicity²⁷¹

Quality housing is disappearing in Detroit: “the number of adequate and affordable rental units available to extremely low income renters (households with incomes at or below 30% of the area median) in Detroit’s Wayne County fell from about 48,000 (54 units per 100) to 24,500 (25 units

²⁶⁶Choi, Jung Hyun, Gideon Berger, Janneke Ratcliffe, Laurie Goodman, Peter J. Mattingly, Linna Zhu, John Walsh, Daniel Pang, and Urban Institute. 2021. “Detroit Market Keys Unlock Dreams Initiative.” Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104857/detroit-market-keys-unlock-dreams-initiative.pdf>.

²⁶⁷Ibid; Nushrat Rahman, Detroit Free Press. 2021. “Report: Black Homebuyers More Likely to Be Denied Mortgages in Metro Detroit.” *Detroit Free Press*, October 4, 2021. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2021/10/04/report-black-metro-detroiters-more-likely-denied-mortgages/5906647001/>.

²⁶⁸Ibid.

²⁶⁹Ibid.

²⁷⁰Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS). 2021. “Using American Rescue Plan Funds to Meet Detroiters’ Home Repair Needs.” *Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS)*. <https://detroitssurvey.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DMACS-ARPA-funds-to-meet-home-repair-needs-reduced.pdf>.

²⁷¹Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS). 2021.

per 100) between 2000 and 2013.²⁷² Almost 38,000 households in Detroit live in inadequate housing with exposed wires, broken heating, lack of water, or pests.²⁷³ The impact of poor housing quality is disproportionately borne by Black households: 14% of those living in poor quality housing are Black, compared to only 8% for white people.²⁷⁴

It is important to understand that while some housing data is disaggregated by race, Detroit is a majority Black city. Therefore, the economic and housing issues are “experienced by a majority Black population in the city and can be directly traced to systemic gatekeeping of property ownership and destruction of community wealth, which created generational wealth gaps because of lack of access to property.”²⁷⁵

Contemporary Impacts of Redlining

As previously discussed, redlining was a practice introduced by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) to provide opportunities for investment in White communities while stripping opportunities for home loans and community investment from Black and racially homogenous areas. The HOLC assigned neighborhoods grades that indicated the risk of lending in these areas. “Neighborhood were assigned 1 of 4 grades and corresponding colors: A (green) for ‘best,’ B (blue) for ‘still desirable,’ C (yellow) for ‘definitely declining,’ and D (red) for ‘hazardous.’”²⁷⁶

Nationwide empirical research has shown that redlining led to disinvestment, segregation, decreased homeownership, and therefore depressed generational wealth accumulation.²⁷⁷ Research has also connected redlining with a host of economic, social, and spatial outcomes including “credit scores and disinvestment, foreclosures, violence, physical factors like excess heat, and health including preterm birth and mental health.”²⁷⁸

Research conducted by Mehdipanah et al. (2023) examined the impact of redlining grades on a Neighborhood Determinants of Health Index (DOHI) that included well-researched predictors of health, including “economic growth, social and human development, governance, and physical environments.”²⁷⁹ The results showed that census tracts that were given an A grade had double the median income of B- and C-graded tracts, and triple the median income of D-graded tracts. D-graded neighborhoods scored significantly lower on educational attainment and homeownership and higher in poverty level. On average, A-graded neighborhoods scored 9.25

²⁷²Eisenberg, Alexa, Eric Seymour, Alex B. Hill, and Joshua Akers. 2020. “Toxic Structures: Speculation and Lead Exposure in Detroit’s Single-family Rental Market.” *Health and Place/Health & Place (Online)* 64 (July): 102390, pp. 3 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2020.102390>.

²⁷³Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS). 2021.

²⁷⁴Ibid.

²⁷⁵Rudelich, Samantha. 2023. “The Detroit Land Bank Authority: A Modern Tool Perpetuating Racism & Classism in the City.” *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy*. Vol. XXX, No. 3, pp 623.

<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2023/07/The-Detroit-Land-Bank-Authority.pdf>.

²⁷⁶Roshanak Mehdipanah, Katelyn R. McVay, Amy J. Schulz, “Historic Redlining Practices and Contemporary Determinants of Health in the Detroit Metropolitan Area”, *American Journal of Public Health* 113, no. S1 (January 1, 2023): pp. S49-S50, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2022.307162>.

²⁷⁷Mehdipanah et al, 2023.

²⁷⁸Medhipanah et al, 2023, 50.

²⁷⁹Mehdipanah et al, 2023, 50.

points higher on the DOHI scale (an 8-40 scale measure) than D-graded neighborhoods, even after accounting for extraneous factors such as changes over time. Moreover, not only were greenlined neighborhoods better off, they also “accrued larger relative benefits,” meaning that their outcomes improved exponentially compared to redlined areas.²⁸⁰

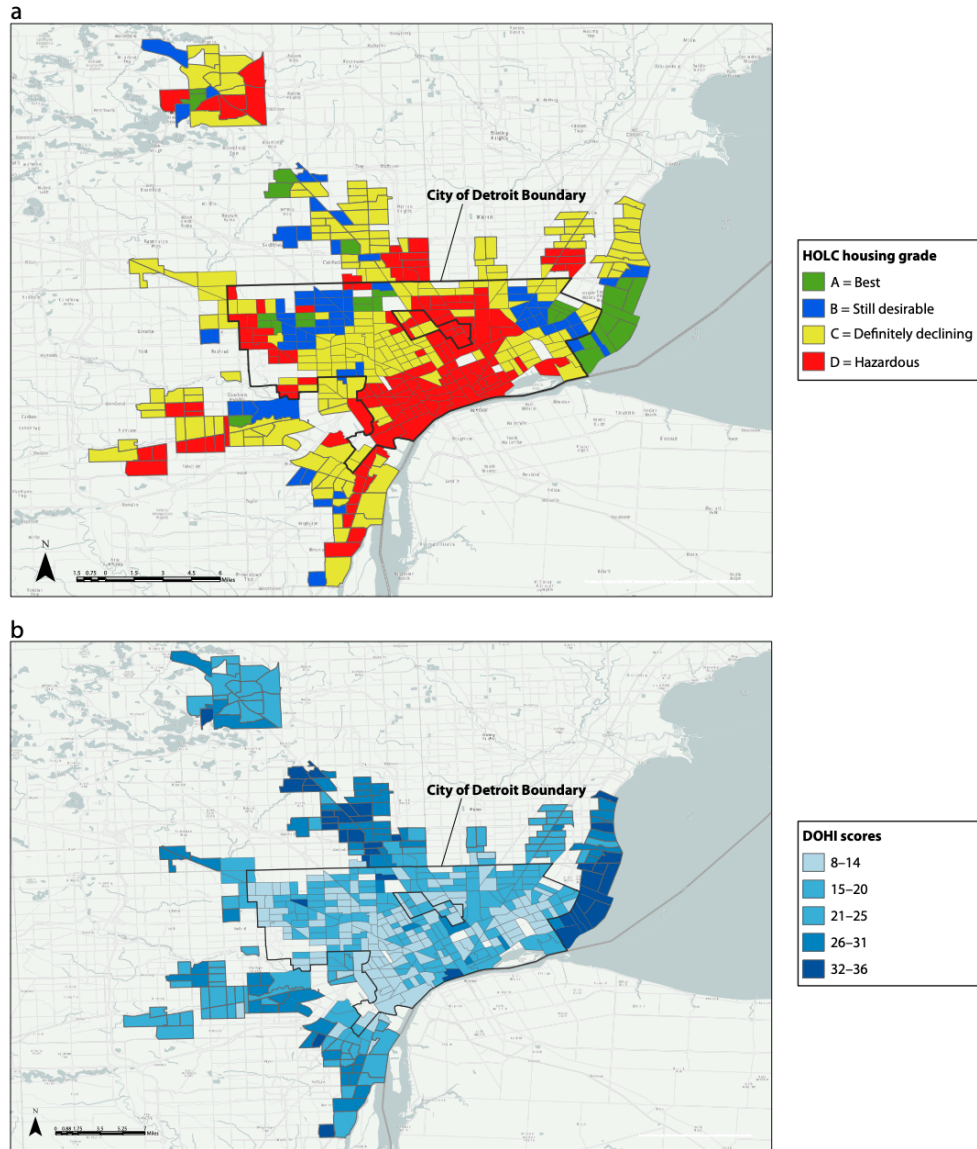


Figure 14: Historical a) Home Owners’ Loan Corporation Redlining Grades, and b) Determinants of Health Index Scores Applied to 2020 Detroit Metropolitan Area Census Tracts.²⁸¹

The authors concluded that the contemporary impacts of redlining are not a coincidence, but rather provide evidence of “the persistent effects of structural racism...Neighborhoods with larger proportions of Black residents were more likely to be redlined; those neighborhoods

²⁸⁰Mehdipanah et al, 2023, 54.

²⁸¹Mehdipanah et al, 2023.

remain disproportionately Black in contemporary Detroit.”²⁸² Moreover, the authors situate their findings within a context of reparations, stating that investment in housing and infrastructure should be explicit in reparations policy.²⁸³

Illegal Over-Taxation

Since 2009, the city of Detroit illegally foreclosed on the homes of 1 in 3 residents.²⁸⁴ The city violated a Michigan law stating that homes should not be assessed at more than 50% of their market value.²⁸⁵ Homes, particularly those with the lowest value, were over-assessed by tens of thousands of dollars, leading to skyrocketing property tax rates. During this period, the city collected more than \$600 million in additional property taxes.²⁸⁶ Without the ability to pay inflated property taxes, over 100,000 Detroiters lost their homes.²⁸⁷ Illegal over-assessments disproportionately impacted the lowest valued homes, and Black Detroiters faced the greatest burden.²⁸⁸

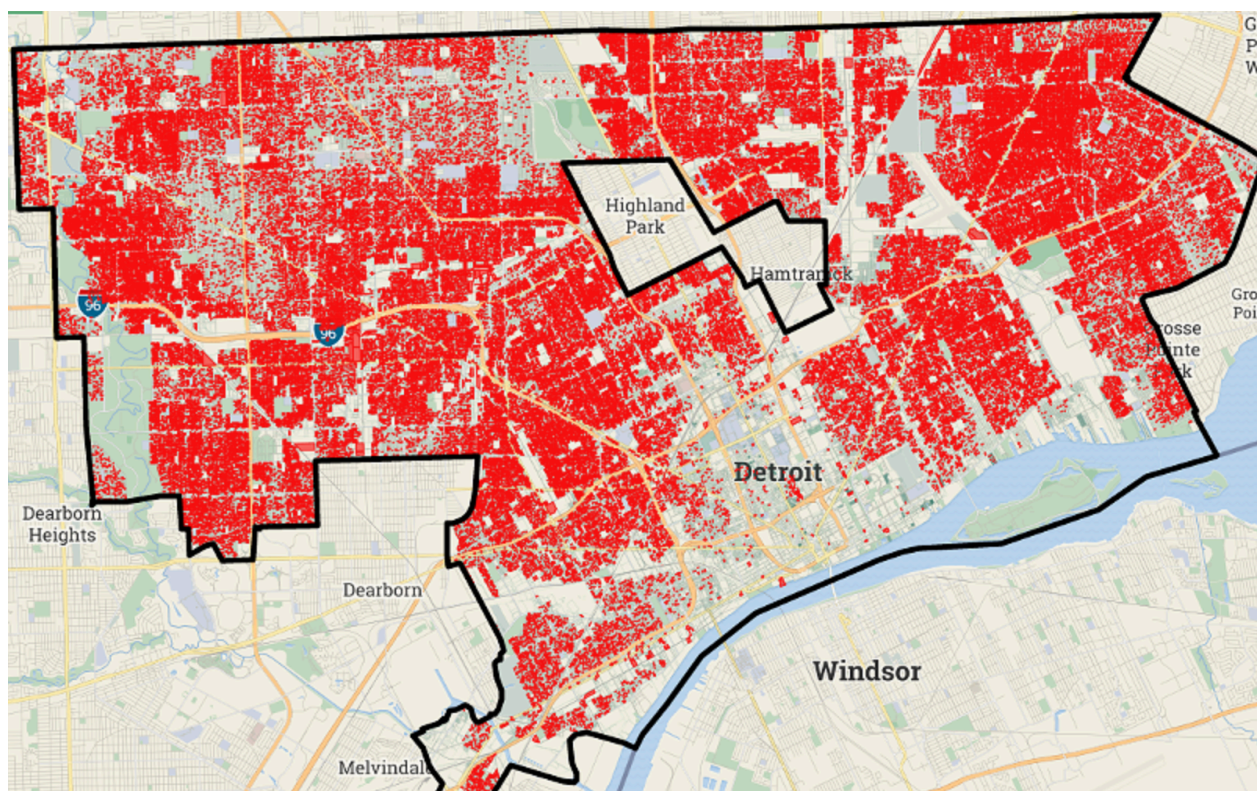


Figure 15: Between 2002 and 2017, every foreclosed home in Detroit - a total of 143,958²⁸⁹

²⁸²Mehdipanah et al, 2023, pp.S56.

²⁸³Mehdipanah et al, 2023.

²⁸⁴“Coalition for Property Tax Justice,” accessed March 2024, <https://www.illegalforeclosures.org/>.

²⁸⁵ Bernadette Atuahene, “Predatory Cities,” *California Law Review*, 108, no. 107 (2020): 107-182.

²⁸⁶“Coalition for Property Tax Justice.”

²⁸⁷“Coalition for Property Tax Justice.”

²⁸⁸“Coalition for Property Tax Justice.”

²⁸⁹Runyan, Robin. 2017. “Loveland Mapped Every Foreclosed and Auctioned Property in Detroit Since 2002.” *Curbed Detroit*, July 10, 2017.

<https://detroit.curbed.com/2017/7/10/15938840/loveland-foreclosed-auctioned-property-detroit>.

Illegal tax foreclosures were pervasive around the entire state, but Detroit's - predominantly Black - residents were disproportionately overtaxed. Blame has been cast on the housing crisis of 2008, individual assessors, and the city of Detroit's weak finances. In reality, a combination of factors contributed to the epidemic of overtaxation, a primary driving factor being explicit, systemic actions by the State of Michigan and the City of Detroit. An investigative report by *Bridge Detroit* suggested that the City of Detroit utilized foreclosure auctions as a means to get a temporary 'cash infusion' to a flailing government budget.²⁹⁰ In an agreement with the State of Michigan, Wayne County "was forced into a consent agreement with the State of Michigan over its deficit."²⁹¹ The plan projected to collect "\$286 million from back taxes, fees, and auctioned properties"—essentially making tax foreclosures a "perverse," government-approved revenue policy.²⁹²

These policies had real implications for *one hundred thousand* Detroiters. The story of Mr. Jones, a Black Detroit resident, illustrates the ramifications of this policy: he was a Detroit resident who purchased a 'threadbare' home for \$2,500.²⁹³ The city taxed the property as if it was worth \$49,829. Unable to pay the inflated property taxes, Mr. Jones lost his home to foreclosure and the city sold it at auction for \$2,900.²⁹⁴ Victims like Mr. Jones reported multitudinous, negative downstream effects of this loss, including homelessness, poverty, mental health crises, and intergenerational effects.²⁹⁵

Sonja Bonnett is a Black Detroit resident who lost her home because she didn't know she was eligible for the poverty tax exemption; now, she works for Detroit Justice Center to ensure that all residents know their rights and do not overpay their taxes.²⁹⁶ Ms. Bonnett describes how when she lost her home, she didn't "just lose a structure," she says, "I lost my health; I lost my footing; I lost confidence in myself."²⁹⁷ Losing a home is more devastating to a family than losing a physical building, it is a psychological and emotional loss that "almost destroyed [Sonja's] family."²⁹⁸ Today, these effects of illegal overtaxation are particularly prevalent within the Black community.

The city apologized for its glaring failure of operations and in 2020, Mayor Mike Duggan proposed a plan to compensate for the city's illegal overtaxation.²⁹⁹ The City Council rejected the

²⁹⁰Herriges, Daniel. 2023. "The Vanishing Houses of Detroit: A Street View Story." *Strong Towns*. September 6, 2023. <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2020/11/10/the-vanishing-houses-of-detroit-a-street-view-story>.

²⁹¹Herriges, Daniel. 2023.

²⁹²Herriges, Daniel. 2023.

²⁹³Bernadette Atuahene, 2020.

²⁹⁴Bernadette Atuahene, 2020.

²⁹⁵Bernadette Atuahene, 2020.

²⁹⁶Sonja Bonnett (Community Legal Advocate, Detroit Justice Center) in discussion with the author, February 20, 2024.

²⁹⁷Emma Stein, Detroit Free Press. 2022. "Detroit Overtaxed Homeowners \$600M. Years Later, Advocates Still Seeking Reparations." *Detroit Free Press*, January 23, 2022. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2022/01/22/detroit-overtaxed-homeowners-600-million/6620156001/>.

²⁹⁸Emma Stein, 2022.

²⁹⁹"Official Report from the People's Forum Held on Jan. 22, 2022," *Coalition for Property Tax Justice*, April 14, 2022, <https://a.storyblok.com/f/98111/x/759a54629c/peoples-forum-report-4-13.pdf>.

resolution in a 5-4 vote.³⁰⁰ The compensation plan had glaring holes that led to its dismissal. Firstly, it only provided compensation to people over-assessed between 2010-2013, while over-assessment persisted until at least 2017. Moreover, it did not extend existing programs (such as housing vouchers), but rather placed beneficiaries at the front of the line, therefore displacing other Detroiters in need of resources.³⁰¹

More recently, the Mayor rejected proposals to pay cash compensation to victims because of a claim that it is illegal under the Michigan constitution.³⁰² While legal experts have argued otherwise, the ambiguity of the constitution has prevented decisive movement on this issue.³⁰³ The city spokesperson, John Roach, claimed that cash compensation will “trigger the return of the financial review commission’s complete control over city finances,” and a loss of the city’s self-determination to an Emergency Manager.³⁰⁴ Detroiters have been traumatized by Michigan law that allows an Emergency Manager to take over the city’s finances if the state deems there has been financial mismanagement. In the past, Emergency Management closed tens of Detroit public schools and put the city school system into bankruptcy.³⁰⁵ Moreover, Emergency Management in Flint, Michigan led to the poisoning of the water system.³⁰⁶ Therefore, compensation plans that involve direct cash reimbursements - and therefore the fear of Emergency Management - have failed. Despite this flimsy excuse, Michigan *does* pay cash to victims of other abuses. Victims of “physical, emotional, or psychological crimes may receive tens of thousands of dollars from the State.³⁰⁷ This generosity does not extend to the Black community despite well-documented legal violations by the City.

Although Detroiters of all races were impacted by illegal over-assessments, Black residents - who make up about 80% of Detroiters - were disproportionately impacted by foreclosures.³⁰⁸ Repair for this policy is something that Black community members, and the Reparations Task Force, have repeatedly voiced as a priority for reparations.³⁰⁹

Detroit Land Bank Authority

Detroit’s epidemic of tax foreclosures, combined with steady population loss, has less to a plethora of abandoned homes and vacant lots. Residents report dangerous, damaged, and abandoned buildings sitting for years without being demolished - a hazard for children, a hub for criminal activity, and a sore spot for the eyes.³¹⁰ In other cases, buildings have been demolished

³⁰⁰“Official Report from the People’s Forum,” 2022.

³⁰¹Ibid.

³⁰²Emma Stein, 2022.

³⁰³Emma Stein, 2022.

³⁰⁴Emma Stein, 2022.

³⁰⁵Cidney Calloway (Chair, Detroit Reparations Taskforce) in discussion with the author, March 2024.

³⁰⁶Cidney Calloway (Chair, Detroit Reparations Taskforce) in discussion with the author, March 2024.

³⁰⁷Nargis Rahman, “Detroit evening report: Michigan expands financial assistance for crime victims,” *Detroit Public Radio WDET*
<https://wdet.org/2023/08/14/michigan-expands-financial-assistance-for-crime-victims/#:~:text=Gov.%20Gr etchen%20Whitmer%20approved%20%2430%20million%20for%20victim,compensation%2C%20an%2080%25%20increase%20from%20the%20original%20%2425%2C000>.

³⁰⁸“Official Report from the People’s Forum,” 2022.

³⁰⁹Detroit Reparations Taskforce Members, in discussion with the author, March 2024.

³¹⁰Jamon Jordan (Official Historian of the City of Detroit), in discussion with the author, March 2024.

despite having occupants, and the abandoned land sits empty for years.³¹¹ Some residents have taken to utilizing Google Street View to visualize the loss of infrastructure and community. Project GooBing Detroit shows how entire blocks can ‘vanish’ over time.



Image 5: The progression of Hazelwood Street from 2009-2018³¹²

The Detroit Land Bank Authority is the primary cause of the city’s deteriorating housing infrastructure and visible ‘blight.’ Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) was created in 2010 with the mission of “managing the city’s vacant and abandoned properties.”³¹³ In 2020, DLBA owned 25% of Detroit homes, accounting for about 22,000 properties. It is often said that “every block in the city” has a DLBA-owned property.³¹⁴ About one quarter of all complaints about abandoned buildings in the city are in reference to DLBA-owned properties.³¹⁵

Many cities are turning to land banks to revitalize abandoned areas and equitably redistribute wealth through homeownership. Cities such as Philadelphia are models of the land bank, with its emphasis on equity, community decision making, accountability, transparency, and simplicity. On the other hand, DLBA has been criticized for continuing the city’s policies of “using legal systems to displace Black and immigrant populations,” barring homeownership instead of

³¹¹Rudelich, Samantha. 2023. “The Detroit Land Bank Authority: A Modern Tool Perpetuating Racism & Classism in the City.” *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy*. Vol. XXX, No. 3, pp 623.

³¹²Herriges, Daniel. 2023.

³¹³Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, pp 621.

³¹⁴Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, pp 629.

³¹⁵Rudelich, Samantha. 2023.

promoting it.³¹⁶ Foreclosed properties come under DLBA's control, and DLBA can then file for "quiet title" which gives DLBA ownership of the property, preventing anyone from asserting a claim on the land (for instance, the previous owner) in the future.³¹⁷ Residents have no avenues for recourse: many cannot afford lawyers, or are not aware of their rights.

DLBA has also been accused of corruption and speculating land to sell to developers and investors for profit: "Between 2005 and 2015, investors accounted for 88% of tax auction sales, with most (68%) going to large and medium scale investors (40% to buyers who purchased 50 or more houses, and 28% to buyers who purchased 10-49 houses, respectively).³¹⁸ Moreover, DLBA directly profits from the racist system of illegal over-taxation through gaining control of thousands of foreclosed properties. Illegal tax foreclosures are used "as a justification to take the land of low-income, Black community members, further [creating] inequities."³¹⁹

DLBA occupies an ambiguous governmental position, as it is under state legislation, separate from the Detroit city government, and yet publicly funded. DLBA is managed by a Board of Directors, five of whom are appointed by the Mayor and one of whom is appointed by the state Housing Development Authority.³²⁰

DLBA has been the subject of numerous lawsuits. *Murray v. Detroit Land Bank Authority* exemplifies the human toll of the DLBA's oppressive practices. The plaintiff, Murray, resided in a home that had been in his family since the 1960s. Despite believing that he had paid delinquent taxes on his property, its ownership was transferred to DLBA, who seized the home, destroyed sentimental property (including family photographs and antiques), and demolished the home. DLBA spent over \$20,000 to complete this demolition rather than invest in helping a resident remain in his childhood home.³²¹

DLBA has also been investigated for corruption and financial mismanagement. In another case, the FBI investigated DLBA after Mayor Duggan initiated an incentive that gave city employees a 50% discount on properties at auction. A probe found that city employees were flipping these properties instead of residing in them, as stipulated by the program. Lawsuits have also been brought against DLBA for financial mismanagement. One probe found a 60% increase in demolition costs after Mayor Dugan introduced a new program. Other lawsuits have alleged retaliation against individuals and companies who brought financial mismanagement to light.³²²

In a particularly egregious case, The Office of the General Inspector (OIG), found that DLBA neglected to notify residents of toxic contamination. At 81 out of 89 sites, a Chicago-based company filled in holes that "contained unacceptable levels of mercury, arsenic, chromium, or

³¹⁶Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, pp 622.

³¹⁷Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, pp 627-8.

³¹⁸Alexa Eisenberg, Eric Seymour, Alex B. Hill & Joshua Akers. 2020c. "Toxic Structures: Speculation and Lead Exposure in Detroit's Single-family Rental Market." *Health and Place/Health & Place (Online)* 64 (July): 102390. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2020.102390>, 4.

³¹⁹Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, 631.

³²⁰Rudelich, Samantha. 2023.

³²¹Rudelich, Samantha. 2023.

³²²Rudelich, Samantha. 2023.

lead.”³²³ OIG also uncovered \$13 million in demolition payments to out-of-state contractors that was unaccounted for. Not only did residents suffer from adverse health outcomes due to toxic chemical exposure, local businesses also suffered from the reliance on out-of-state contractors and mismanagement of public funds. DLBA settled the claims alleged by OIG for \$1.5 million. Although the Board of Directors claims that this settlement did not utilize public dollars, they have never provided an account of the origin of these funds.³²⁴

DLBA acts as a continuation of racist policies that dispossessed Black people from their land and barred them from homeownership: “The land system in Detroit has deep historical roots in the systematic dispossession of land for its low income and Black residents.”³²⁵ While land banks have potential to be sources of repair to generations of stealing wealth from Black communities, DLBA’s “historical and current practices...inform the significant increase in vacant, foreclosed, and abandoned property. The practical implications of systematically barring homeownership in low income, predominantly Black communities directly connects to the social determinants of health.”³²⁶ The city cannot ignore the historical roots of the current disparities in homeownership and home equity, because the current crisis is “a direct result of the systemic failures of the city to ensure its people have access to property and homeownership.”³²⁷ Transforming the DLBA should be a direct strategy of reparations to promote the revitalization of ‘blighted’ areas and increase homeownership wealth among Black Detroiters.

Impacts of Neighborhood Disinvestment on Health Outcomes

Decades of redlining, disinvestment in neighborhoods, foreclosures, and crumbling infrastructure have led to substandard housing quality. The decline of the housing stock reflects Detroit’s “racialized poverty that disproportionately impacts young children” in a majority Black city.³²⁸ Over 90% of children under the age of six live in buildings built *before* the prohibition of lead-based paint in 1978. Foreclosures and a declining housing stock have further exacerbated the dearth of newer, quality, safe housing for families. Evictions have been utilized as a tool to scare residents into paying for substandard housing with “mold, pests, faulty electrical, lack of heat, and sewage backups.”³²⁹ Enforcement of these code violations has been particularly relaxed in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of Black people, of poverty, and of lead exposure.

Housing auctions and demolitions by DLBA and of foreclosed lots have been directly linked to increased lead exposure. Homes that are purchased at auction, often by large investors, have been found to be twice as likely to be demolished than homes owned by families or small landlords.³³⁰ These demolitions release lead and toxic chemicals into the environment. The Detroit Health Department found that demolition activity within 400 feet of a family home was associated with increased elevated blood lead levels (EBLLs) in children. Children who live near homes that are either vacant or have been demolished are more likely to be at risk for EBLLs. Finally, children

³²³Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, 632.

³²⁴Rudelich, Samantha. 2023.

³²⁵Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, 638.

³²⁶Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, 635.

³²⁷Rudelich, Samantha. 2023, 638.

³²⁸Eisenberg et al (2020), 2.

³²⁹Eisenberg et al (2020), 4.

³³⁰Eisenberg et al (2020).

who live in rentals owned by investors who are “active in the annual tax foreclosure auction” are more likely to have EBLLs than children with non-investor landlords.³³¹

The disproportionate lead exposure caused by abandonment, demolition, and disinvestment has contributed to elevated EBLLs among Detroit children. In 2016, among children under six, 8.8% of Detroit children had elevated EBLLs, compared to 3.6% of Michigan children as a whole.³³² Detroit’s population of children with EBLLs accounted for 36% of total statewide cases. Detroit’s predominantly Black population “suffer disproportionately and cumulatively from both exposure to an array of environmental health hazards.”³³³ This issue is no coincidence, it is a direct result of decades of disinvestment in Black communities, disregard for Black people’s health and safety, and the avarice of DLBA.

Community Benefits Ordinance

Detroit has one of the most generous corporate tax abatements compared to similar cities. These tax abatements draw in out-of-state developers, promoting gentrification with little to no benefits to the existing communities. Between 2017 and 2021, Detroit averaged \$20 million foregone in corporate tax abatements, accounting for 16.8% of annual property tax revenue.³³⁴ Corporations can receive a 50-100% abatement for a period of 1-15 years depending on the nature of their project.³³⁵ Compared to a sample of cities of similar size and demographics, Detroit provides by far the greatest amount in corporate tax abatements.³³⁶

The Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO) was established in 2016 to ensure that developers who benefit from tax abatements provide community benefits and mitigate any harms from construction and development.³³⁷ There are three requirements, any of which could trigger a CBO process: the project must either, a) be \$75 million or more in value, b) receive \$1 million or more in property tax abatements, or c) receive \$1 million or more in value of city land sale or transfer.³³⁸ The CBO is a committee of nine members, four selected by the City of Detroit Planning and Development Department, two selected by the At-Large City Council Members, one selected by the local District Council Member, and two elected by residents of the impacted area.³³⁹ The outcome of the selection process is that city bureaucrats select their friends and people with their best interests in mind - not the best interests of local residents. Although the

³³¹Eisenberg et al (2020), 4.

³³²Eisenberg et al (2020).

³³³Eisenberg et al (2020), 3.

³³⁴Dr. Esmat Oshag-Osman, 2022. “Opinion: Business tax cuts are costly in Detroit: Are they worth it?” *Bridge Detroit*, November 16, 2022, <https://www.bridgedetroit.com/opinion-business-tax-cuts-are-costly-in-detroit-are-they-worth-it/#:~:text=Between%202017%20and%202021%2C%20Detroit%20used%2013%20different,34%20percent%29%20of%20the%20total%20abated%20business%20taxes.>

³³⁵“Tax Incentives: How-To-Guide,” *Detroit Economic Growth Corporation*, January 2021, <https://www.degc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DEGC-Tax-Abatement-How-To-Manual-January-2021.pdf>.

³³⁶“Tax Incentives: How-To-Guide,” 2021.

³³⁷“Community Benefits Ordinance,” *City of Detroit*, <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/planning-and-development-department/design-and-development-innovation/community-benefits-ordinance#:~:text=The%20Community%20Benefits%20Ordinance%20%28CBO%29%20is%20a%20law,2016%20and%20amended%20by%20City%20Council%20in%202021.>

³³⁸“Community Benefits Ordinance.”

³³⁹“Community Benefits Ordinance.”

two elected community members might fight hard for significant projects that provide long-lasting, sustainable benefits, they are often outnumbered by the seven members in the pockets of legislators.³⁴⁰

CBO projects can range in scale and cost, and must ultimately be approved by the City Council. Some of the larger projects included \$2.5 million towards 60 basketball courts, allocating a percentage of new housing units to affordable rentals, and \$600,000 over six years towards youth job promotion.³⁴¹ On the other hand, not all approved community benefits projects have included a large funding allocation, if any funding allocation at all. For example, one project mandated communications for road closures, paid window cleanings, reports of hazardous waste removal, pest control, and a nighttime pedestrian lighting plan.³⁴² Considering the massive cost of the project and the potential millions in tax abatements, this list is a miniscule ask for the development company. Moreover, the city government has not updated their publicly available list of CBO projects since September 2018.³⁴³ This lack of transparency reinforces that the CBO is a mere distraction to appease the public, not a true vessel for making change in local communities.³⁴⁴ Both corporate taxation and the CBO could be drivers of community-led development, but these policies fall in the line of other City housing policies: little to no transparency, community voices, fair fiscal practices, or accountability. Reforming the tax abatements and CBO process should be at the forefront of reparations to ensure that Black communities redirect and redistribute wealth to programs that create lasting and holistic change.

Summary

The analysis of these five key issue areas demonstrates how historical harms that have been perpetuated against Detroit's Black community have evolved and persisted into the present day. Black Detroiters not only fare worse than white Detroiters for food security, education, clean water, economics, and housing - Black communities also fall far below human rights standards for quality living and wellbeing. This disparity is a result of intentional, systemic, and pernicious public policy choices by the Detroit city government and other public officials and institutions. Reparations policies for these historical and contemporary harms should come directly from impacted communities, be holistic and sustainable in nature, and ensure the agency and dignity of the people who have been and are harmed.

V. Remaining Sustainable Development Goals

The following section provides an overview of the remaining SDGs, providing examples of how Detroit's Black communities fare compared to the SDG criteria.

³⁴⁰Detroit Reparations Taskforce, in conversation with the author, March 2024.

³⁴¹Karen Gage. "Community Benefits List," September 2018.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/g6wyoh9lrb3z5pu/Community_Benefits_List.pdf?e=2&dl=0

³⁴²Karen Gage (2018).

³⁴³Karen Gage (2018).

³⁴⁴Detroit Reparations Taskforce, in conversation with the author, March 2024.



Figure 16: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals³⁴⁵



Poverty in Detroit is far higher than the national average at 31.8% overall, compared to 12.8% nationally.³⁴⁶ In Detroit, more than one third of Black families live below the poverty line, compared to 25.58% of white households.³⁴⁷ Similarly, 8.50% of Black people are unemployed, compared to only 3.65% of white people.³⁴⁸ 14.3% of Detroit households receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, and 16.93% of Black children live in poverty, compared to 10.78% of white children.³⁴⁹ Only 36% of Detroit residents make a living wage.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁵“Guidelines for the Use of the SDG Logo, Including the Colour Wheel and 17 Icons.” n.d.

<https://unsdg.un.org/resources/guidelines-use-sdg-logo-including-colour-wheel-and-17-icons>.

³⁴⁶“Poverty Rate in Detroit, Michigan.” 2021. 2021. <https://www.welfareinfo.org/poverty-rate/michigan/detroit/>.

³⁴⁷US Census Bureau. 2023. “American Community Survey Data.” Census.Gov. August 16, 2023.

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>.

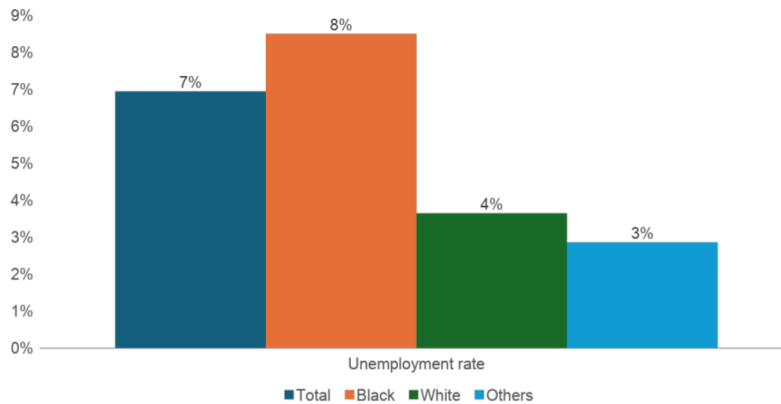
³⁴⁸US Census Bureau. 2023.

³⁴⁹Tanzi, Alex, Annalise Frank, National Low Income Housing Coalition, Kayla Ruble, Jameson Cook, and Mitch Hotts. 2024. “Michigan Poverty & Well Being Map: Metro Detroit Region.” *FACT SHEET*.

<https://sites.fordschool.umich.edu/poverty2021/files/2024/03/Metro-Detroit-MI-2024-final.pdf>; meong

³⁵⁰Sarah Rahal, “UM Report: Detroit Economic Outlook Strong, but Only 36% of Residents Make Living Wage.” *The Detroit News*, August 31, 2023.

<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/2023/08/31/um-report-detroit-economic-outlook-strong-but-only-36-of-residents-make-living-wage/70721676007/>.



Source: American Community Survey

Figure 17: Unemployment rate in Detroit among races³⁵¹



Gender equality

“In our state, a little more than 36% of women and 25% of men experience domestic violence,” says Thomas, who notes those are just the reported cases. In Detroit, 12 people have lost their lives to domestic violence in 2023. In May 2023, alone, there were three women who a partner or ex-partner killed³⁵². Domestic violence affects the Black community at significantly elevated levels, with statistics revealing that 45.1% of Black women encounter incidents of intimate partner physical violence, sexual violence, and/or stalking over the course of their lives, according to a report by Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer³⁵³. For Black women and children in Detroit, access to support services is often limited. Shelters, legal assistance, and counseling services may be underfunded or lacking, leaving victims with few options for help. This lack of access to vital resources exacerbates the difficulties faced by survivors of domestic violence³⁵⁴. Cultural stigmas within the Black community can also contribute to the underreporting of domestic violence cases. Fear of judgment, distrust of authorities, and

³⁵¹ US Census Bureau. 2023.

³⁵² Osborne, Pamela, and Brandon Carr. “Nurse’s Death Calls Attention to Domestic Violence in Metro Detroit.” WDIV, May 16, 2023. <https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/local/2023/05/16/nurses-death-calls-attention-to-domestic-violence-in-metro-detroit/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIn%20our%20state%2C%20a%20little,partner%20or%20ex%2Dpartner%20killed.>

³⁵³ “Whitmer Proclaims October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month.” SOM - State of Michigan. Accessed April 25, 2024. <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/news/press-releases/2022/10/01/whitmer-proclaims-october-as-domestic-violence-awareness-month.>

³⁵⁴ Lynzee Mychael, Multimedia Journalist, November 5. “Alarming Rise in Domestic Violence Rates in Detroit Affecting Black Women and Children at Concerning Rates.” The Michigan Chronicle, November 6, 2023. [https://michiganchronicle.com/alarming-rise-in-domestic-violence-rates-in-detroit-affecting-black-women-and-children-at-concerning-rates/.](https://michiganchronicle.com/alarming-rise-in-domestic-violence-rates-in-detroit-affecting-black-women-and-children-at-concerning-rates/)

concerns about preserving family unity can deter individuals from seeking help or reporting abusive situations.

Michigan state has agreed to block enforcement of the Michigan abortion ban until the court considers the legal challenge against the law later this spring 2024. The ban not only prevents physicians from performing most abortions, but also denies patients the safest medical care, even in cases when a woman's life or health is in danger³⁵⁵. The Michigan legislature passed the abortion ban last year despite two previous failed efforts. In June 1996, the legislature passed its first such bill. A year later, a federal judge declared that ban unconstitutional because it was vague and overbroad. Similarly in 2001, a federal judge struck down a second ban for failing to include an exception to protect women's health. The in-clinic abortion is not offered in Detroit, MI, while the abortion pill is provided up to 11 weeks of pregnancy.



Affordable and Clean Energy

Persistent Disparities in Energy Access and the Burden on Detroit's Black Community

The struggle for energy equity in Detroit is clearly depicted in the city's energy burden statistics, which paint a concerning picture of inequality. The median energy burden for low-income households in Detroit stands at a staggering 10.2%, significantly higher than the national median low-income energy burden of 8.1%. This comparison starkly underscores the heightened energy challenges faced by the city's most vulnerable populations (see Figure 1).

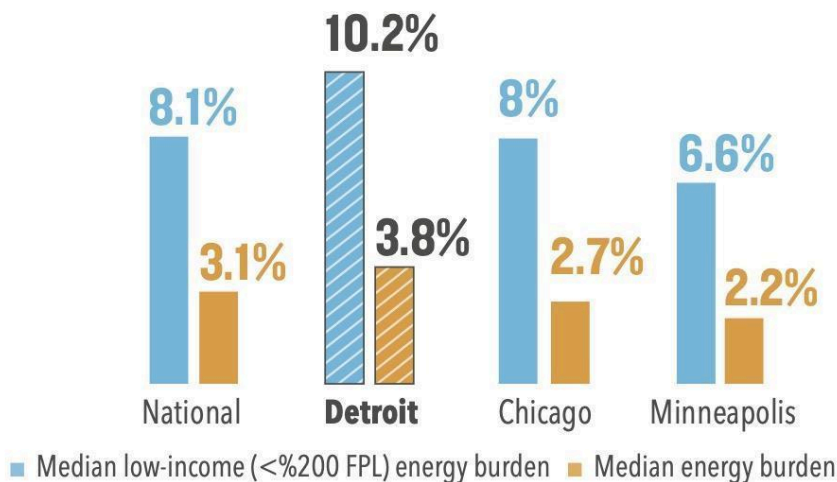


Figure 18: Residential Energy Burdens³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Parenthood, Planned. "Michigan Abortion Ban Put on Hold While Challenge Proceeds." Planned Parenthood. Accessed April 25, 2024.

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/newsroom/press-releases/michigan-ban>.

³⁵⁶ American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. (2020). ACEEE's 2020 report, How High Are America's Residential Energy Burdens.

Further compounding this issue is the racial energy burden gap. In Detroit, the median energy burden for black households is 54% higher than that of their non-Hispanic white counterparts. This is not just a number but a representation of the ongoing inequity that sees black families spending a larger share of their income on energy costs, an economic pressure that non-low-income households do not experience nearly as profoundly (see Figure 2).

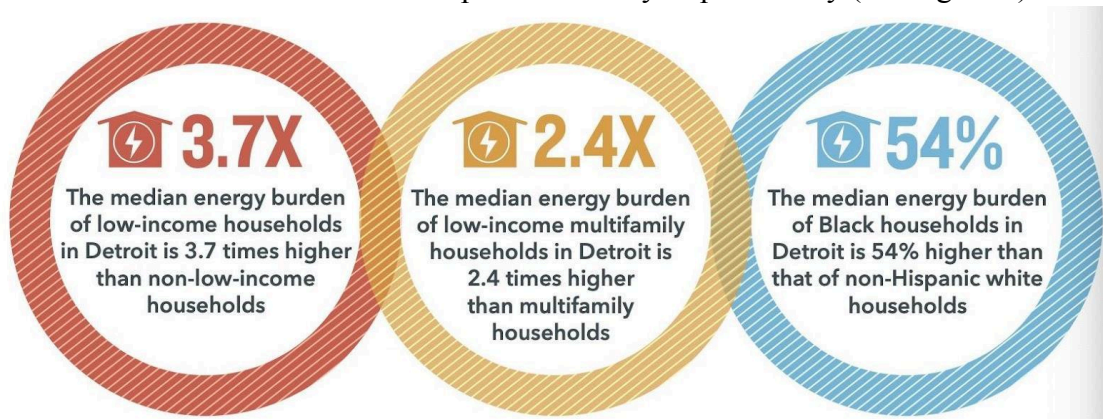


Figure 19: Energy burdens in Detroit³⁵⁷

These statistics reflect not only an economic strain but also a public health concern. The instability of energy provision in black neighborhoods, marked by fluctuating access to heating and cooling, directly contributes to adverse health outcomes. Respiratory diseases, stress-induced ailments, and exacerbated chronic conditions are sadly more prevalent among those facing such high energy burdens. It is a clear indicator that the path to energy justice in Detroit must consider the intersecting lines of income disparity and racial inequity, addressing the root causes that place an undue burden on black communities.³⁵⁸

Tackling the 'Energy Tax' in Detroit's Black Communities

Historical industrialization has left its mark on Detroit, with the city's black communities often nestled near energy infrastructures that contribute to elevated levels of air pollutants, such as PM 2.5. The proximity to such sources of pollution results in compromised air quality and an increased incidence of respiratory illnesses. This disproportionate environmental burden translates to an 'energy tax' for these communities, not through utility bills, but in terms of higher medical costs and decreased productivity as they grapple with chronic health issues resulting from this exposure.³⁵⁹

Despite the historical backdrop, the City of Detroit embarked on numerous initiatives to address sustainability and improve the lives of its residents. The Detroit Sustainability Action Agenda aims to create a more resilient city, with efforts such as the renovation of 40 neighborhood parks and the conversion to city-wide LED street lighting, both steps toward a cleaner environment.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. (2020). ACEEE's 2020 report, How High Are America's Residential Energy Burdens.

³⁵⁸Pollin, R., Wicks-Lim, J., & Garrett-Peltier, H. (2009). Detroit, Michigan: Green Prosperity and Poverty Reduction. Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; City of Detroit. (2019). Detroit Sustainability Action Agenda

³⁵⁹City of Detroit. (2019). Detroit Sustainability Action Agenda

³⁶⁰City of Detroit. (2019). Detroit Sustainability Action Agenda

The groundbreaking of O'Shea Solar Park, the city's first urban solar array, marks a pivotal shift towards harnessing renewable energy.

However, despite these significant city-wide strides encapsulated in the Sustainability Timeline, such as commitments under the Paris Accord and the proactive efforts of the Office of Sustainability, challenges remain in ensuring these benefits equitably reach all communities. In particular, low-income black neighborhoods³⁶¹ have not reaped the full advantages of these sustainability efforts. Structural barriers, including the high initial costs of energy-efficient upgrades and the lack of targeted outreach programs, continue to hinder access to energy-saving measures within these communities.

As Detroit pushes forward with its 2030 District launch and other initiatives indicated in its Climate Plan, it's crucial to intensify efforts to dismantle the cycle of energy poverty. This involves not just broad strokes but also focused policies that account for the economic and social fabric of Detroit's black communities. Bridging this gap calls for a collaborative approach—engaging community leaders, revising funding models, and tailoring programs to address the unique needs of these historically underserved neighborhoods.

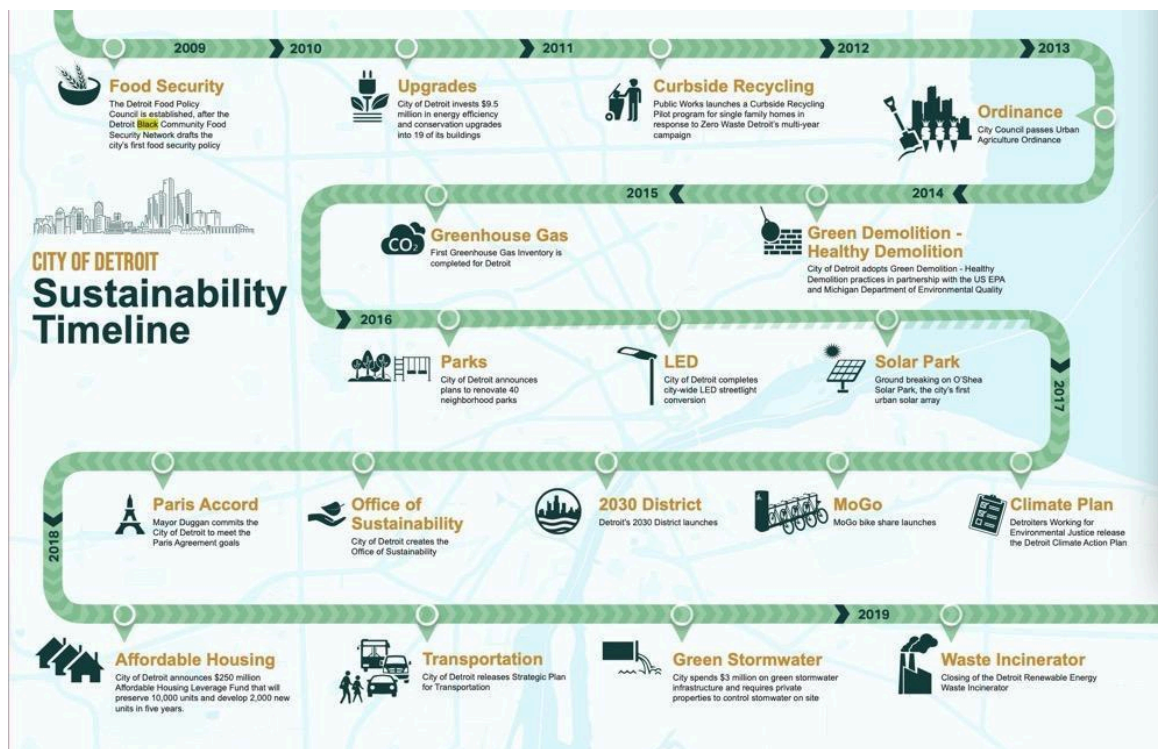


Figure 20: City of Detroit Sustainability Timeline³⁶²

Through targeted retrofitting initiatives and expanding access to renewable energy projects, Detroit can ensure that the sustainability efforts highlighted in its timeline translate into tangible improvements in the day-to-day lives of its black residents. As the city evolves, it's essential that

³⁶¹American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. (2020). Energy Burdens in Detroit.

³⁶²City of Detroit. (2019). Detroit Sustainability Action Agenda

every resident, irrespective of their neighborhood, can participate in and benefit from Detroit's green revolution.

Clean Energy as a Vehicle for boost economy and narrow the gap

Efforts to mitigate these disparities need to be intensified and strategically focused. While the city has launched various programs to address energy insecurity, including weatherization assistance and multifamily retrofit initiatives, there is a critical need for these programs to be designed with and for the most impacted populations.

Moreover, analysis of employment opportunities stemming from clean energy investments reveals a potential for economic upliftment. Investments could lead to significant job creation, with over 11,000 positions accessible to individuals holding a high school degree or less, potentially cutting the unemployment rate by almost three percentage points.³⁶³



Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

Governor Whitmer laid out her MI New Economy,³⁶⁴ a \$2.1 billion plan to grow Michigan's middle class, support small businesses and invest in communities. \$500 million to build on the Michigan Mainstreet Initiative, which offers grants to restaurants, place-based businesses, and microenterprises with further dollars to attract more start-ups. Enacted a bipartisan tax cut for small businesses, enabling them to grow and create jobs. Signed a Buy Michigan executive directive to increase state procurement and contracts with small and geographically disadvantaged businesses. Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve (SOAR) package³⁶⁵ supports business by fully funding a competitive economic development toolkit to help make Michigan a national leader in business attraction. Additionally, the Michigan state government has launched over \$400 million to support small businesses through Growing MI Business grants³⁶⁶.

Among GSER's local key findings, Detroit scored 10/10 in Performance, measuring the size and performance of an ecosystem based on the accumulated tech startup value created from exits and funding; Market Reach, measuring scale ups and unicorns in the ecosystem, size of local reach, and IP commercialization; and Talent and Experience, measuring long-term trends over the most

³⁶³Pollin, R., Wicks-Lim, J., & Garrett-Peltier, H. (2009). Detroit, Michigan: Green Prosperity and Poverty Reduction. Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

³⁶⁴ "MI New Economy." SOM - State of Michigan. Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.michigan.gov/minweconomy>.

³⁶⁵ "Governor Whitmer Signs Legislation Enabling Michigan to Attract Billions in Investment, Create Tens of Thousands of Good-Paying Jobs." SOM - State of Michigan. Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/news/press-releases/2021/12/20/governor-whitmer-signs-legislation-enabling-michigan-to-attract-billions-in-investment-create-tens->.

³⁶⁶ "Governor Whitmer Launches Growing Mi Business Grant Program to Deliver \$409 Million to Support Michigan Businesses and Grow Economy." SOM - State of Michigan. Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/news/press-releases/2022/03/01/governor-whitmer-launches-growing-mi-business-grant-program-to-deliver-409-million-to-support-michi>.

significant performance factors and the ability to generate and keep talent in the ecosystem. Detroit also scored 8/10 in Funding, measuring innovation through early-stage funding and investor’s activity. This news builds on Detroit’s status as an attractive place for entrepreneurs, from its affordable cost of living³⁶⁷ compared to other dense tech hubs to Michigan’s overall growth in VC investment³⁶⁸. In a May 2021 article from Crunchbase, Michigan was recognized as the fastest growing state³⁶⁹ for VC investment, with an increase in venture dollars from \$300 million in 2016 to \$3.1 billion in 2020.



Reduced Inequality

As of 2022, approximately 32.78% of Black residents of Wayne County had incomes below the federal poverty level, compared to 31.46% of white residents.³⁷⁰ Detroit has a majority Black population. In contrast, Michigan as a whole, which has a 13% poverty rate.³⁷¹ Similarly, 17.8% of Detroiters had incomes below 50% of the poverty level, compared to 6.5% across the state.³⁷² 8.5% of Black Wayne County residents were unemployed, compared to 6.94% of white residents.³⁷³

White Detroiters also had a median income more than \$16,000 greater than that of Black Detroiters, and while Black Detroiters have seen modest income increases of 8% in the past few years, White Detroiters have seen a shocking 60% increase in median income.³⁷⁴ As of 2022, Detroit ranked 22nd in the country for income inequality using the Gini Coefficient score.³⁷⁵ Moreover, the city scored a 53 on the racial segregation index, compared to a nationwide city average of 35.³⁷⁶

³⁶⁷ “Why Michigan: Michigan Business.” Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.michiganbusiness.org/whymi/>.

³⁶⁸ “This Just in: Michigan Leads Venture Capital Growth in Great Lakes Region: Michigan Business.” Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.michiganbusiness.org/press-releases/2021/05/this-just-in-michigan-leads-venture-capital-growth-in-great-lakes-region/>.

³⁶⁹ “This Just in: Michigan Leads Venture Capital Growth in Great Lakes Region: Michigan Business.” Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.michiganbusiness.org/press-releases/2021/05/this-just-in-michigan-leads-venture-capital-growth-in-great-lakes-region/>.

³⁷⁰ US Census Bureau. 2023.

³⁷¹ “Poverty Rate in Detroit, MI.” 2024. City-Data.Com. March 15, 2024. <https://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Detroit-Michigan.html#:~:text=Breakdown%20of%20poor%20residents%20within%20races%20in%20Detroit%2C,Native%20Hawaiian%2037.1%25%20Other%20race%2030.2%25%202%2B%20races.>

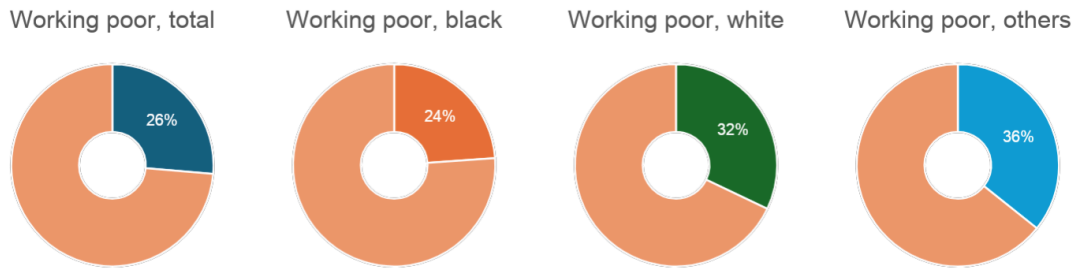
³⁷² “Poverty Rate in Detroit, MI.” 2024.

³⁷³ “Poverty Rate in Detroit, MI.” 2024.

³⁷⁴ Nushrat Rahman, Detroit Free Press. 2021a. “Report: Economic Opportunity Was Out of Reach for Many Detroiters Before the Pandemic.” *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 2021. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2021/05/16/economic-disparities-detroit-existed-before-pandemic-report-finds/5043210001/>.

³⁷⁵ Swindells, Katharine. 2023. “Income in US Cities Is Most Unevenly Distributed in a Decade.” *City Monitor*, March 23, 2023. <https://citymonitor.ai/community/neighbourhoods/us-income-inequality-cities-revealed>.

³⁷⁶ Poethig, Erika C., et al. 2018. “Measuring Inclusion in America’s Cities.” *Urban Institute*, April 25, 2018.



Source: American Community Survey

Figure 21: Percent of working poor among races in Detroit³⁷⁷



Responsible Consumption and Production

Municipal and household waste management in the city of Detroit has been a focal point, with efforts aimed at improving collection and disposal systems to mitigate environmental impact. Initiatives to enhance recycling practices have also gained traction, aiming to increase the recycling rate and divert waste from landfills³⁷⁸. Additionally, there's a concerted effort to address food waste through various programs and campaigns, promoting awareness and implementing strategies for waste reduction throughout the city. According to the state environment department, food is the most disposed of material in Michigan: up to 1.5 million tons of food waste reach Michigan landfills each year³⁷⁹. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates 30 to 40% of all food is landfilled³⁸⁰. In the MI Healthy Climate Plan, cutting food waste in half by 2030, is one of the key recommendations for Michigan to achieve carbon neutrality. Food waste is defined as any food that is grown and produced for human consumption but ultimately is not eaten. Consumer-facing businesses and homes represent over 80% of all food waste generated. Two metro Detroit communities have rolled out new programs to cut down food waste, part of Michigan's efforts to cut its amount of landfilled food in half by 2030.³⁸¹

https://apps.urban.org/features/inclusion/index.html?city=detroit_MI.

³⁷⁷US Census Bureau. 2023.

³⁷⁸“Solid Waste.” SOM - State of Michigan. Accessed May 1, 2024.

<https://www.michigan.gov/egle/about/organization/materials-management/solid-waste>.

³⁷⁹“Solid Waste.” SOM - State of Michigan. Accessed May 1, 2024.

<https://www.michigan.gov/egle/about/organization/materials-management/solid-waste>.

³⁸⁰“Food Waste Faqs.” USDA. Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.usda.gov/foodwaste/faqs>.

³⁸¹ MJ Galbraith | Thursday, April 11, and Sponsored By. “In Local Efforts to Eliminate Food Waste, ‘Southfield and Wixom Are Pioneers’ as New Programs Debut.” Metromode. Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.secondwavemedia.com/metromode/devnews/SE-MI-Food-Waste.aspx>.



Climate Action

Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Changing Emissions Patterns

Detroit's transition towards sustainability is interlaced with racial and socioeconomic dimensions that reflect in its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions patterns³⁸². A telling indicator of this is the per capita emissions across different racial groups. As demonstrated in Figure 1, a stark contrast in emissions, with African American households having lower per capita CO₂ emissions compared to Caucasian households (see Panel A of the Figure 1).

This discrepancy is rooted in the spatial and infrastructural inequities that permeate Detroit. African American households often reside in older, less energy-efficient homes, which could contribute to a seemingly paradoxical lower per capita emission but a higher energy use intensity due to inadequate insulation and outdated heating systems (see Panel B of the Figure). These conditions not only lead to increased energy consumption and higher costs but also reflect a larger pattern of energy inefficiency that disproportionately burdens these communities.

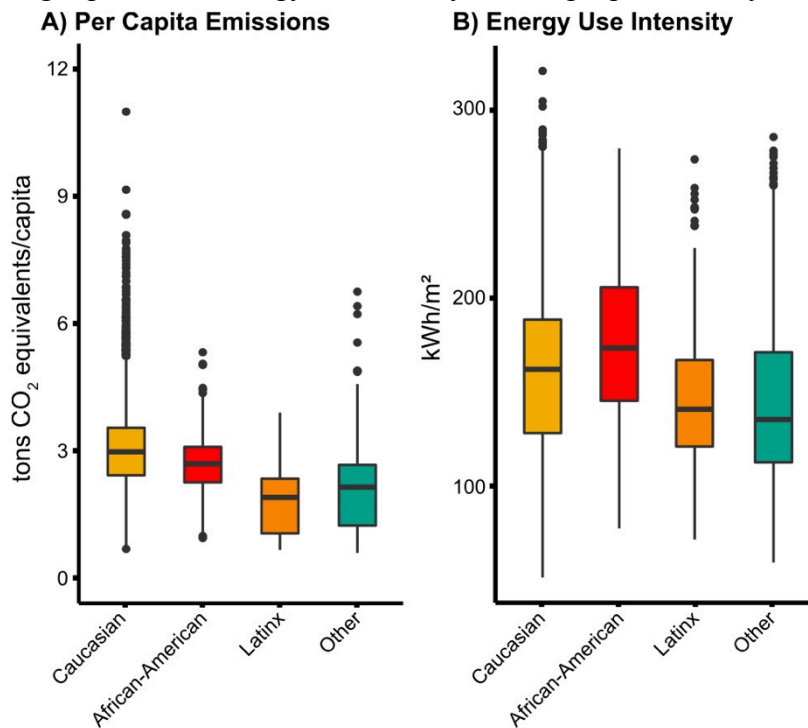


Figure 22: Greenhouse gas emissions from residential energy use and energy use intensity³⁸³

³⁸²Bednar, D. J., Reames, T. G., & Keoleian, G. A. (2017). The intersection of energy and justice: Modeling the spatial, racial/ethnic and socioeconomic patterns of urban residential heating consumption and efficiency in Detroit, Michigan. *Energy and Buildings*, 143, 25-34.

³⁸³Goldstein, B., Reames, T. G., & Newell, J. P. (2022). Racial inequity in household energy efficiency and carbon emissions in the United States: An emissions paradox. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 84, 102365.

Heat Vulnerability and Per Capita CO2 Emissions

In Detroit, the pressing issue of climate change manifests not only in environmental challenges but also in socio-economic disparities. The Heat Vulnerability Index, as researched by Evan Mallen from the University of Michigan (See Figure 2), underscores a stark gradient of risk across the city, with southern and eastern areas showing a higher vulnerability, often aligning with neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by the black community. This vulnerability is compounded by factors such as aging populations, isolation, and socioeconomic stressors.



Figure 23: Detroit Heat vulnerability³⁸⁴

Per capita CO₂ emissions are an illuminating metric, revealing how individuals contribute to city-wide emissions, often correlating with access to resources and modern infrastructure. Historically marginalized communities, particularly in regions of Detroit with outdated infrastructure, may inadvertently have higher per capita emissions due to limited access to clean energy technologies.³⁸⁵

Recognizing these intersecting challenges, initiatives like Detroit's Climate Action Collaborative (DCAC) are vital. They offer community-driven climate planning that specifically targets these disparities. By implementing adaptable strategies and creating policies that reflect the needs of the local communities, efforts like those of the DCAC are essential steps toward not only reducing emissions but also fostering equity in the face of climate change.

³⁸⁴Sampson, N., Knott, K. H., Smith, D., Mekias, L., & Heeres, J. H. (2014). Planning for Climate Change in Legacy Cities: The Case of Detroit, Michigan. *Michigan Journal of Sustainability*, 2.

³⁸⁵Sampson, N., Knott, K. H., Smith, D., Mekias, L., & Heeres, J. H. (2014). Planning for Climate Change in Legacy Cities: The Case of Detroit, Michigan. *Michigan Journal of Sustainability*, 2.

Control of Invasive Species

Invasive species control is a lesser-discussed yet critical aspect of climate action, affecting urban biodiversity and, by extension, community health and resilience. Michigan's invasive species watchlist provides a framework for understanding the threats posed by non-native species, but the engagement of local communities, particularly those predominantly comprising black residents, in these control efforts remains a gap that needs bridging.³⁸⁶

Strengthening Adaptive Capacity to Climate-Related Disasters

Detroit's black communities are on the front lines of climate-related risks, from heatwaves to flooding. The city's adaptation strategies, therefore, must consider the unique vulnerabilities of these neighborhoods. The collaborative effort by Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ) and the DCAC signifies a strategic pivot towards resilience and adaptation, integrating climate action with environmental justice principles.³⁸⁷

Addressing Equity in Climate Action

To ensure that climate action translates into tangible benefits for Detroit's black community, environmental advocates have called for more inclusive approaches. Local environmental advocates emphasize the importance of policies and programs that consider the specific vulnerabilities and strengths of black Detroiters, from the types of jobs created in the green economy to the location and design of cooling centers and green spaces.³⁸⁸

As climate action in Detroit unfolds, it's clear that the convergence of racial equity and sustainability is not just a goal but a necessity. Detroit's Climate Action Plan³⁸⁹ serves as a blueprint for marrying mitigation and adaptation strategies with the social and economic realities of the black community. It's a plan that doesn't just reduce emissions but also enhances the livability and resilience of the neighborhoods most in need of climate justice.



Life Below Water

The Detroit River has been the site of flagrant dumping over the last century, with cannons, firearms, cars, and bottles dating back to prohibition enveloped in its waters.³⁹⁰ Between 1946 and 1948, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare reported that 59 million

³⁸⁶Michigan Department of Natural Resources. (n.d.). Invasive Species - Watch List. Retrieved from <https://www.michigan.gov/invasives/id-report/watchlist>

³⁸⁷Sampson, N., Knott, K. H., Smith, D., Mekias, L., & Heeres, J. H. (2014). Planning for Climate Change in Legacy Cities: The Case of Detroit, Michigan. *Michigan Journal of Sustainability*, 2. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mjs.12333712.0002.004>

³⁸⁸One Detroit. (2023.). Local Environmental Advocates Fight Climate Change Impact on Black Detroiters. Retrieved from <https://www.onedetroitpbs.org/one-detroit/local-environmental-advocates-fight-climate-change-impact-on-black-detroiters/>

³⁸⁹Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice. (n.d.). Climate Action Plan. Retrieved from <https://detroitenvironmentaljustice.org/climate-action-plan/>

³⁹⁰Oliver Thompson, "The Detroit River Has Been a Dumping Ground. Now, Its Health Is Improving," *CBC News*, October 5, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/detroit-river-clean-up-1.6987771>.

gallons of oil and petroleum products had been deposited into the Detroit River per year.³⁹¹ In the early 1960s, the disposal of oil into the Detroit River had increased to 158,000 gallons annually, leading the EPA's predecessor to designate the Detroit River as one of the most polluted in the United States.³⁹² This is the result of decades-long "untreated waste discharges from industrial use and inputs from urban development and stormwater runoff" that produced "high levels of bacteria, PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyls], polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, metals, oils, and greases."³⁹³ The International Joint Commission has identified the Detroit River as an Area of Concern since 1987,³⁹⁴ and it can only be delisted once the following types of environmental degradation have been removed: restrictions on fish and wildlife consumption, fish tumors or other deformities, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, and degradation of fish and wildlife populations, among others.³⁹⁵ The Rouge River, a tributary of the Detroit River, has also been an Area of Concern since 1987 and the subject of "a dizzying list of government advisories [warning] anglers the fish are tainted with industrial waste."³⁹⁶ In 1969, the Rouge River was saturated with so much oil and other petroleum products that it caught on fire, with flames reaching 50 feet.³⁹⁷ The toxicity of the water has and continues to devastate the local ecosystem by "killing organisms living on the river bottom, causing cancer in bottom-feeding fish, and making game fish unsafe to eat."³⁹⁸



Life on Land

Since 2005, Detroit has lost forest cover, even as forest cover has increased throughout southeast Michigan.³⁹⁹ The city's few green spaces are often polluted and under-maintained. Many community organizations are doing the labor of cleaning green spaces, increasing green coverage, and educating the public about healthy landscapes.⁴⁰⁰ Greening of Detroit plants trees, mows overgrown lawns, and plants native species in order to enhance stormwater management.⁴⁰¹

³⁹¹John Hartig, "Great Lakes Moment: Lest We Forget – A History of Detroit River Oil Pollution," Great Lakes Now, February 5, 2024, <https://www.greatlakesnow.org/2024/02/great-lakes-moment-lest-we-forget-a-history-of-detroit-river-oil-pollution/>.

³⁹²Ibid.

³⁹³Region 5 Environmental Protection Agency, "Detroit River AOC," Great Lakes AOCs, August 27, 2019, New York, Great Lakes, <https://www.epa.gov/great-lakes-aocs/detroit-river-aoc>.

³⁹⁴Thompson, "The Detroit River Has Been a Dumping Ground. Now, Its Health Is Improving."

³⁹⁵Environmental Protection Agency, "Detroit River AOC."

³⁹⁶Kelly House, "Once Beset by Industrial Pollution, Rouge River on a Slow Path to Recovery," Great Lakes Now, May 10, 2023, <https://www.greatlakesnow.org/2023/05/once-beset-industrial-pollution-rouge-river-slow-path-recovery/>.

³⁹⁷Hartig, "Great Lakes Moment: Lest We Forget – A History of Detroit River Oil Pollution."

³⁹⁸Ibid.

³⁹⁹"Fragmented Forests: Tree Cover, Urban Sprawl Both Increased in Southeast Michigan Over the Past 30 Years." 2023. University of Michigan News. April 11, 2023. <https://news.umich.edu/fragmented-forests-tree-cover-urban-sprawl-both-increased-in-southeast-michigan-over-the-past-30-years/>.

⁴⁰⁰"Green Infrastructure." n.d. The Greening of Detroit. <https://www.greeningofdetroit.com/whatwedo>.

⁴⁰¹Ibid.



Peace, Justice & Institutions

Detroit, a majority Black city, had a 55% voter turnout rate in the last presidential election.⁴⁰² Moreover, voter suppression is rampant. In 2023, redistricting “lowered the number of African American voters in majority-Black Detroit to the point where they were no longer majorities.”⁴⁰³ In some areas, Black people made up less than 40% of the eligible voting population after redistricting. “This looks like something out of Alabama in the 1960s,” said Sean Trende, Senior Elections Analyst for RealClearPolitics.⁴⁰⁴ Political representation among Detroit City Council members is majority Black and people of color, given that Detroit’s population is majority Black.⁴⁰⁵

Detroit has a high crime rate, but Black people are disproportionately the victims of violent crime. Detroit is in the 16th percentile for safety “meaning 84% of cities are safer.”⁴⁰⁶ Its crime rate is 3.4 times higher than the US average.⁴⁰⁷ Black people, particularly Black men, die from homicide at far higher rates than other racial groups.⁴⁰⁸ The drug overdose death rate is 58 for Black Wayne County residents compared to 42 per 100,000 for white residents.⁴⁰⁹

Police violence is particularly rampant and traumatic for Black communities, as Black Detroiters are arrested at a rate 1.65 times higher than that of white Detroiters.⁴¹⁰ Wayne For non-violent, non-serious crimes such as loitering and public drug use, where officer discretion is a significant component in arrest, the Black arrest rate is 1.54 times higher than the white rate.⁴¹¹ The Black

⁴⁰² *CBS News*. 2021. “Voter Turnout in Detroit Gets a Slow Start on Election Day,” November 4, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/detroit/news/voter-turnout-in-detroit-gets-a-slow-start-on-election-day/>.

⁴⁰³ Beth LeBlank. 2023. “Panel Was ‘playing Dice’ Lowering Black Voter Numbers in Detroit Districts, Analyst Says.” *The Detroit News*, November 3, 2023. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2023/11/02/michigan-redistricting-trial-majority-minority-black-districts-detroit-royal-oak-ferndale-birmingham/71419212007/>.

⁴⁰⁴ Beth LeBlank. 2023.

⁴⁰⁵ US Census Bureau. 2023.

⁴⁰⁶ “The Safest and Most Dangerous Places in Detroit, MI: Crime Maps and Statistics,” n.d., *Crime Grade*. <https://crimegrade.org/safest-places-in-detroit-mi/#:~:text=The%20rate%20of%20crime%20in%20the%20Detroit%20area,part%20of%20the%20city%20to%20be%20the%20safest.>

⁴⁰⁷ “Crime Rate in Detroit, MI.” 2024. City-Data.Com. March 28, 2024. <https://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Detroit-Michigan.html>.

⁴⁰⁸ Oralandar Brand-Williams, *The Detroit News*. 2018. “Detroit Grapples With ‘devastating’ Impact of Black Male Homicides.” *The Detroit News*, October 23, 2018. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2018/10/21/detroit-dealing-devastating-impact-black-male-homicides/808535002/>.

⁴⁰⁹ US Census Bureau. 2023.

⁴¹⁰ “What Policing Costs: Detroit, MI,” n.d. *The Vera Institute of Justice*. <https://www.vera.org/publications/what-policing-costs-in-americas-biggest-cities/detroit-mi#:~:text=In%20Detroit%2C%20Michigan%2C%20Black%20people%20were%20arrested%20at,a%20rate%201.54%20times%20higher%20than%20white%20people>

⁴¹¹ “What Policing Costs: Detroit, MI.”

jail admission rate in Wayne County is 212 per 100,000 for Black people, but only 129 per 100,000 for white people.⁴¹²

Youth are particular victims of the criminal legal system. Although Michigan's record-keeping on youth incarceration is incomplete, estimates suggest that 30% of the youth in detention are there for a non-criminal offense.⁴¹³ Reports show youth in detention for disobeying parents, failing to attend online classes, and testing positive for cannabis.⁴¹⁴ It is estimated that 25% of the youth incarcerated in Michigan are Black, despite making up 17% of the Michigan population; the majority of detainees were female, showing the disproportionate burden on Black women and girls.⁴¹⁵



Partnerships to achieve the goal

In Detroit, government spending focuses on public safety over other services. For example, in 2019 the city budget allocated \$294.9 million to police but only \$9 million to the department of health.⁴¹⁶ As of fiscal year 2024-2025, the city focused on reducing property taxes and increasing the transportation and waste collection budgets.⁴¹⁷ The city offers millions of dollars in available grant funding, specifically for women and minority-owned businesses.⁴¹⁸

Detroit has one of the most generous corporate tax abatements compared to similar cities: between 2017 and 2021, Detroit averaged \$20 million foregone in corporate tax abatements, accounting for 16.8% of annual property tax revenue.⁴¹⁹ Corporations can receive a 50-100% abatement for a period of 1-15 years depending on the nature of their project.⁴²⁰ Compared to a

⁴¹²US Census Bureau. 2023.

⁴¹³Jodi S. Cohen & Duaa Eldeib. 2023. "Judges Are Locking up Children for Noncriminal Offenses Like Repeatedly Disobeying Their Parents and Skipping School." *ProPublica*, December 20, 2023. <https://www.propublica.org/article/judges-are-locking-up-children-for-noncriminal-offenses-like-repeatedly-disobeying-their-parents-and-skipping-school>

⁴¹⁴Jodi S. Cohen & Duaa Eldeib. 2023.

⁴¹⁵Jodi S. Cohen & Duaa Eldeib. 2023.

⁴¹⁶Clara Hendrickson. 2020. "Fact-checking Rep. Rashida Tlaib's Claim on Detroit's Police Spending Vs. Health Care." *Detroit Free Press*, June 16, 2020. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2020/06/16/fact-check-detroits-police-vs-health-s-pending-gap/3194086001/>.

⁴¹⁷Ebony JJ Curry Senior. 2024. "Detroit City Council Approves \$2.8 Billion Budget With Amendments | the Michigan Chronicle." *The Michigan Chronicle*. April 10, 2024. <https://michiganchronicle.com/detroit-city-council-approves-2-8-billion-budget-with-amendments/#:~:text=The%20Detroit%20City%20Council%20recently%20finalized%20the%20city%E2%80%99s,to%20the%20initial%20proposal%20by%20Mayor%20Mike%20Duggan.>

⁴¹⁸"Looking for a Grant? | City of Detroit." n.d. City of Detroit. <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/office-chief-financial-officer/ocfo-divisions/office-development-and-grants/looking-grant>.

⁴¹⁹Dr. Esmat Oshag-Osman, 2022.

⁴²⁰"Tax Incentives: How-To-Guide," *Detroit Economic Growth Corporation*, January 2021, <https://www.degc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/DEGC-Tax-Abatement-How-To-Manual-January-2021.pdf>.

sample of cities of similar size and demographics, Detroit provides by far the greatest amount in corporate tax abatements.⁴²¹ The Community Benefits Ordinance is a committee of nine members that collaborate to develop neighborhood improvement projects on all corporate development projects over \$75 million who benefit from tax abatements.⁴²² These projects can range in scale and cost, and must ultimately be approved by the City Council. In the past, Community Benefits projects have mandated environmental sustainability improvements to new buildings, ensured the safe disposal of hazardous waste, built public parks and sports areas, and guaranteed affordability of new apartments.⁴²³

VI. Reparative Policymaking

Housing

- Invest in historically redlined communities
 - Investment should be made in historically redlined communities to: renovate and repair homes, ensure clean and beautiful public spaces and streets, promote access to affordable healthcare, and protect families from lead exposure.
- Illegal overtaxation repair
 - Adopt the Coalition for Property Tax Justice’s recommendations⁴²⁴ for repair for those who suffered from illegal overtaxation, including:
 - Beneficiaries should be homeowners whose property was over-assessed from the period of *at least* 2008-2017. Evidence shows over-taxation has continued to the present day despite Mayor Duggan’s overhaul of the process.
 - The city should prioritize cash repayment to those who are eligible and desire direct financial compensation for their loss. In Oakland County, Michigan, the county set a legal precedent for this by allocating \$38 million to victims of illegal overtaxation. Those residents were entitled to income the city generated from foreclosure sales.⁴²⁵
 - Beneficiaries must have a say in determining what forms of repair they will receive, “making sure people can determine how they are made whole.”
 - The plan must establish new funding streams so as not to displace other Detroiters waiting for necessary social services.
- DLBA

⁴²¹“Tax Incentives: How-To-Guide,” 2021.

⁴²²“Community Benefits Ordinance,” *City of Detroit*, <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/planning-and-development-department/design-and-development-innovation/community-benefits-ordinance#:~:text=The%20Community%20Benefits%20Ordinance%20%28CBO%29%20is%20a%20law,2016%20and%20amended%20by%20City%20Council%20in%202021.>

⁴²³Karen Gage, 2018.

⁴²⁴“Official Report from the People’s Forum Held on Jan. 22, 2022,” *Coalition for Property Tax Justice*, April 14, 2022, <https://a.storyblok.com/f/98111/x/759a54629c/peoples-forum-report-4-13.pdf>.

⁴²⁵Nushrat Rahman, “Legal cases to watch for Michiganders who lost property to tax foreclosure,” *Bridge Detroit*, August 29, 2023, <https://www.bridgedetroit.com/legal-cases-to-watch-for-michiganders-who-lost-property-to-tax-foreclosure/>.

- Overhaul DLBA. Implement a new board structure with elected community members, not appointed leaders.
- DLBA should provide complete transparency on spending and decisions with the public.
- DLBA should adhere to a mandate to sell and revitalize areas that were ‘blighted’ or redlined, including quotas on home sales.
- Include a requirement to buyers to not ‘flip’ the homes and reside for at least 5 years.
- Allocate significant grant funding to buyers to support the ability of families to take on these dilapidated homes. Grants should count positively towards DLBA’s assessment of buyer suitability.
- Follow other recommendations outlined by Rudelich.⁴²⁶
- CBO
 - Reform CBO member structure. The majority of members should be elected by the local community, not appointed by the Mayor or by City Council.
 - Enhance transparency of CBO processes; update CBO results every quarter.
 - Reduce corporate tax abatements.

Pollution

- Enforce the Detroit City Council resolution that in 2006 charged DWSD to implement the Water Affordability Plan.⁴²⁷ Amendments on water bill caps should be co-created with local advocacy groups and community-led organizations. Existing recommendations maintain that poor Detroit residents should not pay more than 3.5 to 4.7 percent of their income on water.⁴²⁸
- Partner with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, and communities affected by protracted environmental harm to regularly monitor air and water quality and to identify the types and quantities of pollutants affecting Black residents of Detroit.
- Require the City of Detroit to immediately disclose findings of toxins, pollutants, or contaminants on land and water designated for public use to avoid undue harm to local communities.
 - This entails a thorough, transparent assessment of land and water conditions prior to any construction and the City of Detroit’s obligation to restore the safety and health of that environment.
- Ensure that redevelopment site and revitalization projects are distributed equitably and done in collaboration and with the consent of Black communities in Detroit.
- Create a mechanism to reinforce corporate responsibility and accountability for cumulative environmental injuries.

Food Insecurity

- Secure the City of Detroit’s support for the existing localization of the food system.⁴²⁹ Through further legal recognition of agricultural practices and zoning updates:

⁴²⁶Rudelich, Samantha. 2023.

⁴²⁷Rector, “Accumulating Risk: Environmental Justice and The History of Capitalism in Detroit, 1880-2015.” 309.

⁴²⁸*How We the People of Detroit Are Fighting Water Injustice.*

⁴²⁹Rogers, Interview with Alyssa Rogers.

- More Black residents who cultivate land can become owners.
- Black residents with diverse livestock will not have to risk the confiscation of animals that are crucial to their neighborhoods' needs and well being.
- Increase local knowledge of the legal process for neighborhood gardening initiatives and land zoning regulations to ensure that community-based systems achieve permanence and acknowledgment by the City of Detroit.
- Request that the City of Detroit provide accessible and equitable financing opportunities for Black residents who want to open, own, and operate their own local grocery stores.
- Since most food insecure individuals in Detroit depend on retailers beyond their neighborhoods and others travel outside the city, ensure that bus routes facilitate access to grocery stores by minimizing transfers and providing adequate service frequencies.⁴³⁰

Economic and Business Development

- Open more space downtown for Black business owners and vendors to repopulate
- Set education fund/scholarship/mentor program from Black enterprise owners to young Black business owners/youth interested in business
- Advocacy for increasing Black Business owners' visibility in the Detroit market, through organized campaigns and events for rebranding aiming for more visibility towards Black owned business.

Education

- Start targeted literacy interventions early, focusing on minority and economically disadvantaged students. Programs could include summer reading initiatives and after-school tutoring that engage local libraries and community centers.
- Improve transportation options for students traveling to schools outside their immediate neighborhoods by providing subsidized transport or developing more efficient bus routes to reduce travel time and cost for families.
- Launch programs aimed at increasing high school completion rates among Black and Hispanic students, such as mentoring, enhanced counseling services, and support groups that help students manage both academic and personal challenges.
- Increase investment in early childhood education facilities in impoverished areas, making them affordable and accessible. Staff these facilities with qualified early childhood educators to ensure quality early learning experiences.
- Implement recruitment initiatives to build a racially diverse teaching workforce that reflects the student population. Offer scholarships for teacher training to minority candidates and provide incentives for teachers to work in high-demand areas.
- Invest in upgrading school facilities to ensure they are safe, inclusive, and conducive to learning, with a focus on schools serving minority and disabled students to provide equitable access to resources.
- Establish a system for continuous monitoring and assessment of educational policies and interventions to adapt and improve based on feedback and data from affected communities.

⁴³⁰“A City of Detroit Policy on Food Security ‘Creating a Food Secure Detroit.’”

Conclusion

This Capstone project was intended to measure the well-being of the Afro-descendent population in Detroit, Michigan through the lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Through desk research, interviews, and thorough engagement with Detroit communities, students developed an analysis of the historical harms that targeted Black communities for disinvestment, displacement, and violence. Throughlines were connected from historical policies, practices, and systems to present-day realities for Detroit's Black communities in five key issue areas: food insecurity, pollution, education, economic development, and housing. The report demonstrated systematic disenfranchisement of Black communities perpetuated by the City of Detroit, leading to poor health outcomes, poverty, and substandard education. These outcomes can be directly traced to policies of urban renewal, redlining, and racism towards Detroit's Black communities.

In other audit reports, cities may be given a 'grade' that indicates the extent to which they adhere to human rights standards for Black residents. Given the lack of disaggregated, quantitative data, this project relied heavily on first-person accounts and qualitative interviews to drive the research. Therefore, providing a grade to the city's 'score' for human rights could be interpreted as subjective. However, as indicated by this analysis, Detroit's fulfillment of human rights standards along these 17 dimensions is poor. Both qualitative and quantitative data demonstrated that Black people fare worse than white people and other races on most indicators of wellbeing, and fare worse than baseline international standards of wellbeing.

The recommendations put forward are a starting point for communities to consider the many avenues for enriching Black communities and beginning to repair from both historic and contemporary harms. These recommendations were directly informed by the historic and contemporary policies that contributed to present-day inequalities. Moreover, these recommendations were informed by, and created in collaboration with, Black communities in Detroit that are presently filling in the gaps left by racist and neglectful institutions.

Appendix I: Structure of Legislative Bodies in Detroit

The Detroit city government is run by a Mayor, City Council, and Board of Police Commissioners, and Clerk.⁴³¹ All offices are elected except for the members of the Board of Police Commissioners, who are appointed by the Mayor.⁴³² Detroit's Mayor has significant power over the legislative process, often called a "strong mayoral" system.⁴³³

Home Rule

As per the Home Rule Charter of Detroit, the city has home rule powers.⁴³⁴ "Home Rule provisions often state that local powers are to be 'liberally construed.'"⁴³⁵ Though Home Rule varies widely from state to state, generally speaking, there are two concepts that are established by home rule: (1) local governments can take action on various different and important issues

⁴³¹"Government of Detroit," *Wikiwand*.

⁴³²*Ibid*.

⁴³³*Ibid*.

⁴³⁴"Charter of the City of Detroit," *Detroit Charter*, 2012.

⁴³⁵Laurie Reynolds et al., *Cases and Materials on State and Local Government Law*, 9th Edition (West Academic Publishing, 2022). 116-117.

without having to go to the state for specific authorization, and (2) local government decisions concerning these important local issues are protected from displacement by state law.

Reparations Taskforce

The Detroit Reparations Task Force (DRTD) is the main reparation body in the city of Detroit. The DRTD consists of 13 members. Its goal is to “develop recommendations for housing and economic development programs that address historical discrimination against the Black community in Detroit.”⁴³⁶ The Task Force was established through a ballot initiative in 2021 that passed with 80% of the vote.⁴³⁷ Other than a number of internal strategy meetings, the Task Force has decided to adopt a quarterly public meeting schedule which has yet to be made public regarding FY2024. Meanwhile, the Task Force is actively engaging with the public and through education programs, where the citizens would have the access to submit their individual comments and inquiries to the Task Force directly.

City of Detroit Reparation Taskforce (DRTF)⁴³⁸

Taskforce Details

Members :13-appointed by City Council President, Mary Sheffield

Term Length: NA

Point Person Contact Information

Residents can submit public comments and other information to the following email: reparations@detroitmi.gov.

Member roster

Co-Chairs

Cidney Calloway, CoChair

Keith Williams, CoChair

Members

Jasahn Larsosa, Exec. Committee

Dorian Tyus, Exec. Committee

Dr. Kefentse Chike, District 1

Dr. Jeffery Robinson, District 2

Camille Collins, District 3

Bernard Parker, District 4

Dr. Gregory Hicks, District 5

Dr. Gloria House, District 6

Janis Hazel, District 7

Edythe Ford, At Large

Yolanda Jack, At Large

⁴³⁶“Reparations Task Force,” *Detroit Government*.

⁴³⁷Louis Aguillar, “Detroit Reparations Initiative Takes A Step Forward,” *The Detroit News*, Feb. 24, 2023.

⁴³⁸“Reparations Task Force,” City of Detroit, February 3, 2024,

<https://detroitmi.gov/government/city-council/city-council-president-district-5/reparations-task-force>.

Appendix II: Relevant Policies

*Detroit City Charter (2012-2020)*⁴³⁹

- Through the Michigan Constitution, Detroit has “comprehensive home rule power” which is limited only by the Constitution, the City Charter, and by statute.
- City Council is Detroit’s legislative body, and the president of the City Council has administrative responsibility. At least a majority of the City Council members present must vote to adopt an action.
- Ordinances “provide a permanent rule for the conduct of government.”
 - This includes amending, repealing, or adding “language to the Detroit City Code; [establishing] a prohibition for violation of which a penalty is imposed;” [and providing] for the laying and collecting of rents, tolls, excises, and taxes”
- Resolutions are “adopted to express a determination, to direct a particular action, or to approve a singular event”

*City of Detroit, City Council Legislative Policy Division, Resolution establishing the structure of the Reparations Task Force*⁴⁴⁰

- “Reparations for centuries of Black Americans’ enslavement, and subsequent second-class citizenship rooted in structural racism and discrimination, are a long overdue recognition that Black people face unfair and unequal conditions, created within public and private sectors, and reproduced over time and place. Reparations are intended as a way to overcome the reluctance to take action to cure these systemic ills, and to help create true equality...”
- “The Reparations Task Force shall submit a written report of its findings and recommendations to the City Council no later than the date that is eighteen (18) months from the date of the first meeting of the Reparations Task Force.”

⁴³⁹City Government, Charter of the City of Detroit § (2012).

https://detroitmi.gov/Portals/0/docs/Publications/COD%20Charter/2_29_2012_CharterDocument_2_1_WI_THOUT_COMMENTARY_1.pdf.

⁴⁴⁰Legislative Policy Division, City Council Of Detroit

<https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2023-04/Reso%20Establishing%20Reparations%20Task%20Force%202022.pdf> §. Accessed February 2, 2024.