

Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force

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Sam Stragand is the Senior Program Manager for the Poverty Solutions Detroit Partnership on Economic Mobility at the University of Michigan.

Rea Maci is a Research Associate at the Center for Social Solutions and a recent graduate of the Masters of Public Policy (MPP '24) at the University of Michigan.

Marquise Griffin is a doctoral student in English and Education at the University of Michigan.

Matthew D. Lassiter is a Louis Evans Professor of History, an Arthur F Thurnau Professor, Professor of History, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and Professor of Urban and Regional Planning with the A Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan.

Rob Mickey is an Associate Professor of Political Science and a Faculty Associate for the Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.

Jennifer Boock Seth is a Graduate Student Research Assistant and a Climate and Space Sciences and Engineering doctoral student in the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan.

Lara Tobias-Tarsh is an undergraduate student in Climate and Meteorology at the University of Michigan.

Sydney Tunstall is a doctoral candidate in English and Women and Gender Studies and Research Associate at the Center for Social Solutions at the University of Michigan.

Jeremy N. Bassis is a Professor of Climate and Space Sciences and Engineering and Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan.

Rita Chin is the Associate Dean at Rackham Graduate School and a Professor of History at the University of Michigan.

Jessica Cruz is the Research Projects Managing Director at the Center for Social Solutions at the University of Michigan.

Earl Lewis is the founding director of the center for social solutions, a professor of afroamerican and african studies and public policy, and a professor of history at the University of Michigan.

Lauren A. Hood is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Urban Planning in the A Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan.

Kamri Hudgins is a doctoral candidate in political science and a Research Associate at the Center for Social Solutions at the University of Michigan.

Amy Jo Schulz is a University, Diversity and Social Transformation Professor and Professor of

Health Behavior and Health Education in the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan.

Trina Shanks is a Harold R. Johnson Collegiate Professor of Social Work and Professor of Social Work and director of the Center for Equitable Family and Community Well-Being at the University of Michigan.

Allison L. Steiner is a Professor of Climate and Space Sciences and Engineering in the College of Engineering at the University of Michigan.

Mo Torres is an Assistant Professor and Postdoctoral Scholar in the Gerald R Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan.

Alford Young, Jr. is a Professor of Sociology and Afroamerican and African Studies, and Associate Director of the Center for Social Solutions at the University of Michigan.

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Introduction

In August 2023, the Detroit Reparations Task Force called upon several partners at the University of Michigan to develop a harms report designed to inform their recommendations to the Detroit City Council. Partners include: the Center for Social Solutions, Poverty Solutions, the Center for Equitable Family and Community Well-Being, and the Rackham Graduate School.

The Detroit Reparations Task Force identified key focus areas and established a scope of work for UM Partners. The areas, outlined in the sections that follow, include housing, public health, drug policy and policing, education, and employment and economic development. The task force and UM Partners met regularly to build trust and receive input during the process of researching and writing the report. The report was developed through various methods, including identification and analysis of archival evidence and census data, synthesis of existing scholarship, and interviews conducted at the request of the task force. This research work was undertaken by partners at Poverty Solutions, the Center for Equitable Family and Community Well-Being, in addition to a cross-disciplinary faculty group convened by Rackham Graduate School. The faculty group led project-based courses covering the topics identified in the task force's scope of work. Additionally, Rackham Graduate School offered a graduate course during the Winter 2024 semester to connect faculty and students working on research projects related to the harms report from various fields, including public policy, urban and regional planning, social work, political science, public health, as well as climate and space sciences and engineering.

Historical Context

The narrative of Detroit is inexorably linked with the broader American history of racial injustice, tracing its origins from the legacies of chattel slavery, through the era of Jim Crow, to contemporary issues, such as mass incarceration and racial disparities in housing, education, and more. Despite Michigan's role as a beacon on the Underground Railroad, Black Detroiters¹ faced persistent barriers in housing, employment, and civil rights, which perpetuated racial hierarchies reminiscent of the South. As part of the Great Migration, Black families fled the oppressive conditions of the Jim Crow South only to meet new forms of segregation and discrimination in Detroit. These systemic barriers were institutionalized through policies like redlining, restrictive covenants, and urban renewal, which segregated the city economically and residentially and laid the groundwork for vibrant yet resource-deprived enclave communities of predominantly Black residents.

The struggle for civil rights in the 1960s initiated legislative changes such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Fair Housing Act of 1968, yet the structural barriers in Detroit remained. Phenomena such as white flight, where white residents migrated en masse

¹ This report will generally refer to people who identify as Black or African American as “Black.” Some records like census reports have used or continue to use other terminology to refer to this group, so some quotations or direct references may utilize language like “African American” or “non-white.”

from urban centers to suburban areas, often driven by racial tensions and discriminatory lending practices, aggravated socio-economic disparities and hastened urban decline in Detroit. The 1967 Detroit riots or uprisings highlighted deep-seated frustrations over racial inequities, particularly in policing and housing, further worsening these disparities and significantly affecting the well-being of Black Detroiters. In the wake of urban upheaval, aggressive policing tactics and criminalization of minor infractions became the policies of choice for reasserting law and order in what has come to be known as the era of mass incarceration. This approach was accompanied by a glaring lack of protection against violent crimes in Black communities. As the city's core was abandoned by white residents, there was a notable disinvestment in public services that led to poor housing conditions and significant poverty. The City² also increasingly allowed major hazardous industrial operations to be disproportionately located in Black neighborhoods, which further lowered property values and created health crises.

These experiences and conditions are not unique to Black Detroiters or the City of Detroit. They are part of a larger pattern across the United States where Black communities of all sizes face racial disparities because of local, state, and federal government decisions. These gaps and inequalities often include limited access to well-paying jobs, underfunded schools, inadequate healthcare services, and insufficient housing and transportation options. These issues, in short, are not isolated to a single community or city, but are part of a historical legacy of inequitable policies and practices implemented by the federal, state, and municipal governments across the United States.

The Detroit harms report addresses these multifaceted injustices by documenting and analyzing the historical policies that have contributed to the specific conditions of inequity for Black Detroiters. It traces the urban policies that have negatively and disproportionately impacted Black Detroiters, examining factors such as housing segregation and urban renewal projects. Along with providing a comprehensive account of how these policies have systematically disenfranchised Black residents, the report highlights the ongoing impact of these harms. Placing Detroit's challenges within the legacies of systemic racism is crucial for fostering meaningful change and pursuing reparative measures for the city's Black residents.

Objectives

This report aims to document the injustices and human rights violations experienced by Black Detroiters, in order to establish a historical record that underscores the City of Detroit's active role in perpetrating and sustaining these harms. By detailing these injustices, the report provides a foundation for understanding the extent and depth of the harms experienced to make a compelling case for reparative actions.

² In this report, “city” will generally refer to the geographic area and its inhabitants. The capitalized “City” will refer more specifically to Detroit’s municipal government and associated governmental units.

This documentation is crucial for holding institutions accountable and ensuring that the narratives of those affected are recognized. It is not this report's place or aim to further validate the lives and experiences of Black Detroiters who have long been organizing and struggling against the discriminatory policies outlined herein. At the same time, it is important to document how discriminatory policies have affected the livelihoods of Black people and Black communities in Detroit. In so doing, this report can serve as a valuable resource for other municipalities and communities that are also working towards reparative action and that see their own circumstances mirrored in the narrative of Detroit. Consequently, this report acknowledges the reality of their experiences and aims to provide a foundation for broader systemic change.

Conducting a harms report is an essential step in pursuing reparations, which for the purposes of this report, is defined as an attempt to repair the historical harms and contemporary injustices against Black Americans, and can include financial redress from the municipal government, a formal acknowledgement and apology, as well as educational, housing, and healthcare programs. A harms report lays the groundwork for informed and targeted reparation strategies. It enables the identification of specific areas where reparative actions are needed and provides a basis for developing policy recommendations that address the root causes of racial disparities. By presenting a thorough analysis of historical and ongoing inequities, the report informs the development of comprehensive reparation plans that aim to promote equitable policies. This strategic documentation supports local efforts and contributes to a national dialogue on reparations, serving as a model for other communities seeking justice and accountability, all in the spirit of reconciliation and repair.

Scope of Work and Approach

The Detroit Reparations Task Force established a scope of work, which identified five key focus areas for this report: 1) housing and land use, 2) policing, 3) quality of life, 4) education, and 5) economic development and economic insecurity. The report begins by detailing the 20th-century discriminatory housing and land use policies, either enacted or enforced by the City, which laid the foundation for enduring financial, social, and racial inequities. These policies led to segregation, displacement, and disinvestment that still shape the city's landscape today. The report highlights how these harms were compounded by the detrimental impacts of over-policing and drug policies in Black communities, disparate environmental impacts that led to health disparities, chronic underfunding and mismanagement of Detroit Public Schools Community District, as well as emergency management, austerity measures, unemployment and transit inequity. By tracing contemporary disparities back to these historical municipal policies and practices, this report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the systemic inequities affecting Black Detroiters that can serve as a foundation for meaningful reparative measures.

Scope of Injury

To understand and address the contemporary harms experienced by Black Detroiters, it is essential to examine the historical urban policies that have shaped these conditions. This report provides a detailed analysis of the 20th-century phenomena of redlining, white flight, and urban renewal, which together resulted in housing segregation and a Black majority urban core. The distinctive housing and residential patterns that characterize the City of Detroit are central to understanding the full range of systemic inequities that persist today.

Defining Key Terms

These historical themes are interwoven throughout the report and are critical to explaining the full scope of injury imperfectly captured in the current disparities faced by Black Detroiters in relation to quality of life, economic opportunity, and education. For this reason, it is important to first define key terms used throughout the report. Working definitions for redlining, white flight, and urban renewal are offered below.

Redlining

In its present-day usage, redlining generally refers to the practice of systematically denying services or providing discriminatory terms and conditions to residents of certain areas based on racial or ethnic composition. For example, a mortgage company is redlining when it does not offer mortgages to homebuyers in predominantly Black Detroit while offering mortgages for similar homes in the predominantly white suburbs. Historically, however, redlining originally referred specifically to a set of maps developed by the federal Home Owners Loan Corporation, or HOLC, in the 1930s and 40s, that included literal red lines around many of the country's Black communities. The federal government developed these maps in order to provide public and private lenders with a risk assessment for where and how to lend, and many of these risk assessments explicitly referenced the race or ethnicity of a community when determining its risk level: a community of non-ethnic white families was low risk, whereas a community of Black families allegedly signaled the highest risk. Communities assessed as risky or bad investments - including almost all assessed Black communities - often could not access home loans as lenders stayed away and the federal government refused to underwrite or insure loans in the area.

White Flight

Following World War II, modern American suburbs began emerging around the country's cities. These new suburbs promised first-time homeownership, green space, and tranquility to many. However, this opportunity for upward mobility was not equally available to Black families, who faced discriminatory financial and social barriers that made it difficult or even impossible to buy housing in the newly-forming suburbs. For example, many white families obtained home loans through the veterans benefits of the GI Bill, whereas discrimination from banks and other community organizations that assessed qualifications for GI Bill home loans meant that very few

Black veterans could do the same. Many white families left their city neighborhoods as Black families began to move into the same neighborhoods, either because of their own racist beliefs or because of a fear that the addition of Black families to the neighborhood would make the neighborhood a more risky investment according to the federal government (see Redlining definition above). This migration, which accelerated throughout the 1960s, was facilitated by federal and local policies, such as interstate highway construction and the creation of new suburban municipalities. The movement of white families to the suburbs left Black residents in increasingly segregated and economically deprived urban neighborhoods.

Urban Renewal

Urban renewal was a federally-financed effort to remove often-dilapidated housing, aging factories, and even whole neighborhoods from major cities. The nationwide efforts began in earnest after the passage of the Housing Act of 1949, which provided both funding and authorization for “slum clearance.” These projects demolished homes, small businesses, and entire neighborhoods in order to make room for highways, public-use buildings, and modern revenue-producing complexes (for manufacturing or business). For example, in New York, urban renewal involved the clearance of housing, specifically tenements, where poor, working class families squeezed into small dwellings or apartments in unsanitary conditions. Many of these areas were replaced not with housing but with new public spaces like Lincoln Center and the westside highway, which gave wealthier outlying populations easier access to the city and its famed public arts buildings. In Detroit, as in many communities, although local, state, and federal officials promised displaced residents new and improved housing as part of urban renewal policies, not enough units were constructed – either as private single-family dwellings or as public housing – to replace what was lost. That is why the writer James Baldwin described urban renewal as “Negro Removal”: urban renewal projects aimed at revitalizing city centers often resulted in the displacement of Black residents.

These phenomena, along with other factors, resulted in the stark present-day segregation of Detroit and its suburbs, and this segregation, coupled with decades of disinvestment, has affected everything from housing to health and education.

Present-day data provides a telling if incomplete picture of the disparities between Detroit (itself 78% Black), its Black residents, and the surrounding suburbs and their white residents. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic brought these disparities into stark relief. A 2021 study from the Brookings Institute, New Detroit, and University of Michigan found that, while people living in Detroit were less likely to get diagnosed with COVID than their suburban counterparts, Detroit residents were more likely to die from it.³ Additionally, Black residents of Detroit were much

³ Ray, Rashawn, Jane Fran Morgan, Lydia Wileden, Samantha Elizondo, and Destiny Wiley-Yancy, *Examining and Addressing COVID-19 Racial Disparities in Detroit* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, New Detroit, University of Michigan, 2021), https://detroitssurvey.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Detroit_Covid_report_final.pdf.

more likely to have a family member die from COVID-19 than white residents, at 42% and 9%, respectively.^{4,5} Perhaps most stark, however, is the significant gap in life expectancy between Black Detroiters and their suburban counterparts, which is rooted in historical, economic, and environmental factors. As of 2021, the average life expectancy of a Detroit resident was 69 years,⁶ eleven years shorter than the expected 80.1 years for a white resident of suburban Oakland County.⁷ This significant gap reflects broader systemic inequities like higher pollution levels, economic instability, and limited access to quality healthcare. The cumulative effect of these disadvantages has resulted in a persistent life expectancy gap and remains a legacy of segregation and discrimination.

Similar gaps exist across wellbeing indicators. Residents of Detroit have a median household income of around \$35,000, about half of what residents of the larger metropolitan area make. Almost a third of Detroit residents have incomes below the poverty line, while only about 14% of residents from the larger metropolitan area do. Detroit has more than double the unemployment rate of the overall metropolitan area. In education, 83% of Detroiters graduate from high school and only 16% graduate from a four-year college, whereas 91% of metropolitan residents graduate from high school and 33% from four-year colleges.⁸ More than 70% of metropolitan residents own their homes, whereas only 49% of Detroiters do. Even for those Detroiters who do own their homes, the housing wealth gap is enormous: in 2022, the median metropolitan area home value was \$223,800, whereas the median home value in Detroit was \$66,700.⁹ If anything, these data points underestimate the actual gap between Black Detroiters and their white neighbors in the city and across the metropolitan area. Still, the interplay between race, geography, and well-being is prominent in the Detroit area, and that is largely due to the area's historic discriminatory housing and land use policies.

Housing and Land Use

Many of the harms discussed throughout this report have their roots in 20th century housing and land use policies that the City of Detroit implemented or enforced. These discriminatory policies and practices laid the foundation for many of the financial and social challenges the city faces today and inform harms experienced by residents in a range of areas outside of housing.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The percentages reported are organized by census tract to control for differences across neighborhoods and other socioeconomic factors.

⁶ Detroit Future City, "Health: Life Expectancy Indicator," <https://detroitfuturecity.com/dashboard/health/> (visited Aug. 12, 2024).

⁷ Ignaczak, Nina Misuraca, "Understanding social determinants of health in Detroit," *Plant Detroit*, Oct. 30, 2023, <https://planetdetroit.org/2023/10/understanding-social-determinants-of-health-in-detroit/> (utilizing data from [the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#)).

⁸ <https://scorecard.prosperitynow.org/data-by-location#msa/19820>

⁹ American Community Survey 2022 5-year estimate.

Black residents of Detroit have long experienced harm through discrimination in housing, due to both the City Government's official policies and the often violent resistance from Detroit's white residents. Today's Black Detroit residents feel this history personally, as residents experience both present-day discrimination and the legacy of past harms. Many Black Detroiters can point to specific actions the City has taken that have brought them harm through discrimination, displacement, or disinvestment, and their individual stories are important and must be honored. However, this section focuses on the structural forces that led to widespread individual harms.

These harms in fact trace all the way back to Detroit's founding in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Many of the first Black people to arrive in Detroit were enslaved, some by the city's leading white citizens. Scholars like Tiya Miles have recently brought to light many details of this period and of the lives of these early inhabitants.¹⁰ Throughout most of the 19th Century, it was illegal for a Black person to own property and it was illegal for Black person to get an education. Because of both explicit and implicit exclusionary policies, very few Black people settled in Detroit during the 19th Century, with only 4,111 Black residents counted in the 1900 Census comprising 1.4% of the city's population.¹¹

This section picks up the historical narrative at the dawn of the 20th century, where it traces the City and its inhabitants' role in first establishing and then perpetuating housing segregation. This section will then detail the City's failure to adequately repair those harms through policies that instead displaced Black Detroiters and left these same communities underinvested and vulnerable to further harms.

Early 20th Century: Segregation, Restrictive Covenants, and Violent White Resistance

Black migration into Detroit increased significantly from 1900 to 1930 when the city housed more than 120,000 Black residents comprising 7.7% of the city's population.¹² Both newly-arrived and long-established Black residents of this era faced institutional discrimination and violent resistance from both Detroit's city government and its white residents. The vast majority of white property owners refused to sell or rent to Black residents. Often these racial restrictions became part of the property deed itself in a provision known as a restrictive covenant. This meant that these racially-restricted properties could not be sold to non-white families even if the individual owner wanted to make the property available for sale to anyone regardless of race. Although no one has documented the exact number of racially restrictive covenants, as has been done in some other cities such as Minneapolis,¹³ researchers have developed conservative

¹⁰ See, for example, Mapping Slavery in Detroit, <https://mappingdetroitsslavery.com/>, or Miles' Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Bondage and Freedom in the City of the Straits (New York: New Press, 2017).

¹¹ IPUMS NHGIS, University of Minnesota, www.nhgis.org (utilizing census data).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Mapping Prejudice: Maps & Data," University of Minnesota, <https://mappingprejudice.umn.edu/racial-covenants/maps-data>.

estimates based on the amount of housing constructed during this time period between roughly 1917 and 1947. Sociologist Harold Black estimated that around 80% of homes - around 43,000 - constructed in the outlying parts of Detroit included racially restrictive covenants, mostly written into the subdivisions as they were planned and developed.¹⁴ This meant that exclusionary practices enforced by the City and its court system locked Black families out of the growing homeownership movement that brought significant wealth to white working class families across the city. The 1940 city homeownership rates reflect the consequences: 41.4% of white families owned their homes while only 14.7% of nonwhite families owned theirs.¹⁵

Black families that did attempt to move into segregated white neighborhoods faced the threat of physical violence from white residents and the passive acquiescence to that violence by the City and its police department. Most famously, in 1925, Doctor Ossian Sweet bought a house on the eastside of Detroit in an all-white neighborhood. When he and his family moved into the property, they faced daily mobs of violent white residents threatening their property and their lives. Instead of protecting the newly-arrived Black family, the Detroit Police mostly allowed the white mobs to grow. The resulting chaos culminated in violence when two members of the white mob were shot from gunfire emanating from the house and one person died. Dr. Sweet and several of his present relatives were arrested and charged with murder, but were ultimately acquitted after successfully arguing self-defense.¹⁶ Experiences like this were commonplace and underscored the Black community's isolation. The violence was not restricted to Black families attempting to buy housing in where mostly white people lived. In 1917, for example, local white residents invaded an apartment complex that had recently welcomed Black tenants at 202 Harper Ave. and violently ejected the families onto the street.¹⁷

Facing both legal and extralegal - violent - resistance to their presence in large parts of the city, the vast majority of Black Detroit residents lived in a few restricted areas. The emerging Black middle class owned clusters of houses on the West Side and in Conant Gardens. A semi-rural community of Black homeowners built housing in the Wyoming-Eight Mile neighborhood. The majority of Black Detroit residents, however, lived in Black Bottom, a neighborhood directly east of downtown. This enclave faced extreme overcrowding as more and more Black families arrived in Detroit and no more housing opportunities opened up. The limited opportunities available to Black residents involved substandard housing, some of which lacked basic plumbing into the 1940s. Despite these violent means of segregation and the lack of city investment in infrastructure and sanitation, Black Bottom and its neighboring commercial district, Paradise Valley, became important centers of Black Detroit culture and community.

¹⁴ "Restrictive Covenants in Relation to Segregated Negro Housing in Detroit," Harold Black (1947), available at https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1933&context=oa_theses, cited in Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2005 repr.), 44.

¹⁵ IPUMS NHGIS.

¹⁶ "The Chronicles of Dr. Ossian H. Sweet," Ossian Sweet Foundation, <https://ohsweetfoundation.org/who-is-ossian-h-sweet%3F-1>.

¹⁷ Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, and Harry Holzer, *Detroit Divided*, (2000), 147.

Redlining, the Denial of Black Veterans' Benefits, and White Flight

In the 1930s, the federal government further cemented the region's segregated housing patterns and discriminatory policies with the creation of the Home Owners Loan Corporation, or HOLC. The federal government created HOLC and several other federal housing-related agencies in order to expand homeownership through federally-backed thirty-year fixed mortgages and refinancing options in the wake of the Great Depression's high number of residential foreclosures. HOLC did in theory accept refinancing loan applications from African Americans and reported 880 Black-owned single family home refinanced mortgages in Detroit in 1940.¹⁸ However, HOLC's far more lasting and harmful legacy was its creation of a "residential security map" for Detroit and its surrounding suburbs in 1939. This map rated residential housing areas on a scale assessing presumed risk to any private or public investor: red or "D" grade for "hazardous," yellow or "C" grade for "definitely declining," blue or "B" grade for "still desirable," and green or "A" grade for "best." The agency used these ratings to decide whether or not to incentivize home buying by setting the availability and terms of federally-insured mortgages in the area. The agency ostensibly used a range of criteria to determine an area's rating, such as its distance from amenities like shopping centers and the age and quality of its housing. However, the explicitly racist descriptions of areas betrayed the agency's most important determining factor: the race of the area's occupants and the risk of racial "infiltration." "Whereas 100% of 'A'-rated areas were exclusively white and wealthy or upper middle class, HOLC appraisers gave over 90% of areas with African American residents D ratings."¹⁹

Attaching these discriminatory ratings to Detroit's Black neighborhoods had a devastating impact on the racial wealth gap in the Detroit region. Houses in neighborhoods deemed "hazardous" or "definitely declining" struggled to attract banks willing to extend mortgage products. This meant that a current resident of one of these neighborhoods would have trouble selling their house because a potential buyer would almost certainly not be able to obtain a mortgage to purchase the house. Similarly, few insurers would offer policies to protect homes in these neighborhoods. Among many other consequences, this meant that houses in "hazardous" or "definitely declining" zones - areas with Black residents or other stigmatized racial or ethnic groups - were effectively worth less than comparable houses in areas without these groups or the "threat" of their "infiltration."

Housing developers in and around Detroit needed to prove that their proposed subdivisions would not lead to "racial infiltration" in order to obtain construction loans. Most infamously, in order to obtain a Federal Housing Administration loan, a developer built a half mile long six-foot high wall separating a planned white housing development from the neighboring Black

¹⁸ Nelson, Robert K., LaDale Winling, et al. "Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America." Edited by Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers. *American Panorama: An Atlas of United States History*, 2023. <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

community of Eight Mile-Wyoming.²⁰ The Birwood Wall and the City's desire to clear out the longstanding community actually energized the Eight Mile-Wyoming community to organize and successfully defend their housing, although the Birwood Wall still stands today.

White residents living in areas that received "hazardous" or "definitely declining" ratings took seriously the message that they needed to move to areas with "still desirable" or "best" ratings, almost all of which were all-white and located at the edge of the city or in the surrounding suburbs. The results of this migration are readily observed in the burgeoning populations of newly-formed suburbs around Detroit. In 1940, the year after the HOLC map was published, the city had a population of 1,623,452 while the surrounding suburbs had a population of 442,846. City residents made up 79% of the region's population. By 1950, city residents made up 70% of the regional population. By 1960, that percentage had slipped to 44%, with about 1.7 million in Detroit and 2.1 million in its surrounding suburbs.²¹

Many of these recent suburban arrivals brought with them veterans benefits earned during their service in World War II. About 200,000 Detroiters joined the military and countless more worked to support the effort.²² The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the GI Bill, provided veterans with - among other educational and business benefits - low-cost home loans of up to 50% off the purchase price. Not all veterans had access to these benefits, however. The federal government left the distribution and implementation of these benefits to openly discriminatory institutions like realtors, banks, and even white homeowners' associations, and these institutions systematically denied Black veterans access to these benefits.²³ The consequences were dire: a 1956 nationwide estimate by G.L. Holland, then assistant to the VA Administrator, concluded that "fewer than 30,000 of the 1,154,486 eligible African American veterans successfully accessed the homeownership program." This meant that fewer than 3% of eligible Black veterans successfully accessed the program and fewer than 1% of GI Bill loans went to Black veterans.²⁴ If Black Detroiters joined the military at the same rate as all Detroiters, at least 20,000 Black Detroiters served in World War II. If only 3% of those servicemembers successfully accessed the GI home loan program, over 19,000 Black Detroit World War II veterans were unable to access their benefits to purchase homes in or around Detroit despite risking their lives for the country and its democracy.

²⁰ Sugrue, 64.

²¹ IPUMS NHGIS.

²² "Arsenal of Democracy," *Encyclopedia of Detroit*, Detroit Historical Society, <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/arsenal-democracy#:~:text=While%20about%20200%2C00%20Detroiters%20joined,a%20strain%20on%20Detroit's%20housing>.

²³ Mitria Wilson-Spotser, "Honoring America's Promise: How Passing Unused VA Loan Benefits Down to Veteran's Descendants Could Narrow the African-American Homeownership Gap," (March 2022) Consumer Federation of America, 13, available at <https://consumerfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Housing-African-American-VA-Home-Loan-Benefits-Report.pdf>.

²⁴ Wilson-Spotser, 14.

This systematic denial of access to GI Bill loans for Black veterans contributed significantly to the gap in homeownership rates among white and Black veterans. A 1973 report of 1970 census data found that 80.39% of white World War II-era veterans lived in owner-occupied housing²⁵ whereas only 58.88% of Black World-War II-era veterans lived in owner-occupied housing, a difference of 21.50 percentage points.²⁶ The systematic denial of access to GI housing benefits ultimately had a profoundly negative impact on Black Detroiters' homeownership opportunities. Additionally, Black families continued to face the culturally enforced, if no longer legally enforceable,²⁷ barriers of restrictive covenants in the higher rated areas in and around Detroit. Just as most housing in recently-developed outlying areas of the city had restrictive covenants prohibiting Black families from buying in, most of Detroit's emerging suburban housing included restrictive covenants. Many suburbs went even further: many - at least twenty-eight according to one study - had policies excluding Black people from living or staying in the municipality. These towns became known as "sundown" towns for their requirement that all Black people - many of whom had employment in town - had to leave the municipalities by night time.²⁸ This discriminatory exclusion meant that, even as the Black portion of the population grew in Detroit (from 9% in 1940 to 29% in 1960), Detroit's growing suburbs remained almost all white, with only 4% Black population in 1960, down from 5% in 1950.²⁹

The widening gap in average median home values across census tracts illustrates the resulting racial housing wealth gap. Since 1930, the census has reported the median home value for each census tract in the Detroit area. This means that for each census tract, the census reports the value of the house that has a value at the midpoint of homes in the surrounding area, with half more expensive and the other half less expensive. An average median home value can then be calculated for groups of census tracts with similar racial makeups. In 1950, census tracts with

²⁵ The original authors of the study used this category as a proxy for homeownership. While Wilson-Spotser notes that this proxy likely overestimates the homeownership rate, its use across races should preserve the validity of the estimated racial homeownership gap.

²⁶ The 1973 report found a similar disparity among Korean War-era veterans (24.19%) but much less of one among Vietnam War-era veterans (11.57%).

²⁷ In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* that municipal enforcement of racially restrictive covenants was discriminatory and unconstitutional. This meant that white residents could no longer use municipalities and their court systems to keep Black families from purchasing homes in Detroit or elsewhere. This made racially restrictive covenants unenforceable, although it did not eliminate them from existing deeds, and many Detroit homes still have these covenants written into their deeds. It is important to note that one of the cases that accompanied Shelley at the Supreme Court originated from Detroit. *Sipes v. McGhee* involved an attempt by a white neighbor, Benjamin Sipes, and a white neighborhood association to keep the Black McGhee family from moving into a house in a predominantly white West Side neighborhood. Prior to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling, both the Wayne County Circuit Court and the Michigan Supreme Court had ruled that the racial restrictive covenant was enforceable. Sugrue, 181-182.

²⁸ "History & Social Justice - Location: Michigan," University of Tougaloo, <https://justice.tougaloo.edu/location/michigan/>. Municipalities identified as possible sundown towns in the Detroit area based on census data and municipal ordinances include: Allen Park, Birmingham, Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Fenton, Fraser, Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms, Grosse Pointe Park, Grosse Pointe Shores, Grosse Pointe Woods, Lathrup Village, Livonia, New Baltimore, Richmond, Royal Oak, South Lyon, Southgate, St. Clair Shores, Sterling Heights, Taylor, Trenton, Troy, Utica, Warren, Westland, Wixom, and Wyandotte.

²⁹ IPUMS NHGIS.

20% or more Black or other nonwhite population had an average median home value 26% less than census tracts with less than 5% Black or nonwhite population. By 1960, census tracts with 20% or more Black or nonwhite population had a value 36% less than the almost all-white census tracts. This widening gap in home value by race reflects the increasing concentration of housing wealth in the suburbs that was not available to Detroit's Black population, specifically during a time of exploding homeownership rates. Redlining, the systematic denial of benefits to Black veterans, and the resulting exclusion of Black families from suburban expansion meant that most Detroit Black families missed out on the largest middle class wealth generating event in American history.

“Segregated Housing or No Housing at All”: Integrated Public Housing Resistance

Beginning in the 1930s with housing programs associated with the New Deal, the federal government and some local governments began constructing significant amounts of public housing for families in need across the country. These efforts accelerated in parallel with the construction of worker housing during World War II. Government-led construction of public housing in Detroit could have provided similar much-needed relief for the many Black Detroiters experiencing the overcrowding and substandard housing conditions in Black Bottom resulting from discriminatory policies like the enforcement of racially restrictive covenants. Instead, however, the Detroit City Government pursued discriminatory public housing policies throughout the 1940s and 50s that entrenched housing segregation and provided few opportunities for Black families to access better housing conditions.

Violent white resistance to the inclusion of Black families in new public housing units in a predominantly white section of Detroit offered a stark example of popular white resistance to any pro-integration public housing policy. After the City announced that public housing for both white and Black families, known as the Sojourner Truth Homes, would be built in the predominantly white neighborhood of Seven Mile-Fenelon, the initial public outrage led the City to reconsider and attempt to build alternative housing for the participating Black families in a separate Black neighborhood. However, civil rights and union leaders resisted, and the federal government stepped in and insisted that the public housing be allocated across racial lines as originally planned. Despite continued threats of white violence, on the night of February 28, 1942, Black families attempted to move into the homes they had been paying rent on since the first of the year. They were met with violent resistance from white residents. The night ended with shots being fired and 106 Black and three white residents arrested. The racist violence of that night lit a spark of racial tension that ultimately exploded into what became known as the race riots of 1943, which started on Belle Isle and spread to many parts of the city.³⁰ The

³⁰ The term “race riot” is contested and now considered incorrect and inappropriate. Instead, Detroiters widely referred to events like those of 1943 as riots and those of 1967 in particular as an uprising or rebellion by Black residents in response to the blatant racism of their own government and fellow white residents. See, for example,

Sojourner Truth incident and the subsequent upheaval convinced housing officials that white resident resistance would make it nearly impossible to build public housing for Black families in the predominantly white areas of the city.

White business owners also pushed back against efforts to provide public housing for Black families outside of already-Black areas like Black Bottom. During the same period as the Sojourner incident, the central business district's Wider Woodward Association wanted occupancy near the business district to remain exclusively white, so they endorsed only segregated public housing for white families nearby.³¹

Under pressure from white residents and white business owners and despite the protests of Black leaders, the Detroit Housing Commission adopted a policy of public housing segregation under Director Josephine Gomon in 1943. Gomon gave two options to Black leaders: accept segregated housing or no housing at all.³² Given no alternative, the Black leaders obliged. Gomon adopted a policy of explicit racial segregation: “[n]o housing project shall change the racial characteristics of a Neighborhood.”³³ This City policy effectively guaranteed that Black neighborhoods would receive only public housing for Black families, that white neighborhoods would receive only public housing for white families, and that the City of Detroit would play an active role in opposing integration for years to come.

The explicitly racist philosophy of the City's housing officials manifested in the inequitable provision of public housing units over the same period. Between January 1947 and July 1952, 37,382 Black families applied for public housing in Detroit, comprising 39.7% of all applicants. Of this applicant pool, 9,908 white and only 1,226 Black families obtained public housing.³⁴ This meant that Black families only represented 11% of new public housing residents, despite making up nearly 40% of applicants. If Black families had been accepted into Detroit public housing at the same rate that they applied, they would have received 4,420 units rather than the 1,226 they in fact received, a discrepancy of 3,194 units during that five year period alone.

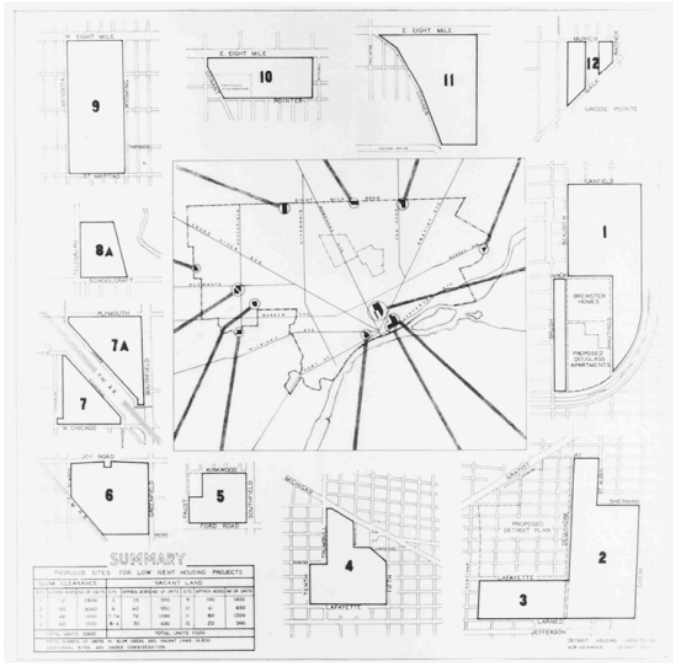
“Uprising of 1967,” *Encyclopedia of Detroit*, Detroit Historical Society, <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/uprising-1967>.

³¹ June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, c2013), 24.

³² *Ibid.*

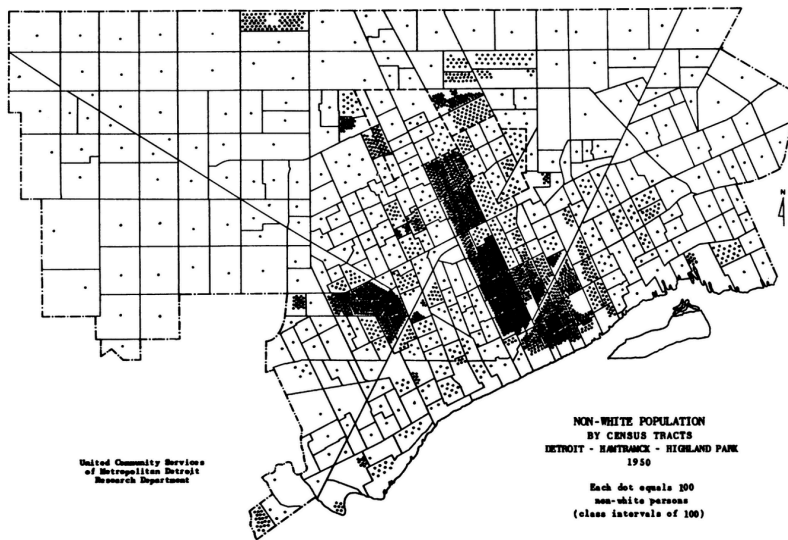
³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Sugrue, 58.



3.1. Of twelve proposed public housing sites in Detroit in the 1940s, only three were built. The outlying sites met with stiff opposition from neighborhood groups and were tabled by Mayor Albert Cobo and the Detroit Common Council in 1950.

Source: *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Thomas Sugrue



Source: [“The Non-White Population of Metropolitan Detroit: The Number and Distribution of the Non-White Population in the Metropolitan Detroit Area: 1950 and Earlier Censal Years.”](#) the United Community Services of Metropolitan Detroit Research Department, 1955

This racial inequity extended to the City's failure to build new public housing as well. Despite the Detroit Housing Commission's stated opposition to pro-integration public housing policy, the city's white residents viewed any public housing development - even one ostensibly reserved for white families - as a threat to the racial composition of their neighborhoods. This fierce opposition to public housing ultimately derailed plans to build any public housing in predominantly white areas in the city after the Sojourner Truth Homes. Of the twelve public housing sites proposed by the City in the 1940s (as seen in the above graphic), only three projects were built, all three in areas with significant Black populations. These three sites provided 6,000 affordable housing units, but they also required the destruction of pre-existing housing, housing that would have been occupied by predominantly Black families. The eight proposed sites (5-12 on the above graphic) in the outlying predominantly white areas of Detroit (as seen in the lack of black dots in Figure 2 above), on the other hand, would have been built on vacant land and would have provided 6,550 units of affordable housing. The election of Mayor Cobo, who ran on a platform opposing public housing and integration, brought an end to any hope that the City would use its power to encourage integration or improve housing conditions for Black families. Instead, Mayor Cobo redirected the administration of city "redevelopment" away from the Housing Commission, and established a specialized unit dedicated specifically to the racially-coded "slum clearance" that would take the form of "urban renewal" in the 1950s and 60s.³⁵

Urban Renewal and the Displacement of Black Communities

Black Bottom, the historic, vibrant, but overcrowded Black district east of downtown and its neighboring commercial corridor, Paradise Valley, would be the City's first targets for "slum removal."³⁶ Black Bottom, Paradise Valley, and the surrounding areas of the Lower East Side held the majority of Detroit's Black population in the 1940s. A former resident of the Brewster Homes in the Lower East Side, Charles Scales, described the Black areas of Detroit as segregated but thriving: "the Conant Gardens, the West Side, the Near East Side, Brewster Homes. Those were places where children could thrive and we had parents who were very, very supportive of us, even though we didn't have the financial wherewithal that our European cousins had... My parents had the same goals and aspirations that other parents in the area had... it was a Ghetto, but it was a thriving Ghetto... The only difference is that there were no whites in those areas."³⁷ Although culturally vibrant, the area did suffer from significant overcrowding and dilapidated housing conditions. Most of the area's housing stock dated to the 19th century and neither landlords nor the City did much to improve or even maintain the housing stock. As noted

³⁵ Robert Goodspeed, "Urban Renewal In Postwar Detroit, The Gratiot Area Redevelopment Project: A Case Study," (honors thesis, University of Michigan, 2004), available at <https://goodspeedupdate.com/RobGoodspeed-HonorsThesis.pdf>.

³⁶ Political leaders at the time considered slums to be dilapidated or out-of-date housing that often housed low-income families. Leaders specifically targeted low-income housing areas with high densities of non-white families.

³⁷ Charles Scales, interview by Trina Shanks and students, May 4, 2024, transcript.

by Thomas Sugrue, “[m]ore than half of the buildings in the neighborhood had substandard facilities and no indoor plumbing, or were classified as fire or safety hazards.”³⁸ These conditions originally drove many in the Black community to champion city-led redevelopment of the area, which they envisioned as centered on new affordable and public housing.³⁹

Whereas the local Black community originally saw urban renewal as an opportunity to obtain better housing conditions, the City’s leadership saw it as an opportunity to change the area more fundamentally. Since at least the 1940s, Detroit’s leadership had sought, with mixed success, to modernize and redevelop the Central Business District (CBD). White-owned businesses - both those already in the CBD and those that the City was hoping to attract - raised consistent objections to the emergence of what they considered a Black “ghetto” to the east of the district. The City leveraged these complaints to claim that it was losing revenue because of Black Bottom, and began planning for the “urban renewal” of the district. The City’s plan, first proposed by the Jefferies Administration in 1946, sought to replace the dilapidated housing of Black Bottom with new private housing. Their plans, long hamstrung by the limits of municipal financing, received a boost from the immense federal funding made available under the Title I of the Housing Act of 1949. The Act spurred similar plans around the country, many of which also centered around the removal of longstanding Black communities in the name of “civic progress”: a term that suggested a future of gleaming skyscrapers to city leaders but a harbinger of removal and exclusion to many Black Americans. Across the country, federal urban renewal funds went directly toward the elimination of low-income neighborhoods - many of them predominantly Black - located near central business districts.⁴⁰

Starting in 1950, the City worked with state and federal authorities to demolish structures throughout Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. The demolition and redevelopment, known at the time as the “Gratiot Project,” leveraged federal and local funds with expectations to recoup the funding through anticipated higher property taxes from new development. The multi-year project demolished the heart of Detroit’s largest and most vibrant Black community, and wiped residences and business off of the map. According to the Renewing Inequality project at the University of Richmond, the project resulted in the displacement of at least 1,900 families from the area, 95% of which were Black or non-white.⁴¹ Whereas the original redevelopment plan had

³⁸ Sugrue, 50.

³⁹ Manning Thomas, 58.

⁴⁰ Manning Thomas, 4.

⁴¹ Digital Scholarship Lab, “Renewing Inequality,” American Panorama, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed August 6, 2024, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/renewal/#view=0/0/1&viz=cartogram>. The Lab identifies the numbers of displaced families based on federal estimates reported from 1955-1966. Given that the Detroit’s City Government had already spent almost a decade publicly planning to demolish these areas in the Lower East Side before federal involvement, it is highly likely that the Lab’s numbers significantly underestimate the number of families and individuals displaced by the project. Many families would have left prior to the physical demolitions in response to the City’s plans and corresponding lack of investment in the area. In fact, former city planner Hilanius Phillips notes that his department even had a term for this lack of investment: “Blight by Announcement.” According to Phillips, the department would instruct its planners to discourage homeowners and

included new replacement public housing for displaced families, the incoming Cobo Administration resisted its inclusion once demolition began and mismanaged its own plans for family relocation. The lack of assistance from the City and the violent resistance of white neighborhoods meant that most displaced families' only option was to relocate to the neighboring Black areas, which themselves quickly became overcrowded. A subsequent study found that about a third of the families eventually moved into public housing but around 35% of the displaced families could not even be located for follow-up.⁴²

Along with the traumatic consequences of housing lost, the loss of economic centers like Hastings Street not only deprived Black residents of immediate economic opportunities but also hindered long-term wealth accumulation and economic stability. As Hilanius Phillips noted, "What they did to us in Black Bottom, they're going to be doing it up here."⁴³ This sentiment reflects the broader reality that these projects were not isolated incidents but part of a larger strategy of economic and social marginalization. The destruction of Black neighborhoods and the systematic exclusion of Black residents from the benefits of urban redevelopment created a legacy of inequity that continues to affect Black Detroiters today.

The physical destruction of Black neighborhoods also had psychological and social impacts. The loss of homes, businesses, and community institutions created a sense of dislocation and loss. The displacement fractured social networks, eroded community cohesion, and left many Black residents feeling alienated in a city that seemed to prioritize the interests of white residents and commercial developers over the needs of its Black population. The destruction of Hastings Street and other Black neighborhoods was not just a loss of physical space but a systematic dismantling of economic power and cultural identity, the effects of which continue to reverberate through the city.

The City repeated this pattern of displacement - demolition without solid plans for relocation - across Detroit through the 1970s. With projects including Lafayette and Elmwood Park No. 1-3, the City continued to leverage federal funds to demolish Black areas near Black Bottom. Additionally, the City displaced significant numbers of Black families in order to redevelop land for a hospital (Medical Center No. 1-3) and for university facilities (University City).⁴⁴ By the end of the 1960s, the City had displaced at least 8,231 families through federally-funded urban renewal projects, and around 67% of those families were families of color.⁴⁵

landlords from applying for home repair permits in areas where urban renewal would occur like the Detroit Medical Center. Hilanius Phillips, interview by Trina Shanks and students, May 2, 2024, transcript.

⁴² Sugrue, 51.

⁴³ Phillips interview.

⁴⁴ Digital Scholarship Lab.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Over the same mid century period, the City demolished additional areas across Detroit to establish and expand its highway system. These highways were meant to connect Detroit's growing almost entirely white suburban population to jobs both downtown and also at the newly-expanded auto industry factories ringing Detroit's suburbs, as several of the highways' names attested to. The City built the Oakland-Hastings Freeway (later renamed the Chrysler Freeway and now comprising present day I-375 and I-75) through the demolished Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. The expansion of the Edsel Ford Freeway (present day I-94), which crossed both Paradise Valley and the Black West Side, required the demolition of 2,800 buildings, many of which were residential. The construction of the Lodge Freeway likewise required the demolition of 2,222 buildings, many in Black areas near Twelfth Street and Highland Park. These projects often made concessions for homeowners, like the relocation of 700 structures from the white neighborhood between Wyoming and Warren Avenues.⁴⁶ But these concessions did not extend to renters, many of them Black families. By the late 1960s, the City had displaced thousands of Black families in order to pave the way for the commutes of white suburbanites.

Continued resistance to integration by white residents, the real estate industry, and the City government - combined with decades of displacement - contributed to increasing racial tensions that ultimately led to the 1967 Uprising and its aftermath. Amongst the growing civil rights movement in 1950s America, an "open housing movement" to outlaw discrimination in housing began to take root in Detroit's Black community and formalized into the Opening Occupancy Conference in 1962.⁴⁷ The movement brought much-needed attention to the continuing discriminatory practices of realtors, like the infamous point system utilized by realtors in the neighboring Grosse Pointe suburbs to exclude Black and Asian families and discourage the arrival of other ethnic groups. Into the 1960s, the Detroit Real Estate Board forbade its members from changing the racial makeup of neighborhoods.⁴⁸ Despite their racist attempts, though, Black families - many displaced by urban renewal and highway construction - increasingly moved into formerly all-white neighborhoods across the city. Seeing an opportunity to benefit financially by stoking racial fears, non-affiliated real estate agents began to deploy the tactic known as "blockbusting." These realtors would spread information - often by pamphlets or word of mouth - in white neighborhoods about Black families moving in with the motive of getting white families to sell their houses for less in a panic to leave the neighborhood ahead of either Black families or the feared collapse of housing values that were thought to accompany racial transition. Having bought these houses at a low price, the same realtors would then sell the houses to Black families. Because of continued racial resistance to integration, these Black families often had few options to purchase, so blockbusting agents were often able to sell the houses for above-market rates or with terms and conditions that would be particularly risky to the buyer attached, like selling the home as a "land contract" that would require the Black

⁴⁶ Sugrue, 47-48.

⁴⁷ Sugrue, 193.

⁴⁸ Sugrue, 195.

purchasers to pay years of rent before obtaining the title and deed. These tactics accelerated both the racial transition of Detroit neighborhoods and the racial tension across the city.

After the end of legally-enforced segregation through racially restrictive covenants in 1948, many white Detroit residents and their realtors attempted to resist integration through neighborhood civic associations (or “improvement associations”). These associations often sprung in neighborhoods on the edges of racial transition as a means of socially - and sometimes violently - enforcing the covenants no longer enforced by the courts. In the 1940s, twenty-five Detroit homeowners’ associations covering large swaths of the outlying white parts of the city filed an amicus curiae brief in support of racially restrictive covenants in the *Sipes* case. These associations eventually pushed for a citywide popular referendum on a Homeowners’ Rights Ordinance, which would have enshrined the right of homeowners to discriminate. In 1963, the Detroit City Council authorized the referendum and it passed by ten percentage points, buoyed by two-to-one votes in favor in the city’s largest white wards. The City would have implemented the racist ordinance but for a court’s ruling that the ordinance was unconstitutional.⁴⁹

Many of these same neighborhood associations continued to resist integration into the 1960s as “defended neighborhoods.” Predictably these strategies often required the threat of violence: there were over two hundred incidents of property and physical violence against Black families who were attempting to move into formerly white areas of Detroit from 1940s through the 1960s.⁵⁰ By 1967, the constant threat of violence cultivated by white residents and abetted by the City Government’s inaction and own housing policies produced a tense and explosive atmosphere. Specific instances of violence against residents ultimately spiked the tension, and resulted in the widespread revolt by the Black community in what has been called the 1967 Detroit Uprising.

While the 1967 rebellion marked a culmination of simmering tensions, some scholars argue that the true withdrawal of white investment in Detroit occurred with the 1973 election of the city’s first Black mayor.⁵¹ Regardless of cause, the suburban outmigration of Detroit’s white residents with their wealth led to a significant loss of tax revenue and skilled labor in Detroit. As businesses and economic opportunities followed the population shift to the suburbs, a harsh economic decline occurred in the city. By 1980, over 20% of the city’s Black population lived below the poverty line, with a per capita income significantly lower than that of suburban areas like Grosse Pointe Shores.⁵²

⁴⁹ Sugrue, 226.

⁵⁰ Sugrue, 233.

⁵¹ Heather Ann Thompson. “Rethinking the Politics of White Flight in the Postwar City: Detroit, 1945-1980.” *Journal of Urban History* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1999).

⁵² Thompson, 163-198.

2000s-2010s: the Consequences of Municipal Disinvestment and the Foreclosure Crisis

By 2010, the city had lost over 50% of its population and 29% of its homes from its height in 1950.⁵³ Given its severely diminished tax base and precarious fiscal position, the City Government began to rely on private market interventions like public-private partnerships in its attempts to provide affordable housing. For example, a federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) following the 2007 recession provided the city with \$47 million used to demolish vacant buildings in designated target areas. For years, the demolition of dilapidated housing stock rather than the construction of affordable housing was prioritized by federal and City policy.

A microcosm of the city's lengthy battle with vacant land occurred in the northwest Brightmoor neighborhood. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, many Black Detroiters had taken out subprime mortgages in response to specific predatory targeting by the mortgage industry. By 2010, after the crash in the housing market, tens of thousands of Detroiters faced foreclosure, and the recession greatly accelerated this phenomenon. One of the largest landowners in the area at the time was the Northwest Detroit Neighborhood Development (NDND). NDND constructed 230 single family homes financed by the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) between 1999 and 2007, until the organization was no longer able to continue paying property taxes and maintaining properties.⁵⁴ Increasingly, in lieu of local organizations like NDND, outside investors began to purchase large areas of land in Brightmoor. Outside investors owned around 1,200 parcels, or about 10% of all properties, by 2009. Because they owned some of the few marginally habitable properties in the heavily vacant area, these investors profited from charging high rents for buildings in bad shape. Oftentimes, these investors would not invest in the properties or even pay property tax. As owners - both local families and outside investors - failed to pay their often-inflated⁵⁵ property taxes, and therefore the City, County and State gained ownership of the properties through tax foreclosure. In Brightmoor alone, these tax foreclosures resulted in over 2,000 parcels (or one-sixth of all properties in the neighborhood) becoming publicly owned. This pattern of deteriorating housing conditions, brought on by maintenance deferred by impoverished individual families, disinterested investors, and the whole City Government, spread across Detroit as the City itself entered emergency management and bankruptcy.

⁵³ George Galster, *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City* (Philadelphia: University Of Pennsylvania, 2014).

⁵⁴ June Manning Thomas and Henco Bekkering, *Mapping Detroit: Land, Community, and Shaping a City* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 152-53.

⁵⁵ A 2020 study by the Detroit News found that more than 90% of Detroit homes - more than 63,000 total - with delinquent debt in 2020 were overtaxed between 2010 and 2016. Christine MacDonald, "Detroit homeowners overtaxed \$600 million," *Detroit News*, Jan. 9, 2020, available at <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/housing/2020/01/09/detroit-homeowners-overtaxed-600-million/2698518001/>.

Key Takeaways

- **Restrictive covenants** across most of Detroit's housing kept the city's burgeoning Black population segregated in vibrant but overcrowded areas like Black Bottom in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.
- **Redlining** and the systemic denial of housing opportunities to Black families - like exclusion from GI Bill home loans - kept Black families from taking part in the largest single generator of middle-class wealth - suburban homeownership - in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s.
- **Violent resistance to public housing** - seen as a threat of integration - resulted in the cancellation of thousands of planned public housing units in Detroit's outlying white neighborhoods in the 1940s and 50s.
- **Urban Renewal and highway construction** displaced thousands of Black families and the City failed to provide adequate replacement housing in the 1950s and 60s.
- **The depopulation of Detroit** that resulted from white flight led to widespread disinvestment in housing and infrastructure in Detroit as its Black population grew as a proportion of the population in the 1970s through the present.

Policing

The relationship between law enforcement in Detroit and Black Detroiters is a harmful one that can be characterized by three primary facets: 1) repressive, brutal – and often lethal – policing (often termed *over-policing*); 2) the failure to protect Black Detroit, whether from crime or collective violence committed by white residents (*under-policing*); and 3) the exclusion, until very recently, of the Black community from the design of policing policy and its implementation as members of the DPD. We also show how Black Detroiters protested these problems and called for a range of solutions. While crucial flashpoints and pivotal events are more easily remembered as harms, it is essential to remember that the less dramatic, everyday injustices of policing exacted an even greater cost on Black Detroiters and their safety, freedom, and equal citizenship. This section captures these everyday injustices in a variety of ways; most important is the use of newly collected evidence of police killings.

From the mid-1800s through the early 1970s, the Detroit Police Department (DPD) was a white-controlled law enforcement agency that enforced racial segregation, upheld the color line, and criminalized Black residents en masse. Almost all patrol officers and higher-up officials were white men until affirmative action policies began to slowly diversify the police department beginning in the late 1960s and increasing with the 1973 election of Coleman Young, the city's first Black mayor. DPD officers at times participated in, and otherwise encouraged or allowed, white violence against Black citizens—most notably in white neighborhood resistance to housing integration, and white vigilante violence in the 1943 race riot. As both formal and informal policy, the DPD engaged in a range of over-policing practices and racial criminalization: racial profiling of Black residents in public spaces, especially white areas of the city; stop-and-frisk policing of pedestrians and motorists; wrongful arrests of alleged crime suspects without probable cause; and physical abuse of detainees in custody. Many white police officers engaged in brutality and misconduct toward Black citizens without fear of any consequences, as both the DPD hierarchy and white city leaders opposed longtime civil rights demands for a robust internal investigation process and/or an independent civilian review board. The DPD also engaged in systemic under-policing of Black communities, first by permitting so-called vice districts (gambling, drugs and alcohol during Prohibition, and prostitution) to flourish through widespread corruption, and second by failing to protect Black citizens from crime or to prioritize public safety and violence prevention in their neighborhoods. Despite rhetoric from white liberal reformers in the mid-1960s, this did not fundamentally change until the Young administration of the 1970s.

The Detroit Police Department also killed an extraordinary number of civilians during the twentieth century and during major flashpoints – 1920s Prohibition, the 1943 race riot, and the repressive crackdown of late 1960s/early 1970s – the DPD was likely the deadliest law enforcement agency per capita in any major American city. Because law enforcement records are generally closed and publicly released data is incomplete and distorted, it is very difficult to

determine the identity of many of those killed by police officers, and impossible to know the full number of police homicides.⁵⁶ In data released in 1970, mainly covering only “justifiable” homicides, the Detroit Police Department officially totaled 183 people killed by its police officers between 1926-1930 (at the height of Prohibition enforcement) and another 311 between 1931-1969.⁵⁷ These totals are a significant undercount of total police homicides, but represent a starting point for assessing state violence, and they do not include individual names or demographic information. A major research project at the University of Michigan has identified the details of more than 700 people killed by the DPD or other law enforcement agencies in the city of Detroit between 1930 and 2014. For the 1930-1956 time period, at least two-thirds of the 238 people acknowledged to have been killed by DPD officers were Black (including 17 during the 1943 race riot alone), an era when the city’s population was less than one-sixth Black. For the 1957-1973 time period, around 80% of the 250 people killed (a very conservative estimate) by law enforcement in Detroit were Black, again far exceeding the population demographics. Black communities and civil rights groups protested many of these police homicides, often accused the DPD of covering up officer criminality in the use of fatal force, and denounced the official policy of allowing deadly force against fleeing and unarmed suspects who posed no direct threat to others—one of the most common scenarios in police killings, later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.⁵⁸

Black Detroit and Law Enforcement until World War I

People of African descent have inhabited the settlement of Detroit since 1701, living first under the rule of the French and British empires. By 1796, Jay’s Treaty had achieved the transfer of Detroit from British North America to the United States.⁵⁹ The complex collision of American law, international law, and Upper Canadian law left the legality of slavery unclear, and in 1800 most of the 139 Black Detroiters appearing in a census were enslaved. Drawing on their mutual cooperation with Black people across the Detroit River, many escaped to Canada. Detroit remained an insecure military garrison that warded off attacks from Native forces and the British with the help of a militia of enslaved Black people. After the conclusion of the War of 1812, the town began to take shape, but less than 5% of the town’s very small population of 1,500 was Black. When the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, many more free Black people began arriving in Detroit.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Patrick Ball, “Violence in Blue,” *Granta Magazine* (March 2016), <https://granta.com/violence-in-blue/>; Matthew D. Lassiter, “Police and the License to Kill,” *Boston Review*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/police-and-the-license-to-kill/>.

⁵⁷ Detroit Police Department, “The 1970’s: A Good Time To Be a Police Officer?” 1970, Box 1, Folder 8, Detroit Police Department Additional Papers (1965-1993), Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

⁵⁸ Police homicide data compiled by the Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab at the University of Michigan, to be published in the forthcoming website *Detroit Deadly Force*; additional citations in the paragraphs below.

⁵⁹ Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: New Press, 2017), 10 and 117-19.

⁶⁰ Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, “Introduction,” in Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, eds., *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 1-23; Veta Smith Tucker, “Uncertain Freedom in Frontier Detroit,” in Frost

Policing in the Michigan Territory (1805-1837) was haphazard. The city was overseen by a county sheriff as well as a marshal acting as a chief constable, and soon hired a few officers to watch over the town's market and outlying townships. Efforts to institute a volunteer patrol that would serve as a night-watch never succeeded.⁶¹ Still, the repressive policing of Black Detroiters began before Michigan became a state. An 1827 territorial law meant to discourage free Black people from entering the Territory required them to carry at all times a valid certificate of freedom, and even file a bond of \$500 guaranteeing their good behavior. Its author was motivated in part by a fear of Black criminality. As would happen throughout Detroit history, state and local authorities obligated police to enforce punitive laws – the county sheriff and local constables were ordered to expel non-compliant free Black people from the Territory.⁶²

Efforts by white citizens to develop a more orderly city increased in the aftermath of the Blackburn Riots. In June, 1833, slave-catchers arrived from Kentucky and captured two fugitive slaves, Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, who were well-known in the Black community. Hearing that the Blackburns had been treated unfairly in a local court, Black Detroiters encircled the courthouse, brandishing weapons and threatening to “set Detroit aflame.” With help from Black Canadians and a few white allies, they effected the escape of the Thorntons across the river to Canada, leaving the county sheriff mortally injured. Federal troops swept in to quell Black resistance, and white Detroiters burned down Black homes without fear of punishment. Prominent white citizens soon issued the first of Detroit's many post-riot commission reports. It condemned most Black residents, viewing them as “vagrant and transient persons” who lived in Detroit in order to commit “depredations against the property of our citizens.” City authorities were urged to redouble their efforts to enforce the repressive 1827 law, and the *Detroit Free Press* increased its alarmist coverage of Black crime. Given this new atmosphere, and with both fugitive and even free Black residents facing the continued threat of slave-catchers, the Black community shrank considerably, with many fleeing to Canada.⁶³

The population of Black Detroit only began to recover with Michigan's attainment of statehood in 1837, when its founding state constitution abolished slavery. Black Detroiters remained excluded from elections and jury and militia service, but the state now provided more security for fugitive slaves. By the mid-1840s, Black Detroit had grown enough for the community to build a large, varied set of churches, community groups, and other institutions. This network safeguarded fugitive Black persons, petitioned city and state officials for voting rights, education,

and Tucker, eds., *A Fluid Frontier*, 28; Karolyn Smardz Frost, “Forging Transnational Networks for Freedom: From the War of 1812 to the Blackburn Riots of 1833,” in Frost and Tucker, eds., *A Fluid Frontier*, 44-45, 48; David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 8; Clarence M. Burton, *History of Detroit, 1780-1850: Financial and Commercial* (Detroit: no publisher, 1917), 79.

⁶¹ Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan* (Detroit: Silas Farmer & Co., 1884), chap. 34.

⁶² Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit*, 159-60; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 6-7.

⁶³ Frost, “Forging Transnational Networks for Freedom,” 53 and *passim*; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 10-11, 17; Barbara Hughes Smith, “Worship Way Stations in Detroit,” in Frost and Tucker, eds., *A Fluid Frontier*, 104.

and fairer treatment by law enforcement, and participated in state and national networks of Black abolitionists and other activists.⁶⁴

The 1850s featured two dozen major and minor riots, but city leaders rejected calls to develop a professional police force, since this disorder occurred in immigrant neighborhoods far from where these leaders lived and worked.⁶⁵ As Detroit grew, a central business district emerged near the city's most prestigious homes on the near west side. But bordering the eastern side of the business district lay a neighborhood of crowded boarding houses for the city's ballooning number of working-class young men, as well as the "low amusements" (brothels, saloons, etc.) they sought out, which other residents associated with crime.⁶⁶ This disorder closer to downtown – accompanied by robberies victimizing the city's "best citizens" – *did* require a response. However, during the 1850s, most Detroit business leaders preferred to hire their own "Merchants' Police" to watch over their own businesses and residences; they viewed this option as cheaper for them than the establishment of a public police force that would protect and patrol the entire city.⁶⁷

The Midwest's only major race riot during the Civil War occurred in Detroit, and it convinced city leaders finally to develop a modern police department. In March, 1863, the *Detroit Free Press* stoked white – and especially Irish – fears of labor competition from Black Detroiters, and published numerous articles meant to whip up anger about alleged Black criminality. Many of the city's Irishmen, already furious about an impending law mandating a draft for the Union Army,⁶⁸ were provoked by the trial of a Black business owner falsely accused of molesting two young girls. The business owner, William Faulkner, was sentenced to life in prison, and a largely Irish white mob numbering more than one thousand threatened to lynch him. One of the federal soldiers called in to protect Faulkner killed a member of the mob. Echoing the *Free Press*' "bugle call to battle," mobbers cried out to murder Black Detroiters. Some of the city's paltry law enforcement tried valiantly to stop the mob, but they were overrun. Scores of Black homes were torched. Volunteer fire companies, bowing to the shouts of the rioters, watched these homes burn. Before troops nearby ended the riot, the mob murdered two Black community members and left more than two hundred homeless. None of those arrested were punished.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Smith, "Worship Way Stations in Detroit," 103-04; Roy Finkenbine, "A Community Militant and Organized: The Colored Vigilant Committee of Detroit," in Frost and Tucker, eds., *A Fluid Frontier*, 154-55; Burton, *History of Detroit, 1780-1850*, 95.

⁶⁵ John C. Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order, 1830-1880: A Geography of Crime, Riot, and Policing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 20-31, 121.

⁶⁶ Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order*, chaps. 2-3.

⁶⁷ Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan*, 204; Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order*, 62-64.

⁶⁸ V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free but not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro during the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 69; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 44-46; Matthew Kunding, "Racial Rhetoric: The *Detroit Free Press* and Its Part in the Detroit Race Riot of 1863," *Michigan Journal of History* 3:2 (2006), 1-29; Norman McRae, Jr., *Negroes in Michigan during the Civil War* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1966), 33-35.

⁶⁹ Anonymous, *A Thrilling Narrative From the Lips of the Sufferers of the Late Detroit Riot, March 6, 1863, with the Hair-Breadth Escapes of Men, Women and Children, and Destruction of Colored Men's Property, Not Less Than \$15,000* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1945 [1863]); Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order*, 70-73.

The 1863 riot shook not just the Black Detroit population, but the city's white elites. Now perceiving potential disorder and crime as endangering all of downtown, they finally backed a governmental response. Battling local Democratic Party opposition to establishing a professional police force, Republican allies of business leaders in the state legislature pushed through a law in 1865 that created a Metropolitan Police Force. The state of Michigan selected Detroit's four police commissioners, and set the budget for the department, which the city would have to finance. The commissioners, usually well-to-do Detroiters, hired all police employees. Given the requirement that patrolmen speak English, there were few German police officers despite their predominance in the city, while Irish citizens were overrepresented.

From its earliest days, Black groups complained that the newly created DPD treated Black residents unfairly. DPD officers regularly relied on charges of vagrancy and suspicion of theft to arrest Black residents without reason. Complaints of police brutality were common as well. Additionally, the DPD was deployed in ways that failed to prioritize the safety of Black residents. Police leaders deployed patrolmen largely to safeguard the downtown homes and businesses of prominent citizens rather than protect and serve all Detroiters; in other parts of the city, police remained in their offices.⁷⁰ Just a few years after the DPD's creation, Black Detroiters complained regularly about the failure of police to intervene when "gangs of rowdies" arrived in Black areas to insult women and children and assault men, as well as the failure of local officials to protect Black efforts to vote from the Democratic Party's interference.⁷¹ In the late 1870s, officers surveilled striking workers and disrupting any public gatherings or even discussions that might involve union activity.

As the city grew rapidly, from 1869 to 1883, the number of patrolmen increased from 66 to 150, but the force remained all-white.⁷² As soon as the DPD emerged, Black Detroiters demanded that it hire Black officers. It usually refused, but even when police commissioners attempted to do so, the racism of its white officers interfered. In 1886, a threatened police strike blocked the hiring of three Black patrolmen. Despite the oldest elite Black families' lukewarm attitude toward Black electoral participation, continued pressure by Black Republican politicians eventually produced the hiring of the first regular Black officer in 1893. However, Mayor Hazen Pingree abandoned the Party's electoral appeals that emphasized its roots in abolitionism, which

Later it was revealed that Faulkner was not of African descent. Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People's History of Self-Determination* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 46.

⁷⁰ Arrest records fit this pattern; a large share of arrests involved public order offenses, such as drunkenness, these were disproportionately transients with no local address, and were made in the central business district. Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order*, 95-101; Rebecca Reed, "Regulating the Regulators: Ideology and Practice in the Policing of Detroit, 1880-1918," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan (1991), 17-18.

⁷¹ Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 101-03.

⁷² Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan*, 207.

weakened its ties to the city's Black Republicans. By 1910, only seven Black patrolmen worked alongside 650 white officers.⁷³

World War I through the 1940s

The city's massive growth during and after the onset of World War I was fueled both by the Great Migration and by the arrival of European immigrants. This growth, when combined with white racism and exclusionary housing practices, produced the worst three decades of policing in the city's history. In the early decades of the 20th century, Black Detroit grew at an astounding rate, from about 4,000 in 1900 to about 149,000 in 1940. However, existing housing practices relegated the vast majority of them to the already-overcrowded lower east side.⁷⁴ Population growth inevitably meant that Black Detroiters would strive to move into other, often all-white neighborhoods, and white violence followed. Moreover, competition with white workers over jobs – worsened by the racist exclusion of labor unions and the employment of Black workers as strikebreakers – produced white violence at the workplace as well.

This residential hyper-concentration produced political problems, too. Historians argue that the cross-class nature of Black Bottom encouraged many better-off Black Detroiters to engage in the politics of respectability; they felt that their proximity to poorer Black people sullied their reputations in the eyes of white Detroiters. For instance, the Detroit Urban League repeated white elites' stereotyping of southern Black migrants as predisposed to crime, and called for hiring of Black police officers not as a way to reduce repressive policing or as a matter of justice, but as an effective means of responding to Black criminality.⁷⁵ And the rapid influx of tens of thousands of Black migrants and white Catholics and Jews fueled the emergence in the Midwest of the Ku Klux Klan, particularly in Detroit. In the early 1920s, the Klan's favorite politician nearly won a mayoral race as a write-in candidate.⁷⁶

⁷³ Only one of the city's 623 firemen was Black. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 120-21, 155-65, 196; Melvin G. Holli, *Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), chap. 9; Reed, "Regulating the Regulators," 97.

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of Population, 1900-1940* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, various years); David A. Levine, *Internal Combustion: The Races in Detroit, 1915-1926* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), 3. Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1992), 26-27. The share of Blacks in Detroit's total population stood at about 8% in 1930, compared to 1% in 1910. Nora Krinitsky, "Undesirable Characters Are Flocking to the City": Urban Space, Labor Politics, and Black Policing in Interwar Detroit," Seminar Paper, History 771, University of Michigan (Apr. 29, 2011), 3.

⁷⁵ Krinitsky, "Undesirable Characters Are Flocking to the City," 3; Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Njeru Wa Murage, "Organizational History of the Detroit Urban League, 1916-60," Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University (1993), 106.

⁷⁶ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 127-43; Russell MacKenzie Fehr, "Political Protestantism: The Detroit Citizens League and the Rise of the Ku Klux Klan," *Journal of Urban History* 45:6 (2019), 1153-73.

Massive population growth also meant a large increase in crime, real and perceived. In ten years, from 1925-35, the number of homicides increased ten times. Far from its early days as a guardian of white wealth, the DPD was now pressured on all sides to respond decisively to the perceived crime wave.⁷⁷

Finally, World War I and the city's growth motivated white elites to concentrate more power in the office of the mayor and the city council. Real estate agents – some of the key foot-soldiers in the pinning in of Black residents into the east side – benefited from these changes; by 1919, five of the nine-person Common Council were real estate agents.⁷⁸ Other political reforms ratcheted up repressive policing; for instance, the Detroit Citizen's League's restructuring of the city's criminal courts meant the takeover by conservative judges who succeeded in launching a “massive crackdown on petty crimes and the poor people who committed them.”⁷⁹ Despite the growth of Detroit's Black voting-age population increasing from 1910 to 1940 by almost *twenty-three times* – from about 4,000 to about 99,000 – Black Detroiters were not yet pivotal players in city elections, as their share of the local electorate remained below 10%.⁸⁰

All of these forces combined to greatly increase the DPD's over-policing. As the first wave of the Great Migration took off in earnest in 1918, many migrants encountered racial differences in treatment right as they stepped off the train—those without smallpox vaccination scars endured humiliating body exams by white male police officers.⁸¹ Even worse, police killings of Black citizens skyrocketed. On one estimate, police fatally shot 55 Black people in the first half of 1925.⁸² The DPD consistently arrested Black citizens without cause, as reflected in the disproportionately large number of arrests compared to convictions.⁸³ Black citizens' right of habeas corpus was routinely violated, too, as police detained them without charging them, sometimes for days, in an effort (often a violent one) to induce a confession.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Krinitsky, ““Undesirable Characters Are Flocking to the City”,” Detroit Police Department and James Couzens, *Story of the Detroit Police Department, 1916-17* (Detroit: Inland Press, 1917), 14; Detroit Police Department, *Annual Report* (Detroit: DPD, 1925), 4.

⁷⁸ Beth Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 36; Maurice M. Ramsey, “Some Aspects of Non-Partisan Government in Detroit, 1918-1940,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan (1945), 94-95.

⁷⁹ Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 138; Raymond R. Fragnoli, *The Transformation of Reform: Progressivism in Detroit – and After, 1912-1933* (New York: Garland, 1982), chap. 5.

⁸⁰ Keneshia N. Grant, *The Great Migration and the Democratic Party: Black Voters and the Realignment of American Politics in the 20th Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020), 79.

⁸¹ Karen R. Miller, *Making Inequality: Northern Racial Liberalism in Interwar Detroit* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 24.

⁸² Boyle, *The Arc of Justice*, 24.

⁸³ Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1992), 110-11.

⁸⁴ Boyle, *The Arc of Justice*, 171; Mayor's Inter-Racial Committee, *The Negro in Detroit* (Detroit: Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research, 1926), section 9, 5 and 33-34.

Additionally, over-policing fell upon Black “vice” relative to vice elsewhere in the city. During the 1920s, the east side was increasingly seen as a haven for vice; white media, elites, and voters used the prism of vice to define how they perceived all Black Detroiters. DPD was especially violent in its treatment of Black prostitutes.⁸⁵

There were some victories against over-policing. By 1939, the NAACP forced the dismissal of two white detectives for police brutality, and helped defeat a local judge who upheld unconstitutional, racist housing policies. It also worked to halt police harassment of interracial couples.⁸⁶ On the eve of World War II, a broad coalition of Black and leftist organizations, the Committee to End Police Brutality, presented to the city a petition with more than 20,000 signatories that demanded that the city fire Police Commissioner Heinrich Pickert. But in his response to the Committee’s demand to investigate scores of cases of the “brutal treatment of citizens,” Mayor Richard Reading responded that almost all officers had behaved appropriately.⁸⁷

As the DPD became a larger, more professional, and more resource-rich agency, it developed new capabilities that often restricted rather than enabled Black freedom. Through the DPD’s new Special Investigations Division (popularly known as “the Red Squad”), the city surveilled, infiltrated, and harassed Black groups such as the Good Citizenship League as well as many other organizations. The Division was abolished soon after a massive DPD corruption scandal in 1939, which led to the indictment of the mayor, the police superintendent, and scores of officers. But it was later reconstituted as the Subversive Squad.⁸⁸ In the early 1930s, the DPD – and likely the Michigan State Police – was infiltrated by the anti-labor and racist Black Legion movement. Police Commissioner Heinrich Pickert sympathized with the Legion during its four-year violent terror campaign in Detroit (1932-36).⁸⁹ The DPD’s use as a political tool against Black and leftist protest was joined by the Ford Motor Company’s “Service Department,” which hired ex-cops and functioned almost as a private army and surveillance organization. In aiding and abetting this surveillance, the city failed to protect Black residents and others from the coercion of private businesses, too.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit*, 79; Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 94, 101-102, 112.

⁸⁶ Ulysses W. Boykin, *A Hand Book on the Detroit Negro* (Detroit: The Minority Studies Associates, 1943), 23; Boyle, *The Arc of Justice*, 120-21.

⁸⁷ Miller, *Making Inequality*, 201-02.

⁸⁸ James B. Jacobs, “The Conduct of Local Political Intelligence,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1977), 117; Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 47; Levine, *Internal Combustion*, 122-24.

⁸⁹ Peter H. Amann, “Vigilante Fascism: The Black Legion as an American Hybrid,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25:3 (1983): 490-524; Robert K. Dvorak, “Terror in Detroit: The Rise and Fall of Michigan’s Black Legion” (Ph.D. dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2000); Phillip D. Schertz, “Against All Enemies and Opposers Whatever:” The Michigan State Police Crusade against the “Un-Americans,” 1917-1977” (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1999); Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 89-91.

⁹⁰ Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 67; Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit*, 56-57.

While over-policing became much worse over this period, the DPD's failure to protect Black residents from daily as well as organized white violence was even more harmful. Early Black gains in seeking racial equality paradoxically heightened the problem. For instance, after effective Black protest, the city by the 1870s had racially integrated many of the city's schools;⁹¹ this had the effect of making Black "incursions" into white areas an even more urgent problem for racists.

When racial covenants failed to block such incursions, white residents resorted to violence. From 1917 and for much of the 1920s, this came in the forms of mob intimidation and the fire bombings of Black homes. Such violence was often met by onlooking police officers and firemen with merely a shrug, or sometimes even support. Attackers were not all working-class white people; mobs often included "respectable" white citizens, even former aldermen.⁹² The Department's failure to protect Black persons and property sometimes reached absurd levels. In 1925, members of a massive mob – at least a few of them white-collar men – demanded that Dr. Alex Turner, a Black physician and owner of a new home, sign over his deed under threat of death. Police officers escorted the homeowner and members of the mob to Turner's office so they could complete the "transaction."⁹³

This failure to protect combined with over-policing and a racist criminal justice system to produce the era's most infamous episode, the Ossian Sweet affair, discussed above in the housing section. Even before the episode, 1925 had already been a terrifying year for Black Detroiters, having featured a Klan rally of 10,000 on the west side (as it prepared for another mayoral campaign); five attacks on Black homeowners by large white mobs; and scores of police killings. In the aftermath of the nationally publicized trial, Mayor John Smith promised to employ more Black police officers, denounced the Klan, and directly challenged the Detroit Citizens League's backing of what was often lawless law enforcement. But in his delicate balancing act, he also denounced Black efforts to desegregate neighborhoods defended by white residents.⁹⁴

Later, the mayor's own race relations committee claimed that it was "obvious" that "exact and even justice for the members of the minority race (in this case the Negroes) is still an unattained ideal."⁹⁵ And Police Commissioner William T. Rutledge told Black audiences that high crime rates among Black Detroiters were due in part "to the many unfair arrests." Rutledge also blamed white police officers who were themselves migrants from the South for the DPD's sorry

⁹¹ Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 84-89.

⁹² Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 78-79; Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 324-25.

⁹³ Boyle, *The Arc of Justice*, 152-53 and 370, fn. 47; Levine, *Internal Combustion*, 154-55.

⁹⁴ Fragnoli, *The Transformation of Reform*, 313-14; Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, chap. 9; Miller, *Making Inequality*, 85.

⁹⁵ Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, *Report of the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations* (Detroit: Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research, 1926), 7; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, 165.

record, and claimed to have fired 300 officers who had been linked to the Klan. But despite this white moderate elite consensus, the 1930s witnessed even worse DPD behavior.⁹⁶

As the NAACP argued, the city's failure to protect Black Detroit was rooted in the even larger harm of failing to provide equal access to housing throughout the city. Indeed, racist housing policy and DPD failures fed one another. Unpunished white terror frustrated Black efforts to expand out of the east side. This in turn allowed white (and some Black) landlords to inflate rents in overcrowded Black east side neighborhoods.⁹⁷

In the early 1940s, an impressive Black-led coalition enabled Black tenants to take residence in the racially integrated Sojourner Truth Housing Project. But they did so largely despite, not because of, police protection. They were forced to face down a cross-burning, intimidation, and a riot in which officers often sided with white supremacists. The state's own investigation of the conflict alleged that the "Red Squad" harassed pro-integration activists.⁹⁸

Both over-policing and failures to protect Black Detroiters continued in part because of the continued exclusion of Black citizens from both developing police policy and implementing it as officers on the beat. By 1916, as the city neared one million residents, the DPD employed 1,340 officers, and 3,000 just four years later. But the force still only deployed 15 Black officers; this was by far the lowest share among ten large destinations of the Great Migration. In the 1930s, despite even greater Black population growth, only 16 more Black officers were hired.⁹⁹ As Black activist Snow Flake Grigsby wrote, in 1933, Black Detroit's share of the city population (7%) suggested there should be 280 Black officers, but there were only 35. Moreover, all of the Department's 278 civilian employees were white.¹⁰⁰ Over this period, the exclusion of Black people from the DPD in its early years was compounded by the infiltration of the DPD by organized white supremacists, *and* by the use of Black taxpayers' income to develop new offices within the DPD that spied on and disrupted precisely those civil rights organizations that aimed to repair the Department.

After the violence of the 1920s and 1930s, tensions boiled over during World War II. The events to come were foreshadowed by the Sojourner Truth Housing Project conflict. In early 1942, a confidential report by a federal agency warned that, in the absence of "socially constructive

⁹⁶ G. D. Howard, "Police Commission Head Addresses Citizens," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Oct. 29, 1927), 12; Miller, *Making Inequality*, 104; "Police Head Scores "Crackers" on Detroit Force: Cowardly, Lazy, and Mean, Says Commissioner," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Nov. 12, 1927), 2; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, 165.

⁹⁷ Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, 375.

⁹⁸ Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit: The Sojourner Truth Housing Controversy of 1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Boykin, *A Hand Book on the Detroit Negro*, 56; Jacobs, "The Conduct of Local Political Intelligence," 117; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, 146.

⁹⁹ Reed, "Regulating the Regulators," 30-32; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, 164; Mayor's Inter-Racial Committee, *The Negro in Detroit*, section 9, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Snow F. Grigsby, *An X-Ray Picture of Detroit* (Detroit: n. p., 1933), 4-5. Grigsby showed similar numbers in the city's education system, its hospitals, libraries, and fire department.

steps,” racial tensions in Detroit were “likely to burst into active conflict.”¹⁰¹ This occurred in the infamous 1943 riot. While almost all other so-called riots in the city were episodes of white crowd violence against Black residents, this was a true riot.

It began with confrontations of groups of young white and Black Detroiters on Belle Isle. As word of the conflict spread through Black neighborhoods, rumors of the murder of a Black woman and child fed Black anger. As historian Marilyn Johnson argues, the rumors were themselves the product of decades of police failure to protect Black people, and especially Black women, from attacks by white people.¹⁰² After days of dithering by local and state law enforcement, hundreds of fires, looting, and pitched violence, federal forces finally quelled the city. Thirty-four were dead, 25 of them Black. Seventeen were killed by police, and hundreds were wounded. Police shot no White rioters, despite the fact that they vastly outnumbered their Black counterparts. Black leaders claimed that many of those killed by police were the victims of “willful inefficiency” and “wanton murder” on the part of the DPD. Police made nearly 2,000 arrests; 85% of arrestees were Black.¹⁰³ Detroit’s City Council approved of two reports, both of which placed the blame for the riot squarely on the shoulders of Black residents, excused away white violence, and praised the DPD’s performance. No police were punished.¹⁰⁴ As the post-World War II period began, Detroit policing had become even more of a barrier to Black freedom and security than it had been over its first half-century.

1950s through 1973

During the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s, the Detroit Police Department remained an overwhelmingly white institution dedicated to policing the color line and maintaining racial boundaries in a segregated city with an increasing Black population. The DPD criminalized Black citizens collectively, especially through policies of racial profiling and selective enforcement in racially transitional neighborhoods and commercial districts, including downtown. Police brutality and extralegal violence against Black citizens was systemic and insulated from accountability by the lack of any meaningful internal investigation procedures. The DPD and the city’s white political leadership continuously resisted demands by civil rights groups for an independent civilian review board. The DPD disregarded its constitutional obligation to enforce the law without regard to race and failed to prioritize the protection of Black neighborhoods and crime victims (an approach known as ‘underpolicing’). The police department also harassed and criminalized many civil rights and Black Power groups when they protested police brutality and exercised other constitutionally protected rights of freedom of speech and assembly. For residents of Detroit’s segregated Black communities, the DPD’s racial

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, 167.

¹⁰² Marilyn S. Johnson, “Gender, Race, and Rumours: Re-Examining the 1943 Race Riots,” *Gender & History* 10:2 (1998), 266-67.

¹⁰³ Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, *Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 18-19, 88; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, 166-68 and 172.

¹⁰⁴ Boyd, *Black Detroit*, 153; Harvard Sitkoff, “The Detroit Race Riot of 1943,” *Michigan History* 53:3 (1969), 202.

discrimination and racialized violence closely paralleled the white supremacist law enforcement policies of the Jim Crow South.¹⁰⁵

The DPD was also one of the deadliest, if not the deadliest, urban police departments in the United States during the civil rights era from the mid-1950s through the early 1970s. Internal DPD records officially acknowledge 201 fatal-force encounters where police officers killed civilians between 1957 and 1973. The names of those killed are not disclosed, but a major investigative project by the Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab at the University of Michigan has identified 75% (151) of the acknowledged homicides. The project also has identified an additional 37 people killed by off-duty DPD officers or by other law enforcement agencies operating in Detroit during the 1957-1973 period. The real total of police homicides is undoubtedly significantly higher and ultimately unknowable.¹⁰⁶ For the 188 identified fatal-force incidents, the research findings include:

- 79% of those killed between 1957-1973 were Black.
- At least 59% involved unarmed civilians, and the armed status is disputed in an additional 19% of the cases.
- 21% were teenagers or preteens (92% of this group were unarmed).
- 68% of the police killings occurred between 1967 and 1973, during a period of intensified and racially targeted police repression.
- Around one-fourth of identified police homicides plausibly met the legal standard to bring murder or manslaughter charges but involved cover-ups and/or were not investigated impartially and thoroughly.
- A majority of police homicides involved excessive and unnecessary force, even if technically “justifiable” under state law and DPD policies that allowed fatal force against “fleeing” and unarmed low-level suspects (the Supreme Court ruled such policies unconstitutional in the 1985 *Tennessee v. Garner* decision).
- The Wayne County Prosecutor declared all but five on-duty police homicides to be “justifiable.” Only three of these resulted in prosecutions; each ended in acquittal.

The foundation of racial discrimination in law enforcement during the civil rights era involved everyday encounters in public spaces. In the 1950s, between one-third and one-half of all

¹⁰⁵ Matthew D. Lassiter and the Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, *Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era* (University of Michigan Carceral State Project, 2021), <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/home>; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Alexander B. Elkins, “Battle of the Corner: Urban Policing and Rioting in the United States, 1943-1971” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 2017); Elkins, “Liberals and ‘Get-Tough’ Policing in Postwar Detroit,” in Joel Stone, ed., *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 106-116.

¹⁰⁶ *Detroit Under Fire*, “Mapping Police Homicide Patterns in Detroit, 1957-1973,” <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/police-homicides-1957-1973>; Lassiter, “Police and the License to Kill.” Data in the bullet points below also comes from these two sources.

non-traffic arrests by the DPD were unconstitutional “investigative arrests” without probable cause, based on a deliberate policy of racial profiling and mass criminalization of Black residents as suspects and law-breakers. The Detroit chapter of the ACLU documented this systematic and illegal DPD policy in a major 1958 expose characterizing the city of Detroit as a “police state” where tens of thousands of Black citizens annually faced “arbitrary arrest,” resulting in criminal records for many innocent people. The ACLU report revealed that police often tortured wrongfully arrested people to coerce confessions and that a significant number of their innocent victims paid high bail bonds or plea-bargained to offenses they did not commit just to get out of jail.¹⁰⁷ An accompanying investigation by the NAACP found that white Detroit police officers routinely brutalized innocent Black residents during racial profiling stops of pedestrians and motorists, verbally abused them with racist and sexist epithets, and retaliated with illegal arrests of those who tried to file complaints. The NAACP and the ACLU each called for an independent civilian review board to investigate and discipline officers for the “appalling abuse of civil rights” by the police department.¹⁰⁸

The United States Civil Rights Commission held hearings in Detroit in late 1960 as part of a wider investigation of racial discrimination in housing, education, employment, and law enforcement in the urban North. Arthur Johnson, the head of Detroit’s NAACP chapter, testified that police brutality toward Black citizens was pervasive and that DPD officers were “anti-Negro, anti-integration, and anti-civil rights; . . . often willing instrumentalities in the racial segregationist aims of the dominant white community.” Black police officers then testified that they frequently observed unprovoked racist violence by white officers, that the police department had an unwritten policy of profiling and illegally searching Black citizens on the streets, and that many white officers refused to enforce equal protection laws in public accommodations. DPD leaders denied that any police brutality existed and exonerated almost every white officer accused of brutality and misconduct.¹⁰⁹

Just weeks after the Civil Rights Commission hearings, the DPD illegally arrested and detained around 1,500 Black males in the “crash” crackdown that followed the murders of two white women in downtown Detroit. The U.S. Civil Rights Commission documented physical torture of a number of innocent “suspects” in police custody, and many if not most of those arrested were classified as murder investigation suspects on their official police records. A broad coalition of civil rights groups condemned the “crash” program and demanded an end to illegal investigative arrests. They also called for the hiring of many more Black police officers and an independent

¹⁰⁷ Harold Norris, “Arrests without Warrant,” *The Crisis* (October 1958), 481-486; *Detroit Under Fire*, “Exposing Police Brutality and Misconduct,”

<https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/police-policing-themselves>.

¹⁰⁸ NAACP, “Police Brutality Complaints Reported to the Detroit Branch,” *The Crisis* (October 1958), 487-491.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Civil Rights Commission, *Hearings before the United States Commission on Civil Rights: Hearings Held in Detroit, Michigan, December 14 and December 15, 1960* (Washington: GPO, 1961), Johnson testimony at 302-317.

oversight board with the power to investigate and discipline DPD officers.¹¹⁰ Very little changed despite the protests against the “crash” initiative. As late as 1963, only 95 of the DPD’s 2,591 officers were Black (3.7%), the same ratio as five years earlier, in a city where Black residents constituted around one-third of the total population.¹¹¹

Civil rights and Black Power groups increasingly mobilized against police brutality and especially killings of unarmed Black civilians during the early-to-mid 1960s. A major flashpoint was the fatal shooting in 1963 of Cynthia Scott, a Black woman and sex worker, by a white officer in a “vice” district near downtown notorious for a long history of police corruption. The DPD and the Wayne County Prosecutor exonerated the officer based on his claim that Cynthia Scott attacked him with a knife, a scenario disputed by multiple Black eyewitnesses and incompatible with the forensic evidence. This resulted in major Black community protests charging the DPD and white city leaders with covering up a police murder.¹¹² A coalition of civil rights groups also protested the DPD policy of permitting fatal force against unarmed and fleeing suspects if they were suspected of committing even nonviolent crimes such as burglary, after the police shootings of multiple unarmed Black teenagers. In 1965, the coalition filed a formal complaint with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission charging that the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office violated the U.S. constitution by automatically exonerating white officers who killed Black residents of Detroit regardless of the circumstances.¹¹³

In the mid-1960s, Detroit’s white leadership launched a “war on crime” primarily targeting the city’s Black population, a subset of the national war on urban “street crime” launched by the Lyndon B. Johnson administration.¹¹⁴ The DPD created the Tactical Mobile Unit with the mission of cracking down on “high crime” areas, a euphemism for Black neighborhoods and commercial corridors, and also controlling “demonstrations of various types,” meaning civil rights protests. The TMU engaged in racial profiling and discretionary criminalization on a mass scale—the DPD’s own annual reports reveal that the unit detained more than 150,000 motorists and pedestrians per year during the second half of the 1960s, while making only a few thousand arrests annually, a majority for misdemeanors. All DPD patrol officers operated under an officially sanctioned “stop-and-frisk” policy that the city council later codified into law soon after the 1967 Uprising, over the opposition of civil rights groups and in direct response to mass demands from white city residents. The DPD also persuaded the city council to pass an “anti-loitering” ordinance that resolved the longstanding problem of unconstitutional investigative arrests by giving police officers unchecked discretion to arrest people in public

¹¹⁰ *Detroit Under Fire*, “Sweep the Streets: Implementing Crash,”

<https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/sweep-the-streets>.

¹¹¹ Detroit Urban League, “Revised Report on the Employment Practices of the DPD,” October 1963, Box 17, Francis Kornegay Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹¹² M. Mann and Brianna Wells, “What Happened to Cynthia Scott?” (July 2020), <https://arcg.is/0LWY09>.

¹¹³ Lassiter, “Police and the License to Kill.”

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

spaces. DPD records show that enforcement of the anti-loitering ordinance primarily targeted Black people in racially transitional areas and also disproportionately harassed activists in civil rights and Black Power groups.¹¹⁵

The DPD utilized the Tactical Mobile Unit, the anti-loitering ordinance, and the top-secret Criminal Intelligence Bureau (aka the “Red Squad”) to conduct illegal surveillance and disruption operations against civil rights groups and other left-liberal political organizations. Urban police departments across the nation began deploying “Red Squads” to target leftist political radicals during and after World War I, and the DPD’s version had a long history of political surveillance and criminalization of “subversive” labor, antiwar, mainstream civil rights, and Black nationalist groups. The DPD’s Criminal Intelligence Bureau worked closely with the Michigan State Police’s parallel Special Investigation Unit and also with the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s COINTELPRO program, two agencies that also engaged in widespread constitutional abuses. When publicly exposed in the 1970s, the DPD’s Red Squad had compiled secret political surveillance files on more than 1.4 million people, a mass violation of civil liberties designed to obstruct progressive groups from advancing racial equality and other causes under the pretext of crime control and thwarting “subversion.” Every civil rights and Black Power group in Detroit had an extensive Red Squad file, along with most of the city’s prominent Black politicians, activists, and other leaders.¹¹⁶

The DPD’s operation to surveil and destroy the Adult Community Movement for Equality/Afro-American Youth Movement (ACME-AAYM) is an illustration of how the police department in a northern city used extralegal and unconstitutional methods to undermine the civil rights and Black Power movements. ACME-AAYM formed on the East Side of Detroit in 1964 as part of the southern-based Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s effort to expand civil rights activism in the urban North. ACME-AAYM launched protest campaigns against racial segregation and discrimination in housing, employment, education, and law enforcement. The DPD responded by harassing and arresting ACME-AAYM members for their political activism, including through deployment of the recently passed anti-loitering law. This led ACME-AAYM to escalate its campaign against police brutality. The DPD’s Red Squad, with FBI assistance, then infiltrated ACME-AAYM with undercover operatives and instigated an alleged riot, labeled the Kercheval Incident of 1966, in order to arrest the group’s leadership and force its

¹¹⁵ Elkins, “Liberals and ‘Get-Tough’ Policing in Postwar Detroit”; *Detroit Under Fire*, “Liberal War on Crime, 1964-1966,” <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/1964-1966>.

¹¹⁶ Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); David Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); *Detroit Under Fire*, “Red Squad: Political Surveillance,” <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/red-squad>, <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/political-surveillance>. Because of controversial privacy restrictions resulting from civil litigation, “Red Squad” files in Michigan are sealed and available only to the specific individuals targeted, so the full extent of the operation is obscured.

dissolution. The DPD portrayed ACME-AAYM activists as violent revolutionaries and boasted that its preemptive tactics had prevented a major race riot in Detroit.¹¹⁷

Police brutality against Black citizens of Detroit was a primary cause of the Detroit Uprising of 1967, when at least 43 people died. Law enforcement agencies shot and killed 35 people, almost all of whom were unarmed, during the week of violence and disorder. Thirty of these fatalities were Black, most killed by DPD officers or Michigan National Guardsmen operating under orders to use discretion to shoot looters (a nonviolent property crime). Numerous investigations have documented that a significant number of fatal force incidents by law enforcement during the Detroit riot/rebellion of 1967 were questionable or unjustified, and that a number involved clear cover-ups. Most of the killings of alleged looters also violated the DPD's own "use of force" policy that a fleeing person should not be shot "upon mere suspicion" or if "any other means" of apprehension was possible. The DPD and the Wayne County Prosecutor exonerated all police killings of "looters" and "rioters" as justifiable homicides. Three white DPD officers did eventually face criminal charges after their cover-up of the murder of three Black teenagers at the Algiers Motel unraveled, but none was convicted. More than 7,200 people were arrested during the 1967 Uprising, most of them Black residents of Detroit, and investigations by the NAACP and other groups documented many cases of police brutality and wrongful detention. The federal Kerner Commission's investigative report blamed "white racism" and metropolitan patterns of housing segregation as the fundamental causes of the urban uprisings in Detroit and other American cities and also highlighted the role of police brutality as the immediate trigger for urban unrest.¹¹⁸

The DPD responded to the 1967 Uprising by intensifying its policies of racialized violence and political repression against members of Detroit's Black community and especially against Black Power organizations. Between 1968 and 1970, large groups of white DPD officers brutally assaulted Black Power activists in newly integrated high schools, Black teenagers in racially transitional neighborhoods, Black youth at a downtown church dance, and nonviolent youth activists at a Poor People's Campaign march. The Detroit Commission on Community Relations and the Michigan Civil Rights Commission documented police criminality in each of these incidents and called for real consequences; the DPD's internal investigation bureau whitewashed each investigation and exonerated almost every officer involved. The DPD's Criminal Intelligence Bureau (Red Squad), assisted by FBI COINTELPRO, also increased the surveillance

¹¹⁷ Jesse Blumberg, Hannah Thoms, and Matthew Lassiter, "The Kercheval Incident, Detroit 1966: The Police Department's Illegal War on Black Activists," <https://arcg.is/Oy5n8W>.

¹¹⁸ Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989); Stone, ed., *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies*; John Hersey, *The Algiers Motel Incident* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968); *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, March 1968* (Washington: GPO, 1968). Homicide analysis in "The 43 Who Died," *Detroit Free Press*, September 3, 1967; Van Gordon Sauter and Burleigh Hines, *Nightmare in Detroit: A Rebellion and its Victims* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1968); *Detroit Under Fire*, "Uprising and Occupation, 1967," <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/1967>.

and criminalization of multiple Black nationalist groups, culminating in the violent mass arrest of 142 participants at a Republic of New Africa political gathering in the New Bethel Incident of 1969. DPD officers also launched a full-scale repression campaign against the small Detroit chapter of the Black Panther Party, ending with mass arrests and a murder conspiracy trial of 15 of its members.¹¹⁹

Civil rights organizations protested this campaign of political repression and reiterated their demands for an independent police oversight commission, while Black Power groups called for complete community control of the DPD. They accused the DPD of systematically whitewashing all internal investigations of both the high-profile incidents of racial confrontation and the everyday brutality and misconduct complaints filed by Black citizens. The Michigan Civil Rights Commission reiterated this critique in a series of scathing reports that the DPD's so-called "Blue Curtain" covered up brutality and misconduct as an unwritten but quasi-formalized policy, and that officers had a pattern of illegally arresting and violently retaliating against civilians who were courageous enough to file complaints. The DPD did not fire a single officer based on its internal investigations of brutality complaints filed by Black citizens during the decade of the 1960s, and only a few faced modest discipline. Under civil rights pressure, the DPD did slowly increase its recruitment of Black officers, with their ranks rising to 11% in 1969 and 15% by 1972, though in a city where Black residents were approaching a population majority. A major watchdog group report also concluded that the DPD had done a terrible job preventing and solving felony crimes of violence during the 1960s, with a declining clearance rate and major initiatives (such as the Tactical Mobile Unit) more committed to racial profiling and political repression than crime control and protection of civilians.¹²⁰

The Detroit Police Department dramatically escalated its use of fatal force against the Black population in the aftermath of the 1967 Uprising and was almost certainly the deadliest urban police department per capita during this era. Between 1967 and 1973, DPD officers killed at least 171 people, a majority of them unarmed Black males. The DPD liberalized its "use of force" policy in direct response to the 1967 Uprising and the internal recognition that many of the shootings of alleged looters violated its existing rules. The new policy shifted evaluation of fatal force from a more objective standard to the "sound discretion" of the individual officer, part of the national trend during this era to insulate law enforcement from oversight and accountability by not questioning the "reasonable" judgment of the police on the scene. The archival record makes clear that the DPD and Detroit's white political leaders viewed the discretionary use of

¹¹⁹ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*; Christian Davenport, *How Social Movements Die: Repression and Demobilization of the Republic of New Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); *Detroit Under Fire*, "Political Violence and Black Power, 1968-1970," <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/1968-70>.

¹²⁰ Michigan Civil Rights Commission, "Recommendations to Improve Police-Community Relations in Michigan," April 9, 1968, Folder 5, Box 4, Michigan Department of Civil Rights, Detroit Office, RG 80-17, Michigan State Archives; Loukas Loukopoulos, *The Detroit Police Department: A Research Report* (Detroit: Committee on Public Awareness, May 1970); *Detroit Under Fire*, "Political Violence and Black Power, 1968-1970," <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/1968-70>.

fatal force as a necessary tool to fight both “street crime” and low-level property crimes and to assure the declining white population that law enforcement would control the Black community and hold the line against Black political power and demographic change.¹²¹

Around half of the identifiable fatal DPD shootings between 1968 and 1973 involved unarmed Black males, most in their teens or early twenties, shot while fleeing from the scene of an alleged burglary or robbery—a policy later determined by the federal judiciary to be in violation of constitutional rights.¹²² In a significant number of cases, civil rights groups and impacted families accused police of using deadly force without legal justification and then covering this up by falsely claiming that they acted in self-defense or to prevent escape. Many of these fatal shootings occurred along major commercial corridors or in racially transitional zones between white and Black neighborhoods. Activist groups charged that this pattern illustrated a DPD deployment policy to protect white-owned businesses and white residential areas from property crime through the deterrent of fatal force—not an intensified crackdown in the poor Black neighborhoods generally designated as the “high-crime” areas of the city. The Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office found every police killing of an unarmed and fleeing “suspect” during this era to be “justifiable” as a reasonable exercise of officer discretion permitted under the DPD’s revised use of force policy. Civil rights and Black Power groups protested many of these police killings, especially of unarmed teenagers such as 13-year-old Chucky Howell, an innocent bystander shot by a white officer who claimed that he mistook the very small boy for a burglary suspect. As almost always, the prosecutor found that “all facts and circumstances indicate justifiable action” in Chucky’s death.¹²³

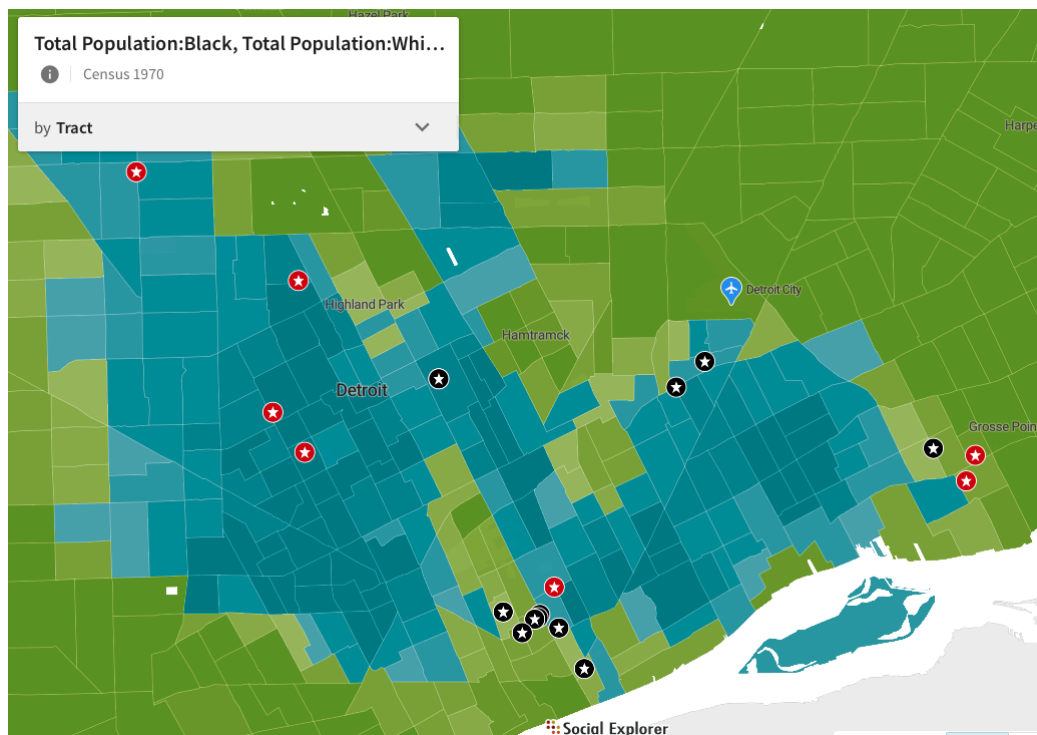
The notorious STRESS unit (“Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets”) was responsible for the fatal shootings of at least 22 people between 1971 and 1973, as well as dozens more non-fatal shootings. Almost all of those killed were young Black males, many in questionable circumstances that led to mass civil rights protests and a number of costly civil litigation verdicts against the city of Detroit. The DPD and Mayor Roman Gribbs championed STRESS as an elite decoy unit that would deter street crime through “proactive policing” and by catching robbers and muggers in the act. James Bannon, the DPD official who designed STRESS, publicly stated that “what is at stake here is whether we can effectively police the black community.” The DPD also claimed that the mission of STRESS was to protect law-abiding Black residents from street crime, but the decoy units primarily deployed near downtown in the Cass Corridor (now called

¹²¹ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*; Lassiter, “Police and the License to Kill.”

¹²² In *Tennessee v. Garner*, 471 U.S. 1 (1985), the Supreme Court ruled that police use of deadly force against unarmed and fleeing people who posed no immediate threat was an unconstitutional deprivation of civil rights. In the context of a historical harms report, police killings of people under a policy that was legal at the time, but later determined to be unconstitutional by the judiciary, should be understood as similar to racial discrimination in housing before the passage of fair-housing legislation or racial discrimination in employment before passage of fair-employment laws.

¹²³ From the Ground Up, *Detroit Under STRESS*, 1973, Joseph A. Labadie Collection, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan; Lassiter, “Police and the License to Kill.”

Midtown) and along other racial boundaries between Black and white residential areas. Most of the fatal STRESS shootings occurred in these areas as well (see map below), strong evidence that the real mission was to reassure white-owned businesses and white residents of metropolitan Detroit that the police department would protect them from the much-hyped threat of Black “street crime.” Black power groups and activists on the political left labeled STRESS a “murder squad” and argued that it sought to “terrorize and intimidate the black community” through illegal and unconstitutional state violence.¹²⁴



Map of location of 22 STRESS fatal shootings, showing concentration in the Cass Corridor/Midtown area and racially transitional areas on the East Side. Black dots = decoy unit shootings. Red dots = shootings by other STRESS units. Blue-shaded census tracts = predominantly Black population. Green-shaded census tracts = predominantly white population. Map courtesy of <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/rememberingstressvictims>.

In September 1971, mass Black community protests erupted after STRESS decoy officers fatally shot two Black teenagers, 15-year-old Ricardo Buck and 16-year-old Craig Mitchell. The DPD and the Wayne County Prosecutor declared the shootings justifiable based on one officer’s claim that the teenagers had attacked him with a weapon, discounting eyewitness accounts of a cover-up and forensic evidence that undermined the police story. The city later settled a civil lawsuit by the two families charging that the STRESS unit had used excessive force and covered up what really happened. Activist groups charged that many other STRESS killings involved

¹²⁴ Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 180-217; Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*; Austin McCoy, “‘Detroit under STRESS’: The Campaign to Stop Police Killings and the Criminal State in Detroit,” *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 7:1 (2021), 1-34; *Detroit Under Fire*, “STRESS and Radical Response, 1971-1973,” <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/1971-73>. Bannon quoted in John F. Nichols and James D. Bannon, “S.T.R.E.S.S.: Zero Visibility Policing,” *The Police Chief* (June 1972), 32-36.

“shoot-first” tactics followed by framing of the victims by planting knives on their bodies. The Wayne County Prosecutor exonerated all STRESS officers except for a single prosecution that resulted in acquittal by an all-white jury. STRESS precipitated a number of other highly controversial incidents, especially after a shootout between STRESS officers and three Black males resulted in a weeks-long manhunt that involved widespread DPD brutality and mass violations of civil liberties in Black neighborhoods targeted in the search. This led to the formation of the United Black Coalition, which called for the abolition of STRESS, and helped bring about the 1973 election of Coleman Young, the first Black mayor of Detroit.¹²⁵

Postscript: 1974 - Present

Coleman Young abolished STRESS soon after taking office, and his election marked the end of the long era of white political control of the Detroit Police Department and the city government. Mayor Young promoted a “community policing” agenda of “law and order with justice,” promising to reform the racist practices of the DPD while maintaining a tough approach in the wars on crime and drugs. Young’s affirmative action policies led to substantial diversification of the police department by race and also by gender, although the white-controlled Detroit Police Officers Association fiercely resisted these efforts. By 1980, 835 of the 2,977 DPD patrol officers were nonwhite (28%), in a city with a 63% Black population. Black women accounted for 144 of these patrol officers. Among ranking officers in 1980, 23% were nonwhite. Despite Young’s reforms, some DPD officers continued to engage in a significant degree of brutality and misconduct, especially targeting Black youth and the poorest areas of the Black-majority city. The mayor did appoint the members of a newly formed Board of Police Commissioners, but the scope of its independent authority to discipline officers fell short of the longtime civil rights demand for a truly independent civilian oversight agency, with the police chief allowed to override its determinations. The DPD also remained one of the deadliest law enforcement agencies in the nation during Young’s two decades in office, with researchers able to identify at least 194 people (a significant undercount) killed by police officers between 1974 and 1993, the vast majority younger Black males.¹²⁶

In 2003, the Detroit Police Department entered into a consent decree with the U.S. Department of Justice to resolve mass violations of the constitutional rights of city residents. The immediate cause of the consent decree was a wave of police killings of Black civilians during the 1990s and the protests organized by the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality, which emerged after the

¹²⁵ Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*; McCoy, “‘Detroit under STRESS’; *Detroit Under Fire*, “STRESS and Radical Response, 1971-1973.”

¹²⁶ Michael Stauch, Jr., “Wildcat of the Streets: Race, Class, and the Punitive Turn in 1970s Detroit” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2015); Dennis DeSlippe, *Protesting Affirmative Action: The Struggle over Equality after the Civil Rights Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); DeSlippe, “Do Whites Have Rights?: White Detroit Policemen and ‘Reverse Discrimination’ Protests in the 1970s,” *Journal of American History* 92:3 (Dec. 2001), 932-960. Employment data from Detroit Police Department, *Annual Report* (1980), 81. Fatal-force data from 1974-1993 compiled by the Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab at the University of Michigan and to be available in its forthcoming website *Crackdown: Policing Detroit through the War on Crime, Drugs, and Youth*.

high-profile beating death of Malice Green by two white officers in 1992. Then in 2000, a series of media exposés revealed that the DPD was again the deadliest per capita large urban department in the United States, that police officers almost never faced consequences for shooting and killing people, and that the city had paid out hundreds of millions to settle civil lawsuits from victim families. The DOJ investigation uncovered that, even with a cautious assessment, almost one-third of DPD fatal-force incidents between 1998 and 2001 alone were unconstitutional deprivations of civil rights. The DOJ also criticized the DPD’s internal investigation procedures for failing to fairly investigate police shootings and civilian brutality complaints. And as in the 1950s, the DOJ found that the Detroit Police Department engaged in a “pattern or practice” of depriving city residents of their constitutional rights through “excessive force, false arrests, illegal detentions, and unconstitutional conditions of confinement” inside its jails and interrogation cells. The DPD remained under federal oversight until 2016.¹²⁷

Key Takeaways

- **Over-policing:** Since its inception, the city of Detroit has invested in both formal and informal policing and criminalization practices that disproportionately target Black residents within the city through brutal, excessive, and often lethal, means.
- **Under-policing:** In several instances, the Detroit Police Department has failed to protect Black communities in Detroit, either by neglecting to address the continued existence of crime in majority Black neighborhoods or sanctioning violence from white residents and police officers against Black residents.
- **Policy and Hiring Exclusion:** Despite the city’s majority Black population, DPD has largely been a white-controlled institution for much of its tenure, adopting policies that disproportionately criminalize and target Black residents through violent, excessive, and, in some cases, unconstitutional means.
- **Deadly Force:** The Detroit Police Department has been recognized as one of the deadliest police forces in the United States with officers disproportionately murdering unarmed, Black civilians; In many cases, the officers involved in these homicides are shielded from accountability by internal DPD investigation or the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office ruling their actions “justifiable.”

¹²⁷ Diana Bukowski, “Serial Killer Kops,” *Michigan Citizen*, April 15, 2000; David Ashenfelter and Joe Swickard, “Detroit Cops Are Deadliest in U.S.” series, *Detroit Free Press*, May 15-18, 2000; David Shepardson, Norman Sinclair, Ronald J. Hansen, and David G. Grant, “Detroit Is Soft on Killer Cops” series, *Detroit News*, May 14-15, 2000. Consent decree documents in *U.S. v. City of Detroit, Michigan* (2003), Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse, <https://clearinghouse.net/case/1028/>. Data on fatal-force incidents cited in U.S. Department of Justice to Mayor Michael E. Duggan, August 25, 2014, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/08/25/dpd_closeout_8-24-14.pdf.

Quality of Life

Detroit has a troubling history of health harms inflicted upon its Black residents by city and state policies. Decades of systemic racism entrenched in housing, safety, and urban policies have contributed to significant health disparities in the city. These disparities are further exacerbated by imposed economic hardship from white flight and suburban resource hoarding, a practice where suburban areas accumulate and control more than their fair share of resources, often at the expense of urban areas. Displacement caused by projects like the construction of the I-375 highway, a failing healthcare system marked by the consolidation of Detroit hospital systems, and the privatization of the public health department, have perpetuated these harms. This section compares contemporary health inequities in Detroit and traces the historic government policies that shaped them.

Healthcare Access

Major Detroit hospitals, such as the Detroit Medical Center (DMC), have become known for low-quality, inefficient, and sometimes dangerous medical care. DMC has failed federal safety inspections multiple times due to unclean surgical environments, inadequate infection control, and dirty medical instruments.¹²⁸ The hospital has faced several lawsuits from physicians, nurses, and custodians claiming it prioritizes profits over patient care.¹²⁹ In 2022, DMC cleaning staff filed a lawsuit alleging unsanitary conditions, including spilled blood and rusty water fountains.¹³⁰ Additionally, a medical resident recently filed a whistleblower lawsuit over wrongful termination after raising concerns about patient mistreatment,¹³¹ highlighting that harms against Black patients continue to occur.

DMC also faced a federal lawsuit resulting in a \$30 million settlement for an alleged Medicare kickback scheme that encouraged physicians to refer Medicare patients to DMC hospitals for personal financial gain.¹³² For over 11 years, DMC has endangered patients and staff with

¹²⁸ Bouffard, Karen, “Federal inspection underway at two DMC hospitals after dirty instruments complaint,” *The Detroit News* (Detroit, MI), Oct. 16, 2018. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2018/10/16/dmc-harper-hospital-leaders-state-inspectors-dirty-instruments-complaints/1657168002/>.

¹²⁹ Bouffard, Karen, “Lawsuit: DMC cost-cutting, fraud led to patient deaths,” *The Detroit News* (Detroit, MI), Mar. 26, 2019. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2019/03/25/doctors-allege-cost-cutting-fraud-at-detroit-medical-center-caused-deaths/3270723002/>.

¹³⁰ Samilton, Tracy, “Lawsuit alleges unsanitary conditions at two DMC hospitals; blames focus on profits, not patients,” *Michigan Public* (Ann Arbor, MI), July 1, 2022. <https://www.michiganpublic.org/health/2022-07-01/lawsuit-alleges-unsanitary-conditions-at-two-dmc-hospitals-blames-focus-on-profits-not-patients>.

¹³¹ Neavling, Steve, “Doctor files whistleblower lawsuit against DMC after patient becomes quadriplegic,” *Detroit Metro Times* (Detroit, MI), Mar. 8, 2024. <https://www.metrotimes.com/news/doctor-files-whistleblower-lawsuit-against-dmc-after-patient-becomes-quadruple-gic-35669677>.

¹³² Thompson, Carol, “DMC, former and current owners to pay \$29.7M settlement in alleged Medicare kickback scheme,” *The Detroit News* (Detroit, MI), May 31, 2023.

hazardous environments and a focus on financial profit. Detroit residents are often forced to endure unsafe conditions in DMC hospitals due to a lack of available, affordable, and safe medical centers, exacerbating health disparities and limiting access to care.

Among those most affected by the inadequate access to healthcare in Detroit are Black birthing persons. Birthing options in Detroit are primarily limited to maternity wards in large healthcare systems, such as DMC, instead of birthing centers and community centered midwifery services, which are associated with better birth outcomes.¹³³ Research on inequities in morbidity and mortality associated with pregnancy shows that racial gaps persist, even when controlling for socioeconomic status, age, and education.¹³⁴ Social determinants of health and discriminatory treatment of Black patients by medical professionals also impact birthing outcomes for Black birthing persons in Detroit.¹³⁵ These barriers, both historical and contemporary, increase the risk of complications during pregnancy. Access to a safe and proximate hospital is crucial for equitable birthing outcomes. However, without easily accessible and culturally competent healthcare facilities, Black birthing persons are unable to receive proper care and treatment during pregnancy. Detroit's history of hospital closures, white flight, and municipal infrastructure disinvestment created a shortage of quality and accessible perinatal care services.

Additionally, Black residents of Detroit are less able to access mental health care services, yet, nationally, Black people are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population.¹³⁶ As of April this year, the federal government has designated 19 areas in Wayne county as lacking mental healthcare professionals, while Oakland and Macomb counties have seven and five areas designated as such, respectively.¹³⁷ A survey conducted by the Detroit Regional Chamber on mental healthcare found that 28% of suburban residents felt it was “easy” to access mental health services compared to 13% of Detroit residents.¹³⁸ An additional survey

<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2023/05/31/dmc-former-and-current-owners-to-pay-29-7m-settlement-in-alleged-medicare-kickback-scheme/70275341007/>.

¹³³ Welch, Leseliey MPH, MBA; Branch Canady, Renee PhD, MPA; Harmell, Chelsea MPH; White, Nicole BS, CPM; Snow, Char'ly MSN, CNM; Kane Low, Lisa PhD, CNM, FACNM, FAAN, “We Are Not Asking Permission to Save Our Own Lives: Black-Led Birth Centers to Address Health Inequities,” *The Journal of Perinatal & Neonatal Nursing* 36, no. 2 (April/June 2022): 138 - 149, DOI: 10.1097/JPN.0000000000000649.

¹³⁴ van Daalen, Kim Robin, Jeenan Kaiser, Samuel Kebede, Gabriela Cipriano, Hassan Maimouni, Ekiomoado Olumese, Anthea Chui, Isla Kuhn, and Clare Oliver-Williams, “Racial discrimination and adverse pregnancy outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis,” *BMJ Global Health* 7, no. 8 (Aug. 2, 2022): e009227, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2022-009227>.

¹³⁵ City of Detroit Health Department, *Perinatal Epidemiology Report 2022* (Detroit, MI: City of Detroit, 2022), https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2022-09/Perinatal%20Epidemiology%20Report_06-22-2022_RED%20Edit_Final.pdf.

¹³⁶ Mental and Behavioral Health - African Americans,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health, accessed Aug. 8, 2024, <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/mental-and-behavioral-health-african-americans>.

¹³⁷ Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), *Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA)*, 2024, distributed by HRSA Data Warehouse, <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>.

¹³⁸ Hurd, Bridget, “Disparity in Access to Mental Health Services Requires Immediate Action,” *Detroit Regional Chamber* (Detroit, MI), Oct. 6, 2023. <https://www.detroitchamber.com/disparity-in-access-to-mental-health-services-requires-immediate-action/>.

conducted by the University of Michigan in 2019 reported that 8.3% of Detroit residents responded that they were unable to access desired mental health services in 2019.¹³⁹ Disparate access to mental healthcare services is due to a shortage of services but may also be influenced by lack of insurance coverage for mental health services, which indicate potential racial disparities in obtaining health insurance policies. In sum, these issues of healthcare access in Detroit are a product of a variety of policies, such as the privatization of healthcare services and disinvestment in Black communities via practices like urban renewal and redlining. Improving access to mental healthcare and other forms of care is achieved by first developing an equitable healthcare system in Detroit that is centered around Black community health.

Healthcare Infrastructure

Federal policies like redlining, along with local events such as funding cuts, white flight, and the closing of the Detroit Health Department, have significantly shaped the city's healthcare landscape.

Prior to the 1960s, Black residents and doctors of Detroit were barred from the city's healthcare system, so they formed their own healthcare centers, such as Dunbar Hospital, the city's first non-profit black hospital.¹⁴⁰ In total, there were 18 Black-owned and operated hospitals in Detroit providing critical access to care for Black residents of Detroit.¹⁴¹ However, this all changed when the federal 1965 Medicare and Medicaid Act was passed, which forced white-run hospitals to desegregate. The act threatened to withhold funding from any hospital that practiced racial segregation,¹⁴² and Black hospitals, which had long been underfunded and overburdened, struggled to attract patients and secure the necessary financial support to remain operational.^{143,144} Thus, desegregation of white hospitals inadvertently led to the eventual closure of all 18 Black hospitals in Detroit, removing critical healthcare infrastructure specifically tailored to the needs of black residents.

The loss of black hospitals after 1965 and the integration of the Detroit Health Department facilities led more Black residents of Detroit to seek care at the Herman Kiefer Hospital (renamed Herman Kiefer Complex in the 1980s). As discussed in the Housing section, in the

¹³⁹ Wileden, Lydia, *Health and Health Insurance in Detroit: Identifying barriers to accessing health care* (Ann Arbor: Regents of the University of Michigan, 2019).

<https://detroiturvey.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Health-and-Health-Insurance-in-Detroit-2-21-20.pdf>.

¹⁴⁰ Jordan, Jaman, "Detroit had 18 Black-owned and operated hospitals: Why they vanished," *Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, MI), Feb. 27, 2022.

<https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/contributors/2022/02/27/detroit-hospitals-black-history-month/6925953001/>.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Duff-Brown, Beth, "How Medicare's architect forced hospital desegregation," *Stanford Medicine*, Stanford Medicine Magazine, May 10, 2021, <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/medicare-architect-forced-hospital-desegregation/>.

¹⁴³ "United Community / Southwest General Hospital," *Detroiturbex.com*, accessed Aug. 9, 2024,

<https://detroiturbex.com/content/healthandsafety/uch/>.

¹⁴⁴ Gliem, Valerie, "History of Detroit's Black hospitals detailed in project," *The University Record* (Ann Arbor, MI), Nov. 6, 2000. <https://record.umich.edu/articles/history-of-detroits-black-hospitals-detailed-in-project/>.

1970s, the city lost a substantial part of its tax base and economic and political support to white flight, with over 300,000 white residents leaving by the 1980s.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, a nationwide economic recession added further financial burden to Detroit and led to a decline in overall health services. Consequently, starting in the 1970s, health facilities throughout the city began to shut down.¹⁴⁶

Despite Detroit's mounting financial crisis, the Detroit Health Department was known as a pioneer in public health throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, with ample resources, high-quality laboratories, and political support.¹⁴⁷ The Detroit Health Department was often asked to teach other municipalities strategies to lower rates of HIV transmission, lead poisoning in children, and Black infant mortality.¹⁴⁸ However, increasing white flight and economic recession led to a 70% reduction in the department's workforce between 2008 and 2010.¹⁴⁹

The decline in the Detroit Health Department culminated in a 2012 decision to outsource effectively all health programs to the Institute for Population Health, a nonprofit but private organization.¹⁵⁰ In 2013, an emergency manager with greater powers than elected health officials was appointed.¹⁵¹ The privatization of the health department transformed healthcare delivery, reducing the political influence of city health officials and undermining public health protections for Detroit residents. Quality of care and health outcomes significantly declined during this period, culminating in Detroit's bankruptcy in 2013. Although there have been efforts to rebuild the Detroit Public Health Department, significant weaknesses and a need for healthcare infrastructure development persist.

The historical and ongoing health disparities in Detroit, rooted in systemic racism and compounded by economic disinvestment and healthcare system failures, highlight the need for reparative action. The integration of white-run hospitals, while intended to promote equity, inadvertently dismantled the crucial infrastructure of Black-run hospitals, leaving Black Detroiters with limited access to competent care. This, coupled with the broader socioeconomic challenges of white flight, redlining, and the privatization of public health services, has led to inequitable access to healthcare in Detroit. The city's Black residents, particularly birthing

¹⁴⁵ Thompson, Heather A., "Rethinking the Politics of White Flight In the Postwar City: Detroit, 1945-1980," *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 2 (1999): 164, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009614429902500201>.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, Noah, "A Health Center Serves as an Oasis in Southwest Detroit," *Direct Relief* (Santa Barbara, CA), Sept. 16, 2019. <https://www.directrelief.org/2019/09/a-health-center-serves-as-an-oasis-in-southwest-detroit/>.

¹⁴⁷ Barry-Jester, Anna Maria, "Hard Lessons From Detroit, A City That Tried To Privatize Public Health," *GBH* (Boston, MA), Aug. 6, 2021.

<https://www.wgbh.org/news/national/2021-08-06/hard-lessons-from-detroit-a-city-that-tried-to-privatize-public-health>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

persons, continue to suffer the consequences of these historical injustices. Addressing these inequities requires not only rebuilding healthcare infrastructure but also implementing policies that prioritize the health and well-being of marginalized communities.

Environment and Health

Pollution is a major issue in Detroit, with many areas failing to meet federal air quality standards and others experiencing significant noise pollution, primarily from traffic and industrial activities, and flooding. Detroit has a higher number of people in sensitive groups for pollution vulnerability than the Michigan and US average, which include the elderly, pregnant people, and children (CDC, MIDHHS).¹⁵²

Intersection of Redlining and Pollution: The Tri-Cities Region

In the mid-20th century, Black residents began moving into the Tri-Cities area of Southwest Detroit, which is composed of Delray, Boynton, and Oakwood Heights. Seeking better economic opportunities in the auto industry and the surrounding factories near the river, this migration was part of the larger Great Migration, during which Black people moved from the rural South to the urban North in search of jobs and to escape Jim Crow laws. Unlike many other parts of Detroit, large amounts of the Tri-Cities area notably lacked racially restrictive covenants. This absence allowed Black families to buy homes and settle in the Tri-Cities, creating a vibrant and diverse community.

In the original HOLC redlining map, the Tri-Cities area of Southwest Detroit was coded yellow. As previously explained in the Housing section, this designation indicated that the neighborhood, already composed of Hungarian, Polish, and Italian immigrants, was considered undesirable by the HOLC. This categorization made it easier for Black families to move in and purchase homes, as the area was not highly sought after by white residents.

Initially, the community thrived with Black-owned businesses and vibrant neighborhoods. Lifelong resident Theresa Landrum reminisces about this period, describing it as a "Harlem

¹⁵² United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "Which Populations Experience Greater Risks of Adverse Health Effects Resulting from Wildfire Smoke Exposure?," last modified Feb. 8, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/wildfire-smoke-course/which-populations-experience-greater-risks-adverse-health-effects-resulting>; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of Population, 2020* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2020); Osterman, MJK, Hamilton, BE, Martin, JA, Driscoll, AK, Valenzuela, CP., *Births: Final data for 2021, National Vital Statistics Reports* 72, no 1. (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, Jan. 31 2023), <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:122047>; Michigan Department of Public Health and Human Services (MIDHHS), Division for Vital Health Records and Statistics, "Fertility Rates by County & Detroit and Age of Mother Michigan Residents 2021", 2021, distributed by the State of Michigan, <https://www.mdch.state.mi.us/osr/natality/RegionRatesObject.asp?Char=208&Row=MICOUNTYDET&Col=STANDARD2&Stat=F&Average=A&TableType=G&RowGroup=REGION&COLGROUP=AGE2>.

renaissance" for the area, where Black families could thrive, supported by good jobs and strong community networks.¹⁵³

However, over the years, the expansion of industrial facilities like the Marathon oil refinery, steel mills, and power plants drastically altered the landscape in spite of strong opposition from the predominantly Black community. In a three-mile radius surrounding the Tri-Cities are more than four dozen polluters monitored by the EPA, including AK Steel, Great Lakes Water Authority waste treatment plant, DTE Energy plants, EDW Levy Co. plant, Magni Industries, Air Products and Chemicals Inc., and St. Mary's Cement.

In the mid-1960s, the construction of I-75 split this region in half, plowing through neighborhoods and Black-owned businesses. Today, I-75 is a congested, eight-lane highway used by 100,000 cars and diesel-powered semi-trucks a day. I-75 is a significant source of nitrogen oxides (NO_x), particulate matter, carbon monoxide, benzene, and other harmful emissions known to cause serious health problems, such as asthma, impaired lung function, cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment, and birth defects.¹⁵⁴

The most prominent polluter in the Tri-Cities region is Marathon, Michigan's only oil refinery. Marathon initially occupied a very small corner of the neighborhood. However, the refinery has expanded significantly. Today, Marathon Oil Refinery is a 250-acre facility that refines 140,000 barrels of oil per day.¹⁵⁵ The refinery emits 29 different types of toxins, putting residents in nearby neighborhoods at an elevated risk of cancer, respiratory disease, asthma, and liver failure. The refinery also emits at least eight chemicals known to cause cancer, including benzene, dioxin, and lead compounds, according to the EPA.¹⁵⁶

The acrid smell emanating from the plant is so intense that residents often feel nauseated inside their homes with the windows shut. "At night, the smell is so bad it wakes you up," Juanita Patterson, who has asthma, tells Metro Times. "I get really, really bad headaches. It's really hard for me to breathe."¹⁵⁷

Since 2012, the state has fielded hundreds of complaints against Marathon. In April 2013, an explosion at the refinery sent rolling plumes of black smoke and toxic chemicals into the air, prompting police in gas masks to close off streets and evacuate residents. In 2019, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) issued at least nine violations to Marathon for noxious odors and exceeding legal limits on toxic emissions. In total, EGLE has

¹⁵³ Neavling, Steve, "Struggling to breathe in 48217, Michigan's most toxic ZIP code," Detroit Metro Times (Detroit, MI), Jan. 8, 2020.

<https://www.metrotimes.com/news/struggling-to-breathe-in-48217-michigans-most-toxic-zip-code-23542211>.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

reported 21 air quality violations by Marathon since 2006. However, Marathon is not the only polluting plant in the Tri-Cities area; many plants in the area have received multiple air quality violations since 2006. EGLE reports 22 air quality violations since 2006 by EDW Levy Co., and the Great Lakes Water Authority wastewater treatment facility has received 7 in the same time period. See Figure 1 in Appendix I for a map of air quality violations.

Air Pollution

Predominantly Black neighborhoods, like the Tri-Cities area, are disproportionately affected by air pollution in Detroit. Redlining and other discriminatory policies have created a cityscape where major roadways and industrial facilities are placed near or in predominantly Black neighborhoods. Therefore, Black residents of Detroit are exposed more heavily to the primary sources of pollution than their white counterparts. Children and those with preexisting health conditions are at greater risk of developing exposure-related conditions. These air pollutants are linked to severe health conditions such as asthma, cardiovascular disease, and various cancers.

Detroit often struggles to meet air quality standards. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) measures a set of 6 criteria pollutants to determine if cities meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) designations set by the EPA. As of July 31st, Detroit is classified as being in nonattainment for sulfur dioxide, and is classified as in maintenance for particulate matter of particle size 10 micrometers or smaller (PM₁₀), ozone, and carbon monoxide.¹⁵⁸ The designation of “maintenance” by the EPA means that Detroit has had a history of exceeding limits for PM₁₀, ozone, and carbon monoxide but is now consistently meeting EPA standards for those pollutants. However, the issue still remains that Detroit exceeds EPA limits for sulfur dioxide, which is a harmful pollutant that is linked to higher prevalence of chronic respiratory diseases and an increased risk of developing acute respiratory diseases.¹⁵⁹

According to the EPA, surface-level roads tend to have higher levels of near-road air pollution compared to below-grade roads. Traffic-related pollutants of particular concern are ozone and particulate matter (PM). While ozone is not produced directly by vehicles, its production is heavily dependent on pollutants directly emitted by vehicles.¹⁶⁰ Compared to freeways, urban intersections have higher levels of fine particulate matter pollution with particle size of 2.5 micrometers or smaller (PM_{2.5}).¹⁶¹ PM_{2.5} concentrations are up to 3.5 times higher at busy

¹⁵⁸ United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “Nonattainment Areas for Criteria Pollutants (Green Book),” last modified Aug. 1, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/green-book>.

¹⁵⁹ Boubel, Richard W., Fox, Donald L., Turner, D. Bruce, and Stern, Arthur C., *Fundamentals of Air Pollution (Third Edition)*, (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 1994), 108.

¹⁶⁰ Duy-Hieu, Nguyen, Chitsan Lin, Chi-Thanh Vu, Nicholas Kiprotich Cheruiyot, Minh Ky Nguyen, Thi Hieu Le, Wisanukorn Lukkhasorn, Thi-Dieu-Hien Vo, Xuan-Thanh Bui, “Tropospheric ozone and NOx: A review of worldwide variation and meteorological influences,” *Environmental Technology & Innovation* 28 (2022): 102809, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eti.2022.102809>.

¹⁶¹ Frey, H. C., Grieshop, A. P., Khlystov, A., Bang, J. J., Roupail, N., Guinness, J., ... and Singh, S., “Characterizing Determinants of Near-Road Ambient Air Quality for an Urban Intersection and a Freeway Site,”

intersections during red lights.¹⁶² While PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} are currently not classified by the EPA as in nonattainment in Detroit, the majority of Detroit ranks in the 80th percentile nationally for PM_{2.5} exposure, with the suburbs ranking in a lower percentile (see Appendix I, Figure 6).

The proximity of predominantly Black neighborhoods to major roadways and heavy vehicle traffic increases exposure, meaning pollutants can more easily infiltrate homes, schools, and businesses, exacerbating respiratory and cardiovascular problems in the community. Ozone acts primarily on the lungs and is thought to be a contributor to the development of asthma.¹⁶³ The majority of Detroit ranks in the 99th percentile in the nation for prevalence of adults living with asthma (See Appendix II, Figure 4). Such high rates of asthma cannot be directly attributed to ozone and other air pollutants, but there is a clear association between pollution and asthma. PM_{2.5}, however, is one of the most damaging pollutants to human health, associated with 95% of air pollution-related mortality;¹⁶⁴ this is because the particles are so small that they can be inhaled deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream. Additionally, diesel fine particulate matter (PM) exposure has been shown to cause excess cancer risk.^{165,166}

Black residents of Detroit experience disproportionate harm from pollutant emissions from industrial activities and bear the brunt of the burden from repeated air quality violations committed by these facilities (see Appendix I, Figure 1). Detroit Renewable Power, LLC, a trash-to-energy plant in Poletown East, has received the most air quality violations since 2006, receiving 84 total violation notices, according to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). While not all violation notices indicate a direct violation of air quality standards, and could be issued for reporting violations and incorrect paperwork, these still reflect non-compliance with standards. Of those violations, 40 occurred from 2015-2016.¹⁶⁷ Detroit Renewable Power, LLC, received 21 violations in that time period for noxious odors and

Health Effects Institute Research Report 207 (Sept. 2022),

<https://www.healtheffects.org/system/files/frey-rr-207-report.pdf>.

¹⁶² Wang, Y., Zhu, Y., Salinas, R., Ramirez, D., Karnae, S., & John, K., “Roadside measurements of ultrafine particles at a busy urban intersection,” *Journal of the Air & Waste Management Association* 58, no. 11 (2008): 1449-1457, <https://doi.org/10.3155/1047-3289.58.11.1449>.

¹⁶³ United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “Health Effects of Ozone Pollution,” last modified April 9, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/ground-level-ozone-pollution/health-effects-ozone-pollution>.

¹⁶⁴ Lelieveld, J., Haines, A., Burnett, R., Tonne, C., Klingmüller, K., Münzel, T., & Pozzer, A., “Air pollution deaths attributable to fossil fuels: observational and modelling study,” *Bmj* 383, no. 8410 (Nov. 29, 2023): e077784, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-077784>.

¹⁶⁵ We were unable to find data on the incidences of cancer and other chronic lung diseases in Detroit, nor were we able to find data on respiratory-related hospitalizations in Detroit. Therefore, we can only suggest that PM exposure is potentially negatively impacting the health of black residents of Detroit, and note that further research is needed to establish this claim.

¹⁶⁶ National Toxicology Program (NTP), “Diesel Exhaust Particulates” in *15th Report on Carcinogens* (Research Triangle Park, NC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Dec. 21, 2021), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK590901/>.

¹⁶⁷ Blichok, Dustin, “Attorney: Detroit incinerator is violating the Clean Air Act,” *Metro Detroit Times* (Detroit, MI), Oct. 20, 2016, <https://www.metrotimes.com/news/attorney-detroit-incinerator-is-violating-the-clean-air-act-2469557>.

another 19 violations for exceeding allowable limits of carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and PM_{2.5}.¹⁶⁸ Of the trash burned at the facility, only 44% is estimated to have actually been generated in Detroit, with the majority coming from Oakland County.¹⁶⁹ Detroit Renewable Power, LLC, while only one of many major polluting facilities in Detroit, makes apparent the relationship between historic practices of redlining and racial discrimination to environmental injustice.

Noise Pollution

Elevated noise levels from traffic are associated with adverse health effects, including sleep disturbances, increased stress levels, and cardiovascular diseases. Predominantly black neighborhoods in Detroit, such as Beniteau, experience disproportionately high levels of traffic on neighborhood streets and also tend to be co-located near freeways and other major urban roads, further exposing residents to noise pollution. A study from the Texas Department of Transportation found that surface-grade roads are noisier than below-grade roads, which implies that Black residents of Detroit experience elevated amounts of noise pollution due to the heavy use of surface-level roads in these neighborhoods.¹⁷⁰ This is particularly concerning for older adults and children, who are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of chronic noise exposure.

Heat Risk

Black residents of Detroit are disproportionately likely to have negative health outcomes as a result of extreme heat, with the majority of Detroit ranking in the 90th percentile or higher in the nation for heat vulnerability in the Center for Disease Control's (CDC's) Heat and Health Index (Appendix II, Figure 8). This is due in part to a lack of vegetation cover in predominantly black neighborhoods relative to the suburbs (Appendix I, Figure 2a),¹⁷¹ which exacerbates the urban heat island effect. Urban areas with little vegetation also experience more intense heat waves than areas with more green space because urban infrastructure materials absorb more heat than vegetation.¹⁷² Thus, many Black residents lack access to the relief of street and sidewalk shade during heat waves, while their neighborhoods have more hot surfaces like parking lots and highways — the same infrastructure meant to make car-based commutes from the leafy suburbs more attractive. Indeed, 89% of Detroit's population experiences 8 °F or more heat than their non-urban counterparts due to the urban heat island effect, according to calculations done by Climate Central (Appendix I, Figure 3). This disproportionate heat exposure, coupled with

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Lewis, C. A., Buffington, J. L., Vadali, S. R., & Goodwin, R. E., *Land Value and Land Use Effects of Elevated, Depressed, and At-Grade Level Freeways in Texas* (College Station: Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University and Texas Department of Transportation, 1997), <https://static.tti.tamu.edu/tti.tamu.edu/documents/1327-2.pdf>.

¹⁷¹ Katz, Daniel S.W. and Batterman, Stuart A., "Urban-scale variation in pollen concentrations: A single station is insufficient to characterize daily exposure," *Aerobiologia* 36 (2020): 417-431, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10453-020-09641-z>.

¹⁷² Gregory, Jeremy and Azarijafari, Hessam, "Urban Heat Islands," MIT Climate Portal, April 16, 2021. <https://climate.mit.edu/explainers/urban-heat-islands>.

inequitable healthcare access and aging infrastructure, leads to more heat-related emergency service calls in Detroit relative to the suburbs (Appendix II, Figure 6). This disparity highlights the importance of the built environment in people’s health and indicates that efforts to decrease health disparities must also focus on eliminating disparities in the built environment, from the perspective of greenery and infrastructure repair and maintenance.

Flooding

Flooding is also a major issue in Detroit, in which a lack of green space in majority black neighborhoods exacerbates inequities, as vegetation can play a crucial role in reducing flooding by intercepting peak flows of stormwater¹⁷³. As discussed in the “Housing and Land Use section”, Black Detroiters experience significant housing inequity. Over triple the percentage of Black families live in aging, substandard housing at higher flood risk (and flood-related sewage backups) due to leaky roofs, basements and uncapped sewer drains, than their white counterparts.^{174,175} These factors, combined with the failure-prone, century-old stormwater management system, compound to exacerbate the risk of flooding in majority Black communities. Black renters are the most likely to experience flooding and the least likely to report it.¹⁷⁶ As a result of flooding, many Detroit residents experience further property degradation, including issues persistent with black mold — the presence of which has been associated with possible exacerbation of asthma and other respiratory conditions. Seven out of ten homes in Detroit have reported issues with black mold, many of which are homes that have experienced flooding (Appendix I, Figure 5). Furthermore, sewer backups are common during flooding events, especially in properties with basement cracks and uncapped drains, exposing residents to raw sewage during flooding events, and in the aftermath as they remediate the damage.

I-375 Reconnecting Communities Project

The I-375 Reconnecting Communities Project highlights significant public health concerns, particularly in neighborhoods burdened by pollution and poor infrastructure. The project could exacerbate existing health disparities by increasing exposure to vehicle emissions and noise pollution, affecting the quality of life and health of nearby residents. Inequitable access to healthcare in Detroit intensifies these issues by limiting access to preventive care and effective treatment, resulting in poorer health outcomes for these communities.

¹⁷³ Kim, Hyomin, Dong-Kun Lee, and Sunyong Sung. “Effect of Urban Green Spaces and Flooded Area Type on Flooding Probability.” *Sustainability* 8, no. 2 (January 30, 2016): 134–34. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8020134>.

¹⁷⁴ Larson, Peter S, Jamie Steis Thorsby, Xinyu Liu, Eleanor King, and Carol J Miller. “Crowd-Based Spatial Risk Assessment of Urban Flooding: Results from a Municipal Flood Hotline in Detroit, MI.” *Journal of Flood Risk Management* 17, no. 2 (February 13, 2024): e12974. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jfr3.12974>.

¹⁷⁵ Peirce, Alexandra M, Leon M Espira, and Peter S Larson. “Climate Change Related Catastrophic Rainfall Events and Non-Communicable Respiratory Disease: A Systematic Review of the Literature.” *Climate* 10, no. 7 (July 4, 2022): 101–1. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cli10070101>.

¹⁷⁶ Larson, Peter S, Jamie Steis Thorsby, Xinyu Liu, Eleanor King, and Carol J Miller. “Crowd-Based Spatial Risk Assessment of Urban Flooding: Results from a Municipal Flood Hotline in Detroit, MI.” *Journal of Flood Risk Management* 17, no. 2 (February 13, 2024): e12974. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jfr3.12974>.

The Environmental Assessment of the I-375 Project conducted by MDOT found that the preferred alternative will delay traffic by about 10 minutes during peak hours. The design will slow traffic overall from a speed limit of 55 miles per hour on the existing freeway to a speed limit of 35 miles per hour on the new boulevard.¹⁷⁷ The change from a freeway to a boulevard will also increase the number of traffic lights and intersections. These changes will contribute to an increase in idling and increase the overall amount of time that polluting vehicles are present in close proximity to residential and community areas. Increasing the number of intersections also has the potential to expose drivers, pedestrians, and the surrounding community to increased particulate matter pollution.

However, the anticipated air quality impacts are not universally negative. A similar project in West Oakland, California, where a freeway was replaced with an urban boulevard, found that overall concentrations of black carbon and nitrogen dioxide decreased by 25% and 38%, respectively.¹⁷⁸ This change was attributed to the reduced traffic capacity of the boulevard as compared to the freeway. Despite this effect, displaced traffic from freeway replacement projects may be rerouted to nearby roads. A study in San Francisco found that about 70% of drivers took another freeway, rather than opting for public transport or taking the new boulevard.¹⁷⁹ Thus, city officials must ensure that the burden of traffic-based air pollution is not shifted to other communities in Detroit as a result of this project.

Furthermore, bringing the freeway to surface level is likely to intensify noise pollution, affecting the quality of life and health of nearby residents. The state has already completed its own analysis on the subject. As required under federal Noise Abatement regulations, MDOT evaluated the project's noise impact, publishing a report in 2020.¹⁸⁰ Under the department's policy, they must "install feasible and reasonable noise barriers associated with transportation improvements" if the project is going to exceed local noise limitations. The report did, in fact, find the noise did meet the FHWA Noise Abatement Criteria or FAC, validating community concerns. However, the estimated cost of the plan to build sound barriers that would adequately

¹⁷⁷ Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), "Environmental Assessment I-375 Improvement Project in Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan," Dec. 2020, <https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/-/media/Project/Websites/MDOT/Projects-Studies/Studies/Environmentally-Cleared/I-375/Appendices/I-375-Environmental-Assessment.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ Patterson, Regan F. and Harley, Robert A., "Effects of freeway rerouting and boulevard replacement on air pollution exposure and neighborhood attributes," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 21 (Oct. 23, 2019): 4072, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16214072>.

¹⁷⁹ Cervero, Robert, Kang, Junhee, and Shively, Kevin, "From Elevated Freeways to Surface Boulevards: Neighborhood and Housing Price Impacts in San Francisco," *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 2, no. 1 (Apr. 22, 2009): 31–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549170902833899>.

¹⁸⁰ Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), "I-375 Traffic Noise Analysis Technical Memorandum," Aug. 26, 2020, <https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/MDOT/Projects-Studies/Studies/Environmentally-Cleared/I-375/Supporting-Docs/I-375-Traffic-Noise-Analysis.pdf>.

cut the noise levels were deemed unreasonable because they “would exceed the allowable cost per benefited receptor.” In other words, sound barriers were found to be necessary, but deemed too expensive. The characteristic of the planned design and investigation by MDOT itself demonstrates that increased road noise is a likely and negative health impact.¹⁸¹

Exacerbating these issues is the shortage of healthcare services in Detroit, where access to medical facilities and services is severely limited. Inequitable access to healthcare intensifies the health impacts of living near pollution sources by limiting access to preventive care, early diagnosis, and effective treatment. Residents of these areas face increased health vulnerabilities due to delayed and inadequate treatment, as well as the compounded effects of poor environmental conditions and lack of healthcare infrastructure. The combination of high pollution exposure and limited healthcare access results in poorer health outcomes for these communities.

Future Climate Concerns

Human-caused climate change is already acting to exacerbate the many environmental harms that Black Detroiters are currently experiencing, and will continue to exacerbate these harms as its impacts become more extreme. Heat waves are almost certain to become more frequent and intense; precipitation patterns are also very likely to change, with both extreme rainfall and drought becoming more likely.¹⁸² This will further compound damages and stress to the city’s aging housing stock stormwater infrastructure, which is now over a century old,¹⁸³ as well as increasing the demand for healthcare and emergency medicine to treat heat related illnesses and comorbidities from the effects of flooding and air pollution. Furthermore, air quality will likely worsen in the future, as increasing temperatures will lead to conditions favorable for increased formation of ground-level ozone, a pollutant Detroit has only recently gotten within EPA allowable limits.¹⁸⁴ Black residents of Detroit are more likely to be severely impacted by climate change than their white counterparts because of Detroit’s history of policies and practices that have yielded inequitable and racialized outcomes. These deliberate harms manifest in disparate access to essential infrastructure such as AC, green space, community cooling centers, and safe,

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Marvel, K., W. Su, R. Delgado, S. Aarons, A. Chatterjee, M.E. Garcia, Z. Hausfather, K. Hayhoe, D.A. Hence, E.B. Jewett, A. Robel, D. Singh, A. Tripathi, and R.S. Vose, “Ch. 2. Climate trends” in *Fifth National Climate Assessment*, eds. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH2>.

¹⁸³ Sampson, Natalie R., Carmel E. Price, Julia Kassem, Jessica Doan, and Janine Hussein, ““We’re Just Sitting Ducks”: Recurrent Household Flooding as An Underreported Environmental Health Threat in Detroit’s Changing Climate,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 1 (2019): 6. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16010006>.

¹⁸⁴ Bassler, Rachel, “EPA Determines Detroit Metro Area Now Meets Federal Ozone Standard; Approves Michigan’s Plan to Maintain Air Quality,” (Chicago, IL: United States Environmental Protection Agency, May 16, 2023), <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-determines-detroit-metro-area-now-meets-federal-ozone-standard-approves-michigans>.

dry and mold-free housing, reducing the community's resilience to future climate extremes. Strong interpersonal relationships and mutual aid within majority black communities is an essential source of resilience in the face of increasingly extreme meteorological events. However, without extensive investment in improving the quality and resiliency of the built environment to these extremes, Black Detroiters will continue to disproportionately shoulder the burden of climate change on the city.

Key Takeaways

- **Inequities in Healthcare Access** Black residents of Detroit face barriers to accessing mental and physical health care due to a history of exclusion from Detroit's medical infrastructure, the privatization of Detroit's healthcare system, and disinvestment in Black communities.
- **Unhealthy Environments:** Redlining and other inequitable housing policies in Detroit have created an unhealthy environment in predominantly Black neighborhoods of Detroit, with these neighborhoods experiencing increased flooding, poor air quality, and increased heat and noise risk, which exacerbate negative health outcomes for Black residents of Detroit.
- **I-375 Reconnecting Communities Project:** The I-375 Reconnecting Communities Project may negatively influence public health in communities surrounding the area due to increased noise pollution and higher emissions of particulate matter from vehicles. The project could place further burden on surrounding neighborhoods already struggling with poor infrastructure, pollution, and healthcare access, making this project a potential environmental justice issue.
- **Climate Change Exacerbates Inequity:** Human-caused climate change will exacerbate existing inequities that Black residents of Detroit face, so future climate adaptation efforts must place Black communities at its center, focusing on increasing the quality and resiliency of the city's built infrastructure.

Education

A history of federal policies, redlining and white flight, and unreliable public transportation has led to Detroit's public education system have led to severe consequences for Detroit students. While the Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD) has made some progress in addressing these longstanding issues, it is largely dependent on federal assistance to make up for the gaps in its resources. Detroit's public education system is largely weakened by federal policies, most notably the Supreme Court decisions of *Brown v. Board* and *Milliken v. Bradley*¹⁸⁵ along with legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. Housing trends such as redlining and white flight intersect with educational access to result in predominantly Black and low-income Detroiters having limited resources for public education.

Additionally, the city's unreliable public transportation have exacerbated the already limited access to education, resulting in chronic absenteeism and lower retention rates. While the Detroit Public School Community District has made some progress in addressing these longstanding issues, it is largely dependent on federal assistance to make up for the gaps in its resources. This section surveys some of the factors that have formed Detroit's educational system including white flight, transportation barriers, and standardized testing.

Systemic Challenges and Decline in Detroit Public Schools

The challenges faced by Detroit Public Schools Community District stem from systemic factors that have actively harmed the district and its students. Historical injustices such as redlining policies and disinvestment due to white flight, manufactured economic hardship from harmful and racist policies, and chronic underfunding have all played significant roles in this decline. Detroit's educational system demonstrates the long-lasting effects of systemic inequities that can also be seen in similar cities nationwide.

The Detroit Public School Community District currently serves 106 PreK-12 schools and over 49,000 students.¹⁸⁶ Among students enrolled at DPSCD, 59.1% are low-income students, 81.9% are Black students, 13.6% are Hispanic/Latino students, 2.5% are White students, and 1.4% are Asian students. Substandard educational outcomes are a direct result of these historical harms, economic conditions, and chronic school underfunding, as shown by standardized test performance, college readiness scores, and high rates of student mental health concerns.¹⁸⁷

As of 2021, graduation rates of Detroit high schoolers have decreased, with nearly 50% of graduates not enrolling in postsecondary education. 76% of students who pursue postsecondary

¹⁸⁵ "Michigan Legal Milestones: 36. *Milliken v. Bradley*," State Bar of Michigan, 2011, https://www.michbar.org/programs/milestone/milestones_Milliken-v-Bradley.

¹⁸⁶ "Detroit Public Schools Overview," Detroit Public Schools Community District, last modified 2024, accessed March 24, 2024

¹⁸⁷ "Overview of Detroit Public Schools Community District," US News and World Report, last modified 2021, accessed March 24, 2024.

education do not finish within 6 years and degree completion by adults 25 years or older has decreased by 20%. Overall, the disparity in graduation rates between Black and white graduates with bachelor's degrees in Michigan is the third highest in the nation.¹⁸⁸

A 2021 report released by the University of Michigan's Youth Policy Lab found that the majority of Detroit high school graduates are not "college-ready."¹⁸⁹ Moreover the report states that while academic preparation is a barrier to college success, other systemic factors such as financial concerns, lack of transportation, and family responsibilities are equally obstructive.

The Detroit Public Schools Community District is underfunded and underserved, and needs critical facility improvements. For example, despite efforts to support student mental health through initiatives like the Universal Wellness Screener, the counselor-to-student ratio remains high, indicating a need for more resources. While DPSCD's commitment to holistic education and student care is evident, financial constraints hinder these efforts. Prior to the 2023-24 school year, the Detroit school board approved a \$1.138 billion budget that cut spending by roughly \$300 million from the previous fiscal year, accounting for a pandemic-fueled enrollment decline and the depletion of federal COVID relief aid. The budget cut includes the elimination of over 300 positions to help stabilize the Detroit Public Schools Community District's finances.¹⁹⁰ DPSCD has stated that the cuts are necessary due to federal COVID funding running out.

DPSCD schools are afforded far fewer resources and worse facilities compared to Metro Detroit schools, contributing to worse educational outcomes and less conducive learning environments for DPSCD students. Suburban schools are better funded as a result of white flight and suburban resource hoarding. This allows them to offer advanced learning materials, technology, and extracurricular activities and they often benefit from newer buildings and well-maintained facilities.

In an interview with Dr. Trina Shanks, Charles Scales, a Detroit native and mechanical engineer, describes growing up in Detroit's public school system.¹⁹¹ In his interview, Scales discussed teachers working in subjects they were not well trained in for the sake of job security: "A lot of the teachers who go into teaching math do so because that's the only way they can keep their jobs. And it's important for them to be able to earn a living. And so they do it and they simply don't have any experience in math. So teaching math is going to be very tough. And so that's one of the reasons why we are not getting into a lot of these technical fields in which the pay is good

¹⁸⁸ "Michigan's Black-White College Graduation Gap Is One of Largest in Nation," Bridge Michigan, July 28, 2020, <https://www.bridgemi.com/talent-education/michigans-black-white-college-graduation-gap-one-largest-nation>.

¹⁸⁹ rep., *Detroit Students' College Pathways and Outcomes*, 2021, <https://youthpolicylab.umich.edu/uploads/detroit-students-college-pathways-and-outcomes.pdf>.

¹⁹⁰ Chalkbeat Ethan Bakuli and BridgeDetroit Micah Walker, "Detroit School Board Approves 2023-24 District Budget with \$300 Million in Cuts," Chalkbeat, October 31, 2023, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/detroit/2023/6/13/23760306/detroit-public-schools-budget-cuts-covid-job/>.

¹⁹¹ Charles Scales, interview by Trina Shanks and students, May 4, 2024, transcript.

and everything else is great about them.” Scales also noted teachers being obstructed by non-teaching tasks and chronic absenteeism, saying, “Things are so bad that you've got teachers, in the schools, as I pointed out earlier, that have so many other non-teaching tasks that they have to perform, that they spend less time teaching and what they need is more time teaching.”

Many Detroit students migrate to suburban schools seeking better opportunities, further exacerbating funding declines for DPSCD and perpetuating educational inequities. This migration results in a loss of per-pupil funding for DPSCD schools, making it even more challenging to address the significant infrastructural and educational needs within the district. The disparity in facility quality and resources underscores the broader issue of educational inequality, as students in under-resourced schools are denied the same opportunities for success as their peers in better-funded districts, which connects back to the discriminatory policies and practices in housing and land use described earlier.

Federal Factors

While the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* is often viewed as a turning point in school desegregation efforts in the U.S., efforts to end racially segregated education began in Michigan nearly a century earlier in 1869 when the Michigan Supreme Court ruled in favor of desegregation in *Joseph Workman v. The Detroit Board of Education*. Workman, a Black man, argued that his son should be able to attend a segregated school near his home that his taxes helped to fund. His case was supported by Fannie Richards, a Black educator in Detroit who, in 1871, began a forty year teaching career at Detroit’s first integrated school, Everett Elementary School. While *Workman v. The Detroit Board of Education* placed Detroit 90 years ahead of the rest of the country, a decision passed after *Brown v. Board* limited the city’s ability to integrate schools.¹⁹²

In 1974, the Supreme Court struck down school desegregation efforts with *Milliken v. Bradley*.¹⁹³ *Milliken v. Bradley* began after the NAACP sued Michigan’s governor, William Milliken, on the grounds that the state intentionally defied *Brown v. Board* and used housing policy to segregate Detroit public schools. The NAACP argued that the state should be compelled to desegregate, with a district judge agreeing and ordering the metro schools needed to integrate. The plan involved predominantly Black Detroit schools integrating with fifty-three predominantly white, suburban schools. White communities organized against the plan, and were joined by Black political leaders who felt the plan was potentially dangerous to Black students, as previous plans involved a one-way exchange of Black students traveling to white schools, where historically they were mistreated. The Supreme Court struck down the plan in a 5-4 decision, arguing that predominantly white schools should only be forced to engage in desegregation if it could be

¹⁹²“May 12, 1869: Detroit Educator Fannie Richards Helps to Desegregate Michigan Schools,” Zinn Education Project, May 13, 2023, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/fannie-richards-desegregation/>.

¹⁹³“Michigan Legal Milestones: 36. *Milliken v. Bradley*,” State Bar of Michigan, 2011, https://www.michbar.org/programs/milestone/milestones_Milliken-v-Bradley.

proven that they were intentionally segregated. The Court asserted that if students are not segregated by law, but by a school district border, then the federal courts are not authorized to mandate integration.

Some experts argue that *Milliken v. Bradley* accelerated how housing trends reinforce school segregation. Justin Driver, a professor at Yale Law school, says the decision “incentivized white flight” and ensured that “the nation as a whole was not going to be required to pursue meaningful racial integration.”¹⁹⁴ The educational nonprofit organization, EdBuild, reported in 2019 that nine million students in America—one in five public schoolchildren—live virtually across the street from a significantly whiter and richer school district. Researchers found that, “For every one student enrolled in a whiter and richer district in our study, three of their neighbors are left behind in lower-funded schools serving far more nonwhite students.”¹⁹⁵ EdBuild also noted a \$23 billion state and local spending gap between predominantly white and predominantly Black schools. EdBuild identified nearly one thousand boundaries in forty-two states where Black students are racially isolated from their non-Black peers and where their schools also receive substantially less funding. The study found that schools on the predominantly white, wealthier side of these boundaries received an average of \$4,200 more per student. EdBuild’s data shows that the border between Detroit and Grosse Pointe is one of the most divided boundaries in the country with a white student population of 75% in Grosse Pointe, and the district receiving nearly \$2,000 more per student in state and local funding than Detroit.

Racial segregation in Detroit public education has only increased since *Milliken v. Bradley*. As of May 2024, just 2.5% of students in Detroit Public Schools Community District are white. In East Detroit, after an increase of Black students, white enrollment dropped from 50% to 18% between 2009 and 2015. Kurt Metzger, mayor of Pleasant Ridge shared that when white families leave, they are careful to leave out race as a reason. He said, “They aren’t going to say it racially, they’re going to say the test scores aren’t good enough.”¹⁹⁶

Harms of Standardized Testing

The framing of test scores as an indicator of a school’s quality can be traced back to the Bush Administration’s No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB was passed with bipartisan support and good intentions, but educational experts argue that it has ultimately caused more harm than good. Some of these harms include an overemphasis on standardized testing,

¹⁹⁴Justin Driver, *The Schoolhouse Gate: Public Education, the Supreme Court, and the Battle for the American Mind* (New York: Vintage Books, 2019).

¹⁹⁵“Dismissed,” EdBuild, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://edbuild.org/content/dismissed>.

¹⁹⁶ Kalyn Belsha and Koby Levin, “45 Years Later, How the Milliken Decision Is Still Shaping School Segregation,” Chalkbeat, November 9, 2023, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/7/25/21121021/45-years-later-this-case-is-still-shaping-school-segregation-in-detroit-and-america/>.

deprofessionalization of educators disregarding teaching pedagogy, and a marginalization of social studies education with a subsequent overemphasis of STEM.¹⁹⁷

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) reported that high stakes testing leads to increased grade retention and dropping out while also forcing teachers to teach to the test material and neglect students. The IDRA also notes that low-income, minority students are most likely to experience a “narrowing of curriculum and instruction” and further warn that “[t]oo often, poor kids in under-funded schools get little more than test coaching that does not adequately prepare them for further learning. In some schools, the library budget is spent on test prep materials, and professional development is reduced to training teachers to be better test coaches.”¹⁹⁸

DPSCD students consistently score below state and national averages on standardized tests. For instance, the district's average 4th-grade reading score was 176 compared to 209 for other large cities. Only 17% of Detroit residents aged 25-34 hold a bachelor's degree, compared to the national average of 35%.¹⁹⁹ Lower than national average SAT scores further highlight low college readiness among DPSCD students and correlates to lower standardized test scores within K-12. Policies such as NCLB determined funding to be diverted from poorly performing schools which was also exacerbated by school choice allowing for charter schools to receive funding that would otherwise be allocated to public schools.²⁰⁰

Facilities Quality

Detroit Public School Community District has received complaints concerning the dilapidation of its buildings including reports of mold, leaky buildings, rodents, faulty HVAC systems, ceilings collapsing, and poor filtration of air pollution.

Improving school facilities has been linked with improving student test scores and well-being. The divide in resource quality between DPSCD and Metro Detroit schools demonstrates marked inequality in both facilities and funding, contributing to overall socioeconomic and educational disparities. Mismanagement of Detroit Public Schools by a revolving door of emergency managers from 2009 to 2016 caused massive school closures, soaring debt, and major budget cuts, all leading to school facility neglect and deterioration.

¹⁹⁷ “The Dangerous Consequences of High-Stakes Testing, Fairtest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing,” IDRA, May 2, 2018, <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/the-dangerous-consequences-of-high-stakes-testing/>.

¹⁹⁸ “The Dangerous Consequences of High-Stakes Testing, Fairtest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing,” IDRA, May 2, 2018, <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/the-dangerous-consequences-of-high-stakes-testing/>.

¹⁹⁹ Chalkbeat Ethan Bakuli and Koby Levin, “Detroit NAEP Scores Put an Exclamation Point on the Pandemic’s Academic Toll,” Chalkbeat, November 9, 2023, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/detroit/2022/10/24/23416781/detroit-public-schools-naep-testing-scores-2022-pandemic/>.

²⁰⁰ Matt Barnum, “Critics of Charter Schools Say They’re Hurting School Districts. Are They Right?,” Chalkbeat, November 9, 2023, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/6/11/21108318/critics-of-charter-schools-say-they-re-hurting-school-districts-are-they-right/>.

The 2018 Facilities Assessment Report revealed that one-third of Detroit schools were in 'poor' condition, highlighting a range of issues from non-working light fixtures and missing ceiling tiles to infestations and broken windows. These deteriorating conditions create environments that are not conducive to learning and pose health and safety risks to students and staff. The estimated cost for high-priority repairs was \$226.8 million, but only \$25 million was initially allocated, leaving a significant funding gap.²⁰¹

In May 2022, the school board allocated an additional \$700 million as part of a facilities master plan to rebuild five schools: Cody High School, Carstens at Golightly, Phoenix, Pershing High School, and Robeson/Marshall. The plan also includes renovations to other schools and improving the District schools' overall Facility Condition Index (FCI) rating from 40 (deficient) to 28 (fair) by 2027. Despite this increased funding, many schools continue to struggle with inadequate facilities. For example, only 35% of Detroit's school buildings have air conditioning, which is essential for maintaining a comfortable learning environment, especially during hot weather.²⁰² These existing facilities inequities will worsen as heat waves become more frequent and intense as a result of climate change and can be even further exacerbated in school areas that lack green space due to the urban heat island effect (Appendix I, Figures 2a and 3).²⁰³ Detroit Public Schools require more support across a myriad of categories, but none more saliently and urgently than facility improvements to enhance student educational outcomes and quality of life.

Research shows a direct correlation between the quality of school facilities and student achievement.²⁰⁴ Comfortable classroom environments are crucial for student engagement and learning. Poor conditions can lead to distractions, increased absenteeism, and lower academic performance. Conversely, upgrading facilities can significantly improve test scores, college readiness, and overall student well-being. Moreover, schools with better facilities tend to attract and retain more qualified teachers, further enhancing the educational experience. Investments in school infrastructure can also instill a sense of pride and community among students, parents, and staff, fostering a more positive school culture. Addressing these disparities requires a sustained commitment to funding and prioritizing school infrastructure improvements. Ensuring

²⁰¹rep., *Using American Rescue Plan Funds to Meet Detroit Repair Needs*, October 2021, <https://detroitssurvey.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DMACS-ARPA-funds-to-meet-home-repair-needs-reduced.pdf>.

²⁰² Chalkbeat Ethan Bakuli, "Major Renovations, New School Buildings Unveiled in \$700m Detroit School Building Plan," Chalkbeat, October 31, 2023, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/detroit/2022/2/10/22928171/detroit-school-district-700-million-facility-proposal-building-s-cody-pershing/>.

²⁰³ Marvel, K., W. Su, R. Delgado, S. Aarons, A. Chatterjee, M.E. Garcia, Z. Hausfather, K. Hayhoe, D.A. Hence, E.B. Jewett, A. Robel, D. Singh, A. Tripathi, and R.S. Vose, "Ch. 2. Climate trends" in *Fifth National Climate*

²⁰⁴ *Assessment*, eds. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH2>.

that all students have access to safe, well-maintained, and modern facilities is a critical step toward achieving educational equity and providing every child with the opportunity to succeed.

Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism negatively affects student health and well-being. Regular school attendance is crucial for academic success, social development, and access to school-based health and nutrition services. Frequent absences can lead to academic struggles, increased dropout rates, and long-term impacts on mental and physical health. Students who miss significant amounts of school are also at a higher risk for disengagement and behavioral issues, which can further hinder their educational and personal development.

Students are considered chronically absent when they miss at least 10% of the days in which school is in session. In a school year of 180 days, that is 18 or more missed days. Chronic absenteeism has a domino effect, leading to lower high school graduation rates and lower college readiness. Two-thirds of Detroit students missed at least one out of every 10 school days in 2021. By the end of the 2022-23 school year, chronic absence rates among DPSCD students were at 68%, more than twice the national average of approximately 28%.²⁰⁵

A combination of transportation challenges, inadequate facilities, and frequent school closures has created a cycle of missed educational opportunities and negatively impacted the health and well-being of Detroit's most vulnerable students. Addressing these systemic issues is essential for improving student attendance, academic achievement, and overall quality of life.

While Detroit is a city built to be traveled by car, one-third of its residents do not own a vehicle.²⁰⁶ DPSCD provides limited school bus service to students and none to high school students, who instead receive passes to ride city buses free of charge. Experts from the Detroit Partnership for Education Equity and Research (DPEER) say that transportation is one of largest barriers to education in Detroit, however they also emphasize that transportation difficulties are not a root cause, but rather exacerbates pre-existing conditions including housing instability, poverty, and chronic health problems, to make Detroit a “uniquely challenging context” for school attendance, according to DPEER.²⁰⁷ This combination of factors has led to Detroit students having a higher rate of absenteeism than almost anywhere else in the U.S.

²⁰⁵ Koby Levin and Chalkbeat Ethan Bakuli, “Missing School, Falling behind: How Detroit’s Pandemic Recovery Hinges on Getting Kids to Class,” Chalkbeat, November 9, 2023, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/detroit/2022/11/7/23422689/school-attendance-detroit-michigan-students-chronic-absenteeism/>.

²⁰⁶ Elizabeth Gerber, Jeffrey Morenoff, and Conan Smith, rep., Detroiters’ Views on Transportation and Mobility Detroit Remains a Driving City, Presenting Challenges for Non-Car Owners, n.d.

²⁰⁷ Koby Levin, “‘it’s Cold and the Bus Passed Me.’ How Transportation Problems Fuel Absenteeism in Detroit.,” Chalkbeat, November 9, 2023, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/detroit/2023/3/22/23650149/detroit-students-transportation-bus-chronic-absenteeism-attendance/>.

Inadequate school facilities further contribute to absenteeism. Many schools lack air conditioning, leading to closures on excessively hot days, which disrupt the learning process and force students to miss more school days. These closures, combined with the already challenging transportation issues, significantly impact student attendance and exacerbate the problem of chronic absenteeism. As discussed above in the Quality of Life section, more frequent and intense heat waves are already being observed, and climate projections indicate that it is virtually certain that this trend will continue.²⁰⁸ As a result, heat-related school closures will increase in the future, further disrupting the learning process for students and exacerbating the issue of absenteeism.

Emergency Management and Austerity Measures

From 2009 to 2016, DPSCD was managed by a series of emergency managers who implemented severe budget cuts and closed numerous schools. These austerity measures were intended to address the district's financial crises but led to further deterioration of facilities and significant disruption and instability for students and families. The closure of local schools forced many students to travel greater distances to attend school, exacerbating existing transportation issues and increasing absenteeism rates leading to a cycle of disrupted education.

The budget cuts also resulted in the elimination of essential programs and services, such as arts and music education, counseling, and extracurricular activities. This reduction in resources further marginalized students who relied on these programs for a well-rounded education and support. The cuts also led to larger class sizes, decreased teacher morale, and a loss of experienced educators, all of which negatively impacted the quality of education.

Additionally, the focus on austerity often overlooked the underlying structural issues affecting the district, such as aging facilities and the need for comprehensive educational reform. Instead of investing in long-term solutions, the emergency managers' approach prioritized short-term financial fixes that ultimately undermined the district's stability and growth.

The mismanagement during this period eroded trust between the community and the school administration. Families felt disenfranchised as decisions were made without their input or consideration of their needs. The loss of local, accessible public education options disrupted students' educational experiences and community cohesion. Neighborhood schools often serve as community hubs, and their closures had a ripple effect, weakening community bonds and reducing access to essential services.

²⁰⁸ Marvel, K., W. Su, R. Delgado, S. Aarons, A. Chatterjee, M.E. Garcia, Z. Hausfather, K. Hayhoe, D.A. Hence, E.B. Jewett, A. Robel, D. Singh, A. Tripathi, and R.S. Vose, "Ch. 2. Climate trends" in *Fifth National Climate Assessment*, eds. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH2>.

Moreover, the instability caused by frequent changes in leadership and policies created an environment of uncertainty for students, parents, and educators. This lack of consistency hindered efforts to build a cohesive educational strategy and implement sustainable improvements. The continuous cycle of cuts and closures made it challenging to develop and maintain effective educational programs, further harming students' learning and wellbeing.

As enrollment decreased, schools faced crippling underfunding, leading to decaying infrastructure and a shortage of essential resources. Teachers found themselves overburdened and under-resourced, often working in environments plagued by vermin, mold, and malfunctioning heating systems.²⁰⁹ These unsafe conditions are detrimental to both teaching and learning, contributing to lower academic performance and increased health risks for students.

Mary Sheffield, a member of Detroit's City Council, said: "We have businesses and restaurants and arenas, but our schools are falling apart and our children are uneducated. There is no Detroit without good schools."²¹⁰ Craig Thiel, a senior research associate for the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, a public policy research group, said "Emergency managers can do anything they want on the spending side of the ledger, but they can't go out and raise taxes and they can't make kids come to their school district, which would increase their revenue."²¹¹ Until Detroit's public school system improves, people will continue to move out of the city to areas with better schools, and the city will miss out on needed revenue.

Key Takeaways

- **Milliken v. Bradley:** While *Brown v. Board* was intended to increase educational access for Black communities, *Milliken v. Bradley* obstructed the ability of the federal government to integrate schools more thoroughly and may have compounded how housing trends reinforce school segregation.
- **Graduation rates and college readiness:** Detroit's graduation rates are lower than average, and among those who attend college, many are unprepared and do not earn a bachelor's degree within 6 years.
- **High stakes testing:** Increased reliance on standardized testing contributed to teachers refocusing their curricula, leading to "teaching to the test" as opposed to a more engaged pedagogy.
- **Public transportation:** Public transportation is inadequate for commuting students to school and DPSCD does not have enough resources to provide support to make up transportation gaps.

²⁰⁹ "5 years after declaring bankruptcy, Detroit reborn at a cost." CBC, 16 July 2018,

²¹⁰ Bosman, Julie. "Crumbling, Destitute Schools Threaten Detroit's Recovery." *The New York Times*, 20 January 2016,

²¹¹ Julie Bosman, "As Detroit Starts to Mend, Its Schools Lurch toward Fiscal Crisis," *The New York Times*, February 29, 2016,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/01/us/as-detroit-starts-to-mend-its-schools-lurch-toward-fiscal-crisis.html>.

- **Chronic absenteeism:** As much as two-thirds of Detroit students are considered chronically absent, placing Detroit among the highest in the nation. Chronic absenteeism is caused by intersectional factors such as housing, poor quality of school buildings, and urban renewal.

Economic Development and Employment Economic Insecurity

Detroit's economic precarity is intertwined with its history of industrial decline, systemic racism, and urban policies that have disproportionately impacted its Black residents. The city's persistent high unemployment rates, coupled with the destructive impact of urban renewal projects, reflect a broader pattern of economic disenfranchisement and structural inequity. These challenges have been exacerbated by employment discrimination, financial mismanagement, and the legacy of white flight and urban renewal projects, all of which have destabilized Detroit's economic foundation. The introduction of emergency financial management, along with severe austerity measures, has further compounded these issues, intensifying the economic hardships faced by Detroit's majority-Black population. This section explores the complex interplay of these factors, focusing on how unemployment, urban renewal, employment discrimination, and transit inequity have collectively shaped the city's economic landscape.

Persistent Unemployment and Economic Insecurity

Detroit's unemployment rate has consistently remained higher than the state average, reflecting deep-seated economic challenges. Detroit's average quarterly unemployment rate increased slightly from 6.9% in the fourth quarter of 2022 to 7.4% in the first quarter of 2023. Michigan's unemployment rate decreased from 4.3% to 4.2% during that time. The average quarterly labor force for Detroit held mostly flat in the first quarter of 2023, while Michigan's increased overall.²¹²

The decline of the automotive industry, coupled with automation and outsourcing, displaced thousands of workers, leading to high unemployment rates and economic insecurity. Additionally, the labor force participation rate in Detroit is significantly lower compared to the region, with only 53.6% of Detroit residents participating in the labor force,²¹³ ranking Detroit last in labor force participation among the top 100 cities by population. The unemployment rate in Detroit is persistently higher, about twice that of the surrounding region.²¹⁴ This disparity is further exacerbated by racial inequities, as the unemployment rate is 1.5 times higher among residents identifying as Black than those identifying as white or Hispanic.²¹⁵

Over the past decade, the Detroit region's economy has shown steady improvement, leading to a significant growth in middle-wage jobs. In 2019, approximately 600,000, or 34%, of the region's

²¹² Barker, E., Hu, L., Alaswad, H., Fleming, O., Klammer, S., and Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics team from the University of Michigan. *Detroit Economic Indicators Report*. In *City of Detroit University Economic Analysis Partnership*, 2023.

²¹³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Situation Summary

²¹⁴ Detroit Future City, *The State of Economic Equity in Detroit* Detroit Future City's Center for Equity, Engagement, and Research, 2021.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

1.7 million jobs were classified as middle-wage—a 23% increase, adding 110,000 positions since 2010, and outpacing the national growth rate of 14%.²¹⁶

Despite this positive trend at the regional level, middle-wage jobs within the city itself only grew by 3% over the same period, making them the slowest-growing segment of Detroit's economy. This is in stark contrast to the growth seen at the national level, where middle-wage jobs increased by 14%, and in the larger Detroit region, where they grew by 23%.²¹⁷ Meanwhile, low-wage jobs in the Detroit region surged by 21%, reflecting a shift towards lower-paying employment.²¹⁸ This trend is particularly alarming for Detroit residents, as it restricts opportunities for those without a four-year degree to advance into the middle class, exacerbating the financial struggles many already face.

While Detroit still maintains a relatively high share of middle-wage jobs, with 35% of the city's jobs falling into this category, the slow growth compared to the broader region underscores a deepening economic divide.²¹⁹ The city's economy is increasingly shifting towards low-wage jobs and positions requiring a bachelor's degree or higher, which further widens the economic gap and limits upward mobility for its residents.

The gap in economic opportunity is further highlighted by the fact that residents identifying as Black in Detroit are less likely than those who identify as white to work in a middle-wage job. Currently, only 28% of African-American workers hold a middle-wage job, compared to 39% of white workers.²²⁰ Additionally, Black residents are overrepresented in accessible but low-wage jobs, with 38% of Black workers in this category.²²¹ This imbalance contributes to the economic inequities that persist in the city, where the shift towards low-wage jobs compounds existing financial challenges.

Urban Renewal and the Displacement of Hastings Street

The economic inequity faced by Black Detroiters today has roots in a history marked by systemic displacement, disenfranchisement, and exclusion, primarily through employment discrimination in a multitude of industries such as manufacturing, city government and education, and urban renewal projects that targeted Black neighborhoods under the pretext of cultural and urban development. These projects, which began in the mid-20th century, and came in different waves, were justified as necessary for the city's progress and modernization. However, the reality for Detroit's Black residents was one of forced displacement, the destruction of vibrant communities, and a deepening of economic disparities.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ DFC, *State of Equity*, 68.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

An example of systemic displacement was the destruction of Hastings Street, a central artery of Black life in Detroit. Hastings Street was the heart of a thriving Black community, filled with Black-owned businesses, social clubs, jazz bars, and cultural institutions that served as vital hubs for the community. The street represented economic independence and cultural vitality for Detroit's Black residents, many of whom had moved to the city during the Great Migration, seeking better opportunities away from the oppressive Jim Crow South.

Hilanius Philips, Detroit's first Black head city planner who served the city for 33 years, provides a firsthand account of the early days of urban renewal in Detroit. Reflecting on his experience within the planning department, Philips recalls, "When I first came on board...Charles Blessing hired me...he had a number of architects who were very good in rendering that would be just drawing concepts of what could be done in various neighborhoods throughout the city."²²² These plans, while ostensibly focused on the city's redevelopment, were more aligned with the interests of the cultural institutions like the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) and commercial developers at the expense of Black communities. Philips also recalls how "this particular plan was being endorsed during the late forties and fifties. Basically, it showed everything east of the Detroit Institute of Art, north of Warren, including the Rackham, but everything else, which now includes the Science Museum, which now includes the Charles Wright Museum of African History, everything to the east up to the Chrysler, which was Hasting Street to be wiped out and nothing but new cultural museums. That was the Blue Book proposal that Charlie Blessing put together. And many of the institutions that existed like the DIA, all supported the cultural expansion encompassing that area."²²³

The Blue Book proposal, which was supported by key institutions like the DIA, sought to transform the area east of the DIA into a cultural corridor. This transformation, however, came at a significant cost to Black residents. The proposal called for the demolition of homes, churches, and businesses in predominantly Black neighborhoods to make way for new museums, cultural centers, and other institutions. As Philips further describes, "That was called Blight by Announcement. And that was a practice that was used...to prevent Black people from two things, getting loans to fix up their property because there was that cloud of uncertainty. And then the other piece was, well, what they did to us in Black Bottom, they're going to be doing it up here, so we're not going to fix our places up."²²⁴

This strategy of "Blight by Announcement" created a sense of fear and uncertainty within Black neighborhoods. Property owners were left in a state of limbo, uncertain whether to invest in their properties or prepare for displacement. The anticipation of forced relocation led many to halt necessary repairs and improvements, which in turn accelerated the physical decline of these

²²² Hilanius Philips, interview by Trina Shanks and students, May 2, 2024, transcript.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

neighborhoods. The deterioration of the housing stock reduced property values, undermined local businesses, and eroded the economic base of the community.

Highway Construction and the Destruction of Black Economic Centers

The broader urban renewal efforts in Detroit were closely linked to the construction of the city's freeway system, intended to facilitate suburban expansion and support the growing automobile industry. However, these highways were often routed directly through the heart of Black neighborhoods, leading to widespread displacement and the destruction of community assets.

This history is exemplified by the transformation of neighborhoods like Black Bottom and Paradise Valley, where Detroit's Black population, which had skyrocketed from 5,700 in 1910 to 120,000 by 1930, established vibrant economic and cultural centers. By 1942, these areas boasted over 300 Black-owned businesses, including bars, restaurants, doctor's offices, barber shops, hair salons, hotels, and drug stores. Coleman A. Young, who would become Detroit's first Black mayor in 1974, recalled the prosperity of Black Bottom during the 1920s and early 1930s, stating, "I never saw prosperity in the black community—hell, in the city—as there was then. The money was practically jumping from pocket to pocket in those days. If you weren't making any, you either weren't trying or were inhibited by an unusual code of lawfulness."²²⁵

However, this prosperity was systematically dismantled through mid-20th century urban renewal projects led by Detroit city government officials like Mayors Edward Jeffries Jr. and Albert E. Cobo. These leaders spearheaded efforts to raze the Black Bottom neighborhood under the pretext of urban renewal. The process began in April 1946 when Mayor Jeffries sought authority from the Common Council to demolish the neighborhood. Three years later, President Harry Truman signed the American Housing Act, which funneled hundreds of millions of dollars into cities like Detroit with the aim of building 810,000 public housing units nationwide by 1955.²²⁶ Yet, by that time, nearly 100 acres of Black Bottom were already gone, and people were already experiencing the consequences

Discrimination in real estate, banking, and local government severely limited Black residents' ability to move to other parts of the city or obtain the loans needed to rebuild businesses and cushion against economic hardships. The sentiment among Black residents was encapsulated in the phrase, "Urban renewal means Negro removal,"²²⁷ reflecting the reality that these projects were more about displacing Black communities than about genuinely improving urban conditions.

²²⁵ Coleman A. Young and Lonnie Wheeler, *Hard Stuff: The Autobiography of Coleman Young* (New York: Viking, 1994), 20.

²²⁶ Coleman, Ken. n.d. "The People and Places of Black Bottom, Detroit." The National Endowment for the Humanities. <https://www.neh.gov/article/people-and-places-black-bottom-detroit>.

²²⁷ Ibid.

Mayor Cobo, a conservative Republican who would later run for governor of Michigan in 1956, pushed for the private sector to redevelop the land instead of using the federal dollars offered by the American Housing Act. However, there were no takers. Ultimately, the Citizens Redevelopment Corporation, a cooperative organization backed by a \$10,000 investment from the Walter Reuther-led United Auto Workers, helped get the project off the ground. Reuther, in a letter to Cobo in 1954, expressed the union's support for the redevelopment, stating, "The UAW-CIO is vitally concerned with the elimination of Detroit's slums and in the redevelopment of blighted areas."²²⁸

In 1956, ground was broken on the Lafayette Pavilion, the first of several high-rise apartment buildings geared toward middle-class individuals and families. What had once been Black Bottom was transformed into Lafayette Park, a largely white residential district. By 1964, the Chrysler Freeway (I-375) ran through the former neighborhood. The 1970 U.S. Census revealed that three-quarters of Lafayette Park's residents were white, underscoring the racial shift that urban renewal had engineered.²²⁹

Former Black Bottom residents were forced to move to other sections of the city where Black residents were welcomed, such as neighboring communities to the east and west, where the African-American middle class had lived since the 1920s. The Detroit Free Press, in a 1974 headline, described the process as a "fiasco" because thousands were displaced with little or no assistance from the local government.²³⁰

In *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit*, June Manning Thomas describes, "Postwar highway and urban redevelopment projects further exacerbated Detroit's housing crisis, especially for blacks. Detroit's city planners promised that the proposed system of cross-city expressways would dramatically improve the city's residential areas, as well as bolster the city's economy. For the thousands of blacks who lived in the path of Detroit's first expressways, both promises were false." The construction of these highways was carefully planned to minimize disruption to middle-class white residential areas, but Black neighborhoods, particularly those closest to downtown, were not afforded the same consideration. Instead, the planners viewed inner-city highway construction as a "handy device for slum clearance."²³¹

Beginning in the late 1940s, the construction of the Oakland-Hastings (later Chrysler) Freeway, and other major thoroughfares like the John C. Lodge Freeway, resulted in the demolition of entire neighborhoods. The Oakland-Hastings Freeway, for example, demolished the Black Lower

²²⁸Coleman, Ken. n.d. "The People and Places of Black Bottom, Detroit." The National Endowment for the Humanities. <https://www.neh.gov/article/people-and-places-black-bottom-detroit>.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, c2013), 47-48.

East Side, Paradise Valley, and the Hastings Street business district, destroying many of the city's "most prominent African American institutions."²³²

As one Black businessman described it, the announcement of highway projects left behind a "no man's land"²³³ of deterioration and abandonment long before actual construction began. Homeowners and shopkeepers were unable to sell property that would soon be condemned, and unable to move without the money from a property sale.²³⁴

The scale of the destruction was immense. By 1950, the construction of the Lodge Freeway alone had led to the condemnation and leveling of 423 residences, 109 businesses, 22 manufacturing plants, and 93 vacant lots.²³⁵ This physical destruction represented not just the loss of buildings but the erasure of the social and economic fabric of Black Detroit. The businesses, social clubs, churches, and cultural institutions that had once thrived along Hastings Street and in other Black neighborhoods were replaced with freeways, office buildings, and cultural institutions that offered little to no benefit to the displaced Black communities.

Employment Discrimination and Economic Insecurity

Alongside the physical displacement of Black communities was a parallel history of employment discrimination that further entrenched economic inequity. Black Detroiters faced systemic exclusion from many of the city's key industries including city government and unions, which were critical gateways to economic stability and upward mobility. This discrimination was often explicitly enforced through union policies and industry practices.

Starting in the 1920s and continuing through the mid-20th century, Detroit's economy thrived as America's industrial powerhouse, driven largely by the automotive industry, which provided stable, well-paying jobs often secured through union membership. However, despite the city's reliance on Black labor, Black residents were systematically excluded from the economic benefits that came with these unionized jobs. Unions, which were critical gatekeepers to better wages, job security, and career advancement, often barred Black workers from membership, thereby locking them out of the pathways to economic security that were available to their white counterparts.

For example, Charles Scales notes, "Labor unions like the Plumbers Union...would not allow African Americans into the Union, and if you couldn't get into the Union you couldn't get a construction job."²³⁶ This exclusion extended to other major industries in Detroit, most notably the automotive industry. Scales further recounts, "In the automotive industry...unions like Local

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Charles Scales, interview by Trina Shanks and students, May 4, 2024, transcript.

600, which was a UAW local for Ford Motor Company, absolutely refused for the longest time to have any African Americans whatsoever in that Union."²³⁷ Such practices not only denied Black workers access to well-paying jobs but also reinforced racial hierarchies within the workforce. This exclusion had serious implications for Black Detroiters, not only in terms of immediate economic security but also in their ability to accumulate wealth over time. Unionized jobs often came with benefits such as pensions, health insurance, and protections against arbitrary dismissal, which were crucial for long-term financial stability. By being shut out of these opportunities, Black workers were systematically denied the means to build wealth and pass it on to future generations.

The effects of this systematic exclusion are still felt today. Despite Detroit's historic status as a manufacturing powerhouse, Black residents have been disproportionately excluded from the economic opportunities that arose from this industrial boom. The result has been persistent economic insecurity.

Even in cases where Black workers managed to secure employment, they often found themselves relegated to the lowest-paying, most precarious jobs. This was compounded by the broader economic shifts that made it increasingly difficult for Black Detroiters to achieve economic stability. The head of Detroit's Department of Welfare, John Ballenger, encapsulated this discriminatory mindset in 1935, stating that Black workers were "a labor reservoir to be maintained publicly until the demand for labor includes them,"²³⁸ reflecting the broader racial hierarchies that shaped Detroit's economic landscape. Charles Scales also speaks to this discrimination, "we are making 75% of the income that our European cousins are...you have to prioritize."²³⁹ This reality reflects the broader systemic barriers that have historically prevented Black workers from attaining the same level of generational wealth and security as white residents in the city at the time.

The exclusion from unions was not an isolated issue but rather one part of a broader pattern of discriminatory practices that compounded the economic challenges faced by Black Detroiters. In addition to being barred from union membership, Black workers were often subject to discriminatory hiring practices, where even those who were highly qualified were passed over in favor of white candidates. This systemic racism extended to nearly every facet of the labor market, further entrenching economic disparities.

Moreover, the few Black workers who did manage to secure employment in unionized industries often found themselves segregated into the least desirable jobs within those industries. For

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Karen R. Miller, *Managing Inequality: Northern Racial Liberalism in Interwar Detroit* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 145.

²³⁹ Ibid.

example, in the automotive sector, Black workers were frequently assigned to the most dangerous and physically demanding positions, with little hope of advancement. These jobs were not only lower-paying but also came with a higher risk of injury, further limiting the ability of Black workers to maintain long-term employment and build economic security.

The exclusion from unions and the broader labor market discrimination also had a ripple effect on other aspects of Black Detroiters' lives. Without access to well-paying, stable jobs, many Black families struggled to secure adequate housing, afford quality education for their children, and save for the future. This, in turn, perpetuated a cycle of poverty that has persisted across generations.

Emergency Management

The Legacy of Racial Politics and Economic Insecurity in Detroit

The economic insecurity brought on by historical discriminatory practices in the workforce set the stage for the financial crises that eventually led to Detroit's emergency management. This intervention, however, worsened the city's economic troubles, especially for Black residents, as it imposed harsh austerity measures.

White flight, driven by racial tensions, expanded freeway access, government-backed FHA loans, and the desire for new suburban schools, caused Detroit's population to plummet from 1.8 million in the 1950s to around 700,000 by the early 21st century.²⁴⁰ This depopulation, combined with the outmigration of manufacturing jobs, led to a shrinking tax base, which left the city unable to support essential public services and infrastructure. The escalating racial tensions, marked by the 1943 and 1967 riots further accelerated white flight, reducing Detroit's white population from 838,877 in 1970 to just 75,758 by 2010.²⁴¹ The resulting decline in per capita income from \$19,034 in 1960 to \$18,621 in 2019²⁴² exemplifies the severe impact on the city's financial resources, ultimately undermining its ability to maintain adequate city services and support pensions.

The Economic Consequences of Austerity Measures

Detroit's descent into financial emergency and subsequent bankruptcy was significantly driven by the city's immense worker-related liabilities, primarily concerning pensions and retiree health benefits. As Detroit faced a rapidly shrinking tax base due to population decline and economic shifts, it struggled to meet its obligations to approximately 21,000 retired workers. By 2013, the

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Eisenbrey, Ross. 2014. "Detroit's Bankruptcy Reflects a History of Racism." n.d. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/blog/detroits-bankruptcy-reflects-history-racism/>.

²⁴² Tatum, James. 2021. "Detroit's Population Decline Should Prompt Property Tax Reforms - Citizens Research Council of Michigan." Citizens Research Council of Michigan. September 2, 2021. <https://cremich.org/detroits-population-decline-should-prompt-property-tax-reforms>.

city had underfunded pension obligations of about \$3.5 billion and an additional \$5.7 billion owed for retiree health coverage.²⁴³ The financial strain culminated in the city's bankruptcy filing on July 18, 2013, marking the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history. Under the leadership of Kevyn Orr, the state-appointed emergency manager, the city underwent an \$18 billion debt restructuring, which included cutting \$7 billion in debt and earmarking \$1.7 billion to improve city services. However, city employees and retirees faced substantial reductions in their expected benefits. The cuts were deemed necessary to stabilize Detroit's finances, but left many retirees financially vulnerable, forcing them to take on additional work or cut back on essential expenses. The crisis, exacerbated by the decline in property values, economic opportunities, and decades of financial mismanagement and corruption, laid bare the deep-rooted challenges Detroit faced in its efforts to regain financial stability.

Emergency financial management in Detroit continues the legacy of economic inequity, intensifying the systematic displacement and disenfranchisement that Black Detroiters have endured for decades. Similar to how urban renewal projects and employment discrimination destabilized Black communities by erasing economic centers and limiting access to stable jobs, emergency financial management deepened this instability by stripping the city of its financial autonomy and imposing austerity measures that disproportionately harmed Black residents. The resulting cuts to public services, pensions, and retiree benefits exacerbated the existing economic precarity in these communities, perpetuating the systematic disenfranchisement rooted in earlier urban renewal efforts and employment discrimination.

The Emergency Manager, Kevyn Orr, appointed by the state, presented a plan to bring the city out of bankruptcy, which involved drastic cuts to retiree health benefits and pensions. This move ignored the Michigan constitution's guarantee that public employee pension benefits be paid in full—a decision that affected Detroit's majority Black public workforce, represented by unions that had opposed the governor's election.

The austerity measures implemented to address the debt further strained public services, isolating low-income residents and limiting their access to economic opportunities and basic quality-of-life services. These historical processes and policy decisions set the stage for the contemporary harms and disparities in Detroit, with drastic austerity measures implemented to manage the city's debt having severe consequences. Public transportation services were slashed by nearly 25%, isolating low-income residents and limiting access to employment opportunities. Additionally, the reduction in public services, such as healthcare, safety, and transit further strained the city's residents, many of whom were already facing economic challenges.

²⁴³ Kurtzleben, Danielle. 2014a. "Everything you need to know about the Detroit bankruptcy." *Vox*, December 15, 2014. <https://www.vox.com/2014/12/15/18073574/detroit-bankruptcy-pensions-municipal>.

Socioeconomic Impacts of Transit Inequity on Detroiters

The legacy of economic inequity in Detroit is not only a result of employment discrimination and displacement and its austerity measures, but is also closely tied to the city's lack of transit infrastructure. Transportation plays a critical role in economic mobility, and for many Black Detroiters, the city's underfunded and inequitable transit system has become yet another barrier to economic opportunity.

Detroit once benefited from substantial investment in public transportation, boasting the largest streetcar system in the nation and federal funding for a comprehensive light rail system. However, inequitable urban planning and structural racism²⁴⁴ led to a decline and disinvestment in the city's transit infrastructure. This has resulted in the disproportionate transit challenges that Detroit's Black residents face today.

Today, Detroit continues to see a pattern of disinvestment in public transit systems serving predominantly Black neighborhoods. As suburbs hoard employment opportunities and socioeconomic resources, they remain largely inaccessible to city-based Detroiters who rely on public transit as their primary (if not only) means of transportation.²⁴⁵

In 2012, state legislation created the Regional Transit Authority, merging the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) and the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transit (SMART) into a single regional entity. However, this plan for a unified regional transit provider has yet to be implemented, in part because it is contingent on a property tax increase that suburban representatives on the RTA board have blocked from voting.²⁴⁶

The limited public transportation that Detroit has more recently invested in vastly prioritizes affluent communities from the suburbs, leaving the rest of the city with subpar services. For instance, although the QLine boasted 2,600 riders per day in 2023, the route only serves the largely gentrified Downtown and Midtown neighborhoods.²⁴⁷ Similarly, the People Mover served 1,500 riders per day in 2023, but only connects Detroit's most affluent commercial districts.²⁴⁸ These two services primarily cater to white, affluent Detroiters and have annual operating costs

²⁴⁴ FROHARDT-LANE, SARAH K. 2011. "RACE, PUBLIC TRANSIT, AND AUTOMOBILITY IN WORLD WAR II DETROIT." University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4832442.pdf>.

²⁴⁵ Humanity in Action. 2020. "Changing the Conversation: Transit Justice in Detroit's Suburbs - Humanity in Action." February 12, 2020. https://humanityinaction.org/action_project/changing-the-conversation-transit-justice-in-detroits-suburbs/.

²⁴⁶ Grevatt, Martha. "Detroit Bus Drivers' Union Protests 'Transit Racism.'" Workers World. August 25, 2016. <https://www.workers.org/2016/08/26649/>.

²⁴⁷ Lawrence, E. D. 2024, January 24, 2024. Detroit Free Press. 2024. "QLINE Touts Big Ridership Boost in '23." *Detroit Free Press*. <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2024/01/23/qline-million-riders-detroit-streetcar-2023/72329543007/>.

²⁴⁸ APTAAdmin. 2024. "Ridership Report - American Public Transportation Association." American Public Transportation Association. May 29, 2024. <https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/transit-statistics/ridership-report/>.

of \$10 million and \$11.5 million respectively.^{249, 250} Conversely, Detroit’s city bus system covers the entire city and has a daily ridership of nearly 40,000 that, according to a 2023 DDOT Title VI Onboard Survey Report, is approximately 80% Black.²⁵¹ Despite this, the bus system receives just \$57 million annually for operating costs. On a per capita basis, the bus system, primarily utilized by Black Detroiters, is severely underfunded. Consequently, Detroit’s bus system received a “D-” from Transportation Riders United in 2019 and has been ranked 125th out of the country’s largest 150 cities for non-car owners.^{252, 253}

The systematic decline in investment in the quality of Detroit public transportation has translated into contemporary transit challenges disproportionately faced by Black Detroit residents, many of which carry socioeconomic implications.

In communities with low rates of car ownership, public transportation becomes increasingly important for residents as a form of mobility and access. Today, over one-third of Detroiters do not own a car — the eighth most in the country — and are thus particularly impacted by inequity in public transportation systems.^{254, 255} Moreover, non-car owners are disproportionately Black. Despite this, Detroit only spends \$69 per capita on transit annually, while comparably sized cities such as Atlanta and Seattle spend \$119 and \$471 respectively.²⁵⁶ This systemic underfunding of public transit infrastructure carries broad socioeconomic implications.

Residents’ average commute time is the single strongest predictor of economic mobility in a neighborhood.²⁵⁷ While Detroit’s car commuters have an average commute of 26 minutes, public

²⁴⁹ Lawrence, E. D. 2023, December 14. “RTA Weighing Proposal for QLINE Control.” *Detroit Free Press*, [RTA weighing proposal for QLINE control](#).

²⁵⁰ City of Detroit. *DDOT 2023 Title VI Onboard Survey Report*. City of Detroit, April 2023.

<https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2023-04/FINAL%20-%20DDOT%202023%20Title%20VI%20Onboard%20Survey%20Report.pdf>.

²⁵¹ City of Detroit. *2023 On-Board Survey Report*. City of Detroit, April 6, 2023.

<https://detroitmi.gov/document/2023-board-survey-report>.

²⁵² Transportation Riders United. *On-Time Performance of DDOT Buses: A Performance Review and Analysis of DDOT Service Standards*. Detroit: Transportation Riders United, May 2012.

<https://www.detroittransit.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/TRU-DDOT-Bus-Timeliness-Report-May-2012.pdf>.

²⁵³ Hoxie, Ali. 2021. “WXYZ 7 News Detroit.” *WXYZ 7 News Detroit*, January 14, 2021.

<https://www.wxyz.com/news/study-ranks-detroit-at-bottom-of-list-for-best-cities-to-live-without-a-car>.

²⁵⁴ Gerber, Elisabeth, Jeffrey Morenoff, Institute for Social Research, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, College of Literature, Science and the Arts, Department of Sociology, and Conan Smith. 2017. “Detroit Metropolitan Area Communities Study | Winter 2017.” Report.

<https://poverty.umich.edu/files/2018/05/W2-Transportation-F.pdf>.

²⁵⁵ Grabar, Henry. 2016. “Detroit Has America’s Worst Transit System. And It Now Has a Chance to Fix It.” *Slate Magazine*, June 7, 2016.

<https://slate.com/business/2016/06/detroit-has-americas-worst-transit-system-could-the-regional-transit-master-plan-save-it.html>.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Chetty, Raj, and Nathaniel Hendren. 2018. “The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility I: Childhood Exposure Effects*.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133 (3): 1107–62.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjy007>.

transit commuters have an average commute of 50 minutes.²⁵⁸ Given that Black Detroiters account for 86% of public transit users, it is evident that Detroit’s lack of adequate public transportation services is directly contributing to limited economic mobility for Black residents.²⁵⁹ Not only are Black residents forced to spend a greater portion of their day in transit, but they are also discouraged from seeking job opportunities in other Detroit neighborhoods or nearby suburbs.

Detroit’s underfunded public transportation systems also place a greater financial burden on Black residents. Black Detroiters are forced to spend 23% of their income on transportation, nearly double that of their white counterparts, who only spend 12%.²⁶⁰ As a result, it is more difficult for Black Detroiters to accumulate wealth and make purchases that can be used to increase their long-term economic standing, such as homes.

Currently, Detroiters who use public transit for their commute spend 21% of their income commuting, compared to 16% for other residents in the region. For those who commute by private automobile, Detroiters spend 24%, compared to 16% for residents across the region.²⁶¹ Though the lower incomes of Detroiters are one factor here, it is not the only factor. For those who commute using public transportation, the average round trip commute is 13 minutes longer, making the cost of time significant. For those who drive, the disparity is mainly the result of high auto insurance rates.²⁶²

Total commute costs as a percentage of wages in 2019 showed that for Metro Detroit, the total out-of-pocket costs and travel time costs were 21% for public transit and 24% for automobiles, while for Detroit residents, these costs were 16% and 11% for public transit and 16% and 19% for automobiles, respectively. Among commuters who live in Detroit, Black people are spending a larger share of their income on travel, with Black commuters spending 25% of their income on travel compared to 19% for white commuters. For those traveling to work by car, the primary driver is the differential in wages. For riders of public transportation, slightly higher wages for Black residents are offset by longer commute times.²⁶³

These factors contribute to the persistent economic insecurity faced by many Detroit residents, underlining the need for comprehensive policies to address these deep-rooted challenges and promote economic equity across the city.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ Detroit Regional Chamber. 2024. “By The Numbers - Detroit Regional Chamber.” May 22, 2024.

<https://www.detroitchamber.com/equity/research/racial-inequity-overview/>.

²⁵⁹ Sands, D. “How Detroit’s Inequitable Transit Costs Black Detroiters More — and What We Can Do to Change It.” December 21, 2021. Metromode.

<https://www.secondwavemedia.com/metromode/features/economic-equity-in-detroit-2.aspx>.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

Key Takeaways

- **High Unemployment Rates:** Detroit's unemployment rate increased from 6.9% in Q4 2022 to 7.4% in Q1 2023, nearly double Michigan's rate of 4.2%. The labor force participation rate in Detroit is only 53.6%, the lowest among the top 100 U.S. cities.
- **Stagnant Middle-Wage Job Growth:** While middle-wage jobs in the broader Detroit region grew by 23% from 2010 to 2019, they only grew by 3% in Detroit itself, highlighting the slowest growth in this job segment and exacerbating financial struggles for residents.
- **Impact of Urban Renewal:** The construction of the Lodge Freeway alone resulted in the demolition of 423 residences, 109 businesses, 22 manufacturing plants, and 93 vacant lots in Black neighborhoods, dismantling economic centers like Hastings Street and deepening racial economic disparities.
- **Impact of Austerity Measures:** The implementation of austerity measures under emergency financial management in Detroit disproportionately impacted the city's majority-Black population, leading to significant reductions in public services, pensions, and retiree benefits. These measures deepened existing economic inequalities and undermined the financial security of many residents, forcing them into further economic hardship.
- **Transportation Inequities:** Over one-third of Detroiters do not own a car, making public transportation crucial. However, Detroit only spends \$69 per capita on transit annually, compared to \$119 in Atlanta and \$471 in Seattle, leading to longer commute times (50 minutes on average for public transit users) and limiting economic mobility for Black residents.
- **Disproportionate Transportation Costs:** Black Detroiters spend 23% of their income on transportation, nearly double the 12% spent by their white counterparts. This financial burden further limits wealth accumulation and economic stability for Black residents.

Conclusion

This harms report examines the role of government policy in shaping the systemic inequities that continue to impact Black Detroiters. From its inception, policies enacted and enforced by the City of Detroit, such as urban renewal and redlining, created and sustained the ongoing racialized disparities seen in housing, public safety, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. These policies, rooted in racial discrimination and disenfranchisement, laid the groundwork for segregation, displacement, and disinvestment—actions that have had long-lasting consequences on the city's Black communities.

In the realm of housing and land use, the report highlights how discriminatory policies were deliberately designed to segregate neighborhoods and limit Black Detroiters' access to quality housing and resources. These policies fostered environments of economic instability and social isolation, setting the stage for decades of marginalization. The city's failure to address these injustices, coupled with the continuation of inequitable practices, has further exacerbated these issues, resulting in a landscape where Black communities remain disproportionately affected by economic hardship, poor housing conditions, and environmental hazards.

The impact of these policies extends beyond housing. The report details how discriminatory urban planning and economic policies have produced significant health disparities, limited access to healthcare, and exposed Black neighborhoods to environmental risks such as air pollution and inadequate infrastructure. These outcomes are not the result of isolated incidents but are the product of a systematic approach to governance that prioritized certain populations while marginalizing others.

In education, the report underscores how state policies and decisions in concordance with federal legislation have contributed to the chronic underfunding, segregation, and mismanagement of Detroit Public Schools Community District. These policies have left the district struggling to provide quality education to its predominantly Black children. The closure of schools, budget cuts, and deterioration of school infrastructure are consequences of financial crises, with direct links to policy decisions that have reinforced educational inequities.

The economic challenges faced by Black Detroiters are similarly rooted in policy decisions. The report traces the connections between historical policies, such as discriminatory employment practices and urban renewal projects that displaced Black communities, and the persistent issues of unemployment, economic insecurity, and transit inequity. These challenges have been compounded by contemporary policies, including austerity measures imposed during the city's financial crises, that have disproportionately impacted Black residents. The socioeconomic impacts of these policies have hindered economic mobility and increased financial burdens for Black Detroiters, making it clear that policy interventions are necessary to address these harms.

Repairing Harms

Grasping the complexities of harm is critical to the repair process. There is value in not simply knowing and acknowledging past and contemporary harms against Black communities (specifically Detroit in this case), but also in understanding the impact of these harms on an individual and community's ability to obtain substantive and sustainable progress. Recent research has focused on the nuances between knowing and understanding the impact of harm using representative survey data from Detroit.

Since 2016, the Detroit Metro Area Community Survey (DMACS) has been a reliable source of public opinion data. According to their 2022 data, 64% of Detroiters support reparations,²⁶⁵ a stark contrast between the 63% in opposition nationwide.²⁶⁶ The largest driver of support for reparations is attributed to Detroit's high Black population relative to the Black population at the national level. However, high Black population notwithstanding, another strong driver of support for reparations is found in one's ability to not only be aware of historical and contemporary harms, but to understand how the legacy of those harms impact Black communities today. Second, white Detroiters' support for reparations also skews higher than white Americans' support overall. This difference is not minimal: the data notes an approximate 10% difference between white Detroiters' (38%) and white Americans' (28%) overall support for reparations, respectively.²⁶⁷

Moreover, reparative policies should be informed by the lived experiences of those most affected by the harms. In addition to providing redress, repair must address the root causes of disparity to help ensure non-repetition of harms. This requires a concerted effort from policymakers, community leaders, community residents, and stakeholders to prioritize the well-being of Black Detroiters through equitable access to housing, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Future Research

This harms report highlights how municipal housing and land use policies in the early 20th century created the conditions that led to harms in the five key areas identified in the Detroit Reparations Task Force's scope of work: 1) housing and land use, 2) policing, 3) quality of life, 4) education, and 5) economic development and economic insecurity. However, there are additional areas of harm outside of the scope of this report that certainly warrant further research.

²⁶⁵ Kamri Hudgins, et al., "Crafting Democratic Futures: Understanding Political Conditions and Racialized Attitudes towards Black Reparations in the United States of America." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* no. 10 (2024): 49-67. <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2024.10.3.03>.

²⁶⁶ Jared Sharpe, "UMass Amherst/WCVB Poll Finds Nearly Half of Americans Say the Federal Government Definitely Should Not Pay Reparations to the Descendants of Slaves." *University of Massachusetts: Amherst Office of News and Media Relations* (Amherst, MA), April 29, 2021, <https://www.umass.edu/news/article/umass-amherstwcvb-poll-finds-nearly-half>

²⁶⁷ Hudgins, 64.

The task force suggests that avenues for future research could include further analysis in the areas of education, quality of life, and economic development.

In education, the task force suggests future research could review funding formulas and whether such formulas included municipal burden in the calculus. While this report discusses the impacts of early 20th century housing and land use, future research could look further back into Detroit's history of education. Given the difficulties caused when Detroit Public Schools Community District discontinued school busing, the task force also suggests looking at exposure to criminality for students taking public transportation. Additionally, the task force suggests future research could explore the role of culturally responsive pedagogy in DPSCD to address harms, examine alternatives to improving education access beyond integration, review professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators, and explore how DPSCD could use the settlement in the right to literacy lawsuit to repair harms.

In the area of quality of life, future research could build on this report's analysis of air pollution, noise pollution, and heat risk to include an analysis of water quality and its impact on Black communities in Detroit. Black communities in Detroit also historically faced healthcare related harms, including challenges faced by Black-owned and operated hospitals before 1965. Such challenges led to disparate mortality rates and other negative health outcomes when managing diseases, such as tuberculosis and the measles. These represent areas of possible future research. Harms related to dental care could also be investigated, from both a historical and present-day lens. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing racial disparities. Future research could explore the impact of the pandemic on Black Detroiters given already existing harms.

The area of economic development also has several avenues for future research. The task force suggests further research could focus on chronic unemployment and labor force participation. The task force also suggested a review of discriminatory commercial lending practices by banks. These practices made it harder for Black residents to secure business loans in the aftermath of urban renewal.

These and other areas of future research could build on existing documentation of harms. In so doing, this harms report and future research ultimately illustrate the systemic inequities faced by Black Detroiters as a direct outcome of municipal policy and practices. This legacy is visible in aspects of daily life for Black Detroiters, from where they live and work to the quality of their education and health. As such, the systemic inequities detailed in this report are interconnected, deeply entrenched, and have been perpetuated over decades through municipal policies and practices. Addressing these challenges will require a comprehensive, reparative approach that acknowledges the historical roots of these disparities and prioritizes the creation of a just and equitable city, where all its residents have an equitable opportunity to thrive.

Appendix

Maps in this appendix were created using ArcGIS Online[®] software by Esri. ArcGIS Online[®] is the intellectual property of Esri and is used herein under license. Copyright Esri. All rights reserved. Navigable versions of many of the maps in this appendix can be found at <https://arcg.is/1Truj>.

Geographical Maps - Environment

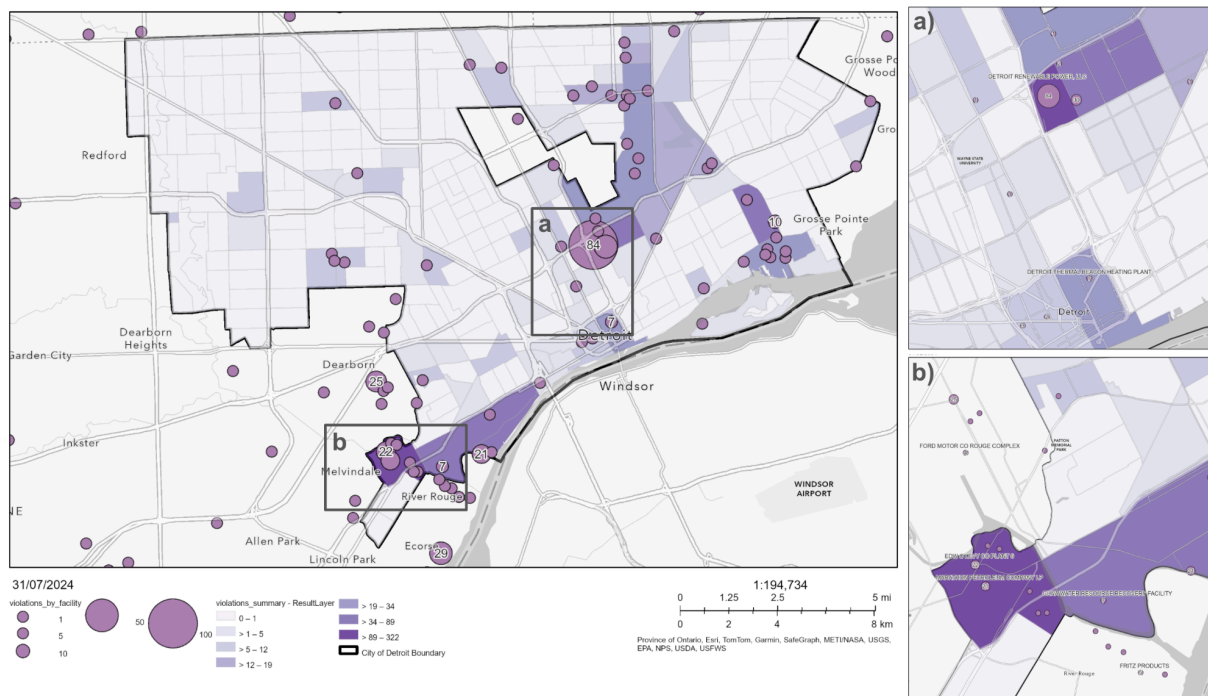


Figure 1: Number of air quality violations reported by Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) for Detroit and the surrounding areas since 2006²⁶⁸, clustered using the ArcGIS “Aggregate Points” algorithm. a) breakdown of major air quality violations in Poletown East and b) the Ford River Rouge complex. The underlying polygons are produced using ArcGIS’s “Aggregate Polygons” algorithm to project air quality violations on to 2020 Census Tracts for the city. Note that a violation notice does not always indicate an emissions violation, it could entail a reporting violation or other act of non-compliance by a facility.

²⁶⁸ “MDEQ - Michigan Air Permits System,” State.mi.us, 2024, <https://www.egle.state.mi.us/aps/>.

Data from the MEQD system scraped using scripts in the following repository from Shelby Jouppe: srjouppe, “GitHub - Srjouppe/Michigan-Egle-Database-Auto-Scraper: Scrapes Michigan Government Database of Air Pollution Records Daily for New Documents,” GitHub, 2022, <https://github.com/srjouppe/michigan-egle-database-auto-scraper>.

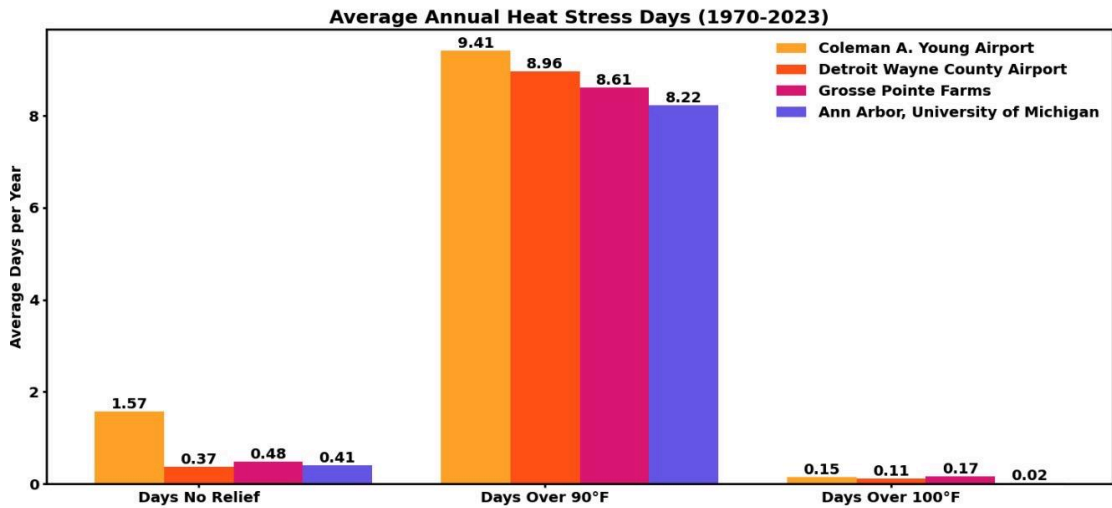
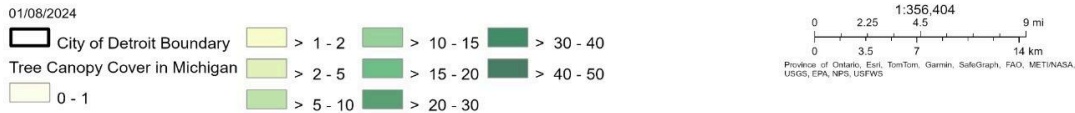
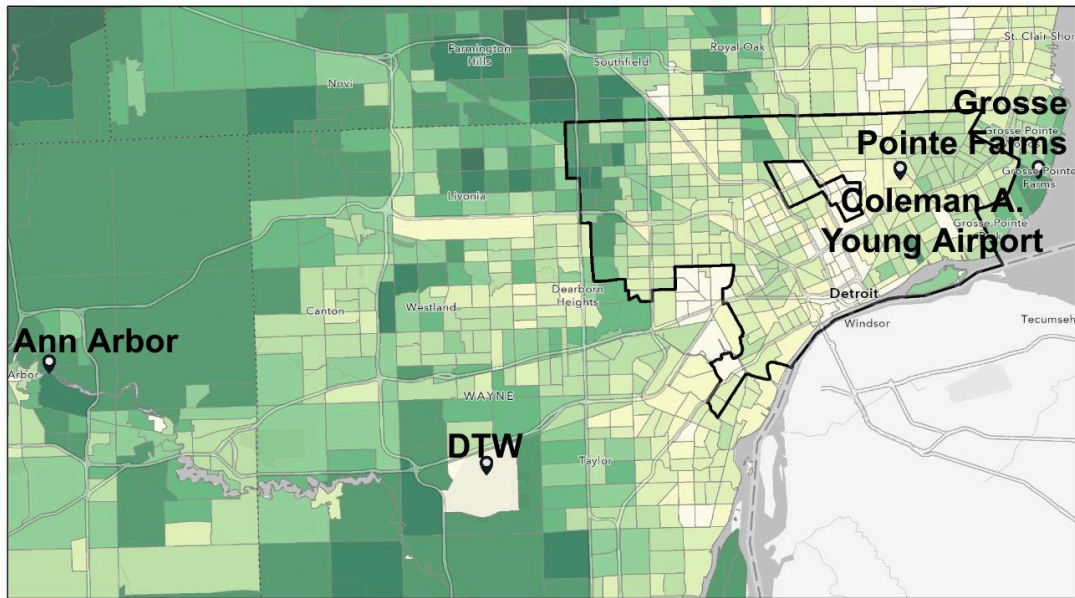


Figure 2: a) Tree canopy coverage for Detroit and the surrounding areas generated from the 2016 National Land Cover Database²⁶⁹ and averaged to census tracts. **b)** Amount of days with signs of excessive heat for selected locations surrounding Detroit. A “no relief day” is any day on which the daily high temperature is above 90°F and the low temperature is above 75°F. Data is

²⁶⁹ Housman, I.W., Schleeweis, K., Heyer, J.P., Ruefenacht, B.; Bender, S., Megown, K., Goetz, W., and Bogle, S., *National Land Cover Database Tree Canopy Cover Methods v2021.4. GTAC-10268-RPT1* (Salt Lake City, UT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Geospatial Technology and Applications Center, Dec. 19, 2023), https://data.fs.usda.gov/geodata/rastergateway/treecanopycover/docs/TCC_v2021-4_Methods.pdf

from the National Centres for Environmental Information’s Global Historical Climatology Network daily summaries^{270, 271}.

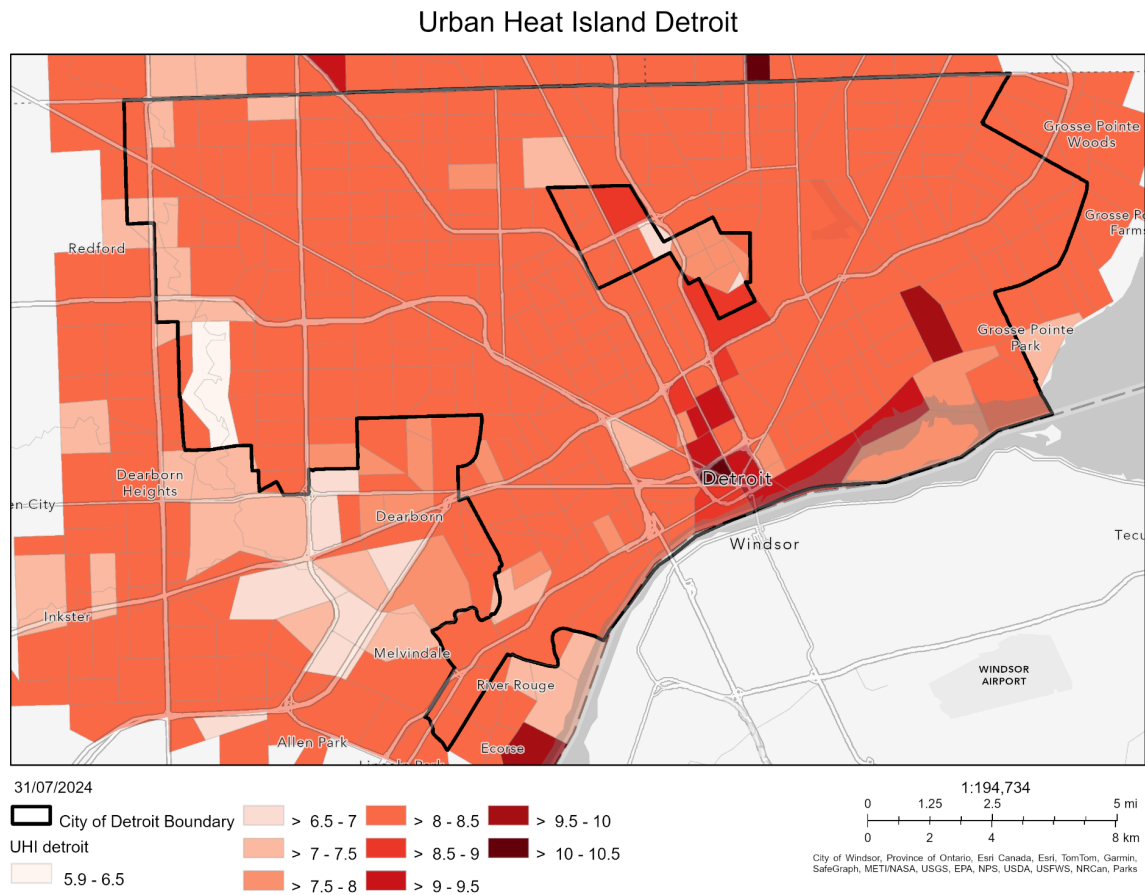


Figure 3: Detroit Urban Heat Island Index (UHI)²⁷², calculated by Climate Central.

²⁷⁰ Menne, Matthew J., Imke Durre, Bryant Korzeniewski, Shelley McNeill, Kristy Thomas, Xungang Yin, Steven Anthony, Ron Ray, Russell S. Vose, Byron E. Gleason, and Tamara G. Houston, *Global Historical Climatology Network - Daily (GHCN-Daily)*, Version 3 (2012), distributed by NOAA National Climatic Data Center, <https://doi.org/10.7289/V5D21VHZ>.

²⁷¹ Matthew J. Menne, Imke Durre, Russell S. Vose, Byron E. Gleason, and Tamara G. Houston, “An Overview of the Global Historical Climatology Network-Daily Database,” *J. Atmos. Oceanic Technol.* 29, no. 7 (July 1, 2012): 897-910. <https://doi.org/10.1175/JTECH-D-11-00103.1>.

²⁷² Climatecentral.org, “Urban Heat Hot Spots,” July 26, 2023, <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/urban-heat-islands-2023>.

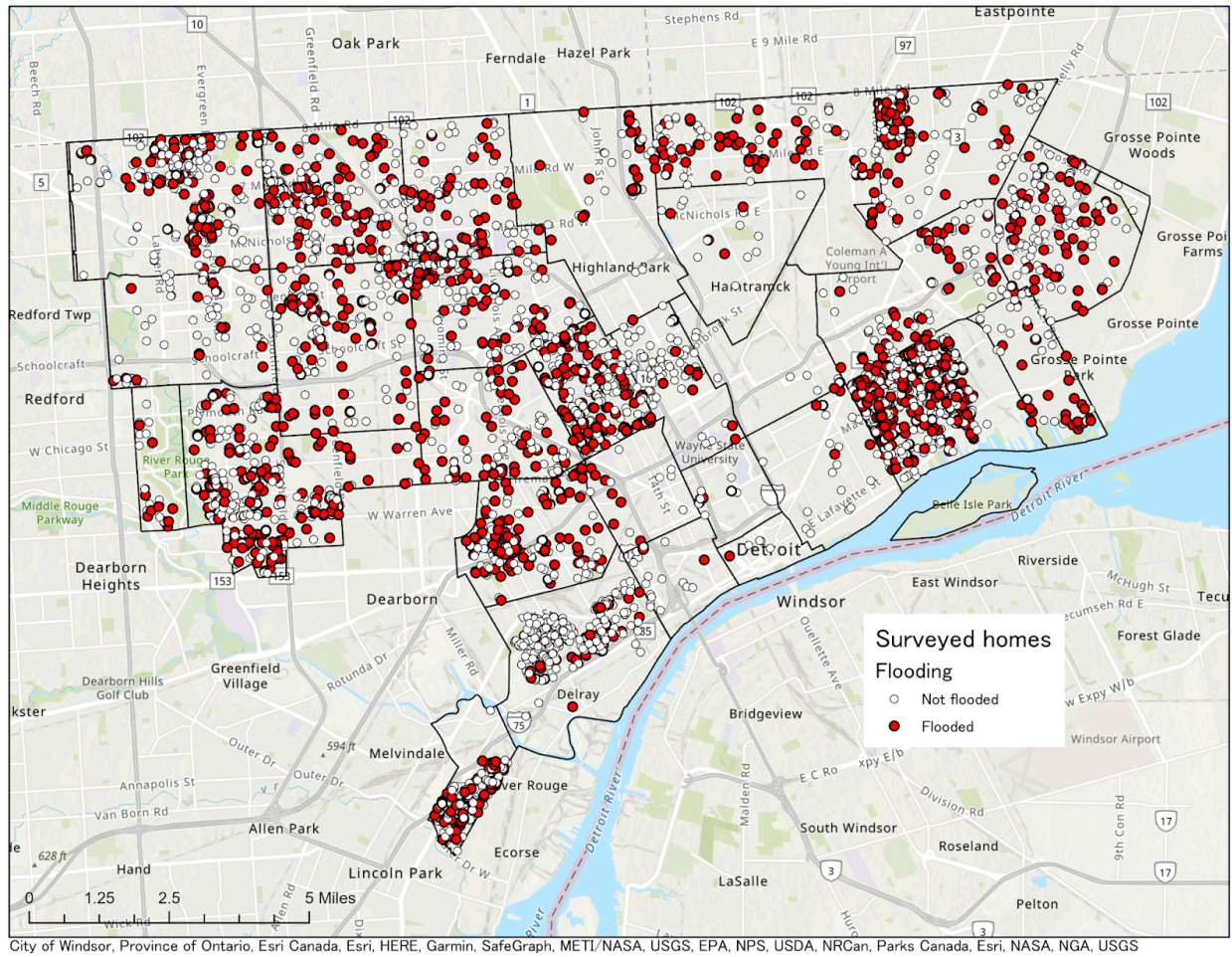


Figure 4: Locations of households reporting pluvial flooding in Larson et al., 2021.²⁷³

²⁷³ Larson, Peter S., Carina Gronlund, Lyke Thompson, Natalie Sampson, Ramona Washington, Jamie Steis Thorsby, Natalie Lyon, and Carol Miller, "Recurrent home flooding in Detroit, MI 2012–2020: results of a household survey," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 14 (July 19, 2021): 7659, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18147659>.

Detroit's mold problem

The vast majority of Detroit homes experience recurrent flooding and/or have mold.

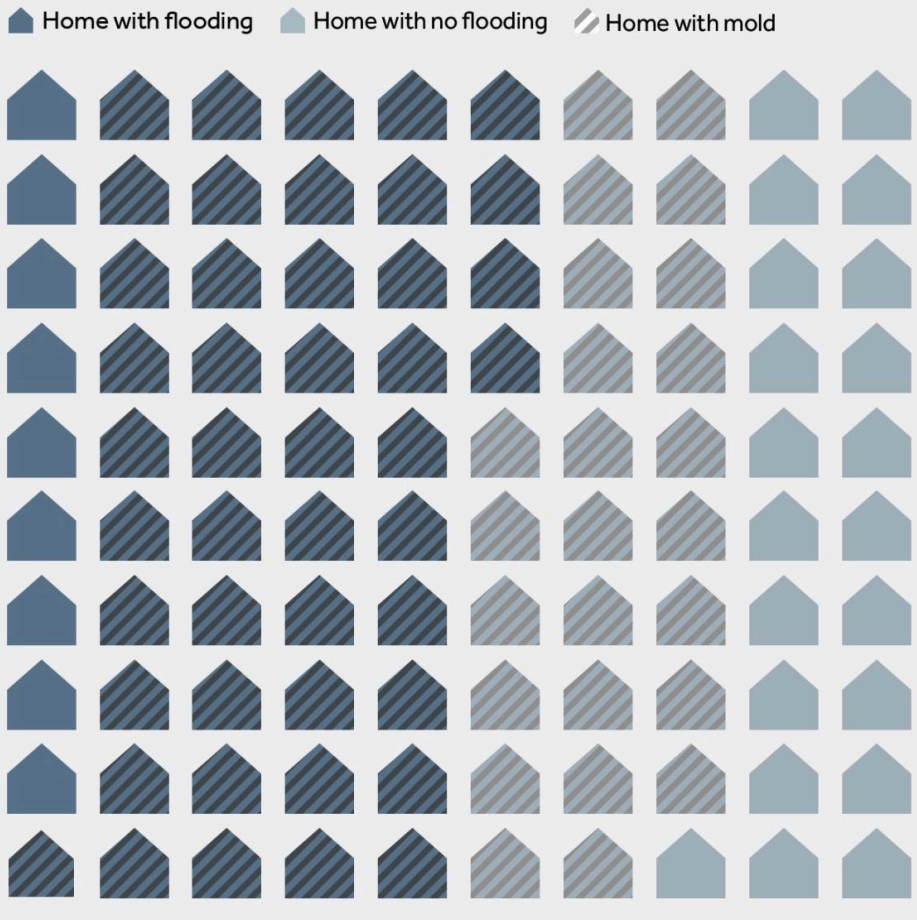


Figure 5: Infographic produced by Climate Central²⁷⁴ showing the proportion of homes in Detroit experiencing one or both of flooding (dark blue) and mold growth (shaded).

²⁷⁴ Gerstein, Michael and Jena Brooker, “Devastating Floods Leave Detroiters with Toxic Mold,” Climate Central, Sept. 29, 2023, <https://www.climatecentral.org/partnership-journalism/devastating-floods-leave-detroiters-with-toxic-mold>.

PM2.5 in the Air by Percentile

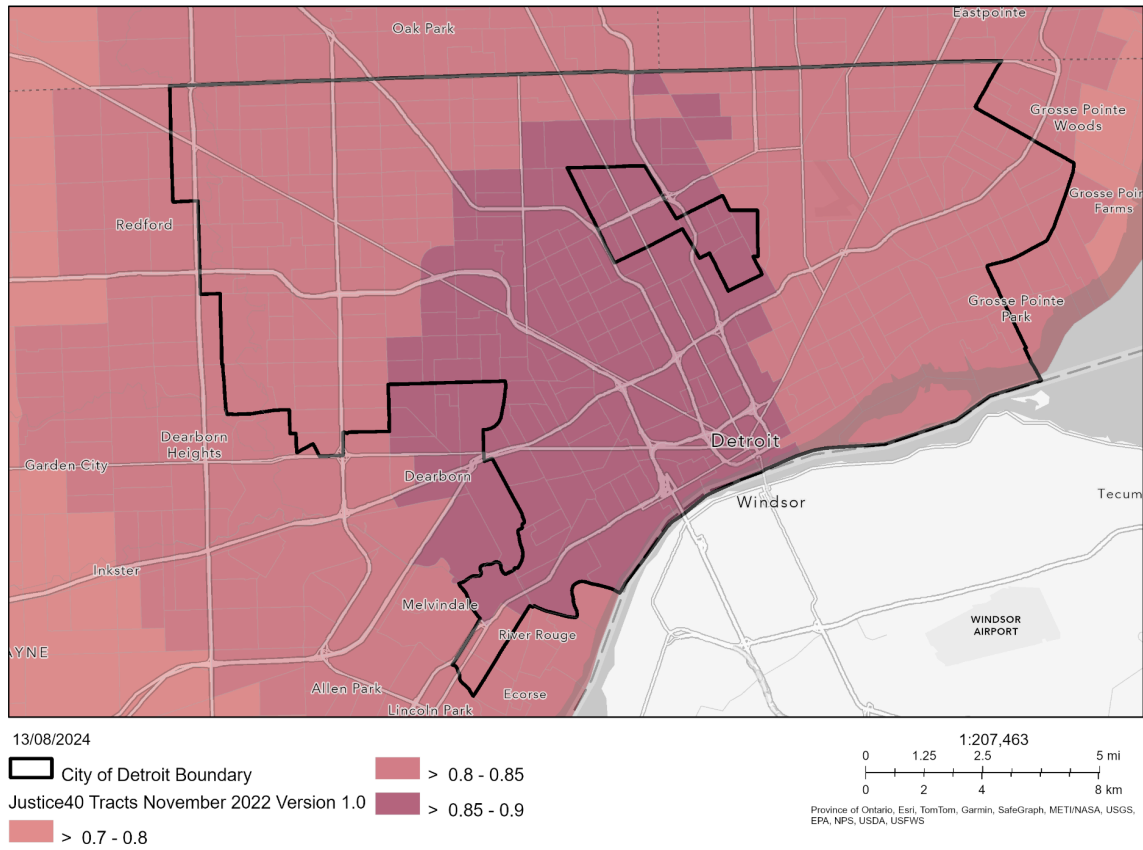


Figure 6: National percentile rank for mean days of PM_{2.5} exposure above regulatory standard (3 year averaged) in Detroit and the surrounding areas by Zip Code. Ranked data is from the Climate and Environmental Justice Screening Tool²⁷⁵

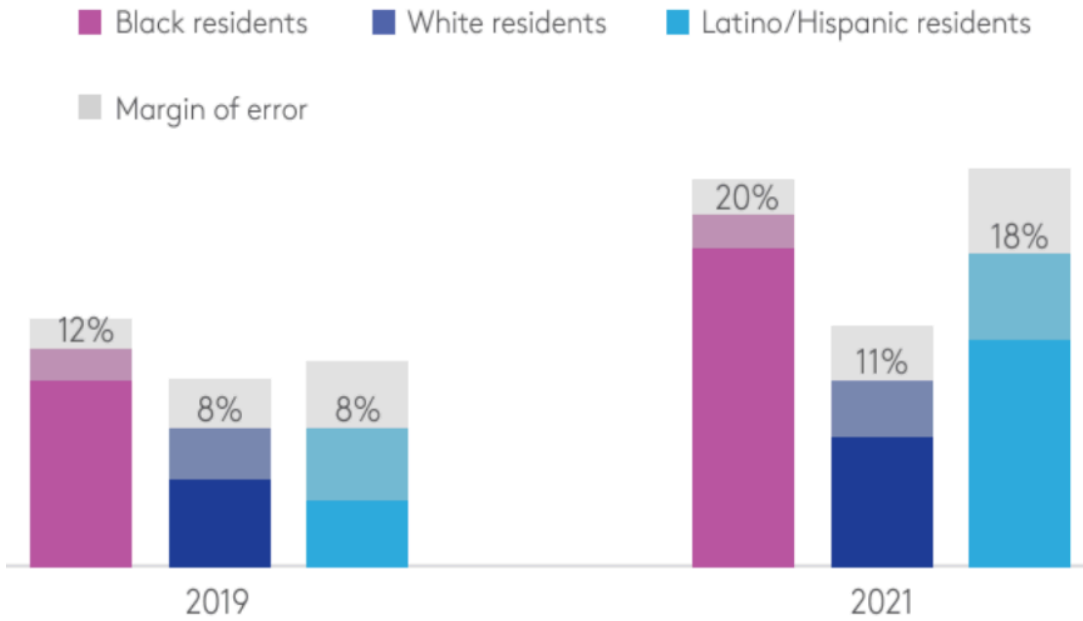
²⁷⁵ White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), *Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool*, V1.0 (Nov. 22, 2022), distributed by Council on Environmental Quality, <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov>.

Mapping Contemporary Harms

Demographic Information

a. Unemployment rate increased for Black residents in the city

Unemployment rate by race, Detroit, 2019 and 2021



Source: American Community Survey, 1-year estimates, 2019, 2021

Unemployment by Percentile

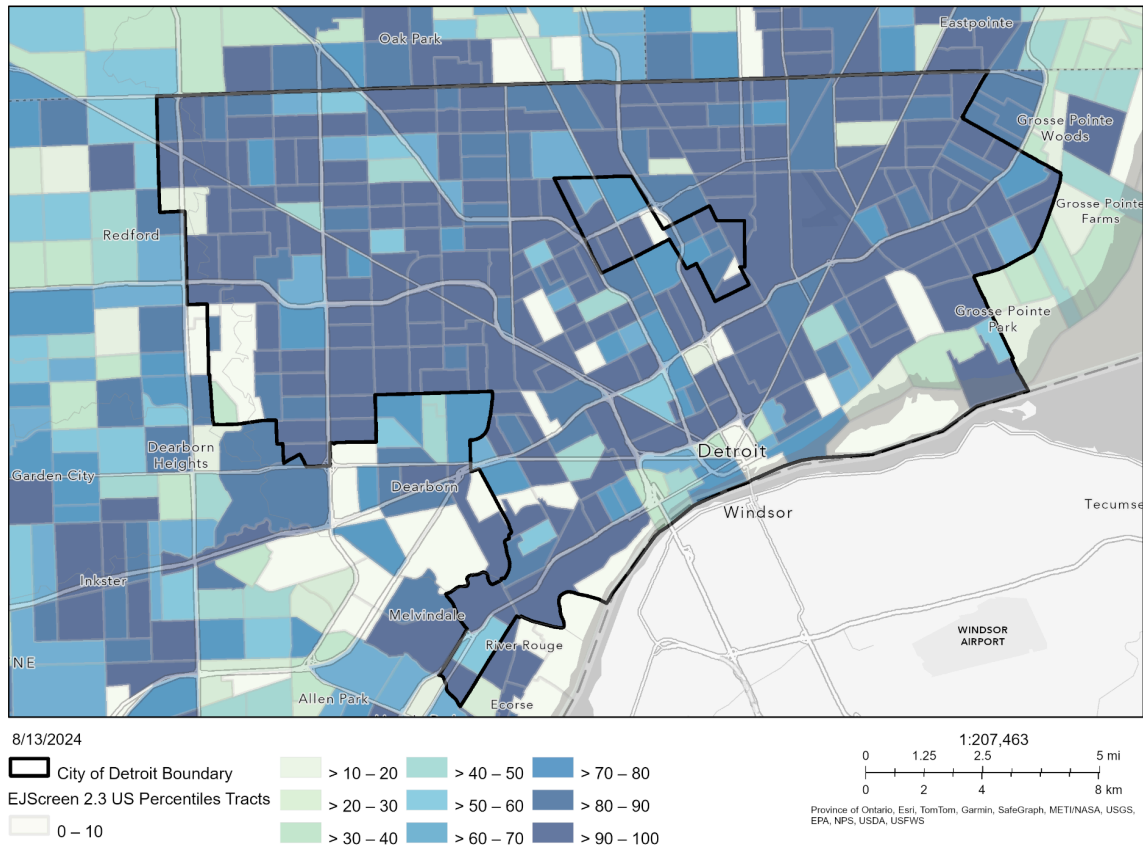


Figure 7a: Unemployment rate change for Black residents in the City of Detroit, from the Detroit Future Cities 2023 Economic Equity Indicators Update.²⁷⁶ **b:** National percentile rank for unemployment in Detroit and the surrounding areas by census tract. Ranked data is from the Climate and Environmental Justice Screening Tool.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Detroit Future City, *Economic Equity Indicators Update 2023* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Future City, November 16, 2023), https://detroitfuturecity.com/data_reports/economic-equity-indicator-update-2023/.

²⁷⁷ CEQ, 89.

Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months (ACS 2018-2022 5 Year Estimate)

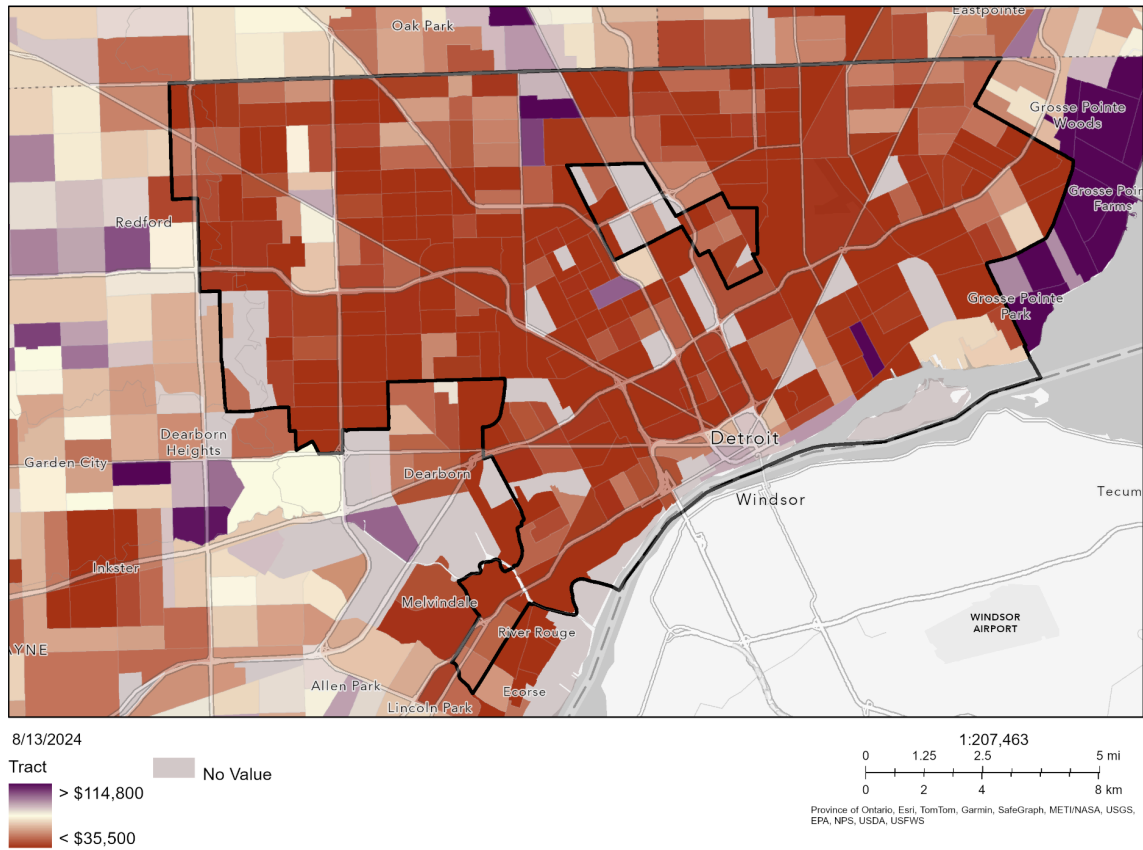


Figure 8: Median Household Income in past 12 months (inflation-adjusted dollars to last year of 5-year range) for Detroit and the surrounding areas by census tract. Derived from U.S. Census Bureau 5 - year ACS 2018- 2022 estimates.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 5-year estimates, Table(s) B17020, C17002

Population with Income Below Federal Poverty Level (Last 12 Months, under 6 years)

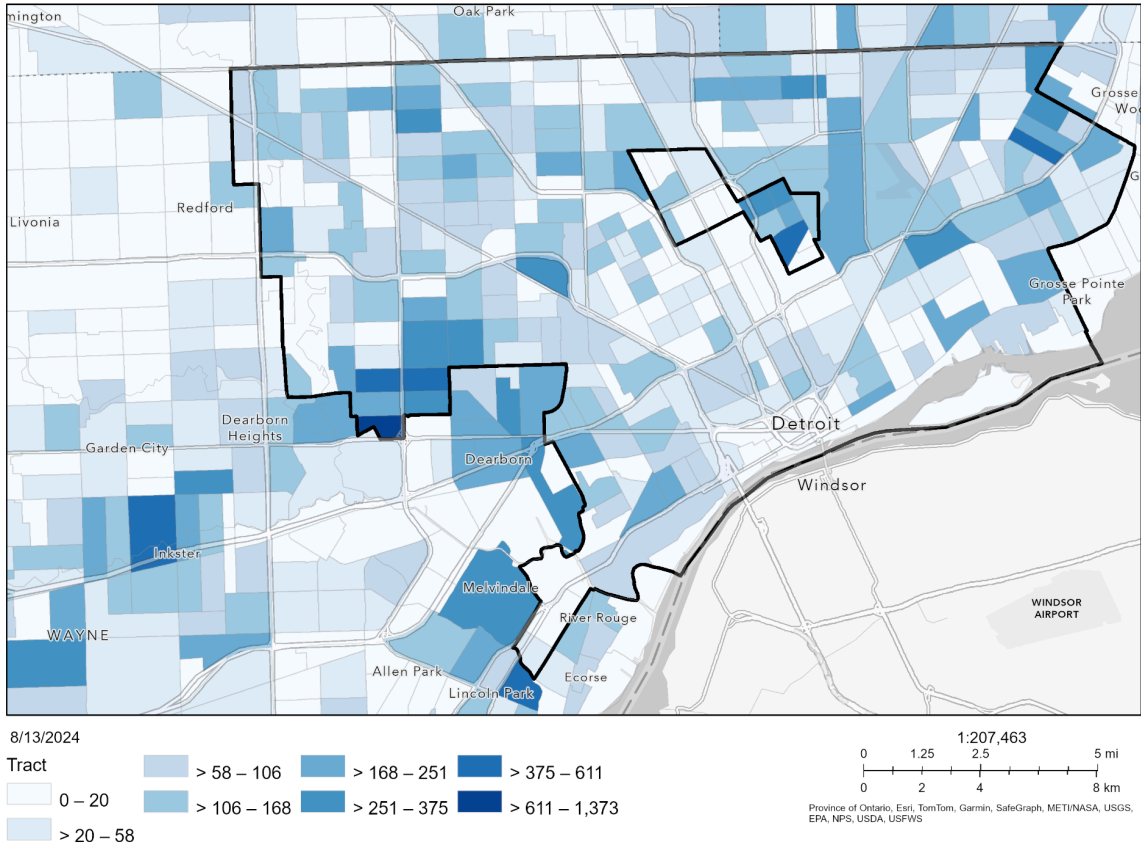


Figure 9: National percentile rank for persons whose income in the past 6 months is below the federal poverty level for up to 6 years in Detroit and the surrounding areas by census tract. Ranked data is from U.S. Census Bureau 5 - year ACS 2018- 2022 estimates²⁷⁹.

²⁷⁹ U.S. Census Bureau., 92..

Life Expectancy at Birth

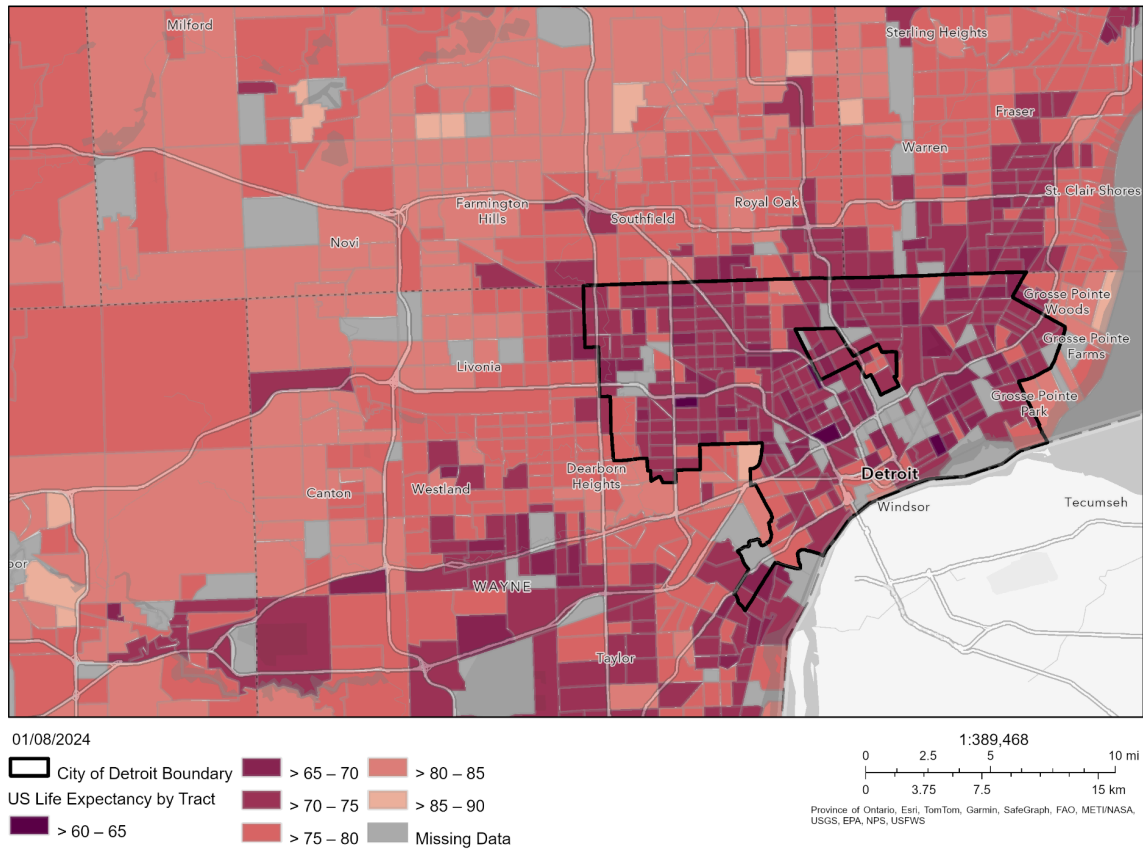


Figure 10: Life expectancy at birth for Detroit and the surrounding areas. Data derived from CDC Life Expectancy Estimates for US Census Tracts over 2010-2015.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Tejada-Vera B, Bastian B, Arias E, Escobedo LA., and Salant B., Life Expectancy Estimates by U.S. Census Tract, 2010-2015 [map], “National Center for Health Statistics Data Visualization Gallery”, last updated Mar. 9, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data-visualization/life-expectancy/index.html>.

Health Information

Current Asthma Crude Prevalence (%)

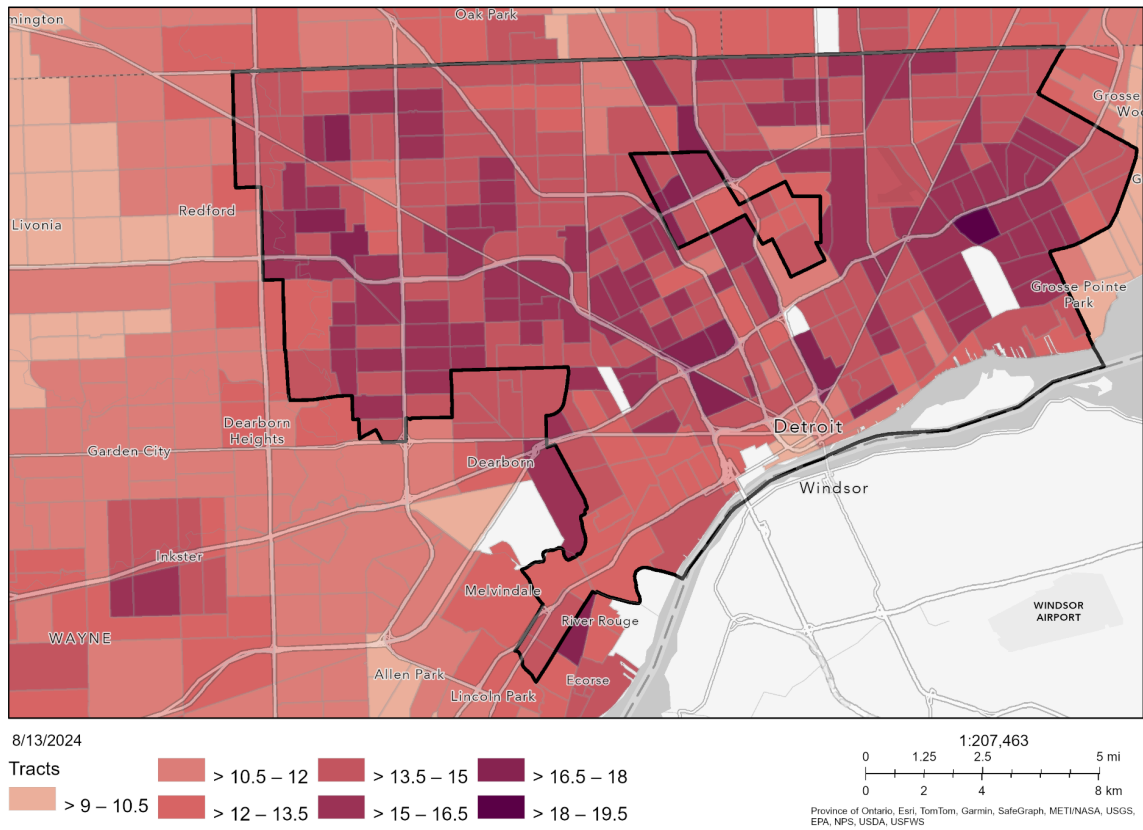


Figure 11: National percentile rank for crude prevalence of adults (18+) living with asthma in Detroit and the surrounding areas by census tract. Ranked data is from the CDC 2023 PLACES reports.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *PLACES: Local Data for Better Health, County Data 2023 Release* (last updated Mar. 27, 2024), distributed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health, https://data.cdc.gov/500-Cities-Places/PLACES-Local-Data-for-Better-Health-County-Data-20/swc5-untb/about_data.

Diabetes Crude Prevalence (%)

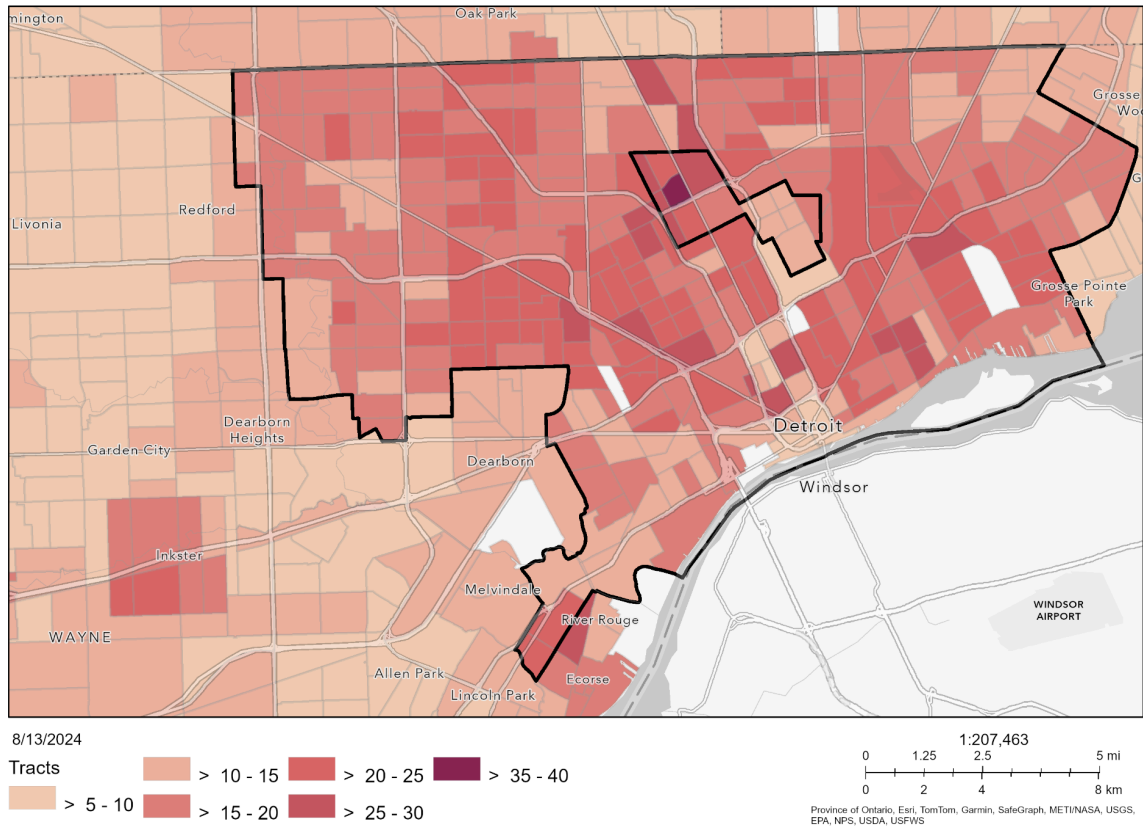


Figure 12: National percentile rank for crude prevalence of adults (18+) living with diabetes in Detroit and the surrounding areas by census tract. Ranked data is from the CDC 2023 PLACES report²⁸².

²⁸² CDC, 95.

Crude Prevalence of Lack of Health Insurance (%)

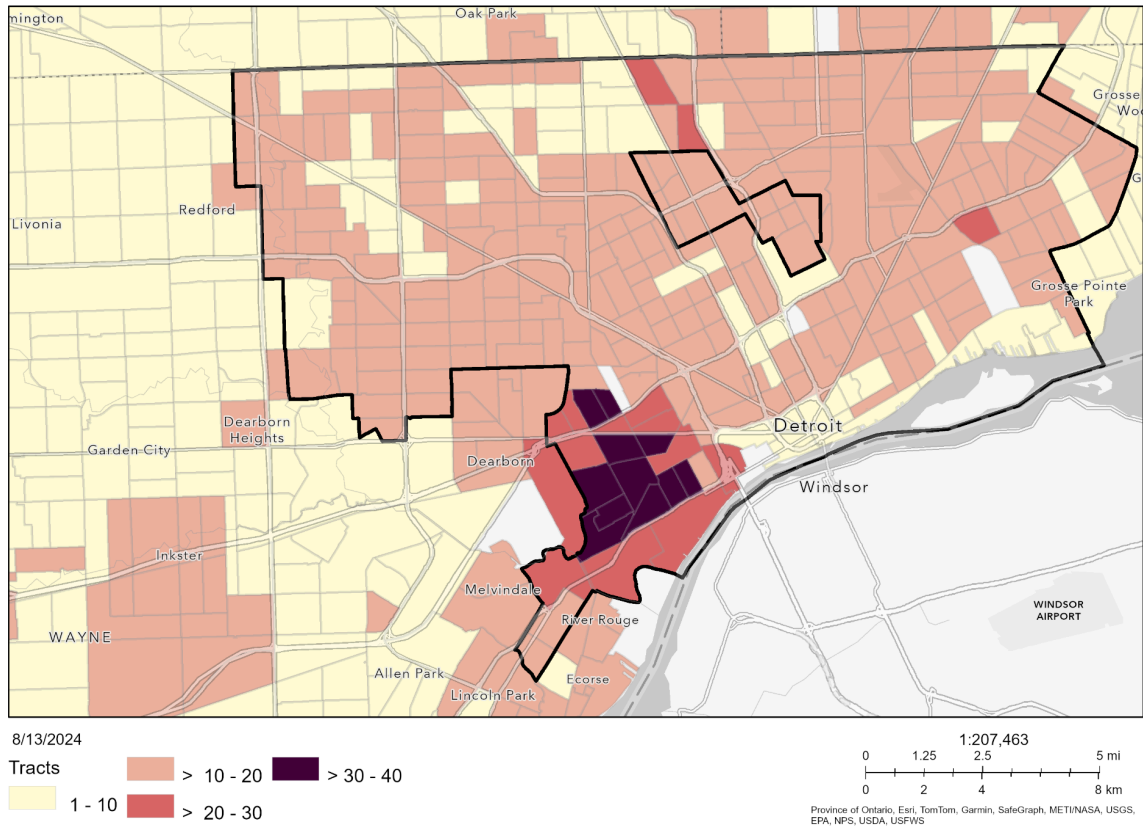


Figure 13: National percentile rank for people without health insurance in Detroit and the surrounding areas by census tract. Ranked data is from the CDC 2023 PLACES report²⁸³.

²⁸³ CDC, 95.

Percentile Rank for Heat and Health Index

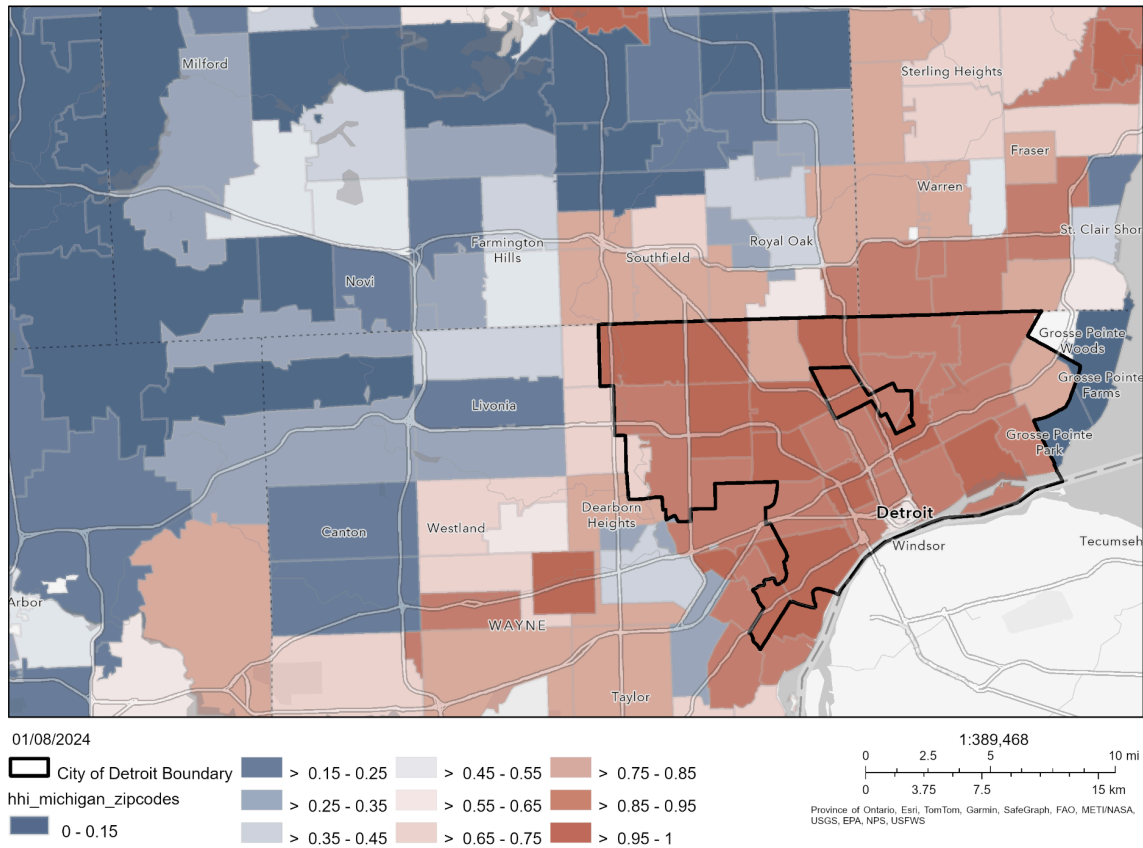


Figure 14: National percentile rank for the CDC Heat and Health Index in Detroit and the surrounding areas by Zip Code. A higher percentile indicates a population at a higher risk to extreme heat. Ranked data is from the CDC Heat and Health Index²⁸⁴.

²⁸⁴ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Heat and Health Index,” Heat and Health Tracker, CDC, 2024, <https://ephtracking.cdc.gov/Applications/heatTracker/>.