



2025 CITY OF DETROIT **REPARATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT**

OCTOBER 31ST, 2025

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Foreword

The Detroit Reparations Task Force (DRTF) has prepared this Report to identify and propose remedies for the many harms endured historically by African Americans in the City of Detroit. To that end, we have supported two major research projects with our academic partners the University of Michigan, Columbia University and Howard University Law School, met with citizens in multiple public forums to gather their insights and advice, contracted professional consultants and a report writer, and retained oversight throughout these tasks to ensure accountability to the City Council and Detroit citizens. Our Report calls for just compensation to Detroiters, not only for the horrendous harms of enslavement of our ancestors, but also for the harms of segregation, discrimination and repression that have continued unabated throughout our history in this City. The City of Detroit is now responsible for implementing measures to compensate for and repair these harms.

As our Report will show, African Americans have called for reparations justice courageously and persistently in every era of our history in this country. The work of the DRTF upholds our people's demand that our labor and our genius, extracted and exploited in environments of ongoing violence and repression, during enslavement and throughout U.S. history, be recognized and compensated justly. Our DRTF effort uplifts this historic demand, while adding our voice to the contemporary reparations struggles being waged throughout the African Diaspora. We hope to have lived up to the serious charge of our appointment to this Task Force and pray that our work will contribute to the welfare of generations to come.

We have been guided as a Task Force by our understanding that the wealth and imperialist power of the United States may be attributed directly to profits generated by the enslavement of our ancestors –

through the slave trade, chattel slavery, peonage, and prison labor. In colonial America and the United States, extraction of Black labor and the violence with which this extraction was conducted, ensured the accumulation of wealth by whites, so that their heirs today continue to enjoy economic security and prosperity. For African Americans, these systems imposed unrelenting physical and social harms, unshakeable poverty, and the underdevelopment of our communities throughout the U.S. and here in our City.

From the 1800s, the Detroit ruling establishment formulated policies explicitly intended to deny African Americans' freedom and to obstruct our people's efforts to build individual and collective wellbeing and wealth. Throughout the City's history, African Americans have been subjected to systemic policies of racist segregation in housing, employment, and education as well as deprivation of essential social services, and repression by racist, violent policing. Intense racism exploded in the riot of 1943, characterized the policies of "urban renewal," and ignited the rebellion of 1967. Following the 1967 rebellion, most African American Detroiters experienced a sharp deterioration in the quality of life in our City. Additionally, harms and hardships to our daily lives peaked and intensified following implementation of the emergency management policies. Appointed by the Governor to exercise control over the City's operations, emergency managers effectively usurped the democratic power of our duly elected government and school officials. They illegally imposed bankruptcy on the City, compromised the hard-earned pensions of City workers, and dismantled the public school system.

In the last decades, our community has suffered wide scale theft of homes and properties through illegal foreclosures; water shut-offs leading to loss of properties, and endangering the health of half the City's population; the dismantling of the public education system and closure of over 100 schools; excessive force and murders by police officers; police surveillance of our children through the DPS

Command Center, and the use of militarized war equipment against Black Lives Matter protesters. Add to these harms the increase in homelessness due to inadequate public housing, and wide scale illnesses contracted by whole neighborhoods due to unregulated corporate pollution of the environment.

Our recommendations seek to repair harms and compensate for losses suffered by African Americans in Detroit as a result of such biased and unjust City policies. Our goal has been to propose projects that will *uplift our entire* community to a higher standard of living by eliminating daily hardships and persistent economic disadvantages. While we recommend individual monetary compensation for some harms, we have also sought remedies to support collectively envisioned, cooperative programs for greater community sustainability. We encourage developing progressive economic business models that lead to solidarity economies. African American activists are developing these models in several centers around the country. We recommend looking to them for their leadership in formulating alternative economic development strategies.

We recommend cash payments to individuals (and heirs of individuals) who have suffered harms such as loss of property due to discriminatory, illegal policies, and loss of health or death due to negligent or oppressive City policies. In order to lessen everyday hardships faced by African American Detroiters, we urge programs and provisions for free City services, exemptions or waivers from some fees, salaries for skilled trades job training, and grants for educational opportunities and business entrepreneurship.

Despite the systemic harms reviewed above, African American Detroiters have excelled in creating world-acclaimed art and cultural legacies. Reparations funds must secure the historic cultural institutions that have been established in music and other arts, and support the creativity and innovation of emerging Black artists. Additionally, we recommend the renaming of Detroit's streets to affirm the contributions of

African American leaders, claiming City spaces for our ancestors and ourselves, setting aside the names of former slave owners and those who made war against Native Americans. These cultural programs, along with the cultivation of our natural environment and neighborhood beautification efforts, will lift the overall quality of life in our City. We recommend the establishment of the Detroit Office of African American Cultural Programs to provide funding, meeting spaces, and other operational necessities to support African Americans' pursuit of the arts, cultural, and civic development.

The administration of reparations in Detroit must be an extended program that will raise the economic and social well-being of the entire African American community. To achieve this objective, reparations must be conceived as systemic and long-term, a period in which African American citizens will receive payments and access to social services to repair damages, relieve poverty, uplift the overall standard of living of the community, and level out the gross economic inequalities among citizens in the City. We recommend that these reparative measures be implemented immediately and applied over a period of 10 years, at which time there should be a reasonable assessment of progress made in ameliorating the economic inequities by the City of Detroit Reparations Administration Office. The United States Congress passed and President Ronald Reagan signed and enacted Public Law 100-383 *the Civil Liberties Act of 1988*, and dispersed a one-time, cash, tax-free payment of \$20,000 restitution to each eligible survivor of Japanese internment as reparations to Japanese Americans illegally interned during World War II from 1988 to 1998 which included a formal presidential apology. The *Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act of 1948*, signed by President Harry S. Truman, provided a mechanism for Japanese Americans who were removed from the West Coast during World War II to file claims for property losses (approximately \$37 million was disbursed to around 26,000 claimants for property loss).

- Public Law 100-383
- Public Law 84-673

- Germany paid Holocaust victims reparations from 1952 to the present.
- Great Britain paid slave owners through loan servicing from 1833 to 2015, *The Black Reparations Project*, pp.138 -146.)

To implement the proposed remedies, we recommend the establishment of the Detroit Reparations Administration Office. The functions of this Office are outlined in the Recommendations section of this Report.

The devastating consequence of Detroit municipal policies over the last 50 years has been the handing over of City governance to corporate control. There has been intensive development of the downtown core -- to the neglect of traditional neighborhoods, and the concession of the people's valuable assets, such as the Water and Sewerage Department and Belle Isle, to suburban and State interests. Earlier concessions led to dissolution of Recorder's Court and the Detroit Health Department, leaving African Americans with fewer health resources and subject to unfair judicial practices.

Our research and intense engagement with the community as a Task Force have revealed some very disheartening factors about our City government and leadership. Even though our City leaders are now mostly African American, the City's administrative policies have continued to reflect the same racial and political biases that characterized policies of previous eras. Our City leaders did not intervene as thousands of African American citizens were robbed of their homes through illegal over taxation. Our City leadership surrendered major City assets to other authorities. Our leaders have not held corporations accountable for delivering benefits negotiated in tax abatement agreements. Community researchers have estimated that City taxpayers have been robbed of billions of dollars that might have been allocated to providing essential social services. Our City leaders have surrendered their authority to the corporate

establishment and entities like the Detroit Downtown Development Authority, leaving the welfare of neighborhood communities unattended and underfunded. Now Detroit consists of two cities, one thriving, the other neglected and plundered. As we submit our Report and Recommendations to City Council, we urge City Council Members to fulfill their charge to protect the interests of the African American citizens who elected them.

Given the extremely racist political environment being fostered by the current authoritarian U.S. administration, we understand there may be opposition to the implementation of our recommendations. We hope that this hostile climate will not discourage but inspire our community to an even stronger resolve. Only a fully mobilized, determined community can guarantee implementation of the proposed recommendations by the Detroit City Council.

Cidney Calloway, Co-Chair

Gregory Hicks, Ph.D.

Kefentse Chike, Ph.D.

Gloria House, Ph.D.

Camille Collins

Yolanda Jack

Edythe Ford

The Honorable Bernard F. Parker

The Honorable Janis D. Hazel

Jeffrey Robinson, Ph.D.

Executive Summary

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

The Detroit Reparations Task Force (DRFT) was originally established by a ballot initiative after the 2021 election. This proposal was brought to the ballot due in large part to the efforts of local grassroots movements like the Michigan Democratic Party Black Caucus, chairperson Honorable Keith Williams, and others. The ballot initiative was passed with public support, and over 80% of Detroit voters approved of the initiative. Today, Detroit remains the only city in America to establish a Reparations Task Force with an elected mandate from the people.

The Task Force

In 2022 an online town hall with residents was held to discuss the structure of the DRTF and the application process. In February 2023, 13 members were appointed to the Detroit Reparations Task Force by the Detroit City Council, and the Detroit City Council appropriated an initial budget of \$350,000 established under the office of Detroit City Council President Mary Sheffield. The Task Force members are:

2023 Task Force Members

1. Lauren Hood, Co-Chair, Executive Committee
2. The Honorable Keith Williams, Co-Chair, Executive Committee
3. Dorian Tyus, Executive Committee
4. The Honorable Rev. Dr. JoAnn Watson, Executive Committee
5. Allen Venable, District 1
6. Jeffery Robinson, Ph.D., District 2,
7. Camille Collins, District 3
8. The Honorable Bernard Parker, District 4

9. Gregory Hicks, Ph.D., District 5
10. Maurice Weeks, District 6, Secretary
11. The Honorable Janis D. Hazel, District 7,
Treasurer
12. Anita Belle, At-Large
13. Cidney Calloway, At-Large

2024 - 2025 Task Force Members

1. Cidney Calloway, Co-Chair, Executive Committee
2. The Honorable Keith Williams, Co-Chair, Executive
Committee
3. Jasahn Larsosa, Executive Committee
4. Dorian Tyus, Executive Committee
5. Kefentse Chike, Ph.D., District 1
6. Jeffery Robinson, Ph.D., District 2, Secretary
7. Camille Collins. District 3
8. The Honorable Bernard Parker. District 4
9. Gregory Hicks, Ph.D., District 5
10. Gloria House, Ph.D., District 6
11. The Honorable Janis D. Hazel, District 7, Treasurer
12. Edythe Ford, At-Large
13. Yolanda Jack, At-Large

On April 13th of the same year, the Task Force held its first official public meeting at the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, outlining its purpose and the scope of its mission.

Later in 2023, the DRTF would endure vacancies due to the passing of the Honorable Rev. Dr. Queen Mother JoAnn Watson, and the resignations of Co-Chair Lauren Hood and Secretary Maurice Weeks. Sidney Calloway (at large) was promoted to Co-Chair in Lauren Hood's stead. In 2024, Allen Venable and Anita Belle resigned. Maurice Weeks was replaced by Gloria House (District 6), Kefentse Chike (District 1) replaced Allen Venable, and Yolanda Jack and Edythe Ford joined as at-large members. The DRTF continued to hold weekly internal meetings, establishing subcommittees for areas of emphasis and forging partnerships with community groups and research institutions. An additional \$66,000 was appropriated in 2024, and by the Spring of 2024, the fully staffed Detroit Reparations Task Force acquired an official office space that was open to the public every week. The DRTF also hired a Project Manager, Community Liaison, and, later, a Report Writer. The DTRF's internal meetings were held weekly via Zoom videoconferencing.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The people of Detroit were an active partner during every step of the way, as is explicitly reflected in the contents of this document, especially the listed recommendations below. The DRTF has maintained the principle of inclusivity, which was established from the beginning at the ballot box. DRTF Public Sessions (or community meetings) were designed to ensure the people of Detroit shaped the recommendations of the final report, and to provide information to our fellow citizens on historic and present harms against Black people.

From April 2023 to November 2025, seventeen monthly Public Sessions were held at multiple centers around Detroit (including the Northwest Activities Center, the Farwell Recreation Center, and the Butzel Family Recreation Center) and were made available simultaneously on Zoom videoconferencing. Some of the meetings featured presentations from our research partners like Columbia University and the University of Michigan. The DRTF also brought in subject matter experts on relevant issues like water rights,

City of Detroit Planning and Development, and municipal taxes as guest speakers at meetings. Others were set up as roundtable discussions where attendees could speak directly with DRTF Members in extended conversations. The DRTF staff took notes from each Public Session for task force members to review at subsequent internal meetings. These are only a few examples of how our Public Sessions served as a productive step in moving the report forward.

Although the Public Sessions ranged in format, every meeting allotted time for public comment in order to get feedback from attendees. Treasurer Reports showing budget balances and expenses were also provided regularly at meetings for full transparency. Official minutes from Public Sessions and all DRTF research findings can be found on the website: Detroitmi.gov/Reparations. Recordings of DRTF Public Sessions are posted on the City of Detroit YouTube page as well. The names and contact information of attendees were collected at each Public Session and community events attended by DRTF staff and members. As a result of this community engagement, today we have increased our subscription base to over 6,000 people.

SUBCOMMITTEES

The DRTF published an online Calendar of public events, launched a *Senior Hotline* to receive recommendations from members of the community who experience the Digital Divide, and subcommittees in 2024 that held weekly meetings via Zoom video conferences for public participation to receive recommendations. The public was also encouraged to email the DRTF at reparations@detroitmi.gov with their recommendations.

Subcommittees:

- Education & Culture Sub-Committee
- Government & Policy Sub-Committee

- Housing & Land Use Sub-Committee
- Quality of Life Sub-Committee
- Revenue & Economic Development Sub-Committee

Bus Tours and Town Hall Meeting Listening Sessions

The DRTF hosted bus tours for residents and our academic partners from the University of Michigan (researchers and writers of the ***Harms Report***) March 11 - 13, 2024 of significant sites in Detroit's racially discriminatory history, narrated by Jamon Jordan, the Official Historian for the City of Detroit. Each day concluded with a town hall meeting, providing a forum for robust discussion and community input. Oral histories of Detroit's Black residents were conducted, allowing them to share their families' stories. The Black Audit Project, founded by Justin Hansford (Professor, Howard Law School and founder and executive director of the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center at Howard University School of Law) and Linda Mann (Professor, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs and Co-founder of the African American Redress Network-AARN) participated in the Bus Tours to measure the well-being of Afro-descendent populations and was shared before members of the United Nations. Data collected was also used to compile an impact analysis to assist the DRTF in developing reparations recommendations for the Detroit City Council.

Southwest to Northwest

- Detroit People's Platform
- Ford Motor Co.(Rouge Plant) - Dearborn
- Marathon Refinery
- Waste Water Treatment Plant
- Zug Island (Formerly "US Steel Site")
- DTE Site

Old Westside

- St. Stephen AME
- St. Cyprian's Episcopal
- Old Tabernacle Baptist Church
- Old Hartford Avenue Baptist Church
- The Blue Bird Inn
- Nacirema Club
- Orsel and Minnie McGhee House

North End

- Oakland Ave Farm - STOP
- Roxborough House
- Frances E.W. Harper House
- Dr. Betty Shabazz House
- Northern High School
- Detroit People's Food Co-Op/Algiers Motel

1967 Neighborhood/Boston Edison

- Charles Fisher Mansion
- Berry Gordy Mansion
- Gordon Park
- Herman Kiefer Hospital
- Henry Ford/Pistons/Michigan State University Future Site
- Motown Museum (Former Hitsville/Motown Studio and Headquarters)

Artists Village

- African Heritage Cultural Museum Site

Northwest to Northeast

- Hope Neighborhood
- Focus Hope - STOP
- Hostess Factory
- Belle Telephone Factory
- Sanders Bakery Factory
- Palmer Park
- Sherwood Forest
- Avenue of Fashion (Livernois and Outer Drive)
- Birwood Wall
- State Fairgrounds/Amazon Facility
- Conant Gardens
- Sojourner Truth Homes
- Farwell Neighborhood

Northeast to Southeast

- The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History
- Cultural Center
- Dunbar Hospital
- Hansbury School of Music
- Detroit Association of Women's Club
- Grosse Pointe Detroit Border
- Jefferson-Chalmers
- Manistique
- Freedom Freedom Growers
- Neighborhood Grocery Store

- The Tree House
- Mack Park
- Dr. Ossian Sweet House
- Islandview
- Boggs House
- McDougall-Hunt
- Boggs School
- Heidelberg Project
- Packard Plant
- Poletown GM Plant
- Black Bottom Neighborhood
- Lafayette Central Park
- Lafayette Park
- Fannie Richards House
- Coleman A. Young Recreation Center
- Camp Ward
- Lafayette and Chrysler Service Drive
- Paradise Valley
- Ford Field
- Brush Park
- Douglass Towers Site
- Medical Center

Three Town Hall meetings were hosted March 11 - 13, 2024 by the DRTF and the Black Audit Project (founded by Justin Hansford, a delegate to the United Nations and executive director of the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center at Howard University Law School and Columbia University as part of the African American Redress Network. The audit project aims to measure the well-being of African-descendant populations and has expanded since visiting 13 cities in 2022 for a presentation before a United Nations forum). The Town Hall meetings were free and open to the public and held at these locations:

- The Historic King Solomon Baptist Church of Detroit
- Alkebulan Village
- Eat at Berts Music Cafe

African World Festival

- The DRTF sponsored a resource table during the 2024 African World Festival held at Hart Plaza to engage with the 25,000 annual attendees and obtain feedback for the DRTF Community Intake Survey.

REPARATIONS COMMUNITY SURVEY

The feedback we received at our Public Sessions, combined with our collaborative research and interviews of Detroit residents, would lay the foundation for our Reparations Community Survey. This survey featured 30 policy recommendations that surveyors ranked in priority. Examples include: “Reducing the tax liability of Black Detroit homeowners who were overtaxed by 10% for 10 years.” The survey was promoted on multiple platforms, including the local four news channels, Bridge Detroit news outlet, and the city of Detroit's official website. The survey received over 800 responses from Detroiters, and all thirty of the proposed recommendations received a majority favorable ranking. The top ten highest-ranking policy proposals were as follows:

- Upgrading Detroit Public Schools (DPSCD) buildings to meet code requirements, to include water and sewerage infrastructure requirements
- Investing in infrastructure to ensure clean and safe drinking water, including lead pipe replacement for Black Detroiters
- Hiring an adequate number of teachers and teaching aides to ensure small class sizes of 20 or fewer students
- Providing free, nutritional lunch to every Black student
- Reducing the tax liability of Black Detroit homeowners who were overtaxed by 10% for 10 years
- Prohibiting Wayne County from giving away the homes of Black Detroiters
- Increasing access to healthy foods by funding community cooperative grocery stores (and fruit and vegetable markets) for Black Detroiters in vulnerable areas
- Providing home repair grants of up to \$40,000 for Black Detroiters
- Offering Black Detroit homeowners and auto insurance at reasonable rates based on income, similar to the State of Michigan's Fair Access to Insurance Requirements (FAIR) plan, known as Michigan Basic Property Insurance Association (MBPIA) Homeowners Insurance organized under the provisions of Act 262 of the Michigan Public Acts of 1968, which is included in chapter 29 of the Michigan Insurance code..
- Providing cash payments to Black Detroiters.

Naturally, this survey data was also a major influence on the final recommendations.

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

The DRTF collaborated with many individuals and organizations that played a pivotal role in our mission. We would like to especially thank and acknowledge the Wayne State University Walter P Reuther Library, The University of Michigan researchers, the Bentley Library, Columbia University, Detroit People's Platform (Theo Pride), We the People of Detroit, Detroiters for Tax Justice (Russ Bellant), the Coalition for Property Tax Justice (Bernadette Atuahene), Black Bottom Archives (Marcia Black) the Michigan Democratic Party Black Caucus (Keith Williams, Chair), Anika Goss (Detroit Future City), Creative Differences, Inc.(Khary Frazier), the National Conference of Black Lawyers (Lisa Holder, Nkechi Taifa, Adjoa Aiyetoro), Osiris Professional Services (Nicholas Cummings), First Repair and the National Symposium for State and Local Reparations, the Detroit Justice Center (Eric Williams), Detroit Grassroots Coalition, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History, Fred Hart Williams Genealogical Society (FHWGS), historian Ken Coleman, Michael Imhotep, the Detroit Legislative Policy Division (LPD), Detroit Historian Jamon Jordan, Detroit Parliamentarian Akilah Redmond, volunteers LaVeta Davenport and Tyrice Kirkland, and the Office of Council President Mary Sheffield.

Special acknowledgement is extended to the writer of this Report, attorney, and social justice warrior Desiree M. Ferguson, a self-described Black Detroit Grandma.

OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

Slavery endured in the United States for 245 years, from 1619, until the passage of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1864. With that Amendment, the legal existence of slavery ended, and federal, state and local governments were charged with abolishing all "badges and incidents of slavery in the United States."

The “harms” section of this report summarizes some of the harms caused by slavery and the lingering negative effects of that abominable institution on the descendants of persons enslaved in the United States, and specifically, in the city of Detroit. The “harms” section outlines actions by the city itself, and in collaboration with other government and private actors, which compound to perpetuate enduring injurious effects on Black Detroiters who are descendants of the enslaved.

The “remedies” section sets forth a comprehensive list of proposed solutions designed to alleviate and compensate for the harms identified. Without remedies specifically targeted to dismantle our city’s racist foundations and heal injuries inflicted by the legacy of enslavement, the “badges and incidents of slavery” will continue to harm Black Detroiters.

FEDERAL VS. MUNICIPAL REPARATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Honoring Congressman John Conyers, Jr. (1929–2019)

The modern movement for reparations in the United States owes much of its foundation to the lifelong advocacy of Congressman John Conyers, Jr., a son of Detroit and a towering figure in American legislative history. Congressman Conyers served the people of Detroit and surrounding communities in Wayne County from 1965 to 2017, making him the sixth-longest serving member of Congress and the longest-serving African American member of Congress in U.S. history.

In 1989, Congressman Conyers introduced H.R. 3745 – the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act in the 101st Congress (1989–1990). This bill laid the groundwork for what would later become known as H.R. 40, named in reference to the unfulfilled promise of “40 acres and a mule.” Congressman Conyers reintroduced H.R. 40 in every session of Congress until his retirement in 2017, steadfastly insisting that the United States must reckon with the moral, legal, and economic debt owed to descendants of enslaved Africans.

After Congressman Conyers' retirement, the torch of this legislative legacy was carried by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee (D–TX), who championed H.R. 40 until her death in 2024. In the 119th Congress (2025–2026), Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (D–MA) reintroduced H.R. 40, renewing the national conversation on federal responsibility for reparations and continuing the work that began with Detroit's own Congressman Conyers.

Federal Reparations: National Responsibility and Legislative Framework

Federal reparations are rooted in the principle that the United States government bears ultimate responsibility for the institution of slavery and the structural systems of racial subjugation that followed.

The federal approach seeks to:

- Acknowledge national culpability for slavery, segregation, and systemic racism;
- Establish a formal commission to document the historical record and quantify the harms of enslavement and discrimination.
- Develop comprehensive remedies at the national scale, encompassing direct payments, policy reforms, and institutional investments to eliminate racial wealth disparities.

The proposed Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans (H.R. 40) represents this federal-level approach. Its purpose is to study the impact of slavery and subsequent racial discrimination on African Americans and to recommend appropriate remedies to Congress. Federal reparations are thus nationwide in scope, legislative in origin, and intended to create systemic correction across all levels of American life.

Historical Precedent: Compensation to Slaveholders in the Nation's Capital

Ironically, the first federally enacted reparations program in U.S. history did not compensate the enslaved—but their enslavers.

Under the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862, Congress freed approximately 3,100 enslaved persons in the nation's capital. However, instead of providing restitution to those who had endured enslavement, the Act authorized the federal government to compensate loyal Union slaveholders for the loss of their "property."

- What It Was: A federal law abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia.
- The Payment: Up to \$300 per enslaved person was paid to slaveholders who filed verified petitions with a board of commissioners. { \$300 in 1862 is equivalent in purchasing power to about \$9,623.05 today }
- The Beneficiaries: Compensation was awarded only to slave owners, not to the formerly enslaved.
- The Exclusion: Freed men and women received no compensation, land, or assistance for their transition to freedom.

This policy underscores a painful truth: the federal government once provided reparations for the economic loss of slaveholders, yet has never provided compensation to those who were enslaved or their descendants. The Detroit Reparations Task Force situates its work within this long continuum of deferred justice.

Municipal Reparations: Local Accountability and Direct Action

While federal reparations require Congressional authorization, municipal reparations are undertaken by cities and local governments that acknowledge their own roles in perpetuating systemic harm through discriminatory policies and practices.

Municipal reparations differ from federal programs in both scope and design:

- Scale: Municipal initiatives address harms caused or sanctioned by local governments—such as redlining, racially restrictive zoning, urban renewal, highway construction, and predatory tax foreclosure.

- Legal Authority: Cities act under their home-rule or charter powers to create local commissions, funds, and programs designed to repair specific harms.
- Delivery Mechanisms: Reparations at the city level often take the form of housing grants, business ownership programs, land restitution, and targeted economic investments, rather than national cash payments.
- Precedents: Examples include Evanston, Illinois, which funds housing reparations through cannabis tax revenue, and San Francisco, California, which has developed a comprehensive reparations plan through its African American Reparations Advisory Committee (AARAC).

Detroit's Reparations Task Force builds on these precedents, adapting them to the city's unique history of racialized displacement, disinvestment, and wealth extraction. In doing so, Detroit joins a growing national movement of municipalities working to implement reparations locally while advocating for federal redress.

Detroit's Role in the National Continuum of Reparative Justice

As the home of Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Detroit stands at the crossroads of the national and municipal reparations movements. The City's 2021 ballot initiative established the Detroit Reparations Task Force to make recommendations for housing and economic development programs that address the historical discrimination experienced by Black Detroiters.

Detroit's legacy in the national reparations movement also includes the pivotal advocacy of Raymond Jenkins, widely known as "Reparations Ray." A lifelong Detroit activist and veteran of the Civil Rights Movement, Jenkins was instrumental in shaping the early national dialogue around reparations for African Americans. His persistent advocacy and collaboration with Congressman Conyers in the late 1980s directly influenced the drafting and introduction of H.R. 3745 — The Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act (1989–1990) in the 101st Congress.

Jenkins's grassroots organizing, public testimony, and moral clarity helped frame reparations not merely as compensation for slavery, but as a constitutional and economic remedy for centuries of systemic racial injustice. His efforts demonstrated how local activism in Detroit could catalyze federal legislative action, bridging the gap between community organizing and national policy reform.

By championing both the moral and practical imperatives of reparations, Reparations Ray Jenkins and Congressman Conyers together established Detroit as the spiritual and strategic birthplace of the modern federal reparations movement.

In honoring Conyers' federal vision through H.R. 40 and acknowledging Jenkins's foundational advocacy, the Detroit Reparations Task Force extends their legacy into tangible municipal action. Municipal reparations, while narrower in scope than federal legislation, serve as laboratories of justice—demonstrating how repair can be implemented, measured, and institutionalized at the local level.

Detroit's reparations work therefore contributes both to healing the city's own historic harms and to advancing the broader national struggle for reparative justice first envisioned by Detroit's own Congressman John Conyers, Jr. and propelled into the public conscience by the relentless advocacy of Reparations Ray Jenkins.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DETROIT REPARATIONS TASK FORCE

The Detroit City Council passed a resolution in 2022 establishing the Detroit Reparation Task Force with the following language:

“Housing and Economic Development Programs”

This initiative aims to address the historic unjust treatment of Detroit's Majority-Black population by making recommendations focused on housing and economic development.

The DRTF's core findings highlight that federal, state, and local policies, alongside discriminatory practices by the real estate and banking industries, have systemically denied African Americans fair

opportunities in Detroit. The resulting redlining, restrictive covenants, and biased lending practices have inhibited homeownership and wealth generation for generations. Similarly, for over 150 years, African Americans have faced structural barriers to economic mobility. The destruction of thriving Black business districts like Black Bottom and Paradise Valley, with no support for displaced businesses, exemplifies this historical harm.

Recommendations - To address these inequities, in alignment with Detroit City Council's 2022 resolution, the DRTF proposes the following recommendations for consideration in housing, economic development, and continuous oversight.

Housing

1. Homeownership and Repair Grants:

- **Goal:** Provide direct financial assistance to Detroiters impacted by discriminatory housing policies.
- **Recommendation:** Offer up to \$40,000 for the purchase of a home in Detroit or up to \$30,000 for home repairs.
- **Priority:** Prioritize individuals and families who were displaced by urban renewal projects, including the Black Bottom and freeway construction.

2. Affordable Home Construction:

- **Goal:** Increase affordable housing for the Black community in the city of Detroit.
- **Recommendation:** To construct at least 1,000 new housing units for African Americans at prices aligned with 50% of Detroit Area Median Income (AMI).

Economic Development

1. Business Restoration Grants:

- **Goal:** Support the expansion and re-establishment of legacy Black-owned businesses.

- **Recommendation:** Establish a grant program providing \$100,000 to businesses displaced by urban renewal projects like Black Bottom.

2. **Commercial Development Incentives:**

- **Goal:** Create new opportunities for Black entrepreneurs and revitalize commercial areas.
- **Recommendation:** Construct ten commercial strip malls and offer rent-free space to African American–owned businesses for a period of five years.

Eligibility Criteria For Detroit Reparations

To receive compensation through Detroit reparations programs, a Detroit citizen must be:

1. A descendant of an African enslaved in the U.S. or in the Diaspora
2. At least 21 years old
3. A current resident of Detroit who has been a Detroit resident for at least 20 years.

Reparations Administrative Office

The DRTF recommends that the Detroit City Council create a Reparations Administrative Office to oversee the reparations process.

- **Goal:** Create a permanent, dedicated body to process and distribute reparations funds.
- **Recommendation:** The RAO responsibilities include:
 - a. Raising funds through grants from corporations, banks, real estate associations, foundations, individuals, etc.
 - b. Collect fees from Detroit casinos, tourist tax, claw backs, equity ownership, and other revenue sources.
 - c. Process and distribute grants to eligible Detroiters.

While these specific recommendations are a crucial step, the task force emphasizes that they alone will not fully close the existing wealth gap, with European Americans having six times more wealth than African Americans. A more comprehensive set of recommendations addressing harm across multiple areas

is available in a subsequent section of this report. The DRTF anticipates that the City of Detroit will review and implement these recommendations over the next ten years.

Recounting Historical Atrocities and Harms Affecting African Descendents¹

The Origins of Black Detroit

From the moment they landed in what is known today as the United States of America, and later, in the city of Detroit, captive Africans and their present-day descendants have suffered sustained and incalculable legal, social, economic, spatial, structural, political, physical and emotional harms, most of which have never been acknowledged or admitted, let alone compensated.

America's wealth was built on the forced labor of captured and trafficked African people and their descendants, who were bought and sold as commodities. In order to maintain slavery, and its aftermath, government actors adopted white supremacist beliefs and passed laws to create a racial hierarchy and control Black people. Government at all levels allowed and participated in exploiting, abusing, terrorizing, and murdering people of African descent so that the white ruling class in America could profit from their enslavement.

In 1883, the Supreme Court of the United States interpreted the 13th Amendment of the Constitution to empower Congress "to pass all laws necessary and proper for abolishing all badges and incidents of slavery in the United States."²

Today, 160 years after slavery's abolition, its badges and incidents remain deeply embedded in all political, legal, financial, economic, health, cultural, environmental, and social systems on the United States, the state of Michigan and the city of Detroit. Without remedies specifically targeted to dismantle these racist foundations and heal the injuries inflicted, the "badges and incidents" of slavery will continue to harm Black Americans in all aspects of American life.

¹ Special acknowledgement is extended to the author of this section of the Report, attorney and social justice warrior Desiree M. Ferguson, a self-described Black Detroit Grandma.

² *The Civil Rights Cases*, 109 US 3, 20 (1883).

“Reparations are a program for acknowledgement, redress, and closure for a grievous injustice.”³

This Report endeavors to identify and delineate many of those harms, and to present a comprehensive list of proposed recommendations for solutions and remedies to ameliorate some of those harms.

“Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole.”⁴

America and Detroit: Born Enslavers

We must begin by telling the truth.

The American story, we have all been told, began in Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts in 1620, when The Mayflower landed, carrying a group of forlorn Pilgrims from England. But, in truth, the American story had already begun by then. The true American saga began in 1619, when the Dutch ship *The White Lion* dropped anchor in the land known by some of its Indigenous inhabitants as Turtle Island, at a site later dubbed Jamestown, Virginia, carrying Black captives from the continent of Africa, who were then sold to white Virginians.⁵

³ Darity, William A., Jr. and Mullen, Kirsten A., *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd Ed, The University of North Carolina Press, 2020, p 2

⁴ Coates, Ta-Nehisi, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2014

⁵ Much praise is owed to Nikole Hannah-Jones, whose groundbreaking publication in *the New York Times Magazine* in 2019, “The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story,” reframes American history by placing the enslavement of Blacks from Africa at the very center of our national narrative.

Those diabolical ships kept coming for at least 240 years. *The Clotilde*, the last known slaveholding ship, docked on the Gulf Coast off Mobile, Alabama in 1860. At that moment, there were four million enslaved Black persons in the United States.⁶

Thus begins the true story of how the place known as the United States of America was born. As remarks Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones in her landmark collection, *The 1619 Project*: “No aspect of the country that would be formed here has been untouched by the years of slavery that followed. On the 400th anniversary of this fateful moment, it is finally time tell our story truthfully.”⁷

The region that came to be known as Detroit was occupied for millennia by the Anishinaabe people, a confederation consisting principally of the Potawatomi, Ottawa and Ojibwe, who called this area Waa-Wi-Ya-Too-Nong, meaning “the land where the curved shores meet.”

The Detroit chapter of the story begins in 1701, when Frenchman Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac lay claim to the place “at the straits,” which is “détroit” in French. After the French established Fort Pontchartrain at the site, the Detroit River became a vibrant and vital thoroughfare through which was fed the insatiable European appetite for hides and furs, especially beaver pelts, which were the lifeblood of the local Indigenous communities that thrived on hunting, trapping, drying and tanning them, on land they had inhabited and stewarded for thousands of years.

The Fort was situated roughly between today’s Hart Plaza on the east, Huntington Place (formerly Cobo Center) on the west, the Detroit River on the south and Fort Street on the North.

As with the rest of America, slavery took hold early and planted deep roots in Detroit. The enslavement of Black people in Detroit was first noted in 1736. The 1750 Census listed 33 enslaved, in a

⁶ *US Census of 1860*, Introduction, p vii, population of enslaved

⁷ “The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019

total population of 483. The oldest institution in Detroit was St. Anne's Church, situated within Fort Pontchartrain. The Church registry lists 82 enslaved in the 1760's – 3 Black people, 2 Mulattos and the rest "Panis."⁸

In Detroit, "[w]hile Black men's backs and legs served as the locomotives that moved ... furs across vast distances, Indigenous women's bodies were plundered for sexual riches, much like the land was stripped of beaver and other fur-bearing animals."⁹

The nation was officially established with the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The much-revered Declaration of Independence, which so eloquently extols the virtues of fundamental human freedom and liberty, was authored by the enslaver and child sex predator Thomas Jefferson, "[t]he nation's third president ... and rutting statesman [who] would pinion slave child Sally [Hemmings] captive beneath him for a period that would run to thirty-eight years, never to set her free. Lubricious with heat by night, writing by day."¹⁰

Enslavers infamously raped and impregnated Black women and girls with impunity and profited from sexually violating them by owning their children. Thomas Jefferson, who enslaved four of his own children, wrote that the "labor of a breeding [enslaved] woman" who births a child every two years is as profitable as the best [enslaved worker] in the fields.¹¹

In 1787, one-fourth of, or 78 Detroit families were enslavers. One of the city's largest slaveholders in the days of its founding was John Askin. He owned six human beings – three Black men,

⁸ Early notations mention "black and panis slaves," where panis frequently describes Indigenous or Native Americans. The term is seemingly based on the name "Pawnee," which is a specific tribe or ethnic group that dwelled in the Western Plains. The wanton use of this catch-all term erased the tribal and ethnic identity of local Indigenous people, who had their own names and languages.

⁹ Miles, Tiya, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits*, The New Press, 2017, p 15

¹⁰ Robinson, Randall, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, Penguin Group, 2000, p 50

¹¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Letter to Joel Yancey*, Jan 17, 1819

two women he most disparagingly referred to as “wenches,” and one “Panis” -- and he fathered three children with one of the women.¹²

Michigan joined the Northwest Territory in 1787, at which time slavery had ostensibly been abolished in the region, but the region indeed remained “a no man’s land between freedom and slavery” for decades. In 1827, the city passed a law requiring escaped Black people to pay a \$500 bond to avoid being captured.

The slaveholding “pedigree” ran deep in this region. “The Campaus, the Abbotts, the Macombs,” all “members of Detroit’s old slaveholding network,” were among those who established the University of Michigan, making public education in Michigan possible.¹³ “Macomb County ... carries the family name of Detroit’s largest slaveholder ... And Detroit itself is situated within Wayne County, named for the famously ‘mad’ General Anthony Wayne, who proudly dispossessed southern Great Lakes Indigenous peoples, laying the groundwork for American ascendance in the Old Northwest and the world.”¹⁴

In 1837, the Detroit Free Press ran an ad for the capture of runaways.

Historian Tiya Miles informs us that, “[w]hile slavery was never the driving force behind Detroit’s economy (based on animal pelts and land speculation), enslaved people’s labor proved critical to domestic, business, and social functions...”¹⁵

At this same moment in time, the United States Constitution was established, enshrining outsized political power for white supremacist interests, while ignoring Black people as citizens, but counting enslaved Black persons as “three-fifths” of a person for purposes of Congressional

¹² Boyd, Herb, *Black Detroit: A People’s History of Self-Determination*, Harper Collins Publishers, 2017, pp 21-22.

¹³ Miles, Tiya, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits*, *supra* at p 235

¹⁴ Miles, Tiya, *The Dawn of Detroit*, *Id.* at p 135.

¹⁵ Miles, Tiya, *Dawn of Detroit*, *Id.* at p 242.

representation on behalf of, and taxation against, enslavers. The Electoral College, which determines the outcome of Presidential elections, was devised to protect the interests of elite enslavers. When the newly-forming United States won the Michigan region from the British in 1783, under the control of General Anthony Wayne – whose name is celebrated by Wayne County and Wayne State University - the “rights” of slave ownership were preserved and protected, well into the 19th Century.

The racial caste system was literally set in stone. Beginning in 1793, enslaved Black people built the United States Capitol and most of Washington, DC. The government paid \$5 per month for their labor -- not to the workers, but to their owners.¹⁶

The white supremacist, slaveholding class of yesteryear are today’s powerbrokers and policymakers – today’s ruling class.

Enslaved Africans constructed the Wall in New Amsterdam that came to be known as Wall Street in New York City, that great bastion of white American economic prominence and dominance.

Half of the nation’s pre-Civil War Presidents enslaved African Americans while in office.¹⁷ The Nation’s first President, George Washington, who fought so valiantly for America’s freedom from Great Britain, owned 124 human beings the day he died. President Washington infamously found it “very proper” to whip his captives with a hickory switch. He doggedly pursued enslaved seamstress Ona Judge after she escaped and fled in 1796, chasing her in the streets and hounding her in the courts until the day he died.¹⁸

One thousand eight hundred Congressional representatives from 40 states once enslaved Black people.¹⁹ That wealth did not just disappear. The descendants of former enslavers are today’s bankers,

¹⁶ Robinson, Randall, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, Penguin Group, 2000, *supra* at p 5

¹⁷ Rosenwald, “Slave-Ownning Presidents Become Targets of Protestors,” Wash Post (June 23, 2020)

¹⁸ www.mountvernon.org

¹⁹ Weil et al, “More than 1,800 Congressman Once Enslaved Black People. This is Who They Were and How They Shaped the Nation,” Wash Post (Nov 28, 2022)

endowment owners, philanthropists, and lawmakers. One hundred current US Congressional representatives, Senators and Supreme Court Justices are the direct descendants of enslavers. The descendants of those who owned sixteen or more enslaved people have an average net worth four million times higher than those without that lineage, in today's dollars.

America's disregard for the humanity of its Black inhabitants was solidly articulated by the Supreme Court of the United States, which stated in *Dred Scott v Sanford* in 1857 that Black people were not citizens and had "no rights the white man is bound to respect." That status of non-citizenship adhered until the 14th Amendment granted citizenship to everybody born in the US, including African descendants born in the US, in 1867.

America's and Detroit's core identity as racial enslaving and profiting government entities was thus solidly embedded from the very beginning.

Early Resistance

Also from the beginning, there was resistance. In 1676, abolitionist Nathaniel Bacon set fire to Jamestown, Virginia. Elizabeth Freeman (Mum Bet) sued for her freedom in Massachusetts in 1781, and won.

In 1774 in Detroit, enslaved woman Ann/Nancy Wyley and Frenchman Jean Baptiste Contencineau staged a robbery and arson as a ruse to free Wyley from captivity.

Slavery was purportedly illegal in the Northwest Territory. So, in 1805, Anthony Smith sued in the Northwest Territory to free his wife and children, and apparently prevailed.

In 1807, the Denison's filed suit in Michigan to free their enslaved children. They lost, but fled to Canada with the children, thus setting precedent both for emancipation litigation and for laying tracks for the Underground Railroad to Canada. As a pivotal waterway, comprised of an international border

between the United States and Canada, the Detroit River thus became the storied Red Sea through which freedom-seeking people fled via parted waters.

The famous Blackburn affair in 1833 led to a mass revolt by the Black Detroit community and a mass exodus of Black people to Canada. The Blackburn's had escaped enslavement in Kentucky and moved to Detroit, where they were embraced by the thriving abolitionist community. They were apprehended by "slave catchers," who were paid by the Wayne County Sheriff. Abolitionists rallied around the couple, and an all-out race battle ensued. The abolitionists broke Rutha / Lucie Blackburn out of jail, freed Thorton from captivity, fatally injuring the Sheriff in the process, then spirited the couple to Canada, where they flourished.

In principal part, the Blackburn affair stoked such hysteria in the white community that it sparked the establishment of a curfew and a police department, to patrol and control the Black community.

Famed abolitionist Sojourner Truth spoke in Detroit in 1850. Prominent abolitionists Frederick Douglass, John Brown and others convened in Detroit in 1859.

Meanwhile, resistance to the trans-Atlantic capture, trafficking and exploitation of Black bodies was spreading worldwide like wildfire. Haiti defeated France and established the first Black Republic in the West in 1804, although, perversely, it was forced to pay reparations for France's property losses! Maroons in Jamaica staged persistent insurrections from strongholds deep in the mountains where slaveholding British colonialists could not capture them.

Renown abolitionists John Brown, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner, among many others, led armed uprisings in Virginia and South Carolina. David Walker's *Appeal*, a seminal anti-slavery publication, was met with great acclaim in 1830. African captives on the *Amistad* ship rebelled,

seized the ship, sued and won their freedom in the United States Supreme Court in 1838.

Early Demands for Recompense

Also from the outset, enslaved Africans made persistent demands for reparations. In 1781, Quock Walker sued for both his freedom and financial compensation. In 1791, Nelly Mumpherd won a lawsuit to recover damages and possession of her freedom papers in New York City. In 1783, Belinda Royall / Sutton sued the State of Massachusetts and won a pension to be paid out of her former enslaver's estate.

Throughout the 1800's, eminent abolitionist Frederick Douglass repeatedly invoked Russia's payment of three acres of land to its former serfs, in his plea for reparations for enslaved Black people.

In 1854, Black People of African Descent called for compensation to repair the wrongs inflicted on them at an "emigrationist convention."²⁰

In 1861, the US paid former enslavers in the District of Columbia \$1 million for their losses, i.e., \$300 per enslaved person, which would be \$22.8 million in 2018 dollars. Free Black man Gabriel Coakley brilliantly cited this provision to win reparations for his own family members, whom he had purchased but who were still technically enslaved. He won \$1500, which is \$170,000 in today's dollars.

In 1878, Henrietta Wood, a free Black woman, won \$2,500 in damages for her kidnapping and enslavement.

In 1898, Callie House and the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association petitioned Congress for a pension plan for formerly enslaved. In 1915, these same parties

²⁰ *Working to Obtain Reparations: A Handbook for Community Organizing, 2d ed*, National Conference of Black Lawyers, March 2025

sued the US Treasury in *Johnson v McAdoo* for \$68 million, the amount the US had collected from the sale of slave-grown and slave-harvested cotton that had been confiscated from confederates. The claim was denied.

The Wagon Train Period, Or Where's My 40 Acres and a Mule?

In their seminal work, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, Darity and Mullen named critical time periods in African American reparations history, as follows:

The Wagon Train Period

The Blood Lust Period

The Picket Fence Period

The Freeway Period ²¹

The Wagon Train Period is characterized by expanding national boundaries through the seizure of Indigenous land and allocating it through the Homestead Act of 1862. But those land distributions did not go to African Americans. Rather, white settlers got 160-acre grants, each worth \$307,317 in 2019 dollars. This discrepancy alone corresponds to today's average wealth gap between Black people and whites, which economists estimate at about \$357,477.²²

After the Civil War, General Sherman's Special Field Orders No.15 (1865) and Representative Thaddeus Stevens' Reparations Bill (1867) authorized the distribution of 40 acres of land along the Atlantic Seaboard to formerly enslaved people. This stretch includes resort islands Hilton Head and

²¹ Darity & Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, *supra*

²² Darity, William A, Jr., Mullen, A. Kirsten, and Hubbard, Lucas, Eds, *The Black Reparations Project: A Handbook for Racial Justice*, University of California Press, 2023, p 31

Kiawah, and some of the most beautiful and valuable beachfront, seaside property in the country. On Kiawah Island today, a four-bedroom beach house on one acre of land is listed for \$3 million. Some Black people did settle on some plots, but the actual distribution was 5 million acres short of the full allocation. And most of the distributions were re-confiscated by President Johnson after President Lincoln's assassination and given to whites. Moreover, despite popular folklore, there may never have been any allocation of mules!

Forty acres per formerly enslaved family amounts to 40 million acres in total. In 2019 dollars, 40 acres per family would be worth \$76,980.²³ An average of 200 residences could be built on each tract.²⁴

Civil War to World War II, Or The Blood Lust Period

After the Civil War, Southern states enacted so-called Black Codes, which forbade Black people from owning land, voting, suing, sitting on juries, or traveling²⁵. Some Northern states disallowed migrating Black people to enter or remain in their territory.²⁶

Federal troops withdrew from the South in 1876, leaving formerly enslaved Black people to do battle with deeply embedded systems of racism and widespread racial oppression. The Civil War and the abolition of slavery left Black people "stuck in a caste system as hard and unyielding as red Georgia clay."²⁷

During Reconstruction -- the twelve years that followed the Civil War -- Southern Black people

²³ *The Black Reparations Project, Id.*

²⁴ Darity & Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd Ed, *supra* at p 208.

²⁵ Degruy, Joy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, Uptone Press, 2017, p 64.

²⁶ Degruy, Joy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, Uptone Press, 2017, *Id*

²⁷ Wilkerson, Isabel, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, Vintage Books, 2010, p 8.

made significant strides in the acquisition and wielding of political power, holding public offices at the federal, state, and local levels, including one Governor and two US Senators. By 1868, 700,000 Black men²⁸ were registered to vote.

Moreover, more than a few Black people managed to acquire property and gain some wealth. They formed mutual aid societies and worker-owned farming cooperatives. Indeed, the term “piggy bank” reportedly originates from the Freedom Farm Corporation, created by Fanny Lou Hamer and others in the 1960’s, which empowered Black farmers and sharecroppers by donating them a pig, which they would keep to turn a profit, but whose piglets they would return to the bank for continued support for other families.²⁹

Black people strongly believed education would make real the promise of emancipation. They pooled their resources to build schools and pay teachers, because they recognized the power of education for achieving real freedom, or what Dr. W.E.B. Dubois called “abolition democracy.” They founded 121 colleges and universities; today 99 remain. At the same time, Black Congressmen fought for access to public education for Black youth.

Newly freed Black people established churches, social clubs, and hospitals. There were 500 Black hospitals in the United States at one time; today there is a single one, at Howard University. In Detroit, there were 18 Black hospitals; today there are none.³⁰

But the success of self-determining and self-empowered Black people, working collectively for a common goal, triggered a vicious backlash from those seeking to preserve the white supremacist order. Whites knew that education and self-determination were the pathways to upsetting white supremacy,

²⁸ Black women – like all women – did not gain the right to vote until the 19th Amendment was passed, in 1920.

²⁹ Gordon Nembhard, Jessica, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014, pp 180-181-186

³⁰ Jordan, Jamon, “Detroit had 18 Black-owned and operated hospitals: Why they vanished,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 27, 2022.

specifically economic and political domination. When Andrew Johnson became President after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, he proclaimed that “[t]his is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be a government of white men [.]”³¹ So thorough was the revenge that there was not a single Black Congressional representative from 1901 until 1970.³²

Jim Crow. After the Civil War, and until well into the 1960’s, a widespread racial caste system throughout the Southern states, known as Jim Crow, maintained and enforced segregation and discrimination in all economic, political, education and social systems. All public and private facilities, social gathering places, event sites, parks, restaurants, shops, institutions, schools, libraries, recreational facilities, drinking fountains and modes of transit were segregated by race / color. Access by Black people was always far inferior, if not completely forbidden. Black people’s movements, speech, gestures, attitudes, and facial expressions were persistently regulated, restricted, and policed. Tricky devices like poll taxes, grandfather clauses and literacy tests were erected to prevent Black people from voting. Jim Crow’s degradation and humiliation constantly pursued free Black people, and chased them North, where a different iteration of white supremacy was waiting.

Racial Terrorism. Marking the Great Migration of 1915 through 1970, Black people quit the South and moved to northern cities like Detroit en masse. Pulitzer Prize winning author, Isabel Wilkerson, reports their numbers totaled six million.³³ Popular folklore insists that economic hardship and the quest for economic opportunity were the main impetus behind the Great Migration. But another principal driver

³¹ Petrella and Loggins, “This is a Country for White Men”: White Supremacy and U.S. Politics” (Jan 5, 2017) *Black Perspectives, African American Intellectual History*

³² US House of Representatives, Office of History and Preservation, *African Americans in Congress 1870-2007* (2008), pp 2, 4

³³ Wilkerson, Isabel, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, Vintage Books, 2010

of this movement was wanton racial violence, aimed at re-establishing white supremacy, that took hold of the entire country during what Darity and Mullen describe as “**the Blood Lust Period.**”

Terror lynchings were violent, public acts of murder, torture and degradation that reverberated throughout the Black community, causing deep trauma. The Equal Justice Initiative has documented 4,084 lynchings in Southern states between 1877 and 1950, in addition to 300 lynchings outside of the South.³⁴ In addition to murdering Black men with impunity, these onslaughts often involved sexually mutilating Black men, sexually assaulting Black women, forcibly evicting Black families from their land and plundering their assets.

Racist whites gathered at these murderous displays and celebrated. There’s a popular belief that the word “picnic” originates from gatherings in which bloodthirsty whites would “pick a [n word]” for public torture. The Jim Crow Museum reports that Black babies were used as alligator bait at public gatherings and in zoo exhibits. These perverse attacks were largely tolerated and even promoted by government officials.

These terror lynchings funneled the mass migration of millions of Black people into the urban ghettos in the North, like Detroit. “They fled as if under a spell or a high fever... They left as though they were fleeing some curse.”³⁵

“Those millions of people, and what they did, would seep into nearly every realm of American culture.”³⁶ By the time it was over, Detroit would never be the same.

³⁴ Equal Justice Initiative, “Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror, 3d Ed 2017

³⁵ Wilkerson, Isabel, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, *supra* at p 8

³⁶ Wilkerson, Isabel, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, *Id.* at p 4

The Picket Fence Period, Or The Making of Black Detroit

To Detroit they fled, in massive numbers. Detroit's Black population soared 611%, from 5,741 in 1910 to 40,838 in 1920. According to legendary Mayor Coleman Young, the migration process represented "the accumulation of generations of social degradation and economic despair, of lynchings and whippings and fires and rages, of second-class citizenship and third-world living conditions ... of ruthless planters cheating their sharecroppers at the autumn settlement ... of mud floors, of trampled spirits."³⁷

Many of these Black migrants were veterans, returning from fighting World War I. "World War I – the war to make the world safe for democracy – intensified the longing to escape the tyranny of the southern caste system and be included in the promise of America."³⁸

Like a Siren, Detroit Industrialist Henry Ford courted freedom-seeking and opportunity-seeking Black people away from the Old South, where they were met with renewed racial hostility in the factories. Between 1920 and 1950, more Black men in and near Detroit worked for Ford Motor Company than all other Detroit area companies combined.

Henry Ford cultivated relationships with influential Black Pastors in Detroit to solicit Black migrants seeking to escape the South and help them get acclimated once they arrived in Detroit. Ford Motor Company hired its first Black employee in 1914 and started hiring Black people in large numbers in 1919. By 1930, 14% of all autoworkers were Black.³⁹

Ford opened the Rouge Plant in 1923, then the largest factory in the world. He famously

³⁷ *Hard Stuff*, Coleman A. Young and Lonnie Wheeler, The Viking Press, 1994, p 15

³⁸ Tompkins Bates, Beth, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2012, p 5.

³⁹ Thompson, Heather Ann, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, Cornell University Press, 2017, p 18.

offered to pay \$5 per day⁴⁰, which was an astronomical increase over what many southern Black people were subsisting on as sharecroppers under white racist tyranny. By 1922, 26% of Rouge's workers were Black, amounting to 27% of all Black men with jobs in Detroit.⁴¹

But the Jim Crow racial caste system did not dissipate at the Mason Dixon line. Deeply embedded racism chased Black people everywhere they fled, and Detroit was no exception. Regardless of their skill level, talent, or aptitude, these newly arriving Black workers were shut out of jobs or training in skilled trades, or as machinists, specialists, journeymen, or engineers. Moreover, they were never allowed to supervise white workers.

Ford's Rouge plant was known as the "house of murder," based on its extremely punishing working conditions.⁴² Black workers at Rouge were concentrated in the foundry, which came to be known as the "Black department." Work in the foundry was characterized by high rates of lung disease, including tuberculosis and pneumonia; hearing loss; burn injuries; inhaling noxious fumes; and a "notoriously high death rate."⁴³

"Auto companies not only routinely relegated their new African American hires to the least desirable jobs, but they also forced them to labor disproportionately in the industry's dangerous foundry and stamping operations. While virtually every white-owned company in Detroit placed Black people in the most inferior and most hazardous jobs, auto companies also sent them to extremely hostile all-white plants that in turn precipitated numerous ugly 'hate strikes.' In 1941 alone, whites shut down Curtis

⁴⁰ In reality, Ford's famed \$5 daily wage was a complicated combination of wages and profit sharing, with steep qualifications for "worthiness," for which Black mostly did not qualify. *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, *Id.* at p 23.

⁴¹ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, *Id.* at pp 60-61

⁴² Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, *Id.* at p 62

⁴³ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, *Id.* at pp 64-65.

Aircraft, Hudson Motors, and Packard Motors in protest of the influx of Black workers.”⁴⁴

Historically, Black people were systematically excluded from the benefits that came with union jobs. Unions were the critical gatekeepers to better wages, job security, and career advancement. Black people were often relegated to the lowest paying, most precarious jobs. Unions like the Plumbers Union did not admit Black people, and without union membership, it was not possible to work construction jobs.⁴⁵

Black Detroiters' economic status is still widely disparate from their white counterparts. Today, Black Detroiters continue to hold a disproportionate share of low-income jobs. According to the 2021 report by Detroit Future City, “the median income for white Detroiters is over \$16,000 more than that of African American Detroiters.”⁴⁶

But where would Black people find to lay their weary heads?

This first generation of Black people to grow up free of enslavement looked North to industry in places like Detroit, for access to the prerequisites of American citizenship.

But Jim Crow ruled the housing scene in Detroit as well as the job scene.

The biggest barrier facing Black migrants was the dearth of available housing. The moment these Black migrants from the American South stepped off the train at Detroit's Central Station, they were corralled into overcrowded, segregated neighborhoods in Detroit's Black Bottom, while a constellation of racially discriminatory government and private entity policies and practices conspired to ensure that they

⁴⁴ Thompson, Heather Ann, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, Cornell University Press, 2017, *supra* at p 19

⁴⁵ “*Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force*,” University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, p 76, Appendix.

⁴⁶ Detroit Future City, “The State of Economic Equity in Detroit, May 2021.

were confined there.

During this era, American culture began to promote the acquisition of home ownership as the ultimate mark of one's successful ascension to American citizenship. Black migrants chased after that elusive dream in places like Detroit. But this "emblem of American Citizenship"⁴⁷ was denied to Black Detroiters. "From a systems perspective, homeownership is the principal means for the accumulation and intergenerational transfer of wealth for the middle class."⁴⁸ Government systems -- in collaboration with the real estate industry, banks and lending institutions -- caused Black Detroiters to be locked out of homeownership, the largest middle class wealth generating event in American history.

White mob terrorists were waging war on self-determining and self-empowered Black people throughout the nation, and they advanced upon fleeing Black people in the North. Race massacres erupted everywhere, laying waste to such iconic Black strongholds as the prosperous Greenwood "Black Wallstreet District" in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921, and the bustling community of Rosewood, Florida in 1923. Historian Paul Ortiz named Election Day 1920 "the single bloodiest day in modern American history," after a white mob burned the entire Black town of Ocoee, Florida to the ground when three Black men tried to vote.

Black Detroiters were agitated by the heinous injustice of the Scottsboro case, in which nine Black boys in Scottsboro, Alabama were charged with raping a white woman, sparking a nationwide conversation about racial injustice.⁴⁹

Here in Detroit, white mobs ejected several Black families from their homes in the early

⁴⁷ Coates, Ta-Nahisi, "The Case for Reparations," *supra* at p 26, quoting Thomas J. Sugrue

⁴⁸ Hammer, Peter J., "Detroit 1967 and Today: Spatial Racism and Ongoing Cycles of Oppression," *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies*, Joel Stone, Ed, Wayne State University Press, 2017, p 276.

⁴⁹ The Scottsboro case culminated in the US Supreme Court decision in *Powell v Alabama*, 287 US 45 (1932), which lay the foundation for establishing claims of ineffective assistance of counsel. Because of overwhelming injustice at trial, the convictions were all reversed. In subsequent proceedings, some of the charges were dismissed.

1920's. The Ku Klux Klan rallied in Cadillac Square Downtown Detroit in 1923.

In an infamous case, one white mob terrorist was killed in a failed attempt to lay siege to the home of Dr. Ossian Sweet in Detroit in 1925. Police and the Ku Klux Klan joined the fray to assist the mob.⁵⁰ Dr. Sweet and all the occupants of his home were arrested and charged with murder. The case put in the national limelight “the liberties, hopes and aspirations of fifteen million colored Americans.”⁵¹

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund was formed as a result of the campaign to defend the Sweets. On that foundation, attorneys litigated Civil Rights cases for the next two decades, ultimately crippling legal school segregation in *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954.

Against this backdrop, the Detroit housing landscape awaiting migrating Black people was infested with racially discriminatory policies and practices. Darity and Mullen call this **The Picket Fence Period**, because it “refers to the shift ... to promotion of homeownership, executed in a highly discriminatory manner, disproportionately building wealth at the expense of black wealth development.”⁵²

As hundreds of thousands of Black people joined Detroit's growing economy, they looked for areas to establish homes, but redlining, racially restrictive covenants and other policies and practices prevented them from living in most areas of the city. Policies enacted by the federal government, city of Detroit, and individual homeowners and real estate agents, coalesced to cordon the Black Detroit community into specific areas that were systematically disinvested. Government action worked to perch white supremacy on its illegitimate throne and perpetuate a racial hierarchy that persists today.

⁵⁰ Scott, Ron,” How to End Police Brutality,” 2015, available as an e-book on amazon.com

⁵¹ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, *supra* at p 107

⁵² Darity & Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd Ed, *supra* at xiii.

Racially Restrictive Covenants

Racially restrictive covenants are provisions within real estate documents which forbid the sale to Black people. The inclusion of racially restrictive covenants became the real estate agent's pitch regarding "congenial neighbors" and "desirable classes."⁵³ Restrictive covenants were very commonly used, at one point governing 80% of Detroit properties.

When the McGhee family bought a home in a nice Detroit neighborhood, the white homeowners' association - the Tireman Improvement Association – sued to force them to move. Although Orsel McGhee was very light-skinned and was mistaken as white by some people, Minnie McGhee was clearly a Black woman. In *Sipes v McGhee*, the Michigan Supreme Court upheld the racially restrictive covenant on their property.

The McGhees took their fight to the Supreme Court of the United States, led in battle by the NAACP and the esteemed litigator, Thurgood Marshall, who went on to be named the first Black Justice on that highest court of the nation. In *Shelley v Kraemer* in 1948, the Court ruled that racial restrictive covenants violate the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause, and that governments – federal, state and city - cannot enforce them.

Black people, especially wealthy and middle-class Black people, began moving into neighborhoods they were formerly barred from living in. Black people in Detroit were inspired to "move forth boldly, looking for housing in predominantly white neighborhoods beyond the city's racial frontier."⁵⁴

⁵³ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, *supra* at pp 100, 101

⁵⁴ Sugrue, Thomas J., *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Princeton University Press, 205, p 182.

"We Can Live Anywhere" ran the banner headline in the *Courier*.⁵⁵

Redlining

One of the most pernicious policies used to lock Black people out of the housing market was redlining.

In 1936, the Federal Housing Authority established a grading system that indicated guidelines for providing home loans, called redlining. The underwriting manuals supported properties with racial restrictions to maintain the "character" of a neighborhood. Areas labeled as "hazardous" to home loans suffered from "adverse influences" that included "inharmonious racial groups."

All Black Detroit neighborhoods, no matter how small the Black population, were rated "D" by federal appraisers and literally colored "red," thus unfit for mortgage financing.

In his seminal article, "The Case for Reparations," renown writer Ta Nehisi Coates amplifies the fact that the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, which pioneered the practice of redlining, selectively granting loans and insisting that any property it insured be covered by a restrictive covenant forbidding the sale to Black people, was a federal agency.⁵⁶ Yes, it was official government policy which drove this blatantly discriminatory policy that shut Black people out of the housing market in Detroit, for decades.

In effect, redlining led to disinvestment, segregation, decreased homeownership, and therefore depressed generational wealth accumulation. Along with other pervasive policies, it pushed poor and working-class Detroit Black people to the Black Bottom and Paradise Valley neighborhoods, the only place they were "allowed."

⁵⁵ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *Id*

⁵⁶ Coates, "A Case for Reparations," *supra* at p 26

The Infamous Birwood Wall

Elsewhere in this report it is stated that Black people hit literal brick walls in their futile quest to find places to dwell in Detroit. That is no hyperbole.

By the 1920's, significant numbers of Black people had begun moving out of the overcrowded conditions in Black Bottom, to the 8 Mile and Wyoming Area, which at that time was outside of the city's boundaries. In 1941, a white real estate developer conspired with the Federal Housing Authority, garnering loans and mortgage guarantees in exchange for constructing a brick wall that promised to seclude the area west of the Wall for whites only. He promised his investors that: "No part of said property shall be used or occupied in whole or in part by any persons not of pure, unmixed, white Caucasian race with the exception of domestic servants."

The Birwood Wall still stands today, between Birwood on the East and Mendota on the West. It is 6 feet high, 4 inches thick and runs one half mile, from 8 Mile to Pembroke.⁵⁷ It purportedly came to be known in the community as the "wailing wall."⁵⁸ Parts of it have been decorated with murals, as it has become a celebrated relic of white supremacist conniving that's still reverberating in Detroit.

Veteran's Benefits

It was noted earlier that many of the new Black Detroiters were veterans, returning from World War I, where the barriers they faced made a mockery of the fanciful democracy they had just returned from defending in Europe.

The GI Bill, which gave veterans access to low-interest home loans, mirrored the broader country's pervasive racist housing policy. The federal government allowed local realtors, banks, and

⁵⁷ *Bridge Detroit*, June 19, 2021 Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *supra* at p 65

⁵⁸ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *supra* at p 65

homeowners' associations to dictate the distribution and implementation of veteran's benefits for homeownership. As a result, fewer than 3% of eligible Black vets successfully accessed GI housing benefits, and fewer than 1% of GI bills went to Black vets.⁵⁹

Ta-Nahisi Coates notes, "[t]he omnibus programs passed under the Social Security Act in 1935 were crafted in such a way as to protect the southern way of life ... 65% of African Americans nationally and between 70 and 80 percent in the South were ineligible ... The oft-celebrated G.I. Bill similarly failed black Americans, by mirroring the broader country's insistence on a racist housing policy."⁶⁰

Public Policy

Ta-Nahisi Coates writes that, "[t]he American real-estate industry believed segregation to be a moral principle."⁶¹

Indeed, in 1924, Detroit Real Estate Board officially codified the policy that "a Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood ... members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood."⁶² They interpreted this provision to forbid any sale "to Negroes in a 100 percent white area."⁶³

As late as 1950, the National Association of Real Estate Boards' code of ethics warned that "a Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood ... any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values." A 1943 brochure specified that such "undesirables" included "madams, bootleggers, gangsters," and "a colored man of means who was

⁵⁹ Wilson-Spotser, Mittrria, "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

⁶⁰ Coates, "*The Case for Reparations*," *supra* at pp 33-34

⁶¹ Coates, "*The Case for Reparations*," *Id.* at p 26

⁶² Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, *supra* at p 105

⁶³ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *supra* at p 46

giving his children a college education and thought they were entitled to live among whites.”

This unholy pact between government and private interests ensured that Black Detroiters would continue to be confined to designated areas of the city. Coates notes, “a government offering such bounty to builders and lenders could have required compliance with a nondiscrimination policy ... Instead, the FHA adopted a racial policy that well could have been culled from the Nuremberg laws.”⁶⁴ ⁶⁵

Blockbusting

Realtors devised the practice of “blockbusting,” that is, frightening white homeowners about impending racial integration, in order to inspire them to sell their homes quickly and cheaply, which the realtors would then re-sell at substantial profit.

With blockbusting, realtors inflamed white residents’ fear, hysteria and hostility against Black people who might flirt with moving into their neighborhoods, in order to manipulate the market for profit. Compounded with the unavailability of mortgage financing due to redlining, Black people were forced to purchase their homes on land contracts, which are very risky and provide no security to buyers.

White Mob Violence and Opposition to Public Housing

Black people were viewed as a contagion.

In 1949, Mayor Albert Cobo campaigned to white homeowners' associations that he would fight for them to keep Negro "invasions" out of their neighborhoods, despite what the Supreme Court said about racial restrictive housing covenants. And white homeowners' associations, along with white housing developers, came out in force to support him.

Propelled by belief that they were entitled to exclusive access to certain areas, whites formed

⁶⁴ Coates, “*The Case for Reparations*,” *supra* at 7, citing Charles Abrams, urban studies expert

⁶⁵ Nuremberg laws were a body of anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish and racist laws enacted in Nazi Germany in 1935.

hundreds of neighborhood and civil associations focused on stemming the “invasion,” and the “colored problem” or the “Negro problem.”⁶⁶ “As the city’s black populations began to spread beyond the confines of the pre-war ghetto, improvement associations adopted increasingly sophisticated strategies to preserve neighborhood homogeneity ... These organizations turned to a variety of legal and extralegal activities from picketing to harassment to vandalism and violence to fight against the threat of black movement.”⁶⁷

White supremacist mobs commonly staged violent sieges outside the homes of newly arriving Black families, in an effort to punish them for daring to live where they were not wanted and force them to move. “For those white Detroiters unwilling or unable to flee, Black movement into their neighborhoods was the moral equivalent of war.”⁶⁸ They staked out territory against “invasions” and “penetrations.” Their goal was the containment of Detroit’s Black population.

Belle Isle Riot of 1943. One such incident led to the infamous Belle Isle riot in 1943, deemed one of the worst race riots in 20th Century America. The clash started on Belle Isle. Rumors spread about a white mob throwing a Black mother and baby off the Belle Isle bridge, and a white mob accused a Black man of raping a white woman. White youths went on a rampage, attacking Black motorists. The white mob poured over into Black Bottom, where it was met with maximum resistance. Detroit police aided and abetted the rioters, literally killing Black people in the streets and terrorizing Black neighborhoods.⁶⁹ Seventeen Black people and zero whites were killed by police.⁷⁰

In 1955, a white mob staged a five-month siege to successfully exclude the Wilson family from the Courville neighborhood. Such violent assaults were commonplace well into the 1960’s.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *supra* at 213-215, 218.

⁶⁷ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *Id.* at 229

⁶⁸ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *Id.* at p 246.

⁶⁹ Scott, Ron, “How to End Police Brutality,” 2015, available as an e-book on amazon.com

⁷⁰ “Race Riot of 1943,” Detroit Historical Society, 2025

⁷¹ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *Id.* at p 233

As one Black realtor taunted, “white hysteria and mania cause the loss in value when a Negro moves into a white neighborhood. Real Estate men often profit by this psychological condition.”⁷²

Professor Peter Hammer notes in particular that many members of these “neighborhood improvement societies” that fomented so much racial hostility, and white flight, became the mayors, legislators and city planners of the surrounding cities and townships to which they fled. “This is perhaps best typified by the political careers of Orville Hubbard, the unapologetic racist mayor of Dearborn (1942-1978), and L. Brooks Patterson, the former prosecutor and ... executive of Oakland County, who ... infamously stated ... [that] ‘what we’re going to do is turn Detroit into an Indian reservation, where we herd all the Indians into the city, build a fence around it, and then throw in the blankets and corn.’”⁷³

Public housing in Detroit was met with staunch opposition from community groups, real estate interests, developers, and elected officials. Historian Herb Boyd recounts the story of 1942 Sojourner Truth Riot, when an armed white mob of 1,200 burned a cross on the grounds of the Sojourner Truth public housing project being planned for Black people.⁷⁴ The Federal Housing Authority refused to insure any more mortgages in the 7 Mile – Fenelon area in the aftermath of the decision to build public housing there.⁷⁵

This constellation of public and private actions forced most Black residents into confined and dilapidated spaces. Professor Hammer names these persistent “spatialized notions of race and racialized notions of space, controlling where people can and cannot live in Detroit.”⁷⁶

During and after WW II, as Detroit’s Black population exploded, Black people were segregated and trapped in the city’s worst housing stock. Real estate brokers and financial institutions shunned Black clients

⁷² Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, *supra* at p 100

⁷³ Hammer, Peter J., “Detroit 1967 and Today: Spatial Racism and Ongoing Cycles of Oppression,” *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies*, Joel Stone, Ed, Wayne State University Press, 2017, *supra* at p 276

⁷⁴ Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People’s History of Self-Determination*, *supra* at pp 139-140

⁷⁵ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *supra* at p 73

⁷⁶ Hammer, Peter J., “Detroit 1967 and Today: Spatial Racism and Ongoing Cycles of Oppression,” *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies*, Joel Stone, Ed, Wayne State University Press, 2017, *supra* at p 274

and systematically shut them out of the home ownership market. Black people flooded the lower East side; the poorest section was dubbed “Black Bottom.” In an adjacent area, emerged Paradise Valley, where the “cream of the crop” of the Black community settled.

Neighborhoods like Black Bottom, Paradise Valley and Hastings Street were densely packed and plagued with poverty. But they boasted over 300 Black-owned businesses, including bars, restaurants, doctor’s offices, barber shops, hair salons, hotels, and drug stores. They were home to Black Detroit’s most venerable institutions, including churches, social organizations, business associations, and famous jazz and blues clubs. The name – Paradise Valley – “was a reflection of the hope of black newcomers to the city, and an ironic comment on the hopes still unmet.”⁷⁷ Mayor Young reminisced, “The money was practically jumping from pocket to pocket in those days.”⁷⁸

Thus, migrant Black people in Detroit found good jobs, decent lives, and a thriving community, in the quest to repair some of the ravages slavery and deep racial oppression had heaped upon them in the South. But, just as the forces of white supremacy had retaliated against Black people who dared to pursue dignity in the wake of slavery in the South, so now did the same oppressive forces launch a wholesale offensive designed to disempower them in urban centers like Detroit.

The Freeway Period, or How to Destroy Black Neighborhoods

Darity and Mullen call the period that followed this surge of Black development **The Freeway Period**, characterized by a federally funded, and locally envisioned and implemented, so-called “urban renewal” policy that specifically targeted Black neighborhoods for “slum clearance” and the construction of interstate highways.⁷⁹ This policy devastated the Black Detroit strongholds in Black Bottom, Paradise Valley and Hastings Street, and sent its inhabitants scattered about, desperately seeking someplace to

⁷⁷ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, *supra* at pp 36-37

⁷⁸ Young, *Hard Stuff*, *supra* at p 74.

⁷⁹ Darity & Mullen, *From Here to Equality*, *supra* at p 11.

call home, and literally hitting brick walls.

Historian Herb Boyd recalls

Urban renewal meant “Negro removal” for many residents of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley ...It took merely three years for the black community on the lower east side to be leveled; in the end more than seven hundred buildings were razed and some two thousand black families forced to relocate.⁸⁰

The freeways “came with the force of destructive tornadoes”⁸¹ through Black neighborhoods. I-375 runs directly over what used to be famed Hastings Street, which was central to Detroit’s Black culture and community. Everything vanished, leaving bare pavement in its place. Space was made for the creation of Lafayette Park, a largely white area. By 1950, 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. With the buildings went the social clubs, churches and cultural institutions that comprised the veritable fabric of the Black community.

Especially lamentable was the destruction of Paradise Valley’s Gotham Hotel, which Boyd likens to Harlem’s Hotel Theresa, as the choice of notable Black people who weren’t welcome in downtown Detroit hotels. With its destruction in 1964, “Paradise Valley had lost its centerpiece. The leveling moved inexorably up and down the route of the Chrysler Freeway, ripping the heart out of Black Bottom so folks in the exurbs had another, faster way to get in and out of the city.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People’s History of Self-Determination*, *supra* at p 161

⁸¹ Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People’s History of Self-Determination*, *Id.* at p 168

⁸² Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People’s History of Self-Determination*, *Id.* at p 187

Prior to urban renewal, Black Bottom, Paradise Valley, and Hastings Street were booming areas of Black entrepreneurship, entertainment, and community. But these were not just buildings and edifices. They were bedrocks of African American culture and society. Few homeowners received any financial compensation, and no amount of money could compensate for the loss of culture and community they suffered.

The harm was exacerbated by the fact that announcements of the forthcoming Chrysler freeway preceded the actual construction by years, thus making it impossible for homeowners and shopkeepers to sell or secure financing for upkeep and repair. The community suffered this disinvestment long before the properties themselves were demolished.

The Black community was dispersed, losing social ties, organizing and activism circles, and community. 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 throughout the city today.

Professor Bernadette Atuahene highlights the long-term effects these cumulative racist government policies had on manufacturing scarcity in decent housing for Black Detroiters.

“Although Black Bottom had a vibrant cultural milieu, including theaters, nightclubs, restaurants, and about 350 black-owned businesses, it was also overpopulated and flush with homes decaying from disinvestment.”⁸³She notes that “[t]he federal government has never taken responsibility for the fact that, by cutting off investment in Black neighborhoods through redlining, it manufactured the blight that its urban renewal programs sought to erase.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Atuahene, Bernadette, *Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America*, Little, Brown & Co., 2025, p 29.

⁸⁴ Atuahene, *Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America*, *Id.* at 48

The People Demand Power, and White Supremacy Retaliates Again

A confluence of policing excesses, persistent racial oppression and massive job losses in Detroit set the stage for the greatest urban insurrection in modern American history.

Policing Tightens Its Grip

It is no exaggeration to attest that policing and punishment in America were specially crafted to control, disempower and disenfranchise Black Americans, and they continue serving that function today.

Modern policing and carceral systems originated in the post-Civil War South, when the former slaveholding class devised “black codes” and “convict laws” to control newly freed Black people and perpetuate the system of bondage. Newly freed Black people were moving about, many in search of a new way to thrive, even a place to sleep. Vagrancy laws were concocted, making it a crime to be idle or unemployed, or to “lurk.” These were applied selectively against Black people. Black men especially were routinely arrested, detained, and forced to work for little or no compensation. The convict population grew ten times faster than the general population.⁸⁵

As discussed earlier, policing to control Black bodies in Detroit was precipitated by white mob wrath after abolitionists freed the Blackburn family from Kentucky “slave catchers” in 1833 and spirited them away to Canada. The white mob responded by condemning Detroit’s Black community as “vagrants and transient persons” who lived in Detroit in order to commit “depredations against the property of our citizens.” They set fire to Black homes, with no threat of government reprisal. Many Black people fled to Canada to escape the heightened repression. The police force was officially established in the wake of the 1863 race riot, in which the white mob torched the Detroit Black community, yet again.

The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, “except as punishment for crime.” Therefore, the Virginia

⁸⁵ *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander, The New Press, 2010, p 31. *Ruffin v Commonwealth* 82 Va 790, 796 (1871).

Supreme Court made it clear in *Ruffin v Commonwealth* that a prisoner is “in a state of penal servitude to the State [is] a slave of the State.”⁸⁶

Tens of thousands of Black people were arrested, charged with such crimes as “mischief” and making “insulting gestures.” Often, they were leased out to do forced labor to pay off their “debt.” Unlike enslavers, who were motivated to protect their investments at least minimally by keeping the people they owned alive, convict lessors were only interested in maximizing the wealth they could extract from their victims. As a result, such “convict lessees” were frequently savagely beaten, and left to die or killed.⁸⁷

In 1903, nearly forty years after slavery had ostensibly been abolished, Carrie Kinsey, a barely literate and grief-stricken mother, wrote President Theodore Roosevelt to beg for his help in locating her 14-year-old son, who had been abducted and sold to a plantation.⁸⁸

Thus was planted the seed of policing Black America.

In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson, someone ostensibly sympathetic to civil rights, talked about Black folks getting too uppity, and the need “to give them a little something, just to quiet them down, not enough to make a difference.”⁸⁹

Johnson deployed the so-called “War on Crime” against the Black community; President Reagan later exacerbated the harm with the so-called “War on Drugs.” The result was intensified policing under the auspices of creating public order. Both offensives were intended to rein in Black people in order to assuage the hysteria of whites.

Detroit was literally ravaged by the War on Crime, the War on Drugs, and the illicit child of them

⁸⁶ *Ruffin v Commonwealth*, 82 Va 790, 796 (1871)

⁸⁷ Blackmon, Douglas, *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, Vintage Books, 2008

⁸⁸ Blackmon, Douglas, *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, Vintage Books, 2008, *Id.* at p 8.

⁸⁹ Thompson, Heather Ann, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, Cornell University Press, 2017, *supra* at xi.

both: mass incarceration. In 1973, there were 7,834 inmates in Michigan prisons. By 1993, there were 38,942. By 2003, there were 49,357.⁹⁰

As police presence increased, so too did police brutality and other excesses escalate. “The archival record makes clear that the [Detroit Police Department] and Detroit’s white political leaders viewed the discretionary use of 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.”⁹¹

The Detroit Police Department [DPD] was commonly regarded by the Black community as a white-controlled, occupying force, that enforced racial segregation and white mob violence, and criminalized Black residents en masse. Police brutalized and killed Black people unfettered. The DPD was one of the deadliest, if not the deadliest, urban police department in the US during the Civil Rights era from mid-1950’s through early 1970’s.⁹²

Arthur Johnson, Executive Director of the Detroit Chapter of the NAACP, remarked in 1960 that “[t]he problem of police brutality is one of the most serious problems confronting Negroes of Detroit ... They see police as being antagonistic and often willing instrumentalities in the racial segregationist aims of the dominant white community.”⁹³ He described Detroit police as “often willing instrumentalities in the racial segregationist aims of the dominant white community.”⁹⁴

In fact, *The Guardians* was an African American police organization founded in the 1950’s to protect Black citizens from police abuse. Fights actually erupted among police in response to the brutal

⁹⁰ Michigan Department of Corrections 2023 Statistical Report

⁹¹ “*Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force*,” University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, at pp 43-44, Appendix.

⁹² “*Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force*,” University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, at 38, Appendix.

⁹³ *Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era*, University of Michigan Carceral State Project, March 2021

⁹⁴ U.S. Civil Rights Commission, *Hearings before the United States Commission on Civil Rights: Hearings Held In Detroit, Michigan, December 14 and 15, 1960* Washington GPO, 1961, Johnson testimony at 302-317.

treatment of Black people by white officers.

From 1930 through 2014, 700 people were killed by law enforcement in Detroit. From 1930 through 1956, at least two-thirds of 283 people killed by DPD were Black. From 1957 through 1973, 80% of 250 people killed by DPD were Black.⁹⁵ Around half of the identifiable fatal DPD shootings between 1968 and 1973 involved unarmed Black males, most in their teens and early twenties, shot while fleeing from the scene of an alleged burglary or robbery – a policy later determined by the federal judiciary to be a violation of constitutional rights.⁹⁶

A group of officers known infamously as the “Big Four” was a four-man terror squad that wreaked havoc on Black Detroiters, especially Black men. A white officer shot a Black sex worker and almost precipitated a riot in 1963. Police clashed with armed Black Power activists on Kercheval Street in 1966.⁹⁷

There were 105 civilian complaints against the Detroit Police Department in 1965; that number exploded to 278 in 1967.⁹⁸ The Michigan Civil Rights Commission reiterated 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.⁹⁹

By 1967, Detroit was a tinder box, about to explode.

Massive Unemployment and “Runaway Jobs”

Meanwhile, companies went on a global quest for cheap labor and diminished costs, free from the demands of democracy and unions and the constraints of health and safety regulations. Free trade

⁹⁵ “*Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force*,” University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, *Id.*, Appendix.

⁹⁶ “*Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force*,” University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, *Id.* at 44. Appendix.

⁹⁷ Scott, Ron, “How to End Police Brutality,” 2015, available as an e-book on amazon.com

⁹⁸ Thompson, Heather Ann, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, Cornell University Press, 2017, *supra* at 44

⁹⁹ “*Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force*,” University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, *supra* at 43. Appendix.

agreements offshored entire industries. Corporate greed caused massive losses of good paying union jobs for Detroiters, and Black Detroiters in particular were left forsaken and jobless, reversing decades of upward mobility.

Between 1948 and 1967, Detroit lost 130,000 manufacturing jobs. Thus disappeared a rung on the ladder of economic opportunity for the poorest workers, with the least education and skills. Growing numbers of Detroiters joined the ranks of “displaced workers,” dislocated by industrial changes. By the 1960’s, there began to emerge a seemingly permanent class of underemployed and jobless Black people.¹⁰⁰

One union Local tried something novel and radical in response to the job losses. In 1951, UAW Local 600 filed suit against Ford for harm caused by “runaway jobs.” The lawsuit challenged the right of the company to eliminate jobs without worker input. The lawsuit birthed the notion of “corporate responsibility” to its workers. The lawsuit sparked a crisis within the UAW, with the International office exerting control over the Local and ousting its left leaning leadership.¹⁰¹

Despite the gallant efforts of Civil Rights and labor organizations, the deindustrialization of Detroit forged ahead throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s, leaving Black workers in the dust. Industry fled the city, leaving Black workers trapped in decaying neighborhoods, behind invisible barriers of race.

Detroit Black Masses Were Agitated

The Black community was ignited. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, Black activism and Black radicalism were everywhere. Civil Rights activists, Black Power activists, student activists, anti-war activists, labor activists, cultural nationalists, socialists, and Communists. Somebody kept painting Black over the face of

¹⁰⁰ Sugrue, Thomas J., *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Princeton University Press, 2005, *supra* at pp 143-144.

¹⁰¹ *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Thomas J. Sugrue, Princeton University Press, 2005, *supra* at pp 160-161.

the statue of Jesus standing in front of Sacred Heart Seminary. Everybody was reading about, listening to, and talking about Nikki Giovanni, Che Guevara, Malcolm X, and Frantz Fanon. The *Inner City Voice* and the *South End* spoke the cries of Black students and workers on the campus of Wayne State University, in the streets and in the factories.

In 1963, 250,000 people marched down Woodward Avenue with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a large contingent of Black radicals gathered at King Solomon Baptist Church to listen to Malcolm X deliver his famous “Message to the Grassroots” speech. They returned in 1964 to hear Malcolm X deliver his groundbreaking “The Ballot or the Bullet” speech.

The Black Panther Party was preaching self-defense, self-determination and revolution, providing free breakfast and social services, threatening, and ousting dope dealers, and selling newspapers on the corners downtown. The Nation of Islam was preaching Black pride, “white-man-is-the-devil separatism,” and self-determination, and selling fruit and bean pies on the neighborhood corners. The Shrines of the Black Madonna (later, the Pan African Orthodox Church) was preaching Black Liberation Theology and buying swaths of farmland in Michigan, and later, South Carolina.

The Republic of New Afrika was demanding five states in the South where Black folks could live apart from white supremacy and breathe free. Parents and Students for Community Control formed a Black Plan, asserting anti-racism and Black community control over the school system. The Black Student United Front demanded removal of police from schools, an end to white supremacist curricula in the schools, and changing the name of Northern High School to Rap Brown High. Activists successfully renamed Eastern High School after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

James Forman, and the Black Economic Development Conference, held in Detroit, proposed adoption of the “Black Manifesto,” which uttered a scathing attack on the “hypocrisy” of “the white man’s religion” and demanded that churches and synagogues pay \$500 million reparations to the Black community.

By 1971, 60% of the workforce at Chrysler's Dodge Main plant was Black. But, consistent with longstanding auto company practice, Chrysler relegated Black people to the most hazardous, the most labor-intensive, the filthiest and the most unsafe operations within its decrepit plants, with the most inhumane overtime demands. Safety conditions in the plants were deplorable. Chrysler's plants, in particular, were notoriously hazardous, indeed savage. Grisly workplace injuries, and even deaths, were increasingly more frequent.

While the Black community's cries about police brutality were met with disregard by civic leaders in the 1960's, so too did complaints about racial mistreatment and foreman abuses on the shop floors fall on deaf ears. Black autoworkers mobilized, agitated and raised dissension within the ranks of the United Auto Workers Union (UAW), via such organizations as the Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC), which hailed from the historically combative Local 600; the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (the League); the United National Caucus (UNC); the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM); and a series of plant-based organizations known as the RUM's.

Racial tension in the plants was rampant, and violence was common. Many of the workers in DRUM were closely affiliated with the *Inner City Voice*, which aimed to be the voice of Black revolutionary nationalism. DRUM criticized Chrysler's stark replication of the Southern plantation by hiring whites "straight out of the Deep South" for its plant security force and then equipping them with the "tear gas, night sticks, riot helmets, and the new untested chemical MACE which might blind you on plant property."¹⁰² DRUM accused the UAW of perpetuating and feeding off of shop-floor racism.

Just as police brutality continued to fuel revolution and counterrevolution in the city, so too did foreman abuses and ever deteriorating working conditions foment shop-floor dissent. Like the city proper, Detroit's auto plants became a war zone between 1967 and 1972.

¹⁰² Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *supra* at 110 102.

The UAW went to war with Black radicals. UAW leaders expended tremendous effort to discredit Black revolutionaries who were mobilizing on Detroit's shop floors. In 1973, the conflict between the UAW and Black radical dissenters within its ranks came to a head at Chrysler's Mack plant, known in Detroit as a "hell hole" because the work was especially hazardous and the pace particularly inhumane. When workers' complaints were ignored at the UAW, they took matters into their own hands. Black and white radical workers united in a "wildcat strike" or work stoppage, and a bloodbath with Chrysler security team ensued. The UAW, led by Doug Fraser, betrayed its own members, and incited police to evict them. In the words of the *Black Voice*, the Union "goon squad" broke the strike.

Fired workers from a similar wildcat strike at the Forge plant filed suit against both Chrysler and the UAW, for conspiring to mistreat them on the basis of their race and political convictions.¹⁰³ The lawsuit did not prevail, but sworn testimony proved that the UAW had turned against its own members it regarded as radicals, even when Chrysler had agreed to reinstate them.¹⁰⁴

Things finally boiled over one hot summer night in 1967, when Black people rebelled in the streets of Detroit.

The 1967 Rebellion

The 1967 Rebellion was catalyzed by a police raid of a so-called "Blind Pig," or "illegal after-hours bar," and arresting all 85 occupants. The community erupted and looting ensued. Some people ran through the streets with merchandise; some scolded them. At first, Black businesses were spared, by posting "Soul Brother" on their windows. But then came the fires, which did not care.

¹⁰³ Thompson, *Whose Detroit: Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *supra* at 200-214.

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *Id.* at 214

Neighborhood shops and grocery stores, owned by outsiders, were especially targeted by looters during the rebellion, because in them Black Detroiters so often felt disrespected, mistreated, and ignored.

The Michigan National Guard was activated. Troops were stationed at Central High School, among other sites. Tanks were in the neighborhood streets. Snipers, they said, were perched atop buildings. The loss of businesses, institutions and community was staggering. The loss of spirit, unspeakable. By the Rebellion's end, 33 African American and 10 white people had been killed, most by the police.

According to the Kerner Commission Report, issued in the aftermath, the real trigger was resentment from deindustrialization, which led to massive job loss and poverty; racism in policing; police brutality; housing segregation; powerlessness; and white racism.

Consider the remarks of the late esteemed co-founder of the Detroit Black Panther Party, Ron Scott:

1967 is popularly known as the "Detroit Riots," but is more accurately a Rebellion – an eruption, a revulsion, an action of resistance against economic, political, and military tyranny. The '67 Detroit Rebellion – in the city where "it couldn't happen" – was reflective of all the hidden lies and contradictions of America. It became the largest, the most violent, and one of the longest of any similar 60's urban uprisings.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Scott, Ron, "How to End Police Brutality," 2015, available as an e-book on amazon.com

Historian Heather Ann Thompson writes that the 1967 rebellion “was the product of African Americans having suffered decades of brutality at the hands of the Detroit Police Departments while civic leaders – even liberal leaders committed to racial equality – were not stopping the abuse. It was the result of grinding poverty that continued to exist in Detroit’s black neighborhoods as white Detroiters enjoyed unprecedented prosperity.”¹⁰⁶

The Algiers Motel Executions

The Rebellion erupted July 23, 1967. Three days later, police raided the Algiers Motel, supposedly looking for a sniper. They found not a single gun on the premises but tortured the Black men and white women they found there together, and killed three Black male teenagers, shooting them with shotguns at point blank range. Despite two police officers’ confessions, no one was ever convicted for the murders.

The Cobo Hall Riots

On May 13, 1968, during a demonstration by the Poor People’s Campaign, mounted Detroit police horseman stormed a rally of Civil Rights activists at Cobo Hall, beating participants with night sticks, injuring several. Detroit police launched another premeditated attack on activists protesting the segregationist presidential candidate George Wallace on October 29, 1968.

The New Bethel Church Raid

On March 27, 1969, a group of radical Black activists, including the Republic of New Afrika, staged a Black Nation Day Celebration at Rev. C.L. Franklin’s New Bethel Church. Police arrived, firing weapons outside, and stormed the sanctuary in a rampage, violently assaulting the meeting participants. In the midst of the melee, two police officers were killed.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City* *supra* at ix

Police apprehended all 142 occupants and hauled them downtown to police headquarters. Detroit Recorder's Court Judge George Crockett, Jr., himself no stranger to radical activism, held court until the early morning hours right at the police station, until all the detainees had been released. The police and the white power structure were outraged. Their wrath manifested decades later, propelling their zeal to dismantle Detroit Recorder's Court.¹⁰⁷

Four men who were Black nationalist activists were charged in the murders of the two police officers. In zealously handling their defense, radical activist lawyers Kenneth Cockrel and Justin Ravitz focused the jury's attention on the grievous abuses of the police. They also put the entire Wayne County jury selection system on trial, when they discovered that Black people were being systematically excluded from jury participation with the arbitrary and capricious use of such biased criteria as "on ADC" [i.e. Public assistance], "long hair," or "community activist." Owing to the resistance staged in the New Bethel case, "for the first time ever in Detroit ... a majority Black jury" sat in the box in Recorder's Court."¹⁰⁸

James Johnson Erupts in the Plant

While the city and workplaces in Detroit were becoming war zones of racial conflict, James Johnson went quietly to work every day at Chrysler's Eldon plant. Although he was not involved with activism, he felt terrorized by the abusive treatment he was enduring at Chrysler. One day in 1970, he walked into the plant with a gun, opened fire, and killed three foremen.

Johnson became a folk hero among plant workers, especially radical activists, and was celebrated in the *Inner City Voice*. His trial was one of the most politically charged events in Detroit's

¹⁰⁷ Change Court Funding, Abolish Detroit Recorder's Court," House Bill 5158 Legislative Analysis (7-29-96), p 2

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *supra* at p 135

history. He was represented at trial by fiery, legendary Black radical lawyer Kenneth Cockrel, who indicted the entire American system of structural racism in Johnson's defense, including recounting the crushing poverty Johnson had suffered in childhood, and most especially, emphasizing Johnson's irreparable trauma from witnessing a horribly gruesome lynching in Mississippi as a young child.

Based on telling Johnson's story in such dramatic fashion, Cockrel not only won a verdict of not guilty by reason of insanity, but he won a Worker's Compensation award against Chrysler for harboring the racism and degrading work situation that drove Johnson to the breaking point.

STRESS: "Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets"

In the quest to quell Black resistance, white conservative forces elected Roman Gribbs Mayor in 1969, over Black candidate Richard Austin. Gribbs had promised his constituents that police would get tougher on crime. In 1971, police formed a special undercover decoy unit called "Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets," or STRESS.

The real mission of STRESS "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.'" Community activists countered that STRESS was a "murder squad," which sought to "terrorize and intimidate the black community through illegal and unconstitutional state violence."¹⁰⁹

After the birth of STRESS, the already severely strained relationship between the police and the Black community disintegrated. The Black community regarded STRESS as an all-white, intrusive, repressive, vigilante force.

The STRESS unit wreaked havoc on the Detroit Black community. Between January and September 1971, STRESS made 1,400 arrests, and its officers killed 10 suspects, 9 of whom were

¹⁰⁹ *"Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force,"* University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, at p 45.

Black. By September 1973, the STRESS unit had killed 22 citizens; almost all were Black men.

The storied case of Hayward Brown, Marcus Clyde Bethune and John Percy Boyd vividly illustrates the breach between the Black community and the Detroit Police Department in this era. The men were young Black activists who launched a campaign to rid the neighborhood of drug dealing. They had two shootouts with police that resulted in one officer's death, setting off "the most massive manhunt in Detroit's history."

The STRESS murder squad went on a rampage, raiding homes and terrorizing the community. Police Commissioner John Nichols – who later lost the Mayoral race to Coleman Young – called the activists "Mad Dog Killers." Meanwhile, the community rallied around them and celebrated them as folk heroes. The melee ended with Bethune and Boyd killed by police in Atlanta, and Brown tried for several counts of assault with intent to murder and one count of murder. At his trial, attorney Kenneth Cockrel assailed STRESS's vigilante persecution of the Black community, and Brown was found not guilty.

The forces of racial oppression were especially appalled when radical attorney Justin Ravitz went on to be elected Recorder's Court judge in 1972. And they were incensed when Kenneth Cockrel, an unapologetic Marxist, won a seat on Detroit City Council in 1977.

Coleman Young Elected Mayor

Black people felt vindicated when Coleman Young was elected Mayor in 1973. Some were elated. Others were just relieved that the emerging police state would falter.

Black Detroiters knew Coleman Young. He had migrated to Detroit's Black Bottom with his family in 1923, like so many others fleeing racial terrorism and crushing poverty in the South. He had worked in the factory, like so many of our fathers and grandfathers. He had fought for America against fascism and

racial hatred; a contradiction with which we were very familiar. He had Detroit grit. He had deep pedigree as an advocate and activist for labor rights, Civil rights and social justice, and he was closely associated with Black leftist radicals, including such illustrious figures as W.E.B. Dubois and Paul Robeson. He opposed government repression when testifying before the House Unamerican Activities Committee in 1952, where he famously declared he was “no stool pigeon.”

Young ran on a campaign of reining in police excesses and heightening civilian oversight over police. He garnered a whopping 80% of the Black vote, against Police Commissioner John Nichols, who had created the STRESS unit in 1971.

The first thing Mayor Young did when he won was abolish STRESS. He promoted “community policing,” and established police mini-stations, intending to make police more accessible and community-responsive. He integrated the police force, racially and in terms of gender. He advocated for and enforced the mandate that police officers reside in the city, thus attempting to alleviate the community’s perception that the police were outside occupiers.

But even after Mayor Young was elected, DPD remained one of the deadliest law enforcement agencies in the nation. At least 194 people were killed by police between 1974 and 1993, the vast majority younger Black males.¹¹⁰

Organized police hostility to Young grew unabated. In 1975, 1,000 white police officers protested Young’s affirmative action programs within the Department. In response to Young’s demand that officers live in the city, one famously replied, “I guess what ol’ boy means is that if you work in a sewer, you have to reside in a sewer.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ “*Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force*,” University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, *Id.* at p 46. Appendix

¹¹¹ Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *supra* at p 205

White Hostility and Flight Intensifies

White racial conservatives were very indignant, and those few remaining in the city who were able, fled. Whites' hostility to Young escalated to such a degree that "their ongoing exodus from the city that had begun slowly in the 1950's became a virtual stampede in the 1970's and the early 1980's."¹¹² With them went their taxes, which were a major funding source for the city. Such was the extreme manifestation of white supremacy's hostility to any semblance of Black self-governance in Detroit.

Economic Downturn

As a result of a major economic downturn in the nation, in 1975 Detroit experienced "its worst fiscal crisis since the Great Depression." The auto companies began moving their plants to so called "right to work" states that did not require non-union workers to pay fees to the union. Chrysler's Jefferson Avenue plant closed. By 1977, 56,400 jobs had been lost in Detroit. At the same time, the suburbs gained 36,500 jobs. Black unemployment reached a full 25% as Young began his third term.¹¹³ Regional, spatial, racial economic apartheid was in full swing.

The New Jim Crow: Police Hit Harder and the Prison Industry Explodes

In the wake of the activism of the 1960's and 1970's, the white supremacist system once again unleashed repressive policing and punishment as a means of controlling the Black community.

The Detroit Police Department launched a Tactical Mobile Unit charged with cracking down on crime, a euphemism for disrupting Civil Rights and Black Power activist organizations, racial profiling, and discretionary criminalization on a mass scale. Policies like "stop and frisk" were officially sanctioned,

¹¹² Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *Id.* at p 206

¹¹³ Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *Id.* at p 207

and an “anti-loitering” ordinance empowered police to conduct investigatory arrests.

The “Red Squad” Units of DPD and the Michigan State Police (MSP), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s COINTELPRO¹¹⁴, deployed a wholesale campaign to infiltrate, obstruct, subvert, foment disinformation and sow dissension within Civil Rights, Black Power, leftist, anti-war and labor organizations, among others.¹¹⁵ The DPD amassed political surveillance files on more than 1.4 million people, a mass violation of civil rights and civil liberties designed to obstruct progressive groups from advancing racial justice and other causes under the pretext of crime control and thwarting “subversion.”

The DPD and the FBI literally destroyed the Detroit Black Panther Party, disrupting its operations; harassing, criminalizing, arresting, and brutalizing its members; and threatening, “we killed [Chicago Black Panthers] Fred Hampton and Mark Clark¹¹⁶ and we’ll get you next.”¹¹⁷

In the 1980’s, massive publicity about the perils of crack cocaine led to an astronomical increase in funding for policing and punishment. But blaming the increased spending on the drug epidemic was a hoax. President Reagan deployed the so-called War on Drugs in 1982, before the crack cocaine epidemic hit in 1986. In 1985, Reagan’s administration launched a media blitz about the horrors of crack cocaine. “The media bonanza surrounding the ‘new demon drug’ helped to catapult the War on Drugs from an ambitious federal policy to an actual war.”¹¹⁸

Cries of conspiracies to perpetrate genocide against Black people became far more credible

¹¹⁴ The FBI’s Counterintelligence Program was known as COINTELPRO

¹¹⁵ Donner, Frank, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Cunningham, David, *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/political-surveillance>

¹¹⁶ Chicago Black Panther Party leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were murdered by Chicago police on December 4, 1969. Police drugged Hampton, then shot him while he lay unconscious beside his pregnant fiancée. When they discovered he was alive, they shot him point blank in the head.

¹¹⁷ Michigan Committee Against Repression, List of 24 Black Panther Party Allegations Against DPD, May 1970, Folder 3, Box 18, Detroit Commission on Community Relations / Human Rights Department Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹¹⁸ Alexander, Michelle, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, The New Press, 2010, at p 5

when, in 1996, the San Jose Mercury News published a series about the proceeds from drug sales in the San Francisco Bay and South Central Los Angeles Areas being used to fund United States' opposition to the leftist revolution in Nicaragua.¹¹⁹ Then in 1998, the Central Intelligence Agency admitted that it had financed a counterrevolutionary guerrilla war in Nicaragua with proceeds from illegal drug smuggling, right when crack cocaine hit the Los Angeles community. "[A]n illegal drug crisis suddenly appeared in the black community after – not before – a drug war had been declared. In fact, the War on Drugs began at a time when illegal drug use was on the decline."¹²⁰

With the drugs came new, harsher laws and a tremendous increase in spending on jails and prisons -- new places to which to remove Black people and cast them aside. Law enforcement budgets exploded, and prison and jail populations skyrocketed. The nation got tougher and tougher on crime, so it was said, and the prisons got fuller and fuller.

The New Jim Crow was born.

Federal laws required military training in narcotics control efforts; allowed the death penalty for some drug-related crimes; authorized the admission of some illegally obtained evidence in drug trials; imposed mandatory minimum sentences for distribution of cocaine; and imposed far more severe penalties for crack cocaine, which is associated with Black people, than for powder cocaine, associated with whites. Public housing authorities were mandated to evict tenants for any drug related activity, which caused severe hardship, with many families losing their homes due to the alleged actions of relatives or guests in their home. Student loans were disallowed for drug offenders.

A gross racial disparity in federal drug sentencing law ensured that Black men would be assigned to federal prisons in large numbers. A 1986 federal law punished crack cocaine offenses one hundred times

¹¹⁹ *"Dark Alliance: The Story Behind the Crack Explosion,"* San Jose Mercury News, August 18, 1996.

¹²⁰ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, *Id.* at p 6

more severely than offenses for powder cocaine. A conviction for the sale of 500 grams of powder cocaine triggered a 5-year mandatory sentence, while only 5 grams crack cocaine triggered the same sentence.

The original 100 to 1 disparity in sentencing was reduced by President Obama in 2010, to create the current discrepancy of 18 to 1. But gross racial disparities persist. Between 2015 and 2023, Black people made up 80% of federal crack cocaine convictions.¹²¹

Michigan never had the sentencing disparity between powder and crack cocaine. But, in Michigan, the penalty for simple possession of over 650 grams of cocaine or heroin, involving no intent to sell or distribute, was mandatory life imprisonment, until declared “cruel or unusual punishment” under the Michigan Constitution in 1992.¹²² Michigan still has some of the most draconian drug sentencing laws in the nation.

Over the last 50 years, state and federal prison population has grown by about 540%. Drug offenses alone account for two-thirds of the rise in the federal inmate population and more than half of the rise in state prisoners between 1985 and 2000. In 2000, in seven states, African Americans constituted 80 to 90 percent of all drug offenders sent to prison.¹²³

Due to persistent race, class and caste disparities, it is easy to recognize the deficits that predict who in society is most likely to end up in prison. 40% of Black people with federal crack cocaine convictions have less than a high school education.¹²⁴ Of all people in state prisons in 2016:

- 33% had a parent incarcerated when they were a child
- 12% were homeless before age 18
- 22% were homeless or housing insecure shortly before incarceration

¹²¹ Policy Brief on Equal Act, December 2024, Princeton School of Public and International Affairs.

¹²² *People v Bullock*, 440 Mich 15 (1992)

¹²³ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, *Id.* at p 96

¹²⁴ Policy Brief on Equal Act, December 2024, Princeton School of Public and International Affairs

- 42% received public assistance before age 18
- 19% lived in public housing before age 18
- 40% have a physical or intellectual disability
- 37% have a diagnosed mental illness
- 49% have substance use disorder¹²⁵

There are two million people locked up in the United States on any given day.¹²⁶ No other society in the history of humanity has imprisoned so many of its own citizens – half a million more than China, which has a population five times greater than the United States.

School-to-Prison Pipeline: One of the principal feeders of mass incarceration affecting the Black community is the “school to prison pipeline.” The “school to prison pipeline” refers to the plethora of public policies and practices that push children, especially Black and Brown children from at-risk communities, out of classrooms and into the criminal punishment system.

Problematic practices include (1) zero tolerance disciplinary policies, which can trigger expulsion for minor infractions; (2) heavy reliance of police, security officers and so-called “resource officers” in lieu of social workers and other professionals trained to address troubled students’ social and emotional needs; and (3) profiling and “adultifying” Black boys, thereby projecting onto them unreasonable expectations about their stage of development and irrational fears of violent tendencies. Cultural misunderstanding and ignorance undergird these racially discriminatory practices, which have led to a dramatic increase in school-based arrests nationally, from 1.7 million in 1974 to 3.1 million in 2000, mostly

¹²⁵ Prison Policy Initiative, March 2025

¹²⁶ Prison Policy Initiative, March 2025

involving students of color.¹²⁷

Dozens of Project Greenlight surveillance cameras are now affixed to Detroit public schools.¹²⁸ In 2011, the District launched a high-tech Public Safety Command Center, which monitors 6,000 cameras throughout the school system 24/7, sounds alarms and dispatches response units.

Mark P. Fancher, American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan Racial Justice Project staff attorney and principal author of a comprehensive report entitled *“Reclaiming Michigan’s Throwaway Kids: Students Trapped in the School-to-Prison Pipeline,”* recalled an instance when a Black Detroit High School student was threatened with expulsion for carrying “an eyebrow archer” into the school¹²⁹, an object which the young woman ruefully lamented was too dull even to groom her eyebrows properly! Fancher remarked: “In school district after school district, from one end of the state to another, we found that black kids are consistently suspended in numbers that are considerably disproportionate to their representation in the various student populations.”¹³⁰

Traffic Enforcement-to-Prison Pipeline: Many Black Detroiters must regularly travel to and through suburbs for work or school, requiring that they daily confront racialized surveillance and policing that constantly increase their chances of landing in the clutches of the carceral system.

Research has identified the ways in which Detroit’s systems of policing and development have dispossessed and harmed its most vulnerable residents. *Highway Robbery: How Metro Detroit Cops & Courts Steer Segregation and Drive Incarceration*, a report published by the Detroit Justice Center in 2022, examines how traffic enforcement is widely used as a revenue-generating tool that

¹²⁷ “*Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track*,” March 2005, p 15; “*What is the School to Prison Pipeline?*” American Civil Liberties Union, June 6, 2008.

¹²⁸ Ikonomova, Violet, “Detroit Expands Surveillance Monitoring Program to Include Schools,” *Metro Times*, April 3, 2018

¹²⁹ Press Release: “*ACLU of Michigan releases report identifying school to prison pipeline in state*,” 2025

¹³⁰ *Reclaiming Michigan’s Throwaway Kids: Students Trapped in the School-to-Prison Pipeline*,”. American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, Racial Justice Project, 2009.

disproportionately affects Black and low-income drivers. The problem is exacerbated by state law that requires district courts to be self-funded, incentivizing those courts to maintain an entrapping cycle of tickets, warrants, and poverty for vulnerable communities. As these residents struggle to meet legal driving requirements, they become an easy target for racial profiling by law enforcement. Hundreds are fined, penalized, or jailed simply for seeking transportation when public transit in the city has serious limitations.¹³¹

The persistent legacy of inequity in Detroit is not only the result of housing and employment discrimination and displacement but is also closely tied to the city's lack of transit infrastructure. The city's underfunded and inequitable transit system is yet another barrier to economic opportunity. There has been persistent opposition to a unified regional transit system. 86% of Detroit Department of Transportation daily bus riders are Black. One third of Detroiters don't own a car.¹³²

This traffic-enforcement-to-jail pipeline disrupts many lives, some irreversibly, as even just one day in jail can result in someone losing their job, home, or custody of their children. Those who are nimble or resourced enough to avoid jail time are still saddled with crushing fines and fees debt.

More Profiting Off Black Bodies: Prisons – like the sprawling enslavement plantations that spawned them – are big enterprises that reap hefty profits off Black bodies. The prison industrial complex is one of the fastest growing industries in the nation, with Wall Street investors, trade exhibitions, conventions, websites, and mail-order catalogs. It also has advertising campaigns, architecture, and construction companies, plumbing and food supply companies, peddling armed security and padded cells in a large variety of colors. The list of companies invested in this reconstituted system of enslavement contains the

¹³¹ *Highway Robbery*,” Detroit Justice Center, June 1, 2022, detroitjustice.org/highwayrobbery

¹³² *“Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force,”* University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, *supra* at pp 80-82

cream of corporate society.¹³³

Moreover, private prisons began to boom in the 1980's.¹³⁴ Michigan has one private prison, in Baldwin, Michigan. It is currently being used as an immigration retention facility, thus potentially generating massive profits, while being exempt from many of the regulations and policy considerations affecting state-run facilities.

The impact of the War on Drugs and the escalation of policing on Black people in Michigan has been tremendous. From 1973 through 2006, Michigan's prison population skyrocketed from under 8,000 to more than 52,000. In 2023, Black men comprised nearly half of Michigan's prison population, while they constitute only 14% of the state population.¹³⁵ The prison population rate for Black people in Michigan is 1,096 per 100,000 people; for whites it is 214 per 100,000 people.¹³⁶

In that same period, national annual prison expenditures grew by nearly 5,000 percent, from \$38 million to \$1.87 billion.¹³⁷ While spending on corrections was soaring, expenditures on social services like education suffered. From 1979 to 2013, Michigan increased school spending by 18%, but it increased spending on corrections by 219%.

Silencing Black Detroit Political Power. One of the perverse effects of mass incarceration and the forcible removal of Black Detroiters with imprisonment is the corresponding evisceration of political power for Black Detroiters at home. More than two thirds of the state's prisons are located in rural towns with

¹³³ Palaez, Vicky, "The Prison Industry in the United States: Big Business or a New Form of Slavery?" *Global Research*, June 14, 2020, p 2.

¹³⁴ Palaez, Vicky, "The Prison Industry in the United States: Global Research Form of Slavery?," *Global Research*, June 14, 2020, *Id.* at p 4

¹³⁵ Michigan Department of Corrections 2023 Statistical Report, *Id.*: white male 46.5%, nonwhite male 45%. Michigan Census 2020 white 72.4%, nonwhite 13.5%.

¹³⁶ Prison Policy Initiative, March 2025

¹³⁷ Nemser, Stark and Tarr, *From the Factory to the Warehouse: A Brief History of Prison Labor in Michigan*, The Brookly Rail, June 2019, p 5

predominantly white populations.¹³⁸ Detroiters incarcerated in rural, white Michigan communities -- eerily reminiscent of Southern plantations during enslavement -- are erased from the Detroit census, which funds schools, roads, hospitals and social service programs in Detroit. Then those same incarcerated people are counted on the census of the county where they're imprisoned.

The effect is astonishing: Four state senate districts and five house districts in Michigan, drawn after the 2000 census, would not have met federal minimum population requirements to be a district if they had not counted incarcerated people, i.e. Prisoners -- who themselves cannot vote -- as their constituents.¹³⁹

The Black community's rapport with the police improved for a time after the 1967 Rebellion and Mayor Young's election. With the emergence of Black command and control officers, who acted in a more appropriate manner, police mini-stations, certainty of punishment for brutality, and the establishment of the Detroit Police Commission in 1974, Detroit saw a noticeable decline in police abuses for a while. The Police Commission gave some oversight to the community, and it is empowered to conduct investigations, hear cases, make policy, and impose sanctions for inappropriate behavior. Mayor Young strongly advocated for and enforced the requirement that police officers live in the city, in order to alleviate the widespread perception that white police were a foreign, occupying force.

Then, Detroit Police Department brutality and other misconduct reared its ugly head again. From 1995 through 2000, DPD officers fatally shot at least 47 people, including six unarmed suspects who were shot in the back. Between 1987 and 2000, the city paid over \$124 million to settle civil lawsuits against DPD officers, including \$46 million for claims involving officers who had previously been sued. At least 19 pretrial detainees had died while in police custody between 1994 and 2000, although no officer had reportedly ever been disciplined for neglect of duty in any of the incidents.

¹³⁸ Nemser, Stark and Tarr, *From the Factory to the Warehouse: A Brief History of Prison Labor in Michigan*, The Brooklyn Rail, June 2019, *Id.* at p 5

¹³⁹ Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *supra* at xviii

The community erupted when three Detroit police officers brutally beat Malice Green to death in 1992. Media exposés revealed that DPD was, once again, the deadliest per capita large urban police department. In 2000, the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality implored Mayor Dennis Archer to initiate a Department of Justice (DOJ) investigation into the mass violations of the rights of Black citizens. The DOJ found that the DPD had engaged in a pattern or practice of unconstitutional use of force. It issued a Consent Decree mandating changes in policies and practices, including de-escalation training and enhanced mental health screening. That Consent Decree remained intact for 13 years, until 2014.

Community relations with Detroit police continue to suffer. In 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement was incited by the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's racist vigilante murderer in Florida. The brutal murders of Mike Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri (a suburb of St. Louis) in 2014 and George Floyd by Minneapolis police on in 2020 shocked the nation and sparked global protests. Infamous stories about brutal police murders of innocent Black people, especially Black men, became daily fodder.

Locally, protesters, including Detroit Will Breathe, demanded changes to police policies, such as demilitarization, and the end to oppressive community surveillance programs like Project Greenlight and racist facial recognition software. Detroit police violently attacked peaceful protesters, choking and beating them; deploying chemical agents, rubber bullets, sound cannons, and grenades; and arresting them en masse without probable cause. In 2022, the city settled a lawsuit by the protesters for over a million dollars.¹⁴⁰

Activists formed the Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability (CPTA) in the wake of the Detroit police murder of 19-year-old Hakim Littleton in 2020, while he lay prostrate on the ground, out of reach of a weapon. In 2022, the CPTA urged the US Department of Justice to investigate the rise in

¹⁴⁰ *Detroit Will Breathe v City of Detroit*, 524 F Supp 3d 704 (ED MI 2021); *Detroit Free Press*, October 13, 2022.

excessive Detroit police violence. And most recently, the CPTA has urged city officials to cease collaboration and cooperation with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) pursuit of immigration detention and enforcement in Detroit.

In 2025, there was heightened concern about the Michigan State Police fatal shooting of Stephen Mason, a gentle young man who was reared in Detroit's African-centered cultural community, whose skillful talent as a carpenter is exhibited by the 30-foot Kwanzaa Kinara (candle holder) displayed at Campus Martius downtown Detroit each holiday season.

Too little has changed since the police were devised after slavery's end to control and contain Black people at the behest of white supremacy.

Improving Outcomes: Restorative Justice. One approach for alleviating the harmful effects of excessive surveillance and policing affecting Black Detroiters is to invest in restorative practices, and divest from punitive carceral responses to anti-social behavior. Restorative justice initiatives offer alternatives to punitive systems by focusing on healing, accountability, and community safety. This practice creates space for non punitive conflict resolution. Trained facilitators work to address harm without extending the trauma of incarceration or policing.

Improving Outcomes: Community Intervention. Another very encouraging approach has been the introduction of community violence intervention strategies, including safety teams, mental health support, and social work intervention teams. An October, 2024 report showed a promising 45% reduction in homicides attributable to community violence intervention.¹⁴¹

The Seizure of Detroit Recorder's Court

Detroit Recorder's Court was established as a remedy to longstanding discriminatory practices

¹⁴¹ Forcedetroit.org

within the courts in Detroit. White supremacist forces had long wanted to dismantle it, as a result.

Detroit Recorder's Court was a very unique court, unlike any other in Michigan. Elsewhere in Michigan, felony criminal charges are handled by a county-wide Circuit Court, with juries drawn from the entire county. Recorder's Court was different, because juries were drawn only from the city of Detroit, rather than from throughout Wayne County. That meant that, for felonies committed inside Detroit, the accused was truly honored with the constitutional right to be judged by a "jury of one's peers."

The venom against Detroit Recorder's Court was no doubt rooted in its audacity to give Black Detroiters some semblance of autonomy and self-governance.

In the renown New Bethel case in 1970, four Black men stood trial for the death of a police officer, which occurred during the violent raid of a convention of Black radical groups at New Bethel Church. Esteemed radical lawyer Kenneth Cockrel put the entire Detroit Recorder's Court jury selection system on trial during the New Bethel II trial, based on discovering that jurors were routinely excluded for such arbitrary and capricious reasons as wearing a beard or a mini-skirt, being on welfare, having long hair, being a community activist or chewing gum. This attack on the racist underpinnings of the jury selection system resulted in a complete overhaul of that system, culminating in selection of the first Black majority jury ever to sit in Detroit Recorder's Court, which led to the acquittal of both accused men.¹⁴²

Legislation that finally abolished Detroit Recorder's Court in 1997 was clearly predicated on racist intentions. Opponents of the Court complained about the special autonomy Detroit Recorder's Court gave Black Detroiters concerning the fates of members of their community. They accused Detroit jurors being too lenient on Detroit defendants, citing a renown case in which the Michigan Supreme Court forced Judge Dalton Roberson, a Black Recorder's Court judge, to sentence two Black youths to adult sentences for murder rather than giving them the opportunity to be adjudicated as juveniles.¹⁴³ On the other hand,

¹⁴² Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, *supra* at pp 134-135

¹⁴³ "Change Court Funding, Abolish Detroit Recorder's Court," House Bill 5158 Legislative Analysis (7-29-96), p 2

they accused Recorder's Court of being too harsh, after abusive police officers Larry Nevers and Walter Butzen were convicted in the murder of Malice Green.¹⁴⁴

Based on overtly racist intentions, the mostly Black Detroit electorate was overtly disenfranchised, and stripped of the right to decide the fate of offenders within our community.

Racism Permeates the Health Care System

Historic racism against Black people in the health care system in this nation, including by this city, created lasting disparities.

The medical treatment of Black people during enslavement was unspeakable. The documented instances of cruel and abusive medical treatment of and experimentation on Black people during slavery are innumerable. For years, Dr. J. Marion Sims -- who is celebrated by the American medical system even today as the so-called "father of gynecology" -- conducted vesicovaginal and rectovaginal fistula surgical experiments on several enslaved Black women without anesthesia in Montgomery, Alabama. One woman, Anarcha, suffered 29 of these procedures. Thomas Jefferson injected 200 Black people he purportedly owned with an experimental smallpox vaccine. Typhoid experiments were infamously conducted on enslaved Black people.

The abusive treatment of Black people by the American healthcare system continued well past slavery's abolition. From 1930 to 1972, the government studied syphilis at Tuskegee University, by leaving Black men untreated long after penicillin was discovered in 1940's; many suspected government involvement with infecting them with the disease in the first place. In the 1950's, Johns Hopkins Hospital appropriated miraculous HeLa cells taken from the body of Henrietta Lacks and used them extensively without her knowledge. In the 1950's, Black babies were injected with radioactive iodide at John Gaston

¹⁴⁴ Change Court Funding, Abolish Detroit Recorder's Court," House Bill 5158 Legislative Analysis (7-29-96), Id. at p 3.

Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

The involuntary sterilization of Black women in Mississippi in the 1960's 1970's, suffered by Civil Rights activist Fanny Lou Hammer and so many others, was so pervasive that it was dubbed the "Mississippi appendectomy." In 1973, the Southern Poverty Law Center documented 150,000 cases of forced sterilization. Both North Carolina and Virginia have recently compensated thousands of Black victims of forced eugenic asexualization and sterilization.

Racial discrimination in the medical system took hold early in Detroit too. Four Catholic nuns established St. Vincent's Hospital, the first hospital in the Northwest Territory in 1845, at Larned and Randolph in Detroit. There were 193 Black people living in Detroit in 1840. Not one Black person was allowed to be treated at that hospital, which proudly cared for the homeless, orphans and prostitutes.

As always, self-empowered and self-actualizing Black people responded by providing for the community's needs. When doors closed on Black people seeking healthcare and healing services, they opened Black-owned and Black-operated hospitals.

In 1891, African American surgeon Dr. Daniel Hale Williams founded Provident Hospital in Chicago, the nation's first Black owned and operated hospital. There were 500 Black hospitals in the United States at one time. Today there is a single one, at Howard University. In Detroit, there were 18 Black hospitals.¹⁴⁵ Today there are none.

Barred from membership in the American Medical Association, Black doctors established the National Medical Association in 1895. There were 14 Black medical schools in the US in 1910.¹⁴⁶ All but two – Howard and Meharry – were destroyed when the American Medical Association published a report that deemed them unfit. "The effects of the Flexner Report on black medical schools were immediate.

¹⁴⁵ Jordan, Jamon, "Detroit had 18 Black-owned and operated hospitals: Why they vanished," *Detroit Free Press*, February 27, 2022

¹⁴⁶ Darity, Mullen & Hubbard, Eds, *The Black Reparations Project, A Handbook for Racial Justice*, University of California Press, 2023, *supra* at 101

Unable to acquire licensing, hospital privileges, and residents, those five medical schools, as well as others that were already struggling financially, were shuttered.”¹⁴⁷ There wasn’t another Black medical school until Charles Drew in 1966 and Morehouse in 1975.

Physician-scientist Dr. Charles Drew perfected large-scale blood banking procedures still used today. But, ironically, neither he nor any other Black person was eligible to donate or receive blood transfusions for years after he devised that procedure, due to racial discrimination.

Dr. Joseph Ferguson was first Black doctor to practice in Detroit, in 1869. He was renowned for incorporating traditional African folk medicine with conventional practice. Neither he nor any other Black doctor in Detroit could practice at any Detroit hospital.

In 1916, Dr. David Northcross and Dr. Daisy Northcross established Mercy General, Detroit’s first Black owned and operated hospital. In 1918, Black doctors established Dunbar Hospital, the first Black non-profit hospital in Detroit. In 1955, Dr. Charles Wright became first Black doctor to be granted privileges at Women’s Hospital, now Hutzel Hospital. Harper Hospital admitted its first Black doctor to practice in 1960.

Black hospitals were the casualty of the enactment of federal Medicare and Medicaid laws. Those provisions required segregated white hospitals to desegregate in order to receive federal funds. Once those doors opened, Black patients and doctors moved to those far-better resourced, better equipped, better-staffed, white-run hospitals, leaving Black hospitals in the dust. This destructive effect on Black hospitals was supposedly unintended, but nothing was done to mitigate or compensate it either.

Before Black hospitals were deserted, the eminent Dr. Charles Wright named Detroit “the African American Hospital Capital of the United States.”¹⁴⁸ The legacy of Black Detroit hospitals ended with the

¹⁴⁷ Darity, Mullen & Hubbard, Eds, *The Black Reparations Project, A Handbook for Racial Justice*, University of California Press, 2023, *Id*

¹⁴⁸ Wright, Charles, M.D., *The National Medical Association Demands Equal Opportunity: Nothing more, Nothing less*, Charro Book Co, 1995

closure of Southwest Detroit Hospital in 1991, leaving a vacuum in the healthcare infrastructure specifically tailored to the needs of Black Detroit residents.

The long and deep history of racial discrimination in the delivery of healthcare services has abiding consequences, evidenced by the great many persistent disparities in health outcomes for Black people compared to whites. “The immense harm caused by racist profiteering from human bondage, subsequent legal segregation, and ongoing discrimination continues to drive racial health inequities.”¹⁴⁹

One of the areas where racial inequities so stubbornly obtain is in matters related to maternal-fetal health. Infant mortality for Black babies – including in Detroit -- is persistently **three times** that of white babies.¹⁵⁰ Nearly 17 out of 1000 Black babies in Detroit will die, compared to nearly 6 white babies out of 1000. “The far-reaching tentacles of long-term structural racism and discrimination continue to be evidenced by the impact on the health status of black citizens in the city of Detroit where we see the [Infant Mortality Rate] is 3 times higher.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ *Methodological approaches to structural change: epidemiology and the case for reparations*,” Jourdyn A. Lawrence, Joy Shi, Jacqueline L. Jahn, Kathryn E. W. Himmelstein, Justin M. Feldman, Mary T. Bassett, *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 2025, 1249-1254, at 1249.

¹⁵⁰ Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People’s History of Self-Determination*, *Id.* at p 321

¹⁵¹ Norman, Gwendolyn S., PhD, “*The Impact of Structural Racism and Bias on Maternal Child Health Outcomes*,” Detroit Health Department, September 30, 2022, PowerPoint presentation

The following chart developed by Dr. Gwendolyn S. Norman¹⁵² illustrates this disturbing pattern:

Region 10 (metro Detroit) Disparities

Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 live births in 2020

	Michigan	Detroit	Wayne County except Detroit
Overall	6.8	14.6	6.5
Black	14.0	16.6	11.8
White	5.0	5.5	5.1

According to Dr. Norman, this same pattern is seen with other variables affecting Black Detroiters' maternal and infant mortality and morbidity:

We see the same dangerous patterns in measuring preterm birth rates, and low birth weight rates, both harbingers of greatly increased rates of morbidity and mortality ...Black women also exhibit far higher rates of maternal morbidity, such as from pregnancy-related deaths, especially if they live in Detroit ... In Michigan, the maternal mortality rate for Black women between 2014 and 2018 was 24.1 per 100,000 live births, compared to 8.5 per 100,000 live births for white women.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Norman, Gwendolyn S., PhD, "*The Impact of Structural Racism and Bias on Maternal Child Health Outcomes*," Detroit Health Department, September 30, 2022, PowerPoint presentation

¹⁵³ Norman, Gwendolyn S., PhD, "*The Impact of Structural Racism and Bias on Maternal Child Health Outcomes*," Detroit Health Department, September 30, 2022, PowerPoint presentation, pp 12, 14-15, 16

Improving Outcomes: Black Birth Centers. Birthing options in Detroit are primarily limited to maternity wards in large institutions, instead of birthing centers and community-centered midwifery services, which are associated with better outcomes and reduced instances of mistreatment and racial disparities. In establishing Detroit's first and only freestanding birth center, the founders of Birth Detroit, a Black-led, midwifery-based center, noted that, "[i]ncreasingly, research links toxic racism, poverty, and other social determinants of health to preterm birth. Such factors are especially salient in the environments of metropolitan communities such as Detroit."¹⁵⁴

Improving Outcomes: Paying for Breastfeeding. Certified Nurse Midwife Darlene Allen, the first Black graduate of the Wayne State University Master's of Midwifery Program in 2008, believes a great many persistent health disparities in the Black community would be alleviated simply by programs and policies encouraging and supporting breastfeeding, including paying a stipend to Black Detroit mothers who breastfeed. "Let's pay Moms to breastfeed for a year. Breastfeeding not only benefits the physical health and wellbeing of both the baby and the mother – radically reducing gastrointestinal problems and risk of infection in the baby, among so many other benefits -- but the bonding it nurtures has longtime social and emotional benefits that permeate into the entire community."¹⁵⁵

In its 2003 report *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*, the Institute of Medicine concluded that bias, prejudice, and stereotyping contributed to widespread differences in health care by race and ethnicity. Fifteen years later, the 2018 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report documented that patients of color receive poorer care than whites on 40% of

¹⁵⁴ "We Are Not Asking Permission to Save Our Own Lives: Black-Led Birth Centers to Address Health Inequities," Leseliey Welch MPH, MBA; Renee Branch Canady, PHD, MPA; Chelsea Harmell, MPH; Nicole White, BS, CPM; Char'ly Snow, MSN, CNM; Lisa Kane Low, PhD, CNM, FACNM, FAAN, www.jpnnjournal.com, April/June 2022

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Darlene Allen, MSN, CNM, July 25, 2025.

quality measures. In a similar vein, Dr. Herbert C. Smitherman reports that older adults who live in Detroit die at 2.5 times rate of adults elsewhere in Michigan.¹⁵⁶

With the closure of Detroit's Black hospitals, many Black Detroiters sought care at Herman Keifer Hospital, which was run by the Public Health Department. Detroit's Public Health Department was known as a pioneer in public health, especially in the 70's and 80's, with ample resources, high quality laboratories, and political support. However, it experienced marked decline, which culminated in a decision to outsource its programs to a nonprofit private entity. Quality of care and health outcomes continued to decline. 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.

Environmental Racism, Or the Slow Poisoning of Black Detroiters

Historically, housing discrimination and employment discrimination combined to drastically reduce the life expectancy of Black Detroiters, by locking them into the most polluted areas of the region while also confining them to the most hazardous jobs. Atmospheric lead pollution most acutely affected neighborhoods inhabited by poor and working-class Black Detroiters. Between 1933 and 1938, 73% of patients diagnosed with silico-tuberculosis were foundry workers, where Black people composed the majority of that workforce. Foundry workers had a death rate 79.37 percent higher than all workers.¹⁵⁷

One of the geographical areas where Black people concentrated due to the plethora of discriminatory policies and practices is the southwest and downriver areas. Expansion of the Marathon oil

¹⁵⁶ Smitherman, Herbert C., R., Kallenbach, Lee, *"Dying Before Their Time III: 19-Year (1999-2017) Comparative Analysis of Excess Mortality in Detroit,"* Detroit Area on Aging, Wayne State University School of Medicine, July 2020

¹⁵⁷ *"Addressing Racial Inequities in America: A United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Audit of US Black Communities, Detroit, Michigan,"* Avila, Fan, Jessa, and Zhang, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, 2024, *supra* at pp 14-15. Appendix.

refinery, steel mills and power plants has drastically increased the environmental contaminants to which Black Detroiters in that area are exposed. Interstate 75 is a congested, eight lane highway used by 100,000 cars and diesel-powered semi-trucks every day, emitting significant amounts of toxins, elevating the risk of cancer, respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, asthma, and liver failure in the region. In 2019, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) issued at least nine violations to Marathon for noxious odors and excessive toxic emissions.¹⁵⁸

In 2001, the Detroit Public Schools, while being governed by an appointed Emergency Manager, built Beard Elementary School in that same southwest Detroit neighborhood, serving mostly Black and Latino families, right on top of a dumping site contaminated with hundreds of toxic substances, including PCB's, lead, arsenic and radioactive paint. Litigation filed by disturbed parents and community members was settled.¹⁵⁹

Detroit often struggles to meet the Environmental Protection Agency's air quality standards, especially in the predominantly Black neighborhoods in proximity to major roadways. The majority of Detroit ranks in the 99th percentile in the nation for prevalence of adults living with asthma.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, Detroit has earned the unsavory reputation of being the third worst city in America to live in with asthma.¹⁶¹

Black Detroiters Live in Food Apartheid

It was discussed earlier that one of the principal targets during the 1967 Rebellion was local shops run by merchants who were detached from the Detroit Black community. This problem is still

¹⁵⁸ . "Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force," University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, *supra* at pp 52-53. Appendix.

¹⁵⁹ Complaint, *Lucero v Detroit Public Schools*, filed 7-26-01, ED MI 01-cv 72792-DT

¹⁶⁰ "Detroit named third worst city to in with asthma," Jena Brooker, Bridge Detroit, September 10, 2024; asthmacapitals.com

¹⁶¹ "Harms Report for the Detroit Reparations Task Force," University of Michigan, August 2023-August 2024, *Id.* at pp 52-53. Appendix.

widespread in Detroit today. Almost all gas stations, party stores, corner stores, dollar stores, beauty supply stores, nail salons, grocery stores and supermarkets are owned and operated by non-Black immigrants, who commonly don't hire from the Black Detroit community; don't live or shop in Detroit; don't share or circulate wealth in Detroit; don't support Black community events or organizations; sometimes don't even speak to or verbally interact with paying Black Detroit patrons; are often accused to treating members of the Black Detroit community, especially young Black women, with disdain or abuse; and on more than a few occasions, have been guilty of assaulting or murdering of Black Detroiters.

Detroit has been described as a “food desert,” because of the dearth of shops where one can buy much other than calorie-dense, nutritionally-sparse fast food items, for high prices, in stores which are often unclean and unwelcoming. But rather than a “food desert,” as explained by food justice activist Malik Yakini, Detroit in truth has been beset by “food apartheid,” because what happened to Detroit was by design:

We want people to realize that the disparities in the food system are anything but nature; they're not something that just occurred; they are intentional and the result of intentional policy... Food apartheid helps us to better conceptualize the food conditions we often see in Black communities ... It's a term that I think is more accurate for Black communities than “food desert.”¹⁶²

As of this writing, there are possibly only two Black-owned grocery stores in Detroit –

¹⁶² Interview with Malik Yakini, March 22, 2024

Neighborhood Grocery, in the Jefferson-Chalmers community, and Linwood Fresh Market – plus the Black-led Detroit People’s Food Co-op, which is owned and operated collectively by more than 4,000 community members. To cultivate a food sovereign ecosystem, the Detroit People’s Food Co-op is affiliated with the urban farming network in Detroit, and throughout the nation. These new markets are striving to provide more nutritious, locally produced, and sourced, culturally relevant foods to the Detroit community.

A Perfect Storm Raged Against Black Detroiters

It is called The Great Recession of 2008. The federal government spent trillions shoring up failing banks, insurers, and corporations, specifically rescuing General Motors and Chrysler from ruin.

Employment fell by 54% in Detroit from 2000 through 2020, but half of that happened in 2008 alone.¹⁶³

What happened next to Detroit’s Black residents, while unemployment in the city was soaring to heights of 24%, and while retirees’ pensions and Detroit’s precious assets were being plundered by the state of Michigan -- via its henchmen, the state-appointed Emergency Managers who usurped elected representatives on City Council and the School Board -- was nothing less than a tsunami of epic proportion.

A constellation of three seismic events was heaped upon Detroit Black residents all at once, pillaging what wealth they had managed to accrue, destabilizing them, and leaving many of them scrambling, yet again, for a place to lay their heads.

It is important to recall that these events adversely affected not only homeowners, but renters as well. When owners of rental properties succumb to predatory practices, foreclosure and eviction ensues, properties are left vacant and vandalized, another Black family falls into housing jeopardy, and another

¹⁶³ Turbeville, Wallace C., “The Detroit Bankruptcy,” *Demos*, November 2013, p 5.

deep wound is inflicted on what had been a stable community.

Peddling Predatory Mortgages¹⁶⁴

After decades of racist housing policies and practices, what remained was ripe for pillaging by pirates masquerading as real estate brokers, banks, and lending institutions.

It started around 2005, when real estate brokers nationwide began marketing inferior subprime and adjustable-rate mortgages. Subprime loans are those with higher interest rates (at least 3% above standard rates) and less favorable terms. Stagnant and falling home prices, and the resetting of unaffordable adjustable rates, were among the major drivers for a foreclosure crisis that hit the nation in 2007.

The impact on African Americans was grave. Decades of racist housing policies by federal, state and local government actors, along with decades of racist housing practices by private actors, had conspired to concentrate Detroit's Black residents in specified areas, filled with people who had been cut off from mainstream financial institutions. "When subprime lenders went looking for prey, they found black people waiting like ducks in a pen."¹⁶⁵

African Americans were a major target for these unregulated, high cost and unsustainable loans, that triggered the housing market collapse and the Great Recession of 2008.¹⁶⁶ One bank officer reported that they specifically targeted Black churches, convincing influential pastors to persuade congregants to take out subprime loans. Another reported that they targeted Black people for subprime loans even when they qualified for prime loans, and they targeted undereducated and non-English-speaking borrowers in

¹⁶⁴ Much gratitude is owed to Detroit social justice attorney, Jerome Goldberg, who substantially contributed the contents of this section pertaining to predatory mortgage lending

¹⁶⁵ Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *supra* at 45

¹⁶⁶ "The State of Housing in Black America 2013," National Association of Real Estate Brokers, vi

particular.¹⁶⁷

This criminal enterprise is spelled out in depth in the United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee report titled Wall Street and the Financial Crisis, *Anatomy of a Financial Collapse*, published on April 11, 2011. The report details extensively how the banks and financial institutions trained agents to go into oppressed neighborhoods, entice Black homeowners into refinancing their homes for home repairs or to pay medical bills, and then sign them into fraudulent subprime loans. These loans had low teaser rates for the first year, which adjusted upward in every succeeding year resulting in exorbitant, usurious payments the banks knew could not be met.¹⁶⁸

Sixty-two percent of subprime loans in the Detroit area went to African Americans. When the national home finance market collapsed in 2008, properties in Detroit plummeted in value. Many homeowners were stuck with mortgage payments that exceeded their property values.

In 2007, Detroit's mortgage foreclosure rate was the nation's highest, at 5%. Since the beginning of the national foreclosure crisis in early 2007, nearly 8% of African American homeowners were foreclosed upon, compared to 4.5% of non Hispanic whites, controlling for differences in incomes among the groups.¹⁶⁹ By 2011, there were more than 90 foreclosed properties per square mile in Detroit.¹⁷⁰ Black families experienced foreclosures at the rate of 17 per 1,000 households, compared to white communities' 10 per 1000. From 2005 to 2015, 65,000 Detroit families lost their homes due to mortgage foreclosures.

Black Detroit homeowners joined in litigation against Morgan Stanley bank, for its particularly egregious conduct targeting them for subprime loans, but the federal court thwarted that litigation.¹⁷¹

The dispossession suffered by Black Detroiters occurred due to the widespread, deliberately

¹⁶⁷ *Wasted Wealth: How the Wall Street Crash Continues to Stall Economic Recovery and Deepen Racial Inequity*, Alliance for Just Society, Ben Henry, Jill Reese, Angel Torres, May 201, p 4

¹⁶⁸ United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee report titled [Wall Street and the Financial Crisis](#), *Anatomy of a Financial Collapse*, published on April 11, 2011

¹⁶⁹ "The State of Housing in Black America 2013," National Association of Real Estate Brokers, p 2

¹⁷⁰ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-War Detroit*, Preface, *supra*

¹⁷¹ *Adkins v Morgan Stanley*, 656 Fed Appx 555 (2nd Cir, 2016).

predatory, and criminal subprime lending practices directed against African Americans. These criminal lending practices by the banks led to the wholesale theft of Black wealth. From 2005 to 2009, African Americans' net household wealth fell 53%, to \$12,124 per household, compared to white median net worth, which fell 16%, to \$113,149.¹⁷²

Illegal Property Tax Foreclosures¹⁷³

The wave of mortgage foreclosures that hit Detroit in 2007 was followed closely by a wave of property tax foreclosures, which inundated and collapsed Detroit's housing market, further destabilizing and ravaging low-income Black Detroit homeowners. 56% of all mortgage foreclosures in Detroit became blighted properties or were foreclosed again for nonpayment of property taxes.

Starting in 2009, the city of Detroit began illegally over-assessing property tax values and inflating property tax bills. From 2009 until 2015, the city illegally inflated property tax assessments of 53 to 84% of homes.¹⁷⁴ "Conservative estimates show that in 2011, the city was illegally inflating the assessed value of about 53 percent of residential properties citywide, and in 2012 this number jumped to 73 percent."¹⁷⁵

Moreover, the illegal overassessment disproportionately impacted the lowest valued homes, and Black Detroiters faced the greatest burden. "10 percent of all homes and 25 percent of lowest-valued homes...would not have gone into tax foreclosure but for the illegally inflated property tax assessments."¹⁷⁶ To add insult to injury, many who lost their homes would have qualified for the city's low-income property tax exemption, but that program was not widely publicized or accessible. So poor and working-class families suffered the greatest harm.

¹⁷² *Wasted Wealth: How the Wall Street Crash Continues to Stall Economic Recovery and Deepen Racial Inequity*, Alliance for Just Society, *supra* at p 1

¹⁷³ Much gratitude is owed to Professor Bernadette Atuahene, whose scholarship greatly informs this discussion.

¹⁷⁴ Atuahene, *Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America*, *supra* at p 309

¹⁷⁵ Atuahene, *Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America*, *Id.* at pp 222- 223

¹⁷⁶ Atuahene, *Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America*, *Id.* at p 223

When homeowners could not afford to pay, Wayne County foreclosed on their homes. Wayne County foreclosed on 1 in 3 Detroit homes, displacing over 100,000 Detroiters for failure to pay the city's inflated property tax bills. In 2020, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled in *Rafaeli v Oakland County* that the practice of counties retaining the surplus proceeds from the sale of tax foreclosed properties constitutes an unconstitutional "taking of property without just compensation." The Court ordered counties like Wayne County to refund surplusage to the foreclosed homeowners.¹⁷⁷

Estimates are that the city overtaxed homeowners by \$600 million dollars between 2010 and 2016.¹⁷⁸ "The property tax foreclosure crisis has caused such massive displacement of families and disassembling of neighborhoods that activists began calling it a hurricane with no water."¹⁷⁹

For the city's role in this plunder of Black Detroit homeownership, Professor Atuahene may have coined the term "predatory governance," which she said occurs when "public officials replenish public coffers through racist policies."¹⁸⁰ "Through a devastating game of musical chairs, property tax foreclosure unjustly ejects Detroit homeowners from their homes. These individuals and families must then scramble to find homes to rent, which stand empty because inflated property tax debt contributes to both mortgage and tax foreclosure."¹⁸¹

The problem continued to replicate itself for years, and has not yet been rectified. In 2020, City Council rejected a plan to compensate homeowners who had lost their homes due to property tax over-assessment, and in 2022, Mayor Duggan claimed payment of cash compensation would violate the Michigan constitution.

¹⁷⁷ *Rafaeli v Oakland County*, 505 Mich 429 (2020)

¹⁷⁸ "Tackling Detroit's Over-Assessment Problem," Citizen's Research Council, October 21, 2021

¹⁷⁹ Atuahene, *Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America*, *supra* at p 152

¹⁸⁰ Atuahene, *Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America*, *Id.* at p 150

¹⁸¹ Atuahene, *Plundered: How Racist Policies Undermine Black Homeownership in America*, *Id.* at p 148

Water Rate Hikes and Shutoffs

The city's water and sewerage policy put the nail in the coffin of housing dispossession for thousands of Black Detroiters.

It's always critically important to recall that the state of Michigan is surrounded by the Great Lakes, which contain an astounding 20% of the world's fresh water!

In the 2000's Detroiters were paying between 3% and 21% for water service.¹⁸² This, in contrast with federal Environmental Protection Agency guidelines indicating that access to water and sewerage should comprise no more than 2.5% of a family's income.¹⁸³

In 2006, Detroit City Council passed a resolution on implementing a Water Affordability Plan capping bills at 2-3%, depending on income, which was inspired by the Honorable late Councilwoman JoAnn Watson and the People's Water Board, but the Kilpatrick administration refused to implement it.

In 2013, Governor Snyder appointed Kevin Orr as the city's unelected Emergency Manager. Orr immediately put the city in bankruptcy. Orr ordered massive water shutoffs as a means of debt collection.

As Detroit was entering the bankruptcy, Canadian water rights advocate Maude Barlow observed the driving forces of racist and capitalist exploitation lurking underneath:

Detroit is a victim of decades of market driven neoliberal policy that put business and profit ahead of public good. Social security programs have been slashed and their delivery privatized. Investment in essential infrastructure has been slashed ... With globalization and the hollowing out of the once

¹⁸² *Mapping the Water Crisis: The Dismantling of African American Neighborhoods*, We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective (2016), p 7

¹⁸³ *Mapping the Water Crisis: The Dismantling of African American Neighborhoods*, We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective (2016), *Id.* at p 20

mighty auto industry, wealth and businesses fled to [t]he suburbs, draining the city of its tax base and the water department of its revenues ... The burden of paying for the water and sewer services landed squarely on those who stayed, mostly poor African Americans. Rates rose 119% in a decade in a city with record high unemployment and a 40% poverty rate.¹⁸⁴

As predicted, while under the dictatorship of emergency management, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) launched a full-scale war against Detroit families needing water. DWSD simultaneously raised its rates and accelerated its policy of terminating service to households with delinquent water bills.

Almost half of DWSD accounts had delinquent bills, accounting for \$118 million in unpaid charges.¹⁸⁵ DWSD shut off water to 30,000 households in the summer of 2014.¹⁸⁶ By 2017, 70,000 homes, or a full one tenth of the population, were without water.¹⁸⁷

DWSD is authorized to shut off water to customers whose accounts are 45 days past due. These customers live in the city of Detroit and are primarily African American, working-class, and low-income. Water authorities in suburban municipalities, in contrast, offer much more lenient late-payment options to

¹⁸⁴ “*Water cut offs in Detroit a violation of human rights*,” Maude Barlow, FLOW Water Advocates, May 26, 2014, published June 4, 2024

¹⁸⁵ *Mapping the Water Crisis: The Dismantling of African American Neighborhoods*, We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective (2016), *Id.* at p 15

¹⁸⁶ *Mapping the Water Crisis: The Dismantling of African American Neighborhoods*, We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective (2016), *Id.* at p 15.

¹⁸⁷ “*#Wage Love: Water Activists Build a Global Movement*,” Melissa Mendes & Anne Elizabeth Moore, Truthout, April 19, 2017

their customers; some do not allow water to be shut off at all¹⁸⁸. And DWSD has a far more lenient policy toward its corporate customers, tolerating chronic non-payment which racks up huge delinquencies.

One of the most egregious effects of a water shutoff is the potential risk of removal of one's children from the home by the Michigan Department of Child Protective Services, because the lack of running water poses a hazard to their health.

The people resist in the streets. The city hired Homrich, Inc., a demolition company, to execute the shutoffs. Nine activists who came to be known as the Homrich 9 were arrested for blocking access to shutoff trucks for several hours. Water rights activists walked 70 miles from Detroit to Flint, connecting Detroit shutoffs with the ignominious Flint water poisoning.

The people resist in lecture halls. United Nations Special Rapporteurs for Water and Housing visited Detroit and condemned the city for human rights violations.

The people resist in the assembly halls. In 2015, then State Representative Stephanie Chang and others introduced a bipartisan "Water is a Human Right Package," which would have established water as a human right in Michigan, created water affordability provisions, decriminalized re-connection by customers, and protected vulnerable citizens from shutoff.

As a State Senator, in 2023, Chang and others introduced a transformative package championed by water rights activists in the People's Water Board Coalition, which hopes to cap water bills at 3% of household income for low-income households, and again, protect against shutoffs and decriminalize customer reconnection.¹⁸⁹

With the introduction of that Bill, Senator Chang noted that, since 1980, average water costs, adjusted for inflation, have increased by 188% in the state, and by up to 320% in urban areas in the state.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ *Mapping the Water Crisis: The Dismantling of African American Neighborhoods*, We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective (2016), *supra* at p 9

¹⁸⁹ As of this writing, the Bill has not been passed.

¹⁹⁰ Press Release October 2, 2023, Sen. Stephanie Chang

317,000 Michigan residents were behind in their water bill during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus posing a significant public health hazard.¹⁹¹

After Duggan was elected Mayor in 2013, he also rejected a water affordability plan.¹⁹²

The people resist in the halls of justice. Nikole Hill lay recovering in a hospital bed from pneumonia that left her lungs compromised, which she believed was caused when her water was shut off.¹⁹³ The absence of running water in any home poses a public health hazard to everyone in the community, as the risk of disease is greatly enhanced. Maurikia Lyda was a single mother of four children on Social Security, who could not afford the \$1200 water bill needed to turn her water back on.

The two women joined other victims of water shutoffs in a lawsuit in *Lyda v City of Detroit*, asserting that water shutoffs violate human and constitutional rights to due process, equal protection, and health and safety; and violate the public trust. Because the city was in the throes of Bankruptcy at the time, the case had to be addressed in Bankruptcy Court. The Bankruptcy judge dismissed the case, essentially refusing to recognize the existence of any legal right to water service or affordable water service.

On appeal, in 2016, the federal Court of Appeals agreed that the “inability ...to pay for water service on a current basis or to make up large arrearages due to past inability to pay is a serious, tragic problem facing the city and some residents....Living without water, even if only for a few days, poses a substantial risk to health and safety. Beyond that, it is a significant indignity.”¹⁹⁴ Somehow, the Court still ruled that the dismissal of the lawsuit was proper. A subsequent federal lawsuit challenging the disproportionate impact of water shutoffs on Black Detroiters is still pending before Judge Denise Page Hood in federal District Court.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Press Release October 2, 2023, Sen. Stephanie Chang, *Id.*

¹⁹² “*#Wage Love: Water Activists Build a Global Movement*,” Melissa Mendes & Anne Elizabeth Moore, Truthout, April 19, 2017

¹⁹³ Voicesfromthegrassroots.org, interview of Nikole Hill by Peter Blackmer & Oriana Yilma, May 25, 2019.

¹⁹⁴ *In re City of Detroit*, 841 Fed 684, 700, 703 (CA 6, 2016)

¹⁹⁵ *Taylor v City of Detroit*, 2020 WL 3891425, filed July 9, 2020.

The pressure the community has applied has resulted in the recent implementation of The Lifeline Plan, a new income-based payment plan, as of December 2024.

The DWSD campaign to shut off water is an implicit component of blight demolition, as a feeder for displacement. In 2006, DWSD began placing unpaid water bills on property tax bills, thus rendering the home vulnerable to foreclosure.¹⁹⁶ Detroit's unaffordable water, then, is contributing materially to Detroit's blight demolition program and tax foreclosure campaign, both of which contribute to the displacement of the city's poorest residents.

Unaffordable water, coupled with illegal property tax overassessments, in the wake of the mortgage foreclosure crisis, have colluded to keep many Detroit Black residents in a perpetual state of uprootedness in the quest to create homes for themselves.

Improving Outcomes: Restorative Housing Justice, and Community Land Trusts. Nancy Parker, Executive Director of the Detroit Justice Center, proposes adoption of a "restorative housing justice framework," including community land trusts, to alleviate harms permeating throughout our housing system in Detroit:

The city should utilize a restorative housing justice framework to address historical harms like redlining, racial zoning, and predatory lending. The solution is to build legal and policy tools that repair the damage and injustices. This involves centering the voices of displaced and unhoused residents in policy development (not wealthy developers and policymakers), removing barriers to homeownership, and supporting wealth-building for

¹⁹⁶ *Mapping the Water Crisis: The Dismantling of African American Neighborhoods*, We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective (2016), *supra* at 23.

communities denied generational wealth. Legal and policy tools can be implemented so that all residents access housing co-ops and Community Land Trusts, ensuring no one is locked out of economic opportunity.

One key strategy to create affordable housing and support healthy communities is the development of Community Land Trusts (CLTs). CLTs are democratically governed, non-profit organizations that own land and lease it to others for community benefit, including residential, commercial, or agricultural uses. Rather than selling public land to private developers, this model promotes the transfer of vacant land bank parcels to CLTs to provide long-term, permanent affordability and prevent future displacement. Since the land is owned by a nonprofit, property taxes are separated from the homes/structures and not the responsibility of the homeowners. CLTs can create economically diverse communities, preserve affordable housing, prevent displacement, speculation, and unwanted land uses, discourage predatory lending and reduce foreclosures, create a source of income to support local needs and promote local entrepreneurship.

Meanwhile, Detroit Public Schools Were Ravaged

The Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD)¹⁹⁷ currently serves 107 Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade schools, and over 53,000 students. 82% of its students are Black.

The state of Michigan took over the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) on two separate occasions, in 1999 and 2009. The second coup lasted seven years. Both takeovers were met with strong resistance from

¹⁹⁷ The Detroit Public School Community District was so named when it was created in 2016 to replace the Detroit Public Schools.

parents, educators, Civil Rights leaders, Black Power organizers, community activists, and student activists, including those organized under By Any Means Necessary (BAMN).¹⁹⁸

Prior to the first state takeover in 1999, Detroit had the most African-centered schools of any city in the country. That number has dwindled from 20 to 3. In 1993, Detroit Board of Education member Kwame Kenyatta introduced an African-centered curriculum to be used at all DPS schools. Some textbooks were changed to be more reflective in content and images of the majority African American student population. DPS held staff trainings for teachers on African-centered instruction. All these efforts to provide Detroit children with educational instruction which celebrated and elevated Black culture and history stopped abruptly with the state takeover.¹⁹⁹

When 1999 takeover was implemented by Governor Engler, DPS had modestly increasing student enrollment, a \$115 million budget fund balance, and academic scores in the broad mid-range. There was no performance justification for the takeover. Engler nullified the elected school board, replacing it with a “reform board” under the jurisdiction of Mayor Archer.

The 1999 state takeover resulted in an enrollment decrease of 16 percent across five years while charter school enrollment grew to 200 percent.²⁰⁰

The suspected explanation among activists for the 1999 takeover is that the state wanted control over the \$1.2 billion remaining from the 1.5 billion bond approved by voters in 1994.²⁰¹

Somehow, the DPS budget surplus vanished. In April, 2004, then-CEO Kenneth Burnley reported a deficit projection of \$200 million. Governor Granholm then approved the sale of \$210 million in bonds, giving

¹⁹⁸ Blackmer, Peter, “Detroit: Austerity and Politics, Part 2,” *Against the Current*, July / August 2021

¹⁹⁹ “Addressing Racial Inequities in America: A United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Audit of US Black Communities, Detroit, Michigan,” Avila, Fan, Jessa, and Zhang, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, 2024. Appendix

²⁰⁰ Shaun M. Black *et al.*, “Impacts of Emergency Financial Management as Governance Reform in Michigan Schools,” *Voices of Reform: Educational Research to Inform and Reform* 5, no 1 (2022): 17

²⁰¹ Bellant, Russ, “Robert Bobb and the Failure of Public Act 72: A Case Study,” 2011, p 2

Burnley another pot of money to spend while saddling the future elected Board with \$21 million per year in debt for the next 15 years.²⁰²

Burnley proceeded to close dozens of schools, including the District's only school for deaf children, and layoff thousands of employees, creating a panic in the community that caused the immediate loss of 9,000 students, and a total loss of 19,697 students over the next two years.²⁰³

Governance over the school system returned to the elected Board from 2006 through 2009.

When the state commandeered the Detroit public school system again in 2009, Governor Granholm appointed Robert Bobb not only over financial systems, but over academics as well. "Granholm avoided seeking direct legislative approval. She used the emergency financial statute to give power to Robert Bobb to not only take over finances, which the law allows, but she approved use of that power to unlawfully control academics and thus all spending of the District. She thus effected a total State takeover under her direct authority without legislative or voter approval."²⁰⁴

In November 2010, the Legislature passed PA 4, greatly expanding the powers of "emergency financial manager" to "emergency manager," thus giving sanction to Granholm's complete expropriation of the Detroit schools in 2009. Snyder was elected Governor in November 2010; he signed PA 4 and it took effect in March 2011.

The community was outraged by this usurpation of authority over our children's education. Voters marshalled 300,000 signatures on a Referendum to place rejection of PA 4 on the ballot. In November 2012, the voters overturned PA 4, soundly rejecting its expansive overreach of powers granted to EM's.

Then with an overnight sleight of hand, the lame duck Legislature passed PA 436 in December 2012, reinstating the EM's broad powers, which the people had specifically rejected, and, under the sound

²⁰² Bellant, Russ, *"Robert Bobb and the Failure of Public Act 72: A Case Study,"* 2011, *Id. at p 2*

²⁰³ Bellant, Russ, *"Robert Bobb and the Failure of Public Act 72: A Case Study,"* 2011, *Id. at p 2*

²⁰⁴ Bellant, Russ, *"Robert Bobb and the Failure of Public Act 72: A Case Study,"* 2011, *Id. at p 2*

counsel Kevin Orr's Jones Day law firm associates, they succeeded in rendering the new provision impervious to public repeal.

The elected Board remained intact but was powerless.

From 2009 to 2016, the District was managed by a series of four emergency managers who scorned the elected school Board; implemented severe budget cuts; closed numerous schools; and eliminated essential programs and services, such as arts, music education, counseling, and extracurricular activities. As enrollment decreased, schools faced crippling underfunding, leading to decaying infrastructure and the depletion of essential resources.

The unelected EM's closed 195 of the district's 288 schools, and enrollment dropped from 168,000 to 47,000.²⁰⁵ The rate of decline in student enrollment was 73% when the city population was falling by only 34%²⁰⁶, which means city residents were sending their children outside of the District. In fact, many of Detroit's children now attend charter, private and suburban public schools. In 2013, there were more Detroit children enrolled in charter schools than in the public school system.

The looting of the Detroit public schools was absolute. During the state-imposed dictatorship, the District's operating budget went from a \$115 million surplus to a deficit of \$3.5 billion²⁰⁷, hundreds of schools were closed, and the District lost over a hundred thousand students.

In 2014, insult was heaped upon injury, when Governor Snyder appointed as EM over the Detroit schools the same Darnell Early who was culpable of contaminating the Flint River, causing irreparable cognitive injury to Flint's largely Black and Brown children from lead poisoning, and creating a deadly outbreak of Legionnaires' disease.

²⁰⁵ *"Public School Enrollment Trends in Detroit,"* Citizen's Research Council of Michigan, June 2016

²⁰⁶ *"Public School Enrollment Trends in Detroit,"* Citizen's Research Council of Michigan, June 2016, *Id.*

²⁰⁷ *Dismantled: The Breakup of an Urban School System in Detroit, 1980-2016*, Leanne Kang, New York: Teachers College Press, 2020

EM Early resigned in 2016, and local control was reinstated. That same year, “Read by Third Grade” legislation was passed, putting the onus of runaway illiteracy rates on a depleted and stripped public school system. And legislation was passed permitting the District to hire uncertified teachers for Detroit’s already forsaken school children.

The large exodus of students out of the District seeking better opportunities further exacerbated funding declines for DPSCD and perpetuated educational inequities. This migration resulted in a loss of per-pupil funding for DPSCD schools, making it even more challenging to address the significant and persistent infrastructural and educational disparities, manifesting as racial and class disparities, across the region.

In 2002, the Bush Administration introduced the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy, which elevated the significance of standardized test scores as an indicator of success, and ushered in the prevalent practice of “teaching to the test.” This overemphasis on test scores led to the disregard of pedagogy among professional educators, and the marginalization of social studies, at the expense of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).²⁰⁸

The Intercultural Development Research Association reported that low-income, so-called “minority” students are most likely to experience a “narrowing of curriculum and instruction,” and further warns 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.”²⁰⁹ Disinvestment in the District, worsened by policies such as the NCLB, caused funding to be diverted from poorly performing schools to charter, private and suburban schools.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ “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>

²⁰⁹ “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>

²¹⁰ Barnum, Matt, “Critics of Charter Schools Say They’re Hurting School Districts. Are They Right?” *Chalkbeat*,

In 2009, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan described the Detroit school system as “New Orleans ... without Hurricane Katrina.”²¹¹

A 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. Research proves there is a direct correlation between the quality of school facilities and student achievement.²¹² The estimated cost to repair was \$226.8 million, but only \$25 million was allocated.²¹³ Only 35% of the buildings have air conditioning, essential for learning in the midst of rising temperatures due to climate change, itself the product of environmental racism.

The extreme deficiency of the Detroit public school system was exquisitely described in *Gary B. v Snyder (later Whitmer)*, a recent lawsuit asserting that decades of disinvestment, neglect and deliberate indifference have denied Detroit public schoolchildren access to the most basic building block of education: literacy. The lawsuit posited that lack of access to literacy, properly trained teachers, basic instructional materials, and support for special learning and mental health needs violated the children’s fundamental rights.²¹⁴

The litigants in *Gary B.* asserted that the alarming outcomes in Detroit schools are a predictable consequence of the state’s consignment of the children to “chaotic, under-resourced, and unsafe schools that lack the necessary learning and teaching conditions for effective delivery of literacy instruction.”²¹⁵

November 9, 2023, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/6/11/21108318/critics-of-charter-schools-say-they-re-hurting-school-districts-are-they-right/>

²¹¹ Complaint, *Gary B v Snyder (later Whitmer)*, 957 F3d 616 (6th Cir 2020), September 13, 2016, p 2

²¹² *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>

²¹³ *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>.

²¹⁴ Complaint, *Gary B v Snyder (later Whitmer)*, 957 F3d 616 (6th Cir 2020), September 13, 2016, *Id.*

²¹⁵ Complaint, *Gary B v Snyder (later Whitmer)*, 957 F3d 616 (6th Cir 2020), September 13, 2016, *Id.*

In an Opinion authored by esteemed African-American Jurist Eric Clay on April 23, 2020, the federal Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals recognized “a substantial relationship between access to education and access to economic and political power, one in which race-based restrictions on education have been used to subjugate African Americans and other people of color,” and “that the denial of education has long been viewed as a particularly serious injustice.” The Court held, for the first time in US history, that there is a fundamental Due Process right to “basic minimum education.”²¹⁶

The parties recently settled the case, in a manner which potentially will benefit the individual plaintiffs and all children in the District, but which most regrettably nullifies the legal precedential value of the case.²¹⁷ This means Judge Clay’s phenomenal declaration of the due process right to minimal education has been technically erased, but freedom-seeking people, thirsting for knowledge, will forever amplify it.

Dictatorship Takes Over, and Detroit is Plundered

Democracy was mocked when the state of Michigan usurped our elected school board and hijacked our school system. Democracy was trounced when the state took over our city.

We begin by recalling the series of events by which the state seized control over Detroit Public Schools.

Legislation allowing the appointment of EM’s was first passed in Michigan in 1990, but it was rarely invoked. In fact, the state essentially only uses the provision to disempower and disenfranchise Black and Brown people.

²¹⁶ *Gary B v Whitmer*, 957 F3d 616, 648-649 (6th Cir 2020), decided April 23, 2020

²¹⁷ Governor Whitmer agreed to pay \$280,000 to the seven named Plaintiffs, which is \$40,000 each, and \$2.7 to the District for literacy resources, to seek \$95 million in literacy funding, and to the creation of two Task Forces. “*Sixth Circuit Vacates Right-to-Literacy Ruling*,” The National Law Review, August 3, 2025; “Michigan Settlement Attempts to Moot Potential En Banc Review of Right-to-Literacy Ruling,” Sixth Circuit Appellate Blog; “*Detroit literacy lawsuit ends without a ‘right to read’ precedent. Advocates say they’ll keep fighting*,” Chalkbeat Detroit, June 10, 2025. On August 2, 2025, the case was dismissed as moot.

From 2008 through 2013, of 10.1% of Michigan residents under Emergency Management, 70.7% were African American, 7.3% were Hispanic and only 2% were white. While African Americans comprised only 14% of the state population, 51% of African Americans were under Emergency Management at some point.²¹⁸

The state took control of the Detroit schools in 1999, then again in 2009. In 2009, the EM was given full authority over financial systems, but also over academics. Then, in November 2010, the Legislature passed PA 4, effective March 2011, which greatly expanded the powers of “emergency financial manager” to “emergency manager,” thus giving cover to that unauthorized power grab by the state. PA 4 granted autocratic powers over collective bargaining agreements, public assets, municipal budgets, and the ability to initiate bankruptcy proceedings.

The community was incensed by this power grab, submitted a Referendum to place the matter on the ballot, and voted to overturn PA 4 in November 2012. Then, in an act of true betrayal, the lame duck Legislature passed PA 436 in December 2012, reinstating the same broad powers to EM’s that the people had specifically rejected. Through some further trickery, PA 436 was made bulletproof, and cannot be repealed.

Untethered, Governor Snyder declared a financial emergency in the city of Detroit and appointed corporate lawyer Kevyn Orr as emergency manager on March 14, 2013. Unleashed, and with democracy suspended, Orr accelerated water shutoffs as a bill-collecting measure, to prime the water department for privatization. He eviscerated collective bargaining agreements. He cut our city up in parts and sold off valued lands, assets, services, and treasured jewels.

²¹⁸ *Racial Inequality and the Implementation of Emergency Management Laws in Economically Distressed Urban Areas*, Shawna J. Lee, Amy Krings, Sara Rose, Krista Dover, Jessica Ayoub, Fatima Salman, Children and Youth Services Review 70 (2016), p 4.

On March 27, 2013, a group of residents and activists filed suit in federal court, asserting that the sweeping powers of the EM provision supplanted elected representation for a disproportionate number of Black, Brown and low-income Michigan residents, in violation of several federal constitutional provisions, including the 13th Amendment's prohibition against "the badges and incidents of slavery." Unfortunately, the Court found no violation of our rights.²¹⁹

Orr filed bankruptcy on July 18, 2013, giving our city the dubious distinction of declaring the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history. Orr used age-old racist narratives to justify the takeover and privatization of public assets which ensued. By blaming "dumb, lazy, happy and rich" Detroiters for the economic crisis, the self-described "benevolent dictator" depicted a majority-Black city that was incapable of self-governance, in massive debt through its own faults, and in need of saving.²²⁰ Notably, Orr pandered to the same racist tropes that had fueled the white flight that caused the depletion of our tax revenues that plunged us into bankruptcy in the first place!

Orr claimed our city had \$18 to 20 billion in debt. This included \$5.8 billion he contended was owed by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD), when in fact that debt belonged to the entire region.²²¹ Yet, when the bankruptcy ended in December, 2014, the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) had been erected in place of DWSD, and ownership and control of Detroit's water was transferred to a regional authority.

The city leases DWSD to GLWA. Further verifying the racist motivation to disempower Black Detroiters, Detroit's political representation on GLWA is now a mere two out of six members. Further evidencing the racist underpinnings beneath the taking, GLWA charges white suburbs wholesale rates but

²¹⁹ The case was dismissed by the District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan on multiple grounds. *Phillips v Snyder, now Bellant v Snyder*, 2014 WL 6474344 (ED MI, 2010). The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed. *Phillips v Snyder, now Bellant v Snyder*, 836 F3d 707 (6th Cir, 2016). The Supreme Court refused to hear the case. *Phillips v Bellant*, cert den'd 583 US 816 (2017).

²²⁰ Blackmer, Peter, "Detroit: Austerity and Politics, Part 2," *Against the Current* July / August 2021

²²¹ Turbeville, Wallace C., "*The Detroit Bankruptcy*," *Dêmos*, November 2013

charges Black Detroit retail rates.²²² Detroit pays 83% of sewerage system costs, while suburban residents pay 17%.²²³

Detroit -- the city at the straits, whose core identity has always been deeply enmeshed with its legacy being situated at the waterway, the international crossroad over which Black Detroiters fled in pursuit of freedom -- Detroit lost its water.

In proclaiming that our fall from grace was due to our laziness and the failure to pay our bills, Orr did not bother to share how much of the city's indebtedness had resulted from very bad investments in risky ventures, making grand profits for bankers and investors. \$800 million of the debt carried a floating interest rate, which was immediately "swapped" or converted to fixed interest rates.²²⁴ To accomplish this, the city entered into risky financial arrangements, triggering hefty bank fees and credit downgrades.²²⁵

Worse of all, Orr tried to blame the city's indebtedness on its workforce and retirees. But pension payments were not responsible for the debt. Pension contributions between 2008 and 2023 remained relatively flat, while healthcare contributions increased by 3.25%, which is less than the national average of 4%.²²⁶ And the city's overall spending during that time had actually decreased by \$356.3 million.²²⁷

In truth, the city of Detroit's bankruptcy was driven by a severe decline in revenues, and, importantly, not an increase in obligations to pension funds. That decline in revenue resulted from depopulation and chronic unemployment, which caused property and income tax revenues to plummet. The city's population declined from nearly 2 million in 1950 to 714,000 in 2010.

²²² "Addressing Racial Inequities in America: A United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Audit of US Black Communities, Detroit, Michigan," Avila, Fan, Jessa, and Zhang, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, 2024, *supra* at 36.

²²³ "Addressing Racial Inequities in America: A United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Audit of US Black Communities, Detroit, Michigan," Avila, Fan, Jessa, and Zhang, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, 2024, *Id.*

²²⁴ Turbeville, Wallace C., "The Detroit Bankruptcy," *Démos*, November 2013, *Id.* at p 30

²²⁵ Turbeville, Wallace, C., "The Detroit Bankruptcy," *Démos*, November 2013, *Id.* at pp 7-8

²²⁶ Turbeville, Wallace, C., "The Detroit Bankruptcy," *Démos*, November 2013, *Id.* at p 7

²²⁷ Turbeville, Wallace, C., "The Detroit Bankruptcy," *Démos*, November 2013, *Id.* at pp 6-7

But the economic decline that plunged the city into bankruptcy was also inflamed when state of Michigan slashed revenue it customarily shared with the city. Alongside the devastating impacts of the Great Recession, a major cause of this revenue drought was a massive reduction in state revenue sharing.²²⁸

The city lost an entire one third of its revenue when the state reduced revenue sharing by \$67 million.²²⁹ In a 2014 report, the Michigan Municipal League found that, in the decade leading in up to emergency management, state lawmakers withheld \$732 million in funds from Detroit. These declines were compounded by an Executive Order signed by Governor Rick Snyder that cut revenue sharing by 33% in 2011, the same year PA 4 went into effect, greatly expanding the powers of emergency managers.²³⁰

Income forthcoming to the city is also persistently diverted away by tax subsidies and tax abatements awarded to corporate developers. Such subsidies amount to as much as \$20 million in some years.²³¹ The Citizen's Research Council of Michigan reports that, between 2017 and 2023, the city facilitated 171 development projects by abating a total of \$842.7 million in property taxation over several years. 93% of those projects were downtown, midtown, and along the riverfront, so do not directly benefit residents.²³²

Against widespread community opposition, those tax monies are “captured” and pooled in funds like the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), available only for use by players in the money-making game. These funds are not available for services or improvements in the neighborhoods, but rather are extracted from the community and redirected for use by downtown developers. This conversion of funds for the benefit of the wealthy and white causes a deprivation of services and benefits belonging to the Detroit Black community.

²²⁸ Turbeville, Wallace C., “Lessons From the Detroit Bankruptcy,” *Demos*, July 16, 2014

²²⁹ Turbeville, Wallace C., “The Detroit Bankruptcy,” *Demos*, November 2013, *Id*, at p 6

²³⁰ Minghine, Anthony, “The Great Revenue Sharing Heist,” *Michigan Municipal League*, February 2014

²³¹ Turbeville, Wallace C., “The Detroit Bankruptcy,” *Demos*, November 2013, *Id*, at p 6

²³² “Detroit’s Use of Tax Abatements and Alternative Strategies to Improve Competitiveness,” *Citizens Research Council of Michigan*, October 2024, Report 419, at p v

According to community leader Donna Givens Davidson, “[b]y state law, these funds cannot be used elsewhere in the city and are managed by a quasi-governmental entity.... The city lacks the funding to remove dead trees, fix flood-damaged homes, support aging residents, reopen libraries, or renovate long-abandoned recreation centers. Yet millions are spent annually on tax incentives for downtown developers, protected from reallocation by state law.”²³³

Davidson emphasizes the serious race and caste equity concerns presented by the DDA structure:

Its model directs public funds toward a narrow geography where the primary beneficiaries — business owners, developers, and new residents — are disproportionately white, unlike the majority-Black city as a whole.²³⁴ Downtown is gentrifying rapidly, displacing low-income and Black residents through luxury developments and commercial real estate turnover that has ousted longstanding Black-owned businesses.²³⁵ These dynamics deepen Detroit’s historic inequalities and further entrench the structural racial divide.²³⁶

Ultimately, in an act of true piracy, the bankruptcy books were settled on the backs of Detroit’s 32,000 loyal workers and retirees. A \$3.85 billion debt reduction was accomplished by gutting retiree health benefits: \$1.7 billion by cutting retiree pensions. Retirees also suffered the loss of any future cost of living adjustments [COLA].

In exchange for the theft of retiree and worker benefits, that exquisite gem of the wealthy and privileged among us -- the Detroit Institute of Art’s world class art collection, valued at \$350 million to \$2

²³³ Interview with Donna Givens Davidson, CEO Eastside Community Network, August 25, 2025.

²³⁴ Detroit Future City (2019), Growing Detroit’s African American Middle Class

²³⁵ Thomas, J.M. (2013), *Redevelopment and Race*, Johns Hopkins University Press.

²³⁶ Interview with Donna Givens Davidson, CEO Eastside Community Network, August 25, 2025

billion, including the magnificent mural radical Mexican leftist Diego Rivera painted in homage to Detroit auto workers -- was protected by being transferred to a private Trust. Another treasure lost by Detroit.

When the dust settled, the state had control of the city of Detroit's most cherished natural resource -- Belle Isle Park. The state now leases the magnificent island park from the city and manages it. Yet another jewel lost to Detroit.

Professor Peter Blackmer aptly assesses the scheme of appropriating Detroit's assets to fatten corporate interests:

The period of emergency management in Detroit was an extension of a new form of colonialism, carried out around the world by the U.S. government and multinational corporations for the past 50 years. Dubbed “the shock doctrine” by journalist Naomi Klein, the strategy uses authoritarian regimes and neoliberal economic advisors to seize assets, markets, and governments during periods of social crisis...[A] moment of crisis puts society onto a “state of collective shock” that is then exploited for conquest. While people struggle to survive, democracy is suspended and austerity measures imposed as a form of “shock therapy” to shrink the government, dislocate the population, attack organized labor and suppress resistance.²³⁷

Detroit water rights warriors make a similar observation:

Detroit community activists recognize that the water crisis and the other destabilizing policies mentioned above, driven by corporate and government austerity imperatives, are leading to the erasure of our communities, to a

²³⁷ Blackmer, Peter, “Detroit: Austerity and Politics, Part 2,” *Against the Current* July / August 2021

reconfiguring of city land and resources to accommodate corporate objectives.²³⁸

The plunder accomplished, Kevyn Orr walked away with a bag full of \$59 million in legal fees our city paid to his law firm, Jones Day.²³⁹

Today's Extractive Racial Economy Has Created The Racial Wealth Gap

Detroit community leader Donna Givens Davidson²⁴⁰ keenly observes that the intentionally, persistently, depressed housing values resulting from decades of devaluation, depopulation, and racially discriminatory policies discussed here have had a reverberating effect throughout time. In essence, those embedded inequities – masking as race-neutral factors like home market values and credit ratings -- are foundational for today's extractive public investment policies that magnify profits for corporate developers in the city, to the detriment of the community:

Detroit's current economy is rooted in racial injustice, shaped by centuries of discriminatory policies and practices—including redlining, racially restrictive covenants, blockbusting, and racially motivated violence—that segregated Black residents into overcrowded, under-resourced neighborhoods.²⁴¹ Although these practices have been outlawed by legislation and court rulings, contemporary systems like appraisal rules

²³⁸ *Mapping the Water Crisis: the Dismantling of African American Neighborhoods*, We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective (2016), Forward

²³⁹ "Jones Day cuts \$17.7 million from Detroit legal fees," *Detroit Free Press*, January 16, 2015

²⁴⁰ Interview with Donna Givens Davidson, CEO, Eastside Community Network, August 25, 2025

²⁴¹ Givens Davidson, citing Sugrue, T.J. (1996)

and consumer credit scoring now serve as race-neutral proxies that continue to perpetuate housing discrimination and economic exclusion.^{242 243}

Discriminatory housing policies not only confined Black residents to overcrowded neighborhoods but also devalued their properties through redlining and exclusionary banking and investment practices. Appraisal standards reinforced these devaluations by restricting property comparisons to homes within segregated neighborhoods, institutionalizing a cycle of low valuation.²⁴⁴ Even after the Fair Housing Act of 1968 banned racial discrimination in mortgage lending, structural inequalities and a lack of access to formal banking institutions led to lower average credit scores among Black households.²⁴⁵ These scores, along with racially biased lending decisions, were used to justify subprime and predatory loan products, deepening the racial wealth gap and increasing foreclosure risk.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁷

Around 2010, the Reinvestment Fund developed a “Market Value Analysis” (MVA) for Detroit, using indicators such as median housing values, homeownership rates, foreclosure data, bank presence, and household income—all of which reflect both historical and ongoing racial injustice. While intended as a neutral tool for assessing investment readiness, the

²⁴² Givens Davidson, citing Perry, A., Rothwell, J., & Harshbarger, D., (2018). *The Devaluation of Assets in Black Neighborhoods*. Brookings Institution.

²⁴³ Givens Davidson, citing Wu, C. C. (2020). *Past Imperfect: How Credit Scores Still Reflect Discrimination*. National Consumer Law Center.

²⁴⁴ Givens Davidson, citing Perry, A., Rothwell, J., & Harshbarger, D. (2018). *The Devaluation of Assets in Black Neighborhoods*. Brookings Institution.

²⁴⁵ Givens Davidson, citing Wu, C. C. (2020). *Past Imperfect: How Credit Scores Still Reflect Discrimination*. National Consumer Law Center.

²⁴⁶ Givens Davidson, citing Pinho, K. (2023). *Crain's Detroit Business*

²⁴⁷ Givens Davidson, citing Newman, K., & Wyly, E. (2004) *Housing Studies*, 19 (1).

MVA guided not only private investment but also public resource allocation, directing public funds—including taxes paid by Black and low-to-moderate income Detroiters—into select, higher-performing neighborhoods.²⁴⁸

This approach has had the effect of reinforcing the racial wealth gap and concentrating poverty in disinvested Black neighborhoods. These policies and practices have contributed to widespread disinvestment, blight, and concentrated poverty across Detroit. Aggressive property taxation and predatory lending continued to extract wealth from Black communities, depressed property values, and drove widespread abandonment.²⁴⁹ In response to the tax foreclosure crisis, the city prioritized mass demolition of vacant properties rather than reinvestment in affected communities. These same neighborhoods also experienced mass water shutoffs after the formation of the Great Lakes Water Authority in 2014, compounding the harm.²⁵⁰

In sum, the coalescence of public and private policies and practices discussed here have maintained a racial caste system that conspires to keep Black Detroiters struggling at the bottom rungs of economic advancement.

That is why remedies are necessary to repair and compensate the sustained harm caused to Black Detroiters.

²⁴⁸ Givens Davidson, citing Pinho, K. (2023). *Crain's Detroit Business*

²⁴⁹ Givens Davidson, citing Newman, K., & Wyly, E. (2004) *Housing Studies*, 19 (1).

²⁵⁰ Givens Davidson, citing Human Rights Watch. (2015) *Detroit Water Shutoffs Report*.

Historical Precedents for Reparations

The payment of reparations is essentially predicated on the basic notion that one who harms another is obligated to compensate the harmed individual, in an effort to make them whole. This is why, perversely, at least 54 countries or territories, including the United States, have paid reparations to former enslavers of Africans for their loss of property.²⁵¹ It is far past time to compensate the descendants of the enslaved, whose injuries caused by white supremacy by this nation, state and city are vastly more severe.

The following enumerates some of the precedent for paying reparations, as well as recent developments in the movement to pay reparations to African Americans:

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 1783 | African woman Belinda Royall aka Belinda Sutton sues Massachusetts for reparations, and wins a pension to be paid out of her former owner's estate |
| 1800's | Frederick Douglass urges reparations for Black people, repeatedly citing the payment of 3 acres of land to Russia's former serfs |
| 1825 | Haiti forced to pay reparations to 8,000 French former enslavers |
| 1833 | Great Britain pays reparations to former enslavers, not enslaved, throughout its empire |
| 1854 | Black People of African Descent call for compensation to repair wrongs inflicted on them "by the American people at an "emigrationist" convention |

²⁵¹ Darity, Craemer, Berry and Francis, "Black Reparations in the United States, 2024: An Introduction," *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of Social Sciences*, p 6.

- 1861 US pays enslavers in the District of Columbia \$1 million for their losses, i.e., \$300 per enslaved person, which would be \$22.8 million in 2018 dollars. Free Black man Gabriel Coakley used this provision to win reparations for his own family members, whom he had purchased but who were still technically enslaved. He won \$1500, which is \$170,000 in today's dollars.
- 1865 General Sherman's Special Field Order No 15 promised 40 acres (and a mule?) for 40,000 formerly enslaved
- 1898 Callie House and the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association petition Congress for a pension plan for formerly enslaved
- 1915 Callie House, Isaiah Dickerson and the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association sue the US Treasury in *Johnson v McAdoo* for \$68 million, the amount it had collected from the sale of slave-grown and slave-harvested cotton that had been confiscated from Confederates. The claim was dismissed, based on sovereign immunity
- 1946 *Indigenous People*: US Indian Claims Commission established – over \$800 million in tribal claims was paid to Indigenous People for land stolen with broken treaties, through 1978
- 1948 *Japanese Americans*: US pays \$38 million to Japanese Americans for property damages related to internment

United Nations enacts the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, such as:

1. Killing members of a group
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”

1952 Germany starts paying reparations to Jewish Holocaust survivors and their heirs and descendants, and to the State of Israel – total payments equal \$61 billion by 2020

1955 Queen Mother Audley Moore writes *Why Reparations? Money for Negroes*

1956 Queen Mother Audley Moore appeals to United Nations for reparations for African Americans

1957 For second time, Queen Mother Audley Moore appeals to United Nations for reparations for African Americans

1963 Queen Mother Audley Moore, with one million signatures, petitions President Kennedy for “reparations for descendants of those enslaved in the United States”

- 1960's Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program called for the "end to the robbery by the white man of our Black community" and demanded the debt owed of forty acres and two mules
- 1963 Malcolm X called for reparations at Michigan State University
- 1967 Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, speaking before the Kerner Commission, invoked international principles of reparations, stating that the amount Black people have paid is "incalculable"
- 1969 James Forman's *Black Manifesto*, signed by several renown Detroiters, demands \$500 million (\$15 per person) reparations from Christian Churches and Jewish Synagogues, "which are part and parcel of the system of capitalism [for] crimes against humanity of slavery and its legacy" -- Received \$500,000 --established Black owned bank, Black Star Publications, four TV networks and the Black Economic Research Center
- 1973 James Johnson, Jr. wins Worker's Compensation against Chrysler for its racism that aggravated his mental illness, which in turn, resulted in his killing three abusive shop bosses at the Eldon Ave Axle Plant
- 1974 To settle class action lawsuit by NAACP, US pays \$10 million for medical care for survivors of Tuskegee experiment --claimants received between \$5,000 and \$37,500 each
- 1987 National Coalition of Black people for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) founded by the National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL), the New Afrikan People's Organization

(NAPO) and the Republic of New Afrika (RNA) – Mission: to win full reparations for Black African Descendants residing in the US and its territories -- part of a global reparations movement

1980's Massachusetts first Black Senator, Bill Owens, sponsored a bill calling for state legislators to pay reparations to the descendants of enslaved African Americans

1988 *Japanese Americans*: US pays \$20K each in reparations to Japanese American interment victims or their heirs – total \$1.6 billion

President George H.W. Bush issues letter of apology to Japanese American interment victims

1989 Under the influence of N'COBRA, Reparations "Ray" Jenkins, JoAnn Watson, Chokwe Lumumba and other Detroiters, Congressman John Conyers first introduces HR 40, which calls for the formulation of a commission to investigate reparations

1994 Florida pays \$150K plus tuition-free education to survivors of 1923 Rosewood race massacre – 142 successful claims

1997 President Bill Clinton apologizes for Tuskegee study

1999 US agrees to compensate Black farmers \$1.2 billion in *Pigford*

Imari Obadele and others with the Republic of New Afrika seek to collect reparations as Japanese American internment victims – claim denied

- 2000 Oklahoma recommends paying reparations to 125 survivors of 1921 Tulsa Greenwood race massacre
- 2001 United Nations hosts World Conference Against Racism in Durban, S. Africa, at which compensation for slavery was cited as a goal and the “trans-Atlantic slave trade” was deemed a “crime against humanity”
- 2004-2023 US pays \$1.5 billion to Marshall Islanders for damages caused by 67 nuclear bomb tests between 1946 and 1958
- 2005 United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparations for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law declared that States owe a duty to provide effective remedies to victims, including reparations, which may include restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition
- Virginia pays victims of Prince Edward County closing entire school system to avoid desegregation
- 2006 7th Circuit Court of Appeals dismisses *Farmer-Paellmann v Fleetboston* lawsuit against thousands of insurance companies invested in slavery, for lack of standing

Wilmington, NC Race Riot Commission recommends reparations for descendants of 1989 massacre

City of Chicago passes Reparations Ordinance to compensate victims of sustained police torture and abuse under leadership of Jon Burge -- \$5.5 million fund, \$100K to each victim

2011 US pays victims of attacks on 9/11 between \$90-\$250K each

2012 US pays \$3.4 billion to Indigenous People for “mismanagement of land and resources”
US pays \$17 million for mental health services and security after Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting

2013 North Carolina compensates for forced eugenic asexualization and/or sterilizations on 7,600 victims

Virginia pays victims of forced eugenic sterilizations

2015 *Hostages:* US pays reparations \$10K per day for 444 days of captivity for 52 Americans held hostage in Iran 1979-1981 – total payments \$4.4 million per person, paid to hostages or their estates – spouses and children got lump sums up to \$600K

Hostages: US pays \$3 million each to victims of bombings of US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998

- 2016 *Indigenous People*: US agrees to pay \$492 million to 17 Indigenous tribes “for mismanagement of natural resources and tribal assets”
- United Nations’ Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent issues its dramatic report calling for reparations for Black Americans, for enslavement and its long-term effects
- 2018 Durham, NC convened Racial Equity Task Force to study reparations
- 2019 Evanston, IL (suburban Chicago) passes “Commitment to End Structural Racism and Achieve Racial Equity” -- launches \$10 million Restorative Housing Program to remedy historical housing discrimination by city, as first initiative of comprehensive “solutions only” reparations program “to address racialized wealth and opportunity gaps” -- grants of up to \$25K each
- 2020 Providence, RI establishes \$10 million Truth, Reconciliation and Municipal Reparations process
- Asheville, NC (12% Black) approves reparations
- 2021 Manhattan Beach, CA pays reparations for taking of Bruce’s Beach
- Reparations task forces or advisory committees established in Los Angeles, CA; San Francisco, CA; St. Paul, MN

N'COBRA publishes *"The Harm is in Our Genes: Transgenerational Epigenetic Inheritance & Systemic Racism in the United States"*

California compensates victims of forced sterilization

2022 Asheville, NC Reparations Commission established

2023 Providence, RI enacts \$10 million non race-specific reparations – available regardless of race or ancestral connection to enslavement – job training and financial literacy programs – funded with reallocated COVID funding

2024 US Presidential candidate Marianne Williamson calls for \$500 billion fund for paying reparations to Black people; Candidate Julian Castro also calls for reparations
Judicial Watch group files suit to oppose Evanston, IL restorative housing program

National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL) publishes *"Working to Obtain Reparations – Balancing the Scales of Justice – A Handbook for Community Organizing"*

St. Louis, MO Commission issues final Report recounting history and making recommendations to heal "City with a deep history of racial trauma"

Asheville, NC Reparations Commission passes 39 policies, including paying \$148K to Black families negatively impacted by urban renewal

2025 Tulsa, OK announces \$105 million private Greenwood Trust fund for descendants of 1921
race massacre in Black Wall Street

Wealth Extraction: How Much Was Stolen? How Much is Owed?

Labor stolen from enslaved Africans, from the arrival of *The White Lion* in 1619 until slavery was abolished with the enactment of the 13th Amendment in 1865, lay the veritable foundation for all aspects of the American economy. “Slavery created the startup capital for the U.S. economy’s meteoric rise. It therefore indirectly benefits all Americans today.”²⁵² “Capital from American slavery provided the startup loan that the United States then took to have an A-rated economy – and it took that loan by force from African Americans. At some point, there is a need to start paying back the loan.”²⁵³

It is implicit that no calculation can truly contemplate the magnitude of pain and suffering from generations of enslavement; race discrimination; torture; sexual exploitation; degradation; humiliation; mental anguish; inferior healthcare, education and housing; excess mortality and morbidity; intergenerational poverty; separation from loved ones; loss of language, culture, kinship and community suffered by the descendants of enslaved Africans in America.

Nevertheless, economists have developed various formulas for estimating the economic value of the labor extracted from enslaved Africans, as well as the economic value of damages suffered by their descendants for many of the manifestations of racial oppression that ensued in slavery’s aftermath.

Wealth Gap

Leading scholars focus on the wealth gap between Black people and whites as the most worthwhile variable for calculating the harm affecting African Americans as a result of slavery and decades of race discrimination. Darity and Mullen state, “we view the racial wealth gap as the most robust indicator of the

²⁵² Darity, Craemer, Berry and Francis, “Black Reparations in the United States, 2024: An Introduction,” *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of Social Sciences*, p 1

²⁵³ “*The New Reparations Math*,” Interview with Economist Thomas Craemer, By Maya A. Moore, UConn Magazine, 2019, p 4

cumulative economic effects of white supremacy in the United States.”²⁵⁴ “[C]enturies of state-sponsored slavery followed by a century of state sponsored discrimination ...had profound wealth implications for African Americans living today. As documented by many scholars, there is a substantial difference in the amount of wealth that Whites and Black people have today. If properly structured, reparations should suffice to close the Black versus White wealth gap.”²⁵⁵

“One argument for focusing on the wealth gap as a target is that it captures, better than any other disparity, the cumulative disadvantages visited upon the present generation – to it can be viewed as embodying all the effects of past atrocities, colonial slavery, U.S. slavery, post-Civil War massacres, Jim Crow discrimination, New Deal discrimination, segregation during World War II, post-War discrimination, and post-Civil Rights discrimination.”²⁵⁶

Economists estimate that, in 2016, the average net worth of white households was \$933,700, while the average net worth of Black households was \$138,200. That is, the average racial wealth gap was \$795,000 per household in 2016.²⁵⁷ It jumped to \$840,900 in 2019.²⁵⁸ In 2018, the estimated per capita Black-white wealth gap was \$325,250.²⁵⁹ Therefore, Darity and Mullen estimate that \$350,000 per eligible Black descendant of a person enslaved in the United States will eliminate the Black-white wealth gap.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Darity & Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd Ed, The University of North Carolina Press 2020, *supra* at 263.

²⁵⁵ “Wealth Implications of Slavery and Racial Discrimination for African American Descendants of the Enslaved,” Craemer, Smith, Harrison, Logan, Bellamy and Darity, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 2020, vol 47(3) 218-254, p 219.

²⁵⁶ “Wealth Implications of Slavery and Racial Discrimination for African American Descendants of the Enslaved,” Craemer, Smith, Harrison, Logan, Bellamy and Darity, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 2020, vol 47(3) 218-254, *Id.* at p 221

²⁵⁷ “Wealth Implications of Slavery and Racial Discrimination for African American Descendants of the Enslaved,” Craemer, Smith, Harrison, Logan, Bellamy and Darity, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 2020, vol 47(3) 218-254, *Id.*

²⁵⁸ *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd Ed, William A. Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen, The University of North Carolina Press 2020, *supra* at xi.

²⁵⁹ “Wealth Implications of Slavery and Racial Discrimination for African American Descendants of the Enslaved,” Craemer, Smith, Harrison, Logan, Bellamy and Darity, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 2020, vol 47(3) 218-254, *Id.* at p 218.

²⁶⁰ “Black Reparations in the United States, 2024: An Introduction,” Darity, Craemer, Berry and Francis, *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of Social Sciences*, p 17

Unpaid Wages

In terms only of compensating the value of unpaid labor, experts estimate the “foregone wages of former U.S. slaves alive at the time of emancipation” at nearly \$7 billion in 1860 dollars, or about \$200 billion in 2022.²⁶¹ “Because our nation failed to compensate newly freed persons for lost wages, they and their descendants have suffered a financial disadvantage for generations.”²⁶²

Craemer estimates reparations for American slavery should be around \$14 trillion in 2009 dollars, based on unpaid wages. Based on a compounded interest rate of only 4%, he said this estimate is “very conservative.” If based on the more realistic rate of 6%, the number “gets into the quadrillions.”²⁶³

Fogel calculated the cumulative bill for enslaved Africans’ expropriated wages to be \$24 billion in 1860. Depending on the amount of interest, today’s debt would be between \$1.6 trillion and \$97 trillion.²⁶⁴

According to Neal, the present value of unpaid labor is \$1.4 trillion.²⁶⁵

Brock urges a payment of \$275,000 per descendant, based on unpaid labor.²⁶⁶

Value of Enslaved Black Lives

One way to measure the worth of enslaved Black people is to consult with the edifices of Capitalism.

Insurance companies commonly financed and insured the property interests of those who kidnapped and enslaved Africans. Chen recounts the events of the English ship *Zong*, headed to Africa from

²⁶¹ “*Double take: Abolition and the size of transferred property rights*,” Jenny Bourne, *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 2022; 103:1706-1718, at p 1706

²⁶² “*Double take: Abolition and the size of transferred property rights*,” Jenny Bourne, *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 2022; 103:1706-1718, *Id.*

²⁶³ “*The New Reparations Math*,” Interview with Economist Thomas Craemer, By Maya A. Moore, *UConn Magazine*, 2019, *supra* at p 4.

²⁶⁴ “A Price for Pain?” Robert Fogel, *The Economist*, April 13, 2002

²⁶⁵ Review of *The Wealth of Races*, by Robert F. America, Peter J. Meyer, *Journal of Economic Literature*, September 1993, pp 1472-73

²⁶⁶ “Paying for Slavery,” Robert Brock, *The Economist*, August 13, 1994, p A28

Jamaica, in which the Captain ordered 132 sickly Africans thrown overboard in order to collect the insurance on their lives, called property losses.²⁶⁷

An unsuccessful lawsuit in *Farmer-Paellmann v Fleetboston* sought to recover damages from thousands of insurance companies that had “conspired with slave traders” to finance, invest, and provide insurance on the value of enslaved human property, thereby “knowingly facilitat[ing] crimes against humanity and further illicitly profit[ing] from slave labor.”²⁶⁸

Recognizing the value of insurance actuarial estimates as a way to assess the losses suffered from slavery, in 2000, California began tracking the financial benefits accrued to financiers of slavery in the United States. By May 2002, eight insurance companies had found records of more than 600 policies they once carried on enslaved humans belonging to more than 400 slaveholders throughout the South. All eight companies were based in nonslave states in the Northeast.²⁶⁹

The price-based method of estimating losses due to US slavery – based on the price of an enslaved person on the market – range from \$17.4 billion to \$38.3 trillion in 2019 dollars.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ “Actuarial Issues in the Insurance of Slaves in the United States South,” Cheryl Rhan-Hsin Chen and Gary Simon, April 24, 2003, p 3

²⁶⁸ The lawsuit was dismissed, and dismissal was affirmed in *In re African Slave Descendants*, 471 F3d 754 (7th Cir, 2006)

²⁶⁹ *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations*, Charles P. Henry, New York Press, 2007, at p 169.

²⁷⁰ “*Black Reparations in the United States, 2024: An Introduction*,” Darity, Craemer, Berry and Francis, The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of Social Sciences, *supra* at p 18

Unallocated Land

As discussed earlier, white homesteaders were given 160 acres of land after the Civil War. To compensate Black descendants with an equivalent amount based on the current value of comparable land would cost \$12.6 trillion, or \$307,921 per 41 million recipients.²⁷¹ Black people were promised 40 acres of land – and, supposedly, a mule. 40 acres is worth \$72,796 per descendant based on 2018 estimates and the 2019 census.²⁷²

²⁷¹ “*Black Reparations in the United States, 2024: An Introduction*,” Darity, Craemer, Berry and Francis, *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of Social Sciences*, *Id.* at p 19.

²⁷² “*Wealth Implications of Slavery and Racial Discrimination for African American Descendants of the Enslaved*,” Craemer, Smith, Harrison, Logan, Bellamy and Darity, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 2020, vol 47(3) 218-254, *supra* at p 227.



REMEDIES



REMEDIES

Proposed Remedies For Past Harms

We, the Detroit Reparations Task Force (DRTF) have debated the scope of our work and have tried to do our best to align our inquiries with Proposal R (2021). We respectfully have adhered to the guidance from the Detroit City Council, as well as other movements and opinion leaders in support of Black reparations. We have also educated ourselves on the international principles related to reparations, emphasizing reconciliation and rehabilitation. From the beginning, we have straddled a line to determine what we have been charged to do by the Detroit City Council, counterbalanced against a rigorous examination of Detroit, its needs, and conditions. The Council's enabling resolution is simply another iteration in a longstanding struggle for recognition, relief, and resolve by survivors of descendants of people forcefully kidnapped, raped, murdered, and enslaved. With continuous debate, we charged ourselves to do our best to harmonize our work guided by the cries for justice from our ancestors. This historical mandate placed upon us by our ancestors is, and should be, a heavy load.

We understand and acknowledge that municipal-level harms stand next to but do not displace state, federal, and private sector harms. These harms have their beginnings in an international system of exploitation wherein the operations of slavery and empire building (colonialism) were not simply restricted to the agricultural economy in the southern part of the United States, but rather operated everywhere and all at once. Insurance companies insured transcontinental shipping that kidnapped and trafficked in human exploitation, and banks loaned and invested in industries that supported slavery. The entire fabric of American commerce was built on the gargantuan profits flowing from slavery. Its size, volume and reach were so dramatic that it became the hidden logic of American capital growth. The final result allowed individuals and families to amass the necessary capital to elevate themselves into elite classes that would sow the seeds and create the legal framework for class and race divisions that exist today.

We have also been mindful of the opportunities and benefits that might bless our future generations,

provided that we meet our challenge, as citizen volunteers, to uphold our end as vessels for serious investigation and consideration of the painstaking job before us. Our deliberations that culminated in recommendations to our local legislative body, the Detroit City Council, are historical in nature and demand serious review and implementation.

Nationally, in today's environment, realistic reparations for past harm savagely imposed on the backs of African people in the Americas is a doubtful scenario. Local evidence of this doubtful scenario is supported by the fact that the push to raise the question and seek an outcome regarding the historical issue of Black reparations is championed exclusively by the City Council with nary a sound of support from Detroit's white mayor. Also, in this national framework the most resolute effort associated with reparations is Congressional consideration of a conservative bill to provide reparations to thousands of January 6th terrorists who attacked the U.S. Capitol and actively support a failed "right-wing coup d'état."

Today, in Detroit and indeed the nation, addressing this important issue is necessary for democracy to win over evil. Locally, both branches of government must seriously address the longstanding harms experienced by Black Detroit. Detroiters, like the rest of the nation, cannot afford to have white citizens deny and obfuscate compelling facts that created the social, political, and economic situation that we live under today. It is within today's doubtfulness and with the many attempts to address historical harms that we and our ancestors have created movements and discussions to challenge inequalities, degradation, and race-based policies (public and private). From this mix of challenges and priorities, we join with others who have conceived of various channels to win partial emancipation for us and others. We see our efforts as adding to the dialogue to clarify the direction for future heroic voices that will emerge, and we add progressive analytical soundness to build into the future. We resoundingly recognize that we and others have a choice to correct past injustices and build real opportunities or to choose to continue to support oppressive systems that have resulted in harm to our community.

Operating on the assumption that readers of this report will continue to adhere to the importance of understanding and addressing the complexities of historical harms experienced by Black Detroit, our efforts as well as theirs must simultaneously look back into history, understand the implications of today's anti-Black environment and concurrently look forward and project a new level of future empowerment for Black Detroiters. Additionally, the reading of our report, given the push to erase or rewrite history, will be hampered by the erasure of history, especially in association with our accomplishments and contributions. We do not know what we do not know. And, if the continued assault on the truth continues, our children will know less than we currently know.

We note the extreme difficulty in developing descriptive evidence and recommendations in an environment where our collective history and individual acts of survival are and continue to be questioned and marginalized by enemies of progress. And by the same token, many cases previously unearthed by credible research were erased, pushed into the dustpans of history. Events and hard-fought ground previously won by us consequently have been lost, outside of the reach of normal public discourse. An alternative reality replete with fabricated narratives has been created to leave an opaque story for the comfort of those in control. Narrow allegiance to advocating for a narrow analytical frame that limits our inquiries exclusively to harms caused directly by city government may very well defeat our historical purpose. We understand the need to hold accountable local government for what it did directly. We also understand that by acts of omission, concurrence and enabling efforts to constrict progress by anyone including local government is directly tied to other levels of government and private actions that resulted in our harm. For example, redlining was a federal initiative, but it could not be implemented without the overlooking of local conditions by local actors who were charged with inspecting property or accessing predatory financial schemes that enriched realtors and people, thereby abandoning various neighborhoods. We call for continuing research and investigation specifically into the archives of city government to illustrate

these and other relationships that formed the bases of discrimination and economic exploitation.

Our efforts to document and expose harms exclusively caused by the city without understanding the effects of many rounds of layered policy and governmental practice wherein people, events, resources, and history all intersect forming our present-day reality can be problematic. To misunderstand the impact of multiple governmental jurisdictions that demand and extract resources creates a distorted lens. Refusal to consider the intersection of commerce and its debilitating past or corrosive history involving Black people underestimates current harm, discredits our history and impedes future opportunity. In traditional capitalistic urban development, segments of divergent people, oftentimes based on race and class, are pitted against each other. In this battle of the haves and the have-nots, surpluses generated from exploitation and advances in technology create an advantage for specific elite people in future economic enterprises. This advantage allows them to create and maintain the structure of power, narrative and legal justifications designed to stop progress, and enhanced their usable resources available to maintain lines of control. They shackle knowledge and future potential. These resources extend their ability to reward their friends and punish their enemies.

Historically the triangular slave trade, American colonialism and domestic practice of apartheid have created segregated communities where success is more attributed to your zip code than to your abilities. Detroit, according to the impressive scholarship by Dr. Tiya Miles (*The Dawn of Detroit, A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits*, 2017) illustrates a Detroit with shifting historical boundaries with various colonial encampments and governance structures. Each political regime inclusive of the English and the French settlers practiced variations of enslavement making it difficult to create a full record of early periods of Black bondage. Detroit's inclusion into the deal that codified the Northwest Territory did not make slavery disappear, but rather allowed for existing rules of enslavement to be grandfathered into the expanded territories. Detroit history is a patchwork of European governing ideas and colonial wars designed

to defeat indigenous people and control and exploit free labor.

Equally understood is the fact that Antebellum slavery simultaneously operated in a complex array of industries including in southern agricultural settings (Blackmon D, 2008; Nembhard, J.G., 2006), northern finance circles (Hill-Edwards, 2024; Baradaran, M., 2024; Murphy, S.A., 2023), transcontinental shipping and transportation, international trade and commerce, partisan and non-partisan environments (Schermerhorn, 2025; Darity, Jr., & Mullen, 2020) - - everywhere and all at once. Accompanying this complex array of trade and commerce was, and remains today, a racist aggressive supportive campaign to justify and miseducate people on historical facts.

The continuing impact of the most exploitative system of human bondage known to mankind is mature and operating at breakneck speed today. Its methods today are more refined and obscured, but alive. (Atuahene, 2025). Included in these complex parameters is the framework for our legal jurisprudence, knowledge creation, educational systems, institutional developments, behavioral and physical intersectional existences, all combining together to create and maintain systematic and individual harms that continue to impede the development of the Black community. For white people, this overarching system of exploitation has allowed for a dramatic positive gap in wealth and sustainability for their ancestors. White present-day families are allowed to harvest generational elite wealth insuring collective prosperity for their children. Elite white people specifically have enjoyed the benefits from this system allowing them to stand in leadership positions to extend their dominance for more than four centuries.

Consequently, this same economic reality ensures Black instability and will add to future underdevelopment in Black generations to come. While episodically, Black people have participated in the economy, we have done so at an untold level of disadvantage, only gaining modest advancements over time. Given the effects between communities, our report is required to remark and, in some cases, make recommendations that hit upon issues in public education, health, public safety, and other vital areas of the

community. We struggled to identify individual stories that document harms, but we understand that our past harms are in large part distributed over the entirety of our community and therefore our remedies should also be both individual and collectively distributed.

When the final chapter of history is written, Black people will likely be understood as beacons of self-determination (Nembhard, J.G., 2024). Africans did not stand idly by and just have “slavery happen to us.” We fought as we entered slave holding shipyards. We resisted while in the Middle Passage as thousands of people chose death over bondage as the ultimate act of human resistance. But even this resistance on the open seas did not equal the savagery of the colonial elite who dumped 1.8 million of us overboard to crush on-ship rebellions by kidnapped Africans and/or to adjust food and supply rations to guarantee safe travels of valuable cargo. Ultimately enslavers kidnapped and relocated more than 12 million Africans into the Caribbean and North American slave states.

Our knowledge of this and other forms of resistance and alternative efforts to build something out of nothing is discussed at great detail by several important historical scholars like W.E.B. Dubois, Carter G. Woodson, John Hope Franklin, Fredrick Douglass, etc. It is also encouraging to see the current focus on Black struggle in areas of housing discrimination, mass incarceration, over-policing and surveillance, and political governance by a wide array of scholars and common day influencers. We are especially thankful for our research partners whose works are added to this report in their entirety. All of the above add to our story and clarifies our direction to seek meaningful remedies to this American dilemma. We call special attention to the testimony of individuals who lived in places like Black Bottom and other noted places of forced or concentrated segregation that have helped guide our deliberations. The fight for our freedom was wide and varied. Some freedom fighters chose every weapon at their disposal. Some of these tactics to escape and relocate from strongholds of the planter class rose to a degree of organization and governance resulting in their acknowledgement as “self-determined freedom towns.” Other tactics to escape oppression involved

revolts, passive resistance, and establishing backwater enclaves with central security and mutual aid efforts.

All of these choices made by our ancestors were designed to clog the capitalistic machinery, destroy the dominant ideology of slavery, and attempt to make for a meaningful life for hostages of American capital.

Our contribution as members of the Detroit Reparations Task Force adds to this tradition and deserves serious review.

Reparations Administrative Office

For reparations efforts to be effective, the City of Detroit needs to institute a Reparations Administrative Office to serve as the central entity responsible for coordinating, monitoring, and sustaining reparations initiatives. The Office will ensure long-term success, accountability, and alignment of reparations efforts by overseeing policy implementation, advocacy, and resource development. The DRTF recommends that the Detroit City Council allocate the remaining funds in the DRTF budget as initial funding in combination with the annual city budget to launch the Office, and for the office to also be supported by grants or philanthropic contributions as needed.

Recommendations

1. Oversight by an independent appointed Board of African American City residents
2. Initiation and implementation of recommended reparations programs
3. Administration of reparations payments, settlements, programs, and policies
4. Coordination of operations with legal consultants, City Council, and other relevant government officials
5. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives
6. Establishment of departments within the Office responsible for:
 - a. Cash payment compensation.
 - b. Reclamation of city assets, enactment of new programs.
 - c. Oversight of free programs and waivers.
 - d. Allocation of grant funding and city-owned land and properties.
 - e. Policy and legislative interventions.
 - f. Work with city departments to integrate an equity lens into decision making and service delivery.
 - g. Maintain a comprehensive database of systemic harms, reparations efforts, and program outcomes to guide ongoing initiatives.
 - h. Develop mechanisms for regular public reporting, such as an annual “State of Reparations” report.
 - i. Serve as a central hub for public input, ensuring Detroit residents have a voice in shaping reparations programs. Create opportunities for residents to share their stories and contribute to shaping initiatives.

- j. Host quarterly public forums and workshops to update residents on progress and gather community input. Publish quarterly reports tracking progress, sharing successes, and identifying areas for improvement.
- k. Hire staff with expertise in research, advocacy, community engagement, and program management. Prioritize hiring Detroit residents with lived experience and relevant skills to reflect the community being served.
- l. Use surveys, focus groups, and community feedback to evaluate the lived experiences of beneficiaries. Use interactive tools, such as online surveys and live QCA sessions, to engage residents who cannot attend in-person events.
- m. Identify and secure funding streams, including public, private, and philanthropic sources, to sustain reparations initiatives.
- n. Partner with local universities or research organizations to ensure rigorous data collection and analysis.

Track the success of reparations initiatives by reporting metrics such as:

- Number of families compensated for property loss or water liens.
- increase in homeownership rates among Black Detroiters.
- improvement in public amenities in historically disinvested neighborhoods.
- job creation through increased Black-owned business contracts and cooperative development
- Progress in reclaiming local control over resources like GLWA and Belle Isle.
- Number of public art installations, educational campaigns, or media projects completed;
- improvement in public sentiment through surveys and/or focus groups.

Conduct regular evaluations to identify areas of success and improvement.

Establish a Reparations Advisory Board composed of community leaders, historians, policy experts, and advocates to ensure accountability and inclusivity.

Eligibility Criteria For Detroit Reparations

To receive compensation through Detroit reparations programs, a Detroit citizen must be:

1. A descendant of an African enslaved in the U.S. or in the Diaspora
2. At least 21 years old
3. A current resident of Detroit who has been a Detroit resident for at least 20 years

Economic Development

Background

Since 1930, the wealth gap between European Americans (white) and African Americans (Black) has consistently widened. Current data indicate that white households possess, on average, six times the wealth of Black households. This disparity is the cumulative result of historical and systemic inequities, including the failure to provide reparations following emancipation (40 acres and a mule), the enforcement of Jim Crow laws, discriminatory lending practices that denied mortgages and business loans, residential segregation, exclusion from high-paying employment, and the treatment of African Americans as second-class citizens.

For over 150 years, African Americans have endured structural barriers that required extraordinary effort to achieve limited middle-class access, while many continue to face economic instability. Addressing these inequities requires targeted investment, intentional policy, and systemic reforms. The following recommendations are proposed to advance wealth generation and economic empowerment for Detroit's African American community.

Recommendations

1. **Business Restoration Grants**

Establish a grant program providing \$100,000 to legacy businesses displaced from Black Bottom to expand or reestablish their operations in Detroit.

2. **Commercial Development Incentives**

Construct ten commercial strip malls, offering rent-free space and security to African American-owned businesses.

3. Innovation and Cooperative Business Support

Provide competitive grants for cooperative enterprises, innovative start-ups, grocery stores, sustainability research, and community-based businesses.

4. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Zones

Designate eligible commercial areas as TIF districts, allowing tax revenues to be reinvested in localized business and infrastructure development (e.g., similar to HOPE zone).

5. Equitable Employment Targets

Establish workforce representation goals aligned with Detroit's demographics. For example, with African Americans comprising approximately 79% of the population, they should hold a proportionate share of city employment opportunities.

6. Resident Hiring Preference

Award 25 additional evaluation points to Detroit residents during the employment selection process.

7. Contracting Equity

Apply a 25% scoring preference for African American-owned businesses competing for city contracts.

8. Skilled Trades Workforce Development

Provide no-cost, post-secondary training in skilled trades to Detroit residents, accompanied by stipends for individuals living below the federal poverty threshold.

9. Urban Agriculture Initiatives

Allocate city-owned land to individuals and organizations for agricultural use and provide grants to support production, distribution, and market access.

10. Housing Rehabilitation Support

Fund grants for construction businesses to repair and renovate homes, with priority given to residences of senior citizens.

11. Financial Literacy and Credit Repair

Develop and deliver online programs focused on debt reduction, credit repair, and long-term financial management.

12. Entrepreneurship Education

Integrate entrepreneurship and business development courses into the Detroit Public Schools curriculum to foster early career readiness.

Conclusion

These recommendations are designed to reduce structural barriers, stimulate economic growth, and create sustainable pathways for wealth generation within Detroit's African American community. By aligning policy, funding, and education with equity goals, the City of Detroit can take measurable steps toward closing the racial wealth gap and strengthening long-term community prosperity.

Housing

Background

Addressing the historical and systemic barriers that have limited African Americans' access to fair and equitable housing is critical to Detroit's future. The recommendations outlined in this report aim to rectify decades of disinvestment and discrimination by promoting affordable housing, equitable development, and pathways to wealth creation. Implementing these strategies requires a coordinated effort among city officials, developers, financial institutions, and community organizations. By prioritizing equity and reinvestment in historically marginalized neighborhoods, Detroit can build a stronger, more inclusive, and sustainable housing ecosystem that benefits all residents.

For decades, federal, state, and local policies—along with discriminatory real estate and banking practices—systematically denied African Americans access to fair housing opportunities in Detroit. Redlining, restrictive covenants, and biased lending practices by the Federal Government, banks, and the City of Detroit prevented African Americans from purchasing homes, obtaining insurance, or securing loans needed to build generational wealth. Neighborhood covenants that prohibited European Americans from selling their homes to African Americans perpetuated segregation and confined Black residents to under-resourced communities with limited housing mobility.

Even after the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, enforcement remained weak. Many landlords continued to rent selectively to white tenants while denying African Americans solely on the basis of race. Those who attempted to move into white neighborhoods were often met with harassment, violence, and property destruction—while law enforcement frequently stood by in complicity.

The City of Detroit also failed to protect residents from predatory lending practices that caused widespread foreclosures when adjustable interest rates rose beyond borrowers' means. Additionally, the city did little to support residents facing tax foreclosures, especially seniors and tenants of absentee landlords.

These failures further destabilized communities and stripped African Americans of homeownership opportunities and wealth accumulation.

Recommendations

To reverse these longstanding inequities, the following recommendations are proposed to promote housing stability, ownership, and wealth-building for African Americans in Detroit:

1. **Cash payments** to all residents and descendants of Chattel slavery that meet the requirements for eligibility.
2. **Authorize Targeted Investment such as HOPE Zones** within historically disinvested neighborhoods to allow residents and small businesses to reinvest their tax revenue locally for community development.
3. **Construct and sell homes to African Americans** at prices aligned with 50% of Detroit's AMI median household income to promote affordable ownership.
4. **Provide home repair grants** of \$30,000, particularly for senior residents, to preserve existing housing stock and stabilize neighborhoods.
5. **Provide a \$40,000 grant for down payment on housing.**
6. **Offer incentives to developers** who build low- and moderate-income housing within the city limits.
7. **End the transfer of city-owned homes and vacant land to Wayne County and the Land Bank,** instead establish a city-managed redevelopment program that prioritizes Detroit residents.
8. **Freeze property taxes for residents** who were historically overtaxed until reimbursement is completed.
9. **Refund African American property owners who lost homes** to tax foreclosure the surplus amount from property sales above the owed tax, advocate for a 5-year period for citizen to apply for this refund.

10. **Remove sewage fees from residential and commercial water bills** to reduce the overall cost burden on low-income households.
11. **Prohibit the addition of delinquent water bills to property titles**, preventing residents from losing homes due to utility debt.
12. **Eliminate Neighborhood Enterprise Zone (NEZ) tax abatements** for luxury developments and redirect those funds toward affordable housing construction.
13. **Advocate for Implement rent control policies** to ensure that no household pays more than 30% of its income on housing costs.
14. **Create housing for the unhoused population** by renovating and repurposing existing vacant properties owned by the city, including vacant schools.
15. **Grants** for Co-op developments.

Policing and Law Enforcement

Background

The research of the Detroit Reparations Task Force has affirmed the findings of the Detroit Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability in its May 2022 appeal to the U.S. Department of Justice:

In every era of Detroit's history, the police have functioned as agents of repression, hostility and violence towards the African American community.... The entire spectrum of police conduct in Detroit, from the hundreds of grievances filed by citizens, to illegal stops and other harassments of African Americans, to killings of African American people that some would characterize as outright murder, is a record of repression meted out daily and as a matter of course. No community must be expected to endure such ongoing, systematic violence. Police practices of this kind have been characterized as genocidal by multiple independent investigative agencies both domestic and international.

Though generations of Detroiters, from the slavery era to present, have resisted and sought redress, the problem of police misconduct and flagrant violation of citizens' rights continues unabated. In light of this history, the Detroit Reparations Task Force proposes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Pay restitution to individuals/heirs for injury or death due to police abuses and/or murder; seek restorative justice in all grievance cases of police abuse of citizens.
2. Restore the Detroit courts to reflect the City's racial demographics, thereby mitigating racism in the City justice system and ensuring trial by peers.
3. Expand grant funding for the development of safety programs and alternatives to policing and incarceration (restorative justice).

4. Continue to fund and expand DPD's mental health crisis intervention program.
5. Continue to fund and expand the Neighborhood Police Officers Program.
6. Create incentives to attract police officers to reside in the City.
7. Hire additional African American police officers to achieve racial representation proportional to the City population in all ranks and commands of the Detroit Police Department (DPD).
8. Fire all police officers who have been identified by the Detroit Police Department as "high risk."
9. Discontinue qualified immunity for DPD officers.
10. Fire Detroit police officers who shoot unarmed citizens.
11. Dismantle the Detroit Public Schools Community District Command Center.(This multi-million dollar surveillance system for monitoring of students and families is the only such operation in Michigan. It is operated by the Detroit Police Department.)
12. Advocate for reversal of cannabis convictions. Eliminate the check box concerning drug use history from City employment application processes.
13. Appoint adequate staff immediately to process the long-standing backlog of formal citizen complaints.
14. Discontinue over policing of the African American community (racial profiling, particularly of Black men; racist speech and other forms of disrespect by police officers, provocation and harassment of citizens, excessive violence) through implementation of staff education and training, as well as a system of internal department reprimands. Dismantle the "One Detroit" Partnership, which represses citizens in an overlay of multiple surveillance and policing operations: the Detroit Police Department, Drug Enforcement Authority, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives,

and Federal Bureau of Investigation. Discontinue reliance and harassment of citizens based on predictive analytical data such as GUNSTAT and National Integrated Ballistic Information Network.

15. Demilitarize the Detroit police force. Discontinue use of tanks and other war equipment against Detroit citizens.
16. Make police video of any instance of use of force available on a public website. Reprimand police officers who refuse to use video equipment, tamper with video, or otherwise interfere with the collection, preservation, and availability of documentation of police engagement with citizens. Create a permanent archive for DPD police videos.
17. Require the Detroit Police Commission to fulfill its duties to oversee and hold the DPD accountable to Detroit citizens, review all areas of police misconduct and/or crimes, and require redress of grievances to the public.

Water and Sewerage

For decades, African Americans in Detroit have contended with exorbitant water bills and resultant water shutoffs. In addition, disorganization within the Water Department billing system created a high level of confusion and frustration for citizens as they attempted to keep up with or contest bills. Because the City attaches unpaid water bills to property taxes, thousands of African Americans suffered home foreclosures, as compounded tax and water bills exceeded their capacity to pay.

Water shutoff policies harmed Detroiters in numerous ways. In homes where there was no running water, parents feared having their children taken from them by Child Protective Services on grounds of compromised sanitary conditions. These policies destabilized neighborhoods, rendered the population vulnerable to disease, undermined family dignity, and robbed families of their property investments. While the City exacted high water payments from inner city residents, it ignored the immense water bills of major city corporations. Leniency towards the corporations regarding water payments suggested that collection of funds was not the essential motive for the City's punitive shutoff policies towards inner city residents. Rather those policies effectively cleared swaths of land for potential developers.

In outrage over the harms thousands of families were suffering, citizens protested regularly, ultimately appealing to the United Nations to intervene. At the end of their investigative visit and public hearings, the UN rapporteurs found that the City's denial of water to those who could not afford to pay constituted a violation of human rights. City officials ignored the UN pronouncement. Detroit residents continue to urge adoption of a water affordability plan that would require families to pay a reasonable 2 to 3 percent of their household income for water.

The transfer of the Detroit Water Department to the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) has harmed City residents further. The Detroit Water Department was built and sustained by the tax dollars of multiple generations of hard-working African Americans, as, over the years, the Department infrastructure

extended out from the City to support emerging suburban communities. GLWA has appropriated this Detroit public asset, and is administering it in measures that are discriminatory and exploitative of Detroit residents.

Recommendations

1. Impose a moratorium on residential shutoffs.
2. Implement a water affordability plan (No more than 2 - 3 percent of household income).
3. Pending implementation of a water affordability plan, implement an effective process for citizen appeal of collections.
4. Implement regular water testing for lead contamination in schools and universities.
5. Renegotiate GLWA's annual lease payment.
6. Renegotiate the terms of the GLWA service agreement to establish "a more equitable cost-sharing model that takes regional inequities into account." (Haas Institute/UC Berkeley)
7. Make expenses associated with the combined sewer overflows common-to-all.
8. "Reappraise the current rate structure based upon a more thorough analysis of water affordability throughout the region." (Haas Institute/UC Berkeley)
9. Forgive outstanding water and sewerage debt for households impacted by unjust billing practices.
10. Pay individuals the value of properties loss due to water shutoffs.
11. Audit outstanding bills of Detroit corporations and require payment.
12. Discontinue the policy of compounding water bills and property taxes.

Education

For generations, Detroit's public schools have been both the heart of the city's communities and the ground zero of systemic inequity. Decades of disinvestment, state-imposed emergency management, and racially biased funding formulas have left the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) under-resourced, under-supported, and unable to meet the full academic, emotional, and developmental needs of its predominantly African American student population. To repair these historic harms and build an educational system that affirms, empowers, and uplifts every child, this proposal outlines a comprehensive Reparations School Grant Initiative—a multi-faceted approach to educational justice in Detroit.

This initiative calls for the establishment of grants for K–12 public education that support academic achievement, athletic development, and mental health programming. It emphasizes collaboration with local healthcare institutions to provide supplemental and required services to students affected by environmental, economic, and social disparities. The program seeks to restore the integrity of Detroit's public education system by investing in the holistic well-being and long-term success of its youth.

Additionally, this plan calls for robust advocacy before the Michigan Legislature to secure equitable and sustainable education funding, including reduced class sizes and improved individualized instruction, reform of Michigan's school funding formulas to support the creation, maintenance, and modernization of Detroit's public-school infrastructure, and more.

Recommendations

1. Establish grants for K-12 public education that support academic, athletic, and mental health, programming, and development.
2. Collaborate and partner with local healthcare institutions to provide supplemental and required services to students.
3. Reparations School Grant:

- a. Offer free tuition for community college to all DPSCD high school graduates (Detroit Promise).
 - b. Fund programs, fellowships in STEM for African American youth, and the relevant supplies and equipment.
 - c. Support funding collaborations and partnerships with local skill trade unions to train, license, and employ DPSCD high school students, providing additional post-high school career alternatives.
 - d. Fund and support initiatives to provide FREE high-speed Internet access to Detroit residents.
 - e. Support and provide funding for creating FREE/Subsidized income.
 - f. Collaborate with the Detroit Board of Education to maximize the utilization of school buildings, primarily closed during state-imposed emergency management.
 - g. Free dedicated bus transportation is available for all children attending public and charter schools within the City of Detroit.
4. Lobby the Michigan legislature on behalf of the Detroit Board of Education Community District for:
- a. Additional public-school funding to lower all K-12 class sizes.
 - b. Changes to Michigan Public School funding rubrics that support school districts in creating, upgrading, and maintaining building infrastructure where public school children are educated.
 - c. Provide funding to the Detroit Public School Community District to recruit African American teachers in Detroit public schools, to better reflect the district's 81% African American student population.

- d. Fund district-wide initiatives introducing teachers and the community to the attributes of African-centered education (culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy) philosophy through sponsorship of partnerships with the city, school district, and teaching union.
- e. Require rigorous curriculum, pedagogical research, and development for Detroit teachers (specifically in African-centered methodology) to offset the socio-economic, social, and political genocide perpetrated by the historical, structurally racist American educational system, its failure and complicity in underfunding public education, and underpreparing teachers in underfunded districts to educate students living within areas of concentrated poverty and legislative neglect.

Quality of Life

For decades, Black Detroiters have borne the compounded harms of food apartheid, industrial pollution, disinvestment, and systemic neglect. Historic redlining, zoning discrimination, and urban renewal created environmental and health inequities that shortened life expectancy, elevated asthma rates, and restricted access to nutritious food and clean air. This section proposes reparative strategies to rebuild the foundations of health, environment, and food sovereignty in Detroit's historically harmed neighborhoods.

Food Apartheid & Food Deserts

Detroit's majority-Black neighborhoods were systematically excluded from supermarket investment through racist lending and zoning policies, producing what residents identify as food apartheid—structural denial of healthy food access.

1.1 Food Sovereignty Fund – Create a Detroit Food Sovereignty and Nutrition Equity Fund to capitalize Black-owned grocery co-ops, mobile produce markets, and cooperative kitchens in USDA-designated food deserts.

1.2 Municipal Land Access – Dedicate vacant city parcels for neighborhood-run food hubs and cooperative distribution centers.

1.3 Incentive Alignment – Offer tax abatements and micro-grants to businesses that open grocery outlets in low-access areas, tied to community-benefit agreements and local hiring quotas.

Data Point: More than 70% of Detroiters live in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh produce (*Detroit Food Policy Council 2022*).

2. Urban Gardening & Agricultural Justice

Detroiters have long sustained themselves through gardening on vacant land yet face barriers to ownership, water access, and soil safety.

Recommendations:

2.1 Reparative Land Trust for Urban Agriculture – Transfer selected city-owned parcels to a Community Land Trust prioritizing Black farmers and gardeners displaced by urban renewal or denied access to agricultural programs.

2.2 Infrastructure Support – Provide city-funded soil testing, compost delivery, fencing, irrigation, and tool libraries for certified, Black-led collectives.

2.3 Education & Co-ops – Partner with Detroit Public Schools and HBCUs to expand greenhouse, hydroponic, and cooperative processing training.

Metric: Target 100 acres of community-controlled agricultural land by 2035.

Environmental Justice

Detroit's Black neighborhoods, especially the East Side and Southwest, host the city's heaviest industrial footprint. Historic zoning placed heavy industry adjacent to residential areas, creating generational health inequities.

Recommendations:

3.1 Environmental Reparations Zones – Designate high-impact tracts (48217, east-side industrial corridors) as Environmental Reparations Zones eligible for enhanced monitoring, remediation, and community-controlled redevelopment.

3.2 Community Health Impact Fund – Establish a fund dedicated to asthma mitigation, lead-paint removal, and green-space restoration.

3.3 Transparency & Accountability – Mandate public, multilingual reporting of emissions, soil, and water quality with enforcement authority by community advisory boards.

Citations: *Michigan Environment, Great Lakes, and Environment (EGLE) Environmental Justice Mapping Tool MiEJScreen (2023)* <https://www.michigan.gov/egle/maps-data/miejscreen>; City of Detroit Zoning Archives (1950–1975).

Asthma Epicenter & Health Equity

Detroit's asthma hospitalization rate for Black children is nearly three times the state average (Henry Ford Health 2022). Exposure to industrial corridors, highways, and substandard housing drives this disparity.

Recommendations:

4.1 Asthma Justice Initiative – Provide free in-home air-quality assessments, HVAC filtration upgrades, and mold remediation for households in affected ZIP codes.

4.2 Medical-Legal Partnerships – Integrate legal aid into healthcare delivery to enforce repairs and tenant protections against environmental triggers.

4.3 Neighborhood Health Promoters – Employ residents as Environmental Health Promoters to conduct door-to-door education and coordinate services.

4.4 Cash payments for loss of health and loss of life due to environmental poisoning.

Goal: Reduce asthma ER visits in targeted ZIP codes by 50% within 10 years.

48217 Toxic Air Quality

48217—Michigan's most polluted ZIP code—is a nationally recognized example of environmental racism.

The area's majority-Black residents face carcinogenic emissions from nearby refineries and waste sites.

Recommendations:

5.1 Free Air Monitoring Program – Deploy publicly funded air-quality monitors across 48217 and adjacent areas, with real-time data dashboards in libraries, schools, and online portals.

5.2 Emission Accountability Measures – Mandate that polluters fund community monitoring stations, annual health screenings, and relocation assistance for households in severe exposure zones.

5.3 Reparative Green Buffer Zone – Acquire and reforest buffer-zone land to create green barriers, solar installations, and job-producing environmental cooperatives.

References: Michigan Environmental Council (2021) Michigan Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Air Toxics Assessment (NATA) | US EPA Data (2019).

Implementation & Oversight

All Quality-of-Life initiatives shall be administered through the Detroit Office of Reparations Implementation (DORI) in coordination with relevant departments and community partners.

Oversight Mechanisms:

- Quality of Life Dashboard – Interactive public metrics on air quality, asthma rates, grocery access, and urban-farm acreage.
- Annual Audits – Third-party evaluation of reach and impact, disaggregated by race, income, and geography.
- Community Governance – Resident advisory boards with veto power on environmental permitting in designated reparations zones.

Cultural Institutions

Black Detroiters have been at the center of Detroit and global culture for almost a century. The genius and innovation of Black people in rhythm can be heard and felt in every genre of music. From the blues clubs and jazz halls in Black Bottom and Paradise Valley, to the soul and R&B of the Motown 'sound', to hip hop, techno, and electronica, all these styles of music have reverberated differently because a Detroiter picked up an instrument or stepped to the mic. Writers have written about the love and culture found here. Painters and sculptors found inspiration and inspired the next generation. No matter the medium, Black Detroiters have been a driving force of art and culture, both on the home front and globally. Though this is the case, Black people involved in the development of this beautiful culture and legacy, which has put and continues to keep Detroit on the cultural map, have not escaped the harm of systemic racism in our great city.

Mostly relegated to the underdeveloped and overcrowded community of Black Bottom, Black people faced major obstacles in establishing homes and the generational wealth that comes with home ownership. During the decades of the Great Migration, Black people sought in the North the presumed relief from the joblessness, oppression, and racism of the South. Growing significantly in numbers during the time between and after the World Wars, the Black population landed in the community and blended in with the Jewish and Eastern European immigrants and families who were there.

The restrictive covenants mostly prevented Black people from leaving the area, but they worked and made the best of what they could. By the 1940s, Black businesses were open and patronized by their customers, often because there were no other options for the Black community.

By the mid to late 1940s, plans of urban renewal would threaten the community, but the 1950s would see the beginning of the destruction of the neighborhood, and by the 1960s, the community was almost completely destroyed and rebuilt in the name of progress. The displacement of the families and the businesses that were the anchors of the community have been largely ignored or played down, for the most part.

In order to redress the ills and harms endured by the cultural community and renew the integrity of Black people in Detroit, we recommend the following actions:

Recommendations

- 1 Establish an office of African American Cultural Programs to provide funding, offices, and other operational necessities to support African Americans' pursuit of arts and cultural development, the establishment of museums, and publishing efforts
 - This office will fund grants for the pursuit of artistic and cultural endeavors
 - This office will provide office space and the necessary hardware and software for the execution of business activities
 - This office will support the development of new priorities and initiatives that will be pillars in the education and development of Black students and families
- 2 Funding for Innovative cultural, arts, and historic preservation projects
- 3 Restitution for Black business/landowners forced out
- 4 Partner with relevant professional unions for workforce development
- 5 Establish minimum hiring requirements/incentives for Detroit/regional union houses
- 6 Grant funding to establish innovative cultural/arts projects (art galleries, studios, etc.)
- 7 Grant funding for African American historic preservation projects
- 8 Name public sites and streets to recognize significant African American leaders and historic cultural contributions of African Americans in Detroit

These recommendations are to reduce the barriers to cultural preservation, ownership, and inclusion in the larger landscape of Detroit. The importance of the Black community to the culture of the city of Detroit must not be minimized or reduced. Black culture is American culture, and Black history is American history, deserving of the dignity we hold and of the respect of all people.

Sources of Revenue

During our deliberations, we have identified and discussed a large number of historical and present-day harms. We challenged ourselves to identify potential methods of payment for corrective repairs that would bring about immediate relief as well as structural relief lasting into the future. Influencing our discussions were basic principles.

- 1 People who have been harmed should not have to pay for remedies resulting from harm.
- 2 Remedies should bear some relationship to the size and impact of the harm that is being addressed.

Some remedies are best administered over time to create stability, but others must start immediately.

- 3 People know best or understand best their individual economic circumstances and how to set individual priorities in spending cash payments.
- 4 Our harms were both individual and systematic, impacting us as a collective, and therefore, reparations should be administered to individuals based on evidence and collectively based on systematic harms or the historical record.

The following represents a summary of the methods of payment or approaches that can be used to pay for the much-needed work to repair our community, resulting from past and current harms.

Government Spending Needs to Be Reprioritized. Annually, the mayor advances a budget for approval by the City Council. The budget reflects spending priorities advanced by the mayor. Many of these priorities enhance the profitability of local, national, and international corporate interests. Through our local governments, we provide resources designed to allow for easy access to and from commerce, education, and support to local infrastructure. We therefore provide support for business. We provide police and fire protection over and above the protections that are afforded to average citizens. We provide educational and training resources to a wide range of public and contractual relationships designed to create the best local job environment possible.

Serious examination of these priorities can result in greater confidence associated with governmental work. Reallocations of city resources to build more support for residents create a healthier and more productive citizenry. For example, recent progress has been made to have a trained social worker accompany police on mental health runs. This practice can be enhanced by re-programming patrol funds or by flattening bloated levels of police command staff in the police department. More dedicated funds to enhance medical and mental health interventions is a better use of funds, which can, in turn, reduce liability to the city in cases of an ill-advised police shooting.

Still other enhancements to our quality of life for our citizens may occur if the city aggressively embarks on programs to reduce or eliminate health disparities like the gap in medical care documented during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Imagine if the city would return to a full functioning hospital and series of health centers as the last resort. A hospital system wherein residents receive services akin to a local health guarantee. We could reignite growth in the city and grow our tax base with recent citizens who had left the city because of high costs creating a reverse flight into the city as we demonstrate our ability to uphold a high standard of life.

Funding reparations Utilizing Special Assessments Like a Downtown Entertainment Tax. Recent public_articles in the daily news along with a report authored by the Citizen Research Council (CRC) discuss a \$50 million tax enhancement by establishing a sports and entertainment tax. Current discussions suggest that this tax should be used to provide more resources for the downtown area where the majority of the sports and entertainment activity occurs. This task force is on record supporting the sports and entertainment tax only if it allocates at least \$10 million of its projected \$50 million (annually) toward reparative work. This entertainment tax can help in the financing of a Department of Reparations that can administer a “whole government approach” to conceptualizing and organizing all the necessary details to implement many of the recommendations suggested in this report.

Equally, we voice opposition to designated taxing districts that collect taxes across the board but only distribute the benefits of these taxes to a narrow segment of our community. Tax practices like Tax Increment Financing (TIFs) practiced by downtown development authorities and tax captures are not in the interest of the community and will not allow for rebalancing wealth within the city. Regional Tax Increment Financing may be a scenario that can win the support of citizens. But even these regional approaches must come with the same guarantees as discussed above. The regional approach by design must allocate a share of its funds for reparative work targeted at African American communities and be by design broad based in otherwise distributing benefits to address systematic discrimination.

Claw back Unfulfilled Promises Associated with Past Economic Development Deals. Detroit has a rich history of economic discriminatory practices. Many of the practices are noted in this report beginning with the treatment of the African American community as chattel in the early days of row-strip farms that dotted the riverbanks. This discrimination evolved into systematic and individual discrimination in “Black Bottom and Paradise Valley”, and later housing redlining, and a long range of practices that have been designed to exploit descendants of the triangular slave trade. In recent times, for better than 50 years the City of Detroit has operated a wide range of economic incentives and programs to encourage jobs and economic opportunity presumably to advantage its citizens. The reality of these programs is that they have led to financing downtown skyscrapers and stadiums owned by rich corporations and individuals who have held us hostage to their economic enrichment goals.

Many of these incentive programs have abated or captured taxes that would normally go to support overall city programs. In these abated or captured tax projects, requesting management has had to identify favorable advantages that would flow to the city in exchange for the financial support provided by the city. Promises like job creation, efforts to employ city workers, efforts to build the city tax base either by new employees or new commerce have all been proffered. An aggressive review of these proffered promises is in order. In the event that proffered promises were not realized the city would seek to claw back funds from

the project in an attempt to recover funds for a breach of the agreements between the city and the project owners. Insofar as these discriminatory actions that practice racism in employment or disinvestment clawing back of financial resources should be policy for the city. Funds returned to the city should be dedicated to fund repair of past harms (reparation work).

Equity Ownership in Development Projects. Looking forward, the city is likely to continue to invest in economic development projects. The city has created various partnerships in the past related to economic development but few, if any, have been entered into with the expressed mandate that the city become an equity partner. The city should realize equity returns commensurate with the investment made by the city. And such equity investment should be dedicated to reparative work. These funds represent new monies and therefore can be allocated without the normal competition associated with reprioritizing or reallocating existing funds. The new funds would represent a perpetual source of funding for reparations for as long as the city invests in new projects to stimulate the local economy.

Funding Generated by Enforcement of the Slavery Era Ordinance. The city has included in its City Code a Slavery Era Record Ordinance. (City of Detroit Ordinance #24-19, Chapter 18, Finance and Taxation, Article V – Purchasing and Supplies, Division 7 – Slavery Era Records and Insurance Disclosures, and Prison Industry Profits.) The ordinance requires companies doing business with the city to research its ancestry and declare by use of an affidavit past practices related to slavery. The ordinance allows for cancelations of contracts or a monetary agreement paid by the company which in turn can be dedicated to fund correcting past harms (reparations) in the city.

The taskforce has made inquiries into the city to ascertain the number of contracts and vendors who fall under this ordinance but has been frustrated in obtaining this data. This notwithstanding, we project that some number of business concerns have in fact had connections that fall under the inspection afforded by this ordinance. We note federal congressional testimony of some banks and insurance companies that have admitted their relationships during slavery. Some of these businesses are local and should have filings with

the city to determine the impact of their businesses in connection with the ordinance. Financial arrangements to pay for these old relationships are allowable under the ordinance and should also become a dedicated source to fund reparative work.

Volunteer Agreements with Vendors/Contractors to Create a Detroit Reparations Trust Fund. The city spends hundreds of millions of dollars to procure goods and services. Banking on the self-imposed need by the city to build the city, as the central objective for urbanization, positive growth in every region of the city can be enhanced by creating this fund to ensure equal resources and prosperity for all residents. In order to build our city every segment of the population must become an intrinsic and a critical part of the economic life of the city by actually participating in the economy.

The city could voluntarily have contractors and vendors pay 1 to 2% of their contract profits toward a fund for affordable housing targeting redevelopment specifically at hard hit neighborhoods. The funds must not come from company expenses as many of them will include this cost as a normal expense. The objective is to convince the business community that they share a future with all of Detroit, not just downtown Detroit. The funds are to be expressly taken from profits therefore not increasing the cost of the city to procure goods and services. The Fund would be an attempt to address past housing discrimination and build a stock of affordable housing options. The city can perpetuate this effort by using this Fund to build “cooperative affordable housing” leveraging future growth. This practice is reparative in nature and would be planned with an engagement strategy wherein the citizens would pick housing locations based on other development projects in an effort to add critical mass within communities.

Neighborhood Corridor Development Zones and Neighborhood Revolving Development Fund for African American Detroiters. Create special neighborhood corridor development districts of commercial properties located adjacent to existing African American communities to develop local/neighborhood commercial zones. These specialized zones are to be designed as walkable or easy access commercial strips (strips that are accessible to residents in a walking distance of five to ten city blocks and/or strips

designed to accommodate the transportation needs of physically disabled residents). The city should make every effort to create commercial zones centering around traditional citizen needs. Commercial and cooperative ventures like shoe repair, bakeries, grocery, cleaners, bookstores, hardware stores and a mix of professional services like medical, law, dental, and optical offices and stores as well as arts and cultural establishments should make up the prime development focus to foster local shopping and the use of local professional services. Funds to support this specialized development is responsive to our need to repair past harms. Investments like these are in recognition of past harms to African Americans like the destruction of Paradise Valley and business corridors like Hastings Street. Development strategies like these offer **HOPE** for increasing the economic vitality of African American business environments. In the current conservative wave of anti-black business development from state and federal actors, funds to support this type of local development should be appropriated using or utilizing general funds specifically taken from yields of our local property taxes. Such a funding strategy follows the logic of “local home rule governance” as allowed under the Michigan State Constitution.

The initial investment should be (1) at least \$5 million appropriated by the city, (2) the city should acquire commercial spaces especially focusing on abandoned commercial buildings or foreclosed commercial space, (3) the city should make these sites available in clustered arrangements to create or increase foot traffic and more commercial opportunities for vendors as part of a common corridor, (4) in such districts the city would build out the commercial space using city employees or trainees in conjunction with building trades journeymen programs to utilize training dollars, (5) interested Detroiters with established residency within the city interested in traditional or cooperative business development would rent out the renovated sites for free for a period of time to show two years of profit derived from the business venture or for no longer than three consecutive years. Commercial and/or cooperative business ventures would retain responsibilities for the payment of all utilities during the period of occupancy. For successful business ventures that stay in business and maintain the property, the city should deed the property to the business

after five consecutive years of operation. Commercial zone businesses should be taxed at the normal rates for commercial property and such taxes should be invested into the same revolving fund for a period of time not to exceed 25 years.

Casino Tax. Detroit's three major casinos, MotorCity Casino, MGM Grand Detroit, and Greektown Casino, are situated in the historic Black Bottom neighborhood, an area where thousands of Black residents were forcibly displaced during urban renewal. For decades, these casinos have generated billions of dollars in annual revenue, yet none of these funds have been allocated to address or repair the harm inflicted on the communities that were uprooted to make way for development.

As the City of Detroit prepares to renew its casino agreements in 2026, there is a critical opportunity to establish a more equitable economic structure. It is recommended that the city negotiate the inclusion of a 2% Reparations Fee on top of existing taxes and fees for all three casinos.

This dedicated revenue stream would be allocated to a Detroit Reparations Trust Fund, which will:

- Fund initiatives that directly benefit descendants of those displaced by urban renewal.
- Support housing and economic development in historically Black neighborhoods.
- Invest in education, health, and wealth-building programs that advance racial equity and community restoration.

By implementing this 2% Reparations Fee, the City of Detroit can take a meaningful and measurable step toward restorative justice, ensuring that the communities most impacted by systemic harm share in the economic prosperity their displacement helped create.

Closing

The DRTF Recommendations Report to the Detroit City Council is a product of years of hard work, community engagement, research, and spirited deliberation. Understanding the severity of the past (and current) harms that occurred against Black people in Detroit is a complicated task in and of itself. In addition to that, the DRTF has identified just and feasible solutions for those harms which are delineated in this report. Furthermore, the DRTF has highlighted criteria for eligibility, plans for implementation and sustainability, and sources of revenue, to ensure that real restitution finally be provided to the Black community. In many instances, Black Detroiters have been victimized by the very institutions that were charged with bringing us equality. This work represents a chance for those governing institutions to finally repay the debts owed. Only by repairing the harms of the past can we truly forge a new way forward.

Biographies

Cidney Calloway

Cidney Calloway is a social justice advocate and community organizer known for her involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement. Born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, she developed a strong sense of responsibility towards her community from an early age. Cidney's passion for justice and liberation led her to engage in activism and advocate for the Black community.

In 2020, Cidney became a vocal abolitionist during the nationwide protests that erupted after the public murder of George Floyd at the hands of police officers. Inspired by the need for systemic change, she actively participated in peaceful protests demanding an end to police brutality and racial injustice.

Unfortunately, during one of these peaceful demonstrations, Cidney was arrested for her activism.

Following her arrest, Cidney's dedication to the cause did not waver. Instead, it led her to join forces with the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), a prominent and influential coalition of organizations advocating for Black liberation and social justice. As a two-time fellow with M4BL, she played a crucial role in organizing and amplifying the voices of those fighting for racial equality and advocating for the dismantling of systems and recreating what safety means in the Black community.

Keith Williams

Chairman of the Michigan Democratic Black Caucus. Ran the campaign that placed the Reparations Taskforce on the ballot. He is concurrently a Director of Recruiting for the Wayne County Sheriff.

Previously, he was Vice-Chair of the Wayne County Commission, an organization designed to pursue social justice aims.

Dorian Tyus

Municipal government attorney who was born and raised in Detroit. He graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelors in public policy, political science and sociology. He then went to Howard University School of Law in 2009. He is an executive board member and criminal justice committee chair of Detroit's NAACP branch, political action chair for the NAACP Michigan State Conference, and board member for the Michigan Democratic Black Caucus. He also works as a senior communications adviser for the Michigan Democratic Party and helped run the party's voter protection operations for the 2020 presidential election.

Dr. Jeffery Robinson

Principal of the Paul Robeson Malcolm X Academy for the Detroit Public Schools Community District. Dr. Robinson is one of the foremost experts in African Centered Education in the Detroit public school system and is one of the original staff members of the Malcolm X Academy, the first public African Centered School in the country. He has also held Adjunct Professor appointments in African American & African Studies Programs at Michigan State University and Eastern Michigan University, as well as in the College of Education at Wayne State University.

Camille Collins

Representing District 3, is a 5th generation Detroiter with a deep-rooted connection to the city and a passion for serving its residents. With over a decade of experience in the nonprofit sector, she has dedicated her career to supporting programs that uplift and empower Detroiters.

As a homeowner within her community, just four blocks from her ancestral home that has been in her family for nearly 100 years, Camille embodies a profound understanding of the city's unique challenges and a personal commitment to its ongoing revitalization. Her upbringing instilled in her a strong sense of

civic duty and a drive to give back to the community that has shaped her identity.

Throughout her career, Camille has actively engaged with various nonprofit organizations, leveraging her skills and expertise to create meaningful change. Driven by her deep-rooted commitment to her hometown, Camille approaches her work with integrity, compassion, and a relentless determination to effect positive change, firmly believing that by empowering individuals and communities, Detroit can continue to thrive and flourish for generations to come.

Bernard Parker

Born and raised on Detroit's Eastside, Bernard F. Parker has devoted his life to community service, education, and social justice. He attended the University of Michigan, where he majored in Education. He later was awarded an honorary Doctorate from Lewis College of Business.

Parker co-founded *Operation Get Down*, serving as CEO for 25 years, and co-chaired the *Detroit Fair Banking Alliance*, securing \$2.5 billion in community lending. Elected *Wayne County Commissioner* in 1991 and re-elected ten times, he championed juvenile justice reform, youth programs, and community investment. He also co-founded and served as CEO of *Timbuktu Academy of Science and Technology*, an African-centered charter school on Detroit's Eastside.

A lifelong activist, Parker has served with the *Black Panther Party*, *Republic of New Africa*, *NAACP*, and currently sits on the boards of *New Detroit, Inc.*, *Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority*, and the *Huron-Clinton Metroparks*.

Dr. Gregory Hicks

Formerly executive director for the 2012 Detroit charter revision commission and secretary of Detroit's Board of Police Commissioners. Received a Doctorate degree in philosophy, a master's degree in sociology, a master's degree in urban planning and a bachelor's degree in public affairs, all from Wayne State. Hicks' professional life has focused on public policy solutions to reduce social and economic inequalities.

Edythe Ford

Edythe Ford is a lifelong community servant and advocate. She began her advocacy at the young age of 5, supporting the civil rights movement. While she continues to fight against racial injustices, she has grown into the role of community organizer and advocate.

In the 48214 zip code in Detroit, Edythe works to bring resources to the community where blight is rampant and poverty rates are high. "I started with small wins such as sending volunteers to help elderly neighbors or connecting with local officers to call them directly with reports on crimes." Edythe is the Director of Community Engagement and Organizing at Mack Avenue Community Church Development Corporation, where she brings local officials, business communities, and residents together to deliver the change we need. Edythe is a grassroots organizer; people are first. She is also the President of the Pingree Park Association, Vice President of the Villages Community Development Corporation, and former co-chair of the Eastside Community Network LEAP Steering Committee.

Edythe leads a massive outreach to deliver resources and information to homeowners and renters in 48214. In 2023, Edythe and her team at MACC Development assisted over 800 Detroit residents in staying in their homes with the City of Detroit Homeowners Property Tax Exemption application and MIHAF.

"Our work helped save residents from foreclosure and eviction, delivering housing justice to residents. This is just one example of how I teach others how they can speak up for themselves and advocate to have their voices heard by local officials and organizations."

Service means being present when others call upon you to lead and be their voice for change. Some get called to serve in our armed services or as elected officials, while Edythe gets called to service by our residents. "Sometimes I will get 20 of these calls at once, but I believe delivering change block by block is how we can restore our communities and build a better Detroit."

Kefentse Chike

Kefentse Chike was born and raised in Detroit Michigan. Dr. Chike has over thirty years combined experience as teacher of social studies and professor of African American Studies. Dr. Chike's has taught in two of Detroit's premiere African centered schools; Aisha Shule/W.E.B. Dubois Prep and Nsoroma Institute, and various colleges and university throughout metropolitan Detroit. He currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Teaching and learning community coordinator in African American Studies at Wayne State University. Kefentse's research interest includes African and African American Education, African spiritual systems and spirituality, and African/African American cultural identity formation. Dr. Chike is the proud father of one son.

Yolanda Jack

Yolanda Jack is the Manager of Community Engagement at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and is also a theatre veteran and professional of over 3 decades. Through her foundation in Theatre, Yolanda began working at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, beginning as an actor and educator, and now leads programming for events like Juneteenth,

Kwanzaa, and other community engagement within the museum and across Detroit and the surrounding communities.

A Detroit native, Yolanda attended Cass Technical High School and Howard University for Theatre Administration, then graduated from Wayne State University with a B.A. In Acting. Yolanda has been awarded for acting and directing, mainly at the Detroit Repertory Theatre, and has taught and directed both adults and youth in theater. Yolanda's career has taken her from stage managing concerts on Howard's campus for of the likes of Phyllis Hyman, Stephanie Mills and George Clinton to working at Crossroads Theatre in New Brunswick, NJ, where luminaries like Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis and others have both encouraged and set the standard for her work. Yolanda returned to Detroit after 10 years on the East Coast to join Mosaic Youth Theatre as the Technical and Touring Coordinator and fulfilled other roles during her years at Mosaic. In addition to this, she began and raised a family and has now established One World Theatre Company with her husband, Phillip Jack.

Dr. Gloria A. House

Gloria House, Ph.D., Kresge Foundation Eminent Artist 2019, is Professor Emerita of Humanities and former Director of African American Studies at the University of Michigan, Dearborn. Upon retirement from Wayne State University, Dr. House was appointed Associate Professor Emerita in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program. During her 27-year career at Wayne State University, Dr. House won distinction as an excellent teacher, a pioneer in comparative cultural studies, and a leader for more equitable treatment of minority students, staff and faculty.

Dr. House earned her bachelor's degree in French and Political Science and her master's degree in Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley. Her doctorate in American Culture was

completed at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where she was a CEW Scholar and recipient of a Rackham Fellowship.

Dr. House's research and special interests have led to wide travels -- in Europe and the former Soviet Union, Africa, the Middle East, China, Central and South America and the Caribbean. From 1992 to 1996, Dr. House was a Visiting Professor in the English Department, and Director of the Partnership with Township High Schools at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Since the 1960's, when she worked as a student in the Southern civil rights movement (field secretary in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in Lowndes County, Ala.), Dr. House has been actively engaged in African American community development and Third World solidarity causes. Since the 1970s, she has been a Board member and Senior Editor at Broadside Lotus Press since the 1970s. She has served as a Board Member of the Detroit Council of the Arts and the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights. Dr. House is a co-founder of the Justice for Cuba Coalition, the Detroit Coalition against Police Brutality, and the Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability. She has been a major contributor to the development of three African-centered schools in Detroit, Aisha Shule/W.E.B. Dubois Academy, Nsoroma Institute and Timbuktu Academy. She served as Principal of Timbuktu Public School Academy for four years. In the 70's, Dr. House designed and implemented a humanities curriculum leading to the bachelor's degree for students at Jackson Maximum Security Prison.

She is the recipient of many awards for her work as an educator and civil and human rights advocate, including the WSU Black Studies Lifetime Achievement Award (2024), the Champion of Justice Award of the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights (2022), the Wayne State University President's Award for Excellence in Teaching (1991), Lifelong Activist Achievement Award of the Michigan Coalition for Human

Rights (2017), the Edward Said Scholar/ Activist Award of the Michigan Peace Team (2012), the Harriet Tubman Award of the Michigan Chapter of NOW (2011), the Lillian Pierce Benbow Award of Delta Sigma Theta (1999), and the Civil Rights Award of the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights. She was a co-founder and volunteer organizer of the Detroit Independent Freedom Schools Movement.

Professor House's publications include three poetry collections from Broadside Lotus Press, *Medicine: New and Selected Poems* (2017), *Rain Rituals* (1989), and *Blood River* (1983); two books of poems published by Third World Press, *Shrines*, (2004) and *For You This Circle* (2025); *The Memoirs of Robert and Mabel Williams*, co-editor with Dr. Akinyele Umoja, University of North Carolina Press (2025); *Tower and Dungeon: A Study of Place and Power in American Culture*, Casa de Unidad Press (1991), and an anthology of the major poets of the Black Consciousness era, *A Different Image: The Legacy of Broadside Press*, for which she was lead editor (Broadside Press, 2005). *A Different Image* was selected by the Library of Michigan as one of 20 Notable Books of Michigan for 2005.

Dr. House's essays and poems are published widely in progressive journals and newspapers. Her experience in the Southern civil rights movement is documented in her essay, "We'll Never Turn Back," in *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts of Women in SNCC*, University of Illinois Press, 2010. She is also the author of *Home Sweet Sanctuary: Idlewild Families Celebrate a Century*, a cultural study of the African American resort settlement in Northern Michigan, published in 2011.

Jasahn Larsosa

Jasahn Larsosa is a community and social justice organizer, leader; and nonprofit executive serving as Executive Director for GreenLight Fund Detroit. As a nonprofit leader, Jasahn has attracted more than \$10 million for advocacy, economic opportunity, safety net, youth leadership, research, and social justice

initiatives. He has mobilized over 15,000 volunteers to advance local agendas and provided training and coaching to over 10 thousand corporate and community leaders across the U.S. and in 90 countries. Most recently, Jasahn served as Founding Director of Advocacy, Equity & Community Empowerment for the Detroit-based and nationally renowned civil rights and human services organization Focus: HOPE.

Larsosa is a published researcher and co-authored a resource guide for inclusive and accessible elections in partnership with Detroit Disability Power. Jasahn is a trusted member of the Metro Detroit community, which is where he was born and where he and his wife Krystal are raising their three daughters. Jasahn is also formally incarcerated due to the devastating War on Drugs which disproportionately imposed social, emotional, environmental, and economic impacts on the Black community. Jasahn earned his Bachelor's degree from Ball State University while incarcerated in Indiana through an extended education program, studying Communications, History, and Counseling Psychology.

Janis D. Hazel

Janis D. Hazel is a nationally recognized reparations advocate, policy strategist, and communications leader whose distinguished career spans public service, broadcasting, and community development. A Detroit native and University of Michigan alumna, Janis began her career on Capitol Hill, where she served as a senior staff member to several trailblazing legislators, including Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm (D-NY), U.S. Senator Donald W. Riegle, Jr. (D-MI), and Congressman John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI).

While serving on Congressman Conyers' staff, Janis helped draft H.R. 3745 – the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act (101st Congress, 1989–1990), the first federal reparations legislation ever introduced in the U.S. Congress. This historic bill became the basis for H.R. 40, the “Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act,” which remains the cornerstone of the national reparations movement.

Appointed by the Detroit City Council, Janis now serves as Treasurer of the Detroit Reparations Task Force, helping guide the City's exploration of reparative justice policies rooted in economic equity, historical accountability, and community-led engagement.

A seasoned public affairs and advocacy professional, Janis has held leadership roles across government and industry. She served in the Reagan, Obama, and Trump Administrations—including appointments with the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the White House Office of Presidential Correspondence. As a Registered Lobbyist before the U.S. Congress, she represented over 350 PBS and NPR stations for the Association of Public Television Stations trade association, successfully securing \$2.45 billion in federal appropriations for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). She also advanced building safety and environmental standards while representing the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) International, an organization supporting over 16,500 members and 19 global affiliates throughout the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom and Australia representing 10.4 billion square feet of office space and 1.8 million jobs. Additionally, she was elected to serve three terms as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (ANC 7D05) for Ward 7 of Washington, DC.

Janis's leadership extends deeply into Detroit's civic and cultural landscape. She served as Director of Marketing for the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) and as Event Marketing Manager for the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau (Visit Detroit), where she led Detroit's successful 2006 Super Bowl XL bid NFL site selection committee in 1999. As an outgrowth of her work on intellectual property rights while working with Congressman John Conyers, Jr. who served as Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Janis served as Executive Director of the Rhythm & Blues Foundation, raised millions of dollars to support aging and indigent artists, protected their intellectual property rights and creative legacies and produced award shows and concert events during Grammy Week featuring Aretha Franklin, Prince, Stevie Wonder, Patti LaBelle, John Lee Hooker and other iconic artists.

Beyond her public policy achievements, she is a multi-platform journalist and former staff writer for the Michigan Chronicle and has produced and hosted radio and television shows throughout the U.S. Janis is passionate about environmental justice and climate resilience. She recently served as an Environmental Justice Fellow with the Office of the Environmental Justice Public Advocate (OEJPA) at the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) through the MI Healthy Climate Fellowship, helping advance Michigan's MI Healthy Climate Plan and community-driven environmental health initiatives. Janis currently sits on the Board of Directors of the Detroit Sound Conservancy, is a Recycling Ambassador with Green Living Science, and represents the City of Detroit on the DTE Energy Low-Income Solar Council (LISC)—a multi-stakeholder initiative expanding access to renewable energy and reducing utility burdens in Detroit, Highland Park, and River Rouge.

Her lifelong commitment to equity, justice, and cultural preservation continues to shape her work as an advocate for reparations, environmental sustainability, and community empowerment in Detroit and beyond.

Appendices

Potential Legal Hurdles

Billion Dollar Loss Report by Detroiters for Tax Justice

Funding Social Housing and Reparations by Detroit People's Platform

Columbia University Report

University of Michigan Harms Report

Detroit Water Equity Report by Haas Institute & UC Berkeley

Water Reparations Presentation by Peter Hammer

Article on Banks and Foreclosures by Jerry Goldberg

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