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**How Cities Became Kindling:
Racism and the Decline of Two
Once-Great American Metropolises,
Detroit and Baltimore**

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Abstract

Baltimore, Maryland, and Detroit, Michigan, were once sparkling examples of postwar American progress. In the early 20th century, their thriving manufacturing industries and lively cultural scenes brought wealth and acclaim, attracting a steady influx of immigrants and southern Americans searching for a share of their offerings. Like other metropolises across the American Rust Belt, however, the cities have since suffered the effects of postwar deindustrialization. Unemployment and poverty trouble urban centers that once burgeoned during those pre-WWII swells. While the roots of their urban crises are complex, decline in both Detroit and Baltimore demonstrates the powerful impact of racist practices and policies that American cities developed and implemented long before the flight of industry.

In this research I explore the role that racism—in both its informal, personal manifestation and its formal, systemic manifestation—had in the decline of both cities. Prewar records including court cases, government ordinances and informal documents demonstrate that Detroit and Baltimore pioneered groundbreaking discriminatory policies and procedures in response to their growing African-American populations in the early 20th century. African Americans were systematically excluded from all but the lowest-level employment positions, resulting in low wages, high unemployment, low work satisfaction and low safety. This discrimination created a grave disparity in wealth between white and black communities within the cities. Concurrent housing discrimination, which controlled the physical residency of black families and their access to wealth investment options via homeownership, further separated the status of racial groups in Detroit and Baltimore.

When deindustrialization after the Second World War depleted urban centers of jobs and revenue, white residents of means were able to relocate. This flight of capital from Detroit and Baltimore cities served to concentrate African-American populations—with few resources at their disposal—into census tracts that became plagued with poverty, crime and a lack of opportunity. Detroit and Baltimore city residents—mostly African-American—have experienced continued employment, housing and environmental discrimination since, further damaging their capability to restore the cities themselves. By instituting racist practices in the decades prior to deindustrialization, both cities—in effect—crippled themselves to deal with its consequences.

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Introduction

By almost any traditional measure of metropolitan success, mid-twentieth century Detroit and Baltimore cities were booming. Expanding industry buttressed lively economies, a steady stream of immigrants swelled populations, and each city developed its own unique cultural overtones. “Motor City” and “Charm City” were not the only burgeoning U.S. metropolises, but their rise was so remarkable that each symbolized what America’s post-war new futures could be: innovative, industrious and, above all, prosperous. It was “Pax Americana” meets “American swagger.”¹

Until it wasn’t. Subsequent decades found both cities in literal and figurative flames. Bailing industry, racial segregation and tension, political corruption, riots, rebellions and rapid depopulation exposed cracks in Detroit and Baltimore’s seemingly polished veneers. Both cities entered an economic, political and social free-fall that continues into the present day. Detroit, once the nation’s richest big city, is now its poorest (with the largest US municipal bankruptcy record on its recent list of defeats). Baltimore, whose harbor once rivaled New York’s in industry and immigration, is now considered the worst large city for a child to escape poverty² and boasts “15 neighborhoods with life expectancies lower than North Korea.”³

¹ The *Pax Americana* reference is from Detroit native Charlie LeDuff (4), who describes Detroit’s rise as a critical example of the American metropolitan ideal. Columnist Jelani Cobb uses “American swagger” to convey the cultural cool, the hustle-and-bustle, of port cities like Baltimore in the mid-twentieth century. Charlie LeDuff, *Detroit: An American Autopsy*, New York: Penguin Press, 2013. Jelani Cobb, “How Racism Doomed Baltimore,” *New York Times* (May 11, 2015). Retrieved January 17, 2016 from

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/opinion/sunday/how-racism-doomed-baltimore.html?_r=0

² Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, and Lawrence Katz, “The Long-Term Effects of Exposure to Better Neighborhoods: New Evidence from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment,” Harvard University Working Paper, May 2015. Retrieved January 3, 2016 from http://www.nber.org/mtopublic/final/MTO_IRS_2015.pdf

³ Adam Gaffney, “Baltimore’s Secret History of Death: Racism, Corporate Greed & the Most Infamous Mass-poisoning in American History,” *Salon* (May 7, 2015). Retrieved January 27, 2016 from http://www.salon.com/2015/05/06/a_secret_history_of_death_in_baltimore_how_segregation_corporate_greed_ravag

These spectacular reversals of fortune garner much attention. Assigning the blame has become an obsession for politicians, residents, scholars and spectators alike—their interests ranging from academic analysis to simple entertainment. There exists, however, a darker undercurrent of curiosity about the decline—one that views Detroit and Baltimore as “the vanguard of our way up,” and fears they may be “the vanguard of our way down.”⁴ Identifying key factors in American metropolitan decline is seen, perhaps, as strategy—as if avoiding these missteps could stem the tide of globalization on American cities and somehow prevent the misfortune that befell the Motor and Charm Cities.

In his explanation of Detroit’s current state as a product of flawed urban design, a contemporary city planner admits that “to a carpenter, every problem is a nail.”⁵ Economists point to the loss of industry and subsequent failure to amend fiscal policy. The overwhelmingly white political establishments in the states of Michigan and Maryland reproach localized, mostly black municipal leadership for lack of foresight and corruption. City governments claim they are overlooked, unsupported financially and otherwise, blacklisted. Downtown blames the suburbs; the suburbs blame downtown.

While some contributors are clear—deindustrialization, depopulation and the resultant declining tax base, for example—their true nature is best understood in the historical and social context of each individual city. In this light, decline does not present itself as the inevitable consequence of economically mature American metropolises, but, rather, as a

ed_its_black_population/

4 Charlie LeDuff, *Detroit: An American Autopsy*, New York: Penguin Press, 2013. (4)

5 Pete Saunders, “The Reasons Behind Detroit’s Decline,” *Urbanophile* (February 21, 2012). Retrieved January 6, 2016 from <http://www.urbanophile.com/2012/02/21/the-reasons-behind-detroits-decline-by-pete-saunders/>

result of specific and identifiable policies and actions.

These measures, when reviewed in total, discredit another deeply held misconception about the fate of deindustrialized American cities: that their decline is somehow the fault of the urban poor, mostly black, that inhabit them. While a 21st century snapshot of Detroiters who “refuse”⁶ to pay their water bills or Baltimoreans burning their local CVS⁷ may initially seem self-incriminating, to neglect the decades of disinvestment, disenfranchisement, discrimination and violence that led to that current chaos is not only ahistorical, it is irresponsible. Proclaiming “Detroit Went Bankrupt Because Blacks Drove Out Whites,”⁸ and citing lack of family values in the urban community⁹ may initially satisfy (or sensationalize), but these oversimplifications and falsehoods provide little in the way of evidence. Instead, they allow the continued, passive consumption of a decades-old narrative crafted for the purpose of generating or fulfilling racist sentiment.

Race and racism were critical, however, in a much more insidious role. A remarkable number of damaging policies and practices enacted by both Detroit and Baltimore cities were specifically directed at African Americans. By creating differential access to wealth, property, education and healthcare for the cities’ black residents, both Detroit and

⁶ A common misconception, connoting that residents have the money to afford the astronomical sums required by Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, but are withholding.

⁷ This single act of arson proved to be newsreel gold during protests following the burial of Freddie Gray, a black Baltimorean picked up by local police for what was deemed suspicious activity and fatally injured before arrival at the police station.

⁸ A headline from political commentator and talk show host Rush Limbaugh. Igor Volgsky, and Alan Pyke, “Rush Limbaugh: Detroit Went Bankrupt Because Blacks Drove Out Whites,” *ThinkProgress* (July 31, 2013). Retrieved January 2, 2016 from <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2013/07/31/2387681/rush-limbaugh-detroit-went-bankrupt-because-blacks-forced-white-people-out/>

⁹ This was indicated, for example, by talk show host Laura Ingraham in a 2015 tweet that read, “No fathers, no male role models, no discipline, no jobs, no values = no sense of right & wrong. #Family #Character.” Catherine Taibi, “What’s Not Working In Media’s Coverage Of Baltimore,” *Huffington Post* (April 28, 2015). Retrieved January 5, 2016 from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/28/baltimore-media-coverage_n_7164064.html

Baltimore not only cultivated fertile ground for discontent, they created economic, social and political environments that were ill-prepared for the challenges of deindustrialization that would come in the last half of the twentieth century. Racism, manifest both in personal prejudices and the institutional forms those beliefs influenced, significantly contributed to the postwar decline of these cities by creating geographical fragmentation and abandonment, wage loss and poverty, and health and safety threats whose effects have been realized for generations.

Employment Discrimination

Perhaps the most fundamentally damaging discriminatory practices were those enacted to maintain and strengthen differential access to wealth. Employment in the industrial North was a beacon to those black Southerners struggling in the waning agricultural economy of the late 19th/ early 20th centuries, and reductions in immigration during WWI and WWII enhanced that need. But limited jobs and harsh employment discrimination that met black migrants when they arrived were significant barriers to their achieving socioeconomic parity with white counterparts. That disparity, when combined with other discriminatory actions and inherited over generations, left African Americans with little agency to dictate their cities' political and physical environments, and resulted in severe constrictions of capital during postwar suburbanization. Downtown Detroit and Baltimore, with their remaining citizens, were left (in Detroit's case, literally) bankrupt, leading to a cycle of metropolitan poverty that would underfund (and therefore cripple) municipal resources from education to emergency services. Both cities became scrap, kindling.

The Great Migration: African Americans Move North in Search of Employment and Opportunity

The prospect of employment served as a main draw for the northward Great Migration of the American 20th century; over six million African Americans relocated between 1910 and 1970 to large, industrial centers including New York City, Chicago, Detroit and Baltimore. Positions in heavy industries that had historically been occupied by non-founding immigrants, including defense manufacturing, experienced vacancies due to drastic immigration restrictions and surging demands for production during both WWI and

WWII. The 1907 peak of 1.3 million immigrants, for example, declined sharply as the restrictive policies of the 1920s combined with war itself effectively slowed migration to a trickle. Despite Japan's full-scale invasion of China in 1937, only 50,000 individuals were absorbed in the USA; that number slowed to less than 24,000 in 1943.¹ Meanwhile, munitions industries were busier than ever. The army alone built over 60 ammunition plants during WWII, each requiring thousands of employees.² The conditions of wartime industrial cities contrasted sharply with the economically depressed postbellum South, where an agricultural base struggled to provide competitive wages to maintain workforces. The social landscape of the South, too, was treacherous as Jim Crow laws sanctioned racial discrimination and emboldened supporting ideologies that created a dangerous environment for African Americans hoping to exercise their rights as citizens. With increased societal stress came an increase in lynching, disproportionately claiming black victims. African Americans, for these and a myriad of other reasons, migrated en masse to northern cities of real and perceived promise. An excerpt from a poem entitled, "They're Leaving Memphis"³ captures their plight:

*Some are coming on the passenger,
Some are coming on the freight,
Others will be found walking,
For none have time to wait.*

Detroit Draws and Baltimore Beckons: Appeal of Motor and Charm Cities

1 Immigration statistics from both Alan M. Kraut, *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921*, Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1982, and Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1973.

2 "Building Bombs and Planes in Rural America," *Nebraska Studies*. Retrieved January 10, 2016 from http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthethe40s/life_10.html

3 From the *Chicago Defender*. Found in: Florette Henri, *Black Migration: Movement North, 1900-1920*, Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1975.

Detroit was an ideal location, given its robust automobile industry. While the city's industrial base had long been important for domestic manufacturing, it was Henry Ford's 1903 founding of Ford Motor Company that radically elevated its economic platform. The promise of steady work at any of the 125 automobile companies established over the subsequent decades, particularly Ford's widely heralded \$5 workday, was alluring. Just before the Second World War, Ford Motor Company was one of the largest private employers of African Americans in the United States.⁴ Automotive manufacturing success established Detroit as an ideal candidate for one of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Arsenal of Democracy" industrial centers, as assembly lines and production plants altered course to construct weapons and military transport vehicles. Within a year and a half of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, "350,000 workers from the American south and elsewhere moved to Detroit to join in the war effort."⁵

Baltimore's busy port and thriving steel industry beckoned job seekers as well. The city's strongly unionized powerhouse, Bethlehem Steel, boasted high wages, health benefits, vacation and sick leave.⁶ Considered a border state in the American Civil War, Maryland's southern culture and northern economy were viewed with optimism by many native and immigrant African Americans.

Troubled Beginnings in the Employment Market

Flourishing opportunities, however, did not often translate into a seamless transition

4 Thomas J. Sugrue, "Motor City: The Story of Detroit," *Gilder Lehrman Museum of American History* (Spring 2007). Retrieved January 03, 2016, from

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/politics-reform/essays/motor-city-story-detroit>

5 Detroit Historical Society, "Encyclopedia of Detroit: Arsenal of Democracy," Retrieved February 01, 2016, from <http://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/arsenal-democracy>

6 Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes, and Linda Zeidman, *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History*, Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1991. From "Sparrows Point, Dundalk, Highlandtown, Old West Baltimore: Home of Gold Dust and the Union Card."

for black job seekers in either city. Locating and securing gainful employment proved difficult to impossible for many African-American migrants, as each step in their pursuit was challenged by racist attitudes and practices. “Employers, hiring offices and unions discriminated in so many seemingly unpredictable ways that even the most seasoned veterans of the labor market had difficulty figuring out the situation.”⁷

With no antidiscrimination laws or ordinances in effect, early-20th-century employers were free to selectively offer available positions to individuals, regardless of qualifications. Race specifications were commonly listed on job advertisements, often prohibiting African-American applicants. Michigan State Employment Services (MSES) recorded that in “December 1946, 35.1 percent of all job orders placed in its offices contained discriminatory clauses,” that number “rising to 44.7 percent in April 1947, and 65 percent in June 1948.”⁸ A full 75% of positions available in even the unskilled labor market were dictated as white-only in May of 1948, despite MSES’s over 60% non-white applicants for those very positions.⁹ The clear mismatch between available, capable employees and employer’s desired/ hired candidates demonstrates that even labor shortages during this industrial boom could not create sufficient impetus to defy racial convention. Some employers avoided black applicants by word-of-mouth advertisement only, often within racially homogenous white neighborhoods. Still others simply waited to deny African Americans the ability to apply until they appeared at the job site. This was the case with

7 Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2013.

8 1951 reached a peak in written specifications for white-only workers at 55.5 percent. “Michigan State Employment Service Experiences in Placement of Minority Group Workers,” Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013) *Ibid.* p94.

9 Memorandum from the Michigan Committee on Civil Rights to the Governor’s Committee on Civil Rights. (December 29, 1948). VF, Box 4, Folder: Fair Employment Practices, Michigan, 1940s; Michigan’s Labor Market 3, no. 6 (June 1948): 3-4. Sugrue provides the example of a Detroit company in 1949 that requested 250 workers daily, but insisted they all be white. Some companies chose to recruit from other states when shortages of white workers were evident. Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013) *Ibid.* p94.

Joseph Mays, a highly-qualified welder laid off from Detroit's Freuhauf Trailer Company, who was denied an application from Dodge Main four times despite the fact that the plant was hiring hundreds of workers per day.¹⁰ Despite Baltimore's congenial reputation with incoming black southerners, its own *The Afro-American* newspaper highlighted that many Maryland government offices banned employment of non-whites as late as 1946.¹¹

Allowance to apply for a position was only an initial hurdle in the race to employment for African Americans in both cities. Out of a sense of fairness or just to avoid controversy,¹² black job-seekers were allowed to submit applications at some places of employment. Discrimination during the actual hiring process, however, often prevented them from securing jobs despite their qualifications. Certainly, there were blatantly racist employers, but as historian Thomas Sugrue points out, "racism and discrimination alone are not satisfactory explanations for the myriad individual decisions that determined the makeup of the labor force." Rather, the decisions must be viewed within the "changing ideological and political context of the 20th century."¹³ Deeply entrenched racial ideology, fear and unfamiliarity, and political expediencies combined to create a systematic exclusion and undervaluing of the African-American worker.

The American worker of the early 20th century, particularly during WWI, saw an increase in union activity. Organized labor negotiations became a regular channel for

10 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013). *Ibid.* p91. Sugrue notes that Mays maintained "impeccable credentials," and altered his approach several times to apply for production, welding, machine operator and general positions. Despite a crowded employment office full of white job-seekers filling out applications, Mays was repeatedly told there were no positions available. "Adding indignity to injury, the agent [that denied Mays an application] interviewed the next man in line, who was white, as Mays walked away still unemployed."

11 Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American: 1892-1950*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998. pg97.

12 Or to encourage it. Detroit and Baltimore, as well as a number of other Great Migration destinations, often used the threat of black employment to discourage growing unions. Desperate for work, African-Americans were, at times, utilized as strike-breakers.

13 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013) *Ibid.* p92.

employees to barter for contract stability, safe workplace conditions and considerations such as leave allowances. Unions, such as United Automobile Workers (UAW) of Detroit and the White Caulkers Union (WCU) in Baltimore, were a powerful democratizing force influencing many employment decisions. If managers felt a hiring decision would put unions on the defensive, or even disrupt the shop floor culture,¹⁴ they avoided it. As the century progressed, unions like the UAW recognized the benefit of racial collectivity with respect to bargaining power, but their hierarchical structures still placed African Americans in subordinate roles for decades after their integration.¹⁵

Black applicants who were successfully hired were often forced to take unskilled labor positions far below their competence, and in dangerous conditions.¹⁶ They were also held to different standards of conduct. At Ford Motor Company, for example, black workers were actually more stable than their white counterparts with respect to turnover, but employers commonly misperceived them as unreliable.¹⁷ As a result, lay-offs, promotion pass-overs and raise refusals plagued the African-American workforce.

The Destructive Impacts of Employment Discrimination on Race Relations and the Well-Being of African Americans

Discriminatory employment practices of the pre-Civil Rights era contributed to the decline of both Baltimore and Detroit in two ways. First, they radically deepened the economic chasm between the cities' black and white residents. Second, they skewed the

14 The "brotherhood," defined as "workers' culture, attitudes, customs and work rules" combined to create a harmonious production environment. Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013). *Ibid.* p93.

15 Bob Morris, *Built in Detroit: A Story of the UAW, a Company, and a Gangster.* Bloomington, IN: iUniverse LLC, 2013.

16 An automobile employer placing black hires in the auto body painting room, despite declaring that it was dangerous for whites, is an example. His response to questions about equal dangers for African-Americans was, "It shortens their lives, it cuts them down but they're just niggers." B.J. Widick, "Black Workers: Double Discontents." *Auto Work and its Discontents.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. Page 54.

17 Thomas N. Maloney and Warren C. Whatley. "Making the Effort: The Contours of Discrimination in Detroit's Labor Markets, 1920-1940." *Journal of Economic History.* 55, no. 3 (1995), 465.

context in which those economic disparities were interpreted by creating and reinforcing racial stereotypes. Both resultant developments directly impaired the cities' abilities to withstand the storm of deindustrialization that came in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁸

Although "labor force participation in the form of employment for a wage confer[red] a status on African Americans that they never had as slaves or as dependent sharecroppers,"¹⁹ discriminatory advertising, hiring and treatment of employees caused rates of pay and employment for black workers to be far lower than those of whites in northern industrial centers. Therefore, as an aggregate, the African-American population attained a rise in economic status during the first half of the twentieth century, but the significantly disparate decades' accumulation of wealth left many black families were still at a severe disadvantage. Black construction workers in 1960 Detroit, for example, earned an average of \$2228 less than their white counterparts. In the building trades, African Americans only cleared \$3530 annually above poverty-level wages, while whites earned thousands more, placing them in the top 50% of Detroit's earning brackets.²⁰

Equally, if not more, damaging to the African-American opportunities in Detroit and Baltimore were the perceptions cultivated by these inequities. These ideas conveniently built upon existing prejudices, and continue to plague black communities today. The roots of racist ideology in the United States found fertile ground in religious, philosophical and

¹⁸ This is not meant to imply that employment discrimination was the sole contributor to these developments, but rather that it significantly contributed to each. Other factors will be discussed at a later point in the text.

¹⁹ Sue Headlee, "Income and Wealth Transfer Effects of Discrimination in Employment." *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 32, no. 3-4 (2005): 39-64.

²⁰ Both sets of earning statistics come from Research Division, Detroit Commission on Community Relations, "Earnings of the Experienced Labor Force by Sex, Color and Industry, Detroit Metropolitan Area," *DNAACP*, Part I, Box 24, Folder: Commission on Community Relations (1963).

later scientific justifications created to buttress the economic phenomenon of the Southern plantation economy. Despite legislation following the Civil War that ended the legal institution of slavery, those 250-year old mechanisms understandably still permeated the American consciousness. Though early twentieth century regional and individual manifestations were diverse, these ideologies still served as a framework with which to interpret the world, and like most cultural understandings, they were inherited by successive generations. In a 1940s sixth grade classroom of the white Van Dyke School of Detroit, when asked to write an essay on “Why I like or don’t like Negroes,” a sample student compilation read:

1. Because they are mean.
2. And they are not very clean.
3. Some of them don’t like white people
4. They leave garbage in the yard and it smells
5. And in the dark they skare you
6. And they pick you up in a car and kill you. At nite
7. And they start riots²¹

The student’s list reflects the stereotypical understandings conveyed by her parents and community: African Americans were dirty, lazy and dangerous. Equipped with that contextual understanding, she could easily locate reinforcing “evidence.”

The conditions of poverty that ensnared African Americans in urban centers reinforced long-standing racial prejudice. Many immigrants were forced into huddled living quarters in downtrodden, underserved areas of the city.²² Because of pay inequalities, few African Americans could afford to own, much less repair or improve the squalid real estate

21 “Compositions—6B Grade—Van Dyke School,” CCR, Part I, Box 3, Folder: Community Reports—Supplementing. Taken from Thomas J. Sugrue (2013) *Ibid.* p218.

22 This point will be explored at length in the housing discrimination portion of this research.

available to them. Unemployment and a surplus of migrant labor created an “underclass” of black workers, as large groups of males often congregated on street corners to participate in what was deemed the “casual labor market.”²³ In addition to providing visual confirmation to whites of “an image of black male shiftlessness,” the “street corner life... fostered a ‘pathological’ sense of present-orientation, self-defeat, personal failure, and hopelessness.”²⁴ Importantly, because this combination fostered anti-black ideology in both races, it served as the basis for continued discriminatory actions from the established white community *and* encouraged African Americans to internalize feelings of inferiority. With so many unemployed and desperate, corner culture also created environments conducive to crime, drugs and gangs when economic downturn hit hard.

Postwar Wealth Inequality in Detroit and Baltimore

Detroit was the center of an industry that was responsible for the employment of one in six mid-century working Americans, and the wealth it created (even for its underrepresented, underpaid black workers) was heralded as a model for the end of class conflict.²⁵ Postwar changes, however, fundamentally altered the production of vehicles. A lack of regulation allowed plants to skirt union demands by decentralizing in search of lower wages and taxes, and automation decimated once-reliable assembly line positions. “The 1950s marked a decisive turning point in the development of the city—a systematic

23 Sometimes referred to as a slave market, informal laborers would gather with their tools and wait for prospective employers to hire them out for short periods of time. These positions were often dangerous and difficult to hire for, and paid very little. Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013) *Ibid.* p120.

24 This data comes from a classic study: Elliot Leibow, *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967. pg.29-71. The study was reviewed and analyzed in Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013) *Ibid.* pg121.

25 Incredibly, “by the mid-twentieth century, a majority of Detroit residents were homeowners; many autoworkers saved money to send their children to college; and tens of thousands could even afford lakeside summer cottages—leading to the rise of blue-collar resort towns throughout Michigan.” Thomas J. Sugrue (2007), *Ibid.*

restructuring of the local economy from which the city never fully recovered. Between 1949 and 1960, the city suffered four major recessions.²⁶ Black workers were hit hardest by these changes for myriad reasons. Automation replaced those unskilled and dangerous positions where they had been disproportionately placed more frequently than specialized jobs. Whites, who had accumulated more wealth during the city's rise, could often afford to relocate to suburban areas, following positions of high pay as they left the urban center. African Americans were left behind, often jobless, in a city bereft of opportunity without the means to extricate themselves from the situation. Job shortage led to a surplus of labor, which depressed wages and diminished workers' capacity to demand safe working conditions. Combined with its preexisting poverty, Detroit's urban center became a furnace of frustrations.

Baltimore's fate was eerily similar. The nationwide trend of a declining manufacturing sector hit Charm City's shipyards and steel mills hard. An identical pattern of decentralization, disinvestment, suburbanization and urban decline left downtown Baltimore at a breaking point. Within a one year period from 1967-1968, both Detroit and Baltimore experienced cataclysmic rioting and rebellion. Detroit's "12th Street Riot" exacted thousands of injuries and arrests in a five-day period, and notably razed much of the city's urban core. The Baltimore riots of 1968, initiated by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., lasted for ten days and accumulated over \$12 million in property damage alone.²⁷ The uprisings were symptomatic of a racially ill societal structure, one in

26 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013). *Ibid.* p126.

27 Peter B. Levy, "The Dream Deferred: The Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Holy Week Uprisings of 1968," In Jessica I. Effenbein, Thomas L. Hollowak, Elizabeth M. Nix, *Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth in an American City*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011.

which African Americans' plight in the crumbling metropolises had reached a previously unseen level of despondency. Black families that had once, despite oppressive discrimination, survived on the scraps of the wealthy cities, increasingly found themselves left with only ruins.

Housing Discrimination

*“If whites don’t want to live with niggers, they sure as hell don’t have to.
Dammit, this is a free country.”¹*

Dearborn 1942-1978 Mayor, Orville Hubbard

The improved economic status of employed African-American migrants, however marginal, did afford some basic conveniences of urban American life. Despite considerable challenges, some African Americans in Detroit and Baltimore were able to accumulate significant wealth and stature. Securing or multiplying that wealth, however, proved difficult as white control over where and how black families could invest their earnings was maintained. What began as restrictive neighborhood covenants (sometimes as informal as verbal pledges) that discouraged the selling of homes to African Americans became full-fledged legal constraints as migrants continued to arrive. Black populations, despite increasing, were denied the expansion of real estate territories in both cities. Overcrowding, with all of its consequences, plagued inner city tracts in the oldest and poorest parts of Detroit and Baltimore. Property seekers attempting to move out of slums confronted a bewildering array of obstacles, from uncooperative real estate agents to bank discrimination, and often forced to pay exorbitant sums for dilapidated residences. Thomas Sugrue famously remarked that, “To a great extent in postwar America, geography is destiny.” As residential status determined access to employment,² education, health and safety services, public transportation, wealth and political leverage, African Americans were effectively shut out from resources needed to attain parity with white citizens. By the time 1960s civil rights housing legislation was enacted,³ whites were already fleeing urban

1 Mark Binelli, *Detroit City is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012. p25. Hubbard’s statue stood outside of Dearborn, Michigan’s City Hall until late 2015.

2 This is particularly true after the “capital mobility” trends discussed earlier that began after the Second World War.

3 US cities have a complex history with racial discrimination legislation that pertains to housing. Technically, 1917’s US Supreme Court Decision in *Buchanan vs Warley* struck down all residential segregation laws, but its efficacy was challenged in diverse ways. Segregation codes remained a “moving target” (to be discussed at a later point in the paper),

centers, relocating their established capital to suburbs where black residents would be informally excluded again. This left both municipalities, Detroit and Baltimore, with the simultaneous problems of populations disproportionately high in need and disproportionately low in resources. Combined with the crumbling infrastructure left by deindustrialization and diminishing support from the United States' federal government, this laid the groundwork for both cities' postwar decay.

Origins of the Housing Crisis

Directly following the Civil War, the United States Civil Rights Act of 1866 did accord black and white males equal property rights, but its power was significantly diminished by the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision. The "separate but equal" ruling served as a basis for residential areas to segregate sharply once African-American populations swelled.

Although Booker T. Washington remarked in 1909 that, "so far as [he knew], there [was] no city in the United States where the coloured population own so many comfortable and attractive homes in proportion to the population, as in the city of Baltimore,"⁴ this perceived harmony was the product of illusion. In those first decades of the twentieth century, the modest gains that African Americans made toward achieving residential parity with whites were increasingly looked upon with scorn and anxiety, particularly since real estate was becoming a valuable, desired commodity. Baltimore, which had the largest free black population of any city before the Civil War,⁵ saw a postbellum influx of immigrants from all races. From 1880 to 1910, its population doubled to half a million residents, 20%

though the Fair Housing Act of 1968 did much to curtail their formal application.

4 Washington made the remark upon viewing the manicured homes lining Druid Hill Avenue, where only the wealthiest of blacks owned property. Just the next year, Pietila reports that segregation of parks, theaters, and department stores in Baltimore increased sharply. Baltimore, it seems, was gearing up for stricter enforcement of discriminatory measures as opposed to integration. Antero Pietila, *Not In My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. 2010. p14.

5 90% of Baltimore's black population of 27,000 was free in 1860, many earning equal or higher pay than whites for similar jobs. Antero Pietila, *Ibid*. p25.

of them black.⁶ The city needed to expand, and did so by acquiring neighboring suburbs at record rates.⁷

“*This is a White Man’s City.*”
–Baltimore Democrats’ 1899 slogan

New neighborhoods were increasingly restrictive about their residents, however. Detroit, for example gained nearly 150, 000 new black individuals in the 1940s, but “gained virtually no new housing” for them until after the war.⁸ Incredibly, Baltimore’s African Americans were allotted “only five suburban developments, totaling fewer than one hundred houses” from the 1900s through the Second World War.⁹ Many black professionals of wealth attempted to purchase in deteriorating white neighborhoods. W. Ashbie Hawkins, a prominent black civil rights litigator, initiated a backlash with his 1910 purchase of 1834 McCulloh St. in Baltimore. In response to the Hawkins sale, the street, previously all white, became a battle ground of legal proportions. Neighbors formed the McCulloh St.-Madison Ave. Protection Association, hoping to reverse the sale and prevent further black geographical mobility.

Full-scale fear mongering and sensationalizing in the following months transformed the neighborhood scandal into a city-wide racial divide. Newspapers ran headlines that warned, “NEGROES ENCROACHING,” accompanied by unusually large spreads that listed the endangered neighborhoods by name. *The Baltimore Sun* published an incendiary letter, supposedly penned by a black resident, which outlined the African-American plan

6 Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p25.

7 The impetus for this was The Great Fire of 1904, which destroyed 140 acres of urban Baltimore as a result of inadequate sewerage. The catastrophe was a wake-up call to city officials and residents alike that overcrowding had reached unsafe levels.

8 When housing was allocated, only 1,895 public housing and 200 private housing units were designated despite tens of thousands of waiting residents. Citizens Housing and Planning Council of Detroit, Annual Report, 1944, in CHPC, Box 1. Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013). *Ibid.* p42.

9 Antony Pietila, *Ibid.* p57.

for invasion.¹⁰ Whites echoed the McCulloh St.-Madison Ave. Protection Association's assertion: "the colored people should not be allowed to encroach upon some of the best real estate in the city and force white people to vacate their homes."¹¹ Sentiment led to action, as politicians played upon white fears to win elections, popularizing and eventually codifying segregation laws. Baltimore became a nationwide leader in preventing the expansion of black living areas; its "innovation was the use of government legislation to achieve systematic, citywide race separation."¹² The city's 1910 coded segregation bill, entitled "*Ordinance for preserving order, security property values and promoting the great interests and insuring the good government of Baltimore City,*" was passed by City Council to the great relief of white residents who wished to maintain homogenous living spaces. The act birthed a dual housing market. Two entirely separate processes for the requisition of housing, from advertisement of available property to lending services for the final sale, established a lasting divide. Though the bill and its subsequent reincarnations only stood for seven years before being nullified by the Supreme Court, its passing sparked a nationwide trend that many cities, including Detroit, followed.

Early Methods of Discrimination

Restrictive Covenants

Discrimination procedures became so entrenched that the 1917 restriction of legal methods did little to stem the tide of mechanisms for residential segregation. Practices

10 The letter was later found to be bogus, but never retracted or apologized for by *The Sun*. Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p21.

11 Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p8.

12 Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p23.

diversified, sometimes sinisterly, as the moving target¹³ of racial housing discrimination continued to restrict African-American residents. Restrictive covenants, redlining, blockbusting and predatory lending quickly evolved to maintain the status quo of segregation.

Prior to the popularization of restrictive covenants, collective community disapproval, intimidation and violence were effective means of dissuading integration. Growing legal pressures with respect to violence and the size of the migrant community, however, decreased the effectiveness of these approaches for whites in large urban centers by the early 1900s. Increasing numbers of residential areas began to create informal contracts between neighbors to discourage the sale of property to non-whites.¹⁴ “Racial covenants were supposed to do what the brick throwers did, while keeping the brick throwers at bay.”¹⁵ The pressure to adhere to these verbal and/or written agreements was severe, as many whites relied on their neighbors for social status and business networking. Covenant manifestations evolved to include racial segregation fees and residence associations,¹⁶ and many wealthy whites refused to buy in neighborhoods where they were absent.

Redlining

Institutional reinforcements grew to support these racial practices.¹⁷ The Federal

13 Vincent J. Roscigno,, Diana L. Karafin, and Griff Tester. "The Complexities and Processes of Racial Housing Discrimination." *Social Problems* 56, no. 1, (2009): 49-69.

14 In many cities, including Baltimore, Jewish families were also excluded via racial covenants. The so-called “dual property market” for whites and blacks was, in fact, triple. A separate publication advertised exclusively to Jewish people in the Charm City through the 1970s.

15 Richard Rexford Wayne Brooks and Carol M. Rose, *Saving the Neighborhood: Racially Restrictive Covenants, Law, and Social Norm.*, Boston: Harvard College, 2013. p162.

16 These gave way to Homeowners’ Associations and HOA fees in the latter part of the century (and today), when they were (are) still used to dissuade certain behaviors (often those associated with class) and economically qualify buyers as an ancillary measure to the mortgage process.

17 Importantly, this occurred in reverse as well. Racist ideology shaped institutional structure.

Housing Administration, created in 1934 to encourage homeownership among American citizens, refused to underwrite loans in mixed-race neighborhoods.¹⁸ Redlining, or sectioning off portions of urban areas as hazardous for investment, was practiced before the FHA's formation. The federal organization, however, "did more to institutionalize redlining than any other agency by categorizing mortgages according to their risk levels and encouraging private lenders who wanted insurance for their mortgages to do the same."¹⁹ The FHA's chief economist even outlined real estate nationality rankings that were formally used until the 1960s:²⁰

1. English, Germans, Scots, Irish, Scandinavians;
2. North Italians;
3. Bohemians or Czechoslovakian;
4. Poles;
5. Lithuanians;
6. Greeks;
7. Russian Jews of the lower class;
8. South Italians;
9. Negroes;
10. Mexicans

Lower-ranked whites were afforded leeway depending on their residential periods and assimilation to American culture, but African Americans and Mexicans were viewed as irredeemably untrustworthy. Mapping this bigotry became one of the responsibilities of Franklin Roosevelt's Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), an organization charged with restructuring loans and financing to bring the nation's housing market to a sustainable point after the Great Depression.²¹ Both the HOLC and the FHA regularly published

18 Richard Rexford Wayne Brooks and Carol M. Rose, *Ibid.*

19 Amy E. Hillier, "Redlining and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation." *Journal of Urban History* 29.4 (2003): 394-420.

20 Homer Hoyt, *One Hundred Year of Land Values in Chicago*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1933. p314-316.

21 Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p62.

appraisal manuals that listed Hoyt's hierarchy, warning homebuyers that their property investments would decrease in value if their neighborhood was racially integrated. Urban centers of the United States were increasingly defined by a series of concentric circles. Red centers signaled alarm, decay. Green suburban expanses on the outside, however, were solid investments, buffered by those shifting neighborhoods in between that were in danger of infiltration.

These cartographic constraints were used religiously by lending institutions whose financing decisions affected hundreds of thousands of families in each city, but their claims lacked substantiation. Often, decay *was* documented in neighborhoods with high crime and poverty. The Black Bottom area of Detroit and stretches of Baltimore along the harbor, for example, were continually marked as hazardous. Physical and social deterioration occurred at high rates in these urban centers, but the causes were complex. Ills that plagued residents—dilapidated buildings, poor sanitation, and overcrowding—were often out of tenants' control. Many could be traced directly to landlords who resided in the loan-safe suburbs. Few black families that owned property could afford necessary repairs, a product of lower wages, home price gouging, and restrictions on building materials during wartime.

These unfounded assumptions regarding racial and ethnic determinants of neighborhood health were, therefore, a particularly shameful aspect of the redlining practice. To remain financially solvent, some would argue, the FHA and HOLC needed to establish criteria to determine the safety of loans; areas of declining value needed to be identified. In practice, however, the FHA and HOLC worked to bail out tens of thousands of white homeowners after the Depression, at the same time discriminating against black

families in similar financial situations (*i.e.*, job loss) with no apparent recognition of the irony. Whites were viewed as solid citizens who were down on their luck; African Americans as inherently irresponsible with money. A Baltimore city Solicitor once claimed that its streets “were literally swarming with able-bodied men and women who apparently have nothing better to do than roam the streets and indulge in social pleasantries”²² after simply observing a black shopping district for a day. Redlining as a practice actually doomed neighborhoods to failure by denying them funds as opposed to accurately predicting poor investments. This was damaging to all ethnicities of residents, as the Polish neighbors of east Baltimore— famous for their scrubbed marble steps and pride in their homes’ appearances—discovered as their properties halved in value overnight when an appraiser deemed the area prime for “Negro and Italian invasion.”²³ More than any other group, however, African Americans incurred the brunt of redlining’s impact as a shameful shadow was cast on even the most responsible individuals. Detroit’s black West Side, a distinguished neighborhood of well-kept homes and gardens where many respectable business leaders, ministers and professionals resided, was marked “D” (red) by the HOLC.²⁴

The perpetual criticism of African-American constitution not only reinforced Americans’ racist ideologies, it also physically separated black earners from the ability to secure their wealth in sound residential investments. African-American buyers were restricted to areas where desirable home mortgages were unavailable, and their subpar

22 The local African American newspaper conducted its own research shortly thereafter. 505 out of the 550 passersby they interviewed had gainful employment—at night; many others were homemakers. Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p83

23 (October 17, 1936) “Confidential Report of a Survey in Baltimore Maryland for the Division of Research and Statistics of the HOLC.” 9 (Record Group 195), NA. Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p71.

24 The HOLC did concede that the West Side housed a “‘better class’ of ‘Negro.’” Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013), *Ibid.* p38.

wages rarely afforded them the ability to accrue the money required for purchase.²⁵

Combined with the demand for living spaces, this created an ideal opportunity for predatory financial institutions and slumlords.

Predatory Lending

Where legitimate lending institutions saw red on the map, unscrupulous organizations saw green. Real estate agents, loan officers and mortgage companies capitalized on the desperate plight of black families by employing a variety of exploitative lending schemes. Since banks avoided lending to them, African Americans seeking home ownership had to borrow from private investors. These individuals and institutions charged exorbitant rates for home purchases. A 1946 Baltimore Urban League survey, for example, found that Fulton Avenue prices for black home-buyers were “170 percent over prewar levels, and “at least 75 percent above the present market value.”²⁶

Worse, these private lenders were entirely unregulated, and their land-installment contracts were illegitimate sales. These “hocus pocus on pieces of paper” agreements “were not recorded, no deeds changed hands, and there was no settlement.”²⁷ Incidental charges and fees, insurance, principals and taxes were paid in regular installments, but little was applied toward the actual loan balance. A single missed payment was ground for eviction, and departing families were quickly replaced by other desperate and unsuspecting buyers. Renters were charged for repairs, sometimes doubly so, and evicted without warning if the

25 In the infrequent situations when African American families could afford to purchase a home outright, whites were reluctant to sell because of restrictive covenants and/or social stigma.

26 Baltimore Urban League survey, Mar. 11, 1946, BJC 333, JMM. Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p98.

27 These were essentially early rent-to-own schemes. Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p99.

landlord desired. “Seldom counseled by lawyers, thousands of black families assumed contractual obligations that they could not afford and did not understand.”²⁸

Blockbusting and Slumlords

For those African Americans relegated to the overcrowded redline areas, as well as those attempting a breakthrough in better neighborhoods via predatory lenders, slumlords became prominent figures. Analysis of a ten-year period in Baltimore is telling of slumlord mentality:²⁹

The 1940 Census listed 34,166 dwelling units without private flushing toilets and 6,889 with those conveniences but no bath. The next Census, in 1950, showed that despite a return to peacetime, the situation had actually worsened: 45,187 dwelling units were without a private bath, and 17,711 had no running water.

Bathrooms generated no rental income, so landlords sacrificed sanitation to gut them, creating sleeping spaces to let.³⁰ Two-thirds of residences in Paradise Valley, the commercial center for Detroit’s black population, were deemed substandard by federal housing officials; units were often “without a toilet or bath, running water, heating, and lighting.”³¹ Living spaces were illegally subdivided, furnaces lacked fire protection, electrical wiring was defective—the owners neglected to invest any capital into maintenance of the home or safety of its residents. Letting dilapidated, hazardous spaces to

28 Pietila provides the example of elderly couple that signed a 75-year lease. “I was almost like a blind person when I bought,” one woman lamented, “I don’t know any law.” Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p104.

29 Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p97.

30 This created considerable problems as tenants were forced to use outdoor “crappers” in crowded, urban areas.

31 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013), *Ibid.* p37.

black tenants was so lucrative that some slumlords purposefully participated in blockbusting—purchasing homes in white neighborhoods with private money for the express purpose of converting to rental properties.³² Blockbusters played both on white fear and black vulnerability. The hysteria produced by racist propaganda and redlining meant that once a single home was sold, the others were up for low bids quickly.³³

New Deal but the Same Old Story

“We Want White Tenants in Our White Community”

Sign posted outside of the Sojourner Truth Housing Project, Detroit, 1942

New Deal legislation brought challenges to urban and suburban black residents alike, as they fought to determine the fate of city-owned land. Public housing was introduced as a way to alleviate market pressure and provide homes for needy city dwellers, but black families were overlooked for many of the projects. Sites that planned to welcome black residents, like the Sojourner Truth Housing Project in Detroit, were met with bitter resentment. Despite its designation as one of only two housing projects available to the city’s African Americans in 1941, neighboring whites protested when residents tried to move in.³⁴ City officials promised that future projects would “not change the racial pattern of the neighborhood.”³⁵

32 Antero Pietila, *Ibid.* p99.

33 Many restrictive covenants barred multi-family living, temporary structures and outhouses, etc., in order to preserve white neighborhoods.

34 The race of the housing project’s residents was changed several times by city planners throughout its construction, leading to confusion. Still, it was the approaching proximity of black families that caused the fury. Pickets asserted the whites’ “Right to Protect, Restrict, and Improve Our Neighborhood.” Dominic J. Capeci, *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit: The Sojourner Truth Housing Controversy of 1942*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984. “At least 40 people were injured, 220 arrested, and 109 were held for trial—all but three black.” Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013) *Ibid.* p74.

35 Mayor’s Interracial Committee, “Analysis and Recommendations Regarding the Racial Occupancy Policy and Practice of the Detroit Housing Commission,” March 24, 1952, 6, CCR, Part I, Series I, Box 12, Binder 3/7/52-12/52.

Roosevelt's domestic plan also encouraged private homeownership in the United States, but black residents of Detroit's Eight Mile-Wyoming area were repeatedly told that this American dream did not apply to them. The African-American enclave was surrounded by farms, sandlots and white neighborhoods, an anomaly that prevented white developers from expanding the city's borders as they pleased. Repeatedly denied FHA funding because of its proximity, one developer even negotiated to build a six-foot-tall concrete wall along the redlined community to arrest the expansion of the black neighborhood. The Eight Mile-Wyoming area was full of "dilapidated shacks," in the words of a school teacher that lived there, but only as a result of FHA refusal to grant mortgages to its residents, many of whom were professionals with good credit standings.³⁶

The Moving Target of Racial Discrimination in Postwar Detroit and Baltimore

The enforcement of restrictive covenants was outlawed by the Supreme Court's *Shelley vs. Kraemer* decision of 1948, and the next twenty years were suffused with civil rights legislation aimed at reversing the damage that housing and employment discrimination had caused for decades. America's legacy of racism, however, proved too heavy a burden to shed. The chasm created by U.S. political, economic and social institutions was vast, and the disparities it caused were insufficiently addressed by legislation.³⁷ "To the majority of white observers, visible poverty, overcrowding, and deteriorating houses were signs of

³⁶ Burneice Avery, "The Eight Mile Road," 5-6; Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983. p205-06.

³⁷ "Writing of Baltimore, Richard Rothstein of Economic Policy Institute argued that the distressed condition of African-American working and lower-middle-class families in Baltimore and elsewhere is 'almost entirely attributable to federal policy that prohibited black families from accumulating housing equity during the suburban boom that moved white families into single-family homes from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960—and thus from bequeathing wealth to their children and grandchildren, as white suburbanites have done.'" Jelani Cobb, *Ibid.*

individual moral deficiencies, not manifestations of structural inequalities.”³⁸ This racist ideology, coupled with upheld traditions of discriminatory practices, was entrenched. Both continued to create a very different American experience for black and white citizens.

The Civil Rights Act of 1968 (including the Fair Housing Act) banned racial housing discrimination outright, but African Americans continue to experience exclusionary and non-exclusionary deterrents to residence.³⁹ Current research “delineate[s] minority vulnerability and gatekeeper discretion in enacting housing exclusion,” which manifests itself in various ways.⁴⁰ The Fair Housing Act did not restrict housing discrimination based on credit history or source of income (Section 8 status, for example). Since historical wealth inequalities restricted the accumulation of capital and credit in black communities, they alone are a barrier to racial integration. Regardless of their economic status, however, contemporary African Americans experience a considerable amount of exclusion. A recent study on racial housing discrimination found that 90% of exclusion cases were from African American men, women and families, despite their comprising only 18% of the population studied.⁴¹ Practices include discriminatory financing by mortgage officials, selective advertising and steering by real estate agents, and differential terms and conditions with respect to rental agreements. Not all methods are subtle, however, as 76% of exclusion cases were outright refusals to rent or sell.⁴² Non-exclusionary practices prioritize white tenants to make African Americans feel uncomfortable in their residences.

38 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013), *Ibid.* p9.

39 Exclusionary meaning “actions and practices that exclude an individual or family from obtaining the housing of their choosing,” while non-exclusionary includes “discriminatory actions and practices that occur within an already established housing arrangement.” Roscigno, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

40 Roscigno, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

41 Roscigno, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

42 Roscigno *et al.*, *Ibid.*

Ranging from differential pet policies to outright harassment, these infractions are usually carried out by a landlord or rental company. Complainants of a 2009 study reported being called “nigger,” “lying nigger,”⁴³ and “nigger baby,” among other slurs. This discrimination happens daily in 2016, and essentially functions to “maintain a [...] black ghetto.”⁴⁴

From legislation forbidding a black lawyer to purchase a home on a white street to differentiation in an apartment complex’s pool policy enforcement, the mechanisms of a century of racial residential discrimination have effectively isolated urban African American populations geographically, culturally and economically. As the populations of Baltimore and Detroit experienced substantial white flight in the mid twentieth century, both cities’ residents were left with what little they and their families had accumulated. Depopulation’s woes combined with the crippling impacts of deindustrialization—job loss and wage depression among them—effectively eliminated the possibility of remaining city dwellers improving their plights. Worse, the poor were left to pay for the exodus of the rich.

43 This particular landlord admitted that he regularly utilized the slur, but always “in fun.” Roscigno, *et al.*, *Ibid.* p63-64.

44 Amy J. Schulz, David Williams, Barbara Israel, and Lora Bex Lempert, “Racial and Spatial Relations as Fundamental Determinants of Health in Detroit,” *Milbank Quarterly*, 80, no.4 (2002).

Environmental Discrimination

Employment and housing discrimination were *products* of widespread interpersonal and institutional racism, but they were also *processes* whose results served to reinforce the underlying ideologies of that racism. This vicious positive feedback loop validated another shameful American tradition: the devaluing of black bodies. Poverty, substandard housing, and a low priority ranking for city and state authorities led African Americans to decades of harsh, dangerous and deadly environmental exposure. Communicable diseases, industrial contaminants and a host of other known, preventable disasters plagued black communities in Detroit and Baltimore, and continue to do so today. Adding to insult, ailing black residents have historically been isolated from quality medical care. Deindustrialization and depopulation left both cities ill-equipped—socially, educationally and financially—to adequately support afflicted populations.

Place Matters: Housing Segregation Leads to Health and Safety Risks

City and state housing authorities failed to regulate slumlords beyond petty fines, which were inevitably cheaper than their properties' needed repairs. Some opportunistic owners tried to pass off upkeep and modernization costs to already-struggling tenants, but most simply ignored the deterioration. This negligence had disastrous consequences for the inhabitants. Fires—fueled by the aging, wood-framed residences and ignored electrical safety—raged in black urban centers. During the 1940s, “nearly a third of Detroit’s residential fires occurred within three miles of downtown, most in predominantly black

neighborhoods that contained only 12 percent of the city's housing.”¹

The overcrowded tracts of poverty forced by restrictive housing practices were incubators for pests and disease. Standing sewage from outdoor toilets (moved by slumlords in lieu of rentable rooms) threatened dysentery and cholera. Infrequent garbage collection led to rodent infestations. Detroit's "rat belt" on the Lower East Side once totaled 206 reported bites in a two year period to city officials.² Progressive Era tuberculosis infections were exceedingly high in densely packed African-American communities such as those in Baltimore's "Lung Block." Mortality rates in the Druid Hills neighborhood, for example, were publicized widely at Johns Hopkins health expositions in order to warn city officials from around the United States about the dangers of infection. This data shaped early twentieth century public health politics. "Lung Block was Exhibit A in Baltimore's campaign of 'infectious fear,' which depicted blacks as sources of contagious disease and targeted them first for surveillance by charities... and later for coercive institutionalization in Maryland's two all-black state facilities, Henryton Sanitorium and Crownsville Mental Hospital."³ African Americans were promoted as the progenitors of disease rather than victims of their unsanitary living environments. This portrayal helped to reinforce racist ideology and segregation, justifying the need for black families to have a separate existence from clean, healthy-habited whites.

1 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013) *Ibid.* p37.

2 "Report of the Executive Secretary, Detroit Branch, NAACP." May 9, 1944-August 1, 1944, 3-4, in NAACP, Group II, Box 87, Folder: Detroit, Aug.-Sept. 1944. Unidentified clipping: "City's 'Rat Belt' Residents Fight Losing Battle." Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013) *Ibid.* p37.

3 Karen Kruse Thomas, "Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation (review)," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 65(3), 434-436. Oxford University Press. Retrieved February 01, 2016, from Project MUSE database.

The Toxic Histories of the Urban Poor in Detroit and Baltimore

These reinforcements were a lasting detriment to African-American health and safety. U.S. urban centers, Detroit and Baltimore included, continued patterns established in the early 1900s for the remainder of the century. With respect to environmental health, black residential neighborhoods were largely ignored or, worse, targeted for risk.

A poignant example, referred to as “the most infamous mass-poisoning in American history,”⁴ is Baltimore’s history with lead. Despite its ban for interior use as early as 1909 in some European countries, lead was widely used as a paint additive in the United States throughout the first half of the century. “Speech delays, lack of impulse control, aggressive tendencies, ADHD other learning disabilities” have more recently been linked to exposure,⁵ but harmful effects were recognized enough to lead Maryland legislators to restrict its use for children’s toys in 1949. A powerful lead industry, however, exerted pressure to overturn that law and suppress others for decades.⁶ The industry manipulated data in order to minimize negative reporting and even blame parents for the harm caused by exposure.⁷ Their efforts kept lead additives in interior paint until the late 1970s.

4 Adam Gaffney, “Baltimore’s Secret History of Death: Racism, Corporate Greed & the Most Infamous Mass-poisoning in American History,” *Salon* (May 7, 2015). Retrieved January 27, 2016 from http://www.salon.com/2015/05/06/a_secret_history_of_death_in_baltimore_how_segregation_corporate_greed_ravaged_its_black_population/

5 According to the WHO, “lead affects children’s brain development resulting in reduced intelligence quotient (IQ), behavioral changes such as shortening of attention span and increased antisocial behavior, and reduced educational attainment. Lead exposure also causes anemia, hypertension, renal impairment, immunotoxicity and toxicity to the reproductive organs. The neurological and behavioral effects of lead are believed to be irreversible.” Amy Barry-Jester, “Baltimore’s Toxic Legacy of Lead Paint.” *538*, (May 7, 2015). Retrieved January 6, 2016 from <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/baltimores-toxic-legacy-of-lead-paint/>

6 Scott Hamilton Dewey, “Review of Brush with Death: A Social History of Lead Poisoning,” *The American Historical Review*, 106, no.3 (2001): 1012–1013. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2692429>.

7 Gerald E. Markowitz, & David Rosner, *Lead Wars: The Politics of Science and the Fate of America's Children*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

Modern Threats to Health and Safety

Despite the eventual ban, lead poisoning and its ruinous impacts on communities are contemporary concerns. Decades of contamination obviously jeopardized consecutive generations of African-American residents, limiting both ability and opportunity for the parents and grandparents of Baltimore urban housing dwellers. But, incredibly, lead *still* poisons a sizable, disproportionately black population each year in the Charm City. Freddie Gray, the African-American male whose death while in police custody sparked the 2015 Baltimore uprising, had a blood lead level seven times the current limit at just 22 months of age.⁸ Maryland state tests reported over 65,000 children were poisoned in Baltimore between 1993 and 2013, but that data was found to be problematic as it assessed “dangerous” lead levels at over twice the acceptable limit.⁹ Poor whites are affected as well, but there exists great disparity even between races of lower socioeconomic statuses. The city has nearly three times the national rate of child lead poisoning, but “a look at the data reveals that, like other health disparities, just a handful of neighborhoods are responsible for almost all of the city’s cases over the last five years”—all predominantly African-American.¹⁰ A national perspective in 1998-99 seemed a bit more balanced, as it demonstrated “an equal percentage of black and white families lived in homes with federally recognized risk for lead exposure,” but the 2006 follow-up reported that “while there had been a significant drop in the percentage of white families who lived in homes

⁸ Gray and other plaintiffs seeking damages from landlords for negligence are often targeted by companies that coerce them to sell their settlements for pennies on the dollar. One such company, Access Funding, struck a deal with Gray in 2013. Terrence McCoy, “How Companies Make Millions off Lead-Poisoned, Poor Blacks,” *The Washington Post*, (2015, August 25). Retrieved January 5, 2016, from <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-38664294.html?>

⁹ In 2013 alone, over 1,000 children were found to be contaminated at 5-9ug/dL (the previously untested concentration). Amy Barry-Jester, *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Amy Barry-Jester, *Ibid.*

with a serious lead-based paint hazard, the percentage of black families had actually increased.”¹¹ This example of environmental discrimination becoming more pronounced and racially concentrated is not an isolated one.

Detroit city hosts hundreds of lead poisoning cases annually, as 94 percent of its homes predate 1980, but abatement efforts have been largely successful.¹² Residents of Flint, Michigan—a largely black industrial town in the greater Detroit Metro area—however, experienced a doubling of infant/child rates of toxic lead exposure after a water source switch in 2014.¹³ Evidence showed the EPA and state environmental officials were aware of the potential for lead poisoning for over a year, though “Flint continued to use corrosive river water without phosphate treatment until October 2015.”¹⁴

Lead poisoning in Baltimore and Detroit, as in any Rust Belt city, is a symptom of the systemic pathologies that surround American racial relations. Replace the word *lead* with *trichloroethylene*, *particulate trace metals*, or even *raw sewage*, and the pattern of dispersal remains the same. Time and again, African-American communities are disproportionately affected by negligence and malice related to environmental contaminants.

Hazards to public health are numerous; city and state officials, often with the support of the general population, continue to gamble with the physical and psychological toll on black lives. A 1987 study found that the minority percentage of a zip code was ‘the best

11 Gerald E. Markowitz and David Rosner, *Ibid.* p36.

12 Brian Bienkowski, “Good News for Detroit: Lead Poisoning of Kids Drops 70 Percent Since 2004,” *Environmental Health News*, (2013, February 28). Retrieved January 18, 2016 from <http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/ehs/news/2013/detroit-lead-poisoning>

13 Hurley Medical Center Doctors. Pediatric Lead Exposure Presentation (concerning Flint, MI.) (2015, September 24). Retrieved January 13, 2016, from

<http://flintwaterstudy.org/2015/09/pediatric-lead-exposure-presentation-from-hurley-medical-center-doctors-concernin-g-flint-mi/>

14 Ron Fonger, “Flint Water Crisis Testimony Today Will Put Gov. Snyder in National Spotlight.” *M Live* (2016, March 17). Retrieved March 17, 2016, from http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2016/03/flint_water_crisis_testimony_w.html

predictor of which zip codes had hazardous waste facilities in them,”¹⁵ the cruel irony being that these populations have the least political clout to alter this pattern. The area around Delray, an impoverished black Detroit neighborhood, for example, is home to several steel mills, a coal-burning power plant and one of the continent’s largest waste incinerators—all powerful contributors to a decrease in air quality.¹⁶ Just across the river, Zug Island, a 325-acre industrial plant with a 200-year checkered environmental history, was “cited by the Environmental Protection Agency for releasing substantial amounts of carcinogenic benzo(a)pyrene and dibenz(a,h)anthracene, a probable human carcinogen.”¹⁷ While all residents of Detroit are affected, the EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) studies “demonstrate that Detroit’s black neighborhoods [are] disproportionately burdened by TRI facility activity.”¹⁸

Detroit’s blight removal/ urban renewal projects of the twentieth century laid miles of highway, and the city is an important international connector to Canada. Freeway corridors are often surrounded by the poorest residential areas, where black families have been historically clustered as a result of their political, social and economic conditions.¹⁹ The Ambassador Bridge, which links Detroit to Windsor, Canada, sees 10,000 diesel trucks cross every day, each spewing exhaust into the southwestern part of the city. Combined with sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-burning power plants and indoor pollutants

15 Commission for Racial Justice, United Church of Christ, “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites,” New York: NY, (1987). Retrieved January 10, 2016 from

http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/13567/toxwrace87.pdf?1418439935

16 Tim Loughheed, “Arising from the Ashes? Environmental Health in Detroit,” *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 122, no. 12 (December 2014). doi:10.1289/ehp.122-A324

17 EHS Today Staff, “EPA Cites Honeywell for Chemical Release Reporting Violations,” *EHS Today*. (2002, May 24). Retrieved January 24, 2016 from http://ehstoday.com/news/ehs_imp_35467

18 Liam Downey, “Environmental Racial Inequality in Detroit,” *Social Forces*, 85, no. 2 (2006), 771-796.

19 Douglas S. Massey and Nancy Denton, *The Creation of Underclass Communities: American Apartheid*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993. p115-47.

associated with poverty like cockroach antigens, the highway fumes create disproportionately high rates of asthma and cardiovascular disease in local residents.²⁰

Timing with respect to environmental compromise of black health is telling. Employment, housing and schools segregated sharply throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but environmental discrimination with respect to proximity hazards for African Americans is relatively recent. With what researchers deemed a “not in my backyard” attitude, white residents and their representatives began to demonstrate concern for environmental hazards only after the awareness campaigns of the 1960s. Prior to 1970, there was “little evidence to show that facilities constructed in Michigan...were sited disproportionately in minority and poor communities. It was not until after 1970, they found, that such patterns began to emerge.”²¹ Metropolitan areas are divided into zones, and then prioritized. Despite Civil Rights Era advances to racial equality, political and economic determinants of health, wealth and power were clearly still under the control of the white establishment. A zoning expert once asserted:

No question that zoning protects some people better than others. Zoning is responsive to wealth, property, political power, and those areas or communities that are more politically empowered or connected clearly will be able to get done the zoning changes that they desire and to prevent the zoning changes that they don't desire. Less politically or economically empowered communities, even though you have a formal structure (for public

20 Lisa K. Baxter, Timothy Barzyk, Alan Vette, Carry Croghan, and Ronal D. Williams, “Contributions of Diesel Truck Emissions to Indoor Elemental Carbon Concentrations in Homes in Proximity to the Ambassador Bridge,” *Atmospheric Environment*, 42, no. 40 (2008): 9080-9086.

Audrey Smargiassi and Tom Kosatsy, John Hicks, Celine Plante, Ben Armstrong, Paul Villeneuve, and Sophie Goudreau, “Risk of Asthmatic Episodes in Children Exposed to Sulfur Dioxide Stack Emissions from a Refinery Point Source in Montreal, Canada,” *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 117, no.4 (2009), 653–659.

Michael Le Bras and Stacie M. Jones, “Inner City Asthma Study: Relationships Among Sensitivity, Allergen Exposure, and Asthma Morbidity,” *Pediatrics* 118, suppl. 1 (2006): S11–S12.

21 Saha, Robin and Paul Mohai, “Historical Context and Hazardous Waste Facility Siting: Understanding Temporal Patterns in Michigan,” *Sociological Problems*, 52, no. 4 (2005), 618-648.

participation), will be less able to impact changes that are taking place to them or around them.

Living in urban poverty clusters has been associated with “higher rates of all-cause mortality, cardiovascular disease, infant mortality and low birth weight.”²² Poverty, racism and perceived risk are also important determinants of psychological well-being. A recent community studies survey examined relationships between racial discrimination and a variety of indicators: happiness and life satisfaction, self-esteem, and perceptions of mastery and control. All but one of the fourteen studies reported a positive association between discrimination and distress.²³ Research that focused on relationships between discrimination and diagnoses of major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, early initiation of substance abuse, psychosis and anger also found positive associations.²⁴ Continued racist ideology and discrimination create unhealthy environments for the psychological development of their victims, impairing their chances for functional, happy lives. This highly individualized response to stress seems particularly damaging in cases of even *perceived* discrimination,²⁵ a variable difficult for legislation to address. According to A.J. Schulz *et al.*, “racial stereotypes may also be linked to... everyday interactions that are insulting, derogatory or unfair,” and “these encounters are associated with negative health outcomes.”²⁶ Structural conditions of neighborhoods even damage interpersonal relationship that could otherwise be a source of stability, as residents adopt racist narratives

22 Amy J. Schulz, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

23 Williams, David, Harold Neighbors and James Jackson. “Racial/Ethnic Discrimination and Health: Findings from Community Studies.” *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 2 (2003): 200-208.

24 Williams et al. (2003). *Ibid.* p200.

25 Williams et al. (2003). *Ibid.* p200.

26 p689.

from the culture at large, “perceive[ing a] lack of safety or trust in neighbors.”²⁷ Many African Americans experience psychological stress in response to their physical environments. Neighborhood conditions such as abandoned buildings, broken windows, visible pollution, a lack of green space, loitering, graffiti, etc. are highest in census tracts with concentrations of poverty,²⁸ and can contribute to perceived risk, thereby creating stress.²⁹

Disparities in health behaviors create differential health outcomes, but they, too, are impacted by location. What may first appear to be poor choices “should more correctly be seen as downstream consequences, as mediators of larger historical and economic forces.”³⁰ Eating healthy in a food desert or exercising outdoors in a dangerous and polluted neighborhood, for example, are difficult if not impossible feats to manage. Class values with regard to certain risky behaviors, such as smoking and fighting, can lead to faulty assumptions about personal ethics and health.

Census tracts that have concentrated unemployment, poverty and other neighborhood risk factors have higher crime rates,³¹ putting residents at greater health risk. Abandoned buildings are a prime target for arson, for example, but declining tax bases mean

27 Amy J. Schulz, *et al.*, *Ibid.* p695

28 “Place Matters for Health in Baltimore: Ensuring Opportunities for Good Health for All,” *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies* (November 2012). Retrieved January 12, 2016 from http://jointcenter.org/docs/40925_JCBaltimoreReport.pdf

29 Deemed contextual or areal effects by Amy J. Schulz, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

30 Adam Gaffney, “Baltimore’s Secret History of Death: Racism, Corporate Greed & the Most Infamous Mass-poisoning in American History,” *Salon* (May 7, 2015). Retrieved January 27, 2016 from http://www.salon.com/2015/05/06/a_secret_history_of_death_in_baltimore_how_segregation_corporate_greed_ravaged_its_black_population/

31 For the “Place Matters” research study, these were high vacancy rate, liquor stores per capita and low home ownership. William Spelman, “Abandoned Buildings: Magnets for Crime?” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 21 (1993): p481-495, and Paul J. Gruenwald, Bridget Freisthler, Lillian Remer, Elizabeth A. LaScala, Andrew Treno, “Ecological Models of Alcohol Outlets and Violent Assaults: Crime Potentials and Geospatial Analysis,” *Addiction* 101, no. 5 (2006): p666-677.

emergency services—including police response and firefighting services—are underfunded and ill-equipped.³² A recent op-ed following Baltimore’s Freddie Gray riots discussed the misleading representation of danger in the city, asserting “Baltimore doesn’t have a homicide problem; it has a black-male-death problem.”³³ One hundred and eighty nine of its two hundred eleven murder victims in 2014 were African-American males. The violence, like so many negative characteristics of the city, was concentrated into a handful of neighborhoods.

Health risks as products of discrimination apply to workplace segregation as well. In addition to the low wages that deindustrialization and white flight left behind in America’s urban cores, “older factories in ...[those] increasingly African-American neighborhoods were less technologically sophisticated than newer plants in suburban areas.”³⁴ This meant that safety hazards from older technology and equipment were more frequent.³⁵

Health Care Access Restrictions

Recognizing the potential for disaster after the 1967 Detroit and Newark “race riots,” President Johnson appointed a special commission on civil disorder. Its basic conclusion was that “our nation [was] moving toward two societies, one black and one white—separate and unequal.”³⁶ Health and healthcare status in the United States was no exception. In addition to disproportionately high rates of physical and mental illness,

32 Amy J. Schulz, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

33 Jelani Cobb, *Ibid.*

34 Amy J. Schulz, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

35 Richard Child Hill, “Race, Class and the State: The Metropolitan Enclave System in the United States,” *Critical Sociology* 10, no. 2 (1980). doi: 10.1177/089692058001000204

36 “Report on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care,” *American Medical Association* (1995). Retrieved January 5, 2016, from <https://www.ama-assn.org/>

African-American populations in the United States have been geographically, financially and culturally cut off from medical care.

According to a recent *Place Matters* Baltimore health study, residential poverty areas (defined as neighborhoods where 30% of households live at or below the federal poverty level)³⁷ are less likely to have family physicians and medical specialists nearby. If hospitals do exist, they are often underfunded and ill-equipped.³⁸ The “higher burden of indigent care” creates financial challenges that often cause facilities to close and/or relay increased pricing to customers.³⁹ The Delray, Detroit community lost its only hospital in 1991, leaving only a small, crowded clinic to care for its 3000 residents. In Baltimore, almost a fifth of black residents report having unmet physical health care needs and a full third report having unmet mental care needs.⁴⁰

As a product of generations of job discrimination, African Americans have higher rates of unemployment, and lower pay rates when employed, than whites. In a largely employment-based insurance system, this translates into a dearth of care.⁴¹ According to the American Medical Association, minority group adults are more likely to be uninsured, have lapses in insurance, have difficulty paying for care, have difficulty receiving specialty care and pay more out-of-pocket for their care as do their non-Hispanic white counterparts.⁴² The impact of this disparity is vast; African Americans fare worse than

37 Around \$22,000 for a family of four.

38 “Place Matters for Health in Baltimore: Ensuring Opportunities for Good Health for All,” *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies* (November 2012). Retrieved January 12, 2016 from http://jointcenter.org/docs/40925_JCBaltimoreReport.pdf

39 Amy J. Schulz, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

40 “Healthy Baltimore 2015.” Baltimore City Health Department. *Baltimore City Government* (May 2011). Retrieved November 20, 2015, from http://health.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/HealthyBaltimore2015_Final_Web.pdf

41 Brian D. Smedley, Adrienne Y. Stith and Alan R. Nelson, *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2003. p476.

42 “Report on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care,” American Medical Association (1995). Retrieved January 5,

those white counterparts in virtually every health outcome. “Black patients with acute myocardial infarction are less likely to receive coronary angiography or coronary artery bypass grafts than are whites; black patients with cancer are less likely to receive the standard of care for their particular cancer; black patients with end-stage renal disease are less likely to receive kidney transplants; and black patients with HIV are less likely to receive appropriate antiretroviral and prophylactic antibiotic treatment.”⁴³ Black women are twice as likely as white women to obtain late or no prenatal care, often citing financial barriers.⁴⁴

African Americans that can secure transportation to doctors and hospitals, and the financial means to do so, may choose to avoid the medical establishment for cultural reasons. Historically, trust has been compromised by unethical experimentation with minorities, as in the Tuskegee Experiments, for example. Baltimore’s own Johns Hopkins University approved a study in the 1990s that knowingly exposed over 100 children aged 12 months to 5 years to lead paint and dust.⁴⁵ For some African Americans, “receiving healthcare is often a degrading and humiliating experience,” as they are often the victims of “disrespect in the health care setting.”⁴⁶ Despite adjusting for severity of symptoms, African Americans are more likely to be refused specialty service referrals by their primary

2016, from <https://www.ama-assn.org/>

43 Alix Weisfeld and Robert L. Perlman, “Disparities and Discrimination in Health Care: An Introduction,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 48, no. 1 (2005): S1-S9.

44 Importantly, even when financial barriers were taken into account, disparities in these figures continued to exist. This suggests other barriers—geographical location, cultural practices, etc.—are also important. “Report on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care,” American Medical Association (1995). Retrieved January 5, 2016, from <https://www.ama-assn.org/>

45 The research study, carried out by the Kennedy Krieger Institute and approved by JHU, was searching for abatement techniques but, apparently, did not encourage separation from toxic environments that were the source of the children’s blood lead. A class action lawsuit was filed in 2011. Timothy Williams, “Racial Bias Seen in Study of Lead Dust and Children,” *New York Times* (September 15, 2011). Retrieved January 16, 2016 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/16/us/suit-accuses-baltimore-institute-of-exposing-children-to-lead.html>

46 Judy Ann Bigby. “Care of Blacks and African-Americans.” In *Cross-Cultural Medicine*. Philadelphia: American College of Physicians, 2003.

care physicians.⁴⁷ Black Americans' emotional and financial investments yield poor returns, leading some to eschew treatment altogether.

The health outcomes of African Americans in Detroit and Baltimore are a reflection of their nationwide status. In Rust Belt cities and other urban centers, the story of the compounded effects of racism and discrimination is the same. Black residents remain:

Mired in corrosive sociocultural, health and biomedical system legacies of [...] years of being portrayed as being biologically and intellectually inferior; 246 years of chattel slavery, including a slave health deficit and a slave health subsystem; 100 years of legal segregation and discrimination and a “Negro medical ghetto;” and contemporary social, political, and economical isolation, oppression, exploitation, and a “dual” and unequal health system.⁴⁸

⁴⁷“Report on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care,” *American Medical Association* (1995). Retrieved January 5, 2016, from <https://www.ama-assn.org/>

⁴⁸ William M. Byrd and Linda A. Clayton, *An American Health Dilemma. Volume 1. A Medical History of African Americans and the Problem of Race: Beginnings to 1900*, New York: Routledge, 2000, and *An American Health Dilemma. Volume 2. Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: 1900-2000*, New York: Routledge, 2002. Both cited in Brian Smedley, et al., *Ibid.*

State of the Cities: Defining Decline

Twenty-first century Detroit and Baltimore demonstrate the disastrous results of deindustrialization and depopulation on heavily segregated urban centers. For the 1.3 million who still reside in the metropolises, the ramifications of cumulative interpersonal and systemic racism are felt from the cradle to the grave. In Baltimore, for example, the neighborhoods of Greenmount East and Little Italy have infant mortality rates on par with the West Bank.¹ Detroit County's morgues have accumulated scores of dead bodies, as families often delay claim of loved ones until they can afford to bury them.²

Educational opportunities afforded to school-aged children are bleak. The withering population presents a critical problem, both economically and logistically, for tax-funded public school systems. Detroit's population peaked in the 1950s at 1.85 million inhabitants, but it has steadily decreased to less than half of that number.³ In the first decade of this century alone, public school enrollment declined by half as the city's population continued to hemorrhage, leaving large educational zoning areas with too few students and too few tax dollars to support aging facilities. From 2003-2013, Detroit closed almost 150 public schools (most of them since the incoming of an Emergency Manager in 2009).⁴ Efforts to merge schools (and therefore close long-open, and more accessible by transport, local schools) have been met with much resistance. Privately-run (but publicly-funded) charter schools attract many families, who hope to avoid Detroit Public Schools' "budgetary shortfalls, school district bankruptcy, teacher and administrator layoffs, hiring and salary

1 Sarah Kliff, "In 2 Baltimore Neighborhoods, Infant Mortality is Higher Than in the West Bank," *Vox* (May 4, 2015). Retrieved January 18, 2016, from <http://www.vox.com/2015/5/4/8541369/infant-mortality-baltimore>

2 Charlie LeDuff, *Detroit: An American Autopsy*, New York: Penguin Press, 2013.

3 The official estimate in 2012 was already as low as 685,000. City of Detroit, "Financial and Operating Plan." *Detroit: Office of Emergency Management* (May 12, 2003a).

4 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013), *Ibid.* pg. xviii.

freezes, pension system defaults, shorter school years, ever-larger classes, faculty furloughs, fewer course electives, reduced field trips, foregone or curtailed athletics, outdated textbooks, ...[and] cuts in school maintenance.”⁵ The charters have shown no improvement in student performance overall,⁶ yet their existence stretches an already-thin educational budget. The combination of a smaller percentage of educational funds, fewer students in the same number of facilities, and a rapidly decreasing tax base as unemployment and emigration skyrocket creates a perfect storm for the failure of Detroit’s public education attempts. As of 2010, only 58 percent of DPS enrollees were set to graduate, most of them late. Student performance on standardized tests is “among the lowest in Michigan,” and a Council of Great City Schools study reported “deficiencies in instruction, data, [and] accounting.”⁷ Schools have recently started requesting that students bring their own toilet paper, and DPS teachers have collectively organized “sick-outs”⁸ to call attention to dilapidated and dangerous conditions in classrooms.

Baltimore City Schools are plagued with problems as well. Federal stimulus money allowed the district the highest per-pupil-expenditure in the nation 2014, but performance indicators such as standardized test scores only declined.⁹ Large infusions of cash are

5 Peng and Guthrie argue that there is no crisis in American education in this article, where they allow that Detroit is an exception. Arthur Peng and James Guthrie. “The Phony Funding Crisis.” *Education Next* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2010). Retrieved January 1, 2016 from <http://educationnext.org/the-phony-funding-crisis/>

6 Bridge Magazine Public Sector Consultants’ data for the state of Michigan. “In fourth-grade reading, math and writing tests, the statewide averages for traditional-school students ranked as meeting or exceeding standards were 84.8 percent, 91.8 percent and 48.2 percent, respectively. Charter-school students scored 76.8 percent, 87.6 percent and 37.7 percent on the same tests. In eight-grade reading, math and science, traditional-school students meeting or exceeding standards were 82.3 percent, 78.8 percent and 78.9 percent respectively, while charter students were at 77.6, 67.8 and 68.7 percent.” Nancy Derringer, “In Michigan Charter Schools, Results No Better Than Other Public Schools,” *M Live* (March 13, 2012). Retrieved January 39, 2015 from http://www.mlive.com/education/index.ssf/2012/03/in_michigan_charters_results_n.html

7 Arthur Peng, *et al.*, *Ibid.*

8 This highly contentious move prompted Emergency Managers to attempt legislation making it mandatory for any employee with knowledge of such action to inform authorities. It is illegal for teachers in Michigan to strike.

9 Jason Bedrick, “Do Baltimore Schools Need More Money?” *Newsweek* (2016, May 6). Retrieved January 18, 2016, from <http://www.newsweek.com/do-baltimore-schools-need-more-money-329085>

quickly consumed by the city's bureaucratic hurdles and aging school infrastructure. Last summer, schools closed in the afternoon for excessive heat three times in the opening two weeks of the academic year, as over 30 percent of Baltimore's schools do not have functioning air conditioning units.¹⁰ It is impossible for the school system's budget, regardless of its size or efficiency, to compensate for the impacts of discrimination that its students have inherited. The 61% of Baltimore's children who live in low-income households¹¹ are carrying with them the weight of decades of separation from jobs, housing and other wealth investment opportunities, and health and safety measures. Malnutrition, learning disabilities, disciplinary challenges, and absenteeism require preemptive and sometimes costly interventions; actions and provisions from individual teachers, schools and even school systems are poor substitutes for the fundamental changes that need to occur at the societal level in order for all children to succeed.

Too often, the back-end approach to "fixing" public schools focuses on maintaining control and order—essentially attempting to force students into ability. Disciplinary suspensions, school resource officers, and even juvenile detention centers function as a "school-to-prison pipeline" that funnels the poorest students, mostly African-American, into the criminal justice system beginning as early as primary school.¹² School discipline studies show, time and again, that rigid consequences are assigned more frequently to

African-American students:

10 Erin Cox and Pamela Wood, "Hogan, Franchot Demand Answers About Lack of AC in Baltimore County Schools," *Baltimore Sun* (September 16, 2015). Retrieved January 18, 2016, from <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/education/bal-hogan-franchot-demand-explanation-on-sweltering-classrooms-20150916-story.html>

11 Jordan Malter, "Baltimore's Economy in Black and White," *CNN* (April 29, 2015). Retrieved November 15, 2015, from <http://money.cnn.com/2015/04/29/news/economy/baltimore-economy/index.html>

12 Rishawn Biddle, "Dropout Nation » Baltimore's School Discipline Problem." *Three Thoughts*, (May 12, 2015). Retrieved January 3, 2016 from <http://dropoutnation.net/2015/05/12/baltimores-school-discipline-problem/>

Put simply, Baltimore's black children in regular classrooms have a one-in-10 chance of being subjected to the harshest of school discipline. For white children, it is just a chance of four in 100, a three in 100 for Latino classmates, and two in 100 for Asian peers.¹³

These data are not a simple reflection of behavioral tendencies. Several independent analyses document that Baltimore City Schools are more likely than other national counterparts to use harsh discipline, and a disproportionate amount of that is directed at African-American youth.¹⁴ Twenty-one Baltimore's elementary schools, all drawing from impoverished census tracts, suspended at least 18 percent of their students in 2005.¹⁵

Dropout Nation asserts, "What happens in the schoolhouse will eventually manifest out of it," and mass incarceration of Detroit and Baltimore's most vulnerable communities are prime examples. Segregation and poverty alone fail to provide explanations for the violence that plague inner-city communities of color, but the recent rise in "targeted and aggressive policing" as part of the "War on Crime" sheds light on this relatively recent development.¹⁶ The United States incarceration rate has quadrupled since 1970, and since African Americans are six times more likely to be imprisoned than whites, black communities are disproportionately burdened by the unemployment, disenfranchisement and detrimental family effects of imprisonment.¹⁷

13 Suspension rates are even higher in what Biddle refers to as "special education ghettos." Importantly, special education status can be assigned for relatively arbitrary statuses, such as "emotionally disturbed" or "developmentally delayed." Biddle argues that this places an unnecessary number of poor students into special ed. classrooms, where they receive the worst treatment. Rishawn Biddle, *Ibid.*

14 Rishawn Biddle, *Ibid.*

15 Rishawn Biddle, *Ibid.*

16 Heather Ann Thompson, "Inner-City Violence in the Age of Mass Incarceration," *The Atlantic Online* (October 30, 2014). Retrieved January 18, 2016, from

<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/10/inner-city-violence-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/382154/>

17 Widely-available databases allow criminal records to follow individuals for the duration of their lives, preventing gainful employment. In many US states, convicted felons are unable to vote, sometimes for life. In Florida, for example, 9 percent of citizens cannot vote, hold office or serve on a jury because they committed a felony at some point during their life. Dan Sweeney, Ann Choi, Rachel Schallom, and Lisa Huriash, "Florida Among Nation's Toughest Places to Have Voting Rights Restored," *The Sun Sentinel* (January 25, 2015). Retrieved January 18, 2016, from

The dramatic postwar rise of the carceral state depended directly on what might well be called the "criminalization of urban space," a process by which increasing numbers of urban dwellers - overwhelmingly men and women of color - became subject to a growing number of laws that not only regulated bodies and communities in thoroughly new ways but also subjected violators to unprecedented time behind bars. In the same way that rural African-American spaces were criminalized at the end of the Civil War, resulting in the record imprisonment of black men that undermined African-American communities in the Reconstruction and Jim Crow-era South, the criminalization of urban spaces of color, in both the South and North, during and after the 1960s civil rights era fundamentally altered the social and economic landscape of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century United States.¹⁸

Just as in school disciplinary data, the disproportionate incarceration rate of African Americans does not reflect increased criminal tendencies of the population. Rather, it highlights the complex process of “criminalizing blackness” that occurred throughout the twentieth century in the United States. Prominent social scientists attempted to empirically document black inferiority and criminality as battles for urban spaces and jobs occurred.¹⁹ Policy followed with punitive and discriminatory drug laws, and unequal policing and surveillance of impoverished communities.²⁰ Maryland spends \$220 million per year to incarcerate Baltimore residents from just 25 of its almost 200 communities—all desperately poor and mostly black.²¹ Baltimore Governor Martin O’Malley’s “zero tolerance” policies for urban crime not only nurtured a culture of mistrust between police and residents, they licensed violent, unethical and illegal police tactics. The city has paid close to \$5.7 million

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/florida/sfl-felon-voting-rights-20150121-htmlstory.html> and Heather Ann Thompson, *Ibid.*

18 Heather Ann Thompson, *Ibid.*

19 Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010.

20 Heather Ann Thompson, *Ibid.*

21 Jordan Malter, *Ibid.*

over police brutality lawsuits since 2011.²² The damage incurred by African Americans as a result of this brutality cannot be overstated; for many communities, it is a breaking-point issue. “With the exception of the riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., every major riot by the black community of an American city since the Second World War has been ignited by a single issue: police tactics.”²³

Several community health indicators in Baltimore signal distress. North Baltimore still maintains four tiny census tracts with significant wealth, but much of the city is composed of \$10,001-\$25,000 annual income tracts.²⁴ The stark difference in wealth is aligned with race, and contributes to Baltimore’s ranking in the top ten segregated cities in America.²⁵ The Upton/ Druid Heights and Roland Park neighborhoods of Baltimore have \$77,000 median income and 20-year lifespan disparities.²⁶ Black residents of Baltimore are three times more likely to have heart disease, eight times more likely to have diabetes, fifteen times more likely to be victims of homicide and twenty times more likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS than whites in the city.²⁷ One quarter of Baltimoreans live below the poverty line,²⁸ but despite public outcry, the city continues to offer tax incentives for ritzy downtown renovations at the expense of basic services like public education.²⁹

Charm City’s impoverished neighborhoods have striking statistics. Freddie Gray’s

22 Pamela Engel, “These Maps Show the Depth of Baltimore's Inequality Problem,” *Business Insider* (April 29, 2015). Retrieved January 4, 2016 from

<http://www.businessinsider.com/these-maps-show-the-depth-of-baltimores-inequality-problem-2015-4>

23 Jelani Cobb, *Ibid.*

24 Pamela Engel, *Ibid.*

25 US Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstracts of the United States*. Washington, DC: 2010.

26 Upton/ Druid Heights has a median income of \$13, 388, while Roland Park has a median income of \$90, 492. Jordan Malter, *Ibid.*

27 “Place Matters...,” *Ibid.*

28 Jordan Malter, *Ibid.*

29 Luke Broadwater. “Baltimore's Quick Economic Growth Contributes to Loss in State Aid to Schools.” *Baltimore Sun* (February 8, 2016). Retrieved February 19, 2016, from

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-school-funds-20160208-story.html>

native Sandtown-Winchester, for example, has a median household income of \$24,000; 60.7% of its population attained less than a high school diploma, 51.8% of its adults are unemployed, and 49.3% of its students are chronically absent.³⁰ The Baltimore Department of Health estimates that approximately 10% of the city's population is addicted to heroin, the highest addiction rate in the country according to the US Drug Enforcement Agency.³¹

Baltimore's physical structure reflects its grim plunge. Almost 48,000 abandoned homes and many more vacant lots line its neighborhood streets, creating health and safety hazards for residents.³² Uninhabitable structures are associated with higher rates of assaultive violence and fires, and Baltimore found that "the cost of providing police and fire services to a block increased by \$1, 472 annually for each vacant house."³³ The city's sewer system is a constant source of trouble, backing up to overflow into almost 400 Baltimore homes in the past five years. Despite hazardous risks, the city has pumped over 330 million gallons of raw sewage into the inner harbor through overflow pipes at Jones Falls.³⁴

Baltimore's failures, regardless how severe, still pale in comparison to those of Motor City. Detroit's physical setting—its infrastructure—is also crumbling. Cracks and potholes line its roads and bridges. Huge numbers of previously-inhabited structures are abandoned,

30 Justice Policy Institute, "Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park," *Prison Policy Initiative* (February 2015). Retrieved January 23, 2016 from <http://static.prisonpolicy.org/origin/md/Sandtown.pdf>

31 Carter M. Yang, "Part I: Baltimore Is the U.S. Heroin Capital," *ABC News* (March 14, 2014). Retrieved January 18, 2016, from <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=92699>

32 Jordan Malter, *Ibid.* and Terrence McCoy, "Baltimore Has More Than 16,000 Vacant Houses. Why Can't the Homeless Move In?" *Washington Post* (2015, May 12). Retrieved January 19, 2016, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/baltimore-has-more-than-16000-vacant-houses-why-cant-the-homeless-move-in/2015/05/12/3fd6b068-f7ed-11e4-9030-b4732caefe81_story.html

33 Terrence McCoy, (2015, May 12), *Ibid.*

34 Timothy Wheeler, "City Faulted for Deliberately Dumping Sewage Into Jones Falls." *Baltimore Sun* (2015, September 15). Retrieved January 19, 2016, from <http://www.baltimoresun.com/features/green/blog/bs-md-ci-sewer-overflows-20151214-story.html>

with even the wealthiest neighborhoods containing at least one. In more historically impoverished areas, such as the city-locked Hamtramck, entire blocks may have only one occupied home. In a famous 2009 *Detroit Free Press* story, a street in northeast Detroit was reported to have 60 out of 66 homes foreclosed upon.³⁵ Across the expanse of Detroit's roughly 140 square miles, an estimated 90,000 structures are abandoned—homes, churches, shops, the Michigan Depot train station and the infamous mile-long Packard Plant. An entire community college outside of Hamtramck was on sale in the summer of 2014 for \$18,000. As in Baltimore, these structures become havens for criminal activity, including drugs and arson, threatening the already fragile communities that remain. Water and sewer lines, part of a weakening and underfunded infrastructure, crumble and leak into properties, often undetected for significant periods of time.

Areas of Detroit that lack abandoned structures usually do so because the properties have been cleared at some point but never redeveloped, leaving vacant lots in their place. Upward of twenty square miles³⁶ of vacancy (excluding parks, industrial vacancy and cemeteries) is spread throughout the city; the almost wilderness-like state of the environs plays host to numerous packs of wild dogs, coyotes, and—most recently—the return of the beaver (previously unsighted since 1934).³⁷

The physical state of Detroit as ruinous is, of course, a result of a rapid decline in its ability to function as a municipality. For the majority of Detroit's residents, population decline means crippling separation from jobs, access to food and medical care, and public services. Remarkably, the city is devoid of even one major-chain grocery store, leaving

³⁵ Mark Binelli, *Detroit City is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012. p8.

³⁶ This is in contrast to previously-reported 40mi², a figure which has been contested because of its inclusiveness but is still cited by many credible sources. Data Driven Detroit, Retrieved January 4, 2016 from <http://datadrivendetroit.org/>.

³⁷ Charlie LeDuff, *Detroit: An American Autopsy*, New York: Penguin Press, 2013. (170)

only shops stocked with overpriced processed and packaged foods to service many communities. A 2007 study found that “92 percent of food stamp outlets were, indeed, liquor stores, gas stations, or pharmacies.”³⁸ Residents seeking transportation through vacant neighborhoods are hard-pressed, as for decades funded proposals for subway, light rail and improved train connections were declined. Now the city finds itself without adequate public transportation and fiscally defunct. The city’s public transportation was better in the 1950s than it is today, as hour-long waits for ill-routed buses are not uncommon.³⁹

Not surprisingly, other public services are incapacitated by funding shortages. Landscaping, streetlights, the aforementioned water and sewerage infrastructure, and public parks in Detroit have all seen a decrease (if not total abandonment) of funding. The town of Hamtramck⁴⁰ has had no functioning streetlights, school or library since 2009. The Police and Fire Departments are woefully underfunded, leading to staff and equipment shortages that greatly decrease their ability to serve the struggling population. Around the time of Detroit’s bankruptcy filing, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder and newspapers were reporting a 58 minute response time for police to emergency calls.⁴¹ The Fire Department’s personnel have been gutted, from 17,000 employees in 2006 to just fewer than 1,000 today. Combined with station closings and defective trucks and hoses, deaths attributed to fire

38 A notable exception is a downsized Whole Foods in Midtown, a product of a huge injection of private funding that services a very small sector of the population. Mark Binelli, *Ibid.* p56.

39 In a recent media-sensation news story, a 56-year-old Detroit resident James Robertson was chronicled on his 21-mile-per-day walk to his job at a Pontiac factory where he earns \$10.55 an hour. Robertson’s community, like so many in Detroit, has no fixed-route bus lines, leaving him to walk the distance from Detroit to Los Angeles (and back) each year for over a decade. Binelli notes that the city is one of the only major metropolises in the US to lack a public transportation option from its airport into downtown. Ryan Felton, “How Detroit Ended Up With the Worst Public Transit,” *Detroit Metro Times* (2014, 11 March). Retrieved January 8, 2016 from <http://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/how-detroit-ended-up-with-the-worst-public-transit/Content?oid=2143889>

40 A tiny city of 22,000 that is geographically surrounded by Detroit City. Hamtramck is the site of the abandoned Dodge Main Auto Plant.

41 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013), *Ibid.* pg. xviii.

continue to increase in the city.⁴² Emergency Medical Services have been reduced to as few as ten operational ambulances.

Perhaps no single indicator echoes the true depravity of Detroit's condition better than the July 17, 2013 Chapter 9 filing itself: Bankruptcy. Depleted, exhausted, ruined. That an entire city (and such a formerly wealthy one, at that) in the United States could do so is, at once, fascinating and appalling. Detroit residents have since felt their fate dictated by corporate and political self-interest over which they have no control. With the March 2013 appointment of Kevyn Orr as Detroit's Emergency Manager, Governor Snyder usurped all power of democratically elected officials in the city. Orr's role "came with sweeping powers; the EM is not accountable to the electorate, but has vast powers to restructure city finances, declare bankruptcy, sell municipal assets, change the terms of the city workers' and teachers' contracts, and reorganize or eliminate pensions and other benefits."⁴³ With up to \$18 billion in debt and over 100, 000 creditors, Detroit clearly needed interventions, but Orr's appointment was questioned as his employer, Jones Day, represents Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Citigroup and numerous other major Wall Street affiliates.⁴⁴ As part of his EM Order # 17, it was proposed that the city allow additional lending from the British bank Barclays to pay outstanding debts toward (Jones Day clients) Bank of America and Merrill Lynch. In return, Barclays would gain a first-priority lien on

42 Lawrence Porter, "Cuts in Fire Protections Lead to Deaths in Detroit," *WSWS* (2013, 12 February). Retrieved January 3, 2016 from <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/02/12/fire-f12.html>

43 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013), *Ibid.* pg. xix.

44 "Call On the Detroit City Council... Moratorium NOW!!" *Moratorium Michigan* (October 19, 2013). Retrieved January 13, 2016 from <http://moratorium-mi.org/call-on-the-detroit-city-council-to-reject-emergency-manager-order-17-approval-of-post-petition-financing/>

“every asset Detroit sells that is worth more than \$10 million.”⁴⁵ This would include the potentially profitable Detroit Water and Sewerage Department.⁴⁶ The bankruptcy’s reach was legally contested as it allowed for pension cuts that are protected under Michigan’s state constitution.⁴⁷ Despite these objections, however, the filing proceeded and the city’s 20,000 retired workers will see a 30% decrease in their pension checks.⁴⁸ At an average previous earning of \$18,000 a year, and combined with a reduction in healthcare coverage (another measure of the bankruptcy directed by Orr), these cuts will serve to critically impair many of Detroit’s remaining earners. Current city workers, too, will see a decrease in pay and coverage. Who among Detroit’s residents with the ability to leave will remain? In a cruel twist of fate, those who cannot afford to leave will effectively be stuck repaying corporate insurers and bondholders debts which they had no responsibility in accruing.

45 Which, as Stephens notes, would be anything Jones Day decides to sell. Tom Stephens, “Detroit’s Dickensian Future,” *Counter Punch* (2013, October 23). Retrieved January 1, 2016 from <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/10/23/detroits-dickensian-future/>

46 Many have argued that the recent rounds of water shut-offs, condemned by the United Nations as a human rights abuse, were an attempt to “clean up the books” by bringing accounts current so that the DWSD would appear more attractive to potential buyers. The DWSD provides services to many of the wealthier suburbs surrounding Detroit proper.

47 Susanna Kim, “Judge Says Detroit Bankruptcy Unconstitutional,” *ABC News* (2013, 19 July). Retrieved January 2, 2016 from <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/judge-detroit-bankruptcy-unconstitutional/story?id=19716119&page=2>

48 Christine Ferretti, “For Detroit Retirees, Pension Cuts Become Reality,” *The Detroit News* (2015, February 27). Retrieved January 6, 2016 from <http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/wayne-county/2015/02/27/detroit-retirees-pension-cuts-become-reality/24156301/>

Conclusion

The African-American Great Migration of the twentieth century was followed by another mass movement as whites exited urban centers for the suburbs. In the decades since the 1950s, Detroit's population has shifted from 83 percent white to 83 percent black; Baltimore's population has gone from 24 percent black to 64 percent black in the same time frame.¹ These demographic shifts are the product of population decline, as whites left for county residences, black families were constrained in urban tracts of poverty and crime. Financial and political limitations have kept many of them there since, often in the same historically redlined areas to which their parents and grandparents were restricted. While many are quick to cite the violent eruptions of 1943, 1967 and 1968,² or subsequent shifts to black political leadership³ as turning points for the cities' populations, to begin there would be to place the blame of white suburbanization squarely on the shoulders of black urban residents. Historical accounts of that nature ignore the profound impact of systematic segregation and oppression in both cities. Racial tensions were high in postwar Baltimore and Detroit, but they were a product of relentless social, economic and political exclusion. They were, by no means, a starting point.

Whites were the beneficiaries of multifarious discriminatory practices and policies that limited African Americans' work and housing opportunities. They participated in

1 Jamelle Bouie, "The Deep, Troubling Roots of Baltimore's Decline," *Slate* (2015, April 29). Retrieved January 2, 2015 from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2015/04/baltimore_s_failure_is_rooted_in_its_segregationist_past_the_city_s_black.html

2 1943's race riot was a disastrous clash that lasted three days and claimed thirty-four lives. 6000 federal troops were called in to restore order after tension. There were several smaller incidences of violence, such as the Sojourner Truth riots in 1942, which were also racially charged.

3 The election of Coleman Young (Detroit's first black mayor), for example.

“resource hoarding,” where “through the combined advantages of race and residence, [they] were able to hoard political and economic resources— jobs, public services, education and other goods—to their own advantage at the expense of the urban poor.”⁴ The differential wealth and power this cultivated between races created very different living experiences for black and white families in urban areas.

Within the parameters of a racist narrative, African Americans’ substandard homes and joblessness were interpreted as reflections of poor character, rather than the results of decades of oppressive discrimination. For those who espoused racist ideologies, these cultural products served as teleological arguments for the inferiority of the black race. This interpersonal racism served to reinforce the systemic racism that created variable living experiences in the first place. The suburbanization of the 1950s was the natural culmination of both types of racism—interpersonal and systemic—at the city level. Consciously or subconsciously, white individuals and the power structures they created construed black individuals as the root of their cities’ problems. Decades of witnessing property values sink in the presence of black neighbors, of unemployed crowds of black men, and of crime and decay in black neighborhoods evinced their claim. When public policy and deregulation allowed for the movement of capital to the suburbs and abroad, whites were left with little reason to remain in urban centers. Following jobs and fleeing black neighborhood expansion, they moved. The demographic shift was dire because of the federal government’s sanctioning of discriminatory practices such as redlining. American journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates reminds that, “white flight was a triumph of social engineering,

⁴ Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, via Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013), *Ibid.*

orchestrated by the shared racist presumptions of America's public and private sectors. For should any nonracist white families decide that integration might not be so bad as a matter of principle or practicality, they still had to contend with the hard facts of American housing policy."⁵

If Detroit and Baltimore could have arrested their development—paused their fates, so to speak—then (in the 1950s or shortly thereafter), the cities' stories may be different today. Instead, both metropolises were immediately thrust into the disastrous throes of deindustrialization. Jobs and residents of means hemorrhaged from the cities for decades, abandoning the most vulnerable populations in the urban centers. Worse, for the last half of the twentieth century (and the first decade of the twenty-first), Detroit and Baltimore have undergone a succession of “urban shocks” that “further diminish the capacity of low-income urban black communities to recover from the one that came next.”⁶ From environmental disasters to targeted policing through efforts like Nixon's war on drugs,⁷

These shocks happened, at least 80 years of them, to the same communities in Baltimore, as they did in cities across the country. Neighborhoods weakened by mass incarceration were the same ones divided by highways. Families cornered into subprime loans descended from the same families who'd been denied homeownership—and the chance to build wealth—two generations earlier. People displaced

5 Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic Online* (October 10, 2015). Retrieved January 5, 2016 from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

6 Emily Badger, "The Long, Painful and Repetitive History of How Baltimore Became Baltimore," *Washington Post* (April 25, 2015). Retrieved January 4, 2016 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/04/29/the-long-painful-and-repetitive-history-of-how-baltimore-became-baltimore/>

7 Richard Nixon's domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman, in an interview published for the April 2016 Harper's magazine, admitted the war on drugs targeted black people. His words: "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black communities. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did." Dan Baum, "Legalize It All: How to Win The War on Drugs," *Harper's* (April 2016). Retrieved March 25, 2016 from <http://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/>

today by new development come from the same communities that were scattered in the name of ‘slum clearance’ and the progress brought by Interstate highways.

Though civil rights efforts tirelessly⁸ work to repair the damage of segregation and discrimination, they have historically proved too little, too late. Even at the highest levels of bureaucracy, racist ideologies and practices reappear in novel, masked versions of themselves. Segregation, while illegal, still occurs in schools, places of employment and residential areas through the implementation of alternative exclusionary criteria. A candidate with a clean criminal record, postsecondary education and networking skills of at least the middle class (all easier to acquire with accumulated wealth) has a better chance of job placement. A student residing in a census tract with a powerful political influence will be districted to better schools, and better classes within those schools. A family with a neat, traditional residential history and an established line of credit will be more eligible for a prime loan in a neighborhood that allows them to multiply their wealth. These avenues are still disproportionately available to whites in America, and in the cities of Detroit and Baltimore the effects of continued segregation and discrimination are more pronounced than ever.

Detroit and Baltimore cities of 2016 serve as “grim epilogues”⁹ of the tragic collision between systematic discriminatory practices and deindustrialization in America. Decades of unfettered spending in the midst of industrial decline, white flight’s degradation of the tax base, and political mishandlings (gross malfeasance locally, oversight and nepotism at the

8 “For the past 25 years, Congressman John Conyers Jr., who represents the Detroit area, has marked every session of Congress by introducing a bill calling for a congressional study of slavery and its lingering effects as well as recommendations for “appropriate remedies.” Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Ibid*.

9 Thomas J. Sugrue (2013) uses this phrasing to discuss the bankruptcy of Detroit.

state and national levels) have mitigated any effort for urban residents to regain any economic footing. Detroit, in particular, became “perhaps the nation’s most prominent casualty of the deregulation of financial services and the lax oversight of Wall Street investment practices that began in the 1990s.”¹⁰

As in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s era, government intervention on behalf of the American people could soften the blow, but urban, mostly-black cities are low state and national priorities. Wells Fargo (2005) and Bank of America (2011) were forced to settle discriminatory lawsuits for over \$500 million for targeted predatory lending to African Americans, but no New Deal-style mortgage salvation was offered for homeowners. “In 2009, half the properties in Baltimore whose owners had been granted loans by Wells Fargo between 2005 and 2008 were vacant; 71 percent of these properties were in predominantly black neighborhoods.”¹¹ Officials for the GOP-led state of Michigan continued its long history of discrimination by decreasing Detroit’s state-shared revenue by almost half between 1998 and 2012.¹² Federally, despite massive corporate bailouts of banks, insurance companies and car manufacturers, cities like Detroit and Baltimore receive little to nothing in the way of additional assistance.

That leaves urban residents to fend for themselves—socially, economically and politically. The cumulative effects of substandard jobs, education, housing, health care make that a formidable battle, however. A post-racial narrative abounds in the United States, particularly since the election of Barack Obama in 2008,¹³ that when combined with

10 Thomas J. Sugrue, (2013), *Ibid.* pg. xx.

11 Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Ibid.*

12 Sugrue blames this on a combination of Michigan’s lack of “political will” and Detroit’s lack of “regional allies.” (2013) *Ibid.* pg. xix.

13 As the first black president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama’s achievement gives the false impression that

American “pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps” individualism, creates a dangerous and damaging framework for interpreting the plight of the black urban poor. While race relations in the United States have improved over the past century, “over half to three fourths of whites” still report harboring beliefs that African Americans are “less intelligent, [and] more prone to violence” and “prefer to live off welfare.”¹⁴ These persistent ideologies continue to challenge African-American citizens, and serve to deter a full recognition of the impacts of historical and contemporary discrimination.

In April 2015, American television sets were afire with coverage of the protests that followed the arrest and subsequent death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore. The city’s crumbling mills and boarded-up row houses were set to flames. Devil’s Night in Detroit brings arsonists out in the wild, abandoned expanse of the city’s decaying corridors. The tradition, like Detroit’s ultimate failure of bankruptcy, is viewed with disdain. For many Americans, discussion of these events fails to extend beyond the confines of the immediate. Gray himself, the protesters and their offenses, greedy politicians like Detroit’s Kwame Kilpatrick, and perhaps a woeful glance at the cities’ impoverished neighborhoods provide a convenient, if flawed, explanation of events. As columnist Jelani Cobb advised, “it was not difficult to see who set the buildings on fire [in Baltimore] last week. The more salient concern is how cities become kindling in the first place.”¹⁵ The fate of Baltimore and Detroit cannot accurately be viewed in isolation from their racist histories, as their

black citizens and white citizens of the USA have equal opportunities.

14 Bobo, Lawrence D. “Racial Attitudes and Relations at the End of the Twentieth Century.” In Neil J. Smelser, William J. Wilson and Faith Mitchell. *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2001. Retrieved January 4, 2016 from <http://www.ebrary.com>

15 Jelani Cobb, *Ibid.*

widespread, intentional, and continued discrimination against African Americans helped to create their current state.

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