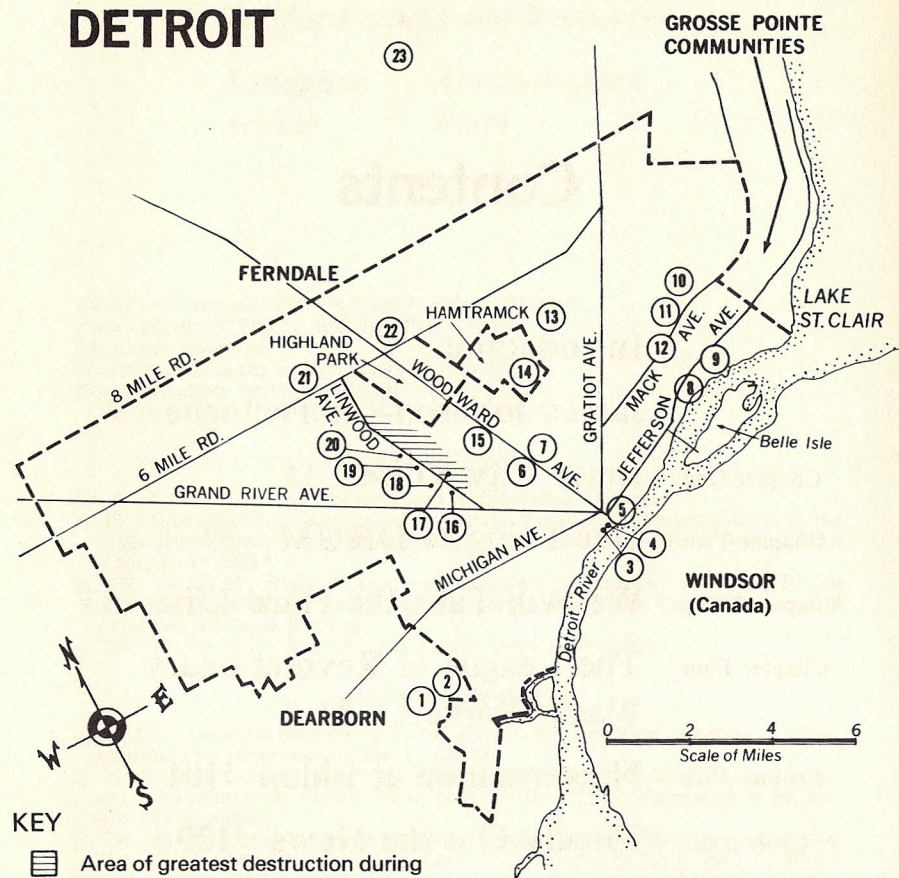



DETROIT



KEY

-  Area of greatest destruction during the Great Rebellion of 1967
- 1. Ford River Rouge plant
- 2. South End immigrant community
- 3. Cobo Hall
- 4. Veterans Memorial Building
- 5. Renaissance Center
- 6. Wayne State University
- 7. Detroit Institute of Arts (Diego Rivera murals)
- 8. Solidarity House (UAW Headquarters)
- 9. Chrysler's Jefferson Assembly plant
- 10. Briggs Manufacturing
- 11. Chrysler's Mack Avenue stamping plant
- 12. Wall of Dignity and St. Bernard's Church
- 13. Chrysler complex, including Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle plant and Chrysler Forge
- 14. Dodge Main complex
- 15. Algiers Motel
- 16. Shrine of the Black Madonna
- 17. New Bethel Church
- 18. Scene of Rochester Street Massacre
- 19. Muslim Mosque #1
- 20. Black Star Bookstore and China-Albania Bookstore
- 21. From The Ground Up Bookstore
- 22. Motor City Labor League Bookstore and Office
- 23. General Motors Technical Center

Introduction

Detroit is the fifth-largest city in the United States, the major industrial center of the nation's heartland, the headquarters of the automobile industry which directly or indirectly employs one out of every six Americans. In 1972, Lawrence M. Carino, Chairman of the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, made the observation that "Detroit is *the* city of problems. If they exist, we've probably got them. We may not have them exclusively, that's for sure. But we probably had them first. . . . The city has become a living laboratory for the most comprehensive study possible of the American urban condition." When Detroit burned in July 1967, in the most widespread and costly of hundreds of urban rebellions throughout the United States, the men who rule America knew they had to take immediate action to end the general crisis. In Detroit, they formed a self-appointed blue ribbon New Detroit Committee. This organization of the city's ruling elite intended to put an end to urban unrest with a vast building program designed to replace inner city squalor with the sleek new architecture of modern office buildings, banks, condominiums, hotels, convention attractions, and a host of related enterprises. The program was meant to stimulate economic development, create jobs, and provide social stability and confidence for a troubled city.

The New Detroit Committee was not operating in a social vacuum. Already embodied within the process of destructive violence represented by the Great Rebellion of July 1967 was a fresh surge of positive revolutionary energy. An attempt to organize the power of the Great Rebellion into a political force capable of restructuring American society began as soon as minimal order had been restored by the National Guard and police. Black-owned newspapers and organizations of black industrial

workers began to present a series of programs and revolutionary visions in sharp contrast to the ideas put forward by the New Detroit Committee. The revolutionaries combined the experience of the black liberation struggle with the radical tradition within the labor movement to speak of a society in which the interests of workers and their families would become the new foundation of all social organization. Even as the New Detroit Committee began to put its plans into action, black workers unleashed a social movement of their own which soon forced a series of organizational, ideological, cultural, political, and economic confrontations with established wealth and power.

The New Detroit Committee represented forces that were the social antithesis of the movement led by black revolutionaries. Its personnel were headed by Henry Ford II, Chairman of the Ford Motor Company; James Roche, Chairman of the General Motors Corporation; Lynn Townsend, Chairman of Chrysler Corporation; Walker Cisler, Chairman of Detroit Edison (Detroit's power and light utility); Joseph L. Hudson, Chairman of the J. L. Hudson Company (Detroit's largest department store chain); Stanley J. Winkelman, President of Winkelman Stores, Inc. (another major retail chain); William G. McClintock, Vice-President of the National Bank of Detroit; William M. Day, Vice-President of Michigan Bell; and Ralph McElvenny, President of Michigan Consolidated Gas Company. Other members included Max Fisher, Chairman of Marathon Oil and Chairman of the United Foundation (Detroit's united charities fund); Dr. William Keast, President of Wayne State University; Dr. Norman Drachler, a retired Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools; Walter Reuther, President of the United Auto Workers; Robert Holmes, Vice-President of the Teamsters Union; and a number of local political figures. The committee was organized in such a way that it was able to bypass openly the elected government and to finance its projects directly from corporate and foundation coffers. Over fifty million dollars were immediately earmarked by some fifty Detroit firms for a massive waterfront rebuilding plan which led to the formation of a separate organization called Detroit Re-

naissance. Two hundred million dollars in short-term mortgage loans were arranged for Detroit Renaissance by a group of thirty-eight banks led by the National Bank of Detroit. This loan was designed to have a second phase beginning in 1977 when the financing would shift to the Ford Motor Credit Company and four insurance companies (Aetna Life and Casualty, Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co., and Travelers Insurance Co.). An enthusiastic Governor Milliken described Detroit Renaissance as "a monument to the vision of a few men and the faith of many."

The rebuilding of the center of Detroit proposed by the New Detroit Committee would mean that eventually the blacks, Appalachians, and students who inhabited the area between the riverfront commercial center and the Wayne State University area would be removed to make room for a revitalized core city repopulated by middle- and upper-class representatives of the city's various racial and ethnic groups. Stopgap anti-poverty programs were to be used as a short-term solution to street violence as a new class of black politicians and businessmen were given a wider role in running the city. These individuals would take places in corporate boardrooms, on union executive boards, and in whatever elective offices their "bloc" vote could carry them to. The police, desegregated and strengthened, were to be a front-line force against "extremists of the right and left" who sought to upset the new dynamism.

The New Detroit Committee, for all its financial and political clout, represented little more than a recycling of pre-1967 Detroit. It sought to deal with the basic contradictions and problems which had produced the Great Rebellion with what amounted to a showcase public relations program. In the first six years of the New Detroit Committee's existence the quality of life in the city deteriorated to a new low. The industrial workers who made up over 35 percent of the population were the hardest hit. They found that the New Detroit meant working longer and faster and paying higher taxes in exchange for diminishing city services and for wage gains more than outpaced by inflation. "Runaway"

factories, new managerial demands, and a declining automotive industry made the very existence of many of their jobs a real issue. Union leaders, humiliated time and again by corporate managers pursuing higher productivity and higher profits, found themselves fighting their own membership as vigorously and as often as they fought the company. Black workers continued to hold the most arduous, dangerous, and unhealthy jobs. Their moves toward job improvement, union office, and shop floor reform were resisted by the company, the union, and even their fellow workers. The black population also bore much of the burden of curtailed public services, especially the nearly nonexistent public transit and a school system on the verge of bankruptcy. Thousands of homes in the city proper were deserted as a result of corruption in public and private lending institutions, making a mockery of the multimillion dollar towers of Detroit Renaissance. The grievances of "invisible" minorities such as white Appalachians and the city's growing Arab population remained largely unheard and unresolved. Established ethnic groups such as the Polish-Americans and Italian-Americans worried increasingly about jobs, property values, and personal safety. The police department resisted desegregation of its ranks, created secret elite units, and organized to win direct political power in city government. The organized state violence and the unorganized street violence of 1967 became more and more institutionalized. Motor City became Murder City, leading the nation and perhaps the world in homicides and crimes of violence. In 1973 the number of homicide victims in Detroit was triple the death toll on all sides in the civil disturbances that took place in Northern Ireland during the same year. Head-in-the-sand reformers talked glibly of gun control while literally millions of guns were sold to Detroiters of every race and class who sought protection from social chaos.

In the pages that follow we have attempted to relate the history of the Detroit struggle from 1967 to 1974, taking the activities of urban revolutionaries as our point of departure. We begin with a small core of black revolutionaries who began their political work in this period by publishing a newspaper and organizing in the

factories and then led a series of activities which inspired other insurgent forces within the city and beyond. More than anywhere else in the United States, the movement led by black workers defined its goal in terms of real power—the power to control the economy, which meant trying to control the shop floor at the point of production. The Detroit revolutionaries did not get sidetracked into a narrow struggle against the police per se or with one aspect of power such as control of education. The movement attempted to integrate within itself all the dissident threads of the rebellious sixties in order to create a network of insurgent power comparable to the network of established power. This movement, clearly in conflict with the wealth, power, and interests represented by the New Detroit Committee, generated an amazing sequence of separate but interlocked confrontations in the factories, in the polling booths, in the courts, in the streets, in the media, in the schools, and in the union halls.

What clearly differentiated the Detroit experience from other major social movements of the sixties and early seventies was its thoroughly working-class character. We have tried to ascertain exactly what this movement by working people meant in terms of the mass culture and the quality of life found in the factories, schools, and neighborhoods of the city of Detroit. Without minimizing the enormous tensions within the working class, tensions between blacks and whites, between men and women, and between competing ideologies and strategies, we have attempted to determine, from primary sources, what those involved in the struggle accomplished and what they had to say about their ultimate goals. At various moments in this effort by working people to gain control of their own lives, different individuals and organizations became more important than others. Our purpose has been to follow the motion of the class which supported them rather than to trace particular destinies or to speculate on the possible future importance of specific individuals, ideologies, or organizations.

We have used original interview material extensively. Most of these interviews were conducted in the summer of 1972. All of

them were recorded on tape, and the majority were recorded in the privacy of the homes of the people being interviewed. Usually, the person interviewed responded at length to a few introductory questions and then answered in more detail specific questions arising from the general discussion. We also had access to the personal papers of several important participants and to numerous plant bulletins, organizational memos, newspapers, and similar documents. In the pages which follow, when reproducing those materials, we have not tampered with the original in any way; this means that some typographical errors, unusual spellings, and grammatical mistakes have been reproduced. We believe this approach is necessary to preserve the unique flavor and tone of the language. Likewise, when quoting speeches, we have retained slang expressions and awkward constructions in the original without using brackets and other devices to make the speech patterns conform to more standard conventions.

Our account concludes on what may seem to be a pessimistic note. That is not our intent and our conclusion is not a pessimistic one. Nothing fundamental has changed in Detroit because the forces that controlled the city prior to 1967 still control the city and the nation. The strategies and tactics that guided their actions prior to 1967 remain more or less unaltered. Neither the ruling elite nor the workers have been able to revive the Motor City. But hundreds of thousands of people have begun to question basic assumptions about the organization and purpose of their lives and about the institutions that control them. They have begun to accumulate valuable skills and experiences necessary to challenge those institutions and to create substitute or parallel structures of power.

Increasingly, groups of white workers have begun to voice the complaints and pursue the objectives that black workers began to voice and pursue in the late 1960s. Ideas once limited to Marxists, youth counterculturalists, and women's liberation groups can now be found on the shop floor in myriad demands and actions for a humane way of life. The capitalist work ethic has been discredited. Men and women no longer wish to spend forty to fifty years performing dull, monotonous, and uncreative work. They see that

the productive system which deforms their lives for a profit of which they have less and less of a share is also one that destroys the air they breathe, wastes the natural resources of the planet, and literally injures or disables one out of ten workers each year. Their rebellion is expressed in extraordinary absenteeism, particularly on Mondays and Fridays, in chronic lateness, in the open use of drugs, in poor workmanship, in repeated demands for earlier retirement, in sabotage, and in the wildcat strike. At the same time, many members of the working class, especially young whites unable to find well-paying jobs, have found a solution to their employment woes by volunteering for the police and armed forces. White workers who can accept racial cooperation on the shop floor often remain hostile to similar cooperation in matters of housing, schooling, health care, and a whole range of social issues. Whether internal divisions will thwart the development of united class action is a question that remains to be answered.

The decade of the sixties with its assassinations, protests, riots, war, and violence has given birth to a decade that is deceptively quiet on the surface, while the forces of change move even more certainly toward the taproots of American society. Popular doubt about the ability of the dominant class to govern effectively has become increasingly widespread in the wake of the energy crisis, corruption in the highest elective office, and malicious corporate intrigues. The system no longer produces what was once touted as the "highest standard of living on earth." The people of the city of Detroit have been dealing with the crisis of power in a dramatic fashion, sometimes emphasizing race and sometimes emphasizing class, sometimes seized by fear and sometimes with vision. This book is about their experiences, a history of the contemporary United States in microcosm, an exemplary case of a social condition and conflicting social visions which stretch from one end of America to the other.