

**Building the Working City
Designs on Home and Life in Boomtown Detroit, 1914-1932**

by

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To Carrie and Joseph

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Abstract

Building the Working City Designs on Home and Life in Boomtown Detroit, 1914-1932

The modern worker's home made Detroit's Fordist industrialization possible. Between the 1914 announcement of Ford's "Five Dollar Day" and the Great Depression, Detroit industrialists, real estate developers and workers produced a building boom in housing, reshaping the urban society and negotiating the terms of what Antonio Gramsci called "a new type of worker and of man." Expanding the architectural history of Fordism beyond the factory, this dissertation argues that it was through the modernization of the larger city—a *Fordist Urbanism* dominated by worker's housing developments between the city's peripheral industrial plants—that Detroit's Fordist culture was constructed. Industrialists promoted modern worker's housing, pursuing social control of the city's largely-immigrant workforce, but shifted the risk of housing construction costs to individual workers by pushing them to seek houses on the open market. Real estate developers responded, and with government support built tens of thousands of bungalows and duplexes for sale to workers on credit. Realtors presented homeownership as a source of financial security for workers yet a realty culture of speculative investment and racial segregation undermined that security from the beginning. At the same time workers had significant agency in this city-building process. They produced more than industrial products in Fordist Detroit, making domestic lives and identities in the pluralistic ways that they chose, outfitted, lived in and cared for their homes, giving meaning and purpose to their routinized

labor. Detroit's industrial modernization—in and through its modern worker's houses—elaborated crises of racial violence and home foreclosure in the mid 1920s and early 1930s, in which workers fought against one another, and ultimately in solidarity, demanding that the Fordist promise of hard work in exchange for domestic security be honored. Detroit's houses of the early twentieth century—the extant and the demolished—still contain a great deal: a history of power negotiated through the modernization of the built environment. This past suggests that the city's future housing—its design, location, financing and use—can influence the management of risk within society, the social construction of difference, and workers' continued struggle for security.

Introduction

Building the Working City

The modern worker's home made Detroit's Fordist industrialization possible. During the years 1914-1932, from Ford's "Five Dollar Day" to the Great Depression, Detroit industrialists, real estate developers and workers produced a building boom in housing that reshaped the city's culture. As mass production transformed the city's economy, these agents grappled to define Detroit's modern subject—what political theorist Antonio Gramsci called "a new type of man suited to the new type of work and production process."¹ Drawing out this city building process—which I refer to as *Fordist Urbanism*—this dissertation explores the modern worker's home as a site of cultural transformation. I argue that the city's worker's houses—many of which are empty and abandoned in the present—helped to shape the city's promise of prosperity for workers but also elaborated conflicts of race and economic control that undermined that prosperity from the beginning.

This project makes transformative interventions, both in the historical understanding of Fordism and in the conceptualization of Detroit's volatile twentieth century. Expanding the architectural history of Fordism beyond the factory, I show that it was through the modernization of the larger city—a Fordist Urbanism dominated by worker's housing developments between

¹ Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, pp. 572, 613. One of Gramsci's greatest contributions to political thought is his emphasis on the role of culture in the reproduction of the capitalist political economy. See Joll, *Antonio Gramsci*, pp. 16-19, 137-138, and Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, pp. 1-3.

the city's peripheral plants—that Detroit's industrial culture was constructed. Fordist power relations were negotiated not only on the production line but, crucially, in workers' houses as well. I also challenge the rise-and-fall narrative applied to Detroit's twentieth century history in Thomas Sugrue's influential *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, and in several contemporary studies of the city's present abandonment.² On the contrary, I show that Detroit had no "glory days" of stable prosperity for workers in the early twentieth century. Because of this, Detroit's twentieth century is more properly conceptualized as a single, precarious, and contradictory process of modernization than as a cycle of growth, decline, and renaissance marked by turning points.

With this dissertation I illustrate a fruitful synthesis of perspectives drawn from urban and architectural history. Urban historians have provided rich studies of early twentieth century workers' lives and politics, but have underestimated the ways that the social world is shaped through the built environment of housing.³ Architectural historians have studied early twentieth century worker's housing in depth, but have often emphasized elite actors such as designers, reformers and the middle class to the exclusion of the voices and agency of workers.⁴ Leveraging

² See Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Andrew Moore, *Detroit Disassembled*, Dan Austin and Sean Doerr, *Lost Detroit: Stories Behind the Motor City's Majestic Ruins*, and Daniel Okrent, "Notown," *Time*, October 5, 2009.

³ See Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* and Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* for exemplary social histories of industrialization that nonetheless give little attention to the architecture of the modern worker's home. Becky Nicolaides, with *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles 1920-1965*, begins to illustrate the home as a site of workers' agency within industrial capitalism—though this occurs in very different ways in the rugged, informal Los Angeles suburb that she explores than in the formally-constructed bungalow districts of boomtown Detroit.

⁴ See Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913* and Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns*. On the contrary authors associated with vernacular architecture have explicitly sought to tell the stories of workers: see Joseph Bigott, *Houses and the Working Class in Metropolitan Chicago, 1869-1929* and Hubka and Kenny, "Examining the American Dream: Housing Standards and the Emergence of a National Housing Culture, 1900-1930, p. 49, *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2006).

the disciplinary strengths of architectural and urban history I show that modern houses were not merely epiphenomenal to changes in economy, politics and culture in Fordist Detroit—they were one of the principal mediums through which these changes were negotiated by industrialists, developers, and crucially, by workers. Through the lens of housing, in which workers navigated the opportunities and threats of rapid industrialization, this project examines what was a precarious social world from the beginning in Fordist Detroit. Before departing for the neighborhoods, however, Detroit’s industrialization must be understood in terms of work itself.

Fordism in the Factory

Gramsci used the term “Fordism” to describe the industrial culture of American corporate capitalism—emerging in the early twentieth century and epitomized in Ford’s Detroit.⁵ Industrial work was rationalized intensively in this context. From historical scholarship to Chaplin’s film *Modern Times*, Fordism is often figured through the moving assembly line and the worker’s experience of mass production on the shop floor, where—after Frederick Taylor’s theory of Scientific Management—industry began to rigorously monitor and coordinate workers’ bodily movements to maximize their productivity.⁶ In 1909 the Packard Motor Car Company invited Taylor himself to Detroit to speak to its management as they explored new production methods.⁷ Three years later a Ford Motor Company executive referenced Taylor’s theory, saying, “it was only a short time ago that someone suggested that, since it paid to study the scientific management of steam and gas engines, it might pay to study the scientific management

⁵ Gramsci theorized Fordism from a Fascist prison in the late 1920s and early 1930s, studying American rationalized production and management practices and distilling lessons that might be applied in socialist modernization, Gramsci and Forgacs, *A Gramsci Reader*, pp. 275-276.

⁶ On Fordism in the factory see for example Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day*, Smith, *Making the Modern*, Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production*, Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, and for its popular and comic representation see Chaplin’s film *Modern Times*.

⁷ Kimes, ed., *Packard: a history of the motor car and the company*, p. 125.

of men.”⁸ Men thus managed, Ford and Packard came to believe, could “accomplish far more than when left to unscientific self-management” as in the past.⁹

In 1910 Henry Ford—benefitting from Packard’s earlier experiments in reinforced concrete factory design—worked with Packard’s architect Albert Kahn to build a large reinforced concrete factory north of Detroit in Highland Park. The Highland Park plant was sited at the crossing of Woodward Avenue and a new peripheral rail line and was dubbed the “crystal palace” for its large expanses of steel sash glazing (Figure I:1).¹⁰ Within the palace’s expansive, fire-resistant, light-filled floors—and in keeping with Taylor’s principals—Ford’s mechanics developed a moving assembly line for automobiles in 1913. Combining innovations gleaned from the bicycle, meatpacking and firearms industries, Ford built Model Ts of interchangeable, machine-made parts. Replacing a practice where mobile workers brought parts to a fixed frame for assembly—as was done in Ford’s earlier Piquette Avenue plant—work at the Highland Park plant was increasingly performed by stationary workers positioned along a moving assembly line (Figure I:2).

The work of Fordist auto making was subdivided into many simple tasks that could be performed by unskilled or semi-skilled laborers exercising little thought or discretion. Crucially, Ford leveraged the increased efficiency of the Highland Park operation to reduce the retail cost of his product: broadening the Model T’s market exponentially to include the middle class, farmers, and eventually autoworkers themselves.¹¹ The methods developed through 1913 in Detroit promised an extraordinary leap in industrial productivity, but the politics of rationalizing

⁸ Marquis, Samuel S., *The Man: a Talk by Samuel S. Marquis*, Ford Motor Company, 1912. Samuel Marquis Papers, Writings and Sermons, Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Smith, *Making the Modern*, pp. 57-76.

¹¹ Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production*, pp. 216-261. See also Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, pp. 77-127 and Smith, *Making the Modern*, pp. 15-56.

workers' bodies and minds—inside and especially outside of the factory—proved more complex than industrialists initially expected.

Agency in Fordist Detroit

Rationalized production entailed hard labor and required strict discipline of workers. Machine operators, for example, were made to perform their work according to ideal time-motion schedules that dictated their physical movements down to the hundredth of a minute—an increment smaller than a second. At Packard, for example, the operation “Cut off both ends on Oliver Saw Standard” was rationalized by time-motion study according to the following schedule:

<u>Description of Sub-Operation</u>	<u>Time</u>
Walk to truck .004 x distance (5 ft.)	0.02
Reach down & select piece	0.01
Walk back to machine .004 x distance (5 ft.)	0.02
Place piece to stop	0.02
Push piece to saw (8”) & cut off one end, pull back	0.02
Turn hinge stop down 2 nd end & place piece to stop	0.02
Push piece to saw (8”) & cut off one end, pull back	0.02
Turn hinge stop back up, pick up piece	0.02
Walk to truck .004 x distance (5 ft.)	0.02
Remove piece to truck	0.01
<u>Walk back to front of machine .004 x distance</u>	<u>0.02</u>
Total:	0.20 minutes [12 seconds]. ¹²

This “elementary time” was based on a small, light piece, and Packard’s time study team allocated a few additional hundredths for more difficult pieces as follows:

For each 5 lbs.:	add 0.02
For work from 40-50” in length:	add 0.04
For work from 50-72” in length:	add 0.06 minutes ¹³

¹² Adapted from Packard Motor Car Company, “Standard Instruction Sheet for Cutting Off Both Sides of Piece on Oliver Cut-Off Saws, Showing Elementary Time,” *Packard advanced training school; lecture course* (1919), p. 171.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Performing this kind of repetitive task for hours, under strict and increasing time pressure, was physically and psychologically stressful. It was work that few would undertake for pleasure or personal fulfillment.¹⁴ Instead it was wages, and the prospects for material and social advancement they represented that gave meaning to routinized labor in Fordist Detroit.¹⁵ But who defined material and social advancement in this context? Whose agency was expressed in the modern homes that so many workers bought and outfitted, by leveraging their industrial pay? Gramsci maintained that the lives and consciousness of “new men” were shaped by the top-down cultural hegemony of capital through a “skillful combination of force (destruction of working-class trade unionism on a territorial basis) and persuasion (high wages, various social benefits, extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda) and thus succeed in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production.”¹⁶ Through cultural reforms such as prohibition, moralistic “regulation of the sexual instinct,” and a higher standard of living accessible through higher wages, advanced capitalism shaped society to maximize industrial productivity and profit.¹⁷

David Harvey extends Gramsci’s argument, emphasizing the ways that capital uses the built environment to shape society. He poses the worker’s home as a crucial locus of capital’s domination over labor; a place where “the drive by labor to improve its condition may be perverted by a variety of stratagems into a definition of use values advantageous to accumulation rather than reflective of the real human needs of labor.”¹⁸ Seeking material prosperity, in other words, Harvey sees workers as adopting a false consciousness—manipulated into valuing ideas

¹⁴ Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day*, pp. 37-66.

¹⁵ Helen and Robert Lynd similarly argued in their analysis of Muncie, Indiana that the experience of modern industrial labor had “to be strained through a pecuniary sieve before it assume[d] vital meaning,” *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, p. 52.

¹⁶ Hoare and Smith eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, p. 571.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, pp. 46-47.

and things promoted by the agents of capital. By purchasing a home on mortgage, for example, Harvey's worker becomes beholden to steady work and bill-paying and is forced to become "a pillar of social stability," unlikely to resist the economic control of his employers. In this way, Harvey argues, homeownership "promotes the allegiance of at least a segment of the working class to the principal of private property, promotes an ethic of 'possessive individualism' and brings about a fragmentation of the working class" into owners and tenants—weakening their political power as a class.¹⁹

This dissertation builds on Gramsci's and Harvey's efforts to connect industrial with cultural change, but will argue for a more complex model of agency that does not ascribe a deterministic, top down cultural authorship to capital. Housing, rather, was a site of cultural negotiation between several actors and one in which workers retained significant agency.²⁰ This approach is supported by critics of orthodox Marxism such as Pier Vittorio Aureli, who has leveraged the work of the 1960s Italian Marxist Operaists to argue for a theory of class struggle emphasizing workers' capacity to struggle "against from within" capitalism—and not only through wholesale rejection of capitalism.²¹ Aureli's study also supports the notion that the city beyond the factory is a crucial site of production and therefore of workers' agency. Operaist author Mario Tronti—as Aureli shows—argued that "society is a factory," and that the

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 37-38, 42.

²⁰ A useful analysis of "post-Marxist" theory, reformed to benefit from Marxist perspectives without relying on class/economic determinism is offered in Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 1986.

²¹ Aureli, *Project of Autonomy*, pp. 9, 33-34, 83. The Operaists were named for the worker—the operaio. A similar theory of workers' agency within capitalism—Aureli points out—is advanced in Hardt and Negri's influential study of contemporary capitalism *Empire*.

relationship between workers and capital is not only negotiated in the factory but in the entirety of social life: in spaces where workers refuse “to *be* work.”²²

Detroit’s worker’s houses of the 1910s and 1920, I argue, were complex sites of production where work was indeed reproduced but where a plurality of cultural forms in excess of, and at times in resistance to the imperatives of work were also made.²³ Often this production took the form of what Michel de Certeau calls “the practice of everyday life,” in the pluralistic ways that workers—in making their homes—“made do” within the constraining order of Fordist industrialization.²⁴ Through exchanges of reciprocity, trust, and coercion, households made the exchange economy possible, but in the process the household, as an institution in civil society, produced “alternatives, possible sources for the development of new kinds of practices [and] narratives about belonging to and participating in society.”²⁵ What workers’ produced through their homes in early Fordist Detroit was not categorically positive or negative, but complex—ranging from emancipatory forms of identity formation to the reproduction of repressive racial segregation.

Premises

Waves of housing development have reshaped Detroit in the twentieth century, and this project focuses on one particular—and particularly significant—wave definable by its period and geography. The homebuilding campaign of the first decades of Fordism, 1910s and 1920s, encircled the former city with new development and this once-peripheral zone—and the many

²² Aureli, pp. 33-34, 37-38.

²³ Planning theorist John Friedmann makes a similar argument with regard to all civil society institutions including the household—that they are sites of production not circumscribed by the project of capital accumulation alone, *Insurgencies: Essays in planning theory*, pp. 116-117.

²⁴ This refers to the central argument in de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, discussed at length in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

²⁵ As planning theorist John Friedmann quotes James Holston: Friedman, pp. 121-122, quotes from Holston, “Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship,” (1995).

worker's houses within it—is the primary focus of this study (Figure I:3). Discussion of the older city center is also interwoven throughout the dissertation, as this area was home to many workers throughout the period of study and representations of its most crowded districts were often used as a foil by reformers and real estate brokers arguing for new housing development.

A diverse cohort of workers made their homes within this geography. This dissertation uses the term “workers” to describe a social and occupational group that is distinct from the professionals and managers with greater control over the Fordist economy, but which is also diverse within itself. Automobile-related jobs dominated the Detroit economy, but skilled tradespeople, streetcar operators, firefighters, clerks, waiters, watchmen and domestic workers—the paid and unpaid—all contributed to the city's diverse population of workers. Even within the automobile industry itself there was a substantial diversity of pay, prestige and autonomy among workers, and these differences manifested themselves in the material possibilities of the home and the family budget. In 1922, for example, a national study of automobile industry pay showed that a routinized drill press operator earned an average of \$31.96 per week, \$1,661.92 per year—or about one third less if the operator was female—while a skilled toolmaker earned an average of \$38.47 per week, or \$2,000.44 per year.²⁶ These yearly income estimates represent best-case scenarios in terms of full employment—something that seasonal layoffs, or illness and injury would often make impossible. Around the same time in Detroit the “cost of maintaining a fair minimum standard of living” for a family of five in a five room house was \$1697.95.²⁷ Even in a good year, the drill press operator's family would clearly have to sacrifice to live in a modern

²⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Wages and Hours of Labor in the Automobile Industry, 1922*, Bulletin No. 348, October 1923, pp. 2-3.

²⁷ National Industrial Conference Board, *The Cost of Living Among Wage-Earners. Detroit, Michigan, September 1921*, p. 14. See also Peterson, *American Automobile Workers 1900-1933*, pp. 71-93.

home while the toolmaker would have some excess income to apply to savings and perhaps to a better-outfitted home with a furnace instead of stove heating.

These workers navigated a housing culture in Detroit that is distinctive in important ways, while in other ways being representative of conditions in many American cities. The most particular aspect of the Detroit case is the extraordinary influence of the automobile industry on the urban economy and culture. As one economist of the 1930's pointed out, automaking—the nation's largest industry of the period—was responsible for an incredible 56.5% of Detroit's total product in 1927, making the city's economy the least diverse by far.²⁸ The next largest industrial concentration in the study was New York's garment industry, comprising just 26.4% of that city's product.²⁹ The concentration of the auto industry in Detroit shaped the city's economy and culture around the wide fluctuations of this mercurial market—its annual cycles of hiring and layoffs, and its exaggerated growth and retraction in response to macroeconomic cycles.³⁰ As consumers put off the semi-luxury purchase of automobiles during the economic crisis of 1920-21 and the depression beginning in 1929, employment in Detroit represented a sharp exaggeration of downward national trends (Figure I:4). In boomtown Detroit, the good times were more encouraging and the bad times more threatening than in any other large American city—cycles that many workers experienced through their mortgaged investments in the city's real estate market.

The bungalow and duplex types that dominated worker's housing development in 1910s and 1920s Detroit—replacing the small cottages of the nineteenth century—represented a transition common to most American cities. Historian Robert Barrows points out that while the

²⁸ Woodworth, "The Detroit Money Market," *Michigan Business Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1932, pp. 8-11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

crowded conditions in New York's four- and five-story tenements and efforts to reform them loom large in the popular imagination of worker's housing from the period, this condition was an outlier.³¹ What was much more common in American urban development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the one- and two-family frame dwellings on narrow lots that this dissertation will trace in Detroit. That said, Detroit again represents an extreme case: a city of bungalows and duplexes par excellence alongside Los Angeles. Both Detroit and Los Angeles were modestly sized cities in 1910 and both more than tripled in population during the proceeding two decades—Detroit growing from 465,766 to 1,568,662 residents—and becoming overwhelmingly defined by an urbanism of factories and small frame houses.³² St. Louis, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, and Cleveland were more established by 1910 and grew less in this period, adding only between 20-61% to their populations in this period.³³

Structure of the Dissertation

The first three chapters of the dissertation trace the making of Detroit's Fordist Urbanism with respect to its three principal actors: industrialists, real estate developers and workers. Each of these figures represents a larger coalition that is unfolded in the text. The first chapter emphasizes industrialists, for example, but looks not only at Henry Ford and his peers but also the business groups, local government officials and architects that shared in industry's vision of social reform through housing reform—a coalition with at times divergent goals. While attending to the internal complexities of the three principal actors these chapters will also draw out the points of engagement between industrialists, real estate developers and workers,

³¹ Barrows, "Beyond the Tenement: Patterns of American Urban Housing, 1870-1930," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 9, No. 4, August 1983.

³² U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1910, 1930," Tables 14, 16, Released 1998 at www.census.gov. On the case of Los Angeles see Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven* and Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*.

³³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ibid.*

revealing that the ultimate shape of Detroit's domestic cultures emerged from a process with all of the contingency and instability of a negotiation.

In Chapter One—through the archives of the Ford Motor Company and the Detroit Board of Commerce—I show the city's emerging mass producers to be aggressive advocates for modern worker's housing who, despite architects' visions for comprehensive housing design, shifted the risks of housing to individual workers by pushing them to seek modern homes on the open real estate market. The second chapter examines the advertisements and sales manuals of Detroit's "other industry"—real estate—and shows how realtors' sales discourse helped to construct a culture of speculative investment and racial segregation in Detroit. The third chapter of the dissertation uses oral histories, fictional portrayals and reformers' photographs to explore workers' navigation of the Fordist domestic ideal and the heterogeneous ways they chose, furnished, and used the spaces of their homes.

While workers found agency, meaning and a measure of material prosperity in modern homes, the urbanization process also elaborated conflicts of race and economic control that undermined that prosperity from the beginning. The fourth and final chapter of "Building the Working City" explores the cracks in the Fordist social model that emerged in the 1920s and early 1930s. Through news reports and survivors' recollections, it illustrates the culture of racial violence that emerged in the city's newly built neighborhoods in 1925, when white mobs formed in order to "defend" a feminine-coded domestic sphere. Five years later, the mass unemployment of the Great Depression shook these same neighborhoods with what was in the 1940s called "the greatest wave of urban home foreclosures in our history," provoking workers to change their practices of resistance in the domestic sphere. In a recession-prone industrial economy, a

speculative real estate market, and a culture of white supremacy deeply fearful of residential integration, the modern home became a site of fear and isolation for many.

The making of Fordist Detroit sheds light on a modern condition as present today as it was in the 1920s: the negotiation of outsize corporate and government power by individuals who retained significant agency to shape their lives and the city itself. Negotiating the social world of boomtown Detroit, many workers attained a precarious hold on material advances even as they elaborated bitter division. This case study dramatically illustrates the high stakes of architecture, of housing more specifically, in the present-day politics of capitalism, where workers continue to seek security amid crisis.

Figures

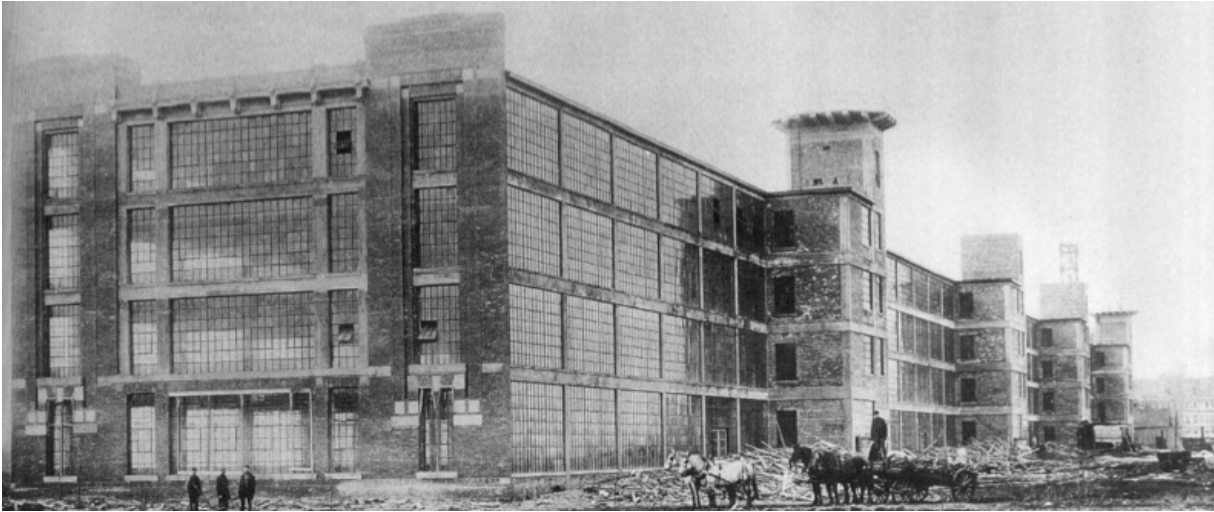


Figure I:1: Ford's Highland Park Plant under construction with the aid of horse power. The factory opened in 1910.
Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI.



Figure I:2: The assembly line brings the chassis to the stationary worker in Ford's Highland Park Plant.
Ford Motor Company, *Ford Factory Facts* (1915). Benson Ford Research Center.

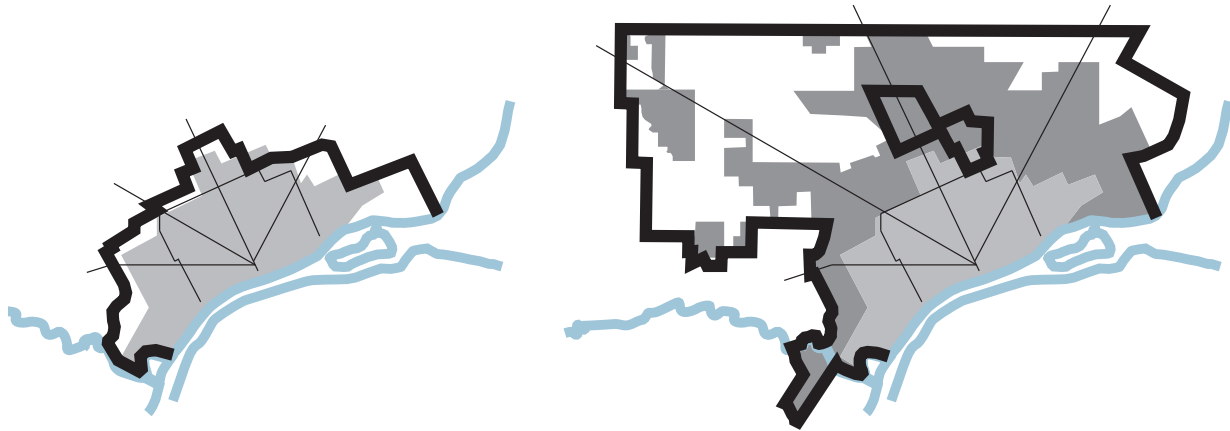


Figure I:3: Geographic expansion of Detroit 1910 to 1930. The dark grey zone at right was rapidly developed in these two decades and is the principal focus of this study.

Illustration by the author. Areas of development are drawn from Doxiadis, *Emergence and Growth of an Urban Region*, pp.69 and Sanborn Map Co., *Insurance Maps of Detroit, MI*, Volumes 5-8, 1910.

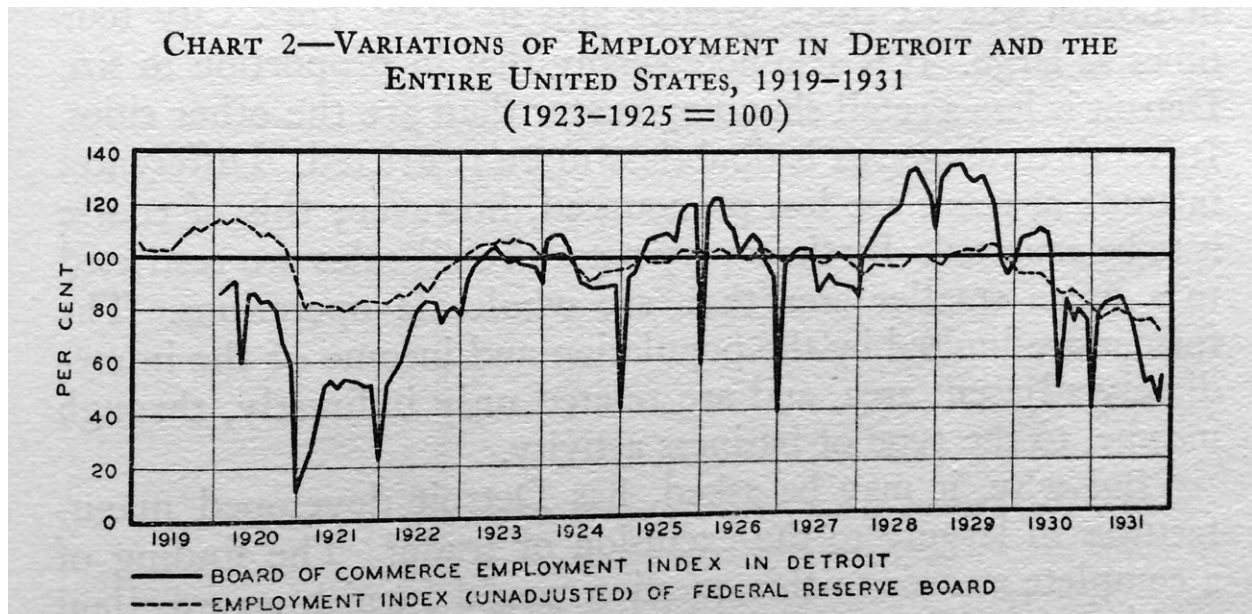


Figure I:4

“Variations of Employment in Detroit and the Entire United States”

Woodworth, “The Detroit Money Market,” *Michigan Business Studies* Vol. 5, No. 2, 1932,

Chapter One
Making ‘New Men:’
Housing Reform and Risk under Fordist Industrialization

There is something sacred about wages—they represent homes and families
and domestic destinies¹
-Henry Ford

In the 1910s the rapid growth of Detroit’s manufacturing economy brought a mass influx of immigrant and migrant workers to the city—driving the fastest population growth among major American cities in that decade.² Housing grew scarce. In this context, the Ford Motor Company and lesser-known organizations such as the Solvay Process Company, American Blower Company, and the Detroit Board of Commerce, all perceived the housing problem as a threat to economic growth. Their concerns included a general housing shortage, crowded conditions in the city’s boarding house districts, and several immigrant enclaves where workers and potential workers lived in relative cultural autonomy from the emerging Fordist society. Detroit’s business elites argued that to grow a modern industrial economy—one based on the hard labor of mass production—Detroit needed sufficient housing for workers, but also housing that could help suppress labor unrest by encouraging workers’ assimilation of Fordist cultural values.

¹ Ford, *My Life and Work*, p. 107.

² Detroit’s population more than doubled, adding an extraordinary 113% to its population in the 1910s from 465,776 in 1910 to 993, 078. Second in decennial growth was Los Angeles, which added 81% in the decade. New York City still dwarfed all American cities, adding 17% to its population in the 1910s to reach 5.6 million residents by 1920. U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1910, 1920,” www.census.gov, Released 1998.

Sharing the progressive ideology of social reform and control through housing reform that Gwendolyn Wright has examined in the case of Chicago, Detroit's more strongly business-led progressive coalition sought to rationalize city life in Detroit by promoting modern worker's housing construction and worker-homeownership.³ The disciplining nature of the Fordist assembly line and the Ford Motor Company's paternalistic inspections of workers' homes have a significant literature, but the importance of new housing development to the project of Fordist social control—and the coalition of business, reform, and design professionals behind it—has gone understudied.⁴ This coalition defined what Gramsci called “a new type of man suited to the new type of work,” a cultural ideal that associated the modern worker's home and its ownership with Americanism, whiteness, and proper family relationships—in short, these cultural authorities presented the modern home as a path to full social participation.⁵ Strong advocates for worker's housing development, Ford and other industrialists nonetheless were daunted by the risks involved in controlling planned housing developments and largely transferred those risks to workers by pressing them to purchase modern homes as independent consumers.

The failure of Pullman—a model city for workers that nonetheless sparked a massive 1894 railroad strike—contextualizes the risk-averse Fordist housing model. George Pullman, railcar maker and benefactor of the town of Pullman, expected to gain social control of his workforce by constructing and carefully managing a planned industrial city. He believed that the beauty and rationality of the city—its civic spaces and houses—would inspire a problem-free workforce, and the railcar maker added direct social controls such as a ban on liquor and a

³ Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*, pp. 105-149. On progressive faith in spatial determinism see Clark, *The American Family Home*, pp. 153-156.

⁴ Scholarly treatments of the modern factory and the Marxist scholars' theoretical framework that supports my turn toward housing are discussed in the Introduction.

⁵ Gramsci, “Americanism and Fordism,” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, pp. 572, 613.

curfew for extra assurance.⁶ In building and owning his employees' houses Pullman took on significant risk. As both employer and landlord the Pullman company's fate became more entwined with that of workers. In the economic downturn of 1894 Pullman could not pass the pain of economic crisis onto his workers through layoffs without experiencing lost rents and labor unrest. Pullman's railcar workers asked the company to share in their loss by lowering rents if wages must be lowered, and embarked on what became a massive and widely publicized strike when Mr. Pullman refused.⁷ Twenty years later the Pullman strike remained an important figure in discourse on industrial housing, with Jane Addams referring to Pullman as "A Modern Lear"—a paternal figure who felt betrayed—just as Henry Ford and his peers began to engage the housing issue in Detroit, negotiating the same risks that Pullman had infamously taken upon himself.⁸

This chapter examines Detroit industrialists' efforts to establish Fordist social control through housing reform, and their confrontation with a question: who should control housing development and bear its associated economic and social risks? Planners and architects urged industry and government to direct planned housing developments, arguing that comprehensively designed and managed neighborhoods would provide more resilient values—better risk management—in the long term, but despite important experiments and compelling arguments their vision went unfulfilled. Ford did commission the design of a massive worker's housing development just outside of Detroit in the late 1910s, but ultimately abandoned the plan in favor of a much smaller development. General Motors built housing on a large scale in the industrial

⁶ Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise*, pp. 37-40.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Jane Addams, "A Modern Lear: A Parenthetical Chapter," in Taylor, *Satellite Cities: a Study of Industrial Suburbs*, pp. 68-90 (1915). On the Pullman Strike see Bigott, *From Cottage to Bungalow* and Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise*, pp. 37-45.

cities of Flint and Pontiac through its subsidiary, the Modern Housing Corporation—planning and selling detached homes on independent lots in Flint’s Civic Park for example, and adding features such as curved streets and designated park space seldom found in Detroit’s worker’s housing of the period.⁹ In Detroit, rather than building and managing planned worker’s housing developments industrial, business, and municipal leaders focused on the construction of the modern worker’s house as a cultural ideal. Through coercive wage schemes, educational programs, housing regulations and lending assistance, Fordist cultural authorities associated modern houses and mortgages with the idealized white American family and encouraged workers’ to seek homes in the private real estate market—establishing the project of Fordist industrialization on the unsteady foundations of white supremacy and workers’ mortgage debt.

Immigration, Labor and Housing

Three-quarters of the city’s residents were immigrants or the children of immigrants in 1910, and new arrivals continued to pour in from Europe, Canada, and from midwestern and southern states to compete for Detroit’s industrial jobs.¹⁰ Detroit’s new arrivals included many “new immigrants” from Southern and Eastern Europe, including Italians, Poles, Hungarians and Russians (Figure 1:1).¹¹ These groups were viewed as racially distinct in America. As David Roediger argues, the racial difference between these new immigrants and older immigrant

⁹ On General Motors’ large homebuilding development in Flint see Meister, “Civic Park: General Motors’ Solution for the Housing Shortage,” in *A Wind Gone Down: Smoke into Steel*, pp.5-14. Meister suggests that General Motors constructed homes for workers in Detroit as well, but I have not encountered evidence of this in my research.

¹⁰ Babson, *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town*, pp. 27-28.

¹¹ “New Immigrants” is a common shorthand in contemporary labor history and whiteness studies to capture the racial difference that white observers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century perceived between that period’s wave of southern and eastern European immigrants and “the whiter and longer established northern and western European migrants o the United States,” that came before them. See Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, pp. 5-6. See also Barrett and Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring 1997).

groups were much starker than today's conception of "white ethnic" distinctions implies. Many Americans of nativist sentiment saw these new immigrants as inferior, uneducated and lacking in work discipline. They were "new to steam, machinery, and electricity," and more familiar with the itinerant work cycles of the farm or village than those of modern manufacturing.¹² They brought holidays, feast days and rituals with them that were unfamiliar to Detroit residents born in the United States, and their racial difference became inscribed in the city's geography as new immigrants tended to congregate in their new urban context.¹³ "The map of Detroit is now a map of nations," the city's Board of Commerce argued in 1915, adding:

two great Polish sections cover together perhaps a fourth of the city's area; well in the center of the city is a solid Italian section. One whole end of the city is practically solid Hungarian, and Russians, Greeks, Roumanians, Servians, Jews, Belgians, Armenians constitute smaller groups throughout. There are a half dozen cities, distinct in type, within the city's boundaries.¹⁴

The Board—a private organization whose directors were elected from among city leaders in industry, banking and construction—made it a priority to encourage the city's immigrants to assimilate. The autonomy of Detroit's immigrant "nations" concerned the board because—as a Federal Judge and prominent Detroit Board of Commerce member put it, with "no associations but their own, [immigrants] kept to their own habits," such as speaking foreign languages and living in crowded conditions.¹⁵

¹² Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*, p. 22.

¹³ See Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*, pp.3-21, Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle*, pp. 14-21, and Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society*, pp.19-32.

¹⁴ National Americanization Committee, *Americanizing a city, the campaign for the Detroit night schools*, 1915, p. 5.

¹⁵ "'Detroit's Duty to Americanize Foreigners,' says Judge Tuttle." *The Detroit*, p. 2. February 21, 1916.

Industrialists associated the threat of militant unionism with isolated, unassimilated immigrant workers. The International Workers of the World (IWW) had led strikes by textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912 and rubber workers in Akron in 1913 (Figure 1:2).¹⁶ Its Detroit group campaigned among Ford's workers in March 1913, using the public street just beyond the Highland Park factory's gates to solicit workers on their way out for lunch, agitating for an eight-hour workday. The police in Highland Park, a small village centered on Ford's new plant, helped to curtail the IWW's public speeches by making arrests, and Ford further diminished the threat by eliminating employees' outside lunch privileges.¹⁷ Perhaps Henry Ford recalled incidents such as this, and Detroit's "six nations" of immigrant workers, and the crowding of the city's boardinghouse districts, when he denounced cities generally in 1922 stating that "every social ailment from which we to-day suffer, originated and centers in big cities...violent plagues of up heave and unrest which afflict our great populations. There is something about a big city of a million people which is untamed and threatening."¹⁸

Out of necessity or as a temporary housing strategy, many new arrivals to Detroit lived in crowded boarding houses in the area surrounding the central business district or elsewhere such as in the blocks adjacent to Ford's Highland Park Plant.¹⁹ The shortage of affordable housing was driven principally by population growth but also by a general decline in rental home building in the early twentieth century as investors increasingly used mortgage bonds, war bonds, and national capital markets to grow their wealth rather than investing in rentals.²⁰

¹⁶ Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, pp. 32-39 and Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day*, pp. 68-70.

¹⁷ Peterson, Joyce Shaw, *American Automobile Workers, 1900-1933*, p. 109.

¹⁸ Ford, *My Life and Work*, 125.

¹⁹ On the housing shortage see Levine, *Internal Combustion* pp. 37-42. On boarding conditions near Detroit's central business district see Thomas, *The City of Detroit: A Study in Urban Geography*, pp. 89-121. On crowding near Ford's plant see Hooker, *Life in the Shadows of the Crystal Palace*.

²⁰ Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 11-20.

Crowding in Detroit differed, however, from the better-known situation in turn of the century New York tenements, made famous by photographer Jacob Riis.²¹ The Secretary of Detroit's Welfare Managers' Association characterized the difference this way:

We have no large tenements, therefore the general public has blindly labored under the impression that Detroit is a city of homes. As a matter of fact...there is less danger from a tenement house which outwardly shows its character than from small houses of a story or two which may be crammed with boarders, but escape the municipal inspector because of their innocent exterior (Figure 1:3).²²

While American-born and immigrant families took boarders into their homes in many parts of the city—in some cases providing meals and clothes washing for their tenants as a way to gain additional income—reformers' greater concern was for the extreme boarding conditions in which absent owners rented many rooms or even beds in aging boarding houses, particularly in the area near the city center.²³ Central city boarding houses included a range of nineteenth century home types, from one and two story frame cottages to elaborate Victorian houses that once housed wealthy families who had since relocated. Describing conditions in these formerly elite residences—while illustrating his distaste for immigrants' family lives—a Geographer of the 1920s explains that the “exclusive homes of the past have been transformed into tenement houses...new partitions have been added...so increased in number that they literally swarm with the oversize, underfed families that seem to gravitate to them.”²⁴ Reform-minded professionals' scorn for boarding house life was shaped, clearly, by a fear of domestic practices often invisible and inscrutable to their gaze.

²¹ Robert Barrows explains that despite the prominence of the New York style tenement house in urban history literature, most early twentieth-century workers experienced variations on the detached residence. Barrows, Robert. "Beyond the Tenement: Patterns of American Urban Housing 1870-1930," pp. 395-420. *Journal of Urban History* 9, no. 4, 1983.

²² “Detroit's Housing Situation Has Become Grave Problem,” pp. 7-8. *The Detroit*, May 8, 1916.

²³ On boarding see Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 62-63, 253-254, Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, and Thomas, “The City of Detroit: A Study in Urban Geography, pp. 89-121.”

²⁴ Thomas, *Ibid.* p. 98.

The cultural isolation of boarding houses implied ill health and immorality to agents of the Ford Motor Company, who described the image of a room filled with beds and hanging laundry as “typical of the crowded foreign boarding houses of Detroit” (Figure 1:4 at left).²⁵ Reflecting an environmental determinism that was typical of progressive-era reform thinking, the same company agent went on to argue, “such sanitary conditions are the greatest breeders of consumption and immorality. Imagine the view and the attitude toward life that the child brought up in these surroundings must have...Isn’t it enough to start the boys on the high road to jail and the girls to the streets?”²⁶

Industrial employers feared that crowded home environments created instability at work, a perspective that assumed a deterministic relationship between workers’ housing and their performance on the job. A Harvard industrial expert advised the Solvay Process Company—headquartered in Syracuse and with a major plant in Detroit—that reforms to industrial housing were needed because “a healthy condition of the body is closely related to a healthy state of mind,” and that “in the development of physical vigor home conditions are an important factor.”²⁷ Modern housing not only suggested mental and physical health, but also a worker’s investment in and attachment to the city where they dwelt. A second labor expert, upon visiting Detroit explained: “the laborers of this country are much less dependable than employees in similar industries in the old world...[the immigrant] lacks many reasons for staying on the job...his interests are often more closely affiliated with his homeland than with the land of his

²⁵ Ford Motor Company, “Unhealthy Living Conditions” in “Fifty-one human interest stories.”

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Paull, “Americanization: A Discussion of Present Conditions with Recommendations for the Teaching of Non-Americans,” p.32.

adoption...his boarding place, robbed of all time-honored environment, is rarely considered a home.”²⁸

Many new arrivals to Detroit moved flexibly between job opportunities, searching for the best positions and moving from one shop to another to gain marketable experience. These practices drove high attrition rates among the city’s industrial workers, a situation described by the Packard Motor Car Company’s employment manager in 1919 as “the most serious problem confronting employers.”²⁹ Henry Ford also came to believe that housing reform was essential to the success of his operations. After his introduction of the moving assembly line in 1913—making work more monotonous and anxious—attrition and absence rates soared at the Highland Park plant and Ford responded with intensive efforts to gain control of workers’ behavior outside of the plant. Historian Steven Meyer has shown that Ford’s staggering 1913 turnover rate of 370 percent meant that the company had to hire over fifty two thousand workers that year to keep the workforce at about thirteen thousand six hundred. At Packard’s highly disciplined shop, where smoking on or near company property was cause for discharge and where spitting on the floor, gambling (even at lunch), “aimless wandering,” and women’s walking in pairs were all strictly prohibited, the turnover rate was less extreme but still high at 200 percent.³⁰ “High labor turnover,” industrialists argued, “inevitably results in inefficiency, spoiled work, decreased production, and high cost per unit.”³¹ Absenteeism added to the problem, and Ford’s daily absence rate represented ten percent of the workforce in 1913.³² Ford’s foremen often could not

²⁸ “‘Brotherhood Essential to Correcting of Evils Arising From Immigration’, Says Dr. Geo. Tupper.” *The Detroit*, May 1, 1916.

²⁹ Dryden, E.A., “Eleventh Session: Employment,” *Packard advanced training school; lecture course*, p. 312, 1919.

³⁰ Holderman, C.F., “Second Session: Discipline,” *ibid*, pp. 42-57.

³¹ Lambie Concrete House Corporation, “Permanent Homes for Workmen,” p.5.

³² Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor, Management, and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company*,

predict whether absent workers were indeed ill or had simply quit the job and were off seeking more desirable work in another shop, going after less layoff-prone work with the street railways or the police force, or finding a place in the booming construction industry.³³

Industrialists—rather than interpreting high attrition as an index of workers’ suffering under mass production labor—saw the turnover as a result of the poor quality and transitory nature of Detroit’s workers’ housing in the 1910s. Mr. E. W. Lewis, secretary and treasurer of the auto components supplier Timken-Detroit Axle, warned that his company could not grow and hire effectively if the city lacked homes for his potential employees, “nor can we hope to induce the right kind of people to come to Detroit unless they know that they can be properly housed.” On the contrary, he had observed a recent increase in “a more undesirable class of labor” in the city, “a class which ‘live in suitcases.’”³⁴ He believed that new worker’s housing could remedy this problem. “We want the class of workmen to come to Detroit,” Lewis explained, “who will attach themselves to our city in a permanent way as home-builders. We all agree,” he added, that the homeowner is “the best citizen and in turn is very useful to the community and helps us secure a better form of government.”³⁵ The housing shortage nevertheless continued and by mid-decade an *American City* columnist reported that every residence in Detroit was filled and that hundreds were leaving the city for want of a place to live, a crisis for a growing industrial economy hungry for new workers.³⁶ A building materials supplier seeking contracts in Detroit counseled industrialists that they did not simply compete for workers in terms of the pay they

1908-1921, pp. 37-42, 67-84.

³³ Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, p. 197 reflects on alternatives to difficult industrial work in 1920’s Chicago.

³⁴ Detroit Board of Commerce, “Housing Conditions,” *The Detroyter*, p. 8, June 1913.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Grant, Arthur Hastings and Bittenheim, Harold Sinley eds., “A Remedy for a House Famine,” *The American City*, vol. 16, p. 47, January 1917. Also, regarding Hoover see Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular: Developers’ Subdivisions in the 1920s*, p. 154.

offered, but also in local residential conditions, arguing that “workmen are drifting to the [urban] centers where good clean homes can be secured for themselves and their families, and where they can live in a manner befitting their increased income. Under these conditions the manufacturer who directly or indirectly provides desirable homes for his workmen is assured of a more permanent force and of a smaller labor turnover than his competitor with less foresight.”³⁷

The Detroit Board of Commerce and labor experts argued that increasing newly arrived workers’ access to home ownership could drive assimilation, “snuff[ing] out bolshevism” and labor unrest in the city (Figure 1:5). “The man who is building or in the process of paying for a home which he can call his own,” one labor expert of the period advised, “is rarely, if ever, an anarchist.”³⁸ Yet worker-homeownership was not the invention of Fordist reform. Olivier Zunz has shown that workers on Detroit’s Polish and German east side had already achieved the highest levels of homeownership in the city in the late nineteenth century, eschewing the formal real estate industry and using savings, self-building and local labor to create inexpensive frame cottages that were often owned outright.³⁹ Industrialists of the 1910s, rather, encouraged immigrants to engage with the formal real estate market by purchasing more spacious, modern houses on mortgage. Formal home buying on mortgage tied a worker’s financial security to steady wages and on-time payments. In this way industry hoped to shape home-owning workers’ subjectivity, making them less inclined to self-identify as working-class, and engage in political fights over economic control, and more inclined to see their prosperity as dependent on the ‘cooperative’ success of capital and labor.⁴⁰ Seeking the social control this ‘cooperative’ vision

³⁷ Lambie Concrete House Corp. “Permanent Homes for Workmen,” p.5.

³⁸ “‘Now is Time for Building,’ States government Expert,” *The Detroit*, pp. 1-2. February 10, 1919.

³⁹ Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 170-176.

⁴⁰ This argument is informed by the work of Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*, especially pp. 291-294.

implied, industrialists and the board of commerce sought to articulate a shared lexicon—teaching the English language and the language of the modern home through night schools.

Night School Social Transformation

Detroit industrialists responded to the threats of an untamed workforce by redefining whiteness and Americanism, and creating a conditional path for many new immigrants to enter these social groups.⁴¹ Under the leadership of its business community Detroit became a national leader and model for night school Americanization, leveraging its language and citizenship classes to teach “American standards of living” to newly arrived workers.⁴² Detroit’s Americanization efforts were lead by the Detroit Board of Commerce, who often emphasized workers’ housing as a crucial front for the city’s commercial and civic progress and promised industrial employers that at night school, “[workers] will learn how to make their homes real American homes,” places that reinforced stable and disciplined work.⁴³ Night school residential reform went deeper than concerns about workers’ health, morality, and dependability though, to address fundamental questions of economic control. Charles Paull, an Americanization researcher and staff member at Harvard University’s Bureau of Vocational Guidance advised that when a worker “understand[s] that he can improve the conditions under which he is living,” and is “taught the elements of household hygiene[,] there should be a change in his attitude toward his work. He will grow to understand that the relation between capital and labor is one of

⁴¹ See Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, pp. 13. Theorists of race identity have used a number of terms to describe this condition of passage from otherness to whiteness, such as “not-yet-white,” “in-betweenness,” and “conditionally white.”

⁴² “New York Evening Sun Praises Night School Work in Detroit,” *The Detroit*, p. 12. November 1, 1915. “Immigrant Education Expert Praises Night School Work,” *The Detroit*, p. 3. December 13, 1915. “Many Cities Follow Detroit’s Example Regarding Foreigners,” p. 4. *The Detroit*, February 14, 1916.

⁴³ Committee for Immigrants in America et al, *Americanizing a city: the campaign for the Detroit night schools, conducted in August-September, 1915*, p. 8.

reciprocal advantages, and that each should be of economic advantage to the other.”⁴⁴ But beginning a night school program was no simple task: it required reaching the residents of the city’s culturally-isolated immigrant communities, many living in crowded conditions as boarders, and convincing them to spend their evenings in a classroom.

The Ford Motor Company developed an in-house English School for its immigrant workforce in 1914 that included “five compulsory courses,” providing language instruction alongside lessons on topics such as “domestic” and “industrial relations.”⁴⁵ As one Ford manager explained, “In [the Ford English School] the men are taught first of all English. Later on the lessons deal with personal hygiene, the care of the home and the right relations therein...last but not least must be mentioned our professor of table manners, who, with grammatic art, teaches the use of the napkin, knife and fork, and spoon.”⁴⁶ Drawings were apparently used to illustrate the lessons, suggested by one instructor’s chalkboard figure of a bungalow presented to a large outdoor gathering of students (Figure 1:6). Education at the Ford English School used what was called a “dramatic” method. “For instance,” Samuel Marquis of Ford explained, “a teacher says ‘I wash myself,’ and goes through the correct action while saying the sentence.”⁴⁷

In the fall of 1915 the Detroit Board of Commerce followed Ford’s lead, coordinating with the municipal schools administration to create a citywide night school program. The Board used its journal *The Detroitier* to promote the program to employers, who in turn encouraged

⁴⁴ Paull, Charles. “Americanization: A Discussion of Present Conditions with Recommendations for the Teaching of Non-American,” p.6.

⁴⁵ Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day*, p. 156.

⁴⁶ Marquis, Samuel. “Address delivered by Dean Marquis May 17, 1916, before the Convention of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, Y.M.C.A.,” p. 12. Samuel Marquis Papers, Speeches.

⁴⁷ Ford Motor Company, “Advantages of the Ford English School,” from the unpublished “Sociological Department Book 1914-1916.” Samuel Marquis Papers, Writings (Folder 8). Cranbrook Center.

their workers to participate.⁴⁸ The Packard company encouraged night school language and citizenship classes for its employees by instituting an “Americans First” policy in 1916, barring non-Americans from “promotions to positions of importance” in the plant. Further, the company stated that all employees “will be required to explain why they do not [attend night school] if they cannot show that they are taking other means of learning the language.”⁴⁹ Packard’s collaboration with the Board of Commerce on Americanization was facilitated by Alvan Macauley, who served both as Vice President of Packard and member of the Board’s Committee on Education in 1917. The board’s founding members represented several manufacturers, a construction company, the YMCA and Detroit Mayor Oscar B. Marx.⁵⁰ To the Board’s delight, Packard’s “Americans First” action drove a noticeable increase in night school participation and inspired similar policies at other factories.⁵¹

In addition to compelling attendance through the workplace, the Board recruited immigrant community leaders including priests and foreign-language newspaper editors to promote night school. They “penetrated into every nook and corner of the foreign sections of Detroit. In the saloons, the coffee houses, the meat shops and stores, the committee’s workers . . . carried the message of the opening of the evening schools [for Fall classes].”⁵² The Board also operated a “Free Information Bureau for Aliens” on the ground floor of its headquarters, staffed with translators ready to help immigrants enroll in classes. Public advertisements in libraries and pools reached out to other potential students—presumably readers of foreign language materials and bathers. Finally, agents of the Board canvassed playgrounds in immigrant districts,

⁴⁸ “Detroit Night Schools Can Accommodate 525 More Men.” *The Detroit*, p. 4. October 11, 1915.

⁴⁹ “Great Impetus Given Americanizing Plan.” *The Detroit*, pp. 1,3. February 7, 1916. “Alvan Macauley is member of Committee on Education.” *The Detroit*, p. 6. February 28, 1916.

⁵⁰ Levine, *Internal Combustion*, pp. 27-28.

⁵¹ “Great Impetus Given Americanizing Plan,” *The Detroit*. February 7, 1916.

⁵² *The Detroit*, p. 1. September 3, 1917.

distributing handbills that read, “Can Your Mother and Father Speak English Well? Take this card home, it will tell them where to go to learn English.”⁵³

As the program grew in popularity the City of Detroit increased its appropriations for night school education and by the fall of 1916 the number of schools had doubled to twenty-six and enrollment had reached 7,000 for the season, not to mention the thousands enrolled at the Ford English School or in the YMCA’s programs. These schools were spread evenly across most of the immigrant-heavy east side and focused in clusters on the far west side within Polish and Hungarian enclaves (Figure 1:7). The number of facilities was expanding to meet growing demand, but the Board reported that as the evenings grew cooler and the classrooms more comfortable, the autumn 1916 night schools had such large attendance that “students were sitting upon the windowsills and even upon the floor (Figure 1:8).⁵⁴

Night schools emphasized home ownership in their definition of Americanism, as seen in the official textbook for the program titled “Manual of American Citizenship,” authored by the Board of Commerce. The Manual taught general civics lessons but kept “the immediate Detroit situation in view,” and was “prepared in simple form so that the foreigners may easily master it.”⁵⁵ The first major section of the text, “Important Facts About Detroit,” taught immigrants that they lived in “A City of Homes.” The Manual argued that:

There is no other large city in the country that has as large a percentage of home owners as has Detroit...To buy a home, save rent, have a flower garden and vegetable patch, should be the worthy ambition of every man in this beautiful city.

⁵³ Levine, David. *Internal Combustion: The Races in Detroit 1915-1926*, p. 30, and Committee for Immigrants in America et al, *Americanizing a City*, p. 14.

⁵⁴ “Number of Night Schools Doubled,” *The Detroider*, p. 2. September 11, 1916, and “Over 7,000 Enroll in Evening Schools,” *The Detroider*, p. 1. September 18, 1916.

⁵⁵ “Board of Commerce Issues Text for Night School Use.” *The Detroider*, p. 4. October 25, 1915, and “Board’s Plan Discussed by National Committee.” *The Detroider*, p. 2. January 24, 1916.

Nothing will add so much to the prestige of a citizen than to be able to say, ‘I own my home.’⁵⁶

It was not unreasonable to characterize Detroit as a high homeownership city. In 1910 in Wayne County—dominated by Detroit—a striking forty two percent of “nonfarm” families owned their homes, eight percent above the average of the nation’s ten most populous urban counties even after excluding the low-ownership outlier New York City.⁵⁷ Yet the authors of the *Citizenship Manual* failed to point out that it was the semi-autonomous immigrant enclaves and their informal housing market that had made Detroit a “city of homes.” Leveraging this heritage, while also redefining the worker’s home around so-called American ideals of modern housing design and financing—facilitated by a formal real estate market—Detroit’s business interests created a cultural discourse that invited immigrants into American citizenship through the purchase of new houses.

Helpful Hints and Advice: Producing ‘New Men’ at the Ford Motor Company

The Ford Motor Company’s assimilationist Language School was paired with a coercive housing reform program that both taught the ideals of the modern worker’s home and its ownership, and forced workers to make steps toward those ideals or forfeit a crucially important benefit. Ford provided benefits to workers in the form of recreational facilities, a band, and a discounted company store, as well as an in-house Savings and Loan Association and a medical department, but its 1914 profit sharing plan the “Five Dollar Day” was the provision that the

⁵⁶ Detroit Board of Commerce and Detroit Board of Education, “Important Information About Detroit,” *A Citizenship Manual for New Americans*.

⁵⁷ United States Bureau of the Census. *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910*. Govt. print. off., Washington, 1914. Data queried through the demographic research tool *Social Explorer* at www.socialexplorer.com. The 32% average among large cities is the mean of the following: Philadelphia County 25%, Allegheny County (Pittsburg) 31%, Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) 37%, St. Louis City County 24%, Wayne County (Detroit) 42%, Suffolk County (Boston) 18%, Baltimore City County 32%, Cook County (Chicago) 28% and Los Angeles County 48%.

company became known for. As Steven Meyer explains, “all Ford workers received their wages, but only those who met Ford standards received their profits.”⁵⁸ The program could effectively double an unskilled laborer’s income from around \$2.50 to an unprecedented \$5.00 per day. Several hundred skilled mechanics—a small minority of the overall workforce—were eligible for \$6.00 per day and a few mechanics and subforeman received \$7.00. Framed as *profit sharing* for eligible workers only, the company retained the prerogative to withdraw the additional pay it was offering at any time and gained a great deal of leverage over its employees. To ensure that workers did not conflate their earned wages with the corporate welfare of profit sharing income these were presented separately in the pay envelope.⁵⁹ It was highly cherished, therefore, to receive the “big envelope” containing not one but two checks. Ford standards for profit-sharing eligibility required that workers’ environments and behavior outside of the plant meet a set of rigorous requirements. With so much money at stake workers had a powerful incentive to meet the company’s standards despite the intrusive paternalism that this implied.

The Five Dollar Day was attractive enough to curb the company’s crisis of absence and attrition.⁶⁰ It also forced other industrialists to compete for the most desirable workers in terms of wages, contributing to a general increase in the city’s industrial wages to an average of \$5.30 a day by 1919.⁶¹ By comparison, a national survey of foreign-born men found that seventy percent earned less than \$600 per year, or about \$2.30 per day.⁶² Ford’s high wages were leveraged as social control, establishing Fordist ideals of mass production discipline at work and mass

⁵⁸ Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day*, pp. 108-109.

⁵⁹ Bates, Beth Tompkins, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, pp. 23-24.

⁶⁰ Histories of the five dollar day emphasize its effects on worker-behavior inside the plant. See Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor, Management, and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921*, and Peterson, *American Automobile Workers, 1900-1933*.

⁶¹ Munger, *Detroit Today*, p. 51.

⁶² Breckinridge, *New Homes for Old*, pp. 35-36.

consumption discipline at home. These were set in opposition to traditional working-class practices such as the pooling of family wages and the taking in of boarders.

The requirements to participate in Ford profit sharing were explained in a manual entitled: *Helpful Hints and Advice to Employes [sic]: to Help them Grasp the Opportunities which are Presented to them by the Ford Profit-Sharing Plan*. The pamphlet, heavily illustrated, could communicate “right and wrong” even to workers just learning to read the English language. Behaviors of mass consumption would be shaped by shaping desire, as company sociologist S.S. Marquis explained, “the Ford idea is to increase a man’s capacity for happiness and at the same time to increase his efficiency, his earning capacity, his worth to society, so that he may have access to the things he has been taught to enjoy.”⁶³ This modern ideal of worth and pleasure defined by consumption revolved around the home and its ownership. Two years after the five dollar wage was instituted one-eighth to one-ninth of Ford’s workers were already buying their own homes, nearly a doubling from earlier levels and rising, representing on the order of fifteen hundred homes.⁶⁴ “It is the hope of this company,” the pamphlet states, “that every one of its married employes [sic] will own his own home as soon as conditions, consistent with comfortable and clean living, will permit.”⁶⁵

Ford employed a “Sociological Department” between 1914-1921 to manage the implementation of the Five Dollar Day through investigation and direct intervention in workers’ home lives. The work of the department epitomized the company’s efforts in the 1910s to create ‘new men’ through paternalistic interventions in immigrant workers’ home lives—a practice

⁶³ Samuel Marquis, largely quoted in Banta, *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford*, p. 26, with additional phrasing found in Marquis, Samuel, “The Ford Idea in Education,” undated text. Samuel Marquis Papers, Writings (Folder 7, n.d.).

⁶⁴ Marquis as referenced in Conot, *American Odyssey*, p. 174.

⁶⁵ Ford Motor Company. *Helpful Hints and Advice*, p. 25.

abandoned by the 1920s when immigration had largely ceased and Ford's high rate of pay became more commonplace. In the 1910s, however, Ford's sociological investigators had the authority to decide whether an employee's home environment and behavior met the requirements for the Five Dollar Day profit sharing. With so much income at stake investigators found that workers generally tolerated intrusions such as unannounced home inspections.⁶⁶ Management chose its investigators from among the Ford workforce and while literacy was required college training was not. Coercing workers to change their lives or risk lost income, these investigators enforced a series of policies that acted upon the worker's family, body and bankbook.

The Sociological Department and its manual *Helpful Hints* illustrated a company-approved model for family relationships. Marriage, and the sexual propriety that it implied, was encouraged through the Five Dollar Day by a policy that "every married man, no matter what age, who can qualify as to sobriety, industry and cleanliness can participate [in profit sharing], if he is living with his family." Unmarried men were not eligible if under 22 years of age, and as the head of the Sociological Department explained, this caused "some unhappy marriages on the part of boys 18, 19, 20 years of age who could not wait until they were 22 to get the profits so they have taken onto themselves a wife...and naturally domestic trouble sometimes arises when the reason for [marriage] is as mercenary as that."⁶⁷ Young men unwilling or unable to marry hastily, one report found, had "hired women to pose as wives at from \$2.50 to \$25 a day, borrowed children, passports and bank books," ruses that the investigators attempted to discover and penalize. The marriage rule reflects the company's fear that surplus cash in the hands of independent young men would be squandered in the pool hall, the saloon, or on inappropriately

⁶⁶ Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day*, pp. 114-118.

⁶⁷ Marquis, Samuel. "Address delivered by Dean Marquis May 17, 1916, before the Convention of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, Y.M.C.A.," p. 13. Samuel Marquis Papers, Speeches.

fine clothing. This rule also worked against the common immigrant's strategy of living lightly and cheaply, by boarding in another's attic for example, in order to send money home to a family living abroad to whom he would eventually return. The program told these workers that they could double their income if they shifted strategies and began putting down the roots of family life in Detroit. Women, of whom a modest 250 to 300 were employed at Highland Park in 1914 at sewing and magneto-assembly stations, were ineligible for profit sharing unless they proved themselves to be the sole provider to dependents. This suppression of women's income reinforced the company's ideal of the male as family breadwinner, and reflected a management culture that perceived women's employment as less significant and more provisional. As General Manager James Couzens explained, it was expected that women would "not infrequently make sudden announcement of their marriage and leave."⁶⁸ Ford's policies were designed to provide enough income to married male workers that they might live in a private home—unencumbered by the crowding of rent-paying boarders—spacious enough to allow parents and children sleep in separate bedrooms (Figure 1:4).

In addition to defining proper family relations, the Ford Sociological Department's *Helpful Hints and Advice* also delineated the proper care and condition of the worker's body. Practices of bodily cleanliness are couched in a language of upward class identification, stating, "employees [sic] should use plenty of soap and water in the home, and upon their children, bathing frequently. Nothing makes for right living and health so much as cleanliness. Notice that the most advanced people are the cleanest."⁶⁹ The importance of regular tooth brushing is illustrated by the juxtaposition of a worker missing teeth, jaw pried open by an inspector's hand,

⁶⁸ Steven Meyer quotes James Couzens in *The Five Dollar Day*, p. 140.

⁶⁹ Ford Motor Company, *Helpful Hints and Advice*, p. 13.

with a smiling white-collar figure that “always uses a toothbrush (Figure 1:9).”⁷⁰ Indoor plumbing and the three-fixture bath, as opposed to the backyard privy, supported this ideal of modern cleanliness. Ford’s sociologists associated cleanliness with the cherished cultural value of social and material ambition. They believed that the backyards of inner city districts consisted of “slovenly conditions and dirt [which] bring contempt for the better things of life and kill ambition. Dirt, and the association with it,” the investigator added, “lowers one’s self-respect and lowers one in the opinion of his community, making it harder to get a job.”⁷¹ Through profit sharing, Ford workers’ rising affluence might be earned and displayed through refinements of habit and environment, under an ideal authored by and modeled after their white-collar bosses. The success of this policy—enforced by the threat of lost profit sharing—was depicted through the casual racism of one reformer who found Ford’s workers exceptionally clean upon visiting, saying she “shall never forget the spotlessly shining face, and neck and arms of a foreigner of the type that I never before have seen clean either in America or Europe. He looked as unfamiliar as the façade of an ancient church which had been put under the grinder.”⁷²

Ford’s ideal of thrift reframed the traditional working-class value of homeownership. As social historians Olivier Zunz and Stephan Thernstrom have shown in their studies of nineteenth century Detroit and Newburyport, Massachusetts, the ownership of small, often informally built houses was a common practice among workers for decades before Fordist reform came along.⁷³ Even if it meant sacrificing children’s education by sending them to work—and thereby sacrificing the family’s future social advancement outside of the ethnic enclave—

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 21.

⁷¹ Ford Motor Company, “A Back Yard in the Tenement District,” in “Fifty-one human interest stories.”

⁷² Tarbell, Ida. “Making Men at Ford’s,” book manuscript, p. 16 (1916). Samuel Marquis Papers, Correspondence.

⁷³ See Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 161, 227-240 and Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*, pp. 115-137.

homeownership had long provided a measure of economic security in an insecure urban world.⁷⁴ In the absence of a robust social safety net the owned home provided working families with insurance against injury, aging or the death of an income earner. Ford sought to replace this model—where a low-paid family pooled the father’s income with his children’s, sometimes his spouse’s, and perhaps with the rents of boarders—with a sole-breadwinner model centered on a well-paid patriarch with thrifty habits. The Ford model suggested a different way of thinking about the family—seeing it as a modern vehicle for not just base security but also social advancement in which the father’s disciplined service to the company could—if thrift and saving were dutifully practiced—free the next generation to study and to aspire. The company’s profit sharing manual instructed workers that “The Ford Motor Company is sharing the profits of its business with its employees so as to enable them to put something away for emergencies and old age,” and that investigators’ audits would ensure habits of saving. “We ask you,” the company advised, “to have your papers and receipts so sorted and arranged, that when the investigator calls upon you to note progress, you will be able to give him, with as little delay as possible, the information he seeks.” Workers’ saving was to be done through “reputable” state or national banks, not neighborhood institutions, and continued, “until they have enough saved to make a fair sized payment upon the home or property that they decide to purchase.”⁷⁵

The company’s coercive methods forced many workers to change their home lives or leave the company: within seven months the number of workers disqualified from profit sharing plummeted from 23% of the workforce to 1.5%, as workers adjusted their environments and

⁷⁴ On self-building see Harris, Richard. "Self-Building in the Urban Housing Market." *Economic Geography* 67, no. 1 (1991): 1-21. See also Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁵ Ford Motor Company, *Helpful Hints and Advice*, pp. 11, 23.

behaviors to meet the investigators' expectations.⁷⁶ The Sociological Department sought to catalogue and celebrate this process by collecting reports of Investigators' work in an internal report titled "51 Human Interest Stories." Examining two of these reports, the following illustrates Investigators' perspectives on worker's domestic conditions ranging from unacceptable to excellent—detailing the company's efforts to define and enforce a worker's housing ideal.

The first story centers on an immigrant family struggling with unemployment in a crowded boarding house whose practices of privacy and hygiene are transformed by the father—Joe Kostruba—finding work and an interventionist Sociological Investigator at Ford. Told as a sweeping success story, the Kostrubas' experience illustrates the ambivalent legacy of the Fordist housing reform. The Investigator's earnest concern for the Kostruba family is poignant yet complicated by the power relations it reflects—a powerful company overreaching to intervene in private lives, and providing a remedy only available to those able to find work and to make the Fordist bargain while others continued without.

Kostruba was a Russian immigrant living with his family at 812 Beaubian Street, in a residential zone just east of the affluent north Woodward area whose perceived value was in decline as commercial and industrial uses encroached. When Joe began to work for Ford an investigator visited his home, and found that the Kostrubas lived in "an old, tumble-down, one and a half story frame house" that they shared with three other families, "one a negro family."⁷⁷ The condition of their home was unsatisfactory to the investigator, who exclaimed: "Joe's apartment (!) was one-half of the attic, consisting of three rooms, which were so low that a

⁷⁶ Ford Motor Company, "A Back Yard in the Tenement District," in "Fifty-one human interest stories."

⁷⁷ Ford Motor Company, "Human interest story number nine" in "Fifty-one human interest stories."

person of medium height could not stand erect—a filthy, foul-smelling hole.”⁷⁸ The family was composed of the parents and six children, the oldest fourteen and the youngest an infant. They were described as “half-clad, thin, pale and hungry looking” (Figure 1:10).⁷⁹ These conditions reflected Joe’s five-month unemployment prior to being hired by Ford and the little income that Mrs. Kostruba had brought in washing clothes.

A basket of provisions was delivered to the Kostrubas the same evening of the initial visit. Circumventing the normal reporting procedures, the investigator sought a special disbursement of fifty dollars from the company and it was granted. He settled past due bills with the landlord and grocer, and established rent for the family in a private five-room house a few blocks away. The same fifty dollars also bought basic furniture, a set of kitchen utensils and provisions, a supply of coal for warmth, cheap dresses for Joe’s wife and children, and “a liberal amount of soap was bought with instructions to use freely.”⁸⁰ In an almost ritualistic act of transformation the family’s “dirty, old, junk furniture” was piled in the yard and set aflame.⁸¹ The investigator noted, “It went up in smoke.”⁸² Within a short time Joe repaid the \$50 loan from his profits. While this intervention appears to have been exceptional, the Five Dollar Day allowed many families to relocate to private residences, where their newly raised incomes could support greater privacy in a rental home while the family saved for the future. Many “Human Interest Story” families do not leave the central city area immediately, though, suggesting that for many the process of transition from boarder to decentralized homeowner was a process of months and years for those who proceeded with it. At least for a time, workers like Kostruba

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

opted to retain convenient inner-city proximity to transit and the co-ethnic cultures and institutions that they had relied on as boarders.

A second story stands in sharp contrast: illustrating the Company's ideal of a disciplined worker, thrifty patriarch and self-directed homebuyer who acquired a modern home after just fourteen months of profit sharing. A company photograph celebrates the worker's newly constructed a 1.5 story side-gabled bungalow at 459 Wanda on the unpaved frontier in Greenfield Twp., present day Ferndale (Figure 1:11). This workman, along with his wife and child, occupied a temporary one-room shack visible at the rear of the property while constructing the bungalow. Having started with a down payment of just \$40 on the lot, and spending \$25 on the shack, this enterprising profit sharer was able to leverage enough credit on mortgages to construct a fine two-story bungalow. The reported value of the improved lot was \$2,600.⁸³ We might project that this autoworker was not a newly-arrived immigrant, nor suffering in poverty at the time of his hiring, as unlike his peers none of this is mentioned by the investigator. We do know that his family opted to be pioneers on the urban fringe. Eschewing central city services and community amenities they struck out to the northern fringe where land was cheap and investment in property carried the promise of large and fast returns, and the promise of future security in an insecure industrializing society.

By 1920 the Sociological Department's power within the company was waning, yet its head Samuel Marquis still wrote Edsel Ford and—while acknowledging the financial constraints that the company faced during the post-WWI recession—made an audacious proposal to address the persistent problem of worker's housing that suggests his faith in the detached home as a solution was waning. With inflation reducing the buying power of then six-dollar-day Ford

⁸³ Ford Motor Company, "Improved Living Conditions" in "Fifty-one human interest stories."

workers, Marquis argued that home buying and renting in Detroit was becoming prohibitively expensive and that the company should pursue the construction of “model tenements” for one thousand families—modest but acceptable environments where workers could live from two to five years at low rent while saving to make a large down payment on a house in the private real estate market.⁸⁴ Ford does not appear to have taken action on Marquis’ idea, an unsurprising result given the company’s pivot at this time—like that of many American corporations following the war and the rise in global working-class militancy—away from a progressive era culture of paternalistic aid to workers and toward a culture where benefits such as wage incentives paired with hard-driving foremanship were used to influence workers’ shop floor performance.⁸⁵ Marquis resigned in the midst of these changes in 1921.

Between 1914 and 1921 the Ford Sociological Department pressed employees to move to modern houses, framing the transition as a pathway to economic security, health and full social participation available for every man’s aspiration, though as the city’s African American population boomed in late 1910’s it became clear that this aspiration was only fully available to *white* men.

The Great Migration and the Segregated City

While focusing on European immigrants’ assimilation into modern American society Ford and the Detroit Board of Commerce largely ignored the cultural isolation forced on Detroit’s African American migrants by housing segregation—reinforcing an urban culture of white supremacy. Before moving to cities such as Detroit the vast majority of African Americans

⁸⁴ Marquis, Samuel, “The Ford Cooperative Plan,” a Letter to Edsel B. Ford dated June 28, 1920. Samuel Marquis Papers, Correspondence.

⁸⁵ Bates, “The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford,” pp. 55-58 and Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, pp. 160-161.

at the turn of the century lived in the rural south, a geography that began to change during World War I as war work and a sharp decline in European immigration created demand for a “Great Migration” of black families to cities in the north and the south.⁸⁶ The growth of Detroit’s African American population was particularly rapid. Only Gary, IN had a higher proportional growth of its black community between 1910 and 1920, and no large city’s black community grew faster than Detroit’s during the decade from 1920 to 1930. From a population of less than 7,000 in 1915, the black population in Detroit grew to 40,000 in 1920 and 80,000 in 1925. Hoping to escape the segregation, agricultural peonage, violence and biased legal system of the rural South, these migrants found a society in the north—Detroit included—in which many whites refused to receive blacks as neighbors. Jobs were available, however, and the Detroit Urban League played a coordinating role steering many newly arrived African Americans into industrial employment. The Ford Motor Company hired black workers in exceptionally large numbers beginning in 1919, when as many as 1700 hires were recorded. By 1926 ten percent of Ford’s Detroit workforce was black—accounting for 10,000 well-paying jobs—and while unskilled black workers received the same compensation as their white peers they were often confined to the most difficult and dangerous jobs in the plant such as foundry work.⁸⁷ African Americans made some inroads in industrial work, but their opportunities for social advancement outside of the plant were delimited by increasingly hostile white communities intent on maintaining the racial segregation of neighborhoods.⁸⁸

Black Detroiters, already American citizens, remained racially excluded from social advancement in the city of homes. In the night school classrooms, and in the city itself, a diverse

⁸⁶ Massey et al., “The Changing Bases of Segregation in the United States,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, pp. 76-78, November 2009.

⁸⁷ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, pp. 37, 61-64.

⁸⁸ Levine. *Internal Combustion*, pp. 44-59.

cohort of Europeans were made “white” through their collective invitation into citizenship and homeownership. African Americans received no such invitation. In fact, the project to expand whiteness in Detroit was paradoxically achieved by redoubling efforts to exclude another “other”—black Detroiters—from the city’s emerging neighborhoods of small but modern homes for industrial workers. Detroit’s race lines were legally defended by restrictive covenants in the 1920’s, and where this failed, by the violence inflicted by white homeowners. Discrimination in the mortgage market also stood in the way.⁸⁹ In this way, as Olivier Zunz has argued, black Detroit “lived history in reverse: while foreign immigrants ultimately became assimilated into a unified structure dominated by the native white America world and based on rank and social status within it, blacks were increasingly segregated from whites on the basis of race and irrespective of their social status.” Many black Detroiters found a place to live in the neighborhood east of downtown called Black Bottom, where black residents’ high industrial wages were taken by exploitative landlords charging high prices for often crowded and antiquated dwellings.⁹⁰ Russian Jews and Italian immigrants remained in this near-east side district in substantial numbers through the 1920s, but the area became increasingly dominated by African Americans as segregation left this fast growing population with few other options.⁹¹ Faced with the crowding of Black Bottom The Ford Motor Company—who readily intervened to assist European-born workers to move to newer, private homes in the 1910s—applied a double standard to its African American employees. Rather than address the problem of racial, spatial segregation that caused the area’s crowding the company reduced its expectations for the homes

⁸⁹ Doan points out this discrimination in *American Housing Production, 1880-2000; a Concise History*, p. 32.

⁹⁰ Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 352-54, 373-378. and Farley, *Detroit Divided*, pp. 28-31, 145-146.

⁹¹ Thomas, “The City of Detroit: a Study in Urban Geography,” Figure 7.

of black workers and accepted that they would live in poorer housing and in many cases keep boarders to meet exorbitant rents.⁹²

The Detroit Board of Commerce engaged with conditions in Black Bottom in 1919, expanding the scope of its Americanization efforts—formerly centered on immigrants—to include African Americans. It is revealing of the extent of segregation that black residents, despite being born in the United States, appeared so culturally isolated to Board representatives that Black Bottom fell under the purview of the Board’s Americanization Committee. Following their inspections the Committee found that Detroit, like many cities, was facing a “problem of Negro housing” as black populations soared.⁹³ The Committee reported that the conditions available to African Americans in Black Bottom were “deplorable,” emphasizing that the area had become a center for the “vice” and “immorality” of gambling, prostitution and rum running.⁹⁴ The front page of the Board’s Journal *The Detroitier* featured the Committee’s report:

Here, we see whole blocks, yes, streets, filled with mean, ramshackle, rickety, wheezy shacks; down at the heel in every sense of the word. The only condition that keeps them from tumbling down is their proximity to each other. These, with rare exceptions, are *sans* plumbing equipment of any kind, and are totally unfit for decent habitation (Figure 1:12).⁹⁵

The rents in Black Bottom were found to be so extreme that “the dirtiest dilapidated shack, facing an alley, will bring the landlord at least \$60 per month,” an amount in excess of what a family of European immigrants would need to rent or buy a substantial modern bungalow in one of the city’s new housing districts close to industrial work.

⁹² Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, pp. 97-98.

⁹³ Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroitier*, pp. 1, December 13, 1919.

⁹⁴ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, p. 79.

⁹⁵ Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroitier*, pp. 1, December 13, 1919.

The Board's Americanization Committee framed the issue of housing segregation in wavering terms. The group argued that the confinement of African Americans to slum districts was an injustice. They further suggested that racial integration had its merits—that the measure of integration in some parts of central Detroit might account for Detroit's avoiding violence such as Chicago's riot of that year, 1919—but added that whether such integration “is an ideal condition from many points of view is a question.”⁹⁶ The Committee's proposed solution reflected this uncertainty. They called for construction of race-specified rental houses “for Negro men and women” on a philanthropic basis by investors willing to accept 5-6% income on the projects while adding that such developments must “be done tactfully and carefully” to avoid reinforcing “segregated colonies.”⁹⁷ Despite acknowledging the injustice in the conditions their investigation found—as historian Beth Tompkins Bates notes—the Board's Americanization Committee “ultimately declared that its organization was not concerned or responsible for the crisis in housing black Americans,” and dropped the issue, apparently taking refuge in a return to their work on the assimilation of immigrants.⁹⁸

The city's business leaders needed and accepted the labor of black workers but did little to address the conditions in Black Bottom—where segregation forced many African Americans into poverty that belied their hard-earned industrial wages—a poverty created by curtailed access to housing as a practical shelter, financial investment, and means of access to social networks.⁹⁹ Allowing black workers to be excluded from homeownership—denied its association with full

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Bates, “The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford,” p. 34.

⁹⁹ As John Freidmann argues, poverty is a more complex phenomenon than merely the lack of income. See Freidmann, “Rethinking Poverty: the dis/empowerment model,” in *Insurgencies: Essays in Planning Theory* pp. 87-108.

citizenship in Fordist society—the city’s business leaders helped to construct the period’s industrial growth upon an unstable social foundation.

In the 1910s local health and housing authorities shared business leaders’ desire to reform conditions in Detroit’s boarding house districts, but despite this—as the Board’s Americanization Committee pointed out—little was done by decade’s end to enforce housing regulations in Black Bottom.¹⁰⁰

Municipal Housing Regulation

Business leaders collaborated with municipal officials on the issue of boarding house conditions in Detroit, leveraging ideal notions of family life in their efforts to establish housing regulations in law. Frank Blair, President of the Union Trust Bank, created the Detroit Housing Association (DHA) in the mid 1910s—an offshoot of the Detroit Board of Commerce—which worked to enshrine housing reform legislation in state law and to assist “the health authorities in the enforcement of state laws with respect to sanitation, light and ventilation.”¹⁰¹ Detroit had had a local building code ordinance that included anti-tenement provisions since 1911, but Blair saw its enforcement as insufficient. In 1916, for example, the Board of Commerce came out against a 64-room “lodging house” proposal, fearing windowless tenement-like conditions, and made public calls for the city to enforce its building codes to prevent the project’s construction, apparently expecting that it would not be stopped unless political pressure was brought to bear.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroitier*, pp. 1-2, December 13, 1919.

¹⁰¹ “Hume McPherson Made Secretary of Detroit Housing Association,” *The Detroitier*, p. 11. December 9, 1918. See also Detroit Building Commission, *The Building Code and Builders’ Guide of the City of Detroit*, pp. 108-119.

¹⁰² *The Detroitier*, June 12, 1916.

The DHA produced pamphlets on housing reform, and when Detroit's Public Health League invited Charles Ball—leading Chicago Health Department official—to speak in Detroit on the subject of housing the Association published his remarks. Ball delivered his lecture “Homes of today and citizens of tomorrow” at the Detroit Museum of Art, urging the assembled elites to take the lead in “curing” the social problems associated with slum-like dwellings.¹⁰³ Ball argued that the privations of slum dwellers directly affect wealthy residents—both as a matter of moral responsibility and personal wellbeing—saying, “God sends the winds to carry the foul air from the hovel to the palace,” and adding, “from the slum also come infection and criminal tendencies to prey upon those who live in the city's more fortunate neighborhoods.”¹⁰⁴ He implored the assembled to open their eyes to the suffering, the high rates of infant mortality, and the moral degradation of the slums, and added, quoting a Philadelphia child welfare expert “No one can question the bad physical and moral effect upon the whole family of bad air, bad drainage and overcrowded rooms.”¹⁰⁵ In children the lack of privacy in these slums, Ball continued, “causes familiarity and moral indifference, the hardest obstacles to overcome.”¹⁰⁶ Ball made the case that housing reform required the intervention of government, through regulations, despite conservative skepticism toward “municipal enterprises.”¹⁰⁷

In 1913 Blair's DHA worked with the city's health department to improve its effectiveness: establishing a record-keeping infrastructure for city housing inspections and later

¹⁰³ On the progressive ideology see for example Addams, “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” pp. 90-100, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, Isenberg, *Downtown America*, pp.13-22 and Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States 1840-1917*, pp. 98-115.

¹⁰⁴ Ball, *Homes of today and citizens of tomorrow*, p.3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

publishing a technical guide on the subject, *Right Methods in a Housing Bureau*.¹⁰⁸ At the State level the Association lobbied for housing law that would make crowded and unhealthful residences illegal. Their first attempt in Lansing brought mixed success: the Michigan legislature failed to enact their proposals in 1915, but the Association did convince Governor Ferris to call for a commission to investigate and report on the housing problem in Michigan. Robert Todd, an executive of the DHA, served as an investigator for the commission.

The commission's report reinforced the case for legal regulation of housing construction. It found that while "good low-cost homes" were present in many Michigan cities, poor design practices perpetuated dark, damp environments that professionals of the day associated with disease, arguing "no apartment is equipped for right hygienic life that does not have direct fresh air and good light...every room must have a large quantity of outdoor air, secured independently of any other room."¹⁰⁹ Minimum standards to ensure this, they argued, would preserve a person's "right to an effective and proper hygienic environment."¹¹⁰

The commission found that even well designed low-cost housing contributed to the problem in the absence of robust regulation, as unrestricted additions or adjacent constructions often obscured windows that had originally provided sufficient light and air (Figure 1:13). The committee argued that the stability of the family, and by extension the society itself, was at stake in housing. "In the cities strong influences exercise a great disintegrating power upon family life," the report urged, and "the house should not be so defective that it serves as one more influence in breaking down the unity of the family. Tenements that are so gloomy and crude that

¹⁰⁸ Detroit Housing Association, *Right Methods in a Housing Bureau*.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*, pp. 119-121.

¹¹⁰ Michigan Housing Commission, *Report* (1916), pp. 37-8.

they drive individuals out of them whenever there is any leisure break into family life instead of fostering it.”¹¹¹

The commission’s report proposed language for a state housing law that its authors implored the legislature to adopt, based largely on the “Model Housing Law” of New York housing authority Lawrence Veiller. The report convinced the legislature. The Housing Law of Michigan, Act 167, was enacted in 1917. It called for minimum standards for per-occupant space in bedrooms and required outside windows in each residential room excepting water closets, thus creating impediments to any high-density or tenement-like construction that might have emerged in response to Detroit’s persistent housing shortage. Frank Blair exerted significant influence as President of a major bank and was noted alongside the State Senator who sponsored the bill as being instrumental in securing passage of the law.¹¹²

The coalition of business leaders and municipal officials surrounding Blair—building on discourse developed in New York and Chicago—argued that family morality was determined by domestic conditions such as privacy, light and ventilation. They legitimized this claim through official publications and new housing regulations, dividing the city’s present and future houses, and families, into the moral and immoral. Everyday life in Black Bottom and other densely occupied districts of the city—its difficulties and its domestic values, the latter hidden to reformers’ eyes—appears to have been little changed in the first years of the new housing regulations. In culture, however, the work of the Detroit Housing Association reinforced the ideology of a social, and increasingly racial divide between the crowded districts and the expanding periphery.

¹¹¹ Michigan Housing Commission, *Report* (1916), p. 35.

¹¹² “Michigan Leads the Way,” *Housing Betterment*, pp.3-5. Vol. 6 No 2, May 1917.

Experiments in Housing Reform

Wealthy, reform-minded individuals developed models for worker's housing alongside the Ford Motor Company's own experiments—both following in the progressive tradition of housing reform and sharing, at least until proven otherwise, the cultural assumption that environment could determine behavior.¹¹³ The Board of Commerce featured the work of one independent reformer, Mary Mannering, in its journal *The Detrouter*. Mannering, who was married to auto body manufacturer Frederick E. Wadsworth, commissioned nineteen workers' homes on the family's Grosse Pointe farm in 1912 and rented them for as little as \$12.50-\$15 per month at a time when \$15-\$25 was considered affordable for industrial workers.¹¹⁴ The houses rented immediately and continuously. They realized many of the features that would soon be celebrated in the Americanization and profit sharing programs, such as the cleanliness of the modern bath and the access to healthful nature. The houses “offered plenty of fresh air, a small garden, comfort and conveniences”. They were:

dark grey in color, of concrete block construction, with roofs of red and a single tall chimney, long and low, with wide projecting eaves, and surrounded by large ground areas, including ample yards both front and rear, the cottages are pleasing to the eye. They follow the lines of the design of the English workingman's home, the interiors being tastefully papered and decorated. There are six rooms, including spacious living room and kitchen, with pantry off the latter, three bed rooms, dining room and bath. Above stairs is a low attic, and all rooms are lighted by electricity.¹¹⁵

Mannering was “somewhat disheartened,” however, that despite these generous provisions her tenants were slow to adopt the aspirations that the homes implied. Some tenants, who “fully appreciated the advantages of the houses,” made efforts to beautify their homes. Others,

¹¹³ On progressive ideology and the evolution of housing reform culture through the nineteenth and early twentieth century see Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*.

¹¹⁴ On the Wadsworth Manufacturing Co. see Burton, *The City of Detroit, Michigan 1701-1922*, p. 607.

¹¹⁵ “The Housing Problem.” *The Detrouter*, pp. 22-23. October, 1912.

however, those “not used to any of the comforts or conveniences and not appreciating them apparently,” made few efforts at the maintenance of their rentals, which became “pathetic examples of lack of care and attention,” this despite Mannering’s offer of prizes for the best-kept lawns and landscaping.¹¹⁶ This experiment suggested that spatial determinism of behavior was inadequate to the reform that Mannering sought.

Henry Ford extended Mannering’s reform ideals three years later, and indeed it is possible that he was aware of her efforts as Ford appears to have had a direct business association with Mannering’s husband, purchasing auto bodies from him.¹¹⁷ Ford was able to leverage the celebrity brought on by his innovative production methods and high wages to promote his own model for the worker’s home. He believed that modern workers should not only live in comfortable detached homes but should aspire, with the help of their employer, to own their homes. Ford pronounced this message to the industrial world through his contribution to the “industrial welfare” exhibits at the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. His agents built a physical model of the Company’s housing reform polemic, labeling the model “the evolution of a Ford workman’s home and surroundings, from a sordid boarding house to the comfortable home of the profit sharing employee (Figure 1:14).”¹¹⁸ Frank Vivian worked at Ford’s San Francisco branch and was charged with overseeing the company’s displays at the Exposition—that of a partial moving assembly line as well as the Sociological Department exhibit—and he recalled in his oral history of 1953 that his team “showed practically 20,000,000 people around [the Ford] exhibits.” Referring to the model of the evolving worker’s home Vivian noted its miniature “houses and shacks,” with “miniature people around in slum

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Davis, John. “The Detroit Engine Works,” http://www.antiquengines.com/DEW_History.htm, accessed August 29, 2013.

¹¹⁸ The Ford Motor Company. *Ford Times*, pp. 548-549. July, 1916.

conditions...showing how the department operated by taking care of and watching the employees.”¹¹⁹

Between the modeled “boarding house,” a two-story tenement, and the ideal “comfortable home,” the exhibit appears to show one of Detroit’s innocent looking small cottages, cut in section to reveal the crowding of boarders inside. The comfortable home to the far right is an “American” home, with a flag prominently displayed on its front lawn. The house resembles one that the company had celebrated in its profit sharing manual of the same period, the likely inspiration for the model (Figure 1:15).¹²⁰ It is built of cost-efficient wood frame construction, with a small porch suggesting leisurely family evenings when the eight-hour workday was finished. A generous day-lit upper story suggests a response to the dark boarder’s attic, and subtly but importantly, a vent pipe protrudes from the roof suggesting interior plumbing and perhaps a modern three-fixture bath.¹²¹ After the exhibition the model was returned to Detroit and placed on long-term public display at the Detroit Board of Commerce building as part of their own industrial welfare exhibit alongside displays for the “elaborate” washrooms that the Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company provided for its employees, the vast cafeteria of Cleveland’s National Lamp Works and the “unusual and successful” milk depots installed at the Cadillac Motor Car Company, “where the men are allowed to leave their work to get a pint.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Vivian, Frank (1953). Interview by Owen Bombard (print transcript), p. 39. Accession 65, Benson Ford Research Center.

¹²⁰ Ford Motor Company. *Helpful Hints and Advice to Ford Employees: to help them grasp the opportunities which are presented to them by the Ford profit-sharing plan*, p. 6, 1915.

¹²¹ The significance of various elements of the worker’s home in this period is explored in Kenny, Judith and Thomas Hubka. "Examining the American Dream: Housing Standards and the Emergence of a National Housing Culture, 1900-1930." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, no. 1 (2006): 49-69.

¹²² “Board Sets Pace in Welfare Movement,” *The Detroit*, pp. 1-2. July 24, 1916.

Ford extended his experiments modeling the worker's home life through full-scale interventions in his distant company towns, from the forests of Michigan's Upper Peninsula in the 1920's to the latex rich Brazilian Amazon in the 1930's.¹²³ In these company towns Ford dominated the local economy and therefore his hegemony over workers' homes and lives could be more complete than might be hoped for in a complex city like Detroit. In these rather small company towns Ford secured ownership and control of both the production process and of the workers' housing as Pullman had on a larger scale in the late nineteenth century. Ford intervened in his Upper Peninsula mill town of Pequaming until it, at least on the surface, resembled his own idiosyncratic vision for exacting industrial modernization in support of a nostalgic interpretation of small-town American cultural life. In Pequaming Fordist ideals of cleanliness, thrift and sexual propriety were pursued through a transformation of workers' housing and an infusion of "old-time" dancing.

Early auto bodies and wheels required lumber, and as Ford expanded his Dearborn Rouge Plant in the 1920's he sought to control this precious resource from forest to factory. Ford bought the mills, houses and forests surrounding the lumber town of Pequaming, MI in 1923, and despite all of his concerns in Detroit became actively involved in the reshaping of the town. As historian Brian Clevon notes, when the Ford Motor Company arrived in Pequaming the new operations manager warned the local workforce: "Your vacation is over, boys."¹²⁴ Ford updated the mills' machinery and processes, and as in Detroit he raised workers wages to five and six dollars per eight-hour day and required disciplined labor in return. The company tied these increased wages with the expectation that mill workers' families would change their habits of

¹²³ On Ford's Brazilian rubber plantation see Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*.

¹²⁴ Clevon, "Henry Ford's "Tasty Little Town: Life and Logging in Pequaming," *Michigan History*, January/February 1999, p.20.

consumption at home. The company painted and repaired the homes inside and out for cleanliness and tore down the many fences that formerly penned workers' chickens, cows and pigs, practices that Ford considered unhygienic. Ford workers were expected to use their increased wages to buy ready-made eggs, milk and meat in shops. These cleaner-and perhaps more healthy and comfortable homes were priced to reflect their increased modernity. Where the former mill owner had charged just a token dollar per year for workers' use of the homes, treating them as something that simply came with the job, Ford transformed the residences' meaning by raising their value in the local culture. Renovated into fine condition and now requiring \$12-\$16 per month rent paid to the company, the homes were transformed into a major element of workers' family budgets and served to enforce a measure of discipline and thrift into workers' use of their increased wages.¹²⁵

Ford cherished the small town of Pequaming over which he had so much cultural control, with affection that he seems never to have had for "untamed and threatening" Detroit. Clevlen notes that Henry and Clara Ford visited the town rather often and hosted local residents in the lodge that they kept in town. Special events hosted at the lodge gave Ford the opportunity to extend the cultural ideals of family and propriety that he associated with small town American life. The Fords threw a special party for the town's children nearly every time they visited, and hosted "old-time" dances that set chaste and formal square dancing and waltzing against an urban world outside where the "Jazz Age" was steadily advancing.¹²⁶ One Pequaming millworker recalled that "Mr. Ford was a wonderful dancer" in an oral history he gave to the company in 1951. During his dances the world-famous automaker "liked to get out and show

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid, pp. 18-23

some of the children his own kind of dancing...Mrs. Ford danced too, mostly with Mr. Ford. Mr. Ford would mix with the other ladies...they would schottische, polka and square dance.”¹²⁷

Mannering’s and Ford’s models for the worker’s home life illustrate these reformers’ own values—from home beautification to the flag-denoted Americanism of the detached residence and the wholesome recreation of the garden or the square dance—but the models also reveal their inability to determine workers’ own values and behaviors in any rigid way. Mannering’s renters negotiated a city of housing options and found hers to be desirable in terms of cost and amenities, but chose to spend their time according to their own needs and preferences rather than their matriarchal landlord’s. Ford appears to have relished the degree of cultural control he achieved in Pequaming—one that he could never achieve in a large and complex city such as Detroit—and yet even there one wonders if many workers dropped the pretense of cultural affiliation with the Fords when they left town, returning to metro Detroit.

Making Employees Permanent: Financing and Technical Advice

As Americanization rhetoric, Ford Sociological Department interventions and the articulation of housing models gave shape to the emerging worker’s housing ideal, industrial and business leaders’ efforts to extend mortgage loans to workers helped to bring the ideal’s pursuit within the reach of workers with little capital. Across the country the rise of lending institutions such as Building and Loans in the early twentieth century “made owning more like renting,” as Marc Weiss explains, by making longer-term, amortized mortgages available so that a home purchase could be accomplished through manageable monthly payments. Still, mortgaging a home in the 1910s and 1920s was far from simple. Loan terms varied but in general mortgaging

¹²⁷ Doyle, Leo (1951). Interview by Owen Bombard [print transcript], pp. 7-8. Accession 65, Benson Ford Research Center.

a home—especially for a buyer with little cash in hand—involved two mortgages: the first covering up to 60% of the home’s value and a second, higher-interest mortgage on top of that if the buyer could not pay 40% at the time of purchase. Long term, amortized loans were available for periods as long as fifteen years, as were renewable, shorter-term loans of three or five years that were especially prevalent among second mortgages.¹²⁸

The commercial mortgage market grew rapidly in the 1910s and 1920s, but in Detroit and elsewhere business groups sought to speed its growth further with their own interventions.¹²⁹ The Detroit Board of Commerce worked in concert with manufacturing employers and the real estate industry to expand home financing for workers, believing that traditional lenders alone were not meeting the city’s extraordinary demand—therefore slowing the construction of modern worker’s housing that both employers and the real estate industry were anxious to scale up. One 1919 cartoon from the Board’s journal *The Detrouiter* suggests their frustration: it featured a banker, happily working in his office, while beyond his window workers trudged about the peripheral tent-city where they lived for lack of permanent dwellings (Figure 1:16). The Board’s housing committee sought to spur homebuilding by making it easier for workers to purchase newly built homes or to commission the construction of a home. It developed two limited-dividend lending institutions of its own to pump credit into the market by making loans to homebuyers: the Detroit Society for Savings in 1916 and the Detroit House Finance Corporation in 1919. As was so often the case in Detroit’s housing reform efforts of the period, initiatives presented as means to assist or uplift workers were also the means by which corporate actors

¹²⁸ For a summary of mortgage conditions in the period see: John Gries and James Ford, Editors, *The President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, Vol. 2: Home Finance and Taxation*, 1932, pp. 1-24.

¹²⁹ On the growth of the mortgage market see Doan, *American Housing Production, 1880-2000; a Concise History*, pp. 28-33. See also Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, p. 49.

gained greater social control over workers and reaped greater profits from them. The Society for Savings' directors, for example, had much to gain from growth in housing: nearly every member was a prominent figure in real estate, building materials, fuel, or homebuilding. Workers who received a "helping hand" from this institution became potential customers of its agents: beholden to pay again and again when the mortgage payment or fuel bill came due.¹³⁰

The House Finance Corporation coordinated some housing developments itself and made loans both to homebuilding contractors and to workers seeking to build a home.¹³¹ The Corporation was led by Eugene Lewis, the former vice president of the Timken-Detroit Axle Company, who attested to the potential creditworthiness of industrial workers with little capital. His corporation would "give high-class financial assistance to high grade moral risks." Lewis' comments suggest an eagerness to reinforce the cultural perception of worker-stability and discipline. "Our investments will be based on character," He explained, "The man with only a few hundred dollars with which to start a home may be just as good a risk as the multimillionaire. It will be our mission to assist such men with their banking problems and thus enable them to secure a home."¹³² As a second cartoon shows, the board asked its members in the manufacturing community to "roll up their sleeves" and fund these lending institutions, to make the desert of undeveloped speculative subdivisions at the periphery bloom with workers' housing (Figure 1:17). The Board urged that "the greatest need at this time is that assistance be given to the wage-earner in building his home. There are many men or families who have from \$100 to \$500 with which to build."¹³³ Keeping their lending operations capitalized required the

¹³⁰ "Detroit Society for Savings," *Michigan Manufacturer and Financial Record*, Vol. 16, pp. 22, 1915.

¹³¹ Southern Pine Association, *Housing Plans for Cities*, pp. 26-30.

¹³² *The Detroit*, p. 11. June 9, 1919.

¹³³ "Industries Lead in Movement to Reduce Shortage of Houses," *The Detroit*, pp. 1-2. March 17, 1919.

Board to keep up its fundraising efforts. Citing the housing shortage and the evils of urban congestion, the Board wrote to its members announcing that the Detroit House Finance Corporation (DHFC) had “financed and built seven hundred homes in its first eight months, tying up all of its available capital.” It urged individual members to invest even at modest levels, “To continue its work [the Corporation] issued \$600,000 in bonds to be purchased by the members of the Board, secured by the mortgages on the homes already constructed and sold, and paying six percent interest. Denominations as small as \$100.00 were available to members.”¹³⁴

The American Blower Co. coordinated a special in-house financing scheme with that of the DHFC to further extend the purchasing power of its employees. This maker of industrial fans could boast in 1919 that one of their workers had purchased a vacant parcel and was then able to build a \$2,500 home upon it financed completely on mortgage. This was made possible by a typical Society loan for 60% of the cost and a second loan, a special employer-sponsored one also managed through the Society, to cover the balance. This financing scheme greatly increased workers’ capacity to leverage debt. Rather than self-building incrementally as many cash-poor nineteenth century workers had, Detroit’s similarly cash-poor industrial workers of the 1910s and 1920s could now buy a complete, professionally built home. Large mortgages telescoped their future earnings into the present, making the kind of formal homebuilding that used to have been “by definition” a middle class activity available to Detroit’s ‘disciplined’ industrial workers.¹³⁵ American Blower emphasized that its provision of loans was no charity, but rather an investment with the Society for Savings that paid them five per cent interest. Furthermore, the

¹³⁴ Letter by Harry B. Warner, Secretary of the Detroit Board of Commerce, August 9, 1920. Detroit Board of Commerce Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹³⁵ Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston 1870-1900*, p. 127.

company emphasized, it supported homeownership in order to “make its employes [sic] permanent as far as possible.”¹³⁶

This series of agreements made the workman a homeowner with only \$800 cash for the vacant lot, and thus leveraged he would be responsible to make on-time monthly payments of one per-cent of the loan, or \$25 plus insurance, taxes and other costs, until the balance was paid.¹³⁷ This financial assistance with home buying was not an isolated practice. In 1919 *The Detroit* listed American Blower alongside the Solvay Process Company, Gemmer Manufacturing Company and General Motors Corporation as companies developing special departments tasked with “furnishing their workmen with funds in reasonable amounts to help them build [houses].”¹³⁸ General Motors, who constructed and sold worker’s homes on a large scale in Flint and Pontiac through its subsidiary Modern Housing Corporation, further allowed employees to have their house payments deducted directly from their wages or from their account at the company’s Savings and Investment Fund, “from which deductions could be made on house-buying account without diminution of the employee-interest...considerably eas[ing] the lot of thrifty employees in their progress toward house ownership.”¹³⁹ Even as Detroit’s population grew precipitously in the 1910s and 1920s the proliferation of mortgage loans—from industrialist-lead efforts to the work of Building and Loan institutions and developers—allowed Detroit to retain the high worker-homeownership status it enjoyed before its Fordist transformation: In 1930 Detroit’s Wayne County reported that 43% of families owned their home, up from 42% in 1910 despite the fact that Detroit had more than tripled its population in

¹³⁶ “Home Buying in Detroit,” *Municipal Journal and Public Works*, vol. 46, No. 22, p. 384, 1919.

¹³⁷ *Municipal Journal and Engineer, Inc.* “Home Buying in Detroit,” *Municipal Journal and Public Works*, p. 384. Vol. 46, No. 22, 1919.1

¹³⁸ “Industries Lead in Movement to Reduce Shortage of Houses,” *The Detroit*, p. 1, March 17, 1919.

¹³⁹ Pound, *The Turning Wheel: the Story of General Motors through Twenty-Five Years, 1908-1933*, p.413.

that time as hundreds of thousands of often-poor immigrants and migrants moved to the city.¹⁴⁰

The number of homes owned on mortgage—as opposed to outright—rose sharply in Wayne County: in 1900 39% of homes were owned on mortgage while in 1920 59% of owned homes were mortgaged, suggesting that Detroit workers were rapidly adopting formal mortgage and homebuilding markets under Fordist industrialization.¹⁴¹

From the worker’s perspective, mortgaged homebuying promised unencumbered ownership after the debt was paid, but it also represented significant risks. Illness or injury that could unexpectedly disrupt one’s ability to work and annual production stoppages brought the perennial threat of lost income. Shutdowns were common in mass-production Detroit, as plants performed maintenance and retooled for product changes in summer or in winter. One 1926 study showed that the city’s manufacturing employment bottomed out in December and January at less than half of the springtime peak before rising again.¹⁴² Cyclical economic crises were another threat, and these triggered large-scale industrial layoffs in 1914, 1920, and 1929, the first causing the local economy to shed eighty thousand jobs even as Ford’s operation grew.¹⁴³ Disrupted mortgage payments could lead to the foreclosure of a home and the loss of years of sunk labor-wages, a scenario imagined in novelist Upton Sinclair’s critique of the Chicago stockyards, *The Jungle*, and a real source of financial insecurity for industrial workers in Detroit.

¹⁴⁰ Wayne County’s homeownership rate in 1930 is distinctive for its context of extraordinarily fast recent growth, but many large American cities were expanding access to homeownership in this period, and among counties containing America’s ten largest cities, minus the low-ownership outlier New York, reveals an average of 41% of families owning their homes.. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, data queried through the demographic research tool *Social Explorer* at www.socialexplorer.com. Ownership statistics for Detroit in this period are only slightly lower than for the county as a whole: 40.3% owners in 1910 and 41.3% in 1930, as noted in Levine, *Internal Combustion*, p.42.

¹⁴¹ In 1900 30,491 homes were owned and of these 39% were “encumbered” with mortgage debt. In 1920 104,072 homes were owned, and of these 59% were encumbered. *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900*, and *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920*, data queried through the demographic research tool *Social Explorer* at www.socialexplorer.com.

¹⁴² Thomas, Jerome G. “The City of Detroit. A Study in Urban Geography,” p. 47-49.

¹⁴³ Martelle, *Detroit [a Biography]*, pp. 87, 92.

In the Depression-era foreclosure crisis of the early 1930's Michigan would become the second largest recipient of Federal HOLC loans—designed to rescue homeowners facing foreclosure—amounting to 31% of all mortgaged, non-farm, owner-occupied dwellings in the state.¹⁴⁴

Employers and lenders offered technical advice to workers to reduce their anxieties about the risks involved in purchasing a house. American Blower, for example, guided its employees through the process of a real estate purchase and sought to protect them from unnecessary costs. Its experts advised, for example, buying directly from the builder to avoid the middleman costs associated with ready-built houses sold by real estate agents. Ford's 1915 profit-sharing manual urged workers to seek a free consultation in the company's legal department before signing anything. In-house experts reviewed contracts and appraisals of property value. The soundness of a home or lot purchase would be assessed by the company's professional staff who offered to make the workman's best interest the company's own concern.¹⁴⁵ Employers understood that on account of the good will established by providing mortgage assistance—and more importantly the dependence on industrial wages that the mortgaged worker would bear—that the worker would in turn make the company's best interest his own in terms of disciplined, long-term employment on the company's terms. In this way mortgaged homeownership was essential to structuring the Fordist bargain that workers made by seeking better lives in Detroit. Surely understanding to some extent the risks of mortgaged dependence on industrial wages, many workers took the bargain—negotiating the city's structure of opportunity even if not deeply accepting the corporate myth of a cooperative relationship between capital and labor.

¹⁴⁴ Harriss, *History and Policies of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation*, 1951, pp. 32-33.

¹⁴⁵ Ford Motor Company. *Helpful Hints and Advice to Ford Employees*, pp. 32-33, and Ford Motor Company "Human Interest Story, Number Nineteen," in "Fifty-one human interest stories."

Planned Worker's Neighborhoods

Planned housing discourse in the early twentieth century conceptualized the neighborhood as a unit of planning—not the racial, religious or class distinctions through which many Detroit workers constructed neighborhood, as illustrated in Chapter 3. Planning advocates—as Clarence Perry memorably did in his 1920s work on the “Neighborhood Unit”—championed professional oversight of a housing development so that a neighborhood’s physical elements such as population, traffic and green space, and housing types could be coordinated.¹⁴⁶ Perry’s work built on a robust discourse around worker’s housing design and planning of the early twentieth century—and particularly during WWI—a discourse that resulted in several noteworthy project proposals for Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan that went largely unbuilt. Indeed, the Detroit Housing Association noted in 1915 that “in the last ten years, housing literature has increased one hundredfold,” and the Detroit Board of Commerce kept a library of architects’, planners’, and reformers’ industrial housing literature at its headquarters.¹⁴⁷

The discourse on housing design took on particular significance as the prospect of large-scale federally funded housing for war workers emerged with US entry into WWI. Wartime industries such as shipbuilding required worker migrations to production centers, and these workers had to be housed.¹⁴⁸ Some in the architectural community lamented the limited-scale of American war housing plans and the apparent lack of coordination and central control, but Detroit architect William Stratton celebrated the opportunity that the war had created. “The

¹⁴⁶ Perry, “The Neighborhood Unit,” Monograph One. Vol. 7, *Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs*, Neighborhood and Community Planning. New York: New York Regional Plan, 1929.

¹⁴⁷ Detroit Housing Association, *Right Methods in a Housing Bureau*, p. 16 and “Industrial Housing,” *The Detroit*, p.15, April 7, 1919.

¹⁴⁸ Crawford, Andrew Wright. “War-Time Housing—A Supreme Opportunity,” p.91. *The Architectural Forum*, April 1918.

government,” he argued, “has shouldered the great need and has put the best artists, architects and builders in the country at the task of making ideal homes for...workers.”¹⁴⁹ The short-lived project of Federal war-worker’s housing in America occurred largely between the summer of 1918 and the fall of 1919. In this period and beyond, Architects and planners sought to mediate between reformers’ desire for moral and physical health, industry’s desire for homes that could reinforce working discipline, and housing designers’ own garden-city-inspired ambitions for comprehensive planning.

The Architectural Forum published articles on industrial housing in its January through March issues of 1918, and followed these with a special issue focused on industrial housing in April. In these articles the value of aesthetic “unity and completeness” within a housing development was stressed. Architect Charles May explained that unity was best achieved through the comprehensive planning of a project from the outset. He argued for the engagement of a “town planner” at the stage of site selection to ensure the proper shape, topography, and adjacent conditions of a development site. The work of John Nolen, leading American Town Planner, at Allwood, New Jersey was presented as “one of the best American examples of clean-cut, industrial town planning,”¹⁵⁰ As May explained, Allwood

displays all the features of comprehensive planning, or zoning, of generous reservations for public and semi-public uses, of gradation of street widths and lot sizes to respective uses—all those features which have been best exemplified in the Garden Village of Letchworth in England.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ “Stratton Says U.S. Artists are Helping in War,” unidentified newspaper article published after the May 1918 Convention. Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts digital Archive, file D282 00002359-00002409.pdf, p.31. College for Creative Studies. See also “The Need for Industrial Housing” and “From Washington” *The Architectural Forum*, pp.23-26. January, 1918.

¹⁵⁰ May, Charles C. “Some Aspects of Industrial Housing,” *The Architectural Forum*, pp.7-14. January, 1918.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.14.

Nolen, a landscape architect by title but today recognized as a pioneer in American urban planning, was influenced by his study of Dusseldorf, Germany, an industrial city where comprehensive planning and zoning resulted in ample parks and playgrounds. Nolen embraced the English Garden City ideal of public ownership of the land. Addressing the first National Conference on City Planning in 1909 he argued that planning should “make recreation more democratic” and emphasize improvements “which are for the benefit and enjoyment of everybody, for the common good.”¹⁵²

Where Detroit’s Henry Ford and Mary Mannering looked to the home itself to reform workers’ behaviors and environments, proponents of city planning in the late 1910s were more skeptical. They argued for centralized management and co-operative maintenance of housing developments.¹⁵³ Charles May recalled, for example, a story of well-designed worker’s houses gone bad. The architect of these houses ordered photographs of the homes two years after their completion, “to illustrate what grace the mellowing of time may bring to humblest surroundings.” Little “grace” was in evidence, however. The images showed “no lawns, no trees, no vines, but broken shutters, sagged steps, patchwork repairs, ramshackle outbuildings, and over the whole an air of dismal devastation.” In another case, May had observed mine-working immigrants from Poland and Italy who “started out to live, in their new houses, under very much the standards of old,” including the “persistent popularity of hog-raising” in backyards and in one case the use of a newly-built cellar as “the abode and recreation ground of six or eight hens,”

¹⁵² Hancock, John. “John Nolen: the background of a pioneer planner,” pp.37-57, in Krueckeberg, *The American Planner: Biographies and Recollections*.

¹⁵³ Topalov, “Scientific Urban Planning and the Ordering of Daily Life,” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 17, 1990, p. 33.

adding, “the warm air duct from the heater was obviously their popular roost.”¹⁵⁴ And lest the reader assume that these problems were purely racial, to be solved by Americanization alone, the author noted misuse of space even in the home of an American workman. Here, “the household life crowded into the kitchen and dining room, with the parlor quite unused,” and the family, including “five children of both sexes,” crowded into one bedroom in order to leave a spare room for guests “sacred and inviolate.”¹⁵⁵ In each of these cases, May implies, a comprehensive plan including use restrictions, education programs and an authority to ensure upkeep and maintenance, these industrial housing developments might have succeeded in shepherding their residents into modern, urban ways of life befitting the American worker.

This national discourse on industrial housing touched down in Detroit through housing design proposals for the Ford Motor Company and the Solvay Process Company. The proposals, though largely unbuilt, illustrate how the Fordist aim of creating ‘New Men’—independent consumers—was refracted through the planning ideals of comprehensiveness and cooperative urban environments passed from Garden City theorist Ebenezer Howard through contemporary advocates such as Nolen and May. Two proposals for Ford Motor Company housing illustrate their designers’ attempts to persuade the client of the utopian promise, the potential for reformist top-down control, and the more stable real estate values made possible by company-led, planned, cooperative environments.

Housing Designs for the Ford Motor Company: City of the Sun and Fordson Village

¹⁵⁴ May, Charles. “Some Aspects of Industrial Housing: III. The Need for Maintenance Measure,” pp. 75-76. *The Architectural Forum*, March 1918.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, pp. 76-77.

Just five years after the Highland Park plant opened *The Detroit News* reported that Ford was planning a new “tire factory, blast furnace, and motor plant all to be surrounded by a model city for employees,” west of Detroit in present-day Dearborn, though “whether or not [Ford] will be directly interested in building [housing had] not been decided.”¹⁵⁶ As the prospect became public Ford’s office received correspondence from several homebuilding interests and architects.¹⁵⁷ An associate of city designer Peter Roveda, of Milan and New York, sent drawings to the Ford office, noting that their “proposition ought to be of great interest to mister Ford”¹⁵⁸ Roveda had argued for a homeownership-based urbanism to reform workers’ physical and moral lives as early as 1910, seeking:

an economical solution which is practicable for [housing] the poorer classes, hygienic for their physique, elevating to their morals, provides them with a salutary habitation, and which stimulates them to become proprietors of their homes through effort...[by] amortization each week or month of the price of the property within a period of 12 or 15 years, so that the satisfaction of ownership of their own dwellings will habituate them to economy, it being a great advantage to the families and also to the land that they become title holders. This will increase the noble sentiment of love for country...¹⁵⁹

Roveda’s proposal, “The City of the Sun,” reached Ford’s office in 1916. Its approach to homeownership was exceptionally compatible with Ford’s, but Roveda’s spatial composition

¹⁵⁶ Bryan, *Beyond the Model T*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁵⁷ A rejected offer to pursue homebuilding for Ford is found in the Chester Emergency Housing Corporation’s letter to the Ford Motor Co., Aug. 5, 1918, in the collection “The Work of Leonard Bernard Willeke,” by Thomas W. Brunk. Acc. 1605, Box 1, Microfilm reel, Benson Ford Research Center. Also, the residential specifications of the Moraine Development Company were provided to Ford and appear in Acc. 47, Box 5, Benson Ford Research Center. See also Bryan, Ford R. *Beyond the Model T*, pp. 75-6. Finally, reformer Ida Tarbell sent information on the Forest Hills Gardens development to her friend Samuel Marquis at Ford in 1916, offering to introduce him to its architect Grosvenor Atterbury, being exceedingly anxious to see people of means and imagination working out groups of these houses in different cities. Tarbell, Ida, Letter to Samuel Marquis, May 12, 1916. Samuel Marquis Papers, Correspondence.

¹⁵⁸ Roveda’s “City of the Sun” project is found in Acc. 47, Box 5, Folder “Concrete Houses 1916.” Benson Ford Research Center. The majority of documents in the folder relate to concrete houses but there is no indication that Roveda’s project is based in concrete construction.

¹⁵⁹ Roveda, Peter. “The City of the Sun,” p. 447. *American Homes and Gardens*. Vol. 7, November, 1910.

was dramatically different from the gridiron of rectangular blocks and lots that Ford had assumed in his model worker's home at the Panama-Pacific Exposition. The City of the Sun was composed of square blocks (rather than typical American rectangular blocks), each inscribed with concentric rings of houses around a common green and a public facility (Figure 1:18). This public center would house a shared amenity such as an infant school or a communal kitchen, and a central plant for the block's heating and lighting in its basement. The four corners of the square block were reserved for shops. Roveda argued for the scheme in terms of economy: the tapered, radial lots of the City of the Sun were smaller than typical American rectangular lots, but they would be more desirable because of the increased sunlight and air that the circular geometry would admit and the convenient access to the central green.¹⁶⁰ The plan called for small but modern worker's housing in a duplex arrangement, each unit including either four-rooms (one bedroom), or five-rooms (two bedrooms), serviced with heating, electricity, and a bathroom. There was one significant luxury as well: a parlor in each unit, apparently a nod to the working-class culture of parlor-keeping that had so bothered leading American planner Charles May (Figure 1:19).

There is no indication that Ford pursued Roveda's unsolicited ideas, but they nonetheless represent an instructive road not taken, another possible iteration of working class life for Detroit. In the City of the Sun, workers' experience would be shaped by independent ownership and access to new hygienic technologies, elements favored by Detroit's industrialists and reformers. But where Ford's model assumed an atomized individual homeowner, situated according to the market rationality of the rectangular lot, Roveda proposes a more cooperative composition: groups of homeowners efficiently sharing parks, greenspace, and community

¹⁶⁰ National Housing Association. "The City of the Sun," *Housing Betterment*, pp. 30-31. Volume 7, No. 1, February 1918.

facilities according to a larger scale of planning coordination and with recourse to ecological rationality through solar orientation. Roveda's argument for larger-scale planning coordination and cooperative sharing of neighborhood space, as well as his scheme's hierarchy of small inner paths and larger outer arterials, and indeed even its literal use of the circular form, stage a dialogue between Howard's Garden City and the Fordist desire to make 'New Men.'¹⁶¹

Ford purchased vast tracts of property between his emerging Rouge Plant and the Henry Ford & Son Tractor Plant in downtown Dearborn, and in 1918 was ready to pursue a housing project in earnest. With his son Edsel's likely encouragement, Ford hired Detroit architect Leonard Willeke to prepare an extensive plan for Fordson Village: an enormous development that would house 3500-4000 employees, that is, more than twice the size of the large-scale precedents identified in Willeke's research such as Pittsburg Crucible Steel's 1500-house development in Midland, Pennsylvania.¹⁶²

Willeke's residential work was already well known to the Fords. Edsel and Willeke were fellow members of the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts, and Willeke had designed an interior renovation to Edsel's home in 1916 marked by intricate plant and animal motifs throughout and by fine materials, such as Pewabic tile and oak veneer.¹⁶³ The modest houses that Willeke designed for Fordson Village revealed some of this Arts and Crafts interest, but moreover, as an urban plan, the project shows a commitment to the Garden City urbanism that Willeke shared

¹⁶¹ On Howard's Garden City plan see Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier*, pp. 23-90 and Howard, Ebenezer. *Garden Cities of to-morrow*. (Being the second edition of "To-morrow: a peaceful path to real reform") ed. London,: S. Sonnenschein & co., ltd., 1902.

¹⁶² Ibid, 78-82. On the early development of the Rouge Plant see Conot, Robert E., *American Odyssey*, p. 192.

¹⁶³ Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts, "List of Members 1916-17," pp. 29-35. *The Eleventh Annual Report Officers and Members for MCMXVIII*, and Brunk, *Leonard B. Willeke*, pp. 79-135.

with Ford's unsolicited designer Peter Roveda. Willeke had studied Garden City planning while abroad, travelling in cities such as Essen, Germany and Bournville and Hampstead in England.¹⁶⁴

Willeke's Fordson Village was structured by hierarchy, with a central, rail-linked business and municipal center (featuring a Ford dealership) surrounded by sub-centers and residential quarters along smaller, curved streets (Figure 1:20). The meandering Rouge River basin is treated as parkland and a "virgin timber reserve," and the waterway is diverted into snaking lagoons in several recreation areas. Another linear green is created to buffer adjacent residences from the Michigan Central railroad tracks that bisect the site. The development would serve a range of income-levels and included three "classes" of detached single family residences from the "best" to the "cheapest." But Willeke also proposed a number of multi-family housing arrangements, pushing back against the nuclear family and homeownership ideals of Ford's reform discourse to address the needs of a diverse workforce. Two and four family apartments were included for sale and rent, as well as boarding houses and worker's hotels "for single laborers," and the various types were mixed within the master plan. For example, in one drawing labeled "typical idea," Willeke illustrates a fourteen-family cluster of houses including detached single-family and four-family apartments arrayed around a shared "small private park." The architectural language of the houses themselves resembles the spare detailing, clustered fenestration, and strong rooflines of Charles Voysey's English Arts and Crafts language, which Thomas Brunk has interpreted as, "a geometrically severe expression which was more appropriate for the modern industrial village than the romantic eclecticism expressed in the

¹⁶⁴ Brunk, *Leonard B. Willeke*, p. 137.

earlier workers housing built in Port Sunlight and Letchworth, England.”¹⁶⁵ This modern quality of expression is evident in Willeke’s elevation drawing for the large boarding house, designed to house 13 single men with a shared dining room and living room, the latter outfitted with a piano (Figure 1:21).

Willeke’s vast project might have been a boon to architects and town planners nationwide who were advocating for Garden City design values, but ultimately it was not built. It is not clear how Ford responded to the emerging details of the plan, as the design was still in development when Ford drastically downscaled his ambitions for the project and replaced Willeke with another architect, Albert Wood. It appears that there was some dispute about Willeke’s design fees, but moreover, in 1919 Ford chose to leverage his cash reserves in a bid to buy out his stockholders, making a large-scale housing development unfeasible. The Maloney Subdivision was built in its place, led by Wood with input from Willeke’s preliminary designs consisting of 250 single-family houses built to the middle class price of \$6,500-\$8,000.¹⁶⁶

Proposals for planned housing development at Ford went unfulfilled, as part of a larger turn in the company’s culture—marked by the departure of the Sociological Department head Samuel Marquis in 1921—away from the progressive, interventionist reforms and toward a greater focus on hard-driving discipline on the factory floor. At the same time, the company’s efforts to coerce, encourage and assist workers to seek modern homes and mortgages in the

¹⁶⁵ Brunk, *Leonard B. Willeke*, pp. 137-147, with quote appearing on p. 144, and Bryan, *Beyond the Model T*, p. 80. See also “Leonard Bernard Willeke papers,” drawer 7, folders 44-47, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁶⁶ On the Maloney Subdivision, which is called the “Ford Homes Historic District” today, see Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, pp. 19-54. Loeb attributes the design of the Ford Homes to the architect Albert Wood who took over the project in late 1918, though drawings in the Leonard Bernard Willeke papers at the Bentley Historical Library suggest that Willeke’s preliminary designs for the houses significantly influenced the final product.

1910s helped to establish a cultural ideal for the modern worker's home, and in the absence of planned housing many workers took on the risks of homebuilding themselves as independent consumers, entering into a relationship of calculated dependence on industrial wages within the unplanned gridiron of blocks and lots at Detroit's expanding perimeter.

Solvay' Jefferson Rouge Development

By contrast with Ford, the Solvay Process Company actually build planned worker's housing in Detroit, albeit at a modest scale. Southwest Detroit's Solvay Process Company was the branch plant of a Belgian firm, one of five major plants that worked the salt deposits in the Delray district of southwest Detroit.¹⁶⁷ Solvay produced carbonate of soda used in the making of glass and the tempering of steel, and as a raw material for paper, paint, soap and many other products. The company, as Ford had, sought industrial discipline by providing "welfare" and education to its largely-immigrant workforce. Solvay commissioned Jefferson Rouge, a 186-unit worker's housing development near its plant around 1918. Only half of the designed units were actually built, but despite its small size the project was held up as an important model in the national discourse on industrial housing. When Leonard Willeke listed twenty-five industrial housing precedents to inform his Fordson Village design, the only Detroit example that he could cite was Solvay's Jefferson Rouge.¹⁶⁸

Solvay's Detroit plant began its "industrial welfare" work in 1900, and operated a range of sports and education programs at the company's Guild Hall by 1915. The Guild served workers and other residents of the southwest Delray neighborhood, claiming to be "the only organization in the city supported by a corporation, for the general use of the public." For

¹⁶⁷ Burton, *The city of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922*, pp. 542-543.

¹⁶⁸ Brunk, Leonard B. Willeke, p. 141.

example, in the winter of 1914-1915, a time of high unemployment among Delray's immigrants, the company offered dressmaking classes to women so that they could "cut and fit their own garments," saving money (Figure 1:22).¹⁶⁹ The Guild Committee investigated housing conditions in the neighborhood and found that "the general feeling among the families visited was one of discontentment. Many, who could scarcely converse in English, made it known to the Inspectors that they would like to live in brighter and less crowded quarters." Perhaps the direst conditions were found among the area's Armenian refugees. Explaining their suffering in hygienic and moral terms, the Guild reported that Armenians had "grouped themselves in the factory district...crowding in quarters much too small. The cafes and restaurants surrounding [their] homes offer cheap amusement which is not conducive to moral living. The worst feature, however, is the utter lack of bathing facilities—and it is this which has developed habits of uncleanness, and has proved a great handicap to the progress of the colony."¹⁷⁰ Solvay engaged the housing problem directly, engaging prominent industrial housing designers Mann and MacNeile of New York to develop a model housing project.

Mann and MacNeille were known among housing advocates for their work at Goodyear Heights, Ohio, Kistler Industrial Village, Pennsylvania, and the unbuilt Neponset Garden Village in East Walpole, Massachusetts—the latter two in collaboration with town planner John Nolen.¹⁷¹ In industrializing southwest Detroit, Mann & MacNeille addressed the high cost of land by integrating commercial thoroughfares into the design, making affordable housing possible. Their design incorporated a stock of surplus building brick that Solvay already owned. The housing typologies that Mann and MacNeille developed are comparable to those that

¹⁶⁹ Solvay Process Company, "Report of the Director," *Solvay Guild Yearbook 1914-1915*.

¹⁷⁰ Solvay Process Company, "The Armenian Colony," *Solvay Guild Yearbook 1914-1915*.

¹⁷¹ Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise*, pp. 95-98, 152-163.

Willeke would design for Ford: boarding houses accommodating single workers, as well as duplex, four- and six-family clusters with private units for sale between \$1,875 to \$2,700, each with “cellars and a heating system, bathroom, and sink with hot water boiler in kitchen” (Figure 1:23). Jefferson Rouge’s architects used their comprehensive overview to establish a hierarchy of main streets and smaller, curved residential streets. Shared playground space was set among the houses and the residential structures around them were carefully composed for aesthetic “unity” (Figure 1:24). An architectural style following “modern English precedent” was consistently applied to extend the perception of unity.

As with Ford, Solvay appears to have struggled with the up-front capital costs of building worker’s housing, especially in a volatile industrial economy. Jefferson Rouge remained only partially complete when during the recession of 1921 Solvay shut down its Detroit plant indefinitely, causing 1600 to lose their jobs.¹⁷² Further, the project’s shifting context undercut its value. The once-meandering Rouge River, which appears as a natural amenity in both Willeke’s Fordson Village and Mann and MacNeille’s Jefferson Rouge, was transformed into a heavy shipping channel to support Ford’s emerging Rouge Plant. At the same time the industrialization of adjacent Zug Island intensified, and within a few years a sewage disposal facility emerged just to the north of Jefferson Rouge.¹⁷³ Jefferson Rouge, Detroit’s most celebrated model of comprehensive housing design, was increasingly isolated by the development of industry on all sides in its fast-changing economic and urban context.

As Ford’s and Solvay’s experiments with industrial housing design show, the detached, owned worker’s home was not predestined to answer Detroit’s housing problems and alternative

¹⁷² “To Close a Solvay Plant: Indefinite Shut-Down, Affecting 1600, Announced in Detroit,” *The New York Times*, June 26, 1921.

¹⁷³ See Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Detroit, Michigan*, Vol. 5, Sheet 97, 1923.

models built on Garden City precedent were vigorously pursued as well.¹⁷⁴ The single family home was, however, the housing model that the city's major industrial and commercial interests generally favored and ultimately supported. Planned industrial housing of the type seen in Fordson Village and Jefferson Rouge offered much that welfare capitalists could like—healthful, up-to-date house housing designs within the reach of Detroit's well-paid five- or six-dollar-a-day workers—but to build them required unsustainably large outlays of capital from industry.

Solvay's Jefferson Rouge was ultimately a rare example of direct homebuilding by industry in Detroit. Ford, despite considering it, built little housing for unskilled workers in this “untamed and threatening” big city, falling back on its 1915 policy that “the company does not undertake to select neighborhoods for its employes [sic], but it does expect that they, to be profit-sharers, will choose wholesome and decent neighborhoods and buildings, and keep their homes and surroundings clean, sanitary and healthful.”¹⁷⁵ Rather than building a great deal of housing, and enmeshing their industrial business with the costs and risks of large-scale construction, Ford and other Detroit industrialists left this business to the city's builders and real estate development. Despite this, industry exerted influence on workers' home lives through their high “welfare” wages, propaganda, novel financing schemes and technical advice to encourage industrial workers to take on the costs and risks of homebuilding themselves, as atomized consumers.

¹⁷⁴In other examples, the owner of the Michigan Bolt and Nut Works urged the Board to research the Co-partnership Tenants Co.'s efforts at building Garden Cities in England as a response to the housing shortage, reported in “Housing Conditions,” p. 8. *The Detroit*, June 1913. See also announcement for the public lecture “Garden Cities: the Greatest Solution of the Housing Problems” in *The Detroit*, p. 4. April 28, 1919.

¹⁷⁵Ford Motor Company. *Helpful Hints and Advice*, p. 7.

Conclusions

The industrial workers of mass-production Detroit were pushed to become ‘new men,’ to see the world through ‘American’ values authored by their employers and other progressive housing reformers. Accepting the high industrial wage and the rigors of the assembly line also meant negotiating a new cultural ideal for life beyond the gates of the plant. Industrialists built little housing in 1910s and 1920s Detroit, and their architects’ visions for comprehensive housing developments went largely unfulfilled. Still, Fordist ideals of ‘white Americanism’—discipline at work, moral and bodily health at home, and a culture of ‘cooperation’ between labor and capital—were indirectly advanced through the fragmented agency of the land subdividers, real estate agents and homebuilders who created tens of thousands of worker’s homes in vacant tracts at Detroit’s fringe. In these new worker’s houses Detroiters pursued a plurality of desires for material and social advancement—many buying new homes on credit and engaging with the Fordist risk model: staking individual claims on the uncertain ground of a rapidly industrializing city.

Figures



Figure 1:1: “New Immigrants” from Russia, upon arrival in Detroit.
Babson, *Working Detroit* (1984).



Figure 1:2: IWW Cartoon. The Detroit Board of Commerce's cartoonist Tom May suggests Americanism itself was in a dangerous struggle with militant labor organizations such as IWW.

Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroitier*, August 6, 1917.



Figure 1:3 “Innocent looking” one-story nineteenth-century cottages, located outside of the city's business district, such as those that became boarding houses during the 1910s and 1920s.

Thomas, “The City of Detroit,” Fig. 88.



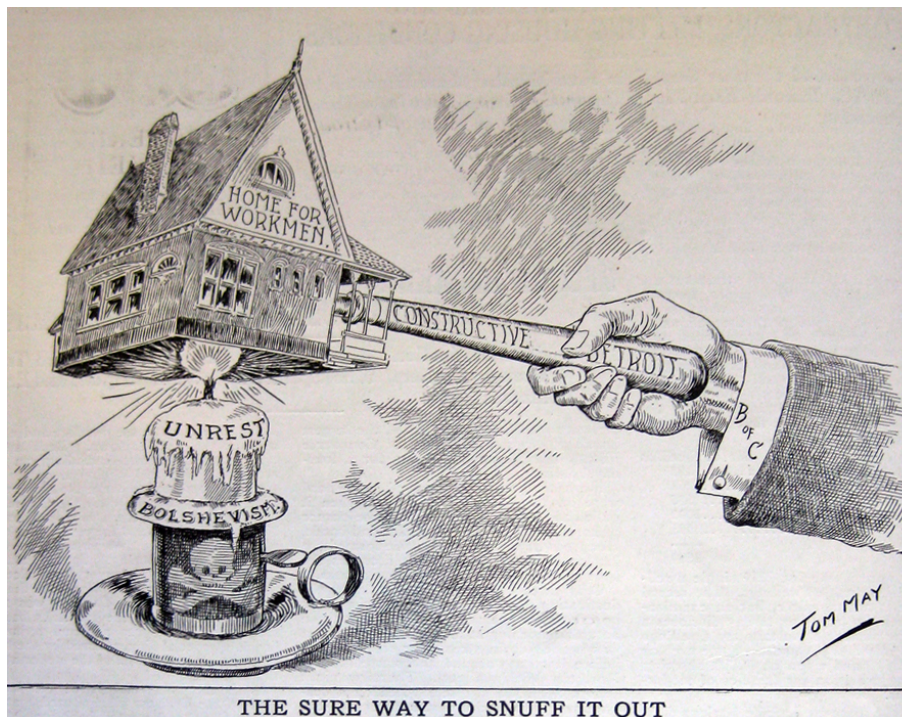
An unhealthy bedroom, a breeder of tuberculosis. Note the child sleeping at the center of the picture



A good, clean room with plenty of light and air

Figure 1:4: Two sleeping rooms juxtaposed. Ford juxtaposes a multi-use, multi-generational living space (an image frequently used to illustrate the ills of boarding) with a neat, single-purpose bedroom apparently made for children.

Ford Motor Company, *Factory Facts at Ford* (1915), Benson Ford Research Center.



THE SURE WAY TO SNUFF IT OUT

Figure 1:5: “[Bolshevism:]The Sure Way to Snuff it Out.” Board of Commerce cartoon.

Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroit* (1919), Burton Historical Collection.



Figure 1:6: Ford English School. The teaching of American standards of living is reflected in the drawing of an apparent single family home on the far-right blackboard.
 “Sociological Department Book 1914-1916,” Samuel Marquis Papers, Writings (Folder 8).

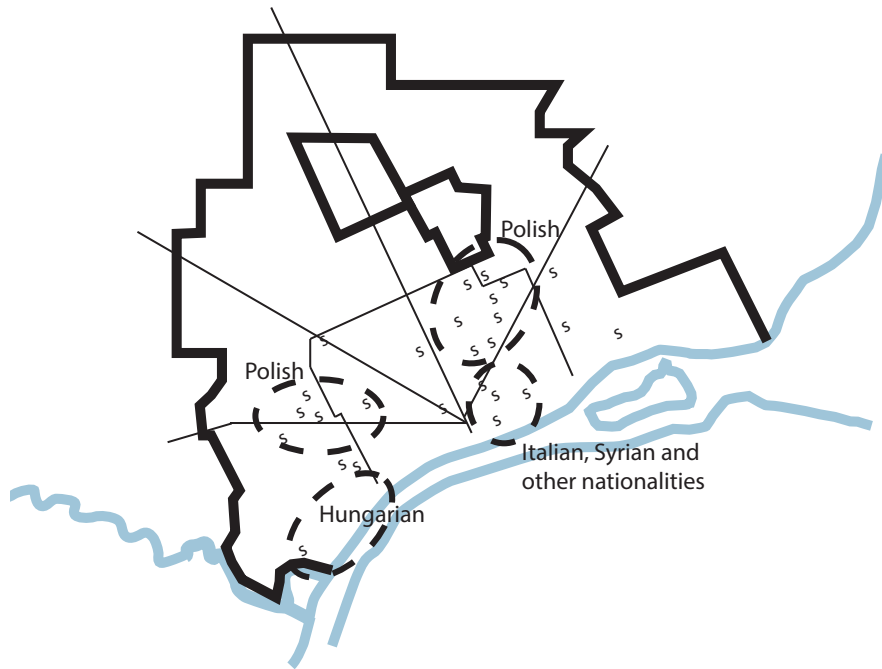


Figure 1:7: Detroit Public Night Schools map for 1916. The locations of these schools reflect congregations of immigrants living east and west of the city center.
 Based on Detroit Board of Commerce, “Evening School Map of Detroit,” *The Detroyter*, September 11, 1916, Babson, *Working Detroit*, p. 26 and Thomas, *The City of Detroit*, Fig. 6.



Figure 1:8: “Class in Citizenship at Cass Technical High School.”
Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroit* (1916), Burton Historical Collection.

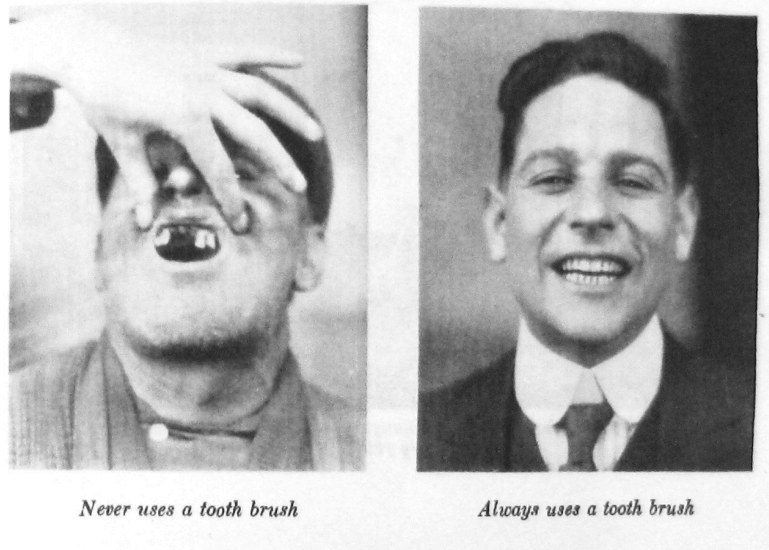


Figure 1:9: Ford represents the cleanliness ideal in an image pairing that well illustrates the company’s attempt to instill desires and aspirations in workers modeled after the middle class.
Ford Motor Company. *Helpful Hints and Advice* (1915). Benson Ford Research Center.



Figure 1:10: Sociological Department photograph of a boarding worker’s family, in conditions that are perhaps similar to those of the Kostruba Family. Ford Motor Company, *Ford Factory Facts* (1915), Benson Ford Research Center.



Figure 1:11: Newly built semi-bungalow of an exceptionally quick student of Fordism, built after just fourteen months of profit sharing. The shack that the worker’s family occupied while the home was constructed is visible at the far right. Ford Motor Company. “Fifty-one human interest stories” (1915), Benson Ford Research Ctr.



WHERE MANY DETROIT NEGROES ARE FORCED TO LIVE.

Figure 1:12: The Board's depiction of the African American enclave Black Bottom, so named in the nineteenth century for the place's rich soil.
The Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detrouter* (1919). Burton Historical Collection.



Figure 1:13: "Cooking, eating and sleeping in a pitch black room," revealed by the flash of the inspector's camera. This room once received some light from an adjacent space, but the doorway between them has been cut off.
Michigan Housing Commission, *Report* (1916).

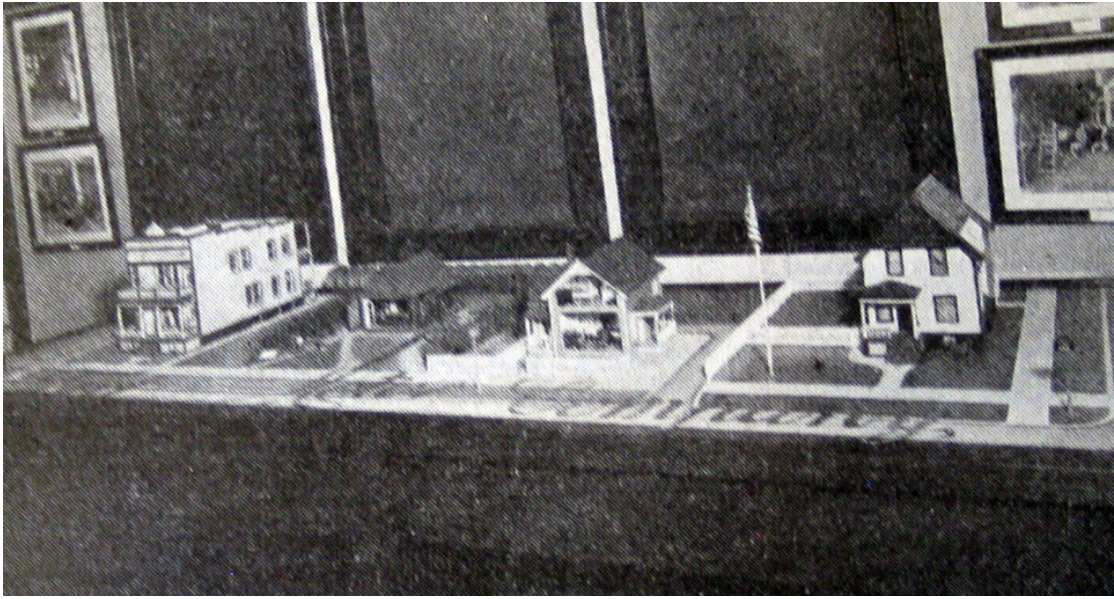


Figure 1:14: “the evolution of a Ford workman’s home and surroundings...”
The Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroit* (1915), Burton Historical Collection.



A good representative home owned by a Ford employe

Figure 1:15: “A good representative home owned by a Ford employe[sic].”
Ford Motor Company, *Helpful Hints and Advice* (1915), Benson Ford Research Center.



Figure 1:16: Housing shortage cartoon from the Detroit Board of Commerce’s journal. The Detroit Board of Commerce. *The Detroit* (1919). Burton Historical Collection.

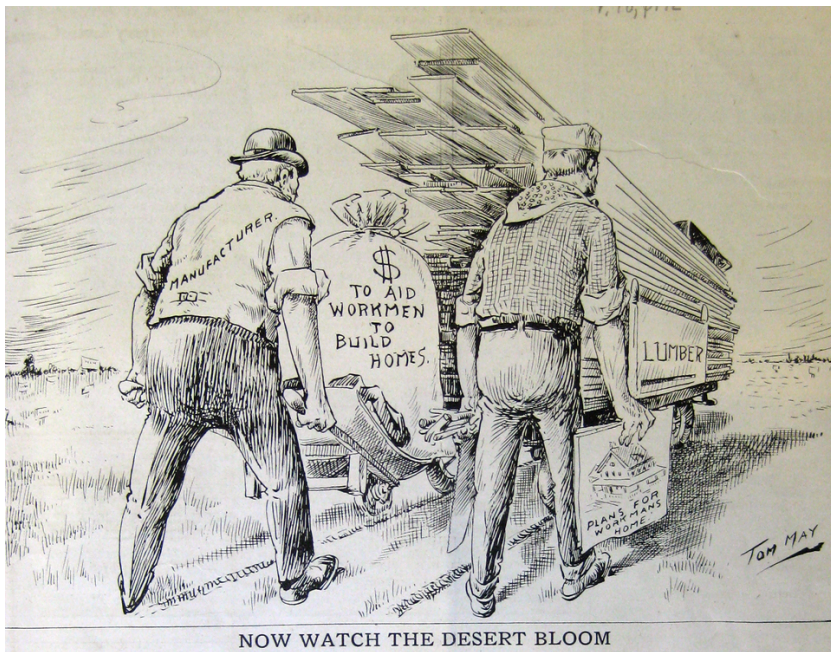


Figure 1:17: “Now Watch the Desert Bloom,” cartoon from the Board of Commerce’s journal. The Detroit Board of Commerce. *The Detroit* (1919). Burton Historical Collection.

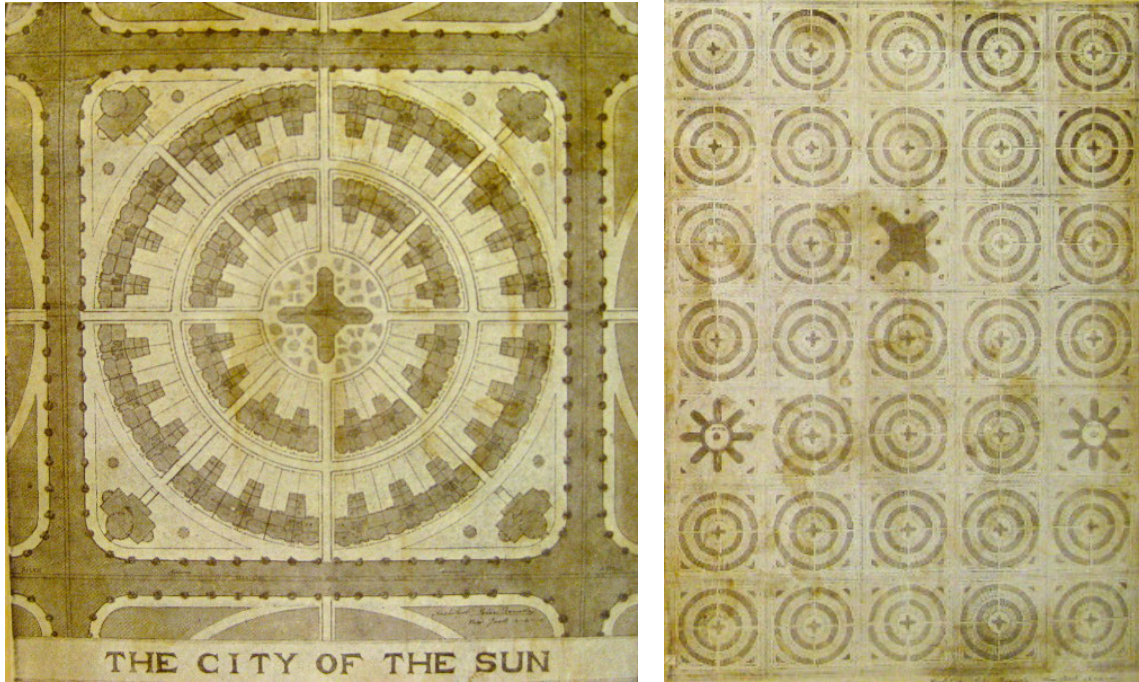


Figure 1:18: Peter Roveda's "City of the Sun" proposal, single block plan at right and city plan composed of many such blocks at right.
Acc. 47, Box 5. Benson Ford Research Center.

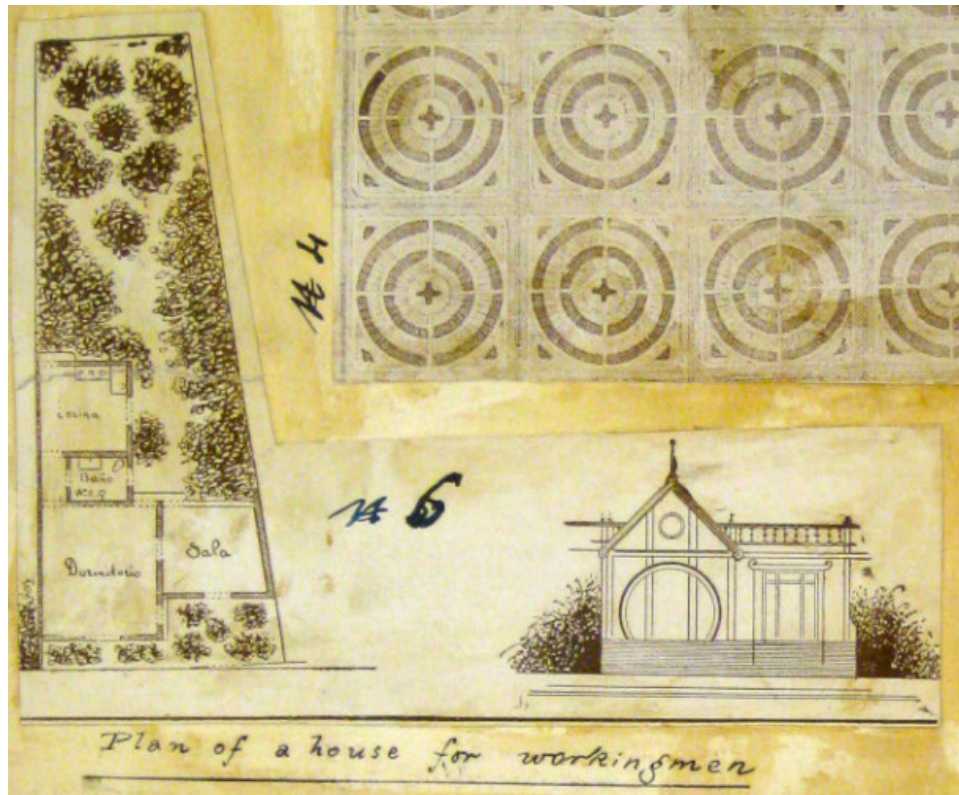


Figure 1:19 Roveda’s proposed four room (above) and five room (below) worker’s houses, plan and elevation drawings. The mixing of English and Spanish language in the drawings of this Italian designer suggests that he was reaching out to an international audience.

Acc. 47, Box 5. Benson Ford Research Center.

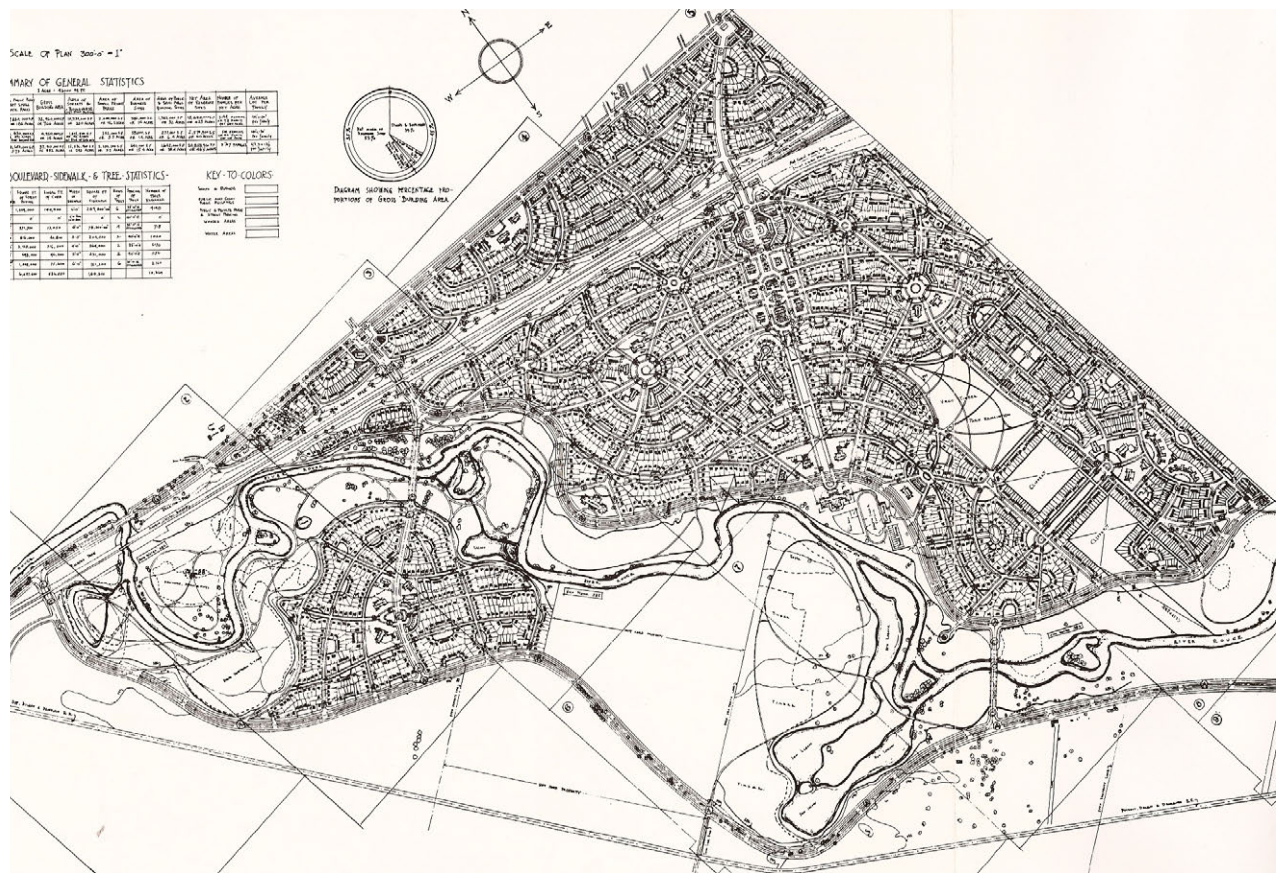


Figure 1:20: Willeke's Fordson Village, site plan for the development, in Dearborn, MI.
 Brunk, *Leonard Willeke: Excellence in Architecture and Design*, 1986.

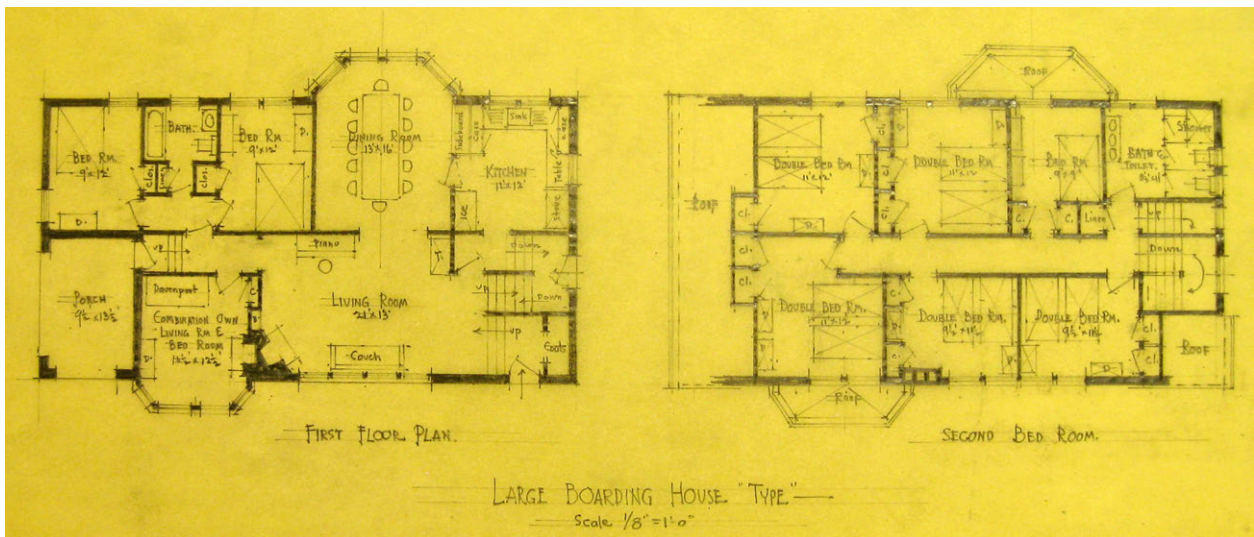
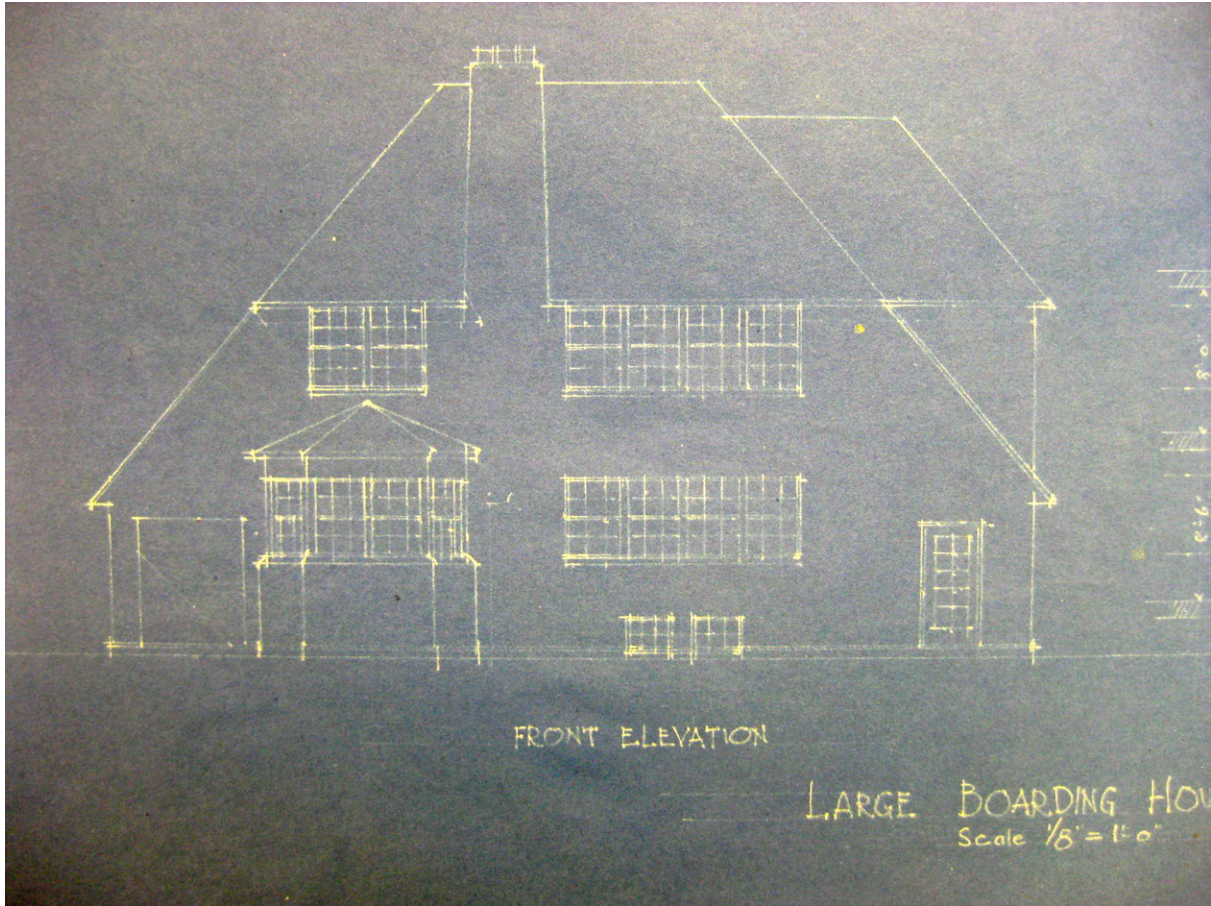


Figure 1:21: Leonard Willeke's proposed "Large Boarding House" type, Fordson Village. Willeke Papers, Benton Historical Library.



Figure 1:22: “Hungarian and Polish Women learning to make their own garments.”
 Solvay Process Company, *Solvay Guild Yearbook 1914-1915*. Burton Historical Collection

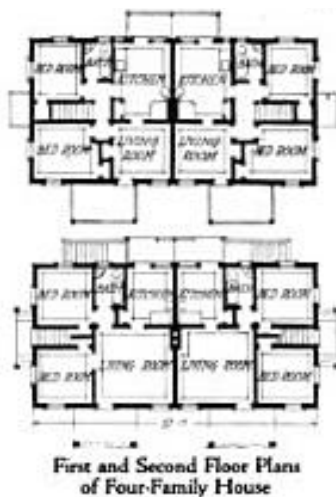


Figure 1:23: A Jefferson Rouge housing type: four private dwellings, each with five rooms.
The Architectural Forum, April 1918.



General View of Henley Street Looking toward Blackburn Street

Figure 1:24: Jefferson Rouge, street view of the worker's housing development in southwest Detroit
Architectural Forum, April 1918.

Chapter Two

Detroit's Other Industry: Real Estate and the Culture of Elusive Security

Prosperity and real estate activity go hand in hand...there is not a shadow of doubt but that the two greatest elements of business life and activity in Detroit today are automobiles and real estate.

-H.T. Clough, Detroit Real Estate Board, 1915¹

With increased wages, Americanization programs, and assistance with financing, Detroit's manufacturers and Board of Commerce sought to discipline the city's workforce by tying workers to houses and mortgages at the urban periphery. Yet it was Detroit's "other industry," real estate, which directly facilitated the city's worker's housing development. The city's real estate industry—supported by federal and city government—authored a set of material possibilities that elaborated the Fordist ideal of the new man authored by Ford and others. While they did not speak with one voice the city's manufacturers and its real estate industry developed a powerful reciprocity in which each supported the growth of the other—builders relying on relatively well-paid workers and manufacturers relying on the shop floor discipline that home buying supported. This reciprocity drove rapid growth for both industries in the 1910s and 1920s.² Detroit can only be called a boomtown for its exceptionally rapid growth in housing construction in this period. Growth in the number of families in Detroit-dominated Wayne

¹ Detroit Board of Commerce. *The Detroit*, p.12. December 20, 1915.

² Across the 1910s and 1920s the number of automobiles registered in the United States soared forty-fold and in this same boom period the total value of Detroit's real estate grew nearly ten-fold from \$377,000,000 to \$3,394,000,000. See Glazer, *Detroit: a Study in Urban Development*, p.91-92.

County—a rough estimate of its growth in housing units—was 284% during these two decades, a pace only surpassed among major cities' counties by Los Angeles County, with Cleveland's Cuyahoga and Chicago's Cook Counties experiencing much less proportional growth at 110% and 91% respectively.³

By building and selling modern houses, technologies, and furnishings, Detroit's real estate industry—including land subdividers, realtors, product suppliers, and contractors—made Fordism real. They made it possible for workers to materially negotiate the Fordist social model in terms that the real estate industry co-constituted along with manufacturers and government—terms such as whiteness, Americanism, and the economic security and upward mobility of the family. Workers had agency in this process and engaged with real estate products in a plurality of ways, yet the real estate industry set many of the discursive and material terms within which workers made do. Detroit's real estate industry leveraged the precariousness of workers' family budgets in their sales discourse, presenting the well-advised home purchase as a hedge against the economic threat of aging and also as a possible boon, a potentially lucrative investment that could bring health, security, independence and social advancement to the worker's family. Many workers found a path to self-defined, better lives in and through the products of the real estate industry, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. At the same time, real estate gave shape to race and class segregation, and to the shift of speculative risks from corporations to workers, thus reinforcing conflicts that made domestic security elusive for many.

³ United States Bureau of the Census. *Thirteenth Census of the United States (1910)* and *Fifteenth Census of the United States (1930)*. Data queried through the demographic research tool *Social Explorer* at www.socialexplorer.com. Growth in number of families residing in each county: Los Angeles County (127k families at 1910 and 653k at 1930, growing 414%), Detroit's Wayne County (115k families at 1910 and 442k at 1930, growing 284%), Cleveland's Cuyahoga County (143k families in 1910, 300k in 1930, growing 110%), Chicago's Cook County (518k families at 1910 and 989k at 1930, growing 91%).

The Federal “Own Your Home” Campaign

Following the First World War the federal government sought to bolster urban real estate industries in Detroit and elsewhere. Housing shortages and labor unrest concerned government officials as wartime industrial work terminated and unemployment rose, creating a concerning “wave of Bolshevism throughout the country.”⁴ Following strong homebuilding of over ten thousand units in 1916, Detroit’s real estate industry came to a near standstill in 1918, as capital and building materials were diverted to war purposes (Table 2:1).⁵ That year, the federal Department of Labor responded to housing concerns by bringing leading figures in construction, real estate, and lending on board—Franklin Miller, Paul Murphy and K.V. Haymaker respectively, the latter hailing from Detroit—to develop a nationwide marketing program to stimulate private-sector homebuilding. The campaign spoke with the authority of the Federal government and used a range of popular media including print, film, radio and local “model home” exhibits in coordination with local real estate interests (Figure 2:1). The Detroit Real Estate Board urged its members to “Help the ‘Own Your Home’ Movement” by reaching out to prospective clients to provide them with tickets to the Detroit Builders’ Show of 1919. Here, future homebuyers could see the latest domestic technologies, listen to a brass band, and attend the lecture of “a prominent orator from the Department of Labor at Washington, who [would] talk on the ‘Own Your Home’ topic.”⁶ The Department of Labor supported a federal home-loan

⁴ Murphy, “The National Own Your Home Campaign,” *American Contractor*, July 12, 1919.

⁵ On the wartime drop in homebuilding see Doan, *American Housing Production 1880-2000*, pp. 27-29.

⁶ Letter of G.W. Drennan, President of the Detroit Real Estate Board to the membership, February 28, 1919. Detroit Real Estate Board, Real Estate File, Burton Historical Collection.

program to further stimulate homeownership, but this failed in Congress in 1919 and such a program was not implemented until 1932 in the context of a financial crisis.⁷

Long before Herbert Hoover became President he was an organizer of the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition where Ford had exhibited a model of “the evolution of a Ford workman’s home and surroundings” as discussed in Chapter One.⁸ The two men shared a belief in homeownership’s potential to strengthen Americans’ morality, on-the-job productivity, and embrace of the principals of industrial capitalism.⁹ As Under Secretary of Commerce from 1921-1928, in the Harding and Coolidge administrations, Hoover took the lead on Federal efforts to bolster homeownership. He argued that:

A family that owns its home takes a pride in it, maintains it better, gets more pleasure out of it, and has a more wholesome, healthful, and happy atmosphere in which to bring up children. The home owner has a constructive aim in life. He works harder outside his home; he spends his leisure more profitably and he and his family live a finer life and enjoy more of the comforts and cultivating influences of our modern civilization. A husband and wife who own their home are more apt to save. They have an interest in the advancement of a social system that permits the individual to store up the fruits of his labor.¹⁰

Hoover praised business groups—such as Detroit’s Board of Commerce—who were “taking a neighborly interest in developing sound financing and other machinery for the use of home seekers,” and anticipating criticism, hastened to add that such programs were “not paternalism but good business and good citizenship.”¹¹

⁷ See Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,” *Journal for Public Policy*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, April 1997, pp. 188-189, and Weiss, “Marketing and Financing Home Ownership, Mortgage Lending and Public Policy in the United States, 1918-1989,” *Business and Economic History*, Second Series, Volume 18, 1989, p. 109-112.

⁸ The Ford Motor Company. *Ford Times*, pp. 548-549. July, 1916.

⁹ Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, pp. 151-153.

¹⁰ Hoover, “Foreword,” National Bureau of Standards, *How to Own Your Own Home*, p. v.

¹¹ *ibid*, pp. v-vi.

Hoover sought to stabilize the national economy after a 1921 slowdown by redoubling federal efforts to strengthen the homebuilding industry. With congressional approval, Hoover established a Division of Building and Housing (DBH) within the Commerce Department, continuing the multi-media advertising campaign established by the Department of Labor three years earlier. The Department sought to increase the homebuilding industry's efficiency, with standardization, uniform dimensions and grades for construction materials such as lumber, and model building code regulations. It was hoped that standardization would reduce the rising cost of home construction.¹² The DBH sought to rationalize urban development more broadly as well, writing model legislation to encourage municipalities to adopt zoning ordinances.¹³ Zoning would provide some insurance to homebuyers by protecting neighborhoods from "intrusion by factories, public garages, and scattered stores."¹⁴

In 1923, Hoover's Commerce Department published the pamphlet, *How To Own Your Home*, and distributed it widely to provide advice and encouragement to potential buyers. The text acknowledged the high stakes that homebuying represented, and that a mistake, such as buying in a declining neighborhood, purchasing beyond one's means, or accepting shoddy construction "may cause discouragement and a loss of all one's savings."¹⁵ To alleviate the anxiety of homebuying—as Detroit's industrialists and Board of Commerce had done years earlier—the Commerce Department's pamphlet provided technical advice to prospective buyers. It provided a chart that allowed buyers to determine at a glance the size

¹² Hutchison, "Building for Babbitt," *Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, April 1997, p. 187.

¹³ Ibid, Wright, *Building the Dream*, p. 197, and Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁴ National Bureau of Standards, *How to Own Your Own Home*, p. 11.

¹⁵ National Bureau of Standards, *How to Own Your Own Home*, pp. 1-2.

of mortgage that their income could comfortably bear, taking into account taxes, insurance, upkeep and other expenses that the inexperienced homebuyer might fail to budget for.

How to Own Your Home argued for new, modern housing by discouraging the practices of the nineteenth-century immigrant enclave. The pamphlet implicitly suggested that homebuyers leave their old neighborhoods of ethnic identity for new, superior neighborhoods identified by class or occupational group—advice that many early twentieth-century Detroiters followed, as Olivier Zunz has shown.¹⁶ “While a family may think that it would like to live close to relatives and friends,” the document explains, “this factor should not be given too much weight. Nevertheless, the general type of people living in the neighborhood is important, especially if there are children in the family, who should be brought up in the right kind of surroundings.” *How to Own Your Home* also discouraged the low cost, informal, and often cash-based forms of homebuilding common among nineteenth century worker’s cottages. In the early twentieth century, with large first and second mortgages becoming available to workers, the pamphlet urged that “borrowing money to buy a home is no disgrace. On the contrary,” the text continued, “it is normal and in many ways desirable. Many families in meeting payments on a loan have learned the habit of saving, and have continued it as a step toward financial independence.”¹⁷ In this context American residential mortgage debt grew at an unprecedented rate during the 1920s.¹⁸

Modern Worker’s Houses

Detroit’s real estate interests expanded the city by constructing new residential subdivisions at the city’s periphery, many in close proximity to new industrial plants along the

¹⁶ Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 326-371.

¹⁷ Gries and Taylor, *How to Own Your Own Home*, pp.4

¹⁸ Doan, *American Housing Production, 1880-2000*, pp. 30-31.

outer belt line (Figure 2:2). City government encouraged this growth by supporting annexation of new and prospective subdivisions into the city until Detroit reached its ultimate size of 138 square miles in 1926.¹⁹ City Hall became increasingly entwined with the real estate industry after 1918. Overhauling the city charter that year, a progressive coalition including industrialists, Protestant church leaders and white American voters did away with the city's ward-based common council. They replaced the ward-based system—which the coalition associated with corruption and the rule of “liquor interests” in heavily-immigrant wards—with a city council elected at-large.²⁰ Five members of the first nine-person at-large council were real estate agents, and the council's aggressive expansion of roads, utilities, and services in concert with the annexation of outlying land supported a robust market for housing at the urban periphery.²¹ Residents of the central city and outlying areas approved annexations by popular vote, and the legal mechanism for municipal expansion lay with State government, but it was city government that drove annexation in that it controlled the legal and financial levers to provide new districts with the basic infrastructure that would allow modern homes and neighborhoods to be constructed.²²

City government invested heavily in the streetcar system to promote urban growth. Jim Couzens, early investor and executive for the Ford Motor Company, became Mayor of Detroit in 1919 promising to address the streetcar issue. Critical of the rising fare and eager to see the railway system expanded, he spearheaded a public takeover of the system (including Detroit and

¹⁹ Gibson, Campbell. “Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990,” Washington DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998. Accessed at www.census.gov, February 26, 2013.

²⁰ Ramsey, Maurice, “Some Aspects of Non-Partisan Government in Detroit 1918-1940,” pp. 24-51, University of Michigan Doctoral Dissertation, 1944.

²¹ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, pp. 34-36 and Ramsey, “Some Aspects of Non-Partisan Government in Detroit 1918-1940,” pp. 85-110.

²² On the nineteenth and twentieth century history of urban annexation see Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 138-156.

adjacent suburbs) that was achieved in the spring of 1922, at which time he announced expansion saying, “We will now start building.” Between the municipal takeover of 1922 and one author’s appraisal in 1931, Detroit’s geographic size increased 64% and its population increased about 80%, and in support of this the municipal railways added more than 53 miles of new track, increased the speed of the system with new equipment, and introduced 548 busses to connect outlying districts to the streetcar system.²³

Within newly annexed districts—and those primed by the prospect of future annexation—homebuilders constructed tens of thousands of modern worker’s houses in the 1910s and 1920s. (Table 2:1) This building, along with the real estate industry’s efforts to promote home and mortgage buying in Detroit, created the conditions for exceptionally high homeownership among workers. Historian Richard Harris illustrates this in his analysis of 1940 census data—in which homeownership was disaggregated to the city level—finding that Philadelphia and Detroit led large American cities with more than 39% of their families owning homes and that Detroit workers in particular—craftspeople, foremen, operatives and laborers—were more likely to own their home than workers in the other large cities studied.²⁴

The makers of Detroit’s modern worker’s homes ranged from small entrepreneurs to large development corporations. Countless small-scale builders constructed just a few homes per year on contract to individuals who already owned their lot. Other moderate-scale developers increased the marketability of their subdivisions by constructing batches of ten or twenty homes there, providing buyers of lots or homes-on-lots in the subdivision a measure of assurance as to

²³ O’Geran, *A History of the Detroit Street Railways*, pp. 333-387 (esp. 378-379), quote pp. 363-364. On the role of streetcars in urban decentralization see Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 116-120.

²⁴ Harris, Richard, “Working-Class Homeownership in the American Metropolis,” *Journal of Urban History*, 17:46, 1990, Tables 3, 4.

the viability of the development.²⁵ Finally, large-scale “community builders” such as B.E. Taylor emerged in the 1920s, corporate entities with enough capital to buy land, subdivide it into many subdivisions and lots, and build and sell many homes upon it.²⁶ Homebuilders at all scales coordinated their efforts with the larger building-industry coalition, including realtors, lumber and supply dealers, plumbing and electrical experts, and sellers of everything from appliances to landscaping materials.²⁷

Higher wages and easy credit boosted workers’ stature in the consumer marketplace, and Detroit’s formal building industry began to serve this group as never before. The coalition’s annual Builders’ Show celebrated workers by including a “Workers’ Day” in their week-long Detroit exhibition in 1920, inviting laborers to peruse realtors’, builders’ and product suppliers’ exhibits and listen to the Studebaker Company band.²⁸ This homebuilding coalition—through their stock plans and product specifications—began to coalesce around a set of ideal worker’s housing standards. Judith Kenny and Thomas Hubka describe this emerging standard as “a generic house plan containing five to six rooms with bath, including a living room, dining room, kitchen, [and] two or three bedrooms.”²⁹ At the same time, many newly-arrived Detroiters sought

²⁵ For Example, The Treppa Realty Co. agents sold their Conant Avenue Subdivision in terms of the momentum they had established developing it: “The streets are already being prepared, cement sidewalks will also be laid soon. The foundations under two beautiful houses are being dug and 10 to 20 houses are going to be built this summer...five rooms with hard floors,” The Treppa Realty Co. Agents, “Attention: Treppa-Ciganek Conant Avenue Subdivision” (advertisement), *Dziennik Polski*, May 13, 1916. Translated from Polish by Justyna Zdunek-Wielgolaska.

²⁶ See Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, pp. 1, 5-6, 20, 39, Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: the Process of Growth in Boston 1870-1900*, pp. 118-127 and Glazer, *Detroit: A Study in Urban Development*, pp. 94-95.

²⁷ Detroit Builder’s Exhibition Incorporated, “List of Exhibitors,” *Detroit’s Second Annual Builders Show: Ford Exhibition Bldg., Woodward and Grand Boulevard, February 28-March 7*. Burton Historical Collection.

²⁸ Detroit Builder’s Exhibition Incorporated, *Detroit’s Second Annual Builders Show* (program).

²⁹ Hubka and Kenny, “Examining the American Dream: Housing Standards and the Emergence of a National Housing Culture, 1900-1930, p. 49, *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2006). On the interwar culture of standardization see Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*, pp. 56-85. The

ultra low-cost bungalows with just four rooms and often no bath, and the city's most modern builders constructed many "sub-standard" homes to meet their demand. For many workers, getting a foothold in the industrial city meant buying cheaply and deferring certain comforts until future additions or remodeling could be afforded. New technology was acquired incrementally as well. One resident of Lincoln Park (southwest of Detroit), for example, sold his home in 1926 with the description "5 room bungalow with bath, thoroughly modern except heat (stove heat); oak floors, paved street. 1 block to street car and bus."³⁰ A modern hot air furnace could be added to such a home, suppliers assured, "on easy payments."³¹

Despite the many hands that built it, Detroit's worker's housing of the 1910s and 1920s generally adhered to two common national types: the bungalow and the duplex. These were modest, affordable, and suited to an urban environment's narrow lots. Their small size and spare aesthetic distinguishes them from the larger middle-class homes of the northwesterly Grand River corridor or Highland Park with their craftsman or colonial-style details. Still, the modern worker's house was more comfortable than the cottages of nineteenth-century Detroit workers—the cottage type being comprised of perhaps four rooms, and lacking amenities such as the bathroom, dining room, and bedroom closet (Figure 2:3).³² This improvement was due in part to the modernization of building-components manufacturing. Following the rapid growth of the millwork industry and the increasing sophistication of its machine tools and methods across the

authors note that this standard was not limited to the single family bungalow but was applicable to other national and regional types such as the duplex, the New England triple-decker, and the Chicago four-family flat.

³⁰ Real Estate Listing Bureau, "1376 Victoria Ave.," *Real Estate Listing Bureau Bulletin*, Nov. 18, 1926

³¹ Detroit Builders' Exhibition Incorporated, *To Those Who Build*, p. 8.

³² In *The Changing Face of Inequality* Olivier Zunz describes this late-nineteenth century split between an informal housing market for workers and a formal housing market for the middle class in Detroit as the "Dual Housing Market." On the increase of amenities from the worker's cottage type to the bungalow type see Hubka, *Houses Without Names*, pp. 64-68.

late nineteenth century, the builders of affordable early twentieth-century homes had broader access to factory-made doors, windows, flooring, moldings, and stairs. These pieces were “more stylish” and often of higher quality than their site-built predecessors. Whether built by small contractors or large-scale developers, Detroit’s modern bungalows were shaped by the intentions of designers and engineers. Bungalows were often based on architect-produced pattern book designs that builders could modify as desired, and everything from homes’ stock millwork to their plumbing, electrical, and heating and ventilation systems embodied expertise.³³

The emphasis on two major types—the bungalow and duplex—reflects among other things the concerns of the homebuilding coalition. For small-scale contractors, the consistent use of a few familiar types continued to provide a hedge against risk—making construction time and salability more predictable as they had for the late nineteenth century builders observed by Sam Bass Warner.³⁴ Large-scale builders enjoyed the economies of scale that the repeated use of standard plans and materials provided. While suppliers of concrete and brick called for builders to use their materials as a basic structure, the lumber industry prevailed with the “speed and economy in erection” of its products, and saw light wood framing become the overwhelmingly most common structure in Detroit’s and many cities’ housing construction.³⁵ Framing consisted of milled wood studs and joists sheathed with wood boards, all fastened with machine-made nails to tie the assembly together and give it strength (Figure 2:4). Framing systems became increasingly simple to execute across the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the size-

³³ Bigott, *From Cottage to Bungalow* pp. 29-35, 50-51 and Gottfried, “The Machine and the Cottage: Building, Technology, and the Single Family House 1870-1910, *The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1995) pp. 47-68. Regarding pattern books see Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 116-137.

³⁴ Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*, pp. 118-127.

³⁵ Weyerhaeuser Forest Products, *High Cost of Cheap Construction*, p. 17 (1922).

accuracy of dimensional lumber improved. All this, and the simple butt joints that the nailed system of fastening allowed “permit[ed] the frame to be rapidly put up.”³⁶

Local lumber suppliers reinforced the use of light wood framing by providing stock plans, cost estimates, and in some cases financing on the purchase of their products to builders and homebuyers (Figure 2:5).³⁷ The Minnesota-based Weyerhaeuser Forest Products Company further reached out to lay consumers who—knowing little about construction and facing an enormous mortgaged purchase—were anxious about hiring a homebuilding contractor. With their book *High Cost of Cheap Construction* the lumber dealer empowered consumers to make basic inspections of their home’s construction in process, to make sure that they were not working with a contractor who would save “a few nails at the cost of squeaking floors,” or save a little labor and material at the expense of excessive coal bills and repair costs” due to gaps in wall, window or door construction.³⁸

The bungalow was celebrated in architectural journals and popular magazines such as the *Ladies’ Home Journal* for its most elaborate “craftsman-style” forms, such as those of Greene and Greene’s California homes.³⁹ At the same time, the small, unadorned bungalows embraced by working-class buyers in Detroit and elsewhere echoed with a set of modern design ideas they shared with their more celebrated brethren—aesthetic simplicity, efficiency of space and use, openness to nature and the staging of a more informal family life, though the meaning of these qualities changed in the transfer from the magazine to the industrial neighborhood.⁴⁰ The type’s simplicity of form was set against the highly ornamented nineteenth-century Victorian style and

³⁶ Kidder, F.E., *Building Construction and Superintendence*, Vol. 2, p. 94 (1920) and Bigott, *From Cottage to Bungalow*, pp. 30-39.

³⁷ Detroit Builders’ Exhibition Incorporated, *To Those Who Build*, pp. 24-25, 46.

³⁸ Weyerhaeuser Forest Products, *High Cost of Cheap Construction*, p. 9 (1922).

³⁹ McAlester and McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, pp. 453-454.

⁴⁰ Wright, *Building the Dream*, pp. 96-113.

contrasted with the visual clutter and congestion of the urban “slums.” The Detroit-based Sibley Lumber Company emphasized this latter distinction in its catalog of home plans, noting that the bungalow’s proximity to “foliage, trees and flowers” would strengthen the owner “whose nature rebels at the thought of crowded halls and tenements.”⁴¹ The bungalow type’s ubiquitous porch celebrated a more open relationship with nature and manifest industrialists’ desire for spaces of wholesome leisure for the worker’s family during off-hours. Rather than the inflexible and space-consuming Victorian hall and parlor, bungalows’ front doors opened directly onto “living rooms,” multi-use spaces where modern parents could engage with and nurture their children.⁴²

The Sibley Lumber Co.’s bungalow plans, “carefully standardized to avoid waste in materials and labor,” illustrate bungalow forms commonly used in Detroit’s worker’s housing expansion of the 1910s and 1920s (Figures 2:6, 2:7). Sibley’s “The Elwood,” a simple 700 square foot, front-gabled bungalow included two bedrooms and a bath to one side and a living, dining room and kitchen to the other—a common plan configuration for this house type.⁴³ “The Lynnhaven,” a 1.5 story semi bungalow of over 1000 square feet also exemplifies a common variation on the type, with the private spaces of two bedrooms and a bath moved to the upper story and the more social living and dining rooms aligned to the public front of the house’s first story. Every bungalow includes a rear-entrance at the kitchen, providing a place for the industrial worker to wash off the day’s grime before entering the more precious spaces of the home.⁴⁴

Variation among bungalows remained meaningful despite the relative standardization of the

⁴¹ F.M. Sibley Lumber Co., *Better Homes at Lower Cost*, p. 92 (1926).

⁴² Clark, Clifford Edward, *The American Family Home, 1800-1960*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1986. p. 131-157, 171-183. See also Kenny and Hubka, "Examining the American Dream: Housing Standards and the Emergence of a National Housing Culture, 1900-1930." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, pp. 49-69.

⁴³ Hubka, *Houses Without Names*, p. 57.

⁴⁴ Kenny and Hubka, "Examining the American Dream: Housing Standards and the Emergence of a National Housing Culture, 1900-1930." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, pp. 49-69.

type. Given standard home plans, Sibley noted, “any reliable contractor can easily move partition walls, windows or doors to suit the owner.”⁴⁵ Bungalows were typically clad with wood boards and shingles, and as the Alladin pre-cut homes company noted, that the owner was “privileged to choose any colors of paint or stain...for the exterior.”⁴⁶

The other common worker’s house of 1910s and 1920s Detroit was the duplex or “two-flat” (Figures 2:8, 2:9). Stylistically Detroit’s duplexes reflect, if faintly, the growing influence of the Prairie Style that quickly emerged and receded in the United States between 1900-1920. The long straight lines at the base of their dormers, hipped roofs and of their full-length balconies emphasize visual horizontality and set the structures in dialogue with the site below despite their height.⁴⁷ Detroit’s duplexes are alternatively clad with brick or wood siding, and often present two distinct front doors on a shared front porch, sometimes accessed by two separate sets of front steps. The Sibley Company’s “Olympia” model illustrates the common type: two residences accessed by separate front doors on a shared porch. One door opens onto the lower-story residence, five rooms plus bath, and the second door leads via stairs to a nearly-identical second level residence.⁴⁸ Describing the Olympia standard plan the company points out both the compromise and the financial strategy that the duplex represented

The home that nearest approaches in comforts and conveniences the private residence is the modern two-family...while the occupants of such dwellings are denied certain private privileges to be found in the individual home, yet there are many practical and desirable features...from a monetary standpoint.

For the buyer willing to take on the additional risk of a larger mortgage, and the diminished prestige of sharing one’s roof with another family, the more expensive duplex offered the

⁴⁵ F.M. Sibley Lumber Co., “Important: Changes in Floor Plans,” *Better Homes at Lower Cost* (1926).

⁴⁶ The Alladin Company, *Alladin ‘Built in A Day’ House Catalog*, 1917, p. 75

⁴⁷ McAlester and McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, p.438-451.

⁴⁸ The Alladin Company, *Alladin ‘Built in A Day’ House Catalog*, 1917, pp. 89-91.

opportunity to collect rental income from the second unit without bringing boarders into the main residence. As one Detroitier who grew up on the west side in the 1920s recalls, her father (a barber) bought a duplex there because he believed it to be “a good investment,” choosing to move the family into the second floor residence and to rent out the ground floor as an additional income stream.⁴⁹

Real Estate and the Culture of Elusive Security

The real estate industry helped to build up the cultural ideals of the Detroit business community introduced in Chapter One, such as the conflation of homeownership with full citizenship. In 1915 the realtor H.T. Clough, for example, wrote in the Detroit Board of Commerce’s journal, “All hail to the workman who lives in his own home; he is the stable citizen, the true *Detroitier*.”⁵⁰ Realtors were the central spokespeople for the real estate industry, though material suppliers’ and homebuilders’ advertisements reinforced its central messages. The United Fuel and Supply Company for example urged its customers to “save rent,” and provide “secure comfort for the wife and kiddies,” by building or buying a house. Homeownership, this supplier of coal and building supplies assured, would provide “a safe investment growing in value,” allowing the homeowner to “be independent,”⁵¹ assurances illustrated by a duplex from which two men departed—apparently for work—as their families looked on, waving (Figure 2:10).

The real estate industry emphasized several themes in its sales discourse, most prominently: (1) that homebuyers could invest with assurance that Detroit’s economy

⁴⁹ Blackwell, Catherine Carter (2005). Interview by Louis Jones [print transcript]. Westsider Oral History Project, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Acc# UOHOO1949.1.

⁵⁰ Detroit Board of Commerce. *The Detroitier*, p.12. December 20, 1915.

⁵¹ Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroitier* (advertisement), April 14, 1919.

would continue to grow (2) that homebuyers could navigate a spatial and social ladder of upward mobility, and (3) that homeownership would secure the family's health and parents' independence in older age. These themes helped realtors to sell property and guided workers' access to the modern material conditions through which many pursued self-defined better lives. At the same time the real estate industry reinforced race and class segregation, accelerated the outward expansion and inner degradation of the city's housing stock, and bolstered a culture of mortgaged, speculative property investment that undermined the economic security of working families and the city itself.

In the 1910s and 1920s realtors' claims increasingly carried the professional authority of trusted fiduciary advisors. Brokerage gained authority by institutionalizing its practices, forming the Detroit Real Estate Board in 1886 and re-organizing it in 1906, and finally joining this local Board to the National Association of Real Estate Boards two years later.⁵² The Board gave structure to the community of real estate brokers. It lobbied for favorable tax policies and kept its members informed about the road and streetcar expansions that were constantly changing Detroit's geography of urban real estate. The board also engaged its members in civic matters, as when it urged them to make donations to the Red Cross as the United States entered the war in 1917.⁵³ Working to build public confidence in its members' professionalism and in real estate as an investment vehicle, the members of Real Estate Boards across the country advertised their high standards for ethical practice and distinguished themselves from other brokers by taking on the title "realtors," one that only Board members in good standing could claim (Figure 2:11). The

⁵² Detroit Real Estate Board, "History," *The Detroit Realtor: Special Edition of the Detroit Realtor for Better Homes and Building Exposition, May 20—27, 1922*. Detroit: The Chas May Co, 1922.

⁵³ Detroit Real Estate Board letters, "State Income Tax: March Diner," March 11, 1921, "The [Detroit United Railways] Wants Fifteen Minutes," undated. The Red Cross appeal was made in a letter from Board President Thad E. Leland, December 17, 1917. Burton Historical Collection.

leading realty firm the Hannan Exchange extended this culture of accountability through its salesmanship manual, suggesting that in addition to being “Truthful in All Statements,” their realty staff were also expected to excel in more superficial ways, presenting a “Pleasant Demeanor” and “Clean Fingernails.”⁵⁴

At the turn of the century, with fewer barriers to entering the business of real estate brokerage, and a large cohort of what the Board saw as ‘fly by night’ non-realtor brokers emerged. Realtors in many large cities saw independent brokers, who often operated with little capital and without structures of accountability to stabilize their work as bad for the image of real estate—especially as bonds and securities increasingly competed with real property for investment dollars. In this context Detroit’s leading brokers sought to reign in their ‘fly by night’ brethren. Though non-Realtor brokers remained in the majority through the 1910s and 1920s, realtors succeeded in bringing all brokers’ practices under new oversight nonetheless. The Detroit Board successfully lobbied for the Michigan License Law, enacted in August 1919, “to promote clean real estate transactions,” making Michigan one of just three states to adopt real estate regulations and licensing requirements by 1919. The terms of the law applied to all real estate brokers in Michigan, requiring registration fees and some oversight and effectively raising the bar for entry into brokerage practice.⁵⁵

Realtors assured their clients that they could be counted on to honestly represent properties’ value and to adhere to a uniform schedule of fees and commissions. The clients of realtors, the Board urged, should “expect and receive the same high standard of service that he

⁵⁴ Hannan Real Estate Exchange, *The Hannan Bible*, p. 86.

⁵⁵ Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, pp. 21-27.

expects and receives when he consults his banker regarding a bond or stock investment.”⁵⁶

According to Harry Culver, a major Los Angeles realtor who addressed the Detroit Board in 1927, these professional ethics had succeeded in establishing public trust over the preceding decades. Culver illustrated this with an anecdote that betrayed his gender prejudices. He described an attorney who had recently called a local realty board to find out if a certain broker was indeed a certified realtor. “I have a client who is a widow,” the attorney said, “negotiating a deal with this broker, and...I find it impossible to be here the day that the deal is closed.” Learning that the broker was indeed a realtor, the attorney was relieved. “I shall now be able to advise her that she can proceed with all safety. She is doing business with a realtor.”⁵⁷

Selling Detroit real estate was a practice of selling the city itself, and the first principal that dominated the city’s realty discourse was that Detroit’s rapid population growth of the 1910s was sure to continue, because, one realtor observed, “the past is but a mirror of the future.”⁵⁸ Claims about the future were ubiquitous. In 1912, with the city’s population around half a million, leading realtor William Hannan began to undersign his journal advertisements with the confident projection “Detroit a Million in 1925.” Though he died in 1917 Hannan’s associates lived to see his once-audacious projection beaten by the actual population growth of the 1910s. In fact, the booming city was home to one million residents shortly after 1920—five years ahead of Hannan’s schedule—and Detroit realtors would not repeat this mistaken modesty. A 1922

⁵⁶ Former Vice President of the Detroit Real Estate Board Guy E. Ellis is quoted here in an article kicking off a series of articles on the city’s realtors. “*Will Acquaint Public With ‘Realtor’ Ethics and Meaning of Term,*” *Detroit Free Press*, January 25, 1925. Real Estate File, Burton Historical Collection. See also “Detroit Real Estate Board: Officers and Members, Commissions and Charges” pamphlet, 1915. Detroit Real Estate Board papers, Burton Historical Collection.

⁵⁷ Culver, “Address of Harry H. Culver Delivered before Detroit Real Estate Board,” Supplement to *The Detroit Realtor*, November, 1927.

⁵⁸ Ralston Printing Company, *Reliability: Detroit’s Real Estate Values are Sound* (part four in the series *Facts About Detroit*), undated pamphlet from the period 1921-1929. Real Estate File, Burton Historical Collection.

Detroit Real Estate Board article boasted “Detroit—Two Million in 1930,” a claim supported by the “conservative predictions of statisticians” (Figure 2:12).⁵⁹ In 1928 Hannan’s successor firm the Hannan Exchange claimed that “no one can question the continued rapid growth of Detroit...conservative estimates made by the public service corporation name 1945 as the date of the third million.”⁶⁰

None of these 1920’s projections were realized by the municipality of Detroit, which, constrained by a ring of fast-growing independent suburbs, reached its peak decennial population in 1950 at 1.85 million. But amidst the extraordinary growth of the 1910s and 1920s, when Detroit’s proportional growth outpaced the nation’s other large cities and its automobiles were transforming urban life nationwide, one booster was inspired to make what today seems to be an absurd prediction that Detroit would surpass even New York City, claiming that “Fifty years from now men will be saying ‘New York is what Detroit was 25 years ago!’”⁶¹

Detroit Realtors found that bullish public sentiment required continuous maintenance. The city’s Real Estate Board distributed a publication, *Bulletin: Selling Points for Salesmen*, to provide “facts” realtors could use to reassure skittish prospects who questioned the city’s future economic health. When the US formally broke ties with Germany in 1917, signaling impending war and possible economic disruption, the *Bulletin* urged salesmen to “SWAT THE LIE.” Citing an unnamed authority the publication argued that any wartime economic disruption would be “purely psychological and only temporary.”⁶² Rather than seeing depression, realtors argued, the

⁵⁹ Detroit Real Estate Board, *The Detroit Realtor: Special Edition of the Detroit Realtor for Better Homes and Building Exposition, May 20—27, 1922*. Detroit: The Chas May Co, 1922.

⁶⁰ *The Hannan Bible*, p. 61.

⁶¹ Joseph Mulcahy, former New Yorker and editor of *the Detroit Times*, as quoted in that paper May 19, 1928. Reprinted in the *Hannan Bible*, p. 71.

⁶² News Bureau of the Detroit Board of Commerce, “SWAT THE LIE,” *Bulletin: Selling Points for Salesmen*, February 20, 1917.

city was likely to “assume the appearance of a great workshop” for war vehicles and munitions, continuing to grow “at the same pace that made it the wonder city of the world.”⁶³ These projections proved largely correct and wartime industry powered Detroit’s economy until a postwar recession set in in 1920. Other realtors’ projections were less prescient, however.

When the growth of the automobile market appeared to be plateauing in the late 1920s Detroit’s realtors began to tie their future projections to a new industry: aviation. Under a section titled “Prosperity without limit,” the sales manual the Hannan *Bible* advised salesmen that, “Since the airplane is only an automobile with wings, it was inevitable that the aircraft industry center in Detroit [and] make real estate history repeat itself in this Wonder City” (Figure 2:13).⁶⁴ The development of private aircraft promised a surge in industrial growth, and further, just as the automobile had, the opening of vast new territories to urban development. Prefiguring the private airplanes that would cross the sky of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City five years later, Hannan’s *Bible* prophesied:

“Very soon we will all see the day when airplanes will extend the residential districts of every city out 50 to 100 miles... and, just as a bird comes down with exact precision and alights on a limb, we will come down and alight on the top of a skyscraper, and get off and take the elevator down to our office (Figure 2:14).⁶⁵

Real estate observers did not hang all future hope on aviation, however, but imagined several future economies that might support continuous growth. Paul Rohr, PhD., author of promotional pamphlets for Detroit real estate firms, suggested that “Detroit’s next greatest industry” would be electric refrigeration, which was in its infancy in the mid-1920s and in his

⁶³ News Bureau of the Detroit Board of Commerce, “THE CRISIS: What will be its effect upon Detroit?,” *Bulletin: Selling Points for Salesmen*, February 6, 1917.

⁶⁴ Hannan Real Estate Exchange, *The Hannan Bible*, p. 67.

⁶⁵ Culver, “Address of Harry H. Culver Delivered before Detroit Real Estate Board,” Supplement to *The Detroit Realtor*, November, 1927.

view “promise[d] to attain a size comparable to the auto industry.” Rohr imagined a future where Detroit’s economy would be bolstered by the desire for iceless refrigeration machines in “every high class apartment,” and “every modern home for families of moderate means.”⁶⁶ He and other observers also looked forward to the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, which would bring Detroit “an average of 650 miles nearer to Europe” via direct oceangoing ships, and perhaps make Detroit a competitive port for the shipping of Midwestern grain.⁶⁷ Finally, the Automobile industry and the promise of its products obsolescence was not to be forgotten, for if “2,000,000 machines are completely scrapped each year,” then “these must be replaced,” suggesting that market “saturation is a long way off at this rate.”⁶⁸

Realtors’ projections of economic and population growth were enmeshed in a second real estate concept: “successive” rings of outward expansion as a spatial and social ladder. Detroit’s relatively flat and featureless surrounds meant that the city could be expanded with relative ease, as observed by Harry Carman, professor of history at Columbia University in the 1920’s. He foretold that the city’s industrial might and its unimpeded terrain for expansion positioned Detroit to become the “greatest city on the Western Hemisphere” in subsequent years.⁶⁹ Indeed, Realtor William Hannan had predicted sprawling outward growth for Detroit even before the Model T was developed, projecting around 1906 that “Detroit is destined to become one of the largest cities on earth, and will not stop until the limits of Wayne County have become the limits of the city.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Rohr, Paul, PhD. *Am I My Dollar’s Keeper?* Detroit: Adix Realty Corporation, p. 25-26 (1926). Burton Historical Collection.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 30-31.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Attributed to Prof. Harry J. Carman, Ph.D., of the history department at Columbia University, *The Detroiter*, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁰ Hannan Real Estate Exchange, *The Hannan Bible*, p. 42.

Succession implied that a “natural” stratification would be manifested in the city’s outward growth. “Drop a rock in a pond,” Hannan observed around 1906, “and the succession of waves circles will follow each other and spread to the outermost limits of the water.” It was, he argued, “just so in REAL ESTATE.” As Detroit grew, “every year has added one more circle about the city’s heart, in which, if a man invested a little money he would be certain to realize a handsome profit, and in many cases, independent wealth.”⁷¹ The social significance of these succeeding urban growth rings was theorized by “Chicago School” Sociologist Earnest Burgess in his 1925 concentric zone theory of urban social structure (Figure 2:15).⁷² Like Hannan, Burgess used biological metaphors to make the complex process of urban growth legible. He argued that city growth tends to proceed in succession, with new arrivals continuously pouring into the slums or “Zone in Transition” encircling the business district, and that many eventually filter outward into the better “Zone of Workingmen’s Homes and perhaps even into the more exclusive middle class zones beyond. While residents succeed through this system it changes dynamically at the same time. As the overall urban population grows, in a “moving equilibrium of social order,” each concentric zone grows outward and tends “to extend its area by the invasion of the next outer zone.”⁷³ In its simplicity Burgess’ model obscures some of the complexities of urban geography, missing the presence of peripheral workers’ housing among affluent suburbs for example, but as a rule of thumb it had a powerful predictive capacity that realtors and their clients had long been aware of and exploiting.

Urban succession was a speculative game that the real estate industry reproduced through its practices of buying and selling, and to win, a buyer had to invest in a lot beyond the existing

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Burgess, “The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project,” in Lin and Mele eds., *The Urban Sociology Reader*, pp. 73-81. Originally published in Robert Park et al (eds.), *The City*, 1925.

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 76, 78.

city with faith that growth would reach them and boost their property's value.⁷⁴ Realtor Roy Swanson advanced this idea with a commercial poem, both acknowledging and seeking to overcome the skepticism of some prospective buyers:

Too Far Out

'Twas back in nineteen hundred ten
Detroit we know was smaller then,
And Real Estate men told you why
Their Real Estate was good to buy.
They told you how to make some dough,
But you, old man, seemed filled with doubt,
You only said, "It's too far out."

...
Detroit will grow as ne'er before
And values here will upward soar.
And Ground you think far out today
Tomorrow big returns will pay⁷⁵

The returns of urban succession were more than financial—they were paid in social prestige as well. The concentric zones of the growing city also represented a social ladder that buyers might climb. Burgess' zone three, for example, was defined by what its residents had left behind: the "zone of workingmen's homes" was inhabited by "the workers in industries who have escaped from the area of deterioration" nearer to the center.⁷⁶ Through disciplined work and saving, and a well-placed real estate investment, a successful industrial worker might position his children to enter a higher social class. The Hannan Exchange advised its salesmen that "Parents with daughters of eighteen, nineteen and twenty years of age are splendid prospects for a lot and new home in a better community where the inevitable mating may be on a higher social level."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Hannan Real Estate Exchange, *The Hannan Bible* p. 33.

⁷⁵ Roy P. Swanson Co. Real Estate, "Too Far Out" (excerpt, from advertisement), 1924. Real Estate, Burton Historical Collection.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.76.

⁷⁷ *Ibid* p.79.

The opposite was true as well. Just as the growth of the urban fringe promised social elevation, the continued expansion of the inner slums (crowded with boarders such as those pictured here) could threaten social depreciation. A new home in a “better community” was presented as an opportunity to escape, to protect the threatened physical and moral security of the family. Samuel A. Merchant’s 1916 advertisement for Elmwood Park, promised the father of the family “a place where his wife and children will be happy, healthy, contented, safe—so he can work all day long with a song in his heart instead of a fear and a worry.” For “The Mother,”

an ideal place for her dear ones to grow up in, where the little ones are not deprived of playgrounds or clean, bright surroundings—where autos will not kill them, where alley-gangs will not corrupt them

Children growing up in a secure environment, “a good home in a good neighborhood with good boys and girls and good influences,” would learn the “whole curriculum of things that make life a success.” The proposed houses themselves were within reach of a Ford “five-dollar-day” recipient at \$2,200, and realized the privacy and sanitary technology that industrialists and reformers sought with its “six rooms, bath, full cellar, brick foundation, hot air heat, electric light, etc.”⁷⁸

Earnest Burgess understood the paradoxical destructiveness of this growth through spatial and social succession. During intensive, “boomtown” urban growth, he argued, the balanced “metabolism” of succession was upset. Under such rapidly-changing conditions of “social disorganization,” he noted that urban growth tends to

Speed up expansion, to speed up industry, to speed up the ‘junking’ process in the area of deterioration [near the city center].⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Samuel A Merchant Company Advertisement, *The Detroit*, p. 11. May 29, 1916.

⁷⁹ Burgess, “The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project,” in Park et al., *The City* (1967) pp. 57-58, originally published 1925.

One of ‘community builder’ B.E. Taylor’s advertisements illustrates the contradictions of succession vividly. In it, an upwardly-mobile middle-class family steps up and away from the expanding “congested area” of old Detroit toward Taylor’s more prestigious developments at the northwestern edge of urban growth (Figure 2:16). For early adopters at Taylor’s innermost developments Southlawn and Westlawn however, the growing congested area was already looming close and perhaps threatening these residents’ security with depreciation. Under succession, the wise homebuyer was careful not to become rooted in one community, but to continue to climb the steps of upward mobility as they lead outward. Once-prized areas depreciated as the “junking process” unfolded, as the Hannan Exchange explained in 1928,

North Woodward, which a little while back was considered “the only place” to live, is, with the exception of a few good streets, fast giving way to this new order of things. Even as far north as Highland Park the pressure is felt. Who *wants* to live in a city where these conditions prevail? In old Detroit, yes—but in new Detroit, NO,—Not, if there is something available which gives us all the charm of old Detroit and just fifteen minutes further away...⁸⁰

As Hannan’s *Bible* teaches, “Good property is where you *make* it. It has to be *created*,” that is, from a green field.⁸¹ To the client who complained, “I can buy property cheaper three miles further in,” not understanding the logic of succession, the Hannan salesman was instructed to reply, “Sure! But look at it! Look at the neighborhood and surrounding tendencies. Are the restrictions such as will safeguard your investment? Or do you just not care who or what your neighbors may be?”⁸²

The third principal behind Detroit’s realty discourse was the security to gained in homeownership (Figure 2:17). Playing on the threats of illness and aging, Detroit’s real estate coalition promised that modern homes would protect the family’s physical health and the

⁸⁰ Hannan Real Estate Exchange, *The Hannan Bible*, pp. 84-85

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 85.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 81.

parents' financial independence in aging. New residential technologies, for example, were presented as basic requisites for health. The FarQuar "sanitary heating" system, for example, urged that a hot air heating system was a fundamental necessity, stating that "VENTILATION in the HOME is as assential (sic) as in the SCHOOLS or HOSPITALS. CLEAN, FRESH AIR is as necessary as CLEAN FOOD and PURE WATER.¹ Similarly the Plumbers Trade Journal urged that "Plumbing in general, and a bathroom or toilet room, in particular, are as necessary to the modern standard of life as the food we eat and the air we breathe."¹ The Sibley Lumber Co. put it simply in their catalogue description of "The Elwood" bungalow model, stating that "doctors have but few calls from happy new homes that are provided with an abundance of light."⁸³

Fears of eviction in older age or of the insecurity that an industrial breadwinner's death could bring to a family were strong motivators of worker homeownership. As Helen and Robert Lynd discovered among Muncie, Indiana's mass-production glass workers of the 1920's, industrial labor was a young person's game. In the low-skill environment of mass-production, youth and speed replaced the traditional craft-based values of age and experience. Under the new paradigm it was not uncommon for industrial workers to be forced into retirement in their late forties as their physical capacity for intensive production began to decline. Aging was thus a source of great anxiety, and as one glass-worker's wife explained, "the only thing a man can do is to keep as young as he can and save as much as he can."⁸⁴ Hannan taught his Detroit realtors to leverage this anxiety in the selling of real estate. "Salesmen," he urged,

bear in mind that every man who walks the streets of Detroit is a prospective purchaser, and will purchase if properly interested... picture to him old age when he has passed the age of usefulness—you can sell him a home—you must educate him... We have from 21 to 40 to accumulate a home. If we have not accumulated a home by that time the chances are we never will, and must be

⁸³ ⁸³ F.M. Sibley Lumber Co., *Better Homes at Lower Cost*, p.100 (1926).

⁸⁴ Lynd and Lynd. *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, pp. 34.

compelled to go into old age homeless, dependent upon a landlord for shelter for ourselves and little ones.⁸⁵

Community builder B. E. Taylor leveraged the fear of aging in his advertisements for the working class Brightmoor neighborhood, using a cartoon in three scenes. (Figure 2:18) In the first, a confident younger man questions his friend's decision to buy a home, saying, "There is plenty of time to buy a home later. What is the rush? I believe in letting each day take care of itself." In the second image, the man's confidence is lost and he has aged considerably. He explains to his wife that they need to move into a cheaper rental. "You know," he says, "it is getting hard to pay rent as I get older. My salary is not as large as it was when I was a young man." In the third scene, the aging man is evicted from his home by an unsympathetic sheriff. "Oh! Where will I go?" the man asks, "I am too old to work and I can't pay rent... I wish I had bought a home in my younger days." The sheriff replies, "Sorry, my dear sir, but it is too late now."⁸⁶

Compounding the fears of aging in the industrial city was the fear of leaving one's family, through death, without adequate financial means to sustain the way of life they'd known. Paul Rohr, PhD's real estate booklet *Am I My Dollar's Keeper?* urged that "the average man's earning capacity today begins to decline at the age of 45," and that upon his death

Out of every 100 widows—
18 are left with some means
47 must supplement the little left by going to work
35 are in real want.

⁸⁵ Hannan Bible, p. 24

⁸⁶ Poster Advertisement for the Brightmoor development, Taylor, B. E., *Your Real Opportunity to Secure a Home of Your Own*, 1922. B.E. Taylor – Realtor, Miscellaneous material. Real Estate papers, BHC.

But that his reader not despair, Rohr added that “A well-chosen real estate investment would be the most solid insurance, not easily dissipated and not declining in value.”⁸⁷

With sufficient foresight and professional advice, Realtors argued, the worker could own their home outright before the threats of aging arrived. And once owned, Hannan explained, “real estate is the basis of all security. It cannot be destroyed, and it is the only security that will ALWAYS be accepted.”⁸⁸ “A man’s home,” Hannan continued, “is his most precious possession. It is better than any plan of life insurance, for it is sure refuge in old age, and the best possible possession for his dear ones when death takes him from them.”⁸⁹ Real estate promised security, and perhaps even independent wealth to those who won at its game, but the homebuying process created new risks and fears for the city’s industrial workers as well.

Building a Dividing Geography

Outside observers derided Detroit’s modern worker’s housing from the first as visually monotonous. One commentator, profiling the city for *The New Republic* in 1927, described its recent urban growth as “regimented...barracks-like colonies.”⁹⁰ In 1942 Spanish-born architect Jose Luis Sert published *Can Our Cities Survive?*, and promoting a centrally-controlled approach to urban development articulated by the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) he used a now-famous aerial view of Detroit’s west side as a foil, arguing that “a city should be something more than a monotonous and unending series of real estate developments” (Figure 2:19).⁹¹ Even recently, planning scholar Brent Ryan made use of this image in his call for

⁸⁷ Rohr, *Am I My Dollar’s Keeper?*, p. 6.

⁸⁸ Hannan Real Estate Exchange, Inc. *The Hannan Bible; being a compilation of inspirational data out of the history of Detroit and its real estate development*, p. 33. Detroit, 1928.

⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 33-34.

⁹⁰ Player. “Detroit: Essence of America,” *The New Republic*, p. 274, August 3, 1927.

⁹¹ Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive?* p. 41.

stronger urban planning and for government-lead housing projects to “shrinking cities” such as Detroit, interpreting this view of west Detroit as proof that Detroit’s privately-built residential blocks were “visually unspectacular” from the beginning, composed of “nearly identical houses,” and that “Detroit was monotonous, even dreary” in the moment that the iconic view was taken.⁹² But in foregrounding this urbanism’s visual uniformity these commentators flatten the complexities of their subject. Residential Detroit was structured by important differences that were understood and constructed between the real estate coalition and its worker-homebuyers, but not readily apparent from the sky. As Ann Durkin Keating and Jon Teaford have explored in other contexts, residential development in boomtown Detroit manifested powerful and divisive social and racial identities in the marketplace of amenities and restrictions that distinguished one neighborhood from another.⁹³ The complexity of this geography will be explored through studies of three areas: the west side, the northwest satellites, and the “Polish” northeast.

West side

Experiments with mass-production called for larger sites and new industrial architectures, and leading automakers such as Ford—who operated shops along the congested inner-city rail junctions—looked to the fields and farms beyond the city for new sites of production. Local investors recognized this pressure for expansion and created the Detroit Terminal Railroad, building an outer belt line six miles from the central business district between 1905 and 1914.⁹⁴ Seeing opportunities in the west side’s growing network of rail infrastructure, industrialists

⁹² Ryan, *Design After Decline*, pp. 69-70.

⁹³ Keating, *Building Chicago: Suburban Developers and the Creation of a Divided Metropolis*, pp. 124-125. and Teaford, *City and Suburb*, pp. 83-87.

⁹⁴ “The Detroit Terminal Railroad.” *Railway Age Gazette* 19 June, 1914: 1522-1523. Article posted at www.michiganrailroads.com.

began to transform the area from an open prairie in the early 1910s to what real estate booster Walt Clyde called the “world’s greatest industrial center” in 1925.⁹⁵

The west side’s industrial expansion immediately raised a question of shared interest between manufacturers and the city’s real estate coalition, “where are the men going to live, who will work in [the west side’s] great plants?”⁹⁶ Large-scale real estate developer Robert Oakman transformed the west side with his purchase of a twelve-mile right of way for a new public roadway and streetcar line in the mid 1910s, which he called the Ford Highway, “named in honor of Henry Ford...whose unparalleled industries...not only made this highway desirable, but absolutely necessary.”⁹⁷ The new highway arced through the Detroit’s westerly periphery, connecting Ford’s enormous plant in Highland Park with his nascent Rouge Plant in Dearborn. Between these two poles the highway roughly paralleled the new rail belt line, providing access to various plants along the way and opening miles of farmland in west Detroit and future Dearborn for the development of worker’s housing. Oakman, of course, also purchased many tracts of this land and as his highway became a reality he was able to profitably sell residential lots from his portfolio of holdings. The highway was later renamed after Oakman himself.

As the project unfolded the *Detroit News* celebrated the new way of industrial life that the west side developments might realize, illustrating the tension between its two dichotomous aspects: the desire for growth, change, and modernization in industry and a pastoral ideal of security, permanence, and proximity to nature

⁹⁵ Clyde, Walt. “Great South and West Area of Yesterday—Today—Tomorrow.” *Greater Detroit Magazine*, reprint. 1925. Real Estate, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library (BHC). See also Thomas, Jerome. “The City of Detroit—A Study in Urban Geography.” Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1928: 54-56.

⁹⁶ “What the New Ford Highway Means to Detroit and to the Northwest Section,” *The Detroit News*, March 25, 1916, p.9.

⁹⁷ “What the New Ford Highway Means to Detroit and to the Northwest Section,” *The Detroit News*, March 25, 1916, p.9.

With the new highway it will be easy for the workingman to get to and from his work in the northwest section of Detroit. He will find in the new district which Ford Highway opens up desirable sites restricted to home purchases, where he may live in reasonably close proximity to his work and still enjoy the blessings and pleasures of a quiet, modest little home” (Figure 2:20).⁹⁸

Realtors’ depictions of west Detroit illustrate these competing ideals. They depict rail lines and smoke stacks—signifying work and wages—alongside clusters of small gabled houses among trees. (Figure 2:21) West-side bungalows and duplexes were densely aligned on narrow lots, yet they were designed and marketed with access to nature and health in mind. A three-fixture bath was often included in workers’ modern west-side homes, freeing the backyard to be a pleasant garden rather than the utility space that it often was in the old city center. Realtors’ advertisements often pictured a shady tree near the home. In these homes the moral value associated with nature in the nineteenth century “cult of domesticity” persisted alongside a growing modern concern for physical health through light and fresh air in these residential types.⁹⁹ At the same time the near proximity of industrial work was advertised as an asset, and supported a persistent walking culture wherein half of Detroit’s workers still walked to their jobs in 1924. Where this was not possible streetcar access to the large plants was emphasized in real estate advertisements.¹⁰⁰ The dichotomous identity of west Detroit allowed spaces coded with secure permanence—the home, playground or cemetery—to be juxtaposed with spaces of dynamic growth and change including the most productive auto-making facilities in the world.

Industrial and residential uses negotiated for space in a fast-changing context, leading to the erasure of Abbott and Beymer’s River View Subdivision and the loss of what the company called “THE WORKING MAN’S PARADISE.” The sub had been laid out within a meander of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Wright, *Building the Dream*, pp. 96, 162.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, “The City of Detroit: A Study in Urban Geography,” 125.

the Rouge River, just west of Detroit on township land that would later become part of Dearborn. The River View Subdivision was imagined and advertised in 1919 as a dream of close proximity to nature: properties included “lots of room for gardening” and the opportunity to take a motorboat out on the river for recreation. Shallow lots for houseboat-mooring were for sale alongside typical lots for homebuilding. The developers of the subdivision offered easy financing—one dollar down and one dollar per week—and the added security of a policy of “NO PAYMENT [required] if sick or out of work.” “Every lot,” the advertisement projected, “will more than double in value long before you have finished paying for it.”¹⁰¹ This paradisiac landscape went unrealized, however. Just as these lots were being advertised Ford’s Rouge Plant—just upriver—was expanding its operations and the meandering Rouge River was being engineered for straightening and channeling in support of industry. A 1919 map indicates with dotted lines the future path of the channel, running through the very bulge of land where Abbott and Beymer had planned to sell residential lots. (Figure 2:22) As occurred at the nearby Solvay Process housing discussed in Chapter One, changing perceptions of the river’s meaning were negotiated between residential and industrial interests, and in each case the former made way for the latter.

The neighborhood known today as Springwells¹⁰² (Figure 2:2, Area 2) reflects the urban density and the close proximity of home to work that exemplified southwest Detroit, situated between a major rail juncture and the expansive green of Woodmere Cemetery.¹⁰³ The area was incorporated into the city as part of a large west-side annexation in 1906, though most of its

¹⁰¹ Abbot & Beymer, *Water Front Lots* (advertising poster), dated 1919. Real Estate, Burton Historical Collection.

¹⁰² A southwest Detroit neighborhood, not to be confused with Springwells township or the nascent development within what would become Dearborn that is also sometimes referred to as Springwells.

¹⁰³ The name Springwells appears to have been fashioned after Springwells Township, the west side jurisdiction from which Detroit annexed the neighborhood’s territory.

homes were built during a period of intensive construction between 1913-1918.¹⁰⁴ Industrial work was close at hand with Ford's Rouge Plant just on the other side of Woodmere Cemetery, Michigan Central's Railroad Shops at the neighborhood's northern edge, and Delray's salt works just to the south. The New York Central rail line that bisected Springwells added many smaller shops to the mix including a refinery, a meatpacking plant, and several manufacturing shops and coal yards.¹⁰⁵ Within the shifting racial landscape of Detroit a Springwells resident could boast in 1926 that they lived in an "American Neighborhood," that in fact included American-born Anglos as well as immigrants from Canada and Germany, but which set itself apart from the Hungarian and Armenian district of Delray to the south and the expanding Polish west side to the north.¹⁰⁶ The clear distinction of "Americans" from "Poles" in the new west side neighborhoods illustrates that even as European immigrants assimilated toward white American identity through English language and citizenship classes, and the purchase of modern homes, ethnic identity remained salient for many.

The bungalows and duplexes that predominate in Springwells were described in the 1920s as "one and two story detached frame houses, unpainted or weatherbeaten, plain and unornamental, but serving their purpose adequately well."¹⁰⁷ A 1940 survey of home values in the area showed the most prized lots to be those on the northern edge and along the greenspace of the cemetery, and the lowest values to be in blocks directly adjacent to the bisecting rail line or the Hungarian district to the south.¹⁰⁸ Springwells' homes were sited on rectangular blocks

¹⁰⁴ Thomas 130, see also Works Progress Administration, *Housing: Analytical Maps, Detroit, Mich.*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁵ Sanborn Vol 5, sheets 1-48, 1923.

¹⁰⁶ Quote is from Real Estate Listing Bureau, "8737 Mason Pl.," *Real Estate Listing Bureau Bulletin*, Nov. 18, 1926. See Zunz 344-347 and Thomas, Figure 6 "Location of Nationalities."

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, 125-6

¹⁰⁸ Works Progress Administration, p. 19.

bisected by alleys, and on narrow, rectangular lots with 25-30' of street frontage. While main roads such as Dix, Fort, and Springwells and Lawndale were paved in brick, most residential streets in Springwells were unpaved in 1918 despite the near-completeness of its housing stock, giving a sense of the rugged, at times muddy, and unfinished quality that prevailed in the neighborhood in its early years.¹⁰⁹

Lambrecht, Kelly & Company, for example, developed the James Fales Subdivision where Tireman Ave. met the new belt line, “in the heart of the new industrial development” (Figure 2:2, Area 1).¹¹⁰ From this subdivision workers could reach large employers such as Paige Detroit Motor Car and Detroit Seamless Steel Tube within a mile’s walk, or use the Ford Highway streetcar to reach Ford’s Highland Park Plant. The developers promised that lots would have “the necessary improvements for immediate occupancy,” and since the land was annexed by the city of Detroit in 1916 municipal water service and street paving was indeed forthcoming.¹¹¹

Workers who made the leap and purchased homes in the west side’s “restricted” neighborhoods such as Fales were promised spatial, social and racial distinction from other groups and from the congested urban core. Many of Detroit’s new, peripheral subdivisions included restrictive covenants in their deeds to protect buyers’ investments, blocking commercial or industrial encroachment into residential districts in the absence of zoning regulations, which

¹⁰⁹ Research on Detroit’s roadbuilding patterns of the 1910s performed under the supervision of Prof. Steven Mankouche at the University of Michigan. Source: City of Detroit, “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Public Works,” *Annual Reports of the City of Detroit*, Free Press Book and Job Printing House, Editions 1909-1918, from the collections of the Detroit Public Library and Burton Historical Archive.

¹¹⁰ Lambrecht, Kelly & Co., “Why Don’t You Make Money By The City’s Growth?,” (advertising pamphlet), undated ca. 1920. Real Estate, Burton Historical Collection.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

the city did not establish until 1940.¹¹² Covenants also went much further, indirectly and directly segregating the poor and African Americans out of newly built subdivisions. At Fales, buyers were assured that the poor could not breach their neighborhood because a minimum cost of construction was imposed at \$2500. Further, buyers were told, “no saloon...pool room...or other public places for the playing of games of chance shall ever be established on said lots.” Finally, racial segregation was enforced and advertised. In the Fales Subdivision, it was legally established that “property shall at no time be used or occupied by a colored person.”¹¹³ Detroit’s west side realtors knew, as prominent Kansas City developer J.C. Nichols explained in a 1923 *Good Housekeeping* article, that “the more restrictions there are, the more cheerfully is the land bought by those wishing permanent homes safeguarded with respect to the financial and other values,” where “other values” might certainly refer to social and racial segregation.¹¹⁴

The racially restrictive covenants of the 1920s responded to the geographic expansion of Detroit’s black community during the wartime migration of the 1910s. Detroit’s African American community grew precipitously in these years and the “overflow” of the crowded city center drove the development of new, peripheral black neighborhoods despite realtors’ and many residents’ hostility toward integration.¹¹⁵ The largest of these new black enclaves was on the west side, a mile or so east of the Fales subdivision, a bastion of black industrial-worker homeownership in 1920 Detroit (Figure 2:23), The sociologist Forrester Washington proudly described this group as “the most promising element in the Negro community...the bone and sinew of the race,” who, saving their wages and investing in real estate, had shown themselves to

¹¹² Detroit Housing Commission, *Housing in Detroit: Reviewing the Past, Previewing the Future*, pp. 6-7 (1943).

¹¹³ Lambrecht, Kelly & Co. *James W. Fales Holden Ave. Subdivision*, advertising poster. Undated, likely ca. 1920. Real Estate, BHC.

¹¹⁴ Nichols, Jesse Clyde. “You Make an Investment; Try and Make It a Safe One,” *Good Housekeeping*, February 1923, reprinted in Detroit Builders’ Exhibition Incorporated, *To Those Who Build*, p.14.

¹¹⁵ Washington, “Environment,” *The Negro in Detroit*, 1920.

be “hard-working and thrifty.”¹¹⁶ Yet what was perhaps most distinctive about these homeowners’ experience was not their exceptional thrift but their exceptional fortune to discover and buy into a district that was uncontested by white residents, and in the brief window before 1920s restrictive covenants such as Fales’ began to foreclose this possibility for subsequent black home-seekers.

Regardless of deed restrictions, preserving segregation was a matter of ethical practice among realtors in Detroit as elsewhere. The National Association of Real Estate Boards’ *Code of Ethics* for 1924 stated that in a realtor’s “Relations to Customers and the Public”:

Article 34.

A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.¹¹⁷

In this way realty practice framed the segregation of city neighborhoods as an ethical good, justified by realtors’ fiduciary responsibility to preserve and enhance property values. The realtor who promoted racial change or introduced “detrimental” building types—perhaps a tenement or pool hall for example—just to make a quick sale, faced sanction. Realtors or local Real Estate Boards who failed to live up to their “grave social responsibility and...patriotic duty” to following the code of ethics would face “disciplinary action.”¹¹⁸

Northwest Satellites

The community builder B.T. Taylor invested heavily in Detroit’s northwesterly Grand River avenue corridor in the late 1910s and the 1920s, developing a series of middle-class

¹¹⁶ Washington, “Environment,” and “Social Classes Among the Negroes of Detroit,” *The Negro in Detroit*, 1920.

¹¹⁷ National Association of Real Estate Boards, *Code of Ethics: Adopted by the NAREB at its Seventeenth Annual Convention, June 6, 1924*, p.7. Detroit Real Estate Board, Burton Historical Collection.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 3, 8.

subdivisions there that increased in prestige and restrictiveness as they moved away from the city center. These subdivisions featured alcohol prohibition, lots as wide as 40' and minimum-construction costs from \$2000 to as high as \$4000 per single residence written into their deed restrictions.¹¹⁹ Further west however, two miles beyond the DTRR belt line and its industries, Taylor purchased tracts of land in 1921 to create an affordable housing development for newly arrived industrial workers called Brightmoor (Figure 2:2, Area 3). This far-west site offered a different value proposition than Taylor's high-priced subdivisions or the west side industrial districts discussed in the previous section: Brightmoor lacked walking or even streetcar access to industrial jobs, but offered a foothold in the industrial city at an exceptionally low cost.

Brightmoor's relationship to Detroit's industries was essential, however. It was industrial wages that the purchase of its lots and homes would be bet upon. Taylor overcame Brightmoor's distance from the industrial belt line practically and discursively: he arranged for a bus service between Brightmoor and major Detroit industrial centers while advertising that Ford's "Rouge and Brightmoor [are] Next Door Neighbors," despite the five or so miles between them.¹²⁰ In a diagram of three connected points—Brightmoor, Ford's Rouge and a third point (likely Ford's Highland Park Plant)—Taylor argued for a nodal conception of the city where immediate proximity was replaced with bus service between essential points of work and home (Figure 2:24). Taylor further overcame Brightmoor's isolation by constructing a community center with a small library in 1922, a hub of community sociability and a place where hired social workers could help Brightmoor's residents assimilate to their new context. In a variation on 1910s Americanization reform, the Brightmoor community center's social project was to teach

¹¹⁹ B.E. Taylor, "Dope on 'Detroit City' Subdivision," (letter), undated—likely 1919 and "Restrictions for B.E. Taylor's Properties" (pamphlet), 1919. Real Estate, BHC.

¹²⁰ Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, p. 63.

American migrants—many from rural Appalachia—the ways of urban and industrial life through recreational programs, and gardening and cooking classes for women.¹²¹

Despite Taylor's interest in community center based reform, the home environment that migrants found at Brightmoor fell far short of the emerging ideal of a well-appointed five bedroom plus bath bungalow. This was no oversight. Taylor was practiced at building fine subdivisions—at Crescent Heights for example he advertised that “the Great American Family demands the comforts of the bath, hot and cold running water, sewage disposal, electric lights, well-kept streets, etc.,”—but he calculated that newly arrived southern migrants with little cash would accept much less.¹²² Too far west to tap into Detroit's utilities and services, Brightmoor's residents lived on largely unlit and unpaved streets, unpatrolled by police, and received water from trucks furnished by Taylor. Under these conditions it is unsurprising that its residents “vote[d] themselves into Detroit” by annexation in 1925 to receive that city's utilities.¹²³ Taylor built and sold Spartan houses in Brightmoor that lacked indoor bathrooms, furnaces and basements. In this context, as Carolyn Loeb has written, investigators found that inadequate sewage disposal was to blame for the widespread illness found among Brightmoor's children. Some residents opted not to purchase a home from Taylor, and rather to erect “tents, tar paper shacks and some garage homes” as a provisional strategy as they saved for a more substantial dwelling.¹²⁴ While he allowed residents to build extremely inexpensive shelters in Brightmoor, Taylor also advertised the development as “restricted,” assuring buyers that despite its humbleness Brightmoor would retain its exclusivity as a white neighborhood.

¹²¹ Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, p. 60.

¹²² B.E. Taylor, “Crescent Heights: Taylor's Newest and Best Offering,” (advertising poster), 1919. Real Estate, BHC.

¹²³ Brightmoor Community Center, inc., *Brightmoor; a community in action*, 1940, p. 61.

¹²⁴ Brightmoor Community Center, inc., *Brightmoor; a community in action*, 1940, p. 4 and Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, pp. 59-60.

Ultra-low cost lots and homes provided Brightmoor residents with a foothold in the industrial city where with steady work and wages one might aspire to greater comfort. Taylor reportedly played upon this ‘Detroitist’ aspiration for material prosperity, bringing out-of-state prospects to Detroit and providing a meal and a room at a downtown hotel before bringing them through the fields west of the city to look at Brightmoor.¹²⁵ Home buying in Brightmoor was structured around the promise of the family’s rising prosperity and social standing. Taylor financed lot purchases himself on terms as low as \$35 down and \$5 per month when the development was getting off the ground in 1922.¹²⁶

Taylor also made the “combination offer” to home seekers, which included a Taylor-built Brightmoor house on its lot plus one additional “restricted” Brightmoor lot that the buyer could hold as an investment. The total cost of the combination was \$2834, “payable \$35 per month, with small payment down.” By taking a loan and committing to industrial work and on-time payments for perhaps ten or twelve years, Taylor predicted that the worker’s family would achieve significant wealth: the original house and lot, he suggested, would likely be worth as much as \$8000 in ten years, allowing them to build a much finer house (surely including a basement, furnace and three-fixture bath) on their investment lot.¹²⁷ In this way, by betting future industrial wages on real estate through a Taylor mortgage, the worker who successfully navigated the work-life of Fordism might transform their family from cash-poor rural migrants into upwardly-mobile, land-owning Detroiters.

¹²⁵ Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, p. 60.

¹²⁶ B.E. Taylor, “Brightmoor Will Be Sensational,” (advertising poster), 1922. Real Estate—B.E. Taylor, BHC.

¹²⁷ B. E. Taylor, “Our Combination Home Offering, (advertising postcard excerpt), and B. E. Taylor, “Your Real Opportunity to Secure a Home of Your Own,” (advertising poster), both undated, likely ca. 1922. Real Estate—B.E. Taylor, BHC.

Once sold, Taylor encouraged his mortgagees to make extra payments if they could, one year offering 200 turkeys and 200 chickens to the first-comers who made extra payments around Thanksgiving and Christmas time. Emphasizing the urban competition for comfort and prosperity that his clients participated in he noted, “Turkeys are scarce this year. Get one from B.E. Taylor.”¹²⁸

Taylor’s single-story Brightmoor Homes—designed by his development company—were a variation on the spare, unornamented bungalow type (Figure 2:25). The houses were particularly small, ranging from four to six rooms (440-600sf) in size. None included indoor bathrooms, and each bedroom was fitted with a window but no more than one, even if wall space allowed more. Taylor took advantage of economies of scale in the construction of Brightmoor houses, purchasing materials in large quantities and taking care in the design of the homes to limit waste. For example, Taylor’s typical Brightmoor house plans called for the wood frame studs of all interior walls to be turned sideways, minimizing the thickness of the wall and thus maximizing the interior space.¹²⁹ While elsewhere in the city many small-scale contractors continued to build houses one at a time, Taylor’s well-capitalized firm was able to hire and direct many crews of carpenters, plumbers and electricians at once, streamlining the construction process and allowing him to promise to skeptical early buyers that he would personally see isolated Brightmoor populated with 200 houses—supporting a population of 800-1,500 people—in the single year 1922.¹³⁰ Taylor realized Detroit Housing Association President Frank Blair’s vision for homebuilding on a mass basis to resolve the city’s housing shortage, with “hundreds of

¹²⁸ B.E. Taylor, “Thanksgiving Day is Turkey Day,” and “Let Santa Bring You a Turkey,” (advertising posters) both undated, likely 1920s. Real Estate—B.E. Taylor, BHC.

¹²⁹ Taylor’s floorplan featured in Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, pp.72, includes the note “inside partition 2”x4” flat with wall board both sides.”

¹³⁰ Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, p. 65-67 and B.E. Taylor, “Brightmoor Will Be Sensational.”

houses under construction at one time,” and staggered crews so that “while one set of contractors is digging cellars, another will be laying foundations, another will be engaged in carpentry work, while others will be painting and doing interior finishing.”¹³¹ Though the product of modern, large-scale construction techniques, Taylor homes pursuit of efficiency and low cost bordered on malpractice: the homes were built upon cedar posts rather than concrete or masonry foundations that would provide greater longevity and interior comfort in cold weather.¹³² Brightmoor “took on the name of being a community of ‘shacks,’” on account of its provisional quality of construction, though as residents achieved greater financial means in the late 1920s they began to dig basements, add on bathrooms and remodel, and build finer homes on interstitial lots (Figure 2:26).¹³³

In another satellite development on the northern edge of Detroit—on unimproved land at Eight Mile and Wyoming—an investor bought and subdivided property for sale to the city’s growing African American population (Figure 2:2, Area 4). The area lacked direct proximity to jobs but offered unrestricted freedom to lot-owners. At Eight Mile-Wyoming cash-poor new arrivals could construct a small, temporary shelters and slowly build a more substantial home, eschewing the formal homebuilding market. In contrast to the white industrial workers who used mortgaged capital to build modern homes on Detroit’s west side or in Brightmoor, residents of the Eight Mile-Wyoming satellite were largely excluded from the formal credit market on the basis of race. Making do within this constraint, Eight Mile-Wyoming residents worked toward homeownership through incremental self-building, and as Tom Sugrue explains, incrementally built homes that combined scavenged building materials and factory components bought with

¹³¹ *The Detroit*, April 7, 1919.

¹³² Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, pp. 63-67, 73.

¹³³ Brightmoor Community Center, Inc., *Brightmoor; a community in action*, 1940, p. 61.

cash as family necessity and income allowed.¹³⁴ The wood frame shacks, garages and other provisional shelters that resulted from this process were often not intended to be permanent homes, but were seen as a process through which residents' future income might support a more substantial home and greater comfort in spite of the race-based oppression that so limited black mobility (2:27).

The material conditions at Eight Mile-Wyoming were Spartan—tar paper could be found in place of wood siding and outdoor water and toilet facilities often had to suffice—but residents were relatively rich in land with many 40' wide lots frontages. In west Detroit by contrast, worker's subdivisions provided greater proximity to work and access to city utilities, but their narrow lot frontage of 25'-35' and stricter regulations allowed for less spatial flexibility. At Eight Mile-Wyoming large front yards and adjacent empty lots could serve as gardens to grow flowers or food (Figure 2:28). The neighborhoods' frame structures were variously aligned at the front, middle and back of their respective lots according to their builders' decisions rather than the uniform setback requirements found in restricted subdivisions. The area's flexibility is further illustrated by the presence of many churches located in small residential-type buildings in the area, where residents formed African Methodist and Baptist congregations. With freedom from regulations and building practices largely outside of the formal credit and homebuilding markets, Eight Mile-Wyoming became an exception to the emerging standard for the modern worker's home in outer Detroit. Industrialists, reformers and the real estate industry went to great lengths to provide modern homes for the city's workers of European origin, but shut African Americans out of the process. The irony of Eight Mile-Woodward was that while the city's elites condemned the poor quality of the Detroit's inner-city nineteenth century-built worker's

¹³⁴ Sugrue, *Origins of The Urban Crisis*, pp. 39-40.

cottages, they left most blacks with no choice but to remain in the inner city or to move to the periphery and anachronistically adopt ad-hoc, nineteenth-century building practices.

The Works Progress Administration's 1940 assessment classified Eight Mile-Wyoming's blocks—in stark contrast to the good repair of most north Detroit blocks—as “needing major repairs [to floors, roof, plaster, walls or foundation] or...as having no private bath.”¹³⁵ Around the same time, in order to meet Federal Housing Authority funding conditions to build a white residential neighborhood next to Eight Mile-Wyoming, developers constructed a half-mile long, six-foot high, one foot thick concrete wall along Birwood St. to provide a racial and social barrier between the black residents of increasingly dilapidated Eight Mile-Wyoming and the new development. In the 1950s government surveyors classified the Eight Mile-Wyoming area as being of the “first [most severe] intensity of blight,” a rare candidate for slum clearance and redevelopment located outside of the city center.¹³⁶

Polish Northeast

As manufacturers migrated to the outer belt line and Polish immigration surged, the real estate industry helped to expand Detroit's existing east-side Polish enclave by expanding its territory, developing an extensive northeasterly zone of new lots and modern homes and marketing the area directly to Poles. As the 1910s began Ford opened his new plant in Highland Park and the Dodge Brothers broke ground on a new factory in nearby Hamtramck Township. Together they promised thousands of industrial jobs at the city's northern periphery, yet few workers could live in the middle-class enclave of Highland Park where Ford was located due to

¹³⁵ United States. Work Projects Administration (New York, N.Y.), *Housing, analytical maps, Detroit, Mich. block statistics*, 1940, pp. 1, 22.

¹³⁶ Detroit City Plan Commission, “Figure 1,” *Redevelopment Study: Selection of areas and assignment of priorities*, 1954.

its high lot prices and deed restrictions. Instead, many workers migrated northeasterly into nearby Hamtramck and surrounding areas.¹³⁷ Polish industrial workers and the real estate industry that served them transformed the village of Hamtramck in the 1910s, building an enclave that stood in stark cultural contrast to Highland Park and that enjoyed independence from Detroit as well. While Detroit's and Highland Park's populations boomed in the 1910s, Hamtramck was also thoroughly transformed: from a largely undeveloped village of 2,559 to a robust urban settlement of 48,615 in 1920, a feat described as "the greatest community growth for that period in the United States" by local authorities.¹³⁸ Incorporated as an independent city in 1922, Hamtramck's population continued to rise and reached 56,268 in 1930.¹³⁹

Northeast Detroit land subdividers delineated subdivisions, a gridiron of residential blocks and thousands of +/- 30' wide lots, selling them to Polish autoworkers through an intense campaign of advertisement in the local Polish-language newspaper *Dziennik Polski* (Polish Daily News), extending many of the same themes that appeared in the city's English-language real estate ads to readers of Polish (Figure 2:29). William Hannan, for example, printed a Polish-language advertisement in 1916 for the west side Sonk Subdivision, where deeds were "properly limited" and "the air is clean and fresh."¹⁴⁰ E. D. Preston—another realtor of Anglo Saxon origin judging by his surname—advised in a *Dziennik Polski* ad that "before prices rise the safest and most reliable way for you to make money is to buy a lot." He promoted the Fleming Subdivision near the center of Hamtramck in the familiar terms of site improvements (cement sidewalks, and municipal water "already accessible on some streets"), proximity to factories and two streetcar

¹³⁷ Thomas, "The City of Detroit," p. 141. Note that a crowded district of tenements and worker's houses was developed adjacent to Ford's plant, but most of Highland Park was developed as deed-restricted subdivisions limited to fine bungalows for the middle class (see Figure 13). On Highland Park see Hooker, *Life in the Shadows of the Crystal Palace, 1910-1927*, (1997).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Wood, *Hamtramck*, p. 19, 115, (1955).

¹⁴⁰ Hannan, "Great Opening of Sonk Subdivision" (advertisement), *Dziennik Polski*

lines, and available credit: lots were available at “\$5 [down] and \$5 a month,” with a promise that payments could be suspended in case of illness or unemployment.¹⁴¹ A third realtor seems to condescend to newly arrived Poles—as if they did not understand the significance or the limits of wealth in urban life—urging, “Make yourself and your family happy...Money makes us happy and brings profit.”¹⁴²

Polish language ads addressed the frustration of trying to build up wealth through hourly wage labor, suggesting that real estate was the worker’s rare opportunity to benefit—as the middle class did—from the growth of capital not by toil but by rapid returns on investment. “Aren’t you weary,” one advertiser asked, “of...working from morning till late evening to earn a living and pay the rent[?]” Why do so when lots were available for purchase on credit for just \$5 per month, that their sellers predicted could allow the buyer “not to work and [to] build up [their] capital ten times in a couple of years.”¹⁴³ Another seller addressed his Polish language ad “TO WORKING PEOPLE!,” urging his reader to take “the only real chance in your life,” a chance to have a home to show for all their labor. “Stop putting forth your efforts,” the ad continued, “and contending with your fate. Stop grasping and yearning for your own home. The chance to possess a house has come. Take it.”¹⁴⁴ Finally, a third agent appealed to workers who might identify with a sense of youthful boldness, urging “POLISH YOUTHS!”: “Instead of depositing money in banks at ridiculously small interest...buy realties to make a fortune.” Despite the economic uncertainty of 1914, this seller promised that fortune would favor the bold—those with “strong will, energy, flexibility, self-confidence and power”—and that his lots in the Polish

¹⁴¹ E. D. Preston, “Flemming Subdivision” (advertisement) in *Dziennik Polski*, August 1, 1914. All quotes from *Dziennik Polski* have been translated from Polish by Justyna Zdunek-Wielgolaska.

¹⁴² Epstein & Tighon, “Edgewood Park Subdivision” (advertisement) in *Dziennik Polski*, July 25, 1914. All quotations from *Dziennik Polski* have been translated from Polish by Justyna Zdunek-Wielgolaska.

¹⁴³ Epstein & Tighon, “Edgewood Park Subdivision” (advertisement) in *Dziennik Polski*, July 25, 1914.

¹⁴⁴ B.A. Horger, “Great Lot Sale at Frederick-Roberts-McKenny Realty Co. Subdivision” (advertisement), *Dziennik Polski* July 10, 1914.

district would quickly double or triple in value.¹⁴⁵ For a recipient of Ford's five dollar day, a tripling in the value of a \$300 lot, in say a year, represent a 50% increase in annual income—a compelling chance secured with relatively little investment: about a week's pay down and a day's pay per month.

The Ford Motor Company advised workers against the purchasing of lots for mere speculation, despite the promise of large and fast returns. In its manual for profit sharers the company presented the risks of real estate speculation: lots may depreciate in value, or see their gains in value lost to tax assessments when the city paved and provided utilities in the future. Even more daunting, if the worker-investor faced a personal financial crisis—such as becoming sick or injured—they may be unable to make payments on their speculative lots and lose their sunk investment to their creditor, a risk that the company's advice implied was worth taking to secure a site for the family home, but not for investment alone. A more “conservative” way to take advantage of the robust real estate market, according to the manual, was to invest in mortgages through a financial institution and draw a more modest but dependable six per cent interest.¹⁴⁶

Real estate sellers tailored messages to speak directly to workers of Polish origin. Calling upon readers' rural experience of the value of livestock, one seller noted that at the Edgewood Park Subdivision in Polish east Detroit, owners, by “keeping hens[,]...may always have fresh eggs.”¹⁴⁷ In the early days of war's breakout in Europe—an event that Detroit's Poles were surely following with intense interest—E.D. Preston framed the war not as a threat to his readers but an opportunity for investors in Detroit real estate to enjoy additional security. He wrote:

¹⁴⁵ Lerchenfeld, “The Most beautiful Subdivision in Hamtramck” (advertisement), *Dziennik Polski*, May 20, 1914.

¹⁴⁶ Ford Motor Company, *Helpful Hints and Advice*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴⁷ Epstein & Tighon, “Edgewood Park Subdivision” (advertisement) in *Dziennik Polski*, July 25, 1914.

War in Europe
Means more business, jobs and prosperity in America.

In Austria, Serbia, Germany, Russia, England, France and Italy men are drafted to armies from fields, factories and offices...these men will not produce anything [and] the industries in all these countries will be stopped during the war.

SO THEY WILL HAVE TO BUY EVERYTHING FROM US IN AMERICA

Further, Preston continued, Poles committed to remaining in Detroit might benefit from shifts in the local labor market precipitated by the crisis. “Thousands of Serbs and Austrians who are leaving America to fight for their motherland leave **their jobs**,” he suggested, “**and those who stay will take their place.**”¹⁴⁸

Hamtramck developer Jan B. Sosnowski addressed readers as “Dear Compatriots,” presenting himself as a trusted fellow Pole providing needed services: he sold ship cards for travel to Europe and offered a free car ride to the train station as a sweetener.¹⁴⁹ Houses and lots were his main products, though, and he advertised his Hamtramck properties as an opportunity for buyers to invest wisely while retaining their Polish cultural/spatial identity. “Do not let yourselves, Fellow Countrymen, be driven into other surroundings, to other countrymen,” he implored, into other districts “far from big factories, schools and churches.” Sosnowski emphasized that his office was located just opposite the Sweetest Heart of Mary Catholic Church—a beloved institution built in the 1890’s within the Polish east side of Detroit. He also did not fail to mention that he had a “big automobile” at the ready for driving tours with clients.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Jan B. Sosnowski, “Dear Compatriots” (advertisement), *Dziennik Polski*, June 20, 1914.

¹⁵⁰ Sosnowski, “ATTENTION FELLOW COUNTRYMEN!” (advertisement), *Dziennik Polski*,

Ford workers purchased most of the 25 homes Sosnowski had built in Hamtramck by 1914. Drawing upon the Ford's company's authority in housing matters, Sosnowski added that his houses and contracts "had first been examined by Ford Company inspectors...[and found to be] most suitable for a worker." Sosnowski assured prospects that doing business with him was "good and safe for you," and explained in another advertisement that all of his houses were "built to stand long, and they are based on stone foundations not on piles," an assurance that B.E. Taylor would not not make to his buyers ten years later at the large west-side Brightmoor development.¹⁵¹

As many realtors did, those advertising in the Polish language press encouraged workers to peruse subdivisions on their day off, Sunday. Despite the advertised nearness of their subdivisions to streetcar lines, realtors often provided automobile tours to make the buying experience more leisurely. This practice was common enough that one concerned realtor urged his prospects to remember that only cars with green flags were bound for his Flemming Subdivision—perhaps worried that other realtors using the same meeting point might intercept his clients.¹⁵² The luxury of an automobile ride in 1914, at a time when most workers had seldom if ever experienced such ease, did more than downplay the distance of new subdivisions from the city core: it also invited prospects to enjoy a sense of their rising consumer clout.

¹⁵¹ Sosnowski, "ATTENTION FELLOW COUNTRYMEN! (advertisement), *Dziennik Polski*, May 30, 1914 and ATTENTION: FORD CO. WORKERS! (advertisement), *Dziennik Polski*, July 4, 2014.

¹⁵² E. D. Preston, "Flemming Subdivision" (advertisement) in *Dziennik Polski*, August 1, 1914.

Conclusions

Detroit's prosperity and the value of its real estate proved to be fragile as tens of thousands of 'successive' bets were placed on lots, bungalows and duplexes in the city's outer neighborhoods and beyond. At the same time the geographic expansion of Detroit itself ceased in 1926 as surrounding suburban villages resisted annexation.¹⁵³ Large automakers established havens from Detroit city governance and taxation as the region fragmented in this way. Highland Park, Hamtramck, and Dearborn gained independence from Detroit in 1918, 1922 and 1927 respectively, each centered on a major industrial plant and becoming enclaves where many Detroit residents worked but did not live. Further, while the real estate market's succession-based model of valuation unfolded, providing wealth and security to investors at the outermost edge of development, it left an expanding zone of crowding and depreciation in its wake, where pockets of abandoned real estate were emerging. Abandonment, so strongly associated with Detroit's contemporary decline, began to emerge as early as the 1920's. Geographer Jerome Thomas described a vacant district of former industrial shops and residences outside of Detroit's business district in 1928. "Gaunt and abandoned," he observed, "these ramshackle frame structures, mere shells of residences, today stand as mute testimony to the fact that even worse conditions than slum congestion can result from decadence...I see no future for this area" (Figure 2:30).¹⁵⁴ His words haunt us as they prefigure the loss of purpose that would come to Ford's Highland Park plant and so many of Detroit's residential neighborhoods as the auto industry continued its relentless march away from its point of origin.

Detroit's boom in modern workers' houses made the city's fordist industrialization possible—an economic imperative supported by manufacturing employers, city and federal

¹⁵³ Teaford, *City and Suburb*, pp.76-104 and Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, pp. 31-32.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas, Gerome, "The City of Detroit. A Study in Urban Geography," p. 106.

government and the local real estate industry. Realtors led with a discursive campaign that assured home buyers that the industrial economy would continue to grow, that outward succession could bring fast profits and social prestige, and that the owned home would provide economic security against the threat of aging. Designers, builders and materials dealers generally cohered around the bungalow and duplex—types that suited their business practices and at the same time gestured toward reform values such as the moral imperative to privacy and the healthfulness of access to light and air. As they developed outlying subdivisions developers, homebuilders and realtors reinforced social divisions—between dwellers at the periphery and the center, between white and black, between Polish and American cultural identities—helping many workers to find their economic and social advancement in the precarious exclusion of others. Further, the economic and social promises of mortgaged homeownership—while transformative and meaningful for many workers—came with risks in an industrial economy where employment prospects could never be as secure as realtors hopefully suggested. For many highly-leveraged home owning Poles for example, two weeks of unemployment was all that stood between a worker’s “decency,” “hot meals” and “easy chairs” and a crisis in which “the best that he can do...is to arrange for the temporary suspension of his [mortgage] payments at compound interest,” knowing that foreclosure loomed and that his deferrals “will not satisfy the grocer for any length of time.”¹⁵⁵ Accepting these risks, and developing a diversity of personal and family strategies for dealing with them, workers sought better lives in Detroit.

¹⁵⁵ Kruesi, *Hamtramck: A Survey*, pp.9-10, 1915.

Table

Year	Single Family	Two-Flats	Notes
1915	3,139	1,537	
1916	4,266	3,305	
1917	2,466	1,468	U.S. enters WWI in April
1918	729	189	
1919	7,191	1,569	
1920	no data	no data	37.7% of families homeowners
1921	2,956	605	Post-WWI Recession
1922	7,134	1,371	
1923	11,172	2,271	
1924	11,848	3,144	
1925	11,952	3,119	High point of housing production
1926	10,452	3,344	
1927	no data	no data	
1928	6,794	2,242	
1929	5,926	1,576	Great Depression begins
1930	2,264	604	41.3% of families homeowners
Total:	88,289	26,344	

Table 2:1: Single Family and Duplex Housing Construction in Detroit¹⁵⁶

Figures



Figure 2:1: “Own Your Home” Advertisement

Murphy, “The National Own Your Home Campaign,” *American Contractor*, July 12, 1919.

¹⁵⁶ Housing numbers from *Annual Report for the City of Detroit, 1915-1930*, as collected in Daley, “City of Mass Production,” pp. 98-99. Home ownership figures per Levine, *Internal Combustion*, p. 42.

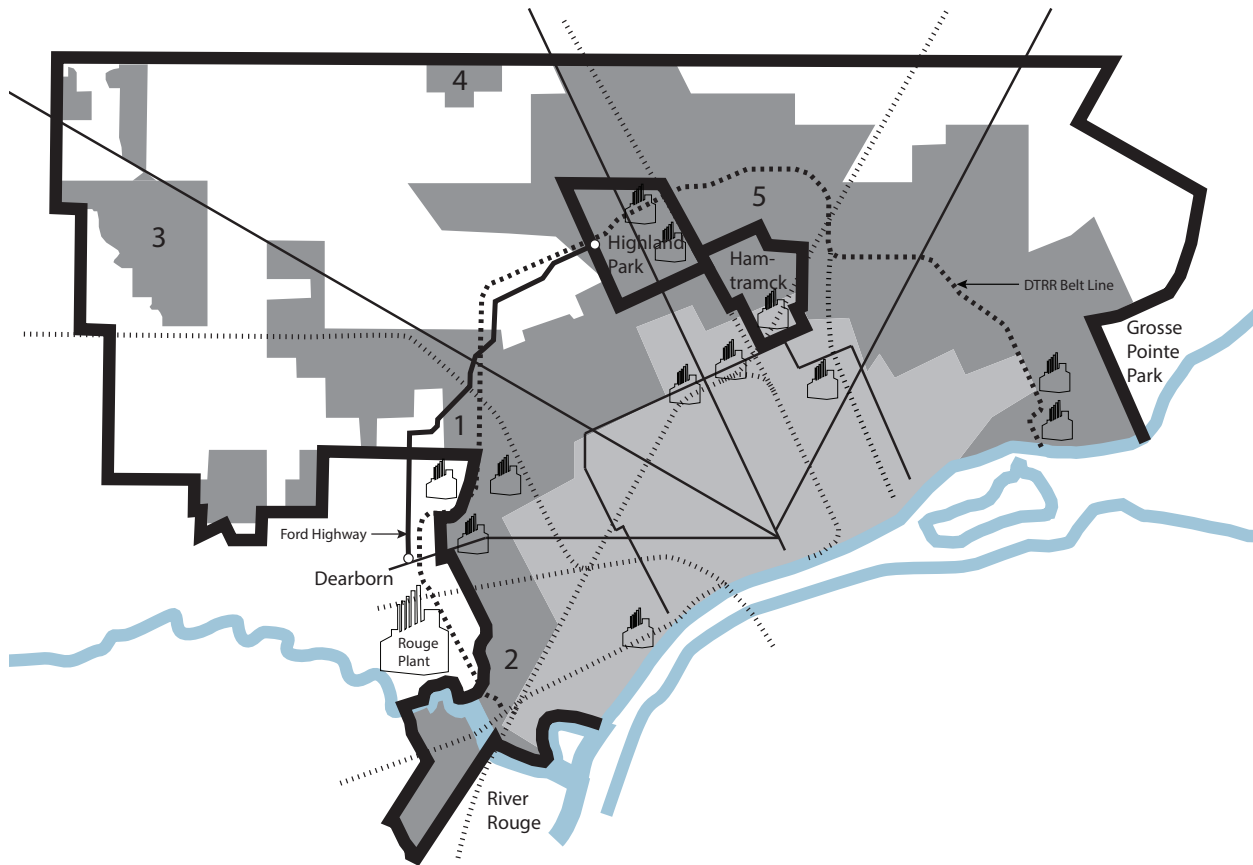


Figure 2:2: Rail roads, automobile assemblers and urban development (1) James W. Fales Subdivision (2) Springwells neighborhood (3) Brightmoor (4) Eight Mile-Wyoming (5) Hamtramck and Polish northeast

Urban development 1910-1930 is shown in dark grey and rail roads with dashed lines. The DTRR Belt Line and Ford Highway are noted as are locations of several automobile factories.

Sources: Areas of development from the period 1910-1930 derived from Doxiadis, *Emergence and Growth of an Urban Region*, pp.69 and Sanborn Map Co., *Insurance Maps of Detroit, MI*, vols. 5-8, 1910 and rail and factory locations per Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, Map 12.2.



Figure 2:3: The cottage. The small home at the center illustrates the type of often-informally-built cottage occupied by workers in nineteenth century Detroit. “Board of Commerce making tour of slums. Board of Health tour on Montcalm,” Wayne State University, Virtual Motor City Collection.

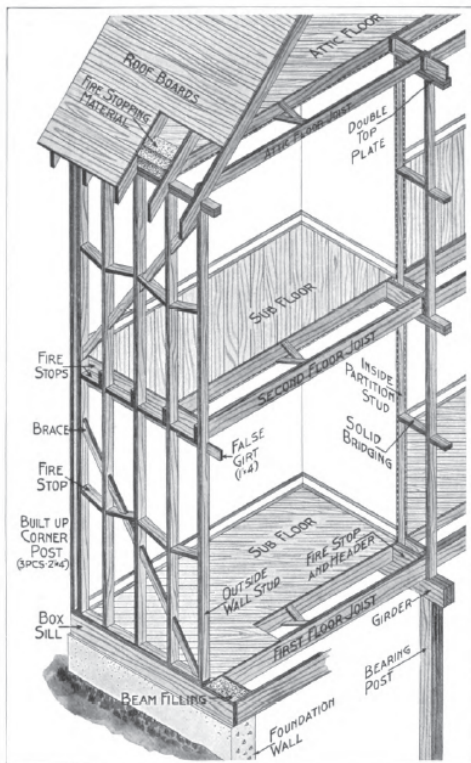


Figure 7a

The Balloon Frame

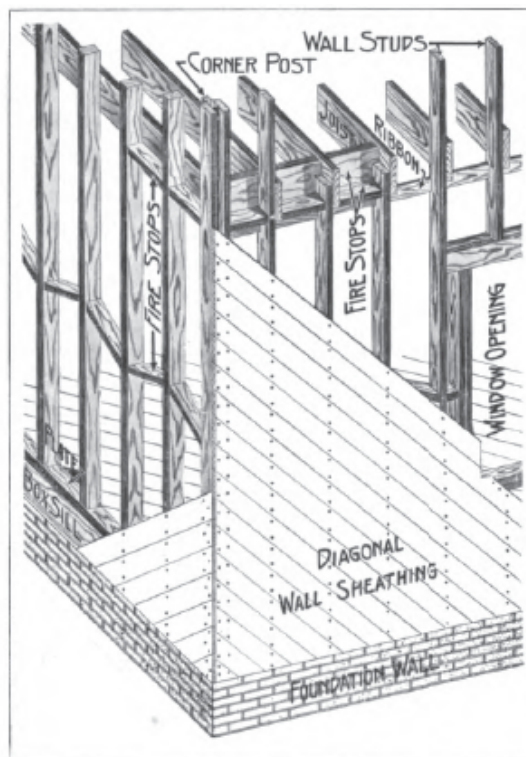


Figure 22

Figure 2:4: Balloon framing, a common form of light wood framing Weyerhaeuser Forest Products, *High Cost of Cheap Construction*, pp. 18, 32 (1922)



Figure 2:5: Croster Lumber & Fuel Co. advertisement
Detroit Builders' Exhibition Incorporated, *To Those Who Build*, pp. 24-25.



Figure 2:6 Common Detroit bungalows (L) and 1.5 story semi-bungalows (R), from the west-side Springwells neighborhood
Photographs by the author.

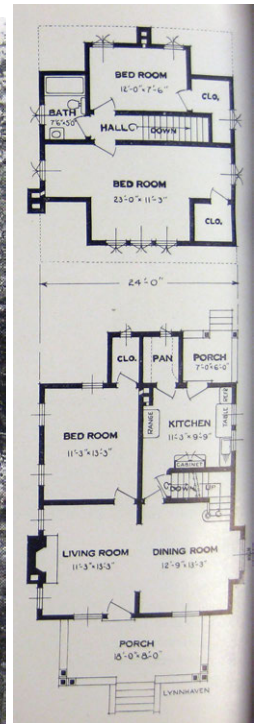
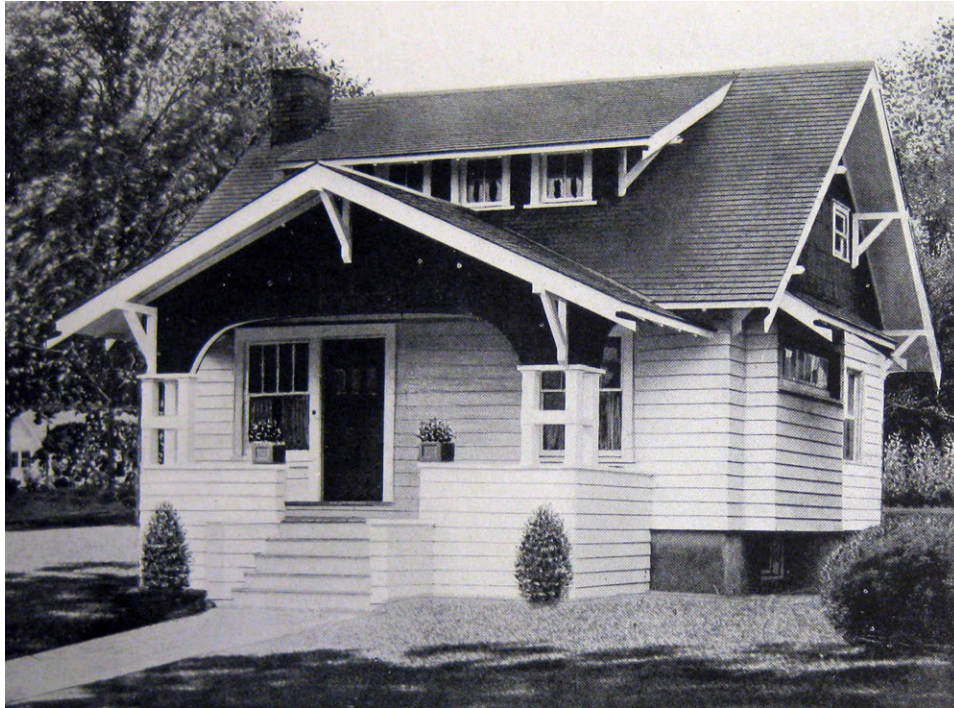
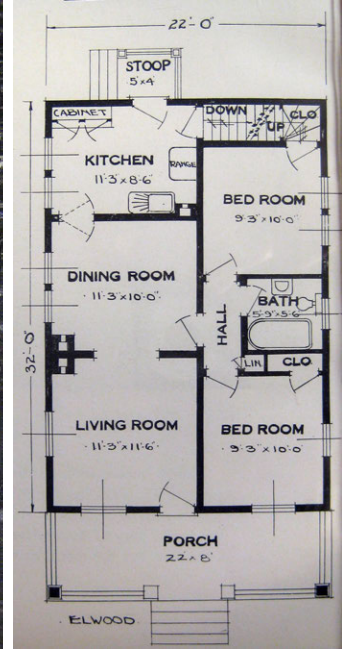


Figure 2:7: “The Elwood” bungalow (top) and “The Lynnhaven” 1.5 story semi-bungalow (bottom). Embellishments such as roof brackets, decorative columns and trim, and a fireplace make these houses more photogenic than most Detroit bungalows would have been, but their size, basic shape and plan configurations illustrate typical Detroit worker’s housing types.
 F.M. Sibley Lumber Co., *Better Homes at Lower Cost*, pp. 92, 100 (1926).



Figure 2:8: Duplexes in the west side Springwells neighborhood.
 Images from Google Street View.



Figure 2:9: “The Olympia” duplex.
 F.M. Sibley Lumber Co., *Better Homes at Lower Cost*, p. 48 (1926).

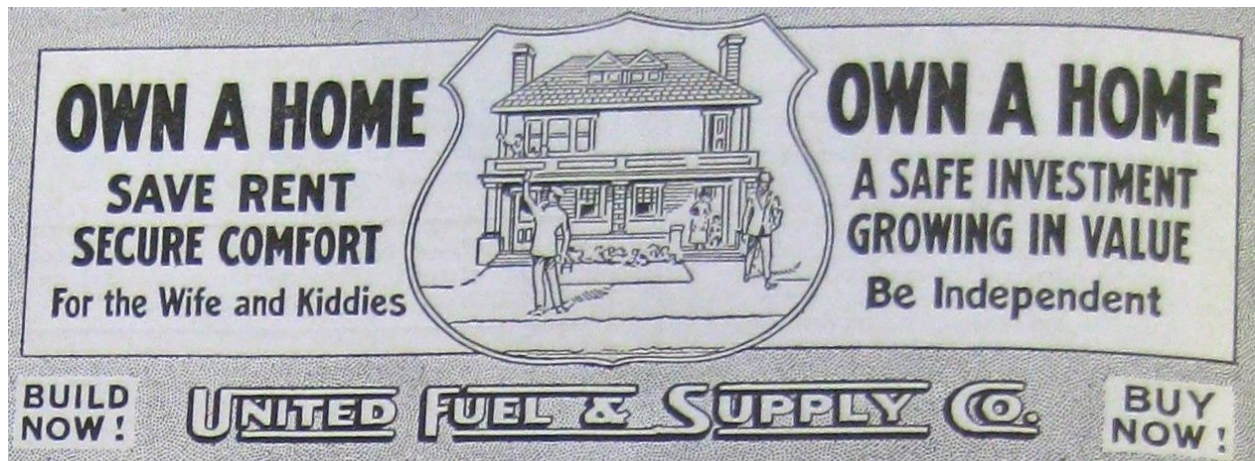


Figure 2:10: “Own a Home,” United Fuel & Supply Co. advertisement.
Detroit Board of Commerce, *The Detroit*, April 14, 1919.

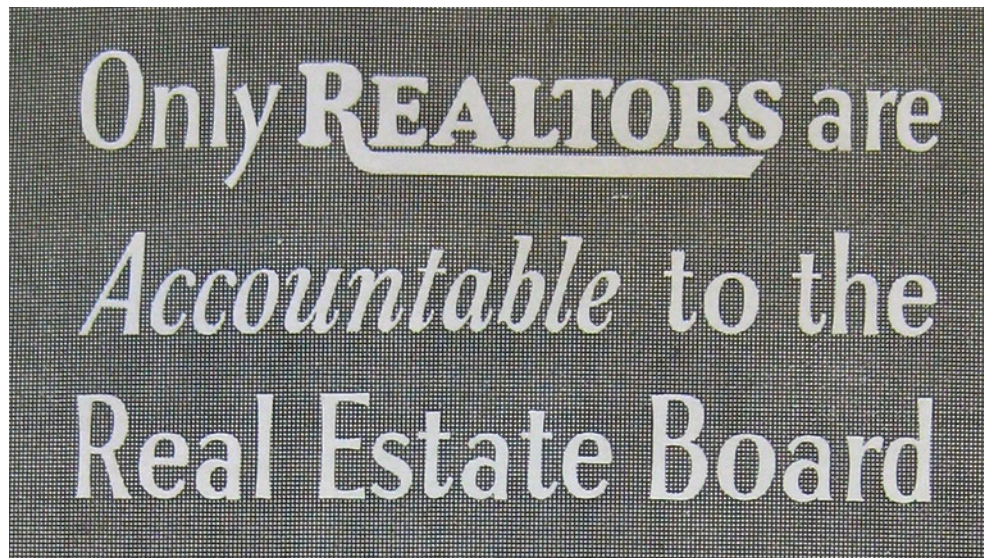


Figure 2:11: “Only Realtors are Accountable,” Detroit Real Estate Board advertisement,
detail.
Detroit Real Estate Board file, Burton Historical Collection.



Figure 2:12: Projections of Two Million residents by 1930, each basing future growth on the basis of the city's past growth.

Left: Leinbach-Humphrey & Roberts Advertisement, Right: Landis, Robert, *Detroit: The Industrial Capital of America and the City of Diversified Industry* (promotional pamphlet), p. 15, 1926. Both from the Real Estate file, Burton Historical Collection.

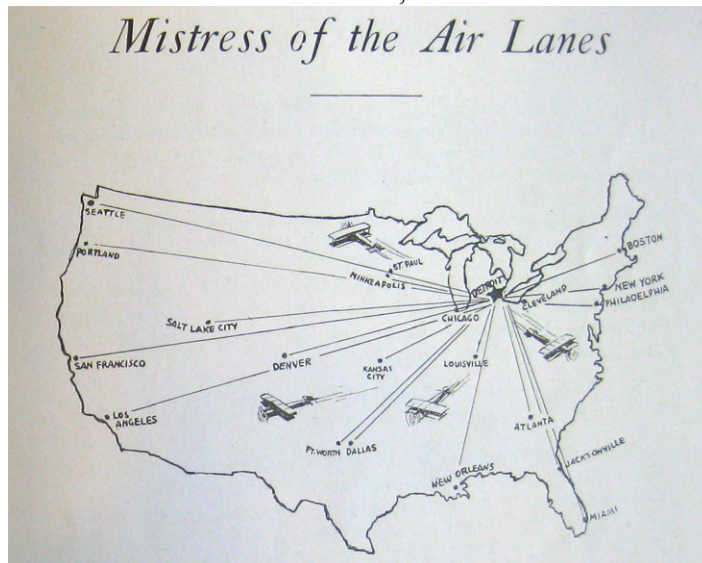


Figure 2:13: Detroit imagined as a center of aircraft manufacturing and delivery. Landis, *Its Yours—As Deep As You Can Dig and as High as You Can Build*, p. 21, Distributed by C.W. Treadwell Realtors, 1926. Real Estate File, Burton Historical Collection.

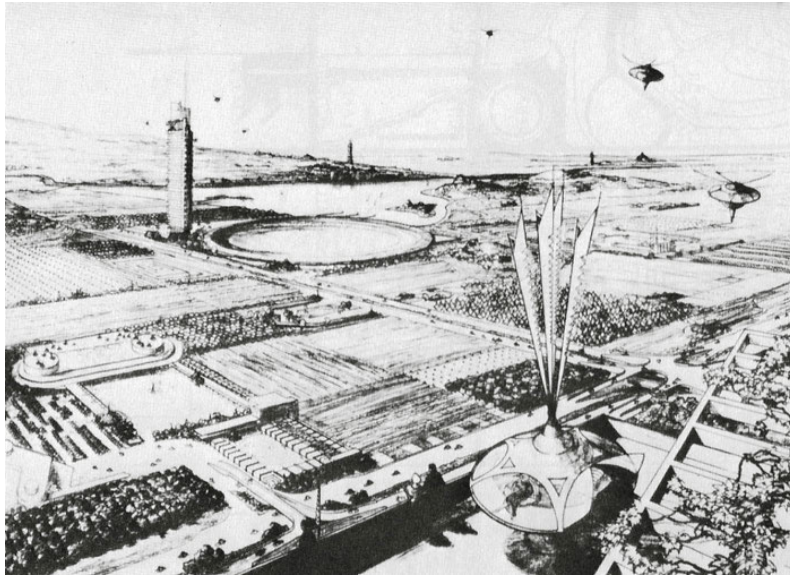


Figure 2:14: Broadacre City's personal helicopters, from Wright's *The Living City* (1958), Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century* (1982)

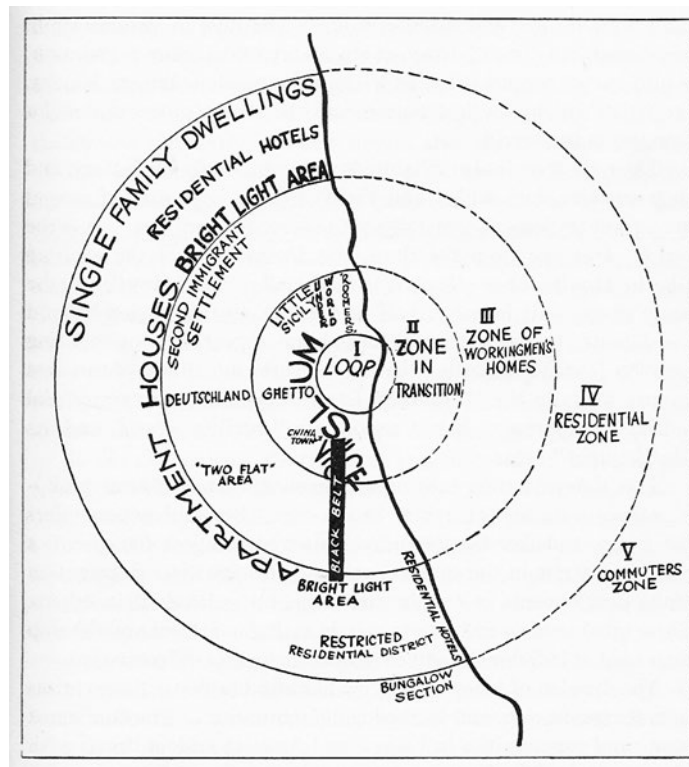


Figure 2:15: Ernest Burgess' Concentric Zone Model of urban social structure. From "The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project," in Park et al., *The City* (1967) p. 55, originally published 1925.



Figure 2:16 “B. E. Taylor’s Kenmore” advertisement, detail.
Real Estate File, Burton Historical Collection.

High Class Workingmen’s Subdivisions

FRANKLIN S. PRIKRYL
Pres. and Gen. Mgr.

GLENN H. BOWER
General Sales Manager

MEMBER
Detroit Real Estate Board



F. S. PRIKRYL & CO.

(INCORPORATED 1915)

Figure 2:17: “High Class Workingmen’s Subdivisions, advertisement. Security was a major theme in the real estate discourse of 1910s and 1920s Detroit
Munger, Thomas, *Detroit Today*..., advertisement p. 654, Detroit Board of Commerce (1921).

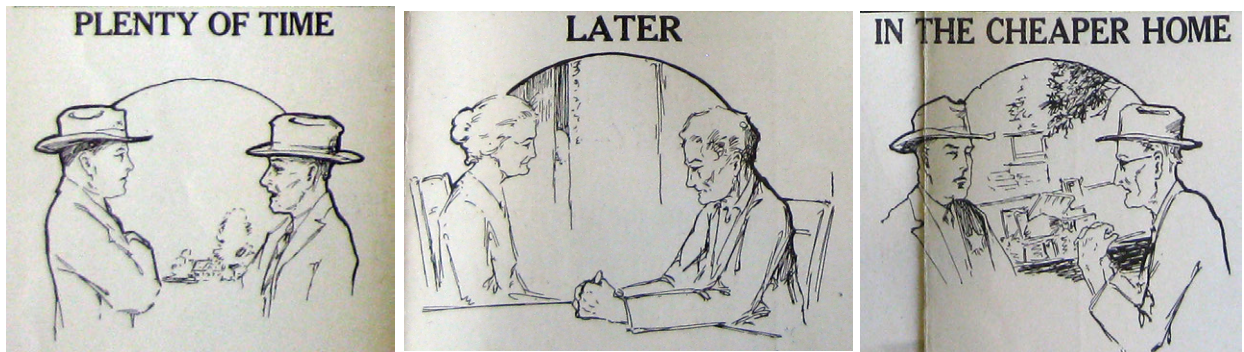


Figure 2:18: Brightmoor advertisement by B. E. Taylor, details.
Real Estate File, Burton Historical Collection.



Figure 2:19: New housing developments in northwest Detroit, aerial view.
Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive?* (1942)

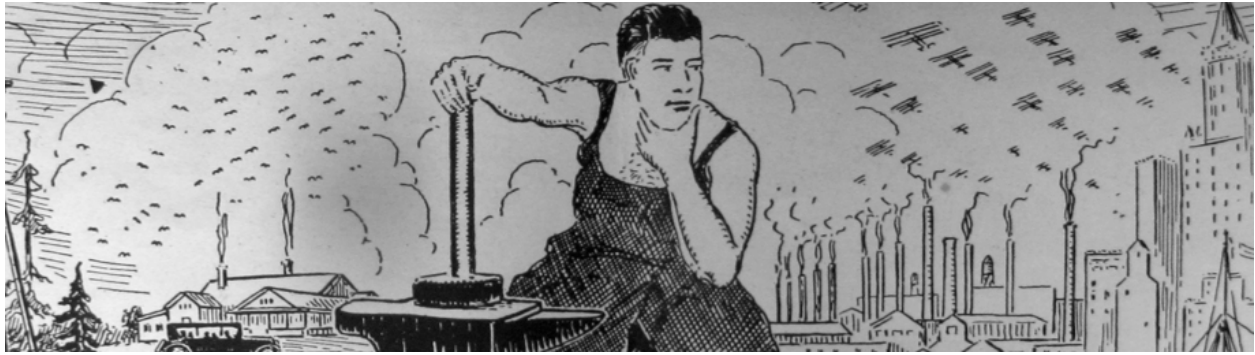


Figure 2:20: The allegorical Detroit worker of the 1920s, looking to the future as one combining a stable, pastoral home life on the one hand with transforming industrial modernization on the other. Clyde, Walt, “Great South and West Area of Yesterday—Tomorrow.” Detail. *Greater Detroit Magazine*. Reprint. (1925). Real Estate, BHC.

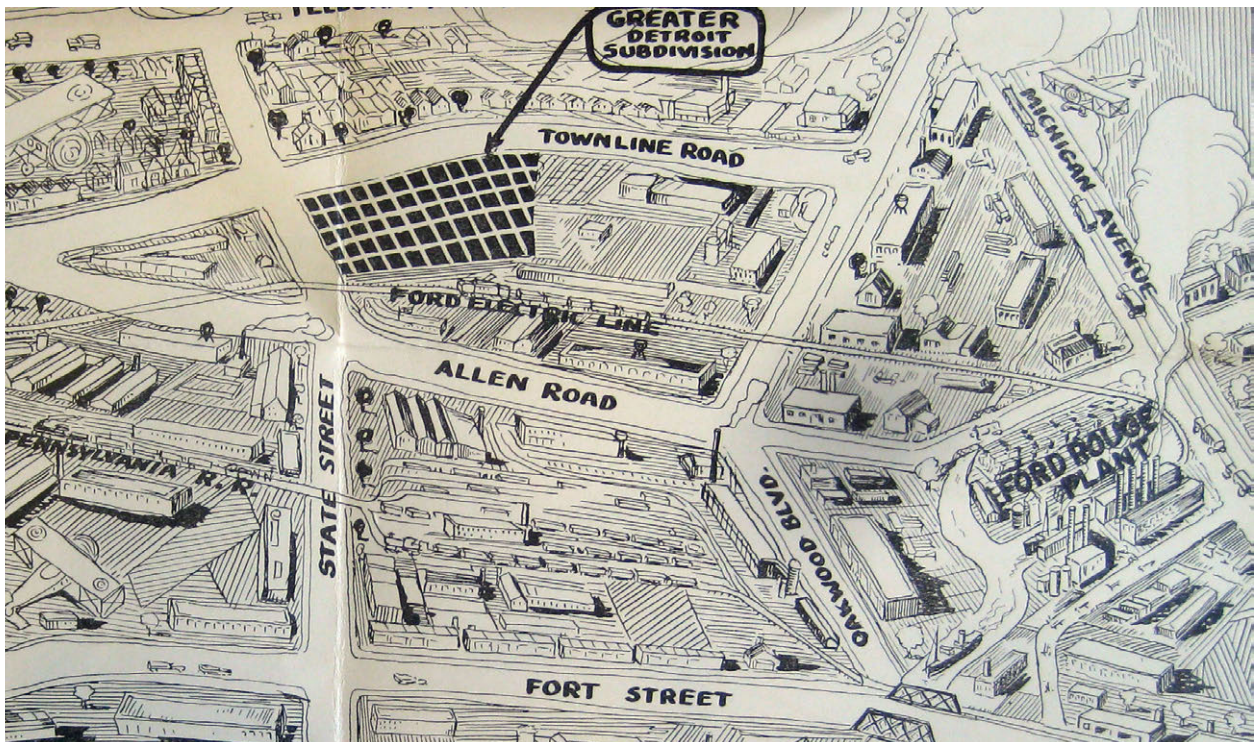


Figure 2:21: Greater Detroit Subdivision advertisement. Gabled bungalows among trees and this new subdivision are celebrated for their nearness to “the very hub of the world’s greatest industry” in west Detroit. O’Connor’s Greater Detroit Subdivision. Advertisement detail. Real Estate, BHC.

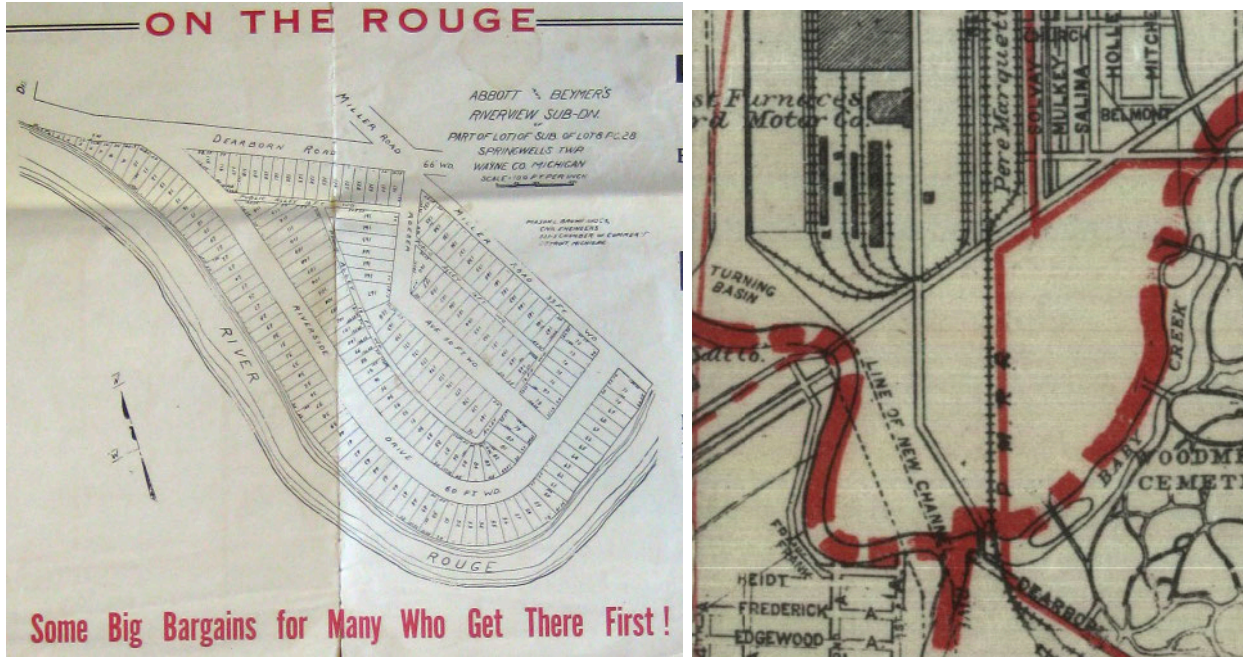


Figure 2:22: Industry displaces a residential subdivision. At left: Abbott and Beymer, *Water Front Lots* (advertising poster detail), 1919. Real Estate, BHC. At right: Wm. Sauer, Map of Detroit (detail), 1919.

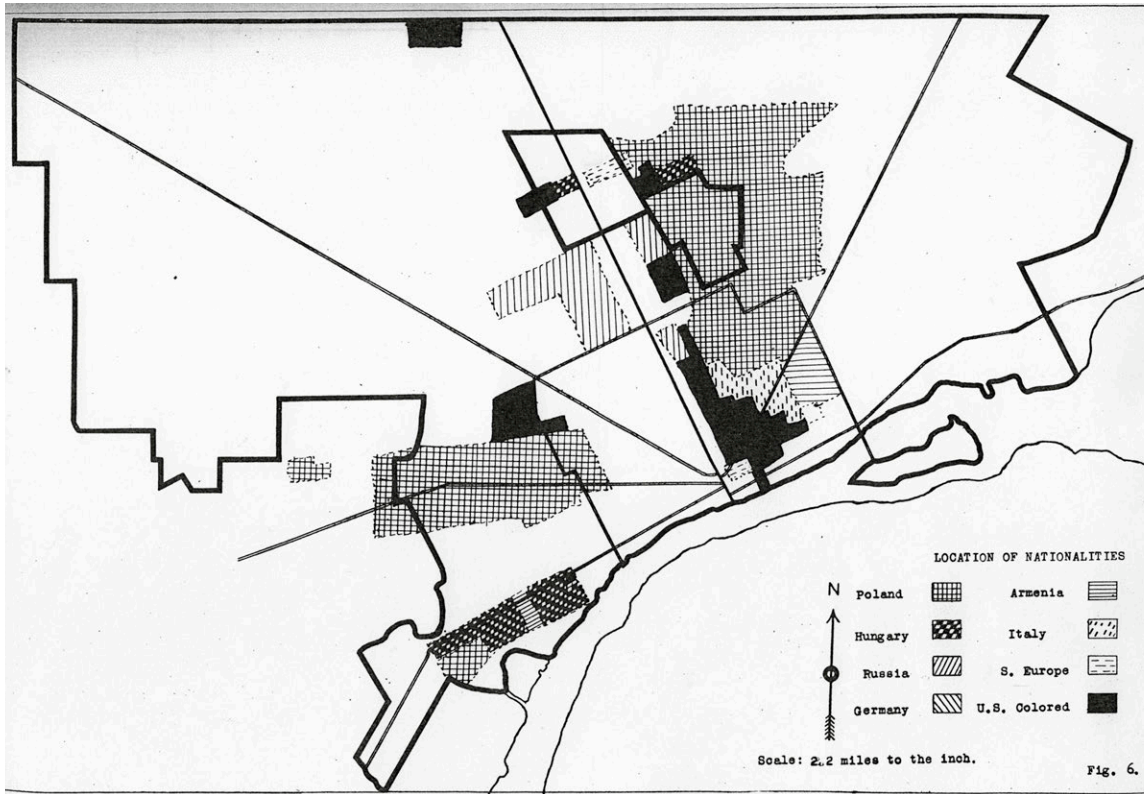


Figure 2:23: Racial concentrations in Detroit, 1928. Thomas, "The City of Detroit: A Study in Urban Geography," 1928.



Figure 2:24: Brightmoor realty office, front window. The poster to the right argues for Brightmoor’s connection to major industrial plants despite its geographic distance. Note that the Brightmoor bungalow type is featured in a model at center right and that the list of services Taylor’s company provided at left includes “loans arranged.”

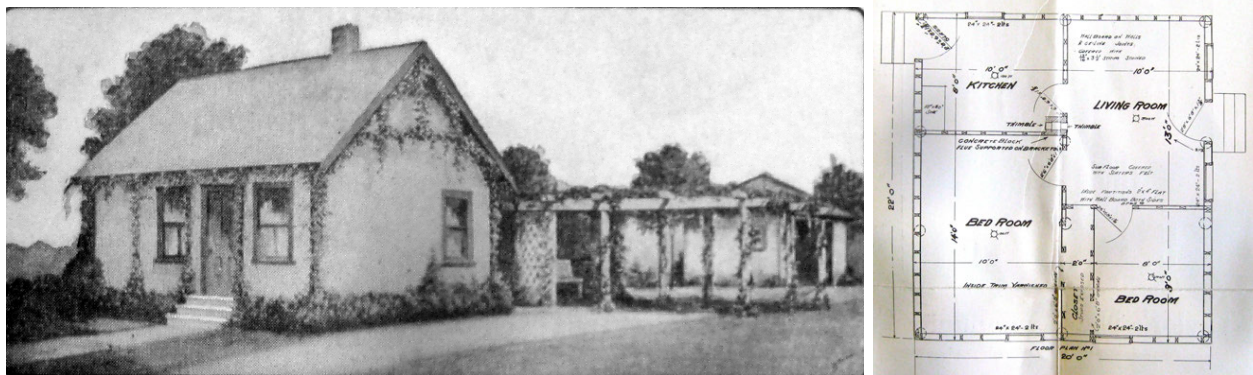


Figure 2:25: A four-room Brightmoor house by B.E. Taylor.
Brightmoor advertisement, B.E. Taylor – Realtor, Real Estate File, Burton Historical Collection.



Figure 2:26: “Typical Brightmoor Houses,” 1940. Photographs illustrate a range of housing from single-story bungalows (likely Taylor houses) on the top and bottom right, a very small (perhaps two-room) house at the upper left, and a substantial two story home at the lower left. Brightmoor Community Center, inc., *Brightmoor; a community in action*, 1940, p. 60.



Figure 2:27: Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood. Small temporary outbuildings and more substantial homes intermixed in the neighborhood, thus photographed in 1941 when a developer walled the neighborhood off from an adjacent development site intended for whites in order to meet the segregationist requirements of the FHA. The Detroit News, “Concrete wall dividing whites from negroes,” *The Detroit News*, June 27, 1941. Wayne State University Virtual Motor City Collection.



Figure 2:28: House, gardens and children at Eight Mile-Wyoming. John Vachon, “House in Negro Section, Detroit, Michigan,” August 1941. Farm Security Administration / Office of War Information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress). See also Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, p. 40.

KUP DOM DZISIAJ!



**Nie
Płac
Rentu.**

Po 5-ciu latach nie będziesz miał nic więcej, jak tylko pokwitowania za płacenie mieszkania, które nie będą miały żadnej wartości.

Figure 2:29: “Buy a house today!” (advertisement). An apparent inter-ethnic partnership emerged in Hamtramck between the well-known, American-born Homer Warren—active in Detroit industry and real estate—and the less prominent Lesiński-Leszczyński Co.—Polish by surname. The partnership advertised in the Polish language press that it had finished constructing six houses “to be moved into on the spot,” with credit offered such that \$150-\$200 down and \$25 per month plus interest would secure the deal. These homes, while modest from a middle-class perspective, were not sold principally on the basis of their low cost but rather their high quality: “They are all built of first rate materials and make, with oak wood floors and Georgia Pine finish.” Photographs illustrate the homes’ front-gabled facades: clean and new and crossed by a gleaming strip of sidewalk. Warren and Lesiński-Leszczyński, *Dziennik Polski*, July 11, 1914.



Figure 2:30: “Ramshackled Frame Houses on West Side.”
Thomas, “Detroit: A Study in Urban Development,” (1928), Figure 89.

Chapter Three

Better Lives: Making a Home in the Industrial City

Detroit is a strange, strange place, made up of dwindling elder men, like Ford, who knew every leisurely street corner when Detroit was, so to speak, a village, and hundreds of thousands of newcomers from every quarter of the globe. There is very little homogeneity; it is a city of strangers...

-Cyril Arthur Player, 1927¹

As industry decentralized and expanded its operations, employers encouraged and helped Detroit's growing workforce to invest their wages in private houses. In turn, the city's realtors and homebuilders transformed dozens of square miles of interstitial farmland into residential subdivisions. With increased wages and new, modern houses, industrialists hoped to change workers—to make “New Men” of them.² Men and women committed to home ownership and material consumption, employers wagered, would be more tied to the hard work of mass production and home making, and less likely to challenge their control of the social order. In short, new *American homes* would make good, *American workers*, transforming a fragmented city of newly arrived immigrants and migrants into a unified society—a melting pot.³ The entwined projects of industrialization and urban decentralization would not have been possible, however, if not for the widespread participation of workers who with their own agency chose to take part—and in important ways shaped—the city's modern domestic cultures.

¹ Player. “Detroit: Essence of America,” *New Republic*, August 3, 1927, p. 272.

² Quoting Antonio Gramsci as discussed in Chapter 1.

³ Olivier Zunz describes this drive for a unified industrial social order in *The Changing Face of Inequality*, p. 286.

Agents such as the Ford Motor Company, the Detroit Board of Commerce, and city realtors attempted to define a unified “American” domestic ideal in terms of *bourgeois* values: property ownership, the primacy of the nuclear family, social exclusivity and access to nature.⁴ As Robert Fishman shows, these values can be traced to the suburban homebuilding of London’s affluent middle class in the eighteenth century and on through the late nineteenth century construction of middle class in rail- and streetcar- suburbs in the United States.⁵ The distinctiveness of the Fordist melting pot as an early twentieth century social model was that it suggested these ideals could be shared beyond the financially secure middle class to the industrial worker with little capital but relatively high five or six dollar per day wages. Modern workers’ houses could not hope to be the equivalent of those of the middle class in size or in architectural detailing, but the real estate industry designed and sold them in comparable ways. As noted in Chapter 2, sellers presented new homes to workers as “thoroughly modern,” “[racially] restricted,” and located out where “the air is clean and fresh.”⁶

The diversity of workers’ domestic practices in the Fordist 1910s and 1920s—from boarding house life to the pluralistic use and outfitting of new houses—reveal wage-earners agency and complex relationships to bourgeois culture. As Lizabeth Cohen warns, we must not assume that workers were “made middle-class by the new products they consumed.”⁷ Bone tired and returning home from a day of hard labor—at a job that might well be lost if the economy contracted—workers surely understood where they fit in the Fordist model of economic control.

⁴ For a rich exploration of the domestic ideal, or “model home,” as a concept see Gwendolyn Wright’s essay “Prescribing the Model Home,” in Mack, ed., *Home: a Place in the World*, 1993.

⁵ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: the Rise and Fall of Suburbia*, pp. x-xi, 3-5 and 134-154. See also Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*, 1978.

⁶ Descriptions as cited in chapter two from *Real Estate Listing Bureau Bulletin* (1926), a B. E. Taylor advertisement for Brightmoor homes (1922), and a William Hannan subdivision advertisement (1916).

⁷ Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly*, Vol 41, Issue 1 (March 1989), p.26.

In this context workers' varied adoptions of bourgeois domestic values did not indicate the flattening of social and racial self-identification. Rather, the ways that workers lived at home showed their construction of new identities—from the immigrant eschewing bourgeois comforts in order to bank wages, to the Polish and African American workers who adopted aspects of bourgeois domesticity without accepting, or being accepted into, the white-dominated middle class. The ways that workers 'made do'—as Michele de Certeau puts it—within the constraining order of Fordism and the affordances of the modern worker's home illustrate their agency. Using the example of a North African immigrant in post-colonial Paris to illustrate the point, De Certeau argues that the immigrant

insinuates *into* the system imposed on him by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language ways of “dwelling” (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language... he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity.⁸

This chapter will explore workers' “ways of using” the residential landscape of Detroit under industrialization. Power relations in industrializing Detroit are different from those in the post-colonial and colonial spaces that de Certeau draws on in his text, but his theoretical framework remains useful. It allows workers' choice and use of domestic architecture in Detroit to be understood as “an entirely different kind of production.”⁹ The as-lived material culture of workers' domestic spaces reveals a city composed not of one modernity, one definition of a better life, but of many.

⁸ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 30 (italics his).

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 31.

Prehistory: Ethnic Homeownership Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century

Homeownership and the nuclear family were valued within Detroit's immigrant enclaves for decades before Fordist attempts to draw their residents into the cultural melting pot. Olivier Zunz's study of population data shows that in late nineteenth century Detroit the nuclear family was the dominant domestic unit in the city's German and Polish enclaves, for example, and that across the city "home ownership was more an emblem of immigrant working-class culture than of the established middle-class native white American culture."¹⁰ German and Polish immigrants—from wealthy shop-owners to unskilled laborers—built up strategically sited communities near water- and rail-front industries. Despite receiving low wages in nineteenth century Detroit, unskilled immigrant workers established a measure of security through the ownership of modest dwellings and participation in community-based mutual-aid institutions providing life insurance and charity aid.¹¹ Rather than relying on a single well-paid breadwinner's wages—the family structure promoted under Fordism in the 1910s and 1920s—low-paid nineteenth century families relied on the work of both parents and often children in order to pay for the home—often at the cost of children's education. Some sought to re-establish the private ownership they had enjoyed in their homelands when buying a lot and building a cottage in Detroit, while others found they were able to own property for the first time (Figure 3:1).¹²

Everyday domestic life in the late nineteenth century ethnic enclave can be glimpsed through the fiction of the period, which while contingent on the author's perspective does

¹⁰ Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, p.161.

¹¹ Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 129-195.

¹² Lizabeth Cohen explores several immigrant and migrant property ambitions and their possible origins in homeland experiences in Cohen, Lizabeth, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes 1885-1915," *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 3, Issue 4, Winter 1980, p. 762.

provide a richness of detail that is otherwise inaccessible. Rather than criticizing workers' environments as social reformers of the period did, literary authors working in the "realist" tradition revealed—to a romanticizing degree—in the fine grain of workers' material cultures.¹³ Michigan author Karl Harriman provides a reflection on domestic culture in Polish Detroit ca. 1903 with his short story "The Homebuilders," published in a collection of the same title. Harriman's story is, of course, not a transparent lens with which to read Polish Detroit at the turn of the century. The simple, colloquial language that he gives to his characters reflects a paternalism of his own and the chaste, thrifty lives of Harriman's characters suggest that his thinking was interpolated by reformers' ideals despite his relative embrace of immigrants' cultural difference. At the same time, Harriman dramatizes the historical reality of the nuclear family and homeownership in nineteenth century Detroit with rich material and experiential description and with an interest in the dialogue between local and elite cultural ideals.

The story is one of immigrants' material progress and their negotiation between local, ethnic cultural values and those of the dominant culture beyond. Harriman's protagonists, young tobacco-stripper Julia Fernowicz and nineteen-year-old Henry Broszki—a sand-hauler in a stove works—grew up in Detroit's emerging east side Polish community. Henry, an orphan, lived as a boarder with his aunt and uncle. He met Julia at a "Polonia Hall" dance and the two begin courting. Discussing marriage the two quickly confront the local cultural ideal of homeownership. Julia receives Henry's proposal of marriage with skepticism, asking: "D'yeh think yeh c'n afford it?," and "Yeh don't own a lot anywhere, do yeh, Henry?"¹⁴ Henry then

¹³ Hubka and Kenny, "The Worker's Cottage in Milwaukee's Polish Community: Housing and the Process of Americanization, 1870-1920," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 8, 2000, pp. 33-52, which introduced me to Harriman's story. For portrayals of urban, immigrant life see Waldo, *Stash of the Marsh Country* (1921), Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) and Harriman, *The Homebuilders* (1903).

¹⁴ Harriman, "The Homebuilders," *The Homebuilders*, pp. 20-21.

secured a lot in the neighborhood, on Leland Street, but Julia's mother remained unconvinced, saying "it ain't possible t' live on just a lot; yeh got t' have a house."¹⁵ Even Henry's Aunt, who herself kept boarders, insisted that marriage be founded in social advancement to a private home, asking with regard to Julia, "Where'll you keep her?" and adding "You can't bring her here [and] you haven't any house."¹⁶ Despite these exhortations it seems that Henry was already well trained in the ownership values of the Polish enclave where he was raised: from the young age of thirteen he had been putting aside savings from his meager wages. Six years later, as Henry and Julia prepared for marriage, the pair began spending their savings at a delirious pace to acquire the material requisites for marriage in their community.

When Henry imagines the home he'd like to share with Julia it is a large brick structure on fashionable Jefferson Avenue, its yard "alive with chickens."¹⁷ (Figure 3:2) In this incongruous domestic vision Harriman positions home ownership as a "cultural bridge" between Henry's American and Polish affiliations, wealth in livestock representing a rural Polish value imported to east Detroit.¹⁸ Henry goes on to buy a more modest version of the hybrid ideal: a used frame cottage, and fencing, relocated to the couple's newly purchased lot. Once the house was in place, Julia and Henry spent an evening pacing the yard and planning their future flowerbed and chicken coop, the house "gleam[ing] in the electric light" of the street lamps.¹⁹ Immigrant workers' nineteenth-century culture of homeownership in Detroit—analyzed statistically and historically by Zunz—takes on the richness of lived experience in Harriman's literary imagination. "The Homebuilders" illustrates the complex construction of domestic

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 25.

¹⁶ ibid p. 18.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁸ Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 53.

¹⁹ Harriman, p. 44.

values. Whether in nineteenth century cottages or in the modern bungalows of the 1910s and 1920s, many Polish immigrants—like Harriman’s Henry and Julia—expressed agency as they made homes, negotiating affiliations to Polish immigrant and white American cultures.

Detroit’s nineteenth-century worker’s cottages were smaller, more sparsely furnished, and lacked the hygienic technologies of the modern bungalows and duplexes built for workers in the 1910s and 1920s. They nonetheless represented a culture of home—of domestic security and affection—influenced but not defined by the dominant white American social order. Henry and Julia’s urban lot and modest cottage represented to their families and their selves a commitment to marriage and to participating in and building up their inner-city Polish community. After two days of wedding celebration with food, drink and dancing the newlyweds returned, exhausted, and entered the marriage home together for the first time. Various gifts waited for them there, and Julia moved immediately toward the greatest of these—the kitchen stove that was Henry’s gift. She examined it with “rapturous delight,” by the light of a match—the house apparently not wired for electricity—and said, “it’s a beauty.”²⁰

This stove in this case, like many furnishings, fixtures, and spaces in accounts of domestic life, takes on meaning that transcends its mere value as a consumer good. These things have the capacity to be, for those who live with them, what Mary Douglas calls “a memory machine”: enabling access to the past and anticipation of the future in an imaginative space punctuated by daily, seasonal and life cycles. Gaston Bachelard provides evocative examples of this phenomenology of domestic spaces and objects, suggesting for example that the wardrobe is a space “filled with memories” and charged by the pleasure of having “good things held in

²⁰ Harriman, p. 62.

reserve.”²¹ These memories are portable as well. Bachelard argues, “an entire past comes to dwell in a new house,” such that the nooks and corners of one’s childhood hiding might long after influence one’s spatial experience of home.²² Perhaps the beauty that Julia sees in the stove, then, is entwined both with her past experiences of domestic intimacy and with anticipation for the future life of the new home—for family meals together and with good fortune, abundant coal for heat in winter.

The domestic space of the Polish worker’s cottage could be a painful space of memory, as Harriman explores in “The Wages of His Toil.” In it Ladislav Adamowsky, an older hauler at a stove works, takes dinner wordlessly with his two sons at the kitchen table, whose fourth chair is left vacant by the recent death of Ladislav’s wife.²³ Ladislav’s own health declines rapidly in the story. As he becomes weaker his paternal authority gives way to the rising influence of his sons and daughter in law—the latter having learned something of American domestic tastes while working as a kitchen maid. The children begin to refurnish the home. Harriman describes the loss that these changes represent to the weakening father, who looks on as “a chair would vanish overnight; a shelf would disappear,” until “after a month the changes had been so many that...the memory in him died.” The older man expressed this loss by moving into the backyard shed with his milk cow.²⁴ The psychological and mnemonic construction of home, as Harriman illustrates with this story, can be as fleeting and fragile as the house’s materiality itself. Making homes in a fast-changing industrial city Detroit’s workers engaged both the productiveness and the destructiveness of the modern.

²¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 79-80.

²² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 5-16.

²³ Harriman, “The Wages of His Toil,” *The Homebuilders*, p. 161 (1903).

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 183.

European immigration increased as Detroit industrialized in the years preceding World War One. The city's economic growth drew a particular cohort of 'New Immigrants' from southern and eastern Europe in that period, including an outsized number of young men.²⁵ The white American middle-class and elite left their enclaves near the city center in this period for new peripheral developments and many German-Americans—who had twenty years earlier formed a large ethnic enclave adjacent to the Poles'—began to disperse into new “white” working class areas as immigration from Germany slowed, and a younger, increasingly American-born generation grew in influence. Wartime discrimination in the 1910s further encouraged Germans to assimilate into whiteness.²⁶ Polish immigration, by contrast, increased at the turn of the century and Poles' ethnic enclaves, rather than dissipating, expanded outward from the center as modern industry decentralized—creating a large urban space of Polish-American cultural negotiation.

Residential districts near the city center remained a prominent 'gateway' for newly arrived immigrants in the early twentieth century, and in the context of an increasing housing shortage these areas became densely populated with boarders.²⁷ (Figure 3:3) The living conditions of boarding workers were of great concern to industrialists and reformers in the 1910s, as discussed in Chapter 1, but this practice was for many a necessary response to economic uncertainty and even a strategic way to navigate the risks of the industrializing city. A closer look at boarding practices illustrates newly arrived workers' difficult choices and experiences—those who would ultimately leave for modern homes and those who would not.

²⁵ Zunz, 287-289.

²⁶ On wartime scrutiny of German workers at Ford see Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day*, pp. 172-179. A comparison of pre and post war maps of east Detroit shows a suppression of German identity that is likely no coincidence: Berlin Street was renamed Benson St. between 1912-1919. Sauer Bros., *Map of the City of Detroit Michigan* (1912) and Wm. Sauer, *Map of Detroit*, (1919), University of Michigan Map Library, digitally archived by Prof. Henco Bekkering and Yanjia Liu in 2011.

²⁷ Zunz, 341-349.

Boarding and the Immigration Experience

Many immigrants came to Detroit for work, but not all were enticed by the prospect of putting down roots—buying mortgages and homes—in a city where jobs were gained and lost regularly and family was thousands of miles away. Living and working in Detroit but staying flexible enough to move on if necessary was a common strategy: one immigration expert estimated that 24,819 immigrants had arrived in Detroit in 1914 and that 5,404 had left the city that same year for their homelands or other American cities and towns.²⁸ Immigration to American cities was, for many, a provisional strategy to make the best of a bad situation: as University of Chicago sociologist S. P. Breckenridge noted at the turn of the century, many immigrants were “almost forced” to leave their homelands by economic or political insecurity there.²⁹ For those who saw their stay in Detroit as potentially temporary, avoiding debts for the cost of a lot, a home, and its furnishings was a hedge against risk.

The letters sent between young Polish workers in America and their families back home illustrate the kinds of international commitments—financial, familial and identity-based—that were at stake in immigrants’ decisions to stay in or leave industrial America. Sociologist William Thomas collected and translated such letters to English in the early twentieth-century as part of a five-volume study of Poles’ experiences “leaving behind a close-knit, family based, traditional culture and seeking to adapt to a more individualistic and competitive world.”³⁰ Hull House benefactor Helen Culver funded the project. Thomas’ collected letters show that a robust exchange of stories, photographic portraits, prayer cards, name-day gifts, tobacco, cash and

²⁸ Cole, Raymond. “The Immigrant in Detroit.” Detroit Board of Commerce Americanization Committee, 1915.

²⁹ Breckenridge, *New Homes for Old*, pp. 1-4, 19, 1921. For an observation of the economic hardships that immigrants fled in rural Slovenia see Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant*, p. 20.

³⁰ Quote from Eli Zaretsky, Editor of an abridged version of Thomas’ original called *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: A Classic Work of Immigration History*, p. xi, 1996.

advice kept homeland commitments alive for many immigrants in America. Poles' families back home monitored and intervened in the lives of those gone on to America, from the parents who urged their children to "economize as much as you can," to those—perhaps fearing the influence of American materialism and secularism—who advised their son on what to look for in a marriage partner, urging "don't look at her dresses, but esteem only whether she loves our Lord Jesus."³¹

Difficult separations occurred during the process of passage: illness, for example, could cause death on the ship or provoke the rejection of some family members at Ellis Island. Such cases speak to the fraught and tenuous relationship that some new arrivals, separated from those who did not complete the voyage, likely had toward the United States. The sociologist Edward Steiner traveled with trans-Atlantic immigrants at the turn of the century and presented their experiences in a sympathetic light for an American audience. He describes the difficulty of the sixteen-day voyage in the crowded steerage compartment of a ship, where as many as 900 passengers endured being "packed like cattle."³² In one case Steiner recalls a boy, "in the last stages of consumption [tuberculosis]," who was brought to the steerage deck for fresher air, but who upon request from the first cabin passengers on the deck above—upset by the sight of him—was driven back downstairs, out of sight.³³ At Ellis Island immigration officials assessed each traveler independently and those found unfit were forced to return in the next available transatlantic steerage. Families were divided in this tense process. In one case Steiner describes witnessing the experience of a Jewish tailor and his son, migrating from Russia, the former "a pitiable looking object" with a "small, emaciated body" and the latter "stalwart" and "neatly

³¹ Thomas, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and American*, Vol 1., pp. 405 (1918).

³² Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant*, pp. 37-38.

³³ *Ibid.*

attired in the uniform of a Russian college student.”³⁴ The father had supported his son’s education, and forced to leave home they had traveled to the United States hoping to work and to join the father’s brother. The inspector looked unfavorably upon the father however, and asked if he and his son were willing to be separated. The father replied, as Steiner recalls:

‘Of course,’ And the son sa[id], after casting his eyes to the ground, ashamed to look his father in the face, ‘Of course,’ [after which the inspector ruled] ‘The one shall be taken and the other left (Figure 3:4).’³⁵

Once arrived in an American city such as Detroit, boarding—renting a room or just a bed in another’s house—was an economizing strategy that responded to the housing shortage and the financial stresses and opportunities that new arrivals faced. Many boarded despite the relatively high potential earnings of an autoworker such as a drill press operator--\$1,661.92 per year in 1922 with full employment—compared to the basic costs for room, board and other needs for a single person boarding in Detroit, estimated at just \$912.60.³⁶ As discussed elsewhere, full employment was a luxury that many workers did not enjoy as plants shed staff in the winter months or during economic slowdowns, and for the newly-arrived or the recently laid off low-cost housing could be crucial. Priorities other than domestic comfort vied for immigrants’ dollars as well. Many emigrated with very little money on hand and owed a substantial debt for their trans-Atlantic steerage ticket to a creditor back home.³⁷ Some were required to send funds home regularly in support of family members left behind, who faced their own creditors and in some cases the threat of hunger.³⁸ The economy of boarding also supported saving in anticipation of a possible layoff, illness or injury, or to make future investments through a Detroit-based bank or

³⁴ Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant*, pp. 87-88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Wages and Hours of Labor in the Automobile Industry, 1922*, Bulletin No. 348, October 1923, pp. 2-3 and National Industrial Conference Board, *The Cost of Living Among Wage-Earners. Detroit, Michigan, September 1921*, p. 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Also see Ford Motor Company, “Fifty-one human interest stories,” No. 12.

³⁸ Thomas, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Vol. 2, pp. 348-374.

by sending cash home for investment in the family estate. One Polish sister wrote, for example, to her brother in America saying, “If your health favors you, earn whatever you can and send [it to] us; it won’t be lost for you here.”³⁹ At the same time, boarding provided crucial income to many homeowners that was earned not just by keeping a roof over tenants’ heads but often through the home-owning matriarch’s labor washing tenants clothes and preparing their meals—a labor that reformers sought to abolish by advocating for the nuclear family home.⁴⁰ The economic constraints and family strategies of immigrant working class life made boarding, while not a permanent or preferred condition for most, a common one practiced by an estimated one-fourth to one-half of working class families in American cities of the early twentieth century.⁴¹

Weighing the shifting risks and benefits of life in American and back home, thirty percent of Poles who traveled to American cities for work returned home after some time.⁴² Correspondence between the Markiewicz brothers, originally from Russian Poland, and their parents back home illustrate the hard choices made both by those who stayed and those who returned. The brothers’ American destinations are unknown but their experiences shed light on the kinds of choices that Detroit’s immigrant workers navigated. In 1908 the first brother, Waclaw, was enticed by his father to return home with the offer that if the son could return with just “a few hundred rubles,” his father would add his own money to help the young man buy a farm of his own.⁴³ Waclaw replied that he would nonetheless stay in the United States, causing his mother to write that she had received his letter, “but I don’t think it true, because,” she added,

³⁹ Thomas, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, Vol 1*, p. 480.

⁴⁰ Ford commented on this issue, arguing that “Men who earn from \$5 to \$9 a day do not need to have their wives take in boarders,” in “Squalid Homes Banned By Ford,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 1914. See also Wright, *Building the Dream*, pp.186-189.

⁴¹ Wright, *Building the Dream*, p.186.

⁴² Thomas, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, Vol 5*, p. 29.

⁴³ Thomas, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, Vol 1*, pp. 466-467.

“I believe that you love your parents and your country.”⁴⁴ Waclaw’s brother Stanisław, also in America for a time, made a different decision and returned to the family home in 1914, explaining upon arrival that the United States “is a golden land as long as there is work, but when there is none, then it is worth nothing.”⁴⁵

Despite the advantage of flexibility that drew some to boarding it is important to acknowledge that others were forced into it. While increased wages allowed some workers the option to leave the densely occupied sections of the inner city, the unemployment, housing shortage, and racial segregation that were endemic to Detroit’s emerging industrial society left others with few choices. For example, during the winter of 1914/15, as one sociologist noted, “the unemployment situation in Detroit was an acute one,” and some immigrants were trapped. “In the past,” he explained, “during financial distress [immigrants] could and often times would return to Europe; but this was made impossible this winter on account of the present War.”⁴⁶ The previous winter saw twelve thousand gathered outside of Ford’s Highland Park plant to demand work following the announcement of the Five Dollar Day. When the 8 A.M. shift change was disrupted by the crowd, however—which did not allow incoming workers to pass—the Highland Park police determined that a “last resort” was needed, and turned fire hoses on the January crowd, whose clothes, after fifteen minutes, “were frozen stiff.”⁴⁷ The conflict that followed—in which the assembled threw stones and broke factory windows—fed into the Americanization discourse discussed in Chapter 1, in which reformers equated foreignness with the risk of political radicalism. Reflecting this view, the *New York Times* described the incident as a “riot,”

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 468.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 485.

⁴⁶ Cole, “The Immigrant in Detroit,” p.15, 1915.

⁴⁷ “Job Seekers Riot, Storm Ford Plant,” *The New York Times*, January 13, 1914.

and suggested that the “foreign element” was responsible for the unrest as their “shouting and exhortation in foreign tongues” was overheard during the confrontation.⁴⁸

Boarding: the Life of a Room

Detroit’s industrialists and housing reformers—inheritors of the anti-tenement ideals developed in New York City in preceding decades—adapted shared concerns for light, ventilation and privacy to the particular housing conditions of Detroit. New York was an outlier in America with its heavy concentration of 4-5 story tenement structures, while Detroit’s ‘housing problem’ was more typical: what one reformer called “innocent looking” frame cottages converted to house many boarders within.⁴⁹ The crowded interior sleeping room, therefore, rather than innocuous-looking gabled cottage as seen from the street, became the central focus of reform discourse. Ford Sociological Department agents visited many of these sleeping rooms in their efforts to relocate Ford employees to modern homes and their representations of sleeping rooms illustrate the social fears that boarding manifest for these onlookers and the rhetoric by which they sought to combat it. At the same time, despite the fact that agents’ photographs and reports are the propaganda of a powerful institution, they can also be read against the grain as a rare archive of the social, spatial and material practices of boarders. Many photographs of boarding conditions are kept in a private Ford company archive today, but through the efforts of historians Kevin Boyle and Victoria Getis a number of them have been published and made available.⁵⁰ Attempting to illustrate the antithesis of the modern worker’s

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The quote is, as noted in Chapter 1, from “Detroit’s Housing Situation Has Become Grave Problem,” pp. 7-8. *The Detrouiter*, May 8, 1916. Descriptions of rooms and yards are drawn from Ford Motor Company, “Fifty-one human interest stories.” (1915)

⁵⁰ Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons: Images of Working-Class Detroit 1900-1930*, 1997.

home, these agents' photographs also provide some access to the ways that boarding workers made do with the constraints and opportunities of the industrializing city.

778 Woodbridge may have seemed an ordinary boarding house—a two-story, nineteenth century frame residence near the east riverfront—but it became consequential in reform discourse when Ford's investigators visited following the announcement of the Five Dollar Day. (Figure 3:5) The sleeping room investigators discovered at 778 Woodbridge yielded perhaps the most influential photograph of boarding in Detroit (Figure 3:6). This image was used to illustrate “unhealthy living conditions” in the company's internal report “Fifty-One Human Interest Stories,” and was also circulated in three reform-minded publications: the company's *Factory Facts at Ford* (1915), the Detroit Housing Association pamphlet *Homes of today and citizens of tomorrow* (1915) and the government-sponsored study *Michigan Housing Commission Report* (1918).⁵¹ In each case the image is used to illustrate the crowding of boarders and the need for housing reform, through high wages and education, outreach by middle-class philanthropists, and stronger housing regulations respectively.

Ford investigators' photographic practice followed some twenty-five years after Jacob Riis published his influential call for housing reform *How the Other Half Lives*, with its flash photographs of crowded sleepers in New York tenements and lodging houses. While Riis often emphasized the faces and something of the interactions of those he photographed—posing them as sympathetic figures—Ford agents took a different approach (Figure 3:7).⁵² Often visiting during daylight hours, Ford's investigators chose to let empty beds do most of the discursive

⁵¹ See Ford Motor Company, “Unhealthy Living Conditions” in “Fifty-one human interest stories.” The image is published along within a Ford investigator's commentary in Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, pp. 68-69.

⁵² Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1970 [orig. 1890].

work of illustrating crowded conditions. In the often-reproduced image that concerns us here there is an important exception: an infant sleeping in its pram, placed between the empty beds where his parents (including his father, a Ford employee) sleep, and four other empty beds where the couple's boarders sleep. This infant likely accounts for the popularity of the image in Detroit's housing reform discourse: reinforcing reformers' contention that one of boarding's greatest ills was its potential to corrupt children.

The absence of adult boarders in the image is noteworthy. Perhaps several residents of this room were out at the time of the visit, but by the child's age we can assume that one of its parents or some caretaker were indeed present, and behind camera, perhaps at the request of the photographer. A second company photograph taken in the same room during the same visit supports this, as an adult's leg is partially visible its lower right corner (Figure 3:8). The exclusion of the parents and their boarders from view has the effect of suspending the photograph's message in abstraction: the beds and child stand in for crowding and its corrupting influence, but the details of the social life of this boarding room are suppressed. If one or both of the child's parents were present in the photograph and engaging with him or her—perhaps the photographer wagered—the message about crowding and corruption would be lost to a more empathetic reading of the family. If boarders were present interacting—or at least tolerating the child's cries as they surely did on a daily basis—would the reform message be similarly diluted? Boarding, unlike the modern worker's home, involved the negotiation of domestic social units larger and more complex than the nuclear family. Such photographs speak to the complexities of a boarding room's inter- and intra-family domestic relationships—their benefits and their problems—despite the photographers' attempts to suppress them in favor of a powerfully abstracted critique.

Suitcases appear under the left-side bed (Figure 3:7) and recall reformers' critiques of boarders' spare material belongings and their "undependability" as laborers due to a lack of commitment to Detroit. At the same time these suitcases speak to the security that some immigrant workers—Stanisław Markiewicz included—derived from the flexibility to leave if changing circumstances called for it. Investigators presented boarders' few material possessions and multi-use sleeping rooms—rooms used for sleeping, eating, and washing and drying clothes—as evidence of social disorder, but at the same time unintentionally recorded the practices by which workers' created a livable domestic culture with few possessions. In one case for example, as Boyle and Getis note, a photograph intended to represent the crowding of many beds in a dwelling near Ford's Highland Park Plant also reveals one boarder's practice of keeping of a portrait of two women over his bed (Figure 3:9).⁵³ Despite wall space being at a premium in the room, and few other possessions being apparent, this resident saw that clothes were hung carefully so as not to obscure his view of the portrait, with which he perhaps remembered relatives left behind. In a similar way another Sociological Department photograph meant to illustrate the shabbiness and disorder of a kitchen—including walls and ceiling patched with nailed-on building paper and newspaper—nonetheless includes a framed picture of a haloed figure, perhaps a Christian saint, hung at the far left and nearly excluded from view (Figure 3:10).

Investigators' written reports interpret boarders' religious and social practices as well. One agent noted that Mustafa, an immigrant from Turkey, practiced Muslim faith by washing his hands and feet in the yard behind the "squalid" downtown boarding house where he lived before praying three times a day.⁵⁴ Juxtaposing this washing practice with a description of the home's

⁵³ Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, pp. 62-63.

⁵⁴ Ford Motor Company, Human Interest Story Number 38, "Fifty One Human Interest Stories."

unclean environment, the writer apparently intended to show the corrupting quality of the “slums” (Figure 3:11). From another perspective, however, this same practice might be read as proof of the normalcy of the everyday life of boarding or perhaps the capacity of religious faith to ennoble the experience of modest environs. Another Ford agent decried the communal meal of a group of boarders, saying: “empty beer-boxes [were] used as tables in the so-called dining room...I was often present when the people had their dinner or supper – I will never forget it. Knives and forks were objects of luxury; the same opinion was held of plates. The meal was put in a big plate, and everyone ladled the soup out of the plate. Only spoons and fingers were in use...”⁵⁵ What disturbed the investigator might, from another perspective, be seen as making do—or even a meaningful ritual of community—for a group of people with fleeting commitments to Detroit’s industrial modernization. A domestic life of few possessions and little space encouraged a different relationship to the city than that of the modern worker’s home. For those who conceived of and used the boarding house as little more than a space to sleep, the city’s shops, theatres and bars complemented a simple domestic life by providing sustenance and recreation outside of the home. Within a few blocks of the boarding house at 778 Woodbridge, in addition to a wide range of industrial shops, 1922 Sanborn maps reveal that residents could easily walk to a city recreation center with pools and ball fields, an Italian Social Center, a motion picture house and many storefront shops—living to a large degree in the city itself and eschewing the bourgeois ideal of the home as a refuge from urban congestion.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ford Motor Company, Human Interest Story Number 12, “Fifty One Human Interest Stories.”

⁵⁶ Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Detroit, Michigan*, Vol. 4, 1922: Sheets 70, 72, 81, 83 and 86.

Two Hamtramcks

Many immigrant workers did invest in houses on the city's fast growing periphery after establishing well paying work and committing to Detroit. This practice was exemplified by the outward growth of Polish Detroit. At once adopting and resisting reformers' ideals for the modern worker's home and its surroundings, Detroit's early twentieth century Poles expanded their nineteenth century enclaves outward into new subdivisions. In the first decade of the twentieth century—in a context of rapid immigration and inner city crowding—they expanded westerly along Michigan Avenue and northeasterly into a “quiet German-American farming community” that would become the Polish-dominated city of Hamtramck (Figure 2:1 Area 5).⁵⁷ The northeasterly community established St. Florian's Catholic Church in Hamtramck Township in 1907. Building one of the earliest ethnically Polish Catholic parishes in the Detroit area, the 74 families that composed St. Florian's first census surely signaled to other Poles that Hamtramck was a burgeoning center of co-ethnic culture.⁵⁸

Hamtramck's new frame bungalows and duplexes were occupied by a diversity of household types, the duplex providing its owner the opportunity to secure rental incomes or to conserve the extended family structures practiced in the Polish homeland: keeping adult children or other relatives under the family roof in relationships of intergenerational support (Figure 3:12).⁵⁹ Whether out of extended family commitments or economic necessity, many residents of Hamtramck eschewed the ideal of the nuclear family's privacy by bringing additional families and boarders under their roofs. One researcher found that in many Hamtramck houses three or four families lived in dwellings designed for one or two, “allow[ing] not more than three rooms

⁵⁷ Hamtramck Public Library and Hamtramck Board of Commerce, “History,” *Facts about Hamtramck Michigan*, 1956. Burton Historical Collection.

⁵⁸ St. Florian Church, *St. Florian Parish Golden Jubilee: 50 Years*, p.18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 19.

to a family.”⁶⁰ Further reducing privacy, “often one of these three rooms is in turn rented to two or more lodgers.”⁶¹ Polish families also chose to be relatively large: leading the city’s ethnic groups in marital fertility around 1900, at which time, in Olivier Zunz’s sample, fertility rates were more than three times that of the least fertile group, white Americans.⁶² These domestic practices helped Hamtramck and northwest Detroit to become the urban region’s densest area outside of the city core by the late 1920’s (Figure 3:13). Outside perceptions of Hamtramck as a crowded city persisted in the urban culture such that a sociology student ca. 1950, having performed interviews in many Hamtramck homes, found that “congestion” remained a major concern and argued “it is impossible for a family of two adults and four or five children to live comfortably in four rooms as they do. They do not have sufficient privacy, space or air.” But these small frame residences, the lead sociologist who published the student’s remarks hastened to add, “which families generally own, and in which they take great pride, are vastly superior to the tenement house conditions that one finds in our large cities.”⁶³

Reformers’ and journalists’ paternalistic forays into booming Hamtramck reflect its residents’ autonomy from the cultural authority of Detroit’s white American elite. “Hamtramck is not a slum,” investigator Harry Lurie reported to the Associated Charities of Detroit, “it is a new, hopeful little town with splendid possibilities, a new American town in the making,” where residents were “buying their small, neat four or five-room cottages on small payment land contracts.”⁶⁴ Still, Lurie defined Hamtramck residents’ domestic practices in terms of deviation

⁶⁰ National Industrial Conference Board, *The Cost of Living Among Wage-Earners. Detroit, Michigan, September 1921*, p. 7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 250-251.

⁶³ Wood, *Hamtramck*, p.211.

⁶⁴ Lurie, Harry, “Survey of Hamtramck Made for Mrs. Gretter in 1915 by Harry L. Lurie, Investigator for the Associated Charities of Detroit,” (unpublished report), 1915. Hamtramck, Excerpts and Miscellaneous. Burton Historical Collection.

from the ideal and sore need of education through “contact with the higher standards of living of the American workingman.”⁶⁵ Despite their having purchased new homes, Lurie warned that Hamtramck residents showed a limited “knowledge of hygiene,” and that “dirt, disorder, disease, drink—all the evidences of dependency are there.”⁶⁶ Lurie also described a village government failing to provide what he saw as basic civic amenities: educational programs in English and “domestic science,” playgrounds and access to medical care.⁶⁷ Hamtramck’s lack of formal recreation space meant—as another investigator noted with alarm—that children were forced use the streets as playgrounds. “I counted 37 children on roller skates,” the investigator explained, “hanging on the tail end of a team [of horses] that was galloping down the concrete street.”⁶⁸

At the same time, Hamtramck’s municipal independence meant that it was possible for Polish industrial workers to be near to high-paying employment and pursue homeownership in an environment where they felt that their cultural traditions could be shared and practiced freely.⁶⁹ So drawn, Hamtramck’s population became 80% Polish by 1920, with the remainder split between a persistent German population and a new black population.⁷⁰ As Thad Radzilowski explains, Hamtramck and adjoining sections of northeast Detroit were not merely sites for the preservation of an imported Polish culture, but were places where Poles revived and constructed identity. Polish language, history and Catholicism had long been suppressed in a European homeland occupied by the Austrian, Russian and Prussian (later German) empires prior to its 1918 independence. Immigrating to Detroit and locating in the northeast section of the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Lurie, “Survey of Hamtramck.”

⁶⁸ Kruesi, *Hamtramck*, p.7.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 174.

⁷⁰ Kruesi, Walter, *Hamtramck: a Survey of Social, Educational and Civic Conditions with Some Recommendations*, p.5, 1915. Burton Historical Collection.

city, Poles sought and in many ways found the freedom to study and practice their Polish identities like never before.⁷¹

Polish Hamtramck complicates industrialists' and reformers' narratives of homeownership and Americanization discussed in Chapter 1. Even as Ford and the Board of Commerce developed inner-city night schools to Americanize immigrants, the northeasterly expansion of the Polish community proved the resilience of that group's ethnic identity. Indeed, in the booming village of Hamtramck in 1915 "a large proportion" of residents spoke no English, and the enclave had no stable night school program until around 1920.⁷² Poles' ethnic concentration reflected a desire for co-ethnic community and also resistance of the continued discrimination they faced in a Detroit culture dominated by its Anglo Protestant elite, where mainstream newspaper articles persisted in distinguishing "Polaks" from whites.⁷³ It is telling that the new racial concentrations that emerged just north of Hamtramck within the larger Polish bloc were not composed of American-born whites but of other stigmatized groups, "Southern Europeans," Hungarians and African Americans (Figures 2:18, 3:14, 3:15). In a city where Poles continued to be marginalized despite the rhetoric of the "melting pot" championed at the Ford language school, the prohibition of alcohol became a proxy for identity politics.

Poles felt that prohibition—made law in majority-white, middle class Highland Park in 1916 and enforceable across Michigan around 1918—was an attack on Polish Catholic cultural freedom to be resisted. Consumption of alcohol played "a key role in sociability, celebration and the rituals of daily life" in Detroit's Polonia, and outside observers and critics seized upon the

⁷¹ Radzilowski, *The Polish Experience in Detroit (Polish Americans in the Detroit Area)*, pp. 23-25 (2001).

⁷² Federal Works Agency, Work Projects Administration, *Cosmopolitan Education: a History of Hamtramck High School*, p. 31, 1940, and Kruesi, *Hamtramck*, p. 5.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 30.

alcohol issue in stereotypical descriptions that suggested Hamtramck's residents' otherness within Detroit society.⁷⁴ An investigator for the Associated Charities of Detroit described the residents of Hamtramck as "hard working, hard drinking, thrifty people originating in rural Poland" in 1915.⁷⁵ The *Dearborn Independent*, published under the auspices of Henry Ford and best known for its virulent anti-Semitism, published a scornful review of Hamtramck culture and politics in 1921, describing the city's population as dominated by "Eastern Europeans who like their schnapps."⁷⁶

Hamtramck's municipal independence from adjoining Detroit and Highland Park made it possible for its residents to resist prohibition, and the Hamtramck government and police force became known for their support of the illicit alcohol economy in the 1920s.⁷⁷ *The Dearborn Independent* complained that Hamtramck "steadfastly refuse[d] to annex itself to Detroit," and therefore still contained a supposed 200 saloons within its two square miles in 1921. "These saloons are not blind pigs," the author hastened to add, "blind pigs aren't counted. We are speaking of regular saloons on a pre-war, pre-prohibition basis, with electrical pianos and real beer."⁷⁸ State of Michigan police raids in 1923-1924 superseded Hamtramck's municipal independence: closing saloons, making arrests and disrupting the city's open disregard for the Eighteenth Amendment. The Detroit press followed the state raids with sensationalist reports, and *Free Press* author James Powers described Hamtramck as "The City of Contrasts."⁷⁹

Juxtaposing an image of Hamtramck's worker's houses with a trio of state attorneys and prosecutors, Powers argued that at six o'clock in the evening the city bifurcated into two

⁷⁴ Radzilowski, *The Polish Experience in Detroit*, p. 30.

⁷⁵ Kruesi, *Hamtramck*, p.5.

⁷⁶ Commons, Henry, "The Town that Hasn't Felt the New Day," *The Dearborn Independent*, August 27, 1921.

⁷⁷ Teaford, *City and Suburb*, p. 85.

⁷⁸ Commons, "The Town that Hasn't Felt the New Day."

⁷⁹ Powers, James, "Hamtramck, The City of Contrasts," *Detroit Free Press*, March 2, 1924.

Hamtramcks: one of domestic “thrift and sobriety” and another of unrestrained “vice” (Figure 3:16). In many homes the disciplines and pleasures of the ideal worker’s home were abided, as he explained, “decent folk are going home. Hot dinners are waiting. There are easy chairs beside shaded lights and magazines and papers are handy. Bedtime is not far off.”⁸⁰ Elsewhere in Hamtramck however, in the very same kinds of modest bungalows, state troopers had found a block where “every other house conceal[ed] an illicit still,” not to mention the saloons and the “brightly illuminated resorts” of nearby commercial thoroughfares, where locals and many visitors were drawn for gambling, prostitution, narcotics and alcohol.⁸¹ In Powers’ formulation the Hamtramck worker’s home held both the promise of a thrifty, secure family life—structured around a good night’s sleep for a good day’s labor to come—and also the fear of its corruption by the vice industry and by residents’ isolation from the prohibition cultures of Highland Park and Detroit. In modern homes Hamtramck’s Poles gained domestic conditions compatible with the melting pot bourgeois ideal—private dwellings and access to sunlight and ventilation—but they did so on partly self-defined terms, pursuing an explicitly Polish culture and rejecting the moralism of the dominant, white middle class culture on issues such as park building, family size, and prohibition.

Making Do in Modern Houses

The modern worker’s house was more than a means to secure Detroit’s labor force and a vehicle for economic risk: it was a place where workers’ families negotiated identities—race, class, gender and generational—within the family and the larger urban cultural landscape.

Making modern houses into homes through the choice and use of space, furniture and

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

equipment—and the routines of daily life—Detroiters variously evoked what Gwendolyn Wright has called “the self or the family [they] want[ed].”⁸² Making homes, workers attended to relationships, faith and memory. Using families’ and reformers’ photographs, homemaking curricula, poetry and residents’ recollections as evidence, the making of the worker’s home—and the plural forms that it took in boomtown Detroit—can be interpreted across key spaces.

The Exterior

New bungalows were similar enough to be called monotonous by critics observing them over large areas but were also made distinct enough in their architectural details, decorative touches and plantings that residents could exercise something that Wright ascribes to suburban the suburban middle class home: “the family’s competing desires for uniqueness and social acceptance.”⁸³ Ford worker Thomas Weich and his family for example, including his mother (who had joined them from Germany), chose a bungalow distinguished by the strong articulation of pediments at its main and porch roof gables, and by its bay window (Figure 3:17).⁸⁴ Apparently favored by its builder, this design was repeated in several adjacent homes along Elsa St.⁸⁵ To beautify their new east side home, and perhaps in anticipation of the visiting company photographer, the family hung translucent white curtains behind the front windows and door, and apparently saw that the façade of the house looked clean and well kept. The abstracting gaze of the investigator’s camera, which captures the entire façade and flattens it through a perpendicular angle of view—managing to make the home itself more prominent than the children in the foreground—results in a photograph that the company could publish to illustrate

⁸² Wright, Gwendolyn. “Prescribing the Model Home,” p. 223, in Mack ed., *Home: A Place in the World*, New York: NYU Press, 1993.

⁸³ Wright, Gwendolyn. “Prescribing the Model Home,” p. 216.

⁸⁴ The surname Weich is an alias provided by Boyle and Getis in *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, p. 34.

⁸⁵ This was observed via the street view feature of Google Maps in an image of Elsa St. taken in September 1913, accessed 9-26-2014 at <https://www.google.com/maps>.

its domestic ideal, as the “Representative Home of [a] Ford Employe (sic) at [the] Time of Second Investigation.”⁸⁶

Family photographs suggest that for residents, by contrast, the house front was an active space of everyday life defined more by the affordances of its depth—from front door to street—than by the domestic facade in a two dimensional sense. The sidewalk could become a place of neighborhood children’s play and care; one that extended from the private activity space of the living room into a neighborhood space of interaction and passing cars. (Figure 3:18) In this 1924 photograph, for example, an east-side child in a white hat—Alfred Diplock Jr.—shares a toy automobile ride outside of his family’s Gladwin Ave. house under the supervision of the photographer (perhaps Alfred’s parent). The children’s toy echoed their parents own newfound access to automobiles: in this relatively affluent neighborhood where skilled tradesmen such as a steamfitter and a carpenter lived alongside a white-collar clerk, many residents were updating their properties by constructing auto garages off of the alley by the end of the 1920s—a trend echoed in one survey of Ford workers that found that nearly half owned an automobile in 1929.⁸⁷

Front and rear yards were frequently chosen as an appropriate context for family photographs, suggesting that their aesthetic qualities were indeed appreciated, but the house itself is frequently cropped, shares space with trees, plantings and other landscape conditions, all playing a supportive role to the main focus of the image: the family together. At the leafy front of the Diplock home—ten years after Alfred Jr. rode in the toy car—three other figures posed at the front of the Diplock house in a composition of well-tended grass and trees and bungalow

⁸⁶ Ford Motor Company, *Factory Facts at Ford*, p.48 (1915 edition).

⁸⁷ Very few homes where on the Diplocks’ block had auto garages in 1916 but most had acquired one by 1929: Sanborn Map Company, *Fire Insurance Maps of Detroit*, Vol 8: Sheet 53 1916 and Vol 11: Sheet 75 1929. Neighbors’ professions are listed in R.L. Polk & Company, *Polk’s Detroit City Directory*, 1924. The Ford survey is cited in Peterson, *American Automobile Workers*, p. 81.

porches. The man at center is perhaps fireman Alfred Diplock Sr. (Figure 3:19 at top). In a larger family photograph from the less affluent Poletown neighborhood, south of Hamtramck, another use and aesthetic interpretation of the domestic exterior appears. Three generations are gathered in a photo for the Catholic Confirmation of one of the girls and array themselves around the oldest figure, grandmother. The rear alley and the backs of three neighboring houses are chosen as an appropriate background, the group taking advantage of the large sunny yard and seemingly unconcerned about the ashcans, debris, and power poles that share the scene (Figure 3:19 at bottom). The tending of plants remained an important practice of the domestic exterior even in this less aesthetically self-conscious context, evidenced by the trellis—perhaps for a rose bush—before the window of the white house at right. The tended quality of the house’s yards was surely of more than aesthetic significance to many residents: it was also an index of the effort and care put into planting, and for some a mnemonic register of past evenings spent outside, recalling back even to the earliest days of the subdivision when few houses or plantings could be seen from it (Figure 3:20).⁸⁸

The face of the home could be read in aesthetic terms or as an index of social prestige, but in Detroit’s Polish enclaves it also afforded resident participation in community processions. On days of civic or religious significance—such as the wedding day of Julia Fernowicz and Henry Broszcki ca. 1903 imagined by author Karl Harriman and the actual funeral of St. Albertus’ pastor Fr. Mueller in 1913 (Figure 3:21)—Poles processed through the cottage-lined streets of their east side enclave to mark the occasion. The latter began with “the deep tolling of the bells in the steeple,” as Richard Bak quotes the *Detroit News*, and as this sound passed through nearby blocks the procession itself began, carrying the visual heraldry of banners,

⁸⁸ The notion of plantings as an index of the gardener’s care is informed by Edward Guest’s poem “Home,” from the collection *A Heap o’ Livin’*, pp. 28-30.

candles, crosses and the regalia of the priests and the parish men's and women's societies past many houses. Their facades provided a spatial corridor lined with windows for the eyes of onlookers, porches and front stairs where watchers might gather and converse. Polish immigrants and their children brought the practice of procession with them to new bungalows and duplexes as the city's east and west side Polish districts expanded outward. In a Detroit News photograph of a 1939 procession to commemorate the Polish Constitution, for example, residents gathered on their porches to watch the parade, undeterred by the line of parked automobiles partially obscuring their view (Figure 3:22).

The Threshold

The domestic front door afforded residents a significant threshold experience as they passed between city and home. Poet Edgar Guest speaks to this. Immigrating to Detroit as a child, Guest remained in the city and became a Free Press writer and poet as the city industrialized, styling his deeply sentimental verse—drawn from his own bourgeois domestic experience—as reflections on the home life of the everyman. While his middle class perspective cannot directly stand in for the experiences of a diverse cohort of Detroit workers, it does provide a wealth of domestic material and experiential details to consider when interpreting the modern worker's home. For Guest the door is where a parent pauses to acclimatize themselves to the protected space of the home—a culturally significant aspiration if difficult to achieve—to leave the burdens of the city at the doorstep. This reflected a persistent bourgeois cultural ideal of the home as refuge from the demands of work and the moral impurity of urban space.⁸⁹ For the factory worker with grease on their clothes and body, a variant on this experience might also be had passing by the formal front of the house and entering at the rear, to wash in the kitchen: a

⁸⁹ Volz, Candace, "The Modern Look of the Early Twentieth Century House," *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, pp. 31-33.

practical and perhaps symbolic cleansing away of the residue of the day before joining the family inside, especially for a worker who—as one Ford employee’s son remembers—spoke of his work primarily in terms of not wanting his children to end up doing the same.⁹⁰ Whether entering at the front or through the kitchen, a parent might reflect, as Guest writes:

The day is done, and here I leave
The petty things that vex and grieve;
What clings to me of hate and sin
To them I will not carry in;⁹¹

The ideal of the home as a private realm set apart from the public world beyond—one that proceeded from the nineteenth century Victorian domestic ideal—reflected and reproduced a profound gendering of the social order.⁹² Male-dominated society coded domestic space feminine and private, a site of unpaid work, despite the fact that women’s labor in modern homes made Fordist industrialization possible in so many ways, beginning with the health, nutrition and family stability that it provided to a current and future generation of industrial workers. In this sense the private vs. public distinction, though naturalized in housing discourse, was a fallacy that served to perpetuate male control.⁹³ As Ruth Schwartz Cowan argues, the assumption that domestic life should take the form of single-family dwellings—which prevailed among Detroit reformers and workers in the early twentieth century—manifested the assumption that housework was a responsibility that women would carry.⁹⁴

The Living and Dining Rooms

Furnishing the home—whether with ready-mades or handicrafts, appliances, décor or objects of mnemonic or religious significance—was a process of economic and cultural negotiation

⁹⁰ Pitts, Cornelius (2005). Interview by Louis Jones [print transcript]. Westsider Oral History Project.

⁹¹ Guest, “At the Door (excerpt),” *A Heap o’ Livin’*, p. 132.

⁹² McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place*, pp. 71-73.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 73-81.

⁹⁴ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, p. 152.

assumed to be lead by a mother on behalf of the family. As mass-produced commercial products proliferated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century women's journals and homemaking how-to publications proliferated, promoting and guiding families' increased consumption.⁹⁵ Though their incomes were lower and less stable the families of industrial workers generally read the same magazines and encountered the same consumer ideals as more comfortable families did, but made do nonetheless.⁹⁶ At times homemaking discourse acknowledged the range of consumers' budgets and tastes. Emily Post for example, syndicated authority on etiquette in the American home, argued regarding tablecloths in a 1930s Detroit Free Press' Women's Bureau essay that a conservative white damask was best, but that "course linen, coarse embroideries, all sorts of Russian drawn-work, Italian needlework or mosaic (but avoiding big scrolled patterns), are in perfect keeping—and therefore in good taste—in a cottage, a bungalow or a house whose furnishings are not too fine," as long as one avoided "very ornate, large and arabesque designs," which created a "vulgar effect."⁹⁷

Home economics pedagogy contributed to the emerging discourse on modern homemaking, presenting the daughters of workers and professionals with modern methods and aesthetic preferences through Detroit's schools. The *Outline for the Teaching of Home Making* (1922), developed by the private reform institution the Merrill-Palmer Motherhood and Home Training School in collaboration with Detroit's public and parochial schools, taught girls for example that living room walls should provide an "inconspicuous" background behind the furnishings and ornaments, using neutral colors and avoiding "spotty patterns" that might distract

⁹⁵ Clark, *The American Family Home 1800-1960*, pp. 132-140.

⁹⁶ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, pp. 186-187.

⁹⁷ Post, "Good Taste Today: What Emily Post Says About Correct Table Setting," in Detroit Free Press, *Home Maker's Handibook*, undated (1930s). Bentley Historical Library.

the eye.⁹⁸ Post's essays were widely-read, while *The Outline* was designed for a more circumscribed audience of educators and administrators in Detroit, but both reflected a larger homemaking culture that—as Candace Volz has pointed out—presented consumer choices as the female homemaker's palate for self-expression.⁹⁹

From the perspective of the magazine or the home economics course the new homes of Ford workers' families still left something to be desired. Exemplary “improved” workers' homes photographed by the Ford sociological department—filled with apparently new furnishings and décor—featured boldly patterned wallpapers and cushions, delicately patterned doilies and curtains and bulbous ornamental lamps (Figure 3:23, 3:24). The living room in Figure 3:23, with its centrally-located table and abundance of chairs and decorative objects, suggests a rather formal and honorific environment more akin to a parlor than to the modern ideal of the living room as an open, informal multi-use space. The traditional middle-class parlor featured a centralized table—a real and symbolic reflection of the family gathered around lamplight—and copious objects displaying high-culture affiliations and sentimental connections.¹⁰⁰ While reformers considered it wasteful and anachronistic, some workers' families expressed pride in their increasing access to material things and domestic space with parlor-like rooms even as the middle class was shedding the convention.¹⁰¹

In style and use, the domestic environments of Detroit's and other cities' workers and their families often illustrate preferences, choices and compromises at odds with prevailing

⁹⁸ Merrill-Palmer Institute, *Outline for the Teaching of Home Making*, p. 17.

⁹⁹ Volz, “The Modern Look of the Early Twentieth Century House,” *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, p.34

¹⁰⁰ Grier, Katherine, “The Decline of the Memory Palace,” *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, pp. 50-53.

¹⁰¹ Recall reform-minded planner Charles May's critique of the working class parlor in *Architectural Forum*, cited in Chapter 1. Industrial workers' late adoption of the parlor convention was noted by Lynd and Lynd in their study of 1920s Muncie Indiana, *Middletown*. Also see Grier, “The Decline of the Memory Palace,” *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, p. 66.

cultural ideals.¹⁰² The authors of the Detroit-based *Outline for the Teaching of Home Making* appear to have seen this as a generational problem—implying that in a city where many parents were immigrants and migrants that it was up to the schools to instruct children of the technical and stylistic requisites of modern domesticity. Many domestic objects, however, had recourse to values other than functionality or style and were chosen as expressions of memory, religious faith or cultural identity—values whose power came specifically from their independence from mainstream culture. In Polish Catholic households, for example, it was common to designate a special corner table to display objects of religious significance such as statues, candles, consecrated palm reeds—adding flowers to mark feast days—and to honor family members by hanging a picture of their name-day Saint (the religious figure associated with the person’s birthday).¹⁰³

Students of homemaking were also taught to consider good economy in the tradeoff between cost and quality.¹⁰⁴ Advertisements also reinforced ideal of the home maker—the matriarch of the house—as a responsible manager of the family’s finances as well as their emotional experience: urging customers to create an “atmosphere” conducive to the family’s happiness while also offering credit, by which that happiness could be had immediately and paid for “gradually, as convenient” (Figure 3:24).¹⁰⁵ Ruth Schwartz Cowan has shown that home-making women’s labor only increased in this early twentieth century period—despite ‘labor-

¹⁰² Lizabeth Cohen explores conflicts between workers’ domestic ideals and those of reformers in the period ending in Cohen, Lizabeth, “Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes 1885-1915,” *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 3, Issue 4, Winter 1980.

¹⁰³ Radzilowski, Thad. *Polish Americans in the Detroit Area*, pp. 2,18 (2001).

¹⁰⁴ Merrill-Palmer Institute, *Outline for the Teaching of Home Making*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ For example Brushaber, “The Influence of Home Atmosphere Cannot Be Overestimated (advertisement);” and, for quote, Weil & Co. “Michigan’s Largest Furniture Store (advertisement),” in B. B. Schermerhorn Publishing, *Marriage Record and Hints on Housekeeping: An Indispensable Household Guide* (1920).

saving' technologies and copious advice publications—as they worked to bring something of the emerging higher standard of living to their families. This was especially true in households with many children, and in those for which industrial work made financial security tenuous.¹⁰⁶

Navigating aesthetic and economic values, however, the purchase of fine things on credit was not the only solution. Working class families were, after all, aware of the threat of lost work and the need to save money. The department store People's Outfitting, for example, anticipating strictly cost-conscious buyers in a *Dziennik Polski* advertisement for its clearance sale, explained: “our warehouse is still full of damaged furniture which we sell at cheap prices.”¹⁰⁷

Spatial limits required other compromises in the modern worker's home. While many five and six room bungalows included a dining room adjoining the living room by a cased opening, B.E. Taylor's smaller four room Brightmoor houses did not. Adapting to this—as a promotional photograph from a *Building Age* piece on Brightmoor shows—the living room could be arranged to take on this role (Figure 3:26). Perpetuating a nineteenth century strategy of a multi-use space containing the house's single heat source—the stove—buyers of inexpensive Brightmoor houses could consolidate their activities into the living room.¹⁰⁸ In another spatial compromise the bedroom beyond the doorway (at the left in the photograph) was made to function as a “sitting room” by day and be transformed for sleeping on a pull out couch at night. The curtain at this room's threshold was likely used to keep heat from escaping the living room space—making for a cold bedroom at night. Despite the modesty of the house overall, some of its finest elements are arranged—whether by residents or the developer and photographer—to

¹⁰⁶ See Cowan, “Coal Stoves and Clean Sinks,” *American Home Life, 1880-1930* and Cowan, *More Work for Mother*.

¹⁰⁷ People's Outfitting, “Clearing Sale Soon To Be Over” (advertisement) in *Dziennik Polski*, May 15, 1914.

¹⁰⁸ Volz, “The Modern Look of the Early Twentieth Century House,” *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, p. 37

make the dining table one of its most honorific spaces: the nearness of the light of the front window, the warmth of the stove, and the tablecloth and decorative centerpiece.

Moveable furnishings, finally, allowed the living room to be flexibly transformed into spaces for celebration, gathering and dancing. Families could transform their living rooms for the hosting of social gathering at holidays or occasional celebrations, and as the phonograph proliferated in the 1910s and 1920s these gatherings were often animated by recorded rather than live music.¹⁰⁹ Through music the house party could also be tailored to the conventions of a family or an ethnic group. Music chosen and played on the phonograph, as Lizabeth Cohen writes, was a means to practice shared cultural identity: as when Polish, Italian or Mexican records filled a home with ethnic language and music and helped to create the environment for family or larger co-ethnic gatherings. American migrants from the south were similarly served by a record industry that recognized and served distinct black and white markets for southern-styled music.¹¹⁰

The Dinner Table

The table is a space within the larger space of the home in which it is set, and the meal, as anthropologist Mary Douglas writes, “a conclave.”¹¹¹ The practice of the family dinner afforded Detroit workers a nightly opportunity to coordinate the myriad rules and schedules of the modern family—planning attendance of school functions or negotiating curfew for a special occasion—though second or third shift workers’ families might have to convene at nontraditional times.

¹⁰⁹ Braden, Donna, “The Family that Plays Together Stays Together,” *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, p. 156.

¹¹⁰ Cohen, Lizabeth, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly*, pp. 8-9, Vol. 41, Issue 1, March 1989.

¹¹¹ Douglas, Mary. “The idea of a home,” p. 65, in Lane Ed., *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

The table was also a forum for the practice discipline and gender and generational roles. The conventions of the family table would vary considerably from home to home, being one of many ways that the family could express their own values in the use and interpretation of the modern home. Emily Post, syndicated authority on American etiquette, suggested for example that the oldest member of the family—presumably a grandparent—or a woman guest, be served first as a gesture of deference. “On no account,” however, was the homemaker or hostess to be served first, “unless no woman guest is present.” At the same time, daughters living at home could not be served before their mother.¹¹² Post urged that parents carefully monitor and correct children’s behavior at the dinner table, warning that “exactly like training a puppy,” the inattentive parent risked letting bad habits form. Straight-backed dining room chairs, of course, elicited a tension between the convention that children must “sit up straight and keep their hands in their laps,” and the discomfort and boredom expressed in their “flopping this way and that.”¹¹³ Flatware created a similar opportunity for discipline. Post advised, for example, that a child “must never be allowed to hold his fork, perpendicularly clutched in the clenched fist, and to saw across the food at its base with his knife,” nor to take overlarge bites. The table, she chided her readers, was not a place for creative projects such as “construct[ing] a tent out of two forks, or an automobile out of tumblers and knives, or ty[ing] the corners of his napkins into bunny-rabbit ears.”¹¹⁴

The Kitchen and Bath

The home economics movement and the makers and sellers of home products promoted a germ-conscious culture that put special emphasis on women’s responsibility for a clean home

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Post, “Good Taste Today: What Emily Post Says About Teaching Children Good Table Manners,” in Detroit Free Press, *Home Maker’s Handibook*, undated (1930s).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

and the clean bodies of their family.¹¹⁵ At the same time not all Detroit workers' houses were outfitted with the new standard three-fixture bath. When the poet Guest nostalgically recalls his nineteenth century childhood experience of bathing in the kitchen he describes a practice that persisted in the least expensive new worker's houses on Detroit's growing periphery: children, each in turn standing in a wooden tub in the cold kitchen air, scrubbing and being doused with stove-warmed water.¹¹⁶ Other workers' families purchased homes outfitted with the three-fixture bath and were able to adopt more of the practices figured in magazines.¹¹⁷ Still, families with modern bathrooms could always aspire for more in Detroit's home products market: finer fixtures and finishes such as a shower-tub and brilliantly white tiled walls for example—as tile was prized for being easy to clean.¹¹⁸

Cleanliness was inseparable from the larger set of expectations presented to women by the homemaking discourse, which demanded the pursuit of an—ultimately unreachable—ideal that included the family's health and happiness, their social acceptance and rising future prospects, and the physical beauty of the homemaker herself.¹¹⁹ Students of homemaking might be asked to reflect in class on the question, “Are you too fat or too thin for your height?” In support of such reflection the Detroit Free Press Womens' Bureau published a chart of proper weights by height and age for readers' reference.¹²⁰ Gracefulness in posture, cleanness and healthfulness of skin, teeth, nails and hair, the use of deodorant, and moral self-control were all emphasized in the Merrill-Palmer basic course in homemaking. Girls were even taught to

¹¹⁵ Clark, *The American Family Home 1800-1960*, p. 132.

¹¹⁶ Guest, “The Old Wooden Tub,” *The Path to Home*, pp. 128-129.

¹¹⁷ Schlereth, Thomas, “Conduits and Conduct: Home Utilities in Victorian America, 1876-1915,” *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, p. 234.

¹¹⁸ Cowan, “Coal Stoves and Clean Sinks,” *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, pp. 214-219.

¹¹⁹ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, pp. 186-187.

¹²⁰ Detroit Free Press, “Age, Height and Weight Tables: Female Lines,” *Home Maker's Handibook*, undated (1930s).

maintain an “alert” and “cheerful” facial expression on top of it all, by practicing positive thinking, perhaps while looking at themselves in the bathroom mirror.¹²¹

In one particularly multi-layered advertising image—a 1920 corset ad—the bathroom is a space where children might be taught the values and practices of cleanliness through caring and playful interaction with their mother (Figure 3:27). The woman is undressed to her corset for his bath, which exerts, according to the company, “a gentle urge toward perfection in figure,” and the two of them appear happy in their finely appointed bathroom where a decorative heat diffuser suggests an atmosphere of warm and comfortable central air.¹²² Such an ideal was at once everyone’s and no one’s modern home in boomtown Detroit, where each homemaker made do within particular financial and spatial constraints, pursuing individual priorities and values toward an ultimately personal definition of a better life.

Homemaking discourse posed the kitchen as a site of intensive design, management and labor on the part of the modern homemaker, and experts’ advice on increasing efficiency in kitchen work was in some cases supported by the same kinds of Taylorized time-studies that underwrote Detroit’s turn toward mass production.¹²³ Cleanliness and organization were designed into workers’ “improved” kitchens. Built-in cabinets with doors, for example, (Figures 3:28, 3:29) provided storage for kitchen wares and reduced the accumulation of unwanted dust.¹²⁴ In the first image, a decorative curtain has been added below the sink to hide its pipes and any stored items and a mat has been placed for residents and guests to wipe their shoes

¹²¹ Ibid, pp. 36-43, and Merrill-Palmer Institute, *Outline for the Teaching of Home Making*, p. 36. Publications such as the *Ladies Home Journal* dedicated many of its advertising pages to beauty products in the early twentieth century.

¹²² NuBone Corsets (advertisement) in B. B. Schermerhorn Publishing, *Marriage Record and Hints on Housekeeping: An Indispensable Household Guide*, p. 66 (1920).

¹²³ Clark, *The American Family Home 1800-1960*, p. 157-162, Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, p. 178.

¹²⁴ Clark, *ibid*, p. 157.

before entering. In the second image a spittoon has been placed in the corner to encourage a clean floor. Often subtle variations in style and technology set one kitchen apart from the other, and the images compared here the latter kitchen appears could boast a hot water heater—thus two faucets at the sink—where the former was only served by cold water. The later kitchen also shows aesthetic and technical design in the application of a subdued and stylish two-tone wallpaper scheme above and below the chair rail, and a sink, flat workspace and stove placed in convenient proximity. In such ways—despite the apparent similarity of Detroit bungalows from the exterior—each home’s comforts and style were a matter of independent, competing choices and capacities.

The instructional kitchens used in homemaking courses were called “laboratories” by the authors of the *Outline for the Teaching of Home Making* (1922), suggesting the scientific rationality that reformers ascribed to the modern kitchen.¹²⁵ Advertisers reinforced this ideal, as when and the editors of the Detroit business directory *Marriage Record and Hints on Housekeeping* advised, “cookery is an exact science,” from the selection of foods for quality and economy, to their preparation.¹²⁶ Instinct alone, they urged, was no substitute for training where the kitchen was concerned. The requirements of an efficient kitchen included cleaned surfaces, good sunlight and ventilation, plenty of wall space for storage and equipment, and short distances between interrelated activities. The *Outline* suggested that a basic design education be folded into the teaching of the kitchen module, including the following assignment that reinforced belief in the young woman’s control of the kitchen environment and her responsibility to labor in it:

¹²⁵ Merrill-Palmer Institute, *Outline for the Teaching of Home Making*, p.4.

¹²⁶ B. B. Schermerhorn Publishing, *Marriage Record and Hints on Housekeeping: An Indispensable Household Guide*, p. 11 (1920).

Select a floor plan for a house and locate in the kitchen the following equipment:

1. Sink
2. Stove
3. Table
4. Storage—Supplies, Utensils, China, Cutlery, Linen
5. Refrigerator
6. Chair

In locating equipment consider:

1. Light on working surfaces, day and night
2. Distance to be travelled between working spaces
3. Perform following duties and trace route:
 - a. Clear dining table and wash dishes
 - b. Prepare mashed potatoes and serve

The assignment was pushed beyond a single experiment as well, requiring students to “try various arrangements and compare [their] desirability by tracing [the] working path,” as well as engaging with their own mother for a critique of their chosen design, asking her, “can the kitchen equipment be arranged so that it will be more convenient?”¹²⁷ In this way homemaking courses staged a dialogue that might serve as a lesson for both mother and daughter.

The Bedroom

The spatial organization of the modern home and its bedrooms—discussed in Chapter 2—manifested an ideology of privacy called for the grounds of sexual propriety.¹²⁸ The emerging housing standard (a much higher standard than most workers could aspire to a generation earlier) called for purpose-built bedrooms--two or three of these such that parents could be separated from children, and children separated by sex.¹²⁹ This measure reflected a shift in American culture in which children were increasingly perceived as sexual beings in the early twentieth century—following the work of Sigmund Freud for example—and as such propriety

¹²⁷ Merrill-Palmer Institute, *Outline for the Teaching of Home Making*, pp. 26.

¹²⁸ As Mark Wigley points out, the construction of private space cannot be separated from the construction of the ideology of privacy itself, *Sexuality and Space*, p. 349.

¹²⁹ Building on the work of Thomas Hubka this standard is discussed at length in Chapter 2.

called for bedrooms to be separated by sex where possible.¹³⁰ By setting bedrooms behind or above the more public, more visually exposed space of the living room, modern bungalows and duplexes represented and reproduced the value of privacy for, and within the family.¹³¹ Thus situated in private bedrooms children were free to dream but their activities and movements could be guarded well by parents, many of whom surely shared Ford's notion that "from 12 years of age to 18 especially is a time when [children] should be guarded well, and not allowed to contract habits and vices injurious to their welfare and health."¹³² The comfort of children's bedrooms was, of course, highly contingent on circumstance and expectations. In one Detroit bungalow's unheated attic, for example, three boys from a family of eight children slept—as one recalled in his oral history—close together under "lots of bed covers" to make it through the Michigan winters.¹³³

Ford sociological investigators collected photographs of workers' "improved," private bedrooms on their return visits, juxtaposing these with images of boarding house sleeping rooms in company publications.¹³⁴ In one a half-curtained window—source of daylight and ventilation—is centered in the frame and illuminates the room (Figure 3:30). In its glaring light the stark whiteness of what may well be new bed linens, tablecloth and curtain are emphasized. Each element contains a touch of ornament from the floral motifs on chair backs and bed frame to the tasseled fringe of the tablecloth. Residents are excluded from the image, but something of

¹³⁰ Calvert, "Children in the House," *American Home Life 1880-1930*, p. 87. This was also a period when workers' children began to receive extended school education and enjoyed delayed entry into the workforce.

¹³¹ This analysis has been informed by Beatriz Colomina's analysis of privacy, sexuality and voyeurism in the homes of Adolf Loos in *Sexuality and Space*. In its own simpler way the modern bungalow situated the bedrooms as a private space where, in Colomina's words, "sexuality is hidden away," p. 82, 90.

¹³² The Ford Sociological Department pamphlet "Helpful Hints and Advice" is quoted here, a document discussed at length in Chapter 1. Quoted also in Levine, *Internal Combustion*, p. 23.

¹³³ Seldon, Felix (2005). Interview by Louis Jones [print transcript]. Westsider Oral History Project.

¹³⁴ See for example Ford Motor Company, *Helpful Hints and Advice*, p. 12.

their choices and experience shows through in the objects displayed in the room. Catholic iconography appears in two hung pictures, edges slightly curling: one a heavenly scene depicting God in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and the other a Madonna and child. Below these is a more enigmatic image: a seated woman with two kneeling children and an infant about her. Cycles of regular prayer appear to have been practiced in the quiet and the privacy of this room, as a Christian rosary has been hung on a nail to the left of the religious pictures. A tabletop clock and a November calendar also signal that the rest and prayer of the room were regulated by the precision of modern time, of daily and weekly cycles of work, of appointments and planned events, and perhaps each morning the responsibility to wake before the rest of the house to light the stove or feed the furnace.¹³⁵

Finally, the intimate space of the bedroom was a site of birth and death in many homes, events that transformed the meaning of that space for residents. One Detroitier recalled the front bedroom of his childhood home on the west side of Detroit as the room where he was born—a spatial memory important enough to the family that he recalled the fact some eighty years later. “Most of the family was born there in the home,” he added.¹³⁶ The poet Guest reflects on another intensely emotional change in family life: death at home. He suggests—as Bachelard would surely agree—that such events thereafter change the experience of the spaces where they occur. The death room may become charged with new significance in the emotional lives of the witnesses to a family member’s passing, causing the home to become “dearer,” and even “sanctified.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Guest, “When Father Shook the Stove,” p.154-155.

¹³⁶ Seldon, Felix (2005). Interview by Louis Jones [print transcript]. Westsider Oral History Project, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Acc# UOHOO1949.1.

¹³⁷ Guest, “Home (excerpt),” *A Heap o’ Livin’*, p. 29 (1916). See also Guest, “Home and the Baby,” *Just Folks*, pp.173-174 (1917).

A Better Life on the West Side

Many African Americans migrated to industrial cities such as Detroit seeking better paying work, distance from Jim Crow segregation, and for some, a “way off the farm.”¹³⁸ Detroit’s black community grew precipitously, especially during the migration waves of 1916-1917, as the war bolstered Detroit industries, and 1924-1925, as the drop in European immigration created a labor shortage.¹³⁹ These migrations, as Richard Thomas argues, must be read in terms of migrants’ agency. Labor agents’ encouragements and word of the Five Dollar Day surely enticed migrants, but at the same time many local elites such as business owners and clergy worked to dissuade black workers from migrating northward. In the end—like their European peers—many Southern blacks *chose* the path of urbanization and industrialization for themselves despite the risks and the separation from family that this required.¹⁴⁰

Industrial jobs paid better than those left behind, but African Americans were largely confined to the least desirable positions such as foundry and paint shop work in the early twentieth century.¹⁴¹ Worse, though, were the restrictions on African Americans’ residential movement. The lower-east-side side of the city—an area where many immigrants such as Germans, Syrians, Lebanese, and Russian Jews mixed with African Americans at the turn of the century—became an increasingly crowded black ghetto during the 1916-17 migration wave. Violent skirmishes and racially restrictive covenants, along with the outward flight of European residents, showed newly-arrived African Americans that they were largely unwelcome outside of this constrained space where many lived as boarders in the most dilapidated nineteenth century

¹³⁸ A son’s recollection of his mother’s reason for migrating from Tennessee to Detroit. Combs, Julius (2005). Interview by Louis Jones [print transcript]. Westsider Oral History Project, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Acc# UOHOO1949.1.

¹³⁹ Thomas, *Life For Us Is What We Make It*, p.26.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 22-24.

¹⁴¹ Babson, *Working Detroit*, p.41 (1986).

structures.¹⁴² On the lower east side there was little chance to buy property and landlords and leasing agents extracted exorbitant rents—charging black workers more to board in old structures than their white peers might pay to rent or to buy a modern bungalow near to the new industrial centers.¹⁴³

At the same time, renting as opposed to buying offered a similar benefit of flexibility that it did for European migrants, allowing many facing unemployment in the 1920-1921 recession for example to leave the city and enabling others to save money and make extended trips back to the south that a mortgage might have prohibited.¹⁴⁴ “Making do” on the lower east side, despite the hardships, residents made meaningful domestic lives. Space could be sacred even in the densely settled lower east side. One Detroitier recalled visits to his grandmother’s house in the area in the 1920s, for example, in terms of the strict hierarchy of spaces that she required. “The blues and jazz [were] controversial then,” he explains, “A lot of people didn’t want jazz in their house because jazz came from whorehouses.” His grandmother refused to have this music played in her parlor, though she allowed it in the kitchen or on the back porch. “I don’t want that devil music in here,” he remembers her saying (Figure 3:31).¹⁴⁵

Despite the many restrictions on their residential movement a small cohort of African American workers and professionals gained a foothold on the west side around 1915 and began to establish their own culture of homeownership and social advancement.¹⁴⁶ As one resident recalls, his father—who worked at Ford—had migrated alone to the city and when his mother arrived around 1920 the family began renting half of a two family flat on the west side. “I think

¹⁴² Levine. *Internal Combustion*, pp. 44-59.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas, *Life For Us Is What We Make Of It*, pp. 28, 38.

¹⁴⁵ Oral history of Paul B. Shirley in Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁴⁶ Washington, “Environment,” and “Social Classes Among the Negroes of Detroit,” *The Negro in Detroit*, 1920.

It was there he saw them build our house on 30th Street,” as the west side enclave was emerging. “He told my mother, “I am going to buy that house.”¹⁴⁷ Former residents maintain a group to this day called the Westsiders, and many gave oral history interviews in 2005 that are rich with recollections of home and neighborhood life there in the 1920s and 1930s. The Westsiders and their interviewer emphasize that many prominent Detroiters grew up in the district, arguing that the particular culture of social advancement that their parents cultivated there helps to account for their successes. Most of the interviewees hold advanced degrees and have had distinguished careers, so it is important to acknowledge that their point of view is not universal to west side culture. Many interviewees’ fathers worked at Ford, for example, who research has shown disproportionately hired married and more highly educated African Americans in the early twentieth century—giving a sense of the west side cohort’s particularity.¹⁴⁸ Still, the domestic experiences they recall detail an important case of making do: a parallel practice of black modern domesticity in a city whose dominant domestic ideal was coded white.

The west side African American neighborhood expanded—despite nearby white residents’ at times violent efforts to defend the color line, as will be discussed in Chapter 4—and came to be bounded by Epworth to the west, Warren to the south, Tireman to the north, and (prior to later expansion) by Grand Boulevard to the east. As one Westsider recalls, these boundary lines were understood in racial terms: Tireman divided black from white and Warren divided blacks from Poles. One resident recalled crossing into the to the Polish area occasionally on specialty shopping trips, but added her great uncle’s observation that from the earliest days of

¹⁴⁷ Jefferson, Horace (2005). Interview by Louis Jones [print transcript]. Westsider Oral History Project.

¹⁴⁸ Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, p. 62

the west side neighborhood “the only blacks that crossed that [Tireman] line [between blacks and whites] were workers in the homes over there.”¹⁴⁹

In Detroit’s modern domestic ideal of the early twentieth century a woman’s labor was to be focused on house and family—rather than on outside employment or serving boarders. Ford reinforced this convention by withholding profit sharing from women on the basis, he argued, that their employment was considered temporary and would end upon marriage.¹⁵⁰ In this theory, male workers’ higher incomes would support a ‘single-breadwinner’ model of the family economy. Realtors’ descriptions of home life furthered this myth by describing the comfortable home in terms of the care of wives and mothers. Even the architecture of the modern bungalow—with more rooms, windows, and furnishings to clean and care for than in the traditional cottage, and an independent kitchen and closets full of ready-made clothes—reinforced the ideal by increasing the labor required in homemaking. Despite this, many Westsiders recall a more complex system of family labor. When they were children in the 1920s, some Westsiders’ fathers worked in Ford’s Rouge Plant foundry (day or night shifts), while another’s worked as a barber, but in each case these children’s mothers worked as well: one as a social worker, others doing “day work” cleaning and ironing in other peoples’ homes.¹⁵¹ Domestic work outside of the family home was the least desirable but by far the most common job among African American women in early twentieth century Detroit.¹⁵² Westside families managed to bring in enough income to live in modern homes, but not easily and not simply through the ‘generosity’ of industrial pay. Indeed many married women—black and white—worked for pay outside of the

¹⁴⁹ Mayfield, Jean Earnst and Horace Jefferson (2005). Interviews by Louis Jones [print transcripts]. Westsider Oral History Project.

¹⁵⁰ “Dr. Shaw Says Women Should Be Included in Profit-Sharing,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1914.

¹⁵¹ Blackwell, Catherine Carter, Julius Combs, Horace Jefferson, Jean Ernst Mayfield and Felix Seldon (2005). Interviews by Louis Jones [print transcripts]. Westsider Oral History Project.

¹⁵² Washington, “Industrial Status of Colored Women in Detroit Today,” *The Negro in Detroit* (1920).

family home in the 1920s despite the ideal of the male industrial breadwinner, as Ruth Schwartz Cowan notes.¹⁵³

It may well be that west side women performed the lion's share of homemaking tasks despite their outside employment, yet the staging of children's chores provided some labor and a way for parents to reproduce bourgeois values in their children, such as pride in the home's beauty and cleanliness. "This was their property," one interviewee said, explaining the domestic values of his parents' generation on the west side. "They wanted this property. They wanted to keep their homes up, paint them, have lawns, all of that sort of thing." In a city where most neighborhoods were defended against black homeownership, having a home was "a big deal," and home-making practices celebrated it.¹⁵⁴ "Mama paid me a penny a dandelion," one Westsider recalls, "which we had to get out with a dandelion weeder because cutting them does not do anything but promulgate more dandelions." She performed this task and "the sons would do the mowing."¹⁵⁵ Perhaps her father, as others' had, took pleasure in watering the lawn to keep it green or in gardening to produce fresh vegetables. Another interviewee recalled the dread that home beautification brought him as a young man, recalling, "as soon as the snow melted, I had to turn up the dirt all around the fence. My mother loved flowers. She was known as 'The Flower Girl.' So I had to go all round the fence and turn up the soil around there. I hated this."¹⁵⁶ (Figure 3:32)

The interior of the home, despite its being more private, was cared for with public view in mind. "My Mother would not have tolerated your not making your bed before you left out of the house," one Westsider remembers, "because something might happen to you and someone might

¹⁵³ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, p. 182.

¹⁵⁴ Jefferson, Horace (2005). Interviews by Louis Jones [print transcripts]. Westsider Oral History Project.

¹⁵⁵ Mayfield, Jean Ernst (2005). Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Jefferson, Horace (2005). Ibid.

have to bring you back.”¹⁵⁷ Children polished wood furniture and floors, washed clothes and cleaned dishes, and practiced at the piano on the west side, some rewarded for their efforts with access to the radio during Sunday evening programs.

Practices of home making taught pride in the owned and well maintained home, and its cycles of effort and delayed gratification were entwined in the cultural value of social advancement. Of his parents’ generation, one Westsider explains, “their values were values of hard work and instilling that and education into their kids.”¹⁵⁸ In some west side homes industrial labor was celebrated but in others parents aspired that through persistent effort and higher education their children could escape foundry labor and domestic day work. The former, one Westsider noted, was “hard and dirty and we could see that by how [my father] looked when he came home. And he talked about the fact that he didn’t wish to see us in that kind of situation.”¹⁵⁹ Like the Polish autoworkers who hedged their bets by boarding—to maintain the flexibility to leave the industrial city in an economic downturn—African American foundry workers on the west side exhibited their own arms-length relationship to industrialization, tying their own careers to it but only in the hope that their children could leave it to pursue more secure and less back-breaking work in the future.

The porch and the neighborhood reinforced the training of children for social advancement through their urbanism of dense social interaction, and through neighbors’ watchful “eyes upon the street.”¹⁶⁰ Jane Jacobs seems to have missed this phenomenon in the unfamiliar setting of the modern worker’s neighborhood when she argued, “Detroit is largely composed,

¹⁵⁷ Combs, Julius (2005) Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Jefferson, Horace.

¹⁵⁹ Combs, Julius (2005). Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, pp. 29-54. In this influential chapter Jacobs argues that the density of “eyes upon the street” facilitated by the urbanism of her Greenwich Village neighborhood made it safe.

today, of seemingly endless square miles of low-density failure.”¹⁶¹ Westside neighbors’ spent social evenings on their porches and “if there were somebody from outside the neighborhood, they were spotted. They were watched.”¹⁶² These ‘eyes on the street’ disciplined children’s behavior on the west side. Among the other families on the block “it was an extended family relationship. If you did something bad, you got a spanking from [the neighbor who saw you]. When you got home, you got a second spanking...”¹⁶³ On the west side the work that African American residents put into beautifying their homes, and protecting and disciplining their children and neighborhood, can be read as a form of resistance in the context of a culture of white supremacy and racial segregation. As the author bell hooks notes, in a caveat to feminist readings of the home that—rightly—emphasize women’s domestic work as exploitative, African American women’s homes and the labor put into them also represent “a site of resistance,” a place where the dignity of the family could be restored in a hostile urban world.¹⁶⁴

Conclusions

Detroit workers’ modern domestic cultures were built up through their own choices and everyday practices. Every step of a worker’s engagement with the Fordist social order—from the decision to migrate, to the decision to pursue a modern home, to the everyday labor of making the individual house a home in the face of economic constraints and insecurity—express that agency. Despite the influence of melting pot rhetoric and the domestic ideals presented by elites such as reformers and product sellers, Detroit’s residential periphery was defined by the plurality of its residents’ approaches to home. In this sense Detroit remained what one commentator called

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 204.

¹⁶² Seldon, Felix (2005).

¹⁶³ Jefferson, Horace (2005).

¹⁶⁴ hooks, “homeplace: a site of resistance,” in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, pp. 68-73. See also, McDowell, Gender, Identity and Place, p. 89.

“a city of strangers” through the 1920s, in which the pursuit of better lives in independent houses and in neighborhoods defined by race, class and ethnicity, reproduced social divisions.¹⁶⁵ In the city’s expanded periphery “new immigrants” such as Poles, African Americans, and socially distinct groups of working class whites built distinct, spatially segregated subcultures, further fragmented in the independent making of nuclear family homes and lives. This acknowledgement of workers’ agency does important historical work. It suggests that the crises that this Fordist society created and faced in the mid and late nineteen twenties—those of racial conflict and economic collapse—must be engaged not only as hardships that Detroit workers were pressed into by the policies of industrialists and real estate developers but as conditions that workers co-authored in their pursuit of better lives.

¹⁶⁵ Commentator Cyrill Player’s thoughts on the “city of strangers” appears at the top of the first page of this chapter.

Figures

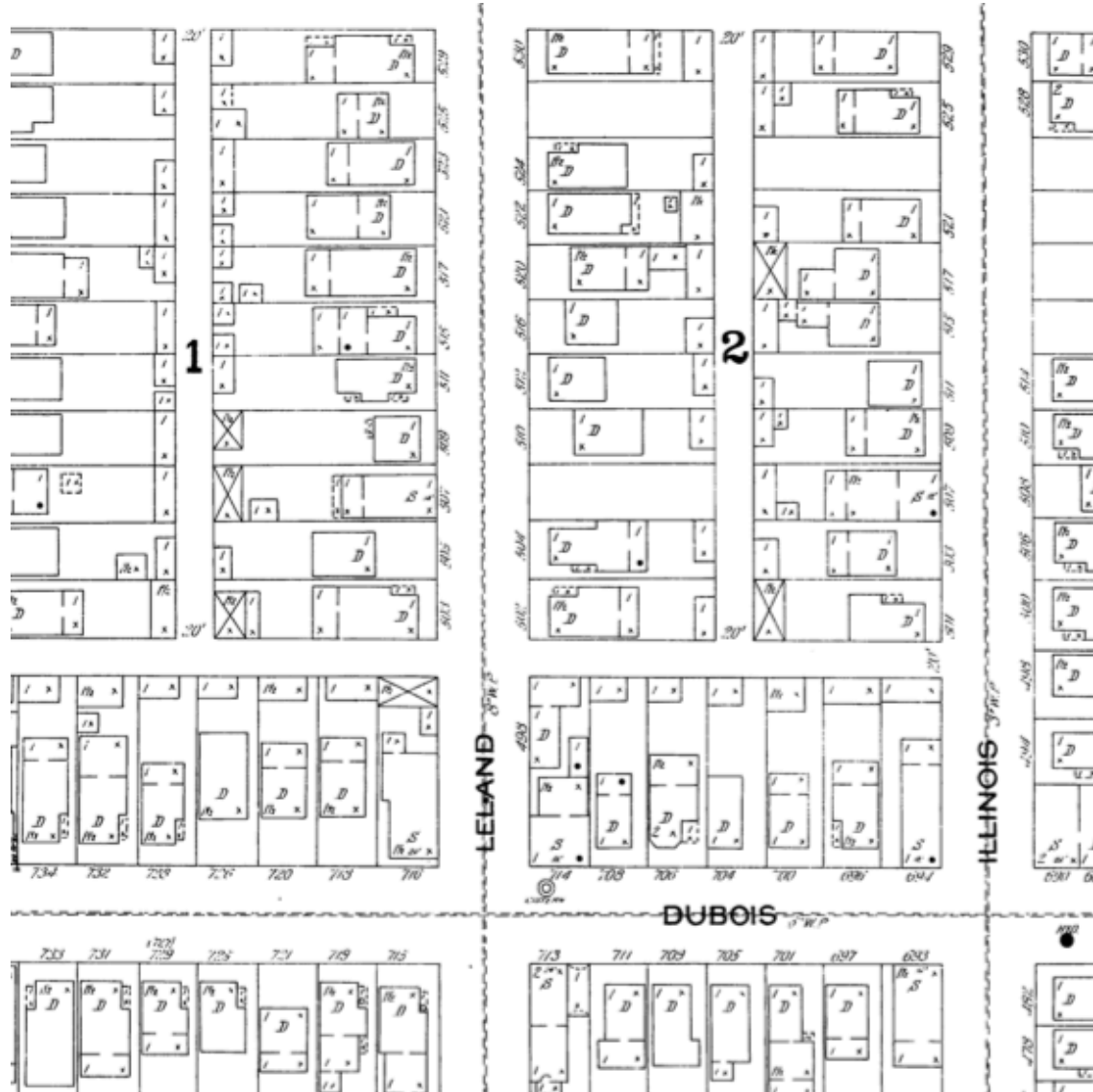


Figure 3:1: Polish worker's cottages in the nineteenth century, northeast of downtown Detroit: most are single-story frame structures with shingle roofs, many as small as 500 square feet. Incremental construction practices are suggested by the large number of additions made at the rear of existing cottages and the informality of construction practices is evidenced by the lack of consistent setback lines, creating a sawtooth effect at the street line.¹⁶⁶

Sanborn-Perris Map Co., *Insurance Maps of Detroit Michigan*, Vol. 3, Sheet 39, 1897.

¹⁶⁶ See Harris, "Self-Building in the Urban Housing Market," *Economic Geography*, Vol 67 No. 1, January 1991.



Figure 3:2: Fine homes on Jefferson Avenue in the nineteenth century – perhaps resembling Henry’s interpretation of the white American domestic ideal.
“Streets; Jefferson; History (1890’s)”, Wayne State University Virtual Motor City Collection



Figure 3:3: “Switching Day,” Polish custom. Despite the pressures that rapid early twentieth century immigration placed on the Polish enclaves built decades earlier, this playful image—used by The Detroit News as a representation of customs in the “Foreign Colonies”—suggests that the pleasures of Polish domestic and community life persisted despite the pressures of industrialization. The ritual depicted is that of “Switching Day,” (Dygus Day) celebrated on Easter Monday by tapping family or friends with a willow switch as a sign of affection.¹⁶⁷
“Foreign Colonies; Polish,” Wayne State University Virtual Motor City Collection, 1916.

¹⁶⁷ The Switching Day tradition is described in the WSU Reuther Library’s caption for the above image, accessed at <http://www.reuther.wayne.edu/node/7211>, March 23, 2014.



Figure 3:4: The rejected awaiting return passage at Ellis Island. Steiner writes: “not merely the dangerous elements are refused admission, but those who for reasons of ill health of mind or body, or inability to work, are likely to prove a hindrance rather than a help.”
Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant*, p. 92-93 (1906).

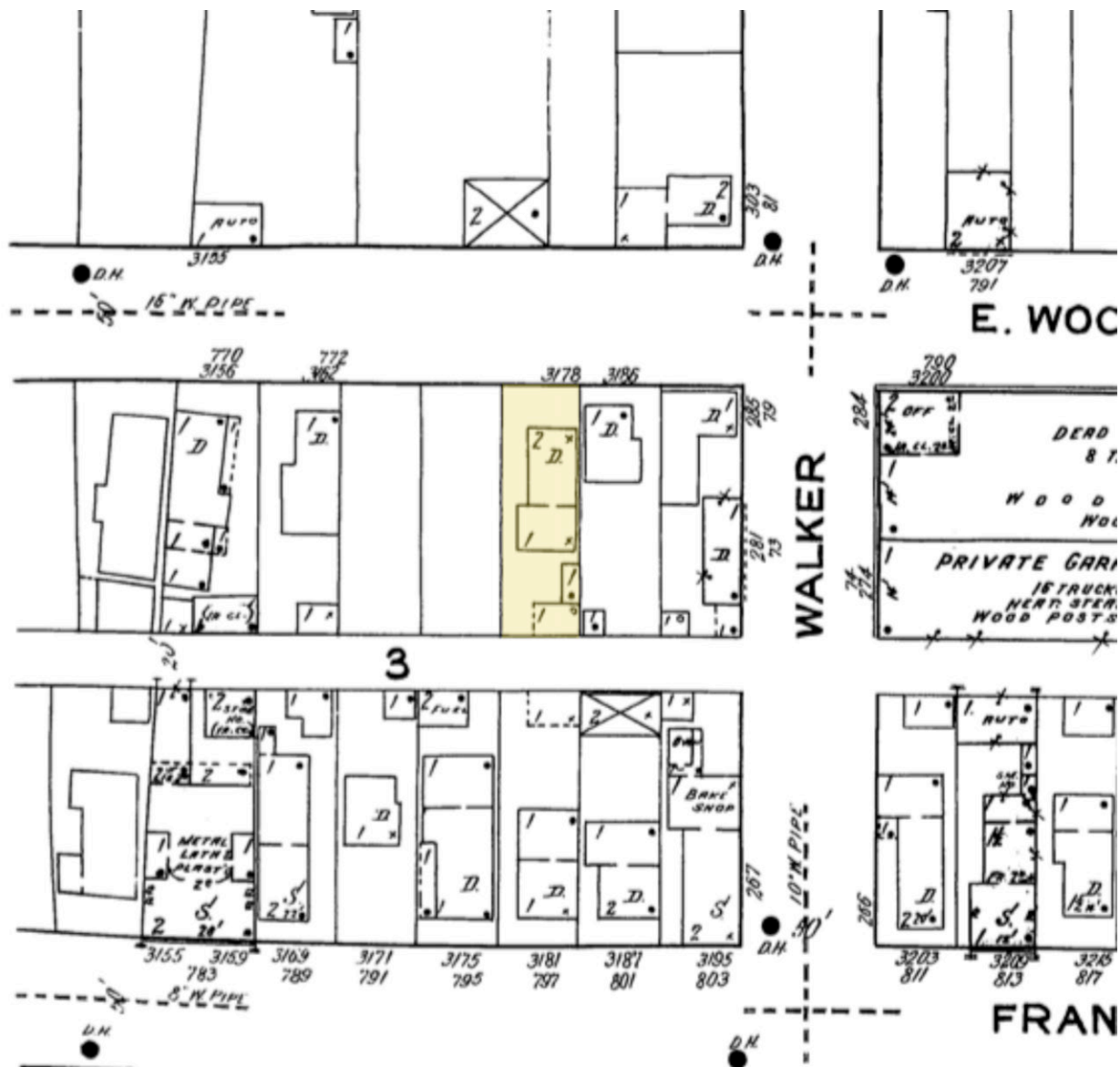


Figure 3:5: 778 Woodbridge (later renumbered 3178 Woodbridge) and context, a neighborhood of nineteenth-century frame dwellings and small industrial shops along the east riverfront and less than a mile from downtown. The home also appears on an 1884 Sanborn map (Vol 2., Sheet 68): the apparent one-story addition at the rear was already in place, suggesting that the structure was already well-used by that time.

Sanborn, *Fire Insurance Maps of Detroit*, Vol. 4, Sheet 84, 1922.

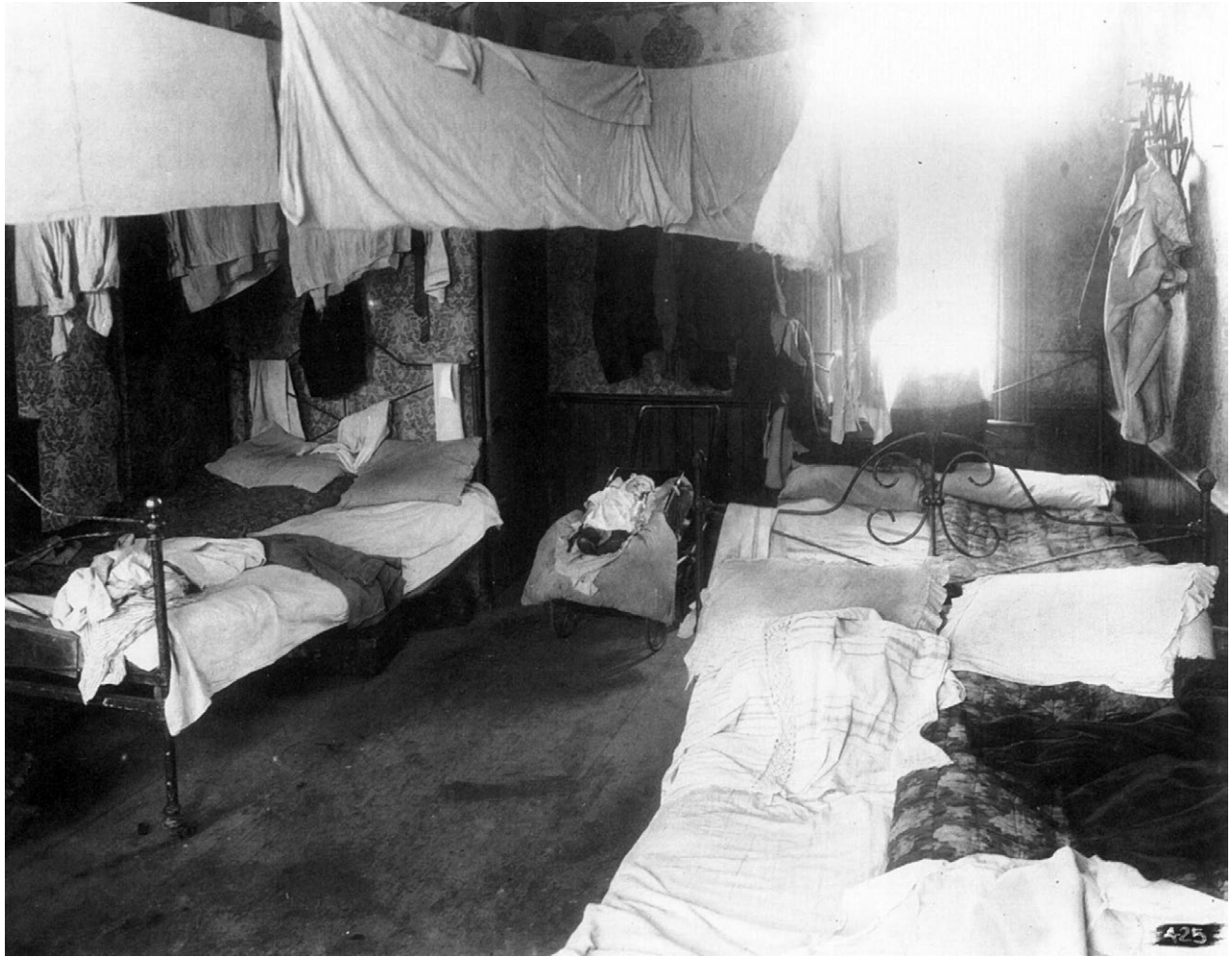


Figure 3:6: Sleeping room occupied by seven residents

Boyle, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons: Images of Working-Class Detroit, 1900-1930*, pp. 68-69 (1997).



Figure 3:7: Sleeping room in a New York tenement.

Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1970 [orig. 1890], pp 58-59.

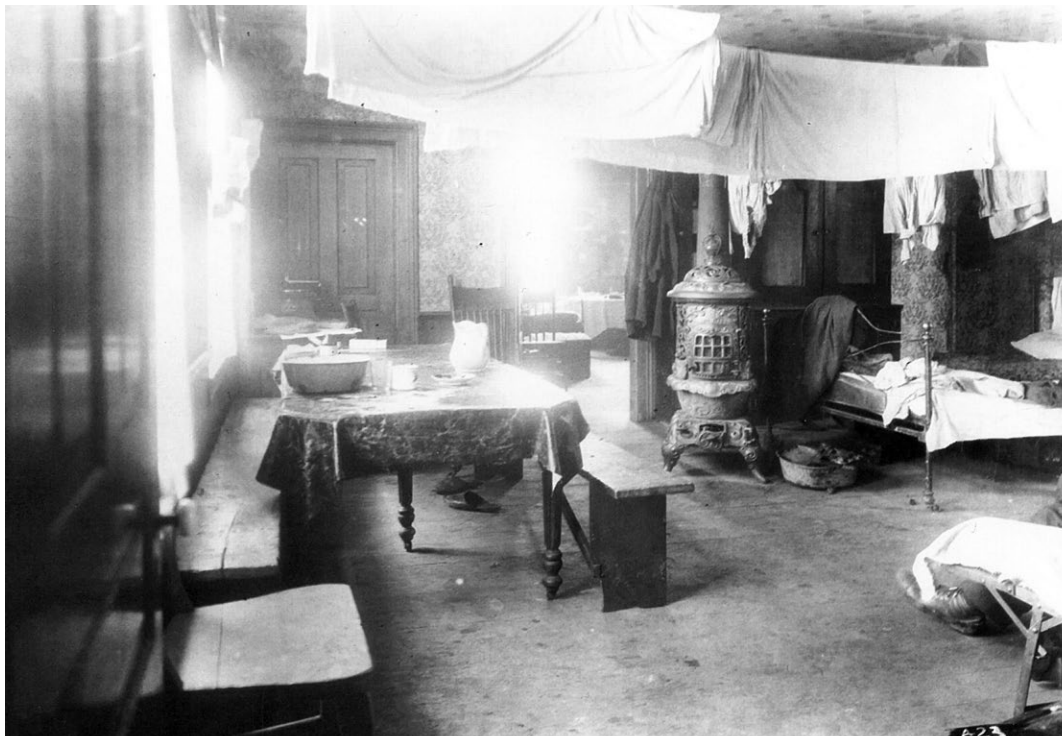


Figure 3:8: A second view of the sleeping room occupied by seven residents.

Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, pp. 68-69.



Figure 3:9: Another sleeping room. The portrait hangs over the bed at left where its owner may be sleeping—it is difficult to say for certain since the photographer cropped the head of the bed out of the photograph. Another resident appears to be sleeping in the rearmost bed. Perhaps these are “third shift” workers required to sleep during the day in preparation for the night’s work.

Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, pp. 62-63.



Figure 3:10: “Kitchen of employee’s home, 1913-1914.”

Ford Motor Company, Acc. 1660, Folder 19, Laboring Classes-Housing.



Figure 3:11: “A Back Yard in the Tenement District.” The Ford Sociological Department described this image as “typical” of yards in the congested inner city: “a first class breeder of flies and germs...dangerous on account of broken glass, rusty nails in boards etc.” The water spigot in the mid-ground at center, located between the two sheds, is perhaps similar to the one that Mustafa used to wash before prayer.

Ford Motor Company, from “Fifty One Human Interest Stories.”



Figure 3:12 Aerial views of Hamtramck ca. 1957. Much of the residential development pictured here was completed in the 1910s and 1920s. Note the Dodge (later Chrysler) plant that forms the southern edge of the city in the background (at left) and the prevalence of two story duplexes in the detailed view of St. Florian's Church and surroundings (at right).



Figure 3:14: Population Density of Detroit, 1928. One Dot Represents 250 persons. Note the density of population in and north of Hamtramck.
 Thomas, "The City of Detroit: A Study in Urban Geography," (1928). Fig. 5.



Figure 3:15: Housing east of Ford’s Highland Park plant, aerial. East of the City of Highland Park and north of the City of Hamtramck, this territory was annexed by the city of Detroit in 1916. The Highland Park reservoir (located in Detroit) dominates the background of the image.

This area is a racial crossroads of northeast Detroit, where the Polish majority meets small “Southern European,” African American, and Hungarian Enclaves. St John’s Roman Catholic Church is visible near the Reservoir.

WSU Virtual Motor City Collection (Detroit News), image 43267, undated—probably 1930s.

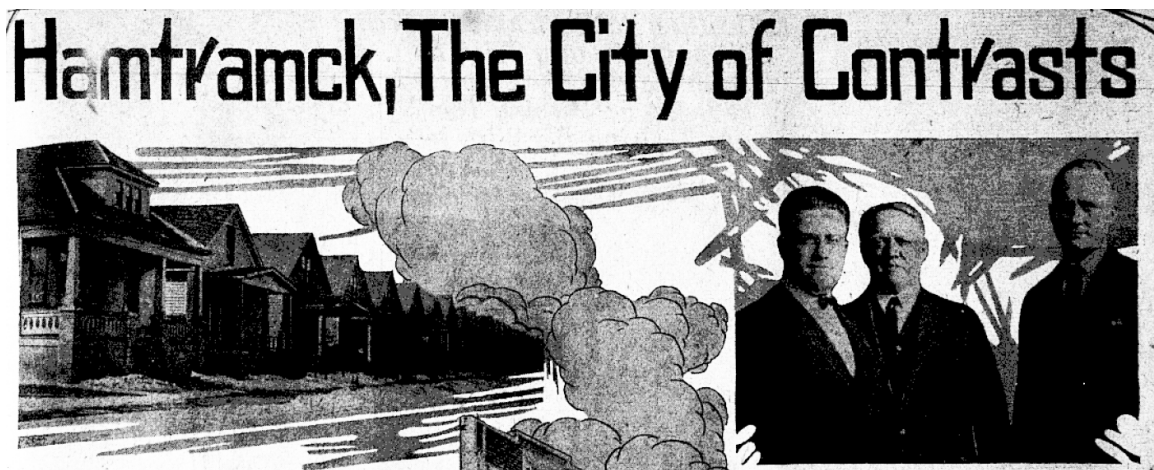


Figure 3:16 “Hamtramck, The City of Contrasts.”
Powers, *Detroit Free Press*, March 2, 1924.



Figure 3:17: 23 Elsa Street

Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, pp. 34-35. In Ford Motor Company, *Ford Factory Facts* (1915)



Figure 3:18: Two children at play on Gladwin Ave., 1924, on Detroit's east side.
Detroit Historical Society Digital Archive, Catalog No. 2011.051.040.



Figure 3:19: Two family photographs. (Top) Three adults pose near 3576 Gladwin, 1935. Detroit Historical Society Digital Archive, Catalogue No. 2011.051.038. (Bottom) Three generations gather in Poletown for a reception following the celebration of a young girl's Communion sacrament in the Catholic Church. Jensen, Cecile Wendt, *Detroit's Polonia*, p. 103.



Figure 3:20: Sitting on the porch of a newly constructed house, 1918. The pole and bicycle in the foreground indicates that while streets and sidewalks were still forthcoming the house had access to electricity and a means of transportation.
Detroit Historical Society Digital Archive, Catalogue No. 2013.045.092.



Figure 3:21: “Funeral, possibly the Cortège of Fr. Francis A Mueller.”
Detroit News, 23 April 1913. Wayne State University Virtual Motor City Collection.



Figure 3:22: Parade Commemorating the Polish Constitution. The Detroit News, 5/7/1939. Wayne State University Virtual Motor City Collection. Polish societies paraded in regalia along Junction Ave. on the west side, commemorating the 1791 Polish constitution. The event ended at St. Hedwig's Church with a celebratory mass.



Figure 3:23: "Living room of an improved home ca. 1914."
Benson Ford Research Center, Acc. 1660, Folder 19, Laboring Classes-Housing.



Figure 3:24: “Living and dining room of an improved home ca. 1914.” The corner of the living room affords a conspicuous place to display meaningful objects, such as the apparent photographs set out on either side of the lamp here.

Benson Ford Research Center, Acc. 1660, Folder 19, Laboring Classes-Housing.

In More Ways than One
**Music Brings Harmony
Into the Home!**

In these days when rapid improvement has brought phonograph-making to its present perfection, it is easily possible for every home to have good music. Even if the beginning should be very small indeed, it is easy to have

A PHONOGRAPH of EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY
What it requires is judicious selection. We suggest that you go to several stores and hear phonographs of other makes—then hear the clear, liquid tones of

“The Sweetest Tone in the World”
The Adora
Plays All Records—Better!

—then compare with the other prices, the factory-to-you price of the *Adora*—

\$68.00

—and you will see that it is really sound judgment to choose this phonograph for your home.

You have a year to pay. The *Adora* carries a five-year guarantee. And any time within a year we will allow you full value on an exchange for a higher-priced machine or a player-piano.

ADORA MUSIC CO.

242 EAST JEFFERSON AVE. Two Blocks from Woodward	863 GRATIOT AVENUE Corner Mitchell	2208 JOS. CAMPAU Hamtramck
2430 EAST JEFFERSON Fairview	1072 CHENE STREET Bet. Frederick and Farnsworth	982 MACK AVENUE Corner Bakwin

**THE Housewife Who
Wants to Be a Capable
Home-Manager**

should think first of the importance of taking care of her husband's income.

When you're buying anything, compare it carefully with other things of similar kinds, to see whether you're buying judiciously.

In buying a phonograph—which is really a necessary part of your home—

**Don't Buy Before
You Have Seen
and Heard**

“The Sweetest Tone in the World”
The Adora
Plays All Records—Better!

It has a sweet, clear tone---and when you buy it

at \$68.00

you actually save the dealer's profit---because we send it right from our own factory to your home!

ADORA MUSIC CO.

242 EAST JEFFERSON AVE. Two Blocks from Woodward	863 GRATIOT AVENUE Corner Mitchell	2208 JOS. CAMPAU Hamtramck
2430 EAST JEFFERSON Fairview	1072 CHENE STREET Bet. Frederick and Farnsworth	982 MACK AVENUE Corner Bakwin

Figure 3:25: Phonograph advertisements. In these paired advertisements the purchase of a quality, value-priced phonograph is presented as both a matter of the emotional “harmony” in the home and of “capable” and “judicious management” of home finances. The Adora (advertisements) in B. B. Schermerhorn Publishing, *Marriage Record and Hints on Housekeeping: An Indispensable Household Guide*, pp. 64-65 (1920).

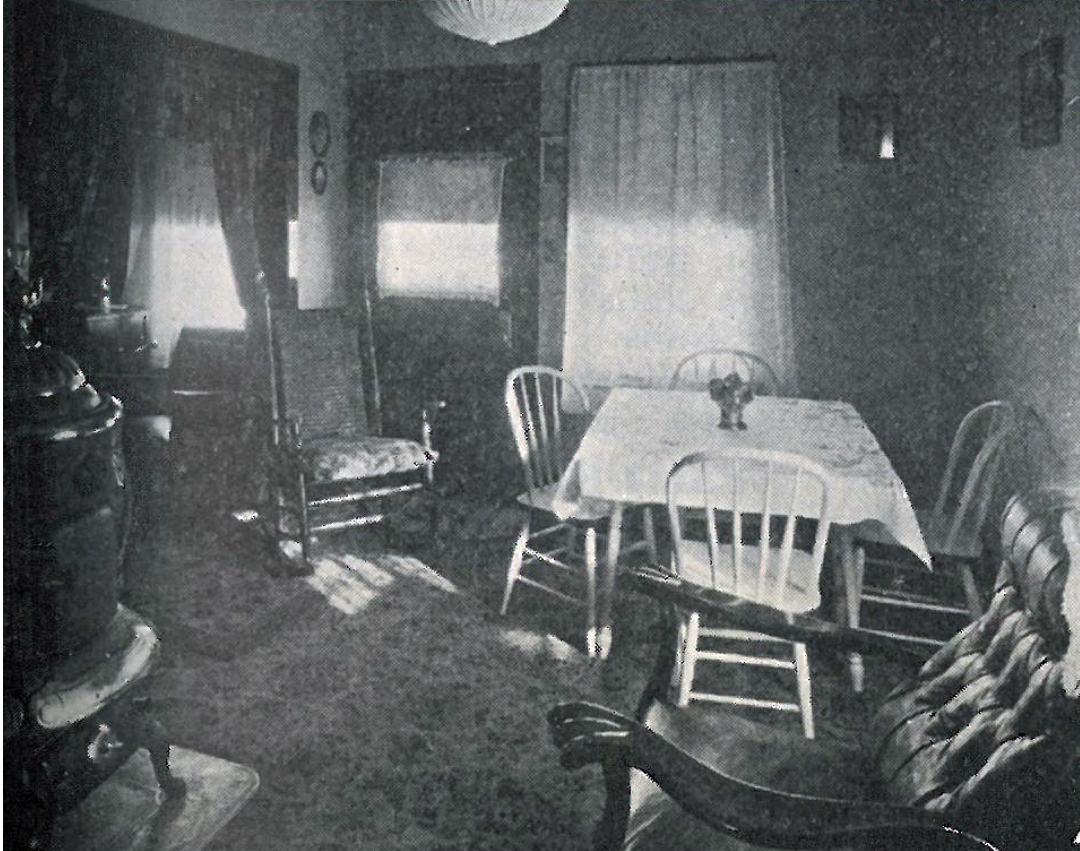


Figure 3:26: Inside a Brightmoor house. The front bedroom has been furnished as a “sitting room” (beyond at left) and the living room doubles as a dining room. *Building Age*, August 1924, pp. 86-87. This image appears in Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*, p. 68.



Figure 3:27: NuBone Corsets advertisement.

B. B. Schermerhorn Publishing, *Marriage Record and Hints on Housekeeping: An Indispensable Household Guide*, p. 66 (1920).

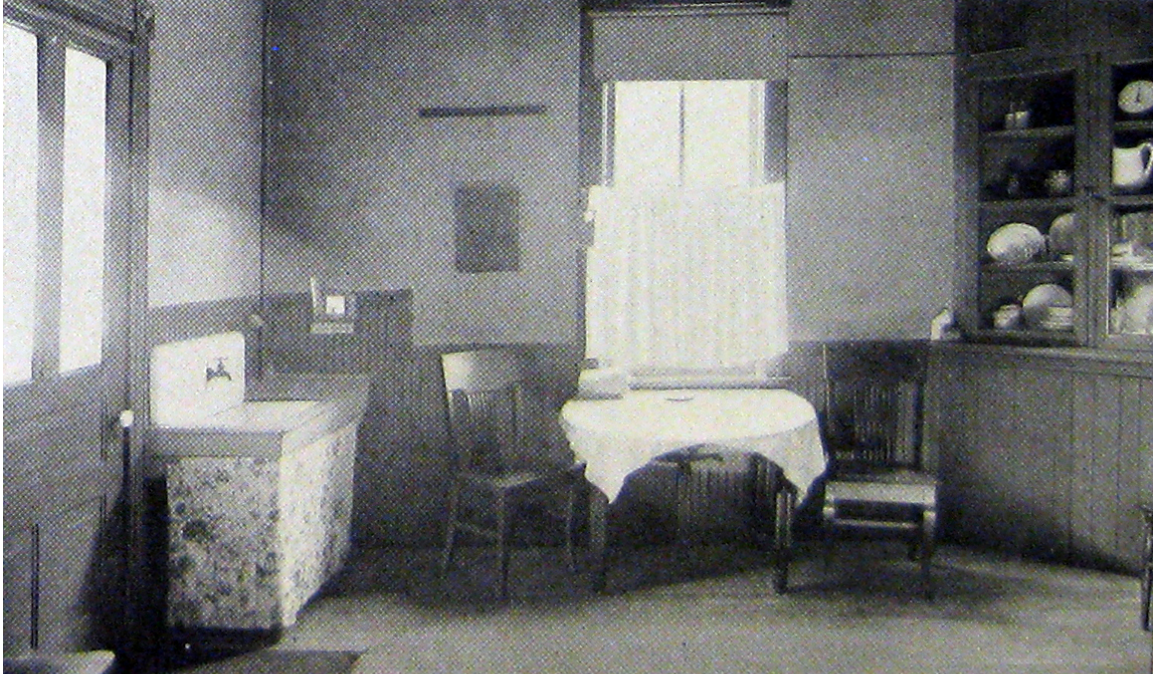


Figure 3:28: a Ford worker's "improved" kitchen.

Ford Motor Company, "Improvement in Home Conditions of the Above Family Shown by Second Investigation," *Ford Factory Facts* (1915 ed.)



Figure 3:29: Kitchen at 23 Elsa St.

Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, pp.36-37.



Figure 3:30: “Bedroom of an Improved Home, 1914.”

Benson Ford Research Center, Acc. 1660, Folder 19, Laboring Classes-Housing.



Figure 3:31: Three sitting on the porch. Photograph by Harvey C. Jackson around the 1930s in Black Bottom, where he lived and worked—part of a series on of his family, friends and neighborhood. Little is known about the couple and infant pictured here, but the image offers a reminder that domestic pride and care were not absent from the lower-east side neighborhood where most black Detroiters lived.

Boyle and Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons*, pp. 62-63. See also Williams, *Detroit: the Black Bottom Community*, p. 37. The original is located in the Harvey C. Jackson Collection at the Burton Historical Collection.

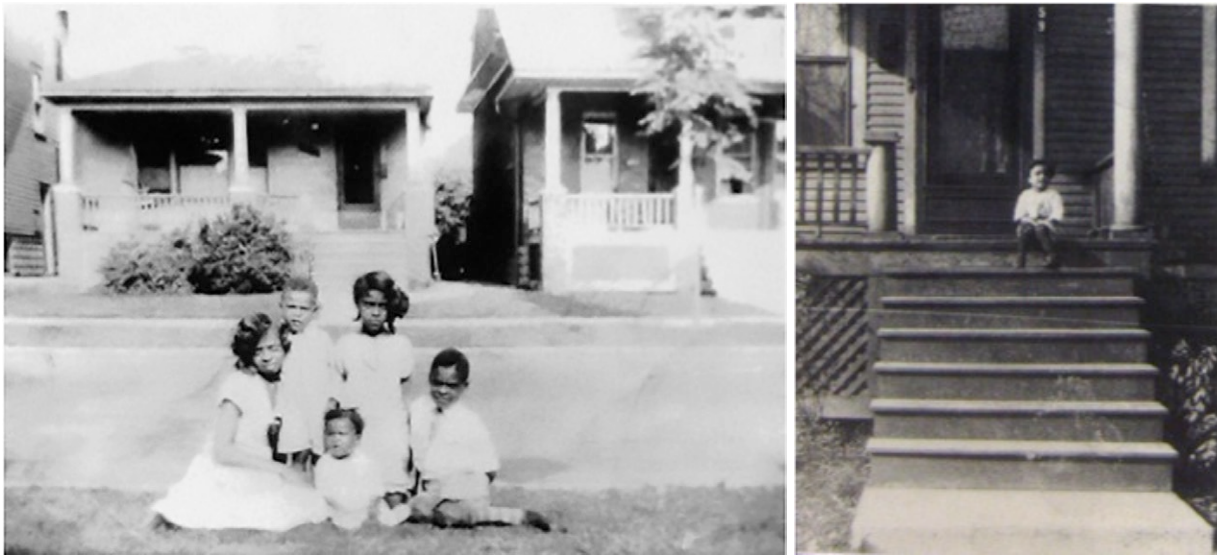


Figure 3:32: Westside family photographs. As observed elsewhere, Westside families chose the front of the home and its neighborhood surroundings as an appropriate site for family photographs.

WestSiders (Society), *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside, 1920-1950*.

Chapter Four

Fordist Urbanism in Crisis

Their Home! Their Home! They had lost it! Grief, despair, rage overwhelmed him...[at] the sight of strange people living in his house, hanging their curtains in his windows, staring at him with hostile eyes!

Only think what he had suffered for that house—what miseries they had all suffered for it—the price they had paid for it!¹

-Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1906)

Modern houses gave shape to boomtown Detroit's promise—one co-constructed by industrial employers, real estate developers and workers—that despite the humblest beginnings if a person committed themselves to a life of labor, in homemaking and in the factory, that their family could attain economic security and upward social mobility. Many workers pursued mortgages and modern houses in Detroit's expanding periphery, accepting the dependence on industrial wages that this implied and the risks and rewards of a speculative real estate market. Workers negotiation with the city's industrial and domestic opportunity structure manifested their autonomous agency to pursue identity formation and family life—articulating values that exceeded or resisted the imperatives of capitalist development.

Workers created a plurality of domestic subcultures in the city's new residential districts, but whether skilled or unskilled, originating in the US or Poland, white homeowners were socially elevated by their segregation from black Detroiters, who were largely confined to

¹ Sinclair, *The Jungle*, pp. 176-177.

the city's aging core. As this chapter will explore, attempts by blacks to cross the lines of racial segregation were met with mob violence and intimidation in the summer of 1925. The climate of fear that these confrontations reveal—both on the part of perpetrators and victims—illustrates that while modern worker's housing set the groundwork for the city's industrial boom it proved to be an uncertain foundation: undermined from the beginning by the corporate social control, real estate speculation and the racial segregation of which it was made.

Part 1: Neighborhood Racial Violence: Building the “Storm Area”

The Detroit Free Press referred to several of Detroit's newly built west side neighborhoods as the “Storm Area” in the summer of 1925.² On several evenings angry white mobs gathered there—filling streets, lawns and porches—to terrify African American residents who had dared to move into white-dominated areas. The storm metaphor is revealing. It suggests that the author implicitly perceived racial violence as a kind of menacing natural event. The prerequisite for violence—a culture of *threatened white supremacy*—may have seemed natural to urban life because it was built into the residential fabric of the city itself. Detroit's fast-growing industrial economy depended on the work of both blacks and whites but its real estate industry provided new housing almost exclusively for the latter, and many white residents perceived their home's value as contingent on this racial exclusivity. Yet African American workers sought the same Fordist bargain that white workers did—hard labor in exchange for modern homes, and the economic security and upward mobility this might bring—leading to conflicts as blacks' residential movement challenged the ideology of whiteness built into the

² The Free Press referred the west side district where several mob attacks had occurred in a matter of weeks as “storm centers” and the “storm area”. Detroit Free Press, “Stop Rioting, Smith Pleads with Citizens,” July 12, 1925, p.1.

city's tens of thousands of new houses. As historian Dianne Harris argues, while residential architecture is "so pervasive and seemingly ordinary as to become critically unobserved, these representational and material forms constitute powerful ideological devices," leveraged in the social construction of race.³

Detroit's neighborhood violence of 1925 has a substantial historiography, with great emphasis on the mob riot at African Americans Ossian and Gladys Sweets' home—an incident that led to the shooting death of a white rioter and the successful defense of the black homeowners in what Reynolds Farley has called the "nation's foremost civil rights trial of the 1920s."⁴ Yet the role of the modern worker's home in these events—in material and ideological terms—has gone underexplored. Part One of this Chapter will revisit Detroit's racial violence of summer 1925 and argue that the modern worker's home as a material and ideological artifact was a powerful shaper of that violence. The home was a central figure in Detroit's growing white supremacist discourse, a tool for committing violence in its name, and a site of African American resistance. Human actors made and understood the racial violence that shook Detroit in the summer of 1925 in and through the built environment. Modern worker's homes made race, racial privilege, and threats to that privilege knowable and actionable. Just as new homes facilitated immigrants' transition to whiteness, and allowed rural white Appalachians to rise in social prestige, the home—coded white—constructed blackness as an excluded, threatening other.⁵

³Harris, *White Houses* pp. 1-3. Race is a social construction and not an objective distinction—John Friedmann points this out by referring to race as "so-called," or by placing the term in scare quotes. *Insurgencies: Essays in planning theory*, pp. 115.

⁴Farley et. al., *Detroit Divided*, p. 144. Boyle's *Arc of Justice* explores the events at the Sweet residence and the subsequent trial in great detail, see especially pp. 168-169. Also see Levine, *Internal Combustion* (1976) and Thomas, *Life For Us Is What We Make It*, pp. 137-140.

⁵ On the changing meaning of whiteness in the context of immigration see Chapter 1, which draws on the work of David Roediger.

Prehistory: Chicago's Red Summer

Detroit's neighborhood violence reflected tensions developing in many American cities after the First World War. As black and white migrants moved northward and populations shifted from rural-to-urban contexts, increased inter-racial competition for jobs and homes precipitated deadly riots across the country in the "Red Summer" of 1919.⁶ Thirty-eight people were killed in a week of rioting in Chicago—23 black and 15 white—and more than five hundred were seriously wounded.⁷ Ultimately, thousands of state militia troops were required to quell the violence.

Housing was central to the Chicago conflict as it was elsewhere in the urban north, and the city's riot was fueled in large part by hatred stirred in neighborhoods undergoing racial change such as Hyde Park beginning in 1917.⁸ Overflowing the crowded and dilapidated "black belt" on the city's south side, African Americans of means had begun to move into homes in this and other previously segregated white neighborhoods. White residents reacted: forming neighborhood associations, organizing public protests, and undertaking a campaign of threats, mob intimidation and bombings. White residents fearing integration of their neighborhoods set off at least twenty-six bombs, targeting the homes of newly-arrived African Americans and the offices of the realtors who served them. These attacks, carried out in secret, created fear and extensive property damage and caused the death of a six-year old girl.⁹ When mobs took to the neighborhood streets of Detroit six years later—reacting against racial integration in the summer

⁶ McWhirther's *Red Summer* (2011) examines several cases of racial violence in 1919 including Chicago's.

⁷ Ibid pp. 147.

⁸ McGreevy points out that racial violence centered on housing more so than other issues in the urban north in *Parish Boundaries*, p.4.

⁹ Tuttle, "Contested Neighborhoods and Racial Violence: Prelude to the Chicago Riot of 1919," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Oct. 1970), pp. 266-288.

of 1925—the tragedy of Chicago weighed on the minds of city officials. Urging calm, but also revealing great uncertainty, Detroit’s Mayor John Smith released a public statement advising “the condition which faces Detroit is one which faced Washington, East Saint Louis, Chicago and other large cities. The result in those cities was one which Detroit must avoid if possible (Figure 4:1).”¹⁰

The Depreciation Stereotype

Racial integration had sparked violent incidents in neighborhoods near Detroit’s center in 1917 and 1920, but—as Mayor Smith realized—the continued expansion of segregated housing, rapid black and white migration from the south, and the rise of the Detroit Ku Klux Klan made conditions in the city’s outer neighborhoods more explosive in 1925.¹¹ A decade of segregated urban growth had hardened white supremacist sentiment in the city and given strength to a profoundly destabilizing idea: the stereotype that black residents depreciated property.¹²

Subdivision developers and realtors put their professional authority behind the depreciation stereotype, as discussed in Chapter 2. When developers introduced racially restrictive covenants in the mid 1920s as a property amenity—promising security to homeowners through segregation—they legitimated the fear of racial integration by constructing a legal means to guard against it. Realtors validated race-based-depreciation by making it a matter of professional ethics that property sellers should “never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood...members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will

¹⁰ Detroit Free Press, “Stop Rioting, Smith Pleads with Citizens,” July 12, 1925, p.1.

¹¹ On earlier race-based residential violence see Levine, *Internal Combustion*, pp.45-46.

¹² Recall Olivier Zunz’s observation that blacks “lived history in reverse” in early twentieth century Detroit: as New Immigrants were invited into whiteness and enjoyed increasing residential mobility African Americans suffered increasing segregation, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 352-54, 373-378.

clearly be detrimental to property values...”¹³ Realtors’ bias against mixed-race neighborhoods could even make the depreciation myth real to the extent that their appraisal and sales practices steered white homebuyers to avoid integrated areas—the Hannan Real Estate Company advised its salesmen, for example, to ask their clients considering a (racially and functionally) unrestricted property in an older neighborhood, “do you just not care who or what your neighbors may be?”¹⁴ Associated Charities investigator Forrester Washington interviewed black and white real estate agents in 1920, and the majority of white agents claimed that the arrival of black residents—or “invasion” as one realtor put it—reduced values from 25% to an absurd 100%. At the same time, while anxious whites might be willing to sell at a lower price in the context of racial change, blacks—with such a shortage of housing available to them—would buy or rent those same homes at a premium. This mismatch, Washington noted, created the opportunity for unscrupulous real estate investors to “commercialize on race prejudice and fill the neighborhood with colored people who are made to pay higher down payments and higher rents than had previously been charged in the neighborhood.”¹⁵

Despite the city’s entwined cultural ideals of industrial growth and the secure home Detroit workers’ lives were fraught with insecurity. The economic anxieties that Detroit workers faced reinforced their belief in the race-based depreciation paradigm. In the city’s industrial economy workers had relatively few youthful years to accumulate secure wealth through their labor—earning capacity dropped considerably after the age of 45 as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2—and the threat of layoffs always loomed. Homebuyers bore an outsize burden of risk, betting

¹³ The Detroit Real Estate Board adopted the 1924 National Code of Ethics into its own. See National Association of Real Estate Boards, *Code of Ethics* (1924), p. 7. Detroit Real Estate Board files, Burton Historical Collection.

¹⁴ As noted in Chapter 2, Hannan Real Estate Exchange, *The Hannan Bible*, pp. 84-85.

¹⁵ Washington, “The Effect on Realty Values of Negro Invasion,” in *The Negro in Detroit*.

their life's labor on the value of their home while employers and real estate developers gathered the profits of that labor. At the same time, if their real estate bets paid off workers might indeed gain the security of capital holdings in the form of an owned home of appreciating value. By seeking and buying racially restricted properties white workers gained some assurance but also its mirror image—the fear of the racial integration that they were guarding against. Some found, as the neighborhood conflicts of 1925 showed, that the system of racially restrictive covenants contained many gaps and was difficult to enforce when an individual white owner chose to sell to an African American buyer.¹⁶ By the time a legal suit was filed, won and enforced would not the psychological (and related economic) damage of racial integration already be done? The present value and hoped-for future gains in the value of workers' new homes were vulnerable to collapse if appraisers, current residents and white consumers began to perceive the neighborhood as declining.¹⁷

Under rapid growth Detroit's housing solution was for workers to adopt the economic risks of housing construction as independent consumers—and this exacerbated the instability of property values under racial transition. Each homeowner was individually at risk for their property's value but external factors beyond their individual control could dramatically change that value. In other words real estate values were *interdependent* on the behaviors and perceptions of many neighbors despite each household's independent economic stake.

Neighborhood Associations acknowledged this mismatch by providing a framework for

¹⁶ Black shows in in “Restrictive Covenants in Relation to Segregated Negro Housing in Detroit,” that Detroit's restricted developments were interspersed among unrestricted ones and that ten percent of restricted areas were merely upheld by agreement between current owners (which could be reneged upon) rather than a-priori restriction established by the original land subdivider, pp. 24-26 and map “Patterns of Restrictive Covenants, 1947.”

¹⁷ Historian Kevin Boyle has shown that the threat of real estate depreciation weighed on the minds of heavily mortgaged white homeowners on the east side of Detroit, as word spread that the family of black physician Ossian Sweet was preparing to move into the neighborhood. Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, pp. 134, 147-149.

collective action in the interests of all homeowners in an area. These associations proliferated in Detroit as the white residents of newly built houses faced the prospect of confronting racial change as destructively competitive individuals.¹⁸ As one midcentury scholar of Detroit's neighborhood "improvement" associations writes, these groups often worked to defend property values by "keep[ing] the neighborhood constantly stirred up against the in-migration of Negroes," raising funds to take breakers of racially restrictive covenants to court and waging intimidation campaigns against those who broke the color line.¹⁹

Individualistic responses to neighborhood change could create a highly unstable market. Once racial integration began—neighborhood associations feared—individual owners might rush to move and spark a panic sell-off in which many white neighbors would leave the area at increasingly great financial loss, selling, as one sociologist of the period observed, "because of hysteria and without regard to market value."²⁰ Homeowners leveraged beyond their means with multiple mortgages might be ruined by such depreciation.²¹

Housing and the Social Construction of Race

The material conditions of the city's neighborhoods reinforced what sociologist Harold Black called the "circular logic" of the race-based depreciation stereotype.²² By confining the city's fast-growing African American population to a small and aging district east of downtown

¹⁸ Black, "Restrictive Covenants."

¹⁹ Black, "Restrictive Covenants," pp.58-59.

²⁰ Washington, *The Negro in Detroit*, Section V "Housing," (1920). Also see Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, p.623. George Galster discusses panic selling and describes homeowners' investments in neighborhoods as "fraught with an unusual amount of uncertainty" given the many changes beyond any one investor's control that could affect an area's perceived values in "On the Nature of Neighbourhood, *Urban Studies*, Vol 38, No. 12., pp. 2111-2124, (2001).

²¹ Boyle reflects on how depreciating values increased the risk that heavily-encumbered workers would default—especially on shorter-term loans—when they came up for payment/renewal and the value of the home itself was, as we now call it, "underwater," *Arc of Justice*, pp.149-150.

²² Black, "Restrictive Covenants in Relation to Segregated Negro Housing in Detroit," Wayne State University Thesis, 1947, pp. 13-23.

Detroit's white residents and realtors fulfilled their own belief that African Americans did not keep up their homes. The stereotype did not account for the crowding and exploitative rents blacks faced on account of their confinement to a ghetto, the advanced age of the structures available to African Americans, or the expansion of factories and garages that all contributed to the degradation of housing in the main African American district Black Bottom.²³ Neither did it acknowledge that Black Bottom and the adjacent commercial district Paradise Valley—despite their housing problems—constituted a diverse center of African American life and culture, a space still shared with immigrant minorities including Russian Jews and Italians, where the city's black elite lived and worked alongside those struggling with poverty and inadequate housing.²⁴

The depreciation myth was not only supported through whites' outward perceptions but also through their self-perceptions: it emphasized the good care that many white families took of their homes without acknowledging the ways that employers, reformers, homebuilders, lending institutions, and realtors all went out of their way to ensure that white workers had access to new, often well-equipped and furnished bungalows and duplexes with little capital down. Invoking both the pride of white homemaking and its threatening other, the Waterworks Park Improvement Association for example called for east side residents facing the threat of racial integration to attend a "self-defense" meeting, asking "Do you want to maintain the existing good health conditions and environment for your little children?"²⁵

²³ The deterioration of this neighborhood's housing stock is explored in Eds. John Gries and James Ford, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*, p. 127-128.

²⁴ See Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability* on the diversity and internal tensions within Detroit's and the east side's black communities. On the geography of immigrant populations in the late 1920's see Thomas, "The City of Detroit: a Study in Urban Geography," Figure 7 and pp. 101-102.

²⁵ "Stop Rioting, Smith Pleads with Citizens," *The Detroit Free Press*, July 12, 1925. Boyle cites the Improvement Association's questions in *Arc of Justice*, p. 131.

In many American cities—Detroit included—blackness was constructed through the material conditions of ghetto housing: a 1932 Federal report on “Negro Housing” noted it was commonly believed that “deteriorated areas...are alone [African Americans’] by right of race,” and that members of this imagined black monoculture were generally “happier in their own neighborhoods.”²⁶ Reflecting this, a University of Michigan Geographer of the 1920s described Detroit’s near east side at length in terms of material conditions and behaviors that he perceived—not as reflections of poverty and segregation—but of “Negro” culture:

The Negro problem in Detroit is of minor importance as long as those residents realize that they are to be restricted to a type area [sic] of their own. As long as they stay in this area it becomes typically Negro. The congestion and carefreeness of the population is evidenced by the ramshackle character of their buildings, by the multiplicity of their store types, by the picturesque gaudiness of their decorations and street attire, the teeming colorfulness of their street life, the lounging and lolling groups of all ages, sexes, and colors who bring to Detroit a landscape far different from that which existed in the same region, on the same streets, and veritably in the same buildings only a few short years ago (Figure 4:2).²⁷

Like-minded Detroiters could not see African Americans’ attempts to leave Black Bottom as expressions of a cross-racial desire for the comforts of modern housing, or as expressions of the black culture of “bourgeois respectability” that historian Victoria Wolcott has described. Instead, they saw African Americans’ residential movement as a threatening desire on the part of blacks to “live socially among white persons,” despite their putative cultural inferiority.²⁸

White Womanhood

The modern worker’s home was designed, among other things, to guard against unsanctioned sexual relationships. Protecting the bourgeois ideal of “white womanhood”—to which sexual propriety was essential—the home’s private bedroom and bathroom walls and its

²⁶ Eds. John Gries and James Ford, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*, p. 35.

²⁷ Thomas, “The City of Detroit,” pp. 101-102.

²⁸ See Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, pp. 134-136.

nuclear family-based structure staged paternalistic control of women's social contacts. In Ford Sociological agents' reform discourse, for example, the intervening barriers of modern domesticity were essential to stop intercourse between "landladies" and their male boarders.²⁹ The prospect of neighborhood racial integration in 1925 called up a related discourse on the male protection of womanhood, but one in which the enclosing walls of the home were insufficient protection. In this case it was not infidelity that threatened white womanhood so much as interracial marriage. As neighbors living side by side in similar houses, white residents feared, black and white residents might begin to meet as social equals. The greatest threat of intermarriage—as sociologist Gunnar Myrdal noted in the 1940s—was that it would provide a "supreme indication" of social equality between two married people, undermining the interracially-married woman's, and by extension all whites' claims of racial superiority.³⁰

Whites fearing integration conflated the idea of black neighbors with threats to the privacy of the bedroom. As a white man from the west side, anxious about racial integration in the 1940s wrote: he believed in "the God-given equality of men," but also believed in his and his white neighbors' God-given "right to choose the people we sleep with."³¹ In a similar discursive bundling of home, sexual propriety and whiteness, a Ku Klux Klan author of the 1920s argued against interracial marriage, urging that "the chastity of woman [is] a sacred trust, and sanctity of

²⁹ An employee in Ford's employment office during the 1910s relays, for example—in a story that may indicate more about the lewd imagination of its teller than of the lived experience of the boarding house—that the sociological department found a boarding house of 18 male residents where "each man had a contract to have the landlady as their wife every 18 days," a condition the interviewed employee believed the Sociological department had put a stop to. A.G. Bondie (1958). Interview by Owen Bombard (print transcript), p. 14. Accession 65, Benson Ford Research Center.

³⁰ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, p. 591.

³¹ Black, "Restrictive Covenants in Relation to Segregated Negro Housing in Detroit," the quote is from a letter of appeal from a white neighborhood association in far southwest Detroit to the local police station in 1945.

the home...an inviolable obligation.”³² The author of another 1920s Klan polemic further conjured the fear of (white) sexual intimacy betrayed—while attacking Catholicism—by imagining the encounter of black parish priests with local white Catholic women. The Klan author asked, “what will be the effect upon our [white] civilization and social status,” if parishes became racially mixed? Dramatizing this threat, the author conjured the image of “negro priests sit[ting] in the confessional where white women must answer the most intimate and suggestive sex questions.”³³ While this was perhaps an affecting image, historian John McGreevey has shown that this Klan author and his readers had little to fear: most Catholic parishes in America, including a cited example from the Polish east side of Detroit, shared the Klan’s desire to keep urban parishes racially segregated.³⁴

The Klan in Detroit

The Ku Klux Klan grew rapidly in American cities in the 1920s—a major resurgence for an institution that had declined during the preceding four decades.³⁵ The urbanization of industrial cities such as Detroit created a cultural space where Klan ideology thrived. 1920s Detroit was charged by what historian David Levine calls the “polyglot intensity” of many distinct and competitive immigrant groups—often Catholic—and Klan rhetoric against Papal authority and parochial schools played on white Protestants’ anxieties about sharing the shop floor and the city with these others.³⁶ The Klan articulated a doctrine of white supremacy and

³² Dr. H.W. Evans, “The Attitude of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan toward the Jew,” *Ku Klux Klan, Papers Read at the Meeting of Grand Dragons at their First Annual Meeting held at Ashville, North Carolina, July 1923*.

³³ Ku Klux Klan, *The K.K.K. Katechism: Pertinent Questions, Pointed Answers*, p. 34 (1924).

³⁴ McGreevey, *Parish Boundaries*, pp.29-38..

³⁵ Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, pp. xi-xii.

³⁶ Levine, *Internal Combustion*, p. 136.

called for stronger legal defense of the residential color line.³⁷ For white workers who believed their modest economic and social gains, and the sexual propriety of white women were at stake in the color line, Klan discourse affirmed their fears and created a forum to act in solidarity against perceived threats. The national leader of the Klan invited prospects to join the organization in “the sacred duty of protecting womanhood,” the Klan being “the soul of chivalry and virtue’s impenetrable shield.”³⁸

Klan-affiliated organizations made tailored appeals to women and children in Detroit and elsewhere, and the national leader of the Klan’s women’s groups urged that women appreciate the protection of their womanhood that men provided by keeping alcohol, gambling and sexual impropriety from the home:

the red in our national banner speaks in no uncertain way of manly blood that has been and will be shed for woman’s protection. The white of our flag’s folds cries out for unstained purity and virtue in manhood and womanhood, and bears silent testimony that the men of the nation would rise as one to protect the honor and chastity of our home-builders—our women.³⁹

The Detroit chapter of the Klan recruited intensively and grew from 3,000 in 1923 to 22,000 eighteen months later, reaching a high of 32,000.⁴⁰

Klan recruiters used spatial strategies in the design of their mass-initiation rallies. While drawing upon Detroit’s large pool of prospective members the organization held their large gatherings in the fields outside of the city, avoiding government and police interference and maintaining a sense of secrecy.⁴¹ The city’s automobiles made this possible by allowing

³⁷ Jackson, pp. 128-129.

³⁸ Albert de Silver, *The Ku Klux Klan*, p.2, pamphlet distributed by the American Civil Liberties Union, 1921. This author, a critic of the Klan, used this quote to illustrate the Klan’s absurdly grandiose claims.

³⁹ Ku Klux Klan, *The Kourier Magazine*, April 1925, pp.11-15.

⁴⁰ See Jackson pp. 128-133 on the Detroit chapter’s growth and pp. 235-249 on the culture of fear that fed the organization in the 1920s.

⁴¹ Jackson pp. 130-136.

thousands—carpooling surely—to quickly converge on an obscure rural site, pass a makeshift checkpoint, and enter the ceremonial field (Figure 4:3). There the altar and its pyrotechnics communicated a pseudo-religious sense of drama and solidarity. When 2,500 were initiated in November 1923 the ceremony was staged in a field west of Detroit on 7 Mile Road, where an acetylene tank was arranged to feed fuel to a huge cross made of pipe. When the organizers lit the device “it blazed forth,” one Klan journalist reported, “and as its white light penetrated the semi-darkness a mighty cheer arose that seemed to fairly shake the earth.”⁴² Thereafter “a hush fell over the crowd” as the assembled leaders began to speak the “oath of Americanism...in deep and solemn tones,” the mass of assembled candidates repeated the words in unison.⁴³ At the height of the Detroit Klan’s power, just before its favored Mayoral candidate Charles Bowles was narrowly defeated in the special election of November 1924, the organization held a Saturday evening rally in Dearborn Township west of Detroit estimated to have drawn at least 25,000, and perhaps as many as 50,000 participants.⁴⁴

The city’s business elite did not welcome the rise of the Klan nor the uncertainty created by racial violence, despite their role in constructing Detroit’s segregated geography and its culture of threatened white supremacy. Industrialists such as Ford and institutions such as the Board of Commerce had created a culture—through Americanization classes, housing reform discourse, and mortgage assistance—that offered full citizenship and social prestige to white workers through modern homes while denying these things to African Americans, even as industry depended on black labor for some of its most difficult jobs. Fearing the phenomenal

⁴² “Elaborate Program on Seven Mile Road,” *The Fiery Cross: Michigan State Edition*, pp. 1, 8, November 30, 1923. At an earlier event, also on Seven Mile and perhaps at the same site, Kenneth Jackson notes that an “electric cross” was used, Jackson, p.131.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

growth of the Klan, however, and the possibility that their Mayoral candidate Charles Bowles could come to power, the business magazine *Pipp's Weekly* argued that Detroit's homes—far from being a cause of unrest—were rather a bulwark against political extremism. *Pipp's* argued that through its phenomenal growth Detroit had attained a reputation for tolerance and neighborliness, and was known “as a progressive city, a home-loving, home-supporting city, because it has had citizens who have prided themselves in their homes, their families, and the general betterment of the community.” This reputation—and presumably future business prospects—were at stake in the election, and the magazine asked: “do you want your city to be known the world over as a Klan city (Figure 4:4)?”⁴⁵ This invocation of a pragmatic, pro-growth civic culture, however, ignored the growing evidence that one of the Klan's most destabilizing ideologies—white supremacy as reflected in housing segregation—enjoyed strong support in many of Detroit's “home-loving” neighborhoods.

Detroit Neighborhoods in Crisis

Several African Americans' houses were attacked by white mobs in the summer months that preceded the widely publicized tragedy at the Sweet residence in September 1925.⁴⁶ Exploring the earliest attack of the summer—and the least considered in literature—this section sheds new light on the experience of neighborhood violence in Detroit by giving explicit attention to the housing that gave material and ideological shape to the violence.

The west side African American community discussed in Chapter 3 expanded during the 1920s—alarming white workers who had bought and built houses in nearby areas with the

⁴⁵ *Pipp's Weekly*.pp. 1-4, October 17, 1925 and, pp. 1-6, October 24, 1925.

⁴⁶ See Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, pp. 151-169, Thomas, *Life For Us Is What We Make It*, pp. 135-143, and Levine, *Internal Combustion*, p. 151-198, and Farley et. al., *Detroit Divided*, pp. 144-149 each addresses Detroit's neighborhood violence of 1925.

expectation of race exclusivity. At the same time the west side was the pride of the city's black elite and reformers, a place where black professionals and workers lived together, negotiating a culture of domestic pride. Reform-minded black women created the Entre Nous club in the area, for example, to promote a culture of black domestic respectability with cleanup campaigns, housekeeping awards, and by bringing pressuring residents whose homes did not meet standards.⁴⁷ At the same time the social identities and behaviors of the expanding Westside's residents were diverse, as evidenced by the Mathis household—black workers whose boarding practices would likely disturb the Westside's African American clubwomen, but whose presence moreover provoked fear and anger in this transitional area's white workers.

Fleta and Aldine Mathis responded to a newspaper advertisement in March of 1925 and rented the lower flat of a duplex on Northfield Street—causing alarm among white neighbors and causing the white family renting above them to promptly leave (Figure 4:5).⁴⁸ Fleta Mathis later recorded her recollections of that harrowing summer of 1925, which were published in a 1997 community-based publication *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside*.⁴⁹ Aldine and Fleta, recent migrants from Georgia in 1925, shared the costs of renting and furnishing their flat with three friends who boarded with them—a man, his wife and his brother. Aldine worked in a furniture store and the two other men labored in automobile factories. Keeping boarders, Al and Fleta

⁴⁷ See Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, pp. 134-136. Wolcott describes the west side as “middle-class,” and though the area was clearly dominated by bourgeois values I find that the area was more socially mixed than this implies. Industrial workers living on the west side were not made middle class by their participation in bourgeois domestic values, I argue in Chapter 3.

⁴⁸ WestSiders (Society), *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside 1920-1950: a Pictorial History of the WestSiders*, p. 103

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

sacrificed privacy relative to the worker's domestic ideal but seem to have embraced the move as an opportunity. Fleta, looking back, called it their "first venture at housekeeping."⁵⁰

Within days a group of white neighbors assembled to plan a response to the breaking of the color line, which would ultimately lead to mob attacks on the Mathis home. This group's efforts were supported by the Ku Klux Klan—Fleta recalls that the KKK sent threatening letters to her new home—and some neighbors may well have belonged to the organization.⁵¹ Detroit's mayor John Smith—who at the time was running for re-election against Klan-endorsed Charles Bowles—laid blame for the city's neighborhood violence squarely on the secretive organization, claiming that its members had gone "from house to house...where resentment is strongest against members of the Negro race and have whispered their criminal propaganda."⁵² The truth of this is unclear, but Klan members and many sympathizers surely did live in the general context of the Mathis's new home—their favored candidate Bowles enjoyed strong support on the far west side and did best in neighborhoods east of Grand River just a mile from the Mathis home.⁵³ At the same time, the racial politics of neighborhood violence were more complex than Mayor Smith had acknowledged.

Fear of neighborhood racial integration helped construct "defense" coalitions that united residents who were otherwise political adversaries. American-born Protestant workers were likely to support Bowles' anti-vice and anti-parochial schools positions at the polls, while Smith's winning coalition of immigrant Catholics and Jews joined with African Americans in opposing Bowles. Yet the southern-born white Protestant and the European-born Catholic worker were more alike than different in an important way: both, having achieved a precarious

⁵⁰ Ibid and Boyle, p. 151.

⁵¹ Ibid p. 104 and Boyle, p. 151.

⁵² "Smith Blames Klan Politics for Race Rows," *The Detroit Free Press*, Sept 13, 1925.

⁵³ Jackson, p. 137.

hold on economic security and social advancement in modern neighborhoods, perceived that their modest gains depended on segregation from their perceived racial and social other: African Americans.⁵⁴ The “close proximity to oppression” that conditionally-white immigrants still felt, as historian David Roediger puts it, motivated socially advancing immigrants to turn on their electoral allies—black workers—in the context of neighborhood violence.⁵⁵

Reflecting on the infamous mob attack on Ossian and Gladys Sweet’s residence, for example, one 1920s author found irony in the fact that a neighborhood where “most of the people...have Polish, Swedish and German sounding names,” residents could become convinced enough of their own racial superiority—in other words, their claim to whiteness—to join the fight against the integration of African Americans.⁵⁶ “The bitterest man,” the author made a point of adding, “was an Assyrian.”⁵⁷ Similarly, in the 1930 census district surrounding the Mathis duplex, immigrants and the children of immigrants represented three times the population of whites of American parentage.⁵⁸ The composition of the mob that attacked the Mathises is unknown, but these demographics suggest that it was a diverse white coalition with a shared interest in housing segregation.

Violence and the Material Negotiation of Race

In an urban culture that valued home—and by extension neighborhood—as a secure haven, it is not surprising that those seeking to remove the Mathis’s began their work inconspicuously. Overt violence, even in the name of “defense,” would surely undermine the

⁵⁴ Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City* pp.240-245 and McGreevey, *Parish Boundaries*, p. 34 discuss the anxieties of white and immigrant communities seeking to hold onto modest social gains.

⁵⁵ Roediger. *Working Toward Whiteness*, p. 32.

⁵⁶ Haldeman-Julius, *Clarence Darrow's two great trials*, pp.29, 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 40.

⁵⁸ *Population (1930 Census) and Other Social Data for Detroit by Census Tracts*, p. 8, Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research, 1937. Tract 119.

perceived security of an area in the eyes of residents and the real estate market at large, even if the perpetrators succeeded in restoring segregation. Given this, the defenders' first attempts to intimidate the Mathises took the form of everyday neighborhood conventions: the Klan sent threatening letters and a group knocked on the front door. The house call was made during the day, Fleta believes, because the group wanted to avoid directly confronting the men—who would presumably be away at work—but “to their surprise,” one of the brothers was home.⁵⁹ The visitors nonetheless gave their putatively reasonable demands: they did not require immediate action and the forfeit of rents already paid, but assured Fleta and her boarder that if the household did not move by the end of the month they had already paid for “there would be trouble.”⁶⁰ Provoked by the threat, Fleta's boarder, “a big man,” she notes, “*told them off*” (italics hers) and caused the group to retreat immediately.⁶¹ The Mathises received other warnings in subsequent days, as Fleta's husband Aldine later reported to the police.⁶²

The household paid their next month's rent in defiance of the neighborhood defenders, who responded by changing their tactics in ways that overtly and strategically breached domestic conventions. Dropping any pretense of respect for the Mathis's home that the mailed and personally delivered threats had contained, defenders began to watch the duplex and to vandalize it while the residents were away. Fleta does not describe the vandalism in her account, but whether it included broken windows, torn-up landscaping, or surfaces marked with paint, raw eggs or tomatoes, the tactic was a powerful one. Vandalism punished the Mathis household with costly repairs—paid in cash and in time spent cleaning or filing police reports—and it also did a great deal of cultural work. Conspicuous damage to the duplex distinguished it from the field of

⁵⁹ WestSiders (Society), *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside 1920-1950*, p. 103.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Detroit Free Press, “Negroes Saved From Big Mob By City Police,” April 10, 1925.

closely spaced bungalows and duplexes surrounding it, a move that might humiliate the singled-out duplex's residents. One vandalized home among many well-tended neighboring homes visually reinforced the Mathis household's otherness from the neighborhood while at the same time staging a seeming unity among the many unmolested "white houses" surrounding them.⁶³

When vandalism failed to remove the Mathis household from Northfield Street the group assailing them appears to have made a dramatic change in tactics: determining that an overwhelming show of force was needed to make the Mathis household fear for their lives. A white mob estimated at 5,000 strong—several times larger than the mob that would later attack the Sweet residence on the east side—surrounded the Mathis's duplex the evening of April 9. A friend happened to be visiting that evening, walking west—perhaps from the established Westside African American neighborhood nearby—and he warned that "many folks were gathering" on the streets nearby.⁶⁴ The process of mob-building is not entirely clear, but it seems likely that a group of core instigators—perhaps including those responsible for the earlier letters, house calls and vandalism—called local residents from their homes and set in motion a building spectacle that drew others from their homes. An evening attack was likely planned to ensure that the victims and the maximum number of perpetrators would be home from work.

Converging on the duplex, and surrounding it, the mob performed a fearsome inversion of the very domestic ideals they gathered to "defend": the home—embodying secure family independence and social acceptance within the neighborhood context—was transformed by the surrounding mob into an isolated, vulnerable place from which the Mathises and their boarders could not escape (Figure 4:6). The many windows of the modern duplex—a pleasure in daily life

⁶³ A reference to the title of Dianne Harris' *White Houses*, a phrase which succinctly captures the interwoven construction of race and domestic space.

⁶⁴ From Fleeta Mathis's recollection, published in WestSiders (Society), *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside 1920-1950*, p. 103.

similarly inverted—became a terrible liability, shattering one after another as the mob threw stones and bottles. The *Detroit Free Press* reported that before the police arrived in force the crowd “managed to smash every window in the Mathis dwelling and had threatened to set fire to the house.”⁶⁵ It is a testament to the household’s fear and desperation that Aldine and the household’s visiting friend took up firearms as the violence began.⁶⁶ In the American South the lynch mob remained a serious threat in the 1920s, as Reynolds Farley notes, and the Mathises had no way of knowing how far the mob would go.⁶⁷ Apparent warning shots were fired early in the assault, with no injuries, though the newspaper could not confirm whether they were fired from the crowd or from the home.

In June and July similar mob attacks were carried out nearby, north of Tireman, where a crowd of four thousand descended on the home of African American waiter John Fletcher and his family and boarders, and another mob of five thousand attacked the home of black physician Alexander Turner.⁶⁸ (Figure 4:7) In each of the summer’s attacks the instigators of violence appear to have coordinated their efforts with groups outside of the immediate neighborhood. Recorded details suggest that others—perhaps members of the city’s organized white supremacist organizations—arrived from some distance by automobile to take part in the violence. Author Marcet Haldeman-Julius interviewed Ossian Sweet during his trial and described the gathering crowd around the Sweet home this way:

Already the schoolyard was full! So was the space around the grocery store!
People were in the alley, on the porches of the two-flat houses opposite! Cars
were coming and parking—two deep...⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Thomas notes that in the early twentieth century carrying concealed weapons was a more common part of black and white southern culture than of northern culture in *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, p. 114.

⁶⁷ Farley et al, *Detroit Divided*, p. 145.

⁶⁸ Ibid pp. 136-137, Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, p. 152-155, Levine, *Internal Combustion*, pp. 153-154.

⁶⁹ Halderman-Julius, *Clarence Darrow’s Two Great Trials*, p. 40.

A police lieutenant who had witnessed the mob attack on the Sweet residence stated at trial that traffic was thick with approaching cars that did not belong in the neighborhood as the crowd gathered, forcing police to divert traffic from Garland Avenue.⁷⁰ The automobile seems to have been an important mob-forming tool in the attack on the Mathis home attack as well, where in addition to local rioters an influx of apparent outsiders forced police to halt “all traffic in both directions” in order to gain control of the situation.⁷¹ In a similar attack on the home of black physician Alexander Turner the mob—apparently due to arriving participants and gawking passers-by—caused traffic to be “hopelessly stalled” on the major artery Grand River Avenue.”⁷²

The size of the 1925 neighborhood mobs is startling when considered in spatial terms. In the context of the Mathis home for example a crowd of five thousand was large enough to represent the entire population of every home and flat in sixteen urban blocks.⁷³ Standing in perfect rows three feet on center this number of participants could completely fill Northfield Avenue for the entire length of the Mathis’ block, with hundreds left over and spilling into the adjacent roads.⁷⁴ In actuality the mobs of 1925 dispersed over a larger area than this calculation implies: filling nearby porches, streets, alleys and schoolyards. While a core of assailants surrounded the target houses—throwing stones and shouting threats—many other participants remained half a block or more away from the riot’s center, and were probably unable to even see their victims’ house clearly. The *Detroit Free Press* described these more passive participants in the Mathis incident as an “orderly crowd” who was “in a naturally curious mood”—but curiosity fails to explain the motivation to stand with a mob. Why did these participants not fear for their

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 60-61.

⁷¹ Detroit Free Press, “Negroes Saved From Big Mob By City Police,” April 10, 1925.

⁷² Levine, *Internal Combustion*, p. 153-154.

⁷³ Based on 4 persons per residence—the rough average per the city’s 1930 census—and an average of 75 residences per block as observed in the Northfield Ave. context.

⁷⁴ With a conventional 9sf of standing room per person this stretch of Northfield’s 39,000sf could only accommodate 4,330 rioters.

own safety? How did they justify their collusion in the violence? Clearly these participants were welcome, and chose to enact their solidarity with the mob, the neighborhood, and with whiteness in its defense against the perceived threats of racial integration.

In the days following the attack the Mathises and their boarders began to rebuild. Despite being renters, and despite the fact that the duplex's windows were broken by others, the household took it upon their own agency to have the windows re-glazed—restoring, in an act that exemplifies resistance in author bell hooks' sense—the dignity of their home despite the indignities presented by the social world outside it.⁷⁵ The cost of these repairs was surely daunting, but Fleta recalls that the household's Baptist church donated funds to make the repairs in support of their cause. The fight for the Northfield duplex's meaning was not over however—its conventions of domestic security would be breached one more time.

Four days after the mob attack Fleta and her female boarder Suzie lay together in one of the house's bedrooms with Suzie's infant daughter Belle. Modern duplexes such as the Mathis's were designed to reinforce the privacy of bedrooms: locating them behind a living room and stairwell that faced the street.⁷⁶ Shielded from view from the street view—its windows opening on the narrow space between houses—these spaces represented the ideal of the bedroom as a safe and protected place for the family, for so-called “womanhood” as discussed earlier and for children.⁷⁷ When assailants entered the narrow yard beside the Mathis's duplex, then, they surely understood the charged meaning of their presence in a private space adjacent to bedroom windows. Fleta recalls that the infant began to cry and that suddenly—perhaps having heard the cries—the attackers threw two bricks through the bedroom window. The bricks and shards of

⁷⁵ As discussed in Chapter 3, see hooks, “homeplace: a site of resistance,” in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, pp. 68-73.

⁷⁶ See floorplan presented in CH2.

⁷⁷ The bedroom's ideal of privacy is discussed in CH 3.

glass landed on the bed where the women and the infant Belle lay. The mother and infant rushed to the safety of a windowless corner of the dining room and Fleta took up a gun, firing twice through the bedroom window and striking the house next door without injury. Fleta was arrested briefly but not prosecuted.⁷⁸ The Mathises persevered in the duplex, even after the infant Belle and the sanctity of the bedroom had been threatened, until finally the household's assailants purchased the duplex from its owner and evicted Fleta, Aldine and the others.⁷⁹

Conclusions

An ideology of race was negotiated through Detroit's worker's houses, and it bore the imprints of many actors—the industrial and business elite who helped to author the city's domestic ideal as white, the land subdividers and realtors who validated segregation in law and in professional practice, and the diverse coalition of workers who joined ranks under whiteness in the name of neighborhood defense. The city's mercurial industrial economy and the risks of mortgaged homeownership amplified white workers' sense of a precarious—and threatened—hold on social advancement. Gendered notions of the well-kept modern home and of domestic privacy provided a material language for the construction of whiteness and of a threatening other: a blackness that many associated with the city's crowded, antiquated core. Attempting to shame and terrify the Mathises—while at the same time reproducing white solidarity—neighbors inverted the very domestic ideals they held dear such as material care, social acceptance, and the secure bedroom in a series of violent attacks. At least for a time—in another turn of material meaning—the Mathises reasserted their dignity in an act of domestic care, repairing windows that the mob had broken.

⁷⁸ WestSiders (Society), *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside 1920-1950*, p. 104, Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, p.151.

⁷⁹ *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside*, Ibid.

Part 2: Work, Welfare and Domestic Insecurity in the Depression

For the victims and perpetrators of Detroit's racial neighborhood violence the modern home became a source and site of desperate fear. In a similar way the idealized security of the worker's home proved elusive for the many who lost their jobs in the industrial economy's cyclical downturns. Novelist Upton Sinclair powerfully illustrates the anxieties of worker-homeownership in lean times with *The Jungle* (1906) and *The Flivver King* (1937). Each novel's worker-protagonists mortgage their houses eagerly in good times and experience subsequent financial crises from the anxious perspective of the homeowner. *The Jungle*'s Rudkus family, dependent on the wages of the Chicago meatpacking industry, lose their house and the wages sunk into it when unemployment brings foreclosure and eviction. *The Flivver King* (1937), named for Henry Ford and his Model T, popularly called the "flivver," tells a different story in which the house is kept but its pride and pleasures are inverted by the loss of work. Written as a critique of Fordism in support of the emerging United Auto Workers union, *The Flivver King* follows protagonist Abner Shutt's rising fortunes as a sub-foreman in the Ford Motor Company, and the Shutt family's purchase of a six-room house on a large lot in Highland Park. At home, Abner happily tended a garden of onions and turnips after work and watched his children grow in security, thinking to himself that "Mr. Ford was right, as usual; it was a good thing to own your own home."⁸⁰

The Shutt home was transformed utterly by Abner's job loss. During a post-WWI layoff he "sat at home and brooded," taking odd jobs shoveling snow.⁸¹ To survive, these thrifty savers

⁸⁰ Sinclair, *The Flivver King*, pp. 32-33.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 53.

“had to draw money from the savings-bank, and to both Abner and his wife it was like dying.”⁸² They put off home improvement projects as Abner worried, “suppose they were to lose the house, on which they were only halfway through paying!”⁸³ After six idle weeks Abner was called back to work and the family completed their house payments in the hard-driving but steady industrial growth period of the mid 1920s—restoring, for a time, the family’s sense of domestic security.

In lived reality as in Sinclair’s fictionalized Detroit, the cultural ideal of the Fordist worker—disciplined on the assembly line and secure in the modern home its wages provided—was thrown into crisis by the worldwide depression that followed the growth boom of the 1920s. Mass layoffs of Detroit industrial workers raised the threat of mass home foreclosure as many exhausted their savings, defaulting on debts accrued in the boom years of the 1920s. This second part of Chapter Four examines the politics of the Depression-era worker’s home in Detroit. It argues that as government, industrial leaders and the city’s communist-led workers’ councils negotiated the entwined issues of employment and eviction policy they staked positions on the legacy of Fordism itself. Many were laid off in the crisis and as Sinclair’s Abner Shutt did, found that without income the home became a hard place. Abner and his wife Milly lacked even the capital to make tax payments on their owned house after prolonged unemployment, and slowly the home became a cramped boarding house of the kind that the Ford Motor Company rejected for its workers at the idealistic dawn of Fordism fifteen years earlier. Renting out all but two rooms to boarders, and taking in their unemployed, underemployed and evicted children, the Shutt family learned to live in tight quarters and began pawning their possessions at great loss.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 41, 77, 89-90.

“What were they supposed to do with that home,” the Shutts thought, having no income, “sit in it and freeze to death, or starve, or both? They couldn’t sell [the house] for anything.”⁸⁵

The economic crisis created a charged political environment in which the relationship between government, industry and workers was debated: what were the terms of the Fordist bargain, now that its debts were being called? Frank Murphy—presiding judge in the landmark civil rights trials of Ossian Sweet and his family—was elected Mayor of Detroit in 1930 with the support of labor, immigrants, and the NAACP, and urged that welfare programs for the unemployed were not a matter of charity but a right of Detroit citizens and a responsibility of the government.⁸⁶ In turn, city government and workers pressed industry to take a greater role in resolving the crisis, but while manufacturers provided some aid they largely rejected claims that they remained responsible for their former employees’ domestic security. Idealized notions of the Fordist worker as a thrifty father and homeowner, willing and proud to work, were resuscitated in debates over who deserved welfare and what kinds of aid were most appropriate. Workers themselves, having taken the Fordist bargain of hard labor for domestic security in the boom period of the 1910s and 1920s pressed government and industry to take responsibility, as implicitly promised, for their threatened domestic security. The economic crisis precipitating these negotiations—despite the ceaseless optimism of real estate boosters discussed in Chapter Two—was not entirely unexpected in the latter years of the 1920s.

Fordist Culture Under Scrutiny

British historian Ramsay Muir coined the term “Detroitism” in his in 1927 travelogue *America the Golden*—before Gramsci’s more lasting term Fordism emerged—to critique what he

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 90.

⁸⁶ Fine, *Frank Murphy: the Detroit Years*, pp. 257-258. See also Babson, *Working Detroit*, pp. 56-57.

saw as a corporate-dominated culture supported by a reckless credit-based consumer market. In Detroit the local business paper *Pipp's Weekly* seized upon this international attention, but choosing not to acknowledge Muir's critique they instead provided their own more celebratory definition of Detroitism. *Pipp's* called Detroitism a "doctrine of prosperity," in which the "efforts of [capital and labor] co-ordinated—at peace with one another," an urban culture, "working to the end that the average man, woman, and child may be better fed, better housed, better educated, better protected in health and morals, with more of the comforts and pleasures of life, and have enough left for old age."⁸⁷ In this way, even as the automobile market and the Detroit real estate industries began to show signs of weakness, these editors held fast to the ideals of the worker's home and labor peace that had underwritten the housing boom of the 1920s.⁸⁸

By contrast Muir's original Detroitism captured both the power and the instability of Detroit's industrial growth. Muir confessed that his "hardened heart cannot quite melt to the enthusiasm of [the city's] votaries."⁸⁹ Muir described Detroit as "the home of mass-production, of very high wages and colossal profits, of lavish spending and reckless installment-buying, of intense work and a large and shifting labor-surplus. Its spirit is the spirit of genial and cocksure ruthlessness."⁹⁰ What was more, prefiguring the coming economic crisis, Muir insisted that the city's surge in growth was a historical anomaly that was "nearly at an end" as the domestic

⁸⁷ Edwin Pipp, editor. "Detroitism," *Pipp's Magazine*, 1929. Detroit Real Estate Board, 1922 Folder (filed anachronistically), Burton Historical Collection. This Reprint was likely included as an insert in a mailing produced by the Detroit Real Estate Board or a private realty firm. The title of this article borrows the neologism "Detroitism" from British historian Ramsay Muir, who coined it two years earlier in his travelogue *America the Golden*.

⁸⁸ Automobile production began to slow down in 1926-1927, though following Ford's release of the Model A the industry saw a record high production year in 1929 before falling again. See Peterson, *American Automobile Workers 1900-1933*, p. 130. Chapter Two's Table 2:1 illustrates that Detroit's robust homebuilding market of 1923-1926 had declined considerably by 1928-1929.

⁸⁹ Muir, "Detroitism," *America the Golden*, p. 81.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 81.

market for automobiles began to slow.⁹¹ Adding to this threat, he argued, was the American corporate preference to “waste men rather than materials,” by hiring and firing industrial workers as consumer demand rose and fell to avoid producing any surplus.⁹² This preference had been amply illustrated by the wide fluctuations in Detroit employment in the economic crisis following WWI and in subsequent annual slowdowns.⁹³ Muir’s were dire predictions for Detroit’s ideal of the worker’s home as a source of security and labor peace. For some heavily-mortgaged Detroit Poles for example, two weeks of unemployment was all that stood between the “decency,” “hot meals” and “easy chairs” that exemplified the ideal home and a crisis in which “the best that he can do...is to arrange for the temporary suspension of his [mortgage] payments at compound interest,” knowing that foreclosure loomed and that his deferrals “will not satisfy the grocer for any length of time.”⁹⁴

As the economic crisis unfolded other critiques of Fordist culture emerged. Nelson Young for example, a 1930s researcher of Detroit’s “distressed homeowners,” argued that the city’s real estate industry had created a culture that celebrated “homeowners” as fuller and more responsible citizens—of a higher social status—on the precarious basis of promised future payments, dependent on future work. A heavily encumbered Detroit resident may be “called the ‘owner’ of a \$6,000 home,” Young argued, “but he really is a debtor to the amount of \$5,400.”⁹⁵ Looking back on the collapse Young placed a good portion of the fault on lending institutions, claiming that their failure to anticipate the decline in real estate values might be excused as

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 87.

⁹² Muir, “Detroitism,” *America the Golden*, pp. 81, 83-84.

⁹³ As discussed in Chapters One and Three, and illustrated in Introduction figure I:4.

⁹⁴ Kruesi, *Hamtramck: A Survey*, pp.9-10, 1915. “Decency,” “hot meals” etc. refer to the idealized home as discussed in Chapter Three, the better of “Two Hamtramcks,” according to Powers, “Hamtramck, The City of Contrasts,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 2, 1924.

⁹⁵ Young, *A Study of the Problems of the Distressed Home Owner of Detroit*, pp. 3, 49.

ignorance, but that “no such excuse can be offered for their disguising mortgage-owing as ‘home-owning.’”⁹⁶

Architect F. Gordon Pickell’s critique went beyond the misleading semantics of the city’s development boom to attack the unplanned quality of the larger project of urban expansion, citing the city’s acquiescence to speculative developers in the 1910s and 1920s as an abdication of its responsibility to direct and control urban growth. He saw vindication in the depression for a long-held belief that Detroit’s unregulated, speculation-driven property market was unsustainable. Pickell’s mid-1930s pamphlet *Detroit’s Colossal Gold-Brick* illustrates the exponential growth in subdivided, platted lots in and around Detroit in the 1910s and 1920s as far outpacing the growth of the population, and therefore often developed as investment vehicles rather than as home sites for immediate need.⁹⁷ This kind of “gambling,” Pickell argued, turned productive farms into idle sinks for private and public capital, and further, was a “sacrifice of future freedom for planing [sic] needs of [the] city.”⁹⁸ “What can be more criminal,” he asks, “than for a government to fail to control the use of the land for the good of all?” Pickell added, as a provocation to future planning, “a city which in the winter of 1933 had no less than three hundred thousand destitute people may well begin to give [planning] a little attention.”⁹⁹ As critics such as Young and Pickell debated Fordist Urbanism’s legacy many workers were forced to consider a related question—how to navigate the Fordist bargain of domestic security in exchange for disciplined work now that its terms had been betrayed.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Pickell, F. Gordon, “Chart Showing Tremendous Increase of Unneeded Lots,” *Detroit’s Colossal Gold-Brick*, Burton Historical Collection, (1935).

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 8

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 6

Distressed Homeowners

The American manufacturing market weakened in the late 1920s even as a speculative investment bubble drove the stock market to unsustainable heights, from which it fell precipitously in the crash of October 1929 as part of a global slide into economic depression.¹⁰⁰ Mass unemployment and steeply dropping home values transformed Detroit and many other American cities in the subsequent months and years. This Great Depression precipitated what economist Miles Colean, writing in the 1940s, called “the greatest wave of urban home foreclosures in our history.”¹⁰¹ The hardest hit were those—such as Detroit workers with little capital—who had relied on multiple mortgages to cover the costs of home buying in the overpriced speculative market of the 1920s.¹⁰² Detroit was particularly hard hit by the crisis. Michigan became the second largest recipient of Federal HOLC loans—designed to rescue homeowners facing foreclosure—aid extended to the owners of 31% of all mortgaged, non-farm, owner-occupied dwellings in the state.¹⁰³ A midcentury historian of the HOLC attributed the heavy concentration of distressed homeowners in Michigan to the failure of major Michigan banks and more fundamentally to “the collapse of the Detroit real estate market.”¹⁰⁴ As the depression set in Detroit’s home values fell to such an extent that many houses were worth less than what was owed on their first mortgages, typically representing 60% of the original value, meaning their owners were completely “under water” with regard to any second mortgage they might hold to cover buying costs beyond that 60%.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Babson, *Working Detroit*, p. 53.

¹⁰¹ Twentieth Century Fund and Miles Colean, *American Housing*, pp. 226, 258.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Harriss, *History and Policies of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation*, 1951, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20, 37-38.

¹⁰⁵ Young, Nelson. “A study of the problems of the distressed home owner of Detroit as revealed by applications to the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation; report to the Earhart Foundation.” Ann Arbor:

By October 1930 about 80,000 Detroit workers had registered as unemployed through city relief agencies, while those who managed to retain employment faced deep cuts in pay and work days.¹⁰⁶ A supervisor in the Crankshaft Department at Ford's Rouge Plant recalled in his oral history that most employees wages were cut back from \$7 per hour to \$4 per hour during the depression, and that, "we worked three days a week one week, and the next week we'd work two days a week. We did that for some time trying to spread the work out."¹⁰⁷ Unemployment or reduced wages created the risk that workers would default on their installment payments, home mortgages or rent obligations. Older workers with home mortgages carried an especially difficult burden in the crisis, facing foreclosure in a cruel reversal of the 1920s real estate ideal of the home as source of security in aging. Examining a sample of Detroit homeowners in default one researcher of the 1930s found that half of the applicants for HOLC rescue loans were fifty or older, as older workers were more likely to face unemployment in the crisis than the younger. "Firms requiring high-speed work, and especially those with pension plans," the researcher noted, "have quite well-recognized policies of employing only younger men," and since older workers were unlikely to find well-paid work again when the factories reopened, many would ultimately lose their houses—and principal investments—despite HOLC help unless they had working-age children to contribute to the family economy.¹⁰⁸

Earhart Foundation, 1934. "Under water" was a term frequently used during the 2008 foreclosure crisis to describe houses whose owners owed more than the current value to their mortgager. The average Detroit home among those studied by Young had declined to 60% of its original value, see pp. 5, 31.

¹⁰⁶ "City to Handle all Job Calls," *Detroit News*, October 4d, 1930.

¹⁰⁷ Beebe, Howard (1954). Interview by Owen Bombard [print transcript]. Benson Ford Research Center, Acc. 65.

¹⁰⁸ Young, pp. 9-12, 25-26.

Defending Fordist Culture

Conscious of the social unrest that eviction, cold and hunger could bring Frank Murphy's city government attempted to sustain workers' domestic security and forestall the collapse of the Fordist bargain. In the absence of established welfare or unemployment insurance programs local government and private charities were the first line of social defense in the crisis—it was not until 1932 that the Michigan legislature passed a moratorium on foreclosure sales and 1933 when the federal government began to extend HOLC loans to restructure homeowners' unsustainable mortgage debts.¹⁰⁹ Reflecting on the city's efforts in the first year of the crisis Murphy argued in 1931, "welfare work has minimized racialism. Detroit would have been on fire without relief."¹¹⁰

Detroit's depression-era relief program was among the most robust in the nation both by reputation and financial investment—in 1930-1931 the city's per capita relief spending was twice the national average and only surpassed by Boston among major American cities.¹¹¹ Relief was focused on workers with homes and families—after the ideal of the Fordist "new man"—those whose social status had risen sharply in the 1910s and 1920s and who, without work, faced the shame of losing the material gains of their lives' work. Houses bought in the real estate culture of the 1920s as investments in economic security failed to deliver in the context of crisis, becoming sites of fear and desperation as foreclosure notices arrived, pantries and coal stores became empty, and installment-purchased furniture was repossessed for nonpayment. The eviction of a family from their home was perhaps the most potent symbol of Fordist culture's collapse. Against all of these humiliations—these threats to the social contract and stability of the city—the Mayor's Unemployment Committee tailored its welfare provisions.

¹⁰⁹ Young, p 1.

¹¹⁰ Frank Murphy as quoted in "Some Bums Depart," *Detroit Saturday Night*, March 21, 1931. This quote appears in part in Fine, *Frank Murphy*, p. 259.

¹¹¹ Fine, *Frank Murphy*, p. 306-307.

Forestalling evictions was a priority for the Unemployment Committee, which extended legal aid to families faced with eviction. Working with landlords and mortgage holders the Committee claimed that by the end of 1930 it had postponed eight hundred evictions and hundreds of foreclosures.¹¹² Unemployed workers registered themselves with city government to request this and other forms of relief. Sending case workers to interpret the worthiness and needs of each household and giving preference to workers with families, the city adopted responsibilities and social authority once held by industry as it extended grocery vouchers, rent and utility assistance, free hospitalization and job placement at its own discretion.¹¹³ This process perhaps deflected shame from Detroit's industrial culture—by preserving many workers' places in modern homes—even as workers themselves bore the shame of allowing city welfare agents into their homes to confirm their need in a return to the kind of paternalistic gaze applied by Ford's Sociological Department in the 1910s.

In addition to welfare assistance the city coordinated an employment program to direct what meager jobs became available toward workers with large families. The Unemployment Committee's jobs bureau asked all city employers to coordinate their hiring through the city, who would direct jobs to workers—both men and women, white collar and blue—based on their number of dependents, as the *Detroit News* explained, “men with seven or more dependents are being given first call. There are about 3,500 in this group. Men with six dependents will be called next, and so on.”¹¹⁴ With so many prospective workers and so few jobs at hand the Committee created work for some unemployed people selling apples and bags of sand, and worked to ensure that even these modest efforts only benefitted those it considered most worthy. Following reports

¹¹² Fine, *Frank Murphy*, p. 266.

¹¹³ Fine, *Frank Murphy*, p. 259.

¹¹⁴ “City to Handle all Job Calls,” *Detroit News*, October 4, 1930, and “J.N. Duncan in charge at Job Headquarters,” *Detroit News*, October 1, 1930.

that apples and bags of sand were being sold outside of the auspices of the Committee's program its representatives urged buyers to demand that their apple or sand seller show their city-provided credentials. "Our men are chosen because they are in hard straits and have large families," explained the Committee's Secretary of Creative Employment.¹¹⁵ By turning to a city-sponsored sand-seller when seeking material to make slippery sidewalks less dangerous in winter, a buyer was assured that the delivery driver was "a worthy man who is out of work," and that "these men will put every cent they earn back into circulation. They will buy food, clothing and other necessities for their families."¹¹⁶

Unemployed single men and women without houses received a lower standard of relief amounting to room and board in a lodging house. Critics of welfare spending such as the business newspaper the *Detroit Saturday Night* perceived this group less sympathetically than married workers with dependents, urging that many were "bums" from out of town—not committed Detroit workers—and willing to take welfare but unwilling to work.¹¹⁷ Murphy urged over Council opposition that the city must fund lodging houses for unemployed singles, arguing that this was fair given the preference married men received in rehiring and city relief spending.¹¹⁸ The Mayor rejected criticisms of the city's lodging house residents, arguing that they were not alien to Fordist culture and despite the loss of work were still *New Men* in the sense discussed in Chapter One, not "bums" but "self-respecting, sensitive men, willing to do some kind of work but unable to find it...[an] entirely new type of man."¹¹⁹ The city's Unemployment Bureau did pay private lodging houses to room the unemployed and General

¹¹⁵ "City Sand Men Carry Cards," *Detroit News*, January 3, 1931.

¹¹⁶ "Sale of Sand is Increasing," *Detroit News*, December 29, 1930 and "Sale of Sand to Aid Jobless," *Detroit News*, December 23, 1930.

¹¹⁷ "Some Bums Depart," *Detroit Saturday Night*, March 21, 1931 and Babson,

¹¹⁸ Fine, *Frank Murphy*, p. 277.

¹¹⁹ Murphy as quoted by Fine in *Frank Murphy*, p. 271.

Motors and Studebaker also donated unused factory buildings for boarding purposes, where many unemployed workers slept on army cots.¹²⁰

While many accepted welfare to survive, Detroit's depression-era urban culture continued to celebrate the figure of the proud, independent worker who either went without help or who asked for it only at great pain. In 1930 the *Detroit News* published a feature story figuring this ideal unemployed worker—a home owning family man, proud and willing to work—in the person of Joe Vandervoort. A married autoworker and father of one, originally from Holland, Vandervoort had been unemployed for a year and was months behind on house payments in October 1930. Because his family's house was located just north of Detroit they were ineligible for city welfare programs—an accidental independence that contributed to Joe's power as a Fordist figure. “Who will help me get a job?” implored the placard that Vandervoort held aloft as he stood conspicuously along downtown's Washington Boulevard, “I do not want charity” (Figure 4:8).¹²¹ The News' feature celebrated Vandervoort's proud independence and dramatized his psychological pain at asking for help finding a job, noting that it was not until his third trip to the Boulevard that Joe could bring himself to display the sign and that he finally did so “with tear-filled eyes...with his heart, as he explained in his own words, ‘shriveling up inside him.’”¹²² Vandervoort, figured in this way, presented the cultural ideal of the Fordist worker as strained but not broken by economic crisis—persisting in those who would humbly seek any work in order to regain a contradictory independence.

Other workers—finding no room or refusing the paternalism of the municipal lodging houses—sought a kind of independence in homelessness that government and commentators

¹²⁰ Peterson, *American Automobile Workers 1900-1933*, p. 135.

¹²¹ “He Wants a Job,” *Detroit News*, October 3, 1930.

¹²² *Ibid.*

were far less sympathetic toward. Thousands took shelter in outdoor encampments in depression-era Detroit, though a turn of bitterly cold weather might drive some back into the shelters.¹²³ Several hundred created a conspicuous settlement in the city center's Grand Circus Park while others settled in outer districts.¹²⁴ In the winter of 1932 the *Detroit Free Press* reported that one such group of unemployed people created a "community of tin and tarpaper shacks" on a west side dumpsite where the newly-built Springwells neighborhood discussed in Chapter Two meets the Michigan Central rail yards.¹²⁵ Collecting and selling scrap metal and rags and earning ten or fifteen cents per day, the group joined unemployed and homeless people in many American cities in calling their settlement "Hooverville" in criticism of the President, who many blamed for the Depression. The community self-organized along the racial lines drawn during the city's rapid growth of the previous two decades, "Negroes' shacks in one cluster and the whites in another."¹²⁶ After a period of zero degree temperatures fifty residents remained of an initial two hundred, some resolute in their rejection of city-provided shelter. In turn, the city showed no sympathy for these workers choosing to survive outside of the propped-up Fordist culture of relief for the worthy, and four days before Christmas in this Christian-majority city police "routed" the group from the site and put their shelters to the torch, citing reports that residents of the encampment had stolen coal.¹²⁷

Work in the Garden

In the absence of industrial work Detroit's depression-era government sought to keep the Fordist ideal of thrift alive in a program of subsistence gardening—a light form of welfare in

¹²³ "Cold Crowds City Shelters," *Detroit News*, November 29, 1930.

¹²⁴ Peterson, *American Automobile Workers 1900-1933*, p. 135.

¹²⁵ "Torch Applied to Shantytown," *Detroit Free Press*, December 23, 1930.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

which the gardener's efforts and sacrifices would bring them material rewards, and a practice that Murphy believed would preserve the "work habits" of the unemployed.¹²⁸ Large-scale gardening had been successfully coordinated by the city during the depression of 1893 and WWI, and unlike other more controversial welfare programs the "Thrift Gardens" initiative required little capital and could be administered with minimal cost to taxpayers on the basis of donations. Indeed, the gardening concept was so widely embraced that in addition to city government it was supported by the Detroit Real Estate Board—whose members lent land for cultivation—the Detroit Board of Commerce—whose representative helped to plan a fundraiser for the project—and Ford, who developed a parallel gardens program on company owned land.¹²⁹ Cultivating a garden, Murphy argued, could restore workers' threatened identities and the conciliatory labor politics of the boomtown era by reinstating a simulacrum of the Fordist bargain—those worthy and willing to work under supervision would receive material rewards—food—and be given the means to do the work—seeds, tools, and land (Figure 4:9). Giving workers "the privilege of work" in gardens, Murphy argued, in addition to providing food, was a way to fighting back against "the psychological effect of idleness," which Murphy saw as "dangerous to the safety and morale of our country."¹³⁰

Two types of gardens were promoted—home gardens for those with sufficient space in their yard or on adjacent lots and city garden spaces for those without dispersed at 27 sites within and beyond the city's outer neighborhoods. In 1931 the program served more than 1,600 home gardens and 2,700 city garden spaces at minimal cost and was considered by its administrators to

¹²⁸ Fine, Frank Murphy, p. 284.

¹²⁹ "City Gardening Plan Launched, *Detroit News*, March 7, 1931, "Clubs Back Job Garden Plan, *Detroit Times*, March 21, 1931, and Peterson, *American Automobile Workers 1900-1933*, pp. 136-137.

¹³⁰ "Mayor Forms Garden Group," *Detroit Times*, March 24, 1931.

be a great success to be repeated the following year, “with unemployment conditions seemingly no better [at year’s end] than they were in the spring.”¹³¹

Garden work was not the hard-driving experience of the assembly line and contrary to the single breadwinner ideal of the boomtown city families were not discouraged from working their gardens together (Figure 4:10). At the same time gardens were regulated and supervised according to an exacting set of rules and prescriptions that replicated the demands of true employment. To be given a 40’x100’ lot for cultivation one had to apply through the city, who would determine whether the applicant was truly in need and required the applicant to sign a pledge to consume and not re-sell their produce, and “to plant their gardens according to prescribed diagrams, to keep them in good condition, free from weeds; to keep a record of the amount harvested and to respect the rights of neighboring gardeners.”¹³² Field overseers walked the gardens from “7 a.m. until 7 or 8 p.m.,” providing advice and instructions to gardeners as they followed the detailed “Model Layout” provided, an in-depth prescription for a forty-row garden in which thirty-five rows were predetermined for staples such as corn, beans and carrots, and five rows were set aside for the “gardener to plant what he chooses (Figure 4:11).”¹³³ These strictures, as one overseer in the southwest neighborhood of Delray found, were difficult to enforce and the actual content of gardens was subject of frequent argument and negotiation between overseer and gardeners. As he explained to a *Detroit News* reporter, who found him in the midst of debate with several gardeners:

¹³¹ Detroit Thrift Gardens Committee, “Report of the Detroit Thrift Gardens Which Helped To Feed 4,369 Families in 1931,” pp. 5-7, 15, Burton Historical Collection, Unemployed File.

¹³² “City Gardens Sought by 850,” *Detroit News*, March 20, 1931.

¹³³ Detroit Thrift Gardens, “Detroit Thrift Gardens: Model Layout for Vegetable Garden, Revised for 1933,” pamphlet. Burton Historical Collection, Unemployed File. Regarding overseers’ schedule see “Assign 6,000 Garden Plots,” *Detroit Times*, April 28, 1931.

Our gardeners come from different parts of the globe. The majority were raised on farms and have definite ideas about gardening which they brought from the old country... We had to make some deviations from the blue prints of the model garden supplied to us by agricultural experts to suit racial tastes. Yes, we are raising chili beans and kapusta [cabbage] and petrezselyem [parsley]. And we will raise enough paprika to satisfy all the needs of the Hungarians in Delray.¹³⁴

At the same time, despite the modest agency that unemployed workers found in the gardens, and the reporter's impression that all he observed that day in Delray "smiled good naturedly, looked with love upon their garden plots and were optimistic about the future," the material promises of Fordism would likely elude many gardeners in the future.¹³⁵ Two men interviewed—one fifty eight and two years unemployed—had "a wife and four children to support," and the other, sixty five and recently laid off from the Department of Public Works, despite their diligent labor in the industries of the 1920s and the Thrift Garden of the early 1930s, would face the industrial economy's age discrimination in any future attempt to enter the workforce and would likely find difficulty resuming mortgage or rent payments when the crisis receded. Gardens approximated the Fordist bargain but the pay—whether in nostalgia for a rural life or in vegetables to eat—was an unsure foundation for future economic security.

Risk and Responsibility

As government stepped in to sustain and defend an urban culture built on industrial work and wages, many called for industrial employers to take a greater responsibility for unemployed workers—though with little success. Within the Mayor's Unemployment Committee, for example, liberal and labor voices clashed with those of industry on the question of a required minimum five-day workweek.¹³⁶ The proposal would require factories to run five days a week

¹³⁴ "Sons of 11 Nations Toil Joyously in Thrift Gardens," *Detroit News*, May 13, 1931.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ "Leaders Divide on 5-Day Week," *Detroit News*, November 11, 1930.

and spread out the available work, rather than operating more or fewer days than that on the basis of business need. In shops with an influx of work, Frank Martel of the Detroit Federation of Labor asked, “why should men be working six or seven days a week, many of them between 10 and 12 hours a day, when we have in our city 100,000 unemployed?”¹³⁷ John Lovett of the Michigan Manufacturer’s Association rejected the proposal in what was a long and heated debate, arguing that the Committee “has no business prescribing [working hours] to industry,” and taunted his Committee colleagues saying, “adopt your five-day week and see how far you will enforce it.”¹³⁸ As Lovett suggested, the political power to force such a move was absent and industry retained its autonomy with regard to scheduling work.

The municipal fragmentation of metropolitan Detroit served the Ford Motor Company’s withdrawal from responsibility for its employees. Ford, the metro region’s largest industrial employer, cut jobs drastically as orders for its products plummeted—from 128,000 employees in 1929 to 37,000 in the summer of 1931.¹³⁹ As Mayor Frank Murphy and the Unemployment Committee struggled with the high cost of relief—and as critics mocked the city for its extensive spending on relief—Murphy argued that the Ford Motor Company should do more to support the unemployed. Ford, with its major plants located outside of Detroit in Dearborn and Highland Park as discussed in Chapter Two, paid no taxes to the city of Detroit even as an estimated 15% of workers living in Detroit and drawing welfare were laid off Ford workers.¹⁴⁰ The company deflected Murphy’s argument with a distracting critique of what Ford saw as unacceptable waste and fraud in the Detroit welfare system, and while Ford did provide meals to former employees

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Peterson, *American Automobile Workers 1900-1933*, p. 131.

¹⁴⁰ The Unemployed Council calculated this by examining a sample of 32,000 unemployed workers living in Detroit, Fine, *Frank Murphy*, pp. 309-310.

living in Dearborn it continued to evade responsibility for its large cohort of laid off workers living in Detroit.¹⁴¹ As the company's independence from worker's housing—discussed in Chapter One—left risk for employees' domestic security in the independent hands of workers themselves, Ford's moves to Highland Park and Dearborn further insulated the company from the unemployment risks of many of its workers.

As Murphy pressed the Ford Motor Company on its responsibilities, Communist-led Unemployed Councils challenged city government to take a greater responsibility for the material conditions of the unemployed. During the Depression the Communist Party rallied unemployed workers in many American cities, and Detroit Communists charged that the efforts of the Mayor's Unemployment Bureau were “wholly inadequate.”¹⁴² Many workers took their first working-class political action by attending the Unemployed Councils' soup kitchens and political rallies. The context of crisis allowed the Councils to established coalitions of the unemployed that crossed the racial, ethnic and gender divisions of the 1910s and 1920s—bringing men and women and blacks and whites together in a shared identity as unemployed workers.¹⁴³ Even Sinclair's Abner Shutt, a proud “100% American” member of the KKK in the 1920s, was willing to march alongside Jews, Catholics, blacks and “Reds” to demand work, though he later felt ashamed of his participation.¹⁴⁴ Early in the crisis, in March of 1930, this broad coalition drew an unexpectedly large crowd of 50,000 to the city center to demonstrate.

Representatives of the Unemployed Councils brought their demands to city government in an October 1930 meeting, as two thousand unemployed demonstrators gathered outside of

¹⁴¹ Peterson, *American Automobile Workers*, p. 137.

¹⁴² “Idle Protest to the Mayor,” *Detroit News*, October 25, 1930.

¹⁴³ Babson, *Working Detroit*, p. 57.

¹⁴⁴ Sinclair, *The Flivver King*, pp. 58, 85-87.

City Hall. The Councils demanded that the material and domestic security of workers become a responsibility of the whole society, asking, as the *Detroit News* reported, that:

the families of unemployed persons be given \$20 a week and \$5 for each child or other dependent; cessation of eviction proceedings; free light, gas and heat during the unemployment period; prohibition of the removal of furniture from workers homes for non-payment of installments; free meals, fares and clothes to school children, and free fares to unemployed; [and] that the city take over all vacant houses and vacant hotel rooms for housing the homeless.¹⁴⁵

These demands represented an entirely different politics from that of Murphy's welfare regime. Rather than bare subsistence aid targeted to keep workers' families in their homes until industry resumed full operation—preserving the power relations of Fordist culture—these demands suggested a world in which workers need not suffer deprivation due to unemployment. Under such conditions the urgent need to resume work—formerly the burden of the unemployed—would be carried by the whole society including government, lending institutions, property owners, employed taxpayers and industry (Figure 4:12).

The Mayor sought common ground in his exchange with city Communists, noting the merit of the Unemployed Council's proposal on utility assistance and arguing that his government had effectively halted evictions, asserting that "there is no place on earth where greater measures have been taken for public relief than in Detroit, and that includes Moscow."¹⁴⁶ At the same time Murphy became dismissive on the question of income. Standing firmly on the cultural ideal of pay for willing work, and adopting a variant of the argument that his own critics had used to suggest Detroit's welfare programs were overgenerous, Murphy chided the Council's representatives, arguing, "If I could get \$20 a week from the City, free rent, food, light and

¹⁴⁵ "Idle Protest to the Mayor," *Detroit News*, October 25, 1930.

¹⁴⁶ "Idle Protest to the Mayor," *Detroit News*, October 25, 1930.

carfare, I wouldn't work either."¹⁴⁷ Nearly a year later, presenting a more detailed proposal to the Mayor with lower income requirements, the Unemployment Council's representative Philip Raymond raised the prospect of a revolution, noting, "We are trying to work within the present system of government. If we find no solution within it, the workers may be forced to solve their problems some other way."¹⁴⁸

Raymond's ominous threat of revolution came in the context of deteriorating conditions for the city's unemployed. In 1931 Murphy claimed that "no person receiving relief and threatened with eviction, and whose situation has been made known to us, has since been evicted"—but this defense of Fordist domestic culture could not be maintained as the months dragged on.¹⁴⁹ That same year, facing rising budget deficits, the city reduced its spending on welfare and cut jobs in the Department of Public Works.¹⁵⁰ In 1932 a Mayor's Unemployment Committee report reviewed a sample of unemployed families and found that in one factory 40% of 230 home owning employees had lost their homes, while among a group of about 1000 renters nearly one third were behind on payments and 28 had been evicted. Ten percent of families with installment-purchased goods in the home had seen them repossessed.¹⁵¹ Labor historian Steve Babson found that as the city cut rent subsidies evictions spiked in the summer of 1931 to as many as 150 per day.¹⁵² In the fearsome spectacle of eviction a mother, small children, and intimate household possessions—things idealized for their protectedness in the city's beleaguered domestic ideal—were forced to the curb and exposed to weather and to view (Figure

¹⁴⁷ "Idle Protest to the Mayor," *Detroit News*, October 25, 1930, on criticism of Murphy see "Detroit Giped as Sap Town," *Detroit Free Press*, March 20, 1931 and "Some Bums Depart," *Detroit Saturday Night*, March 31, 1931.

¹⁴⁸ "Greater Help asked of City," *Detroit News*, October 26, 1931.

¹⁴⁹ "Greater Help Asked of City," *Detroit News*, February 26, 1931.

¹⁵⁰ Babson, *Working Detroit*, p. 56.

¹⁵¹ Fine, Frank Murphy, pp. 247-250. and Peterson, *American Automobile Workers 1900-1933*, p. 131-135, citing the Committee report "The Effect Upon Detroit of the Three Years of the Depression."

¹⁵² Babson, *Working Detroit*, p. 57.

4:13). Some, determined not to acquiesce to such affronts on families' domestic independence, turned to civil disobedience and moved families' possessions back into a home once authorities had left, or by covertly restoring utility services cut for nonpayment.¹⁵³ With the economic crisis deepening and city government reducing its welfare program, Unemployed Council leaders planned a march on the Ford Rouge Plant.

Crossing the Line

The infamous Ford Hunger March of 1932—which ended when four unarmed protesters were killed by police and Ford Motor Company agents' gunfire—revealed the power invested in the dividing line between Detroit and Ford's Dearborn, and between the company and its unemployed workers. The march dramatized the municipal divide by design. In it three to five thousand unemployed workers and protesters gathered on the Detroit side and marched up Miller Road, planning to cross into Dearborn and deliver a list of demands at the symbolically charged Ford Motor Company employment office, Gate Three.¹⁵⁴ The day was cold and the marchers, as labor attorney Maurice Sugar notes from his interviews with marchers after the event, were “men and women, white and Negro.”¹⁵⁵ Along Miller, with the Rouge River at left and a rail road at right—and the houses and Woodmere cemetery of Detroit's Springwells neighborhood beyond—the march proceeded until it encountered a roadblock of fifty Dearborn police and Ford agents at the city line, who quickly escalated the encounter to violence, firing tear gas into the crowd (Figure 4:14).¹⁵⁶ With overwhelming numbers the march pressed past this checkpoint, with workers throwing stones and causing the police and company agents to fall back to the plant. There, at the employment office's Gate Three, the marchers were dispersed with tear gas, icy

¹⁵³ Babson, *Working Detroit*, pp. 57-58.

¹⁵⁴ Sugar, *The Ford Hunger March*, pp. 32-36 and Babson, *Working Detroit*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁵ Sugar, *The Ford Hunger March*, p. 33.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 34-36.

water hoses and ultimately gunfire—killing four and wounding at least twenty-two workers.¹⁵⁷

Sugar claimed that “perhaps fifty more were hit [with gunfire], escaping to their homes or places of hiding for medical attention.”¹⁵⁸

Home was likely never far from Hunger Marchers’ minds as they made their way across the militarized Detroit/Dearborn line. The deprivations experienced by unemployed workers and their families—in empty cupboards and coal bins—represented a profound loss of domestic security. The work and wages that marchers demanded of Ford that day, as Ford himself had said years earlier, represented the “domestic destinies” of the assembled demonstrators.¹⁵⁹ Indeed the unfulfilled intent of the march was to stage a meeting between Unemployed Council leaders and Ford officials to discuss a list of workers’ demands, including demands for work, wages, an end to racial discrimination in employment, the opportunity to organize, and crucially, direct aid in the realm of worker’s home. Marchers sought an end to “foreclosure on homes of former Ford workers,” with “Ford to assume the responsibility for all mortgages, land contracts, and back taxes on homes until six months after regular employment,” and an even more fundamentally material demand, a stock of “five tons of coke or coal for the winter.”¹⁶⁰ The modern worker’s home—marchers would remind Ford through their demands—was inseparably entwined in the project of industrialization.

Conclusions

Detroit’s housing construction program of the 1910s and 1920s secured a disciplined workforce for the city’s growing industry and created a space where workers made meaningful

¹⁵⁷ Ibid,

¹⁵⁸ Sugar, *The Ford Hunger March*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁹ Ford, as quoted in the epigraph to Chapter One.

¹⁶⁰ Sugar, *The Ford Hunger March*, p. 32.

domestic lives. This urbanism manifested the central bargain of Fordist culture—that the hard work of mass production would be rewarded with domestic security and upward social mobility. Yet the security of the worker’s home proved elusive in the economic crisis of the early 1930s as it had in the neighborhood unrest of 1925. As Detroit’s industries shed jobs precipitously the meaning of workers’ homes was fearsomely inverted, transformed from sources of pride and security to places to sources of fear—fear of eviction and of the loss of hard-earned material comforts and social prestige. The depression upended Fordist culture and pressed a question that lay dormant through much of the 1910s and 1920s: where, ultimately, did the social risks of industrial modernization rest? In crisis, Detroit’s unemployed workforce faced many of these risks in their private homes, through loss—of wealth and pride—and deprivation. As industry took shelter in layoffs and, in the case of Ford, behind defensive municipal lines, workers negotiated the possible loss of the material and psychological shelter of their homes. Workers pressed city government and industry in individual and collective ways: some asked for ‘work not welfare,’ others resisted eviction or planted unsanctioned paprika, and crucially, organized workers put the housing question back to the industrial leaders who had driven the building of the working city. Despite the hardships of more than two years of economic crisis Detroit’s Hunger Marchers did not abandon hope in Fordism—in the bargain of hard work for domestic security—and took great risks to demand that its promises be honored.

Figures



Figure 4:1: "Stop Rioting, Smith Pleads with Citizens."
Detroit Free Press, July 12, 1925.

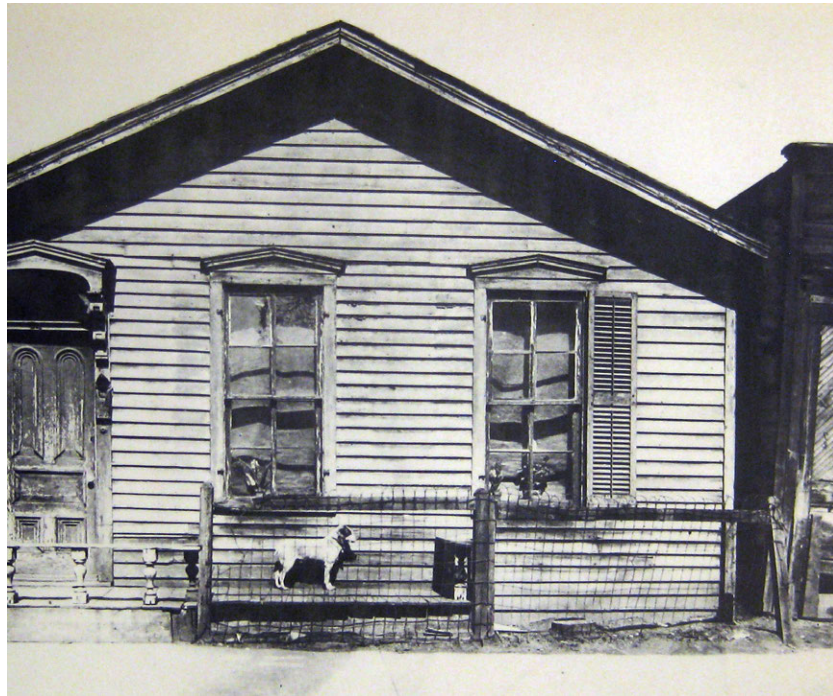


Figure 4:2: "Decadent Frame Cottage Now Part of the Negro Section."
Thomas, "The City of Detroit: A Study in Urban Geography," Fig. 86a, 1928.



Figure 4:3: Ku Klux Klan Labor Day Event, Pontiac, Michigan, 1925. The crowd was said to be “made up very largely of Klan members from Detroit.” The business newspaper *Pipp’s Weekly* intended to shore up opposition to the Klan by showing its fearsome strength with this image, adding that the image “reveals only a part of the machines, only those within range of the camera from one point.”
 “A Gathering of the Ku Klux Klan—And Its Political Significance,” *Pipp’s Weekly*, September 26, 1925, p. 12.



Figure 4:4: “Do you Want Klan Rule?”
Pipp’s Weekly, October 17, 1925.



Figure 4:5: The Mathises' Northfield St. Duplex. Where Fleta and Aldine Mathis moved with three others in 1925, breaking a west side color line. This undated photograph was perhaps taken in the 1990's: in the 1920s neighboring houses existed immediately to each side of the duplex, apparently demolished by the time this photo was taken.

WestSiders (Society), *Remembering Detroit's Old Westside 1920-1950: a Pictorial History of the WestSiders* (1997).

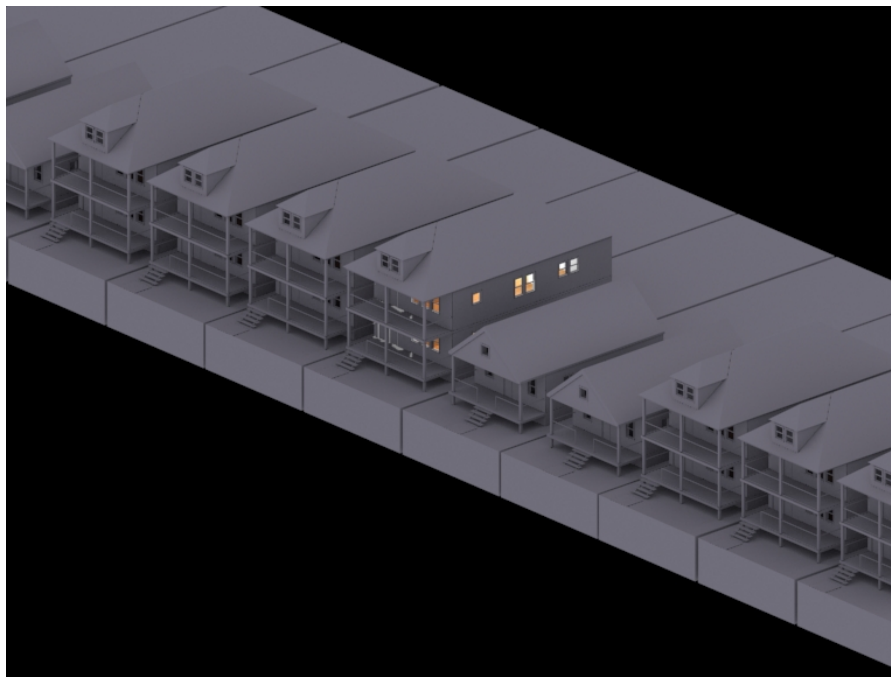


Figure 4:6: An illustration of Northfield Street's Bungalows and Duplexes. The basic arrangement of houses in the context of the Mathis's home on Northfield St, where the singling out of one home and the expressed solidarity of the rest were practiced by vandals and the mob. By the author with reference to Sanborn Fire insurance Maps.

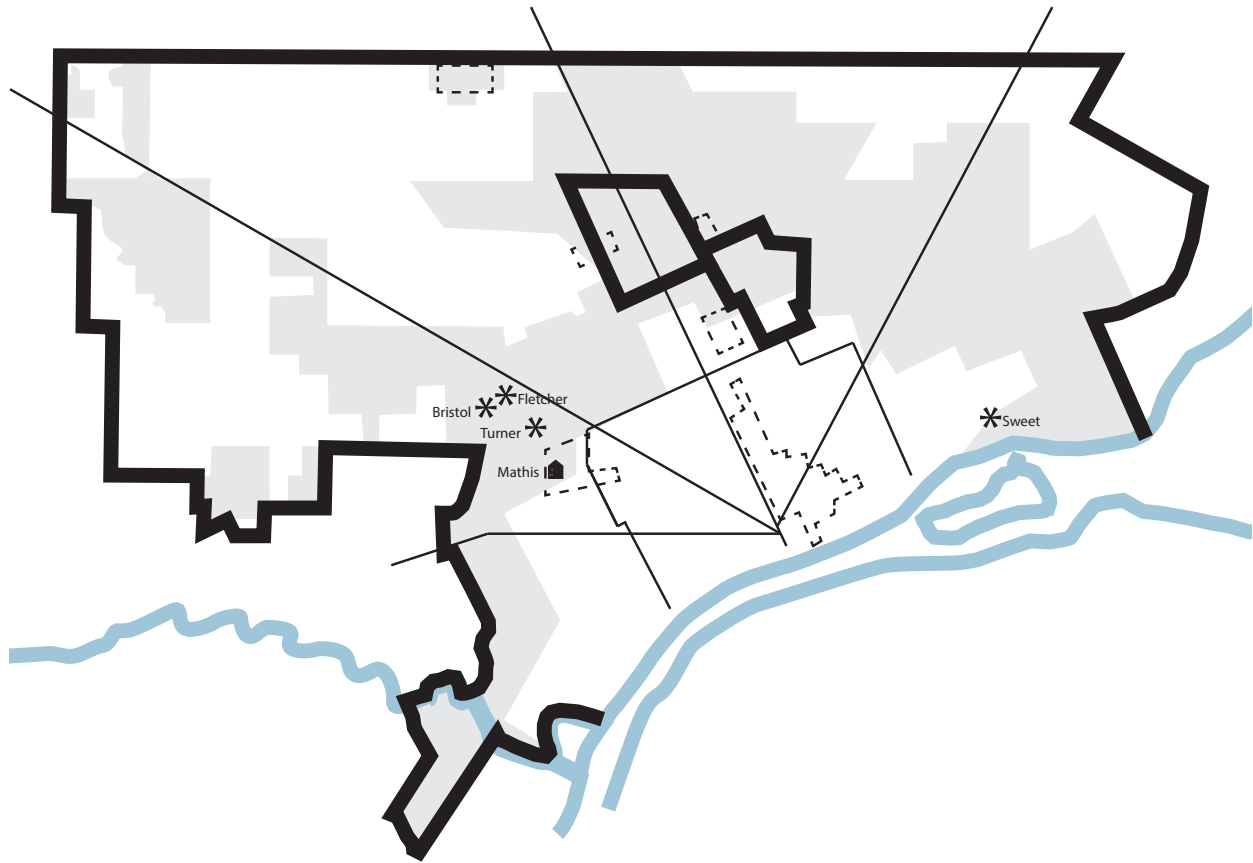


Figure 4:7: Neighborhood Racial Violence, 1925. Districts with concentrated African American populations in 1928 are depicted with a dashed line and the five major mob riots of summer 1925 are located by victims' last names. African American districts per Thomas, "The City of Detroit: A Study in Urban Geography," Fig. 6, 1928. Descriptions of these five riots can be found in Thomas, *Life for Us is What We Make of It*.



Figure 4:8: “Who Will Help Me Get a Job? I Do Not Want Charity.”
Detroit News, Wayne State University Virtual Motor City, Image 77794. A similar photograph of Vandervoort appeared in “He Wants a Job,” *Detroit News*, October 3, 1930.



Figure 4:9: Applicants Wait for Seeds at an East Side Thrift Garden Office, 1931.
“Seeking Seeds for City Garden Plots,” *Detroit News*, April 14, 1931.



Figure 4:10: Children and Adults Gather at a Thrift Garden Well, ca. 1931.
Detroit Historical Society Digital Archive, Catalog No. 2012.045.333.

DETROIT THRIFT GARDENS.										
NORTH		MODEL LAYOUT FOR VEGETABLE GARDEN REVISED FOR 1933 PLOT 40 FT. x 100 FT. PREPARED BY THE SEED AND PLANT COMMITTEE OF THE DETROIT THRIFT GARDENS.					HOW TO PLANT THE SEEDS AND THIN THE PLANTS.			
<p>For the season 1933, thrift gardens for families under the care of the Department of Public Welfare are being handled directly by the Thrift Garden Project of that Department. Additional gardens for worthy non-welfare families are being provided by the Detroit Thrift Gardens, a project of the Mayor's Unemployment Committee. These sponsors are working in closest co-operation.</p>		ROW NO.	NAME OF VEGETABLE	VARIETY NAMES IN PARENTHESES.	DISTANCE OF ROWS APART	WHEN PLANTED IN DRILLS.		WHEN PLANTED IN HILLS.		
						DEPTH OF SEED IN GROUND	DISTANCE OF SEEDS APART	DISTANCE OF PLANTS APART AFTER THINNING	DISTANCE OF HILLS APART	NO. OF SEEDS IN HILL
DATES FOR FIRST PLANTINGS	ROW NO.	NAME OF VEGETABLE	VARIETY NAMES IN PARENTHESES.	DISTANCE OF ROWS APART	DEPTH OF SEED IN GROUND	DISTANCE OF SEEDS APART	DISTANCE OF PLANTS APART AFTER THINNING	DISTANCE OF HILLS APART	NO. OF SEEDS IN HILL	NO. OF PLANTS TO LEAVE AFTER THINNING
MAY 15-25	40	CORN LATE	(BANTAM EVERGREEN)	2'						
MAY 15-25	39	CORN LATE	" "	3'						
MAY 15-25	38	CORN LATE	" " IF DESIRED, GREEN OR WAX POD BEANS INSTEAD OF CORN, MAY BE PLANTED IN ROWS 35 TO 40. SUPERVISOR WILL FURNISH NECESSARY SEEDS.	3'	1-1/2 IN.	2 IN.	10-12 IN.	2'-3 FT.	5-6	3-4
MAY 1-15	37	CORN EARLY	" "	3'						
MAY 1-15	36	CORN EARLY	" "	3'						
MAY 1-15	35	CORN EARLY	" "	3'	1-1/2 IN.	2 IN.	8-10 IN.	2 1/2 FT.	5-6	3-4
MAY 15-31	34	SQUASH, WINTER	(TABLE QUEEN OR DELICIOUS)	3'	1 IN.			5-6 FT.	6-8	3-4
	33	SUGGESTIONS								
	32	THIS SPACE LEFT FOR GARDENER TO PLANT WHAT HE CHOOSES. SUPERVISOR WILL SUPPLY SEEDS MARKED WITH STAR. GARDENERS MUST SUPPLY ANY OTHERS.								
	31	* TURNIP	SUMMER SQUASH							
	30	* CHINESE CABBAGE	COLLARDS							
	29	* ROUND BLACK	EGG PLANTS							
	28	* SPANISH RADISH	PARSLEY							
	27	* BLACK EYED PEAS	ENDIVE							
	26	* OKRA	FLOWERS							
	25	* KALE	HERBS							
MAY 15-31	25	CUCUMBERS	(EARLY FORTUNE)	4'	1 IN.	3-4 IN.	1-1/2 FT.	4-5 FT.	10-15	3
JUNE 1-5	24	TOMATOES, PLANTS	(MARGLOBE)	4'						SET TOMATO PLANTS 3-4 FT. APART.
JUNE 1-5	23	TOMATOES, PLANTS	PLANTS SUPPLIED BY SUPERVISOR	4'						
APRIL 15-30	22	PARSLEY (HAMBURG THICK ROOT)	PEPPERS GARDENERS SUPPLY OWN PLANTS	1'-3"	1/2 IN.	1 IN.	PARSLEY 4-6 IN.			MAY 15-31 SET PEPPER PLANTS 1'-2 FT. APART.
MAY 15-25	21	BEANS, LIMA	(HENDERSON'S BUSH LIMA)	2'	1/2-2 IN.	2 IN.	5-6 IN.			NOTICE GARDENERS SHOULD KEEP THEIR GARDENS CONTINUOUSLY PRODUCTIVE. ALL ROWS HARVESTED BEFORE JULY 15 SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY REPLANTED. SEE SUPERVISOR FOR SEEDS FOR REPLANTING AND GENERAL DIRECTIONS. CULTIVATE GARDENS AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK AND KEEP PATHS CLEAN AROUND YOUR GARDEN. SEE COMPLETE RULES AND REGULATIONS ON REVERSE SIDE.
MAY 15-25	20	BEANS, LIMA	" "	2'	1/2-2 IN.	2 IN.	5-6 IN.			
MAY 20 JUN 10	19	BEANS, WAX POD	(PROLIFIC BLACK WAX)	2'	1/2-2 IN.	2 IN.	5-6 IN.			
MAY 5-15	18	BEANS, WAX POD	" "	2'	1/2-2 IN.	2 IN.	5-6 IN.			
MAY 20 JUN 10	17	BEANS, GREEN POD	(STAINLESS GREEN POD)	2'	1/2-2 IN.	2 IN.	5-6 IN.			
MAY 5-15	16	BEANS, GREEN POD	" "	2'	1/2-2 IN.	2 IN.	5-6 IN.			
JUNE 1-10	15	CARROTS	(DANVER'S HALF LONG) FOR WINTER STORAGE	2'	1/2 IN.	1/4 IN.	3-4 IN.			
JUNE 1-10	14	CARROTS	" " " " " "	2'	1/2 IN.	1/4 IN.	3-4 IN.			
MAY 5-15	13	CARROTS	(CHANTENAY) MARK CARROT ROWS WITH A FEW LETTUCE SEEDS	2'	1/2 IN.	1/4 IN.	3-4 IN.			
APRIL 15-30	12	CARROTS	" " " " " "	2'	1/2 IN.	1/4 IN.	3-4 IN.			
JUNE 1-15	11	BEETS	(DETROIT DARK RED) FOR STORAGE	2'	1 IN.	1 IN.	4 IN.			
MAY 15-30	10	BEETS	" " " "	2'	1 IN.	1 IN.	4 IN.			
APRIL 15-30	9	BEETS	" " " "	2'	1 IN.	1 IN.	4 IN.			
APRIL 15-30	8	SWISS CHARD	(LUCULLUS)	2'	1 IN.	1 IN.	8-10 IN.			
APRIL 15-30	7	ONIONS	(SOUTHPORT YELLOW GLOBE) SETS SUPPLIED BY SUPERVISOR	2'	1 IN.	2-3 IN.				
APRIL 15-30	6	ONIONS	" " " "	2'	1 IN.	2-3 IN.				
APRIL 15-30	5	KOHL RABI	(EARLY WHITE VIENNA)	2'	1/2 IN.	1/4 IN.	6 IN.			
APRIL 15-30	4	LETTUCE (B.S. SIMPSON)	RADISHES (EARLY SCARLET GLOBE)	2'	1/2 IN.	1/4 IN.	6-8 IN.			
APRIL 15-30	3	PEAS (LAXTON'S PROGRESS)	FOLLOW PEAS WITH LATE CABBAGE PLANTS	2'	1/2 IN.	1/4 IN.	1-2 IN.			
APRIL 15-30	2	PEAS	" " " "	2'	1/2 IN.	1/4 IN.	1-2 IN.			
APRIL 15-30	1	PEAS (AMERICAN WONDER)	SUPPLIED BY SUPERVISOR	2'	1-2 IN.	1 IN.	1 IN.			

Figure 4:11: Model Layout for a Thrift Garden.
 Detroit Thrift Gardens: Model Layout for Vegetable Garden, Revised for 1933, Burton Historical Collection, Unemployed File.



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Figure 4:12: Unemployed Council Demonstration. One visible placard states, “If you can’t give us work give us wages. We refuse to starve,” a demand suggesting a social contract where the risk of unemployment is borne by all.

“Unemployment; Detroit,” Wayne State University Virtual Motor City Collection, Image 63783_5.



Figure 4:13: Eviction Scene, one of several photographs of evicted Detroit families taken by the Detroit News in the period 1936-1938—this one from the West Side on DeSoto Avenue, 1936. Wayne State University, *Virtual Motor City*, Image 27208_8, apparently misnamed as DeSota Street at *Virtual Motor City*.



Figure 4:14: The Detroit/Dearborn Line. Photographed here during a later demonstration in 1933, this image illustrates the landscape where the Ford Hunger March of 1932 took place. From left to right the image depicts the Rouge River, Miller Rd (beginning at lower left and bending at center), a rail road, and Detroit's Springwells neighborhood at Right.
Detroit News, Wayne State University Virtual Motor City, Image 377.

Conclusion

The Houses that Built Fordism

Relations of power were negotiated across multiple dimensions of production in industrializing Detroit, and the material and cultural making of the worker's home was as essential to the shaping of a Fordist society as the new methods of automobile assembly were. A new subjectivity was at stake in the production of Fordism's domestic architecture: "a new type of man suited to the new type of work."¹ Employers sought social control in this new housing while the real estate industry sought a market for land, houses and other products as seemingly endless as that for the Model T. At the same time workers chose to participate in this Fordist bargain, producing identities and domestic lives through their homes that exceeded the mere reproduction of work, giving meaning to the wages of their often de-skilled labor. The city's worker's housing of the early twentieth century did not simply *reflect* the changing fortunes of a boomtown economy as it moved through cycles of capitalist growth and crisis, rather, it *shaped* the terms and the experience of Detroit's industrial capitalism. Through worker's housing, the Fordist society struggled to define who was entitled to the benefits of its membership and how the risks of its massive development project would be apportioned. The Fordist ideal of hard work exchanged for economic security was found to be a fraught, difficult, and elusive promise from the beginning, but one that many workers continued to believe was worth fighting for.

Industrialists such as Ford and the business group of the Board of Commerce—in

¹ Hoare and Smith, "Americanism and Fordism," *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, pp. 572, 613

keeping with progressive-era reform thinking—attributed deterministic power to the built environment of worker’s housing. Modern environments, marked by access to light and air, sanitary technologies and aesthetic beauty could, according to this ideology, make workers more productive and less militant. At the same, time the development of centrally-planned and managed neighborhoods of the kind promoted by many planners and architects involved large outlays of capital and significant risks. Pullman provided a cautionary tale in which industry had borne the risks of housing development and were held liable for workers’ domestic security during the economic depression of 1893. Small philanthropic and corporate model housing experiments were performed in Detroit, and the Ford Motor Company commissioned designs for a massive planned neighborhood to house workers, but ultimately the city’s industrialists shifted the risk of housing construction costs to workers by pushing them to seek modern homes and mortgages on the open real estate market. Using rhetoric, wages, loans, home inspections, and threats, employers such as Ford and Packard taught that to fully join the American melting pot—a space where whiteness was constructed in part through the exclusion of black workers—one must put down roots through the purchase of a new home.

The real estate industry—land subdividers, lenders, material sellers, homebuilders and realtors—facilitated the transfer of risk between manufacturers and workers with a major building program, eschewing neighborhood planning and instead transforming the peripheral land among the city’s new industrial plants into a gridiron of lots where workers could mortgage new bungalows and duplexes as independent consumers. City government annexed land and extended utilities into the urban periphery to support this growth. Realtors acknowledged the inseparable link between work and home, assuring prospective buyers that the city’s industries would continue to grow, and the continuous flow of wages would allow workers to make good

on their real estate bets, finding financial security and upward social mobility in the process. At the same time, the Ford Motor Company further insulated itself from responsibility for its workers' domestic security by growing its operations in the independent suburbs of Highland Park and Dearborn, where Ford could not be held politically accountable to its many Detroit-based employees. Industry had authored the "melting pot" ideal of the white, American worker as the only full citizen in Fordist society, and real estate developers extended this ideology with their rhetoric and restrictive covenants, making the value of the modern worker's home contingent on its segregation from black residents and from the socially inferior class of workers who still resided in the "congested zone" of the central city.

Workers negotiated the opportunities and risks of the Fordist domestic ideal in a plurality of ways, building home lives influenced but not circumscribed by the cultural imperatives of industrial employers and real estate agents. Some worked in Detroit for a limited time before returning home to Europe, for example, while others remained in the cottages and boarding houses of the "congested zone"—both groups, either by choice or circumstance, keeping their distance from the project of modern housing. For those who did buy or rent new houses on the urban periphery, their domestic cultures varied significantly from district to district and from house to house, belying the apparent unity or homogeneity implied by aerial views of the city's seemingly monotonous houses. Workers of Polish origin, for example, constructed an explicitly Polish cultural life through the large and small rituals of the houses and neighborhoods of Hamtramck and northeast Detroit. African American workers and professionals, resisting the constraints of segregation, built and made modern houses on the west side of Detroit and asserted a distinct culture of respectability and domestic care. The interior life of each home was distinct, reflecting among other things the ways that each family dealt with the economic constraints that

came with the unstable and often-inadequate wages of industrial work. Some households took boarders into their new homes, while others relied on the work and income of both parents—strategies that increased financial security but which were explicit violations of the Fordist ideal of the private family home and the patriarchal, single-breadwinner family. Differences in wages, family size, preferences, and varying attitudes toward the risks of debt meant that some children in Detroit’s modern bungalows slept in unheated attics while others slept in comfortable bedrooms. Some workers’ families cared for themselves in three-fixture baths while others made do with the kitchen faucet and the backyard privy. Some workers drove Model T’s and other walked to their jobs, saving streetcar fare. Workers’ agency to produce domestic culture cut both ways. Home was a site where ways of life in excess of or in opposition to the dominant corporate culture were shaped, but was also a medium through which many workers built up the divisive ideology of white supremacy, and through their practices of consumption deepened their dependence on an industrial economy known to shed jobs precipitously in a downturn.

The economic security that workers sought in modern houses proved elusive from the beginning, undermined by the power struggles embodied in those same houses. As African Americans began to move into formerly white neighborhoods on the urban periphery in the summer of 1925—seeking the same Fordist bargain of hard work for domestic security that whites had sought—they were attacked by mobs of white workers, including newly-white immigrants, whose ideology of white supremacy was manifested in the belief that African American neighbors would depreciate the value of their homes. In short, the destabilizing racism that the Fordist society was built on was understood and enacted in and through the built environment and not only in the abstraction of the psyche. In a similar way, African Americans countered the affronts of segregation and violence by reasserting their domestic dignity in the

care they took of their homes. Black and white workers alike faced a crisis of domestic security in the worldwide depression that began in 1929, one from which industry took shelter in mass layoffs while workers, left without wages for months and years, faced the loss of their houses and the hard-earned wages sunk into them during better times. Having given so much to the Fordist bargain of work for domestic security, laboring for years in factories and in homemaking, Detroit workers began to develop a new politics in the crisis of the early 1930s, one that repositioned the home-centered ideal of Fordism with regard to the employers such as Ford who had initially authored it. When unemployed marchers demanded wages, an end to evictions and coal to heat their freezing homes, they figured the Fordist ideal of the worker's home in a way that bypassed the intermediaries of mortgage finance and municipal boundaries to argue that the means to domestic security was a fundamental worker's right.

What is the significance of this Fordist past—the culture built in the houses and factories of early twentieth century Detroit—now that these structures are vacant and disappearing? Even the attention lavished on their architectural ruins during the Great Recession is receding into the past as the city emerges from bankruptcy with the promise of new developments, plans to aggressively demolish abandoned houses, and a mayor aiming to grow the city's population for the first time in half a century.² But Detroit's worker's houses of the early twentieth century, the extant and the absent, still contain a great deal: a history of power, negotiated through the modernization of the built environment under capitalism. Their history illustrates that Fordist culture—its promises and its destabilizing contradictions—were constructed in architecture. In the same way, Detroit's modernization sheds light on the high stakes of imagining and building the future of housing in Detroit and elsewhere. Detroit, persistently segregated and hard-hit in the

² Detroit Blight Removal Task Force, *Report*, accessed at www.timetoendblight.com March 23, 2015, and Dolan, Matthew, "Mayor Aims to Reverse Detroit Exodus," *Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 2014.

recent subprime foreclosure crisis, bears on the contemporary question of architecture's potential in the politics of confronting economic inequality.³ This past suggests that the city's future built environment—the size, shape, location and financing of its houses—can influence the management of risk within society, the perception and construction of difference, and workers' continued struggle for security.

³ On the concentration of poverty within the Metro Detroit region see Kneebone, Nadeau and Berube, "The Re-emergence of Concentrated Poverty in the 2000s," Detroit-Warren detail sheet, www.brookings.edu. On contemporary discourse on the future of housing in Detroit and elsewhere see Kenoff, Martin and Meisterlin eds., *The Buell Hypothesis*, Ryan, *Design After Decline* and Dewar and Thomas eds, *The City After Abandonment*.

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